

A Time to Speak:

**When Do Leaders Choose to Make
Statements of Resolve?**

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Puzzle

- Obama on the Islamic State, 10 Sep 2014:
 - “Evil,” a “cancer”
 - Will be “vanquished from the earth”
- Obama on the Islamic State, 7 Jan 2014:
 - “jayvee team”
- Why make tough statements in one case and a dismissive statement in another?



Existing Theory

- Benefit of tough statements: Convey resolve, may persuade the adversary to back down
- Drawbacks
 - Domestic punishment or reputational damage
 - Getting locked into fighting
 - Danger of hostile adversary reaction
- Generally more likely to make statements if care more about the issue
- **Makes sense, but hard to test**

Observable Factors

- Observable factors that might affect when statements are made
 - Ability to follow through
 - Diversionary incentives
 - Level of international tension

Ability to Follow Through

- Statements are likely to be more effective if the leader has more ability to follow through
 - Therefore, making statements is more attractive

H1: More statements will be made when a country has greater relative military power

H2: More statements will be made when a leader has more hawkish veto players

H3: More statements will be made when a leader has greater domestic support

Diversionary Incentives

- Resolved statements might create a “rally around the flag” effect
 - Therefore, making them might be more attractive when domestic popularity is weak

H4: More statements will be made when a leader has **less** domestic support

International Tension

- Sometimes statements cause tensions
- If tension already exists, there is less danger that statements will adversely affect relations or create much higher audience costs
- Norms and public expectations demand statements in tense times

H5: More statements will be made in times of higher tension

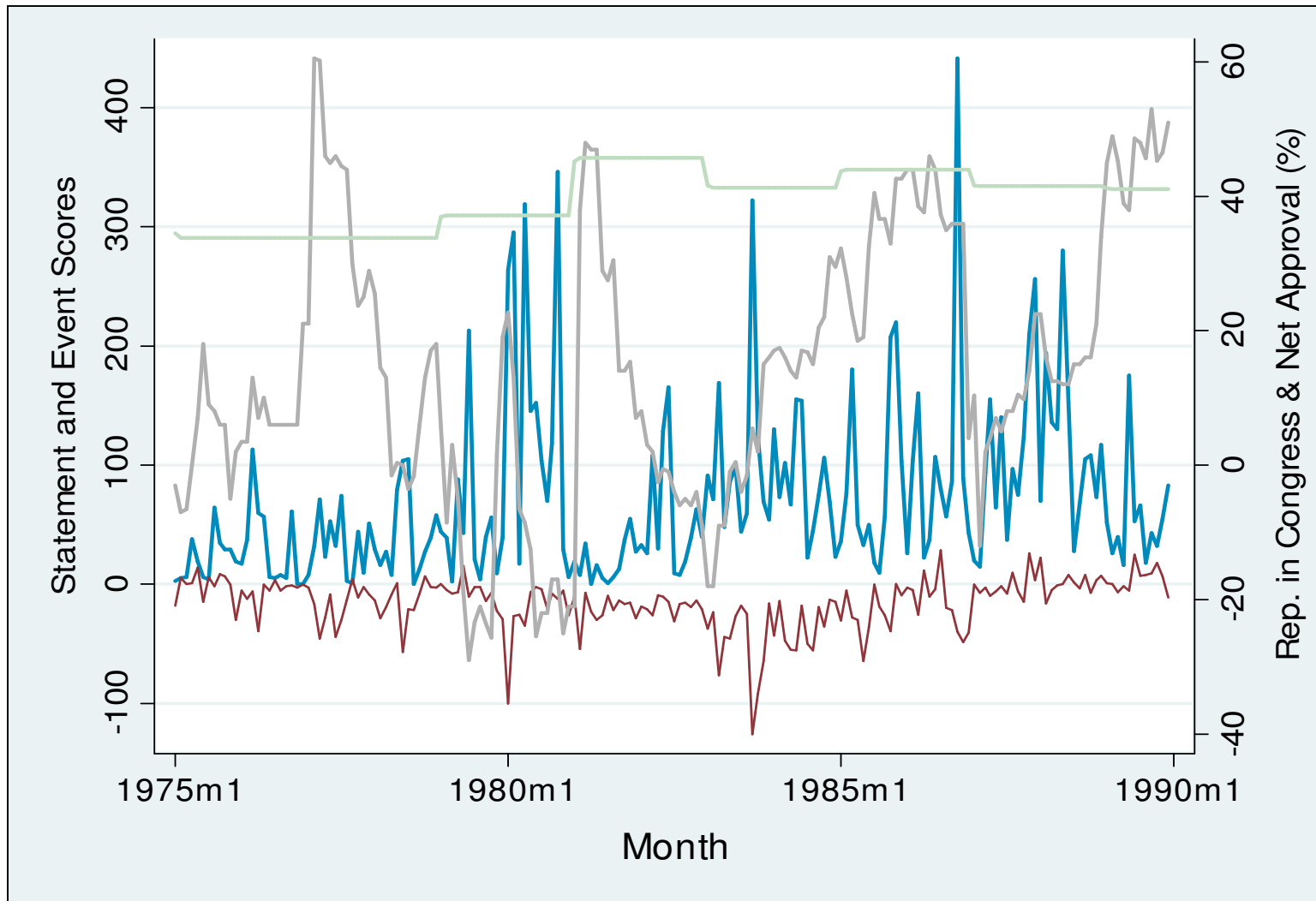
Empirical Analysis

- Analyzed level of US presidential statements of resolve in five long-term rivalries:
 - US-Soviet Union (1975-1989)
 - US-Libya (1975-2000)
 - US-North Korea (1975-2000)
 - US-Iran (1979-2000)
 - US-Iraq (1984-2000)
- Also analyzed level of US presidential statements of resolve in MIDs, 1950-2005

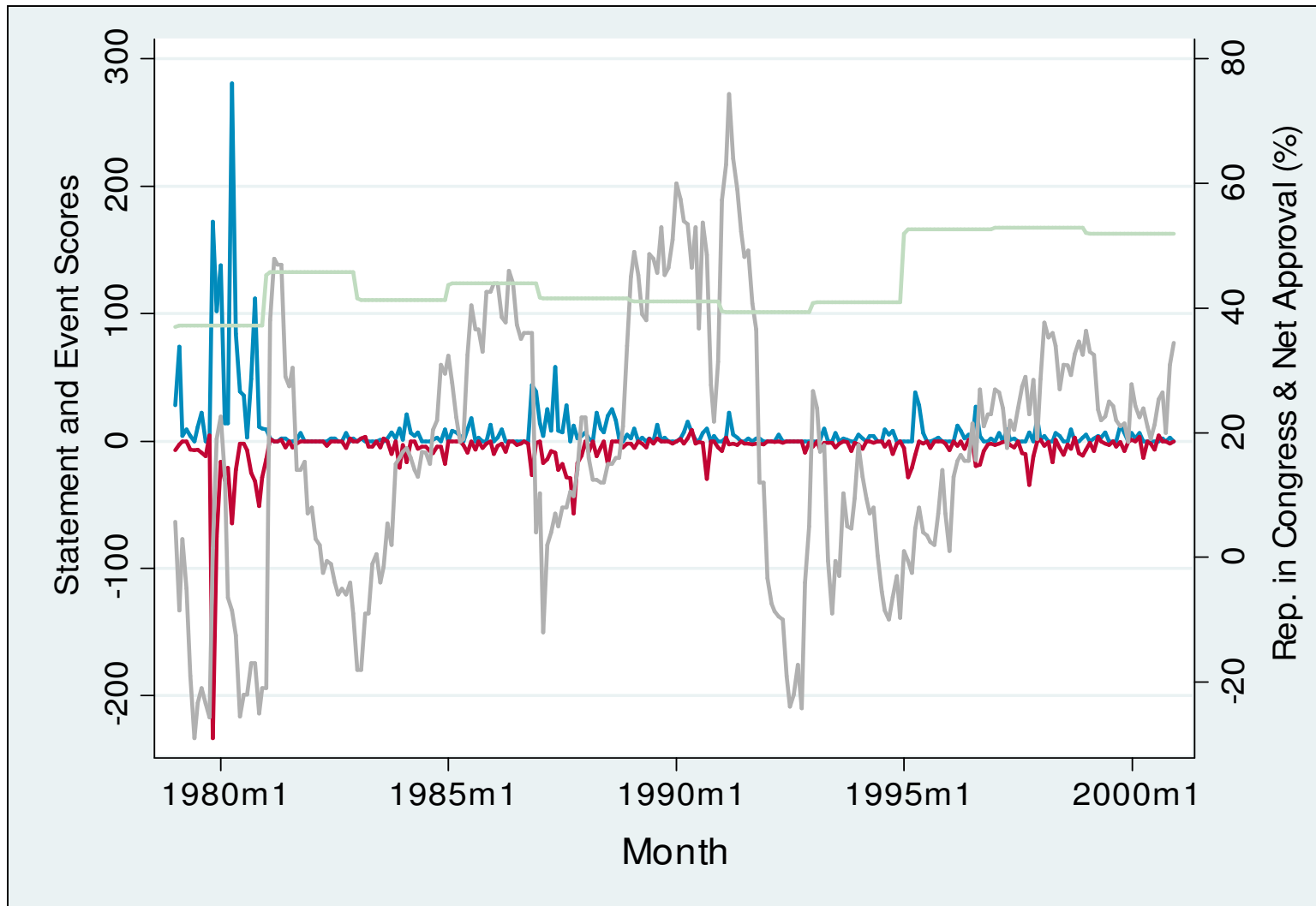
Rivalry Analysis

- Dependent variable
 - Level of resolve in US presidential statements directed at rival, measured with content analysis
- Independent variables
 - Percentage of Republicans in Congress
 - US presidential approval
 - Level of tension, measured with event data
- All variables measured monthly

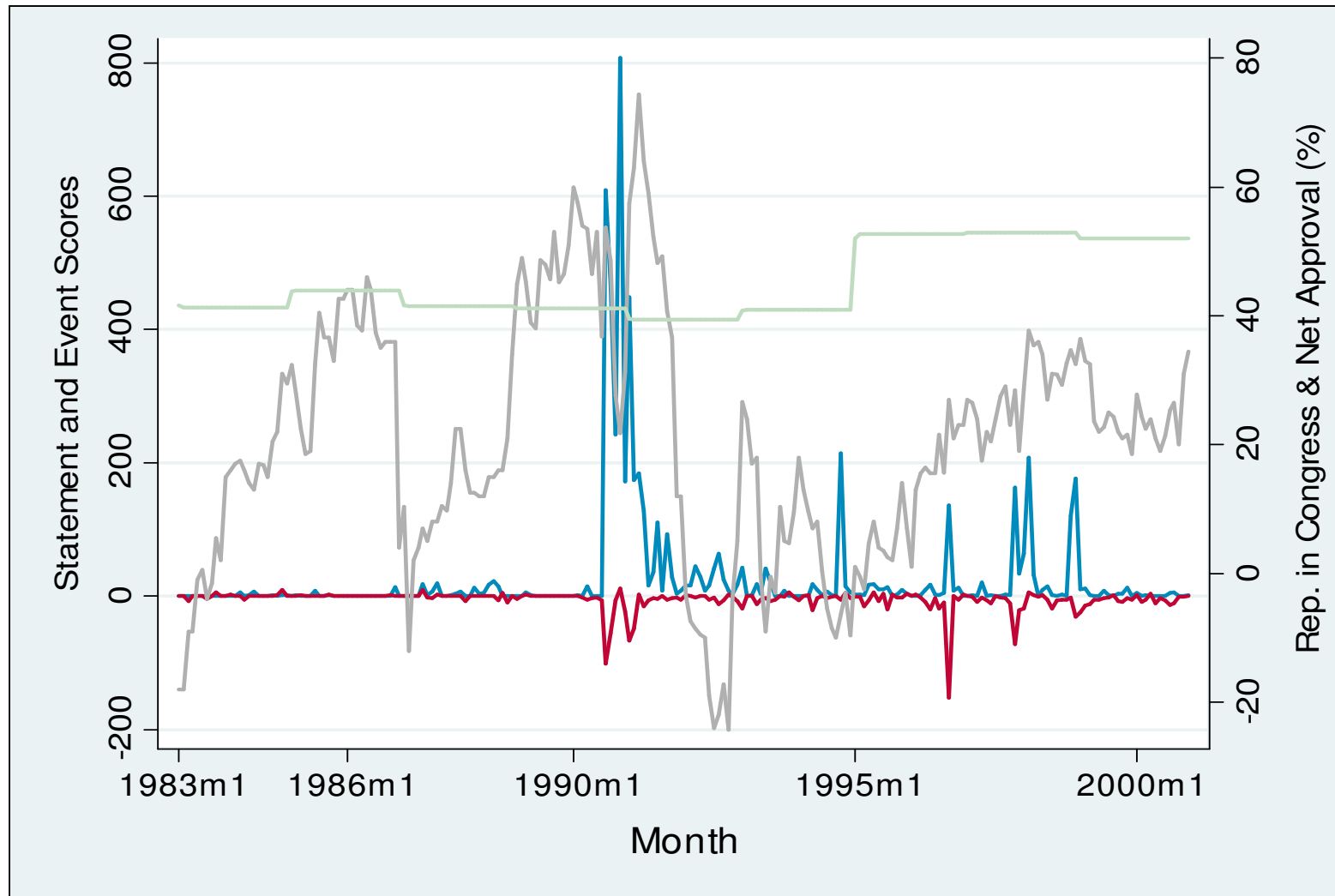
US-Soviet Union



US-Iran



US-Iraq



Analysis of US MIDs, 1950-2005

- Dependent variable
 - Level of resolve in US presidential statements directed at MID adversary
- Independent variables
 - Percentage of Republicans in Congress
 - US presidential approval
 - Relative military capabilities
 - Identity of the president
 - MID characteristics

Tobit Predicting MID Statements

Variable	Coefficient
Republicans in Congress	- 0.141
Net Approval	0.004
Relative Capabilities	- 2.898***
US Hostility	0.255***
Rival Hostility	0.110
Sanctions	0.693
Fatal	0.449**
Territory Revision	0.665
Regime Revision	0.265
Policy Revision	0.303
Defense Pact	- 0.019
Affinity	- 0.288
Rivalry	0.529**

Variable	Coefficient
Kennedy	0.602*
Johnson	0.083
Nixon	- 0.103
Ford	1.507**
Carter	2.489***
Reagan	1.327***
Bush, G.H.W.	2.469**
Clinton	1.924***
Bush, G.W.	1.164*

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Conclusions

- No evidence that the ability to follow through or diversionary incentives matter much
- The most important predictor of when resolved statements are made is the level of tension
- More recent presidents also make more statements
 - Suggests an important role of norms



Backup Slides Begin

Measuring Statements of Resolve

- Statements obtained from the *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*
 - Searched to identify relevant statements
- Developed content analysis dictionary by reading statements and consulting colleagues
- Counted words and added weights using Yoshikoder program

Coding Example

- “Any hostile move anywhere in the world against the safety and freedom of peoples to whom we are committed – including in particular the brave people of West Berlin – will be met by whatever action is needed.”
President Kennedy, 22 Oct 1962

Coding Example

- “Any **hostile** (+1) move anywhere in the world against the safety and freedom of peoples to whom we **are committed** (+2) – including in particular the brave people of West Berlin – will be met by **whatever action** (+3) is needed.” *President Kennedy, October 22, 1962*

Total Score = 6

Most Common Dictionary Words

- Aggression
- Strong*
- Threat
- Strength*
- Stand
- Threaten*
- Enem*
- Promise*
- Brutal*
- Violat*
- Determined
- Firm*
- Defend*
- Violen*
- Determination
- Expect
- Mistake*
- Demand*
- Prevent
- Stake*
- Condem*
- Obligat*
- Doubt
- Totalitarian*
- Repress*
- Reject*
- Stead*
- Pledge*