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PRESIDENTIAL STRATEGIES IN STATEMENTS OF ADMINISTRATION POLICY

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ARTICLE

Presidential Strategies in Statements of Administration Policy

IAN OSTRANDER and JOEL SIEVERT

Presidents routinely employ Statements of Administration Policy (SAPs) to inform Congress about the executive's thoughts and position on pending legislation. Such statements are used for a variety of purposes, including bill promotion, suggesting changes, issuing veto threats, and addressing perceived threats to traditional powers. While SAPs have been identified as an important vehicle for interbranch communication and a key source of insight into presidential preferences, many questions remain as to how presidents make use of SAPs' full range of potential. Using a novel data set of over 4,600 SAPs across multiple administrations, we explore the content of these interbranch communications to uncover how, when, and why presidents use such statements over time. Ultimately, we demonstrate the many ways that presidential use of SAPs is strategic based on political contexts.

Despite lacking formal avenues to influence legislative proceedings, modern presidents have come to play an important role in the legislative arena (Bond and Fleisher 1990; Peterson 1990). Indeed, Greenstein (1978, 45) observed that “it has come to be taken for granted that [the president] *should* regularly initiate and seek to win support for legislative action” (emphasis in original), and presidents now routinely develop and lobby for ambitious legislative agendas (Cohen 2012). To wield influence, modern executives have developed a variety of tools. Presidents can utilize the Office of

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Management and Budget's central clearance process to review proposed or pending legislation (Kernell et al. 2019; Neustadt 1954), they can pressure Congress by going public with their program (Barrett 2004, 2005; Canes-Wrone 2006; Kernell 1997), they can bargain directly with Congress (Beckmann 2010; Neustadt 1990), and they can use their executive powers, such as the veto (Cameron 2000) or unilateral actions (Belco and Rottinghaus 2014), as leverage in a negotiation. All of these strategies rely in some way on communication.

For decades, presidents have employed Statements of Administration Policy (SAPs) to inform Congress about the executive's position on and intentions toward pending legislation (Kernell et al. 2019, 336–37). While presidents can make their preferences and expectations known through a variety of mechanisms, SAPs constitute a formalized, technical, and bill-specific means of providing presidential input that makes them uniquely suited as a vehicle for interbranch communication on legislation (Kernell et al. 2019; Stuessy 2016). Prior research suggests that SAPs are multifaceted and can be used for both purely rhetorical purposes, such as credit claiming (Rice 2010; Sievert and Ostrander 2017) or highlighting constitutional concerns (Ostrander and Sievert 2013b; Sievert and Ostrander 2017), as well as strategically for position taking (Kernell et al. 2019; Ostrander and Sievert 2020) and veto threats (Guenther and Kernell 2021; Hassell and Kernell 2016; Lewallen 2017).

Although previous studies offer valuable insights about the use of SAPs, they have primarily studied SAPs as a means to understand other presidential tools, such as signing statements (Ostrander and Sievert 2013b; Rice 2010; Sievert and Ostrander 2017), or focused on one specific use of SAPs, such as veto threats (Guenther and Kernell 2021; Hassell and Kernell 2016; Lewallen 2017). While there is value to studying SAPs in this manner, the uses and range of presidential positions contained in SAPs are quite variable (Kernell et al. 2019; Ostrander and Sievert 2020). While we know that SAPs can be used for a variety of different purposes, we do not know the relative frequency with which they are employed in their various roles or how presidents generally make use of SAPs across differing political contexts. A broad and systematic study is merited in order to better understand the usage of this important vehicle for interbranch communication.

We examine the use of SAPs by investigating how and when presidents employ these tools, as well as the content of the president's messages. Our study, which draws on an original data set of over 4,600 cases from 1987 through 2020, begins by exploring general patterns in the use of SAPs. We coded each SAP for its rhetorical content, presidential position, length in words, number of policy objections, and whether it contained a veto threat. Along with the SAP content, we compiled information about bill characteristics and political contexts, which allows us to explore changes in the use and content of SAPs over time and in a variety of circumstances. Overall, the analyses presented herein suggest that presidents have institutionalized the use of SAPs since the 1980s and that they are now more focused on salient legislation. Furthermore, SAPs are used by presidents to address a variety of differing goals, including the issuance of veto threats and noting specific objections, but also often for taking an entirely positive position on pending legislation. Our findings reinforce the importance of SAPs as a tool for interbranch politics and suggest several new avenues of inquiry.

Presidential Use of SAPs

SAPs are executive branch documents sent to Congress during the legislative process in order to express the administration's thoughts and preferences toward pending legislation at a level of detail appropriate for a government audience (Stuessy 2016, 7).¹ While the structure and use of SAPs have evolved over time, they have been in use since at least the Reagan administration.² The White House retains the ultimate authority to issue a SAP, but each statement is vetted and often written directly by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).³ In addition to the OMB, executive agencies that are stakeholders in policy areas impacted by the legislation in question often participate in the generation of SAPs, which makes them similar to other presidential tools (Rudalevige 2012; Sievert and Ostrander 2017). The final product that is directed at Congress may therefore combine both the political sentiments and objectives of the White House as well as the concerns of career civil servants with regard to implementation (Stuessy 2016).

In order to document general trends and patterns in the use of SAPs, we collected data on all such statements from the last congress of the Reagan administration (starting in 1987) through the last SAP issued by the Trump administration in 2020. The time period encompasses almost the entirety of SAP use for which reliable records exist for full congresses. To find SAPs and their associated text, we relied upon the American Presidency Project (Woolley and Peters 2021), which provides a text archive of all SAPs organized by year.⁴ From this archive, we identified and analyzed over 4,600 SAPs for their rhetorical content, including the presence of veto threats, stated objections, type of arguments present, and broad position on the legislation.

In the top panel of Figure 1, we report the number of SAPs per year. One of the first things to note is the disparity in the frequency of SAP use over time and between administrations. The volume of SAPs was highest in the 1980s and early 1990s, but there is a noted drop in the number of SAPs after the G. H. W. Bush administration and again after the Clinton administration. Although he only served for four years, George H. W. Bush issued over 1,200 SAPs, whereas the Clinton administration authored roughly 1,400 statements. Barack Obama released a nearly identical number of SAPs during his eight years in office as Reagan did in the final two years of his administration. The Trump administration authored the fewest SAPs, with only 174 statements in four years. By comparison, Ronald Reagan, G.H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton routinely issued more SAPs in a single year than Trump did in an entire term. Despite a reduction in use

1. Although SAPs generally focus on a single pending bill, a handful of these communications were directed at a pending amendment/motion. On rare occasions, presidents used SAPs to deliver remarks on multiple, often related, bills. The use of SAPs to address multiple bills, however, accounts for less than 1% of our cases.

2. For more information, see Samuel Kernell, "Introduction to SAPs," 2005, <http://pages.ucsd.edu/~7Eskernell/resources/Introduction-to-SAPs.pdf>. According to Kernell, while interbranch communications existed much earlier, consistent and reliable records of SAP use go back to just 1985.

3. The process for writing and issuing SAPs is detailed in the OMB Circular A-19, which also outlines the process for writing signing statements and executive veto messages.

4. See <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/> for more details.

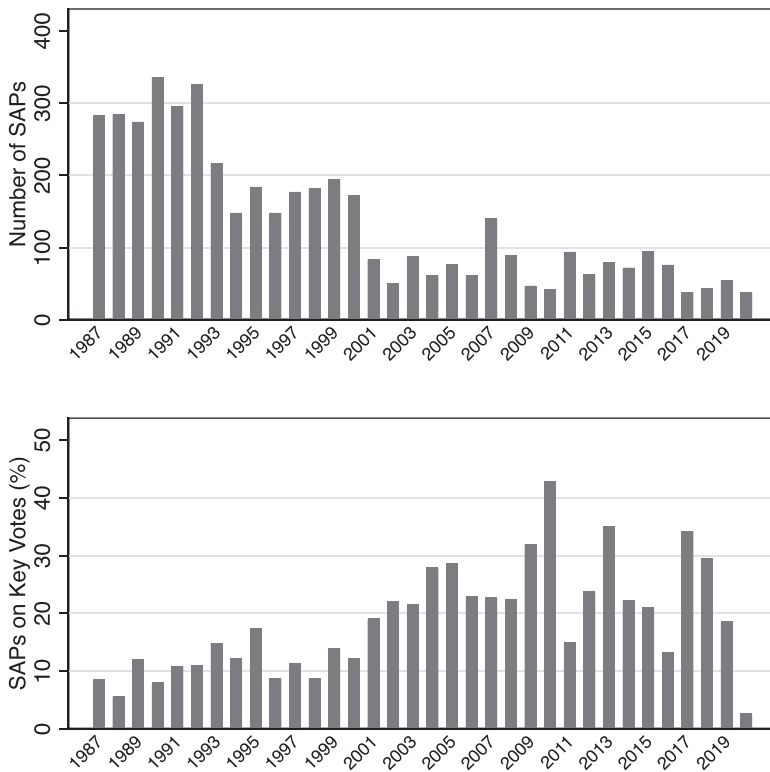


FIGURE 1. Frequency of SAP Use and as a Proportion of Key Votes, 1987–2020. *Note:* Data compiled by authors.

over time, the decline is not monotonic, and there are several spikes and drops within the data that suggest variation in presidential motivation or opportunity to issue SAPs within administrations. Regardless of this noted decline, the patterns of issuance suggest that SAPs remain a routine presidential tool of interbranch communication.

The raw number of SAPs per year, however, masks important developments in how presidents deploy this rhetorical device. The bottom panel of Figure 1 reports the percentage of SAPs in a given year that target the most salient legislation, which we define as the measures that *Congressional Quarterly* identified as key votes in its yearly report. Rather than a decline, we observe that presidents have increasingly focused a higher share of their SAPs on important legislation. During the last two years of the Reagan presidency, only 7% of SAPs were directed at legislation subject to a key vote. In the G.H.W. Bush and Clinton administrations, the share of salient legislation targeted increased to only 10% and 12%, respectively. With the start of a new century, however, presidents became more likely to use SAPs to target key legislative proposals. Approximately 23% of both the G. W. Bush and Obama administrations' respective statements were issued on key vote measures. Although the Trump administration

released fewer SAPs, his administration was about as likely as G. W. Bush and Obama to target legislation with a key vote, which accounted for around 21% of his SAPs.

While the total number of statements has decreased, presidents have become more focused in their usage of these statements. The observed change over time is consistent with presidential strategy in other areas. As a tool becomes institutionalized, the White House will shift from more widespread use to a narrowly tailored strategy or shift to use the device for a limited number of functions or objectives (Ostrander and Sievert 2013a, 2013b; Ragsdale and Theis 1997). For example, it was not unheard of for the White House to release SAPs that were only a few sentences or even a single sentence in length. George H. W. Bush's SAP on HR 4801 during the 102nd Congress, which extended authorization of the Historic Preservation Fund, typifies this use of SAPs. His entire message was a single sentence outlining his support: "The administration supports enactment of H.R. 4801" (Bush 1992). While recent presidents certainly release short messages, the single-sentence SAP effectively disappeared by the start of George W. Bush's administration. Such early SAPs not only inflate the raw count of SAP usage in the first few administrations after their formal creation, but they are also qualitatively different from the type of policy messages presidents author today.⁵

Once the White House decides to release a SAP, the next strategic consideration is when in the legislative process to transmit the statement. SAPs can occur at any stage of lawmaking, from well before floor deliberation starts to moments before the final passage vote. Furthermore, presidents on rare occasions will even issue more than one SAP for the same piece of legislation as it evolves (Ostrander and Sievert 2020). As legislation often changes between the House and Senate, presidents may also direct a SAP to the chamber where the bill is, or soon will be, actively under consideration. Ultimately, presidents seek to deliver the SAP when it will have the greatest impact on outcomes (Stuessy 2016, 3).

Figure 2 displays the relative frequency of SAP usage at key stages of the legislative process for all SAPs within our data. We have roughly divided the legislative process into the pre-floor stage in the chamber of origin, reaching the floor of the chamber of origin, advancing to the other chamber, and finally the resolving differences stage where differences between each chamber's version of the bill are reconciled. The vast majority of SAPs, roughly 88%, are delivered early in the legislative process. By far the modal category for SAP issuance, with approximately 3,000 cases, is at the floor stage within the chamber of origin. The next most common outcome, with just over 1,000 cases, is for a SAP to be delivered before floor consideration has begun in the originating chamber. The prevalence of SAPs at these early stages of the legislative process is likely due in part to the fact that many bills die at the earliest stages of the legislative process and never advance further. These findings are consistent with an account of SAPs being used as a tool for position taking in order to winnow legislation at the early stages of the legislative process (Ostrander and Sievert 2020). When

5. Another plausible explanation for some of these changes is that a growing preference in Congress for omnibus legislation (Sinclair 2016) has led to fewer and longer SAPs.

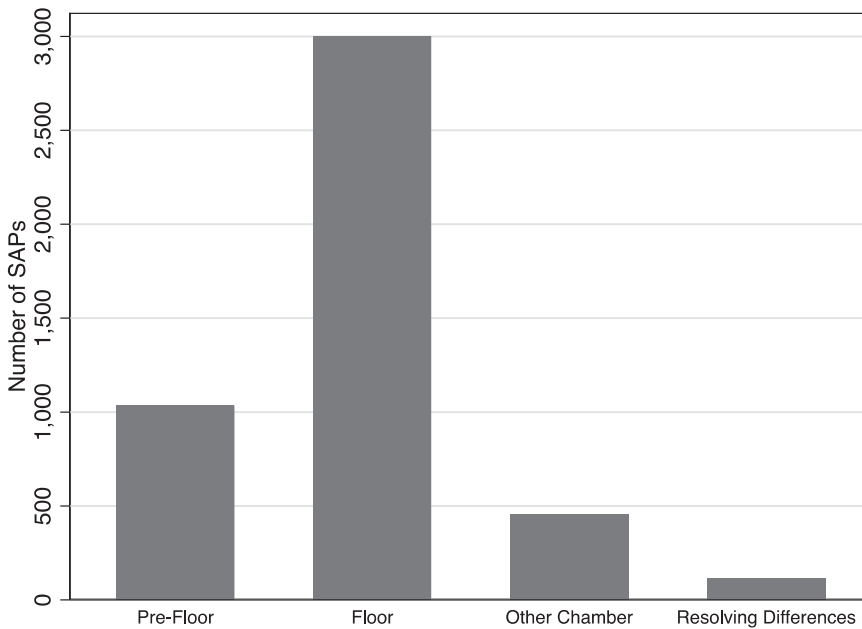


FIGURE 2. SAP Timing by Bill Progression, 1987–2020. *Note:* Data compiled by authors.

presidents do issue a SAP later in the legislative process, they are more likely to do so when the other chamber first takes up consideration of the bill. There are approximately 450 SAPs in our data set, nearly 10% of our observations, which target legislation passed by one chamber as it moves on to the next. While far less common, these cases reveal that the president and OMB continue to actively monitor legislation as it moves through the lawmaking process. On a few rare occasions, the White House released a SAP on a conference report or as the chambers looked to reconcile their respective versions of the bill, but this accounts for less than 3% of total cases. Overall, these data suggest that SAPs are not generally used later in the legislative process in the hopes of swaying votes on final passage, though there have certainly been occasions when presidents have employed them for this task.

In terms of their rhetorical content, SAPs are perhaps best known as a vehicle for presidential veto threats (Kernell et al. 2019; Lewallen 2017). Yet, the majority of SAPs do *not* contain such threats. As noted in Table 1, over 70% of all SAPs do not contain any direct veto threat language. Importantly, SAPs absent veto threats are not necessarily endorsements of the legislation at hand. Most SAPs contain some objections or suggestions for improvement—about 70% of the messages in our data set contain at least one objection—and a veto threat is not necessary in order for a SAP to note points of disagreement. The inclusion of objections in the absence of an explicit veto threat suggests either that there is a threshold differentiating between basic disagreement and

TABLE 1
SAPs and Veto Threats, 1987–2020

	N	%
No Veto Threat	3,277	71.04
<i>Threat Type</i>		
May Veto	1,103	23.91
Will Veto	233	5.05
Total	4,613	

Note: Data compiled by authors.

TABLE 2
Key Votes and SAP Message Content

<i>Position</i>	<i>Key Vote (N)</i>	<i>Non-Key Vote (N)</i>
No Position	6.26 (42)	17.20 (678)
Support	37.56 (252)	36.58 (1,442)
Oppose	9.10 (61)	20.35 (802)
Veto Threat	47.09 (316)	25.88 (1,020)
<i>Total</i>	671	3,942
Rhetoric	Key Vote (N)	Non-Key Vote (N)
Constitutional	24.33 (671)	12.63 (3,942)
Work with Congress	54.93 (671)	40.13 (3,942)

Note: Cell entries report presidential position and rhetorical content of SAPs across key votes and non-key vote measures, with the number of cases in parentheses.

the threat of a presidential veto or that presidents are strategic and do not always resort to a veto threat when they have objections to legislative proposals.

Veto threats within SAPs are not ambiguous, as they are often highlighted with underlining and/or bold text. They do, however, tend to come with two distinct levels of threat (Hassell and Kernell 2016). First, presidents often indicate that they *may* veto a bill, which accounts for approximately 24% of all SAPs (see Table 2). In these cases, the text including the veto threat is often accompanied by an indication that a president's advisers would suggest the veto but not necessarily that they themselves would issue such a veto should the bill pass. By not fully committing to issue a veto if the legislation passes, the White House leaves room for bargaining and further action. Second, presidents can issue a stronger threat that should a bill pass or should a particularly offending provision be included within the bill as passed, the president *will* veto the legislation. While these cases make up just over 5% of all SAPs (see Table 1), they represent the strongest signal of disagreement between a president and the given legislation.⁶ Overall, presidents make almost five times the number of weaker threats as compared to the stronger threat variety.

6. We do find a handful of rare cases where a single SAP makes multiple veto threats within its text, but we code only for the strongest of these veto positions.

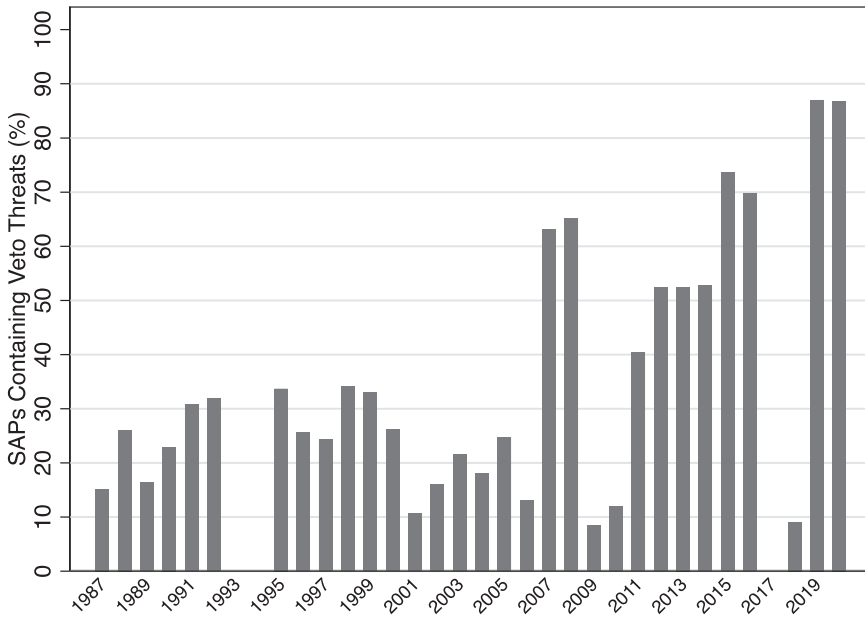


FIGURE 3. Percent of SAPs with Veto Threats, 1987–2020. *Note:* Data compiled by authors.

The inclusion of veto threat rhetoric varies dramatically by political contexts as well as over time. In Figure 3, we report the percentage of SAPs in a given year that contained a veto threat. The figure demonstrates large variation overall and, more intriguingly, that the proportion of SAPs containing a veto threat appears to be generally increasing over time. Indeed, most SAPs—about 70%—authored by the Reagan and G.H.W. Bush administration did *not* contain veto threats. During the first two years of his term, Clinton did not issue a single veto threat. In the wake of the Republican takeover after the 1994 election, however, between 30% and 35% of Clinton's SAPs in any given year contained some type of veto threat.

From the G. W. Bush administration onward, however, veto threats come to dominate the rhetorical content of SAPs during periods of divided government. Well over three-quarters of G. W. Bush's SAPs in his last two years in office contained a veto threat, as compared to between roughly 15% and 30% in the prior six years. Both the Obama and Trump administrations also used SAPs primarily as a vehicle for veto threats after losing control of the House majority in the midterm election. During his first two years in office, approximately 10% of Obama's SAPs contained veto threats. For the next four years, the share of SAPs with veto threats increased to about half before increasing to around 70% after Republicans gained control of both chambers of Congress. The shift in Trump's use of SAPs was even more pronounced. After issuing only four veto threats in the first two years of unified government, the Trump White House released 80 SAPs containing veto threats in his last two years with divided government, which was approximately 87% of SAP cases during that time. These changes within

administrations demonstrate the marked difference in use and strategy that can occur in response to changing political context.

The pattern observed above is comparable to the findings outlined in Figure 1, where the fewer SAPs issued in later years tend to be more focused on salient legislation. Here, Figure 3 demonstrates that SAPs in later years are more often used as a vehicle for the issuance of veto threats. The relationship is, however, moderated by the presence of unified government as noted above. When these two trends are taken together, it offers further evidence for the institutionalization of SAPs. By the late 1990s and early twenty-first century, presidents became more focused in their use of SAPs, with fewer small and noncontroversial bills receiving a SAP. As we discussed above, a pattern of more tailored usage of these tools is a hallmark of the institutionalization of presidential directives (Ragsdale and Theis 1997).

While previous scholars have, for clear reasons, focused primarily on veto threats, Table 1 makes it clear that SAPs can contain much more. First, SAPs allow presidents to state their overall position on legislation, which may in fact be positive. President Obama's SAP on the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Treatment Extension Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-87) demonstrates this more positive usage of SAPs. President Obama's SAP started with an affirmation of his "strong support" for the bill and concluded by noting that his administration "looks forward to working with the Congress on this effort to ensure that the Ryan White Program provides the most efficient, effective systems of care for people living with HIV/AIDS" (Obama 2009).

Second, many SAPs make requests or suggestions for changes without resorting to the costlier threat of a presidential veto. President Bill Clinton's SAP on the Work Incentives Improvement Act (P.L. 106-170) began by noting that the current draft of the bill failed "to provide certain key supports for individuals with disabilities who are returning to work that were included in the President's FY 2000 Budget as well as in the Senate-passed and House Commerce Committee versions of the bill" (Clinton 1999). President Clinton then went on to outline a set of specific provisions in the bill that needed to be amended. As is typical in these cases, President Clinton concluded by stating that his "administration looks forward to working with the Congress to enact landmark bipartisan legislation" (Clinton 1999).

Third, even when noting deficiencies in a bill or asking for further changes, presidents will often include language that provides "glowing endorsements of the legislation under consideration" (Rice 2010, 692). For example, President George W. Bush's SAP on the United States and India Nuclear Cooperation Promotion Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-401) began by noting that his "administration strongly supports House passage of ... this historic initiative," but it went on to urge "consolidation of the many reporting requirements found in this legislation and requests that the House place a sunset provision on such reporting requirements" (Bush 2006). The SAP concluded by outlining amendments to the law that, if passed, could lead the Bush administration to change its position on the bill. Even in cases where presidents threaten a veto, they may take a moment to praise other elements of a bill. In this sense, the SAPs presidents deliver to Congress are as complex as the bills they address.

Furthermore, some SAPs are purely rhetorical and positive in nature in that they contain no veto threats, requests for changes, or reservations on the legislation at hand. Beyond demonstrating support for the legislation at hand, the rhetorical functions of SAPs may include credit claiming, congratulating critical members of Congress after passage within a chamber, and making requests for more or similar legislation in the future. Such SAPs may be analogous to rhetorical presidential signing statements that have similar language, characteristics, and goals (Evans 2014; Evans and Marshall 2016). The broader connection between the two forms of presidential messages has not gone unnoticed (Ainsworth et al. 2014; Ostrander and Sievert 2013b), and some scholars have even suggested that, given the similarity in content, SAPs are in fact replacing signing statements as a tool for expressing presidential thoughts on legislation (Garvey 2011; Sievert and Ostrander 2017). The key difference between a rhetorical SAP and a signing statement is that SAPs occur during the legislative process and therefore many of the bills receiving a rhetorical SAP do not ultimately become law.

Importantly, despite their reputation as vehicles for veto threats, many SAPs are purely positive and provide a strong endorsement of the underlying legislation. For example, in April 2016, President Obama issued a SAP in strong support of Senate Bill 1890, the Defend Trade Secrets Act of 2016.⁷ In his SAP, Obama praised the bill and noted that he looked forward to working with Congress on its passage. How often does this happen? Based on content coding of each SAP, we identified the following range of positions: no position, support, oppose, veto threat.⁸ The first category, no position, includes any case where the president does not take a clear position, but instead perhaps just offers suggestions for some change coupled with discussion of the bill's merits. SAPs coded as supportive include those in which the president explicitly states support for the bill, which often means language along the lines of how the president "looks forward to signing" the bill in question. The third category, oppose, covers SAPs where the president opposed the bill in its current form, perhaps noting several objections, but without offering an explicit veto threat. In the final category, we include all SAPs that contain any veto threat. Table 3 reports a breakdown of all SAPs from 1987 to 2020 by the president's stated position.

Overall, we find that just under 16% of SAPs did not contain a clear presidential position on the proposed legislation, which makes it the least common of the four types of positions. Next, positive SAPs are actually the modal category and represent approximately 37% of cases. That is not to say that presidents never raise concerns or suggest improvements in these types of SAPs, but the overall content is either largely supportive or at least provides no signal of presidential opposition. When taken together, the data for these first two categories indicate that by focusing exclusively on

7. See <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=117358> for the full text of this SAP.

8. We employed a team of undergraduate coders for the entire content analysis. While many of the variables, such as veto threats, were relatively straightforward to code, the position is the most subjective. To address concerns about inter-coder reliability, we had a single coder independently code the position variable for a random sample of 500 SAPs. The independent coder and our team of undergraduate coders were in agreement about the president's position in 94% of cases. The main point of disagreement in the remaining 6% of cases related to whether or not the president took a clear position (e.g., no position versus support).

TABLE 3
SAPs by Presidential Position, 1987–2020

	N	%
No Position	720	15.61
Support	1,694	36.72
Oppose	863	18.71
Veto Threat	1,336	28.96
Total	4,613	

Note: Data compiled by authors.

the negative function of SAPs, scholars would overlook well over half of the SAPs issued over the last 30 years. If the White House does object, however, the SAP is more likely to contain a veto threat, about 29% of all SAPs, as compared to general opposition, roughly 19% of cases.

Presidential Goals and Strategies

Our theoretical interest and expectations concern the conditions under which presidents will issue SAPs and the rhetorical content of these messages. We expect that both the decision to author SAPs and their rhetorical content will be influenced by the White House's strategic calculations and considerations. It is important to remember, though, that SAPs are necessarily reactive messages since the White House must wait for legislation before it can issue a statement, which limits executive discretion on the use of this tool. As Larsen-Price (2012, 147) notes, the “opportunity structure” of presidential policy tools often constrains executive attention as observed through tool use. Presidents can use a SAP to discuss the legislation that they would like to have seen, but they are stuck reacting to the legislation or measure as it exists in Congress at a given moment. SAPs are therefore part of a larger interbranch dialogue, with the actions and disposition of Congress dictating in part what kind of SAPs are issued (Ostrander and Sievert 2013b).

Below, we outline several factors that we expect will predict both the volume of SAP use as well as their rhetorical content. Before this discussion, however, we want to emphasize that SAPs are highly versatile and can be used to accomplish a variety of objectives. While our own descriptive data and prior literature have noted their importance for veto threat politics, one of the main contributions of this project is to document the multitude of other ways SAPs are deployed. In fact, individual SAPs are commonly intended to achieve multiple goals.

Political Context

First, we expect that both the use of and rhetorical content in SAPs will be reflective of the congressional contexts at the time of issuance. For example, presidents

should be more likely to issue SAPs with objections and veto threats during periods of divided government but use more positive rhetoric during periods of unified government. The salience of the legislation will also influence the White House's decisions regarding both the volume and content of SAPs. Presidents should, for instance, be more inclined to comment on legislation reforming entitlement programs than the renaming of a rural post office. That does not mean, however, that presidents will always comment on important pending legislation, as often in bargaining presidents may be more advantaged by silence (Covington 1987). Nor is it the case that relatively minor legislation in terms of policy is immune to SAPs. Minor bills touching on presidential prerogatives may merit a presidential message on constitutional grounds (Ostrander and Sievert 2013a). However, in general, we believe that higher-salience bills will be subject to more and stronger presidential position taking.

We also expect the rhetorical content of SAPs to be responsive to the policy content of legislation. For administrations with a legislative agenda to promote, not all bills are created equal. Though to some extent presidential priorities are based on opportunity and congressional factors (Gelman, Wilkenfeld, and Adler 2015), presidents develop and promote agenda priorities (Cohen 1995, 2012) that are likely to attract more attention from both the public and the administration. Such issue attention should vary across administrations based on individual agendas as well as changing political contexts. However, we also expect that every president will tend to pay more attention to traditional spheres of presidential power compared to other issues. For example, prior research has demonstrated that presidents use signing statements strategically with an eye toward defending traditional presidential spheres of influence, such as defense and foreign policy matters (Evans 2011; Ostrander and Sievert 2013a). As such, the issue at hand within the legislation should matter for predicting SAP use.

Position Taking

Second, presidents may also use SAPs for general position-taking purposes. Since these statements are able to go into more technical detail, they can serve as a platform for position taking on not just bills as a whole, but also individual sections including relatively short policy riders on major legislation (Hassell and Kernell 2016). Furthermore, these communications can serve as a signal to presidential allies and opponents alike as to where the White House stands. In short, SAPs are an important tool in the White House's toolkit when it comes to publicizing the administration's positions on pending legislation. While most position-taking may occur with an eye toward influencing passage, other political goals exist. As Gelman (2017) observes, Congress routinely proposes legislation that is dead on arrival in order to please allied interest groups. Presidents may have similar incentives to take strong positions on doomed legislation. Furthermore, presidents may take positions on legislation as a part of an inter-branch dialogue to defend their institutional prerogatives by advancing their own conceptualization of the boundaries between the branches. Such motivations have

already been attributed to presidential signing statements (Korzi 2011; Rush 2018), which are similar in content to SAPs (Sievert and Ostrander 2017).

Agenda Setting

Third, SAPs may be a valuable tool for presidential agenda setting (Ostrander and Sievert 2020). For example, presidents may use SAPs to make final passage of a bill more or less likely by wholly endorsing or entirely opposing a piece of legislation. While such appeals are unlikely to sway the public (Edwards 2003), presidential involvement in the lawmaking process has the potential to influence congressional actions (Eshbaugh-Soha 2010; Eshbaugh-Soha and Miles 2011; Marshall and Prins 2007; Villalobos, Vaughn, and Azari 2012) and attention (Edwards and Wood 1999). Villalobos, Vaughn, and Azari (2012, 549) observe that Congress is responsive to the “perceived quality of legislation” at hand, which SAPs often directly address with the inclusion of input from stakeholder agencies. Furthermore, the veto threats found in SAPs can serve as an effective deterrent to further action on legislation (Hassell and Kernell 2016).

Similarly, presidents may intend to use SAPs as a means of influencing the congressional agenda, which is distinct from influencing final passage or bill content as there can be political value in determining what is under debate. By staking out early positions, presidents may be seeking to influence Congress's agenda through “winnowing” the legislation that receives consideration (Krutz 2005). Indeed, the data reported in Figure 2 on the timing of SAPs is consistent with the claim that they can be used to this end. Through early intervention, presidents may seek to speed or impede legislation depending on their preferences. Once a bill has advanced to later stages in the lawmaking process, presidents may be using SAPs to directly lobby allies for votes on a close roll call (Beckmann 2010).

Policy Outcomes/Content

Lastly, both the decision to issue SAPs and the message's rhetorical content will be done with an eye toward influencing policy outcomes.⁹ As prior studies of veto threats demonstrate, SAPs can be used to highlight flaws in a bill or indicate the changes that would need to be made to avoid a presidential veto (Guenther and Kernell 2021; Hassell and Kernell 2016). One advantage of SAPs is that they offer the White House the opportunity to outline how they would like legislation to be changed and to offer suggested fixes to a piece of legislation along with their

9. Since our interest is the decision to issue a statement and the content contained therein, an evaluation of the efficacy of SAPs as a policy tool is beyond the scope of the current project. It is important to note, though, that identifying the policy impact of SAPs can be complicated by many factors, such as the need to identify the relevant population of bills to compare (Guenther and Kernell 2021). As a result, the few studies that have looked at how SAPs, specifically those with veto threats, impact lawmaking have focused on a subset of legislation and legislative provisions—authorization bills (Guenther and Kernell 2021) and legislative riders in appropriations bills (Hassell and Kernell 2016).

objections. In that sense, a single SAP can be used for both negative and positive agenda control. For example, the president can indicate which provisions need to be retained and which should be removed or amended to ensure a presidential signature rather than a veto.

We expect that a desire to influence policy outcomes will influence both the decision to issue SAPs as well as the nature of the rhetorical content. If presidents hope to use SAPs to influence either the congressional agenda or to bargain with Congress, they should be more likely to use SAPs and to take firmer positions early in the process. Indeed, the descriptive data reported above and prior research on veto threats (Guenther and Kernell 2021) provide support for this claim. With respect to the content of the statements, we expect this means presidents will provide more detail or clearer objections when they want to shape the content of a bill as it progresses through the lawmaking process.

Strategies in Statements of Administration Policy

Based on the theoretical expectations outlined above, we conducted a series of descriptive and empirical analyses that use the SAP-specific content data discussed earlier and additional bill-specific and political context variables. These data provide a comprehensive look at how presidents utilize SAPs. Our analysis proceeds in four parts. First, we examine how partisan control of government influences the rhetorical content of SAPs. We then investigate how legislative saliency influences presidential position taking strategies. Next, we examine how agenda setting considerations influence SAPs. Lastly, we conduct a more systematic regression-based analysis to evaluate how these factors and other bill-specific characteristics, such as policy area, influence the length and number of objections within SAPs.

Partisan Control of Government

Partisan control of Congress is one of the main forces that structures presidential–congressional relations. While unified control of government does not guarantee that the president and Congress will always be aligned on matters of policy, the White House can at least expect the legislative branch to be more amenable to its concerns and priorities. Once even one chamber of Congress is controlled by the other party, however, presidents find themselves in a different political environment. It should not be surprising, then, to find that presidential positions will depend on partisan control of Congress. In Table 4, we report the position presidents took in SAPs by partisan control of Congress. Intuitively, veto threats are more common during periods of divided government and rare in unified government. When the opposition party controls both chambers of Congress, nearly 31% of SAPs contain a veto threat. Interestingly, SAPs are used to convey veto threats at higher rates when only one chamber is controlled by the other party. Under this division of partisan control, veto

TABLE 4
Presidential Position in SAPs by Partisan Control of Congress

	<i>Unified (N)</i>	<i>Partially Divided (N)</i>	<i>Fully Divided (N)</i>
No Position	4.51 (37)	5.77 (31)	20.02 (652)
Support	85.00 (697)	35.94 (193)	24.69 (804)
Oppose	2.20 (18)	11.73 (63)	24.02 (782)
Veto Threat	8.29 (68)	46.55 (250)	31.27 (1,108)

threats are the modal category at nearly 47%. When the president's party controls Congress, however, only 8% of SAPs contain veto threats.

Conversely, presidents are more likely to use SAPs to voice their support for a bill during unified government. Eighty-five percent of all SAPs authored during periods of unified government expressed support for the bill in question. There is a large drop-off in expressions of support, however, under fully divided government. In periods where the opposition controls both chambers of Congress, approximately a quarter of SAPs express support for passage. When the president's party only controls one chamber, roughly 36% of SAPs express support for the legislation in question.

Partisan control of Congress also has a predictable effect on the likelihood of a president using a SAP to express opposition, but not a veto threat. Under unified government, SAPs that note presidential opposition are as common as veto threats. When the opposition party controls one or both chambers, the share of SAPs in which the president opposes the bill in question increases to roughly 12% and 24%, respectively. A more surprising finding, though, is that omission of presidential positions altogether is largely a product of fully divided government. While it represents the least common position, it is not too far behind most of the other categories, and the vast majority of SAPs with no position occur under this partisan alignment. One plausible explanation for this pattern is that presidents see greater value to obfuscating their position in these periods given the potential polarizing effects of presidential involvement in legislative battles.

Overall, the data in Table 4 reveal an interesting mix of SAP usage conditional on political context. When the president's party enjoys unified control of Congress, the White House primarily uses SAPs to voice support for pending legislation. Under split partisan control of Congress, presidential strategy tends to be far more binary—support or veto threat—than in any other political context. Surprisingly, we find the greatest mix of positions in periods of full divided government.

Policy Salience

Not all legislation is equally important in the eyes of an administration, and this fact should influence the issuance and content of SAPs. In the first section of Table 2, we examine differences in content between SAPs on bills that were subject to a key vote

versus other legislation.¹⁰ From these data, we can see that presidents are much more likely to take a clear position on important legislation. Roughly 6% of SAPs on legislation subject to a key vote contained no clear position, as opposed to 17% of other SAPs on all other measures. For legislation subject to a key vote, however, presidential disagreement is more likely to manifest as a veto threat than mere opposition (9% versus 47%). By contrast, for all other bills in our data set, veto threats are nearly as common as more general opposition, approximately 26% and 20%, respectively. Presidents are, however, equally likely to use a SAP to voice their support for a bill across both types of legislation, roughly 38% versus 37%. While policy saliency leads presidents to be clearer in outlining their positions, it does not alter the use of SAPs for positive position-taking purposes.

In the bottom half of Table 2, we examine the relationship between key votes and different notable forms of rhetoric contained in SAPs—constitutional objections and requests to work with Congress. Nearly a quarter of all legislation subject to a key vote contained some type of constitutional concern, which is almost twice the amount of constitutional rhetoric in SAPs for other bills. These findings indicate that the rhetorical content of SAPs is shaped by forces similar to those influencing another presidential tool, the signing statement. Indeed, earlier research found major legislation was one of the best predictors of a constitutional signing statement (Kelley and Marshall 2010; Ostrander and Sievert 2013a). The similarity should not be surprising since both messages are a product of the same legislative clearance process in OMB (Sievert and Ostrander 2017). Nevertheless, these data are still of note and add credence to the claim raised in prior research that the signing statement was unlikely to be the first instance in which a president raised these constitutional qualms.

While policy saliency influences the inclusion of constitutional objections, we find fewer differences with respect to requests to work with Congress. Of the SAPs directed at key legislation, almost 55% included a request to work with Congress on future iterations of the bill. There is a small decrease in such requests for SAPs on minor legislation, just over 40%. These comparatively smaller differences, however, further suggest that SAPs are a frequent tool in presidential efforts to negotiate with Congress over the content of legislative proposals regardless of the bill's significance. Indeed, these data suggest that appeals for continued negotiations are a common feature of SAPs in general.

Rhetorical Content

The length and number of objections in a SAP should vary along with the reasons a president issued the statement. Positive SAPs may be quick statements in support of a measure with little purpose other than publicly taking a position on a bill. In contrast, veto threats constitute a substantial disagreement between the branches, and the White

10. Our decision to use CQ Key Votes to identify salient legislative measures follows standard conventions in the study of inter-branch politics (Eshbaugh-Soha and Miles 2011; Marshall and Prins 2007).

House will likely take the opportunity to explain its reasoning and perhaps even suggest agreeable statutory alternatives. Presidents may also spend time carefully outlining their position when legislation raises constitutional issues between the branches. In this sense, SAPs may serve a function similar to presidential signing statements and serve as part of an interbranch dialogue over the boundaries between the branches (Korzi 2011; Rush 2018). When presidents use a SAP to express a desire to work with Congress on improving legislation, the text may outline these ideas at length. Finally, in the last stages of the lawmaking process, presidents, who are unlikely to force significant changes to the legislation, may simply state their position in an effort to sway final passage votes.

SAPs have wide variation in terms of their content and their length. Importantly, these differences are likely meaningful in terms of the goals that the SAP represents. Prior research has suggested that longer presidential communications about a particular subject likely imply an attempt to sway outcomes, as it both demonstrates greater attention to an issue and provides more opportunity to persuade an audience (Collins and Eshbaugh-Soha 2019, 37–38). We propose that the length of a SAP—as a simple word count—similarly captures administration attention to a given proposal. Indeed, SAPs vary considerably in length. The average word count of all SAPs in our data set is roughly 460 words, but the range of length extends from a minimum of five to a maximum of over 13,000 words. In general, short SAPs tend to be purely position-taking instruments, whereas presidents who want to bargain with Congress over legislation go into detailed descriptions of their desires for different sections of a pending bill.

To examine the variations in SAP length, we estimated an ordinary least squares (OLS) model where the outcome variable is the word count for a given SAP. While word counts are censored at zero, we use OLS for ease of interpretation and because of the large variation between SAPs. Alternative approaches to modeling suggest that our findings are robust to model choice. Because lengthy outliers skew the distribution of the variable of interest, word count, we use robust standard errors in response to issues of heteroskedasticity. SAPs also vary widely with respect to the number of objections that they contain. While not all objections are fully articulated, administrations often take the time to address their reservations about specific statutory sections in a bill, and nearly 70% of all SAPs note at least one such objection. The average SAP contains about five objections, with the maximum number of specific objections within one SAP just over 300. We use a negative binomial regression where the outcome variable is the number of statutory provisions objected to in a SAP to further explore patterns of presidential objections within SAPs.

In addition to the outcome variables described above, we include a number of covariates in both regression models that we expect will account for variation across SAPs. First, we include a measure for whether a SAP was released in a midterm or presidential election year as compared to years with no federal elections. This takes into account the fact that presidents may be incentivized to speak more or differently when in an electoral context. Second, we account for partisan control of government with a nominal variable that denotes whether it was a period of unified, partially divided, or

fully divided government. Since congressional polarization further augments the nature of lawmaking (Lee 2015), we posit that the effect of partisan control is conditioned by the level of congressional polarization. For the models below, we follow the standard approach of using the absolute difference between the congressional parties' respective medians (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2016). Because most of the bills in our data set originated in the House, we use the House scores to capture polarization, but our findings are substantively the same if we use Senate polarization instead.¹¹

Next, we include measures for several influential bill characteristics. Prior scholarship has noted that appropriations legislation is targeted by presidential communications like SAPs (Ostrander and Sievert 2020). The main issue area addressed in the legislation has also been demonstrated to influence how presidents talk about legislation (Ostrander and Sievert 2013a). We therefore include indicators for appropriations legislation as well as accounting for the issue areas of defense and foreign affairs and economics. To account for message-specific content, we examine whether presidents made constitutional arguments or offered to “work” with Congress on a given bill. We control for presidential political capital by including a measure of presidential approval from the opinion survey closest to the date of SAP issuance.

We report our model results for both length and the number of objections in Table 5. The first column of Table 5 reports the regression estimates from an OLS model predicting word count for all SAPs authored between 1987 and 2020 while the second column of Table 5 reports the regression estimates for the count model of objections. Both models are generally supportive of our expectations that presidential attention and objections are heavily influenced by political contexts. Because we interact partisan control and polarization, however, interpreting these results requires some additional care. In Figure 4, we report the marginal effect of both partisan control and polarization for each set of models. The first plot in the upper half of Figure 4 presents the effect of polarization on SAP length across levels of polarization. While polarization is predicted to lead to lengthier SAPs in periods of unified or fully divided government, it has no substantive effect on length during partially divided government. The predicted change in SAP word count over the interquartile range of polarization is roughly 302 and 270 more words, respectively, under unified and fully divided government. By contrast, the estimate change over this same range for periods of partially divided government is a mere seven-word increase in SAP length.

The next plot in Figure 4 reports the effect of partisan control of government when polarization is held constant at its median value. We find evidence of a small increase in the predicted word count across the categories of partisan control. Notably, it is only fully divided government that is expected to have a statistically significant impact on SAP length. Although SAPs are, on average, longer under divided government, the difference of approximately 53 more words does not constitute a statistically meaningful

11. Since polarization has increased monotonically throughout the period under study, we omit fixed effects for presidential administrations because the two measures will be highly correlated. Our main substantive conclusions for the other covariates are the same when we included fixed effects in a separate model specification to account for each individual president having tendencies to be more or less verbose in official communications.

TABLE 5
SAP Length and Number of Objections

	<i>Length</i>		<i>Objections</i>	
	<i>Est.</i>	(<i>SE</i>)	<i>Est.</i>	(<i>SE</i>)
<i>Political context</i>				
Partially divided	1,528.19	(886.72)	-1.31	(1.36)
Fully divided	232.47	(337.90)	-4.35*	(0.59)
Polarization	2,017.94*	(405.14)	0.68	(0.70)
Polarization × Partially divided	-1,966.85	(1,089.55)	1.70	(1.62)
Polarization × Fully divided	-217.19	(456.19)	6.11*	(0.76)
Midterm elections	44.02*	(19.06)	0.10*	(0.04)
Presidential elections	105.77*	(27.19)	-0.07	(0.04)
Presidential approval	0.62	(0.93)	-0.01*	(0.00)
<i>Bill characteristics</i>				
Appropriations	775.23*	(41.81)	0.81*	(0.04)
Defense and foreign affairs	153.01*	(31.95)	0.29*	(0.05)
Economics	-20.23	(12.94)	-0.05	(0.05)
Key vote	73.04*	(31.91)	0.11*	(0.04)
<i>Message characteristics</i>				
Floor	45.16	(26.43)	-0.08	(0.04)
Next chamber	61.23	(38.47)	-0.12	(0.06)
Resolving differences	-228.53*	(60.96)	-0.33*	(0.11)
Work with congress	285.84*	(17.65)	0.88*	(0.03)
Constitutional	503.58*	(44.62)	0.70*	(0.04)
Support	-53.21*	(22.53)	-0.75*	(0.06)
Oppose	96.97*	(20.69)	0.72*	(0.06)
Veto threat	314.31*	(27.93)	0.96*	(0.05)
Constant	-1,595.76*	(295.62)	0.43	(0.56)
<i>N</i>	4,612		4,612	
<i>R</i> ²	0.45			
<i>α</i>			0.69*	

Note: Cell entries are regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

**p* < .05, two-tailed test.

change. During periods of fully divided government, however, SAPs are predicted to be nearly 70 words longer and the difference in the marginal effects is statistically significant.

The bottom half of Figure 4 examines the effect of partisan control of government and polarization on the number of objections. The first panel reports the expected number of objections under the different categories of partisan control over levels of polarization. Unlike with word count, we now find more notable effects for polarization under fully divided government. An increase in polarization from the first to the third quartile is predicted to result in an additional 3.5 objections. In order to help contextualize the magnitude of this effect, it is important to note that the median number of objections is two, which means the estimated change is a 175% increase. We do find a smaller positive effect for polarization in the other categories of the partisan makeup of government. Under unified government, the estimated change in the number

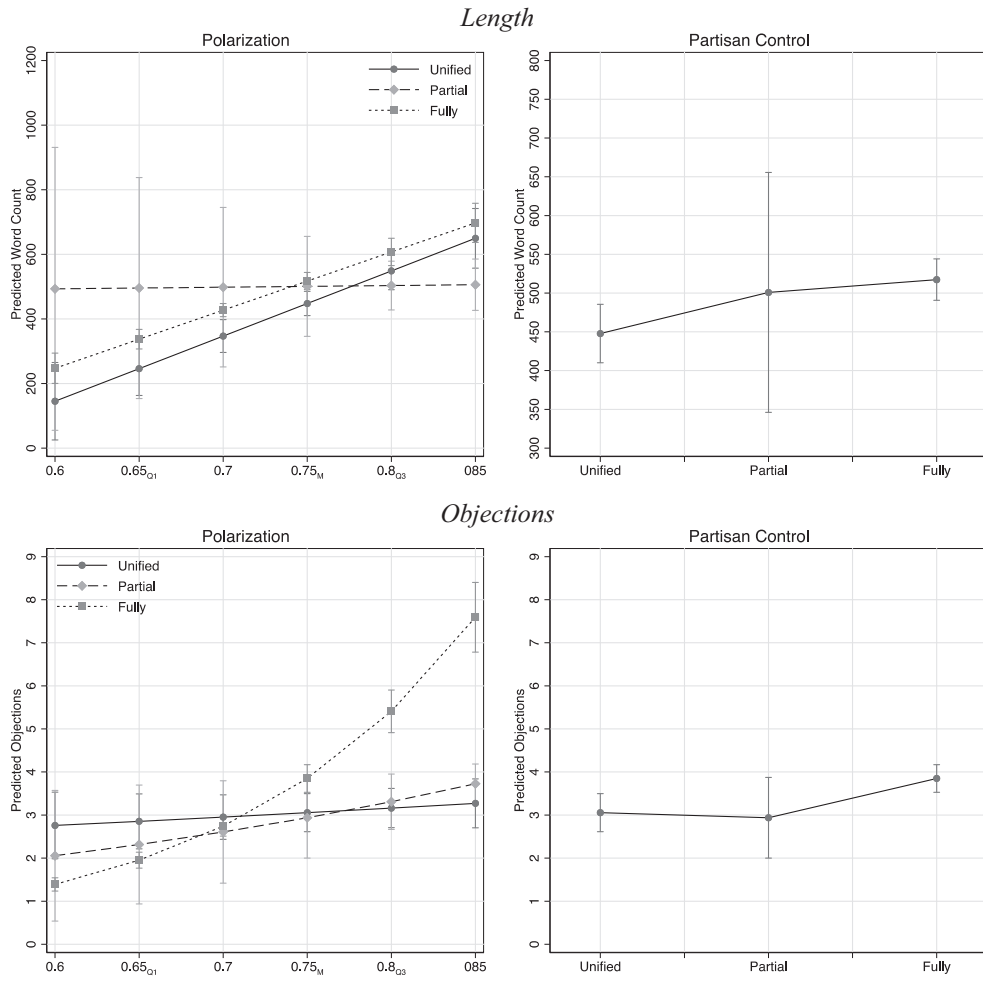


FIGURE 4. Marginal Effects of Partisan Control and Polarization.

of objections over the interquartile range of polarization is a mere 0.3 objections. For partially divided government, the estimated change is one additional objection, which still constitutes a 50% increase given that the median number of objections is two.

The final plot in Figure 4 reports the effect of partisan control of government when polarization is held constant at its median value. Overall, these estimates comport with our expectation that the effect of congressional partisanship will be conditioned by polarization. We find little substantive difference between unified and partially divided government as the predicted change is a decrease of -0.1 objections, which is not statistically significant. The comparison between unified and fully divided government results in an expected increase of 0.8 additional objections, which equates to a 40% increase.

The content of SAPs also varies along with electoral context. During midterm election years, presidents issue longer SAPs (by about 43 words) and offer marginally more objections (about half of an objection). In presidential election years, the estimates for length are also positive and statistically significant, with SAPs predicted to be roughly 105 words longer. Surprisingly, however, our results indicate that presidents actually issue slightly fewer objections per SAP. One plausible explanation for the observed patterns is that presidents may aim to issue more positive or credit-claiming SAPs when running for re-election. Interestingly, while presidential approval appears to have no effect on the length of a SAP, it does appear that higher approval is associated with a lower number of specific objections within SAPs. The predicted number of objections drops by 1.1 objections across the interquartile range of approval, from 44% to 60%.

We now consider the effect of both bill-level factors and SAP message content. Since the coefficients for the negative binomial regression model cannot be directly interpreted, we report the predicted marginal effects for both our bill and SAP content measures in Figure 5. Each of the bill-level characteristics is estimated to have the hypothesized effect on both length and the number of objections. Presidents are found to issue significantly longer SAPs on appropriations bills—by over 775 words. Similarly, a president will outline an additional five objections, which represents a 25% increase, on appropriations bills as compared to other types of legislation. With respect to the policy content of bills, presidents are predicted to issue significantly longer SAPs, by over 150 words, and outline more objections, an increase of roughly two objections, for defense and foreign affairs legislation. There is, however, no statistical relationship in either regression for economics legislation. For salient legislation, as measured by the

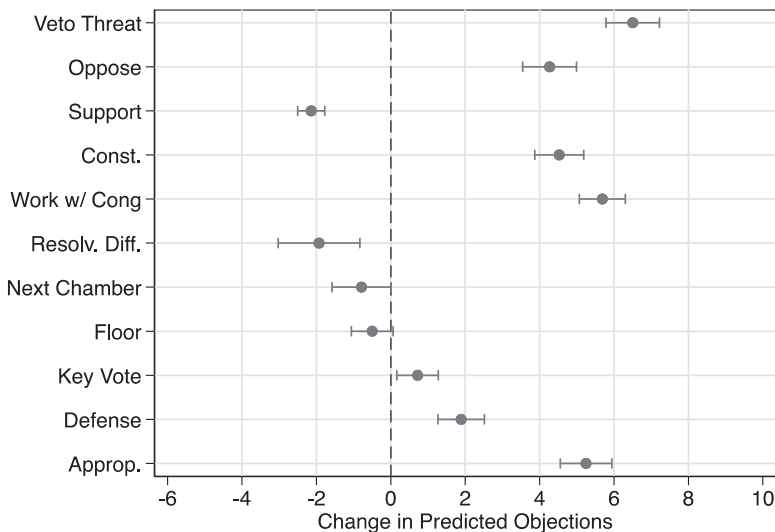


FIGURE 5. Change in Predicted Objections for Bill and Message Characteristics. *Note:* Each dot denotes the estimated change in the predicted number of objections for each bill-level characteristic and measure of SAP rhetorical content. The lines and bars represent the 95% confidence interval for each prediction.

presence of a key vote, presidents are predicted to issue longer SAPs—by just over 70 words—and marginally more objections. When taken as a whole, these findings suggest that presidents are mostly responsive to bills related to their traditional powers as well as more salient bills.

Next, we examine the results with respect to message content. First, in terms of timing in the legislative process, we find that there is no significant difference in the length or number of objections for SAPs issued at the floor or next chamber stages as compared to the baseline of SAPs issued before a bill reaches the floor in the chamber of origin. However, SAPs issued at the resolving differences stage are predicted to be significantly shorter, almost 230 fewer words, and have roughly two fewer objections. These results are consistent with our earlier contention that SAPs issued late in the legislative process are likely to be more position-taking messages intended to signal allies and win votes rather than bargaining with Congress over bill text.

We also find evidence that SAP length and objections are related to the kinds of rhetoric the administration deploys. Presidents who offer to work with Congress to improve a bill issue far longer SAPs, by roughly 285 words, and note significantly more objections, almost six additional objections). This pattern may be indicative of presidential bargaining over the details of legislation as it proceeds through Congress. When a president makes a specific reference to the Constitution or raises constitutional concerns, the resulting SAP tends to be longer, by approximately 505 words, and contains more objections, over four additional objections. While the causal relationship may be muddled (presidents might bring the Constitution up as a defense for objections), this pattern is consistent with the intuition that presidents will use SAPs to outline and defend their own conception of the constitutional borders of their branch when faced with potential congressional encroachment.

Unsurprisingly, SAPs vary in length and number of objections depending on whether a president supports or opposes a bill and whether the message contains a veto threat. SAPs that are generally supportive tend to be roughly 50 words shorter in length and have approximately one fewer objection. These findings suggest that supportive SAPs may be more about broad position taking than bargaining over content. When the White House uses SAPs to note general opposition to the underlying bill, they are approximately 100 words longer and contain an additional four objections. As expected, SAPs that contain a veto threat tend to be longer by over 300 words. Notably, veto threats are predicted to produce over 6.5 additional objections, which is an approximately 325% increase over the median number. It is interesting to note, though, that the estimated effect for veto threats and presidential requests to work with Congress are quite similar in magnitude.

Conclusion

Past accounts of SAPs have primarily examined them in relation to the use of other presidential powers, such as the veto (Guenther and Kernell 2021; Hassell and

Kernell 2016; Lewallen 2017) or signing statements (Ostrander and Sievert 2013b; Rice 2010). While there is value in understanding SAPs as they relate to other tools, these approaches capture only a portion of the goals underlying and strategies behind the many uses of SAPs. Our investigation is among the first to examine SAPs in their own right and to determine how these statements vary depending on political contexts. Ultimately, we demonstrate that presidents use SAPs to accomplish a variety of different goals, including position taking, raising specific concerns, issuing veto threats, discussing constitutional boundaries, and supporting favored legislation.

Our descriptive analysis of SAPs provides several new insights into how this tool is used by presidents. In particular, we demonstrate that SAPs are not entirely a negative power, as we find that presidents use supportive SAPs in over one-third of all cases. While prior research noted the potential for this purely rhetorical and positive use of SAPs (Sievert and Ostrander 2017), we provide a systematic account of how often they are used to support rather than oppose legislation. Furthermore, we demonstrate that in many cases, presidents will note their objections to a law in great detail without actually resorting to an explicit veto threat. In this way, SAPs capture a broad range of agreement and disagreement between the branches. We also find that SAPs use has changed over the past several presidencies. Although recent presidents have authored fewer SAPs, they tend to be more concentrated on salient legislation and used in instances where a president wishes to convey a veto threat. These findings are consistent with the pattern observed during the institutionalization of other presidential tools and indicate an important point of commonality between SAPs and other presidential messages or directives.

Our regression models examining SAP length and the number of objections illustrate that SAPs are a multipurpose presidential tool. Intuitively, we find that presidents tend to issue longer SAPs with more objections when one would expect more political disagreement between the branches (e.g., fully divided government), on salient legislation, when veto threats are issued, and during the appropriations process. But we also demonstrate that SAP length is responsive to the electoral cycle, suggesting that SAPs are a mechanism for presidents to communicate with a broader public beyond Washington, DC. We also find longer SAPs and more objections present where constitutional issues arise and in the traditionally presidential sphere of defense and foreign policy, which suggests that SAPs play a role in defining and defending the presidents' intuitional boundaries. And finally, we demonstrate that SAPs issued at the last stage of the legislative process tend to be shorter and have fewer objections. These findings are consistent with the intuition that late-stage SAPs are used primarily for position taking for swaying final votes while earlier SAPs are used, among other purposes, for bargaining with Congress over the content of legislation. Taken together, these findings provide strong evidence supporting a conception of SAPs as a multifaceted tool and show exactly how SAP use varies to fit the different political contexts faced by presidents.

Our analysis of SAP use and content suggests several avenues of future work. First, the fact that such a high percentage of SAP cases are relatively positive statements suggests that scholars may consider using these messages in studies of how presidents

push their agendas. SAPs are much more than vehicles for veto threats. Because SAPs are directed at a congressional audience, it may be the case that they serve as a compliment rather than a substitute for more public appeals such as public remarks. Second, the inclusion of constitutional language and objections in SAPs suggests a plausible connection between these messages and other presidential tools, such as signing statements. While we believe this is suggestive evidence that the White House may use SAPs and signing statements in coordination as part of a larger interbranch dialogue, future work should explore this link more systematically.

Additionally, more work can be done to determine if, when, and how Congress responded to presidential objections—not just veto threats—raised in SAPs. To do so, it will be necessary to track presidential objections and suggestions at the bill section level rather than examining the bill as the unit of analysis. It may be the case that presidents often successfully influence Congress without resorting to a divisive veto threat. Lastly, it may be profitable to connect veto threats with the actual use of vetoes in cases of no congressional concessions to determine how credible presidential veto threats are in practice.

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