Speaking Up:
Down-Ballot Candidate Communication, Clinton, Trump,
and the Election that Surprised America


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A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of


Doctor of Philosophy


University of Washington

2017


Reading Committee:
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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
Department of Communication

University of Washington

**Abstract**

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This dissertation examined legislative candidates' public communications about Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential election, via three forms of analysis. Specifically, I employed content analysis to examine patterns of state and federal legislative candidate communication on Twitter, with attention to the level of office sought, incumbency status, partisan identity, and candidate gender. I analyzed tweets referencing the presidential nominees from 98 candidates running for legislative office during the election. Second, I conducted semi-structured interviews with candidates for the Washington State Legislature, to examine how candidates constructed discourse about the presidential nominees. Third, I analyzed Republican U.S. senators' public communication responses to the release of a video showing Trump bragging about sexually assaulting women, a discursive moment that essentially forced lawmakers to react publicly. Together, these analyses indicate important differences in how down-ballot candidates communicate about the nominees at the top of the ticket, and complicate the role of these political actors and communicators. Findings of this work have several important implications for our understanding of legislative candidate communication, and offer insight into an understudied area of American political communication.

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## Acknowledgments

Writing a dissertation is a solitary activity, but I was lucky to embark on this journey surrounded by supporters, mentors, and loved ones near and far. Beginning a dissertation about the value and construction of public communications with a public expression of gratitude feels both appropriate, and not nearly enough. To everyone who walked with me in this endeavor, thank you. A few special acknowledgements:

To the Department of Communication at the University of Washington, particularly Heather Werckle for always having an answer and a solution, Anita Verna Crofts for sharing her friendship and love of pie, the many exemplary faculty with whom I have had the honor to grow as a scholar, and the colleagues and classmates from whom I have learned so much. And to members of the DRG who taught me how to be a student of political communication: Dr. Lindsey Meeks, Dr. Damon Di Cicco, and Dr. Colin Lingle, thank you. A special thanks to Lindsey for her assistance in mastering the world of Twitter communication, and to Dr. Katy Pearce, for her guidance in strengthening the analysis of Chapter Three.

Part of this research was generously funded through the support of the William and Janice Ames Endowment for Graduate Research. Thanks to the many donors who invest in graduate education, and particularly Dr. Jerry Baldasty, someone I respect immensely, who invested in mine.

To the intrepid public servants who interrupted the last weeks of a busy campaign to spend time with a doctoral student, and graciously offered me insight into your decision-making, communication, and strategy—thank you.

To my colleagues at the Evans School, particularly Dean Sandra Archibald, Rebecca Ehrlichman Blume, and my wonderful team, thank you for giving me space and support to pursue this work.

To my committee, Dr. Pat Dobel, Dr. Christine Harold, and Dr. Mark Smith, thank you for your guidance, questions, and willingness to dive into this topic alongside me.

And to Dr. David Domke, for teaching me, challenging me, pushing me to do my best, and helping me chart my own course through these years of intellectual adventure. Your mentorship and intelligence has made me a better scholar, and your curiosity will always inspire me to keep asking questions, and searching for answers. It has been a true privilege to pursue this work under your guidance.

Finally, to the wonderful people I am lucky enough to call family: Willy, Tiger, Lindsay, and especially Mom, Kendall and Stella. And to Alex, for making me laugh, making me put down the laptop (sometimes), and making this possible. I love you all more than I can say.

**Chapter One**
**Down-Ballot Communication in American Politics**

On April 12, 2015, as Hillary Clinton announced her campaign for U.S. President, two

female Democratic politicians tweeted messages about her.  New York Senator Kirsten

Gillibrand sent this message to her Twitter followers: "@HillaryClinton has a vision for a better

future.  Help make it a reality, join #OffTheSidelines & support Hillary."  That same day,

Washington State Representative Gael Tarleton, who represents part of Seattle, tweeted the

following message to her Twitter followers, in response to an article from the *Chicago Tribune*:

"We now endure 19 months of 6-7 Republican men shredding character of one Democratic

woman.  Hillary will be last one standing."  Senator Gillibrand and Representative Tarleton were

two politicians operating in distinct contexts, with very different connections to Clinton and her

campaign.  Gillibrand replaced Clinton as U.S. senator from New York after the latter's

appointment to President Barack Obama's cabinet, and then worked alongside Clinton in

subsequent months.  It is likely that Clinton and Gillibrand had a personal relationship in

addition to their professional connection—and also likely that Gillibrand, a national figure

herself, was careful in her use of Twitter as a public forum to reach her 156,000 followers.

Tarleton, a state representative, likely did not have either a personal or professional connection

with Hillary Clinton—nor, with fewer than 1,200 Twitter followers, did she command a national

audience of potential benefit for Clinton's presidential hopes.  It is possible that she simply

wanted to share her feelings about her favored candidate.

What these messages illustrate is that two politicians, across the country and in very

different political contexts, believed that their public communications about a presidential

candidate were valuable.  Political campaigns are propelled by numerous public

communications.  Words, especially uttered by political leaders in public, matter.  Political

leaders, and those seeking elected office, give endless stump speeches and rallies, air television

and radio advertisements, host "Saturday Night Live," and appear on talk shows and debates.

Their faces, voices, and words are close to omnipresent, especially during campaign season—

and especially during presidential campaigns.  But political leaders do not simply *talk* to the

public.  Instead, they strategically construct discourse to attain set goals.  Campaign

communications are carefully crafted with specific political objectives in mind (Domke & Coe,

2008).  Leaders convey messages to the public that are intentional and strategic.  As Manheim

(1991) writes, "What sets strategic political communication apart from other types [of

communication] is the way in which those engaged in it use sophisticated knowledge about

human behavior to mold information to accomplish very specific, and often very short-term,

objectives" (p. 7).  Political communication, then, is a public contest with a public goal.

Politicians, in their communications to the public, are working to achieve their own objectives

and aims.  These goals drive their public communications, and necessitate strategic approaches

to their discourse.  Both Gillibrand and Tarleton—white female politicians from the same

political party, from different levels of political office, on different sides of the country—sought

an impact by communicating publicly about Clinton.  For these political leaders at different

levels of elected office, there was perceived value in communicating publicly about a

presidential nominee.

This dissertation examines how federal and state legislative candidates varying in levels

of political proximity to the White House, in level of office, in incumbency status, in political

party affiliations, and in gender identities communicated to and about the two major party

presidential nominees running for the presidency in 2016.  Specifically, I focused on a set of

2016 U.S. Senate, U.S. House of Representatives, and state legislative races to examine how legislative candidates publicly communicated about, and connected themselves to, the presidential nominees at the top of the general election ballot. To explore these public communications, I conducted a content analysis of candidates' Twitter messages regarding presidential nominees to understand broad patterns of discourse in their public communications, and I conducted a series of in-depth interviews with state-level legislative candidates to gain more insight than might be available from 140-character messages. My content analysis examined purely public communications, while the interviews offered additional windows into candidates' processes, strategies, and thoughts behind these public communications, as well as insights into when they chose not to speak. My final piece of analysis was an examination of Republican senators' responses to release of a video in which Trump was recorded bragging about sexually assaulting women. Publicly released in the final weeks of the campaign, this video forced political leaders to react, which they did in different ways. Together these three analytic moves offered insightful understanding of the ways legislative candidates communicated about Trump and Clinton during the election. Overall, each form of analysis aimed to understand how candidates communicate to and about presidential nominees.

With this study, I hope to enhance scholarly understanding of American politics in two arenas: first, to broaden academic understanding of political communication at the state and federal levels, and second, to more closely distill potential connections and interaction between different levels of office—that is, to examine the role of political proximity on political communication. The vast majority of political communication scholarship examines the presidency, or presidential elections. Much less academic work has been devoted to systemic examinations of communication patterns and themes from other political actors—federal and

state politicians and candidates.  These lawmakers play a critical role in American democracy.

Congress is one of three branches of federal government, and representatives and senators are

often very closely aligned to the needs of the people they represent.  State legislatures, as well,

are also important sites for political communication research.  State legislatures hold significant

legislative and budgetary authority: they determine taxes, offer or revoke rights, determine laws

and have meaningful impact on residents.  Comprehending how candidates for these federal and

state roles communicate will not and should not supplant the scholarly attention paid to

presidents and presidential candidates, but may offer a more thorough understanding of how

American political actors communicate in the public arena.  With this dissertation, I hope to

enrich this broader view of American political communication.

**Down-Ballot Candidate Communication**

As long as the United States has been a country—and even before—political leaders have

communicated, in public, to achieve strategic goals and present themselves and their political

stances to the electorate.  Communication has always been important to politics—indeed, politics

is largely discursive in nature.  Through their communicative acts, political actors shape, frame,

configure and explain the world around them, encouraging specific interpretations.  Even the

country's founding documents are by nature communicative.  The Declaration of Independence,

the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and the Bill of Rights were all efforts to explain and then

accomplish set goals, and often to convince specific audiences to agree and act in accordance.

This foundation of communication is an important aspect of America's political history and

political culture.  Political communication, of course, has changed significantly since the

Founders wrote documents for publication.  Mass (and now ubiquitous) media, the increasingly

professional status of campaign staff and pollsters, unprecedented spending on campaigns, and

the 24-hour news cycle are developments that have reshaped American political communication in unanticipated ways.

But one aspect of American political communication has remained consistent. Political leaders are strategic and goal seeking in their communications. This is, of course, even more true when it comes to political campaigns and candidates. Campaigning—and governing, once elected to office—is largely based on communication (Jacobson, 2009). These goals drive political leaders' public communications, and necessitate strategic approaches to their discourse. Campaigns are major communicative moments. Candidates seeking election are not yet in a position to govern—that is, to make material change. They cannot enact laws, negotiate bills or budgets, or question testimony at hearings. All they can do is articulate the case for their aptitude in governing, and encourage the electorate to support them, by articulating their values and ideas via communication. Communication may be part of ritualized campaign moments such as debates or convention speeches, through the increasingly important opportunities presented by digital and television advertising, through the highly negotiated lens of the news media, or, as this dissertation shall particularly emphasize, via social media. What political leaders, both elected and aspiring to office, say publicly is important, and has potential to shape political discussion or encourage action.

Candidates running for various levels of office at the same time, in the same place, often interact—and these communications could theoretically have significant impact. This starts, of course, with the presidential nominee at the top of the ticket, who, in earning the nomination, becomes leader of his—and, in 2016, her—political party (Klinghard, 2005). The presidential nominees set the tone, both for party platform and policy emphasis, for the campaign, and down-ballot candidates of that party often jump on board, both via their communication and through

appearances.  I use the term "down-ballot candidate" to refer to any political office that appears in a lower physical position on an election ballot, which almost universally lists contested offices in descending order from national (presidential) to local.  For the purposes of this dissertation, I use the term "down-ballot candidates" to refer to candidates for Congress and state legislatures.

Presidential candidates often rely on others to speak and campaign on their behalf.  Since presidential candidates cannot be everywhere at once, often they must rely on surrogates, including their own vice presidential running mate, their spouse (see MacManus & Quecan, 2008), high-ranking Cabinet hopefuls, and other allies to represent them on the campaign trail. In many cases, local down-ballot candidates or elected leaders step into those roles.  These appearances give surrogates the opportunity to increase their own name recognition, to earn political favor with the party and nominee, and to speak to areas of expertise or introduce important constituencies to the nominee (Kessler, 1981)—but above all, as an article in *Time* magazine put it, "There's one pretty simple rule to being an effective campaign surrogate: Make the candidate look good" (Berenson, 2016).  Surrogates are tasked with garnering support, but may also take on the job of "saying things the candidate wants said, but considers, for reasons of strategy, unwise to say" him- or herself (Kessler, 1981, p. 148).  Candidates at different levels can engage with the public and opponents in varying ways—and have distinct roles within the campaign.  While down-ballot candidates may appear at joint events with presidential nominees, or may speak on the nominee's half as a surrogate, these opportunities may occur a few times over the months and years of a modern campaign.  Instead of joint appearances, communication *about* and *between* candidates for different levels of office, when candidates are mostly not in the physical presence of one another, is a far more common way for these candidates to interact.

*America's Political Structure*

To understand contemporary American political campaigns, it is important to note the

peculiar context in which campaigns, across all levels of elected office, operate. A discussion of

the difference between levels of office—or what I will define as political proximity—is included

later. I begin with America's political structure and the unsubtle role it plays in contemporary

U.S. politics. In Milbrath's words, in the introduction to his 1965 study *Political Participation*,

"[E]very human is touched by politics." But different parts of the American political system

touch people in different ways, and are designed to do so. The political system of the United

States is founded upon multiple levels of office, holding differing and distinct responsibilities.

Even before the founding of the United States, the decision to share political authority between a

central (federal) government and multiple local (state) governments was central to how those

who wrote the Constitution thought about this new nation. Political power is shared between one

central authority and many decentralized authorities: the federal government, made up of the

executive, legislative and judicial branches, and the fifty state governments, respectively.[1] This

system of federalism, defined by Gerston (2007) as "multifaceted political power relationships

between governments within the same geographical setting," is a mechanism for organizing

political power. Federalism addresses the intersection of people, policies, and political power. It

is a mechanism that helps to "guide the actions of various governments on endless topics of

importance" (Gerston, 2007, p. ix). It is not uniquely American (Canada, Brazil and South

Africa are examples of a few other countries that employ this system of government), but is a

defining feature of American politics. As new policy issues emerge, as the Supreme Court

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[1] Because this dissertation is interested in representative government at the federal level, I do not include discussions of U.S. territories, including Puerto Rico, in this study. These territories elect non-voting delegates to serve in the House of Representatives, and Americans abroad can vote in presidential elections, including primaries. Because these systems are so atypical, however, for the purposes of this study I focus on states alone.

continues to assign new areas of policy and political authority to state or federal jurisdiction, and as population changes and shifts compel new interpretations of the Constitution, America's political context is constantly evolving, even as the overall structure remains constant.

These levels of government impact people in distinct ways—or, as Leach (1970) writes, "each level of government in a federal system insists upon its right to act directly upon the people" (p. 1). The key difference in how levels of U.S. political office operate is that all people are impacted by the same federal government, while state governments impact those who live or are located in the state in which a law is passed—though a number of state laws are honored by other states. The federal government, made up of the executive branch (the president and executive agencies), the legislative branch (Congress), and the judicial branch (the Supreme Court and other federal courts) impacts everyone living within the United States, constantly. Regulations set by executive agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency extend across state lines, setting national goals and standards for air and water quality. Supreme Court decisions set legal standards across the country. Congress, likewise, passes relatively few laws each year, but they almost always reverberate through the states. As Kerwin writes, "If we examine the body of laws enacted by Congress, it is immediately apparent that they touch virtually every aspect of human life" (1999, p. 29). The federal government, across these different branches, offers distinct authority from other levels of American political structure.

State governments offer a different level of impact to residents. Amendment Ten of the Bill of Rights states, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people" (U.S. Const. amend. II). The Framers, having decided that they perhaps did not provide enough direction in the Constitution itself, added an amendment explicitly stating that levels of

government hold different and all remaining authority. This difference between federal and state government, of course, also means that voters in one state have no say over state officials in any other state—and are generally not impacted by laws enacted by state officials in any other state. For example, Alaska's decision to make it illegal to give alcohol to a moose impacts only those within Alaska, while Ohio's decision to prohibit giving alcohol to a fish matters only for Ohioans or those visiting the state. Alaskans may happily intoxicate a fish, while any Ohioans who get their hands on a moose are legally welcome to offer it a beer. State legislatures and governors may look to each other for advice, ideas, approaches and input, but each state government operates with significant, though by no means total, independence.

Elections are hugely important in American political culture and have great impact on all levels of government. Voters, of course, determine who holds office within each level of government—by electing those leaders. A basic tenet of American democracy is that on a regular basis, citizens of age have the opportunity to cast a vote for elected leaders. Elections "provide ritual expression of the myth that makes political authority legitimate: We are governed, albeit indirectly, by our own consent" (Jacobson, 2009, p. 1). This is usually at set intervals—for instance, presidential elections are held the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, every four years—or may be at the episodic discretion of a local board of elections as issues arise within communities. The form in which these elections take place also varies widely. Some voters may mail ballots because their state is vote-by-mail or they are out of the state on Election Day, others may line up to cast ballots in ballot booths according to the precinct in which they are registered. Voters also contribute in a range of ways in the political process— by voting, by a variety of activism including campaign contributions, letters to elected officials,

political marches and demonstrations, interest group activity, and citizen meetings with those in positions on power.

Elections, of course, frequently involve filling multiple political offices, in different areas of the government, simultaneously. A voter's ballot in a presidential election year will necessarily include candidate elections at the federal level: a presidential choice, possibly a U.S. Senate race (U.S. senators are elected every six years, in three rotating classes, so each state will go at most four years between electing a senator), and always a U.S. representative (every one of the 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives is elected every two years), meaning any presidential election must also be a congressional election. A ballot for elections at the state and local levels may include candidates for governor (term lengths and limits vary state to state), state officials such as secretary of state, lieutenant governor, commissioner of public lands, state senator and representatives; county officials such as executive, council, or commissioners; city or municipal elections such as council or mayor; and special district elections such as port commissioners or school board members. While some of these offices may be non-partisan, most have party affiliations. Since multiple parties are represented at the same election and on the same ballot (i.e. a "blanket" ballot; see Rusk, 1970, for a thorough history of the adoption of these ballots), voters have the ability to make decisions about individual candidates, and possibly support different parties at different levels of office. This is known as "ticket-splitting" (Burden & Kimball, 1998; Burden, 2002, etc.), the phenomenon in which voters support candidates of one political party for some elected roles, and candidates of another party for different roles. A well-known example is the 1956 presidential election, in which incumbent Republican president Dwight Eisenhower defeated Democrat Adlai Stevenson by a significant margin, but Republicans lost both chambers of Congress—indicating that many voters supported a

Republican president and Democratic members of Congress, on the same ballot. This "privilege which the American electorate exercises almost uniquely in the democratic world, the right of voters to split parties" (Campbell & Miller, 1957, p. 293) indicates that a voter's choice for president may impact their party preferences for supporting similar party candidates all the way down the ballot—or may not. Voters have the option to make discrete decisions for each office. This has important implications for candidates, especially with regard to their public communications. I turn now to those implications.

*The View from Below: Down-Ballot Candidate Communication*

When candidates at different levels of office pursue elections at the same time, they often become connected to each other's elections, even if they do not wish to do so. These connections can plausibly impact electoral outcomes: that is, whether or not one or the other candidate is elected. Most likely, this impact occurs from the top down: the candidate higher up on the ticket may impact electoral outcomes for candidates further down the ticket. Many scholars have examined the "coattails effect" (Ames, 1994; Campbell & Sumners, 1990; Golder, 2006; Samuels, 2000, to name just a few), which Moos (1952) defined thusly: "the strong momentum generated by the presidential campaign along with the prestige of the presidential candidate helps to sweep into office a sizable number of congressional candidates" (p. 5). Having a popular nominee at the top of the ticket generates enthusiasm, and leads to increased voter turnout, which in turn helps elect same-party candidates down the ballot. Simply being on the same ballot with a popular presidential candidate, regardless of interaction, can be impactful—positively, for those of the same party, or negatively, for those of the opposite party whose potential voters got caught in the popular president's coattails.

But candidate communication almost certainly can shift, decrease, or increase that impact for both their own races and for presidential campaigns. First, what down-ballot candidates say publicly about presidential nominees is important, and has potential to impact the presidential race. Gathering support from elected officials—that is, from people holding elected office at different levels—is a core element of the "invisible primary," the race to win over major donors, party insiders, and elected officials. That competition matters: until the 2016 Republican Party primary, the best predictor of the Democratic and Republican presidential nominee since 1980 had been endorsements by elected officials (Cohen, Karol, Noel, & Zaller, 2008). Positive support from hometown elected figures, such as local Congressional and state-level officials, through endorsements and surrogate appearances, can help to deepen a connection between a presidential candidate and local voters. Likewise, negative comments about a presidential nominee from a beloved (and widely elected) local political figure could potentially have impact on a presidential nominee's electoral outcome.

Early enough in the presidential campaign process, endorsements from down-ballot candidates also signal that a presidential candidate's campaign is strong enough to survive. In these instances, endorsements may be important both in quantity and timing.[2] For example, as Republican Party presidential caucus votes were still being counted in Iowa in 2016, South Carolina Republican Senator Tim Scott publicly endorsed Republican presidential candidate Marco Rubio. Rubio's strong third place showing in Iowa proved him to be a viable contender for the Republican nomination, but a major endorsement so early in the voting process was also a

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[2] On the Democratic Party side, support from elected officials is also important because their individual support can have a real impact on primary campaign outcomes. All Democratic members of the U.S. House and U.S. Senate, plus all sitting Democratic governors, are "superdelegates"—delegates who are seated automatically at the party's national convention, and who get to determine individually who they would like to support, rather than being pledged based on primary or caucus results. Garnering the support of these superdelegates is not determined by primary outcomes; rather, these individuals may support whomever they want. Because of this flexibility, in theory these delegates could swing the national convention selection process to nominate a Democratic candidate who did not win the majority of delegates—or votes—during the primary contests.

calculated—and public—risk for Scott. Scott's backing indicated establishment support for

Rubio's candidacy, but with Rubio's nomination far from a sure thing, this early support offered

value to Rubio's campaign in the critical early-voting state of South Carolina. Another example:

in January 2008, just two days after Barack Obama's stinging loss to Hillary Clinton in the New

Hampshire Democratic presidential primary, Senator John Kerry's endorsement of Barack

Obama was an important signal that in spite of the defeat Obama still had strong support among

legislative leaders. These demonstrations of support are important for presidential candidates.

Campaigns are very aware of their significance and treat them as the important communicative

moments they are. Campaigns often release lists of local endorsements prior to early voting

states—as Hillary Clinton did in 2016 by releasing a list of prominent African American women

supporting her in South Carolina, prior to the primary in that state—to suggest that local support,

especially among targeted audiences, is widespread. In sum, public support by down-ballot

candidates has strategic value to presidential candidates—and candidates understand, and

publicly emphasize, that value.

The impact of these public endorsements by down-ballot candidates may be even more

important and influential when the presidential nominee does not fall within the traditional

trappings of presidential candidates—that is, when the nominee is a pioneer in some way.

Support from elected leaders at different levels may then convey a level of institutional support

that lends legitimacy to an unusual candidate. For instance, in the example noted above, Senator

Tim Scott's endorsement of Senator Marco Rubio was important both because of Scott's office

(U.S. Senate), and because of the electoral value, or at least expected value, of his support

immediately prior to his state's primary. Because Rubio was also a sitting senator—a member of

the political establishment himself—this support was advantageous, certainly, but far from

determinative. When a political candidate is not within the political mainstream, however, support from party elites—elected officials—may be more meaningful. Being an outsider to politics has significant advantages, and is a discursive tool many politicians employ. Nye, Zelikow and King (1997) demonstrate that since Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign, most political candidates have "run against Washington." Slogans decrying "politics as usual" are common. Candidates clearly see value in presenting themselves as an alternative to the norm. However, being a political outsider with the connections to be an effective executive is one thing; having no allies is another. Supportive communications from down-ballot candidates might be a way for a presidential nominee to have it both ways. He or she can claim to be an outsider, and leave political insiders to argue on their behalf.

Both major party presidential nominees, in 2016, had claim to the role of outsiders, in highly distinctive ways. It is also important to note that this was an open presidential election— neither nominee was an incumbent. Hillary Clinton, the Democratic nominee, fell very much within political norms in terms of her career in elected and appointed office. She had previously held elected office, appointed office, and served as First Lady for both Arkansas and the United States. Her long legacy of public service was obvious. However, she became the first woman in American history to be a major party's nominee for president. Her role as a pioneer for her gender set her firmly apart. When she conceded to Barack Obama in 2008 after an unsuccessful primary campaign to be the Democratic nominee, she declared that she had not been able to "shatter that highest, hardest glass ceiling" (Clinton, 2008). In 2016, she moved one significant step closer to breaking that glass ceiling once and for all. The idea that female candidates portray themselves as outsiders by virtue of their gender has been explored extensively. Women candidates, as scholars have noted, may present themselves as different from male candidates in

ways that can benefit the political realm (Shames, 2003). This is also a brand new arena for scholars of political communication. No one before 2016 knew what a female presidential nominee's campaign communication might look like. While scholars, pundits, and armchair political analysts could draw conclusions based on women candidates for federal office or for state-level executive office, there was no previous model. While being the most insider of candidates, Hillary Clinton ran far, far from the political norm.

Donald Trump, the Republican nominee, was another candidate who presented as an outsider, but for very different reasons. While Clinton's gender set her apart, Trump's background was markedly different from most who seek the nation's highest office. He was seeking to become the only president without any previous elective, appointed, or military experience (Fallows, 2015). When Trump announced that he was seeking the Republican nomination for president, on June 16, 2015, the first line of the *New York Times* story was "Donald J. Trump, the garrulous real estate developer whose name has adorned apartment buildings, hotels, Trump-brand neckties and Trump-brand steaks, announced on Tuesday his entry into the 2016 presidential race, brandishing his wealth and fame as chief qualifications in an improbable quest for the Republican nomination" (Burns, 2015). In a crowded field of career politicians, Trump was clearly—and proudly—an outsider. That made it more important for him to have some insiders willing to "vouch" for him. When both New Jersey Governor Chris Christie and Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions threw their weight behind businessman Trump, this visible support from two members of the Republican Party elite boosted Trump's standing by indicating that some members of the GOP political establishment found him an acceptable standard bearer for their party. Down-ballot support, then, plausibly might have an especially

strong impact on a presidential nominee's electoral outcomes when that nominee is a political outsider.

These down-ballot communications about presidential nominees may not be exclusively positive. Sometimes, in seeking the media spotlight, politicians will emphasize drama or conflict (Vinson, 2013). Some down-ballot political actors may offer negative public communications about top of ticket nominees. This public opposition can become especially noteworthy when it occurs within the same political party. It is rare for down-ballot candidates during general elections, all too dependent on the popularity of their party-mate at the top of the ticket, to publicly badmouth that nominee, making these occasions all the more noteworthy. For example, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham's comment about a Republican presidential candidate— "The more you know about Trump, the less likely you are to vote for him"—was unusual both for its rancor but also for its rarity. With this statement, Graham indicated that any strategic value offered by having Trump, a controversial and highly polarizing figure, at the top of the ticket, was perceived to be limited. That Graham spoke out publicly against a possible Republican presidential nominee was uncommon but not unprecedented.

We can also imagine how down-ballot candidate communication about presidential nominees could be impactful for the down-ballot candidate. A down-ballot candidate's public communications about presidential nominees would seem to have the potential to impact the down-ballot candidate's own election, in a few different ways. To start, the electoral benefit of connecting to a popular candidate at the top of the ticket can be significant. In 2008, with Barack Obama at the top of the ticket for Democrats, that party defeated five incumbent Republican Party senators (Alaska, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Carolina, and Oregon), and picked up open seats in Colorado, New Mexico, and Virginia, indicating strong national enthusiasm.

Rarely, legislative candidates have determined that attempting to hitch a ride on their own party's nominee will not work—and so they try to jump on other coattails. In 2012, Connecticut's Republican Senate candidate, Linda McMahon, aware of the challenges of running against a popular incumbent Democratic president in a very Democratic state, went so far as to distribute election materials connecting her campaign to Barack Obama's reelection campaign, and to air television ads featuring Obama voters announcing their support of her campaign. At the same time, her campaign website removed the words "Republican" and "Mitt Romney," the Republican presidential nominee. Clearly McMahon believed that the only coattails worth riding were those of Barack Obama, even if they were of opposing parties. While this example is far from common, it does indicate the value for down-ballot candidates in being connected to a popular presidential nominee—and being publicly explicit in that support.

Second, a down-ballot candidate's communication regarding a presidential nominee also would seem to have the potential to impact whether citizens vote or not. A popular presidential candidate can go far to encourage enthusiastic same-party voters to vote (and then continue to vote for candidates of that party down the ballot—the coattails effect), but a more local candidate has the potential to inspire voters to engage, volunteer, or otherwise connect with campaigns, increasing voter turnout. Local politicians, unlike presidential candidates, are community members, neighbors, go to the same coffee shops, appear frequently on local radio and in local news—and intimately know their community and issues. Additionally, they often have strong support and connections with legislative district, local, or county party infrastructure. This may be especially true of state legislatures, where part-time citizen legislators often hold jobs in addition to their legislative duties, and likely less true of congressional actors—but even congressional leaders are based in districts, live in those districts, and make significant effort to

visit and be a part of those districts, especially in election cycles.  This local connection may drive voters to greater levels of participation, based on the public communications of local candidates.  In contemporary American society, citizens are faced with massive amounts of information—and scholars have posited that one way they may navigate this information overload is by finding shortcuts in their decision-making.  Popkin (1994), for instance, argues that voters employ shortcuts such as personal information about candidates, and party affiliation, to reduce uncertainty about candidates.  He refers to this approach as "low-information rationality, or gut reasoning" (p. 212).  Counting on a local, well-known leader to signal presidential candidate support may be one such shortcut.  If Gael Tarleton, a Washington State Representative, communicates publicly and positively about Hillary Clinton, and an undecided voter in her district supports Representative Tarleton, that voter may decide to turn out and vote for Clinton—and to knock on doors to turn out additional voters.

Third, whether down-ballot candidates do communicate about presidential nominees at all is important.  Silence can be a powerful form of political communication—not overtly supporting your own party's top-of-the-ticket nominee is a notable message—and the impact of that message is different across different levels of political proximity.  In his study of Congressional response to the Gulf War, Zaller (1994) makes the case that in the face of controversial decisions, members of Congress typically take a "low-profile approach to the issue" (p. 263) in order to mediate risk to their careers, and in the face of uncertainty about how potential action would be judged in light of future events.  This same low-profile response may apply to communications about controversial presidential nominees, or controversial elections. For instance, Senator Elizabeth Warren, Democrat of Massachusetts, made an important statement by not publicly supporting either Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders, the two leading

2016 Democratic candidates for president, during the primary season. Her support for either would have been an important signal to the progressive mainstream she represented to line up behind a candidate. By not endorsing, and not communicating publicly about her party's potential nominees, she publicly indicated her refusal to declare a favored candidate. Were such a significant figure within a party to decide not to publicly support the party's eventual presidential *nominee* would be a notable moment—and one with the potential to sway other opinions. Silence, then, can be just as meaningful as speech, and is an important aspect of down-ballot candidate communication.

Finally, whether and what a candidate communicates about a presidential nominee may also have significant personal and political impacts for the down-ballot candidate if the nominee is elected to the White House. Once a president is elected, he or she must fill the Cabinet, ambassadorships, and other roles within the executive administration (see Lewis, 2009; 2010). Additionally, he or she must fill close to 3,000 political appointments throughout the federal government (Lewis, 2010), a number that ebbs and flows as presidents rearrange the internal structure of the administration. Party and personal loyalty is often essential to this process, especially at the top—that is, higher-level positions. As President Richard Nixon said, "We can't depend on people who believe in another philosophy of government to give us their undivided loyalty or their best work" (in Edwards, 2001, p. 14). These appointments are often drawn from the political allies who stood by the nominee on the campaign trail. Public support, expressed via communication, may be an important way down-ballot candidates can align themselves with a future employer. This is self-serving, yes, and also highly strategic.

How candidates seeking legislative office communicate—or don't—about top-of-the-ticket nominees would seem to have political and electoral implications for candidates across

levels of political proximity to the White House. Further understanding this aspect of presidential campaigns offers conceptual value to scholars of political communication. Political communication as a field is largely focused around the presidency. In many ways, this makes sense—the American presidency and presidential elections, surrounding events, and related media are rich loci for this work, and issues and discourse often cascade into other areas of political communication. The role of United State president is called "Communicator-in-Chief" for a reason (Rozell, 1995). But focusing so heavily on the presidency leaves other areas of political communication, areas rich with meaning and in many ways closer to the average voter, underexplored.[3] America's political environment is ripe with less-developed arenas for scholarly attention. The nation is a political entity based on federalism; that is, authority is divided between the national, state, and local governments. Each of these systems is necessary for a fully functioning democracy and system of government. Each of these systems, then, is worthy of examination and understanding. While presidential elections elevate one individual to serve as the president, the implications of those elections are far reaching—and impact both government as an institution, and officials' ability to govern at multiple levels. In this study, I hope to add value to a broadened and broadening understanding of political communication research, and continue to demonstrate the full impact of how political leaders, across levels of political proximity, communicate publicly.

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[3] Evidence indicates that the presidency gets most scholarly attention within the field of American political communication. For example, a recent search on Google Scholar for "Presidential communication" returned 654,000 articles, compared to 439,000 for "Senate communication", 308,000 for "Congressional communication" and 145,000 for "House of Representatives communication." A search for "state legislature communication" yielded 562,000, but many articles were about laws, not communication. "State legislature" plus "political communication" returned 49,700. Likewise, a search within the archives of the *Journal of Political Communication* yielded 738 articles with "president" as the search term, 362 articles for "Congress" and just ten articles for "state legislature." While valuable research has been, and increasingly is being, conducted on other levels of government and candidates who seek to hold office, the presidency continues to attract the most research.

**Types of Political Communication**

Communication is an important and constant feature of political campaigns. Contemporary American political campaign communication occurs through multiple channels, and continues without stop through the election, often beginning years in advance of the actual electoral cycle. Campaign communications are almost always carefully crafted with specific political objectives in mind (Domke & Coe, 2008). Campaign communications are also, at their best, nimble and responsible, and campaigns are able to adapt quickly to changing political environments and policy contexts. An important point here, brought up by multiple scholars, is that political leaders can—and do—adapt their messages in the face of shifting political conditions (Villalabos, Vaughn & Azari, 2012; Coe & Reitzes, 2010). Once a rhetorical path is chosen, political actors can and do make strategic discursive moves toward ensuring that their messages connect with intended public. Communication efforts also differ based on the audience. An electorate that always votes Republican, as Burton and Shea (2010) point out, might only need to know that a candidate identifies as a member of the GOP. What political leaders say publicly, and how they choose to communicate, can indicate their strategic goals and needs. Several channels for political communication are especially important. Direct communication from candidates, including speeches and debates, paid media (advertising) and earned media (news coverage), symbolic participation such as yard signs, and finally direct voter contact, such as phone calls, door-to-door conversations, and simply shaking hands are all ways that political candidates and campaigns may connect with voters. This list is not exhaustive (for a more detailed look at campaign communication channels, see Burton & Shea, 2010, and Jacobson, 2009), but indicates several approaches that campaigns across different levels of office may take to engage with voters.

First, direct communication from candidates, via speeches and candidate debates, is important. Imagine political communication, and one place to start is with candidate stump speeches. Speeches are important communicative moments for campaigns, and have been for a long time. In 1840, William Henry Harrison delivered what scholars consider to be the first partisan presidential campaign speech, in an effort to defeat incumbent president Martin Van Buren (Jamieson, 1996; Genovese, 2010). Actively employing communication tools—in this case, public speeches—was not an generally accepted part of political campaigns until 1896, when William Jennings Bryan's fiery oratory ushered in a new era of presidential campaign as an audition to be the nation's communicator-in-chief (Jamieson, 1996). Since then, campaign speeches have been a key approach for candidates interested in disseminating their message. As Degani (2015) writes, speechmaking is "a key component of modern presidential campaigns" (p. 3) and indeed, direct communications from candidates continue to be an important aspect of campaign communication.

Offering similarly direct channels from candidates to the public, candidate debates hold a critical role in political communication during campaigns. Debates have "become a true staple of the political information environment" (Kaid, 2004, p. xv). Debates are important learning moments for voters. For example, scholars find that debates convey important information about candidates. According to Chaffee (1978), the top three motivations cited by viewers for watching debates were a desire to learn about candidates' issue positions; to compare candidate personalities; and to gain information to make a voting decision. Voters are watching debates to learn about the candidates, and sometimes that exposure impacts voters' minds. Indeed, scholars have found that debate exposure influences viewer perceptions of candidate character or image traits (e.g. Benoit, Webber & Berman, 1998; Benoit et al. 2001; Benoit, McKinney &

Stephenson, 2002).  Debates are major communication moments of the campaign.  This is in part

because debates reach larger audiences than any other campaign event (McKinney & Carlin,

2004) and in part because debates attract the greatest media coverage of any single campaign

event (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2000).  The result is the communications in debates

continue to resonate in public attention long after they occur.  Sheets et al. (2011), writing about

presidential campaigns, stated that debates serve as "epicenters…surrounded by a whirlwind of

news, commentary, and public attention" (p. 767).  In the midst of the 24-hour news cycle,

increased social media, and endless campaign advertising, debates remain critical opportunities

for candidates to connect, without filters, with interested audiences.  The combination of potency

of message along with range of impact means that debates are crucial communicative moments

in campaigns.  Debates may also be a local or third-party candidate's only way to earn media

exposure (Burton & Shea, 2010).  It is worth noting, however, that not all elections hold debates.

When they do, candidate debates are forums in which candidates seek to accentuate differences

through their messages.

Second, paid media, otherwise known as political advertising, is an important

communication tactic for political campaigns.  As Kaid writes, "Political advertising has evolved

into the dominant form of communication between candidate and voters in the United States"

(2004, p. 155).  Much of this is via television.  Kaid (1981, p. 250) defines political advertising

as "the communication process by which a source (usually a political candidate or party)

purchases the opportunity to expose receivers through mass channels to political messages with

the intended effect of influencing their political attitudes, beliefs, and/or behaviors."  These

messages increase name recognition, expose voters to candidate positions, tell candidate stories,

and are an important component of many elections.  Paid advertising is almost universal for U.S.

Senate elections, common for U.S. House races, and is slowly increasing for state legislative races as state legislature campaigns become more professionalized—that is, as campaigns hire experts, most often in mass media (Abbe & Herrnson, 2003). Paying for media is expensive, however. As Herrnson, Stokes-Brown and Hindman (2007) point out, state legislature candidates tend to spend less than candidates for federal office, so paid advertising is likely less available to those candidates. Not all advertising is positive, of course. In fact, scholarship indicates that negative advertising has a very strong effect: Ansolabehere and Iyengar (Ansolabehere et al., 1994 and Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995) find that negative commercials, or what they call "attack advertising" leaves Americans more inclined to tune out and not participate in the political process. This demobilization hypothesis has since been challenged by other scholars, including Kahn and Kenney (1999) and Wattenberg and Brians (1999), with some in fact suggesting that negative advertising may increase political action. Goldstein and Freedman's (2002) study of the 1996 election indicates that negative advertising does increase voter turnout. Paid advertising, then, is an important communication tool for candidates and campaigns.

Third, earned media, or news coverage, is an important component of contemporary political campaigns. Media coverage in elections matters for campaigns and candidates. According to agenda-setting theory, news coverage directly affects what readers consider to be important (e.g. McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 1997; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; McCombs & Shaw, 1993; Iyengar & Simon, 1993). Agenda setting, according to Iyengar and Simon (1993), is generally defined as "the ability of the news media to define the significant problems of the day" (p. 366). Blumler and Gurevitch (1981) conceptualize each side of the press and politician partnership as "striving to realize certain goals

vis-à-vis the audience; yet it cannot pursue them without securing in some form the cooperation of the other side" (p. 477). The challenge for candidates seeking earned media, of course, is that unlike their own public efforts, campaigns do not control the narrative (Burton & Shea, 2010). Consultants, managers and experts may pitch stories that show their candidate in a favorable light, but the media's independence makes this form of communication both high risk (lack of control) and high reward (may reach voters the campaign cannot reach, and this is free).

Fourth, symbolic markers of civic participation may be considered an important part of campaign communication. Yard signs, for example, function as a "practitioner's tool to build name recognition or spur mobilization" (Panagopoulos, 2009). Candidate yard signs may be viewed as a necessary component for political campaigns, but, as Makse and Sokhey (2013) point out, despite the ubiquity of yard signs, little is known about how and why individuals engage in this form of political participation. These scholars conclude that yard signs do constitute an important, symbolic aspect of an individual's campaign experience, but that their value may be one of participation, more than political information. Regardless, political campaigns continue to value this sort of symbolic participation. For example, Carl Paladino, Donald Trump's New York State campaign co-chair in 2016, said his campaign was relying on conventional get-out-the-vote efforts and blanketing of the upstate New York region with signs and bumper stickers in an effort to win (Murray & Killough, 2016). Yard signs, bumper stickers, campaign buttons and other symbolic forms of participation signify the trappings of political campaigns.

Fifth, direct contact, either in person, on the phone, or via mail, is a powerful channel for candidates and campaigns to communicate to voters, without mediated filters. These highly targeted contact points matter, and personal contact can make an important difference in

campaigns, with significant variation based on the office sought. Jacobson (2009) relays the story of Larry Presser, who represented South Dakota in both houses of Congress from 1974 to 1996. Personal voter contact played a huge role in his first election, for the U.S. House. "I tried to shake 500 hard hands a day," Presser has said. "That is where you really take their hands and look at them and talk to them a bit. I succeeded in doing that seven days a week. I put in a lot of twelve-hour days, starting at a quarter to six in the morning in some plant in Sioux Falls or Madison" (p. 93). For Presser's campaign, more value was to be gained with a simple handshake than any other use of the candidate's time, indicating the importance of personal voter contact. Volunteers, of course, play a huge role in voter contact. In 2012, the Obama campaign announced that it had made more than 125,000,000 personal phone calls or visits as of the weekend prior to the presidential election—meaning the campaign contacted roughly one out of every 2.5 people in the country since the 2008 election (Stein, 2012). This staggering number did not include "robo" calls (pre-recorded calls, often featuring celebrities, the candidate, or surrogates), mailers, or more passive communications such as advertising. These personal contacts were an important aspect of the campaign's communication strategy.

Finally, "new" media have come to play a central role in political campaigns (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Trent & Friedenberg, 2008). Candidate websites, once rare, are now essential for campaigns at every level of government, and viewers are increasingly discerning. "A candidate without a web site appears less than serious, and a confusing or slipshod site hints at a disorganized campaign" (Burton & Shea, 2010, p. 173). Radio and television advertising "reach all the voters who do not actively 'zap' the ad; they are 'opt-out' media. The web, however, is an 'opt-in' medium, meaning that some sort of off-site marketing might be necessary to garner a substantial surfer base" (Burton & Shea, 2010, p. 173). Websites offer candidate messages and

policy positions directly to interested readers (Trent & Friedenberg, 2008). Furthermore, candidate websites serve a variety of overlapping purposes: provide information to voters, raise money, share candidate issue positions and views, share news and information about the campaign, offer election information (such as when to register to vote), recruit volunteers, seek input from community members, communicate upcoming events, and attack the opposition. A strong web presence is also affordable; unlike more expensive forms of outreach such as paid media, websites are accessible to even small campaigns, such as those for the state legislature, without huge war chests. Websites are an important communicative tool for contemporary American campaigns.

Another form of new media—that is, social media—offers opportunity for more immediate communication. I turn now to the role of Twitter in contemporary American political campaigns, with particular interest in its role in down-ballot communications.

## Twitter and Down-Ballot Candidates

For most of the last century, political discourse has taken place via the filters of political parties, news media, and advertising. However, as Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) argue, profound changes in both society and the media may be giving birth to a new form of political communication. Social media, in particular Facebook and Twitter, are now important communicative tools for many reasons. Facebook, an online social networking platform, was founded in 2004. Users—including individuals, businesses, organizations, and groups—create profiles, generate their own content, connect (on Facebook, this involves "friending" someone else), and share updates. Participants can interact by writing on each other's walls (which can be shared publicly), sharing posts from other users, "liking" or otherwise responding to posts from other users, or can passively digest information posted by others. Twitter, another social media

network, was founded in 2006, and has grown into a key form of communication for politicians and media—in less than a decade.

Twitter is a real-time microblogging platform that allows users to share information through both public and private short messages known as "tweets" which are limited to a maximum of 140 characters. This short length allows tweets to be sent via cellular phones or other mobile devices as text messages, although Twitter is also designed to be accessed via computers. These messages are organized chronologically on each user's account. While tweets are by default public, it is possible to send them to a targeted individual via direct messaging. Twitter also enables users to forward tweets from others (retweeting) either with or without adding their own additional commentary, to reply directly to the sender of a tweet, and to include images, photos, and links in tweets. Twitter is an important tool for contemporary American political communication, especially by candidates and elected leaders. As Tumasjan et al. (2010) describe, "after the rise of candidate websites in 1996, e-mail in 1998 (the Jesse Ventura campaign), online fund-raising in 2000 (the John McCain campaign), and blogs in 2004 (the Howard Dean campaign), Twitter has become a legitimate communication channel in the political arena as a result of the 2008 campaign" (p. 178). Social media, including Twitter, has changed the landscape of how campaigns interact with distinct audiences, including voters, donors, news media, and pundits.

One of the earliest adopters of Twitter was reporter John Dickerson, who first used Twitter early in the 2008 election, and sang its praises: "One of the things we are supposed to do as journalists is take people where they can't go. It's much more authentic, because it really is from inside the room" (Cohen, 2008). The tool quickly gained use—that year, a total of 1.6 million tweets were sent on Election Day (Ostrow, 2012). Twitter's growth since then has been

rapid.  As Pearson and O'Connell (2012) note, in "2009, Twitter was a novelty in politics.  In 2012, it's a necessity."  In 2015, Twitter posted that 500 million tweets were being sent every day (Oreskovic, 2015).  Campaigns themselves employ these social media tools.  The 2008 presidential election was really the first instance of campaigns engaging in communications via social media, and the impact seemed to be sizeable.  Some commentators went so far as to attribute Obama's success in 2008 to his campaign's social networking ability (Williams & Gulati, 2008).  Significant communication scholarship has investigated the role of social media in the 2008 presidential election (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008; Vaccari 2010; Woolley, Limperos, & Oliver, 2010).  While just a sample of the multitude of academic work that continues to emerge on this topic, these studies reflect the majority of scholarship around social media on both the 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns: that is, social media were a tool of the presidential campaign, useful to get, earn, or mobilize votes.

Significant scholarship has emerged and is still emerging about how political leaders, organizations and voters employ Twitter as a communication and persuasion tool.  Scholars, for example, have examined the role of interactivity in campaign social media efforts to connect with voters (Lee & Shin, 2012; Stromer-Galley, 2000).  Scholars like Gerodimos and Justinussen (2015) are interested in how citizens and viewers interact with political leaders (in their case, Barack Obama's 2012 campaign) via tools of political voice such as Facebook's interactive features (in this instance, the "like" and "share" options that enable users to act upon a post in some way).  Others have examined how members of Congress employ Twitter (for instance, Amman 2010; Glassman, Straus, & Shogan, 2010; Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010; Lassen & Brown, 2011; Parmelee & Bichard, 2011).  Some have looked at candidate Twitter style, and at the content of their tweets (Bode et al. 2016).  Evans, Cordova and Sipole (2014) offer a

comprehensive look at the content of all tweets by U.S. House members and candidates in 2012.

Scholars who have examined candidate and elected leaders' communications via Twitter often

are interested in the type of messages being communicated broadly. For example, Golbeck,

Grimes, and Rogers (2010), Glassman, Straus, and Shogan (2010) and Haber (2011) all are

interested in the content of communications. Each of these studies is interested in how

candidates campaign to win their own election, or to communicate with voters or donors. Across

the board, these studies identify one level of government (for example, Evans, Cordova and

Sipole's 2014 work focuses on U.S. House elections only) and examine communications within

that level of government.

In this dissertation, I look across and between levels of government: that is, at how

candidates and elected political leaders at four levels of office—U.S. Senate, U.S. House, state

Senate and state House—communicate to and about presidential nominees. Twitter is a useful

tool to employ for this work for several reasons. First, Twitter is highly public. Most tweets are

visible to all, and can be retweeted, liked, may garner responses, and, for highly public figures,

are of considerable interest to the media. As Jungherr (2014) writes, "political actors integrate

these services into their campaigns, journalists use them as sources and topics of political news

coverage, and the public uses them to comment on political events and to discuss politics" (p.

239). Campaigns and candidates are aware of this scrutiny, and the highly public nature of these

communications. Political actors are increasingly skilled in influencing political coverage by

strategically releasing information via their social media tools (Chadwick, 2011).

Communications via Twitter are intended to be public and are used strategically.

Second, Twitter is an increasingly universal tool in politics, and especially well suited to

campaign communication. A presidential campaign without Twitter, in 2016, is unimaginable.

This is also true for Congress. In 2009, just a few years after Twitter was founded, 29 percent of Representatives and 31 percent of senators had registered, active Twitter accounts (Glassman, Straus & Shogan, 2009). A study of Twitter use across U.S. House campaigns in 2012 indicated that the majority of campaigns and candidates employed the social media tool (Evans, Cordova & Sipole, 2014). In the four years since the 2012, this number has likely only grown. At the state legislative level, too little scholarship has been devoted to understanding candidate social media use to be particularly useful for this work. For instance, Herrnson, Stokes-Brown and Hindman (2007) found that candidates at lower levels of office (that is, state legislative races) were less likely to use online communications than presidential and congressional candidates. Their data were from 1998 to 2000, and the digital and campaign landscapes have changed so much in the years since their data gathering as to be almost unrecognizable. No specific statistic is available for current Twitter use by state legislators, but it seems likely to be highly utilized. Twitter's real-time, direct approach is also a strong fit for communication from candidates (or campaigns) to constituents and voters. As then-Mayor of Newark (and current U.S. Senator from New Jersey) Cory Booker has stated, "I hope more elected officials discover the power of Twitter. It truly is an effective way to connect with the body politic" (Scola, 2011). Some scholars suggest that Barack Obama's intentional effort to gain more Twitter followers during his 2008 presidential campaign indicated that Twitter was an important component of his online campaign strategy (Stirland 2008; Greengard 2009). Twitter facilitates politicians' efforts to have information reach constituents.

Third, the tool does not change significantly across levels of office. Resource barriers do not exist as they do for television or media advertisements. Joining Twitter takes approximately two minutes, and is free. Unlike paid advertising, which may be prohibitively expensive for

many campaigns—especially for state-level races and U.S. House races—Twitter is always the same, and the costs to enter are always low.  While some politicians or candidates may employ social media professionals and high-cost strategy experts (Jacobson, 2009) in order to construct powerful brand strategies or media strategies via Twitter, the tool itself is the same.  The message format, which is still restricted to 140 characters, does not change.  Twitter is ready at all times for any campaign with a smart phone, a candidate or an aide with a quick mind and a significant amount of energy.

Twitter, then, is a public tool that is widely used in politics, and reaches across levels of political office.  It is a social media channel available to candidates and politicians regardless of party, campaign resources, or political office sought.  Examining Twitter communications can provide insight into candidate communication patterns.  For these reasons, I focus on Twitter to explore patterns of public communications in the 2016 presidential election.  In this research, I am interested in both *which* down-ballot candidates communicate about presidential nominees, drawing upon candidate identity and characteristics, and on the *content* of those communications, with a focus on connecting with those nominees and indicating level of support.  Especially in a presidential election in which both nominees presented themselves as outsiders—and had strong claims to being outside the norm for presidential nominees—the public communications of other members of the political system, across both the federal and state levels, was an intriguing, underexplored area of political communication.  With this in mind, I analyzed down-ballot candidate communications about presidential nominees during the 2016 general election, from the national party nominating conventions in July through the general election in November.  I focused on how Twitter communications intersected with four characteristics: political proximity (what level of office was each candidate seeking?), incumbency status, partisan identity, and

gender of the candidate seeking office.  With this research, I hope to offer a deeper

understanding of how down-ballot candidates communicate to and about presidential nominees.

*Political Proximity*

First, I wanted to account for the potential importance of political proximity, or the

different levels of office candidates might seek.  The American political system, as discussed

earlier, is designed so that different offices—U.S. Senate, U.S. House of Representatives, state

Senate, and state House of Representatives, for example—hold distinct responsibilities, but it is

possible that the differences between these offices are discursive as well as material.  That is,

political proximity to the presidency may matter in how candidates and office holders

communicate publicly about presidential nominees.  In this dissertation, I am specifically

interested in four elected offices, in two different jurisdictions, which operate at distinct political

distances from the White House.  At the federal level, I am interested in candidates for the U.S.

Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives.  At the state level, I am interested in candidates

for state Senate and state House of Representatives seats.  In this section, I discuss first the

difference between federal and state legislative office, then turn to differences within federal

legislature—that is, between the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House.

Federal and state legislative offices have several distinctions that are relevant for this

study.  First, federal legislators and state legislators operate differently with regard to the federal

executive branch.  The federal legislative branch of government, as discussed earlier, is a part of

the same political arena as the executive branch.  In general, elected leaders who hold or wish to

gain federal legislative office—that is, to be members of Congress—operate fairly closely to, and

likely communicate with, at least indirectly, the executive branch.  As discussed earlier, the

American system of federal government involves significant interaction between these two

branches of government. State legislators, on the other hand, have no designed interaction with the president or presidential candidates. While the Constitution designates specific areas of jurisdiction for state and federal lawmakers, the federal executive and state legislative branches never formally interact. Candidates running for the state legislature, then, have differing points of emphasis and perhaps may have very different experiences from candidates for federal office. It stands to reason, then, that federal legislators probably have a much higher level of communication than most Americans with (and perhaps about) the president.

Second, federal legislators and state legislators represent very different districts. State legislative districts are, of course, smaller than any district at the federal level—a House District for the U.S. House of Representatives, or the entire state, for the U.S. Senate. Washington State, for instance, has 49 legislative districts (the districts represented by state legislators), but 10 Congressional districts. One state senator and two representatives represent each legislative district. Washington's two U.S. senators both represent the entire state, while the 10 members of the U.S. House each represent a geographically distinct district. In Spokane, a city in Washington's 3rd Legislative District, for example, a voter in 2016 would be represented by Democratic State Senator Andy Billig, two Democratic state Representatives (Marcus Riccelli and Timm Ormsby), Republican U.S. House member Cathy McMorris Rodgers (this hypothetical voter also lives in the 5th Congressional District), and two Democratic U.S. senators, Maria Cantwell and Patty Murray. So while state Representatives Riccelli and Ormsby and state Senator Billig both represent essentially the city of Spokane alone, U.S. Representative McMorris Rodgers also represents approximately one fifth of Washington's land, predominantly rural agricultural area and forest, plus the city of Spokane. U.S. Senators Cantwell and Murray zoom even further out. Their district (the state of Washington) is the 13th most populous state,

includes Seattle, the nation's 18th largest city, and ranges from Representative McMorris Rodgers's primarily agricultural Congressional district all the way over mountains and forests to the Pacific Coast. Each of these lawmakers represents Spokane, but will do so differently because of its distinct standing within their districts. District differences between legislators at the state and federal level, then, may mean that legislators representing the same area may do so—and may communicate—in very different ways.

Third, candidates and campaigns are different at the state and federal levels. Federal candidates universally need to raise more money and cover more ground than either state senators or state representatives. Abbe and Herrnson (2003) document shifts in the communication channels state legislative candidates employ to reach voters—from personal outreach to voters (Adamany, 1972) to direct mail (Hogan, 1997; Moncreif, Squire, & Jewell, 2001), and now increasingly mass media (Hogan 1997; Lynch & Rozell 2002). Candidates for the state legislature, then, have increasing opportunities to speak publicly to voters, but still cannot command the media and public platform of federal candidates. There tend to be significant differences between candidates for federal and state legislature that are relevant to this research. Many federal legislators (especially in the Senate) have held elected office prior to serving at the federal level. In fact, more than half of the Senate in the 114th Congress began their careers in elected office by serving at either the state or local level (Herrnson, 2015). Few attain the U.S. Senate, or the U.S. House, without significant previous political experience. On the state side, on the other hand, many state legislators are composed of part-time citizen legislators, who might be expected to hold other jobs, and who are in session for only a few months a year. This means that state legislators are members of their communities in ways that federal legislators are not. While federal legislators have to be in Washington, D.C. with

frequency, often at considerable distance from their districts, many state legislators are able to spend significantly more time in their (smaller) districts, and even when in session, are geographically closer, for the most part.

There are also, of course, important distinctions within the two federal legislative chambers as well—that is, between the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives. Although these chambers both hold important roles in terms of national law-making, they do so by very different processes and with different approaches (Jacobson, 2009). The structure and makeup of these two chambers are distinct. The Senate is made up of 100 senators, two from each state regardless of state population, each with a term of six years. Senators are elected in three classes, with one class up for election every two years. This long term on the national stage—and the fewer number of individuals—means that individual senators are often known nationally. As Abramowitz writes, "The relatively small number of senators, the size and political importance of Senate constituencies, the length of Senate terms, and the special constitutional responsibilities of the Senate all contribute to the political visibility of individual senators" (1988, p. 385). Similar trends hold true for candidates: scholarship indicates that candidates for the U.S. Senate are more familiar to voters than candidates for the U.S. House (Hinckley, 1980; Hinckley, 1981). This is likely due to the vastly more members, and their shorter terms, in the U.S. House. Each one of the 435 members of the House of Representatives is elected every two years, and represents roughly 710,000 people. This leads to great variance between districts. For example, in 2016 13 of New York State's 27 congressional districts are comprised of New York City, while the entire state of Alaska (the largest state by size in the nation) is made up of just one congressional district. California alone has 53 Representatives, more than any other state (Texas follows, with 36 Representatives, and then Florida and New

York with 27 each).  Although they are both legislative chambers at the federal level, the U.S. House and U.S. Senate operate—and legislators within them may communicate—in distinct and important ways.

Campaigns for these different offices within the federal legislative branch are also quite distinct.  U.S. Senate campaigns are more significant undertakings than U.S. House campaigns (Jacobson, 2009; Abramowitz, 1988; Campbell & Sumners, 1990, among others).  First, Senate campaigns are statewide and often require significant funding in order to cover significant geographic areas and multiple media markets.  As I have shown earlier, paid advertising is almost universal for U.S. Senate elections, while used in only some U.S. House races (Abbe & Herrnson, 2003).  Second, senators are more likely to have to defend their nomination, but less likely to have competitive primaries than Representatives (Hernnson, 2015).  Third, there are important structural distinctions between the House and Senate that impact elections: the two senators from any one state will never run on the same election cycle, while each state's entire House delegation is up for election at the same time—and every other term is up during a presidential election, while alternate elections for senators are held during presidential elections. Finally, Senators serve six year terms, while House members have two year terms, meaning once elected they must begin running for reelection almost immediately.  While senators are likely continually raising money for their next election, they are not permanently campaigning as House members are.  Although candidates for the U.S. Senate and U.S. House from any given state are all running to serve within the federal legislative branch, candidates for these offices will likely campaign—and communicate—in distinct ways, due to the differences within the offices they seek.

With this in mind, I predict that candidates for federal office, i.e. the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives, will communicate publicly on Twitter to and about presidential nominees more than candidates for state office, i.e. state Senate and state House (H1). My hypothesis is that due to the closer political proximity of federal candidates to the presidency, these candidates will offer more communication about presidential nominees, with my specific definitions offered in Chapter Two. Federal and state legislatures, as demonstrated above, hold very different responsibilities over very different jurisdictions. With those differences in mind, it follows that their communication habits in relation to nominees for the presidency would be noticeably different. Keeping in mind the distinct roles that U.S. senators and U.S. representatives hold within the federal legislative level, I also predict that candidates for the U.S. Senate will communicate on Twitter to and about presidential nominees more often than candidates for the U.S. House (H2). The U.S. Senate is the legislative chamber that is most closely connected to the president, and has a greater level of national (versus district) impact; the person in the Oval Office will more directly impact the work of the Senate than the U.S. House. This hypothesis is based on both the structure of power between the federal executive and federal legislative branches of government, and on previous scholarship above. With this is mind, it stands to reason that U.S. Senate candidates will communicate more about presidential nominees than candidates for the U.S. House. I offer specific definitions in Chapter Two.

*Partisan Identity*

Second, I want to examine the potential importance of the partisan identity of down-ballot candidates in how they communicate to and about presidential nominees. Political party identification is powerful in contemporary American politics. In line with previous work in political science, I understand partisan identity as a social identity (Campbell et al. 1960;

Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012; Greene, 1999; 2002; 2004). As Mason (2014) writes, "the connection between partisan and party is an emotional and social one, as well as a logical one" (p. 2). Partisanship among voters has always been an important factor in political elections. In their landmark work "The American Voter" (1966) Campbell et al. wrote, "few factors are of greater importance for our national elections than the lasting attachment of tens of millions of American to one of the parties" (p. 121). Bartels (2000) argues that the impact of partisanship on voting behavior has grown and continues to be very important for elections. His research suggests that partisan loyalties had even more "impact on voting behavior at the presidential level" than in previous decades. In recent decades, many scholars agree that partisan-ideological sorting has occurred—that is, Democrats are now more liberal and Republicans are more conservative than they were half a century ago (i.e. Mason, 2014; Abramowitz, 2010; Jacobson, 2009; Levendusky, 2009). Mason (2009) specifically argues that this partisan sorting has increased the strength of political identities in terms of mass political behavior. As Miller and Conover (2015) argue, political competition combined with strong party identities intensifies party rivalries and anger toward the opposing party.

Jacobson (2009) and others have written extensively about the president's role as party leader and unifier:

> The president is his party's dominant public face. His words and actions articulate and define his party's current principles and objectives. Judgments about his competence in managing domestic and foreign affairs inform assessments of his party's competence in such matters. The components of a president's supporting coalition, and the interests he favors while governing, help to define the party's constituent social base and thus appeal as an object of individual identification. People's affective reactions to the president, whatever their source, inevitably color their feelings about the other politicians in his coalition. Every president thus shapes public attitudes toward his party as well as beliefs about who and what it stands for and how well it governs when in office; insofar as the party label represents a brand name, the president bears responsibility for the brand's current image and status (p. 684).

Partisan identity, then, is likely very important in how voters make decisions about whom they should support for elected office.  Knowing that, then, we should reasonably expect partisan identity to matter for down-ballot candidates in their communication about presidential nominees of theirs or another political party.  The president's role as public face of his or her party inexorably connects all members of that party running for office concurrently.

While the fact that winning presidential candidates are often elected simultaneously with legislative candidates of the same party has long been of interest to scholars, pundits and, of course, campaign professionals and candidates, scholars have struggled to find a convincing explanation for this phenomenon.  Previous research may overstate the importance of presidential "coattails," while ignoring factors such as voter preference and the economy that may have greater impact on electoral outcomes (Meredith, 2013).  What we do know for sure is that when presidents are elected, their party tends to also fare well in that year's congressional elections.  One explanation is Campbell's theory of "surge and decline" elections (1960).  In this theory, a combination of high-stimulus elections, and high levels of voter turnout of both core and peripheral voters typify presidential elections; these are surge elections.  Lower energy elections, and only core voters, with more peripheral voters staying home, characterize mid-term elections.  Another explanation is the "coattails" effect (see Campbell, 2015), in which a winning presidential candidate sweeps into office with down-ballot legislators of the same party riding the candidate's popular standing, resulting in a large swell of same-party down-ballot winners.[4]

Regardless of whether this rush of support for down-ballot candidates of the same party as the winning presidential candidate is due to surge and decline voter participation or the coattails effect, the result is that partisan identity is important for down-ballot candidates running

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[4] See Campbell (2015) for an interesting history of the coattails effect, and Meredith (2013) for a thorough literature review of the concept.

for office during a presidential election.  As Campbell (2015) writes, the crucial element of both

the surge and decline and coattails theories "is the premise that short-term forces in on-year

elections consistently favor the winning presidential candidate's party" (p. 16).[5]  Knowing that,

then, we should reasonably expect partisan identity to matter for down-ballot candidates in their

communication about presidential nominees of theirs or another political party.  Scholarship on

the coattails effect indicates that presidential candidate success has great implications for down-

ballot candidate success based on partisan identification (Campbell & Sumner, 1990).  Party

identity, then, likely matters in how down-ballot candidates communicate, and especially how

they communicate to or about leaders of their party, or the opposition party.

   Partisan identity may be especially important for down-ballot candidates at the federal

level.  For federal candidates, who rely on the political party machine to raise money, bring in

surrogates, coordinate campaigns, corral volunteers, and conduct get out the vote (GOTV)

activities, partisan identity may be critical.  Political party, then, is important for federal

candidates.  This is especially true in presidential election years, when the presidential nominees

are frequently big draws for voters, many of whom may be highly partisan.  Federal candidates

may communicate about the presidential nominees with whom they plan to work in order to

encourage voters to look beyond the top of the ticket.  There is a "natural drop-off as voters

move down the ballot" (Lott, 2009, p. 172).  Also known as "voter fatigue," this is the tendency

of some voters to refrain from voting on offices or ballot measures located near the bottom of

lengthy ballots (Dubois, 1979; Walker, 1966; Augenblick & Nicholson, 2016).  For federal

candidates who are reliant on party machinery and resources to turn out the vote, it may be in

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[5] These theories are distinct along three grounds, according to Campbell (2015): the coattails effect is silent about
individual voting behavior, the coattails effect appears to more narrowly focus on "the presidential candidates and
their issues to account for the systemic tilt of presidential elections in favor of the winning presidential candidate's
party" (p. 17), and finally the surge-and-decline theory partly explains the swing away from the president's party at
the midterm by expected turnout decline, which midterm elections are not considered by the coattails theory.

their own interest to firmly connect themselves with the person at the top of the ticket to combat this voter fatigue.  With this in mind, I predict that both U.S. Senate and U.S. House candidates will communicate on Twitter in predominantly positive terms about their own party's nominee, and communicate negatively about the opposing party's nominee (H3).  By communicating positively about their own nominee, and negatively about the opposing party's nominee, candidates at the federal level are indicating their alliance to their political party—and encouraging voters to support the candidate whose coattails they may need to ride.

Sometimes, however, down-ballot candidates may prefer to use a more low-profile approach to discussing controversial presidential nominees of their own party.  Just as Congressional leaders attempt to steer clear of contentious political waters (Zaller, 1994) by avoiding certain issues, down-ballot candidates may see the benefit to being quiet about relatively unpopular nominees within their own party.  Political parties within Congress institutionally support this silence by their members.  As Mayhew (1974) stated, "the best service a party can supply to its congressmen is a negative one: it can leave them alone" and not force them to vote on party lines against the wishes of their district, hurting their reelection chances (p. 99).  Simply going on the record can be damaging.  In one example of a political effort to avoid controversy, then-Illinois State Senator Barack Obama voted "present" rather than for or against a politically fraught bill letting juveniles be tried as adults (Hernandez & Drew, 2007).  In another example, Congressional Republicans in 2015 were able to avoid facing a vote either for or against legalizing marriage equality in America when the Supreme Court ruled instead.  As the *New York Times* reported, removing this decision from Congress was beneficial to Republican lawmakers who could then avoid voting against the vocal within their party: "In most corners of the party—and, notably, from those who are likely to seek the Republican presidential

nomination—there was silence" (Peters & Martin, 2015). Maintaining silence may be an effective way to avoid making politically damaging avowals. In the 2016 presidential election, I predict that more-down ballot communications overall will be in regard to the candidate leading in the polls—that is, in this case, Hillary Clinton (H4). Republican down-ballot candidates may see advantage in attacking a high-profile opponent, while the luster of being connected to a comparatively more popular candidate may encourage Democrats to discuss their nominee more than they discuss her opponent.

*Incumbency Status*

Third, I want to examine the potential importance of down-ballot candidate incumbency status in how they communicate to or about presidential nominees. Significant structural distinctions exist between running for office as an incumbent, a challenger, or for an open seat. As Jacobson (2009) notes, whether a candidate is attempting to be reelected, running for an open seat, or challenging a sitting lawmaker shapes every aspect of candidate and campaign activities and communication. The "incumbency advantage" is a well-known phenomenon in American electoral politics: it is the reality that incumbents, as existing inhabitants of they office they seek, have structural advantages that frequently contribute to their reelection (Erikson, 1971). The incumbency advantage has been so well-documented, according to Jacobson (2009), that it was the main focus of congressional research from the 1960s through the 1990s. Levitt and Wolfram (1997) unpack the incumbency advantage to examine direct office-holder benefits (fundraising advantages, the franking privilege—sending mail without paying postage), the ease with which incumbents can scare off challengers, and "higher average quality of incumbents" as compared to challengers (p. 46). What is clear is that incumbency status has important implications for electoral outcomes, and for campaign resources and strategy. It stands to reason, then, that

incumbency status would also have important implications for how candidates running as challengers, incumbents, or for an open seat would communicate publicly to and about presidential nominees.

Scholarship indicates that the incumbency advantage is present at both state and federal elections—that is, incumbency status matters in both levels of election with which this study is concerned (Hainmueller, Hall, & Snyder, 2015). Previous work indicates that the incumbency advantage is present in state legislative elections—those candidates running to retain their seats are more likely to win than candidates hoping to unseat currently-serving officials (Breaux, 1990; Garand, 1991; King, 1991). Hogan (2004) also explored how state, district and candidate-level factors impacted reelection prospects, finding that institutional and district conditions outweigh all other factors, including how elected leaders represent policy. Incumbency status may also impact candidates running for office at the federal level. Incumbents at the congressional level are more likely to win than their opponents (Cover, 1977; Erikson, 1971; Ferejohn, 1977, among others). Congress may be particularly well suited for preserving incumbents' seats. As Mayhew wrote, "If a group of planners sat down and tried to design a pair of American national assemblies with the goal of serving members' reelection needs year in and year out, they would be hard pressed to improve on what exists" (1974, p. 81-82). Candidate incumbency status has important implications for electoral outcomes, and likely drives candidate communication strategy and messaging during elections.

There is disagreement among scholars as to how the incumbency advantage impacts elections in highly competitive races. Some predict that it will be greater in competitive districts than in safe districts; that is, that the incumbent will win by larger margins in competitive races. Specifically, Erikson (1971) hypothesized that competitive districts weed out weak incumbents,

leading to higher quality incumbents running for reelection. Hainmueller, Hall and Snyder (2015) posit that incumbents who won previous elections by narrow margins will be motivated to work harder at getting reelected. Several scholars (including Jacobson, 2009) highlight office-holder benefits as an impactful way for incumbents in tight races to make a difference. On the other hand, it is possible that the incumbency advantage may be larger in safe districts, rather than competitive districts (see Hainmueller, Hall & Snyder, 2015). That certainly seems plausible when we consider the fact that the national parties sometimes do not even field candidates in districts historically tilted against them.

Regardless of how incumbency status plays out for electoral outcomes, what scholars can agree on is that incumbents running to retain their offices are already accepted participants within their party's political structure. Incumbents running for office during a presidential election are, as discussed above, frequently reliant on their party organization to get out to the vote, to raise financial support, to gather volunteers, and to run their campaign. While they may not agree with their party leadership on all fronts, they are obviously and publicly tied to their party's presidential nominee simply by having been an elected member of that party already. As Trent, Friedenberg, and Denton (2011) point out, "incumbents run (at least in part) on their records" (p. 101). Challengers, on the other hand, may or may not be bound by the same rules. Especially depending on level of office, they may have never held elected office, may not hold or exhibit any party loyalty, and may not be connected in the public eye to party machinery. Voters need to be persuaded that the challenger is the candidate most likely to produce more desirable conditions or policies (Trent, Friedenberg & Denton, 2001)—and the challengers are the ones to do that persuading. With this in mind, I offer two hypotheses about how down-ballot candidate incumbency may potentially impact how those candidates communicate about the top-of-the-

ticket nominees.  First, I predict that incumbents at the federal level, both U.S. Senate and U.S. House, will communicate on Twitter to and about presidential nominees with greater frequency than challengers for federal office (H5).  Incumbents, running on their records, are necessarily running as members of their party—and their party's presidential nominee, as discussed above, leads that party.  This should, I think, lead to more communication by incumbents.

Several distinctions exist about how incumbency status impacts candidates of the two chambers of Congress.  According to Jacobson (2009), 79 percent of senators have won reelection since the postwar period, compared to 94 percent of House members.  The incumbency advantage may be different for the U.S. House and U.S. Senate for several reasons. First, Senate elections are often highly competitive, more so than House races (Abramowitz, 1988; Jacobson, 2009; Carson, 2005).  Challengers are likely to have been previously elected, for instance (Carson, 2005; Jacobson, 2009).  Second, sitting senators often attract significant financial backing, and can employ the trappings of office to de facto run for reelection (Jacobson, 2009).  Senate offices include significant travel budgets, have large staff, and have the resources to promote name recognition, all of which helps reelection efforts.  Thirty-nine states have chosen senators of different parties since 1984 (Jacobson, 2009).  The office itself offers some disadvantage, as well.  Senators may find it challenging to have the same high-frequency contact with voters and constituents that mark House races, since their districts are so much larger in size and population (excepting the seven states with single-district representatives, which have comparatively small populations).  The incumbency advantage is distinct for candidates for the U.S. House and U.S. Senate.  Keeping in mind the structural proximity of the U.S. Senate to the executive office, and the close ties of U.S. House members to district-level issues rather than national issues, I also predict that at the federal level, incumbent senators will

communicate on Twitter about presidential nominees with great frequency than incumbent House members (H6).

*Candidate Gender*

Finally, I am interested in the role of gender in down-ballot candidate communications to and about presidential nominees.  Specifically, it is possible that the gender of down-ballot candidates may impact their communications about presidential nominees.  In the 2016 election, gender occupied a unique position in presidential politics—for the first time, a woman was at the top of a major party ticket.  Gender is important in contemporary American politics, which is a highly masculinized space.  That is, masculine behaviors, characteristics, identities, subjects, and communication styles are the norm, and it is a space occupied by men (Meeks, 2013; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005).  Significant scholarship has explored the importance of gender in terms of candidate communication (Anderson, 2002; Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 1996; Lawrence & Rose, 2010; Banwart, 2010 among many others; see also Coe et al. 2007 for a discussion of performed masculinity).  Dow and Tonn (1993) see a "feminine" style as personal, likely to use anecdotes and examples as evidence and inductive reasoning, and likely to encourage identifications between a speaker and audience.  Similarly, Meeks (2013) has suggested that men and women candidates may consciously adopt and implement gendered communication styles for political benefit.  A candidate's gender, then, may impact how he or she communicates.  This dissertation is interested in how candidate gender is related to communications about presidential nominees of different genders, but it is important to acknowledge that gender is infused in every aspect of campaign communication.  I turn now to the issue of gender representation in politics.

Politics is a masculine space.  For one thing, far fewer women than men have held elected office historically, or hold it now.  U.S. women gained the right to vote with the passage of the

19th Amendment in 1920. Nearly a century later, women are more likely than men to participate in the electoral process by voting. According to the Center for Women in Politics, more women than men vote, both by number and by proportion (2015). While women make up more than half of the electorate, there is far from equal representation in holding public office. This is true at the federal, state, and local levels. In the 114th Congress, for example, 104 women held seats, comprising 19.4 percent of the 535 total members: 20 women were in the United States Senate (20 percent), and 84 were in the House of Representatives (19.3 percent). Jeanette Rankin, Republican from Montana, was the first woman elected to Congress when she was elected to the U.S. House in 1916. Hattie Caraway, Democrat of Arkansas, was the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate, in 1932. This is true at the state level, as well, although women gained ground within those legislative bodies earlier. Thirty-nine women have served as state governors in U.S. history; in 2016, women executives headed six of the fifty states (12 percent). In 1894, two and a half decades before women could legally vote, three women were elected to the Colorado State House of Representatives—Clara Cressingham, Carrie Holly, and Frances Klock. Two years later, Martha Hughes Cannon was elected to Utah State Senate as the first women elected to a state Senate. In 2015, 24.6 percent of state legislators in the United States were women. Local politics tells a similar tale. Bertha Knight Landes, of Seattle, was the first woman elected to lead a major city in the United States, in 1924. In 2016, 18.8 percent of mayors in U.S. cities with more than 30,000 residents were women. Across all levels of government, then, women remain vastly underrepresented in elected office.

Another important milestone has yet to be crossed—until 2016, no woman had been a major party's presidential nominee, and to date no woman has been elected president. Women have run for president since Victoria Woodhull in 1872, and women have been vice-presidential

nominees in both 1984 (Democrat Geraldine Ferrero) and 2008 (Republican Sarah Palin).

Hillary Clinton first ran for president in 2008, losing the Democratic party's primary campaign

to Barack Obama after earning almost 18 million votes—or, as she famously put it to her

supporters at her concession speech, after they put "18 million cracks in that highest, hardest

glass ceiling" (Clinton, 2008). On April 12, 2015 she announced her campaign for president,

and on July 26, 2016, the Democratic Party officially nominated Clinton for president. The 2016

presidential election, then, marked the first time that anyone—legislative candidates and

legislators, media, political elites, and voters—could consider a female presidential major-party

nominee in the concrete, rather than the abstract. The role gender played in the ways candidates

communicated about presidential nominees, within this context, is particularly important and

worthy of consideration.

Gender in the 2016 election is likely to be closely connected to novelty. As Meeks

(2013) discusses, "novelty labeling"—that is, a combination of *gender labeling*, which evokes a

candidate's gender, and *uniqueness labeling*, which invokes the candidate's unusual status—may

be used to characterize women candidates as unique or distinct. Numerous studies have found

that women running for office receive more novelty coverage than men—that is, media coverage

characterizes women as novel or different within a particular context. For example, a study of

women running for office between 1872 and 2008 demonstrated that media sources almost

always noted gender for women, but almost never for men (Falk, 2010). Novelty labeling is a

way of marking women candidates as existing outside the norm. It may also be a way of

celebrating achievements, and acknowledging barriers broken. With these patterns in mind, I

predict that gender holds a role in how candidates will communicate—that is, will drive some

communication. First, I predict that down-ballot candidates' Twitter communication about

Hillary Clinton—from both men and women down-ballot candidates—is likely to include more "novelty" references and labels than their Twitter communications about Donald Trump (H7). Clinton's status as presidential nominee was glass-ceiling shattering, barrier breaking, and likely to draw significant attention from candidates down the ballot.

Partisanship, of course, is an important factor in considering which down-ballot candidates communicate about gender in this election—and may be more important than candidate gender. According to Dolan (2014), men and women are overwhelmingly likely to support the candidate of their political party, regardless of the sex of that candidate. Legislative candidates, eager to earn the votes of their own party members, are unlikely to treat gender as more important than political identity. With the likely greater importance of partisanship over gender in mind, I predict that down-ballot Democratic candidates are more likely to communicate on Twitter about gender novelty in elections than Republican candidates (H8). Novelty around gender, in this particular presidential election, was partisan. While Democrats might celebrate both a historic nomination and their party's prominence in nominating the first major-party female nominee, the same might not be true of Republicans. It is unlikely that Republicans would want to draw attention to the potentially historic nature of the first woman president (and the already historic nature of the first major-party female nominee) while encouraging voters to oppose her on Election Day.

It is possible that one group of down-ballot candidates may connect strongly with Clinton's novel candidacy than others: Democratic women. Unpacking the intersection of H7 and H8, I expect Democratic women candidates to communicate on Twitter about gender more than all other candidates in the 2016 presidential election (H9). I posit this hypothesis for two reasons. First, these candidates share two important identities with one of the presidential

nominees at the top of the ballot—both party and gender.  As a woman attempted to scale the

highly masculinized peak of American politics, Democratic women candidates for both the state

and federal office likely communicated about her in a unique way.  It is possible that their

communication will be reflective of these shared, historic, identities.  And second, talking

explicitly about the woman at the top of the ticket's gender is a road ripe with pitfalls for male

candidates, regardless of party.  When Donald Trump said, "If Hillary Clinton were a man, I

don't think she'd get five percent of the vote.  The only thing she's got going is the woman's

card," Clinton's campaign raised almost $2.5 million from outraged supporters in three days.

Part of this was savvy campaigning from the Clinton team, but this also demonstrated the danger

of a male candidate speaking about a female opponent's pioneering qualities—and the

corresponding outrage from women voters.

I also posit two research questions that guided qualitative aspects of this research,

illustrated in my second data chapter.  These questions were designed to access information not

visible through public communications along, but instead accessed via interviews with legislative

candidates.  While my quantitative research identified instances of public silence, it was not

possible to deconstruct public silence through the broad communication analysis conducted in

Chapter Three.  These individual interviews, however, offered me the ability to unwrap

candidate decision-making, strategy, and goals around public silence.  My first approach, then,

was to examine how legislative candidates decided to remain publicly silent.  For legislative

candidates, communicating about the presidential nominees while locked in a tight race had the

potential to be more damaging than valuable, to detract focus from issues state legislators might

grapple with once in office, or could create an uncomfortably close link to an unpopular

presidential nominee.  As evident in Chapter Three, some state legislative candidates remained

silent on this topic. To explore that communicative choice in depth, my first research question (RQ1) asked: For what reasons did state legislative candidates *not* engage in public communications about Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump?

I also approached legislative candidate communication with an interest in how candidates constructed the public discourse they did share throughout the campaign. State legislative candidates who were public in their communications did so with the knowledge that the major issues of their owns races would be local, not national, that communicating about either presidential nominee could be off-putting to some voters, or fail to generate support among others, and might ultimately serve as a distraction from their own efforts to win office—yet they chose to be public in their communications, indicating that they saw a greater value in vocality than in silence. To that end, my second research question (RQ2) asked: How did state legislative candidates communicate about, support, or oppose the presidential nominees via their public communications?

## Chapter Outline

This dissertation explores what public leaders, across partisan identity, political office, incumbency status, and gender, communicate to the public about presidential nominees. The core principle of this work is that the way that public leaders communicate during elections may be impactful. By examining these communications from the ground up—that is, from candidates for state and federal legislative office—this dissertation offers additional depth to an emerging field. The 2016 presidential election proved to an especially rich arena for these explorations, as this race between the first female presidential nominee and an outsider despised by many in his own party offered new prominence to those holding, and seeking, other offices. In this first chapter I introduced the conceptual framework that guided this dissertation, articulated my

expectations, and sought to place this work within the landscape of contemporary American political communication scholarship.

Chapter Two presents the design of this research, and the methodological approaches that I brought to this dissertation. In this chapter I outline my study design, specify my process for selecting federal and state candidates, detail the specific methods of analysis undertaken, and depict the advantages of the multi-method approach I employ to understanding down-ballot candidate communication about the presidential nominees.

I then move into three data chapters. In Chapter Three I present results of the content analysis of federal and state candidate communication about the presidential nominees via Twitter. Chapter Four presents results of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with state legislative candidates in Washington State. Chapter Five presents results of an analysis of Republican Senate candidate responses to the unexpected release of a video in which Trump bragged of sexually assaulting women. Each chapter provides detailed analysis that corresponds with each of my hypotheses and research questions from Chapter One.

Finally, in Chapter Six I offer a discussion and interpretation of the data, connect the results of these finding to my conceptual framework, and highlight the implications of this work for scholarship and candidates. I conclude by offering suggestions for future research.

**Chapter Two**

**Dissertation Design and Methodology**

I employed three methodological steps to examine down-ballot candidate communication about the presidential nominees during the 2016 general election. The first was a content analysis of candidate communication via Twitter in legislative elections at the federal and state level that were held in November 2016. The analysis examined how candidates across differing partisan identities, level of office, incumbency status, and gender communicated publicly to and about the presidential nominees. The second step was an interview analysis of candidates running for state legislative office in 2016. This analysis explored how candidates for the state legislature intentionally chose to communicate—or not—about the presidential nominees with whom they shared a ballot. The final step was an analysis of Republican Senators' public responses to public remarks Donald Trump made in which he bragged about sexually assaulting women. Together, these three approaches offer a multimethod approach to understanding how legislative candidates publicly communicated about the presidential nominees during elections— and also explored the particular topography of the 2016 election, which proved turbulent. There are several reasons that researchers may apply multiple methods. Generally, employing multiple approaches enhances the analytical power of each method: "By enlarging the scope of the research to which it is applied, the multimethod perspective holds out the larger promises of more sociologically significant conclusions and great opportunities for both verification and discovery" (Brewer & Hunter, 2006, p. 9; Tashakkori & Teddie, 2003). In this case, the use of multiple research methodologies offered rich insights into the discourse in question. The depth offered in a small number of interviews is not accessible via 140-character Twitter communications or via large-pattern content analysis, just as the broad discursive patterns

uncovered via content analysis are not accessible via qualitative interviews.  Additionally, by

diving into one defining discursive moment, I grounded this research in this particular

communicative period.  Together, the three methods in this research provided a range of

complementary insights.  I turn now to a more detailed discussion of the approaches I employed

in this dissertation.

### Content Analysis: Candidate Communications

Content analysis is the "systematic analysis of selected written, spoken, or audiovisual

texts" (Graber, 2004, p. 50), and it enables a sustained examination of communications to tease

apart different forms of defined concepts.  This is a widely used method in political

communication research (Krippendorf, 2012; Graber, 2004) and is well suited to assess the

frequency of certain communication elements to examine underlying trends (Neuendorf, 2002).

For this work, content analysis revealed "typical patterns or characteristics" and identified

"important relationships" in communications of political figures, when other approaches might

have been less revealing of broad patterns (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2005).  Other scholars have

employed content analysis to examine discursive themes on Twitter (Waters & Jamal, 2011;

Meeks, 2013).  Because this study is concerned with the content of candidate communication

about presidential nominees, content analysis allowed me to analyze whether these

communications were present, and if so, what patterns emerged across multiple public

communications.  Content analysis is defined as any "sense-making effort that takes a volume of

qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings" (Patton, 2002, p.

453).  More broadly, it is any "systematic analysis of selected written, spoken, or audiovisual

texts" (Graber, 2004, p. 50).  Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005) emphasize how the statistical analysis

inherent in the method offers interpretive power allowing researchers to "describe the

communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context." This focus on candidates' Twitter communication offers important insight into broad themes that may emerge. I turn now to how candidates were elected for inclusion in this work, beginning with federal candidates.

 ***Selected Federal Elections***: The content analysis focused on Twitter feeds for a collection of 54 federal legislative campaigns in 2016. For this analysis, I selected races for the U.S. House of Representatives based first on levels of competitiveness. Highly competitive general election races, as compared to blowout wins, may prompt candidates to focus even more on how they present themselves to the public in order to create distinction from their opponent (Meeks, 2013). The phenomenon of "post-primary moderation" indicates that in two-party general elections, each party's nominee moves closer to the ideological center (Burden, 2001; Agranov, 2011)—that is, closer to each other. As candidates become more moderate, then, they may increasingly need to emphasize their differences via their public communications. Competitiveness was assessed by analysis from the Cook Political Report, and cross-referenced with rankings by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and FiveThirtyEight.com, each of which published ranked lists of the most competitive House races. These races also included a variety of types of elections: for example, open-seat races and races between incumbents and challengers, and exclusively races between Democrats and Republicans. Both male candidates and female candidates were present. My final selection was made up of the consensus 20 most competitive races in the nation (the full list is included below). I also included all U.S. Senate seats up for election in 2016; that is, a census of all Class Three Senate elections. Class Three is made up of 34 of the 100 U.S. Senate seats (Class One and Class Two each include 33 senate seats), and was most recently up for election in 2010, the first mid-term election after Barack

Obama won the White House.  Notably, I did exclude the Senate race in Louisiana, whose

"jungle primary" made direct comparison challenging.  In summary, this wave of analysis

provided a broad look at candidate communication across both types of federal legislative office,

taking differences of incumbency status, partisan identity, and gender into account.  Tables 2.1

and 2.2 provide a list of the federal candidates contained in this analysis.

Table 2.1
U.S. Senate Candidates, 2016

| District | Senator | Party | Incumbent status | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| AL | Richard Shelby | R | Incumbent | Male |
| AL | Ron Crumpton | D | Challenger | Male |
| AK | Lisa Murkowski | R | Incumbent | Female |
| AK | Ray Metcalfe | D | Challenger | Male |
| AZ | Ann Kirkpatrick | D | Challenger | Female |
| AZ | John McCain | R | Incumbent | Male |
| AR | Conner Eldridge | D | Challenger | Male |
| AR | John Boozman | R | Incumbent | Male |
| CA | Kamala Harris | D | Open | Female |
| CA | Loretta Sanchez | D | Open | Female |
| CO | Darryl Glenn | R | Challenger | Male |
| CO | Michael Bennet | D | Incumbent | Male |
| CT | Dan Carter | R | Challenger | Male |
| CT | Richard Blumenthal | D | Incumbent | Male |
| FL | Patrick Murphy | D | Challenger | Male |
| FL | Marco Rubio | R | Incumbent | Male |
| GA | Jim Barksdale | D | Challenger | Male |
| GA | Johnny Isakson | R | Incumbent | Male |
| HI | John Carroll | R | Challenger | Male |
| HI | Brian Schatz | D | Incumbent | Male |
| ID | Jerry Sturgill | D | Challenger | Male |
| ID | Mike Crapo | R | Incumbent | Male |
| IL | Tammy Duckworth | D | Challenger | Female |
| IL | Mark Kirk | R | Incumbent | Male |
| IN | Todd Young | R | Open | Male |
| IN | Evan Bayh | D | Open | Male |
| IA | Patty Judge | D | Challenger | Female |
| IA | Chuck Grassley | R | Incumbent | Male |

| KS | Patrick Wiesner | D | Challenger | Male |
|----|----------------|---|-----------|------|
| KS | Jerry Moran | R | Incumbent | Male |
| KY | Jim Gray | D | Challenger | Male |
| KY | Rand Paul | R | Incumbent | Male |
| MD | Chris Van Hollen | D | Open | Male |
| MD | Kathy Szeliga | R | Open | Female |
| MI | Jason Kander | D | Challenger | Male |
| MI | Roy Blunt | R | Incumbent | Male |
| NV | Joe Heck | R | Open | Male |
| NV | Catherine Cortez Masto | D | Open | Female |
| NH | Maggie Hassan | D | Challenger | Female |
| NH | Kelly Ayotte | R | Incumbent | Female |
| NY | Wendy Long | R | Challenger | Female |
| NY | Chuck Schumer | D | Incumbent | Male |
| NC | Deborah Ross | D | Challenger | Female |
| NC | Richard Burr | R | Incumbent | Male |
| ND | Eliot Glassheim | D | Challenger | Male |
| ND | John Hoeven | R | Incumbent | Male |
| OH | Ted Strickland | D | Challenger | Male |
| OH | Rob Portman | R | Incumbent | Male |
| OK | Mark Workman | D | Challenger | Male |
| OK | James Lankford | R | Incumbent | Male |
| OR | Mark Callahan | R | Challenger | Male |
| OR | Ron Wyden | D | Incumbent | Male |
| PA | Katie McGinty | D | Challenger | Female |
| PA | Pat Toomey | R | Incumbent | Male |
| SC | Thomas Dixon | D | Challenger | Male |
| SC | Tim Scott | R | Incumbent | Male |
| SD | Jay Williams | D | Challenger | Male |
| SD | John Thune | R | Incumbent | Male |
| UT | Misty Snow | D | Challenger | Female |
| UT | Mike Lee | R | Incumbent | Male |
| VT | Scott Milne | R | Challenger | Male |
| VT | Patrick Leahy | D | Incumbent | Male |
| WA | Chris Vance | R | Challenger | Male |
| WA | Patty Murray | D | Incumbent | Female |
| WI | Russ Feingold | D | Challenger | Male |
| WI | Ron Johnson | R | Incumbent | Male |

Table 2.2
U.S. House of Representatives Candidates, 2016

| District | Name | Party | Incumbency | Gender |
|----------|------|-------|------------|--------|
| AZ-01 | Tom O'Halleran | D | Open | Male |
| AZ-01 | Paul Bebeu | R | Open | Male |
| CA-25 | Stephen Knight | R | Incumbent | Male |
| CA-25 | Bryan Caforio | D | Challenger | Male |
| CO-06 | Mike Coffman | R | Incumbent | Male |
| CO-06 | Morgan Carroll | D | Challenger | Female |
| FL-18 | Brian Mast | D | Open | Male |
| FL-18 | Randy Perkins | D | Open | Male |
| FL-26 | Carlos Curbelo | R | Incumbent | Male |
| FL-26 | Joe Garcia | D | Challenger | Male |
| IA-03 | David Young | R | Incumbent | Male |
| IA-03 | Jim Mowrer | D | Challenger | Male |
| IL-10 | Robert Dold | R | Incumbent | Male |
| IL-10 | Brad Schneider | D | Challenger | Male |
| ME-02 | Bruce Poliquin | R | Incumbent | Male |
| ME-02 | Emily Ann Cain | D | Challenger | Female |
| MN-02 | Angie Craig | D | Open | Female |
| MN-02 | Jason Lewis | R | Open | Male |
| NH-01 | Carol Shea-Porter | D | Challenger | Female |
| NH-01 | Frank Guinta | R | Incumbent | Male |
| NV-03 | Jacky Rosen | D | Open | Female |
| NV-03 | Danny Tarkanian | R | Open | Male |
| NY-01 | Lee Zeldin | R | Incumbent | Male |
| NY-01 | Anna Throne-Holst | D | Challenger | Female |
| NY-03 | Jack Martins | R | Open | Male |
| NY-03 | Tom Suozzi | D | Open | Male |
| NY-19 | John Faso | R | Open | Male |
| NY-19 | Zephyr Teachout | D | Open | Female |
| NY-22 | Claudia Tenney | R | Open | Female |
| NY-22 | Kim Myers | D | Open | Female |
| NY-24 | John Katko | R | Incumbent | Male |
| NY-24 | Colleen Deacon | D | Challenger | Female |
| PA-08 | Brian Fitzpatrick | R | Open | Male |
| PA-08 | Steve Santarsiero | D | Open | Male |
| TX-23 | Will Hurd | R | Incumbent | Male |
| TX-23 | Pete Gallego | D | Challenger | Male |
| UT-04 | Mia Love | R | Incumbent | Female |

| UT-04 | Doug Owens | D | Challenger | Male |
| WI-08 | Mike Gallagher | R | Open | Male |
| WI-08 | Tom Nelson | D | Open | Male |

*Selected State Elections*: My second wave of content analysis focused on 147 state

legislative races.  For state level races, I focused on legislative election contests in Washington

State.  Washington State follows a "top two" primary system, meaning the two candidates in the

summer primary elections with the most votes move on to the general election, regardless of

party.  Unlike most other states, this means that general election races sometimes were between

two candidates of the same party.  The selected elections also included races with male and

female candidates, incumbents, challengers, and open seat candidates.  All state Senate seats up

for election were included as part of this analysis; that is, I collected a census of the 26

Washington State Senate seats up for election.[6]  Unlike at the national level, some of these races

were uncontested.  In keeping with my selection of House of Representatives candidates at the

federal level, for my state-level research I also examined the 20 most competitive House races.  I

created this list through a multi-step process: first, by compiling a list of competitive House races

in Washington as outlined by Ballotopedia.com's list of competitive elections together with a list

of "Races to Watch" by Crosscut, a Seattle media organization.  Second, I double-checked this

list with the Washington State Public Disclosure Commission's website to determine which races

were the focus of both party and campaign spending, another indicator of competitiveness.[7]  To

ensure that no entries were skipped, I found all these groups by looking through every single

[6] In additional to the 25 Washington State Senate seats up for election in presidential election years, the 36th Legislative District held a special election to fill a previously appointed seat.  Democrat Reuven Carlyle had been appointed by the King County Council to fill the Senate seat after the previous Senator stepped down to accept another role, and ran for election.
[7] I looked at all races to which the following groups made contributions: Washington State Democrats, Washington State Republicans, House Democratic Campaign Committee, House Republican Organization Committee, House Democratic Caucus Campaign Committee, Washington State Democratic Central Committee, Washington Senate Democratic Campaign, and the Republican Senate Committee.

entity that made campaign contributions to state legislative races in Washington State in 2016. After double-checking this against my initial list to see which were both seen as competitive by media and by the local parties, I had a list of 14 races. Next, I went back through the six races identified by Crosscut and Ballotopedia.com where neither candidates was a recipient of state party support, and included an additional four races in which the final vote tally was separated by fewer than ten thousand votes. I then looked through the entire groups of legislative House races to see if any of those races were close in terms of votes, and included one final race, bringing my total to 20. With the three remaining races from my initial list all separated by a roughly equal number of votes, I then decided to include a House race in a district with another competitive House race, as well as a competitive Senate election, believing that interest in all legislative races would be higher in that district. The 20 races selected for this study are listed in Tables 2.3 and 2.4.

Table 2.3
Washington State Senate Candidates, 2016

| District | Name | Party | Incumbency | Gender |
|----------|------|-------|------------|--------|
| 1 | Mindie Wirth | R | Open | Female |
| 1 | Guy Palumbo | D | Open | Male |
| 2 | Randi Becker | R | Incumbent | Female |
| 2 | Marilyn Rasmussen | D | Challenger | Female |
| 3 | Andy Billig | D | Incumbent | Male |
| 3 | James Apker | L | Challenger | Male |
| 4 | Mike Padden | R | Incumbent | Male |
| 4 | *No candidate* | | | |
| 5 | Mark Mullet | D | Incumbent | Male |
| 5 | Chad Magendanz | R | Challenger | Male |
| 9 | Mark Schoesler | R | | Male |
| 9 | *No candidate* | | | |
| 10 | Barbara Bailey | R | Incumbent | Female |

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| 10 | Angie Homola | D | Challenger | Female |
|----|--------------|---|------------|--------|
| 11 | Bob Hasegawa | D | Incumbent | Male |
| 11 | Dennis Price | L | Challenger | Male |
| 12 | Brad Hawkins | R | Open | Male |
| 12 | Jon Wyss | R | Open | Male |
| 14 | Curtis King | R | Incumbent | Male |
| 14 | Amanda Richards | R | Challenger | Female |
| 16 | Maureen Walsh | R | Incumbent | Female |
| 16 | *No candidate* | | | |
| 17 | Tim Probst | D | Challenger | Male |
| 17 | Lynda Wilson | R | Incumbent | Female |
| 18 | Ann Rivers | R | Incumbent | Female |
| 18 | Erik Holt | D | Challenger | Male |
| 19 | Dean Takko | D | Incumbent | Male |
| 19 | Sue Kuehl Pederson | R | Challenger | Female |
| 20 | John Braun | R | Incumbent | Male |
| 20 | *No candidate* | | | |
| 22 | Sam Hunt | D | Open | Male |
| 22 | Steve Owens | N | Open | Male |
| 23 | Christine Rolfes | D | Incumbent | Female |
| 23 | *No candidate* | | | |
| 24 | Kevin Van De Wege | D | Open | Male |
| 24 | Danielle Turissini | R | Open | Female |
| 25 | Hans Zeiger | R | Open | Male |
| 25 | Karl Mecklenburg | D | Open | Male |
| 27 | Jeanne Darneille | D | Incumbent | Female |
| 27 | Greg Taylor | R | Challenger | Male |
| 28 | Steve O'Ban | R | Incumbent | Male |
| 28 | Marisa Peloquin | D | Challenger | Female |
| 36 | Reuven Carlyle | D | Incumbent | Male |
| 36 | *No candidate* | | | |
| 39 | Kirk Pearson | R | Incumbent | Male |
| 39 | *No candidate* | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 40 | Kevin Ranker | D | Incumbent | Male |
| 40 | Daniel Miller | R | Challenger | Male |
| 41 | Steve Litzow | R | Incumbent | Male |
| 41 | Lisa Wellman | D | Challenger | Female |
| 49 | Annette Cleveland | D | Incumbent | Female |
| 49 | Lewis Gerhardt | R | Challenger | Male |

Table 2.4
Washington State House of Representatives Candidates, 2016

| District | Candidate | Party | Incumbency | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1B | Shelley Kloba | D | Open | Female |
| 1B | Jim Langston | R | Open | Male |
| 5A | Jason Ritchie | D | Challenger | Male |
| 5A | Jay Rodne | R | Incumbent | Male |
| 5B | Darcy Burner | D | Open | Female |
| 5B | Paul Graves | R | Open | Male |
| 6A | Lynnette Vehrs | D | Open | Female |
| 6A | Mike Volz | R | Open | Male |
| 17A | Sam Kim | D | Open | Male |
| 17A | Vicki Kraft | R | Open | Female |
| 19A | Jim Walsh | R | Open | Male |
| 19A | Teresa Purcell | D | Open | Female |
| 25A | Jamie Smith | D | Challenger | Female |
| 25A | Melanie Stambaugh | R | Incumbent | Female |
| 25B | Michelle Chatterton | D | Open | Female |
| 25B | Joyce McDonald | R | Open | Female |
| 26A | Larry Seaquist | D | Open | Male |
| 26A | Joyce McDonald | R | Open | Female |
| 27B | Barry Knowles | R | Challenger | Male |
| 27B | Pat Sullivan | D | Incumbent | Male |
| 28A | Mari Leavitt | D | Challenger | Female |
| 28A | Dick Muri | R | Incumbent | Male |
| 28B | Christine Kilduff | D | Incumbent | Female |
| 28B | Paul Wagemann | R | Challenger | Male |

| 30A | Mike Pellicciotti | D | Challenger | Male |
|-----|-------------------|---|------------|------|
| 30A | Linda Kochmar | R | Incumbent | Female |
| 30B | Kristine Reeves | D | Challenger | Female |
| 30B | Teri Hickel | R | Incumbent | Female |
| 35B | Craig Patti | D | Challenger | Male |
| 35B | Drew MacEwen | R | Incumbent | Male |
| 42A | Sharlaine LaClair | D | Challenger | Female |
| 42A | Luanne Van Werven | R | Incumbent | Female |
| 44A | John Lovick | D | Incumbent | Male |
| 44A | Janice Huxford | R | Challenger | Female |
| 44B | Katrina Ondracek | D | Challenger | Female |
| 44B | Mark Harmsworth | R | Incumbent | Male |
| 47A | Brooke Valentine | D | Challenger | Female |
| 47A | Mark Hargrove | R | Incumbent | Male |
| 49B | Alishia Topper | D | Open | Female |
| 49B | Monica Jurado Stonier | D | Open | Female |

*Data Collection*: To analyze the Twitter communications during these general election campaigns, I collected the Twitter feeds for each candidate. Some candidates have both campaign accounts, dedicated to their election efforts, and official accounts, if they were incumbents. When candidates had both official and campaign Twitter accounts, only the campaign account was included, since this work is focused on campaign communication. The timeframe for this analysis was from the primary elections, which ended in July of 2016, through the general election on November 8, 2016. I identified each candidate by their unique Twitter handle, and then a colleague downloaded each identified candidate's complete Twitter feed from July 1, 2016—the month of both parties' nominating conventions—through November 15, 2016—one week after the general election. The complete Twitter feeds from the selected candidates were then downloaded via a script written to pull tweets directly from the Twitter API

(Application Programming Interface).  This same process has been used previously for doctoral

dissertation work, and verified by a professional software engineer.[8]  This resulted in 47,792

tweets, representing the complete census of all tweets sent by these candidates during the

selected timeframe.

I then narrowed these messages to those relevant for this study.  The scope of this

research involved communications specifically regarding and to the presidential nominees, and

only those tweets that fell within these parameters were retained.  I did this filtering in two

waves.  First, to build this original data set, I began with the complete set of collected tweets and

used simple filter functions in Microsoft Excel to identify relevant tweets.  I began with specific

terms including, for example, "nominee," "Hillary Clinton," "Clinton," "Donald Trump,"

"Trump," "@HillaryClinton," "@realDonaldTrump," "DJT," and "HRC."  I copied each of these

complete tweets, along with user handle and time stamp, to a new worksheet.  I also included

commonly used hashtags with specific meaning and connection to the campaigns, such as

"#imwithher," "#MakeAmericaGreatAgain," "#LoveTrumpsHate," and "#NeverTrump."  After

filtering for all explicit references to and about the presidential nominees, for my second wave of

collecting tweets I read through the entire collection of almost 48,000 tweets to include tweets

that did not use these key words, but that were obviously about either of the presidential

nominees.  For example, the message "PSA: It's not voting for the lesser of two evils when one

is a white supremacist and the other is a qualified woman who rubs you the wrong way" was

clearly about the choice between Trump and Clinton, but would not have been included in my

first wave of analysis.  To ensure that all relevant tweets were collected, I read through the

complete collection of tweets twice.  For example, the initials "HRC" were often used in

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[8] The source code used for this process is available online: https://github.com/Tashkant/twitter_archiver

reference to the Human Rights Commission, as well as Hillary Rodham Clinton. This final

check was an important test for inclusion in this study. The final collection of tweets was 3,769

tweets; this made up my data set for my content analysis.

*Variables and Operationalization:* My variables included both items about the

candidates and contents of their communications. First, I coded all variables related to candidate

identity: that is, level of office sought, incumbency status, gender, and whether they were

seeking federal or state office.

To test the hypotheses, I created the following content variables and operationalizations

(see Appendix A for the complete codebook). The unit of observation and unit of analysis was

the individual tweet. Specifically, I coded the following items from the tweets.

*Nominee Reference*: My first point of analysis was to determine whether down-ballot

candidates referenced the presidential nominees.

> CD: Any tweet that explicitly or manifestly referenced either Donald Trump or Hillary
> Clinton. Note: In order to be included in this study, every single tweet had to be coded
> "Present" for at least one of these variables.
> - *Reference Trump*: Any statement that directly and explicitly mentioned Donald
>   Trump by name, initials, or @realDonaldTrump. This variable did not include
>   state-specific campaign handles such as @TrumpforFL.
> - *Reference GOP Nominee*: Any statement that directly and explicitly mentioned
>   Donald Trump by title, position, or other clear reference, not including his name.
> - *Reference Clinton:* Any statement that directly and explicitly mentioned Hillary
>   Clinton by name, initials, or @HillaryClinton. This variable did not include state-
>   specific campaign handles such as @HillaryforIL.
> - *Reference Dem Nominee*: Any statement that directly and explicitly mentioned
>   Hillary Clinton by title, position, or other clear reference, not including her name.

*Support or Opposition*: My second point of analysis was to determine whether down-

ballot candidates communicated either support or opposition to the presidential nominees, by

name or via another reference. These variables captured overall positive and negative

communications included in each tweet.

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CD: Any tweet that explicitly and directly referenced candidate's support or opposition towards Donald Trump and/or Hillary Clinton, either by name or clear reference. These variables were not mutually exclusive; a tweet could be coded "Present" for multiple reference variables. Operational definitions are below.

- *Support Clinton*: explicit support of Hillary Clinton by name or @HillaryClinton
- *Support Trump*: Any statement directly and explicitly referencing candidate's support for Donald Trump by name, initials, or Twitter handle (@realDonaldTrump), or made support explicitly clear after referencing Trump by name.
- *Support GOP nominee*: Any statement directly and explicitly referencing candidate's support for Donald Trump that refers to the GOP nominee, New York businessman, or similar language obviously in reference to Trump.
- *Support Dem nominee*: Any statement directly and explicitly referencing candidate's support for Hillary Clinton that refers to the Democratic nominee, former First Lady, or similar language obviously in reference to Clinton.
- *Oppose Clinton*: explicit opposition to Hillary Clinton by name or @HillaryClinton
- *Oppose Trump*: Any statement directly and explicitly opposing Donald Trump that did not refer to him by name or @realDonaldTrump, but instead referred to the GOP nominee, New York businessman, or similar language obviously in reference to Trump.

*Gender*: The gender of those seeking office was an important issue in the 2016 election—both the nominees' gender, and how those nominees conceptualized gender and the importance of gender, at least to down-ballot candidates. To understand how legislative candidates communicated about nominee or candidate gender, at least through the eyes of the down-ballot candidates under examination, I first looked at "gender reference." This variable offers insight into how down-ballot candidates discursively positioned nominees vis-à-vis important voting blocs, groups of constituents, or simply audiences that may care about specific issues. I was also interested in whether and how down-ballot candidates emphasized the gender of either nominee; that is, if down-ballot candidates directly noted Clinton's status as a female presidential nominee, and Trump's as a male presidential nominee. Previous studies (Meeks, 2012) demonstrate that the news media often refer to female candidates by gender labels, especially when those female

candidates run for the White House.  With this variable, I explored whether down-ballot

candidates employed these same labels.

> CD: Any tweet that explicitly or clearly references gender in relation to either of the presidential nominees.  Operational definitions are below.
> - *Clinton gender*: When a down-ballot candidate used gender-specific language in reference to Hillary Clinton—using words such as woman, female, mother, or phrases or phrases such as "you go, girl."  This variable did not include normal use of pronouns.
> - *Trump gender*:  When a down-ballot candidate used gender-specific language in reference to Donald Trump's gender—using words such as man, male, father, or phrases such as "no man should act this way."  This variable did not include normal use of pronouns.
> - *Candidate gender*: When the candidate tweeted using gender-specific language in relation to his or her self, or his or her opponent—using words such as man, woman, male, female, father, mother, or phrases or hashtag such as "I'm a dad for Hillary" in conjunction with the nominee.

*Novelty*: Next, I operationalized whether down-ballot candidates invoked presidential

nominee novelty.  Scholars indicate that news media convey deviance by employing labels that

mark events or people as different in some way—creating "norm breakers" (Shoemaker, 1985;

Meeks, 2012).  In 2016, both presidential nominees could have been considered

groundbreaking—Hillary Clinton for her gender, and Donald Trump for his non-political

background and volatile language.  As Shoemaker (1985) notes, journalists often convey

deviance via emphasis on a candidate's non-standard characteristics: for example, their gender,

or unique background.  In this high-stakes, newsworthy election, down-ballot candidates could

well have been interested in how these presidential nominees departed from the norm.

Additionally, the historic nature of Clinton's candidacy as the first female presidential nominee

of a major party made this pioneering position perhaps of interest to down-ballot candidates.  For

this reason, I also examined how down-ballot candidates communicated about novelty *specific to*

*gender in this election*.  No woman had ever made it so far in the presidential election process; it

stands to reason that some down-ballot candidates would take note of this groundbreaking

campaign.

> CD: Any tweet that clearly and explicitly references novelty in terms of the presidential
> nominees.
> - *Non-gender novelty*: When a candidate tied the content of the tweet to a
>   nominee's uniqueness in a certain context, meaning that they were the first, or
>   pioneer to do something based on religion, experience, age, or background, or
>   phrases such as "once-in-a-generation" candidate.  This excluded gender novelty.
> - *Gender novelty*: When a candidate tied the content of the tweet to a nominee's
>   uniqueness in a certain context, meaning that they were the first, or pioneer to do
>   something, based on gender.  This code included tweets that mentioned the
>   historic nature of Clinton's candidacy, including phrases about breaking glass
>   ceilings that clearly referenced Clinton.

*Coding Procedure:* I conducted intercoder reliability testing with one other coder, using

a random subset of the collection of tweets (*n*=600).[9]  Reliability was calculated using

Krippendorf's alpha, and intercoder reliability coefficients ranged from α=.804 (Support Clinton)

to α=100 (Support GOP nominee, Clinton gender, and gender novelty), thereby meeting

acceptance levels (Krippendorf, 2004).

**Interviews**

For my second major analytic approach, I conducted interviews with state legislative

candidates to talk with them directly about whether and how they communicated publicly about

the presidential nominees.  Smaller-sample research approaches, such as interviews, "care less

about finding averages and more about understanding specific situations, individuals, groups, or

moments in time that are important or revealing" (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, p. 2).  This approach

was particularly appropriate for this research because of the overall context in which this study

was conducted: the 2016 presidential election.  This election, featuring both the first-ever female

major party presidential nominee and a candidate who could potentially be the first president to

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[9] This size exceeded the minimum required sample size suggested by Riffe, Lacy, and Eico's (2005) equation for
selection an appropriate sample size for ICR.

have never held elected, appointed, or military office, was an important, revealing moment that transcends averages.  With in-depth approaches to add nuance and reveal differing insights than might be apparent through content analysis, I sought multiple lenses on how down-ballot candidates communicated publicly about the historic 2016 presidential candidates.

I focused specifically on Washington State legislative candidates for these interviews. Washington was a geographically convenient location, but it also was an appropriate focus for this dissertation for a number of reasons.  First, like all other states except Nebraska, Washington has a bicameral legislature, meaning both a House of Representatives and a Senate.  Second, Washington is politically "purple" at the state level.  Going into the 2016 election, Democrats controlled a majority in the state House, and Republicans controlled a majority in the state Senate, both by very narrow margins.  Third, Washington has a high number of women in the legislature; it is currently ranked fifth nationally (out of the 50 states) in percentage of elected women, and has been ranked as high as third.  Going into the 2016 elections, 33 of the 98 House members were women, and 17 of 49 Senators were women, making it an intriguing location to study whether and how gender was part of the 2016 campaign discourse.  And finally, I have professional experience working with members of both chambers of the Washington legislature, often across the partisan aisle; these relationships helped me connect with legislators and candidates.[10]  In sum, Washington state legislative candidates were the focus of my interviews.

I conducted interviews with a selection of state legislative candidates.  Interviewing, more than most other methods, enables researchers to develop an understanding of how people conceptualize themselves, their experiences, and their world, allowing them to tell their own

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[10] At different points over the past several years, I have lobbied some of the candidates included in this study on specific legislative issues, chaired a bi-partisan Political Action Committee that made donations to some of these candidates (of both political parties), and was a Steering Committee member for an organization seeking to elect women to state office.

stories on their own terms (Burns, 2000; Mischler, 1986).  Qualitative research interviews are

"attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of

their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Kvale &

Brinkmann, 2009, p. 1).  In this dissertation, I followed the approach Burns (2000) characterizes

as "semi-structured" interviewing, using a pre-determined list of questions.  This approach did

not specify response choices, question order, or require that all questions be asked at each

interview.  Two strengths of this approach were that it affords interviewers with flexibility to set

aside questions that emerge as irrelevant and to probe for more information when productive,

and encouraged subjects to express their own construction of worlds, themes, and topics (Rubin

& Rubin, 2005; Warren, 2002).  These interviews were intended to provide a deeper

understanding of communication patterns than were observable through public means via

Twitter.  The semi-structured interviews encouraged legislators to share their understanding of

the world, making this approach a strong conceptual fit for the purposes of this research.

I interviewed 21 candidates for state legislative office, surpassing recommendations on

the number of interviews needed for meaningful work offered by Kvale & Brinkmann (2009).  I

reached out via email and phone to state House of Representatives candidates, and state Senators

up for election in 2016, in Washington State.  Obtaining access to individuals who are leaders or

experts in their communities for research purposes can be challenging (Hertz & Imber, 1995).

The benefits of speaking directly with state legislators made it worth the difficulty in contacting

and connecting with them.  I invited them to participate in an interview prior to the November 8

general election.  I then employed an interview guide approach (Patton, 2005).  Topics were

prespecified and were part of an interview protocol (see Appendix B for the complete interview

instrument), but could be reworded as needed, and were not in a proscribed order, which allowed

more flexibility to let the conversation unfurl and candidates to offer their own thoughts. Almost all candidates were interviewed prior to the election, but a few occurred in the two-week period following the election. For interviews after the election, I also asked questions about whether they would have adapted behavior or communication activities had they known the outcome, but otherwise all questions were consistent regardless of when interviews took place.

Interview topics focused on several key aspects of this research: how candidates decided if and when to communicate publicly about presidential nominees of their or another political party, the interaction that they valued between presidential elections and their own campaigns, how candidates decided to employ Twitter, and the role of gender in both the presidential election and their own campaigns. These questions and topics offered greater discursive richness to the broad themes communicated by my earlier examination of public Twitter communications. Among the questions I asked during these interviews are the following:

Twitter
- How important is/was Twitter to your external communication strategy?
- What is/was your strategy around Twitter communications?

Participation
- What is/was your strategy to discussing either presidential nominee this year?
- Do you think it is/was important for state legislators to weigh in on the presidential campaign?

Presidential nominees
- Do/did you publicly communicate about either your party's presidential nominee or the other party's presidential nominee, and if so, why?
- How does/did the presidential election impact your own election?

Incumbency
- Do/did you plan to run for office again?
- Will you run for this same office, or seek a new position?

Gender
- Do/did you see the role of gender as important in this presidential election? If so, how?
- What role does/did gender play in your election?

Demographics
- How would you describe yourself politically?
- How important is your partisan identity to you?
- Is/was this your first election?

Wrap up:
- Anything you would like to add?

While specific questions may have differed slightly as appropriate for specific candidates, these broad areas guided each interview.

In summary, the content analyses of federal legislative candidates and state legislative candidates, along with in-depth interviews with state legislative candidates, together positioned this dissertation to explore how down-ballot candidates situated themselves via their public communications in relation to presidential nominees, in differing electoral contexts. The interviews explored how individual candidates operated within the broader patterns of discourse revealed by the content analysis. I expected that candidate proximity to the White House would play a role in these public communications, as candidates running for different levels of office may have different relationships with the presidency based on American political structure. By examining direct communications from federal legislative candidates, and through personal interviews with state legislative candidates, I sought to offer significant insight into these two distinct political experiences.

One final, unanticipated form of analysis is included in this research as a result of the specific dynamics of the 2016 presidential election. In addition to the broad discursive patterns illustrated by examining Twitter, and the qualitative data gathered through individual interviews with state legislative candidates, I also analyzed one particular communicative moment in greater detail: Republican U.S. Senator responses to a video in which Trump bragged about sexually assaulting women, released during the final month of the campaign. This unexpected scandal

was a highly revealing communicative moment that occurred under a glaring media spotlight, threatened core Republican Party values, and offered an unprecedented opportunity for down-ballot candidates and sitting legislators to publicly speak about their nominee.  I collected all Republican Senators' public responses to this news that I could find to identify potential thematic patterns and gain insight into how these leaders responded to one of the most shocking moments in contemporary American political discourse.

The 2016 presidential election was unprecedented in significant ways: it brought the first female major-party nominee, the first potential president to have never held elected, appointed, or military office, and arguably the two most unpopular presidential nominees ever to run for the White House—and this was all happening as new tools for political communication continued to emerge.  The nominees at the top of the ticket were potentially connected with electoral outcomes down the ballots.  In an election year in which down-ballot campaigns have rarely been more important, this dissertation offered important insight into the relationship between presidential elections and down-ballot candidate communication.

**Chapter Three**

**Down-ballot Candidate Communications about Presidential Nominees**

For some legislative candidates, communicating about presidential nominees during the 2016 presidential election was tantamount to a high-wire balancing act. When asked who he was supporting for president in August 2016, Utah congressman Jason Chaffetz, a Republican running for re-election, told the media it would be Donald Trump: "Yes, oh yes, absolutely. Having somebody coming in from the outside to reconstitute what's going on in the Congress and in Washington D.C., I think that's a good thing." Just two months later, on October 7, when a video surfaced in which Trump boasted of grabbing women by the genitals, Chaffetz declared: "I'm out. I can no longer in good conscience endorse this person for president. It is some of the most abhorrent and offensive comments that you can possibly imagine. My wife and I, we have a 15-year-old daughter, and if I can't look her in the eye and tell her these things, I can't endorse this person" (Phillips, 2016). Nineteen days later, Chaffetz tweeted, "I will not defend or endorse @realDonaldTrump, but I am voting for him. HRC is that bad. HRC is bad for the USA." While Chaffetz's "he will—he won't—he will" approach to Trump was more erratic than many of his Congressional colleagues, news and pundit interest in whether Republican candidates would support Trump was high. *The Atlantic* published a "cheat sheet" on November 6, two days before the election, outlining who among Republican elites was publicly supporting Trump and who had changed their minds along the way. Newspapers around the country, from the *New York Times* to the Wichita *Eagle*, generated reports of legislative and candidate endorsements, reversals, and evasions (Yourish, Buchanan & Parlapiano, 2016; Lowry, 2016). In short, whether down-ballot candidates communicated publicly about the presidential nominees was a newsworthy topic—and a highly scrutinized discourse during the presidential election.

For candidates running on the same ballot as Trump and Clinton, the challenge of how to approach public communications about these two presidential nominees was obvious. Legislative candidates in 2016 seeking to win their own electoral contests did so surrounded by the swirl of a presidential election between the two most unpopular nominees in recent history. In this dissertation I contend that the ways down-ballot candidates communicate about presidential nominees is informed by the particular context of the office they seek, their partisan identity, their incumbency status, and their gender. As a first step to examining these communication patterns for the 2016 election cycle, I conducted a content analysis of campaign Twitter feeds across federal and state legislative elections. Specifically, I began by looking at all U.S. Senate races, the 20 most competitive U.S. House races, all Washington State Senate races, and the 20 most competitive Washington State House races. In total I examined 98 candidates' Twitter messages to and about the presidential nominees, starting on July 1, 2016 (the month of both parties' nominating conventions) and ending on November 15, 2016, one week after the general election. All together I employed two data sets: first, the 190 legislative candidates who matched the parameters of this study, and second, the full set of 3,679 tweets from these candidates. In this chapter, I explore how candidates seeking various levels of legislative office communicated via Twitter about presidential nominees.

## Expectations for Federal and State Candidate Communication

I had several expectations about how down-ballot candidates, across level of political office, with differing partisan identities, some male and some female, and with different incumbency status, would communicate publicly via Twitter about the two presidential nominees while seeking election themselves. First, I predicted that candidates for federal office (i.e. both U.S. Senate and the U.S. House) would communicate on Twitter at a greater volume than would

candidates seeking election to a state House or state Senate (H1). This expectation was based on research on key differences between state and federal office. Specifically, federal and state legislators communicate via different channels (Abbe & Herrnson, 2003), generally have different personal backgrounds (Jacobson, 2009), and represent vastly different districts to do vastly different jobs. Furthermore, federal and state legislators hold very different forms of interaction with the federal executive branch. While federal legislators are a constitutional check to presidential power, and may either work closely with or in opposition to a White House's legislative agenda, state legislators have no formal interaction with the White House. It stands to reason, then, that federal legislators likely have a much higher level of communication than state legislators with, and perhaps about, the potential president.

My second prediction was that among those seeking federal office, candidates for the U.S. Senate would communicate to and about the presidential nominees more often than candidates for the U.S. House (H2). This expectation drew on scholarship outlining the differences between the two federal legislative chambers, both in job structure and in campaign practices. Specifically, scholarship indicates that senators are often more visible and familiar to voters due to their longer terms in office, their national stature, and the smaller size of their group (Hinckley, 1980; Hinckley, 1981). Senate campaigns are also generally more time consuming and resource dependent undertakings than campaigns for the U.S. House (Jacobson, 2009; Abramowitz, 1988; Campbell & Sumners, 1990, among others). Although they are both legislative chambers at the federal level, the U.S. House and U.S. Senate operate—and legislators within them may communicate—in distinct ways. Because of these key differences both in office and in campaign structure, I expected that candidates for the U.S. Senate would

communicate about the presidential nominees at a greater volume on Twitter than candidates for the U.S. House.

My third prediction was that partisan identity would be a differentiating factor in how candidates communicate. Specifically, I expected that candidates' Twitter communication about a candidate's own party's nominee would be primarily positive, while communication about the opposing party's nominee would be only negative (H3). Partisan identity is critical for elections (Bartels, 2000; Campbell et al., 1966) and especially important in presidential elections (Jacobson, 2009). According to the "coattails" effect (see Campbell, 2015), down-ballot candidates may sweep into office, benefiting electorally by having attached themselves to a popular presidential figure of their same party. Scholarship on the coattails effect indicates that presidential candidate success has great implications for down-ballot candidate success based on partisan identification (Campbell & Sumners, 1990). For federal candidates who are reliant on party machinery and resources to turn out the vote, it is usually in their own interest to firmly connect themselves with the person at the top of the ticket to leverage those connections. By communicating positively about their own nominee, and negatively about the opposing party's nominee, candidates at the federal level indicate their alliance to their political party—and encourage voters to support the candidate whose coattails they may need to ride. It follows, then, that down-ballot candidates in the 2016 election would communicate positively about their own nominee while offering only critiques of the opposing party's nominee.

My fourth prediction again focused on overall focus of communication. Specifically, I expected that down-ballot candidates would communicate (via Twitter) more about Clinton than about Trump (H4). That is, I predicted that candidates would communicate more about the presidential nominee leading in the polls for the majority of the general election period, since she

was widely expected to win. When faced with politically damaging choices, politicians may instead choose to remain silent. This is well documented for legislators in office (Mayhew, 1974; Zaller, 1994), and likely extends to legislative candidates as well. While their own nominee made gaffe after gaffe, Republican down-ballot candidates likely chose to stay relatively silent, rather than offer continued defense of and vocal support for Trump. For a nominee with potentially limited coattails appeal, Republicans could have distanced themselves through lack of communication. Democratic candidates, on the other hand, had the comparative advantage of being connected by party to a relatively more popular candidate—which could have encouraged Democrats to reference their nominee at a higher rate in order to benefit from her coattails.

My next two predictions focused on the meeting of incumbency status and down-ballot candidate communication regarding the presidential nominees. First, I expected that incumbents at the federal level (both U.S. Senate and U.S. House) would communicate on Twitter to and about presidential nominees with greater frequency than challengers for federal office (H5). For this prediction, I considered all federal incumbents one category of candidates, and all federal challengers a separate category of candidates. As Jacobson (2009) notes, incumbency matters: whether a candidate is attempting to be re-elected, running for an open seat, or challenging a sitting lawmaker shapes every aspect of candidate and campaign. The "incumbency advantage" is a well-known phenomenon in American electoral politics: it is the reality that incumbents, as existing holders of the office they seek, have structural advantages that frequently contribute to their reelection (Erikson, 1971). They also have a key distinction from challengers—they have spent some years (and perhaps many) serving in federal legislative office, and so may have political and policy successes to tout, working relationships or a history of opposition to the

executive branch, or other close ties to the presidency.  Whether they support the current White House or not, they are political insiders, and as such likely communicate with more frequency about presidential politics.

Unpacking this expectation one step further, I also expected that for federal office, incumbents seeking re-election to the U.S. Senate would communicate via Twitter about the presidential nominees with greater frequency than candidates seeking re-election to the U.S. House (H6).  This prediction compared candidates from two categories—U.S. Senate incumbents and U.S. House incumbents.  As scholars have noted, the incumbency advantage is different for senators and representatives (Jacobson, 2009), and the very factors that make senators higher profile—fewer members, national stature, closer working ties with the White House, longer terms in office—may keep them removed from their districts.  As House members need to maintain close district connections to be elected every two years compared to the Senate's six-year terms, their communication regarding presidential nominees likely differed.  For these reasons, I expected incumbent senators to be more communicative on Twitter about the presidential nominees than incumbent House members.

My seventh prediction was that, in engaging with a hard-contested election between two unusual candidates, down-ballot candidates would remark on nominee novelty—their unique, groundbreaking, pioneering status—in different ways.  Donald Trump was the first potential president in modern history to not have held elected, appointed, or military office.  He ran as an outsider who was unfamiliar with the ways of Washington, and packaged his lack of political expertise as advantageous.  In many ways, Clinton was the most expected presidential nominee possible—she had been in public service for decades, had held both elected and appointed office, had come achingly close to winning the Democratic nomination in 2008, and campaigned on her

years of experience. But trumping that was her historic role as the first female presidential

nominee of a major party. Being female is notable in contemporary American politics, which is

a highly masculinized space. That is, masculine behaviors, characteristics, identities, subjects,

and communication styles are the norm, and it is a space predominantly occupied by men

(Meeks, 2013; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005)—and, at the presidential level, exclusively by

men to date. Clinton's nomination was momentous, and signaled an important barrier crossed.

While Trump's candidacy was unexpected and novel in many ways, it did not hold the same

groundbreaking status as Clinton's. With all of this in mind, I predicted that Twitter

communication about Hillary Clinton was likely to include more "novelty" references and labels

than communications about Donald Trump (H7).

My next predictions unpacked the idea of novelty to address gender novelty directly. My

definition here draws on work by Meeks (2013), and is a combination of *gender labeling*, which

invokes a candidate's gender, and *uniqueness labeling*, which invokes the candidate's unusual

status. I offer two expectations about how down-ballot candidates would communicate using

gender novelty labeling. First, I expected that Democratic candidates would be more likely to

communicate via Twitter using gender novelty labeling than Republican candidates (H8). The

value of gender novelty, in this election, was highly partisan. Only one party—the Democrats—

was attempting to shatter a political glass ceiling by electing the first female president.

Communications from that side were likely to reference the historic nature of Clinton's

candidacy. Republicans, on the other hand, were seeking to elect another male presidential

nominee. While much was novel about Trump's candidacy, his gender did not offer the same

opportunity to be pioneering. For Democrats, then, claiming this historic moment made sense.

For that reason, I predicted that the majority of gender novelty communication came from

Democratic candidates.  And finally, I expected Democratic women candidates to communicate

about gender more than all other candidates in the 2016 presidential election (H9).  Down-ballot

Democratic women candidates shared two important identities with their presidential nominee at

the top of the ballot: gender and party.  As a woman attempted to reach the highest and most

traditionally masculine seat in American politics, candidates who shared both gender and party

identity likely found this meaningful and worthy of communication.

    With all of these expectations as the focus, the remainder of this chapter is an exploration

of down-ballot communication patterns, in two stages of analysis.  First, I identify general

patterns of Twitter use that are relevant for this study.  Specifically, I provide data on which

relevant candidates employed Twitter to discuss the presidential nominees during the time period

covered in this study.  Next, I address each hypothesis and focus on the content of this Twitter

communication.  The data will indicate that most of these hypotheses are supported, with a few

notable exceptions.  These analyses provide insight into down-ballot communication patterns in

candidates' Twitter communications in the 2016 presidential election.

### Outlines of the Data: Twitter Use Regarding Presidential Nominees

    During the 2016 general election, a total of 469 federal legislative seats were up for

election.  I start here with the 34 seats that make up Class 3 seats within the U.S. Senate and

were up for election.  In this study I focus on 33 of these seats, with 66 candidates.[11]  Of these

Senate candidates, 14 did not tweet about Trump or Clinton during the examined time period.

Three of these candidates did not have Twitter accounts, while the other 11 either did not tweet

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[11] Due to Louisiana's unique electoral structure, known as the "jungle primary" in which all candidates for
legislative office appear on the same ballot, on November 8, 2016, concurrent with the presidential election,
Louisiana has been excluded from this study.  Since no Senate candidate received a majority of the vote, a runoff
election was then held between the top two primary candidates, Republican John Neely Kennedy and Democrat
Foster Campbell.  Kennedy went on to win with more than 60% of the vote.  While two other states, Washington
and California, employ election structures in which the top two vote getters move forward, regardless of party,
primaries earlier in the election determined the final two candidates for each of these states.  For that reason, they
are included in this study.

at all or did not tweet about either presidential nominee.  Of the remaining 52 candidates, five

ran for three open seats (California, Indiana, and Maryland), and 23 challengers contested 24

incumbents.  In terms of gender, 13 candidates were women, while 39 were men.  For party

affiliation, 28 of these candidates were Democrats, while 24 were Republicans (Senate elections

in both California and Oregon were between two Democrats).  Twenty-five of these candidates

lost, and the remaining 27 candidates won their elections.

For my analysis of the U.S. House of Representatives contests, I focused on the 20 most

competitive races across the U.S.  Of these, one candidate did not have a Twitter account, and an

additional seven candidates did not tweet about the presidential nominees during the time period

of analysis (of these, five were incumbents).  Of the remaining 32 candidates, 18 were competing

for open seats, five were incumbents, and nine were challengers.  Ten were women, 22 were

men.  Fourteen were Republicans (including all the incumbents), and the remaining 18 were

Democrats (including all the challengers).  Sixteen of these candidates won, and 16 lost.

In Washington State, a total of 124 state legislative elections were held at the general

election in 2016.  Washington's 49 state legislative districts each elect two representatives,

elected every two years, and one senator, elected every four years in two alternating classes.  I

began with a census of the 26 state Senate races and the 20 most competitive state House races,

to match the races examined at the federal level.[12]  I built this list of competitive races in several

steps: first, I created a list of candidates who won their races by fewer than 10,000 votes.  I then

cross-checked that list for candidates to whom party organizations (for example, the Washington

State Democrats, or the House Republican Organization Committee) made donations, creating a

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[12] In 2016, the Washington State Senate had 25 seats up for election, as well as a special election in the 36th
legislative district, to fill an unexpired term held by Reuven Carlyle, who was appointed to fill the seat vacated when
Jeanne Kohl-Welles was appointed to the King County Council.  The addition of this special election brought the
total number of state Senate elections to 26.

list of 14 candidates in seven races.  Next, I checked to see which races were won by narrow

margins but did not receive support from state parties, bringing the total to 19 races.  Finally, I

included one of the House races in the 25th LD, which fell close to the stated categories.  This

provided a robust collection of candidates that included men, women, incumbents, open seats,

challengers, Democrats, and Republicans.  Across the 46 races I examined at the state level, 16

candidates used Twitter to discuss the presidential nominees during this study's time period.

To identify patterns within these communications, I employed content analysis.  I began

by creating my first data set, of candidate Twitter feeds.  After identifying all candidates who fell

within the parameters of this research: all candidates (a) for the U.S. Senate excluding Louisiana,

(b) in the 20 most competitive U.S. House races, (c) in Washington State Senate contests, and (d)

in the 20 most competitive state House contests, I downloaded their complete Twitter feeds from

July 1, 2016, to November 15, 2016.  This resulted in more than 47,000 tweets from federal and

state candidates.  To focus on tweets relevant to the 2016 presidential election, I used the filter

function of Excel to search the tweets for keywords directly related to the nominees—for

example, Hillary, Clinton, Donald, Trump, HRC, and #imwithher.  I copied the relevant tweets

into a new spreadsheet.  I then searched for broader terms among the complete set of tweets: for

example, president, nominee.  I added those relevant tweets to the second spreadsheet.  I then

read through the remaining 42,488 tweets two separate times to capture other relevant tweets.

These two final moves garnered an additional 209 tweets, for a total of 3,679 tweets relevant to

this work from the candidates under consideration.  For this data, the unit of analysis and

observation was each tweet.  The following analysis considered patterns that emerge within this

body of tweets.  I then created a second data set, based on candidates, instead of tweets.  To build

this data set I employed information gathered from my first data set, specifically which

candidates used Twitter to discuss the presidential nominees, to what degree.  For this data set,

the unit of observation and analysis was each of the 190 candidates who fit the parameters of this

study.  I turn now to an analysis of my hypotheses using these two data sets.

**Results**

The first hypothesis predicted that candidates for federal office would communicate on

Twitter to and about presidential nominees more than candidates for state office (H1).  To test

this hypothesis, I first compared federal candidates for the U.S. Senate and U.S. House to

candidates for the Washington state Senate and House in the presence and number of their tweets

to and about Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1
*Frequency of communication by federal and state candidates*

| Percent of candidates who tweeted about the presidential nominees | | Mean number of tweets per candidate about presidential nominees | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Federal candidates (*n=106*) | State candidates (*n=84*) | Federal candidates (*n=106*) | State candidates (*n=84*) |
| 77.3% | 19.0% | 32.2 | 3.1 |
| $\chi^2$ = 63.8, d.f. = 1, *p* <.05 | | t = 4.07, d.f. = 188, *p* <.05 | |

I began this analysis by testing whether legislative candidates at the federal and state level

tweeted at all about the presidential nominees.  One hundred and six candidates for federal

legislative office were eligible for inclusion in this study—that is, were running for U.S. Senate

or for one of the 20 most competitive U.S. House races.  Of these 106 eligible candidates, 82

employed Twitter to communicate to or about one or both of the presidential nominees from July

2016 to November 2016.  Therefore, 77.3 percent of all eligible federal candidates

communicated via Twitter about the presidential nominees in the period examined.  Among state

candidates, 84 were eligible for inclusion in this study—that is, were running for the Washington

State Senate or in one of the 20 most competitive Washington State House races.  Of these, 16

employed Twitter to communicate to or about one or both of the presidential nominees from July 2016 to November 2016. Therefore, 19.0 percent of all eligible state candidates communicated about the presidential nominees. This finding supports my prediction that candidates for federal office would communicate to and about presidential nominees via Twitter more than candidates for state office.

To examine this hypothesis via a second approach, I next examined the per-candidate average number of tweets produced by the candidates. On the federal side, the 106 candidates produced a total of 3,417 tweets to or about the presidential nominees, for an average of 32.2 communications per federal candidate. On the state side, 84 candidates produced a total of 262 tweets to or about the presidential nominees, for an average of 3.1 communications per state candidate. Federal candidates communicated more than 10 times as much as state candidates. By two measures, then, federal candidates communicated via Twitter more about the presidential nominees than did state candidates—both in percentage of candidates who communicated about the presidential nominees and the relative number of communications made by candidates in each group. This hypothesis was supported.

Next, I examined the federal level of government in greater detail, by examining possible differences in communication between candidates for U.S. Senate and U.S. House. My second prediction was that, due to each position's unique election structure, district structure, interaction with the president, and role in federal government, candidates for U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives would communicate about presidential nominees differently. Specifically, I predicted that candidates for the U.S. Senate would communicate to and about the presidential nominees via Twitter more than would candidates for the U.S. House (H2).

Table 3.2
*Frequency of communication by U.S. Senate and U.S. House candidates*

| Percent of candidates who tweeted about the presidential nominees | | Mean number of tweets per candidate about presidential nominees | |
|---|---|---|---|
| U.S. Senate (*n=66*) | U.S. House (*n=40*) | U.S. Senate (*n=66*) | U.S. House (*n=40*) |
| 75% | 80% | 39.8 | 19.7 |
| $\chi^2$ = .25, d.f. = 1, *n.s.* | | t = 1.6, d.f. 104, *p* = .05 | |

This analysis, shown in Table 3.2, demonstrated that this prediction was not supported by one examination of the data but was supported by another means of analysis. Beginning with the percentage of candidates who tweeted at some point about the presidential nominees, we see that 75 percent of U.S. Senate candidates tweeted about the presidential nominees versus 80 percent of House candidates. In sum, more candidates for House communicated about the presidential nominees via Twitter than candidates for Senate, in contradiction to my expectations. To dive deeper into this hypothesis, I then turned to the per-candidate mean number of tweets produced by the federal legislative candidates. Over the five months of this research, the 66 candidates for U.S. Senate issued 2,628 individual tweets regarding the presidential nominees, with a mean of 39.8 tweets per Senate candidate. On the U.S. House side, the 40 candidates in this study tweeted 817 messages regarding Trump and/or Clinton, with a mean of 19.7 tweets from each candidate. With a total of twice as many tweets from Senate candidates as from House candidates, this disparity indicates that, in this form of analysis, this hypothesis was indeed supported. Together, these findings also indicate that while slightly more House candidates overall than Senate candidates tweeted *at least once* about the presidential nominees, the Senate candidates tweeted at a much higher per-candidate volume. I discuss this finding in additional detail in Chapter 6.

Next, I examined whether down-ballot candidates communicated positively or negatively about the presidential nominees. I predicted that positive or negative communication would be entirely driven by partisan alignment—that is, candidates would communicate positively about their own party's nominee and negatively about the opposing party's nominee (H3). For this analysis, I focused on Twitter communications that were explicitly in support of or opposition to the nominees—not simply references.

Table 3.3
*Partisan support and opposition for Clinton and Trump*

|  | Total tweets by Democratic candidates | | Total tweets by Republican candidates | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Federal (*n=2537*) | State (*n=234*) | Federal (*n=1000*) | State (*n=28*) |
| Clinton |  |  |  |  |
| Support | 263 | 24 | 0 | 0 |
| Oppose | 0 | 0 | 236 | 6 |
| Trump |  |  |  |  |
| Support | 1 | 0 | 81 | 1 |
| Oppose | 660 | 71 | 45 | 5 |

The patterns in Table 3.3 reveal two notable results. First, partisan identity was a clear factor in whether candidates for federal and office communicated positively or negatively about Hillary Clinton. At the federal and state level, Republicans spoke exclusively negatively with regard to Clinton ($\chi^2$ =.68, d.f.=1, n.s.) while Democrats at both levels only communicated positively about Clinton ($\chi^2$=8.24, d.f.=1, $p$ <.004). These patterns support my hypothesis. Communications about Donald Trump, however, were more complicated, particularly for Republican candidates ($\chi^2$ =.43, d.f=1, n.s.). Democratic candidates at the state level exclusively opposed Trump, and only one lone tweet from a Democratic federal candidate was offered in support of him. It is intriguing, though, that at both the state and federal levels Democratic candidates offered almost three times as much public opposition to Trump as they did public support of Clinton ($\chi^2$=9.38,

d.f=1, $p$ <.002).  Republicans, in their communications about Trump, were very different.

Clearly Republican candidates at the federal level were torn regarding positive or negative

communication, while state candidates were far more negative in regards to their own

presidential nominee.  This hypothesis was partially supported.

Some examples of these tweets can provide insight.  On the Democratic side,

communications were exclusively positive in reference to Clinton.  More than 10 percent of all

messages from Democratic candidates for the U.S. Congress and the Washington State

Legislative were in support of her, with no messages in opposition.  For example, U.S. House

candidate Brad Schneider, a Democrat running for the Illinois 10th, tweeted "Hillary Clinton is

the only qualified candidate in this race."  Democratic candidates were even more vocal in their

opposition to Trump, with 26.4 percent of tweets by federal-level Democratic candidates against

him and 30.3 percent of tweets by state-level Democratic candidates tweets against him, almost

three times the percent of messages explicitly supporting Clinton.  For example, Darcy Burner, a

Democrat running for an open seat in the Washington State House, tweeted "Like many abusers,

@realDonaldTrump has decided if he can't have this country then he'll try to destroy it so

nobody can."  The vast majority of communications about Trump were negative, but Democratic

candidate Idaho Senate challenger Jerry Sturgill made one positive comment about Donald

Trump.  He tweeted: "Donald Trump and I agree on this: Our government is corrupt and broken

#idpol."  Sturgill, running against 18-year incumbent Republican Mike Crapo, clearly saw value

in at least one positive message regarding Trump, but no other Democrats did the same.

On the Republican side, messages were again consistent with regards to Clinton and

messy with regards to Trump.  Republicans were unified in their opposition to Clinton.  With

more than 20 percent of Twitter communications from both federal and state Republican

candidates opposing her (23.6 percent of tweets from federal candidates, 21.4 percent of tweets from state candidates), and no messages in support, the Republican response to Clinton was straightforward.  For example, incumbent Republican Senator from Missouri Roy Blunt tweeted "From #Benghazi to her email scandal, @HillaryClinton has a track record of deception." Republicans were unified in their messages about the opposing presidential nominee.

Republican communications regarding their own nominee were considerably more complicated.  While more Republican messages were favorable to Trump than opposed to him, it was a mixed bag—with less communication either in support or opposition overall than from the Democrats regarding their nominee.  Notably, Republicans at the federal level tweeted 4.9 percent of their messages in support of their party's nominee, while a close 4.5 percent of tweets these same candidates opposed him.  This narrow division between support and opposition demonstrated the challenging ties between Trump and down-ballot candidates of his own party. For example, Paul Babeu, a Republican running against Democrat Tom Halleran for the open U.S. House seat in Arizona's 1st district, tweeted "Obama has released hundreds of dangerous criminals into my Country, even convicted illegal murderers.  I will vote for Trump over HRC any day."  But Mark Kirk, the incumbent Republican Senator from Illinois, was one of the earliest and most vocal opponents to his party's nominee.  He tweeted "@realDonaldTrump: as I said last month & reaffirm today, I don't believe you have the temperament or judgment to be our commander-in-chief."  At the federal level, and among candidates of his own party, Trump was a divisive figure—and down-ballot candidate communications reflected that division.

On the state side, communication for Republicans about Trump was far more negative on balance, as 3.5 percent of communications about presidential nominees from state-level candidates were in support of Trump but 17.8 percent of communication from state-level

candidates were in opposition to him. This form of communication—opposition to a candidate's own presidential nominee—was not present, at least via Twitter, on the Democratic side. If federal Republican candidates were divided in their opposition and support of their nominee, Washington State Republican candidates were more unified, if not entirely aligned, in their vocal opposition to Trump. This finding did not support my hypothesis. Overall, then, this hypothesis was supported in regards to communications referencing Clinton, and not supported in regard to communications referencing Trump.

Next, I examined which presidential nominee was the subject of the overall majority of down-ballot candidate communication. My fourth hypothesis predicted that more down-ballot communications overall would be in reference to the candidate leading in the polls for the majority of the presidential campaign—that is, in this instance, Hillary Clinton (H4). To test this prediction, I compared how frequently all candidates referenced Trump and Clinton, both by name and in reference to the Republican and Democratic party nominees.

Table 3.4
*Frequency of legislative candidate communications about Clinton and Trump*

|  | Mean number of tweets per candidate about presidential nominees |
| --- | --- |
| Trump references | 25.5 |
| Clinton references | 20.1 |

Results in this table indicate that the mean number of tweets from the full corpus of federal and state candidates referencing Trump was 25.5, while the mean number of tweets from the same candidates referencing Clinton was smaller, at 20.1. An independent sample t-test indicated that the finding was significant ($t = 2.06$, d.f. $= 189$, $p < .05$). This analysis showed that, counter to my prediction, communications about Trump, not Clinton, were offered more frequently by

legislative candidates.  This hypothesis, then, was not supported.  Communications about Trump, across all levels of candidates, dominated this discourse.

Next, I deepened my analysis of down-ballot communication among candidates for federal office.  Specifically, for my fifth hypothesis I looked at the potential role of incumbency. I began by looking at both levels of federal office.  Of the 66 candidates for U.S. Senate who were eligible for inclusion in this study, 43.9 percent were incumbents, 43.9 percent were challengers, and 12.1 percent were running for open seats.  Of the 40 candidates for the U.S. House who were eligible for inclusion in this study, 25 percent were incumbents, 25 percent were challengers, and the remaining 50 percent were seeking open seats.  Across federal levels of office, then, 36.7 percent of all candidates were incumbents seeking election, with an equal 36.7 percent of federal candidates challengers.  I predicted that among federal candidates, incumbents would communicate via Twitter to and about the presidential nominees more than challengers (H5).  To test this prediction, I compared how often incumbents for federal office communicated on Twitter about Clinton and Trump, compared to challengers for federal office.

Table 3.5
*Federal incumbents compared to federal challengers in Twitter communications about Clinton and Trump*

|  | Percent of federal candidates who tweeted about presidential nominees ($n$=106) | Mean of tweets per federal candidates about presidential nominees ($n$=3679) |
|---|---|---|
| Open seat | 20.7% | 13.8[a] |
| Challenger | 29.2% | 57.6[b] |
| Incumbent | 27.3% | 20.1[a] |
|  | $\chi^2$=.33, d.f.=2, *n.s.* | Note: differing superscripts indicate means are significantly different ($p < .05$) using Tukey's HSD posthoc test |

I began this analysis by examining how many federal candidates across incumbency levels tweeted at all about the presidential nominees. Not all of the incumbents tweeted about the presidential nominees. Of the 106 federal candidates included in this research, almost 30 percent of communicators were challengers, compared to slightly fewer incumbents (27.3 percent) and fewer candidates running for open seats (20.7 percent). This finding was not statistically different and ran counter to my prediction. I then turned to the total body of tweets. A comparison of mean tweets produced by federal candidates indicated that, with a mean of 57.6 tweets to or about the presidential candidates from federal challengers and a mean of 20.1 tweets produced by federal incumbents, challengers in fact communicated almost three times as much as incumbents, contrary to my prediction. Further, candidates for open seats were even less likely than incumbents to tweet about the presidential nominees. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of incumbency status on the tweets each candidate produced. An analysis of the variance showed that the effect was significant, $F (2, 103)=5.48$, $p <. 005$. Through two forms of analysis, then, this hypothesis was not supported, and in fact shown to be directly counter to patterns of candidate communication.

Next, for my sixth hypothesis I delved further into exploring the relationship between federal candidates' communication about presidential nominees and incumbency status by separating the two levels of federal office to examine each in detail. I predicted that incumbent candidates for the U.S. Senate would communicate to and about the presidential nominees more than candidates for the U.S. House (H6). The results shown in Table 3.6 indicate that, in support of my predictions, incumbent candidates for the U.S. Senate did communicate more to and about the presidential nominees than did incumbent candidates for the U.S. House.

Table 3.6
*Federal incumbent candidate communication to and about presidential nominees*

| | Percent of federal candidates who tweeted about presidential nominees (n=106) | Average number of tweets per federal candidates about the presidential nominees (n=106) |
|---|---|---|
| U.S. Senate Incumbent | 83% | 25.2 |
| U.S. House Incumbent | 50% | 5.3 |
| | $\chi^2$=4.2, d.f.=1, $p$ <.05 | t=.94, d.f.=37, $p$ <.178 |

As seen in Table 3.6, 83 percent of U.S. Senate incumbents communicated on Twitter about the

nominees, compared to 50 percent of U.S. House incumbents.  I then examined the comparative

volume of communications between U.S. Senate incumbents and U.S. House incumbents.  The

29 U.S. Senate incumbents collectively tweeted an average of 25.2 communications per

candidate, nearly five times greater than the 5.3 communications per candidate produced by

incumbent candidates for the U.S. House.  By two different forms of measurement, incumbents

for the U.S. Senate communicated far more about the presidential nominees than did incumbent

candidates for the U.S. House, supporting my hypothesis.

For my final series of hypotheses, I explored how down-ballot candidates talked about

the unique or pioneering attributes of either presidential nominee.  Specifically, I predicted that

Twitter communication to or about Hillary Clinton would include more novelty references and

labels than communication about Donald Trump (H7).  For this expectation, I was interested in

which nominee garnered more novelty references overall, shown in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7
*Novelty references to Clinton and Trump*

|  | Clinton (*n=1391*) | Trump (*n=2118*) | Clinton (*n=1391*) | Trump (*n=2118*) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Novelty |  |  | 2.3% | .006% |
| Gender Novelty | 2.2% | 0.0.% |  |  |
|  |  |  | χ²=23.5, d.f.=2, *p* <.001 | |

As I expected, communications referencing novelty were about Clinton more often than about

Trump. Specifically, Table 3.7 indicates that 2.3 percent of all tweets from all candidates about

Clinton referenced her novelty, while only .006 percent of tweets about Trump referenced his

novelty. For down-ballot candidates, Clinton's pioneering role as the first female presidential

nominee of a major party was more novel than Trump's unique qualities. This hypothesis was

supported.

For Clinton, the vast majority of this communication—90.9 percent of all novelty

references about her, and 2.2 percent of the total corpus of tweets referencing her—was in

reference to gender novelty. For instance, Pennsylvania Democratic Senate challenger Katie

McGinty tweeted "On Tuesday, we have the chance to elect PA's first woman senator AND our

first female President. Let's make history!" Maggie Hassan, a Democrat challenging incumbent

New Hampshire Senator Kelly Ayotte, tweeted, "Congrats to @HillaryClinton for becoming the

first woman nominee from a major political party! We are #StrongerTogether. –MH." In an

electoral contest between two unusual candidates, gender was consistently highlighted as more

novel than anything Trump could offer.

Many of these communications about Clinton's gender came at highly ritualized

moments—at the Democratic National Convention, for instance, when Clinton formally accepted

the nomination of the Democratic Party and in doing so, became the first female presidential

nominee of a major American political party.  And several candidates, including Zephyr

Teachout, a Democrat running for a U.S House seat in New York against an incumbent; and

Washington State House incumbent Gael Tarleton retweeted Clinton herself.  For instance,

Teachout retweeted Clinton's message: "RT @HillaryClinton: When Ruline was born in 1913,

women couldn't vote.  In 2016, she'll cast her vote to elect the first woman president!"

Sometimes, candidates could let the historic nature of the moment carry their communications.

Not a single communication linked Trump and gender novelty—not surprisingly, since he

was seeking to be the 45th male President.  In contrast to Clinton's overwhelmingly positive

novelty discourse, many of the .006 percent of tweets about him that invoked novelty were

unflattering.  New Hampshire Democrat Carol Shea-Porter, challenging an incumbent for her

former U.S House seat, tweeted, "Donald Trump is a unique threat to American democracy."

Ohio Democratic Senate challenger Ted Strickland tweeted, "It's disappointing that Republican

members of Congress silently condone Trump's unique brand of hate & racism."  And Bryan

Caforio, a Democratic challenger for a House seat in California, tweeted, "The choice in this

election couldn't be more clear.  Trump is the most unfit, unqualified nominee in history.

#CA25debate."  The remainder of these comments referenced history-making moments: for

example, New York Senate challenger Wendy Long, a vocal Trump supporter, tweeted, "See

history being made: Watch @realDonaldTrump speech tonight following his trip to #Mexico.

I'll comment after!"  Similar communications indicate that novelty discourse about Trump either

signaled the sender's dismay, or noted his role in events.

My next prediction was also concerned with gender novelty, with the added context of

partisan identity.  I hypothesized that gender novelty references on Twitter would be more likely

to occur among Democratic candidates, in the context of the 2016 presidential election, than

among Republican candidates (H8).  A chi-square test revealed that, taking my expectation to the extreme, this discourse was communicated exclusively by Democratic candidates.  That is, Democratic candidates were the only ones who tweeted about gender novelty during the period of analysis—not a single Republican candidate, at the state or federal level, commented on any pioneering or novel aspect of this presidential election with regards to gender ($\chi^2$=11.2, d.f.=1, *p* <.001).  Among candidates included in this study, Democrats at both the federal and state level communicated about gender novelty.  For example, Democratic Senate challenger Jay Williams of South Dakota tweeted, "History just made!  The first woman nominated for president of the USA: Hillary Clinton our next president!  #DemsinPhilly It's unanimous!"  And Patrick Murphy, a Democrat challenging Marco Rubio for the Florida Senate seat, tweeted "Today is the anniversary of the 19th Amendment.  96 years after women gained suffrage, I look forward to our 1st Madame President! #ImWithHer."  And Kamala Harris, a Democratic woman running for the open Senate seat in California, sent a message the night of the first presidential debate: "This is a momentous occasion: the first time a woman nominated for president of a major party is on the debate stage.  #debatenight."  And finally, Kevin Ranker, an incumbent Democratic state Senator in Washington, tweeted, "History made!  @HillaryClinton."  At multiple levels of government, a number of Democrats were vocal on Twitter about the gender novelty of their nominee while Republicans never were.  This hypothesis, in sum, was supported.

Finally, I was interested in the overlap between gender and partisan identity in relation to communications about gender novelty.  Specifically, I predicted that Democratic women candidates would communicate on Twitter about gender more than all other candidates in the 2016 presidential election (H9).

Table 3.8
*Candidate communication about gender novelty by party and gender*

|  | Gender Novelty References (*n*=30) |
| --- | --- |
| Democratic female candidates | 74% |
| Democratic male candidates | 26% |
| Republican female candidates | 0 |
| Republican male candidates | 0 |
|  | $\chi^2$=19.8, d.f.=3, *p* <.001 |

As seen in Table 3.8, women Democrats made a whopping 74 percent of the gender novelty

communications, compared to male Democrats who made 26 percent of those communications.

Among Democrats, then, women made almost three times as many communications about

gender novelty as did men.  Notably, not a single instance of this communication was uttered by

Republicans, either men or women.  Across partisan and gender lines, Democratic women did

indeed communicate about gender novelty more than other groups.  This hypothesis was

supported.

**Discussion**

This chapter presented a content analysis of 98 legislative candidates' campaign tweets

across multiple general elections in the 2016 election at both the federal and state level.  I

expected that candidates for federal office and state office would communicate in different ways,

and in different amounts, with regard to the presidential nominees.  Specifically, I expected that

partisanship would be an important factor influencing communication about the presidential

nominees, and that distance between the presidency and down-ballot candidates—specifically in

terms of level of office and incumbency status—could also impact communication about the

presidential nominees.  These broad expectations were founded on scholarship about America's

government structure, political campaign communications, and the differing degrees of

connection between the presidency and the legislative offices.  For candidates navigating their

own complex electoral battles concurrently with the presidential election, these factors guided their communication about the presidential nominees, but did not prescriptively determine how down-ballot candidates communicated. Ultimately, the data in this chapter presented a more complex relationship between legislative candidates and the presidential nominees at the top of the ticket—a relationship that was perhaps particularly complicated due to the specific dynamics of the two presidential nominees in the 2016 election. In this section, I discuss notable patterns in the analyzed discourse.

First and foremost, partisanship was at the core of most legislative communication patterns about Trump and Clinton during the 2016 presidential election. Republicans and Democrats communicated differently, and in different quantities, with regard to both their own presidential nominee, and the nominee of the opposing party. Democratic patterns of communication were generally straightforward. As I predicted, Democrats, when speaking about Clinton and Trump, spoke positively about Clinton and negatively about Trump. No communications from this group about Trump were positive, and no communications about Clinton from this group were negative—although there was significantly more communication about Trump than about Clinton overall. Republicans, on the other hand, exhibited more volatile communication patterns across multiple aspects of this discourse. While no Republicans spoke favorably of Clinton, and many opposed her, almost as many Republicans spoke publicly in opposition to Trump via Twitter as offered him support through the same channel. This highly mixed communication was in stark difference to the consistent, if less vocal, support Democrats expressed for Clinton. Overall, discourse about Trump absolutely dominated communication regarding the presidential nominees.

Thus the specific dynamics of the 2016 presidential election and the nominees of the major parties likely played a role in down-ballot candidate communication patterns regarding the two major party presidential nominees. While these findings did not match my initial expectations, they did follow the narrative of the presidential election as it unfolded. Several potential explanations for this phenomenon seem plausible. One is simply the unexpectedness of Trump's presidential campaign and attention he garnered as an unlikely underdog. While Clinton had a sizeable lead prior to the nominating conventions, the gap between these two nominees narrowed over the course of the campaign, generating considerable attention to the horse-race aspect of this election. Another possibility is that Clinton's nomination, in spite of significant support for Bernie Sanders during the Democratic primary, was much more likely considerably earlier than Trump's nomination—meaning that interested parties could have been discussing her nomination while the very crowded Republican field was still highly competitive. And finally, the unexpected revelation of Trump's comments about sexually assaulting women generated a tremendous amount of chatter—and, as I discuss in Chapter 5—drew a range of responses from Republicans and outright condemnation from Democrats. In a highly unusual presidential election, Trump attracted the majority of down-ballot communications. While much of the communication about Clinton followed my expectations of support and opposition based on partisan identity, Trump waged an unprecedented campaign, giving rise to unexpected communication patterns from interested parties, including down-ballot Republicans. Previous scholarship has shown that political competition combined with strong party identity intensifies anger towards the opposing party (Miller and Conover, 2015; Jacobson, 2009; Mason, 2009), which is consistent with the Democratic Twitter emphasis anti-Trump more than pro-Clinton.

But among Republicans the vocal opposition to their own party's nominee may be a uniquely 2016 phenomenon.

Partisanship played a role in another key factor of communication in this race, as well. As expected, Democrats acknowledged Clinton's groundbreaking role as the first female presidential nominee of a major party—and, for much of the campaign, the anticipated winner— through their commutations, while Republicans never acknowledged her role in cracking the glass ceiling. In particular, and in line with my expectations, I found that Democratic candidates were more likely to communicate about this novel status for a woman candidate than were Republicans candidates. In fact, not a single Republican communicated via Twitter about the fact that a woman had reached this point in presidential politics. Gender novelty, then, did not trump partisan loyalty—the inverse was very much true. But candidate gender was indeed important among Democrats. Democratic women, the group that could most identify with Clinton's experience as a candidate, was also the group that consistently highlighted her groundbreaking status. This is not overly surprisingly, but in analyzing the Twitter feeds we see concrete evidence of these patterns of discourse.

Beyond partisanship, two other factors were important in shaping discursive patterns of candidate communications. First, level of office clearly played an important role in whether legislative candidates communicated about the presidential nominees—and if they did, the content of their communications. Candidates running for office within the same level of government as the president—that is, federal—are considering the same policies and legislation, and operating in the same political spheres. Scholarship has shown that these legislative campaigns are larger, more visible, more expensive, and include national issues (Jacobson, 2009) in ways that state legislative races do not. In terms of number of candidates who communicated

about the presidential nominees at all, and how many communications those candidates sent, as I predicted federal candidates did communicate on Twitter more about the presidential nominees than state candidates.

Second, incumbency status did seem to have an impact in the way legislative candidates communications about Clinton and Trump, but that impact was counter to my expectations. While I anticipated that incumbents (that is, those who had already held elected office, and thus were already recognized as party leaders and intimately tied to the acts of governing) would communicate about the presidential nominees more, they in fact did so less than non-incumbents. This could be because these candidates knew that they were already forced into some complicity with nominees simply by virtue of being party leaders, and so made discursive moves to maintain their distance, while non-incumbents attempted to gain political credibility by communicating about the nominees. It is also possible for non-incumbents, whose likelihood of winning against established incumbents was low (Jacobson, 2009), used communication about the nominees to either tie themselves to a successful campaign, or stir up opposition to an unpopular opposing candidate.

The analyses in this chapter indicate that legislative candidates differentially drew—or avoided—connections in Twitter communications between themselves and the presidential nominees who dominated national attention. While the context and candidates of the 2016 presidential election are perhaps unique enough to make generalizable conclusions challenging, this analysis offers deeper evidence of communication patterns in this critical election. The next chapter dives deeper into understanding how candidates navigated communicating about the presidential nominees, through an analysis of interviews with state-level candidates.

**Chapter Four**

**Constructing State Legislative Discourse**

Much public and media excitement around the 2016 general election focused on the

presidential contest between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, but while this contest unfurled,

critical congressional and state races were happening across the United States.  These legislative

elections had the potential to alter power structures within states.  For example, prior to the 2016

election Republicans controlled both chambers of bicameral state legislatures in 30 states,

Democrats controlled both chambers in 12 states, and seven states split control.[13]  Just as at the

federal level, single party control over both legislative chambers provides a political party greater

ability to pass priority legislation, control key budget processes, and confirm or reject executive

appointees.  In Washington State, the bicameral state legislature in 2016 was divided along

narrow margins.  In the House, Democrats were defending a two-seat majority while in the

Senate one Democrat joined Republican ranks to caucus, giving leadership to the Majority

Coalition Caucus.  If the Democratic Governor were reelected as expected and Democrats held

the House and gained a governing majority in the Senate, Democrats would control the entire

state legislative process.  For Republicans, the hopes were to defend and expand their slender

majority in the Senate and flip enough seats in the House to take control for the first time in 15

years.  In this high stakes context, state legislative races were critical.

Voter enthusiasm for the 2016 election was high in Washington.  On October 11, 2016,

the day after the deadline to register to vote in the 2016 general election, the *Seattle Times* led

with a story about a significant jump in voter registration: the story began, "The two presidential

candidates may be more unpopular than any in history, but Washington residents are as eager as

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[13] Nebraska is unique among states in terms of its legislative structure: while all other states have partisan, bicameral chambers, Nebraska alone has a single, nonpartisan legislative chamber, with 49 Senators.

they've ever been to cast a ballot in this year's election" (Gutman, 2016). With races for president, U.S. Senator, governor, multiple statewide offices, half the state senate, all the state representatives, and numerous contested ballot initiatives, Washington State voters found their ballots packed.[14] And the presidential campaigns were paying some attention to the state: both Trump and Clinton traveled to Washington during the final months of the election—Trump to the town of Sultan and city of Spokane for rallies, and Clinton to Seattle for a fundraiser. At these events, state legislative candidates eager to hitch their stars to a winning presidential ticket clamored for a moment sharing the nominee's spotlight while other candidates steered clear of potentially damaging waters.

In this environment, state legislative candidates had to make decisions about how to publicly communicate about Clinton and Trump. While Clinton was expected to comfortably win Washington, a traditionally Democratic-leaning presidential state, voters had earlier in the election cycle rejected her at the party's primary caucuses. Clinton lost the March Democratic caucus in Washington to Senator Bernie Sanders, who won an astounding 77 percent of the state's caucus goers, and carried every single county. Trump had won the Republican primary in May with more than 70 percent of the vote, but since he was the only remaining official candidate in the race at that point, his support in the state was untested. For Washington State legislative candidates, then, deciding to praise or oppose either nominee was not a slam-dunk decision—either could generate support, or lead to an electoral cost. The ways that down-ballot state candidates communicated about the presidential nominees during this election offers insight into the connections between state legislative office and federal executive office. Examining

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[14] Since 2011, all elections in Washington State have been vote-by-mail. Ballots, in 2016, we mailed out at the end of October, and had to be postmarked by 8:00 pm on election night. Now that "Election Day" voters had more than three weeks between receiving ballots and their required return, the communication stakes during this time period were higher than ever, since each individual communication, positive or negative, could theoretically result in a voter making his or her final decision.

how state legislative candidates communicated about presidential nominees provides a window

into state legislative races, communication strategy, and decision-making—an area ripe for

additional study.  This chapter is the first of two chapters that dive deep into the discourse

offered by legislative candidates as they grappled with the opportunities and threats incumbent

upon them as candidates running for office alongside Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

### Research Questions and Procedures

I expected state legislative candidates to publicly communicate about the presidential

election that was happening concurrently with state legislative races—and if not, for that silence

to be revealing.  To examine these expectations, I conducted qualitative interviews with

candidates in Washington State seeking to be elected to the state House or Senate in 2016.  I

anticipated that patterns would emerge regarding whether and how they communicated about the

presidential nominees, their decisions to remain removed from presidential elections, and the

connections they drew between their own campaigns, opponents, and the presidential nominees.

There are a variety of ways in which I expected this communication to manifest.  For instance, I

expected that candidates for state legislature might display distinct patterns in how they linked

themselves to presidential nominees through their public communication—and equally distinct

patterns in how they might engage in communication to tie their opponent to the presidential

nominee of the other party.

The first section of the findings in this chapter explores the decisions of some candidates

to be consistently and publicly silent about the presidential election during their own campaigns.

Because state legislators and the federal executive have no shared jurisdiction and operate as two

distinct levels of government, as discussed in Chapter One, it stands to reason that some

candidates for state legislatures might not see value in publicly communicating about the

presidential nominees at all.  This could be because down-ballot candidates saw no connection between candidates' own electoral contests and the presidential election.  It also was plausible that in the particularly fraught context of the 2016 election, candidates believed that communicating about either of the historically unpopular nominees would be damaging to their own elections.  Perhaps some candidates saw no benefit in publicly communicating about nominees when doing so could turn voters away from their own races.  Finally, it is possible that candidates for the state legislature emphasized local decisions and policies they undertake as legislators, rather than the race for federal executive office.  With this in mind, my first research question (RQ1) asked: For what reasons did state legislative candidates not engage in public communications about Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump?

The second section of my findings in this chapter explores why and the ways that state legislative candidates did publicly communicate about the presidential nominees.  First, some state legislative candidates might have felt strongly enough about the presidential election that they wanted to share their support of their own nominee, or their opposition of the opposing nominee, publicly.  At the same time, given the nature of the 2016 presidential contest, some state legislative candidates might have vocally opposed their own party's nominee.  And finally, in the unique context of the first woman nominee of a major party, it seemed likely that special attention would be drawn to Hillary Clinton's nomination—and that some candidates, especially those aligned with her in terms of party and/or gender, might emphasize her pioneering campaign in their public communications.  With all this in mind my second research question (RQ2) asked: How did state legislative candidates communicate about, support, or oppose the presidential nominees via their public communications?

To address these research questions, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 21 Washington State legislative candidates about whether they communicated publicly about Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential election, and if so, what they said. These interviews included candidates for the Washington State House and Washington State Senate, men and women, incumbents, challengers, candidates for open seats, candidates with and without opponents, Democrats and Republicans, and candidates who won and some who lost. Most of these interviews were conducted prior to the general election on November 8, 2016, but several took place after the election, which meant I could seek additional insight into their election behavior with the benefit of hindsight, as well as their own analysis of their campaigns. These candidates were recruited purposefully, via emails and phone calls (and in one instance, Facebook messaging) in order to build a body of candidates able to offer insight into a variety of campaign communications. All individuals were assigned pseudonyms to protect their privacy and anonymity, although the majority of these candidates offered comments candidly and on the record.

Candidates were asked questions covering a variety of topics relevant to campaign communication. For example, candidates were asked about their communication about the presidential nominees (i.e. "Do/Did you publicly communicate about Donald Trump? Do/Did you publicly communicate about Hillary Clinton? If so, what do/did you say?" and "What is/was your strategy for discussing either presidential nominees this year?"). I was also interested in whether candidates were silent or vocal based on whether they supported one of the nominees, so I asked about their support (i.e. "Will/did you support either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton for president this year?"). Because I was interested in the role of partisanship in these communications, I asked candidates questions about the political identity (i.e. "How would you

describe yourself politically?" and "Have you always supported the nominee of your party?").

Other questions inquired into the role of nominee gender during the election in their eyes (i.e.

"Do you believe that Clinton's gender plays/played a role in this election, and if so, what role?").

Finally, I asked candidates about the relationship between the presidential election and their own

campaign (i.e. "Does/Did sharing a ballot with the presidential candidates mean anything to you,

either in terms of campaign operations or otherwise?" and "Do you think it is important for state

legislators to weigh in on the presidential campaign?  Why or why not?").  If speaking to a

candidate after the election, I also asked, "Would you change how you communicated/did not

communicate about the presidential nominees, based on the results of the election?"  I closed

each interview by asking candidates if they wanted to expand on any answers or if they had

additional insights they would like to share.  These questions were designed to offer interview

participants the opportunity to describe their communication patterns freely.

This chapter analyzes the 21 transcripts that resulted from these interviews.  These

transcripts are treated as texts in order to identify major themes among legislative candidates in

regards to how and what they communicated to or about Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.  I

approached these transcripts by inductively developing thematic categories through an open-

coding approach to the texts that was most similar to Kvale's (1996) "meaning categorization."

In this approach, categories and subcategories of discourse can emerge through an open coding

process, and then those categories and subcategories may be applied to additional texts.  After an

initial reading through all the transcripts, these iteratively developed categories and subcategories

were then used as a foundation for a second reading, during which I refined elements into codes.

The final list of codes was then used consistently across all texts in a final round of analysis.  I

turn now to findings derived from this process.

**Public Silence**

Every four years, legislative candidates running for state office seek office concurrently with a presidential election. In this milieu, they likely are asked to communicate publicly about the presidential nominees at the top of the ticket—even though they might not be interested in commenting on nominees who may or may not appeal to voters within their district, potentially derailing focus from the local issues they would consider once in office, or a process with no formal connection to their own. Navigating whether and how to communicate about a presidential nominee who may garner passionate support or vitriolic opposition—or both—might be, for legislative candidates, one of the more challenging aspects of their campaign communications. In 2016, with two strikingly unpopular presidential nominees in a race that shifted from a predicted rout in the summer to a tight battle in the final days of the election, these communication decisions were tense for down-ballot candidates—and had the potential for great impact on their own electoral outcomes. With these tensions in mind, some legislative candidates publicly chose to remain silent about the presidential election—although relatively fewer than those who spoke out, and who I will discuss in later sections. In this section I focus on these publicly silent candidates, examining the rationale they offered about their lack of public communication regarding the presidential nominees. My first research question (RQ1) asked: For what reasons did state legislative candidates not engage in public communications about Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump?

Some candidates at the Washington State legislative level said they either did not see value in communicating publicly about the presidential nominees, regardless of their actual support, or knew that the political stakes were too high, and so chose not to be vocal in regard to the presidential nominees. This was true of both Republicans and Democrats. Some candidates

said there simply was no electoral benefit for publicly supporting their party's nominee—and indeed, that they decided to stay silent to avoid alienating otherwise supportive voters. For these candidates, discussing the presidential nominees just did not offer enough value to be worthwhile. The overarching theme across the patterns that emerged as these candidates shared their motivation for remaining consistently silent was their desire to maintain focus on local issues. I discuss this theme below.

Many publicly silent state legislative candidates I interviewed said that their reason for not publicly discussing either Clinton or Trump was their focus on the local issues, to which the presidential election served as a distraction. To these candidates, as current or hopeful lawmakers who were campaigning to spend the next several years crafting legislation, drafting budgets, and working with state agencies to represent Washington constituents, the absence of interaction between state legislators and the occupant of the Oval Office was crucial. When asked either explicitly about their own communication practices regarding the nominees, or about the value in state legislative candidates communicating with regards to federal elections, these candidates said they did not see a reason to comment. Incumbent House Republican Harry Belton stated, "I stayed away from the national scene…No, I didn't [communicate publicly about Clinton or Trump] because again I really felt that the focus was on the people of the district, representing them and—that there wasn't the need to engage in the national talk." For some state legislative candidates, their interest in focusing on local issues was a great reason to not communicate about the presidential nominees. Belton was focused in his effort to stay out of the presidential race, which he did not think provided value to him. "I think for my district, I firmly believe that the presidential race did not have an impact on my race [or communication]. I think

that would've been the case regardless of who the nominee for either party would've been."

Some other legislators agreed.

Melissa Carroll, an incumbent Republican House member, drew a clear distinction between her role as a state legislator and the presidential election. She did not publicly support either nominee, and decided to not share her presidential pick with her constituents. She said:

> I decided that I don't publicly endorse and I don't publicly support either of the candidates. I believe that my vote will be private, as every other American gets to experience when they vote on November 8th. I'm just staying there because I know that my role is not on the national level. It is simply on the state level…My approach has always been about people and not about politics   If the presidential race comes up, I gladly listen to people's perspectives and then direct it back to what my role is in the political conversation and ability to impact policies, which is back to the state level. I don't talk about the presidential side of things very long simply because my focus is on the state side.

She went on to say, "I try to [communicate about Trump and Clinton] as little as possible." For Carroll, her priority was keeping the conversation focused on the local issues of her race. She continued, saying:

> I want to be purposeful in what I do. This is valuable time to be out talking to members of my community, going door to door. I want to work on the issues that I can work on with them, not have to spend time discussing something that we all don't have direct control over. We have a vote in November, but beside that, we don't have any other abilities besides, 'Let's work on policies for past this January [when the Washington State legislative session starts].'

Carroll, who told me that she would not vote for either Trump or Clinton, did not find value in communicating that information publicly, even though other candidates in her district had shared opposition to their party's nominee without negative ramifications from voters.

This emphasis on local issues was not the purview solely of Republican candidates. First-time candidate Derek Santos, running for an open House seat against another Democratic candidate, thanks to Washington's top-two primary election, had this to say:

> Personally I considered the messaging about the presidential race to be a diversion of not talking about the issues that were of consequence to your actual race. We didn't do anything in our mailers, or I don't even think on the website. Even on Facebook we didn't really do much about the presidential race, if anything, because I just didn't consider it substantive to the race I was running.

Santos shared that one of his opponents in the primary race, another Democrat, had clearly seen value in talking about Trump, by sending a mail piece out to potential voters that featured only a photo of Trump's face on one side. With Clinton's eventual winning of his heavily Democratic district almost a certainty, he ended our conversation by saying, "It's certainly not my job to campaign for presidents…I didn't think it would matter in my race to encourage people not to vote for Trump." In addition to not offering Santos any electoral benefit, he also believed that communicating about the presidential nominees would not benefit the presidential campaigns in a way that he saw as valuable.

Most intriguing, I spoke with one incumbent Republican House member running for reelection who not only declined to explicitly share whether he supported Trump, but conducted a 35-minute interview about the presidential nominees without ever referencing Trump by name. In that interview, he referred to Clinton by name several times, and to multiple other politicians, including Senator Marco Rubio, Senator Bernie Sanders, two other presidential candidates, and Mitt Romney, the 2012 Republican presidential nominee. When asked which presidential hopeful he supported this year, he said, "I stayed out of the race. I had supported a different candidate during the primary process. When that didn't come to fruition, I remained silent and focused on my race. Continued that throughout the process." Later in our conversation this candidate said, "I was supportive of Senator Rubio, and even the nominee," in clear reference to Trump, but that support was in terms of his vote, and not public communication. When asked

explicitly about whether he had communicated about Trump, he said, referencing a public forum in which he was questioned about who he would support for president:

> My answer to that is that by asking that question, that continues to perpetuate that caustic political environment that we're all trying to escape from. I wasn't gonna engage in that. Focus on my campaign. That was my answer during that debate. That was the only time that I was publicly asked about the nominee.

For at least this legislative candidate, he had no problem identifying which of his party's primary candidates he initially supported—a potentially alienating choice between different factions of his own party—but, despite admitting he would support his party's nominee, he would not say his name, even off the record.

These state legislative candidates, running for elected roles parallel to the presidential election, intentionally chose not to communicate publicly about the presidential nominees during the 2016 election. Whether it was to avoid the damage to their own campaigns that communicating about the presidential election could cause, due to a perceived lack of connection between state legislative office and the federal executive branch of government that encouraged candidates to emphasize local issues over national issues, or from the belief that negative communication about either presidential nominee would ultimately be damaging for the democratic process, these candidates decided to be publicly silent about the presidential nominees—in some instances, to the chagrin of their potential constituents. By choosing to remain silent about the presidential nominees, these candidates loudly and clearly shared a message that the distance between the presidential nominees and their own state legislative elections was too great to make communicating about the nominees important, or worth the potential attendant risks.

## Consistent Vocality

Most legislative candidates, though, were not publicly silent about the presidential nominees. In fact, a number of the legislative candidates with whom I spoke during these interviews were outspoken and intentional in their decisions to publicly communicate to or about the presidential nominees, often extensively. These state legislative candidates came out in strong support or opposition to the presidential nominees, made discursive moves to tie their opponents to the nominee of the opposing party, and cemented their public interaction with their own presidential nominee by building explicit connections between their own campaign and the presidential campaign. My second research question asked (RQ2): How did state legislative candidates communicate about, support, or oppose the presidential nominees via their public communications? In this section, I present findings of the public communications of those state legislative candidates who were vocal in their communications about the presidential nominees—that is, who shared their belief that state legislative candidates should be public in their communications about the presidential nominees, and then were in fact vocal about the presidential nominees.

Across the 21 candidates I interviewed, five were consistent in their outspokenness. I begin with a focus on the reasons some candidates gave explaining their perceived responsibility to be publicly vocal about their position on the presidential election, and I then move to how some legislative candidates communicated publicly about the presidential nominees. While aspects of this communication followed common sense lines—for instance, the vast majority of Democratic candidates only expressed support for Clinton, and not a single Democrat spoke favorably of Trump, while many vocally opposed him—once again, communication about Donald Trump among Republicans proved to be more complicated. In fact, not a single GOP

candidate I interviewed offered intentional and vocal support of Trump, and only a few candidates offered subdued opposition to Clinton. I begin with examples of the ways Democrats publicly supported Clinton, the reluctance with which some Democratic candidates brought their eventually unencumbered support to Clinton, and the more muted support Republicans offered their nominee before examining how candidates communicated opposition to their own nominees. Finally, I then turn to the ways candidates tied their own electoral contests to the presidential elections, either by explicitly linking their opponent to the opposing presidential nominee to draw negative associations for voters, or by actively participating in coordinated efforts with their own nominee, to proactively seek out positive coattails.

In some instances, legislative candidates saw value in publicly communicating their strong support of their party's nominee. Some legislative candidates of both parties said that a key aspect of their role as party leaders was to help clarify the choice at the top of the ticket for constituents who might look to them for direction—and they used their public communications to make their support clear. Janelle Roberts, an incumbent Democratic House member, said:

> I think there's a lot of people, particularly people that are new to the political process, that are looking to me for leadership…I think for lots of people, really it's about—right now it's a rough process, and so I spent most of my time really helping them to understand what else is in play this year on the ballot.

For others, it went even further, to offering insights into what kind of politicians and people they were, and sharing that with voters. Incumbent Democratic House member Gary Peters concurred, saying:

> I think that it's expected by our constituents to have a position and a view. We're not elected to some non-partisan office. We're elected to a partisan office to represent a political party, and its views. Yet some people run to say "Hey, I'm independent with my party," but that really goes to, "Will I vote for what is good for my district?" versus the Political Party with capital Ps. I think people do expect you to talk about the alignment of the philosophy of your political party.

> That then translates into the biggest philosophical choice of all is who's the candidate for president.

For these candidates, their decision to support a particular nominee was not a decision to keep private, but was seen as an important data point for voters to better understand them, and a responsibility to share with the public.

*Enthusiastic Support*

From the moment she lost the Democratic primary to Barack Obama in 2008, rumors swirled that Clinton would make another run for the White House—rumors that grew more substantial after she stepped down as Secretary of State, launched a national book tour for her memoir, and unveiled a Twitter presence with the hinting but enigmatic descriptor "Wife, mom, lawyer, women & kids advocate, FLOAR, FLOTUS, US Senator, SecState, dog owner, hair icon, pantsuit aficionado, glass ceiling cracker, TBD…" When she formally announced her second bid for president in April 2015, fully nineteen months before the 2016 presidential election, she essentially guaranteed that she would remain at the forefront of political chatter and punditry for the next year and a half. A symbol of the political establishment, a fixture in the White House and Congress for more than two decades, and described by the media as "the ultimate insider" (Klein, 2016), Clinton was perhaps the best-known presidential nominee ever to run—while at the same time, in the unprecedented position of being the first female presidential nominee of a major party.

For some Democratic candidates for state legislative office, Clinton's second candidacy was the moment they had been awaiting with enthusiasm, and they were vocal in their support of her. For some supporters, enthusiasm for Clinton's candidacy was grounded in her political experience. When asked if he publicly supported Clinton, Gary Peters simply said, "Very much, yes." Josh Frederickson, an incumbent Democratic House member, "I've posted on Facebook

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and Twitter my support for her. I certainly posted on Facebook that I was a Hillary Clinton supporter and spoke to volunteers about my support for her." Along similar lines, incumbent Democratic House member Judy Farwell told me:

> I support Hillary Clinton. I have since she ran in 2008. I supported her as presidential nominee for the Democratic Party, of course, when Barack Obama earned the presidential nomination. I have been a supporter of Hillary Clinton before she ever ran for the presidential office. I was a huge supporter of her when she ran for the U.S. Senate.

Farwell went on to talk about the importance of her public communications regarding Clinton, saying:

> I formally endorsed her last December. Knowing, going to Iowa [the first electoral contest in the 2016 presidential cycle], that the game was on, I felt as an elected official, as a state representative, and as a member of the Democratic Party and the Floor Leader in the House of Representatives, that I owed it to my voters and to my constituents and to my colleagues that they needed to know where I stood in this presidential election. The stakes were so high for me that I made a decision that I would announce my support for her prior to going into the legislative session, and let everyone know that throughout the entire primary season I was supporting her.

Clinton's long political history, previous elected leadership, and years of federal experience—combined with specific policy work, like her championing of healthcare and women's rights—endeared her to at least some legislative candidates from her same political party. These glowing communications were unique to Clinton among the candidates I interviewed. While some Republican candidates did support Trump, as discussed below, the tenor of their support was muted in comparison to the highly enthusiastic support and policy rich Clinton garnered among some Democratic state candidates.

*Reluctant Support*

For some Democratic legislators, especially incumbents already in office, the long and unexpected primary battle between Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont shaped their

communication about the top of the ticket race. I never mentioned Sanders in these interviews, but his shadow proved long—multiple candidates brought him up organically, clearly believing that primary communication had an impact on their communication about presidential nominees. Democrat Jen Phillips, running to retain her seat in the House, said, "I supported Bernie Sanders in the primary, but with the knowledge that if Hillary Clinton became the nominee, I would very happily and passionately support her." Incumbent House Democrat Janelle Roberts was similar in her communications, saying:

> I was a Bernie Sanders supporter in the primary, but even while we were at the convention in Philadelphia, where I was a delegate, I publicly stated in media interviews that I would be supporting the Democratic nominee—even though it was not him, I would be happy to cast my vote Clinton.

For these legislators and others, supporting Sanders during the primary was an important way to indicate solidarity with their constituents. Since Sanders swept the Democratic caucus in Washington, these legislators had to balance supporting their constituents' choice (Sanders), with the presumptive and then official nominee (Clinton).

Not all Democrats who were public in their communications about the presidential election were enthusiastic supporters of Clinton. Janice Garten, running against an incumbent Republican for a House district in eastern Washington, a generally conservative area, was a proud Bernie Sanders supporter and a reluctant Clinton voter. After the primary, she said, "[I only communicated publicly] the reasons I did not prefer her, I was pretty open about that reasons. Yeah, I was very open with my opinions…It would come up sometimes in candidate forums and debates and in online discussions. I would discuss that, yeah." She went on to remark:

> I would say I supported Hillary begrudgingly. She was not my Democratic candidate of choice, but against Trump, I did in the end, yeah. I did not endorse her. I did not donate to her campaign. Really I just supported her with my vote.

If people asked, I would say "Yeah, I'll vote for her, even though she's really not who I would've liked to see be the Democratic nominee."

Compared to the fervent support for Clinton from other outspoken candidates, Garten's approach was more muted: she identified a vote for Clinton as the lesser of two evils. Among the Democrats I interviewed, this approach was unique.

Communication regarding Clinton and Trump by legislative candidates of their same parties differed greatly, reflecting the communication patterns examined in Chapter Three. But generally, if the 2016 presidential election brought out occasionally lukewarm support of same-party presidential nominees, it offered opportunities for vitriolic opposition from outspoken candidates, as well. Some state legislative candidates were unswerving in their belief that legislative candidates should loudly and vocally oppose the nominee of the opposing party. Among the candidates with whom I spoke, this was an exclusively Democratic communication strategy—not a single Republican candidate was vocal in his or her opposition to Clinton for president. In the following subsection, I turn to Democratic opposition to Trump before exploring Republicans' soft opposition to Clinton.

*Strong Opposition*

The most predominant discourse from these outspoken candidates was vocal opposition to Donald Trump. Many Democratic candidates were vocal and public in their opposition to Trump, often citing concern over long-term damages to the country if he were to be elected. This opposition ranged from strategic choices to communicate, being inspired to respond to specific incidents. While these candidates were clearly personally and politically opposed to Trump, they were very intentional in how they communicated this opposition publicly—which they did so with the goal of helping him lose the election. Incumbent (and unopposed)

Democratic House member Judy Farwell was one legislator who intentionally used her platform to speak out against Trump.

> I'm probably the most vocal elected state legislator in Washington State, if I am not mistaken, on Twitter that Donald Trump's team has ever seen. I probably tweet at least twenty times a day, to push back on the lies and the misinformation and the deception that is happening out of the Donald Trump campaign…I used that time to just skewer Donald Trump.

Farwell went on to say, "I made a conscious…decision that I was going to do everything I could to expose Donald Trump for the—for what he is, and what he believes." Gary Peters, another incumbent Democratic House member, said that he publicly described Trump as "racist, misogynistic, harsh and mean, and [someone who] would set back our nation's efforts to improve equality across the board by a decade or more." For many Democrats, speaking out against Trump was an easy and obvious decision from the beginning.

For some, events during the campaign inspired them to speak out in opposition to Trump. Janelle Roberts, an unopposed Democratic House member running for reelection, felt similarly. She described communicating about Trump this way: "Every so often, when I reached peak levels of disgust I usually say something about him." Roberts went on to say:

> For me, it's much more focused on when I think something particularly egregious has happened that people need to know about. I think a good example is that I personally am a survivor of sexual assault, and when the comments came out from the Billy Bush tape, I took care to make sure people understood that we were not just talking about lewd comments, but he, in fact, was talking about sexually assaulting women, and making sure that I used my platform and my life experience to help people understand why that's so unacceptable. The combination of using my platform and my voice has been important. That's new and different for me this year because I'm a candidate, but I'm already a legislator by appointment. I think people are looking to me for leadership in a way that's new for me and it's not enough to just say that Donald Trump is bad and Hillary Clinton is good. For me, it's been drilling down, understanding sexual assault is bad, and talking about racism, and talking about the misogyny, and really pulling

back that curtain for people to understand how dangerous he is. That's how I've
used my platform.

Roberts explicitly saw her role as a legislator as one of communication—she was an information sharer as events occurred about which people needed information and direction. She sought out opportunities to speak against him: as she said, "Some of my first public comments were very public. I did media interviews in March, especially with KUOW, the NPR affiliate, where I talked at length about his candidacy and how unacceptable I thought it was." Gary Peters said, "A lot of my communications about Trump are just the dumbfounded response to someone who is running for president, and could, incredibly, not understand that grasping a woman is sexual assault, or talking about Mexican immigrants, and calling them all racists is racist." For these candidates, speaking out publicly against a nominee they saw as a threat to basic human decency was an important aspect of their public communications during the election.

*Subdued Opposition*

If Democratic opposition to Trump was vocal, Republican opposition to Clinton was significantly more muted—in fact, not a single Republican was consistently vocal in public opposition to her. This reticence stood in sharp contrast to the expansive and expressive opposition Democrats offered Trump, and even to the ways some Republicans communicated their opposition of their own nominee. Of the many Republican candidates I interviewed, not a single candidate was outspoken in his or her opposition to Clinton.

One possible explanation for this restraint was Washington State's expected eventual support of the Democratic candidate. While individual legislative districts were likely to support Trump, the state as a whole was a clear win for Clinton. The old saying in Washington State politics, "A Democrat standing atop the Space Needle can see every voter he needs to win the state," is based on truth, and the deep well of Democratic support on the western side of the state

was a robust bulwark against Republican control.  With the knowledge that Clinton was widely expected to win their state, Republican candidates may have just steered clear of badmouthing her.

It is also possible that with such a polarizing nominee as Trump leading their own party, Republicans did not want to draw attention to the presidential race.  This theory is supported by the emphasis state legislative candidates continued to place on local issues, and the deep divisions Trump caused in terms of support.  In other words, Republicans found both nominees at the top of the ticket damaging enough to cause them to retain focus on legislative races.  Since no legislative candidates vocally supported Trump, this also stands to reason as a possible explanation for Republican reticence in terms of positive communication about their presidential nominee.

*Breaking the Glass Ceiling*

Finally, for some of these vocal candidates, showing support for the first female presidential nominee was an important motivator in their decisions to communicate publicly their support for Clinton.  When I asked him why he decided to be public in his support of Clinton, he said, Gary Peters said, "I believe that it's an important message to show support for the first qualified woman candidate of a national party to be president of the United States, who I believe shares my values, and those of the constituents I work to represent."  He went on to say, "I would say that I would not be able to call myself a feminist if I didn't support an incredibly well-qualified woman, who has progressive values, and has proven that she'll tenaciously work for them."  Jen Phillips articulated similar feelings: "As a woman candidate, it really was exciting, and it mattered a lot that we had a woman and a woman such that Hillary is—accomplished and passionate and service-oriented—running as our presidential nominee."  Again, this

communication around the candidate's gender was completely unique to communications

involving Clinton.

For some candidates, Clinton's nomination as the first female presidential nominee of a

major party was a source of deep personal pride. These candidates all communicated their

support of Clinton publicly, and were eager to share their motives for doing so. Becky Voss, a

Democratic challenger running in an up-hill House race, said about supporting Clinton, "This is

breaking a glass ceiling. It feels like this is just kind of amazing. Just the progress in women's

rights and women's equality, this is that pinnacle moment of that, a representation of that." Judy

Farwell, an incumbent and unopposed Democratic House member who vocally supported

Clinton, shared this:

> I'm 57 years old. I've been voting since—1980 was the first election I was able
> to vote in, because I turned 18 only a few months after the 1976 election. I've
> been voting now for 36 years in presidential elections. There has never been a
> choice for me on the ballot to choose between a man and a woman. Now there is.
> As a voter and a citizen and as a woman who has been working my entire life, and
> participating in every election my entire life as a voter, or my entire adult life, I
> just can't even express how meaningful and deeply, deeply powerful it is that I
> get to vote for a woman who is my choice, not because she's a woman. She is my
> choice.

Farwell went on to elaborate:

> It means everything to me that I have the honor of being able to run to serve the
> people of my district alongside a ballot that now includes the first woman for
> presidential candidate for a major party, and especially of my party. I also ran for
> the state legislator for the first time in 2012. That was the time when I was on the
> ballot with now-President Barack Obama, for his reelection to his second term. I
> remember thinking to myself what an extraordinary moment in history, that I was
> on the same ballot with the first African-American president. Now I am on that
> same ballot with the first woman candidate for presidential office. It's humbling.

Janelle Roberts, who shares a district with Farwell, also mentioned how powerful

Clinton's nomination was—even though Roberts was not a huge Clinton fan initially.

She said:

I personally take a tremendous amount of pride in the face that I do believe we are on the cusp of electing the first woman president. It's been a long time coming. Clinton is her own person who faces her own challenges, but I do see so much of the treatment of her in the media and by her critics—I think any of us that have been in politics have experienced that as women. I see it as an elected official. I also saw it as a candidate in a very competitive campaign four years ago. I am also somebody who's worked behind the scenes in politics for a combined 16 years at this point, and just to see her persevere, to see her step up. I am proud of her. I identify with her.

For other candidates, Clinton's nomination was an important signal about the changing American political landscape. For Janelle Roberts, Clinton's presidential nominee and perceived win (when we spoke prior to the election, Roberts firmly expressed her belief that Clinton would win decisively) was historic, even if it would not solve systemic and past inequality immediately. She said:

I think it's gonna be a really important barrier, or glass ceiling as she and others say, for us to break through. That doesn't mean it's going to be the end of misogyny or sexism, bit it's gonna help us move that ball further down the field as women.

For these candidates, the novel experience of having a female presidential nominee on the ballot inspired personal and highly emotional public communications.

## Episodic Communication

While some legislative candidates were consistent in either their silence or their vocality, others changed over time, or for certain moments, in their approach to communication about the presidential nominees. These candidates were more varied in how they approached publicly talking about Clinton and Trump: sometimes they espoused their role as state-level legislators with no connection to the federal executive election and decried the need to comment on national elections, while at other times they shared their support for one nominee (or their passionate opposition to the other). In this section, I unpack the main threads of communication from these candidates as they wove between public silence and public communication. I focus on the

reasons candidates moved from silence to speaking, or vice versa.  I explore this communication in two main patterns.  The first communicative pattern I examine is a shift from public communication to public silence—specifically, the reasons that prompted candidates to shift from publicly communicating about the presidential nominees to being unwilling to do so during the 2016 presidential election.  The second communicative pattern I explore is the shift from public silence to public communication—that is, what prompted candidates to step off of the sidelines and into the verbal fray around the 2016 presidential election.  I turn first to the ways candidates moved from speaking to silence.

*Speaking to Silence*

While varied communication was common among the candidates I interviewed, in almost all instances it took the form of previously silent candidates compelled to speak out publicly. The opposite was rare—most candidates who were vocal stayed consistently vocal throughout the election instead of clamming up.  In fact, the only instance of this communicative shift was regarding an opportunity to seek electoral gain.  Democratic Senate challenger and first-time candidate Leslie Waters was a strong Clinton supporter and was public in her support of her nominee.  In addition to public communications supporting Clinton, she said that she was "very pleased to be a caucus leader initially, and involved with her campaign.  I had some of her field team living in my house for a couple of months."  For Waters, her support went past the stated to the material.  As she said, "Part of the campaign has been to connect with the public.  When involved in her campaign, and where it was appropriate, I was very pleased to say that I endorsed her."  And she continued, saying, "To be on the same ballot as a woman, who I had hoped would be president of the United States, was awesome.  I was incredibly proud, and, in fact, voiced that

often and to many people what an honor it was to be on the same ballot." Waters was vocal in her public support of Clinton.

At times, however, when there was electoral benefit to her if she remained silent, she did so. Waters said, "I did have a couple of people, strangely enough, who were going to be supporting me and supporting Trump. Made no sense to me, but yeah, I'm not going to argue with them about why they should support Hillary Clinton. I was there to get their vote." For Waters, deciding to be silent was in direct response to her need to win votes—which she ultimately did, winning the Senate seat as the only successful Democratic Senate challenger in the state. Aside from this instance of electoral gain inspiring a candidate to silence her public support, the episodic communication present during this campaign was mostly in the other direction—candidates inspired to speech from silence. I turn now to explore those patterns.

*Silence to Speech*

From the interviews I conducted with state legislative candidates, vocal opposition to the nominees was one of the most prevalent forms of vocal communication candidates offered. While it stands to reason that candidates would speak in opposition of the other party's presidential nominee, what emerged during the 2016 presidential election was striking. This opposition took the form of particularly powerful disapproval of Trump from members of both parties, and, surprisingly, only one public occasion of opposition to Clinton, from a Democrat. The candidates discussed here each shared with me their belief that legislative candidates did not need to weigh in on the presidential race—that they then did so implied that something notable had occurred to inspire this vocal and public opposition.

Public opposition to Clinton, among the candidates of both parties I interviewed, was limited to one Democrat. Other Democrats expressed disappointment or apathy about Clinton as

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their party's standard-bearer, and not a single Republican planned to support her, but Republican opposition was muted. So it was left to one Democrat to occupy the communicative space of vocal opposition towards the Democratic nominee. Senator Richard Osada, an incumbent Democratic state senator who had always previously supported his party's nominee, was blunt when asked if he'd support Hillary: "No. It's my personal choice that I'm not going to vote for Hillary, because I just can't do it." He announced his opposition at a meeting of his legislative district's party leadership, a space full of party leaders and organizers. Osada elaborated to say, "I have no doubt that Hillary's gonna win. I'm a little concerned about the long-term direction she takes. Not to mention that fact the I just don't even trust her. It's kinda like whenever I hear her I think she's lying. Yeah, she's lying. Her positions always seem to waver on any given issue, particularly on labor issues and powerful people." While some members of her party voted for her begrudgingly and did not campaign on her behalf, Osada was the only Democrat in this study who opposed the party's nominee strongly enough to both publicly oppose and not vote for her. This public opposition was also a significant shift for him, away from his previous public support of the presidential nominee of his party.

Opposition to Clinton from the other party was more muted. Republican House member Henry Weber, running for an open Senate seat, said, when asked if he had communicated about Clinton, said, "I have not done so that I can think of. Certainly I oppose her for the same reasons I would oppose probably any Democratic president, for the kinds of policies that a Democratic president would offer." Several other Republican legislative candidates confirmed that they absolutely did not support Clinton, but not a single Republican candidate said they spoke out against her explicitly.

This was in stark contrast to public communications excoriating Trump.  While most

Republican opposition to Trump generally took the form of silence, several candidates of both

parties were outspoken in their communications opposing him, despite earlier statements that

they saw no reason to weigh in on the presidential election.  One particularly vocally opposed

Republican was Senate candidate Henry Weber, who publicly opposed his party's nominee and

communicated that opposition during his campaign.  When asked about his political philosophy,

Weber said that his partisan identity as a Republican was:

> Not important enough to always vote for the presidential nominee of my party.  I
> would rather be for what's right, and what I feel is the right thing to do.  In this
> case, not voting for my party's nominee.  I spend a lot of time helping to elect
> Republicans in Washington State to legislative positions, and also helping to build
> a farm team for the Republican Party here in our state.  I've done my share of
> work for the party, but I'm not gonna support the party no matter what…I have
> voted Republican in every presidential election in which I've voted.  This will be
> the first time that I have not voted for the party's nominee.

He also shared an incident that inspired him to communicate opposing Trump.  He said, "After

the video that came out just recently, the Billy Bush video [also known as the "Access

Hollywood" video], I went on Twitter and I posted, "We need a president who honors women,

upholds the sanctity of marriage, respects the dignity of all human beings, and leads with

civility."  Weber went on to expand on how he communicated about this opposition:

> I have been vocal about Trump for the last year or so on social media.  The first
> real instance of that was when Trump gave his speech about no Muslim
> immigration into the United States.  I went on Facebook and posted Trump's
> position…to exclude people based on their religious faiths is profoundly un-
> American.  Religious liberty is central to our national identity.  Something like
> that.  Of course, that generated quite the conversation.  Most people were
> sympathetic to what I was writing, but there were others who were critical.  That
> was the first taste I had of what public reaction might be if I were to weigh in,
> and say something about presidential politics this year.

He continued, sharing that the topic was certainly of interest to potential voters:

> They're going to have expectations that I would support my party's nominee. They are certainly disappointed by the decision I've made. The topic came up at a forum that I was at two or three weeks ago where a League of Women Voters moderator said, "I was not going to ask this questions, but we've gotten it from so many people on notecards I'm gonna go ahead and ask it." The question was, "Will you support your party's nominee for president?" I simply said no. A few different people came up to me afterwards, and said that they agreed with me. Nobody came up afterwards and challenged my decision. I don't think that it's some terribly surprising thing that I would take a position like that.

Weber was the rare Republican I interviewed who was so vocal in his opposition to Trump. After writing in a former Republican governor of Washington State, he went on to win his race by more than 20 percent. For Weber, who won his first race several years previously by only 29 votes, speaking out against the Republican presidential nominee was a deliberate choice, and one without negative impact to his own electoral contest.

If this discourse was limited from Republican candidates, it was far more common from Democrats. The majority of Democratic candidates with whom I spoke intentionally were vocal in their opposition to Trump, making this the most common communication theme in this area of my research. Some Democratic candidates felt so strongly that Trump was unfit to be president that they felt compelled to speak out against him. Osada, the incumbent Democratic Senator running in a safe district who also opposed Clinton, said that he was campaigning "strongly against Trump…I absolutely cannot support—I mean, Trump would be a disaster. He's a fascist. He's got so many people misled about what they think he can do to stand up for working people." He went on to say, "I'm telling everyone "Don't vote for Trump! We can't afford it." Waters, the Democratic challenger for a Senate race who had previously shared her approach to staying quiet about Trump, said, "Yes, I [talked about Trump], to people when I was at someone's door who was identified as a strong Democrat who shared with me their concerns. I certainly was very up front about sharing my concern deeply." Patrick Ralston, an incumbent

Democrat running for reelection, said, "Yeah, I have posted [to Facebook and Twitter] multiple times in opposition to Trump." For these Democratic candidates, publicly and vocally opposing Trump was a communication priority.

And at least one candidate made the decision to publicly oppose Trump after events on the campaign trail surpassed his ability to stay silent. For Democratic House challenger Mark Bianchi, the release of the video in which Trump bragged about grabbing women by the genitals and kissing them against their will encouraged him to respond publicly. He had initially stayed away from communicating about the presidential nominees, saying, "I think candidates are generally running local races." Voters responded positively to his focus on the local, he found, saying, "I think people frankly appreciated that, given the issues surrounding the presidential race. That they could focus on issues that were important to them locally." Still, Bianchi stepped away from this self-imposed reticence to communicate about the presidential election after the video was released. He said:

> The only time I [explicitly communicated about Trump], I did a Facebook post when all the issues came out related to his claims of sexually assaulting a woman, or wanting to sexually assault a woman. I tied that into my experience as a prosecutor combating sexual assault at King County. I think it tied into that context, and the fact that the chair of the Republican Party, who at that time was defending his actions, had just, a day or two before, or the same day that she was defending his actions she was in the district campaigning for my opponent, actually for the Republicans.

*Electoral gain*

Some candidates intentionally drew connections between their own opponent and the opposing party's nominee, presumably in order to boost their own electoral chances. Notably, not a single Republican candidate employed this discursive move—this was a communication strategy employed exclusively by Democratic candidates. For instance, Jackson Rivers, a Democrat challenging an incumbent for a Washington House seat in a swing district, said, "I

thought, going into this, man, we're gonna hammer [my opponent] with the whole Trump thing.

We're gonna time this, it's gonna be Hillary Clinton winning going away." He continued, "I

went out of my way to do everything I [could]. Every piece of paid mail, TV, Facebook,

everything we did, made an attempt to tie them together." He went on to say, "For me, it was a

matter of trying to distinguish myself. We have Donald Trump running against Hillary Clinton.

My opponent has supported Donald Trump, and I supported Hillary Clinton. I went out of my

way to talk about that as much as I could. Publicly, in newspaper interviews, emails,

absolutely." For Rivers, highlighting the connection between his own opponent and Trump was

valuable enough to constitute the central communication theme of his campaign. He summed up

this pattern of communicating about the opposing party nominee by saying:

> I come from a place of, if it doesn't make sense, if you're not getting some bang
> for your buck, don't do it. The Republican opponents to [the other Democrats in
> my district] both publicly stated, "We do not support Donald Trump." My
> opponent did not. I saw that as a great contrast piece…I tied him to Trump, tied
> my opponent to Trump. It didn't work, but it got close, closer than anybody else
> has gotten.

Don Martins, a Democrat challenging an incumbent Republican in a conservative and rural

House district, agreed, saying: "I brought up that I was supporting the Democratic Party and

Hillary Clinton for president, which prompted the reporter to ask [my opponent] who he

supported. Then another time in a debate it came up. Mostly in my campaign, [talking about

presidential nominees] was to point out my opponent's support for Trump." Martins went on to

say, "I did talk about Trump being dangerous I guess. I really did talk some negative stuff

about—and pointed it at my opponent—and I said that here we have a person that would allow

this to happen for him to have this stance—or at least what he says he's standing for and that

shouldn't be tolerated." For Martins as well, value was to be gained by connecting his

Republican opponent to the Republican nominee in an effort to increase voter opposition to them both.

Other candidates saw value in connecting unpopular presidential nominees to their opponents, but made the decision not to draw those connections explicitly because of the make-up of their district. Dwight Lewis, an incumbent Democratic House member running for reelection in a moderate district, had this to say:

> I'm running against a Republican, and I know that their nominee will drag down their support and enthusiasm, and to me, it is up to the Republicans to distance themselves away from him. I don't have a lot of reason to beat up Donald Trump. Some candidates with swing memberships like to attack their opponent on it…If I were in a more threatening district, and I was going negative and bringing up my opponent, I think it would be. I would have no attacks on him, maybe his voting record in terms of actually how many times he's voted, but he's got a staunch bio. He's a really nice guy. I don't really have anything valid to say about him, but I think him running in my district, I would have to paint the picture of what a majority Republican district means and why that's counter to the values of my district. Donald Trump would be at the head of that messaging, if I had to do it.

For Lewis, connecting his opponent to the unpopular Republican nominee was a way to hurt an otherwise inoffensive challenger. Lewis made the decision to not communicate about Trump and his opponent, but only because his district was sufficiently Democratic to not warrant this more aggressive tactic. Mark Bianchi, the lone Democratic challenger to defeat an incumbent Republican for a House seat, went through a similar thought process. In one of the most competitive and visible legislative races in Washington State, both candidates appeared to grapple with how to address the Republican nominee. Bianchi had this to say:

> Certainly it's an area for thought. Definitely a lot of the style of [my opponent's] campaigning fit with Trump's style. In terms of her connection, she continually identified the fact that she was undecided, and she was frustrated. She did indicate during the primary that she did not support Trump. I think she said she was with Kasich. It's obviously something I gave thought to in light of everything that was going on. Really, the focus, I really kept trying to tie it to local issues. Probably did her, in some ways, a favor by that.

Bianchi ultimately did call upon his opponent to disavow Trump publicly, and recalled her

earlier concern about the Republican nominee: "She refused to say. I think she publicly, until the

end, said that she was undecided…I remember she was interviewed on TVW several months ago

and was concerned about the fact that people were gonna try to connect her with Trump…a

couple of weeks before the election, she was avoiding the question and publicly stated that she

was undecided." In this highly visible race, both candidates understood that connections

between Trump and the Republican candidate could have a potential impact.

*Speaking when pressed*

For Republican legislative candidates who supported their own party's nominee, public

declarations of support were more muted, and sometimes provided only in response to specific

inquiries. Republican incumbent Representative Tim Dennett said, "I wouldn't say I endorsed

[Trump]. I wasn't asked for his endorsement. I did make it—when I was asked if I would vote

for him, I said I would. He was our party's nominee, so absolutely." He continued, saying:

> When asked [if I supported Trump], I [confirmed that I] did. I didn't go out, and
> take out an advertisement in the newspaper, or anything like that. When asked
> by reporters, which I think there were one or two that asked me, that was all,
> who I would support. I supported the top of the ticket, that's just the way it was
> for me. Was he my first choice? No, but he went out, and worked hard, and
> received the nomination.

Dennett emphasized his lack of interest in negative campaigning, since it could be damaging to

future cooperative relationships. He said, "I didn't really publicly comment a whole lot about it.

I just didn't go there." He elaborated, saying:

> If I go out there in an election, and you're the big Hillary Clinton fan, and I just bash
> Hillary Clinton to no end, pretty soon, you don't like me. I haven't done anything to help
> the campaign, anybody's campaign, actually, which it became negative. It's made my
> heart harder, and your heart harder, and there's been no accomplishment. I'm a big
> believer in America, and I'll talk about the things that I think we need to work on, and
> change, but I just don't like beatin' up people. I could be the worst evil person in the

world, but I've never seen a real reason to try to politically—character assassination.  I just hate that stuff.

Incumbent Republican House member, Justin Foster, echoed similar sentiments.  For him, the choice was less about Trump and more about avoiding Clinton; the comparison was critical to his decision to support Trump.  He said, "I'll admit he was not my first choice.  When pressed, I got a call from the press a little bit after the primary I think, the way that I explained my thinking was given the choice that is evident between Trump and Hillary Clinton, I'm gonna choose Trump."  While these candidates supported their nominee, they did so without much enthusiasm.  Notably, both shared their support of Trump only with caveats—in a choice between a despised Democrat or Trump, Foster picked Trump, while Dennett's support was tied to the top of the ticket, regardless of individual.  Furthermore, they both found it necessary to articulate these caveats, demonstrating the apathy Trump fostered even among those legislative candidates supporting him.

**Discussion**

This chapter presented the findings of semi-structured interviews with legislative candidates seeking office in the Washington State Senate and Washington State House of Representatives during the 2016 general election.  My goal was to explore how candidates approached their decisions about whether to be public in their communications about the presidential nominees at the top of the ballot.  I was especially interested in how candidates decided to remain publicly silent, to be consistently vocal, or to move between silence or communication, either based on developing circumstances or as an indication of the complex positions they needed to navigate.

Several meaningful patterns emerged.  First, I found that some candidates deliberately stayed publicly silent about the presidential nominees, even when pressed by constituents,

potential voters, or the media.  Disinterest, perceived irrelevance, or potential harm outweighed any benefit these candidates thought they could derive from being public in their communications.  Second, I found that some candidates were deliberately vocal in their public communications about the presidential nominees, either in strong support or in outright opposition.  This was true across party lines, and was true of candidates speaking about either nominee.  Third, I found that the majority of candidates were irregular in their communications—for instance, they sometimes decried the need for state legislative candidates to weigh in on presidential elections, yet were vocal in their own communications about the nominees.  In some instances, these candidates felt compelled to communicate in response to specific instances (for example, a perceived outrage inspiring opposition) or because of unusual aspects of the election (for example, the desire to vocally support the first female presidential nominee).  Yet most of these candidates simply seemed to respond to different values at different points in time.  Finally, there were stark differences in how candidates communicated about their own nominees.  Neither Democrats nor Republicans as a whole were vocally opposed to their own nominees, but positive communication about their nominee was the sole approach of Democrats, with no Republicans speaking in favor of Trump.  Together, these patterns indicate that the tumultuous events of the 2016 presidential race impacted the decisions down-ballot candidates made in terms of communication, but that the more important factor for candidates was their own constituents.

Three points merit exploring with regard to how legislative candidates communicate about presidential nominees.  First, state legislative candidates were aware of their role as thought leaders.  This awareness informed their decisions to be either publicly silent or publicly vocal; candidates approached communicating about the presidential nominees in very different

ways, but were always aware of the public attention they attracted. Many of the candidates with whom I spoke were deliberate and intentional in their approach to communicating about the nominees, in light of the authority their positions lent to their opinions. As multiple candidates noted in our conversations, constituents were looking to them for leadership, and turning to them as area experts. For these candidates, the decision to be either silent or vocal was not just personal, but had the potential—and indeed, the likelihood—to influence how those around them conceived of the presidential nominees. Their communication, either via silence or speech, took place in a spotlight with an active and engaged audience eager for guidance. Each candidate's decision to be either silent or vocal in their communications, then, was undertaken with the knowledge that the public, including the voters they needed for their own elections, was watching.

Second, legislative candidates were strategic in their public communications, but this took different forms. For some candidates, the goal was to positively influence their own election. These candidates sought electoral gain through public speech: by connecting an unpopular nominee of the opposite party to their opponent, or by hitching their own wagon to their own party's nominee. Others may have been strategic through their silence, acknowledging that the risks of communicating about these nominees were greater than gains likely made by communicating about them. These candidates may have sought to mitigate harm by not speaking publicly about their own support of presidential candidates, or not alienating voters by besmirching the opposing party's nominee. In other circumstances, their desired outcomes were about the presidential election itself. Several legislators spoke about their efforts to either rally support around their nominee, or to actively dissuade voters from supporting the nominee of the opposing party. While these groups of candidates may have sought to achieve different

outcomes, at different stages of the electoral process (hurt their opponent, benefit themselves, hurt or benefit to the presidential nominees), they were united in recognizing that their public communications alone, beyond any actions they took, were enough to be impactful, and thus to approach those communications strategically.

Finally, legislative candidates displayed no universal understanding of how the federal executive and state legislators could be connected. This variance indicates both confusion and opportunities for greater clarity—as likely many voters are equally confused. While many candidates remarked on the distance between the Washington State Legislature and the White House in terms of their respective spheres of influence and areas of political and legislative jurisdiction, there was no unified meaning behind that distance. For some candidates, being part of the political arena at any level included a duty to communicate about the presidential nominees. At the same time, other candidates explicitly considered themselves to be private citizens when it came to commenting about the presidential nominees, and thus believed themselves entitled to the same privacy around their votes that all other citizens hold. It is telling that candidates consistently got so many questions about the presidential nominees, from a wide range of sources. Many of the candidates I interviewed referenced questions about their presidential vote from candidate forums, panels, the media, constituents, and voters. The public was clearly indicating a hunger for information, but the wide array of responses about the role of legislative candidates in this space indicates that greater clarity could add value to legislative campaigns and voter understanding.

While it was clear going into this election that the 2016 presidential election was also going to involve a particularly fascinating approach to down-ballot candidate communication about the presidential election—two deeply unpopular candidates, with well-established and

antithetical public personas and communication styles, seeking to prove their own approach to leadership was more effective—the reality of the campaign was impossible to predict, even once the nominees were official. In a year ripe with opportunities for legislative candidates to offer commentary about the presidential nominees, one particular moment both stood out, and necessitates deeper analysis. In the following chapter, I explore how Congressional candidates responded publicly to the release of a 2005 video in which Trump boasted of sexually assaulting women. With just one month to go until Election Day, the release of this video on October 7, 2016 forced all candidates, but particularly Republicans and those who had previously supported Trump, to fully communicate their stances to and about the Republican presidential nominee in face of a tremendous scandal. Staring down the possibility of a crushing defeat for their party, even many previously silent Republicans became vocal, while those offering support now offered quiet or strong opposition, disapproval, or outright condemnation. I turn now to a deeper exploration of this moment.

**Chapter Five**

**Public Responses to Trump's "Access Hollywood" Remarks**

On October 8, 2016, *Washington Post* journalist David Fahrenthold came into possession of a tape of Donald Trump from his days as host of television's "The Apprentice." With just weeks left to go in the presidential election, release of this video of Trump created a critical communicative moment, derailing previous campaign plans and hijacking news cycle after news cycle. The recording, from a 2005 appearance on NBC show "Access Hollywood," showed Trump on a live microphone bragging in "vulgar terms about kissing, groping, and trying to have sex with women" (Fahrenthold, 2016a). Trump, alongside "Access Hollywood" co-host Billy Bush, was shown arriving at the set of soap opera "Days of Our Lives" to film a cameo he was to make on the show. While tape was running and their microphones were hot, Trump and Bush were recorded talking as they arrived on set and were greeted by actress Arianna Zucker. A partial transcript of their conversation is below:

Unknown: She used to be great. She's still very beautiful.

Trump: I moved on her, actually. You know, she was down on Palm Beach. I moved on her, and I failed. I'll admit it.

Unknown: Whoa.

Trump: I did try and fuck her. She was married.

Unknown: That's huge news.

Trump: No, no, Nancy. No, this was [unintelligible]—and I moved on her very heavily. I fact, I took her out furniture shopping. She wanted to get some furniture. I said, "I'll show you where they have some nice furniture." I took her out furniture—I moved on her like a bitch. But I couldn't get there. And she was married. Then all of a sudden I see her, she's now got the big phony tits and everything. She's totally changed her look.

Bush: Sheesh, your girl's hot as shit. In the purple.

Trump: Whoa! Whoa!

Bush: The Donald has scored. Whoa, my man! [Crosstalk]

Trump: Look at you, you are a pussy.  All right, you and I will walk out.  [Crosstalk] Maybe it's a different one.

Bush: It better not be the publicist.  No, it's, it's her, it's—

Trump: Yeah, that's her.  With the gold.  I better use some Tic Tacs just in case I start kissing her.  You know, I'm automatically attracted to beautiful—I just start kissing them.  It's like a magnet.  Just kiss.  I don't even wait.  And when you're a star, they let you do it.  You can do anything.

Bush: Whatever you want.

Trump: Grab 'em by the pussy.  You can do anything.  (Bullock, 2016).

This was unlike anything ever publicly heard from a presidential nominee, of either party.

Public reaction from almost all corners was immediate—and took many forms.  Large numbers of Democrats released statements criticizing Trump for his comments as we might expect, while among Republicans the responses were more varied.  Some Republican Party leaders, including House Speaker Paul Ryan of Wisconsin and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, issued statements criticizing their presidential nominee.  Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus, former U.S. Presidents George W. Bush and George H. W. Bush, and former presidential candidates Carly Fiorina, John Kasich, Jeb Bush, Scott Walker, Mitt Romney, and Jon Huntsman all spoke publicly against Trump.  Former Secretary of State Condeleezza Rice called on him to withdraw, as did some elected Republicans around the country.  Trump remained adamantly in the race, declaring "This was locker room banter, a private conversation that took place many years ago.  Bill Clinton has said far worse to me on the golf course—not even close.  I apologize if anyone was offended" (Lemire, 2016).  When it became clear that this statement would not stop the tidal wave of criticism, Trump released a longer video, saying, "I've said and done things I regret, and the words released today on this more than a decade-old video are one of them."  He continued: "I said it, I was wrong, and I apologize."  Within hours of these events, most—but not all—Republican legislators and

candidates released statements opposing Trump's language, morals, and, in rarer cases, candidacy.

This unprecedented moment in a presidential campaign was a veritable perfect storm of intersecting crisis points for Trump and his campaign. While many previous presidential candidates had blundered prior to becoming a major-party nominee, no one had ever encountered such a moment after a party's convention. The best comparisons were far more tame: Bob Dole's grimace after falling while campaigning in 1996, George W. Bush's admission of a decades-old driving-under-the-influence charge in 2000, or Al Gore's sighs in 2000 or George H.W. Bush in 1992 checking his watch, both during presidential debates. Throughout the course of the campaign Trump had consistently veered into offensive attacks, including dismissing Judge Gonzalo Curiel because of his Mexican heritage, picking a fight with Gold Star family Khizr and Ghazala Kahn by insulting their dead son, abusing multiple women over personal appearances, and objectifying young girls. Just days earlier he had underscored earlier offensive comments about a former Miss Universe whose weight he repeatedly criticized. Over the course of the campaign, Trump was no stranger to self-generated trouble because of his words. But this moment was different. And unlike Trump's words, none of these earlier matters implicated party, and none of them inspired strong criticism and active opposition from those within the nominee's own party. This moment was unique, entirely without precedence in several key ways that ultimately can help us to conceptualize when down-ballot candidates might move to publicly oppose their party's presidential nominee.

The timing, content, and sordid nature of this event all emphasized this importance of this communicative moment. The release of this tape, just two days before the second presidential debate between Clinton and Trump, and one month away from the election, almost meant that

voter and media attention could not have been closer. At this point in the campaign, each word the nominees uttered was analyzed, each tweet picked apart, each commercial and event scrutinized—and most campaigns handled the intense surveillance with careful attention to detail amid highly controlled appearances and communications. In contrast, this video showed Trump using crass, vulgar, highly offensive language—and the "caught on tape" aspect of the video highlighted the tawdry nature of the exchange. The content and form of Trump's comments were absolute violations of the expected norms of presidential nominee communication, and the timing of this tape's release, the seeming likely impact on women voters (a critical and decisive voting bloc), and the intensity of the media environment crystalized a moment of crisis for Trump and Republicans.

This was both a crisis moment for Trump and for the Republican Party that nominated him for president, and a critical juncture for the Republican Party moving forward. According to Fearn-Banks, a crisis is "a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its public, products, services, or good name" (2016, pg. 2). The release of the "Access Hollywood" tape well meets this definition, with potentially negative ramifications for both Trump and the entire Republican Party. But beyond the crisis to Trump's campaign prompted by the tape's release, this moment was also a critical juncture for the Republican Party. As defined by Hogan and Doyle (2007), a critical juncture is a trigger event "that set processes of institutional or policy change in motion" (pg. 885). Even following years of Trump's public misogyny, this tape was so jarring, and public outcry so swift and universal, that the Republican Party and individual actors found themselves at a possible turning point. A Trump campaign source, speaking to CNN immediately after the tape's release, said his remarks "could be the death knell" of Trump's presidential hopes and continued, saying,

"I think that next 48 hours will be the most consequential of the entire election. Right here, right now, this is game time" (Diamond, 2016). As Collier (2002) points out, "underlying societal cleavages or crises [may] lead up to the critical juncture" (pg. 28); in this case, Trump's long history of vulgarity and offensive language paved the way for a truly egregious offense. For Trump's campaign and the party supporting him, this tape's release was a defining moment that had potential to ostracize the Republican Party from its key constituents, usher in a Democratic sweep of the U.S. Congress, and provide Democrats with ammunition to use for years to come, or could be adeptly navigated, all depending on their public responses. The release of this tape was a high-stake moment for Trump, and for those around him. Republican Senator responses, viewed through the lens of crisis response, offer insight into how down-ballot political actors might employ communication to limit damage to themselves and their party—and what aspects of the context in which these communications became public were important to guiding those communications. I suggest there were at least three crucial factors that compelled Republican Senators to speak out.

First, the popular standing of the transgressing party nominee was important. Trump's unpopularity was historic as a major-party nominee and likely opened the door for members of the Republican Party to consider coming out against him. As discussed in Chapter One, down-ballot candidates may rely on the coattails of their party's presidential nominee to ensure strong turnout—but Trump's unpopularity made this complicated. Headline after headline emphasized low Republican engagement because of voters' antipathy towards Trump: in the *New York Times*, "Donald Trump's Slip in Polls Has G.O.P. Worried About Congress" (Martin & Burns, 2016), in *Time Magazine* "Donald Trump Has Already Lost the Election" (Newton-Small, 2016), and in the *Wall Street Journal*, "Victory is Slipping Away for Trump" (Rove, 2016) are just a

few examples of this abundant take on the election.  In this context, down-ballot candidates knew to not rely on the presidential nominee to generate enthusiasm, which left them more free than usual to speak out against him.  Trump was also unpopular among Republican Party leaders: many of them had opposed him throughout the Republican primary.  With seventeen primary candidates, including one former and four current U.S. Senators, establishment support was split between multiple candidates, with Trump seen as an outsider.  Further, a number of sitting Senators had withheld strong endorsements after Trump received the nomination; as a result, a decision to withdraw support or to oppose him almost certainly would be less burdensome than in switching sides after a previous whole-hearted endorsement.

Second, the specific targets of Trump's remarks were important to giving Republicans safe ground to push back.  Trump's words and described actions violated a key traditional value of the Republican Party—the sanctity of women.  His comments victimized women in the abstract; he discursively reduced them to objects for his sexual gratification, including two specific women—Nancy O'Dell, a well-known television personality, who he referenced pursuing, and Arianna Zucker, the actress he embraced in the video after crudely describing his attraction to her.  As Schrieber (2016) describes, social conservative ideology, a central component of the Republican Party, views women through a highly gendered lens based on "traditional" family values.  This was made explicit in the last 1970s, when the Republican Party moved away from supporting the Equal Rights Amendment, and instead formally adopted a family-focused, traditional view of women (Domke & Coe, 2008).  In this world, women require male protection, occupy the domestic sphere, and heterosexual marriage is sacred (Sanbonmatsu, 2004).  Trump's comments attacked not only these two (married, famous, white) women, but also gave voice to an attack on a core Republican value.  His vocalized disregard for O'Dell's

marriage and his complete inattention to his own marriage of less than a year threatened the central role within Republican ideology that personal virtue and heterosexual marriage have held for decades.  Because Republicans speaking up against their own presidential nominee could in fact frame their statements as protecting women, they were likely able to ameliorate any accusations of party betrayal.

Third, the media environment enveloping this event mattered.  The immediacy of the 24-hour news cycle meant that audio and video of this event were on repeat across multiple channels and platforms, all day, every day; simply hunkering down and quietly sitting out this storm was almost impossible for legislators and candidates.  Already under the microscope as political leaders or at least potential ones, they were inundated by Trump's recorded words as a near-constant reprise.  Republican Party leadership reactions became a story in and of themselves—media outlets such as PBS, *The Atlantic*, *The Washington Post*, *Rolling Stone, and The New York Times* published lists of Republican responses, updated as new reactions were made public.  The social media bombardment and endless cable news cycle meant this story was omnipresent in the final weeks of the campaign, just as candidates were entering the sprint to Election Day.  This moment was a textbook example of a media "feeding frenzy," defined by Sabato (2006) as "the press coverage attending any political event or circumstance where a critical mass of journalists leap to cover the same embarrassing or scandalous subject and pursue it intensively, often excessively, and sometimes uncontrollably" (pg. 6).  Fahrenthold's original story about Trump's remarks broke both records and servers at the *Washington Post*, where it quickly became the most read story of all time at the paper, crashing the servers that measured the Post's web traffic due to high volume (Fahrenthold, 2016b).  Howard Kurtz, host of Fox News' 'Media Buzz,' said "This is the most incredible couple of days in the most amazing campaign that any of us

[journalists] have ever covered" (Littleton, 2016).  In this media context, many candidates did the only thing they could do—they had to address what they thought of their party nominees words and whether they supported his candidacy.  Together, these three factors facilitated the perfect storm in which legislators could break with tradition and publicly oppose their nominee.

Following the release of Trump's remarks, sitting legislators and candidates—these leaders and potential leaders—were faced with openly communicating about a difficult choice: to publicly support a nominee who had bragged about sexual assault; to publicly oppose their own party's presidential nominee and alienate a potential president, however unlikely that seemed at the time; or to refuse to take a stance.  The Republican Party was in crisis, and it is in moments of crisis that leadership becomes particularly scrutinized and important (Stewart, 1967, 1976; Yukl, 2002).  Bligh, Kohles, and Meindl (2004) suggest that in crises, leaders need to walk a narrow line between "acknowledging the pain and trauma followers are likely to feel while helping them to collectively envision a more positive future" (pg. 568).  Communications about this incident from Republican leaders, then, needed to accomplish multiple objectives.  Any of these options had to be selected and then enacted by down-ballot candidates while under the microscope of their own campaigns, being watched closely by voters, the media, their opponent, and Donald Trump himself.  For all down-ballot candidates, this was a defining moment in the 2016 election.

In this chapter, I investigate the many ways Republican candidates for the U.S. Senate— including those serving as Senators at the time—responded publicly to the release of the "Access Hollywood" tape and Trump's responses.  I gathered these responses systematically, in three steps.  First, I identified every Republican Senator in office, with a distinction between those seeking re-election and those in the middle of their terms (two Senators were retiring: Dan Coats

of Indiana and David Vitter of Louisiana, who declined to run for reelection after unsuccessfully running for governor in 2015) to collect a complete census of Republican Senator responses. Immediately following release of this video, many news outlets created their own collections of Republican Party leadership responses (e.g. Weldman, 2016; Graham, 2016; Blake, 2016). As a second step, I gathered public responses from Senators. Many of these were easily gathered due to their public visibility. For those whose public reactions were not immediately at hand, I conducted a Google search with the candidate's name plus variations of "Access Hollywood," "Trump," "Support," and "October 8," the day the majority of elected leaders responded. As a final third step, I turned to the Twitter data I gathered for the analysis presented in Chapter Three, since all Republican Senators running for office were included in that data. Together, via these steps, I created a complete picture of Republican Senator responses to Trump's comments. What emerged is that Republican Senators adopted a variety of approaches in responding to this Trump moment. In the next section I first discuss how some Republican Senators offered public opposition, some public rebukes, and close with an examination of those who remained totally silent in the midst of this incident.

### Public Opposition

A decision to publicly withdraw support from one's own party's presidential nominee had to be daunting for Republican Senate candidates, but in the days following the news of Trump's comments, several Republicans did just that, in a variety of ways: by publicly encouraging Trump to step down as the party's nominee, in doubling down on previous opposition, or by moving from publicly uncommitted to actively opposed to Trump. The release of this tape, framed by media as the death knell of Donald Trump's improbable campaign, in

many ways released these candidates from the unwelcome connection to a presidential nominee who they themselves did not support or endorse, and who was likely to cause harm to their own campaigns.

*Escalated Opposition*

Following the tape's release a few Republican Senators who had previously opposed their party's presidential nominee publicly called on Trump to step down as the party's standard-bearer. This group included Illinois Senator Mark Kirk, running for re-election in a difficult race, and a handful of Senators who had been critics of Trump from earlier in the campaign. Kirk, who had been the first sitting Republican Senator to publicly oppose Trump as a candidate, was particularly vehement in his public comments. On Twitter after the videotape release, he said, "DJT is a malignant clown—unprepared and unfit to be president of the United State." He continued, saying, "@realDonaldTrump should drop out. @GOP should engage rules for emergency replacement." With these communications, he both expressed his opposition to Trump's role as nominee, and encouraged the Republican Party to take steps to formally distance themselves via their existing protocols. Kirk was seen as one of the most vulnerable Senators Republicans had up for election in 2016. His re-election would hinge upon him walking a centrist line with appeal to both Republicans and Democrats—so this public and vitriolic opposition to Trump was clearly viewed as having strategic value for his own electoral chances.

Several of those who had already opposed Trump and now called for his withdrawal were sitting Senators who were not up for election in 2016. Freed from the restraints of their own campaigns, these Senators were blunt in their public responses to Trump's comments. Nebraska Republican Ben Sasse, another early opponent of Trump's candidacy, sent the following message to his Twitter followers: "Character matters. @realDonaldTrump is obviously not

going to win.  But he can still make an honorable move: step aside and let Mike Pence try."

Maine Republican Senator Susan Collins said in a statement,

> I'm appalled at Donald Trump's latest comments.  This is the latest in a series of inappropriate, lewd, reprehensible comments that he has made.  That led me in August to conclude that he was unsuitable for the presidency and I certainly could not vote for him.  This is another indication that he is simply temperamentally unsuitable to hold the highest office in our land.

South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham, who was involved in a very public feud with Trump during Graham's own short-lived campaign for the Republican nomination, said via Twitter, "I have never been comfortable with Donald Trump as our Republican nominee."  He continued: "I don't believe the Bill Clinton defense will work as we impeached Bill Clinton.  I was there."  He included a link to a CNBC story titled "Trump apologizes for saying 'foolish things'" in that tweet, making it clear that the simple apology Trump offered wasn't enough—while also emphasizing his own long history in Republican elected leadership.  Graham characterized this incident as an embarrassment to the party he represented for so long.  He continued, saying, "Name one sports team, university, publicly-held company, etc. that would accept a person like this as their standard bearer?"  Without explicitly calling out the Republican establishment that passed him over in favor of Trump—an establishment of which he had long been a key player— these first two comments allude to his own central role in the Republican party: "our" Republican nominee, and "I was there."  With his last comment, Graham is saying, "Told you so!" to others within the GOP.  In his public opposition to Trump, Graham comes armed with a grudge he makes clear through these communications.  Like others opposing Trump without the yoke of re-election campaigns, he is blunt and forthright in communicating that opposition.

*From Silence to Opposition*

For several Republican Senators, including two running for re-election, this moment was enough for them to move away from previously ambiguous statements into active opposition to Trump. This was true for Senator Mike Lee, cruising to an easy re-election in Utah, and Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, who won her previous re-election in 2010 as the first successful write-in Senate campaign in the United States in more than 50 years. On October 7, Lee tweeted, "Donald Trump is a distraction. Time for him to step aside so we can focus on winning ideas that will carry Republicans to a victory in Nov." Murkowski, a moderate, had won narrowly against a more conservative Republican running to her right in 2010, and the 2016 election was anticipated to be a close race. She tweeted on October 8, the morning after the tape was released, "I cannot and will not support Donald Trump for president. He has forfeited the right to be our party's nominee." Both of these messages from sitting Senators who were 2016 candidates came from individuals who had previously not made public their stances on Trump's candidacy, but in this moment explicitly called for Trump to step away from the election.

Two other uncommitted Senators, not up for re-election in 2016 but certainly aware of their upcoming 2018 campaigns, released statements opposing Trump. Dean Heller of Nevada had been previously opposed to Trump, but didn't rule out changing his mind. In June 2016 he said, "Today, I'm opposed to his campaign. He did a lot of damage. It's very difficult for him, as far as I'm concerned, to recover from his previous comments. I'll give him a chance, but at this point, I have no intentions of voting for him." Following the release of Trump's comments, he responded by supporting two members of the Nevada Congressional delegation as they withdrew their own support. He said, "What those videos and tapes had to say was reprehensible and I don't think Dr. Heck had a choice and I don't think Cresent Hardy had a choice. I know it makes some people uncomfortable, but it's the right position to take" (Rindels, 2016). Senator

Jeff Flake of Arizona, also not up for re-election in 2016 but facing votes in 2018, used Twitter to communicate. He said, linking an article from the *Washington Post* headlined "Amid growing calls to drop out, Trump vows to 'never withdraw,'": "Donald Trump is wrong about his level of support. He needs to withdraw from the race." He also tweeted, "America deserves far better than @realDonaldTrump." For these Senators, the videotape and Trump's response compelled them to become publicly outspoken in opposition to their own party's presidential nominee.

*Rescindence of Support*

For candidates who were already publicly opposed to Trump or who had never publicly committed themselves either way, publicly denouncing him as a nominee was perhaps easier than for those candidates who had publicly announced support. Nonetheless, in the wake of Trump's comments some Republican Senatorial candidates publicly reversed their earlier support, making a pivot from the expected (supporting their party's nominee for president) to the unusual (actively opposing their party's nominee). Some of these candidates publicly called on Trump to step down in favor of a conservative alternative who was not clad in scandal, such as Republican vice president nominee Mike Pence, Trump's chosen running mate. By indicating support for Pence, these candidates attempted to publicly oppose their party's presidential nominee without relinquishing their chances at the White House, and without alienating voters, regardless of whether they supported Trump or were horrified by his words. One key difference between these candidates and those who were either previously opposed or uncommitted and came out against Trump: these candidates, who were in essence switching positions, released longer statements, in an effort to articulate their conversion. I turn now to several examples of these communications.

New Hampshire Senator Kelly Ayotte, in one of the most tightly contested Senate races of 2016, initially supported Trump, but did so grudgingly and without offering a formal endorsement.  Throughout the campaign, Ayotte had struggled with how to approach her support of Trump.  He was the resounding winner of her state's critical primary, but just a few days prior to the release of the videotape she caused problems for herself when she declared in a debate that Trump was a role model for her children and then immediately afterward backtracked, rescinding her remarks.  Her opponent, Democratic Governor Maggie Hassan, quickly put up a television advertisement titled "Absolutely" consisting of video of Trump insulting women book-ended between audio of Ayotte's "role model" comments.  For Ayotte, as a result, the public release of Trump's 2005 comments forced a critical communicative moment for her campaign.  On October 8, she tweeted, "I will not vote for Donald Trump.  Read my statement here."  This linked to the following statement:

> I wanted to be able to support my party's nominee, chosen by the people, because I feel strongly that we need a change in direction for our country.  However, I'm a mom and an American first, and I cannot and will not support a candidate for president who brags about degrading and assaulting women.  I will not be voting for Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton and will instead be writing in Governor Pence for president on Election Day.

Some other Senators running for re-election approached this situation similarly.  In Ohio, Senator Rob Portman was in what appeared at the time to be a close election against former Democratic governor Ted Strickland.  In a statement withdrawing his support, Portman was explicit in condemning Trump while not judging those who still supported him in an effort to walk on both sides of the line.

> As I said yesterday, Donald Trump's comments were offensive and wrong.  I had hoped to support the candidate my party nominated in the primary process.  I thought it was appropriate to respect the million of voters across the country who chose Donald Trump as the Republican Party nominee.  While I continue to respect those who can still support Donald Trump, I can no longer support him.  I

continue to believe our country cannot afford a Hillary Clinton presidency. I will be voting for Mike Pence for President.

Idaho Senator Mike Crapo, who had endorsed Trump on July 19, 2016, following his official nomination by the Republican Party, held back from completely withdrawing his support immediately. The evening the video was released, he tweeted: "The comments made by Mr. Trump are outrageous, and he must apologize immediately for his disrespectful, profane and demeaning language about women. He must take full responsibility for this unacceptable disrespect of women, renounce it and apologize, no excuses." The following day, Crapo went further in a series of six tweets to his followers: he rescinded his endorsement. These tweets, which made up a full statement, are below:

> I have reached the decision that I can no longer endorse Donald Trump. This is not a decision that I have reached lightly but his pattern of behavior has left me no choice. His repeated actions and comments toward women have been disrespectful, profane and demeaning. I have spent more than two decades working on domestic violence prevention. Trump's most recent excuse of "locker room talk" is completely unacceptable and is inconsistent with protecting women from abusive, disparaging treatment. Make no mistake—we need conservative leadership in the White House. I urge Donald Trump to step aside and allow the Republican Party to put forward a conservative candidate like Mike Pence who can defeat Hillary Clinton.

In perhaps one of the most watched moves away from Trump, former GOP presidential nominee and current Arizona Senator John McCain, up for re-election in 2016, had publicly struggled about supporting the abrasive Republican nominee. After reluctantly supporting him after Trump accepted the nomination, McCain disavowed support of Trump when these comments were made public. McCain tweeted, "There are no excuses for Donald Trump's offensive behavior. Cindy & I will not vote for him." He released a full statement linked in that initial Twitter announcement, saying:

> In addition to my well-known differences with Donald Trump on public policy issues, I have raised questions about his character after his comments on Prisoners

of War, the Khan Gold Star family, Judge Curiel and earlier inappropriate comments about women. Just this week, he made outrageous statements about the innocent men in the Central Park Five case. As I said yesterday, there are no excuses for Donald Trump's offensive and demeaning comments in the just released video; no woman should ever be victimized by this kind of inappropriate behavior. He alone bears the burden of his conduct and alone should suffer the consequences. I have wanted to support the candidate our party nominated. He was not my choice, but as a past nominee, I thought it was important I respect the fact that Donald Trump won a majority of the delegates by the rules our party set. I thought I owed his supporters that deference. But Donald Trump's behavior this week, concluding with the disclosure of his demeaning comments about women and his boasts about sexual assaults, make it impossible to continue to offer even conditional support for his candidacy. Cindy, with her strong background in human rights and respect for women, fully agrees with me on this. Cindy and I will not vote for Donald Trump. I have never voted for a Democratic presidential candidate and we will not vote for Hillary Clinton. We will write in the name of some good conservative Republican who is qualified to be President.

Several Republican Senators who were not up for election in 2016 issued similar statements, offering nuanced approaches to withdrawing support from their party's nominee.

Cory Gardner, Republican of Colorado, tweeted, "If Donald Trump wishes to defeat Hillary Clinton, he should do the only thing that will allow us to do so—step aside" and then linked to the following statement:

> Millions of Americans are set to choose between two people to lead this nation. One candidate is a danger to our constitution, freedoms and security, who would sell our national security to the highest bidder and finalize the destruction of the rule of law. The other—a candidate whose flaws are beyond mere moral shortcomings and who shows a disgust for American character and a disdain for dignity unbecoming to the presidency. I cannot and will not support someone who brags about degrading and assaulting women. I am committed to defeating Hillary Clinton. The only way this is now possible is with a new nominee that reflects the values of our country and our party. I will not vote for Donald Trump. If Donald Trump wishes to defeat Hillary Clinton, he should do the only thing that will allow us to do so - step aside, and allow Mike Pence to be the Republican party's nominee. If he fails to do so, I will not vote for Hillary Clinton but will instead write-in my vote for Mike Pence.

Dan Sullivan, Republican Senator of Alaska, also offered a lengthy public statement asking Trump to step aside, and indicated that he would now be supporting Mike Pence.

Inspired by my three wonderful teenage daughters, and my wise and gracious wife, I have tried to do everything in my authority as an Alaskan public official over the past seven years to combat sexual assault and domestic violence. I've worked to encourage men to chose respect and change the culture of abuse against women and children, which is at epidemic levels in Alaska and many part of the country. We need national leaders who can lead by example on this critical issue. The reprehensible revelations about Donald Trump have shown that he can't. Therefore, I am withdrawing my support for his candidacy. Because I love Alaska and our country, I cannot and will not support Hillary Clinton. She and her husband have their own sordid history of abuse of women. Further, her stated policies will undermine Alaska's economic future and our constitutional rights. My Republican Party—the party of Lincoln, Roosevelt, and Reagan—stands for upholding the constitution, economic opportunity, strong national defense, protecting the most vulnerable and the dignity and liberty of all people. As such, I will continue to campaign for Republican candidates across Alaska and the country. Keeping Republicans in the Senate majority is critical to the economic and national security of Alaska and America. As for the White House, Donald Trump should step aside. I will support Mike Pence for president.

Each of these statements, from some Senators running for re-election and from some in the middle of their terms, included a clear declaration of withdrawing support, a clear declaration of whom they would now support, and their continued belief in the need to defeat Hillary Clinton. With the exception of Portman, each of these statements also offered deep concern about how Trump treated women (and, in McCain's case, other groups and specific individuals Trump had criticized on the campaign trail). Both Sullivan and McCain explicitly mentioned female family members, connections to policy pertaining to women's rights or sexual violence, and the importance of protecting women. These emphases indicate where these Senators thought they would be most vulnerable—by going on defense explicitly through these statements, they put forth discursive attempts to ensure criticism leveled at Trump could not be turned to them. Just as their promised support for Mike Pence for president was likely intended to show their continued conservative ideology in the face of this crisis, this communicated attention to those victimized by Trump's comments was likely intended to separate themselves from his boorishness.

**Public Rebukes**

For many Senators who had previously publicly expressed support for Trump, including those up for election in 2016, the Republican nominee's comments forced them into a nearly impossible position. Some declared they could not vote for Trump, as we've seen. Some others, as we will now see, made attempts to publicly rebuke Trump without commenting directly on their own support of his candidacy. Unlike the lengthy and nuanced statements released by candidates moving from support to opposition, each of these messages were brief and emphasized dismay and chastisement without further comment about their own actions, beliefs, support, or position with regards to the Republican nominee.

*Issued Statement, Did Not Rescind Support*

Responses from candidates in this camp came quickly. Ron Johnson, running a seemingly uphill battle to retain his Senate seat in Wisconsin against former U.S. Senator Russ Feingold, tweeted the following on October 7, shortly after the story broke: "Donald Trump's recent comments are completely indefensible and I refuse to even attempt to try and do so." Senator Jim Lankford of Oklahoma said, "The audio comments I heard today are disgusting. In a campaign year full of lies, personal attacks and vile language, today was yet another reminder that there is no role model, from either party, running for President this year." Despite expressing disgust and the belief these comments were indefensible, neither Johnson nor Lankford publicly withdrew support from the presidential nominee they were admonishing. Two other candidates, Senator Roy Blunt of Missouri, and Senator Richard Burr, of North Carolina, emphasized that Trump was right to apologize for his statements. On Twitter, Blunt said, "Donald Trump's statements were disrespectful and inappropriate, and he was right to apologize." In a campaign debate closely following the tape's release, Burr said, "I'm the son of

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a Presbyterian minister.  My dad taught me when somebody asked for forgiveness, you grant it.  Now, I'm not going to defend Donald Trump, what he said or his actions, but when I look at our choice, it's not close for me" (Naylor, 2016).  With this statement, Blunt invoked his religious upbringing as a rationale for forgiving Trump—and framed forgiveness as the right moral choice.

Two candidates focused their critical comments on their views of how women should be treated.  Florida Senator Marco Rubio tweeted, "Donald's comments were vulgar, egregious & impossible to justify.  No one should ever talk about any woman in those terms, even in private."  And Georgia Senator Johnny Isakson, in a non-competitive election, said: "As a husband, father of a daughter and grandfather to five granddaughters, I am disgusted by Trump's comments.  There are wholly inappropriate and unacceptable, but Georgia is in recovery mode from Hurricane Matthew, and my focus remains on my state."  Isakson pivoted quickly away from dealing with Trump's scandal, in a discursive move to separate him from the presidential nominee while publicly maintaining focus on his state's doings, but did so with a statement couched in concern about women.

Several other Republican Senators similarly expressed general condemnation in brief statements without focusing on details.  For example, Dan Coats, Republican of Indiana (who declined to run for re-election in 2016, leaving a hotly contested open seat), tweeted: "Donald Trump's vulgar comments are totally inappropriate and disgusting, and these words have no place in our society."  Joni Ernst, Republican of Iowa, tweeted: "The comments DJT made are lewd & insulting.  There is no excuse, and no room for such reprehensible and objectifying talk about anyone, ever."  Tim Scott of South Carolina said, "That's awful, it's disgusting.  It's not even a question on what he was involved in, I would never stick around to hear the end of that

story" (Cope & Willks, 2016).  Scott made clear later that he would continue to vote for Trump.

Mike Rounds of South Dakota called Trump's comments "despicable" but said he would still

vote for Trump (Epp, 2016).  Jim Risch told the *Idaho Statesman*, his local paper, that he was

"disgusted by the vulgar and indefensible revelations relating to the Republican nominee's

character" (Russell, 2016).  Others made attempts to distance Trump's statements from

Republican Party values.  For instance, Senator Mike Barrasso of Wyoming in an email

statement to the *Casper Star Tribune* said, "Donald Trump's comments are offensive, disturbing

and repugnant.  They do not reflect my values or those of the Republican Party.  I will not defend

them" (Hancock, 2016).  And Louisiana Senator Bill Cassidy tweeted: "Every life has value.

This has been a part of the Republican Party platform since it was founded.  Mr. Trump's

statements and actions as revealed in this release from 2005 do not represent this.  They are to be

condemned."  These Senators made public comments opposing Trump's statements either

broadly or as a reflection of their party, without diving into the specifics of why Trump was

wrong—and without rescinding their support of the nominee.

Some Republican Senators who were not up for re-election specifically called out gender

in their statements excoriating Trump.  Shelley Moore Capito, Republican Senator of West

Virginia said, "As a woman, a mother, and a grandmother to three young girls, I am deeply

offended by Mr. Trump's remarks, and there is no excuse for the disgusting and demeaning

language.  Women have worked hard to gain the dignity and respect we deserve.  The

appropriate next step may be for him to re-examine his candidacy."  Although Capito

encouraged Trump to re-examine his candidacy, she did so obliquely—without explicitly asking

him to step down, sharing any action she would personally take, or acknowledging if and

whether her own stance had changed.  Clearly Capito felt the need to weigh in and publicly

communicate, but did so while keeping as many options open as possible.  While Capito was the only Republican woman Senator to bring her own gender identity into the conversation, some of her male colleagues also focused their comments on how women should be treated.  Senator Thom Tillis of North Carolina tweeted: "Donald Trump needs to take responsibility for his actions and apologize to women everywhere.  As a proud husband and father of a daughter, I find Donald Trump's comments indefensible."  Along the same lines was a statement from Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, who tweeted: "I am disgusted by Mr. Trump's words about women: our daughters, sisters, and mothers.  And I am profoundly disappointed by the race to the bottom this presidential election has become."  His fellow Texan, Ted Cruz, tweeted: "These comments are disturbing and inappropriate, there is simply no excuse for them.  Every wife, mother, daughter—every person—deserves to be treated with dignity and respect."  Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah agreed, tweeting, "Mr. Trump's comments were offensive and disgusting.  There is no excuse for such degrading behavior.  All women deserve to be treated with respect."  Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader and Senator from Kentucky, said, "These comments are repugnant, and unacceptable in any circumstance.  As the father of three daughters, I strongly believe that Trump needs to apologize directly to women and girls everywhere, and take full responsibility for the utter lack of respect for women shown in his comments on that tape."  Montana Senator Steve Daines said, "These comments are completely inappropriate and offensive.  No woman should ever be demeaned or described in this manner."  And John Boozman of Arkansas was blunt, saying: "As a husband, father of 3 daughters, and grandfather of two precious little girls, if I ever heard anyone speak this way about them, they would be shopping for a new set of teeth."  As these statements make clear, these Senators framed their criticism of Trump's comments as a

defense of women, aligning with the Republican Party's traditional gender values, but they did not publicly commit to withdraw their support for his candidacy.

One other Republican Senator up for re-election in 2016 was remarkably unforthcoming and ambiguous in his public communications about this event. Senator Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, in a tight battle against Democratic challenger Katie McGinty, had not previously publicly announced his position on Donald Trump, although this was a frequent question along the campaign trail and a consistent question from McGinty. In the aftermath of the "Access Hollywood" tape release, Toomey tweeted a denunciation of Trump's comments: "Donald Trump's comments were outrageous and unacceptable—PT." Toomey signed the message with his initials, indicating that he has written it himself (rather than his staff), in a move to personalize the comment and highlight its important. But at no point did Toomey announce his opposition to Trump, or his support.

Like many of the sitting Senators running for re-election, some Senators in the middle of their terms called for Trump to withdraw, and to instead bump Mike Pence to the top of the ticket, but did so without actually withdrawing their support of Trump. For instance, South Dakota Republican John Thune made the following statement via Twitter: "Donald Trump should withdraw and Mike Pence should be our nominee effective immediately." Senator Deb Fischer, Republican of Nebraska, felt similarly, stating via Twitter: "The comments made by Mr. Trump were disgusting and totally unacceptable under any circumstances. It would be wise for him to step aside and allow Mike Pence to serve as our nominee." A few days later, Fischer reversed course, saying that she would continue to support Trump at the top of the Republican ticket and planned to vote for him in November. Despite both these candidates calling for

Trump to step aside and make way for his running mate, both Rounds and Fischer never fully backed away from their initial support.

Four Senators were explicit in emphasizing the importance of apologizing as a result of these comments, either demanding Trump apologize or commending his apology, depending on the timing of various messages.  For instance, Senator John Hoeven of North Dakota said, "Donald Trump's comments were offensive and wrong.  He not only needs to apologize, he needs to show through his words and actions that he does not believe in the views expressed in the video."  Roger Wicker, Senator from Mississippi, followed a similar line in saying, "Mr. Trump's vulgar statements and apparent actions are reprehensible and impossible to defend.  Most of us have done things in life that made us ashamed and call for a true apology.  It will be important to see if Donald Trump is able to demonstrate genuine remorse and humility."  Iowa Senator Chuck Grassley, in an email to Des Moines radio station KCCI, said, "The comments were terrible and shameful, and this kind of talk about our fellow human beings shouldn't be acceptable to anyone.  His apology was necessary and appropriate" (KCCI, 2016).  Senator Bob Corker of Tennessee agreed, saying, "These comments are obviously very inappropriate and offensive and his apology was absolutely necessary."  These Senators emphasized Trump's apology—or called on him to apologize—in order to indicate their awareness of his extreme wrongdoing.  By highlighting the need to apologize they were publicly urging him to take action seen as rectifying this wrong.

Another approach two Senators took in discussing Trump's comments was to underline the political reality at stake with this election, and emphasizing that although Trump was far from perfect, the other option (Clinton) was worse.  Republican Senator Mike Enzi of Wyoming said, via a spokesperson,

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The choice in November is still the same, however, and the American people are going to have to make it. Sen. Enzi does not want four more years of failed Obama policies that are severely hurting Wyoming and this country. He also does not want a Supreme Court that will ignore for years to come the freedoms guaranteed in our Constitution. This is what electing Hillary Clinton will bring.

And Tom Cotton of Arkansas said:

Let's not beat around the bush: his words on that tape were demeaning and shameful. Donald doesn't have much choice at this point: he needs to throw himself on the mercy of the American people tomorrow night [at the presidential debate]. He needs to take full responsibility for his words and his behavior, he needs to beg their forgiveness, and he needs to pledge to finally change his ways. And he needs to ask for one last chance to stop the dangerous consequences of a Hillary Clinton presidency and to bring the change this country needs so badly, from higher wages for working families to better health care to safer streets. If he doesn't do those things, if he won't do those things, then he should step aside and allow the Republican Party to replace him with an elder statesman who will. (Talkbusiness.net, 2016).

Both these Senators expressed their concern over the election with longer statements, and emphasized the clear choice for voters—and presumably party leaders—in November. By emphasizing Clinton's awfulness, they also emphasized their reasons, even without being explicit, for not withdrawing support from Trump.

And finally, Senator Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma brought together multiple discursive approaches, condoning Trump's treatment of women, continuing to denounce Clinton, and focusing on Trump as a lesser of two evils. He said:

What Trump said about a married woman 10 years ago is disgusting, and I do not support women being talked about in such vile ways. The hypocrisy of Hillary Clinton to criticize Trump's past is equally disturbing as her personal failings involved expensive, well-coordinated campaigns to bully and degrade women. At no point did she believe there was a need to apologize to victims, only the need to bury their stories and destroy their reputations. We need to remember that in this election cycle, November is about who has the best policies to revive our economy and rebuild our military. Whether this ultimately benefits Hillary Clinton, it doesn't mean any less that her policies and philosophy will only hurt America should she get the opportunity to lead it.

Together, these Senators brought nuance to their public statements: rebukes of Trump but not withdrawal of support.  It was a partisan balancing act.

## Public Silence and One Defense

While the majority of Republican Senators, both those running for office and those not up for election, did make public comments, eight did not comment on Trump's comments.  Those up for election in 2016 who remained publicly silent were all in easy re-election campaigns: Jerry Moran of Kansas, Richard Shelby of Alabama, and Rand Paul of Kentucky.  Those who remained quiet without being in election cycles were Thad Cochran of Mississippi, Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, David Perdue of Georgia, and David Vitter of Louisiana, who was retiring from the Senate at the end of the year.  It is probable that these Senators, all from highly conservative states that were almost certain to strongly support Trump (and ultimately did) simply felt that they had nothing to gain through public communication, and would not lose anything through their silence.

One final Republican Senator's approach to these comments merits mention.  Senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama, the first member of the Senate to endorse Trump, remained a vocal supporter of Trump without issuing any public rebuke or statements.  In fact, when approached by a reporter from *The Weekly Standard* to ask for his view just three days after the tape was made public, Sessions publicly questioned whether Trump's words even described sexual assault.  The exchange, below, was printed verbatim in numerous outlets:

Sessions: This was very improper language, and he's acknowledged that.

The Weekly Standard: But beyond the language, would you characterize the behavior described in that [video] as sexual assault if that behavior actually took place?

Sessions: I don't characterize that as sexual assault.  I think that's a stretch.  I don't know what he meant—

TWS: So if you grab a woman by the genitals, that's not sexual assault?

Sessions: I don't know.  It's not clear that he—how that would occur (McCormack, 2016).

This reaction was unique among all Senators who commented in any way on this situation.

Whether other candidates still planned to support or vote for Trump or not, each other individual

who commented made it clear that Trump's remarks were abhorrent.  Although Sessions would

later state that these comments had caught him off guard and "of course assault is unacceptable"

he never clarified whether Trump's remarks had in fact described sexual assault.  Sessions was

unique in not couching his continued support with any sort of reprimand, distancing, or

acknowledgement of how bad Trump's comments had been to his candidacy and party.

**Discussion**

This chapter presented an analysis of Republican U.S. Senators' responses to the news of

Donald Trump's comments during a 2005 appearance on "Access Hollywood" in which he

bragged about sexually assaulting women.  This chapter was an unexpected addition to this

dissertation—even at the start of a presidential election that promised to be rife with personal

insults, deep animosity between candidates and nominee, and sharp opposition between parties, a

communicative maelstrom of this nature seemed impossible to imagine.  This was a moment that

tested the morals of the Republican Party, resulted in outright opposition from some legislative

candidates to their own presidential nominee, and seemingly assured Hillary Clinton's supporters

of her moral and electoral victory over a toxic Republican nominee.  When considering down-

ballot candidates' communications about the presidential nominees during the 2016 presidential

election, looking at broad patterns via social media and state-level interviews would have

effectively elided this critical and revelatory moment—a moment that highlighted the

discomfort, uncertainty, and confusion with which many Republican legislators approached their communication about Donald Trump.  In this section, I highlight notable patterns in the analyzed discourse about Trump's "Access Hollywood" comments.

First and foremost, this was a strategically challenging moment for Republican Senators, both those running for election and those in the middle of their terms, and one that Republicans almost universally reacted to via public communications.  Of the 54 Republican Senators in office, 44 (meaning 81 percent) offered public comment.  Of the 22 Senators running for re-election, eighteen—again, 81 percent—responded publicly.  Only a few Senators, both running for re-election and serving their terms, remained silent in the face of this controversy, and only one, who would be "rewarded" by being named U.S. Attorney General, essentially mounted a defense of Trump.  In the aggregate, therefore, U.S. Senators and potential Senators within the Republican Party by and large chose to be active participants in this moment by making an effort to control the communications narrative through public statements.

Second, the most common response, by Republican Senators seeking re-election and those in the middle of their terms, was a strong public statement criticizing Trump's comments without accompanying promises to withdraw their support, change their endorsements, or otherwise materially change their responses to Trump overall, aside from this moment.  For the majority of Republican Senators, this was presented as a terrible set of comments by their party's presidential nominee that merited rebuke but were then to be moved past as quickly as possible.  By making public comments rebuking their presidential nominee for reprehensible words without changing their approach to the presidential election—including their support—in any ways, these federal legislators and candidates attempted to balance two competing partisan needs

through their public communications.  Essentially they needed to convey their own personal values, but in ways that did not turn away their potential partisan-aligned voters.

Finally, the way legislators and candidates expressed themselves differed across the responses made to Trump's comments.  Those issuing public rebukes without changing their support, and those who already opposed Trump, approached this incident with brief statements, without a need of—or in an effort to avoid—extensive explanation.  Those who publicly changed from support to opposition, in contrast, issued notably longer and more detailed statements than any other group of legislators, indicative of the distinct complexity of their positionalities during this election.  Opposing one's own presidential nominee is a bold and powerful statement, but one full of attendant risks.  These lengthy and complex statements spoke to the multiple objectives candidates releasing them hoped to achieve, while all the time avoiding the myriad pitfalls possible.  Unlike legislators and candidates publicly rebuking Trump and moving on, these candidates and legislators crafted communications that had to explain, to articulate, a major pivot point in their intended actions.  These communications were tense, meaningful, and risky.

Together, the analyses in this chapter indicate that legislators at the federal level, including those running for office, approached news of Trump's comments proactively, publicly, and generally—but with key exceptions—in attempts to move on as quickly as possible.  In an unexpected election, this was perhaps the most unexpected moment, but one that came to define the campaign.  Without a roadmap to follow, or examples of how to gracefully rebuke one's own nominee without incurring voters' wrath, these Republican Senators were making it up on the fly, trying desperately to ameliorate a damaging situation.  In the following chapter, I will connect the discursive threads across the broad communicative patterns examined in Chapter Three, the individual approaches state legislative candidates brought to the election as analyzed

in Chapter Four, and the examination of Republican responses to Trump's "Access Hollywood" remarks presented in this chapter.  I will also consider future potential directions of work in this area of American political communication.

**Chapter Six**

**Understanding Legislative Candidate Communications**

On Tuesday, November 8, 2016, Donald Trump won 304 Electoral College votes, defeating Hillary Clinton to be elected the 45th president of the United States.  Messages of cheer and congratulations poured in from legislators and legislative candidates, including from those who had vehemently opposed him during the election.  For instance, Arizona Republican Senator John McCain, who reversed his previous support for Trump, tweeted, "Congrats to President-Elect Donald Trump - as Chrmn of Armed Services Cmte I'll work to confront nat'l security challenges & support troops."  Republican Senator Mike Lee of Utah, who had called on Trump to step aside exactly one month earlier, said, "I congratulate President-Elect Trump & look forward to helping him repeal Obamacare, reduce regulation, and confirm conservative judges." And newly elected Washington State Senator Hans Zeiger, a Republican who spoke out against Trump throughout the campaign, retweeted a message from Nebraska Senator Ben Sasse, saying, "RT @BenSasse: My family and I just prayed that President-Elect Trump will be wise and faithful in his new vocation.  We call on all Americans to as well."  At the same moment many of these down-ballot candidates were being elected to either the 115th United States Congress or the 2017 Washington State Legislature.  These candidates, now lawmakers, were now facing the reality of the past five months of campaign communications—those who were vocal supporters of Trump might receive appointments, while those who spoke out against him could either continue to oppose him in this new role, with that move's attendant political complications, or reverse course and become publicly supportive.  For example, Trump soon appointed his earliest and most vocal Senate supporter, Jeff Sessions, as his Attorney General.  While campaign

communication ended with the election, the impacts of those communications continued to reverberate within the new Trump administration.

Similarly, Washington State legislators who were elected or re-elected in the 2016 election continued to feel the impact of their comments about presidential nominees. During the May 2017 congressional recess, Denny Heck, a Democratic U.S. Representative from Washington's 10<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, traveled home to hear directly from his constituents at a Town Hall. More than a year after the Washington State presidential primary, seven months after the general election—when he was re-elected by more than 18 points, while Trump was defeated by a similar margin in his district—and more than 140 days into President Trump's term in office, Heck found himself surrounded by crowds chanting "Get the Heck out!" because he had vocally supported Clinton during Washington's presidential primary. How legislative candidates communicate about presidential nominees is complicated, and can have long-lasting ramifications for those candidates, even once the election is over. As illustrated by Heck's experience, memories of these communications can linger and continue to live with legislators long after the end of the campaign.

This dissertation sought to bring these threads together by exploring the many ways congressional and legislative candidates communicated about presidential nominees in the 2016 presidential election. This research offers a number of new contributions to our understanding of down-ballot communication. In particular, I wanted to examine both broad discursive patterns about presidential nominees among federal and state legislative candidates, and a more in-depth examination of how state legislative candidates, an under-studied population, demonstrate their positionality in relation to the presidency via their public communications. The goal of this dissertation was to move closer to understanding the ways legislative candidates at the state and

federal levels construct public communications about the presidential nominees. Specifically, I wanted to focus on political identity, incumbency status, level of office, and candidate gender. As such, I focused on a selection of federal and state elections to examine broad patterns of communication via widely accessible social media tools, in-depth interviews, and public reactions. Legislative candidates inhabit a unique electoral space—federal legislators have differing degrees of connection to the federal executive branch, while state-level legislators have no formal connection to federal government other than as citizens themselves. Yet all elected leaders are also considered party leaders and represent constituent interests. As such, they strategically construct their public communications to achieve specific political objectives (Domke & Coe, 2008). The role of legislative candidates within these political spaces has been underexplored, as most scholarship is focused on the president and presidential nominees. As discussed below, several factors likely influenced how candidates constructed their public communications, and the degree to which they communicated: political proximity from the White House, including level of office sought and incumbency status, partisan identity, and candidate gender.

To examine these communications across a variety of electoral contexts, I employed a mixed-methods approach. First, I conducted a content analysis of all U.S. Senate elections, the 20 most competitive U.S. House of Representatives races, all Washington State Senate elections, and 20 highly competitive Washington State House of Representatives races. Specifically, I analyzed candidates' tweets about Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump from the month of nominating conventions through the general election, with regards to candidates' incumbency status, level of office sought, political identity, and gender. This analysis was presented in Chapter Three. Next, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 21 candidates for state

legislative office in Washington State, to learn more about their communicative approaches to

discussing Clinton and Trump during their own elections.  This analysis was presented in

Chapter Four.  And finally, I conducted an analysis of how Republican members of the United

States Senate, both those running for re-election and those in the middle of their terms,

responded to the release of a video showing Donald Trump's sexist response while on a live

microphone in 2005—which became a telling communicative moment in terms of legislative

communication about presidential nominees.  This analysis was presented in Chapter Five.

Together, these approaches offer substantial insight into how legislative candidates at the federal

and state levels communicated publicly about the 2016 presidential nominees.  In this chapter, I

first revisit the conceptual framework and how it accorded with this dissertation's predictions

and eventual results.  I then present the limitations of this research and ideas for future research.

And finally, I discuss the broad implications of this research for legislative candidates, the

expanding field of political communication scholarship, and campaign communications.

## Conceptual Framework, Predictions, and Results

In this dissertation, I examined down-ballot candidate communications in a variety of

contexts: broad communication patterns across federal and state races throughout a presidential

campaign, state legislative candidate communication throughout the campaign as articulated via

interviews, and in-depth analysis of federal senators' responses to one specific discursive

moment.  Together, these three approaches offer insight into multiple sides of a complex

communication behavior.  The first approach I took to examining these concepts was through an

analysis of broad communication patterns among state and federal legislative candidates in

Chapter Three.  I argued that four factors would impact the degree to which legislative

candidates in highly scrutinized elections would communicate to and about presidential

nominees of both political parties: level of office sought, incumbency status, candidate gender, and partisan identity. I argued that these factors would influence the volume of candidate communication. First, I expected that one aspect of the presidential campaign would impact both which legislative candidates communicated via Twitter and the content of that communication: Hillary Clinton's groundbreaking campaign as the first female nominee of a major party, and the responses that would inspire from different groups of legislative candidates. Gender is important in contemporary American politics, which is a highly masculine, and masculinized, space. That is, masculine behaviors, characteristics, identities, subjects, and communication styles are norms, and it is a space predominantly occupied by men (Meeks, 2013; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005). I predicted that legislative candidates would identify Clinton as a novel candidate, and that the majority of novelty communication would be in reference to her because of her gender. I also anticipated that Democratic women, the group most closely aligned with Clinton's experience navigating this highly masculinized space, would communicate about her groundbreaking status as the first female nominee more than all other groups. On both counts, my expectations were strongly supported. Specifically, Clinton's pioneering status was recognized with more communication about novelty overall, and Democrats were exclusively responsible for this discourse, with Democratic women leading the way.

But these findings hide a deeper communicative pattern of the 2016 presidential election—the surprising and overwhelming lack of communication about Hillary Clinton's gender. Both Clinton herself and Trump played roles in this lack of emphasis, I posit. First, Clinton was a challenging candidate to emphasize this identity. While many women candidates intentionally adopt more masculine communication styles and choose to emphasize policy areas identified with men in order to increase their electoral success (Meeks, 2013), Clinton had spent

decades stepping away from the traditional feminine coating of a woman in American politics. When her husband first ran for president in 1992, she was pilloried for her comment, "I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas, but what I decided to do was fulfill my profession" (quoted in Chozick, 2016)  In her first presidential run, in 2008, Clinton de-emphasized the historic nature of her campaign for the nation's highest office (Traister, 2010; Kornblut, 2009).  Instead, she emphasized her experience, policy knowledge—someone with no knowledge of the election reading her announcement speech would have no idea she was a woman seeking the nation's highest office.  The 2008 election, from Clinton's perspective, was one in which she sought to de-emphasize her gender in order to better match the historic ideal of an American president—a man.  It was not until the end of her campaign that Clinton intentionally evoked gender in her communications, inviting others to do so as well.  During her concession speech, she alluded to the "highest, hardest glass ceiling" ("Text of Clinton's 2008 concession speech," 2008)) that had yet to shatter, possibly her most memorable reference to the historic nature of her campaign.

Clinton's 2016 campaign, in contrast, evoked her gender immediately.  Gender was a part of Clinton's message from day one.  Clinton intentionally made her gender—and her novelty status—a key issue of her campaign: she highlighted her role as mother and grandmother (Frizell, 2015), had surrogates speak to her natural warmth (Blyth, 2016), and even sold tongue-in-cheek "woman cards" after a debate jab from Trump (Bellstrom, 2016).  In her announcement speech, she declared, "I may not be the youngest candidate in this race.  But I will be the youngest woman President in the history of the United States.  And the first grandmother as well!  And one additional advantage: You won't see my hair turn white in the White House; I've been coloring it for years!" (Frizell, 2015).  A primary slogan and hashtag promoted by her

campaign, "I'm with her," subtly infused every communication with gendered implications: there was only one "her" in this race, and Clinton was claiming and disseminating that identity. When Clinton walked on stage on June 7, 2016, claiming the mantle of Democratic presidential nominee, she entered following a video of historic breakthroughs for women, that ended with a smiling image of Clinton and the text "Let's keep making history" (Clinton, 2016). This time, she seemed determine to emphasize the gender historicity of her campaign. But after decades of time in the spotlight, with a firmly established public persona, Clinton was possibly the best-known presidential nominee in history, and efforts to calibrate her public image failed.

I also believe that Trump's presence in the race played a key role in the absence of discourse emphasizing Clinton's gender for another reason—the overwhelming amount of commentary about Trump, from members of both political parties and the media, dominated public communications. Some Republicans defended their chosen nominee, others walked the fine line between support and opposition, and others tried to distance themselves, while Democrats were united in their opposition. In this campaign environment, communication about Clinton was far less present overall. The media context supported this: the immediacy of the 24-hour news cycle and constantly updated social media feeds made the sound bites and tweets favored by Trump—as well as dissecting his blunders—more newsworthy than Clinton's detailed policy proposals. Similar patterns were at play in the news media. According to a study out of the Harvard Kennedy School, Clinton received 15 percent less media coverage than Trump (Sutton, 2016). And Trump benefitted from more than $4 billion worth of earned media, more than twice what Clinton earned (Confessore & Yourish, 2016), keeping him at the front and center of news and information consumption. Clinton's share of attention, then, was already smaller than Trump's. Since Republicans at the legislative level had nothing to gain by

emphasizing Clinton's history-making status as a woman, this discourse was reasonably limited to Democrats. But Democrats were also predominantly vocal about Trump, instead of Clinton, presumably seeing greater opportunity in running against a highly unpopular nominee than on hitching onto the coattails of their own unpopular nominee. The patterns I anticipated were demonstrated to be accurate—down-ballot women Democrats were the group most likely to communicate about Clinton. But while that expectation was matched, the overall absence of communication about this aspect of the 2016 presidential election was unexpected, and challenged my expectations of communication content and volume.

Second, I anticipated that political proximity from the White House would play a crucial role in determining the degree to which legislative candidates would communicate about the presidential nominees. Both levels of office sought—in this study, U.S. Senate, U.S. House of Representatives, state Senate, and state House of Representatives—and incumbency status informed distance from the White House. Overall, I anticipated that the closer a candidate was to the White House, through office sought and previous service, the more he or she would publicly comment on the presidential nominees. In many ways, this broad expectation was supported. Federal legislative candidates communicated via Twitter about the presidential nominees at a much higher rate than state legislative candidates, with more than three-fourths of federal candidates tweeting at least once about Clinton and Trump compared to almost one fifth of state candidates. The mean number of tweets from these groups of candidates was different as well, with federal candidates tweeting 10 times more than state candidates. Political proximity, then, was highly related to volume of legislative candidate communications.

I also expected that incumbency status would play a role in down-ballot candidate communication, and the degree to which these candidates engaged with the presidential

nominees. The "incumbency advantage" is a well-known phenomenon in American electoral politics: it is the reality that incumbents, as existing holders of the office they seek, have structural advantages that contribute to their reelection success (Erikson, 1971). I posited that those candidates positioned closest to the White House by factor of having served in legislative office previously—that is, incumbents—would offer different levels of communication than either those running for open seats or those challenging sitting legislators for their position. There was indeed a significant difference in the volume of communication between federal challengers and federal incumbents, but it was in fact *challengers* who offered the majority of communication about the presidential nominees, counter to my expectations. Among incumbent candidates at the federal level, however, U.S. Senators did offer more communication than U.S. House members by percent of communication, and more than five times the per-candidate mean. This mixed support indicated that the role of incumbency had different meanings across level of office, and was more complicated than my initial predictions.

Finally, I anticipated that partisan identity would play a major role in how legislative candidates discussed the presidential nominees—and this indeed proved to be the case, but with an unexpected twist. Presidential nominees are the dominant faces of their political parties (Jacobson, 2009), and can be vital in determining success for candidates down the ballot when up for election. I predicted that partisan identity would dictate the content of legislative candidates' communications, which would be primarily positive about their own nominee and primarily negative about the opposing party's nominee. While this expectation was strongly supported in terms of Democratic candidate communication about Hillary Clinton, it was challenged in regards to Republican communication about Donald Trump. Among this group, almost as many communications about Trump were negative as were positive. Throughout the

other two data chapters of this dissertation, this pattern of vocal Republican opposition occurring parallel to vocal support was consistent, a broader trend to which I return in this chapter. Partisan identity, then, was a key to down-ballot communication, but likely one that was impacted by the specific contextual factors of the 2016 presidential election.

Beyond broad patterns of communication, I also examined the construction of public communications by state legislative candidates, a context that has been underexplored by scholars of political communication. Two research questions guided this work, explicating the factors that informed candidates' decisions to communicate publicly or remain silent, or to move between silence and communication. First, I was interested in the reasons state legislative candidates did not engage in public communication about Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump; and, second, the ways state legislative candidates did communicate about, support, or oppose the presidential nominees via their public communications. To examine these topics, I conducted interviews with state legislative candidates, presented in Chapter Four. These interviews offered illumination on several patterns of communication.

First, I found that some state candidates were consistent in their communicative decisions, either by being consistently vocal or consistently silent. Candidates who remained silent said they did so because they did not see value in communicating about the presidential nominees, or intentionally remained silent to avoid damaging relationships with voters. For the majority of these candidates, they said their focus was consciously and intentionally on state and local issues that would be their purview as legislators, without the distraction of a particularly toxic presidential election. Candidates who were consistently vocal, on the other hand, offered a different approach to the presidential nominees. Communication among Democrats was consistently favorable about Clinton and consistently unfavorable about Trump, while not a

single Republican offered vocal support for Trump. Instead, communication about the presidential nominees from Republican candidates was divided between subdued opposition to Clinton and vocal opposition to Trump, the Republican nominee. From Democrats, several candidates—both women and men—were explicitly focused on her groundbreaking status as the first female nominee of a major party. The majority, however, were focused on explicitly opposing Trump. In direct opposition to their silent colleagues, some of these candidates said they chose to be vocal specifically because of their role as party leaders.

In general, however, I found that the majority of candidates were episodic in their communications about the presidential nominees, moving back and forth from decrying the need for state-level candidates to speak publicly about the presidential election to doing just that themselves. Overall, this navigation between silence and speech highlighted the complex role of state legislative candidates in presidential elections. Like federal legislative candidates, state candidates share the ballot with presidential nominees, but unlike their federal counterparts, the state ones have no formal (and likely no informal) connection to the White House. Yet they are often also considered party and political leaders, despite a political structure that keeps them far removed from the federal executive. In some cases, these candidates realized opportunities for electoral gain could be achieved through more communication. Mostly, however, candidates focused on maintaining discursive distance, but broke their silence at specific moments to communicate outrage, predominantly against Trump. For the majority of candidates of both parties who communicated sporadically, they said their goal was silence—but they felt compelled to speak out against a presidential nominee they saw as unfit to lead the country, either from the beginning or as the campaign unfolded. This also offered Democrats the opportunity to connect their Republican opponents to the Republican nominee, an opportunity

several exploited through their public communications. Altogether, findings from this approach indicate that state legislative candidates do not hold a consensus or necessarily consistent viewpoint on both how voters see them in connection to the presidential nominees and how to effectively and proactively employ their public communications for electoral gain. Many of these candidates entered the race with one approach, and shifted paths over the five months of the general election to take a new discursive tack, most often public opposition of the Republican nominee.

Finally, to understand how legislative candidates might react to one specific high-profile discursive moment, I explored how U.S. Senate Republicans, both those running for re-election and those in the midst of their terms, responded publicly to news of Donald Trump bragging about sexually assaulting women on a hot microphone in 2005, a video of which was released in the final days of the campaign. Examining public responses to this incident provided an opportunity to explore one remarkable communication moment from the campaign, and assess communication between legislators about the same issue. This moment crystallized just how difficult down-ballot communication about presidential nominees might be. When faced with evidence of a universally abhorrent action undertaken by a presidential nominee, Republican senators almost unanimously employed public communication to indicate one thing— disapproval—while the nuances of their responses varied, from rescinded endorsements to light rebukes to continued support. Perhaps more than any other approach in this study, examining public communication around this incident highlighted the level of strategy involved in public communications from legislative candidates.

My goal in this dissertation was to offer insight into a critical and oft-overlooked aspect of contemporary American political communication: legislative candidate campaign

communication, particularly about top-of-the-ticket presidential nominees. This work explored

the broad patterns of communication across broad reaches of time and geography, examined how

state legislative candidates discursively constructed their interaction with presidential nominees,

and excavated one discursively rich moment to which a group of legislators was effectively

forced to respond. By turning the ballot upside-down, as it were, and examining how those at the

bottom communicated about the figures at the top, this work offers insight into the role of

political proximity, incumbency status, partisan identity, and candidate gender in candidates'

public communications. These factors, however, were not enough to explain the full range of

complexity revealed through these public communications. An underlying theme that emerged

across these three approaches is that candidate communications are varied, multifaceted, and

fluid, their motivations and influences wide. Political proximity, incumbency status, partisan

identity and gender were all important factors that impacted the communications studied, but a

key finding of studying this phenomenon during this particular election was that the specific

context of an election also generates reverberations felt up and down the ballot, regardless of

proximity to the White House. This complexity does not undermine these or future findings

undertakings; instead, it makes a case for sustained attention to this important area, across

varying electoral contexts.

**Limitations and Future Research**

When I began this project in early 2016, I designed this dissertation to explore an aspect

of political communication that I believed to be an important but under-studied corner of the

field. Over the next several months, and more urgently between July 2016 and November 2016,

it became clear that the 2016 presidential election offered both opportunities for greater insight

into the field *and* the distinct possibility of an election so unusual that larger conclusions could

not be extracted solely from these events. All elections are unique, but the specific context and events—particularly communicative events—that occurred during this general election were not commonly—perhaps ever—found in modern American history. This presented a unique environment to collect qualitative and quantitative data in real time, but also created challenges. In this section I wish to discuss some limitations, which also point to opportunities for future work to further this research.

As a first step, the specific methodological approaches I undertook in this work merit consideration, for both the value they offered and the challenges they present. While the strengths of bringing multiple approaches together to paint a more complete picture of a complex issue was compelling, each methodological approach contains its own disadvantages. First, the content analysis I employed in Chapter Three offered strengths and limitations. Perhaps foremost was my decision to employ tweets as a vehicle of understanding broad patterns of discourse across candidates seeking different offices, with differently resourced campaigns, around the country. Twitter was an appropriate tool for this work, but it did offer a literally limited view of complex issues. Incorporating additional artifacts while maintaining the breadth of this analysis was not feasible for this work, but would have perhaps offered a more nuanced understanding of the complex communications at stake in this election. Furthermore, the codebook I implemented across this corpus of tweets offered insight into the breadth of this discourse. But because I was interested in the presence or absence of these variables, I did not focus as deeply or broadly on the content of these tweets as could have been undertaken. A richer exploration of the content of these tweets could offer a more nuanced view of candidate communication than the black and white impressions I created in this work. Using this research as a starting point, future research could build upon both incorporating different artifacts,

particularly if new vehicles for candidate communication prove advantageous, and could offer additional depth and breadth regarding the variety of content, primarily in terms of issue or policy areas discussed and, potentially, the differing kinds of praise and critiques.

Second, the approaches I employed to examine state and federal legislative communications had some limitations. As I outlined in Chapter Four, in-depth qualitative interviews are a well-suited means to explore construction of discursive themes, but the time-consuming and personal nature of this work necessitated a limited number of participants. The state legislative candidates I interviewed, as well as those included in the content analysis in Chapter Three, were all from Washington State; this certainly made sense as a locus for this research, but restricting this level of my study to one state necessitated a corresponding loss of generalizability. A next step for future work could involve incorporating candidates from a wider geographic reach. As Lindloff and Taylor (2002) point out, interviewing often entails engaging relatively small samples selected without probability methods, meaning that statistical generalizability is commonly reduced. Finally, the selection criteria for these interviews meant that those candidates with whom I had professional or personal interactions were more likely to participate, again skewing the group of participants. My analysis of Republican senators' responses to the release of the "Access Hollywood" tape in Chapter Five offered limitations as well. The high-profile nature of this particular incident meant that, by design, it provoked communications that were outliers in legislative candidates' communication over the duration of this campaign. This was an inevitability for this particular approach, but in future work, adding additional, similar, deep dives into other significant moments could expand the reach of this sort of focused analysis.

But perhaps the biggest challenge to this work was the wholly unexpected path of the 2016 election. This offered exciting opportunities for future research, but also created limitations. Both nominees were unprecedented: the first female nominee of a major political party faced a complete political neophyte widely reviled by many in his party's establishment. This is a political environment that would be impossible to replicate again. This research benefits from offering a real-time and in-depth understanding of candidate communication in the unique context of the 2016 presidential election, but it also suggests that drawing larger conclusions from these data alone may be unreliable. That said, future research has potential to build upon this initial work in meaningful ways. A possible next step might be attempting wider and longer-running quantitative data, in order to build comparisons across elections.

## Implications

This dissertation offers several key contributions to our understanding of political communication beyond the presidency. In this section of the dissertation, I focus on three broader implications. First, I argue that the role of down-ballot candidates during presidential election, as seen through their constructed public communications during a presidential election, holds both uncertainty and complexity. While legislative candidates at the federal level seem to share an understanding that they are connected to the presidency, state legislative candidates do not appear to have a unified approach to engaging with federal elections, and indeed occupy very different stances. Second, my findings suggest that down-ballot legislative discourse about the presidential nominees was carefully constructed in response to the particular context of the 2016 presidential election. And finally, I offer an appeal for legislative candidate communication as a valuable arena for future study for scholars of political communication. As this research argues, down-ballot candidate communication is an important and understudied aspect of American

political communication.  I discuss each of these implications in turn as a final section of this research.

The Constitution of the United States begins, following the Preamble, with outlining the composition and election of members of Congress.  Since 1789, members of the U.S. House of Representatives have been "chosen every second Year by the People of the several States" (U.S. Const. art. I, § 2), and since the ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913, U.S. Senators have been popularly elected by voters of each state.  From the very birth of America, and almost from the first sentence of the founding document that delineates that framework of government, legislative candidates have been political players at the federal level.  State legislative candidates, in some form, were part of America's political structure even earlier.  In 1619, the Virginia General Assembly was established as the legislative body of the Commonwealth of Virginia, and is the oldest continuous law-making body in what is now the United States.  For almost four hundred years, then, legislators and legislative candidates have played a role in creating America's democratic structure.  Yet very different ideas are held concurrently about the ways these political actors should or do interact with the federal executive, particularly during elections.  The qualitative findings of Chapter Four, supported by the discursive patterns revealed quantitatively in Chapter Three and Chapter Five, indicate that the relationship between legislative candidates, at both the federal and state level, and the presidency, is both complex and convoluted.

The findings in Chapter Four suggest that legislative candidates at the state level lack a shared outlook on their role's interaction or engagement with the White House.  In these qualitative interviews, candidates directly contradicted each other, as some espoused the importance of their platform to inspire and educate voters about the presidential nominees, while

others remained silent about the ongoing presidential election explicitly due to the lack of connection between the presidential election and the office they sought.  I do not wish to argue that all state legislative candidates should behave one way or another; I wish to simply acknowledge that significant inconsistencies exist among candidates running for the same office in the same state, who are simultaneously constructing discourse around the same national political events.  One group of these candidates remained consistently vocal, another consistently silent, while the majority aspired to silence while continuing to engage via public communications.  This variance of these communications across the 21 candidates interviewed indicates a fundamental fissure between how individual legislative candidates at the state level approach communications in this arena, and highlights the need for more examination of the role of state legislative candidates in presidential elections.  Results from Chapter Three underline these findings: while the percent of state legislative candidates who commented and the per-candidate means of their communications both were low, the very fact that part of this group saw value in public communications via that channel while the majority did not suggests a disconnect about their role in the public arena around this issue.

At the same time, findings in Chapter Three also suggest that federal legislative candidates are closely connected to the presidency, and see value in publicly communicating about the presidential nominees, at least to some degree.  While these findings were not universal, they were consistent across the vast majority of federal candidates examined.  Candidates released public statements articulating support or opposition to the presidential nominees, referenced the presidential election, and otherwise chose to communicate about the presidential nominees.  The specific results of Chapter Five also add additional emphasis to this finding.  A key take-away from my exploration of the "Access Hollywood" videotape was that

Republican senators, amid one of the most high-pressure, complex, potentially devastating and damaging moments, proactively responded through public communications. To these federal lawmakers, engagement with the presidential election was widely understood as a possible approach to a daunting situation. Federal legislative candidates, then, through both broad communications across a five-month period and a specifically highlighted moment, demonstrate their recognition of their close connection to the presidency. Taken together, these findings indicate that legislative communication across both levels of government is a deeply complex activity, without a well-understood unifying thread. The results of this dissertation call for a renewed emphasis on the important communicative role of legislative candidates across America's federalist system of government.

Second, findings across all three chapters suggest that legislative candidate communication is constructed specifically with regard to the electoral context in which it occurs. The two presidential nominees at the top of the 2016 tickets played outsized roles in shaping down-ballot public communications across the election. Even without a unified understanding of how legislative candidates should publicly engage with presidential nominees, my findings suggest that the four factors studied here—level of office, incumbency status, partisan identity, and candidate gender—did indeed contribute in varying ways in how candidates shaped their public communications about the presidential nominees. In other words, these factors impact the ways that legislative candidates communicated publicly about Clinton and Trump. Findings from state and federal content analysis conducted in Chapter Three and the state legislative interviews conducted in Chapter Four highlight the ambiguity with which many state candidates approached their nominees. Across these two chapters, similar patterns emerged as Democrats were almost exclusively positive about their own nominee while Republicans were neatly

divided between opposition and support of Trump.  While these patterns did not match the

outcome of the election, they did follow the establishment Republican mistrust with which the

party initially met Trump, as well as the early and sustained support Clinton garnered after years

of political activity and leadership.  These responses were strikingly different.  This same pattern

held across my analysis in Chapter Five, as Republican U.S. senators offered a wide and nuanced

variety of responses to the same event.  Even among those candidates publicly rebuking their

nominee, the content and tone of responses differed depending on multiple factors including

previous relationship to the presidential nominee.  In other words, across three different forms of

examination it became clear that down-ballot communication up to the top of the ticket was a

highly strategic and nuanced form of discourse.

Another contextual aspect of this work is important: the 2016 presidential election

occurred during a shifting of the norms that determine how political actors at the legislative level

communication to or about the president, or presidential nominees.  The American presidency

has long occupied a highly ritualized discursive space.  Communicative interaction occurs with

ceremony and tradition (Rose Garden signing ceremonies, State of the Unions and annual

addresses to Congress, Inaugural addresses) and core belief that despite political opposition, the

office of the Presidency is still sacrosanct.  When Representative Joe Wilson interrupted

President Obama in the middle of his 2009 State of the Union with the words "You lie!" that

sanctity cracked, and weakened the inviolability of the president.  This was an important

precursor to the communicative moves of the 2016 presidential election.  As the communicative

traditions surrounding the "Communicator in Chief" are disbanded, space for opposition speech

not only grew, but lost some of the barriers of ceremony and ritual that has accompanied them

for more than two centuries.  Without that interruption, and subsequent similar communicative

violations, the specific patterns of this campaign might be seen as an aberration—but following a slight but established pattern, leaves us to wonder how and if these norms will continue to be relevant at all.

Finally, this research indicates that down-ballot candidate communication is an important aspect of political communication that is worthy of renewed attention from scholars of political communication. In an exceptional presidential election whose twists and turns will be taught and studied and examined for some time, legislative candidates were an intriguing component of the larger picture. In the earliest days of the campaign, each potential presidential candidate attempted to corral down-ballot support via endorsements and surrogates, seeing value in having public support from these leaders, and local connections around the country. Over the course of the general election, endorsements and surrogate events continued, along with shared resources and targeted communications about the other party's nominee and candidate's own opponent. At ritualized moments like debates, down-ballot candidates might publicly emphasize particularly connected points. And at high-profile controversial moments, as explored in this research, legislative candidates weighed in with opinions. No matter what was occurring in the presidential race, down-ballot candidates were communicating, even if that communication was through their public performance of silence.

Three federal legislators and at least two state legislators represent every citizen in the United States; while one president holds office, there are 535 federal legislators and 7.383 state legislators serving in 2017 (Dittmar, 2017), with additional numbers seeking those offices unsuccessfully. Public communication by these political actors is an important area for future attention, both to enhance our understanding of how these political leaders and aspiring leaders construct their communication, but because this field intersects with existing work. Almost

certainly no president has ever been elected without the support of legislators and legislative candidate. Indisputably no law has ever been passed, at the state or federal level, without the deep involvement of legislators. And legislative candidates more accurately represent the diversity that exists in America. While no woman, including in 2016, has gained the White House, 24.8 percent of all current state legislators are women, and 19.4 percent of current members of Congress are women. Just over seven percent of Congress is Hispanic in 2017, and just over nine percent is African American, percentages echoed in state legislatures nationally, while just one male president of color has held office. Scholars—and citizens—have multitudes of data regarding the ways white male political leaders communicate publicly, but closer attention to legislative candidates can offer deeper insight into a broader, more diverse, more varied body of political communication. Through future research, we can fill in these shadows to gain a more complete understanding of American political communication as a whole.

Further, carrying this research beyond campaigns into how actual sitting politicians communicate about their sitting president or competing nominees could be compelling. One important finding across all three data chapters of this work was the vocality of Republican opposition to Trump, which in at least some cases was offered with the belief that he would lose. Instead, on January 20, 2017, Trump was sworn into office alongside many legislators who had previously spoken out against him. Once again, these legislators now had to navigate the fine line between public disapproval of their party's elected leader and their past opposition. As this presidency has unfolded, additional high-profile communicative moments have emerged, challenging Republican legislators to decide whether to publicly rebuke their elected leader. Along with campaign communication, legislator communication has the potential to be a

revealing and nuanced arena of study that can offer additional insight into the complexities of American politics.

Thus, I conclude this dissertation with the idea that renewed attention to legislative communication, both by scholars and by legislative leaders themselves, offers opportunity for a greater understanding of a component of America's political structure that has received only minimal scholarly attention. Elections are multi-faceted and complex, with shifting events and multiple participants striving for individual and collective goals, making discursive decisions that sometimes impact others to advance their own agendas. Political communication by the federal executive is an important focus, particularly as new approaches challenge and enhance existing scholarship. But America's political system is far more expansive than one "communicator in chief." And while legislative candidates do not need to approach public communications in the same way, this research highlighted dynamics that state legislative candidates and state legislators seem particularly well served to address. As more and more communicative channels appear, scholars have more opportunity to meaningfully engage with this body of our political system. Through future research, we can gain a better understanding of the complexly woven communication threads of down-ballot communication in American politics.

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**Appendix A:**
**Codebook for Content Analyses**

*General coding notes:*
- The unit of observation and analysis is each individual tweet.
- Tweets can contain multiple variables, e.g. be a retweet and reference a nominee.
- All of the content of the tweet should be coded, including "hashtags" unless otherwise noted within the operational definition of a variable. A hashtag is when a user includes a "#" symbol to mark a keyword or topic. Some of the examples below include hashtag content that would be coded present for certain variables.
- Coders should only code a variable present when it is explicit and manifest in nature, not implicit or latent. When in doubt, code the variable as not present.

*Inclusion criteria:*
These data are examined in two waves, both conducted by multiple coders. The initial wave was to determine whether each individual tweet falls within the parameters of this research. Only tweets that explicitly and manifestly reference either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton will be included in the second (coding) wave of analysis.

Variables
1. Unit ID
   Unit ID is the numerical file name of the individual tweet, which is also the unique identification number attached to each tweet by Twitter, e.g. 00231.

2. Candidate
   Record the code next to the appropriate candidate. You can determine which candidate it is based on the name of a folder containing the tweets, which coincides with the candidate's @username.

3. Date
   The date that the tweet was posted. Record as MMDD, e.g. August 15 would be entered as 0815.

**The following variables should be coded as either "Not Present" (0) or "Present" (1). Below, "CD" stands for Conceptual Definition and "OD" stands for Operational Definition.**

**Presidential Nominee Reference**
CD: Any tweet that explicitly or manifestly references either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton. Note: In order to be included in this study, every single tweet must be coded "Present" for at least one of these variables.

4. Reference Trump (RefTrump)
   OD: Any statement that directly and explicitly mentions Donald Trump by name, initials, or @realDonaldTrump. This variable does not include state-specific campaign handles

such as @TrumpforFL. For example, Iowa Senate candidate Patty Judge tweeted, "As @realDonaldTrump takes the stage, remember some politicians have stood up to his discriminatory speech. @ChuckGrassley is not one. #iasen." *Note*: This tweet would also be coded present for "Opponent reference" since it explicitly references Chuck Grassley, Patty Judge's opponent in her U.S. Senate campaign.

5. Reference GOP Nominee (RefGOPNom)
   OD: Any statement that directly and explicitly mentions Donald Trump by title, position, or other clear reference, not including his name. For example, New York Representative candidate Anna Throne Holst tweeted, "Good for GOP Congressmembers and Senators who have abandoned their party's disgusting and conceited nominee."

6. Reference Clinton (RefClinton)
   OD: Any statement that directly and explicitly mentions Hillary Clinton by name, initials, or @HillaryClinton. This variable does not include state-specific campaign handles such as @HillaryforIL. For example, Schneider tweeted, "Hillary Clinton is the only qualified candidate in this race."

7. Reference Democratic Nominee (RefDEMNom)
   OD: Any statement that directly and explicitly mentions Hillary Clinton by title, position, or other clear reference, not including her name. For example, Washington state representative candidate Noel Frame tweeted, "WA getting ready for our moment during the roll call vote for our Democratic nominee for President! #DemsInPhilly" Note: The hashtag #imwithher is only included in this variable if additional context is provided; for example, Gael Tarleton tweeted, "We know where she stands. She stands with us. #WomenTrustWomen #WomenCanStopTrump #ImWithHer."

8. Trump campaign reference (TrumpCamp)
   OD: Any explicit reference to, or mention of Trump-related presidential campaign activities, or groups connected with his presidential campaign, including state and constituency-specific groups such as @Catholics4Trump. For example, Crumpton tweeted, "Trump campaign says the tape is just @realDonaldTrump being Donald. If thats the Donald being Donald, Donald is unfit." Note: This tweet would also be "Present" for "Trump reference" and "Oppose Trump."

9. Clinton campaign reference (ClintonCamp)
   OD: Any explicit reference to, or mention of Clinton-related presidential campaign activities, or groups connected with her presidential campaign, including state and constituency specific groups such as @HillaryforOH. For example, Florida Senate candidate Patrick Murphy tweeted, "Thanked volunteers at Orlando's @HillaryforFL campaign office today. It was inspiring to see so many passionate voices!"

10. Mike Pence reference (PenceRef)
    OD: Any explicit reference to or mention of Mike Pence by name, by username (@mikepence), or by title. For example, Jim Lankford tweeted, "Mike Pence is a solid

conservative VP pick. Well done Mr. Trump." Note: This tweet would also be coded "Present" for "Trump reference."

11. Tim Kaine reference (KaineRef)
    OD: Any explicit reference to or mention of Tim Kaine by name, by username (@timkaine), or by title. For example, North Carolina Senate candidate Deborah Ross tweeted, "@TimKaine is a great #VP pick. He'll stand up for working people, families, students, & folks who want to retire w/ dignity. #NC."

**Presidential Nominee Support or Opposition**
CD: Any tweet that explicitly and directly references candidate's support or opposition towards Donald Trump and/or Hillary Clinton, either by name or clear reference. These variables are not mutually exclusive; a tweet may be coded "Present" for multiple reference variables.

12. Support Trump Name
    OD: Any statement directly and explicitly referencing candidate's support for Donald Trump by name, initials, or Twitter handle (@realDonaldTrump), or makes support explicitly clear after referencing Trump by name. For example, Wendy Long tweeted, "I'm proud to stand with @realDonaldTrump for POTUS." Note: This tweet would also be coded "Present" for "Reference Trump."

13. Support Republican Nominee
    OD: Any statement directly and explicitly referencing candidate's support for Donald Trump that refers to the GOP nominee, New York businessman, or similar language obviously in reference to Trump. For example, Arizona candidate Paul Babeu tweeted, "Trump is our nominee and we're looking forward now to Nov. What would you like to hear from Trump as he fights to win?" Note: this example would also be coded "Present" for "Support Trump Name" and "Reference Trump."

14. Oppose Trump Name
    OD: Any statement directly and explicitly referencing candidate's opposition to Donald Trump, or belief in his unfitness for office, by name, initials, title, or Twitter handle (@realDonaldTrump). For example, Washington U.S. Senate candidate Chris Vance tweeted, "@RR_Anderson You know I don't support Trump, right?" Note: This tweet would also be coded "Present" for "Reference Trump." Another example is

15. Oppose Republican Nominee
    OD: Any statement directly and explicitly opposing Donald Trump that does not refer to him by name or @realDonaldTrump, but instead refers to the GOP nominee, New York businessman, or similar language obviously in reference to Trump. For example, New York Representative candidate Anna Throne Holst tweeted, "Good for GOP Congressmembers and Senators who have abandoned their party's disgusting and conceited nominee." Note: This tweet would also be coded "Present" for "Reference GOP nominee."

16. Support Clinton Name

OD: Any statement directly and explicitly referencing candidate's support for Hillary Clinton by name or @HillaryClinton, or strong belief in her policies, experience, or other relevant information. For example, Vermont Senate candidate Patrick Leahy tweeted, "We made history. Now we need to put @HillaryClinton and @timkaine in the Whitehouse this November. #DemsinPhilly." Note: This would also be coded present for "Tim Kaine reference" "Clinton reference" and "Gender Novelty" but not "Clinton Gender."

17. Support Democratic nominee
OD: Any statement directly and explicitly referencing candidate's support for Hillary Clinton that does not refer to her by name or @Hillary Clinton, but instead refers to the Democratic nominee, former First Lady, or similar language obviously in reference to Clinton. For example, Ohio Senate candidate Ted Strickland tweeted, "Wow. I'm with her. We are stronger together #ohsen #DemsinPhilly." Note: This variable includes all uses of the hashtag "#imwithher" in reference to Hillary Clinton (i.e. all references unless context explicitly indicates it refers to a different candidate).

18. Oppose Clinton Name
OD: Any statement directly and explicitly referencing candidate's opposition to Hillary Clinton by name, initials, or Twitter handle (@HillaryClinton). For example, Wendy Long tweeted, "Never supporting HRC--#NeverHillary." Note: This tweet would also be coded "Present" for "Reference Clinton."

19. Oppose Democratic Nominee
OD: Any statement directly and explicitly opposing Hillary Clinton that does not refer to her by name, initials, or Twitter handle (@HillaryClinton), but instead refers to the Democratic nominee, former First Lady or Secretary of State, or similar language obviously in reference to Clinton. For example, Mike Lee tweeted, "I can't support a former Sec. of State for president who is so dishonest. #NotWithHer."


**Gender**
CD: Any tweet that explicitly or clearly references gender in relation to either of the presidential nominees.

20. Clinton Gender
OD: When a down-ballot candidate uses gender-specific language in reference to Hillary Clinton—using words such as woman, female, mother, or phrases or phrases such as "you go, girl." This variable does not include normal use of pronouns. For example, Senator Patty Murray tweeted: "Proud to support female president Hillary Clinton." Note: This tweet would also "Present" for "Reference Clinton" and "Support Clinton Name."

21. Trump Gender
OD: When a down-ballot candidate uses gender-specific language in reference to Donald Trump's gender—using words such as man, male, father, or phrases such as "no man should act this way." This variable does not include normal use of pronouns. For

example, Martins tweeted, "I expect better from a father of daughters, especially one running for POTUS. Disgraceful comments." Note: This tweet would also be coded present for "Candidate Gender" "GOP Nominee reference" and "Oppose GOP Nominee."

22. Candidate Gender
    OD: When the candidate tweeting uses gender-specific language in relation to his or her self, or his or her opponent—using words such as man, woman, male, female, father, mother, or phrases or hashtag such as "I'm a dad for Hillary" in conjunction with the nominee. For example, Rep. Derek Kilmer tweeted: "As father of 2 daughters, proud to vote for woman president." *Note*: This tweet would also be coded as present for "Clinton Gender" "Democratic Nominee Reference" and "Support Democratic Nominee."

**Novelty**
CD: Any tweet that clearly and explicitly references novelty in terms of the presidential nominees.

23. Gender Novelty
    OD: When a candidate ties the content of the tweet to nominee's uniqueness in a certain context, meaning that they are the first, or pioneer to do something based on gender. This code includes tweets that mention the historic nature of Clinton's candidacy, including phrases about breaking glass ceilings that clearly reference Clinton. For example, Rep. Kilmer tweeted: "As father of 2 daughters, proud to vote for first women president— historic!" *Note*: This tweet would be coded as present for "Clinton Gender" and "Candidate Gender" as well as "Gender Novelty."

24. Non-gender Novelty
    OD: When a candidate ties the content of the tweet to their uniqueness in a certain context, meaning that they are the first, or pioneer to do something based on religion, experience, age, or background, or phrases such as "once-in-a-generation" candidate. This excludes gender novelty. For example, Brian Schatz retweeted reporter Maggie Haberman, saying "@maggieNYT: Reupping [sic] the old quote that Trump said in 2000 he could be first candidate to run for POTUS and make $." Note: This tweet would also be coded "Present" for "Retweet and "Reference Trump."

**Campaign Communication**
CD: Any tweet that references the candidate's own campaign, election, or related subject.

25. Opponent mention
    OD: When a candidate references their direct opponent and includes either their @username, a variation of their given name, or the content of the tweet explicitly references the opponent but does not use their name, but rather says something like "my opponent" in the body of the tweet. For example, New York Representative candidate Colleen Deacon tweeted: "As the mom of a 13 y/o, I know Trump's words are dangerous & disgusting. Time for my opponent to denounce him #NY24." Note:

26. District/state
OD: Any explicit reference to the candidate's district, state, or groups, locations, or entities specific to that location. This does include universities, restaurants, civic organizations referenced by geography, among others, and does not include mentions of other locations. This does not include hashtag references to a candidate's campaign that are unrelated to other text. For example, Washington state representative candidate Noel Frame tweeted, "WA getting ready for our moment during the roll call vote for our Democratic nominee for President! #DemsInPhilly"

27. Campaign event or activity
OD: Any explicit reference to a campaign event or activity involving both candidate and Donald Trump and/or Hillary Clinton. For example, MADE UP CANDIDATE tweeted, "I can't wait to appear with @realDonaldTrump at our #rallytowin in Iowa!" This includes references to campaign activities such as door knocking, debates, polls, getting out the vote, ballots dropping, visiting a district or state, voting, and other references.

**Twitter communications**
CD: Any tweet that engages in communication via Twitter-specific approaches.

28. Hashtag reference
OD: Any tweet that includes a hashtag (a word with the # symbol at the front) that references either of the nominees, presidential campaign activities, constituency groups, or related terms directly relevant to Clinton or Trump. This does include #strongertogether and #makeamericagreatagain, as long as other variables are also present. This variable does not include names of the nominees on their own--#Trump would not be included in this variable. For example, Washington state representative Gael Tarleton tweeted, "@HillaryClinton thank you Michelle Obama for having our backs, for standing w/ another first lady to say #EnoughIsEnough #WomenCanStopTrump." Note: this tweet would also be coded "Present" for "Reference Clinton."

29. Nominee retweet
OD: When a user reposts a tweet first posted by Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Mike Pence, or Tim Kaine, and "RT" appears at the beginning of the tweet. For example, Patrick Leahy tweeted, "RT: @HillaryClinton We love you back @POTUS." *Note*: This tweet would also be coded "Present" for "Reference Clinton."

30. Nominee reply
OD: When a candidate tweets to Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Mike Pence, or Time Kaine (the @username(s) appears at the beginning of the tweet and is not the grammatical subject of the sentence or a retweet, and is not being quoted). For example, Iowa Democratic Senate candidate Patty Judge tweeted, "Congratulations @HillaryClinton, I'm excited to #IoWIN this November. #ImWithHer." Note: This tweet would also be coded present for "Reference Clinton" and "SupportDemNom."

31. Retweet

OD: Retweet is when a candidate reposts another user's tweet and "RT" appears at the beginning of the tweet. If a tweet is a retweet, mark as "Present" (1), if not mark as "Not present" (0). This variable does not include retweets from Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Mike Pence, or Tim Kaine.

**Appendix B:**
**Interview Instrument**

**Demographics**
- How would you describe yourself politically?
- How important is your partisan identity to you?
- Have you previously supported the presidential nominee of your party?
- You're running for state legislative office during a presidential election year. Does sharing a ballot with the presidential candidates mean anything to you, either operationally or in the way you think about this election?

**Presidential nominees**
- Do you support either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton for president? If you endorsed, how/why did you decide to do so? If you did not, why?
- Do you publicly communicate about Donald Trump?
- Do you publicly communicate about Hillary Clinton?
- What do you say about Trump? What do you say about Clinton?

Post-election:
- Would you change how you communicated, based on results of election?

**Participation**
- What is your strategy to discussing either presidential nominee this year?
- Do you think it is important for state legislators to weigh in on the presidential campaign?

**Twitter**
- Do you use Twitter? In what context, or to what purpose?
- What is your strategy around Twitter communications?
- How important is Twitter to your campaign communication strategy?
- Do you see any drawbacks to using Twitter for campaign communication?

**Incumbency**
- Do you plan to run for office again?
- Will you run for this same office, or seek a new position?

**Gender**
- Do you see the role of gender as important in this presidential election? If so, how?
- What role does gender play in your election?

**Wrap up:**
- Anything you would like to add?