

FACES OF CONGRESS:  
CONTEMPORARY MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN THE HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES

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## **ABSTRACT**

ANTHONY J. CHERGOSKY: *Faces of Congress: Contemporary Media and Communication Strategy in the House of Representatives*  
(Under the direction of Jason Roberts.)

I examine the systematic patterns underlying the amount of media attention obtained by members of Congress from national television broadcasts, including ideological cable news outlets and Sunday morning political talk shows. I posit that members' media visibility is determined by a two-step process: first, the perceived utility of media appearances for members in pursuing their goals, and second, by their ability to satisfy the media's crucial objectives of highlighting powerful figures and political conflict. Based on my theory, I predict that ideologically extreme members will make up a disproportionate share of members interviewed on cable news, while institutional leaders within Congress (such as party and committee leaders) will comprise a disproportionate share of members interviewed on the Sunday talk shows. I find that institutional leaders make significantly more appearances on Sunday shows than other members, while ideologically extreme members do not gain a substantively meaningful boost in visibility from these shows relative to less extreme members. Meanwhile, institutional leaders and ideologically extreme members make significantly more appearances on cable news than other members of Congress. My results display that the faces of Congress presented to the public differ across media types, with the goal-seeking behavior of members appearing to reinforce the permanent campaign in Congress.

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## **Introduction**

When President Barack Obama delivered his seventh State of the Union address on January 20, 2015, he saw before him the members of the new 114th Congress in the audience. Referencing the historically polarized, gridlocked, and unproductive years in Congress since the Republicans recaptured the House majority in the 2010 midterm elections (Binder 2015), Obama spoke directly to the members: “many of you have told me that this isn’t what you signed up for – arguing past each other on cable shows, the constant fundraising, always looking over your shoulder at how the base will react to every decision.” Here, Obama offered three diagnoses for the ills of contemporary congressional politics, and this paper shall examine his first – the emergence of cable news channels as an outlet for members of Congress to gain national exposure and, as Obama suggests, engage in combative, ideologically-charged rhetoric. What kind of ‘face’ does Congress present to the public through the media, and is Obama correct that this factor contributes to understanding why contemporary congressional performance has not lived up to the expectations of scholars, politicians, and the public alike?

In contrast to the executive branch of government, Congress lacks a single spokesperson or public face for the institution. While Obama represented the executive branch as its unambiguous public face when he gave the State of the Union address, there are multiple faces of Congress – from party leaders, to influential members of committees, to ambitious legislators seeking to make a name for themselves, to other members who may not fit within these categories but nevertheless gain media attention. Becoming a face of the institution is not a mandatory duty for members, but some in Congress undeniably seek and attain more media visibility than others. For instance, during the 112th Congress (which met from January 3, 2011 to January 3, 2013), Congressman Allen West (R-FL) was interviewed 72 times on the Fox

News Channel (among numerous other media appearances), while Congressman Morgan Griffith (R-VA) was not interviewed on cable or national newscasts at any point. Both members served in the majority party, and both were freshmen during this period. Given their commonalities, why did West become a face of Congress rather than Griffith?

Stated more generally, what explains the process by which some members, but not others, emerge as prominent spokespersons for the institution and become highly visibly political actors in the national media? Moreover, does this process feed into Congress standing out as the “broken branch” of government, characterized by partisan acrimony and lackluster deliberation (Mann and Ornstein 2006)? Scholarly attention has been devoted to describing the rise of the “permanent campaign” in contemporary American politics, with such work noting the blurred distinctions between campaigning and governing (Hecklo 2000). There is compelling evidence that changes in congressional procedures and institutions have embedded campaign-style dynamics into the legislative process (Brady and Fiorina 2000) as well as suggestive evidence that such changes have been accompanied by a rise in hyperbolic, combative rhetoric from members – particularly ideologically extreme members (Brady and Theriault 2001). This project aims to contribute a systematic inquiry into how congressional communication strategy feeds into the permanent campaign, which ought to command scholarly attention in the era of 24-hour news channels and the resulting increased opportunities for all members of Congress to obtain media attention, if they so choose. Particularly, if ideologically extreme members have gained the chance to ‘make noise’ and highlight conflict on newer types of media platforms – indeed, platforms that have increased in prominence or simply did not yet exist when many notable studies on the permanent campaign were conducted – then the permanent campaign may now be even more intense and pervasive than these prior studies recognize.

In what follows, I shall present a theory that carries the potential of broadly explaining congressional communication. Central to my theory, attaining media attention is a two-step

process that involves multiple actors: in this case, the individual members of Congress, and the media gatekeepers who transmit communication. A member of Congress must decide to pursue an ‘outsider’ strategy by sending a message in the media, and this member must then find a media venue in which he or she can transmit the message. For their part, I conceive of actors in the political media as motivated by the desire to portray powerful political figures and the goal of showcasing political conflict. Thus, once members have made the decision to seek media attention, their type and amount of attention will depend on their ability to satisfy these goals of the media. If they satisfy both goals, members will gain a significant amount of attention across a broad array of platforms. Those who can only partially satisfy the media’s goals, meanwhile, will be most successful in gaining attention from media outlets that are relatively lacking in elite reputations or selectivity about the actors that get covered.

I test my theory through measuring the number of television interviews conducted by members of the House between January 3, 2009 and January 3, 2015. During this six-year period, which spans the entirety of the 111th, 112th, and 113th Congresses, I counted television interviews conducted by members on two ‘ideological’ cable news channels (Fox News and MSNBC) as well as four Sunday morning political talk shows on national television networks (these shows include *Meet the Press* on NBC, *This Week* on ABC, *Face the Nation* on CBS, and *Fox News Sunday* on Fox). My theory carries the observable implications of institutional leaders becoming prominent faces of Congress in both types of media (but particularly on Sunday shows), while ideologically extreme members of Congress (who may actually hold limited power within the institution) become faces of Congress to a significant degree within the ideological niches of cable news but not on the Sunday shows. My results display that institutional leaders gain a platform to communicate on Sunday talk shows, while ideologically extreme members of the House attain a venue to convey their views on cable news – even when these members lack legislative clout or formal institutional power.



## **Goal-Seeking Behavior in Congress and the Media**

Some basic assumptions must first be established to begin crafting an understanding of why certain members become faces of Congress in the national media while other members remain anonymous on the national stage. I shall assume that members are motivated by reelection, the pursuit of good public policy, and the prospect of advancement within the institution of Congress (Fenno 1973). I also note that certain members engage in purposive behavior extending beyond the pursuit of individual goals, as these members are given leadership positions and charged with resolving collective dilemmas (Mayhew 1974). In general, then, goal-seeking behavior in Congress can be understood on individual and collective levels. Rank-and-file members lack positions of institutional prominence, so my focus turns to how communication strategies do or do not mesh with their individual goal-seeking behavior. I will then turn to institutional leaders and address how communication efforts fit within their responsibility to the members who gave them authority to resolve collective dilemmas.

The first question to address concerns what individual members stand to gain from seeking and obtaining publicity in the national media. As a first cut at this question, I examine the matter of which members opt for ‘insider’ strategies in pursuit of their goals, and which members opt for ‘outsider’ strategies. Insider strategies involve building and maintaining personal connections with other elites, working within established legislative institutions and processes, and engaging in deal-making and bargaining while generally avoiding the media spotlight. An insider strategy fits the goals of advancement within the institution and the crafting of good public policy through its emphasis on relationship building and negotiating. By contrast, an outsider strategy involves actively seeking the media spotlight. Members may use this approach to attract attention to an issue, engage in the ‘permanent campaign’ through attacking the other party and praising one’s own, and establish their expertise and influence

(Cook 1989). Consequently, outsider strategies can be used to pursue the goals of good public policy and increased institutional influence, but the methods encompassed within insider and outsider strategies could hardly be more different.

The purist-professional dichotomy provides useful insight about which members are particularly likely to employ an insider versus outsider approach when pursuing their goals. As members who tend to be ideologically extreme, purists are likely to express their views on issues to their colleagues and the C-SPAN audience through floor speeches because these members tend to lack formal institutional power within the legislative process, requiring them to find other ways to convey their positions and draw attention to their opinions (Maltzman and Sigelman 1996; Morris 2001; Rocca 2007). Indeed, purists are ‘outsiders’ in the legislative process and craft public relations strategies aimed at conveying their positions and perspectives on what constitutes good public policy. If they lack institutional power and wish to make an impact on matters of policymaking and agenda-setting, then adopting a media strategy aimed at indirectly pressuring other elites via public appeals may make sense for these members. Professionals, meanwhile, are content to let the party set the issue agenda and would therefore be inclined to employ a national media strategy to raise their own profile and pursue advancement within Congress and their party. As institutional ‘insiders,’ they maintain channels for their goal-seeking behavior aside from seeking national media visibility, since they can pursue their goals within established legislative institutions and processes more effectively than purists can (Cook 1998; Volden and Wiseman 2014).

To this point, then, my discussion implies that purists dominate congressional communication, while the professionals prefer an ‘insider’ rather than ‘outsider’ goal-seeking approach. However, party leaders have come to play a significant role in crafting and carrying out messaging and communication strategies. These leaders are charged with protecting and enhancing the brand of their party, which is accomplished through controlling the legislative

agenda and transmitting a positive image of the party to the mass public (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005; Groeling 2010). Importantly, party leaders now personally intervene with growing frequency in public relations matters and dealings with the press, as interacting with the media has become an increasingly prominent duty for them (Cook 1998). In addition, party leaders and their staff coordinate with the press offices of individual members to ensure that the party is staying ‘on message,’ and the leadership staff leverages its relationships with reporters and producers to shape which members make media appearances and get interview bookings on radio and television (Malecha and Reagan 2012; Vinson 2013). All told, the public relations arm of party leadership is far more prominent and powerful in the contemporary Congress than in previous periods of congressional history.

Through using both a general framework and a communications perspective, I have now discussed the goal-seeking efforts of members of Congress as well as the responsibilities and actions of party leaders. Engaging in national communications efforts is consistent with the institutional positioning and goal-seeking behavior of purists and party leaders. Professionals outside of the formal leadership apparatus should not view seeking national media visibility as an efficient way to obtain their goals – at least, relative to party leaders and purists. The next step in laying the groundwork for my theory is to move from the senders of communication to the transmitters, and craft an understanding of the goals sought by media gatekeepers.

The political media are drawn to conflict, making reporters and producers likely to give attention to politicians who are criticizing their own party (highlighting intraparty conflict) or the opposing party (underscoring divisions between the two parties). In addition, the media find authoritative sources more newsworthy than sources that lack political authority (Groeling 2010). Institutional leaders in Congress are therefore newsworthy based on both the former and latter criteria – their responsibility for the party brand makes them some of the central actors in

the saga of partisan conflict in Congress, and they are the agenda-setters who make crucially important policymaking decisions. Ideologically extreme purists are newsworthy based on the former criteria – their ideology certainly creates a clear contrast with the other side – but they are not as politically powerful as the institutional leaders.

These members engage in the negotiation of newsworthiness to determine what gets covered in the media and what does not. The negotiation of newsworthiness refers to the interactive process through which political actors and members of the media shape the content of the news, with political actors aiming to determine media access and the types of events and issues that become newsworthy, while members of the media decide whether to cover a story, the context of this coverage, and the level of visibility to offer the story (Cook 1989). The negotiation of newsworthiness ought to look different on cable news channels than on Sunday network talk shows. Indeed, cable news outlets have far more time to fill than Sunday shows, so their level of selectivity in determining which political figures to cover is necessarily lower.

For members who desire to make attaining media attention an element of their goal-seeking behavior, they are in a more advantageous position within the negotiation of newsworthiness when seeking attention from cable news outlets than Sunday talk shows. This is a simple matter of supply and demand – the demand for media attention from members likely exceeds the supply of attention from Sunday shows quite considerably, while this distinction between the media’s supply of airtime and the members’ demand for it is far more even for cable news. Members may determine that making public appeals on national media platforms is consistent with their goals, but this is a necessary rather than sufficient step in building their media profile. Once they have entered the ‘pool’ of potential faces of Congress, they must compete for media attention with fellow members – with this competition being particularly intense for some media platforms and less intense for others.

## **Explaining Member Visibility in the Media**

To be successful, an attempt at communication must have a willing sender and a platform on which the message can be sent. In the case of this analysis, the member of Congress must be motivated to give an interview and the media gatekeepers must be motivated to air the interview before any media appearance by the member becomes possible. The negotiation of newsworthiness must result in both the media gatekeeper and the member of Congress deciding that their goals are better served by conducting and airing an interview than by not conducting and airing an interview. From the standpoint of the individual member of Congress, this actor must opt in to becoming a face of the institution by determining that his or her goal-seeking behavior can be better facilitated by seeking media attention than by not seeking this attention. Indeed, the negotiation of newsworthiness cannot begin until a member has decided that this negotiation is even worth entering in the first place.

I continue my theoretical discussion through my assumption that all political news outlets generally desire to showcase conflict and influential sources. The crucial question for media actors in the negotiation of newsworthiness is the extent to which a member can help facilitate these goals. To the extent that media outlets are advantaged in the negotiation of newsworthiness, with the demand for attention from members exceeding the supply of media attention, media gatekeepers can be selective about which political figures get covered and offer attention to those who satisfy the goals of showcasing powerful figures as well as highlighting political conflict. To the extent that media outlets are not advantaged in the negotiation of newsworthiness, however, media gatekeepers may need to settle for only partially satisfying this set of goals. Thus, cable news outlets should be less selective than Sunday shows about which political actors to cover, advantaging ideologically extreme members who aim to gain attention from these platforms. Purists may not generally hold much institutional sway, but they are still political elites who can highlight partisan and ideological

conflict. Such members are in a more advantageous position within the negotiation of newsworthiness when they seek attention from cable news than when they aim to gain attention from Sunday shows or other media venues with relatively high levels of selectivity in determining who to cover due to the limited supply and stiff competition for attention.

Indeed, for the Sunday shows, the balance of power in the negotiation of newsworthiness and the responsibility of institutional leaders to protect the party brand prompt different expectations about which members emerge as faces of Congress in these venues. Here, the goals of the media actors push in the same direction as the goals of party leaders. Driven by the desire to portray conflict and showcase authoritative sources, Sunday shows should gravitate toward members of Congress who are ‘in the know,’ have institutional influence, and represent the focal points of partisan conflict. Interviewing members who reside within the party leadership system or have strong connections to this system fits these goals. For their part, institutional leaders can help fulfill their responsibilities for protecting and promoting the party brand name through making Sunday talk show appearances, as they can obtain visibility advocating for their party brand on a prominent platform, thereby promoting their status among the rank-and-file as leaders who faithfully perform their duties for the collective.

In sum, when the institutional leaders carry the weight of communicating for their party on the Sunday shows and the purists conduct a significant portion of the congressional communication on ideological cable news, the needs of purists, institutional leaders, and media gatekeepers are met. Purists lack formal institutional power but gain a friendly audience for advertising their positions when they make appearances on cable news outlets, which are well-served by the conflict that can be presented when ideologically extreme members hit the airwaves. In spite of purists’ relative lack of ‘insider’ influence within Congress, they are able to highlight political conflict and thus partially satisfy the goals of the political media, gaining a platform on ideological cable news due to the expanded supply of airtime. When the media’s

power in the negotiation of newsworthiness is increased and outlets can demand that members satisfy the goals of highlighting political conflict and showcasing powerful political figures, as is the case when moving from cable news programs to Sunday talk shows, the media actors prefer institutional agenda-setters and leaders to purist backbenchers. The tables are turned in the negotiation of newsworthiness, as the more exclusive and elite nature of the Sunday shows relative to cable news screens out members who are not sufficiently newsworthy. Institutional leaders in Congress, particularly those holding party leadership positions, are incentivized to appear on these shows to advance the party's agenda and brand, displaying their credibility to the audience and their colleagues in Congress.

I thus conceptualize congressional communication via the mass media as a two-step process. For a member to gain media attention, two conditions must be met: the member must view pursuing and attaining media visibility as consistent with his or her goal-seeking behavior, and the member must be able to at least partially satisfy the goals of the media venue from which he or she is seeking visibility. If a member decides that national media visibility serves no important purpose in his or her goal-seeking behavior, then the second step of my theory – the negotiation of newsworthiness in which members must partially or fully satisfy the goals of media actors to gain attention – is irrelevant. The two-step process I propose ends before the negotiation of newsworthiness has the opportunity to begin. Once members opt to pursue media visibility in the interest of seeking their goals, however, then their position within the negotiation of newsworthiness and their ability to satisfy the goals of the political media will determine their success in attaining media attention. I arrive at the following three hypotheses that represent outcomes I should observe if my theory is valid:

*Hypothesis 1:* The more extreme a member's ideological position, the more interviews he or she will conduct on ideological cable news channels.

*Hypothesis 2:* Leaders of parties and committees will be significantly more likely than other members of Congress to make appearances on Sunday talk shows.

*Hypothesis 3:* In contrast to ideological cable news channels, being ideologically extreme will not be sufficient to gain a member appearances on Sunday talk shows.

## **Data and Methods**

My two dependent variables of interest – visibility on ideological cable news and the Sunday shows – will be operationalized first through the sum of appearances made by each member on the Fox News Channel (FNC) and MSNBC, and second, through the sum of appearances made by each member on *Face the Nation*, *This Week*, *Meet the Press*, and *Fox News Sunday*. I have gathered data on all such television appearances made by members of the House during the 111th, 112th, and 113th Congresses (January 3, 2009 through January 3, 2015). For each member, I searched his or her name on LexisNexis and narrowed down the results by selecting the relevant television channels (FNC and MSNBC). I looked at each result to determine if the particular transcript included an interview with the member. I recorded the date, time, program, and channel for each interview. I then used the official websites for the four Sunday political talk shows on network television to find the guest lists for each episode that aired during this six-year period. I used these guests lists to obtain counts of appearances for each member, recording the date and program for each interview.

I must now describe the operationalization of the independent variables that I will include in my statistical models. I will begin by using DW-NOMINATE scores to operationalize the ideological positions of members. This is problematic because DW-NOMINATE scores are measured via roll-call votes, which may not always be ideological in nature and cause the scores to be dependent on the institutional agenda (Lee 2009). Still, DW-NOMINATE scores offer a significant amount of explanatory power for voting behavior across a simple left-right ideological dimension (Poole and Rosenthal 2007). I calculated the distance



between each member's score and the score of his or her party's median. Positive scores on this variable thus indicate members who are more ideologically extreme than the party median, while negative scores indicate members who are more ideologically moderate than the party median. In the interest of using an alternative method of tapping into the concept of ideological extremism, I also created a dummy variable that measures membership in two caucuses: the Tea Party Caucus and the Progressive Caucus. Members scored a 1 if they belonged to one of these caucuses and a 0 if they did not. Of the caucuses based on an ideological orientation, the Progressive Caucus is clearly the furthest to the ideological left, while the Tea Party Caucus emerged under the leadership of Congresswoman Michele Bachmann (R-MN) out of the conservative Tea Party Movement and its push to move the Republican Party to the right.

I also predicted that institutional leaders will be faces of Congress to a greater extent than non-leaders, and I operationalize this through two dummy variables: one variable measuring if a member was part of the party leadership (he or she is coded 1 if this is the case), and another variable measuring if a member was the chair or ranking member of a standing committee (again, such members are coded 1). Party leaders include the speaker, majority and minority leaders, and whips. The key is that each type of member is aptly considered an 'agent' of the party caucus due to the selection process that enables caucus votes on party and committee leaders. As agents of their party, institutional leaders are given responsibility to protect and promote the party brand – a critical idea underpinning my theory.

I include additional variables in my statistical models to help me observe the relationship between my independent and dependent variables of interest while accounting for potential confounding variables. With more years served in office, members might gain more opportunities to develop access to the media and contacts with reporters. Thus, my first control variable is a count of years each member served in the House prior to the beginning of each given Congress. Congresswomen may seek media visibility above and beyond that of their

male colleagues due to the underrepresentation of women in the institution, and gender may be correlated with ideology (the same could hold for racial minority members relative to white members). I use two dummy variables here, one for women (coded as 1) and another for racial minorities (coded as 1). Members of exclusive committees may gain more media visibility than non-members due to their more prominent policymaking role, and these members may differ systematically from other members in the sense that they were granted these assignments by party leaders and may thus be considered party loyalists. Following the definition of exclusive committees from Davidson et al. (2014), I code members as 1 for this variable if they belong to Appropriations, Energy and Commerce, Rules, or Ways and Means, and code them as 0 otherwise.

In addition, I include a dummy variable for member party affiliation, in which majority party members are coded 1 and minority party members are coded 0. Majority party members may be considered more newsworthy than minority party members due to their greater institutional sway, while minority party members may gravitate toward media platforms in large numbers to air their grievances due to their lack of policymaking power in the majoritarian House. Members who win elections with lopsided margins of victory may feel more flexibility to develop a national media strategy due to their electoral security, so I account for the percentage of the vote each member received in the previous election. Finally, I include two dummy variables – one for members of the 112th Congress (coded 1) and another for members of the 113th Congress (coded 1) – to account for any systematic variation in member media appearances across the three Congresses in my data set.

The unit of analysis in my study is a given member in a given Congress. My dependent variables are counts, so I use negative binomial regression in my analysis. I shall begin by regressing counts of cable news interviews on my independent variables of interest (deviation from the party median DW-NOMINATE score, and the dummies for ideological caucus

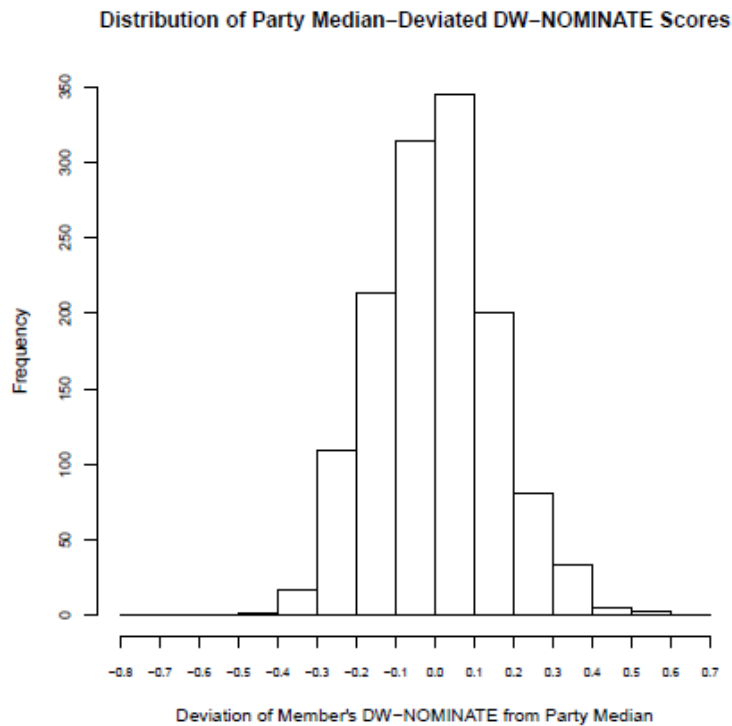
membership, party leaders, and committee leaders), along with my controls (previous vote percentage, years served in office, and dummies for exclusive committee membership, majority party membership, racial minorities, female members, membership in the 112th Congress, and membership in the 113th Congress). The second model (counts of Sunday show interviews) shall employ the same set of independent variables given that my theory and hypotheses demand comparison of member media visibility across these media types.

## Results

*Table 1: Descriptive Statistics*

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Sunday Show Interviews	1,329	0.533	2.379	0	41
FNC & MSNBC Interviews	1,329	4.020	8.144	0	73
Dev. from Party Median	1,329	-0.001	0.155	-0.734	0.619
Ideological Caucus Member	1,329	0.265	0.441	0	1
Party Leader	1,329	0.057	0.232	0	1
Committee Leader	1,329	0.097	0.296	0	1
Exclusive Committee Member	1,329	0.363	0.481	0	1
Majority Party Member	1,329	0.559	0.497	0	1
Previous Vote Percentage	1,329	65.675	12.347	39	100
Years in Office	1,329	9.445	9.370	0	58
Racial Minority	1,329	0.169	0.375	0	1
Female	1,329	0.174	0.379	0	1
Member of 112th Congress	1,329	0.335	0.472	0	1
Member of 113th Congress	1,329	0.330	0.471	0	1

I begin my analysis with an inspection of the descriptive statistics in Table 1. Eight of the variables that I shall use throughout my analysis are dichotomous, so the “mean” column can be interpreted as the proportion of the observations for each dichotomous variable coded 1. Thus, one observes that women and racial minorities each comprised less than one-fifth of the overall membership in the House during the time period under examination. Unsurprisingly, due to the limited quantity of the positions, less than 6% of members were in party leadership, less than 10% of members were either the chair or ranking member of a standing committee, and just over one-third (about 36%) of members belonged to an exclusive committee. Just over one-quarter of the members belonged to the Progressive Caucus or Tea Party Caucus.



*Fig. 1:* Histogram displaying the distribution of members' DW-NOMINATE scores deviated from the median score of their party. Higher values represent a member who is more ideologically extreme than his or her party median, while lower values represent a member who is less ideologically extreme than his or her party median.

One of my main independent variables of interest is not measured dichotomously and therefore demands visual inspection. Figure 1 displays the distribution of DW-NOMINATE scores for each member deviated from the party median. The distribution is roughly symmetrical. The median (0) and mean (-0.002) of the variable are approximately the same, underscoring the lack of skew in the dispersion of this variable. Importantly, the graph reveals extreme values on this variable that stand out from the rest of the distribution. For instance, four cases exceed 0.5 and two cases are less than -0.5. In spite of the symmetrical appearance of the distribution, then, I am alerted to the presence of these unusual cases.

My dependent variables display a distinct positive skew. The median number of FNC and MSNBC interviews is 1, while the mean is 4.02. Meanwhile, the median number of Sunday show interviews is 0 (as is the number of interviews at the third quartile, for that matter), while the mean is 0.533. As displayed in Figure 2 for cable appearances and Figure 3 for Sunday

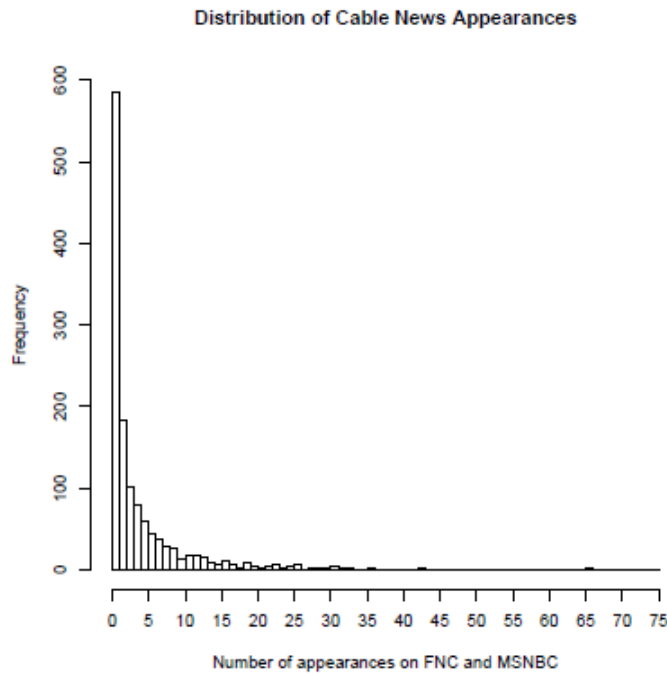


Fig. 2: Histogram displaying the number of appearances made on FNC and MSNBC by each member of the House during the 111th, 112th, and 113th Congresses (January 3, 2009 to January 3, 2015).

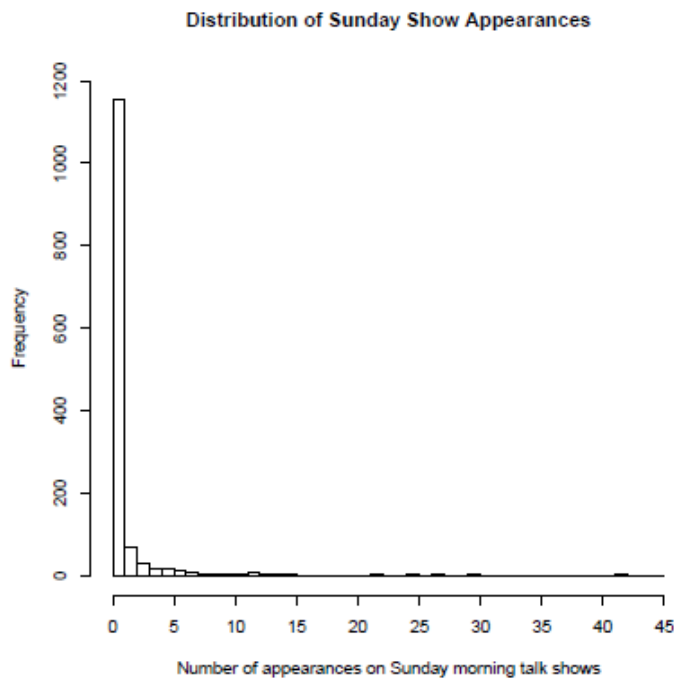


Fig. 3: Histogram displaying the number of appearances made on Sunday talk shows by each member of the House during the 111th, 112th, and 113th Congresses (January 3, 2009 to January 3, 2015).

show appearances, the modal number of interviews – for both cable news and Sunday shows – is 0. Of the members in my data set, 86.98% did not make any Sunday show appearances, while 44.02% did not make any ideological cable news appearances. These numbers and a visual inspection of Figures 2 and 3 substantiate a key assumption I made: the limited supply of airtime and the more elite nature of Sunday shows relative to cable news constrains opportunities for members of Congress to gain appearances on Sunday shows. Members are at a more advantageous position when engaged in the negotiation of newsworthiness with cable news gatekeepers than with Sunday show gatekeepers.

Having inspected the data in a descriptive sense, I now advance to my regression model that employs counts of FNC and MSNBC appearances as the dependent variable. I begin by interpreting the sign and significance of the coefficients in Table 2. Most importantly for my purposes, the coefficients for deviation from the party median, ideological caucus members, party leaders, and committee leaders are positive and statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ).

Thus, moving from the most moderate to most extreme members of the party increases the expected count of FNC and MSNBC interviews. In addition, moving from 0 to 1 on the ideological caucus member variable increases the expected count of FNC and MSNBC interviews, as does moving from 0 to 1 on the party leader and committee leader variables. Exclusive committee members made significantly fewer appearances on ideological cable news outlets than other members. The coefficient for years in office significantly differs from 0 ( $p < 0.01$ ), as higher values of this variable are associated with lower expected counts of FNC and MSNBC interviews, and vice versa. The coefficients for racial minorities and females do not significantly differ from 0, so I fail to reject the null hypothesis that white members and non-white members differed in their counts of FNC and MSNBC interviews, nor do I reject the null hypothesis that male and female members differed in their counts of interviews.

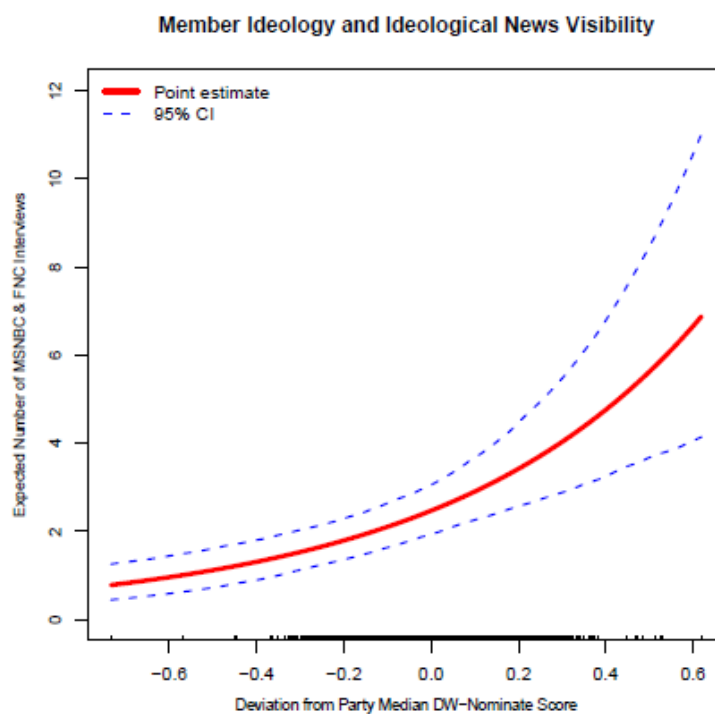
Table 2: Number of Interviews Conducted by Members of Congress on FNC and MSNBC

	Count of Interviews
Dev. from Party Median	1.615** (0.356)
Ideological Caucus Member	0.554** (0.123)
Party Leader	1.183** (0.209)
Committee Leader	0.573** (0.180)
Exclusive Committee Member	-0.223* (0.107)
Majority Party Member	-0.082 (0.103)
Previous Vote Percentage	0.006 (0.005)
Years in Office	-0.021** (0.006)
Racial Minority	-0.071 (0.144)
Female	-0.145 (0.133)
112th Congress Dummy	0.283* (0.121)
113th Congress Dummy	0.132 (0.121)
Constant	0.764* (0.304)
N	1,329
Log Likelihood	-2,934.979
$\theta$	0.353** (0.018)
AIC	5,895.958

Note: \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01

To this point, my discussion of the results has not focused on the actual quantity of interest in my analysis: the expected counts of cable news interviews conducted by members of the House. Thus, I created a hypothetical independent variable ‘profile’ for a member of Congress, holding the dichotomous independent variables constant at their modes, holding the

variables for years served in office and previous vote share at their means, and only varying the value of deviation from the party median DW-NOMINATE score. At the minimum value of this variable (-0.734), the model predicts a count of 0.751 interviews on FNC and MSNBC. At the maximum deviation from the party median DW-NOMINATE score (0.619), by contrast, the model predicts a count of 6.669 interviews. Moving from the lowest to highest value of this independent variable increases the expected count of FNC and MSNBC interviews conducted during a Congress by 5.918.



*Fig. 4:* Plot displaying the expected counts of FNC and MSNBC appearances made by members of the House during the 111th, 112th, and 113th Congress (January 3, 2009 to January 3, 2015), with the dichotomous variables (party leader, committee leader, exclusive committee, freshman, female, majority party, racial minority, ideological caucus) set at their modes, and the measures for years in office and previous vote percentage set at their means. The rug plot displays observations of the “deviation from party median” variable.

When visually inspecting the results as depicted in Figure 4, one notes that there is a curve in the relationship between deviation from the party median DW-NOMINATE score and the expected number of FNC and MSNBC interviews. The slope of the red line clearly increases as one moves from low to high values on the x-axis. I am therefore prompted to take a more



nuanced approach to understanding the relationship displayed. Moving from the lowest to highest value of this independent variable of interest might increase the expected count of FNC and MSNBC interviews quite noticeably, but the path from lowest to highest deviation from the median DW-NOMINATE score is characterized by inconsistent rates of change in the expected number of interviews. Returning to my model, I find that the expected count at the median value of deviation from the party median DW-NOMINATE score (0) is 2.454. Thus, the difference in the expected count of FNC and MSNBC interviews between the minimum and median values of the independent variable is 1.704, while the difference in the expected count of interviews between the median and maximum values is 4.215. As this shows, the difference in cable news visibility is greater between the most extreme member and the party median than between the party median and least ideologically extreme member.

I now address the effect of ideological caucus membership on the expected count of cable news interviews. I begin by determining the change in the expected count of cable news interviews when the ideological caucus dummy variable is set to 0 and 1 (and the other independent variables are held constant at their means and modes). For members not belonging to an ideological caucus, the expected count of FNC and MSNBC interviews is 2.452. Meanwhile, members belonging to an ideological caucus have an expected count of interviews equal to 4.267, resulting in a difference of 1.815 in expected interviews between caucus members and non-members. To further examine the effect of ideological caucus membership on cable news interviews, I set the ideological caucus dummy variable at 1, adjusted the deviation from the party median DW-NOMINATE score variable to various different levels, and determined the resulting expected counts of FNC and MSNBC interviews. With the deviation from the party median DW-NOMINATE score variable set at its minimum, the expected count of interviews is 1.305 (of course, it is unlikely that the most moderate member of Congress would belong to either the Tea Party Caucus or Progressive Caucus). With this

variable at its maximum, the expected count of interviews is 11.606. The expected count is 4.271 at the median and 4.987 at the third quartile of deviation from the party median DW-NOMINATE score. At the 90th percentile, the expected count of FNC and MSNBC interviews is 5.862, and the expected count of interviews is 6.541 at the 95th percentile.

My first hypothesis is supported. First, the coefficients for deviation from the party median and ideological caucus membership are statistically significant in the hypothesized direction. Moving from non-members to members of ideological caucuses results in the expected count of cable news interviews increasing by nearly 2, and moving from median to maximum values of deviation from the party median DW-NOMINATE score increases the expected count of interviews by 4.215. These figures may not seem spectacular in the context of a two-year Congress, but I emphasize that the hypothetical members I have been describing possess scant institutional power. Indeed, the member is a white male majority party member who is not a party leader or committee leader, does not serve on an exclusive committee, and has served nearly 10 years in Congress. From the standpoint of showcasing powerful political figures, such a member would hardly be the media's top choice when deciding which members of Congress to cover. Such a member can, however, potentially satisfy the media's desire to showcase political conflict.

My hypotheses also demand that I examine the difference in cable news visibility between institutional leaders and non-leaders. This involves identifying the change in the expected count of cable news interviews when the party leader dummy variable is set to 0 and 1 (and the other variables are held constant at their means and modes), as well as looking at the change in the expected count of interviews when the committee leader dummy variable is set to 0 and 1 (and, again, holding the other variables constant at their means and modes). Using these independent variable profiles, I first found that the expected count of FNC and MSNBC interviews for non-party leaders is 2.452, while the expected count for party leaders is 8.001.

This amounts to a difference of 5.549 expected interviews. Meanwhile, compared to the baseline of 2.452 expected interviews, committee leaders have an expected count of FNC and MSNBC interviews equal to 4.347, meaning that the difference in expected counts between committee leaders and non-leaders is 1.895. Thus, committee leaders have an expected count of FNC and MSNBC interviews that does not quite double the expected count of interviews for non-committee leaders, so this increase is not as dramatic as the growth in expected interviews when moving from members not in party leadership to those holding party leadership positions. In fact, the value of being a committee leader is similar to that of being an ideological caucus member, in terms of the boost in cable news appearances.

Having described my results for FNC and MSNBC interviews, I now turn to my results for Sunday talk show interviews in Table 3. As was the case for the first model I estimated, I find positive and significant coefficients for deviation from the party median, party leaders, and committee leaders. Moving from ideologically moderate to extreme members, evaluated against the median of a member's party, increases the expected count of Sunday talk show interviews. Party leaders have a higher expected count of Sunday interviews than members not in party leadership, and committee leaders have a higher expected count of Sunday interviews than non-leaders. Unlike the first model, however, the coefficient on ideological caucus members does not significantly differ from 0. The coefficient for exclusive committee membership does not significantly differ from 0, either. Going from minority party members to majority party members is associated with a significant increase in the expected count of Sunday show interviews, while going from congressmen to congresswomen is not associated with a significant increase in the expected count of Sunday show interviews. Previous vote percentage and years served in office display no significant effect on the expected count of Sunday show interviews. Finally, the coefficient for racial minorities is positive and

statistically significant, meaning that non-white members of Congress compiled a significantly greater expected count of Sunday show interviews than white members of Congress.

*Table 3: Number of Interviews Conducted by Members of Congress on Sunday Shows*

	Count of Interviews
Dev. from Party Median	1.722* (0.765)
Ideological Caucus Member	-0.176 (0.261)
Party Leader	2.823** (0.392)
Committee Leader	2.316** (0.348)
Exclusive Committee Member	-0.282 (0.229)
Majority Party Member	0.816** (0.227)
Previous Vote Percentage	-0.003 (0.010)
Years in Office	-0.006 (0.013)
Racial Minority	0.883** (0.293)
Female	0.455 (0.271)
112th Congress Dummy	0.500 (0.273)
113th Congress Dummy	1.329** (0.261)
Constant	-2.592** (0.666)
N	1,329
Log Likelihood	-831.301
$\theta$	0.105** (0.012)
AIC	1,688.602

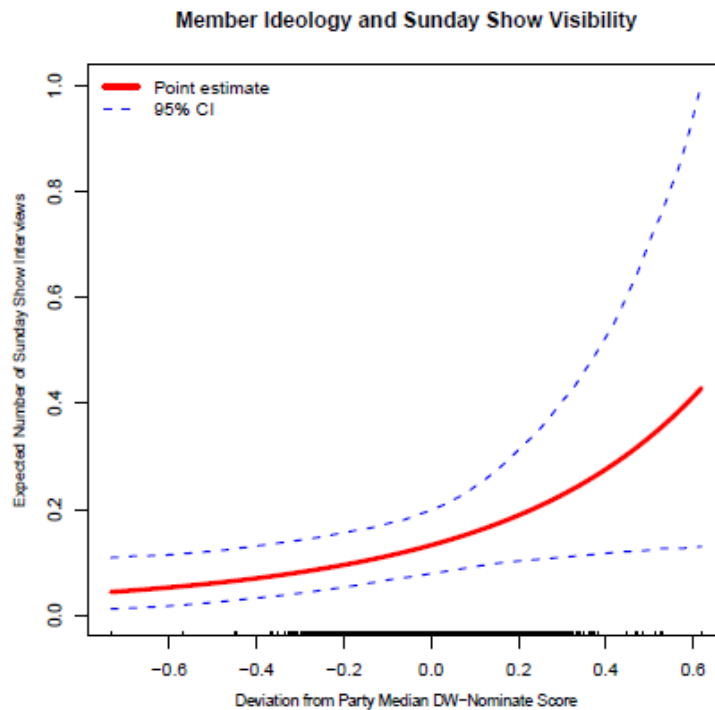
Note: \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01

Again, though, the discussion of my second model to this point does not address the quantity of interest: the number of appearances made on the Sunday morning talk shows by members of Congress. As was the case with the first step of my analysis, I will look at expected

counts of Sunday interviews across values of deviation from the party median DW-NOMINATE score, as well as between institutional leaders and non-leaders. To begin, I set all independent variables at their means and modes and calculated the expected count of Sunday show interviews for the member with the lowest observed value of deviation from his or her party's median DW-NOMINATE score, and the expected count of Sunday interviews for the member with the highest observed value of this variable. With the variable for deviation from the party median DW-NOMINATE score set at its minimum, the expected count of Sunday show interviews is 0.036. At the maximum value of deviation from the party median DW-NOMINATE score, the expected count of Sunday show interviews is 0.376. Members who do not belong to an ideological caucus have an expected count of 0.129 Sunday show interviews, while members belonging to an ideological caucus have an expected count of 0.109. Interestingly, when I set the ideological caucus variable equal to 1 and set the deviation from party median DW-NOMINATE variable at its 95th percentile, the expected count of Sunday show interviews is 0.171 – not even one-fifth of an expected interview.

At first glance, the visual depiction of the results shown in Figure 5 displays a pattern similar to the results for cable news appearances. Higher values on the x-axis are associated with higher expected counts of Sunday show interviews, with the slope of the red line increasing when moving from low to high values of the independent variable. Note, however, the scale of the y-axis. Among the most centrist members, the expected count of Sunday show interviews is approximately equal to 0. Importantly, the point estimate of expected counts of Sunday interviews does not even surpass 0.5 at any point along the x-axis.

I now advance to a discussion of how institutional leaders differ from non-leaders in expected counts of Sunday show interview. First, I held all independent variables at their means or modes aside from the dummy variable indicating a position in party leadership, and then calculated the expected counts of Sunday show interviews when this variable is equal to 0 and



*Fig. 5:* Plot displaying the expected counts of Sunday talk show appearances made by members of the House during the 111th, 112th, and 113th Congresses (January 3, 2009 to January 3, 2015), with the dichotomous variables (party leader, committee leader, exclusive committee, freshman, woman, majority party, racial minority, ideological caucus) set at their modes, and the measures for years in office and previous vote percentage set at their means. The rug plot displays observations of the “deviation from party median” variable.

when it equals 1. For non-party leaders with this independent variable profile, the expected count of Sunday show interviews is 0.129. Party leaders, meanwhile, have an expected count of 2.178 interviews. Additionally, compared to the expected count of interviews for non-committee leaders (which, again, is equal to 0.129), committee leaders have an expected count of 1.312 Sunday show interviews. My second hypothesis is supported, as is my third. I hypothesized that leaders of parties and committees would make significantly more appearances on Sunday talk shows than other members. While the expected counts of interviews are hardly massive, few members aside from institutional leaders display the ability to gain any visibility on the Sunday talk shows. I also hypothesized that being an ideologically extreme member would not, in and of itself, prove sufficient to garner a platform on the Sunday shows. When I set my two independent variables tapping into ideology at their maximum

values, representing the most extreme hypothetical member my data can portray, I do not even obtain half of an expected interview on these platforms during a Congress.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

My findings support my theoretical expectations. Leaders with formal institutional power displayed the ability to successfully engage in the negotiation of newsworthiness with Sunday show gatekeepers, while being ideologically extreme was not enough, in isolation, for members to gain any substantively meaningful level of attention on Sunday shows. Meanwhile, I found that institutional power was associated with more attention gained on FNC and MSNBC, but party and committee leaders by no means dominated the airtime on these cable news channels. In particular, members who lacked institutional power but were ideologically extreme gained visibility on cable news. For instance, merely being a member of an ideological caucus provided a boost in cable news airtime that was roughly equal to the boost provided by being the chair of a standing committee.

Importantly, in no respect did I find centrist members gaining significant visibility via the television media. Rather, my findings demonstrate that the airtime I examined was controlled to a significant degree by ideologically extreme members along with institutional leaders who serve as agents of their party. Viewers of Sunday shows and cable news would encounter members of the House who possess the goal and responsibility of improving their own party brand, discrediting the brand of the opposing party, or both. The two-step process of congressional communication that I propose – members deciding if and how to communicate through the media, and the subsequent negotiation of newsworthiness – results in the highlighting of political conflict when members make appearances on national platforms like cable news and Sunday shows. At the same time, the conflict likely takes on a different tone in these two venues. Party and committee leaders do have responsibilities to protect and promote the party brand, but they are also key players in the policymaking arena. Ideologically extreme

purists, by contrast, are generally not influential within the formal policymaking institutions of Congress. Moreover, as Cook (1989) observes, ‘outsider’ strategies are far more of a blunt instrument than ‘insider’ strategies, with outsider approaches proving well-suited for agenda-setting and engaging in the permanent campaign rather than dealing with the minutia of the formal lawmaking process. Institutional leaders must go back and forth between the insider and outsider modes, while purists appear free to pursue their good public policy goal through exerting pressure on leaders to adopt a particular agenda while building a base of support beyond their district and creating a stark contrast with the opposing party.

I conclude through revisiting my discussion of the permanent campaign in Congress. My theory and results display that the media’s goal of highlighting conflict interacts with the incentives of leaders and outsiders in Congress to make the public ‘face’ of the institution one in which partisan and ideological wrangling appear to be prominent characteristics. This is similar to the conclusions reached by Brady and Theriault (2001), who found that more ideologically extreme members received more mentions in newspapers and network newscasts. I hope that I have not only updated their account through examining different types of media outlets and investigating member interviews rather than mere mentions, but I have also aimed to develop a more complete account of the process through which the theme of campaign-style conflict dominates the public side of Congress presented through the media. The permanent campaign, as I perceive it through my study, simply results from members rationally determining whether or not to ‘opt in’ to emphasizing the pursuit and utilization of media attention while in office, with the media then selecting who to highlight from this ‘pool’ of members based on their ability to satisfy the goals of highlighting political conflict and powerful figures. Whatever its normative implications, the permanent campaign functions as it does because the political and media actors are appropriately responding to their respective sets of incentives.



Still, even as my theory and results make me strongly suspect that the two-step process of members seeking and gaining media attention is an important force behind the continuation of the permanent campaign, I now plan to inspect the content of television interviews and other media communication by members to gain a greater handle on the linkage between contemporary congressional communication and the permanent campaign. Indeed, it will be important to address the extent to which partisan rhetoric and ideological battles characterize this communication. And, moreover, my framework could be extended to any number of other communication platforms through which members might aim to convey messages. In sum, I hope this study provides an apt starting point for a rich inquiry into the institutional and strategic underpinnings of the permanent campaign in Congress. As my framework asserts, the design of the institution and the placement of individual members within it have consequences for the types of members who emerge as faces of Congress, which then has consequences for the persistence of campaign-style tactics like strategic partisan communication and ideologically-charged rhetoric being used in the context of governance. Much work remains to be done, but in this study, I have aimed to provide a piece of the puzzle in unpacking the story of how institutional roles and member objectives influence congressional communication and the permanent campaign.

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