

**Ventriloquism or an Echo Chamber? Measuring the Strength of House Members' Rhetoric
in Local Newspapers.**

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*Paper prepared for the 2015 Midwest Political Science Association Meeting.
Chicago IL.
April 15-19, 2014*

Ventriloquism or an Echo Chamber? Measuring the Strength of House Members' Rhetoric in Local Newspapers.

Political elites have been shown to excel at manipulating the information environment. Theories about press control by elites vary. Some argue that actors manipulate the media like a ventriloquist, using the press to restate their rhetoric verbatim, while others argue that journalists act with more agency when deciding the news. I examine the ability of members of the House of Representatives to manipulate news about their work in Washington. Members have an incentive to promote themselves in order to control the public's perception and attempt to leverage the local press through mediated homestyles; cultivating news agencies as a constituency using press releases that are ready-made for news consumption. The extent to which news articles echo press statements will vary depending on the complexity of the issue and the clarity of a member's expressed agenda. To test this relationship, data on press releases is gathered and is matched with corresponding district news coverage. Press releases and matched articles are examined using plagiarism detection software to evaluate overlapping use of representatives' rhetoric.

The media system in the United States is tasked with taking the millions of signals, events, actions and non-actions of political actors and condensing them down into meaningful and understandable stories that can be absorbed easily by the populace. Even with advances to media technology that allow individuals to customize and filter the news they receive, the prevailing wisdom is still that politics is a mediated experience that requires an intermediary to transmit information about events that are largely “out of sight, out of mind” (Lippmann, 1922). Since politics is chiefly a mediated experience (Edelman, 1995; Delli Carpini and Williams, 2001), proponents have argued that the effects of this sort of news-producing and disseminating process has become more vital because of its impact on citizens and their perceptions of government (Delli Carpini and Williams, 2001). Essential to understanding this process then, are the factors which affect the decisions to focus on particular events over others in the news media. Beyond the concept of gatekeeping (Soroka, 2012; Shoemaker, 1991), the news media has the ability to influence the political agenda by focusing attention and framing particular events as newsworthy while ignoring others. But who is actually controlling the news agenda?

This same agenda setting power can be influenced, however, by political elites; many of whom work to influence the frame used by journalists by providing their own accounts of the news. Agenda setting, the “successful transfer of salience from the mass media agenda to the public agenda” (McCombs, 2004: pg. 37) is based primarily on the belief that individuals have an interest in public affairs and a need for information about the world they live in but may not have direct access to. Since the early studies performed on undecided voters in North Carolina (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), the theoretical boundaries of agenda setting have expanded to include examinations of rhetoric, symbols and their importance to the successful adopting of the media’s agenda (Entman, 1993; Comstock and Scharrer, 2005), the psychological effects of

agenda setting on individuals (Soroka, 2003; Kinder and Iyengar, 1987), and the impact of advances to communication technology on the ability of the press to influence the public (Zeller, 2005; Hamilton, 2004). Political elites are argued to excel at manipulating and controlling the information environment that media work in, however empirical examinations have returned mixed results. The common belief is that political actors can manipulate the media like a ventriloquist, using the press to restate their rhetoric word-for-word. Journalists are autonomous actors, however, and one could argue that the world of journalists is more like an echo chamber, with various messages bouncing off the walls in differing degrees of clarity. We therefore have to ask the question: to what extent can representatives exert control over the content of media reports about their behavior in such an environment? That is, how successful are congressional press operations at controlling the message distributed to the public utilizing their own rhetoric?

Here, I focus attention on the production side of news making, specifically examining how the relationships that members of Congress develop with journalists affect patterns of news coverage that define the media's agenda. I am most interested here in examining the abilities of members of the House of Representatives to manipulate and control the agenda and topics concerning their work in Washington in the local press. I argue that Representatives have an incentive to manipulate local news outlets in order to control their public profile and that local press outlets are constrained by the need for a localized angle for discussing national issues. Members of Congress attempt to leverage local press outlets through the use of press releases sent out to local news agencies that are ready-made for news consumption and thus lower the costs of providing news to the public. In this way, member of Congress develop a *mediated homestyle*, in which they attempt to cultivate journalists as a constituency in order to use them as access points for the purpose of influencing public opinion in the district. One way in which

representatives cultivate journalists in this way, I argue, is through the use of press releases tailored to be used by local press outlets. Press releases are beneficial to members of Congress since they provide a frame for news stories that can positively affect a member's image in the eyes of their constituents.

In order to understand the level of success representatives have at controlling the message of news articles written about them in the local press, I analyze the content of press releases and corresponding coverage using publicly available cheating detection software in order to calculate the percentage of *echoing* of representative's press statements that occur in the press. Data on press releases was gathered utilizing members own web-pages on House.gov and matched with corresponding news coverage within their local district using the Newsbank research collection. I expect that press outlets will likely exhibit a significant amount of echoing of Representative's statements overall, and that the ability of news agencies to overcome economic and information constraints will mitigate the level of echoing that is exhibited overall.

Legislative Strategy and the Media Agenda

The choice in what events journalists focus on and write about on a day-to-day basis is the result of the norms and traditions of news making, interactions among news organizations and with specific agencies, and interactions with sources, which have their own agendas that they hope the news will focus on (McCombs, 2004; Soroka, 2012; Entman, 1993; 2007). News organizations, acting as strategic entities, decide the news agenda in order to maximize readership and reputation (Mullainathan and Heifer, 2005; Hamilton, 2004; Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2006). To this end, smaller and more regional newspapers rely on news about local representatives in order to stay competitive in the market and provide consumers with

information that is relevant to their interests. Arnold (2004), in his study of local news coverage and political accountability, supplies evidence that local newspapers do provide a sufficient volume of coverage to voters about incumbent legislators, however there is wide variation between individual papers. The media environment has been shown to be affected in some ways by member's own press operations, specifically during election years and in influencing the frequency of neutral stories written about a representative and their actions (Cook, 1989; Gershon, 2012; Romano, 2014). Substantive coverage of representatives and Congress tends to focus more attention to distributive benefits that legislators bring to the district rather than policy stances, however, since these types of messages are often more appealing to readers interested in the local impact of legislation (Zaller, 1992; Tidmarch et al, 1984; Grimmer, 2010; Grimmer et al, 2012).

In order to maximize attention and influence the public agenda, journalists must provide a frame that consumers can understand and accept. Entman (1993: pg. 52) offers the most widely accepted definition of a frame, stating that, "to frame is to *select some aspect of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation*" (emphasis in original). For local journalists and news agencies, the prevailing frame is one of localization, where journalists focus on the impact of news items in a more limited scope and focus on how stories will affect readers "at home" rather than painting a broad picture about issues under discussion and allowing local papers to remain competitive with the national press (Vinson, 2002; Schaffner and Sellers, 2003; Arnold, 2004; Larson, 1992). A localized frame only provides a single part of the various angles journalists utilize when making news decisions, the aggregation of which becomes the eventual story the public sees. From the

press perspective, the overarching concern when framing a story is whether it will provide readers with something they find interesting, that will stimulate readers to continue reading other stories and continue patronizing a particular outlet (Hamilton, 2004). This leads reporters to focus on the widespread news values of focusing on conflicts, attention-grabbing narratives, easily simplified stories, and events with some sense of novelty and timeliness (Gans, 1979; Graber, 2010; Larson, 1992).

There is a growing body of literature that provides evidence in support of the argument that political actors work with the media to produce the news by focusing on the interactions that occur between the two (Arnold, 2004; Gans, 1979; Fogarty, 2009; Vinson, 2002; Larson, 1992; Schaffner, 2006). While it can be reasonably argued that the final news product is created in part through interactions between representative A and news agency B, we cannot be certain of just how much of an interaction there is, and how successful representatives are at incentivizing journalists to focus on their work and manipulating the story to meet their goals. Entman (2007), in his work examining media bias, argues that while bias itself may be difficult to fully grasp, researchers can measure media *slant* by examining the differences in the skills and decision making strategies of journalists and media staffers of political actors, and the interactions between each entity. In this way, we can imagine the production of a news product as a type of political game in which actors utilize a series of incentives to coerce journalists to produce favorable news, and journalists respond by using their abilities as gatekeepers and agenda-setters to coerce representatives to give them greater access. Fogarty (2009) develops several models of news agency-legislator interactions in which signals sent by the electorate and investigated by the media are picked up on by legislators to varying degrees, and constrains a legislator's voting preferences in order to remain in office. Previous work by Sellers (2010) has shown that political

parties can be successful in manipulating the frame of news coverage so long as members maintain a single, coordinated media message. Likewise, Domke et al. (2006) finds that members of executive agencies have similar success in the media so long as they remain “on message” with the President. However, how does this sort of result translate when we focus attention on local media sources and the messages of individual members of Congress?

Ventriloquist Dummies and Echo Chambers

The ways in which representatives present themselves via press statements has a significant impact on the ability of a legislator to forge an electoral connection (Grimmer, 2010). Variations in the types of messages transmitted to the public by representatives have been shown to have a significant impact on constituent opinions (Grimmer et al, 2012). In order to influence constituent opinion, legislators must act outside of their official capacity as decision makers and interact with constituents through various means, the most well-known of which is the development of personal “homestyles” when directly communicating with the public (Fenno, 1978). In order to assess the success of these efforts, one can measure how strongly constituents believe that legislator A is at standing for their interests via the analysis of “fit,” or congruence – the level of correspondence between the actions of legislators and the desires of the public (Miller and Strokes, 1963; Golder and Stramski, 2010). Implicit in these theories is the assumption that a representative’s actions are known to the public, and that this knowledge was developed independently. This neglects the fact that representatives allocate significant amounts of time and resources to ensure that constituent reactions to their behavior is framed in a way that will bolster support in the district (Arnold, 1992; 2004; Fenno, 1978; Mayhew, 2000; Grimmer, 2010). Representatives cannot interact personally with constituents on a daily basis, however, and must also rely on the media in order to successfully control public support (Schaffner and

Sellers, 2003). Whether direct or indirect, when interacting with constituents, “legislators use tools of communication to explain to constituents why their representative is effective.

Legislators use this communication to *define* the type of representation they provide, through the creation of homestyle” (Grimmer, 2010: 627).

In order to influence the perception of the public, representatives have increasingly allocated resources to media operations within their offices (Born, 1982, Romero, 2006). This is done with the hope that press operatives can incentivize media agencies to accept and broadcast a representative’s message with little editorial framing. While representatives have their own style of influencing the perceptions of the public at a personal level, it is the mass media largely controls the regular transmission of messages from public figures to the mass public. In order to engage the electorate, therefore, members of Congress must engage in a form of impersonal influence (Mutz, 1998), relying on indirect contact and associations in order to influence the public’s perception about their actions and behaviors while in Washington. News agencies are autonomous agencies with their own interests and beliefs on what constitute a “good story,” and have the ability to conduct their own investigations into the behaviors of representatives in the legislature. This could potentially lead to stories that portray a representative acting out of step with the political beliefs of the district they serve. The interaction between news agencies and representatives, therefore, creates a type of mediated homestyle, in which representatives attempt to brand themselves using their own unique styles and rhetoric while appealing to the journalistic norms and standards of the news. Essentially, representatives and their press operations attempt to “cultivate a constituency” in the press in order to incentivize journalists to convey their behavior in a positive light. The new “weapons of combat” (Zaller, 1999: pg. 1-1) are the press releases, statements, press conferences and “spin” that representatives put on their work in order

to reassure the public that they are acting in the best interests of the district and the nation. Members of Congress and their staffs are afforded several opportunities to strategically insert themselves into the process of perception building. Representatives work with the media by developing personal relationships with journalists, editors, and news agencies (Gershon, 2012; Cook, 1989; 2005), managing media gatekeeping by varying the amount of statements coming from their offices (Soroka, 2010; Shoemaker, 1991), and inserting their own narratives into the frames of stories to manage the agenda setting function of the media in the district (McCombs, 2004; McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Entman, 2007).

Here, I focus on the concept of *ventriloquism* and *echoing* that occur in the final news product by analyzing the level of congruence that exists between the press releases of members of the House of Representatives and corresponding local news agencies. In order to insert themselves into the news production process, members of Congress utilize a number of press releases which are designed specifically for press consumption (Cook, 1989). Newspapers, especially local papers, are often subject to economic constraints that make it difficult to dedicate time directly to investigating and observing the actions of members of Congress in order to cover what representatives do in the legislature (Vinson, 2002). To fill this gap, editors and journalists often rely on press releases sent out from congressional offices (Cook, 1989; Arnold, 2004; Vinson, 2002; Schaffner, 2006; Grimmer, 2010). Press secretaries commonly believe that they will have a high degree of success generating news coverage with press releases (Cook, 1989; Gershon, 2012). Cook (1989) notes, however, that press releases are far more successful at generating attention to specific topics, rather than controlling the language used by journalists to describe members' actions. The use of press releases as a source in journalists' articles is often referred to as "ventriloquism" by scholars (Grimmer, 2010: pg. 5) due to the fact that releases

can often be duplicated as news stories almost verbatim, “much like a ventriloquist’s dummy.” Printing of press releases in this way is commonly believed to be done more often by smaller newspapers, and newspapers that are constrained economically in other ways. Table 5.1 presents an example of ventriloquism of Sam Farr’s (D-CA) press statements by the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. The press release and subsequent article focus on a planned workshop for immigrants looking to gain citizen status in the United States. While the language of the September 3, 2010 article is rearranged slightly, it bears a striking resemblance to the previously released statement made by Farr’s office on September 2, 2010.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The factors that lead to press ventriloquism may vary depending on certain characteristics of the news agency and characteristics of a district’s representative, however, and the concept of ventriloquism may not be the norm for many news outlets. Representatives who work with the press and develop a mediated homestyle can have some influence over the eventual frame of a news story through the use of press releases. While this influence over the frame can be beneficial by leading journalists to write more positive articles, representatives must still overcome the hurdle presented by norms of newsworthiness in order to affect the press agenda. Contrary to the idea of direct copying of press releases and ventriloquism, I propose here that legislative press releases – especially those sent out by members of the House of Representatives – exist inside what can be described as an “echo chamber.” The concept of an echo chamber is based on the idea that statements made by members of Congress are often picked up by the press to varying degrees based on characteristics of the news agency – such as economic constraints and the ability of an agency to provide independent investigations – as well as characteristics of the representative and the district they serve. Some legislators are more adept at creating

statements that the press will utilize, and thus are better at controlling journalists like “ventriloquist dummies.” The relationship between the frequency of press releases distributed and news articles produced is rarely perfectly correlated, however, and members of the House are often not the only source of information used by news editors and staff when generating a story. The use of a member’s press releases and the variation in the level of congressional rhetoric that ends up in a final news product, therefore, is often more disbursed, leading the press to echo the sentiments of a legislator without explicitly becoming a representative’s mouthpiece, or “partner in propaganda” (Bagdikian, 1979).

Briefly, Table 5.2 presents an example of press echoing of a statement made by Paul Tonko (D-New York) by the *Albany Times-Union*, which serves Tonko’s district. As the side-by-side comparison shows, the level of clarity between the press release distributed by Tonko’s office on September 2, 2010 and the subsequent news article printed by the *Times-Union* on September 3, 2010 is focused specifically on a few key quotes in Tonko’s press release. The *Times-Union* focuses specifically on Tonko’s call to increase the level of oversight by public safety officials after a gas leak evacuated several homes in New York’s 21st district. The article falls short of emphasizing the potentially catastrophic impact that could occur if the cause of the leak is not discovered, an opinion that is emphasized by Tonko’s statement. The author of the *Times-Union* piece does use the press release and statements made by Tonko as the main subject of the final article; however the final story does not completely copy the statement and utilizes the release to create a concise, short article that explains the representative’s feelings regarding a local event.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Data

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

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

[Insert Table 3 about here]

In order to measure the saturation of a legislator's press releases in a local news outlet, each member was matched first to a local newspaper that services the representative's district. Afterwards, news articles were scraped from each newspaper utilizing keyword searches of the Newsbank Digital Archive, which provides a comprehensive list of several thousand local, regional, and national newspapers within the United States. The final sample contained 10,276 news articles, collected based on whether a representative's name was mentioned in the article.

To determine if a press release from a representative's office was used in a newspaper, I used publically available cheating detection software to analyze whether a press release and newspaper had similar content (Bloomfield, 2008). Table 5.3 presents some brief descriptive information about the initial results of the detection analysis. Overall, the software was able to detect 897 newspaper-press release dyads which contained a percentage of quotes, paraphrasing, or explicit plagiarism in newspapers from congressional press releases. Of the 10,087 press releases sampled, only 8.81% were found to be used in a corresponding news article. The average number of press release by a news agency included in the sample was approximately fifteen total. In column six of Table 5.3, the average percentage of press releases that was copied by news articles for each member of the House. The range of use is between 0.0% - indicating that there were no measurable similarities between a member's press releases and news articles – to 57.7%, indicating a high level of copying. On average, members' press releases were copied by news agencies, either in quotes, paraphrasing, or direct plagiarism, a total of 18.36% of the time.

One way in which representatives may cultivate journalists in order to influence the news is by having media operations tailor press statements in a way that is easily transformed into a story by journalists. Among the subjective factors that journalists consider when writing the news is the level of readability that a story has. Readability, the ability of a text to be understood by its audience, has received a great deal of attention in the fields of literacy and education, and has previously been used in political science in studies concerning ballot question readability (Reilly and Richey 2011), understanding and absorbing information in newspaper articles (Johns and Wheat 1984), policy making strategies in divided government (Colomer, 2005), and the clarity of jury instructions (Charrow and Charrow, 1979). The first measures of readability were

developed in the middle of the 20th century in an attempt to better quantify and evaluate the literacy of students. While several measures of readability now exist, the baseline of each measure is the difficulty an individual has with reading and assessing a piece of writing. Basic models, such as the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Formula translate scores into a “grade level” for a piece of writing, which allow evaluators to better assess whether a piece of prose can be understood by a particular audience. Measures of readability are calculated utilizing a mixture of discrete features in a text, such as the number of words, characters, sentences, or syllables. Each of these features are easily observable and quantifiable characteristics of the text, the underlying theory being that the shorter and simpler a word or sentence, the easier it is for an individual to understand. Here, I rely on several factors that may influence the decision to replicate the language of a press release in order to examine the level of skill a representative has at providing journalists with news products they can use. Specifically, I include the traditional Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (FKGL) index and the Dale-Chall Readability Score (DCRS), which measure readability utilizing two distinct formulas, as well as the number of syllables and difficult words in a press release to act as controls for the length of a document and the amount of “jargon” in the text respectively.

Findings

The average percentage of a member’s press releases that was copied by corresponding news articles was analyzed using an OLS regression. Two models were tested in order to examine the impact of including factors that may be significant to mediated homestyle. The first model focuses primarily on variables that have previously been shown to impact the likelihood of press attention in the media. Factors believed to be significant to causing variations in the level of press echoing are based primarily on characteristics of the representatives themselves,

such as demographic features like race and gender, as well as terms in office and age. Members own behavioral traits, such as ideological extremism based on the Poole-Rosenthal scores as well as bill sponsorship and the number of press releases distributed by a congressional office are included to examine whether behavioral characteristics are cause the press to adopt the language of a representative more readily. Frequency of press releases is believed to have a curvilinear relationship, however, based on previous research performed by Schaffner, Schiller and Sellers (2003) and Romano (2014). Finally, characteristics of the news agency are included to test whether factors such as daily circulation, chain ownership, and whether the newspaper has a bureau in Washington significantly impact the ability of a press agency to generate news items free from the manipulation of congressional press offices. Table 4 presents summary statistics for each of the variables utilized in the model.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

The results of the OLS regression analysis are displayed in Table 5. While certain demographic features - such as being a minority in Congress or being female - were believed to spark more press attention and thus increase the likelihood that members of the press will echo statements sent out by these representatives, the analysis here finds that there is no significant effect of either two demographic characteristics on the level of press echoing in the model. Likewise, terms in office is not found to have a significant impact on press echoing, however it is signed appropriately based on previous theories of press attention to more senior members (Gershon, 2012; Romano, 2013). The amount of bills sponsored by a member of Congress, however, was found to increase the level of press echoing. Based on the results in Table 5, an increase in the number of bills sponsored by a member of the House increases the average percentage of press echoing by 0.241 points, all other variables held constant. Bill sponsorship is

an activity that both representatives and members of the press find newsworthy, since representatives can utilize sponsorship as a way to provide public goods to the district, and journalist can easily craft stories that have a local angle which readers can understand. Adding in variables to test the specific factors that lead to a more mediated homestyle does not significantly affect the strength of bill sponsorship on press echoing, as well. Even accounting for mediated homestyle variables, an increase in the number of bills sponsored by a representatives lead to a 0.252 percent increase in the level of press echoing by local newspapers.

[Insert Table 5 about here]

Looking at characteristics of the newspapers included in the models, the analysis in Table 5 shows that the daily circulation of a newspaper actually has the effect of decreasing the level of press echoing that occurs overall. In Figure 1, the daily circulation of a newspaper is plotted along with the predicted level of press echoing in order to show how increases in the daily circulation of a newspaper decrease the expected level of press release mirroring by news agencies. Overall, holding other variables constant, an increase in the logged daily circulation of a newspaper has the effect of lowering the percent average level of press echoing by -3.198 points. This amount is not significantly affected by including factors attributed to a representative's mediate homestyle, with the impact of an increase in daily circulation decreasing the percentage of press echoing by -3.541 points. These results suggest that, following theories put forward by Kaplan (2006) and others, news agencies exist in an open system which constrain their ability to independently produce news on a daily basis, and the ability of a certain outlet to overcome certain constraints – such as economic constraints caused by their level of circulation or information constraints based on their ability to conduct independent investigations in the

chamber – will significantly affect whether a journalist must rely on legislators as a primary source of information.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Adding factors that can be attributed to a member's mediated homestyle does have an invaluable effect on our understanding of what causes press outlets to adopt the language of congressional press statements. Including variables ascribed to a representative's media tactics (such as number of press releases and the readability of those press releases), allows us to explain 18.7% more of the variance in the model itself ($R^2 = 0.447$). Interestingly, the number of press releases sent out by a member's office does have a significant, positive effect on the level of press echoing that occurs in local newspapers. Increasing the number of press releases has the effect of increasing the level of press echoing by 0.080 points in the model. This is conditioned, however, by the inclusion of the quadratic function to test whether press releases have a curvilinear relationship with press plagiarism. Accordingly, it should be understood, based on the results in Table 5, that while increasing the level of press releases does have a positive effect, this effect can be mitigated slightly by sending out too many releases at one time. Controlling for length of press releases as well as the number of difficult words in a release also had the expected effect on press echoing. Increasing the length of a press release (measured based on the number of syllables in a release), increased the amount of echoing in a news article by 0.024 points, while using more difficult words in a release had the effect of decreasing the level of press echoing by -0.210 points per word used.

The key feature of any text is its readability, however, and here the results in Table 5 show some mixed results. According to the results in full model presented in Table 5, an

increase in the difficulty of a text, according to the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (FKGL), has the effect of decreasing the overall use of echoing by the local press by -3.263 points. This makes sense, as studies have found that journalists often write at approximately a 9th grade reading level to ensure the maximum number of readers comprehend a given news story. An increase in the readability of a press release, therefore, should decrease the likelihood that it will be utilized verbatim by a journalist, since they would need to rewrite the release in order to cater to a more general knowledge audience. However, this finding is opposed to the results found when examining press echoing using the Dale-Chall Readability Score (DCRS). Unlike the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level, the results in Table 5 show that an increase in the readability of a press release when measured using the DCRS has the effect of increasing the amount of press echoing by 8.439 points. This is likely due to the fact that the FKGL and DCRS both measure readability in fundamentally different ways. Whereas the FKGL primarily takes into account the basic attributes of a text, the DCRS accounts for the complexity of language used.

Conclusions

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

legislators, and allow representatives to manipulate the news that is distributed to constituents through local news outlets.

Here, I have focused attention on the ability of members of the House to successfully manipulate the language and topics used by members of the press to describe political events as well as member's own actions in Washington. Using a unique sample of the press releases of sixty representatives and corresponding news stories from local news outlets, I have shown that there is a significant level of echoing that occurs between members of Congress and the press, however the level of mirroring is not so high as to conclude that members of the press are mouthpieces for representative's to utilize. The findings here provide evidence that variations in the political characteristics of representatives and the limitations of news agencies have a significant impact on the amount of echoing that occurs in the local press, and thus the ability of representatives to manipulate the language used to describe their actions to the electorate.

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

Table 1: Side-by-Side Comparison of Sam Farr (D-California) and the Santa Cruz Sentinel Newspaper

<i>The Santa Cruz Sentinel (September 3, 2010)</i>	<i>Sam Farr Press Release (September 2, 2010)</i>
Citizenship workshop Saturday Congressman Sam Farr, D-Carmel, will host his first citizenship workshop from noon-3 p.m. Saturday at	WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Sam Farr (D-Carmel) on Saturday will host his first citizenship workshop, to take place in Watsonville. The goal of the event is to increase the number of citizenship applicants

Table 2: Side-by-Side Comparison of Paul Tonko (D-New York) and the Albany Times-Union Newspaper

<i>The Albany Times-Union (Sept. 3, 2010)</i>	<i>Paul Tonko Press Release (Sept. 2, 2010)</i>
GAS LEAK BRINGS CALL FOR OVERSIGHT Times Union, The (Albany, NY) - U.S. Rep. Paul Tonko sent letters to state and federal agencies on Thursday, calling for more oversight after a propane gas leak last week in Schoharie	Congressman Paul Tonko today sent letters to U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and NYS Public Service Commissioner Garry Brown calling for answers and oversight in the wake of the Texas Eastern propane pipeline leak

Table 3: Measuring the Coverage Rate of House Press Releases

<u>Name</u>	<u>Newspaper</u>	<u>Number of Press Releases</u>	<u>Number of News Articles</u>	<u>Frequency of Press Release Use</u>	<u>Average Percent Usage</u>
Aaron Schock	Peoria Journal Star, The (IL)	114	459	6	20.2%
Adam Putnam	Ledger, The (FL)	140	158	9	24.6%
Al Green	Houston Chronicle	81	143	0	0.0%
Alcee Hastings	Sun Sentinel (FL)	106	201	54	29.4%
Anna Eshoo	Daily Post/Daily News (Palo Alto)	171	73	7	18.4%
Bart Stupak	Traverse City Record-Eagle (MI)	369	98	25	23.2%
Chellie Pingree	Portland Press Herald/Main Sunday Telegram (ME)	373	228	18	27.6%
Chris Van Hollen	Baltimore Sun, The (MD)	367	51	1	10.0%
David Wu	Oregonian, The (OR)	76	108	1	5.0%
Donna Edwards	Baltimore Sun, The (MD)	219	31	0	0.0%
Duncan D. Hunter Dutch	San Diego Union-Tribune	74	53	0	0.0%
Ruppersberger	Baltimore Sun, The (MD)	159	100	7	9.0%
Ed Perlmutter	Denver Post, The (CO)	241	149	7	7.4%
Eddie Bernice Johnson	Dallas Morning News	214	302	4	11.8%
Elijah Cummings	Baltimore Sun, The (MD)	244	35	0	0.0%
Erik Paulsen	Twin Cities Star-Tribune, The (MN)	120	94	6	24.5%
Frank Wolf	Winchester Star	212	93	18	22.4%
Fred Upton	Kalamazoo Gazette, The (MI)	79	236	7	20.9%
Gary Miller	San Gabriel Valley Tribune (CA)	39	70	13	17.0%
Ginny Brown- Waite	Tampa Bay Times (FL)	81	212	24	25.6%
Glenn Thompson	Centre Daily Times (State College, PA)	162	58	5	6.6%
Gregg Harper	Starkville Daily News (MS)	83	57	10	39.4%
Hank Johnson	Atlanta Journal-Constitution (GA)	168	161	8	29.6%
James Langevin	The Pawtucket Times	182	43	14	41.3%
Jim Costa	Fresno Bee	208	339	13	14.4%
Jim McDermott	Seattle Post-Intelligencer	135	126	16	44.0%
Jim Moran	Alexandria Gazette Packet (VA)	144	96	6	32.2%
Joe Pitts	Intelligencer Journal-Lancaster New Era	121	188	12	25.2%
Joe Wilson	The State (Columbia, SC)	206	316	14	15.4%
John Mica	St. Augustine Record (FL)	153	146	11	24.2%

John Tierney	Salem News, The (MA)	143	300	5	30.0%
Judy Chu	San Gabriel Valley Tribune (CA)	77	183	17	14.7%
Kathy Castor	Tampa Bay Times (FL)	171	276	10	12.7%
Kenny Marchant	Fort Worth Star Telegram	51	66	2	8.0%
Kurt Schrader	Oregonian, The (OR)	133	122	4	13.5%
Lois Capps	Ventura County Star (CA)	344	230	58	12.7%
Lynn Jenkins	Topeka Capital-Journal, The (KS)	137	196	6	38.0%
Mac Thornberry	Wichita Falls Times Record	115	206	15	24.7%
Marcia Fudge	Plain Dealer, The (OH)	120	145	6	18.3%
Marsha Blackburn	Commercial Appeal, The (Memphis, TN)	98	178	8	16.0%
Mike Doyle	Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PA)	69	198	0	0.0%
Mike Pence	Journal Gazette, The (IN)	531	178	7	19.3%
Mike Simpson	Idaho Statesman, The (ID)	178	215	9	27.2%
Niki Tsongas	Sun, The (MA)	159	539	47	21.7%
Patrick McHenry	Hickory Daily Record (NC)	122	111	54	57.7%
Patrick Tiberi	Columbus Dispatch, The (OH)	93	204	15	13.4%
Paul Tonko	Times Union, The (NY)	179	248	8	8.6%
Ralph Hall	Dallas Morning News	50	61	0	0.0%
Raul Grijalva	Arizona Daily Star	337	233	23	13.2%
Richard Neal	Milford Daily News (MA)	23	80	0	0.0%
Robert Brady	Philadelphia Inquirer (PA)	56	27	2	20.0%
Rosa DeLauro	New Haven Register (CT)	559	170	28	15.7%
Sam Farr	Santa Cruz Sentinel (CA)	170	261	61	23.7%
Sander Levin	Detroit News, The (MI)	251	152	26	23.6%
Spencer Bachus	Birmingham News	222	211	51	13.2%
Steve Scalise	Times-Picayune, The (LA)	206	379	49	22.0%
Tim Ryan	Vindicator (Youngstown, OH)	167	92	19	24.4%
Virginia Foxx	Winston-Salem Journal (NC)	83	214	13	11.9%
Wally Herger	Chico Enterprise-Record (CA)	146	263	27	16.0%
Zoe Lofgren	San Jose Mercury News (CA)	56	114	3	12.3%

Table 4: Summary Statistics

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Min.</u>	<u>Max</u>
<u>Mediated</u>					
<u>Homestyle Factors</u>					
Number of Press Releases	168.10	108.70	145.00	23.00	559.00
FKGL	12.44	1.03	12.40	10.29	16.35
DCRS	9.35	0.47	9.43	7.93	10.95
Difficult Words	103.89	30.00	99.01	61.88	254.68
				352.4	1,888.3
Syllables	640.30	243.87	572.10	0	0
<u>Environmental</u>					
<u>Factors</u>					
	133,39	109,83	88,776	3,700.	448,271
Daily Circulation	0.00	5.00	.00	00	.00
Bill Sponsorship	20.12	13.96	15.00	1.00	83.00
Chain Ownership	0.67	0.46	1.00	0.00	1.00
Ideological Extremity	0.52	0.14	0.52	0.22	0.84
Age	57.22	11.33	57.50	28.00	86.00
Minority Representative	0.17	0.38	0.00	0.00	1.00
Female	0.25	0.44	0.00	0.00	1.00
Terms in Office	5.50	3.93	5.00	1.00	15.00
Washington Bureau	0.45	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00

Table 5: News Release Echoing by Representative Style
(Traditional and Mediated Homestyles)

	Trad. Homestyle		Mediated Homestyle	
	Coef.	(S.E.)	Coef.	(S.E.)
<i>Political and Environmental Factors</i>				
Daily Circulation	-3.198**	(1.490)	3.541* *	(1.384)
Bill Sponsorship	0.241**	(0.109)	0.252* *	(0.103)
Chain Ownership	-5.177*	(3.033)	7.359* **	(2.715)
Ideological Extremity (Median)	17.063*	(9.963)	12.224	(10.07 5)
Age	-0.118	(0.173)	-0.097	(0.152)
Female	-1.13	(3.385)	0.254	(3.043)
Terms in Office	-0.145	(0.488)	-0.13	(0.466)
Washington Bureau	-2.293	(3.212)	-3.892	(2.965)
Minority Rep.	-2.771	(4.012)	-3.177	(3.733)
<i>Mediated Homestyle</i>				
Num. Press Releases	--	--	0.080* *	(0.038)
Num. Press Releases^2	--	--	0.0002 **	(0.000 1)
FK-Grade Level	--	--	-3.263*	(1.799)
DCRS	--	--	8.439*	(4.275)
Syllables	--	--	0.024* *	(0.011)
Difficult Words	--	--	0.210* **	(0.077)
Constant	53.572* **	(19.09 1)	22.321	(38.52 8)
N	60		60	
R2	0.373		0.587	
Adj. R2	0.26		0.447	
Residual St. Error	10.156 (df=50)		8.780 (df = 44)	
F-Statistic	3.299*** (df=9; 50)		4.176*** (df = 15; 44)	

***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1

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