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# THE STATE HOUSE AND THE WHITE HOUSE: GUBERNATORIAL RHETORIC DURING THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

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THE STATE HOUSE AND THE WHITE HOUSE:  
GUBERNATORIAL RHETORIC DURING THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
Austin Peyton Trantham

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Richard Waterman, Professor of Political Science

Lexington, Kentucky

2017

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### THE STATE HOUSE AND THE WHITE HOUSE: GUBERNATORIAL RHETORIC DURING THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

What is the importance of political speechmaking? Do state governors discuss presidential priorities? This study addresses these questions by analyzing the contents of annual State of the State addresses given by governors from 2012 to 2014 during the presidency of Barack Obama. A descriptive paper provides evidence that governors primarily discuss employment and economic issues in their addresses, are discussing greater number of policy issues than in previous decades, and are delivering their address before the presidential State of the Union message. Examining health care and immigration policy in separate empirical papers, I theorize that contextual factors, including legislative partisanship, public approval, and presidential influence may affect the extent to which policies supported by the Obama administration are rhetorically referenced by governors. Empirical analyses found limited support for the influence of divided government, but demonstrated significant evidence for the importance of including state-centric factors, including annual employment rate and proximity to Mexico, as well as temporal effects, into future analyses of gubernatorial rhetoric.

**KEYWORDS:** Governor, President, Rhetoric, Affordable Care Act, Medicaid, Immigration

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Austin Trantham

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November 16, 2017

THE STATE HOUSE AND THE WHITE HOUSE:  
GUBERNATORIAL RHETORIC DURING THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

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November 16, 2017

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## DEDICATION

To my parents, David and Vikki.

To my wife, Stephanie.

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I could have not have undertaken a project of this magnitude without the assistance and guidance of many scholars that I have had the privilege to meet while at the University of Kentucky. Richard Waterman began as my advisor and professor, yet quickly became a friend and confidant. His caring personality, continual encouragement, and desire to improve my academic growth are ideal components to an enriching faculty-student relationship. I can confidently state that my dissertation would not have been completed without his guidance, and I hope to follow in his path as a scholar-mentor. The other members of my advisory committee, Justin Wedeking, Ed Jennings, Nicolai Petrovsky, and Alan DeSantis provided invaluable guidance on various drafts and revisions of the project, and each has taught me the value of positive mentorship.

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## **Introduction: Presidents and Governors in Political Time**

*“The presidency and the state governorship have come over the years to conform to a common basic institutional pattern. They are fundamentally similar not only in their place in the governmental structure but also in their powers, responsibilities, and functions and in the qualities called for from those who seek to fill them.”*

This quote first appeared in *The American Chief Executive: The Presidency and the Governorship* (1966) written by University of Michigan political scientist Joseph E. Kallenbach. Though five decades have passed since its publication, the work describes a relationship that remains relevant today as presidents and governors increasingly represent a similar type of political figure: individuals working to set a political agenda. This dissertation relates to one nexus between presidents and governors: their rhetorical power to influence the political agenda, primarily through their State of the Union and State of the State addresses. In particular, do presidents and governors discuss the same issues in their addresses and if so, do governors respond to the president setting a national agenda?

Why should we study presidential and gubernatorial rhetoric? Studying national and state-level executives simultaneously allows scholars the opportunity to avail themselves of rich institutional and ideological variation within the policymaking process. At the national level, while the three most recent former U.S. presidents—Democrat Bill Clinton, Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Barack Obama—have each served for one uninterrupted eight-year period, the legislative branch is continually changing, with House and Senate elections every two years, and special elections due to death, resignation, or retirement. Amidst political turmoil and turnover, the sitting president must continually work with Congress, comprised of a House and Senate that

may support or oppose the president's ideological issue preferences. While the relationship between the president and Congress is well documented, the same dynamic prevails at the subnational level. For example, Alabama, California, Iowa, New York, and Texas may be viewed as geographically, politically and socially dissimilar (Elazar 1972), yet all have an executive who must contend with a state legislature in developing, considering, and passing policies. Further complicating matters, the federal system in the United States divides authority and influence between actors at the national and state levels; a power-sharing arrangement that has historically required interaction and coordination between national and subnational executives. It is for this reason that a joint examination of presidential and gubernatorial rhetoric is particularly relevant.

The relationship between governors and presidents has changed over time. The era of cooperation began in the 1930s, during which time national, state, and local governments began working together to exercise common policy responsibilities. Changing political, economic, and societal demands brought on by the Great Depression and Franklin Roosevelt's activist agenda forged a new bond between executives at all levels of government—ending dual federalism in the United States. As one example, Roosevelt's New Deal politics created massive federal public works programs centered on improving many aspects of society, including job creation, urban renewal, economic affairs, and the agricultural industry—achieving these objectives required providing state governments with the financial means to implement policies through federal categorical grants. Entering into a more cooperative era, presidents and governors began working together to find solutions to common issues plaguing the nation. Three decades later, Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" program succeeded, in part, because of

relationships developed between individual states to achieve the promises of job training and educational assistance through categorical grants. This transformation allowed presidents and governors to meld into a similar type of executive—one who plays a leadership role in formulating national policy while speaking to two distinct constituencies—the legislature and the public-at-large (Teten 2011).

Certain instances of federal-state relations are indeed positive and work toward the betterment of all citizens. This said, a holistic comparison of executives is also informed by negative examples of historical interaction between presidents and governors. Representing one of Neustadt's (1960)'s "cases of command," Eisenhower resorted to federalizing the Arkansas National Guard following Democratic Governor Orval Faubus' decision to deny the "Little Rock Nine" admittance to Central High School following the Warren Court's decision in *Brown*. A more recent case involved the 2009 passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) by the Obama administration, offering states one-time funds for improving unemployment, education, and infrastructure. Certain governors, notably Mark Sanford (R-SC), balked at this provision while wishing to use his state's allotment of ARRA funding on debt reduction. When this plan proved unsuccessful, Sanford threatened to completely reject federal monies, but this request was denied by the state legislature. Whether strengthening or straining the status quo between national and state-level executives, these cases serve as illustrative caveats that considering presidents and governors as distinct and separate actors negates the opportunity to realistically examine the dynamic nature of the interrelationships within modern-day politics.

The idea of simultaneously examining governors and presidents dates back

several decades, with Ries (1969) noting that “...efforts to construct a more comprehensive and dynamic framework within which to view political chief executives seem increasingly worthwhile” (ix). Investigating the choices and actions of multiple political actors allow for a more complete and realistic understanding of American politics. As social and fiscal policy issues, such as education, health care, economic development, and immigration, are large-scale concerns affect the whole of a society, it seems natural for national and subnational executives to speak about them to their respective constituencies in legislative and other messages.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

The literature on political executives yields an array of national and state-level work, thus forming a solid basis for this project. The historical gold-standard of scholarship on the American presidency remains Neustadt’s (1960) *Presidential Power*. Scholarship before and since (Corwin 1948; Rossiter 1956; Schlesinger 1973; Rudalevige 2006; Howell 2003; Rockman and Waterman 2008) have also focused on the presidency as the main actor of interest. Other work on political executives has taken a sub-national approach, giving attention to state governors. Sabato’s (1978) foundational work on the modern governorship since the 1960s formed a basis for further scholarship in this area (Ransone, Jr. 1982; Herzik and Brown 1991; Rosenthal 2013). It is now time to consider the next question in advancing our understanding of presidents and governors: Can these two groups of officeholders be systematically compared in a meaningful way? The brief answer to this inquiry is in the affirmative.

Presidents and governors wield similar types of executive authority in their positions. Fully understanding the specific nature of this idea is difficult—while scholars

have developed reliable and valid quantitative indicators measuring the presence and extent of gubernatorial power and authority (Schlesinger 1965; Bernick 1979; Sabato 1978), comparable measures are lacking for presidential influence. We can, however, glean valuable knowledge from historical, case-study, and game-theoretic work (Howell 2003) on the American Presidency. Executives may assume power based on formal grants and authority within national or subnational constitutions (Corwin 1948) allowing them to impact the political system. Over time, however, presidents and governors have increased their power base—using informal means to “go public” (Kernell 1986)—while using the stature of their office to directly influence other actors within the political system.

One of the most routine and public methods of communication available to modern executives is the legislative message – the State of the Union for presidents or the State of the State address for governors. Part policy pronouncement, value statement, and issue assessment (Campbell and Jamieson 2008), these addresses allow presidents and governors the opportunity to *persuade* others—the public and the legislature—to support their agenda while conveying important information about issues to the legislature and the public. These speeches are further utilized by the individual speechmaker to prioritize preferred policies. As they operate concomitantly in similar secular time (Skowronek 1997), it should also be unsurprising that State of the Union and State of the State messages presented by national and subnational executives may discuss similar policies. A test of this thesis is at the heart of this dissertation.

In 2014, the topics in State of the Union and State of the State addresses included education reform, economic development, taxes, and healthcare. There is a widely cited

canon of work regarding presidential rhetoric (Tulis 1987; Cohen 1995; Wood 2007), but systematic analysis on state-level rhetoric is less prevalent (see DiLeo 2001 and Coffey 2005 for exceptions). This project allows for exploration into state politics scholarship, while making broader connections to the American presidency literature. Scholars have standardized the use of presidential and gubernatorial rhetoric in understanding the historical progression of the institution (Tulis 1987; Teten 2011); policy issues (Whitford and Yates 2009; Wood 2007; Carpenter and Hughes 2011) articulation of moral values (Shogan 2006) and ideological orientation (Weinberg 2010; Coffey 2005). Due to their comparability over time and perennial relevance, these messages constitute an ideal medium to compare how executives employ rhetorical authority over the same time frame.

As a way of conceptualizing the shared rhetorical role of presidents and governors, this work examines statements on healthcare and immigration reform in State of the Union and State of the State addresses between 2012 and 2014 during the Obama administration. Both were chosen for analysis due to the significance in American politics during the period under study. These issues also raise significant moral and ethical questions important to daily life in a democratic society: Who should live or die? Should everyone be allowed entrance into the country, regardless of background? Perhaps more importantly for the current project, both policy areas are decidedly partisan and timely in American politics, serving as focal points for the 2016 presidential campaign and in current debates between the Donald Trump administration and members of Congress.

President Barack Obama's signature domestic achievement, the Patient Protection

and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) has served as a divisive element between supporters and detractors of the national policy. Immigration is a second agenda item that has caused an increase in partisan rancor during the Obama administration, with politicians from both sides adopting strong rhetorical stances on the number and status of those living illegally in the United States. The individual empirical papers examine whether gubernatorial rhetoric on these issues is affected by contextual factors such as presidential influence, public approval, past election results, and legislative partisanship and ideology. Do governors follow a Chief Executive in setting policy or are their efforts insulated from Washington, D.C. influence? The overall goal of this project is to provide increased clarity on how presidents and governors address salient public policy issues, and in turn, influence the policymaking process.

### **The Comparative Method**

Scholars systematically explain variations in political phenomenon, such as institutions or elected officials through quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, and comparative analyses (Wilson 1996). This latter approach is an appropriate tool for simultaneously studying the behavior of two different sets of actors in the same system.

In my dissertation, I use these methodological approaches for four interrelated goals: (1) Description of a behavior, in this case comparing presidential and gubernatorial speechmaking, (2) Classification of the types of speeches presented, (3) Hypothesis Testing regarding whether gubernatorial speechmaking is related to presidential rhetoric, and (4) Prediction about the nature of this relationship (Collier 1993). Describing phenomena in-depth allows one to develop a better understanding of individual components in a given study and how each may relate to the larger whole. Classification

allows for organization and grouping of information based on a certain attribute. Developing and testing hypotheses helps explain a given relationship between two variables and indirectly connects theory with data (King et al. 1994). Finally, prediction allows for generalizable conclusions to be drawn from the work while providing avenues for future research.

This project uses a comparative approach to examine the relationship between gubernatorial rhetoric, presidential policy priorities and related contextual factors including partisanship and public influence. The initial examination of the textual speech data is descriptive in nature, providing an understanding as to how state executives are discussing various policy issues in their annual addresses. Classification of national and subnational elites is essential due to the differences inherent in the political system; partisanship is used to distinguish Republicans and Democratic executives in this study. Finally, the overall results will ideally lend themselves to predicting future interactions between different classes of executives over shared policy issues.

### **Description of Study Population**

The population under investigation derives from two general classes of political executives: (1) The President of the United States and (2) U.S. state governors. These elites employ rhetoric daily during the course of their tenure, attempting to frame pertinent policy issues with various stakeholders. Many of these utterances, however, are devoted to highlighting certain issues while downplaying others. This study focuses on a broad platform to measure the extent of gubernatorial rhetoric; this project considers the impact of executives' annual messages delivered to their respective legislature. Kernell (1986) notes presidential speeches are "major addresses," and thus are more likely to

receive greater attention from the media, the public, and other policymakers, including those at the state level. Gubernatorial speeches are also likely to garner attention from local media (see Cohen 2009). Both types of elite speeches are comparable in terms of a similar mode of content and delivery.

The timeframe for the study is limited to the years of 2012, 2013, and 2014 due to a desire to reflect current policy discussions in the United States. The time period also provides an opportunity to explore the impact of elections in the American political system. 2012 was a presidential election involving an incumbent president, 2013 was a non-election year and thus provides a control on national electoral behavior, and 2014 features the national midterm election. I also control for the election of governors in these three years. The total number of cases accounts for three addresses given by President Barack Obama (D) and one hundred and fifty gubernatorial addresses. Because certain state legislatures meet only once in two calendar years, certain governors do not give a legislative message each year affecting Arkansas, Montana, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, and Texas. Therefore, a total of thirteen State of the State addresses will be missing from the overall dataset. This is not an issue with State of the Union addresses, as Congress meets regularly each year. With these exclusions, the total number of observations is 137.

### **The Structure of the Dissertation**

The framework of the dissertation is three papers on presidential and gubernatorial rhetoric. The first paper, “Understanding and Analyzing Executive Speechmaking,” examines the literatures related to political speechmaking and political executives. Following an explanation of rhetoric as a historical and modern

communication tool, the rhetorical presidency scholarship is discussed at length. Conceptual distinctions in seminal works including Tulis (1987), Neustadt (1960), and Kernell (1986), among others, are included in this section. This provides an understanding into the ability for national-level executives to set their agendas while in the White House. Prior work on state governors demonstrates general relevance to the study of comparative executives. The remainder of the study focuses on analyzing gubernatorial rhetoric by the first issue presented in each State of the State address, the total number of issues presented in gubernatorial speeches, and the timing of governors' addresses through presentation of basic descriptive statistics.

The second paper, "The Affordable Care Act: A Comparison of Presidential and Gubernatorial Rhetoric" considers the tenuous relationship between President Barack Obama and state governors surrounding the former's signature domestic achievement during his term of office. An opening section provides a brief overview of the 2008 election and Obama's rise to the presidency. A section describing passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) further contextualizes the divisiveness of the issue serving as the focus of this analysis paper. Qualitative and quantitative evidence will be shown in demonstrating how governors discussed this issue during the period under study. The Trump administration's recent actions regarding repealing and replacing Obamacare conclude the paper.

The third and final paper, "Immigration Reform: A Divergence of Gubernatorial and Presidential Rhetoric," seeks to provide a similar understanding for the partisan immigration debate. The paper first discusses immigration as a salient policy issue covered at length by traditional and social media outlets. Pertinent remarks by Barack

Obama and congressional Republicans associated with the annual State of the Union message demonstrate the significance of border control and related immigration issues to national policymakers. A related subsection chronicles actual actions taken by Obama during this period. Gubernatorial rhetoric on immigration policy in State of the State addressed is then chronicled, with formal hypotheses and analysis following in the paper. A concluding section details the Trump administration's thoughts and actions toward immigration policy.

A conclusion references substantive findings and places them in a larger political scope while providing avenues for future research in the area of gubernatorial and presidential rhetoric.

## **Paper One: Understanding and Analyzing Executive Speechmaking**

Previous studies have analyzed presidential State of the Union messages (Shogun 2006; Druckman and Holmes 2004) and State of the State addresses given by governors (Coffey 2005), *yet no previous work compares the content of public speeches given simultaneously by the national and subnational executives in the United States*. This comparison is a major contribution of this dissertation. In particular I examine the following questions: Why is political rhetoric important? How have various scholars conceptualized the “rhetorical presidency” and its utility for executive influence over time? What forces have allowed the state governorship to grow in prominence? What policy issues do governors choose to mention first in their State of the State addresses? Are there similarities or differences across party and region? Are there noticeable differences between governors in the timing of the annual legislative messages respective to the national State of the Union address? These inquiries are important in understanding the impact of gubernatorial rhetoric and will provide an important contextual basis for understanding the reach and impact of presidential rhetoric, as well as how other executives—in this case, state governors—respond to the President of the United States. As such, we should develop a better understanding of the scope and rhetorical influence of presidential power.

This paper presents a discussion of the relevant literature and methodology to be employed in this and the next two empirical papers examining two polarizing issues related to presidential and gubernatorial rhetoric during the Obama administration: health care policy and immigration policy. These analyses will empirically demonstrate whether governors follow the president’s rhetorical and policy lead or whether they

oppose it and offer substantive alternatives.

### **Why Rhetoric?**

Rhetoric is essential to those in public office and has been utilized as a linguistic tool since Aristotelian times. The noted Greek philosopher defined the term in his work as the “art of discovering all the available means of persuasion in a given case” (Hart et al. 2013). Three interrelated concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos (Murphy 1974) characterize rhetorical practice. Ethos is an ethical appeal based on the speaker’s perceived credibility and authority, pathos focuses on an audience’s emotional state, while logos is a logical appeal based on reason. These elements directly correlate with Aristotle’s writings on human nature at large. Describing humans as political beings with the ability to use language in discourse, Denton, Jr. and Hahn (1986) support the idea that politics and communication are interwoven elements in daily life. An ability to use rhetoric effectively was traditionally seen as the mark of an educated citizen.

The uses of rhetoric and speechmaking have expanded in the modern era, especially as the avenues for public communication, including radio, television, electronic mail, and social media have gradually increased throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These developments have allowed the spoken and written word to become more prevalent in American society. Politicians routinely take advantage of all available platforms as they seek a closer connection with everyday citizens. Doris Graber’s (1981) seminal work examines political communication, contending that information dissemination, agenda-setting, interpretation and linkage, projection for the future and the past, and action stimulation categorize the present-day functions of politically-based language.

Recalling Madison's statement in *Federalist 51* that "ambition must be made to counteract ambition," the Founders wished to minimize opportunities for national popular leadership—as its practice represented a feared step towards demagoguery. This desire, coupled with the state-centric Articles of Confederation, led to placing a modicum of institutional power in the executive office (Waterman 2013). Despite these concerns, presidents have utilized language as a conduit for expressing themselves and achieving their policy goals since the Washington administration. Our first chief executive responded to the constitutional mandate found in Article II, Section 3, Clause I, requiring all presidents to "from time to time give to the Congress Information of the state of the union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient." The traditional annual address has been viewed as a formal source of presidential authority (Corwin 1948; Rossiter 1956) while serving as a platform for agenda-setting through policy articulation. This speech, while a significant event on the national political calendar, represents but a small entity of the entirety of what has been termed the "rhetorical presidency."

While rhetoric has been employed at least since the days of Aristotle, it has only recently been viewed as a topic for rigorous research by those in the academic community. This paper will examine Tulis's (1987) notion of the "rhetorical presidency" as a conduit for executive power and influence at the national level, contrasting this notion with Kernell's (1986) "going public" thesis and a Neustadtian (1960) bargaining framework regarding executive power. As this project concerns comparative executive leadership through rhetorical usage, it is also appropriate to discuss prior work on state governors.

Scholars have examined how political leaders seek to articulate public policy initiatives. The literature on domestic policy articulation and formation (Kingdon 1984; Light 1999; Pfiffner 1996) and issue ownership (Petrocik 1996; Egan 2013) demonstrates a general pursuit for preferred policies. Understanding the policies that an executive may advocate or downplay during their tenure may be a function of partisan affiliation and public opinion. Discussing the role of party and ideology, thus, allows us to examine the linguistic choices made by executives at a particular point in political time. Having discussed the general contours of speech, we must consider its rhetorical implications to presidents and governors.

The next section discusses the rhetorical presidency in depth, noting its strength as a symbolic and substantive tool for executives to use as they work to set their agenda. This paper includes discussion of Kernell's (1986) "going public" thesis and Edwards' counter-argument that presidents should "stay private," and instead focus their efforts on working "at the margins" (1990) to achieve favorable policy outcomes. However, an executive's ability to employ rhetoric effectively may be hampered by personal, political, and temporal circumstances occurring during their term of office. The subject of gubernatorial rhetoric provides a way to begin understanding the comparative nature of executive speech by looking more closely at how subnational executives in the United States use this communication medium. A later section brings both governors and presidents together to provide a more general argument for why comparing the two offices is a significant endeavor needing careful analysis. Theoretical and methodological considerations conclude this general paper on executive speechmaking.

## **The Rhetorical Presidency**

Rhetorical efforts may help define an executive's tenure in office. Various speeches provide information about a political leader's political agenda while allowing them to state their position on significant policy issues. The ability to give frequent addresses also allows a president the opportunity to directly communicate with the public, interest groups, political parties, and the media regarding future actions. Many past chief executives have utilized language during their presidencies through notable speeches; examples include Washington's Farewell Address, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt's "Fireside Chats," and Kennedy's inaugural.

Scholarly attention to the rhetorical efforts of American presidents began with qualitative work chronicling historical changes leading to a rise in political speech. Ceaser and his coauthors (1981) give dual credit to a paradigm shift in how the political importance of rhetoric was considered by chief executives while also emphasizing how institutional developments (e.g. modern mass media and campaign system) allowed the public-at-large to become more informed and involved in the political process. The classic work in this area by Tulis (1987) agrees with this conceptualization, yet places greater emphasis on individual presidents' innovations in broadening public communication while in office. Defining the rhetorical presidency into three historical stages, the "Old Way" lasting from Washington through McKinley ended with Theodore Roosevelt's activist communication style. During this period, presidents did not routinely communicate with others through oral messages, thus, written communication was the main way that chief executives distributed their thoughts, desires, and policy stances. Roosevelt symbolized the "Middle Way" of presidential speechmaking where

policy positions were articulated through popular discourse grounded in principle and tradition.

Tulis's (1987) "New Way" period commenced with Woodrow Wilson—whose rhetorical efforts gave way to the modern presidency. Tulis writes that Wilson achieved a deeper connection with the public through policy-based and visionary speech—allowing a Chief Executive to explain their views on significant national issues while simultaneously charting a new way forward for the country. These two objectives may be seen in tandem during a State of the Union message, which became an oral presentation to Congress during Wilson's tenure. Despite the continual modernization of technology—allowing current presidents a greater number of channels by which to publicize their proposed agendas—the basic practice of engagement

through active and engaged communication, or "going public," (Kernell 1986) has remained a lynchpin of the rhetorical presidency.

#### *Going Public: The Rhetorical Presidency in Practice*

Kernell's (1986) "how-to" strategy for presidents centers on "a class of activities that presidents engage in as they promote themselves and their policies before the American public" (x), including giving major and minor political addresses, making public appearances, and engaging in domestic and foreign travel. In an earlier era of "institutionalized pluralism," Kernell argues that Neustadt's (1960) treatise on persuasion and bargaining is apropos due to having an insular political system defined by reciprocity amongst a manageable number of what Tsebelis (2002) terms "veto players." The above efforts at "going public", according to its author, are modern-day necessities for Chief Executives operating in a system of "individualized pluralism" due to an increasing number of organized interests, advances in transportation and

communication, and political party decay (Kernell 2007, 31). A basic overview to *Going Public* provides us with Kernell's overall argument—and allows us the opportunity to critique the work on theoretical and historical grounds.

The “going public” rationale for explaining presidential activity includes positive and negative attributes which enhance and detract from its overall utility as a theoretical construct. Directly reaching the public allows a president to build trust and support with everyday Americans; this may work especially well if the leader already has a high level of Weberian charismatic legitimacy (O’Neil et al. 2010). A given president could accomplish this by combining Greenstein’s (2009) metrics of “public communication” and “emotional intelligence” in forming their leadership style. Building and maintaining public trust, however, is not a simple prospect. Thompson (2000) discusses how public approval of authorities, indicating specific support (Easton 1975), are fragile resources that must be closely guarded by a given White House. In a political era characterized by distrust of government and hyperpartisanship, elite support may be short-lived; this can be seen in a post-national convention “bump” or the public responding favorably to presidential agenda items. In a broader sense, due to the “expectations gap” thesis (Waterman et al. 1999; Jenkins-Smith et al. 2005; Waterman et al. 2014; Hetherington and Rudolph 1998), presidential support may be generally hard to obtain, whether “going public” or not.

The degree of control and predictability that presidents have over their public efforts both helps and hinders them. Waterman et al. (1999), noting that “image-is-everything” when discussing the American presidency, make an insightful statement. A

given president is able to use their rhetorical abilities to “go public” at any time they desire, appearing strong and in control of their messaging. Through the introduction and availability of different communications media (e.g. radio, television, social media), Waterman (2013) argues that technology has strengthened the presidency over time. Further, presidents may select the rhetorical format best suited for their personality and public style. For example, a live press conference may suit those who can think quickly and possess the ability to quickly summarize complex ideas in soundbite form when answering journalists’ questions while a longer sit-down interview may allow those with quieter strength and the ability to strongly and clearly articulate one’s thoughts to shine as the country’s Rhetorician-in-Chief.

While addresses and appearances do provide the presidency with a unique way to address the nation (Kernell 1986), Lim (2008) argues that these instances may not allow a leader to strongly assert their positions on issues due to a steady decline in rhetorical complexity over time. Rhetorical statements may do the most political damage when combined with an unfavorable visual setting that will make the president seem weak-minded or out-of-touch with everyday Americans; examples include Ford’s 1976 debate gaffe with Carter and Carter’s “Crisis of Confidence address. Finally, the modern-day onset of social media allows anyone to weigh in with their political opinion—and those in disagreement with the administration may distort their message—weakening the presidency’s ability to provide one coherent message to the American public. Rhetoric may certainly affect presidential image in the short and long-term, leading to an impact on a chief executive’s overall degree of strength.

A number of presidency scholars have further studied what impact the use of

rhetorical statements has on the larger political system; significant work has been conducted in the area of public priming and approval. The president is able to directly speak to the people in order to positively promote initiatives while setting the national agenda (Wayne 2009). Analyzing State of the Union messages and the traditional Gallup “Most Important Problem” (MIP) question, Cohen (1995) finds that as presidents increase references to specific policy areas in their annual messages to Congress, the more likely citizens are to rate that problem as significant when asked in a Gallup poll. Other research on public priming also finds a presidential-public connection. Druckman and Holmes (2004) show that a president can affect their personal level of public approval by priming those factors important to public evaluations, revealing those who watched Bush’s 2002 State of the Union address, famous for categorizing Iran, Iraq, and North Korea, as an “axis of evil,” placed more emphasis on international terrorism. Controlling for presidential rhetoric in his work on agenda-setting, Beckmann (2010) also supports Kernell’s main argument.

However, other political figures also have opportunities to present their views on White House policies—and their actions are uncontrollable from the Oval Office. Members of Congress, especially opposition party leadership, routinely take to the public airwaves to criticize the president for perceived policy failures and an inability to set a palpable agenda. This is a constant occurrence in the present era where divided government (Fiorina 1989; Fiorina 2003) is the normal state of political affairs. The public presidency may thus be hampered by the fact that other individuals hold rhetorical power. Other scholars’ works challenge the “going public” thesis with alternative conceptualizations.

*Staying Private: Opposing the Rhetorical Presidency*

The inability to properly consider institutional and ideological variation regarding presidential speech began with a work still viewed as canonical. Neustadt (1960) focuses on persuasion and bargaining within Washington as the main tools for an executive to promote their administration's policies (see also Cameron 2000), arguing that political influence is manifested through a president's professional reputation and their public prestige. This argument, while intuitively plausible, fails to account for the ideological makeup of the national legislature.

A president's ability to persuade members of Congress to support desired initiatives is somewhat dependent on the ideological and regional makeup of the institution. This is illustrated by Lyndon Johnson's famed ability to coax reluctant lawmakers to support civil rights legislation. Despite Democratic control of the 88<sup>th</sup> and 89<sup>th</sup> Congresses by wide margins, more Republican members than Democrats supported the Civil Rights Act of 1964. A central explanation for this result centers on political divisions among Southern Democrats (Stewart and Escobedo 2014).

Presidential expectations are altered during an administration due to electoral mandates which may shift party control of the legislative branch; influence is thus a continuous variable. Neustadt (1960) agrees with this contention, treating an executive's political bargaining capability as a variable term, which meshes with the realities of modern politics. Studying presidential-congressional lawmaking, Beckmann's (2010) work accounts for this distinction. While supporting the Neustadtian contention by noting that "the essence of presidential leadership...is arm-twisting, browbeating, and deal-making" (67), he employs Poole and Rosenthal's (2000) DW-NOMINATE

methodology to discern legislator's ideological preferences. Understanding the ideological distance between a given president and members of Congress allows for a more nuanced view of how executives attempt to shape legislative outcomes by strategically shaping their policy agenda and lobbying efforts.

Other prominent presidential scholars since *Presidential Power* have also argued against the conception of the rhetorical presidency. Opposing Kernell's thesis (1986), Edwards (1990, 2003) writes that politically savvy presidents would do well to avoid continual public speechmaking; he finds that charisma and personality will not, contrary to past wisdom (Barber 1972) be significant for moving public opinion. Stimson's (1991) work on public mood underscores this conclusion and makes intuitive sense—if public sentiment naturally shifts away from a president over time, no amount of Oval Office bravado or theatrics will help; the onset of war may trigger a “rally” effect proving an exception to this point. Chief Executives should instead work at the “margins,” convincing a smaller set of key politicians to support desired policy agenda items. These ideas culminate in a notion of “staying private,” which may, as Edwards claims, theoretically help in “reducing gridlock, incivility, and public cynicism” (254). While not going to Edwards' extremes, Wood (2007) finds that presidential speech has an indirect yet significant effect on marginally increasing public confidence about the nation's current economic state. Discussing presidential “saber-rattling,” Wood (2012) sheds further light on this argument, regarding foreign policy rhetoric as increasing global conflict.

Another alternative to Kernell's (1986) work deals with the simple fact that a president should not have to go public as the means to achieve their policy ends. This

school of thought centers on unilateral actions, including the use of executive orders, signing statements, national security directives, and other means to achieve goals while in the White House (Howell 2003; Howell and Kriner 2008; Waterman 2013). An important advantage of utilizing these instruments over “going public” is that a president’s success is not dependent on personal skill (e.g. having a clear communication style), leverage (e.g. tools, resources, political capital) noted by Fine and Waterman (2008) or historical timeframe (Skowronek 1997). As president, Harry Truman implemented Executive Order 9981 to desegregate the armed forces. Facing a unified Congress under Republican control (Jillson 2011), receiving only moderate public approval and governing in a period with rampant anti-desegregationist sentiment from Southern Democrats, “going public” to gain political support for such a substantive social policy change seems unwise at best and foolish at worst. Unilateral action provides the president an ability to ‘go public” after the fact, which may be the best course of action under certain political conditions. Being able to sensibly consider alternative positions to Kernell (1986) allows for a more complete examination of the rhetorical presidency literature.

One many wonder if it is practically feasible for a president expected to be in the public eye in an era of relentless partisanship at all levels of government to avoid their rhetorical responsibilities. President Trump has made few formal public statements, instead using Twitter as a form of rhetoric to communicate his views, often incendiary, to the public and the press. While rhetoric may fall on “deaf ears,” a given president cannot afford to be silent—especially in the face of an opposition coalition bent on distorting and dismantling a presidential message. And Trump’s tweets definitely have not fallen on

deaf ears! As the modern mass media continually demonstrates, presidents do regularly give major and minor addresses. Thus, there must be a middle ground between continually “going public” and constantly “staying private.” What conditions have previous works identified to impact and affect executive rhetoric? This inquiry is the subject of the following subsection.

### *Influences on the Rhetorical Presidency*

Many conditions may restrain or propel a president to address a given constituency during their tenure. Previous work by Ragsdale (1984) and Eshbaugh-Soha (2010) provide foundational evidence for explaining institutional causes of the occurrence of major presidential addresses. Examining the Truman through Clinton presidencies, they find that national events and shifts in public approval increase speechmaking efforts while military activity and poor economic conditions decrease the probability of a major presidential address. By informing the public of nationwide events (i.e. natural disasters, scandals), Ragsdale theorizes that the president will be able to minimize political fallout.

Conversely, a president might want to speak during a national disaster to demonstrate control and resolve; an example is George W. Bush’s Oval Office speech the night of September 11, 2001. During hard economic times, the president will strategically lower speechmaking efforts due to his inability to directly affect market conditions and little real influence on macroeconomic factors (Wood 2007; Wood et al. 2005). Wood’s later (2009) work disagrees with those advocating a public role, arguing that presidential issue stances are highly partisan and do not fluctuate widely with changing public mood (Stimson 1991; Stimson 2004). Others take a measured approach,

stating that public opinion matters (Heith 2004) but its effect on presidential actions is tempered by policy type or prior presidential agreement with public views (Cohen 1999; Canes-Wrone 2006; Tatalovich and Schier 2014). Personal and temporal factors also influence when a president “goes public.”

Apart from the political realm, personal attributes and characteristics may advantage or disadvantage a president in utilizing the rhetorical powers of their office. Greenstein’s (2009) categorization scheme allows one to observe why modern Chief Executives may have succeeded or failed at the public presidency. While these characteristics are presented as singular characteristics by the author, it is possible to theorize a causal relationship between the characteristics. If a president possesses high degrees of “public communication” and “vision,” (e.g. Barack Obama), utilizing the rhetorical presidency may prove a great benefit as they will be able to set their agenda through easily understood speeches. George Bush, conversely, was criticized for lacking an all-encompassing vision (Gelderman 1997; Ragsdale 1993) and presidents who share this trait would likely do better shying away from the rhetorical spotlight. In his work, Barber (1972) presents a more psychologically-based view of presidential personality which also contains indirect effects for rhetorical leadership. A Chief Executive who is classified in the “active-positive” realm (e.g. Kennedy) can and likely will make the most of a “going public” strategy while a president possessing a more negative personality type (e.g. Johnson, Nixon) will be least at ease with public rhetoric and may limit their availability.

Political conditions will likely fluctuate during one’s White House tenure due to elections, public acceptance of a policy agenda. A president may also be able to alter and

improve their personal shortcomings as they become accustomed to the position and develop a better understanding of the Washington political structure. However, time is an element that is constant for every presidency. Skowronek (1997) provides a useful distinction between political and secular time—the former referring to present interrelationships between the president and other political actors, and the latter chronicling the historical aggregation of political power and influence. Both conceptualizations affect the rhetorical presidency.

An understanding of how political time may affect presidential rhetoric is seen through duration in office. As a president is officially inaugurated, their influence has reached its apex. Washington goodwill quickly dissipates, leaving the newly-minted Chief Executive left to govern in a political environment noted for dysfunction and partisan rancor; various authors urge a president to establish a governing agenda early in their administrations, if not before assuming office (Pfiffner 1996; Light 1999; Cronin and Genovese 2004). This advice is especially useful in the midst of divided government between the executive and legislative branches of government. In the first term, a president is more likely to spend political capital on rhetorical efforts in a desire to set their governing agenda by building support for major priorities.

During the re-election cycle, speechmaking efforts should theoretically increase as Chief Executives “go public” (Kernell 1986) to make their case for a second term in office. If the campaign is successful, presidents begin a second term with markedly less influence. Facing a public disenchanted with failed policies, unfulfilled promises, or both, presidents may shift to unilateral action (Howell 2003; Howell and Kriner 2008) to accomplish objectives instead of relying on public persuasion. Beckmann (2010)

underscores this point by noting a temporal distinction between “early-game” and “end-game” leadership; presidents seek different strategies when trying to impact the policy process at the beginning and the end of their administrations.

Skowronek’s (1997) secular time also provides theoretical expectations for presidential communication. If a president finds themselves governing during the Politics of Reconstruction (e.g. Franklin D. Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan), a period defined by a president replacing a predecessor from the opposing party while articulating and instituting a new governing philosophy, these executives will theoretically possess a more favorable environment to set the agenda through rhetorical speechmaking. A president unfortunate enough to preside within the Politics of Disjunction (e.g. Herbert Hoover and Jimmy Carter), characterized by the end of a governing regime where a president cannot articulate nor repudiate the overarching political ideology may find the rhetorical presidency a lackluster option for effective agenda-setting. Presidents in this situation could employ unilateral actions to still display executive leadership, including signing executive orders (Howell 2003) and making bureaucratic appointments (Lewis 2008).

While Skowronek’s (1997) does provide a certain degree of insight into how time may affect the presidency, even presidents in advantageous circumstances still feel their rhetorical clout dissipating over time; temporal circumstances thus may not be a useful metric to capture across-tenure variation. Institutional and ideological change, however, is more dynamic within an administration and may provide a more complete picture of the rhetorical presidency. Before analyzing the impact of presidential speechmaking in greater detail, the rhetorical efforts of state-level executives will be discussed.

## **Governors and Rhetoric**

Increasing levels of power and authority have allowed state-level executives to transform over time from administrative clerks primarily concerned with managing intrastate affairs to independent leaders frequently articulating their views on national issues, consistent with the recommendations of Richard Neustadt (1960). Their rise to political prominence has been relatively recent; scholars cite that fundamental change has occurred within the latter half of the twentieth century (Sabato 1978; Ransone, Jr. 1982; Ferguson 2006; Ferguson 2013). Increasing gubernatorial power (Rosenthal 2013) is central to this discussion. State executives now find themselves in a more advantageous position to set their state's political agenda due to shifting to changing electoral and governing dynamics.

Governors are now able to serve longer individual terms in office and re-election to the position is now commonplace (Beyle and Muchmore 1983; Bowman and Kearney 2000). This allows state-level executives to retain longer control over the state's governing apparatus, which in turn, allows their views and policy priorities to remain pertinent within the political system. Remaining in the governor's office allows one to exercise power through leadership in crafting the state budget; Kousser and Phillips (2012) find that state-level executives have an ability to wield fiscal authority (Ries 1969) within favorable political conditions. An additional power that modern governors wield lies in appointing individuals to state institutions, boards, and commissions (Rosenthal 2013; Beyle and Muchmore 1983). These authorities can be theorized to expand their political significance in two distinct ways. A governor may work to further partisan priorities by vetoing budget proposals that do not meet his or her wishes or by appointing

like-minded individuals to state posts. Conversely, to show they are team players open to working with political supporters and opponents, they may concede on certain spending points or value diversity in certain appointments. Independent sources of authority are significant, but as Rosenthal (2013) points out, in the area of policymaking, “the executive and legislative branches of government, separate as they are by design, are thrown together in the same arena” (10).

No matter how they fare on a given gubernatorial power index, all governors must eventually confront a state legislature—with a majority being of their own or the opposing political party. This relationship is important for ambitious executives wanting to set their agenda in their favor to those more congenial expressing the familiar “to get along, go along” adage. Can governors simultaneously work with state lawmakers while still pushing forward preferred policy outcomes? How has the executive-legislative relationship been conceptualized in past analyses? Existing gubernatorial literature elucidates several potential answers to these related inquiries.

Role and personality may impact a governor’s effectiveness as a legislative leader. It is instructive to consider how state executives personally view their role and position in the state political system. Bernick and Wiggins (1991) describe role theory—a construct that allows one’s personal views and attitudes to shape how they consider the office or position they hold. In the case of a state governor, this would mean taking either a passive or active legislative stance. They supplement this notion with interviews with former governors, comparing legislative authority as either a “mere crutch to keep one upright or a bludgeon to help secure a policy program” (84). If Sabato (1978) and Ransone, Jr. (1982) are to be believed, we should not find a host of passive governors in

the present era. Politicians ostensibly seek elected office to make an impact on the political world by advocating for and achieving policy goals. To do this, executives must remain active and engaged in the political world. Discussing skill and experience, Ferguson (2006) provides a better intervening variable in considering how an individual's background might predict legislative success. If a governor comes to the state house having already served in the legislature, they are presumably better able to use Neustadtian (1960) informal power to influence their former colleagues. Individual-level variables only explain the executive-legislative relationship to a degree. In understanding how broader political variation might impact state executive rhetoric, we must examine institutional-level explanations for the cooperative or contentious nature of the executive-legislative relationship.

The association between the executive and legislative branches at the state level will likely be influenced by broader institutional forces, such as the partisan composition and degree of polarization of each branch. The modern reality of divided government and its effects on interbranch politics has been a central topic for examination in the literature (Mayhew 1991; Edwards et al. 1997; Fiorina 2003, Nicholson et al. 2002; van Assendelft 1997; Thurber 2009; Bond and Fleisher 1990). This relationship has grown contentious through a gradual strengthening of executive and legislative authority. Governors, once relegated to managing state affairs, are today pivotal players airing their views on mainstream media outlets (Sabato 1978) while state legislatures have grown in professionalism measured in part by increasing member salaries and time demands (Squire and Hamm 2005) leading to increasing contentiousness at the state level. Debate exists on this point, however, as King (2000) finds that the Georgia, Massachusetts, New

Hampshire, and New Mexico legislatures have become less professionalized over time due to changes in population size, state wealth, and session length. Political parties are a second set of institutions central to the relationship between governors and legislatures. Setting an acceptable governing agenda is politically easier in states where there are low levels of policy differentiation between parties (Erikson et al. 1993). As the national and state levels have been treated independently, it is now appropriate to discuss the theoretical basis for this project—observing the *interactions* between presidents and governors.

Scholars have traditionally focused on rhetoric as a political tool that executives may employ when promoting their policy agendas. Previous analyses have focused on the underlying causes (Eshbaugh-Soha 2010) and ultimate effects (Wood 2007) of executive speech, but they have not considered how institutional and ideological variations might impact linguistic choices made by presidents and governors. Executives may also be emboldened or constrained in their rhetorical efforts by various personal, political, and temporal circumstances inherent in the political system; these conditions allow for more detailed examination of the association existing between elites when setting their political agendas. Setting agenda priorities allows presidents and governors to directly impact the national or state-level political system, as financial and human resources often must be spent to achieve various policy goals.

### **Description of Methodology**

The central goal of this project is to develop a fuller understanding of how political, social, and other contextual factors may affect gubernatorial attention to the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid, and immigration policies. This paper provides a

descriptive summary of gubernatorial rhetoric by examining what kinds of issues are discussed by governors in their State of the State addresses.

This paper specifically focuses on three interrelated topics: (1) The first substantive policy issues mentioned by governors in their annual messages, (2) The total number of policy topics discussed in each address, and (3) The timing of each State of the State as it relates to Barack Obama's State of the Union address. The initial examination of the textual speech data is descriptive in nature, providing an understanding as to how state executives are discussing various policy issues in their annual addresses.

Classification of national and subnational elites is essential due to the differences inherent in the political system; partisanship is used to distinguish Republican and Democratic executives in this paper. Finally, the overall results will ideally lend themselves to predicting future interactions between different classes of executives over shared policy issues.

Political affiliation of state governors during the period under study will be categorized dichotomously, with zero representing Republican governors, while Democratic state executives will be coded as one. Governors who describe themselves as political independents will be coded as zero, since they do not necessarily belong to President Barack Obama's Democratic party.

The first issue in each speech was calculated by the author thoroughly reading each gubernatorial address within the text corpus. Once the first substantive policy was determined in a given speech, the length of discussion for the issue was determined by a simple word count. This count was then divided by the total number of words found in the entire address minus the opening introductory greetings toward legislators and special

guests. The resulting fraction gave a percentage of the speech that concerned the first policy issue.

The number of total issues in each address were obtained by the author manually coding each State of the State message for changes in discussion of policy topic. Avoiding unnecessary duplication, each issue priority was noted once, even if the policy area was discussed on multiple occasions in a governor's individual speech.

The timing of each gubernatorial address relative to Barack Obama's State of the Union speech involved first acquiring the exact date of each State of the State address. Data was collected from various *Governing* articles (Maciag 2012; "State of the State Addresses;" "2014 State of the State Speeches"). Delivery dates for the State of the Union addresses were obtained through the White House website during former President Obama's administration. Each address was coded as "1" if it came before Barack Obama's State of the Union, "2" if both state and national speeches were given on the same day, or "3" if a governor gave their address after the president.

Previous work on executive rhetoric has considered presidential and gubernatorial annual addresses as separate events—not in comparison or interrelated with one another. Understanding the general contours of the data thus fits well in the context of an exploratory investigation. Descriptive statistics including frequency distributions and simple percentages—are employed in cataloging the mentions of different policy areas in annual addresses. Documenting the issue attention of state executives is the focus of the descriptive analysis. Including certain bivariate measures allows for a more detailed evaluation of significant relationships arising between pairs of variables. This step is theoretically appropriate, as the project examines two separate political institutions

(executives and legislatures) at two different levels of government with widely varying degrees of partisanship.

## **Descriptive Analysis of Gubernatorial Agenda Setting**

### *First Issues in State of the State Addresses*

What then are the basic empirics of gubernatorial rhetoric? One way to address this question is to examine the first issue mentioned by governors in their addresses. Issue placement in a speech is important as a first-mention of an issue gives it greater prominence and attention. Developing a clearer understanding of how state governors enact their annual agendas therefore can be demonstrated by the issue priorities they choose to highlight in their messages. Issue attention can be viewed in gubernatorial State of the State Addresses by capturing: (1) The first policy issue mentioned in each speech (2) how much attention – in terms of percentage of words from the overall speech the issue receives. The corpus of governors’ messages was utilized to identify each of these metrics. A detailed listing of public policy issues is found in Appendix A. Issues were defined following a careful manual review of each governor’s address. Tables 1.1 through 1.3 present data on first issues by year.

Tables 1.1 through 1.3 signify that three policy issues primarily dominated governors’ legislative and rhetorical priorities from 2012 to 2014: (1) Jobs, (2) Economy, and (3) Budget. This makes intuitive sense if we consider that electoral and political success for executives is their effectiveness at bringing jobs and economic growth to their state. Many governors discussed their abilities to work to lower unemployment while making their state a better place for residents to work and raise a family, even in an

economically challenging atmosphere. Tables 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6 present first issues by party affiliation.

The second set of first issue tables demonstrate discussion of permanent or perennial issues (Herzik 1983, DiLeo and Lech 1998), such as jobs, infrastructure, and a wide array of temporal policies needing attention—including gun violence, Medicaid and drug abuse.

Issue attention and the content of governors' policy agendas is very similar between parties. Governor Robert Bentley (R-AL) spoke about jobs for 14.1% of his 2013 State of the State message, Oregon's John Kitzhaber (D) spent 14.2% of his 2013 address on this issue, and Maine's Paul LePage allocated 14.3% to jobs in 2014.

Republican and Democrats each had similar numbers of governors looking at education their initial policy over the time period—and these levels of similarity also hold true when looking at the amount of rhetorical attention given by Republican Butch Otter (Idaho) at 27.2% and Washington Democrat Jay Inslee (28.9%) on this issue. Table 1.7 illustrates partisan differences through frequency counts.

The differences-of-means-tests analyze whether there is a significant difference between how Republican and Democratic governors are discussing initial policy issues in their State of the State addresses. There are many "first" issues that a governor could choose to discuss; these statistical tests focus on an aggregate analysis of issues rather than limiting the analysis to a single policy.

Turning to the analysis of first issues mentioned in State of the State addresses by party affiliation, it is logical to hypothesize that there should be no difference between Democratic and Republican governors. All politicians are concerned with providing for economic growth, as an example, due to the issue's salience for their own re-election

prospects or the immediate political success of co-partisans. Differences of means tests were run on each year in the dataset. Again, the analysis focus on an aggregate analysis of issues rather than one singular “first” issue. Partisan affiliation was not shown to be significant in demonstrating differences between the first issue addressed by a given governor.<sup>1</sup>

Studies of state politics employ natural geographic and regional variations to draw conclusions about issue priorities in different areas of the United States. One would not theoretically expect to find any statistically significant regional differences because many of these issues affect all states, though not all to the same degree. All governors should be concerned with providing jobs to citizens, ensuring school safety, and giving all the opportunity for a quality education. Differences of means tests were conducted to examine relationships among percentage of attention given to “first issues” by U.S. region. As with party, no statistically significant evidence was found to support region as a relevant factor in understanding which policy issues state governors choose to discuss first in their annual legislative addresses.<sup>2</sup> This result makes intuitive sense if one remembers that historic growth of gubernatorial prestige in the United States. Governors have transitioned from state or region-centric figures to substantive policymakers over the past half-century (Sabato 1978), and are now addressing national, broad-based issues.

#### *Total Issues in State of the State Addresses*

Governors in their State of the State addresses also examine other relevant issues

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<sup>1</sup> T-statistics for partisan differences on first issues in State of the State addresses were found to be 0.0978 for 2012, 0.9104 for 2013, and 0.2001 for 2014.

<sup>2</sup> T-statistics for regional differences on first issues in State of the State addresses were found to be 0.1899 for 2012, 0.9399 for 2013, and 0.8223 for 2014.

related to their constituents. An additional measure of issue attention is the total number of issues presented in each gubernatorial address, which demonstrates the diversity of issues a governor identifies. Table 1.8 provides summary information on the number of total issues.

The numerical data presents governors' discussion of multiple topics pertinent to life in the American states from 2012 to 2014; this list includes pensions, Medicaid, mental health, charter schools, and climate change (Maciag 2013). There was a substantial sixty percent increase in the average number of policy issues addressed over time by governors from both parties; they mentioned an average of approximately twelve distinct issues in 2012, seventeen in 2013, and nearly twenty in 2014. In comparison, van Assendelft (1997) notes that an average of only six issues were discussed by selected governors in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

State governors mentioned policy issues a total of 510 times across the 2012 legislative messages. 865 mentions of topics were made in 2013, and 732 items were referenced in 2014 State of the State addresses for a total of 2,107 policy mentions by subnational executives. The rationale for the increase from 24.2% to 41.1% of issue attention between 2012 and 2013 gubernatorial message remains an open question, but it does reveal increased attention to policy issues by state executives during this period.

Are total issues presented in State of State addresses related to governors' party affiliation? We should not expect any significant differences regarding Democratic and Republican governors regarding the number of total issues discussed in their annual addresses. All state executives wish to be seen setting a comprehensive policy agenda. However, the statistical evidence proves otherwise.

Statistical significance on partisan affiliation and total number of issues presented in gubernatorial State of the State messages is provided through the difference of means analyses conducted in each year of the study. Specific t-test results, indicating whether group means are statistically different from each other, included: 2012 (0.0232), 2013: (0.3302), and 2014 (0.0127). The addresses given in 2012, a presidential election year, and 2014, a midterm election are significant as they are less than .05, while significant results were not found for the 2013 messages. Differences in partisan philosophy toward government on position issues such as health care and immigration—highlighted in election years—may help explain these findings. Future research could investigate whether governors up for re-election did, in fact, present more issues in their State of the State addresses.

Distinctions by regional and geographical diversity should also be discussed due to the comparative nature of subnational politics. By including population size in the analysis, we are controlling for any effect that larger states might have due to increased political significance. As an example, Texas is a much larger state by land area and number of inhabitants than Rhode Island., making it possible for the former to have more residents without health care. Because of Texas' proximity to the Mexican border, it might also be theorized that the Lone Star State would have more undocumented immigrants living within its borders.

Geography and population size should not produce any meaningful significant differences between total issues mentioned by governors, as each state executive wishes to be viewed as competent and capable of setting a comprehensive policy agenda that simultaneously addresses economic, social, and political issues. T-tests and correlational

analyses prove that regional and population differences do not significantly impact the amount of total issues raised by governors within State of the State addresses.<sup>34</sup> Timing is a final metric that may be utilized to understand the nature of gubernatorial discourse.

### *Timing of State of the State Addresses*

An additional metric we may consider in evaluating executive rhetoric is the timing of a major legislative address. Tables 1.9 and 1.10 present summary information on when the State of the State addresses from 2012 through 2014 were delivered by their respective governors. The tables contain the number of addresses given before, on the same day as, or after Barack Obama's State of the Union (SOTU) message by year and political party.

The tables illustrate that the majority of governors in both parties gave their legislative address prior to Barack Obama's State of the Union message. Given the small number of same-day addresses, we can conclude that governors are discussing issues of shared importance to the president in previous and current speeches. While many state constitutions stipulate that a state governor should provide information to the legislature on their state's condition (Ruskowski 1943),<sup>5</sup> a given governor is free to set the exact timing of their legislative message irrespective of the president, Ransone (1982) notes that first-term state executives may want to deliver their State of the State as early as possible after their election to capitalize on their political honeymoon period with

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<sup>3</sup> T-tests were used to measure a regional impact on total number of issues presented by state governors. T-statistics for each year under study are 2012: 0.9383, 2013: 0.6448, 2014: 0.9961.

<sup>4</sup> Correlational analysis was utilized to investigate a relationship between population size and total issues. State population figures were taken from the 2010 U.S. Census for comparability. Detailed information on state rankings and population size is available in Appendix B. All years resulted in positive correlations, but none approached 1. Specific correlations are: 2012: 0.1562, 2013: 0.0501, 2014: 0.0054.

<sup>5</sup> Note: State constitutions that do not explicitly require an annual gubernatorial address are Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

legislative leaders. Some governors also time their legislative address to coincide with the release of the state budget (Sher 2017). Governors could also choose to be more strategic with choosing to give their State of the State speech prior to or following the televised presidential State of the Union event. Speaking before the national chief executive keeps the focus squarely on state issues, but following Obama gives governors—especially Republicans—an opportunity to refute and rebuke presidential policy positions. Issue attention is a central component of gubernatorial rhetoric and allows state executives to speak about issues facing their state and the nation-at-large.

### **Conclusion**

Previous scholarship has provided valuable insights regarding how presidents and governors use annual legislative messages to promote policy initiatives. This work begins the process of investigating a gap in the continuing examination of executive rhetoric by simultaneously analyzing both presidential and gubernatorial messages. Rhetoric provides an avenue for elites to address other through presentations of information, persuading others to support a given position, or negating an adversary's argument. These activities are important for the ability to set an agenda, advocate for its adoption, and ultimately achieve desired objectives. Political speechmaking has played an increasingly important role in presidential communication. National chief executives from George Washington onward have availed themselves of opportunities to “go public” (Kernell 1986) and communicate their views with fellow politicians in Congress and the public-at-large. Other scholars, notably Edwards (1990, 2003) have questioned the utility of always delivering public addresses, contending that rhetoric might best be utilized in “staying private” and having discussions “at the margins” with a smaller group of key

individuals about a given policy or issue. Many interrelated personal, political, and temporal conditions may impact the rhetorical presidency. Modern technological advances such as radio, television, and the Internet have certainly enlarged presidential rhetorical ability, while social media outlets have contributed to a diminished degree of control and predictability regarding messaging efforts due to partisan opponents having a rhetorical platform to state their viewpoints and counterarguments.

State governors have grown in the political prominence since the latter half of the twentieth century. Increases in institutional authority and tenure in office have led these executives to use rhetoric more frequently when advocating for policy change. The political reality of passing desired initiatives, however, includes governing with a state legislature. While role and individual personality may partially impact a governor's success or failure, institutional and structural forces such as increasing professionalism among state legislatures and the presence of political parties are much more likely to engineer political wins and losses at the state level. As the United States has become a nation whose politics are increasingly characterized by hyperpartisanship and gridlock, it is vital to understand how modern political culture may impact policy progress made at the national and state levels. Apart from understanding the nature of general nature of political rhetoric and executive-legislative relations, this paper also addressed issue attention and rhetorical efforts by state governors from 2012 to 2014 during the Obama administration.

The analysis of first issues mentioned by subnational executives demonstrated discussion of multiple policies including jobs, infrastructure, child welfare, the economy, transportation, education, gun violence, infrastructure, health care, drug abuse, and

technology. The budget, economy, and jobs proved to be the three issues most generally discussed over the three-year period. Categorizing issue presentation by party affiliation yielded no evidence of partisan differences, as Republican governors and their Democratic counterparts mentioned policy issues with similar frequency. Significant empirical support was not found for partisan or regional differences of governors' first issue priorities. The importance of these findings demonstrates that all governors across the nation set their political agendas by discussing the importance of broad economic and social issues in the United States at the present time, a historical trend that Sabato (1978) documents beginning in the 1960s

The total number of issues raised in annual State of the State addresses were additionally examined to gauge the extent of gubernatorial rhetoric. The statistical difference between the total average of issues by political party were negligible, with Democratic governors discussing slightly more issues than Republicans each year. However the large percentage increase of issues over time, it seems that the nation's present governors are indeed articulating a significantly broader policy agenda than in prior decades (Van Assendelft 1997). As with first priorities, regional differences among total issues proved non-significant.

Political timing was the final indicator of gubernatorial rhetoric studied in this paper. The majority of state governors presented their State of the State addresses prior to, but all presented within three months of Obama's State of the Union address given in late January or early February. These results indicate that there were no important distinctions between parties on address timing. This close proximity may be attributed to the fact that executives see the beginning of a new year as a "fresh start" and wish to

announce their priorities early in the policymaking process.

Future research could delve more historically into rhetorical efforts at the state level prior to work completed on governors serving in the 1950 and 1960s. Does gubernatorial speechmaking via State of the State addresses in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century follow known trends in presidential rhetoric? As they were typically written documents transmitted to Congress for reading, early State of the Union messages were known to contain a listing of policy items. Woodrow Wilson began a modern rhetorical presidency (Tulis 1987) by increasing the usage of identification rhetoric (“we” and “us”) (Teten 2011) by orating directly to his audience. Historical data on gubernatorial addresses during these periods is steadily increasing due to collaborations with state libraries and online repositories, and this project would allow future scholarship to further extend comparisons between presidential and gubernatorial rhetoric.

Executives must consistently use rhetoric in articulating policy preferences in responding to a wide array of political, social, and economic issues. The first issue discussed by a state governor is one measure of their priorities. Governors have also discussed more total issues in State of the State addresses than in previous decades; this can be evidenced by their prominence in American politics and desiring to promote comprehensive policy change. They are independent in when to give their legislative message each year, but political calculations may play a role. This descriptive paper has provided an introduction for understanding gubernatorial-agenda setting.

**Table 1.1 First Issues Mentioned in 2012 State of the State Addresses**

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Issue</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Robert Bentley</b>	Alabama	Republican	Jobs	19.8
<b>Sean Parnell</b>	Alaska	Republican	Economy	46.4
<b>Jan Brewer</b>	Arizona	Republican	Budget	3.4
<b>Jerry Brown</b>	California	Democratic	Budget	16.7
<b>John Hickenlooper</b>	Colorado	Democratic	Jobs	9.0
<b>Dannel Malloy</b>	Connecticut	Democratic	Economy	5.2
<b>Jack Markell</b>	Delaware	Democratic	Economy	8.7
<b>Rick Scott</b>	Florida	Republican	Jobs	19.9
<b>Nathan Deal</b>	Georgia	Republican	Budget	26.6
<b>Neil Abercrombie</b>	Hawaii	Democratic	Education	14.9
<b>Butch Otter</b>	Idaho	Republican	Jobs	18.7
<b>Pat Quinn</b>	Illinois	Democratic	Economy	5.5
<b>Mitch Daniels</b>	Indiana	Republican	Economy	23.7
<b>Terry Branstad</b>	Iowa	Republican	Budget	8.1
<b>Sam Brownback</b>	Kansas	Republican	Economy	32.4
<b>Steve Beshear</b>	Kentucky	Democratic	Budget	19.6
<b>Bobby Jindal</b>	Louisiana	Republican	Education	59.3
<b>Paul LePage</b>	Maine	Republican	Economy	7.97
<b>Martin O' Malley</b>	Maryland	Democratic	Jobs	22.9
<b>Deval Patrick</b>	Massachusetts	Democratic	Jobs	22.3
<b>Rick Snyder</b>	Michigan	Republican	Jobs	3.3
<b>Mark Dayton</b>	Minnesota	Democratic	Jobs	26.0
<b>Phil Bryant</b>	Mississippi	Republican	Jobs	9.7
<b>Jay Nixon</b>	Missouri	Democratic	Jobs	5.8
<b>Dave Heineman</b>	Nebraska	Republican	Child Welfare	22.2
<b>John Lynch</b>	New Hampshire	Democratic	Jobs	13.0
<b>Chris Christie</b>	New Jersey	Republican	Economy	16.2
<b>Susana Martinez</b>	New Mexico	Republican	Budget	16.7
<b>Andrew Cuomo</b>	New York	Democratic	Economy	11.8
<b>John Kasich</b>	Ohio	Republican	Education	6.3
<b>Mary Fallin</b>	Oklahoma	Republican	Jobs	17.8
<b>John Kitzhaber</b>	Oregon	Democratic	Health Care	13.0
<b>Tom Corbett</b>	Pennsylvania	Republican	Budget	14.5
<b>Lincoln Chafee</b>	Rhode Island	Independent	Jobs	4.5
<b>Nikki Haley</b>	South Carolina	Republican	Jobs	17.5
<b>Dennis Daugaard</b>	South Dakota	Republican	Infant Mort.	4.0
<b>Bill Haslam</b>	Tennessee	Republican	Jobs	18.2
<b>Gary Herbert</b>	Utah	Republican	Jobs	16.7
<b>Peter Shumlin</b>	Vermont	Democratic	Transportation	4.5
<b>Bob McDonnell</b>	Virginia	Republican	Jobs	2.7
<b>Christine Gregoire</b>	Washington	Democratic	Education	10.1

**(Continued: Table 1.1 First Issues Mentioned in 2012 State of the State Addresses)**

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Issue</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Earl Ray Tomblin</b>	West Virginia	Democratic	Taxes	2.6
<b>Scott Walker</b>	Wisconsin	Republican	Jobs	23.8
<b>Matt Mead</b>	Wyoming	Republican	Technology	6.3

**Table 1.2 First Issues Mentioned in 2013 State of the State Addresses**

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Issue</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Robert Bentley</b>	Alabama	Republican	Jobs	14.1
<b>Sean Parnell</b>	Alaska	Republican	Crime	9.5
<b>Jan Brewer</b>	Arizona	Republican	Child Abuse	8.4
<b>Mike Beebe</b>	Arkansas	Democratic	Medicaid	27.7
<b>Jerry Brown</b>	California	Democratic	Education	19.3
<b>John Hickenlooper</b>	Colorado	Democratic	Bureaucracy	9.5
<b>Dannel Malloy</b>	Connecticut	Democratic	Gun Viol.	18.8
<b>Jack Markell</b>	Delaware	Democratic	Education	24.6
<b>Rick Scott</b>	Florida	Republican	Economy	10.3
<b>Nathan Deal</b>	Georgia	Republican	Crim. Justice	9.4
<b>Neil Abercrombie</b>	Hawaii	Democratic	Budget	17.6
<b>Butch Otter</b>	Idaho	Republican	Budget	11.8
<b>Pat Quinn</b>	Illinois	Democratic	Jobs	3.8
<b>Mike Pence</b>	Indiana	Republican	Jobs	8.6
<b>Terry Branstad</b>	Iowa	Republican	Budget	6.9
<b>Sam Brownback</b>	Kansas	Republican	Jobs	8.4
<b>Steve Beshear</b>	Kentucky	Democratic	Budget	6.2
<b>Bobby Jindal</b>	Louisiana	Republican	Jobs	8.1
<b>Paul LePage</b>	Maine	Republican	Economy	6.1
<b>Martin O' Malley</b>	Maryland	Democratic	Budget	7.3
<b>Deval Patrick</b>	Massachusetts	Democratic	Education	14.7
<b>Rick Snyder</b>	Michigan	Republican	Economy	2.2
<b>Mark Dayton</b>	Minnesota	Democratic	Jobs	2.7
<b>Phil Bryant</b>	Mississippi	Republican	Jobs	19.1
<b>Jay Nixon</b>	Missouri	Democratic	Jobs	2.8
<b>Steve Bullock</b>	Montana	Democratic	Budget	6.1
<b>Dave Heineman</b>	Nebraska	Republican	Education	15.7
<b>Brian Sandoval</b>	Nevada	Republican	Education	34.3
<b>Maggie Hassan</b>	New Hampshire	Democratic	Budget	9.3
<b>Chris Christie</b>	New Jersey	Republican	Infrastructure	13.4
<b>Susana Martinez</b>	New Mexico	Republican	Budget	15.5
<b>Andrew Cuomo</b>	New York	Democratic	Econ. Devel.	9.1
<b>Pat McCrory</b>	North Carolina	Republican	Govt. Eff.	14.8
<b>Jack Dalrymple</b>	North Dakota	Republican	Jobs	8.4
<b>John Kasich</b>	Ohio	Republican	Health Care	23.5
<b>Mary Fallin</b>	Oklahoma	Republican	Education	8.9
<b>John Kitzhaber</b>	Oregon	Democratic	Jobs	14.2
<b>Tom Corbett</b>	Pennsylvania	Republican	Jobs	7.9
<b>Lincoln Chafee</b>	Rhode Island	Independent	Budget	10.5
<b>Nikki Haley</b>	South Carolina	Republican	Jobs	7.0
<b>Dennis Daugaard</b>	South Dakota	Republican	Budget	15.9
<b>Bill Haslam</b>	Tennessee	Republican	Budget	8.9

(Continued: Table 1.2 First Issues Mentioned in 2013 State of the State Addresses)

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Issue</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Rick Perry</b>	Texas	Republican	Jobs	18.2
<b>Gary Herbert</b>	Utah	Republican	Education	20.1
<b>Peter Shumlin</b>	Vermont	Democratic	Jobs	19.5
<b>Bob McDonnell</b>	Virginia	Republican	Jobs	1.0
<b>Jay Inslee</b>	Washington	Democratic	Jobs	4.8
<b>Earl Ray Tomblin</b>	West Virginia	Democratic	Jobs	5.9
<b>Scott Walker</b>	Wisconsin	Republican	Budget	8.7
<b>Matt Mead</b>	Wyoming	Republican	Education	12.6

**Table 1.3 First Issues Mentioned in 2014 State of the State Addresses**

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Issue</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Robert Bentley</b>	Alabama	Republican	Jobs	18.5
<b>Sean Parnell</b>	Alaska	Republican	Energy	19.0
<b>Jan Brewer</b>	Arizona	Republican	Budget	3.6
<b>Jerry Brown</b>	California	Democratic	Fiscal Policy	13.0
<b>John Hickenlooper</b>	Colorado	Democratic	Economy	3.1
<b>Dannel Malloy</b>	Connecticut	Democratic	Budget	18.0
<b>Jack Markell</b>	Delaware	Democratic	Jobs	1.9
<b>Rick Scott</b>	Florida	Republican	Budget	12.9
<b>Nathan Deal</b>	Georgia	Republican	Budget	32.4
<b>Neil Abercrombie</b>	Hawaii	Democratic	Fiscal Policy	10.1
<b>Butch Otter</b>	Idaho	Republican	Education	27.2
<b>Pat Quinn</b>	Illinois	Democratic	Small Busin.	7.0
<b>Mike Pence</b>	Indiana	Republican	Jobs	7.2
<b>Terry Branstad</b>	Iowa	Republican	Budget	2.9
<b>Sam Brownback</b>	Kansas	Republican	Economy	13.2
<b>Steve Beshear</b>	Kentucky	Democratic	Jobs	25.5
<b>Bobby Jindal</b>	Louisiana	Republican	Jobs	57.6
<b>Paul LePage</b>	Maine	Republican	Jobs	14.3
<b>Martin O'Malley</b>	Maryland	Democratic	Fiscal Policy	8.7
<b>Deval Patrick</b>	Massachusetts	Democratic	Infrastructure	2.0
<b>Rick Snyder</b>	Michigan	Republican	Jobs	7.9
<b>Mark Dayton</b>	Minnesota	Democratic	Jobs	17.7
<b>Phil Bryant</b>	Mississippi	Republican	Jobs	5.2
<b>Jay Nixon</b>	Missouri	Democratic	Jobs	6.3
<b>Dave Heineman</b>	Nebraska	Republican	Health Care	15.7
<b>Maggie Hassan</b>	New Hampshire	Democratic	Jobs	2.7
<b>Chris Christie</b>	New Jersey	Republican	Jobs	3.0
<b>Susana Martinez</b>	New Mexico	Republican	Fiscal Policy	3.6
<b>Andrew Cuomo</b>	New York	Democratic	Budget	5.6
<b>John Kasich</b>	Ohio	Republican	Budget	4.5
<b>Mary Fallin</b>	Oklahoma	Republican	Budget	3.7
<b>Tom Corbett</b>	Pennsylvania	Republican	Fiscal Policy	2.4
<b>Lincoln Chafee</b>	Rhode Island	Democratic	Education	6.2
<b>Nikki Haley</b>	South Carolina	Republican	Jobs	7.3
<b>Denis Dugaard</b>	South Dakota	Republican	Jobs	1.5
<b>Bill Haslam</b>	Tennessee	Republican	Budget	4.1
<b>Gary Herbert</b>	Utah	Republican	Jobs	1.9
<b>Peter Shumlin</b>	Vermont	Democratic	Drug Abuse	75.2
<b>Bob McDonnell</b>	Virginia	Republican	Jobs	4.0
<b>Jay Inslee</b>	Washington	Democratic	Education	28.9
<b>Earl Ray Tomblin</b>	West Virginia	Democratic	Fiscal Policy	5.5

(Continued: Table 1.3 First Issues Mentioned in 2014 State of the State Addresses)

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Issue</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Scott Walker</b>	Wisconsin	Republican	Economy	5.8
<b>Matt Mead</b>	Wyoming	Republican	Economy	1.0

**Table 1.4 First Issues Mentioned in 2012 State of the State  
Addresses by Party Affiliation**

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Issue</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Robert Bentley</b>	Alabama	Republican	Jobs	19.8
<b>Sean Parnell</b>	Alaska	Republican	Economy	46.4
<b>Jan Brewer</b>	Arizona	Republican	Budget	3.4
<b>Rick Scott</b>	Florida	Republican	Jobs	19.9
<b>Nathan Deal</b>	Georgia	Republican	Budget	26.6
<b>Rick Scott</b>	Florida	Republican	Jobs	19.9
<b>Nathan Deal</b>	Georgia	Republican	Budget	26.6
<b>Butch Otter</b>	Idaho	Republican	Jobs	18.7
<b>Mitch Daniels</b>	Indiana	Republican	Economy	23.7
<b>Terry Branstad</b>	Iowa	Republican	Budget	8.1
<b>Sam Brownback</b>	Kansas	Republican	Economy	32.4
<b>Bobby Jindal</b>	Louisiana	Republican	Education	59.3
<b>Paul LePage</b>	Maine	Republican	Economy	8.0
<b>Rick Snyder</b>	Michigan	Republican	Jobs	3.3
<b>Phil Bryant</b>	Mississippi	Republican	Jobs	9.65%
<b>Dave Heineman</b>	Nebraska	Republican	Child Welfare	22.2
<b>Chris Christie</b>	New Jersey	Republican	Economy	16.2
<b>Susana Martinez</b>	New Mexico	Republican	Budget	16.7
<b>John Kasich</b>	Ohio	Republican	Education	6.3
<b>Mary Fallin</b>	Oklahoma	Republican	Jobs	17.8
<b>Tom Corbett</b>	Pennsylvania	Republican	Budget	14.5
<b>Nikki Haley</b>	South Carolina	Republican	Jobs	17.5
<b>Dennis Daugaard</b>	South Dakota	Republican	Infant Mort.	4.0
<b>Bill Haslam</b>	Tennessee	Republican	Jobs	18.2
<b>Gary Herbert</b>	Utah	Republican	Jobs	16.7
<b>Bob McDonnell</b>	Virginia	Republican	Jobs	2.7
<b>Scott Walker</b>	Wisconsin	Republican	Jobs	23.8
<b>Matt Mead</b>	Wyoming	Republican	Technology	6.3
<b>Jerry Brown</b>	California	Democratic	Budget	16.7
<b>John Hickenlooper</b>	Colorado	Democratic	Jobs	9.0
<b>Dannel Malloy</b>	Connecticut	Democratic	Economy	5.2
<b>Jack Markell</b>	Delaware	Democratic	Economy	8.7
<b>Neil Abercrombie</b>	Hawaii	Democratic	Education	14.9
<b>Pat Quinn</b>	Illinois	Democratic	Economy	5.5
<b>Steve Beshear</b>	Kentucky	Democratic	Budget	20.0
<b>Martin O' Malley</b>	Maryland	Democratic	Jobs	22.9
<b>Deval Patrick</b>	Massachusetts	Democratic	Jobs	22.3
<b>Mark Dayton</b>	Minnesota	Democratic	Jobs	26.0
<b>Jay Nixon</b>	Missouri	Democratic	Jobs	5.8
<b>John Lynch</b>	New Hampshire	Democratic	Jobs	13.0
<b>Andrew Cuomo</b>	New York	Democratic	Economy	11.8

**(Continued: Table 1.4 First Issues Mentioned in 2012 State of the State Addresses by Party Affiliation)**

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Issue</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>John Kitzhaber</b>	Oregon	Democratic	Health Care	13.1
<b>Peter Shumlin</b>	Vermont	Democratic	Transportation	4.5
<b>Christine Gregoire</b>	Washington	Democratic	Education	10.1
<b>Earl Ray Tomblin</b>	West Virginia	Democratic	Taxes	2.6
<b>Lincoln Chafee</b>	Rhode Island	Independent	Jobs	4.5

**Table 1.5 First Issues Mentioned in 2013 State of the State Addresses  
by Party Affiliation**

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Issue</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Robert Bentley</b>	Alabama	Republican	Jobs	14.1
<b>Sean Parnell</b>	Alaska	Republican	Crime	9.5
<b>Jan Brewer</b>	Arizona	Republican	Child Abuse	8.4
<b>Rick Scott</b>	Florida	Republican	Economy	10.3
<b>Nathan Deal</b>	Georgia	Republican	Crim. Justice	9.4
<b>Butch Otter</b>	Idaho	Republican	Budget	11.8
<b>Mike Pence</b>	Indiana	Republican	Jobs	8.6
<b>Terry Branstad</b>	Iowa	Republican	Budget	6.9
<b>Sam Brownback</b>	Kansas	Republican	Jobs	8.4
<b>Bobby Jindal</b>	Louisiana	Republican	Jobs	8.1
<b>Paul LePage</b>	Maine	Republican	Economy	6.1
<b>Rick Snyder</b>	Michigan	Republican	Economy	2.2
<b>Phil Bryant</b>	Mississippi	Republican	Jobs	19.1
<b>Dave Heineman</b>	Nebraska	Republican	Education	15.7
<b>Brian Sandoval</b>	Nevada	Republican	Education	34.3
<b>Chris Christie</b>	New Jersey	Republican	Infrastructure	13.4
<b>Susana Martinez</b>	New Mexico	Republican	Budget	15.5
<b>Pat McCrory</b>	North Carolina	Republican	Govt. Eff.	14.8
<b>Jack Dalrymple</b>	North Dakota	Republican	Jobs	8.4
<b>John Kasich</b>	Ohio	Republican	Health Care	23.5
<b>Mary Fallin</b>	Oklahoma	Republican	Education	8.9
<b>Tom Corbett</b>	Pennsylvania	Republican	Jobs	7.9
<b>Nikki Haley</b>	South Carolina	Republican	Jobs	7.0
<b>Dennis Daugaard</b>	South Dakota	Republican	Budget	15.9
<b>Bill Haslam</b>	Tennessee	Republican	Budget	8.9
<b>Rick Perry</b>	Texas	Republican	Jobs	18.2
<b>Gary Herbert</b>	Utah	Republican	Education	21.0
<b>Bob McDonnell</b>	Virginia	Republican	Jobs	1.0
<b>Scott Walker</b>	Wisconsin	Republican	Budget	8.7
<b>Matt Mead</b>	Wyoming	Republican	Education	12.6
<b>Mike Beebe</b>	Arkansas	Democratic	Medicaid	27.7
<b>Jerry Brown</b>	California	Democratic	Education	19.3
<b>John Hickenlooper</b>	Colorado	Democratic	Bureaucracy	9.5
<b>Dannel Malloy</b>	Connecticut	Democratic	Gun Violence	18.8
<b>Jack Markell</b>	Delaware	Democratic	Education	24.6
<b>Neil Abercrombie</b>	Hawaii	Democratic	Budget	17.6
<b>Pat Quinn</b>	Illinois	Democratic	Jobs	3.8
<b>Steve Beshear</b>	Kentucky	Democratic	Budget	6.2
<b>Martin O' Malley</b>	Maryland	Democratic	Budget	7.3
<b>Deval Patrick</b>	Massachusetts	Democratic	Education	14.7

**(Continued: Table 1.5 First Issues Mentioned in 2013 State of the State Addresses  
by Party Affiliation**

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Issue</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Mark Dayton</b>	Minnesota	Democratic	Jobs	2.7
<b>Jay Nixon</b>	Missouri	Democratic	Jobs	2.8
<b>Steve Bullock</b>	Montana	Democratic	Budget	6.1
<b>Maggie Hassan</b>	New Hampshire	Democratic	Budget	9.3
<b>Andrew Cuomo</b>	New York	Democratic	Econ. Devel.	9.1
<b>John Kitzhaber</b>	Oregon	Democratic	Jobs	14.2
<b>Peter Shumlin</b>	Vermont	Democratic	Jobs	19.5
<b>Jay Inslee</b>	Washington	Democratic	Jobs	4.8
<b>Earl Ray Tomblin</b>	West Virginia	Democratic	Jobs	5.9
<b>Lincoln Chafee</b>	Rhode Island	Independent	Budget	10.5

**Table 1.6 First Issues Mentioned in 2014 State of the State Addresses  
by Party Affiliation**

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Issue</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Robert Bentley</b>	Alabama	Republican	Jobs	18.5
<b>Sean Parnell</b>	Alaska	Republican	Energy	19.0
<b>Jan Brewer</b>	Arizona	Republican	Budget	3.6
<b>Rick Scott</b>	Florida	Republican	Budget	12.9
<b>Nathan Deal</b>	Georgia	Republican	Budget	32.4
<b>Butch Otter</b>	Idaho	Republican	Education	27.2
<b>Mike Pence</b>	Indiana	Republican	Jobs	7.2
<b>Terry Branstad</b>	Iowa	Republican	Budget	2.9
<b>Sam Brownback</b>	Kansas	Republican	Economy	13.2
<b>Bobby Jindal</b>	Louisiana	Republican	Jobs	57.6
<b>Paul LePage</b>	Maine	Republican	Jobs	14.3
<b>Rick Snyder</b>	Michigan	Republican	Jobs	7.9
<b>Phil Bryant</b>	Mississippi	Republican	Jobs	5.2
<b>Dave Heineman</b>	Nebraska	Republican	Health Care	15.7
<b>Chris Christie</b>	New Jersey	Republican	Jobs	3.0
<b>Susana Martinez</b>	New Mexico	Republican	Fiscal Policy	3.6
<b>John Kasich</b>	Ohio	Republican	Budget	4.5
<b>Mary Fallin</b>	Oklahoma	Republican	Budget	3.7
<b>Tom Corbett</b>	Pennsylvania	Republican	Fiscal Policy	2.4
<b>Nikki Haley</b>	South Carolina	Republican	Jobs	7.3
<b>Denis Dugaard</b>	South Dakota	Republican	Jobs	1.5
<b>Bill Haslam</b>	Tennessee	Republican	Budget	4.1
<b>Gary Herbert</b>	Utah	Republican	Jobs	1.9
<b>Bob McDonnell</b>	Virginia	Republican	Jobs	4.0
<b>Scott Walker</b>	Wisconsin	Republican	Economy	5.8
<b>Matt Mead</b>	Wyoming	Republican	Economy	1.0
<b>Jerry Brown</b>	California	Democratic	Fiscal Policy	13.0
<b>John Hickenlooper</b>	Colorado	Democratic	Economy	3.1
<b>Dannel Malloy</b>	Connecticut	Democratic	Budget	18.0
<b>Jack Markell</b>	Delaware	Democratic	Jobs	1.9
<b>Neil Abercrombie</b>	Hawaii	Democratic	Fiscal Policy	10.1
<b>Pat Quinn</b>	Illinois	Democratic	Small Bus.	7.0
<b>Steve Beshear</b>	Kentucky	Democratic	Jobs	25.5
<b>Martin O'Malley</b>	Maryland	Democratic	Fiscal Policy	8.7
<b>Deval Patrick</b>	Massachusetts	Democratic	Infrastructure	2.0
<b>Mark Dayton</b>	Minnesota	Democratic	Jobs	17.7
<b>Jay Nixon</b>	Missouri	Democratic	Jobs	6.3
<b>Maggie Hassan</b>	New Hampshire	Democratic	Jobs	2.7
<b>Andrew Cuomo</b>	New York	Democratic	Budget	5.6
<b>Lincoln Chafee</b>	Rhode Island	Democratic	Education	6.2

**(Continued: Table 1.6 First Issues Mentioned in 2014 State of the State Addresses  
by Party Affiliation**

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Issue</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Peter Shumlin</b>	Vermont	Democratic	Drug Abuse	75.2
<b>Jay Inslee</b>	Washington	Democratic	Education	28.9
<b>Earl Ray Tomblin</b>	West Virginia	Democratic	Fiscal Policy	5.5

**Table 1.7 Selected First Issues by Party Affiliation,  
State of the State Addresses, 2012-2014**

	<b>Republican Addresses</b>	<b>Democratic Addresses</b>
<b>Budget</b>	18 (21.4%)	9 (17.0%)
<b>Economy</b>	11 (13.1%)	6 (11.3%)
<b>Jobs</b>	32 (38.1%)	18 (34.0%)
<b>Education</b>	8 (9.5%)	7 (13.2%)
<b>Gun Violence</b>	0 (0%)	1 (1.9%)
<b>Health Care</b>	2 (2.4%)	1 (1.9%)
<b>Total</b>	84	53

**Table 1.8 Average of Total Issues in State of the State Addresses  
by Party, 2012-2014**

	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>Republican Addresses</b>	10.0	16.5	17.2	14.6
<b>Democratic Addresses</b>	13.8	18.1	21.9	17.9
<b>Average</b>	11.9	17.3	19.6	16.3

Note: Specific information on total number of issues for each State of the State address is provided in Appendix C.

**Table 1.9 Timing of Gubernatorial State of the State Addresses  
by Year, 2012-2014**

	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>Before SOTU</b>	28 (63.6%)	44 (88.0%)	29 (67.4%)
<b>Same Day as SOTU</b>	2 (4.5%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.3%)
<b>After SOTU</b>	14 (31.8%)	6 (12.0%)	13 (30.2%)
<b>Total</b>	44	50	43

**Table 1.10 Timing of Gubernatorial State of the State Addresses  
by Party, 2012-2014**

	<b>Republican Addresses</b>	<b>Democratic Addresses</b>
<b>Before SOTU</b>	60 (71.4%)	41 (77.4%)
<b>Same Day as SOTU</b>	2 (2.4%)	1 (1.9%)
<b>After SOTU</b>	22 (26.2%)	11 (20.8%)
<b>Total</b>	84	53

Note: Barack Obama delivered his State of the Union Address on January 24, 2012, February 12, 2013, and January 28, 2014. Detailed information on address timing is found in Appendix D.

**Paper Two: The Affordable Care Act:  
A Comparison of Presidential and Gubernatorial Rhetoric**

Health care was at the center of the national debate throughout the Obama presidency. But was health care a subject of debate at the state level? Did governors discuss it in their State of the State addresses? If so, were Democrats in favor of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and Republicans opposed to it? Or did other issues dominate the state debate? While we know a great deal about presidential rhetoric, our understanding of gubernatorial priorities in State of the State addresses is less well understood. This paper qualitatively and quantitatively addresses this gap in the scholarly literature.

Health care access is a life-or-death issue for many and a significant priority for the U.S. federal government; the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) note that it comprised approximately 17% of GDP spending (“Centers”) between 2012 and 2014. Controlling this cost while providing access for the most number of Americans possible underscores the partisan nature of this legislation. Democratic presidents, including Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Bill Clinton tried and failed to pass health care reform, while Lyndon Johnson achieved in creating Medicare and Medicaid programs for the indigent and senior citizens.

Underscoring the political, social, and economic importance of health care for every American, comprehensive background information is provided pertaining to health care’s role in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections and the introduction of the Affordable Care Act or “Obamacare” to the American political lexicon through passage by Congress. As regulating health care has traditionally been seen as part of the “police power” held at the state level, governors should theoretically desire to generally discuss

this issue in their State of the State addresses. As enactment of the Affordable Care Act caused controversy amongst subnational executives, we may also expect state governors to discuss Obama's signature legislation. Employing logit regression analysis, the paper's central focus is how state governors responded to Obamacare through their legislative messages. The significance of the Affordable Care Act and its impact on gubernatorial-presidential relations concludes the study.

### **The 2008 Presidential Election and National Health Care**

The 2008 presidential election was a significant contest in American political history. With no incumbent president or vice president running on either major party ticket (Stewart 2012; Mayhew 2008) for the first time since Hoover's 1928 defeat of Governor Al Smith, this cycle marked the first truly "open-seat" race for the White House in eight decades. The primary contests included the Democratic race between then-Senators Barack Obama of Illinois and Hillary Clinton of New York while the Republican primary candidates included Arizona Senator John McCain as well as former Governors Mike Huckabee of Arkansas and Mitt Romney of Massachusetts.

As the campaign for the White House began, Americans were ideologically divided on a number of key issues relating to health care coverage. Blendon et al.'s (2008) survey research found four general topics dominating the discussion: (1) George W. Bush's health care policies, (2) the general state of U.S. health care, (3) individuals' specific health care needs, and (4) longer-term remedies to current health care problems. Republicans generally believed that health care should be the responsibility of individuals while Democrats favored greater intervention by the federal government.

Linking partisanship to vote intention in the 2008 election among likely voters,

the authors find that 65% of those surveyed who voted in Democratic primaries and caucuses desired a new and comprehensive plan allowing those presently uninsured to have coverage compared to 23% of Republicans while 27 % of GOP respondents preferred maintaining the status quo compared to only 8% of Democrats. Apart from these differences regarding health care, a majority of adults in a 2008 Gallup poll collectively answered “cost” and “access” when asked, “What would you say is the most urgent health problem facing this country at the present time? (“Healthcare System”). The general election featured proposals regarding health care reform addressing these concerns from the two eventual major party candidates, Republican John McCain and Democrat Barack Obama.

#### *John McCain and Health Care Reform*

*“Controlling health care costs will take fundamental change. Nothing short of a complete reform of the culture of our health care system and the way we pay for it will suffice”*  
(“Straight Talk...”) (Tanner 2008)

John McCain’s health care proposal affected overall cost through changes to the then-current tax code by providing credits of \$2,500 to individuals and \$5,000 to families to ease buying coverage through the existing individual insurance marketplace. Americans could then use the funds to supplement employer-based health care and deposit any extra money into a personal health savings account (Rustgi et al. 2008). The latter was supported by President George W. Bush, and consistent with a conservative ideology of limited government, and allowed private citizens to make their own health decisions in consultation with private physicians. Some scholars agreed, arguing McCain’s plans to lower costs to individuals would create a system characterized by enlarged choice and competition (Moffit and Owcharenko 2008).

McCain desired to increase health care access through deregulation and allowing citizens to purchase coverage across state lines. This would theoretically allow a more competitive market (Peters 2010), as citizens would have greater options to compare and price care that fit their unique situation. The Republican nominee also proposed providing health care to those previously denied coverage due to preexisting conditions. It was argued that while McCain's plan would decrease overall health care costs (Tanner 2008), its effect on increasing accessibility would be modest at best (Buchmueller et al. 2008), only reducing the uninsured by five million in five years following enactment (Burman et al. 2008). Obama's proposal provided a different solution to alleviate America's health care crisis.

#### *Barack Obama and Health Care Reform*

*"Our health care system is broken: expensive, inefficient, and poorly adapted to an economy no longer built on lifetime employment—a system that exposes Americans to insecurity and possible destitution" (Obama 2007, 22-23).*

Barack Obama's answer to solving the nation's chronic health care problem, while greatly differing from his Republican opponent, similarly focused on decreasing costs while increasing access to everyday Americans (Peters 2010). The Democratic nominee's approach included a planned savings per family of \$2,500 each year through creation of a national insurance program. This system would ideally reduce wasteful spending by decreasing fraudulent charges by insurance companies and increase the focus on preventive care (Foer 2007) through funding for electronic health records systems which could decrease physician error through, for example, ordering unneeded examinations ("Barack Obama's Plan..."). Allowing college-age children to remain on their parents' health insurance until age twenty-six allows students to avoid going without

insurance due to cost and having to simultaneously pay other expenses including student loans. Obama's plan finally offered small businesses a sizeable tax credit as an incentive to offer coverage to their employees (Akinnibi 2013).

"I am absolutely determined that by the end of the first term of the next president, we should have universal health care in this country" (Pickler 2007). This quote from the 2008 campaign nicely summarizes Obama's view on increasing access during his time in office. The plan included coverage for all Americans by expanding existing federal programs including Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) while creating a new national public health care exchange enabling others to purchase insurance if not already covered through a private plan or their employer ("President-Elect Barack Obama's..."). Obama's signature domestic achievement was praised by scholars for its ability to improve health care access for Latinos (Alcalá et al. 2017) and young adults (Barbaresco et al. 2015). Outside of academia, however, its reliance on the federal government was a cause for concern among conservative interests such as the Heritage Foundation (Moffit and Owcharenko 2008). McCain and Obama provided detailed and policy-oriented solutions toward repairing the broken health care system.

### *General Election Results*

The results of the 2008 election demonstrated a mandate for one candidate and their agenda regarding health care reform. Barack Obama decisively defeated John McCain on November 4, 2008 in the Electoral College and won the popular vote by seven percentage points (Jacobs and Skocpol 2016). A sizeable margin of voters noted concern over being able to afford health care coverage following the election; these

individuals overwhelmingly selected Obama by a two-to-one margin (65% to 23%) (“Inside Obama’s Sweeping Victory...”).

### **The Obama Administration and Passage of the Affordable Care Act**

On January 20, 2009, Barack Obama was sworn into office and delivered an inaugural address containing inspirational and forward-looking rhetorical statements consistent with his historic campaign for the White House. Marking the occasion, he noted, “Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this America. They will be met.” Obama acted quickly to begin the contentious process of implementing the Affordable Care Act.

The new president delivered a speech to a joint session of Congress one month later. Discussing the issue of health care, Obama noted:

“Already, we have done more to advance the cause of health care reform in the last thirty days than we have in the last decade...Now, there will be many different opinions and ideas about how to achieve reform, and that is why I’m bringing together...Democrats and Republicans to begin work on this issue next week. I suffer no illusions that this will be an easy process. It will be hard...So let there be no doubt: health care reform cannot wait, it must not wait, and it will not wait another year” (“President Obama Addresses...”).

In this speech, Obama’s rhetoric called for a bipartisan effort to pass the ACA while displaying a sense of resolve and resoluteness concerning the legislation’s eventual passage. The president’s laudable call for bipartisanship, however, would not be realized during key votes on congressional legislation.

Then-Governor Bobby Jindal (R-LA) delivered the Republican response to the presidential address. His statement on health care noted partisan differences on this issue while echoing Obama’s call for bipartisanship in the days and months ahead:

“Republicans believe in a simple principle: No American should have to worry about losing their health coverage...We stand for universal access to affordable health care coverage. What we oppose is universal government-run health care...We believe Americans can do anything, and if we put aside partisan politics and work together, we can make our system...affordable and accessible for every one of our citizens” (CNN Politics).

Despite both parties calling for civility in the legislative process, key events in the actual passage of the Affordable Care Act would demonstrate the inherent inter-party divisiveness characteristic within modern American politics, mirroring ideological differences present in presidential-gubernatorial relations. Throughout the first half of 2009, the Obama administration worked vigorously to begin the national conversation on health care while advancing its preferred reform plan. Wishing to avoid centrally developing the legislation, a failure of the Clinton White House’s reform efforts during the 1990s, the current administration hosted a health care summit (Smith 2012; Starr 2013) inviting various stakeholders including politicians, medical professionals, and pharmaceutical representatives to work together and develop initial action steps (Lothian 2009) toward passing comprehensive health care legislation. Obama told forum attendees that “the status quo is the one option that’s not on the table, and those who seek to block any reform at all—any reform at any costs will not prevail this time around (“President Obama Speaks...”)

Members of Congress were also working diligently during this time regarding the president’s signature domestic initiative. Within six months of Obama taking office, Senators Max Baucus (D-MT) and Chuck Grassley (R-IA) of the chamber’s Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee led a series of congressional roundtable discussions related to financing the Affordable Care Act (Iglehart 2009; Schier and Eberly 2016). Both chambers eventually proposed and passed America’s

Affordable Health Choices Act, an early forerunner of the ACA, before adjourning for the traditional congressional summer recess (Cannan 2013; O'Connor 2009).

As members travelled home to reconnect with constituents, they encountered a mixture of opinions regarding the legitimacy and implications of nationalized health care. The Gallup polling organization conducted a national survey during July 2009 to gauge Americans' feelings on an array of health-related issues. The results found that a majority of Americans supported congressional action, with sharp partisan disagreements: nearly 80% of Democratic respondents favored, while over 70% of Republicans opposed reform. Similar differences were found when respondents were asked specific questions on mandatory health insurance for individual Americans (Jones 2009). Popular sentiments were also voiced at many congressional town hall meetings around the country.

Elected officials routinely participate in these "meet-and-greet" events whenever possible as a way of staying connected with constituents while continuing to build support for future re-election campaigns and explaining the significance and impact of public policies (Fenno 1978; Mayhew 1974). This latter element became increasingly important during the recess period, as frustrated and concerned voters were determined to make their ideas known to lawmakers on Obama's health care reform package. Conservative groups instructed individuals to "pack the hall," "yell out and challenge the Rep's statements early," and "get him off his prepared script and agenda" (Urbina 2009). These rhetorical suggestions only added to the already fever-pitched partisan fervor felt throughout America, especially among those wary of large-scale government actions. Amidst this charged environment, at a Portsmouth, New Hampshire town hall meeting,

the president pushed back against popularized statements concerning the legislation notably that “death panels” would decide if older Americans received health care (Smith 2012). Obama vowed not “to “pull the plug on grandma” (Wilson 2010). The partisanship displayed during the summer months worked its way into the halls of Congress after the recess period.

The remainder of the year saw increased political and legislative activity relating to final passage of the Affordable Care Act. The House of Representatives passed its version of the health care bill on November 7, 2009 by a 220-215 margin; a sole Republican member voted in favor of the legislation (Hulse and Pear 2009). The Senate followed suit six weeks later in a 60-39 vote—this time without a single GOP supporter. Then-Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) noted, “This fight is long from over. My colleagues and I will work to stop this bill from becoming law” (Murray and Montgomery 2009). Despite Republican misgivings toward the Affordable Care Act, Barack Obama signed the measure into law on March 23, 2010. Marking the historic occasion, the president noted:

“Today, after almost a century of trying; today, after over a year of debate; today, after all the votes have been tallied -- health insurance reform becomes law in the United States of America...In a few moments, when I sign this bill, all of the overheated rhetoric over reform will finally confront the reality of reform...”

“With all the punditry, all of the lobbying, all of the game-playing that passes for governing in Washington, it’s been easy at times to doubt our ability to do such a big thing, such a complicated thing...But today, we are affirming that essential truth...that we are not a nation that scales back its aspirations...”

“We are a nation that faces its challenges and accepts its responsibilities. We are a nation that does what is hard...That is what we do. That is who we are. That is what makes us the United States of America...And we have now just enshrined, as soon as I sign this bill, the core principle that everybody should have some basic security when it comes to their health care” (“Obama signs health-care...”).

These rhetorical statements display a sense of finality regarding the arduous and

controversial process of passing health care reform while situating the ACA within a broader political context. Obama also wished to remind his audience that America is a persevering nation—declaring that even through conflict, the country will succeed in passing public policies benefitting citizens’ livelihoods. While health care reform had been achieved between the legislative and executive branches of government, the judiciary had not yet weighed in regarding the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act. A second large stakeholder in health reform, the American electorate, had not been able to vote to approve or disapprove of the legislation. Both groups of actors would have an opportunity to formally weigh on the issue.

### **Judicial and Electoral Hurdles in Health Care Reform**

#### *Obamacare on Trial: The Courts Respond*

Within eighteen months after the passage of the Affordable Care Act, debate over the legislation began in the federal court system. Various cases were brought concerning the legislation with judges and appeals panels in Virginia, Florida, Georgia, and Ohio providing contradictory rulings to uphold and also strike down the existing health care law (Cooper 2011; Sack 2011; Mears 2011). A central issue in these litigations concerned the individual mandate, a provision requiring all Americans to have some type of health insurance or pay a monetary penalty. Could the federal government force citizens to literally “buy into” the administration’s idea of health reform? Jurists in these cases, appointed by presidents of differing political parties (Cooper 2011), disagreed on the mandate’s legitimacy and if Congress possessed sufficient authority to enforce this necessity. Partisan divisions at the appeals court level led the U.S. Supreme Court to grant certiorari and decide the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act.

Ideological tensions were evident in rhetorical statements before the Supreme Court hearing. Dan Pfeiffer, White House Director of Communications at the time, noted that, “We know the Affordable Care Act is constitutional and are confident the Supreme Court will agree.” In opposition, Mitch McConnell retorted, “This misguided law represents an unprecedented and unconstitutional expansion of the federal government into the daily lives of every American” (Barnes 2011). As judicial legitimacy, congressional power, executive policy, and public health would be affected through their decision, the justices recognized the importance of *National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) v. Sebelius* by granting over five hours of oral argument (Liptak 2011), four more than standard practice, for counsel to present their positions.

The eventual 5-4 decision by the Roberts Court, while voting to uphold the law, only continued to enrage the partisan feelings underlying comprehensive health care reform. The controversial individual mandate was deemed constitutional by the Court’s then-four liberal members—Justices Stephen Breyer, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Elena Kagan, and Sonia Sotomayor—and surprisingly, Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr., a Republican appointee. The majority ruled that Congress could require individuals to purchase health coverage through its taxing authority while negating the authority of the Commerce Clause as binding in this area. Justices Alito, Kennedy, Scalia, and Thomas dissented, arguing that the decision amounted to judicial overreach (Mears and Cohen 2012). Speaking for the minority, Kennedy stated that “The majority rewrites the statute Congress wrote...what Congress called a penalty, the court calls a tax. The Affordable Care Act now must operate as the court has revised it, not as Congress designed it.” (Wolf and Jackson 2012). A majority of the justices additionally ruled the legislation’s

Medicaid expansion provision an unconstitutional use of Congress's spending authority (Rosenbaum and Westmoreland 2012; Sunkara and Rosenbaum 2016). *NFIB* only began the Supreme Court's involvement with the Affordable Care Act; by a 6-3 decision vote, *King v. Burwell* (2015) upheld state-based tax subsidies associated with the legislation (Leonard 2015).

### *The 2012 Presidential Election*

President Barack Obama ran for reelection in 2012 against former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney. Health care remained a central discussion point in the electoral conversation, as the contest became a referendum of Obama's first term and policies.

### Mitt Romney and Health Care Reform

During his gubernatorial tenure, Romney worked successfully with a Democrat-controlled General Court<sup>6</sup> to pass comprehensive state-based health care reform. In describing the legislation, Acosta and Homick (2009) note that it bans gender discrimination while disallowing insurers to use age, pre-existing conditions, or current health status as benchmarks for providing insurance—causing some to summarize “Romney care” as “‘Obama care’ minus the public option.” During a 2008 Republican primary debate, Romney positively declared, “I'm the only one that got the job done. I got health insurance for all our citizens. We had 460,000 people without insurance. We got 300 of them -- 300,000 of them -- signed up for insurance now. I'm proud of what we accomplished.” Overcoming primary challenges from former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, among a host of others, Romney secured the right to oppose Obama in the November general election.

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<sup>6</sup>The Massachusetts state legislature is formally known as the General Court.

In running for the White House, the Republican challenger vowed to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Articulating a traditional conservative philosophy of smaller government, Romney desired to put health choices directly into the hands of individuals and state governments through Obamacare exemptions, block grants, and reducing taxpayer cost while increasing coverage choice for individuals (Semuels 2012; Collins et al. 2012). At the first moderated debate with Obama in October, Romney further distinguished his views on his state's efforts and privatizing health care through an exchange on Medicare:

“And by the way, if the government can be as efficient as the private sector and offer premiums that are as low as the private sector, people will be happy to get traditional Medicare or they'll be able to get a private plan.

I know my own view is I'd rather have a private plan. I'd just assume not have the government telling me what kind of health care I get. I'd rather be able to have an insurance company. If I don't like them, I can get rid of them and find a different insurance company. But people make their own choice.”

In a later exchange, he chided Obama for the Affordable Care Act's adoption and implementation while championing his gubernatorial efforts on the issue.

“First of all, I like the way we did it in Massachusetts. I like the fact that in my state, we had Republicans and Democrats come together and work together. What you did instead was to push through a plan without a single Republican vote. As a matter of fact, when Massachusetts did something quite extraordinary -- elected a Republican senator to stop Obamacare, you pushed it through anyway.

So entirely on a partisan basis, instead of bringing America together and having a discussion on this important topic, you pushed through something that you and Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid thought was the best answer and drove it through” (Commission on Presidential Debates 2012).

While many agreed with the former governor's views, many opposed him, believing that the progress made by the Obama administration should not be dismantled. The president

himself certainly supported the ACA and worked throughout the 2012 campaign to defend his record.

### Barack Obama and Health Care Reform

Barack Obama ran for reelection to the presidency in an effort to cement health care reform and other first-term achievements. His campaign strategy persuading Americans to validate the ACA through their votes included crisscrossing the country, reminding citizens of its benefits. Speaking in Pittsburgh, the president noted:

“If you have health insurance, the only thing that changes for you is you're more secure because insurance companies can't drop you when you get sick... We've got millions of young people who are able to stay on their parent's plan right now because of that health care law. We've got millions of seniors who are seeing cheaper prescription drugs.

And if you don't have health insurance, we're going to help you get health insurance... I make no apologies for it. It was the right thing to do. And we're going to keep moving forward. That's why I'm running for a second term as President of the United States.” (“Remarks at a Campaign Rally...”).

While positively extoling the virtues of the legislation, Obama spent the latter half of the 2012 general cycle defending Obamacare from the rhetoric of its most high-profile foe, Mitt Romney. During remarks at the first presidential debate with Romney, the incumbent directly rebuked his challenger's claims.

“Governor Romney said this has to be done on a bipartisan basis. This was a bipartisan idea. In fact, it was a Republican idea. And Governor Romney at the beginning of this debate wrote and said what we did in Massachusetts could be a model for the nation.

And I agree that the Democratic legislators in Massachusetts might have given some advice to Republicans in Congress about how to cooperate, but the fact of the matter is, we used the same advisers, and they say it's the same plan.

Let me make one last point. Governor Romney says, we should replace it, I'm just going to repeal it, but – but we can replace it with something. But the problem is, he hasn't described what exactly we'd replace it with, other than saying we're going to leave it to the states.” (Commission on Presidential Debates 2012).

The candidates' messages respectively illustrate the concept of retrospective

voting by calling on Americans to look back and ask, “Am I better off now than I was four years ago?” Famously employed by Ronald Reagan during his 1980 race against Jimmy Carter, this cognitive heuristic (Popkin 1994) allows those with weakly defined partisan attitudes to easily compare candidates’ issue stances on health care against their own lives. Americans who dislike large, government-run programs and prefer state and local level controls would reasonably desire a Romney presidency. However, if they feel the ACA has eased concerns over the cost and access to health care, then it is natural to expect them to support Obama. Following this and successive debates between the two principal candidates, the final choice of the campaign—made on Election Day---was left to the people.

#### General Election Results

While closer than his 2008 victory over John McCain, Obama decisively won a second term in office by defeating Mitt Romney 303-206 in the Electoral College (Cohen 2012). The continued importance of health care to the American people incumbent’s win is easily seen in exit polling data; Obama won three-quarters of those in the electorate who noted the issue as a top priority (“Exit Polls 2012”). His victory ensured that the Affordable Care Act would remain intact for another four years while becoming a piece of Obama’s historical legacy as president. Since its enactment, the ACA has become a legislative tool for both parties to use as they wage rhetorical battle in Washington, D.C. The next section provides an analysis of how health care reform has been rhetorically utilized by Barack Obama and Republican officeholders in the period since Obama’s successful reelection.

#### **The President Speaks: Health Care as National Policy**

Presidents often use State of the Union addresses, Campbell and Jamieson (2008)

argue, to discuss national values while advocating and advancing preferred policies. In the years immediately following the enactment of the Affordable Care Act, Barack Obama used his annual bully pulpit to discuss the landmark policy and its significance in American society. As is common with this type of executive address, the opposing party gives an immediate response to the president's remarks. This exchange of ideas would come to represent a rhetorical focal point for national health care reform for both former President Obama and Republican officeholders. Discussing how the Chief Executive and his conservative detractors described the state of health care reform over time further demonstrates the continuing partisan nature of the policy issue. Displaying ideological dissimilarities at the national level helps to frame the empirical analysis chronicling how state governors discuss health care in their own legislative messages.

### *Presidential Rhetoric on the Affordable Care Act*

Former President Obama used his first official State of the Union address in 2010 as a rhetorical platform to continue promoting domestic priorities. On health care, he stated:

“...I didn't take on health care because it was good politics. I took on health care because of the stories I've heard from Americans with preexisting conditions whose lives depend on getting coverage; patients who've been denied coverage; families...who are just one illness away from financial ruin.

After nearly a century of trying—Democratic administrations, Republican administrations—we are closer than ever to bringing more security to the lives of so many Americans. The approach we've taken would protect every American from the worst practices of the insurance industry. It would give small businesses and uninsured Americans a chance to choose an affordable health care plan in a competitive market. It would require every insurance plan to cover preventive care” (“Text: Obama's State of the Union Address”).

The remarks begin by emphasizing the public need for the Affordable Care Act, signifying that the spirit undergirding reform for everyday Americans cannot be

dampened by the partisan infighting typifying Washington, D.C. politics. He directly illustrates how the legislation will benefit citizens by referencing those without prior coverage because of cost or denial. Following these statements, Obama indirectly reminds his audience about past efforts to enact reform and then details specific societal ills concerning health care that his plan would cure.

Placing desired policies in historical context may affect the public mood while increasing catalysts for change in the current political system (Easton 1965). Previous legislative addressees by Chief Executives have used similar rhetorical techniques when arguing for new, controversial, and politically charged policies. Building support for sweeping reforms eventually passed as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson told Congress, “We have talked long enough in this country about equal rights. We have talked for 100 years or more. It is time now to write the next paper, and to write it in the books of law.” (O’Donnell 2014). Over the course of his administration, the current president summoned similar rhetorical force in presenting his case for the newest form of equal rights—comprehensive health care coverage— in the United States.

The Chief Executive continued the discussion on the Affordable Care Act by Referencing the measure in successive legislative messages to Congress:

“Now, I have heard rumors that a few of you still have concerns about our new health care law. So let me be the first to say that anything can be improved. If you have ideas about how to improve this law by making care better or more affordable, I am eager to work with you. We can start right now by correcting a flaw in the legislation that has placed an unnecessary bookkeeping burden on small businesses...

“What I’m not willing to do is go back to the days when insurance companies could deny someone coverage because of a preexisting condition...So I say to this chamber tonight, instead of re-fighting the battles of the last two years, let’s fix what needs fixing and let’s move forward” (Wingfield 2011).

—2011 *State of the Union Address*

“Already, the Affordable Care Act is helping to slow the growth of health care costs. And the reforms I’m proposing go even further...We’ll bring down costs by changing the way our government pays for Medicare, because our medical bills shouldn’t be based on the number of tests ordered or days spent in the hospital; they should be based on the quality of care that our seniors receive. And I am open to additional reforms from both parties, so long as they don’t violate the guarantee of a secure retirement. Our government shouldn’t make promises we cannot keep—but we must keep the promises we’ve already made” (Text of President Obama’s...)

—2013 *State of the Union Address*

“Already, because of the Affordable Care Act, more than three million Americans under age 26 have gained coverage under their parents’ plans. More than nine million Americans have signed up for private health insurance or Medicaid coverage...” And here’s another number: zero. Because of this law, no American can ever again be dropped or denied coverage for a preexisting condition like asthma, back pain, or cancer.

Now, I don’t expect to convince my Republican friends on the merits of this law. But I know that the American people aren’t interested in refighting old battles. So again, if you have specific plans to cut costs, cover more people, and increase choice – tell America what you’d do differently. But let’s not have another forty-something votes to repeal a law that’s already helping millions of Americans like Amanda. The first forty were plenty. We got it. We all owe it to the American people to say what we’re for, not just what we’re against” (“FULL TRANSCRIPT..”).

—2014 *State of the Union Address*

These statements demonstrate Obama’s use of rhetoric to discuss and defend his signature domestic initiative. In 2011, with his reelection bid based on a referendum of the Affordable Care Act and other first-term policies, it is logical for the incumbent Chief Executive to project a conciliatory tone by calling for bipartisanship on improving the legislation. After his successful victory, the president is signifying his willingness to engage in credit-claiming and position-taking (Mayhew 1974) when speaking to the legislative branch. Obama quantified the success of his reform efforts by arguing that the

ACA provided continued coverage three million young people under their parents' insurance while nine million total citizens gained health care access. These rhetorical selections also displayed presidential authority, as Obama made clear his unwavering position that advances in increasing access to health care for all must continue despite Republican opposition. The State of the Union address, while influential in its rhetorical significance, represents one voice in the ongoing political conversation. Following the annual message to Congress, the opposition party is afforded an opportunity to share their views with the American public.

### *Republican Rhetoric on the Affordable Care Act*

Opposition responses have been a component of the annual presidential State of the Union address since 1966, when congressional leaders Senator Everett Dirksen (R-IL) and Representative Gerald Ford (R-MI) provided their perspective on Lyndon B. Johnson's executive agenda ("Opposition Responses..."). Modern messages are given in primetime following the president's remarks, providing the public with an opportunity to compare both parties' statements.

Speaking from the Virginia statehouse while delivering the 2010 Republican response, then-Governor Bob McDonnell said:

"There is much common ground. All Americans agree that we need health—health care system that is affordable, accessible, and high quality. But most Americans do not want to turn over the best medical care system in the world to the federal government..."

"Republicans in Congress have offered legislation to reform health care...And we will do that by implementing common sense reforms, like letting families and businesses buy health insurance policies across state lines and ending frivolous lawsuits against doctors and hospitals that drive up the cost of your health care..."

“And our solutions aren't 1,000-page bills that no one has fully read, after being crafted behind closed doors with special interests... (“Bob McDonnell’s GOP...”).

McDonnell began by promoting health care as beneficial for all and supported by members of both political parties. However, his remarks quickly pivoted to advocating traditional conservative principles of smaller government with individuals making health care decisions for themselves. The response ended with a direct critique of the congressional process used to write the Affordable Care Act, which was perceived by Republican detractors as nontransparent, private and secretive. Subsequent messages echoed these basic themes while highlighting the deficiencies of the president’s efforts and their negative impact on everyday Americans’ lives.

“Then the president and his party made matters even worse, by creating a new open-ended health care entitlement. What we already know about the president's health care law is this: Costs are going up, premiums are rising, and millions of people will lose the coverage they currently have...

Last week, House Republicans voted for a full repeal of this law, as we pledged to do, and we will work to replace it with fiscally responsible, patient-centered reforms that actually reduce costs and expand coverage...

Health care spending is driving the explosive growth of our debt. And the president's law is accelerating our country toward bankruptcy... We cannot deny it. Instead we must, as Americans, confront it responsibly. And that is exactly what Republicans pledge to do” (“Transcript: GOP Response”).

—*Representative Paul Ryan (WI), 2011 Response*

“In word and deed, the president and his allies tell us that we just cannot handle ourselves in this complex, perilous world without their benevolent protection. Left to ourselves, we might pick the wrong health insurance...” (Rupar 2012).

—*Governor Mitch Daniels (IA), 2012 Response*

“For example, Obamacare, it was supposed to help middle-class Americans afford health insurance. But now, some people are losing the health insurance they were happy with. And because Obamacare created expensive requirements for companies with more than 50 employees, now many of these companies aren't hiring. Not only that, they're being forced to lay people off and switch from full-time employees to part-time workers” (“Transcript: Marco Rubio’s...”).

—*Senator Marco Rubio (FL), 2013 Response*

“Not long ago I got a letter from Bette in Spokane, who hoped the President's health care law would save her money—but found out instead that her premiums were going up nearly \$700 a month. No, we shouldn't go back to the way things were, but this law is not working. Republicans believe health care choices should be yours, not the government's...” (“State of the Union GOP Response...”).

—*Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA), 2014 Response*

While the above statements were all delivered by Republican officeholders, the speeches differ in rhetorical tone, context, and direct issue attention. Congressman Ryan's remarks are couched in a more somber, serious tone and emphasize broad economic considerations including heightened health insurance costs and lowered coverage for a wide swath of the American electorate. Governor Mitch Daniels' effort employs a more mocking delivery while sacrificing substance for rhetorical style in comparing the Obama White House to a divine guardian helping subjects find their way. Discussing the issue of middle class unemployment, Marco Rubio's address is, like Ryan's, characterized by a sincere tone. Finally, Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers' response is more personal and heartfelt in nature as she discusses health premiums.

Despite rhetorical variation, linguistic choices are theoretically constrained by similar parameters. Politicians articulate their thoughts during a shared time period and so it is logical to expect their remarks to succinctly chronicle current political events. A second consideration is that speakers often personalize their messages based on personal experiences and objectives. Each set of political remarks signifies a specific political context or can be ascribed to the individual Republican officeholder delivering them.

Giving the GOP response only one year following passage of the ACA legislation, it is logical that Ryan devoted part of his address to discussing the then-popular sentiment of repealing Obamacare. Daniels' remarks are consistent with the

2012 election year rhetoric, where negative, biting language is the norm among those in the party-in government. The 2013 address by Rubio discusses Obamacare's negative impact on employment; this is a salient campaign issue and foretold the Florida senator's own quest for the presidency in 2016. Finally, McMorris Rodgers told the story of a constituent letter she received regarding the Affordable Care Act, evidence that members of Congress continually highlight issues that matter to their district. This message further illustrates of the eventual decision by Republicans to cease calls for a full repeal of Obamacare, and to recommend "repeal and replace." The rhetorical choices of former President Obama and conservative officeholders represent the ongoing conversation regarding health care reform in the United States. State governors also choose to make their positions known on this contentious issue through their annual State of the State addresses.

### **The Governors Respond: Health Care in the States**

Presidents and governors routinely acknowledge one another in their annual messages concerning ongoing national discussions over salient public policy issues. Referencing the implementation of the Affordable Care Act in his 2014 State of the Union address, President Barack Obama referenced a state governor:

"And if you want to know the real impact this law is having, just talk to Governor Steve Beshear of Kentucky.... Kentucky's not the most liberal part of the country, but he's like a man possessed when it comes to covering his commonwealth's families..." ("FULL TRANSCRIPT...").

State executives also mentioned the president, with Governor Dave Heineman (R-NE) noting in his 2014 State of the State address:

“So, let’s begin our conversation today about one of those challenging and important issues—health care. President Obama said if you like your current health care plan you can keep it. “*Period.*” Unfortunately, that’s simply not true. Millions of Americans have received cancellation notices of their current health care plans because of Obamacare” (“Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman’s...”).

Governor Martin O’Malley (D-MD) took a more supportive view of the president’s signature domestic achievement in his legislative message:

“Now, thanks to President Obama and the Affordable Care Act, not a single person can be denied coverage because of a preexisting condition, and no one can be dropped from their insurance because they get sick” (“Full Text: O’Malley’s”).

These rhetorical statements from former President Obama and Governors Beshear, Heineman, and O’Malley indicate an interrelationship between presidential and gubernatorial rhetoric on the temporal issue (Herzik 1983) of health care. Perhaps more importantly for this project, it demonstrates that governors were listening to Barack Obama State of the Union messages and responding through their own legislative addresses. This section provides a sampling of quotations from governors’ State of the State addresses from 2012-2014 to further understand how state governors consider and respond to presidential policy priorities.

*Statements by Republican Governors in State of the State Addresses*

Conservative state executives used their annual legislative messages over the period under study to voice their opinions toward the Affordable Care Act. The following statements are representative of these comments.

“We will continue to push back against the federal takeover of our health care system. South Carolina does not want, and cannot afford, the President’s health care plan. Not now, and not ever.” —*Nikki Haley, South Carolina, 2012*

“Like many of you, I oppose the President’s health care plan. That’s why, after weighing the pros and cons of the ObamaCare health exchange, I opted against Arizona’s participation. I also led Arizona in joining a coalition of states that sought to block the program in court, and I’ve taken every opportunity to argue for health reform with less bureaucracy, more patient choice and fewer costs.”

—*Jan Brewer, Arizona, 2013*

“Last month, I announced that Nevada would comply with the provisions of the Affordable Care Act as they related to the expansion of Medicaid services. As a result, some 78,000 more Nevadans will now have coverage – without facing the new tax penalties imposed by the Affordable Care Act.”

—*Brian Sandoval, Nevada, 2013*

“I didn’t support Obamacare. But it’s the law of the land. The election is over and the Supreme Court has ruled. My job is not to play party politics, but to implement this law in a way that best serves New Mexico.”

—*Susanna Martinez, New Mexico, 2013*

“The implementation of the ACA and associated costs are looming. Despite my strong objection to the ACA and my asking the Attorney General to fight the case in the U.S. Supreme Court, it is the law of the land. We now have to play the cards in our hand.”

—*Matt Mead, Wyoming, 2013*

“The Affordable Care Act – or Obamacare and Medicaid expansion is taking our nation deeper into the abyss of debt, and threatens to dismantle what I believe is one of the most trusted relationships, that of doctors and their patient...The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is everything but Affordable.”

—*Robert Bentley, Alabama, 2014*

“Most Hoosiers didn’t like Washington intruding on our healthcare long before it became a reality. Now, more people than ever know why we were right to stand up to the federal government on the Affordable Care Act.”

—*Mike Pence, Indiana, 2014*

“Because of a flaw in the Affordable Care Act, we have about 60,000 Utahns living below the poverty line who receive less assistance through Medicaid than many who live above the poverty line...This is not fair, and it is not right.”

—*Gary Hebert, Utah, 2014*

All of these statements were made by state executives ideologically opposed to the Obama administration’s health care reform efforts, yet important differences exist regarding the rhetorical framing of the discussion. Governors Haley, Brewer, Pence, and Bentley express their displeasure with the ACA in starkly negative terms, calling the

initiative a “federal takeover” and “everything but Affordable” while trying to “stand up to the federal government” and “block the program in court.” These executives additionally employed plural pronouns (e.g. “we,” “us”), illustrating a direct bond or linkage with their audience. These rhetorical choices also allowed the governors to create political distance between their agenda and Washington, D.C. Pursuing a more moderate approach, Governors Sandoval, Martinez, and Mead touted eventual acceptance and compliance with the legislation; they note a necessity to play “the cards in our hand” and rise above partisanship.

While some governors discuss Obamacare in purely ideological terms, other state executives argue that their ideas form a policy-oriented perspective. Examples include Sandoval discussing the program’s tax penalties, Bentley noting a decline in the relationship between patients and their primary health providers, and Hebert’s assertion that too many Utah residents are fighting a daily struggle with poverty. These and other linguistic choices in discussing health care reform may simply represent personal preferences or demonstrate Republican governors need to respond to the broader political environment.

*Statements by Democratic Governors in State of the State Addresses*

The president’s co-partisan governors also expressed their views toward the Affordable Care Act through State of the State addresses.

“Just last summer, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Affordable Care Act as constitutional. The benefits, costs and insurance mandates, that you like or dislike about the law many call “Obamacare”, will continue going into effect this year and the next.”  
—Mike Beebe, Arkansas, 2013

“California was the first in the nation to pass laws to implement President Obama’s historic Affordable Care Act. Our health benefit exchange, called

Covered California, will begin next year providing insurance to nearly one million Californians. Over the rest of this decade, California will steadily reduce the number of the uninsured.”  
—*Jerry Brown, California, 2013*

“Fortunately, thanks to President Barack Obama, we now have the Affordable Care Act, which will improve the health of the people of Illinois and create thousands of jobs.”  
—*Pat Quinn, Illinois, 2013*

“This isn’t the time to re-open the debate or reargue the merits of the President’s health care plan. I had some problems with it, and I know many of you did as well. But Congress passed it – the President signed it – and the Supreme Court upheld it. It’s the law of the land. And it’s not within our power to rewrite federal laws, even if we wanted to. It is within our power – it’s our responsibility – to now do what’s right for Missouri.”  
—*Jay Nixon, Missouri, 2013*

“Effectively implementing the Affordable Care Act will save us money by removing the hidden tax of hundreds of dollars paid monthly by all our state’s insured citizens. We can do this for the health of our family and the health of our economy.”  
—*Jay Inslee, Washington, 2013*

“We also need more providers trained to offer emotional support and help to those who become addicted; not just dole out maintenance drugs that sometimes find their way back into the drug market. The Affordable Care Act will help us do this because for the first time it requires coverage for substance abuse disorders and treatment, and the federal support to pay for it.”  
—*Peter Shumlin, Vermont, 2014*

As with their Republican counterparts, Democratic state executives expressed a wide variety of opinions toward Obama’s signature health care legislation. Supporting the theoretical proposition that partisanship explains gubernatorial responses to presidential initiatives, Governors Brown, Quinn, Inslee, and Shumlin stated their approval and support for the Affordable Care Act. All governors provided a policy-based rationale for their statement which theoretically gave their rhetorical stances increased credibility. From lowering the uninsured population, creating jobs, allowing citizens to keep more of their income, and curbing societal ills such as substance abuse, Democratic governors touted the strengths of Obamacare. However, some Democratic executives echoed their conservative colleagues and state a more measured tone regarding the

Affordable Care Act; Governors Beebe of Arkansas and Nixon of Missouri sounded like New Mexico's governor, Republican Susanna Martinez. They noted that "the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Affordable Care Act as constitutional" and "it's not within our power to rewrite federal laws, even if we wanted to."

The textual evidence, then, points to a rhetorical discontinuity between state executives of both parties—giving further credence to the hypothesis that a binary conception of partisanship does not fully explain how state governors consider and respond to former President Obama's health care policy. Does looking at the broader political environment help to explain this evidenced discrepancy within gubernatorial rhetoric?

### **Theory**

Executives set agendas to pursue preferred policies. Rhetorical statements allow state and national-level elites to discuss their views with legislators and the general public. State of the Union and State of the State addresses are opportunities for presidents and governors to set an agenda by presenting a series of immediate and long-range policy goals they wish to see enacted during their administration. Former President Obama gave many addresses on comprehensive health care reform in supporting this domestic priority. The task of agenda-setting for an executive varies depending on the degree of political strength they may possess at a given moment, related to Light's (1999) cycles of effectiveness and influence. Rhetoric can be an instrumental means of setting the agenda (McCombs 2014). It may be set legislatively (Cox and McCubbins 2005) or through unilateral authority (Howell 2003), including executive orders and signing statements, which are another important form of presidential communication.

Rhetoric plays a significant role in both setting and implementing an executive's political agenda.

Using established theoretical perspectives from the agenda-setting and mass media literatures, the narrative surrounding passage of the Affordable Care Act can be examined in further detail. Before the beginning of the Obama administration, the state of U.S. health care had not experienced a major policy shift since the 1965 passage of Medicare and Medicaid during the Lyndon Johnson presidency. Major changes can occur incrementally over time (see Kingdon 1984), as support for an issue builds or they can occur suddenly, through a process of punctuated equilibrium (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Baumgartner et al. 2014, Jones and Baumgartner 2005). Selective attention to issues supports a sudden shift, positing that major activity in a dormant issue area can be achieved by policymakers in a short timeframe through outside pressures or crisis situations (Birkland 1997).

Pursuing the White House in 2008, Barack Obama made health care reform a signature campaign issue through his rhetoric about his plans to expand medical access and coverage, including the coverage of individuals with pre-existing conditions and those suffering from mental illness. As Kingdon notes, the "three streams" came together when the new president, buoyed by Democrats' unified control of Congress and support from a more united interest group sector, passed Obama's health care reform legislation while supporting its implementation through his public addresses. These actions also relate to Cobb et al.'s (1976) mobilization model, positing that policymakers place an issue on the governmental agenda and then attempt to gain support for it via the public agenda (Cobb and Elder 1983), though public support for the legislation rarely if

ever exceeded 50 percent in national polls. A more viable theory is Kingdon's (1984) work advocating a "streams" approach is additionally illustrated in the Affordable Care Act becoming a salient policy issue; health care was considered a pressing problem and politicians at the national level were ready to change the status quo. As Kingdon notes in his discussion of the policy network, other institutions and actors in the political system besides the president and his allies were instrumental in setting the health care agenda.

The mass media routinely contributes to policymaking by prioritizing certain issues and deemphasizing others. While changing mediums from newspapers and radio to more recent arrivals of cable news coverage and the Internet have continually altered the media landscape, the core interrelated missions of informing, investigating, and interpreting news stories have remained constant over time. Agenda-setting allows the media to select which events deserve attention. Time and space constraints lead to many outlets being prevented in the number of daily political events that they cover. Should you lead with a story on racial tensions, the rising unemployment rate, or health care passage? Journalists and editors often serve as gatekeepers (McCombs and Shaw 1972; McCombs and Shaw 1977; Littlejohn 2002; Wilson and Wilson 2001), making decisions and selecting issues for public consumption. Closely related media effects include priming and framing (Weaver 2007), centering on characterizing people, events, and issues in a certain way and attempting to alter the public's view.

This interrelationship between the media and general public has been connected to the broader policy agenda (Rogers and Dearing 1988; Dearing and Rogers 1996) and helps to explain how health care reform became a national priority. The media fueled a public debate over the ACA through its presentation of issues allowing citizens the ability

to strengthen their existing views concerning the policy through confirming existing beliefs. If someone supported Obama's signature legislation, they were more likely to be attuned to stories centering on framing positive aspects of the law (Fairhurst and Sarr 1996) including expanded coverage. Media outlets with a conservative bent published news items with a negative spin discussing the ACA's consequences; FOX News wrote on colleges and universities being forced to increase costs for student health insurance plans ("Students suffer ObamaCare...") due to the law's provisions.

Health care reform rose on the public agenda due to actions by elite policymakers and the media's efforts at agenda-setting, framing, and priming various aspects of the ACA through their coverage. It is rational to assume that state executives would additionally wish to articulate their views concerning Medicaid expansion, cost of insurance premiums, and other controversial aspects of the ACA. The next sections present the general methodological approach and specific hypotheses to be tested followed by various analyses to test the impact of contextual factors on state executives' speechmaking efforts on health care policy.

### **Description of Methodology and Hypotheses**

The central goal of this project is to develop a fuller understanding of how political, social, and other contextual factors may affect gubernatorial attention to the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid, and immigration policies. There are a variety of external conditions, including party control of the national and state legislature, elections, public approval, and partisan affiliation, which may impact executive speechmaking. For the purposes of analysis, these influences will be expressed as independent and dependent variables as detailed in the following subsections.

### *Dependent Variables*

State governors, as independent political actors, possess the ability to register their sentiments toward presidential policies. The central outcome variables of interest thus center on governors' choices in addressing the Affordable Care Act, a chief domestic legislative priority of the Obama administration, in their State of the State Addresses. The presence of this White House priority is categorized and measured as two distinct groups of variables: if health care policy is (1) *included* and (2) *supported* in a gubernatorial address. Inclusion will be measured as a discrete variable, coded one if health care included in an individual governor's State of the State address and zero otherwise. A gubernatorial mention of former President Obama's national health care initiative will be noted as discussing the issue in one or more sentences in one section of the State of the State address. Support for health care reform in a gubernatorial legislative message will be measured by a continuous variable providing the percentage of the speech that specifically discuss this issue. Both indicators, taken together, allows for any variations in influence between presidents and governors to be observed within the analysis.

The following sections detail the analytic techniques used to examine the rhetorical efforts of governors as seen through their annual legislative messages. The main analyses of health care policy employ differing modeling techniques. In certain instances, one may be focused on an event taking place or not (e.g. voting in an election). In this case, there are only two choices to consider—voting or not voting—so the outcome or dependent variable is dichotomous (Pollock 2012). Logistic regression accounts for nonlinear relationships by expressing probabilities through logged odds

ratios. The empirical analysis regarding inclusion of health care policy thus employs logit modeling, as this dependent variable is defined as whether governors will include Barack Obama's signature domestic priority of the Affordable Care Act in their legislative messages. Standard ordinary least squares (OLS) regression techniques work well in instances when linear relationships are present in data and assume a constant change between independent and dependent variables. As support for health care reform will be measured by a continuous variable, OLS is appropriate in this case.

### *Independent Variables*

#### **Legislative Partisanship**

Legislative partisanship has increasingly become a regular occurrence at all levels of the American political system. While succinctly defined as split party control between the executive and legislative branches, adequately conceptualizing divided government becomes problematic due to theoretical and methodological inconsistencies across the literature. The current study addresses this issue by defining legislative partisanship at the state level as a trichotomous variable, with three representing unified government, two signifying a situation where at least one chamber is controlled by the executive's political party, and one defining complete split control where both chambers of the legislature are controlled by the party opposite the executive. This categorization is useful because it accounts for all potential governing legislative-executive governing arrangements while categorizing divided government as a decreasing measure of gubernatorial control. The state of Nebraska presents a unique case as it only has a unicameral legislature. Partisanship for this state will be measured dichotomously and trichotomously as unified government. The presence or absence of divided control in a

state legislature was collected through data provided by the National Conference of State Legislatures' (NCSL) annual State and Legislative Partisan Composition data tables ("State Partisan Composition").

Partisan identification is traditionally viewed as one indicator of political ideology. Political affiliation of state governors during the period under study will be categorized dichotomously, with zero representing Republican governors, while Democratic state executives will be coded as one. Governors who describe themselves as political independents will be coded as zero, since they do not necessarily belong to President Barack Obama's Democratic party. While it is important to realize that many modern-day U.S. electoral maps include "purple" states when representing ideological shifts in political culture, this study employs a simple "red/blue" division to illustrate partisan and electoral divisions. This decision is presently appropriate when discussing presidential victories in individual states either won by either a Democratic or Republican candidate or partisan control of state legislatures, but is an intriguing idea for use in future research. Specific hypotheses for legislative partisanship are:

H1: In periods of divided government at the state level, governors will be less likely to *include* agenda items in their State of the State addresses that are important to President Barack Obama. We can expect this result because in times of split party control, a governor should logically possess a lesser degree of political influence. They may not wish to speak on divisive federal issues, especially if the governor is trying to persuade legislators to pass other controversial state-based initiatives.

H2: In periods of divided government at the state level, governors will be less likely to *support* agenda items in their State of the State addresses that are important to President Barack Obama. This is expected for the same rationale as H1.

### **Public Approval**

Popularity of state governors is measured by a proxy variable consisting of the percentage of the vote that Barack Obama received in each state during the 2008 presidential election between the Democratic candidate and Republican John McCain for 2012, and the 2012 presidential election between the Democratic incumbent and Republican challenger Mitt Romney for 2013 and 2014. The results of these elections provide a comparable estimation across states regarding the level of public support of administration policies. An indirect measure for gubernatorial popularity was chosen for analysis due to data availability and comparability issues.<sup>7</sup>

. With high specific support (Easton 1975) from the general public, a president may employ informal power (Neustadt 1960) through appealing to those living in various states. Thus, governors' issue priorities may be impacted by a popular Chief Executive, especially if the sitting state governor is faced with an approval rating below fifty percent. Additional measures used in estimating support for state executives centers on (1) their percentage of the popular vote in a given election and using this information to calculate each governor's (2) margin of victory from their most recent election or re-election to office. This statistic was ascertained in each state contest by subtracting the opponent's percentage of the popular vote from the victorious governor's vote

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<sup>7</sup> Note: An attempt was made to use the Job Approval Ratings (JAR) database developed by Niemi, Beyle, and Sigelman for gubernatorial approval figures, but the database ends in 2000 before the current study takes place. Comparability issues further complicate this measure, as various print and digital media sources report popularity numbers at different times, making reliable data difficult to obtain.

percentage. Vote information for both indicators was collected from the Secretary of State's website for each state, or in some cases, the State Board of Elections.

Hypotheses for understanding the extent of public approval are:

H3: The higher Barack Obama's approval rating in a particular state, the more likely governors are to *include* the ACA in their State of the State addresses.

H4: The higher Barack Obama's approval rating in a particular state, the more likely governors are to *support* the ACA in their State of the State addresses.

H5: As an individual governor's vote percentage from their last election to office increases, the less likely they will be to include and support the ACA in their State of the State addresses. This hypothesis is expected due to the fact that a given governor will feel emboldened and empowered to enact their own legislative agenda once a successful re-election confirms a popular governing mandate.

H6: As an individual governor's margin of victory increases, the less likely governors will be to include and support the ACA in their State of the State addresses. It might be logically assumed that the converse of this statement would be true— that a Democratic governor with a sizeable victory margin would want to discuss Obamacare— however, the reasoning for this expectation includes a sense of independent leadership amongst individual governors following confirmation of popular approval over an electoral opponent.

H7: As an individual governor's margin of victory decreases, the more likely governors will be to include the ACA in their State of the State addresses. This is the opposite result that we may see occurring under H5 and H6. If a governor loses the electoral confidence of their citizens, they may be forced to reconsider their own policies and pivot toward discussing the ACA.

### **Presidential Influence**

Due to their constitutional responsibilities and central role as a governing figure, U.S. president and governors play a large role in executing and implementing policies at the federal, state, and local levels. Citizens in all states look to those in Washington, D.C. to set the governmental agenda (Cobb and Elder 1972), and thus, national leaders have a direct ability to influence how issues are viewed at the subnational level. Presidential influence in states will be captured through a yearly approval rating of Barack Obama for 2012 (Jones 2012), 2013 (Jones 2013), and 2014 (Saad 2014) in each state compiled from the Gallup polling organization. Presidential popularity and approval are strong predictors of influence at the federal level. An indicator of executive influence is registered by the public at the conclusion of every quadrennial election cycle. If a presidential candidate wins election or reelection to the White House in a majority of states, they have the ability to claim a popular mandate. This bolstering of public support also increases their power and influence at the subnational level through the implementation of favored policies. The hypotheses to be tested for the extent of presidential influence are:

H8: As the percentage of Barack Obama's vote in the last presidential election increases (from state to state not over time) governors will be more likely to *include* the ACA in their State of the State addresses. If Obama and his policy initiatives are popular naturally among voters, governors will want to promote them within their state.

H9: As the percentage of Barack Obama's vote in the last presidential election increases, governors will be more likely to *support* the ACA in their State of the State addresses.

### **Analysis of Gubernatorial Rhetoric on Health Care Policy**

#### *Political Tone and the Affordable Care Act*

Can basic ideological and partisan distinctions between executives fully explain rhetorical differences or do contextual factors play a more significant role than previously assumed? A preliminary examination of the data yields anecdotal evidence supporting a relationship between gubernatorial rhetoric on health care and politically salient conditions in given states. As noted in the textual analyses of selected passages in State of the State addresses, both Republican and Democratic governors demonstrate rhetorical differences on this issue. Tables 1A, 1B, and 2 display key variables and the rhetorical tone used by the selected governors in this paper regarding statements made on health care in State of the State addresses.

Tables 1.11 and 1.12 focus on Republican governors from 2012-2014 and compare political factors including presidential job approval, the governor's electoral victory margin and whether their State of the State address was deemed to have a moderate or negative tone regarding the Affordable Care Act. In this analysis of Republican gubernatorial messages, rhetorical tones were determined by the author solely

reading each individual speech and making an informed, facially valid determination based on the construction and usage of language.

Tonal categories were coded into three easily distinguishable groups of “positive,” neutral,” and “negative” rhetoric. Democratic Governor Pat Quinn extolled the ACA noting that it “will improve the health of the people of Illinois and create thousands of jobs.” Republicans Susanna Martinez and Matt Mead expressed a resigned and accepting rhetorical stance toward Barack Obama’s signature domestic reform; their statements are included in the “neutral” category. Both state executives object to the law but admit that “the law of the land” must be respected, enforced, and implemented and “we now have to play the cards in our hand.” Finally, Governor Nikki Haley’s desire to “push back against the federal takeover of our health care system” and Jan Brewer’s declarative statement that “I oppose the President’s health care plan” demonstrate negative tone, as both governors relay their displeasure and resistance toward the Affordable Care Act.

In summation, the governors of New Mexico (Martinez), Nevada (Sandoval), and Wyoming (Mead) utilize more conciliatory rhetoric while those in Alabama (Bentley), Arizona (Brewer), Indiana (Pence), and South Carolina (Haley) take a more caustic approach.

Table 2.1 presents all the governors in the Republican sample while Table 2.2 omits Wyoming—which appears to be an outlier. This decision was made to highlight the impact of state ideology. As seen in yearly public polling data by the Gallup organization, (Newport 2013; Smith 2014), Wyoming has a history of being viewed as an extremely conservative state within the period under study. These facts underscore

the descriptive data chronicling Wyomingites' views toward their state and national executives. While Governor Mead won initial election in 2010 with nearly 65% of the vote amid a 42-point spread, Barack Obama only received an average a 30.2% of the state's vote across his 2008 and 2012 victories. The president's approval ratings in Wyoming tell an even bleaker political tale; his approval average for 2012-2014 was a mere 23.4%. Those in the Cowboy State demonstrate easily discernible ideological and partisan leanings which skews aggregate data when it remains in the analysis.

Focusing on Table 2.2, a distinctive pattern emerges. All of the states where governors gave more moderate responses when discussing the ACA are also places where (1) Obama captured over 50% of the vote in both the 2008 and 2012 elections, (2) the president maintained a higher approval rating on average, and (3) the sitting governor had an average victory margin of below ten points. These findings combine to create a political setting where the state executive should logically present their arguments toward the signature Obama policy with a centrist tact. Governors Haley, Bentley, Pence, and Brewer faced a different environment during this time. All four executives seemed to have a greater degree of rhetorical freedom, as Barack Obama (1) failed to carry a majority of the state's vote in either of his national victories, (2) his approval rating hovered under fifty percent, and (3) the individual state governor had, on average, safely won reelection (e.g. more than ten points.) These circumstances allowed governors to take a more forceful tone in expressing their negative tone toward Obamacare in legislative messages. Comparable tonal data corresponding to Democratic governors is shown in Table 2.3.

The conclusions are logical, yet not surprisingly the reverse of their GOP

counterparts. We can first notice and determine tonal distinctions through reviewing and manually categorizing textual differences in governors' State of the State addresses.

Governor Quinn provides the most direct evidence for positive tone, as he simply states, "thanks to President Barack Obama, we now have the Affordable Care Act..."

Washington's Jay Inslee positively touted the economic benefits of the legislation, noting "Effectively implementing the Affordable Care Act will save us money" by eliminating frivolous tax fees. Gov. Peter Shumlin (D-VT) positively argues that the ACA provides needed financial support for citizens recovering from substance abuse issues. However, much like Republicans Mead and Martinez, Missouri Governor Jay Nixon employs a more restrained and neutral tone when discussing Obamacare. He claims while "I had some problems with it" but after being approved and upheld by all three institutions of government, "It's the law of the land. And it's not within our power to rewrite federal laws." Measurements of political popularity reinforce these differences.

Those states where the governor delivered a positive assessment of federal health care (Brown—California, Inslee—Washington, Quinn—Illinois, and Vermont—Shumlin). Obama won handily in 2008 and 2012 with 60% of the popular vote, had a high approval rating of above fifty percent, and the governors, excepting Shumlin, had a very low approval rating below fifty percent. These are traditionally "blue" states and Democrats usually do well in national and subnational elections. More moderate statements were made by Governors Mike Beebe (AR) and Jay Nixon (MO). In these areas, Obama was less popular and both state executives enjoyed a high approval rating—giving them political latitude to make more restrained comments. This is electorally advantageous in both states, which are more conservative-leaning in nature

### *Gubernatorial Rhetoric and the Affordable Care Act*

The regression models presented below demonstrate the extent that external conditions may have on linguistic choices. One main dependent variable is the (1) inclusion of the Affordable Care as a policy issue, coded as one if the ACA is included and zero otherwise. The second dependent variable measures (2) support for the Affordable Care Act as a policy issue is categorized as a percentage of words that discuss the issue in a given address.

The party affiliation of state governors was coded dichotomously, with zero representing Republican state executives and one signifying Democratic governors. Independent were coded zero as they do not necessarily represent the president's party. Divided government is a trichotomous measure depending on whether zero, one, or two chambers is controlled by the current governor's party. Barack Obama's approval in each state is used as a proxy measure for the popularity of a given state governor in 2012, 2013, and 2014. Additional independent variables measure support for state executives through popular vote percentage and margin of victory. Finally, presidential influence is expressed as a percentage of the popular vote won by Barack Obama in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections.<sup>8</sup>

This analysis of gubernatorial rhetoric regarding the Affordable Care Act also accounts for the comparable differences found in U.S. states. Control variables include (1) The number of citizens currently uninsured and lacking health care coverage, and because health care coverage is often tied to employment status, (2) The annual

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<sup>8</sup>Note: An attempt was made to use the Job Approval Ratings (JAR) database developed by Niemi, Beyle, and Sigelman for gubernatorial approval figures, but the database ends in 2000 before the current study takes place. Comparability issues further complicate this measure, as various print and digital media sources report popularity numbers at different times, making reliable data difficult to obtain.

unemployment rate. The state-by-state percentages of those uninsured is a portion of the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS is sent monthly to a select 1 in every 38 households in a given year. Each questionnaire may be completed on paper or online. Resulting statistics are published by the Census Bureau and are used by governmental agencies to assist in allocating community-based funding ("American Community Survey"). Percentages were taken directly from the ACS portion of the Census Bureau's website and rounded to the nearest tenth for use in analysis. The annual unemployment rate was taken from the Bureau of Labor Statistics website. The percentage figures for each state were again rounded to the nearest tenth for uniformity. Including these elements provides a better understanding of health care's political, social, and economic impact throughout the nation.

The once-laborious task of manually processing and coding textually-based data has been streamlined through the development of computerized software programs. Each package varies in the specific components of language that result from measuring a given passage. The use of content analysis as a tool to understand rhetorical addresses is well-established (Weber 1990; Krippendorff 2004; Slacher et al. 1997), resulting in various insights concerning elite and mass behavior. This project employs DICTION, a dictionary-based software program widely used in analyzing political speech (Hart 2001; Hart et al. 2013). Its utility for this work lies in the ability to create custom dictionaries based on self-generated word lists. These lists will be used to establish and analyze the rhetorical priorities of state governors in their legislative messages concerning health care policy. The complete list of words used in the health care dictionary is available in Appendix E.

Table 2.4 presents pooled models analyzing gubernatorial rhetoric and the Affordable Care Act from 2012 to 2014. A table of summary statistics relating to this analysis may be found in Appendix G. Note that 2014 is used as a reference category in these analyses to study yearly effects.

The pooled analyses find limited support for state executives' rhetorical efforts regarding inclusion of health care policy.<sup>9</sup> Separate models were run with each conception of divided government to systematically examine the individual effects of this variable. In states with a higher unemployment rate, the probability of including health care reform in legislative addresses by state governors tends to be lower. As states work to provide increased employment opportunities for their residents, workers may opt for health coverage through their jobs with greater choices for themselves and their families. Employer-funded health care may be more attractive than the Affordable Care Act due to workplace contributions versus subsidies that may not be available in states choosing not to expand Medicaid.

The models show the interaction term representing the percentage of uninsured individuals per state and state-level unemployment approaching significance. With p-values of 0.059 and 0.063 in the two inclusion models, their effects are worth noting. It appears that interacting the percentages of uninsured and unemployed lead to an higher probability of discussing health care policy. As the American Community Survey data indicates, the number of Americans without health insurance under the Affordable Care

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<sup>9</sup>Note: Running other interactions, including divided government and partisanship, did not result in significant findings in any models.

Act fell in each state from 2012 to 2014.<sup>10</sup> Individuals who did not have health insurance should value the ACA's objective to increase coverage. Governors may feel obligated to include health care in their State of the State messages to account for these citizens, especially if they lead a state with higher percentages of poorer individuals. Finally, when compared with 2014, the year 2012 saw a lowered probability of including gubernatorial rhetoric relating to health care policy in State of the State addresses. Many regulatory changes regarding the ACA did not go into effect until 2013-2014, and so state executives would not have opportunities to discuss certain provisions beforehand.

The second model displaying support for health care policy by examining the percentage of words discussing the issue through a computerized content analysis did not find support. This may be due to the small percentages found in these addresses on health care; only 3 governors across all years made health care over 2% of their message. State executives have many topics to cover in trying to develop a full policy agenda, and so, they must judiciously select which issues to focus on in their annual State of the State report.

The expansion of Medicaid was a central component of the Affordable Care Act during this period pertinent to state policy-making, is critical toward understanding gubernatorial rhetoric. This issue's importance and relevance to state executives is discussed in the upcoming section.

### **Medicaid Expansion and the Affordable Care Act**

Medicaid is a means-tested health care program providing insurance for those in

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<sup>10</sup> Data collected from the "Percentage Without Health Insurance Coverage" of the 2012-2014 American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau.

the United States with limited income, including families, the disabled, and the elderly. The Affordable Care Act significantly expanded Medicaid eligibility, allowing many advantages for consumers including increased coverage, affordability, access, and number of provided services (Antonisse et al. 2017). As states manage their own individual Medicaid programs, however, they are allowed broad discretion over implementation of the ACA's provisions. As of January 2017, 31 states and the District of Columbia have expanded their Medicaid program while 19 have not.<sup>11</sup>

State governors should theoretically play an important role in deciding the issue through proposing and articulating their policy agendas, but their wishes may not result due to interactions with other institutions of government. As an example, current Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe (D) favors Medicaid expansion but the Republican-controlled state legislature voted against it (Leonard 2017). Electoral and personal conditions may provide a given state executive with more freedom to advocate for their policy preferences. Observing the content of gubernatorial addresses, individual differences of opinion on Medicaid expansion were expressed:

“Suffice it to say, we must have Medicaid reform...in the coming year.”  
—*Pat Quinn (D), Illinois, 2012*

“As a result of a downturned economy and the provisions of federal legislation known as Obamacare, we are seeing a growth in our Medicaid rolls. As you know, I have elected not to expand our eligibility limits for Medicaid...”  
—*Nathan Deal (R), Georgia, 2013*

“While my proposed balanced budget covers a wide range of important state services, it is clear that Medicaid will receive the lion's share of attention, and rightfully so.”  
—*Mike Beebe (D), Arkansas, 2013*

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<sup>11</sup> States that have not expanded Medicaid as of January 1, 2017 include: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Maine, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Data from “Status of State Action on the Medicaid Expansion Decision” (Kaiser Family Foundation).

“I’m also committed to working with this Legislature to pursue Medicaid reform. There are a lot of great, innovative ideas and policy solutions coming from the men and women in this room, and we will continue to explore them.”

—*Mary Fallin (R), Oklahoma, 2014*

“Washington is asking us to expand Medicaid as part of the Affordable Care Act without any clear guidance or reasonable assurances...At this time, without serious reforms, it would be financially unsustainable for the taxpayers, and I cannot recommend a dramatic Medicaid expansion.”

—*Tom Corbett (R), Pennsylvania, 2013*

### *Theory*

Executives set agendas to pursue preferred policies. Rhetorical statements allow state and national-level elites to discuss their views with legislators and the general public. State of the Union and State of the State addresses are opportunities for presidents and governors to set an agenda by presenting a series of immediate and long-range policy goals they wish to see enacted during their administration. The task of agenda-setting for an executive varies depending on the degree of political strength they may possess at a given moment, related to Light’s (1999) cycles of effectiveness and influence and Kingdon’s policy streams approach. As Kernell argues in his book on presidential speechmaking, presidents often go over the heads of Washington insiders to press their agenda with the public. While Obama had considerable support on Capitol Hill, Kernell’s basic point that presidential rhetoric is an important component of presidential leadership is relevant in the case of the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Without a solid majority of the public behind his initiative, Obama regularly presented his arguments in favor of the legislation in national speeches, to important interest groups, and in smaller addresses across the country. Rhetoric, therefore, was an additional mechanism used to implement agenda priorities, both

legislatively (Kingdon; Cox and McCubbins 2005) and through unilateral authority (Howell 2003), such as Obama's executive order applying the Hyde Amendment on abortions, designed to reach out to more conservative Americans and legislators. Rhetoric played a significant role in both setting and an executive's political agenda. In this regard, the Medicaid expansion was one of the most important components of the legislation when it came to governors and their approach to policy making in their own states. Obama discussed the need for a Medicaid expansion, but did his rhetoric and that of governors fall of deaf ears?

Likely not. We can theorize that both the public and political elites would be attuned to this issue. In setting their agenda on the impact of the Affordable Care Act, the media would logically discuss Medicaid expansion in depth as it affects many Americans with limited incomes. Having been educated on the issue through media coverage and Barack Obama's public rhetoric during his presidential campaigns, poorer individuals and the unemployed have primed themselves to think of Medicaid expansions salient (Dearing and Rogers 1988; Rogers and Dearing 1996) and important to their future social and economic livelihood. Governors then, especially those with constituencies who would benefit from expanding Medicaid, would rationally set their agenda with a focus on touting their plans to increase coverage in their state.

#### *Description of Methodology and Hypotheses*

The presence of Medicaid rhetoric in each state serves as the central dependent variable of the analysis and was determined by a manual content analysis of all gubernatorial State of the State addresses given from 2012-2014. Every mention of the term "Medicaid" was coded as one mention. The main independent variables already

discussed in the study on the Affordable Care Act were also utilized for this analysis.

Specific hypotheses for Medicaid rhetoric are:

H1: In periods of divided government at the state level, governors will be less likely to mention Medicaid in their State of the State addresses. This is expected due to that executives will not want to articulate a controversial policy item if the opposing party controls at least one legislative chamber and can simply block their wishes.

H2: As an individual governor's vote percentage from their last election to office increases, the less likely they will be to mention Medicaid in their State of the State addresses. Electoral victories often lead to executives claiming a "governing mandate." If this is the case, then they may wish to pursue their own goals and objectives following a re-confirmation of their abilities in office.

H3: As an individual governor's margin of victory increases, the less likely they will be to mention Medicaid in their State of the State addresses. This expectation stems from state executives having the ability and desire to talk about independent objectives in their State of the State addresses while moving away from presidential policies.

H4: As the percentage of Barack Obama's vote in the last presidential election increases (from state to state not over time), the more likely governors will be to mention Medicaid in their State of the State addresses. If Obama and his policy initiatives are popular naturally among voters, governors will want to promote them within their state.

H5: The higher Barack Obama's approval rating in a particular state, the more likely governors will be to mention Medicaid in their State of the State addresses. By supporting the president, it can be assumed that citizens are also supporting his policies. If a governor wishes to be re-elected and/or maintain a high degree of popularity throughout their tenure in office, they may decide to discuss Obama's plan for Medicaid expansion in their address.

Table 2.5 presents a pooled analysis of Medicaid mentions in gubernatorial State of the State addresses from 2012 to 2014. A table of summary statistics relating to this analysis may be found in Appendix H.

The pooled models find that political and electoral conditions may impact whether a state governor chooses to mention Medicaid in their annual legislative message. Separate models were run with each conception of divided government to more precisely estimate the effect of legislative partisanship.

In the first model, measuring partisan control of a state legislature as a dummy variable leads to a higher probability of Medicaid rhetoric, thus, H1 is not supported. With either zero houses of the legislature or both supporting the governor's policies, they are less likely to have partisan support for their plans. If both houses oppose Medicaid expansion and the governor supports it, they may choose to discuss the issue more in their address to explain their position. As a governor's personal popularity increases, there is a higher probability they will mention Medicaid in their State of the State address. H2, then, is also not supported. A governor may feel that with increased support from the public, they feel a greater degree of political freedom to discuss controversial policies. However, H3 regarding a governor's victory margin and the

lowered probability they will mention Medicaid is supported. An increased level of political support allows an executive a greater degree of independence to discuss preferred policy objectives. The converse of this statement is that if they did not win initial election or re-election by a large margin, governors may not want to upset voting blocks in their state by speaking too much about Medicaid while promoting less politically charged issues such as education and job growth.

Barack Obama's likeability in a state, as measured by his state-by-state approval rating, leads to a lowered rather than an increased probability of Medicaid mentions in gubernatorial messages. Thus, H4 is not empirically supported. Republican governors will likely not choose to discuss the ACA due to ideological differences with the former Democratic president. Their Democratic counterparts, however, may also choose to sidestep the issue if they are governing in a more conservative state like Kentucky where one legislative chamber is controlled by Republicans and the state electorate votes for conservative presidential and congressional candidates to represent them at the national level. These results are supported by percentages of mentions in actual addresses. A majority of governors, 81.8% did not mention Medicaid from 2012-2014, whereas only 3.6% mentioned the issue on 10 or more occasions.

In the second model, conceptualizing partisan control of a state legislature as a trichotomous variable leads to a lowered probability of Medicaid rhetoric, finding empirical support for H1. A governor will have support for their agenda with either one or two legislative houses, two out of three possible outcomes of the variable. With support or opposition for Medicaid expansion already established in the legislative, a governor would not necessarily spend their rhetorical capital discussing the issue.

Similarly to the first model, as a governor's personal popularity increases, there is an increased probability they will mention Medicaid in their State of the State address, thus support is not found for H2. Further, in states where a governor had an increasing victory margin and Obama had a higher approval rating, the probability of mentioning Medicaid was lower. This results in support for H3 but not for H4.

Medicaid expansion provides a significant metric by which to analyze gubernatorial rhetoric on an important part of the Affordable Care Act. Theoretical expectations are supported as the public was aware of the Medicaid expansion provision of the ACA and may have employed it as part of their voting calculus. Governors responded to voters' decisions and state-level partisan dynamics in deciding whether or not to discuss health care. As Barack Obama left office in January 2017, Republican Donald Trump entered the White House with very different ideas on the future of the American health care system

### **Repealing and Replacing Obamacare: Donald Trump and the Future of Health Care Reform**

Health care reform continued to divide the American political landscape during the 2016 presidential election between Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and businessman Donald Trump. Both major party candidates presented their views on the Affordable Care Act during the Fall campaign, with Trump supporting a new vision if he prevailed in the November 8 vote. In a speech in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, a week before the election, Trump clearly stated his plan to fundamentally overhaul Obamacare.

“The Obama administration has just announced massive double digit and triple digit Obamacare premium hikes everywhere, all throughout the country. Here in Pennsylvania, premiums are going to increase more than 60 percent and that's nothing compared to what will happen in the future. Of course, in the future, I'm

president, there won't be Obamacare, so you won't have to worry about it” (“Remarks on Obamacare”).

Trump’s victory over Clinton in the Electoral College gave the GOP unified government and a seemingly clear political path to enacting a “repeal and replace” agenda.

At the time of this writing, however, a conservative alternative to Obama’s chief domestic priority remains unrealized. In March 2017, congressional Republicans-proposed the American Health Care Act. This legislation aimed to—among other provisions—dismantle the individual mandate for insurance coverage, a key proponent of Obamacare. The bill passed the House of Representatives two months later by a slim four-vote margin. (Keneally 2017). Senate agreement on a bill was fraught with failed votes through the summer months while Trump encouraged chamber Republicans on social media with “Come on Republican Senators, you can do it on Healthcare. After 7 years, this is your chance to shine! Don't let the American people down!” However, the final vote on a crucial “skinny repeal” bill in late July 2017 was 51-49, with GOP Sens. John McCain (Arizona), Lisa Murkowski (Alaska) and Susan Collins (Maine) voting with all Democrats opposing the measure. The partisan rancor on Capitol Hill and across the United States regarding suitable health care will undoubtedly continue during the Trump Administration.

### **Conclusion**

Health care reform is a critical issue facing the United States. Many presidents tried and failed to provide comprehensive coverage to all Americans; Barack Obama finally succeeded in this task. The Affordable Care Act or “Obamacare” has passionate supporters and detractors, and it is this degree of partisan rancor that makes this issue

pertinent for discussion and analysis concerning how state governors set their political agendas.

Obama began supporting the need for health care reform during the 2008 campaign. An electoral victory against Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) and both chambers controlled by Democrats all but assured the issue would remain a part of the national political dialogue. While debate and passage on the legislation led to a bitter partisan debate in Congress, the Supreme Court would also weigh in on the constitutionality of the law's individual mandate, requiring all Americans to have health insurance or pay a penalty. The ACA was surprisingly saved by the vote of Chief Justice John G. Roberts, appointed to the Court by Obama's Republican predecessor. The 2012 general election saw Obama face former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney. Railing against Obamacare throughout his campaign, he was forced to reconcile the president's health care initiative with his own successful efforts at passing health care reform during his governorship. In the end, Romney was defeated and the ACA remained a part of national policy.

Obama faced continual Republican criticism over his version of health care reform. Analyzing conservative rhetoric through rebuttal addresses given following the president's State of the Union message allow for further confirmation of how the issue was portrayed by the opposing party. Many officeholders, such as Rep. Paul Ryan (WI) and Sen. Marco Rubio (FL) underscored the flawed nature of the legislation with somber and serious rhetoric. GOP governors were also unfavorable toward the ACA in their annual legislative messages. Comments such as those expressed by Southern state executives Nikki Haley (R-SC) and Jan Brewer (R-AZ) were dismissive of the law, calling it a "federal takeover" and vowing to challenge its very existence. Other

Republicans, including Gov. Susana Martinez (R-NM) and Gov. Matt Mead (R-WY), settled on a more resigned tone by begrudgingly accepting the ACA.

The analysis of this paper centered on whether the broader political environment played a role in determining how governors discussed the Affordable Care Act in their State of the State addresses. A manual content analysis of selected gubernatorial messages revealed that governor-centric elements, such as electoral support through popular vote percentage and vote margin against an opponent did factor into how they discussed Obama's signature domestic achievement. Governors in politically precarious positions were more likely to mention the ACA whereas those in states where Obama was not popular and who were comfortable in their own position did not discuss the legislation.

A limited degree of empirical support was found for these relationships. The current state unemployment rate did matter and its interaction with the percentage of uninsured individuals by state was nearly significant in determining whether a discussion on the ACA was included in the analysis. The year 2012 produced a decrease in health care rhetoric, likely due to the gradual implementation of the ACA. A related analysis of support as measured by the percentage of words devoted to health care did not find significance, likely due to the small amount of space given the issues during the period under examination.

The secondary study of Medicaid rhetoric by state governors found mixed support for the independent variables utilized in the study. Partisan and electoral conditions, including a given governor's vote percentage in their most recent election and margin of victory, presidential influence conditions, measured by Obama's percentage of the two-

party vote in a given state, and more state-centric factors such as the degree of legislative partisanship, were all found to matter to governors in their rhetorical decisions to discuss Medicaid expansion in their State of the State addresses. Future research endeavors may wish to account for gubernatorial ideology (Weinberg 2010) as a way to provide a more precise estimate of tonal distinctions amongst subnational executives.

President Donald Trump, Obama's Republican successor, vowed to dismantle Obamacare during his successful 2016 presidential campaign against Hillary Clinton. This prospect, however, seems in question as of this writing, due to failed congressional efforts to pass a bill repealing and replacing the ACA. Expanding the time horizon of the project through the final years of Barack Obama's presidency in 2017 would likely provide a more complete picture of the impact that his health care reform efforts had on American political discourse between presidents and governors. In addition, if the ACA is repealed under President Donald Trump, then it will be possible to examine attitudes before and after the repeal of the ACA. However, the preliminary analysis demonstrates that state governors are seemingly taking presidential popularity, their own electoral position, and state partisanship into account when discussing national health policy. No matter the ultimate fate of Obamacare, providing quality health care to the American people is a politically divisive issue that will remain contentious.

**Table 2.1 Rhetorical Tone and Political Conditions on Health Care Policy,  
Selected Republican State of the State Addresses With Wyoming, 2012-2014**

<b>Governor and Year</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Tone</b>	<b>Obama Victory 2008</b>	<b>Obama Victory 2012</b>	<b>Obama Approval 2012</b>	<b>Obama Approval 2013</b>	<b>Obama Approval 2014</b>	<b>Governor's Vote Percent</b>	<b>Governor's Victory Margin</b>
Martinez 2013	New Mexico	Moderate	56.91	52.99	47.20	45.00	39.10	53.29	6.74
Sandoval 2013	Nevada	Moderate	55.15	52.36	46.30	45.70	38.70	53.36	11.75
Mead 2013	Wyoming	Moderate	32.54	27.82	28.50	22.50	19.30	64.87	42.21
Average			48.20	44.39	40.67	37.73	32.37	57.17	20.23
Haley 2012	South Carolina	Negative	44.90	44.09	44.20	42.10	40.00	51.37	4.46
Brewer 2013	Arizona	Negative	45.12	44.59	44.30	44.50	40.80	54.33	11.86
Bentley 2014	Alabama	Negative	38.74	38.36	36.90	37.30	32.70	57.90	15.80
Pence 2014 <sup>^</sup>	Indiana	Negative	49.95	43.93	40.80	38.70	34.30	57.80	17.70
Average			44.68	42.74	41.55	40.65	36.95	55.35	12.46

**Table 2.2 Rhetorical Tone and Political Conditions on Health Care Policy, Selected Republican State of the State Addresses Without Wyoming, 2012-2014**

<b>Governor and Year</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Tone</b>	<b>Obama Victory 2008</b>	<b>Obama Victory 2012</b>	<b>Obama Approval 2012</b>	<b>Obama Approval 2013</b>	<b>Obama Approval 2014</b>	<b>Governor's Vote Percent</b>	<b>Governor's Victory Margin</b>
Martinez 2013	New Mexico	Moderate	56.91	52.99	47.20	45.00	39.10	53.29	6.74
Sandoval 2013	Nevada	Moderate	55.15	52.36	46.30	45.70	38.70	53.36	11.75
Average			56.03	52.68	46.75	45.35	38.90	53.33	9.25
Brewer 2014	Arizona	Negative	45.12	44.59	44.30	44.50	40.80	54.33	11.86
Bentley 2014	Alabama	Negative	38.74	38.36	36.90	37.30	32.70	57.90	15.80
Haley 2012	South Carolina	Negative	44.90	44.09	44.20	42.10	40.00	51.37	4.46
Pence 2014	Indiana	Negative	49.95	43.93	40.80	38.70	34.30	57.80	17.70
Average			44.68	42.74	41.55	40.65	36.95	55.35	12.46

**Table 2.3 Rhetorical Tone and Political Conditions on Health Care Policy  
Selected Democratic State of the State Addresses, 2012-2014**

<b>Governor and Year</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Tone</b>	<b>Obama Victory 2008</b>	<b>Obama Victory 2012</b>	<b>Obama Approval 2012</b>	<b>Obama Approval 2013</b>	<b>Obama Approval 2014</b>	<b>Governor Vote Percent</b>	<b>Governor Victory Margin</b>
Beebe 2013	Arkansas	Moderate	38.86	36.88	37.20	34.90	32.00	64.42	30.79
Nixon 2013	Missouri	Moderate	49.29	44.38	40.60	37.60	34.70	56.59	15.57
Average			44.08	40.63	38.90	36.25	33.35	60.51	23.18
Brown 2013	California	Positive	61.01	60.24	54.20	55.80	50.50	53.80	12.90
Inslee 2013	Washington	Positive	57.65	56.16	51.30	47.10	44.40	51.54	3.05
Quinn 2013	Illinois	Positive	61.92	57.60	52.30	53.70	46.10	46.79	0.00085
Shumlin 2014	Vermont	Positive	67.46	66.57	59.10	56.60	44.90	57.99	20.31
Average			62.01	60.14	54.23	53.30	46.48	52.53	9.07

**Table 2.4 The Affordable Care Act in State of the State Addresses, 2012-2014**

VARIABLES	(1) Inclusion	(2) Inclusion	(3) Percentage of Words on Health Care	(4) Percentage of Words on Health Care
Party of Governor	-0.340 (0.545)	-0.358 (0.517)	0.084 (0.320)	0.088 (0.303)
Divided Government as Dummy Variable	-0.324 (0.514)		0.146 (0.096)	
Governor's Percentage of Vote in Most Recent Election	0.014 (0.890)	0.023 (0.814)	0.020 (0.289)	0.020 (0.282)
Governor's Victory Margin in Most Recent Election	-0.011 (0.832)	-0.013 (0.800)	-0.007 (0.419)	-0.007 (0.409)
Obama Percentage of State Vote in 2008 and 2012 Elections	0.006 (0.918)	0.006 (0.925)	-0.009 (0.343)	-0.010 (0.331)
Obama Yearly State Approval Rating	-0.027 (0.662)	-0.027 (0.665)	0.000 (0.982)	0.000 (0.988)
Yearly Uninsured Percentage of State Population	-0.240 (0.371)	-0.254 (0.362)	-0.051 (0.340)	-0.055 (0.301)
Yearly State Unemployment Rate	-1.009* (0.041)	-1.011* (0.048)	-0.065 (0.415)	-0.072 (0.366)
Interaction Term of Uninsured and Unemployment	0.071 (0.059)	0.072 (0.063)	0.005 (0.508)	0.005 (0.459)
	-2.417**	-2.457**	0.034	0.048

**(Continued: Table 2.4 The Affordable Care Act  
in State of the State Addresses, 2012-2014)**

Dummy Variable for 2012 Year				
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.703)	(0.584)
Dummy Variable for 2013 Year	0.028	0.001	0.094	0.101
	(0.961)	(0.998)	(0.255)	(0.217)
Divided Government as Trichotomous Variable		-0.029		-0.077
		(0.920)		(0.171)
Constant	3.725	3.356	1.014	1.314
	(0.554)	(0.596)	(0.317)	(0.218)
Observations	137	137	137	137
R-squared			0.103	0.098

Note: Robust p-values in parentheses

\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

**Table 2.5 Medicaid Rhetoric in State of the State Addresses, 2012-2014**

VARIABLES	(1) Medicaid Mentions	(2) Medicaid Mentions
Party of Governor	0.352 (0.238)	0.248 (0.316)
Divided Government as Dummy Variable	0.770** (0.001)	
Governor's Percentage of Vote in Most Recent Election	0.294** (0.000)	0.268** (0.000)
Governor's Victory Margin in Most Recent Election	-0.140** (0.000)	-0.127** (0.000)
Obama Percentage of State Vote in 2008 and 2012 Elections	-0.067** (0.008)	-0.066** (0.008)
Obama Yearly State Approval Rating	0.014 (0.664)	0.013 (0.692)
Yearly Uninsured Percentage of State Population	-0.051 (0.675)	-0.085 (0.454)
Yearly State Unemployment Rate	-0.060 (0.816)	-0.105 (0.683)
	-0.106	-0.111

**(Continued: Table 2.5 Medicaid Rhetoric in State of  
the State Addresses, 2012-2014)**

Yearly Undocumented Percentage of State Population		
	(0.287)	(0.248)
Interaction Term of Uninsured and Unemployment	0.014	0.017
	(0.409)	(0.288)
Dummy Variable for 2012 Year	-0.473	-0.331
	(0.258)	(0.398)
Dummy Variable for 2013 Year	0.195	0.275
	(0.550)	(0.355)
Divided Government as Trichotomous Variable		-0.496**
		(0.000)
Constant	-11.344**	-8.148*
	(0.004)	(0.017)
Observations	137	137

Note: Robust p-values in parentheses  
\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

**Paper Three: Immigration Reform:**  
**A Divergence of Gubernatorial and Presidential Rhetoric**

The United States is comprised of citizens from various backgrounds, cultures, and traditions. From the historical “melting pot” conception to the modern “salad bowl” notion of inclusiveness, our nation has welcomed many across its borders. Many have, however, directly experienced cultural and social marginalization throughout American political history. As individuals governing the nation or one of its fifty states, presidents and governors have developed a shared concern for comprehensive immigration reform in the United States.

The current national debate over immigration is an outgrowth of the War on Terror beginning after the U.S. attack on September 11, 2001. Political instability, economic inequality, psychological warfare, and social disruption have heightened since this period, allowing terrorist groups such as ISIS, Boko Haram, and the Taliban (MacAskill 2014) to increase their activity in many countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan (Baker 2014), Syria, and India. These developments, in turn, fostered a desire in the United States to bolster homeland security and border control efforts (Moses 2009) against those who would cause unnecessary harm.

Politicians from both major parties have publicly aired their differences regarding border security and curtailing illegal immigration. These confrontations can be clearly expressed in photographs depicting a 2012 encounter between President Barack Obama and Governor Jan Brewer (R-AZ) on the Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport tarmac (Davenport 2012). The national and state-level executives engaged in a serious exchange over Arizona’s “Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act,” or SB 1070 legislation. The law introduced penalties for various kinds of immigration-related

activities such as human trafficking (“Arizona’s Immigration). Final passage of the law in 2010 began a firestorm of rhetorical activity over this salient policy issue.

Do state governments discuss immigration policy in the State of the State addresses? Are southern border state governors apt to mention their shared border with Mexico? This paper utilizes the rhetorical language present in presidential and gubernatorial annual addresses as a way of better understanding how the immigration debate has progressed during the Obama administration, as well as the general political and social implications of immigration policy, As this issue was significant to the 2016 election campaign between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton and continues during the early months of the Trump administration, political elites at all levels of government will likely continue discussing and debating its relevance in the foreseeable future.

### **Immigration Policy in the Media**

The mass media made the immigration issue a central priority of its agenda during the latter half of the Obama administration. Some outlets, such as the *Washington Post*, took a more balanced approach in their coverage by providing both positive and negative aspects of Barack Obama’s DACA policy (Markon and Somashekhar 2014), while others framed the issue as the stories of illegal individuals already in the United States being discounted and neglected by national immigration reform (Carcamo and Linthicum 2014). Academic research was conducted on agenda-setting and framing the immigration issue in print and broadcast outlets; general findings of one study included widespread coverage for a direct pathway to citizenship, positive reporting of younger immigrants, and inadequate news stories regarding immigration enforcement (Opportunity Agenda 2013).

Immigration reform retained its political salience during the 2016 presidential primaries and general election. NPR reported differences between primary candidates of both parties on a host of related issues—support for Obama’s executive actions on immigration, ending or sustaining birthright citizenship, and a desire for legal status for undocumented individuals (Kurtzleben 2015). A central issue that arose due to Donald Trump’s candidacy concerned the building and financing of a border wall between the United States and Mexico. Different media sources displayed the partisan nature of immigration by covering the issue using various descriptive headlines. *Newsweek* used an alliterative approach in concluding that Trump’s vision was “impractical, impolitic, [and] impossible” (Dean 2016). Conservative blog RedState responded to many sources citing Mexico’s unwillingness to associate with the border wall by noting that “Mexican Cement Builder Offers to Help Build Trump’s Wall” (Ruth 2016).

With the prevalence of social media now allowing the public direct engagement with the issues and one another, popular discussion of immigration issues during the campaign can be seen through online platforms. Facebook groups include “TRUMP FRIENDS ON FACEBOOK FOR A PRODUCTIVE BORDER WALL” and “El Pasoans Against a Border Wall,” while a Twitter user remarked, “Illegal immigration is down over 61%, immigration arrests up 49%, 400 ICE arrests everyday and we are building a #BorderWall,” in support of the Trump administration’s agenda. Popular participation via social media has become a mainstay in recent American elections, with Facebook partnering with mainstream television outlets for Election Night coverage and photos on sharing applications noted that “I Voted” after casting a ballot. Ordinary citizens directly and indirectly became involved on the immigration issue by watching and responding to

media stories. We turn now to the rhetoric espoused by those elected to governmental positions of power and authority by various constituencies.

### **The White House: The Obama Administration on Immigration Policy**

Barack Obama made immigration policy a significant rhetorical component of his annual legislative messages while in office. His remarks serve to highlight the national importance of this issue while providing a baseline for understanding how governors responded to his views.

#### *Presidential Rhetoric on Immigration Policy*

As the presidential State of the Union address is constitutionally-prescribed, occurs annually, and is widely covered by the mass media, it presents a comparable way to judge the impact of executive rhetoric over time. During his administration, Barack Obama continually and consistently presented his views on immigration reform to the American public—emphasizing border security, economic growth, and citizenship rights for all through a hopeful call of bipartisanship within a fragmented and hyperpolarized political era.

“Now, I strongly believe that we should take on, once and for all, the issue of illegal immigration. And I am prepared to work with Republicans and Democrats to protect our borders, enforce our laws, and address the millions of undocumented workers who are now living in the shadows. I know that debate will be difficult. I know it will take time. But tonight, let's agree to make that effort. And let's stop expelling talented, responsible young people who could be staffing our research labs or starting a new business, who could be further enriching this Nation.”

—2011 State of the Union Address

“I believe as strongly as ever that we should take on illegal immigration. That's why my administration has put more boots on the border than ever before. That's why there are fewer illegal crossings than when I took office. The opponents of action are out of excuses. We should be working on comprehensive immigration reform right now...

But if election-year politics keeps Congress from acting on a comprehensive plan, let's at least agree to stop expelling responsible young people who want to staff our labs, start new businesses, defend this country. Send me a law that gives them the chance to earn their citizenship. I will sign it right away.”

—2012 *State of the Union Address*

“...And right now, leaders from the business, labor, law enforcement, faith communities -- they all agree that the time has come to pass comprehensive immigration reform. Now is the time to do it. Now is the time to get it done. Now is the time to get it done.

Real reform means strong border security, and we can build on the progress my administration has already made -- putting more boots on the Southern border than at any time in our history and reducing illegal crossings to their lowest levels in 40 years.”

Real reform means establishing a responsible pathway to earned citizenship -- a path that includes passing a background check, paying taxes and a meaningful penalty, learning English, and going to the back of the line behind the folks trying to come here legally...”

—2013 *State of the Union Address*

“Finally, if we are serious about economic growth, it is time to heed the call of business leaders, labor leaders, faith leaders, and law enforcement – and fix our broken immigration system. Republicans and Democrats in the Senate have acted. I know that members of both parties in the House want to do the same. Independent economists say immigration reform will grow our economy and shrink our deficits by almost \$1 trillion in the next two decades. And for good reason: when people come here to fulfill their dreams – to study, invent, and contribute to our culture – they make our country a more attractive place for businesses to locate and create jobs for everyone. So let's get immigration reform done this year.”

—2014 *State of the Union Address*

These statements reflect Obama's views toward passing comprehensive immigration policy during his presidency. His addresses focus on several themes: (1) Relating to previous positive actions on immigration taken by the administration, (2) Desiring to improve America's future by extending citizenship to those currently

undocumented, and (3) Presenting factual claims extolling the positive benefits of immigration reform and enforcement. Campbell and Jamieson (2008) note that this activity is standard rhetorical fare, as presidential legislative messages often center on ceremonial and deliberative rhetoric. Ceremonial speechmaking focuses on making value and aspirational statements, while setting legislative goals characterizes deliberative rhetoric.

Obama's messaging also signifies the current partisan nature of American politics. In their work on political tone, Hart et al. (2013) operationalize rhetoric by devising a two-party dichotomy to better understand partisan differences in speechmaking. The "Democratic tone," the authors note, is comprised of (1) Reform, (2) Utility and (3) Community. Reform centers on social change, while utility and community focus on concrete initiatives that benefit a wide array of individuals in society. The president's remarks regarding "real reform" through specific criteria representing a "responsible pathway to earned citizenship" for the "millions of undocumented workers who are now living in the shadows" directly represents Hart et al.'s (2013) discussion of "Democratic tone." From 2012-2014, Barack Obama took a number of important actions regarding his rhetorical support for immigration reform.

### *Republican Rhetoric on Immigration Policy*

As with health care policy, Republican national officeholders used their rebuttal addresses to Obama's State of the Union to speak on this pressing issue facing the nation.

“We can also help grow our—grow our economy if we have a legal immigration system that allows us to attract and assimilate the world’s best and brightest. We need a responsible, permanent solution to the problem of those who are here illegally. But first, we must follow through on the broken promises of the past to secure our borders and enforce our laws. —*Sen. Marco Rubio (FL), 2013*

“Every day, we’re working to expand our economy, one manufacturing job, nursing degree and small business at a time. We have plans to improve our education and training systems so you have the choice to determine where your kids go to school...so college is affordable...and skills training is modernized. And yes, it’s time to honor our history of legal immigration. We’re working on a step-by-step solution to immigration reform by first securing our borders and making sure America will always attract the best, brightest, and hardest working from around the world.” —*Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA), 2014*

Senator Rubio and Representative McMorris Rodgers employ language indicative of Hart et al.’s (2013)’s “Republican tone” when discussing immigration issues; conservatives often speak using themes of (1) Restoration, (2) Values, and (3) Nationalism. Restorative language is demonstrated through Rubio’s “broken promises of the past” statement, while discussing the nation’s “best and brightest” places a positive value judgement on the American public. The terms “our” and “America” symbolize a connection with the nation and its citizenry; this practice is characteristic of identification rhetoric (Beasley 2004; Teten 2011) in public address.

Compared with the Republican rhetoric on health care policy, both lawmakers express similar rhetorical positions on immigration. This may be attributed a stronger degree of intra-party polarization present in an issue directly emblematic of Barack Obama’s progressivism or a wider array of moral and societal aspects to consider rather than a longer-term issue with more entrenched inter-party policy positions. State-level executives of both parties would respond to the president through legislative messages as he acted on his verbal promises throughout his second term in office.

### *Presidential Action on Immigration Policy*

Following his 2012 State of the Union address, Obama supported his rhetorical promise to broaden citizenship for younger Americans by initiating the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), this decision allowed those immigrating to the United States prior to age sixteen, among others who meet stated requirements, the opportunity to defer deportation and to apply for employment authorization. Clarifying the intent of the policy, Obama stated:

“Now, let’s be clear – this is not amnesty, this is not immunity. This is not a path to citizenship. It’s not a permanent fix. This is a temporary stopgap measure that lets us focus our resources wisely while giving a degree of relief and hope to talented, driven, patriotic young people.” (Obama 2012)

Gilbert’s (2013) research argues against the president’s altruistic motives, citing the legislation as politically calculated in response to the DREAM Act’s failure and a then-potential Supreme Court ruling on SB 1070. Other scholars would agree with the conceptualization while arguing that these actions would have direct electoral benefits toward a Democratic candidate supporting policies favoring Latinos, a rapidly growing minority group, in a presidential election year (Skrentny and Lopez 2013; Wallace 2012; Sanchez et al. 2012).

After winning reelection by defeating Republican Mitt Romney, Obama continued the push for large-scale reform on immigration into his second term. By this time, however, the president found himself on Light’s (1999) cycle of decreasing influence. Facing the typical second-term political environment of waning authority with Congress and declining public approval ratings, Obama issued a series of executive actions—a form of unilateral authority (Howell 2003)—in November 2014 to achieve

further progress on immigration reform. Announcing his decision in an East Room primetime speech, the president noted:

“The actions I’m taking are not only lawful, they’re the kinds of actions taken by every single Republican President and every single Democratic President for the past half century. And to those members of Congress who question my authority to make our immigration system work better, or question the wisdom of me acting where Congress has failed, I have one answer: Pass a bill. I want to work with both parties to pass a more permanent legislative solution. And the day I sign that bill into law, the actions I take will no longer be necessary.

First, we’ll build on our progress at the border with additional resources for our law enforcement personnel so that they can stem the flow of illegal crossings and speed the return of those who do cross over.

Second, I’ll make it easier and faster for high-skilled immigrants, graduates and entrepreneurs to stay and contribute to our economy...

Third, we’ll take steps to deal responsibly with the millions of undocumented immigrants who already had live in our country.” (Obama 2014).

These decisions allowed up to four million undocumented individuals to receive legal protection from immediate deportation while expanding DACA (Ehrenfreund 2014).

This issue quickly became partisan, as Republican state and federal officials voiced their collective displeasure of Obama’s immigration efforts by filing lawsuits in federal court accusing the president of executive overreach (Lillis 2015; Hart 2015). The Supreme Court eventually became involved in the politicized battle over Obama’s actions; issuing a per curiam opinion in *United States v. Texas*, the justices voted 4-4 to sustain a lower court’s injunction halting the administration’s program (Liptak and Shear 2016). The tie decision was due to the one-seat vacancy on the Court from February 2016 to April 2017 following the unexpected death of Associate Justice Antonin Scalia and prior to Associate Justice Neil Gorsuch’s successful nomination and Senate confirmation. State governors were not silent on the ongoing immigration debate; Democratic and Republican officeholders alike made their views public through

individual State of the State addresses.

### **The State House: Gubernatorial Rhetoric on Immigration Policy**

The impact of immigration was detailed by governors in their State of the State messages from 2012 to 2014. As with comments on health care initiatives, rhetorical stances from Democratic and Republican state houses ranged from support for the Obama administration to questioning the wisdom of the White House's policy agenda.

#### *Statements by Republican Governors in State of the State Addresses*

“Today, sitting with my family, is Ying Sa. I met Ying at the Iowa Immigrant Entrepreneurial Summit. She is a leader who has helped hundreds of immigrant entrepreneurs start successful businesses in Iowa, including her own... I was honored to address their summit and to recognize 125 immigrant entrepreneurs who started a new business in Iowa last year.”  
—*Terry Branstad, Iowa, 2012*

“I strongly believe that we are a nation of laws rather than of men and that people who illegally cross our border, violating our federal laws, cannot be ignored. It is not only the state's right but responsibility to determine if these violators are among our general population, particularly when they have also violated the criminal statutes of Mississippi.”  
—*Phil Bryant, Mississippi, 2012*

“We protected...our citizens from the dangers of illegal immigration.”  
—*Nikki Haley, South Carolina, 2012*

“I've heard the earnest calls for immigration reform...To the reformers, I say: Demonstrate your stated commitment to a secure border by making that your FIRST priority. After so many broken promises -- so many starts and stops with border security -- join me in holding the federal government to account. Once our border is secure, I pledge to work with all fair-minded people to reform our Nation's immigration system. The steep decline in illegal crossings is proof that our border CAN be secured when the federal government employs the right mix of fencing, manpower and technology. Now, I ask the President to finish the job.”  
—*Jan Brewer, Arizona, 2013*

“We need to focus on legal immigration and make sure people know Michigan is the most welcoming place, and I'm intent on moving forward with that. To take action on this front, I'm going to sign an executive order, creating the Michigan Office for New Americans to be a coordinating resource to say let's welcome these individuals to encourage entrepreneurship, to encourage those students that are getting those advanced degrees...not to have to leave the country, but to stay and grow companies and employ Michiganders...to say if someone has the opportunity to come to our country legally, let's hold our arms open and say, "Come to Michigan, this is the place to be." —Rick Snyder, *Michigan*, 2014

While tonal and linguistic differences are readily seen in how Republican state executives discuss immigration policy, their words are seemingly not as politically divisive as when discussing the Affordable Care Act. Governor Rick Snyder's address demonstrates a positive, uplifting message as he welcomes immigrants to his state as a way to spur economic development and job growth. Iowa Governor Terry Branstad also touts encouraging rhetoric concerning immigrants and their ability to contribute to state entrepreneurship.

Other conservative governors delivered a more somber and cautious review of immigration policy and its impact on American society. Former Governor Nikki Haley of South Carolina, currently serving as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, gave a simple yet powerful statement concerning the societal risks and threats posed by immigration while Phil Bryant (R-MS) takes a legal approach, citing immigration as a gateway for the occurrence of possible criminal activity in the nation. Arizona's Jan Brewer's speech utilized accusatory language, blaming the federal government for its inefficiencies and mismanagement of national immigration reform.

These statements, while expressing a variety of sentiments on immigration policy, all do not resonate as overtly political as was the case with health care policy. This may be because while health care affects citizens in every state—regardless of location—

border state and Southern governors (Arizona, South Carolina, and Mississippi) may be more apt to extol a more negative outlook on immigration due to geographical proximity with other nations.

*Statements by Democratic Governors in State of the State Addresses*

“We also took a big step forward by passing the Illinois DREAM Act to help high school graduates from immigrant families.”  
—*Pat Quinn, Illinois, 2012*

“We must also live up to the promise of the Lady in our Harbor and ensure that New York remains a land of opportunity for all. We will create an Office for New Americans to assist the many legal permanent residents eager to contribute to our economy and become part of the family of New York.”  
—*Andrew Cuomo, New York, 2012*

“For pilgrims seeking to worship freely, for slaves seeking freedom, for immigrants seeking a better way, for your mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers seeking a toehold in the middle class, Massachusetts has beckoned seekers as a land of opportunity.”  
—*Deval Patrick, Massachusetts, 2013*

“In so many other ways, California is a pioneer. We have 25 percent of the nation’s foreign born and we are the first state in modern times to have a plurality of families of Latino origin. So it’s not surprising that California is the state where immigrants can not only dream – they can drive.”  
—*Jerry Brown, California, 2013*

“Together, so that the children of New American immigrants, can realize their full potential, we passed the DREAM Act in Maryland.”  
—*Martin O’Malley, Maryland, 2014*

Unlike Republican officeholders, Democratic governors were unified in presenting the immigration issue using positive dialogue. Their rhetorical differences were slighter, centering on either discussing their affirmative stance in either value or policy-based terms. Governors Andrew Cuomo (New York), Deval Patrick (Massachusetts), and Jerry Brown (California) express how immigrants have added fundamental value to the United States by seizing opportunities and contributing to the

country's economy. In making their cases for embracing immigration, Patrick and Cuomo cite the historical significance of welcoming all into a land of opportunity; in contrast, Brown uses quantitative data on California's sizeable Latino population in defending his state's hospitable climate for immigrants. All three executives, as a final point of comparison, use specific state imagery in their remarks; Brown employs the ruggedness of California's frontier environment, Patrick discusses how the first immigrants to America settled in Massachusetts, and Cuomo notes the "Lady in our Harbor" as a beacon of opportunity for those entering the Northeastern state from other countries.

Policy-based rationales for supporting immigration reform can be seen through Governors Pat Quinn (Illinois) and Martin O'Malley (Maryland). Both Democrats cite passage of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors or DREAM Act in their states, citing educational equity and future social mobility for all state residents as positive attributes of the legislation. As the DREAM Act did not pass at the federal level, Democratic state executives are using their state legislative addresses to signal indirect support for federal immigration reform. Governors from both political parties make immigration policy a priority in their State of the State addresses, but how does the issue become a part of the political agenda?

### **Theory**

Executives set agendas to pursue preferred policies. Rhetorical statements allow state and national-level elites to discuss their views with legislators and the general public. State of the Union and State of the State addresses are opportunities for presidents and governors to set an agenda by presenting a series of immediate and long-

range policy goals they wish to see enacted during their administration. The task of agenda-setting for an executive varies depending on the degree of political strength they may possess at a given moment, related to Light's (1999) cycles of effectiveness and influence. Rhetoric may additionally be used to implement agenda priorities through unilateral authority (Howell 2003), including executive orders and signing statements. Former President Barack Obama and current President Donald Trump have both taken this approach on illegal immigration through desiring to protect immigrants already in the United States or restricting their admittance into the country. Rhetoric plays a significant role in both setting and implementing an executive's political agenda.

Public policymaking may begin through internal agenda-setting efforts by political elites, changing public attitudes, external events such as the onset of war and conflict, or a combination of these elements. What helps to explain the salience of immigration policy in the United States? Immigration policy has been reformed at the national level frequently and recently than health care policy. Berg (2015) theorizes that opinions on immigrant groups and policies stem from changes in social and cultural beliefs. Popular concerns over widespread immigration in the early twentieth century led to Congressional action ("Overview of INS History") and the passage of the Immigration Act of 1917, restricting Asian migration to the U.S. while setting educational requirements for entry (Cohn 2015). These events are indicative of Cobb et al's (1976) outside initiative model of agenda-setting, stating that issues organically arise among societal groups. Fluctuations on the public agenda, in turn, leads to activity on the political agenda managed by governmental policymakers.

Recounting the history of public opinion and U.S. immigration policy,

Harwood's (1986) work is supported by Cobb et al.'s (1976) theoretical perspective. Following a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment toward Germans and Austrians in the World War II era, the 1950s and 1960s saw a change in public attitudes regarding immigration policy. Heightened economic growth, a lessening of xenophobic attitudes, and public support for the Cold War gave way to the governmental agenda providing more opportunities for potential immigrants from various world regions. The Bracero Program provided short-term agricultural employment to Mexican workers. Race was also removed as a consideration for immigration decisions while the Kennedy administration began providing services for Cubans coming to the U.S. with the 1962 Migration and Refugee Assistance Act (Cohn 2015). Decades later, the deadliest attack on American soil since Pearl Harbor would alter immigration policy to reflect a modern, more globalized society.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 shifted attitudes toward immigration policy once again, providing a punctuating event (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Baumgartner et al. 2014) that led to changing agenda priorities. Quickly adapting to the onset of global terrorism, Kingdon's (1984) "streams" approach provides a theoretical rationale for agenda-setting on immigration policy in the modern era. Al-Qaeda and related terrorist organizations were considered a threat (problem stream), alternative policies to the status quo needed to be implemented (policy stream), and former President George W. Bush and Congress were willing to make policy changes (politics stream) to fight the new "War on Terror" through passage of the Patriot Act and creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

As discussed, the media has played a significant role in controlling the narrative

regarding immigration policy. Akdenizli et al. (2008) state the media's role on this issue:

“Deeply ingrained practices in American journalism have produced a narrative that conditions the public to associate immigration with illegality, crisis, controversy, and government failure. Meanwhile, new voices of advocacy on the media landscape have succeeded in mobilizing segments of the public in opposition to policy initiatives, sometimes by exaggerating the narrative of immigration told by traditional news organizations.”

Work on framing and priming (Goffman 1974; Entman 1993; Iyengar et al. 1982) underscore how the media seeks to construct an image of an issue; various techniques used in this pursuit include metaphor, language, and spin as advocated by Fairhurst and Sarr (1996). Immigration policy further affects undocumented, non-English speaking individuals who may live in a border state; these are significant variables to consider when analyzing rhetorical efforts concerning immigration. Scholars using content analysis to analyze newspaper coverage on immigration have found differences in the tone of coverage by English and Spanish-language outlets and that news coverage helps set the public agenda (Branton and Dunaway 2008); Dunaway et al. 2010). These findings reinforce theoretical work on the interrelationship between the media, public, and policy (Rogers and Dearing 1988; Dearing and Rogers 1996). The analyses conducted in this paper seek to understand how and why governors were using annual legislative messages—a form of media—to discuss immigration policy.

### **Description of Methodology and Hypotheses**

The central goal of this project is to develop a fuller understanding of how political, social, and other contextual factors may affect gubernatorial attention to the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid, and immigration policies. There are a variety of external conditions, including party control of the national and state legislature, elections, public

approval, and partisan affiliation, which may impact executive speechmaking. For the purposes of analysis, these influences will be expressed as dependent and independent variables as detailed in the following subsections.

### *Dependent Variables*

State governors, as independent political actors, possess the ability to register their sentiments toward presidential policies. The central outcome variables of interest thus center on governors' choices in addressing immigration policy in their State of the State Addresses. The presence of this domestic policy issue is categorized and measured as two distinct groups of variables: if immigration reform is (1) *included* and (2) *supported* in a gubernatorial address. Inclusion will be measured as a discrete variable, coded one if immigration is included in an individual governor's State of the State address and zero otherwise. A gubernatorial mention of immigration policy will be noted as discussing the issue in one or more sentences in one section of the State of the State address. Support for immigration reform in gubernatorial legislative message will be measured by a continuous variable providing the percentage of words in each speech specifically discussing this issue. Both indicators, taken together, allows for any variations in influence between presidents and governors to be observed within the analysis.

The following sections detail the analytic techniques used to examine the rhetorical efforts of governors as seen through their annual legislative messages. The main analyses of immigration policy employ differing modeling techniques. In certain instances, one may be focused on an event taking place or not (e.g. voting in an election). In this case, there are only two choices to consider—voting or not voting—so

the outcome or dependent variable is dichotomous (Pollock 2012). Logistic regression accounts for nonlinear relationships by expressing probabilities through logged odds ratios. The empirical analysis regarding inclusion of immigration thus employs logit modeling, as this dependent variable is defined as whether governors include immigration policy in their legislative messages. Standard ordinary least squares (OLS) regression techniques work well in instances when linear relationships are present in data and assume a constant change between independent and dependent variables. As support for immigration reform will be measured by a continuous variable, OLS is appropriate in this case.

### *Independent Variables*

#### **Legislative Partisanship**

Legislative partisanship has increasingly become a regular occurrence at all levels of the American political system. While succinctly defined as split party control between the executive and legislative branches, adequately conceptualizing divided government becomes problematic due to theoretical and methodological inconsistencies across the literature. The current study addresses this issue by defining legislative partisanship at the state level as a trichotomous variable, with three representing unified government, two signifying a situation where at least one chamber is controlled by the executive's political party, and one defining complete split control where both chambers of the legislature are controlled by the party opposite the executive.

This categorization is useful because it accounts for all potential governing legislative-executive governing arrangements while categorizing divided government as a decreasing measure of gubernatorial control. The state of Nebraska presents a unique case as it only has a unicameral legislature. Partisanship for this state will be measured

dichotomously and trichotomously as unified government. The presence or absence of divided control in a state legislature was collected through data provided by the National Conference of State Legislatures' (NCSL) annual State and Legislative Partisan Composition data tables ("State Partisan Composition").

Partisan identification is traditionally viewed as one indicator of political ideology. Political affiliation of state governors during the period under study will be categorized dichotomously, with zero representing Republican governors, while Democratic state executives will be coded as one. Governors who describe themselves as political independents will be coded as zero, since they do not necessarily belong to President Barack Obama's Democratic party. While ideal-point estimation provides a more precise estimate of the strength of one's political affiliation, using a simple "red/blue" division represents the general state of current American political culture. Thus, hypotheses for divided government are:

H1: In periods of divided government at the state level, governors will be less likely to *include* a discussion of the president's immigration reform proposals in their State of the State addresses. We can expect this result because in times of split party control, a governor should logically possess a lesser degree of political influence. They may not wish to speak on divisive federal issues, especially if the governor is trying to persuade legislators to pass other controversial state-based initiatives.

H2: In periods of divided government at the state level, governors will be less likely to *support* the president's immigration reform proposals in their State of the State addresses. This is expected for the same rationale as H1.

## **Public Approval**

Popularity of state governors is measured by a proxy variable consisting of the percentage of the vote that Barack Obama received in each state during the 2008 presidential election between the Democratic candidate and Republican John McCain for 2012, and the 2012 presidential election between the Democratic incumbent and Republican challenger Mitt Romney for 2013 and 2014; this information was collected through the Federal Election Commission's website ("Federal Elections 2012"). The results of these elections provide a comparable estimation across states regarding the level of public support of administration policies. An indirect measure for gubernatorial popularity was chosen for analysis due to data availability and comparability issues.<sup>12</sup>

With high specific support (Easton 1975) from the general public, a president may employ informal power (Neustadt 1960) through appealing to those living in various states. Thus, governors' issue priorities may be impacted by a popular Chief Executive, especially if the sitting state governor is faced with an approval rating below fifty percent. Additional measures used in estimating support for the state executives centers on (1) their percentage of the popular vote in a given election and using this information to calculate each governor's (2) margin of victory from their most recent election or re-election to office. This statistic was ascertained in each state contest by subtracting the opponent's percentage of the popular vote from the victorious governor's vote percentage. Vote information for both indicators was collected from the Secretary of State's website for each state, or in some cases, the State Board of Elections.

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<sup>12</sup>Note: An attempt was made to use the Job Approval Ratings (JAR) database developed by Niemi, Beyle, and Sigelman for gubernatorial approval figures, but the database ends in 2000 before the current study takes place. Comparability issues further complicate this measure, as various print and digital media sources report popularity numbers at different times, making reliable data difficult to obtain.

Hypotheses for understanding the extent of public approval are:

H3: The higher Barack Obama's approval rating in a particular state, the more likely governors are to *include* a decision of the president's immigration reform proposals in their State of the State addresses.

H4: The higher Barack Obama's approval rating in a particular state, the more likely governors are to *support* the president's immigration reform proposals in their State of the State addresses.

H5: As an individual governor's vote percentage from their last election to office increases, the less likely governors will be to include and support the president's immigration reform proposals in their State of the State addresses. This hypothesis is expected due to the fact that a given governor will feel emboldened and empowered to enact their own legislative agenda once a successful re-election confirms a popular governing mandate.

H6: As an individual governor's margin of victory increases, the less likely governors will be to include and support the president's immigration reform proposals in their State of the State addresses. Again, the reasoning for this expectation includes a sense of independent leadership amongst individual governors following confirmation of popular approval over an electoral opponent.

H7: As an individual governor's margin of victory decreases, the more likely governors will be to include and support the president's immigration reform proposals in their State of the State addresses. This is the opposite result that we may see occurring under H5 and H6. If a governor loses the electoral confidence of their citizens, they may be forced to reconsider their own policies and pivot toward discussing immigration policy.

### **Presidential Influence**

Due to their constitutional responsibilities and central role as a governing figure, U.S. president and governors play a large role in executing and implementing policies at the federal, state, and local levels. Citizens in all states look to those in Washington, D.C. to set the governmental agenda (Cobb and Elder 1972), and thus, national leaders have a direct ability to influence how issues are viewed at the subnational level. Presidential influence in states will be captured through a yearly approval rating of Barack Obama for 2012 (Jones 2012), 2013 (Jones 2013), and 2014 (Saad 2014) in each state compiled from the Gallup polling organization. Presidential popularity and approval are strong predictors of influence at the federal level. An indicator of executive influence is registered by the public at the conclusion of every quadrennial election cycle. If a presidential candidate wins election or reelection to the White House in a majority of states, they have the ability to claim a popular mandate. This bolstering of public support also increases their power and influence at the subnational level through the implementation of favored policies. The hypotheses to be tested for the extent of presidential influence are:

H8: As the percentage of Barack Obama's vote in the last presidential election increases (from state to state not over time) governors will be more likely to *include* the presidents' immigration reform proposals in their State of the State addresses.

H9: As the percentage of Barack Obama's vote in the last presidential election increases, governors will be more likely to *support* the president's immigration reform proposals in their State of the State addresses.

### **Analysis of Gubernatorial Rhetoric on Immigration Policy**

Immigration has become a salient policy issue in recent years and state governors may choose to discuss its political and social implications in their annual State of the State messages. The regression models presented below demonstrate the extent that external conditions may have on linguistic choices. One main dependent variable is the (1) inclusion of immigration reform as a policy issue, coded as one if it is included in a governor's State of the State Address and zero otherwise. The second dependent variable measures (2) support for immigration as a policy issue, categorized as a percentage of words that discuss the issue in a given address.

The party affiliation of state governors was coded dichotomously, with zero representing Republican state executives and one signifying Democratic governors. Independent were coded zero as they do not necessarily represent the president's party. The presence of divided government is a trichotomous variable depending on whether the sitting governor's party controls zero, one, or both houses of the state legislature. Barack Obama's approval rating in each state for 2012-2014 is a proxy measure of gubernatorial popularity. Other measures include the subnational executive's popular vote percentage from their last re-election and their winning vote margin. Finally, Obama's share of the

two-party vote in his 2008 and 2012 victories represents presidential influence.<sup>13</sup>

Control variables in this paper included: (1) Geographic proximity to Mexico. This focused on the four U.S. states (Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas) bordering Mexico, and are coded “1” if the state borders Mexico and “0” otherwise. Because immigration is a shared issue concerning both countries, it is important to account for this geographical distinction. (2) The number of citizens currently undocumented in each state, and since immigration status is linked to employment opportunities, (3) The annual unemployment rate. Data concerning the percentage of undocumented individuals by state to the nearest tenth were collected through the Pew Research Center for 2012 (Passel and Cohn) and 2014 (“U.S. Unauthorized Immigration”). Figures for 2013 were created by averaging these percentages together. The annual unemployment rate was taken from the Bureau of Labor Statistics website. The percentage figures for each state were again rounded to the nearest tenth for uniformity.

The once-laborious task of manually processing and coding textually-based data has been streamlined through the development of computerized software programs. Each package varies in the specific components of language that result from measuring a given passage. The use of content analysis as a tool to understand rhetorical addresses is well-established (Weber 1990; Krippendorff 2004; Slacher et al. 1997), resulting in various insights concerning elite and mass behavior. This project employs DICTION, a dictionary-based software program widely used in analyzing political speech (Hart 2001;

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<sup>13</sup>Note: An attempt was made to use the Job Approval Ratings (JAR) database developed by Niemi, Beyle, and Sigelman for gubernatorial approval figures, but the database ends in 2000 before the current study takes place. Comparability issues further complicate this measure, as various print and digital media sources report popularity numbers at different times, making reliable data difficult to obtain.

Hart et al. 2013). Its utility for this work lies in the ability to create custom dictionaries based on self-generated word lists. These lists will be used to establish and analyze the rhetorical priorities of state governors in their legislative messages concerning immigration policy. The complete list of words used in the health care dictionary is available in Appendix F.

Tables 1 presents pooled results for gubernatorial attention toward the issue of immigration policy during the Obama administration.<sup>14 15</sup> A table of summary statistics relating to this analysis may be found in Appendix I. Note that 2014 is used as a reference category in these analyses to study yearly effects.

While none of the stated hypotheses regarding public approval, state partisanship, or presidential influence found empirical support in the inclusion models, they nonetheless indicate significant evidence for gubernatorial rhetoric on immigration policy in State of the State addresses with inclusion of control variables. Nearly significant p-values of 0.060 and 0.068 were found with percentage of undocumented individuals in a state. As the undocumented population increases, there appears to be an increased probability regarding including immigration reform in a governor's State of the State address. This makes intuitive sense—governors may want to discuss ways to protect and provide for these new residents or they may discuss the topic as a means to halting the rise of their state's undocumented population. In states with a higher unemployment rate, the probability that a governor will include immigration rhetoric tends to be higher.

Discussion of jobs and workforce development in legislature message focuses attention

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<sup>14</sup>Note: Running other interactions, including divided government and partisanship, did not result in significant findings in any models.

<sup>15</sup>Note: The exclusion of Florida from the analysis did not produce significant results.

on providing training and education to unskilled workers, many of whom may be recent immigrants. The interaction term between the undocumented population and unemployment results in a decrease in immigration rhetoric.

The control variable signifying proximity to Mexico is significant and leads to an increase in including immigration rhetoric in a governor's State of the State address. This finding is logical due to border states having higher levels of immigrants, and thus, the issue becomes more politically salient for governors in southern states. Finally, as compared with 2014, governors are not including as much discussion of immigration reform in the preceding two years as measured by 2012 and 2013 dummy variables. Barack Obama's executive order in 2014 shielding undocumented immigrants from deportation gave the issue heightened salience and likely increased discussion over the merits of the president's reform efforts.

The second set of models centering on support for immigration policy through the percentage of words spent on the issue as measured by the DICTION computerized content analysis found significance for legislative partisanship; measuring divided government as a trichotomous variable leads to a decrease in the percentage of words centered on immigration in a State of the State message. Governors may wish to treat immigration-related subjects in general terms so as to not alienate minority legislators and/or those representing minority constituencies. For states with proximity to Mexico; border state governors have a higher probability of discussing immigration-related issues in their addresses. This result can be attributed to a similar rationale as in the first set of models, namely that border control and security issues became more salient if a state shares a geographic boundary with the foreign country.

The divisive 2016 presidential campaign ended with Donald Trump’s inauguration as the nation’s forty-fifth Commander-in-Chief. His presidency brings a new administration to power—and new ideas that allow governors to participate in the ongoing political conversation on border security and related immigration issues.

**Building the Wall and Banning Travel:  
The Trump Administration and the Future of Immigration Reform**

Donald Trump waged a notable campaign for the White House in 2016 by supporting policy solutions not favored by other candidates in the Republican party. At a campaign stop in Phoenix, Arizona, the then-Republican nominee articulated his original immigration policy.

“We will build a great wall along the southern border. And Mexico will pay for the wall. One hundred percent. They don’t know it yet, but they’re going to pay for it. And they’re great people and great leaders but they’re going to pay for the wall. On day one, we will begin working on intangible, physical, tall, power, beautiful southern border wall” (Trump 2016).

Trump’s call for “building the wall” became a symbol of the hyperpartisanship and polarization confronting modern-day American politics—praised by supporters as a much-needed reform to help solve the nation’s broken immigration system while maligned by detractors as a costly, unwieldy endeavor centered on marginalizing certain groups in American society. Governors of various states made their views known on Trump’s proposal, becoming involved in the national conversation apart from an annual legislative address.

As with the rest of the nation, subnational executives were divided on Trump’s ideas regarding border security. The “wall” plan fractured the Republican primary field, with Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker and Governor John Kasich of Ohio supporting

the proposal (Edelman 2015; Keller 2016), while New Jersey's Chris Christie initially opposed the plan (Catanese 2015; Diamond and LoBianco 2017). Other top state officials, including Governors Susana Martinez and Nikki Haley, called Trump's goal ill-advised, unworkable, irresponsible, and detrimental to American cultural diversity (Gold and Rucker 2016). Eventually, with Trump clinching the Republican party's nomination, conservatives began to coalesce around his candidacy. Once in office, the Trump administration began another series of actions centering on immigration.

President Trump initiated a travel ban, curtailing immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries, through executive order. The next few months involved a separation of powers struggle between the White House and federal courts, with multiple judges citing the action's unconstitutionality and blocking its continued enactment (Almasy and Simon 2017). Attorneys General from multiple states and Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant (R) supported the ban (Dreher 2017) while other state executives from both parties voiced their displeasure. Illinois' Bruce Rauner, a Republican, issued a statement noting his opposition to "immigration bans that target any specific religion" (Korecki 2017). Governor Jerry Brown (D-CA) took a more personal tone in his 2017 State of the State address: "Let me be clear. We will defend everybody—every man, woman and child who has come here for a better life and has contributed to the well-being of our state" (Myers 2017). These statements are evidence that governors continue to remain active contributors in discussions on presidential policy priorities. Trump's September 2017 call for Congress to legislatively replace the DACA program serves as the latest point of contention in the ongoing debate on immigration policy.

## Conclusion

The issue of immigration reform is significant within the American political system. Beginning with the September 11, 2001 attacks—the larger such event on U.S. soil since Pearl Harbor—the phrases “War on Terror,” “enemy combatant,” and “protecting the homeland” became common parlance during the George W. Bush administration. President Barack Obama continued the ongoing discussion. How do we protect our borders from harmful individuals? What is the proper role of government in securing our country? Permanent answers to these and other questions remain elusive, but executives in positions of power and authority may certainly contribute to shorter-term solutions. This paper provided a detailed analysis of immigration policy and examine its relevance toward gubernatorial rhetoric.

The national discussion regarding immigration reform efforts is seemingly ubiquitous—with all forms of media news outlets either championing or condemning various policy solutions. As a 2016 presidential candidate, Donald Trump uniquely contributed to this dialogue through statements expressing his desire to build a southern border wall between the United States and Mexico, a notion decisively derided by his primary opponents. His Democratic predecessor, Barack Obama, promoted a progressive agenda for comprehensive immigration reform within his annual State of the Union messages. His rhetoric reflected a spirit of community while focusing on giving everyday, responsible citizens the opportunity to live, work, and flourish in the United States without fear of reprisal. National Republicans framed the immigration issue as one of restoring the nation, repairing it from past faults and broken promises while allowing the “best and brightest” to write their own uniquely American story. Both partisan

groups are discussing immigration in a positive manner yet promoting different rhetorical messages. Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and subsequent executive order fueled further rhetoric from both parties. State governors voiced their opinions on the matter through their State of the State addresses during 2012-2014.

This paper provided different analyses of gubernatorial rhetoric regarding immigration policy. The initial tonal examination of immigration rhetoric found both Democratic and Republican governors to be positive, with quotes extolling their state as a safe and welcoming haven for immigrants. The empirical analysis on inclusion of immigration policy found no support for the impact of the political and electoral environment in how state governors approached immigration policy in their legislative addresses, but credence was found for the inclusion of control conditions including a state's unemployment rate and proximity of Mexico. Yearly effects should also be taken into account, as decreasing significance was found for immigration reform in 2012 and 2013 as compared with 2014. The DICTION-based computerized content analysis models depicting the impact of percentage of words on immigration did find support for legislative partisanship, noting a decrease in rhetoric with divided government measured trichotomously. Governors, then, when speaking must seemingly take both political and state-centric conditions into account. Future work in this area might use rhetorical comments in State of the State addresses in developing a more precise measure of gubernatorial ideology (Weinberg 2010), allowing more precise conclusions to be drawn regarding the partisan nature of immigration rhetoric.

The Trump administration's use of unilateral power on immigration via the much-

discussed travel ban on those hailing from selected Muslim-majority countries, provides new ways for state governors to remain involved in the ongoing political rancor over immigration. Dealing with the opposing objectives of curbing the negative effects of illegal immigration while retaining a welcoming and inclusive society requires a continual dialogue from all in government and will likely not be solved in the near future.

**Table 3.1 Immigration Policy in State of the State Addresses, 2012-2014**

VARIABLES	(1) Inclusion	(2) Inclusion	(3) Percentage of Words on Immigration	(4) Percentage of Words on Immigration
Party of Governor	0.138 (0.855)	0.069 (0.930)	-0.064 (0.133)	-0.062 (0.146)
Divided Government as Dummy Variable	0.497 (0.509)		0.104* (0.038)	
Governor's Percentage of Vote in Most Recent Election	0.046 (0.657)	0.037 (0.719)	0.007 (0.297)	0.008 (0.273)
Governor's Victory Margin in Most Recent Election	-0.037 (0.569)	-0.032 (0.627)	-0.002 (0.635)	-0.002 (0.611)
Obama Percentage of State Vote in 2008 and 2012 Elections	0.022 (0.781)	0.032 (0.701)	0.015 (0.076)	0.015 (0.073)
Obama Yearly State Approval Rating	0.116 (0.287)	0.104 (0.335)	-0.011 (0.151)	-0.011 (0.143)
Yearly Undocumented Percentage of State Population	2.398 (0.060)	2.414 (0.068)	0.013 (0.855)	0.016 (0.816)
	1.587*	1.585	-0.000	-0.000

**(Continued Table 3.1 Immigration Policy in State of the State Addresses, 2012-2014)**

Yearly State Unemployment Rate	(0.041)	(0.055)	(0.999)	(0.999)
Interaction Term of Undocumented and Unemployment	-0.377*	-0.374*	-0.004	-0.005
	(0.023)	(0.033)	(0.633)	(0.596)
Border State to Mexico	3.904**	3.832**	0.395**	0.390**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.001)
Dummy Variable for 2012 Year	-2.112*	-1.988*	-0.028	-0.020
	(0.030)	(0.049)	(0.554)	(0.664)
Dummy Variable for 2013 Year	-2.461**	-2.362**	0.011	0.014
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.808)	(0.754)
Divided Government as Trichotomous Variable		-0.030		-0.066*
		(0.931)		(0.041)
Constant	-20.088**	-19.469**	-0.446	-0.273
	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.221)	(0.423)
Observations	137	137	137	137
R-squared			0.253	0.257

Note: Robust p-values in parentheses

\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

Note:

2014 is used as a reference category in these analyses to study yearly effects.

### **Conclusion: Political Executives, Public Policy, and Agenda Setting**

American political executives have many governing responsibilities—one includes developing a political agenda. Rhetoric allows presidents and governors to maintain campaign promises, serve varied constituencies, and promote beneficial changes in national or state government. Both classes of chief executives routinely use public addresses as a rhetorical vehicle to “go public,” (Kernell 1986) promoting their ideas while engaging those around them. State of the Union and State of the State addresses, annual legislative messages focusing on policy issues, provide a comparable source for analysis in furthering our understanding of how governors and presidents engage in a shared federal system. This project specifically centered on three papers discussing different aspects of gubernatorial agenda setting during the recent administration of Barack Obama from 2012-2014 and how state executives consider presidential policy initiatives.

“Understanding and Analyzing Executive Speechmaking” provides a detailed discussion and analysis of why political rhetoric is important to presidents and governors. We find that executives may take an active or more restrained approach to speechmaking depending on their political goals. Appeals to other political elites and the mass public are often undertaken to increase support for a policy proposal or other initiative. Various institutional and electoral considerations, including the desire for high public approval and the reality of legislative gridlock, make *when* and *how* to speak as important as the subject itself.

The analysis on rhetorical efforts focused on three items related to rhetorical attention at the state level: (1) the first issue mentioned in a State of the State address, (2)

the total number of issues, and (3) the timing of presenting an address. We find that state governors, regardless of party, routinely present jobs, the economy, and the budget in their legislative messages. This is not surprising given the singular importance of each issue to state policymaking and individuals' everyday lives. Breaking issue attention down by party affiliation, distinctions become apparent. Democratic governors are more apt to mention social policies whereas Republicans focus on fiscal priorities; both parties' overall philosophy of government align with these findings. Examining the number of total issues results in Democratic governors addressing a slightly greater number of subjects than Republicans. No significant differences were found regarding partisan affiliation or region in terms of total issues addressed. This is logical as governors wish to set a broad agenda. The final element of executive speechmaking focuses on timing in presenting State of the State addresses. A majority of governors presented their legislative messages before President Obama from 2012-2014. Facing no formal constitutionally-based requirements regarding address timing, many state executives may choose to capitalize on an electoral victory or deliver the annual speech in conjunction with the state budget rollout. This paper provides an overview analysis of gubernatorial rhetoric by examining various elements of decision-making.

“The Affordable Care Act: A Comparison of Presidential and Gubernatorial Rhetoric,” examines Barack Obama’s landmark health care legislation. A detailed timeline noting the political process involved in passing universal health care is useful in understanding the partisan nature of the Affordable Care Act. Notable events include health care’s impact on Barack Obama’s successful 2008 and 2012 electoral victories, the

passage of DACA, and the Supreme Court's upholding the law's controversial individual mandate.

Turning to the ACA as national policy, rhetorical statements from former President Obama's State of the Union messages in context with those given by Republican national officeholders including Rep. Paul Ryan and Sen. Marco Rubio illustrate basic ideological differences between political parties on this issue. Quotes from gubernatorial State of the State messages across the time period under study find that governors use rhetoric to describe Obamacare in different ways. Republican officeholders discussed the law in ideological terms ranging from outrage and disgust to resigned acceptance of the legislation's place in American political life while others took a more policy-oriented approach in outlining the law. Tonal responses of Democratic state executives are found to express a range of opinion, from neutral consideration to optimism and joy. Their consideration of Obamacare as an issue was focused solely on policy consideration which was different than Republican governors.

Analyzing the impact of gubernatorial rhetoric on the ACA involved (1) distinguishing between tonal differences, (2) studying the impact of divided government, public support, and presidential influence on governors' decision to include and support the measure in their annual address, and (3) discussing the area of Medicaid expansion. Differences in rhetorical tone was found to be affected by political and external conditions. Republican governors with a high approval rating who won their last election by large margins over a state where former President Obama was not popular took a much more negative approach in their rhetoric while Democratic executives living in Obama-friendly territory who had won an initial term or re-election by a slim margin and carrying a low approval rating tended to discuss in more positive terms. The empirical

analysis of inclusion for Obamacare found limited support for relationships between governors' priorities and contextual effects, including a state's unemployment rate, and when looking at rhetorical efforts in 2012 as compared with 2014. Interacting the uninsured and unemployed populations resulted in nearly significance. No evidence was found for support by percentage of a speech dealing with health care reform, likely due to the low percentages of addresses discussing the issue. The secondary analysis involved Medicaid expansion proved to be more significant, with divided government, a state executive's vote percentage, margin of victory, and Barack Obama's approval rating in each state playing a role in understanding how governors set their agendas.

The Trump administration has embraced the Republican "repeal-and-replace" plan toward the Affordable Care Act since taking office. With recent passage in the House but a failed vote in the Senate on a bill to accomplish this task, Obamacare remains the law of the land for the foreseeable future. This paper provides a detailed consideration of a controversial policy issue with large-scale political and social ramifications.

"Immigration Reform: A Divergence of Gubernatorial and Presidential Rhetoric" concerns immigration policy in the United States. Immigration has been a salient subject for mass media consumption, with traditional and social media outlets weighing on the issue. While in office, Barack Obama made immigration policy a rhetorical priority, discussing its positive impacts on American culture in various State of the Union addresses. Comparing his speechmaking with that of national Republicans, we find thematic differences in how party leaders frame immigration reform. Obama discusses the issue in terms of social change and benefitting a wide array of citizens, while

congressional conservative leaders utilized value-based language emphasizing restoration and nationalism. The judicial branch also became involved in immigration in deciding the constitutionality of Obama's executive order granting undocumented individuals security from deportation.

Gubernatorial agenda setting on immigration policy was examined through analyzing tonal statements made in State of the State addresses and empirical analysis. Republican rhetoric on immigration was found to be not as divisive as on health care reform, instead expressing optimism and opportunity for those coming to seek a better life in America and a need to remain vigilant against divisive enemies. Democratic speechmaking was found uniformly positive, focusing on positive values or policy considerations. Following the content analysis of governors' legislative messages, empirical analyses testing the impact of executive influence, popular support, and divided government proved insignificant across the Obama administration in models examining inclusion of immigration reform. Control conditions, such as state unemployment and proximity to the Mexican border, did prove to be significant in the inclusion models and supports the idea that governors may take immigration-related issues into account when discussing their policy agendas. The analyses on the percentage of words on immigration policy in each State of State address found significance for geographical proximity to Mexico and legislative partisanship. As Commander-in-Chief, President Donald Trump has certainly weighed in on immigration, desiring to fulfill a campaign promise to build a border wall between the United States and Mexico. Living in a globalized society, immigration will continue to be an issue vitally important to the safety and security of the United States.

The results of this project can be discussed in light of previous findings regarding the factors associated with presidential rhetoric. Public approval has been identified to increase speechmaking efforts (Ragsdale 1984; Eshbaugh-Soha 2010), possibly due to the chief executive believing they can more liberally spend their rhetorical capital when they have a fair amount of public support. In the analysis of Medicaid mentions, however, mixed evidence was found for the significance of public opinion. While an increase in a governor's percentage of the popular vote during their most recent election does lead to increased Medicaid statements, declining attention was given to the issue with an increase in the governor's vote margin. These results could stem from governors making different decisions on whether or not to address controversial policies.

Presidential rhetoric has also been discussed by scholars as having an indirect impact on macroeconomic conditions (Wood et al. 2005; Wood 2007) and poor economic conditions may decrease the propensity of a major presidential address (Ragsdale 1984; Eshbaugh-Soha 2010). The presence of economic measures found similarities and differences with previous research. Unemployment did lead to the expected decrease in inclusion of the Affordable Care Act in a given State of the State addresses, but had the opposite effect of increasing the inclusion of immigration policy in a governor's annual message. Immigration status and unemployment are directly related, and a sitting governor may wish to discuss the two issues in tandem.

Divided government has been found to decrease a president's rhetorical ability, Cummins (2006) finds, especially regarding health and social issues. This is likely due to a president needing support from the legislative branch to enact large-scale policy changes in these areas. The only analysis in this study finding a relationship between

speechmaking and legislative partisanship involves Medicaid policy. Separately measuring split party control as dichotomous and trichotomous variables leads to a respective increase and decrease in Medicaid rhetoric, thus, past findings are partially supported in this work.

Presidential rhetoric may fall on deaf ears with the general public depending on the issue, but not with other political elites, such as governors. Subnational executives not only hear the president's policy agenda, but must also consider it. The analyses show a much greater propensity to consider political and contextual factors on health care than immigration policy. This indicates an important distinction regarding the responsiveness of governors to presidential priorities that should be investigated further in future work.

Future research regarding executive speechmaking should focus on further understanding issue attention and the interrelationship between presidents and governors. Non-polarizing issues such as education, would allow scholars to investigate the extent to which rhetorical differences exist among party elites. These issues would likely be much easier to locate in gubernatorial addresses of Democrats and Republicans due to their nature, and thus empirical testing would not be plagued by non-discussion. A secondary area for future research involves examining more recent gubernatorial speeches to see if rhetorical tone shifts over time. Do governors discuss health care and immigration differently under President Trump? These are simply a few avenues that would continue to shed light on gubernatorial rhetoric.

Gubernatorial rhetorical speechmaking allows subnational executives an opportunity to influence the political system. As governors continue to promote and

advance preferred policies, it will be interesting to observe how their efforts are received by state legislators, the public, and most importantly, the President of the United States.

## **Appendix A. List of Policy Issues in State of the State Addresses, 2012-2014**

Agriculture  
Budget  
Bureaucracy  
Casino Gaming  
Child Welfare  
Crime  
Drug Abuse  
Economy  
Education  
Emergency Preparedness  
Energy  
Environment  
Ethics Reform  
Exports  
Fiscal Policy  
Government Efficiency  
Gun Violence  
Healthcare  
Housing  
Infant Mortality  
Infrastructure  
Jobs  
Juvenile Justice  
Medicaid  
Minimum Wage  
Oil and Gas  
Prisons  
Same-Sex Marriage  
School Safety  
Small Business  
Taxes  
Technology  
Texting and Driving  
Tourism  
Transportation  
Workforce Development

**Appendix B. Numerical Listing of U.S. States by Population Size,  
2010 U.S. Census**

1. California – 37, 253, 956
2. Texas – 25,145,561
3. New York – 19,378,102
4. Florida – 18,801,310
5. Illinois – 12,830,632
6. Pennsylvania – 12,702,379
7. Ohio – 11,536,504
8. Michigan – 9,883,640
9. Georgia – 9,687,653
10. North Carolina – 9,535,483
11. New Jersey – 8,791,894
12. Virginia – 8,001,024
13. Washington – 6,724,540
14. Massachusetts – 6,547,629
15. Indiana – 6,483,802
16. Arizona – 6,392,017
17. Tennessee – 6,346,105
18. Missouri – 5,988,927
19. Maryland – 5,773,552
20. Wisconsin – 5,686,986
21. Minnesota – 5,303,925
22. Colorado – 5, 029,196
23. Alabama – 4,779,736
24. South Carolina – 4,625,364
25. Louisiana – 4,533,372
26. Kentucky – 4,339,367
27. Oregon – 3,831,074
28. Oklahoma – 3,751,351
29. Connecticut – 3,574,097
30. Iowa – 3,046,355
31. Mississippi – 2, 967,297
32. Arkansas – 2,915,918
33. Kansas – 2,853,118
34. Utah – 2,763,885
35. Nevada – 2,700,551
36. New Mexico – 2, 059,179
37. West Virginia – 1,852,994
38. Nebraska – 1,826,341
39. Idaho – 1,567,582
40. Hawaii – 1,360,301
41. Maine – 1,328,361
42. New Hampshire – 1,316,470
43. Rhode Island – 1,052,567
44. Montana – 989,415
45. Delaware – 897,934
46. South Dakota – 814,180
47. Alaska – 710,231
48. North Dakota – 672,591
49. Vermont – 625,741
50. Wyoming – 563,626

**Appendix C. Number of Total Issues in State of the State Addresses, 2012-2014**

**Number of Total Issues in 2012 State of the State Addresses**

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Total Issues</b>
<b>Robert Bentley</b>	Alabama	Republican	8
<b>Sean Parnell</b>	Alaska	Republican	9
<b>Jan Brewer</b>	Arizona	Republican	6
<b>Jerry Brown</b>	California	Democratic	11
<b>John Hickenlooper</b>	Colorado	Democratic	14
<b>Dannel Malloy</b>	Connecticut	Democratic	4
<b>Jack Markell</b>	Delaware	Democratic	9
<b>Rick Scott</b>	Florida	Republican	3
<b>Nathan Deal</b>	Georgia	Republican	9
<b>Neil Abercrombie</b>	Hawaii	Democratic	12
<b>Butch Otter</b>	Idaho	Republican	5
<b>Pat Quinn</b>	Illinois	Democratic	18
<b>Mitch Daniels</b>	Indiana	Republican	8
<b>Terry Branstad</b>	Iowa	Republican	4
<b>Sam Brownback</b>	Kansas	Republican	9
<b>Steve Beshear</b>	Kentucky	Democratic	14
<b>Bobby Jindal</b>	Louisiana	Republican	4
<b>Paul LePage</b>	Maine	Republican	10
<b>Martin O' Malley</b>	Maryland	Democratic	14
<b>Deval Patrick</b>	Massachusetts	Democratic	9
<b>Rick Snyder</b>	Michigan	Republican	11
<b>Mark Dayton</b>	Minnesota	Democratic	5
<b>Phil Bryant</b>	Mississippi	Republican	11
<b>Jay Nixon</b>	Missouri	Democratic	14
<b>Dave Heineman</b>	Nebraska	Republican	4
<b>John Lynch</b>	New Hampshire	Democratic	12
<b>Chris Christie</b>	New Jersey	Republican	8
<b>Susana Martinez</b>	New Mexico	Republican	13
<b>Andrew Cuomo</b>	New York	Democratic	32
<b>John Kasich</b>	Ohio	Republican	19
<b>Mary Fallin</b>	Oklahoma	Republican	16
<b>John Kitzhaber</b>	Oregon	Democratic	11
<b>Tom Corbett</b>	Pennsylvania	Republican	12
<b>Lincoln Chafee</b>	Rhode Island	Independent	16
<b>Nikki Haley</b>	South Carolina	Republican	14
<b>Dennis Daugaard</b>	South Dakota	Republican	14
<b>Bill Haslam</b>	Tennessee	Republican	12

**(Continued: Number of Total Issues in 2012 State of the State Addresses)**

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Total Issues</b>
<b>Gary Herbert</b>	Utah	Republican	11
<b>Peter Shumlin</b>	Vermont	Democratic	12
<b>Bob McDonnell</b>	Virginia	Republican	17
<b>Christine Gregoire</b>	Washington	Democratic	21
<b>Earl Ray Tomblin</b>	West Virginia	Democratic	21
<b>Scott Walker</b>	Wisconsin	Republican	9
<b>Matt Mead</b>	Wyoming	Republican	15

Note: Average Number of Issues by Republican Governors: 10.0

Note: Average Number of Issues by Democratic Governors: 13.8

### Number of Total Issues in 2013 State of the State Addresses

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Total Issues</b>
<b>Robert Bentley</b>	Alabama	Republican	11
<b>Sean Parnell</b>	Alaska	Republican	10
<b>Jan Brewer</b>	Arizona	Republican	14
<b>Mike Beebe</b>	Arkansas	Democratic	10
<b>Jerry Brown</b>	California	Democratic	15
<b>John Hickenlooper</b>	Colorado	Democratic	19
<b>Dannel Malloy</b>	Connecticut	Democratic	11
<b>Jack Markell</b>	Delaware	Democratic	16
<b>Rick Scott</b>	Florida	Republican	11
<b>Nathan Deal</b>	Georgia	Republican	11
<b>Neil Abercrombie</b>	Hawaii	Democratic	23
<b>Butch Otter</b>	Idaho	Republican	18
<b>Pat Quinn</b>	Illinois	Democratic	22
<b>Mike Pence</b>	Indiana	Republican	22
<b>Terry Branstad</b>	Iowa	Republican	8
<b>Sam Brownback</b>	Kansas	Republican	11
<b>Steve Beshear</b>	Kentucky	Democratic	20
<b>Bobby Jindal</b>	Louisiana	Republican	8
<b>Paul LePage</b>	Maine	Republican	14
<b>Martin O' Malley</b>	Maryland	Democratic	20
<b>Deval Patrick</b>	Massachusetts	Democratic	11
<b>Rick Snyder</b>	Michigan	Republican	24
<b>Mark Dayton</b>	Minnesota	Democratic	17
<b>Phil Bryant</b>	Mississippi	Republican	12
<b>Jay Nixon</b>	Missouri	Democratic	26
<b>Steve Bullock</b>	Montana	Democratic	14
<b>Dave Heineman</b>	Nebraska	Republican	12
<b>Brian Sandoval</b>	Nevada	Republican	18
<b>Maggie Hassan</b>	New Hampshire	Democratic	25
<b>Chris Christie</b>	New Jersey	Republican	13
<b>Susana Martinez</b>	New Mexico	Republican	18
<b>Andrew Cuomo</b>	New York	Democratic	32
<b>Pat McCrory</b>	North Carolina	Republican	22
<b>Jack Dalrymple</b>	North Dakota	Republican	21
<b>John Kasich</b>	Ohio	Republican	12
<b>Mary Fallin</b>	Oklahoma	Republican	24
<b>John Kitzhaber</b>	Oregon	Democratic	17
<b>Tom Corbett</b>	Pennsylvania	Republican	18
<b>Lincoln Chafee</b>	Rhode Island	Independent	17
<b>Nikki Haley</b>	South Carolina	Republican	23
<b>Dennis Daugaard</b>	South Dakota	Republican	28

(Continued: Number of Total Issues in 2013 State of the State Addresses)

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Total Issues</b>
<b>Bill Haslam</b>	Tennessee	Republican	17
<b>Rick Perry</b>	Texas	Republican	17
<b>Gary Herbert</b>	Utah	Republican	19
<b>Peter Shumlin</b>	Vermont	Democratic	11
<b>Bob McDonnell</b>	Virginia	Republican	25
<b>Jay Inslee</b>	Washington	Democratic	17
<b>Earl Ray Tomblin</b>	West Virginia	Democratic	18
<b>Scott Walker</b>	Wisconsin	Republican	22
<b>Matt Mead</b>	Wyoming	Republican	21

Note: Average Number of Issues by Republican Governors: 16.5

Note: Average Number of Issues by Democratic Governors: 18.1

**Number of Total Issues in 2014 State of the State Addresses**

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Total Issues</b>
<b>Robert Bentley</b>	Alabama	Republican	11
<b>Sean Parnell</b>	Alaska	Republican	13
<b>Jan Brewer</b>	Arizona	Republican	13
<b>Jerry Brown</b>	California	Democratic	16
<b>John Hickenlooper</b>	Colorado	Democratic	20
<b>Dannel Malloy</b>	Connecticut	Democratic	16
<b>Jack Markell</b>	Delaware	Democratic	21
<b>Rick Scott</b>	Florida	Republican	12
<b>Nathan Deal</b>	Georgia	Republican	13
<b>Neil Abercrombie</b>	Hawaii	Democratic	18
<b>Butch Otter</b>	Idaho	Republican	14
<b>Pat Quinn</b>	Illinois	Democratic	21
<b>Mike Pence</b>	Indiana	Republican	16
<b>Terry Branstad</b>	Iowa	Republican	18
<b>Sam Brownback</b>	Kansas	Republican	16
<b>Steve Beshear</b>	Kentucky	Democratic	31
<b>Bobby Jindal</b>	Louisiana	Republican	14
<b>Paul LePage</b>	Maine	Republican	13
<b>Martin O'Malley</b>	Maryland	Democratic	26
<b>Deval Patrick</b>	Massachusetts	Democratic	29
<b>Rick Snyder</b>	Michigan	Republican	28
<b>Mark Dayton</b>	Minnesota	Democratic	15
<b>Phil Bryant</b>	Mississippi	Republican	13
<b>Jay Nixon</b>	Missouri	Democratic	23
<b>Dave Heineman</b>	Nebraska	Republican	12
<b>Maggie Hassan</b>	New Hampshire	Democratic	31
<b>Chris Christie</b>	New Jersey	Republican	18
<b>Susana Martinez</b>	New Mexico	Republican	22
<b>Andrew Cuomo</b>	New York	Democratic	34
<b>John Kasich</b>	Ohio	Republican	14
<b>Mary Fallin</b>	Oklahoma	Republican	22
<b>Tom Corbett</b>	Pennsylvania	Republican	18
<b>Lincoln Chafee</b>	Rhode Island	Democratic	15
<b>Nikki Haley</b>	South Carolina	Republican	19
<b>Denis Dugaard</b>	South Dakota	Republican	24
<b>Bill Haslam</b>	Tennessee	Republican	13
<b>Gary Herbert</b>	Utah	Republican	20
<b>Peter Shumlin</b>	Vermont	Democratic	11
<b>Bob McDonnell</b>	Virginia	Republican	27
<b>Jay Inslee</b>	Washington	Democratic	20
<b>Earl Ray Tomblin</b>	West Virginia	Democratic	26

**(Continued: Number of Total Issues in 2014 State of the State Addresses)**

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Total Issues</b>
<b>Scott Walker</b>	Wisconsin	Republican	15
<b>Matt Mead</b>	Wyoming	Republican	29

Note: Average Number of Issues by Republican Governors: 17.2

Note: Average Number of Issues by Democratic Governors: 21.9

## Appendix D. Timing of State of the State Addresses, 2012-2014

### Timing of 2012 Gubernatorial State of the State Addresses

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Days</b>	<b>Timing</b>
<b>Robert Bentley</b>	Alabama	Republican	2/7/2012	14	After
<b>Sean Parnell</b>	Alaska	Republican	1/18/2012	6	Before
<b>Jan Brewer</b>	Arizona	Republican	1/9/2012	15	Before
<b>Jerry Brown</b>	California	Democratic	1/18/2012	6	Before
<b>John Hickenlooper</b>	Colorado	Democratic	1/12/2012	12	Before
<b>Dannel Malloy</b>	Connecticut	Democratic	2/8/2012	15	After
<b>Jack Markell</b>	Delaware	Democratic	1/19/2012	5	Before
<b>Rick Scott</b>	Florida	Republican	1/10/2012	14	Before
<b>Nathan Deal</b>	Georgia	Republican	1/10/2012	14	Before
<b>Neil Abercrombie</b>	Hawaii	Democratic	1/23/2012	1	Before
<b>Butch Otter</b>	Idaho	Republican	1/9/2012	15	Before
<b>Pat Quinn</b>	Illinois	Democratic	2/1/2012	8	After
<b>Mitch Daniels</b>	Indiana	Republican	1/10/2012	14	Before
<b>Terry Branstad</b>	Iowa	Republican	1/10/2012	14	Before
<b>Sam Brownback</b>	Kansas	Republican	1/11/2012	13	Before
<b>Steve Beshear</b>	Kentucky	Democratic	1/4/2012	20	Before
<b>Bobby Jindal</b>	Louisiana	Republican	3/12/2012	46	After
<b>Paul LePage</b>	Maine	Republican	1/24/2012	0	Same
<b>Martin O' Malley</b>	Maryland	Democratic	2/1/2012	8	After
<b>Deval Patrick</b>	Massachusetts	Democratic	1/23/2012	1	Before
<b>Rick Snyder</b>	Michigan	Republican	1/18/2012	6	Before
<b>Mark Dayton</b>	Minnesota	Democratic	2/15/2012	22	After
<b>Phil Bryant</b>	Mississippi	Republican	1/24/2012	0	Same
<b>Jay Nixon</b>	Missouri	Democratic	1/17/2012	7	Before
<b>Dave Heineman</b>	Nebraska	Republican	1/12/2012	12	Before
<b>John Lynch</b>	New Hampshire	Democratic	1/31/2012	7	After
<b>Chris Christie</b>	New Jersey	Republican	1/17/2012	7	Before
<b>Susana Martinez</b>	New Mexico	Republican	1/17/2012	7	Before
<b>Andrew Cuomo</b>	New York	Democratic	1/4/2012	20	Before
<b>John Kasich</b>	Ohio	Republican	2/7/2012	14	After
<b>Mary Fallin</b>	Oklahoma	Republican	2/6/2012	13	After
<b>John Kitzhaber</b>	Oregon	Democratic	1/13/2012	11	Before
<b>Tom Corbett</b>	Pennsylvania	Republican	2/7/2012	14	After
<b>Lincoln Chafee</b>	Rhode Island	Independent	1/31/2012	7	After
<b>Nikki Haley</b>	South Carolina	Republican	1/18/2012	6	Before
<b>Dennis Daugaard</b>	South Dakota	Republican	1/10/2012	14	Before
<b>Bill Haslam</b>	Tennessee	Republican	1/30/2012	6	Before
<b>Gary Herbert</b>	Utah	Republican	1/25/2012	1	After
<b>Peter Shumlin</b>	Vermont	Democratic	1/5/2012	19	Before

**(Continued: Timing of 2012 Gubernatorial State of the State Addresses)**

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Days</b>	<b>Timing</b>
<b>Bob McDonnell</b>	Virginia	Republican	1/11/2012	13	Before
<b>Christine Gregoire</b>	Washington	Democratic	1/10/2012	14	Before
<b>Earl Ray Tomblin</b>	West Virginia	Democratic	1/11/2012	13	Before
<b>Scott Walker</b>	Wisconsin	Republican	1/25/2012	1	After
<b>Matt Mead</b>	Wyoming	Republican	2/13/2012	20	After

Note: Barack Obama delivered his 2012 State of the Union Address on January 24, 2012.

### Timing of 2013 Gubernatorial State of the State Addresses

<b><u>Governor</u></b>	<b><u>State</u></b>	<b><u>Party</u></b>	<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Days</u></b>	<b><u>Timing</u></b>
<b>Robert Bentley</b>	Alabama	Republican	2/5/2013	7	Before
<b>Sean Parnell</b>	Alaska	Republican	1/16/2013	27	Before
<b>Jan Brewer</b>	Arizona	Republican	1/14/2013	29	Before
<b>Mike Beebe</b>	Arkansas	Democratic	1/15/2013	28	Before
<b>Jerry Brown</b>	California	Democratic	1/24/2013	19	Before
<b>John Hickenlooper</b>	Colorado	Democratic	1/10/2013	33	Before
<b>Dannel Malloy</b>	Connecticut	Democratic	1/9/2013	34	Before
<b>Jack Markell</b>	Delaware	Democratic	1/17/2013	26	Before
<b>Rick Scott</b>	Florida	Republican	3/5/2013	21	After
<b>Nathan Deal</b>	Georgia	Republican	1/17/2013	26	Before
<b>Neil Abercrombie</b>	Hawaii	Democratic	1/22/2013	21	Before
<b>Butch Otter</b>	Idaho	Republican	1/7/2013	36	Before
<b>Pat Quinn</b>	Illinois	Democratic	2/6/2013	6	Before
<b>Mike Pence</b>	Indiana	Republican	1/21/2013	22	Before
<b>Terry Branstad</b>	Iowa	Republican	1/15/2013	28	Before
<b>Sam Brownback</b>	Kansas	Republican	1/15/2013	28	Before
<b>Steve Beshear</b>	Kentucky	Democratic	2/6/2013	6	Before
<b>Bobby Jindal</b>	Louisiana	Republican	4/8/2013	55	After
<b>Paul LePage</b>	Maine	Republican	2/5/2013	7	Before
<b>Martin O' Malley</b>	Maryland	Democratic	1/30/2013	13	Before
<b>Deval Patrick</b>	Massachusetts	Democratic	1/16/2013	27	Before
<b>Rick Snyder</b>	Michigan	Republican	1/16/2013	27	Before
<b>Mark Dayton</b>	Minnesota	Democratic	2/6/2013	6	Before
<b>Phil Bryant</b>	Mississippi	Republican	1/22/2013	21	Before
<b>Jay Nixon</b>	Missouri	Democratic	1/28/2013	15	Before
<b>Steve Bullock</b>	Montana	Democratic	1/30/2013	13	Before
<b>Dave Heineman</b>	Nebraska	Republican	1/15/2013	28	Before
<b>Brian Sandoval</b>	Nevada	Republican	1/16/2013	27	Before
<b>Maggie Hassan</b>	New Hampshire	Democratic	2/14/2013	2	After
<b>Chris Christie</b>	New Jersey	Republican	1/8/2013	35	Before
<b>Susana Martinez</b>	New Mexico	Republican	1/15/2013	28	Before
<b>Andrew Cuomo</b>	New York	Democratic	1/9/2013	34	Before
<b>Pat McCrory</b>	North Carolina	Republican	2/18/2013	6	After
<b>Jack Dalrymple</b>	North Dakota	Republican	1/8/2013	35	Before
<b>John Kasich</b>	Ohio	Republican	2/19/2013	7	After
<b>Mary Fallin</b>	Oklahoma	Republican	2/4/2013	8	Before
<b>John Kitzhaber</b>	Oregon	Democratic	1/14/2013	29	Before
<b>Tom Corbett</b>	Pennsylvania	Republican	2/5/2013	7	Before

(Continued: Timing of 2013 Gubernatorial State of the State Addresses)

<b><u>Governor</u></b>	<b><u>State</u></b>	<b><u>Party</u></b>	<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Days</u></b>	<b><u>Timing</u></b>
<b>Lincoln Chafee</b>	Rhode Island	Independent	1/16/2013	27	Before
<b>Nikki Haley</b>	South Carolina	Republican	1/16/2013	27	Before
<b>Dennis Daugaard</b>	South Dakota	Republican	1/8/2013	35	Before
<b>Bill Haslam</b>	Tennessee	Republican	1/28/2013	15	Before
<b>Rick Perry</b>	Texas	Republican	1/29/2013	14	Before
<b>Gary Herbert</b>	Utah	Republican	1/29/2013	14	Before
<b>Peter Shumlin</b>	Vermont	Democratic	1/10/2013	33	Before
<b>Bob McDonnell</b>	Virginia	Republican	1/9/2013	34	Before
<b>Jay Inslee</b>	Washington	Democratic	1/16/2013	27	Before
<b>Earl Ray Tomblin</b>	West Virginia	Democratic	2/13/2013	1	After
<b>Scott Walker</b>	Wisconsin	Republican	1/15/2013	28	Before
<b>Matt Mead</b>	Wyoming	Republican	1/9/2013	34	Before

Note: Barack Obama delivered his 2013 State of the Union Address on February 12, 2013.

### Timing of 2014 Gubernatorial State of the State Addresses

<b>Governor</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Days</b>	<b>Timing</b>
<b>Robert Bentley</b>	Alabama	Republican	1/14/2014	14	Before
<b>Sean Parnell</b>	Alaska	Republican	1/23/2014	5	Before
<b>Jan Brewer</b>	Arizona	Republican	1/13/2014	15	Before
<b>Jerry Brown</b>	California	Democratic	1/22/2014	6	Before
<b>John Hickenlooper</b>	Colorado	Democratic	1/9/2014	19	Before
<b>Dannel Malloy</b>	Connecticut	Democratic	2/6/2014	9	After
<b>Jack Markell</b>	Delaware	Democratic	1/23/2014	5	Before
<b>Rick Scott</b>	Florida	Republican	3/4/2014	35	After
<b>Nathan Deal</b>	Georgia	Republican	1/15/2014	13	Before
<b>Neil Abercrombie</b>	Hawaii	Democratic	1/21/2014	7	Before
<b>Butch Otter</b>	Idaho	Republican	1/6/2014	22	Before
<b>Pat Quinn</b>	Illinois	Democratic	1/29/2014	1	After
<b>Mike Pence</b>	Indiana	Republican	1/14/2014	14	Before
<b>Terry Branstad</b>	Iowa	Republican	1/14/2014	14	Before
<b>Sam Brownback</b>	Kansas	Republican	1/15/2014	13	Before
<b>Steve Beshear</b>	Kentucky	Democratic	1/7/2014	21	Before
<b>Bobby Jindal</b>	Louisiana	Republican	2/27/2014	30	After
<b>Paul LePage</b>	Maine	Republican	2/4/2014	7	After
<b>Martin O'Malley</b>	Maryland	Democratic	1/23/2014	5	Before
<b>Deval Patrick</b>	Massachusetts	Democratic	1/28/2014	0	Same
<b>Rick Snyder</b>	Michigan	Republican	1/16/2014	12	Before
<b>Mark Dayton</b>	Minnesota	Democratic	4/30/2014	92	After
<b>Phil Bryant</b>	Mississippi	Republican	1/22/2014	6	Before
<b>Jay Nixon</b>	Missouri	Democratic	1/21/2014	7	Before
<b>Dave Heineman</b>	Nebraska	Republican	1/15/2014	13	Before
<b>Maggie Hassan</b>	New Hampshire	Democratic	2/6/2014	9	After
<b>Chris Christie</b>	New Jersey	Republican	1/14/2014	14	Before
<b>Susana Martinez</b>	New Mexico	Republican	1/21/2014	7	Before
<b>Andrew Cuomo</b>	New York	Democratic	1/8/2014	20	Before
<b>John Kasich</b>	Ohio	Republican	2/24/2014	27	After
<b>Mary Fallin</b>	Oklahoma	Republican	2/3/2014	6	After
<b>Tom Corbett</b>	Pennsylvania	Republican	2/4/2014	7	After
<b>Lincoln Chafee</b>	Rhode Island	Democratic	1/15/2014	13	Before
<b>Nikki Haley</b>	South Carolina	Republican	1/22/2014	6	Before
<b>Denis Dugaard</b>	South Dakota	Republican	1/14/2014	14	Before
<b>Bill Haslam</b>	Tennessee	Republican	2/3/2014	6	After
<b>Gary Herbert</b>	Utah	Republican	1/29/2014	1	After
<b>Peter Shumlin</b>	Vermont	Democratic	1/8/2014	20	Before
<b>Bob McDonnell</b>	Virginia	Republican	1/8/2014	20	Before
<b>Jay Inslee</b>	Washington	Democratic	1/14/2014	14	Before
<b>Earl Ray Tomblin</b>	West Virginia	Democratic	1/8/2014	20	Before

**(Continued: Timing of 2014 Gubernatorial State of the State Addresses)**

<b>Scott Walker</b>	Wisconsin	Republican	1/22/2014	6	Before
<b>Matt Mead</b>	Wyoming	Republican	2/10/2014	13	After

Note: Barack Obama delivered his 2014 State of the Union Address on January 28, 2014.

## Appendix E. Dictionary of Words for Health Care Policy Analysis

access	prescription drug benefit
affordable	reform
basic need	responsibility
benefit	retirement benefits
benefits	self-sufficient
children's health insurance plan	seniors
CHIP	subsidiz
disable	subsidy
doctor-patient	sue
drug	tort reform
elderly	uninsured
eligible	welfare
enrollment	welfare benefits
exploit	working poor
frivolous	
government	
government ownership	
guarantee	
health	
health-care benefits	
high-cost	
individual	
individual mandate	
insurance	
insurance companies	
lawsuits	
lawyers	
liability	
liability insurance	
litigate	
Medicaid	
Medicaid expansion	
middle class	
necessity	
need	
Obamacare	
ownership	
patient-rights	
plan	
poor	
poor families	
poverty	
premiums	
prescription	
prescription	

## Appendix F. Dictionary of Words for Immigration Policy Analysis

African-American	lawless
apprehend	legalize
assault	liber
bear arms	Mexican
behind bars	Mexico
blacks	minorit
border	mortatorium
convict	murder
crack down	Muslim
crime	no parole
criminal	no tolerance
cruel	non-violen
decrim	offend
dehuman	organized crime
deter	overcrowded prisons
discriminat	parole
divers	penal
domestic abuse	predator
domestic violence	preferences
drug	prejudice
drug abuse	prison
drug counseling	prosecute
drugs	public defender
equal	punish
equal opportunity	quota
equal protection	racial profiling
execut	rape
felon	reverse discrimination
forgiv	school violence
freedom-of-religion	secure
gangs	sentence
haras	steal
hate	stereotype
hate crimes	stolen
human rights	terror
illegal	tougher
immigra	unequal
imprison	unlawful
incarcerate	victim
injustice	violen
innocent	weapon
inter-racial	
intrud	
juvenile	
law enforcement	

**APPENDIX G. Summary Statistics Table for Health Care Policy Analysis**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
VARIABLES	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum Value	Maximum Value
Inclusion of Health Care Policy	137	0.314	0.466	0	1
Percentage of Words on Health Care	137	0.989	0.389	0.260	2.660
Party of Governor	137	0.394	0.490	0	1
Divided Government as Dummy Variable	137	0.234	0.425	0	1
Divided Government as Trichotomous Variable	137	2.620	0.719	1	3
Governor's Percentage of Vote in Most Recent Election	137	55.83	6.951	37.60	74
Governor's Victory Margin in Most Recent Election	137	15.72	13.10	0	47.90
Obama Percentage of State Vote in 2008 and 2012 Elections	137	49.11	10.35	24.80	71.90
Obama Yearly State Approval Rating	137	43.14	8.977	19.30	64.20
Yearly Uninsured Percentage of State Population	137	12.35	3.875	3.300	22.10
Yearly State Unemployment Rate	137	6.620	1.573	2.900	10.40
Interaction Term of Uninsured and Unemployment	137	84.19	38.26	19.14	198.7
Dummy Variable for 2012 Year	137	0.321	0.469	0	1
Dummy Variable for 2013 Year	137	0.365	0.483	0	1

**APPENDIX H. Summary Statistics Table for Medicaid Analysis**

VARIABLES	(1) N	(2) Mean	(3) Standard Deviation	(4) Minimum Value	(5) Maximum Value
Medicaid Mentions	137	2.095	3.686	0	29
Party of Governor	137	0.394	0.490	0	1
Divided Government as Dummy Variable	137	0.234	0.425	0	1
Divided Government as Trichotomous Variable	137	2.620	0.719	1	3
Governor's Percentage of Vote in Most Recent Election	137	55.83	6.951	37.60	74
Governor's Victory Margin in Most Recent Election	137	15.72	13.10	0	47.90
Obama Percentage of State Vote in 2008 and 2012 Elections	137	49.11	10.35	24.80	71.90
Obama Yearly State Approval Rating	137	43.14	8.977	19.30	64.20
Yearly Uninsured Percentage of State Population	137	12.35	3.875	3.300	22.10
Yearly State Unemployment Rate	137	6.620	1.573	2.900	10.40
Yearly Undocumented Percentage of State Population	137	2.457	1.551	0.200	7.400
Interaction Term of Uninsured and Unemployment	137	84.19	38.26	19.14	198.7
Dummy Variable for 2012 Year	137	0.321	0.469	0	1
Dummy Variable for 2013 Year	137	0.365	0.483	0	1

**APPENDIX I. Summary Statistics Table for Immigration Policy Analysis**

VARIABLES	(1) N	(2) Mean	(3) Standard Deviation	(4) Minimum Value	(5) Maximum Value
Inclusion of Immigration Policy	137	0.131	0.339	0	1
Percentage of Words on Immigration	137	0.165	0.241	0	1.39
Party of Governor	137	0.394	0.490	0	1
Divided Government as Dummy Variable	137	0.234	0.425	0	1
Divided Government as Trichotomous Variable	137	2.620	0.719	1	3
Governor's Percentage of Vote in Most Recent Election	137	55.83	6.951	37.6	74
Governor's Victory Margin in Most Recent Election	137	15.72	13.10	0	47.90
Obama Percentage of State Vote in 2008 and 2012 Elections	137	49.11	10.35	24.8	71.90
Obama Yearly State Approval Rating	137	43.14	8.977	19.3	64.20
Yearly State Unemployment Rate	137	6.620	1.573	2.90	10.40
Yearly Undocumented Percentage of State Population	137	2.457	1.551	0.20	7.40
Border State to Mexico	137	0.073	0.261	0	1
Interaction Term of Undocumented and Unemployment	137	17.09	13.22	1.16	71.04
Dummy Variable for 2012 Year	137	0.321	0.469	0	1
Dummy Variable for 2013 Year	137	0.365	0.483	0	1

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### Education

M.A., Political Science, University of Kentucky, 2015  
M.A., Political Science, American University, 2010  
B.A., Political Science, Austin College, 2008

### Professional Positions

Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science  
Jacksonville University, Jacksonville, Florida

Visiting Instructor in Political Science  
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Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky

### Scholastic and Professional Honors

Invited Participant, Faculty Research Program, Illinois College, 2017  
Travel Grant, University of Kentucky, 2015  
Travel Grant, University of Kentucky, 2015  
Travel Grant, Murray State University, 2015  
Travel Grant, University of Kentucky, 2014  
Travel Grant, American Political Science Association, 2014  
RA Summer Grant, University of Kentucky, 2014  
Teaching Assistantship, University of Kentucky, 2010-2014  
Ulmer Award and Travel Grant, University of Kentucky, 2012  
Graduate Honor Award, American University, 2008-2010  
Robert D. Bradshaw Memorial Scholarship, Austin College, 2006  
Academic Excellence Scholarship, Austin College, 2004-2008

### Professional Publications

Trantham, Austin. Forthcoming. Review of *The Dealmakers of Downstate Illinois: Paul Powell, Clyde L. Choate, John H. Stelle* by Robert E. Hartley. *Journal of Illinois History* 18(3).

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