

THE IMPACT OF PRESIDENTIAL VISITS  
ON MIDTERM GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS

by

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis work to my family and many friends. I will always appreciate what they have done for me throughout my education. Most of all I would like to dedicate my thesis to my loving wife Ashley who has always had words of encouragement for me and has pushed me to be the best that I can be. I would not be here without you, and I love you. Thank you to my parents Curt and Jamie who have always done everything they could for me. Also thank you to my siblings Wesley, Emily, and Rachel and my in-laws Robert, LariAnn, and Brandon for all of their support. Thank you and always remember “The past is behind, learn from it. The future is ahead, prepare for it. The present is here, live it.”

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## ABSTRACT

Scholarship on the impact of visits by the president of the United States on midterm gubernatorial elections is limited. This paper will examine the effects of such visits by the president of the United States on midterm gubernatorial elections. Cohen, Kreassa, and Hamman (1991) analyzed the impact of presidential visits on senate races and discovered these visits are strategic; also, when the president gets involved in an election, the president has a positive impact. I also believe that when different visits are split out different types of visits will have different effects. This is based on the time commitment of the president as the more time spent on a visit the greater the impact the visit should be. Using an original dataset, I evaluate how visits by the president effect vote share; this is as I seek to adapt some of the findings of the strategic calculations of the president to determine the impact of those visits by the president. My analysis shows that presidential visits have a positive effect on the vote share of the midterm gubernatorial candidates. In addition, I find that rally visits have the most consistent positive impact on candidates over the other types of visits analyzed in this study. Finally, when analyzing the interaction between visits and partisanship, the impact of a visit has variation dependent on the partisan composition of a state.

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## INTRODUCTION

How does a president affect a candidate of their party in a midterm election? This question is discussed with great frequency following every midterm election. Pundits discuss the effect of whether a candidate embraced the president or if that same candidate adopted the correct strategy in distancing their campaign from the president. This is particularly true with candidates of the president's party when deciding whether to receive a visit from the president or whether to distance themselves from the president.

For example, following the 2014 elections, this question of whether a candidate should have campaigned with the president was once again asked after a historic election for the Republicans. This is particularly true with Governorships as Republicans were able to pick up many states that President Obama won in the previous two general elections. However, one notable exception in this Republican wave election was in Pennsylvania where the incumbent Republican governor lost his seat to the Democratic challenger Tom Wolf in that midterm gubernatorial election. This is even more notable as it was the first time an incumbent governor running for re-election had been defeated in Pennsylvania. Another reason that Wolf is a notable exception is because Democrats such as Mark Pryor, Mary Landrieu, Mark Udall, Kay Hagan, and Mary Burke went out of their way to distance themselves and even avoid visits from President Obama. Tom Wolf did not adopt this approach. Rather Wolf's campaign embraced the president and actively campaigned with him. So much so that the president even gave remarks at a rally for Tom Wolf the day prior to the election. The goal of the visit by the president was to drive

up election turnout in key areas for the Wolf campaign (Field, 2014). The result seemed to positively affect Wolf as he cruised to a nine-point victory over the incumbent. This is just one example of how a visit by the president can influence a midterm gubernatorial election. The question then becomes is this impact similar to the impact a presidential visit has in general or is it nothing more than an exception?

In scholarly research, the effect that a president has on gubernatorial elections has only been addressed in passing. This is because current scholarship does not directly examine this phenomenon but rather looks at the strategic motivation behind whether a president campaigns for fellow members of his party. One of the reasons why gubernatorial candidates and elections need to be studied is that states and governors matter. (Squire and Moncrief 2013) States matter because on issues such as taxes and social services, the state has the power to change many things, which could drastically alter a person's daily life. Knowing what factors might influence the election of the state executive office is particularly important because they have the ability to sign or veto laws. This is increasingly true, as the gridlock within Congress has strengthened the ability and necessity of states to write the laws and solve problems. In addition, a large number of states have unified government, which makes the process of passing legislation easier. Another reason for this research is that it will directly address the effect that a national figure such as the president can have on a statewide election of a gubernatorial candidate that might impact the direction of policy.

Most of the attention given to the nature of presidential visits and midterm gubernatorial elections has focused on the strategic calculations of a president in deciding where to visit. Cohen, Krassa, and Hamman (1991) analyzed Senate elections and found

two things. They first find that the president is strategic, meaning the president appears to carefully choose where to visit in relation to the goals they seek to achieve. The second finding is that visits have a positive impact on senate elections meaning that presidents improve the ability of the members of their party to be elected. Based upon this finding, two future paths of research were constructed, with one focusing on the strategic calculation of the president and another focusing on the impact that a visit by the president has. Yet since the 1991 publication by Cohen et al., research has focused on the strategic calculation of presidents. This has left a tremendous gap in scholarship and as a result, we do not understand how presidential visits impact elections. This gap needs to be addressed in order to more fully understand if visits do actually matter or if a president is potentially wasting their time. I fill this gap in the literature by testing visits by the president and their impact on midterm gubernatorial elections. I then further examine whether different types of visits have different impacts and how the partisanship of a state affects the impact of a visit.

Building upon the foundation of previous literature, I have my own theoretical expectations. I expect that presidential visits should have a positive impact on the elections. However, not only do I expect a visit to have a positive impact, I also expect that different types of visits will have different types of positive impact. Then based on the theory of time commitment, which is a version of the cost-benefit analysis, I am able to argue which type of visit should have the largest impact. Through which I argue that rally visits should have the largest impact of the types of visits examined when visits are separated out. This is because a rally visit has the largest time commitment for a president

signifying it should also have the largest payoff for the president and candidate represented in my results.

In my analysis, I use data from nine election cycles from 1982 to 2014, only analyzing midterm election years to ensure comparability across elections. The dependent variable I use is vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party. The main independent variable that I use in my first model is total visits. I define total visits as the summation of all the types of visits. Using total visits, I test my first hypothesis that a presidential visit should positively impact a candidate's midterm gubernatorial election of the president's party. My main independent variables in my second model are rally, fundraiser, and other visits. I use those variables to test my second hypothesis, which is different types of visits by the president should have varying impacts on a candidate's midterm gubernatorial election. My control variables include partisan affiliation, the unemployment rate, median income, Electoral College votes in the previous election, presidential approval, and the number of years the president's party has controlled the White House.

The results of my analysis demonstrate a few different things. First, total visits have a consistently statistically significant relationship with vote share at a rather high confidence level. This means that presidential visits increase the vote share received by a midterm gubernatorial candidate. Second, when distinguishing among types of visits, the results change. Rally visits are much more similar to total visits. Rally visits like total visits are always statistically significant. Third, adding an interaction between visits and partisanship, demonstrates the impact of a visit varies dependent upon on the partisan makeup of a state. Meaning the impact of a visit to one state will not be the same as

another state. Fourth, some control variables seem to have more significance than others do. The two control variables I find to be the most significant include whether the president won Electoral College votes in the previous election and the national approval of the president in September of the midterm election year.

The remainder of this thesis contains the following. First, a literature review in which I examine academic work that is related to my research question. This shows what the evolution of work in this research field is and how my work will further prior research as well as influence the continuation of research in the future. I then move to a theory section in which I provide my expectations for my findings, particularly how I expect my main independent variable to explain variation in my dependent variable. Following my theory section, I will describe the data and methodology I used to examine my theory in an effort to discover if I am able to reject the null hypothesis. After presenting my data and methods, I summarize the key findings. I then conclude my paper by drawing further conclusions as well as list implications and discuss directions for future research.

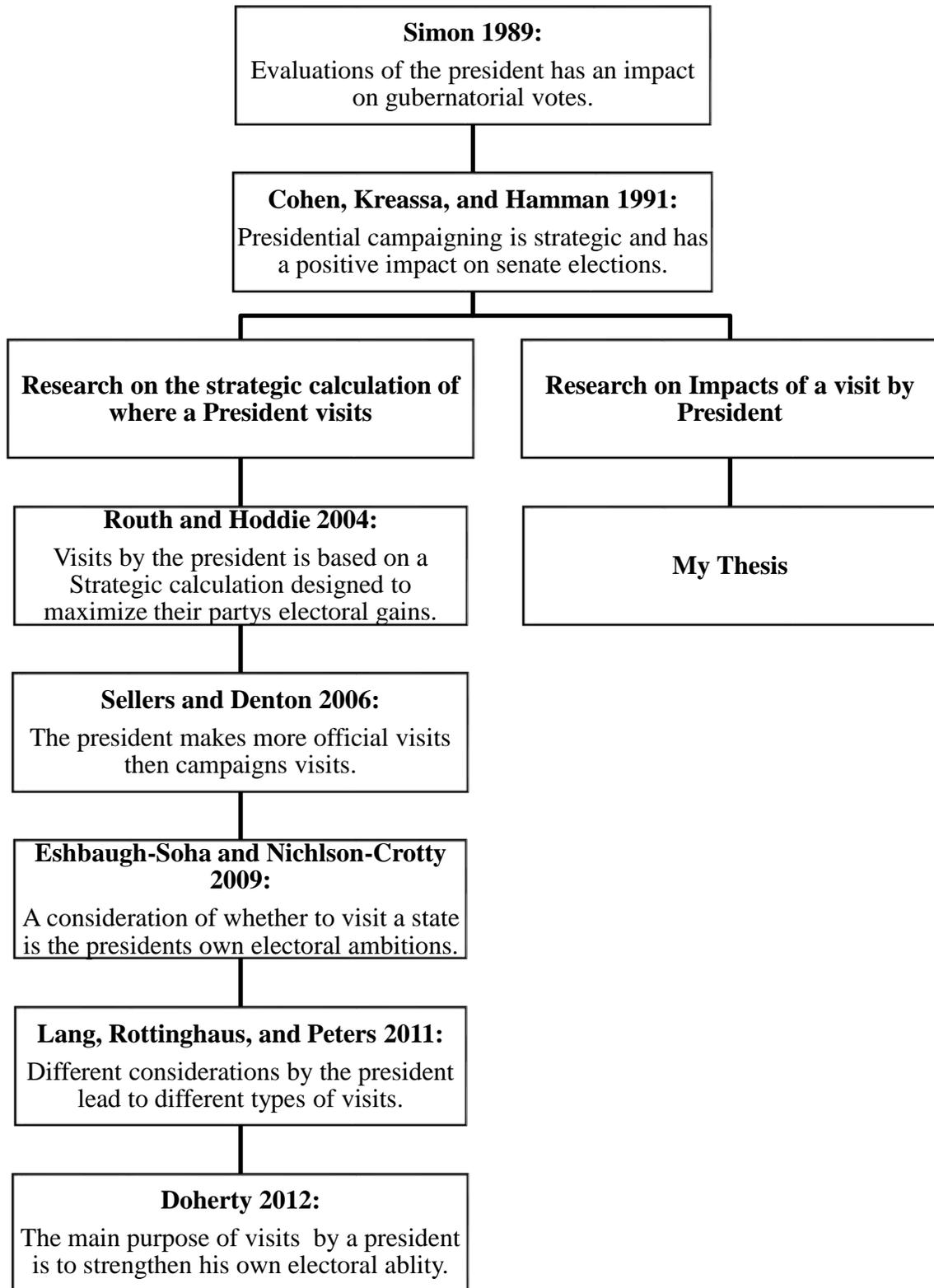
## EXISTING LITERATURE

The role of presidential visits in state-level elections is addressed in existing political science debates. Previous research on the effect that a president has on a gubernatorial election began with Simon (1989). Simon examined gubernatorial elections to see if they demonstrate a relationship between the approval of the president and votes cast in gubernatorial elections. He demonstrates that citizen evaluation of presidential performance has an influence on voting behavior in gubernatorial elections because electoral accountability of the president is imposed through voting on gubernatorial candidates from his party because of that party relationship. The key finding of the analysis is that an evaluation of the presidents has a significant influence on the voting behaviors in gubernatorial elections when controlling for factors such as party affiliation of the incumbent governor.

Cohen, Krassa, and Hamman (1991) build upon Simon and this relationship by looking at past approval and examining visits by presidents. They examined the determinates and consequences of presidents campaigning in midterm Senate elections. They argued that presidential campaigning is strategically based on presidential popularity and the competitiveness of the electoral race meaning that a president looks to visit areas with competitive elections where they also have their highest approval. This is because the president's time is valuable and they want to use that time to most benefit the most candidates. This is why the president is strategic when determining which elections to visit. By strategic calculation, they discuss that a president attempts to "campaign

where their impact might make the most difference and when they are in the greatest need of congressional support” (Cohen, Krassa, and Hamman 1991, 169). This signifies that the strategic calculation of a presidential visit is used to describe the considerations, which can lead to the president making the greatest difference.

Based on this logic, Cohen et al. sought to explain why a president campaigned in any given midterm senate election. They define campaigning as whether the president made an appearance with the Senate candidate in that candidate’s state. In their research, they focus upon the competitiveness of the elections, presidential popularity, and the percentage of legislative losses last election through which they make two key discoveries. Their first discovery confirms their expectation that campaigning by the president is strategic, meaning presidents strategically decide when, where, and for whom to campaign (Cohen, Krassa, and Hamman 1991). The second finding is that when the president does get involved in an election, the visits the president makes has a positive impact on the candidate (Cohen, Krassa, and Hamman 1991). These findings lead to two tracks in the trajectory of future research when looking at the visits by the president. From this point, future research could have looked at the strategic calculations of a president to visit a certain election or second it could look more into the impact of a president’s visit on that election.



**Figure 1 Summary Table of the evolution of Scholarship**

In the years since Cohen et al., the focus of the research has been on the strategic calculations of a president to visit certain candidates and campaigns. Routh and Hoddie (2004) narrow the discussion by looking only at the strategic calculation. They seek to further understand what factors influence a president's decision to visit a particular state specifically during the midterm election for governors and members of Congress. Routh and Hoddie look at the strategic calculation of the president based on things such as the degree of party polarization in Congress, presidential scandals, the approval rating of the president, and the distance of the state from Washington D.C. They find that the midterm election behavior of a president is based on a strategic calculation designed to maximize his gains in congress and in governorships by focusing visits primarily on competitive campaigns. This finding that presidents travel to states where they have higher popularity and where there are a higher number of competitive seats demonstrate a potential focus of the president on committee or group visits which could allow the most amount of good in the least amount of time.

Sellers and Denton (2006) further narrow the discussion as they seek to determine how collective concerns about party interests and individual concerns about electoral fortunes lead presidents to visit states leading up to the midterm elections. This is done by making a simple distinction between official and campaign visits both of which the president make with frequency. Based on this analysis, they find that presidents serving between 1982 and 2002 made more official visits than campaign visits and the frequency of each type of visit is dependent upon a range of state and national factors. One of these factors they found is that presidents tend to visit states with more electoral votes, which

demonstrates that a consideration of the president might be their own future electoral ambitions.

This distinction in different types of visits leads Lang, Rottinghaus, and Peters (2011) to a different and more detailed division of the types of presidential visits. Lang et al. argue that understanding the type of visit and what the president does on that visit allows for a deeper exploration of presidential motivation. The differentiation between types of visits is more complicated than the differentiation made by Sellers and Denton. The types of visits that they identify include rally, fundraiser, and virtual visits. Rally visits are when there is an event where the president speaks to a crowd with the purpose of rallying supporters or encouraging citizens to vote. Fundraiser visits are visits where the president's primary objective is to raise money for a candidate or candidates. Virtual campaigning is where the president did not physically visit a location but had a live or taped message for a group. They conclude that when aggregating visits together, Electoral College votes and the previous state-level winning percentage of the president in the state affect the probability of a visit. However, when looking at the different types of visits, rally visits are used more often when presidents are more popular and when the number of competitive races in a state is greater. Presidents are more likely to host a fundraiser in a state when the number of Electoral College votes is higher but are less likely to visit when there are fewer competitive races.

Eshbaugh-Soha and Nicholson-Crotty (2009) build upon previous research by examining how the strategic calculation of the president to help candidates from their party relates to their own electoral ambitions. Eshbaugh-Soha et al. examine specifically mid-term elections to see if the president is more concerned with improving their party's

candidates or with their own electoral ambitions. They argue that presidents have multiple goals when they campaign in midterm elections, seeking not only to influence individual races and affect the composition of Congress but also to increase their own chances for reelection. The research found that the likelihood of visiting a state is based on many factors. One example is that presidents tend to travel more to states with vulnerable statewide offices and competitive House elections in order to help the electoral fortunes of his party. Although a contributing factor to the likelihood of visiting a state is based on their own electoral ambitions. This idea of presidential concern about their own electoral ambitions is often referred to as the permanent campaign.

The permanent campaign is based on the belief that rather than the president's primary concern with visits being to help the parties' candidates the primary role of visits could be to further the president's own electoral hopes. Doherty (2012) built upon the concept of the permanent campaign (Caddell 1976, Blumenthal 1980, and Tepas 2000) as he looks to see what extent do presidents respond to electoral initiatives throughout their terms in office. He argues that the president's efforts in visiting other candidates are related to their own personal electoral concerns and how that affects the ways, in which decisions are made in the White House. The theory behind it being that the president makes strategic choices, which in turn reveal their priorities as president. The analysis concludes that the strategies and efforts of the president are often to strengthen his hand. However, the president's strategies to strengthen his hand also can undermine his role as a unifying national leader, heighten public cynicism, and limit prospects for bipartisan compromise.

In a departure from the others, Mellen and Searles (2013) look to see if some of the same factors that lead to a visit at the state level also apply to the district level. The authors argue that much of the existing research explains why presidents devote their limited resources during a midterm election but do not attempt to explain a presidential visit to a particular congressional district. The factors they look at include the amount of competitive districts in a state, district popularity, open seats, and other types of competitive elections in close proximities such as senate and gubernatorial elections. Their findings suggest that although presidents do indeed behave rationally when they make appearances for their co-partisans, visits are more likely to occur when there are multiple higher-level competitive races in a district, and presidents are more likely to go where they are already popular (Mellen and Searles 2013).

All of the research that I discussed has painted a clear picture of the evolution of research related to presidential visits. This line of study about visits by the president was begun with the research of Cohen et al. as they examined presidential visits and midterm senate election. They demonstrate how the president is strategic and that visits have a positive impact. However as demonstrated in this literature review and as visually demonstrated in Table 1, all of the subsequent research has been related to the first finding of Cohen et al. about the president being strategic with their visits. The research on presidential visits has focused on the strategic calculation of where the president visits, in so doing it has left research on the impact of those visits back in 1991.

## THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

The concept of impact is fundamental to this project as I seek to understand the impact of a visit by the president on a midterm gubernatorial election. An impact is the ability of the president to harm or help the ability of the members of their party to be elected. Specifically, I seek to understand the impact of a visit by the president on the candidate of the president's party in a midterm gubernatorial election. Impacts are important to understand because they are the consequence felt by an action. Both actors, the gubernatorial candidate, and the president feel the consequence based on the impact of a visit. It is felt by the candidates because either the impact is positive and increases their chances of being elected governor or the impact is negative and decreases their chances of being elected governor. The president feels the impact of a visit in two ways. First, the president either helps or harms their party electorally, particularly in that state in which they visit. The second consequence felt by the president is based upon self-interest, especially in the current era of partisan divide as governors of states of the opposition party challenge much of what a president does.

This has been seen during the Obama administration as Republican governors have challenged all sorts of things. Examples are the Affordable Healthcare Act, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals executive order, and even the president's stance on Syrian refugees. Impacts are important to understand in two different ways. Thus, the consequence felt by the president on how much opposition is received by these governors is dependent upon on how many are elected or reelected. An impact can be measured in

two separate but important ways first statistical significance shows whether the impact, in fact, matters and at what level it matters. Second to see if there is an economic impact of visits, meaning to what degree visits provide a benefit or impairment to those candidates that president's visit. Thus, I seek to examine the impact presidential visits have on the midterm gubernatorial elections.

I expect that a visit by a president should have a positive impact on those elections that the president chooses to participate in. I have this expectation because if campaigning had a negative or no impact then over time it would have lead presidents away from it and instead to find another use of their time. As the president has only a finite amount time in the position, the president tries to use their time in the way that will most benefit their goals. This is also illustrated in the strategic calculation by a president of where to visit. Since the president spends time on this consideration as demonstrated in previous research, if the visit was not beneficial, it seems that the president would stop these visits in an effort to find a way to promote their agenda. I also argue this expectation as previous literature has found that visits positively impact elections such as Cohen et al. found with Senate elections.

For these reasons, I expect in general that a visit should have a positive effect on behalf of candidates. I expect a presidential visit to have a positive effect because presidential visits increase turnout. This is because presidential visits should typically result in a higher vote share for gubernatorial candidates of their party by helping reestablish the enthusiasm among their key constituencies who got them elected to turn out to vote for the candidate that they are visiting. For example, as discussed previously, Tom Wolf received visits in the 2014 midterm elections from President Obama so that he

could help increase the enthusiasm among African-American voters in key urban areas to vote. This phenomenon should be particularly helpful to a candidate in the midterm election cycle. This is as midterm elections typically have a lower participation rate than the general election cycle so this increase among their key constituencies should have an even larger effect in a midterm gubernatorial election.

**Hypothesis 1:** A presidential visit should positively impact a candidate's midterm gubernatorial election.

As pointed out in previous research, there are many different types of visits and many different ways to categorize visits. This is important to recognize because since not all visits are the same, it is clear that the impact of each type of presidential visit might also vary. For example, Sellers and Denton (2006) separate visits into two categories, which are official visits and campaign visits. They consider official visits to be visits that are non-campaign visits that are being used to strengthen the president's own electoral support in states. Campaign visits are considered visits being used to boost the candidate of the president's party.

Related to Sellers and Denton, another work that also separated out visit types is Lang, Rottinghaus, and Peters (2011) who have a more complicated and intricate visit structure. The identified visit types include rally, fundraiser, and virtual. Rally visits are an event where the president speaks to a crowd with the purpose of rallying supporters or encouraging citizens to vote. Fundraiser visits are visits that the president's primary objective is to raise money for a candidate or candidates. While virtual campaigning is when the president did not physically visit a location, but had a live or taped message for a group. However, these are just a few of the ways that visits can be categorized.

I argue using a similar visit structure involving rally visits, fundraiser visit, and other visits. I argue that each visit type has a different impact, like each type of visit, has a different and unique predictor of when that visit type would occur. As with my first hypothesis, I argue that visits have a significant and positive impact, although I argue that different types of visits should have different degrees of impact. I argue that these different degrees of impact of visits can be seen through the application of the theory of time commitment by the president. Through this theory, I am able to distinguish the theoretical expectations of why some types of visits should be more impactful than other types of visits.

Lang, Rottinghaus, and Peters describe the theory of time commitment by the president as they use it to distinguish between their dependent variables in hopes to see where presidents are more likely to visit. I argue that the theory of time commitment by the president allows for a theoretical distinguishing between the main independent variables to see what type of visit gives the largest impact for a candidate. According to the theory of time commitment by the president, rally visits are the most time-consuming event for a president and as a result, they should have the highest degree of payoff for a candidate. Next fundraisers require less presidential time, planning, and coordination than a rally and should have the second highest degree of payoff. Finally, virtual visits have an even lower time commitment than both a rally and a fundraiser so the degree of payoff should be the least of the three types of visits. The only adaptation I make to the theory of time commitment by the president presented by Lang, Rottinghaus, and Peters is changing virtual visits to other visits. In so doing, I expect the lower time commitment to remain the same, also the lower degree of payoff.

Based on the theoretical expectation of time commitment by a president as a proxy for an electoral payoff for gubernatorial candidates, I argue the largest coefficient should be seen with rally visits. I argue that the next largest coefficient should be seen with fundraiser visits. Moreover, I argue that the smallest coefficient should be seen with other visits. This signifies that I expect that different types of visits should have different impacts. Nevertheless, it seems that if the president chooses where to campaign strategically, then different types of partisan audiences should react differently to a visit from the president.

**Hypothesis 2:** Different types of visits by the president should have varying impacts on a candidate's midterm gubernatorial election.

**Hypothesis 2a:** Rally visits should have the largest positive impact on a candidate's midterm gubernatorial election.

**Hypothesis 2b:** A fundraiser visit should be the second largest positive impact on a candidate's midterm gubernatorial election.

**Hypothesis 2c:** Other visits should be the smallest positive impact on a candidate's midterm gubernatorial election.

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

### Data

To test these hypotheses, I analyze all midterm elections between 1982 to the present. As not all states hold their gubernatorial elections in the midterm election cycle, typically 36<sup>1</sup> states held their elections with the exception of 2010 in which, there were 37<sup>2</sup> elections held. Keeping this in mind, I operationalized each of my variables in the following ways:

In previous scholarship, there are many ways to measure an impact. These different ways are important to discuss because different approaches could lead to differences in the findings across studies. Although impact can be measured in many ways, the focus of this thesis is using vote share as a measure of impact. For example, Peverill and Fastnow (1994) measure impact as a binary variable dependent upon if the president's party wins the seat or not. Leyden and Borrelli (1995) measure impact as the percentage of two-party vote share of the party of the president. Nagel and McNulty (1996) use the measure of the percentage of total vote share of the party of the president for impact. However, Mellen and Searles (2013) look at the difference in the vote share

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<sup>1</sup> The states hold elections their midterm gubernatorial elections in the midterm election cycle include Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

<sup>2</sup> The exception of 2010 is Utah, which held a special election in the midterm year to elect a new governor to fulfill the remainder of Governor Jon Huntsman Jr's term. This was following the appointment of Governor Huntsman to become United States Ambassador to China by President Obama.

between the president's party and the non-president's party as a measure of impact. Noting these measures and how visits have been measured allows for the use of scholarship to inform and structure the operationalization of the variables in this project.

The dependent variable is the vote share of the candidate from the president's party. This allows me to see if there is a positive or negative impact regardless of the outcome of an election. I operationalize this variable as the percentage of total vote share of the party of the president, similar to Nagel and McNulty (1996). I measure this variable by looking at the percentage of the total vote obtained by the candidate of the president's party.

The main independent variables included in the model include types of visits by the president:

Visits have been measured in various ways throughout the literature. It is important to note the differences in how they have been measured because the differences in how visits have been measured may cause the differences in the findings across the various studies. When looking at presidential visits, Cohen et al. (1991) defines a visit as whether or not the president campaigned in the midterm senate election. Routh and Hoddie (2004) chose to use the number of presidential campaign visits to a state between August 1st and November's Election Day. Eshbaugh-Soha and Nicholson-Crotty (2009) use the Cohen method, using a nominal level measure of whether or not a president campaigns in a state during a midterm election. Mellen and Searles (2013) measure the number of visits to a district in a midterm election year. The rest of literature seems to follow one of these methods on the measurements of a visit.

As discussed above, the concept of visits has been separated in some of the most recent literature. Measurement of visits when separating them out into different types of visits allows for further examination and further testing. For example, Sellers and Denton (2006) measure visits by how often the president visited one of the 50 states in the twenty-two-month period preceding each midterm election, but they broke it down into two categories, which are official, and campaign. Official visits are visits that are non-campaign visits that are being used to strengthen his own electoral support in some states while campaign visits are visits being used to boost the candidate of the president's party. Lang, Rottinghaus, and Peters (2011) use an even more in-depth visit structure. They count a specific type of visit made by the president in a state during the midterm election season, which is defined as August to the election. The types of visits defined by Lang, Rottinghaus, and Peters (2011) include rally, fundraiser, or virtual. Rally visits are an event where the president spoke to a crowd with the purpose of rallying supporters or encouraging citizens to vote. Fundraiser visits are visits where the president's primary objective was to raise money for a candidate. Virtual campaigning is when the president did not physically visit a location but had a live or taped message for a group.

A visit in this article is measured by the number of presidential visits to a state which there was mention of the gubernatorial candidate between August 1st and Election Day such as done by Routh and Hoddie (2004), plus the number of explicit campaign visits in the midterm election year prior to August as done by Mellen and Searles (2013).

I obtained this information by using data from The American Presidency Project<sup>3</sup>. First, there are “total” visits, which is the summation of all of the various types of visits.

Based on the research done by Lang, Rottinghaus, and Peters (2011) it appears that there are three major types of visits by the president. Those types of visits are rally visits, fundraiser visits, and virtual, or what I will call other types of visits. First, as discussed by Lang, Rottinghaus, and Peters (2011), a “rally” is defined as an event where the president spoke to a crowd with the purpose of rallying supporters or encouraging citizens to vote. A “rally” was typically noted in the title of the president’s remarks for coding purposes. Second, as identified by Lang, Rottinghaus, and Peters (2011), a “fundraiser” is defined as a visit where the president’s primary objective was to raise money for a candidate. The president would often make formal remarks at such events and this type of event is often times connected to a breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Third, as identified by Lang, Rottinghaus, and Peters (2011), is what they call “virtual” campaigning, which I am going to call “other” visits. These “other” visits include things such as exchanges with reporters with the governor, interviews the president does for governors, official visits with the governor in attendance, official press releases about a governor from the office of a president, press briefings in which a governor is explicitly discussed, and satellite events.

To mirror past studies, my model includes the following independent variables in my study as control variables that each has been found to impact elections:

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<sup>3</sup> The types of visits that the American Presidency project are candidate breakfast, candidate dinner, candidate fundraiser, candidate lunch, candidate rally, candidate reception, candidate lunch, committee breakfast, committee dinner, committee fundraiser, committee lunch, committee rally, committee reception, exchange with reporters/interviews, mention of candidates in attendance, as well as discussion of candidates in press briefing, and satellite/virtual events.

*Partisan Affiliation:* Following the lead of Folke and Snyder (2012), partisan affiliation is the partisan division of seats in the state's lower house. For my model, I specifically use the percentage of seats in the lower state house from the president's party. I obtained this information from the University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research (UKCPR) National Welfare Data. This seems particularly important to control for, as existing scholarship shows how partisanship is a determinate for a candidate's electoral outcome. I expect that as the partisan affiliation of the president's party increases the vote share of the candidate from the president's party will increase.

*Unemployment rate:* The model also includes the rate of unemployment at the state level. I obtained this information from the UKCPR National Welfare Data, which uses the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) program. This seems particularly important to control for, as demonstrated to a significant factor in previous scholarship for example Bardwell (2005) who were able to show unemployment is a determinate of voting behaviors in gubernatorial elections. I expect that as the rate of unemployment increases the vote share of the candidate from the president's party will decrease.

*Median income:* The model includes the median income at the state level. The median income data is in current dollars, which means the income included in the model for a person, household, or family adjusted for inflation. This data comes from the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements. This seems particularly important to control for, as Atkeson and Partin (1995) discovered governors, as state executives, are held accountable for perceived state economic

conditions. I expect that as the median income increases the vote share of the candidate from the president's party will also increase.

*Won Electoral College votes in the Previous Election:* The model includes a binary variable that is coded as a "1" if the president won Electoral College votes for that state the previous election while it is coded as a "0" if the president did not win Electoral College votes in the previous election<sup>4</sup>. This is important to control for, as it allows for controlling for states in which the president's party should naturally do better. I expect that if the president won Electoral College votes in a state, the vote share of the candidate from the president's party will be larger.

*Presidential approval:* The model includes presidential approval data, which I obtained from Lang, Rottinghaus, and Peters (2011). They used the national approval of the president in September of the midterm election year, as registered by the Gallup Poll. This data I obtained from the question that they asked "Do you approve or disapprove of the way that president [insert name] is handling his job as president?" They cite their data as taken from Ragsdale (2007) and the Roper iPoll database. This seems particularly important to control for, as Simon (1989) was able to specifically demonstrate the relationship between a citizens' evaluation of the president and voting behaviors in gubernatorial elections. Based upon this finding, presidential approval becomes an important aspect of the modeling. I expect that as the presidential approval increases, the vote share of the candidate from the president's party will also increase.

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<sup>4</sup> There are only two states in which Electoral College votes are devisable within the same state these two states are Maine and Nebraska. However only once in the observed period are is a state's electoral votes divided between two different candidates. This occurrence is in 2008 when President Obama won one of Nebraska's five potential electoral votes.

*Number of Years the president's Party has controlled the White House:* The model includes a variable that I coded for how many consecutive years the president's party has held the Presidency. This seems particularly important to control for, as scholarship has shown a fatigue effect for the president's party meaning the longer the president's party controls the white house the greater the electoral losses his party tends to have in other elections. I expect that as the number of years the president's party has controlled the white house increases, the vote share of the candidate from the president's party will decrease.

**Table 1**      **Descriptive Statistics**

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
The Vote Share of the Gubernatorial Candidate from the president's Party	0.444	0.109	0	0.734
Total Visits	1.182	1.925	0	11
Rally Visits	0.191	0.485	0	3
Fundraiser Visits	0.308	0.697	0	6
Other Visits	0.683	1.331	0	9
Partisanship	0.468	0.19	0	0.92
Unemployment rate	6.164	2.269	2.3	15.6
Median income	37677.37	13171.03	16464	76165
Won State in the previous election	0.691	0.463	0	1
Presidential Approval	50.778	10.283	38	65
Number of Years President's Party has held the White House	4.667	2.67	2	10
Observations	325			

Table 1 shows each of the descriptive statistics for all of the variables described in the data section above. By examining these statistics, more context can be given to both my data and the results of my regressions. For example, my data analysis contains 325 observations. This is important because it signifies the central limit theorem.

In Table 1, each of the variables has its mean, standard deviation, min, and max. These statistics describe multiple things, for example when discussing total visits it has a mean of 1.182 meaning that out of all midterm gubernatorial elections, the president on average visits his candidate just a little over one time. However, because the minimum is zero it is seen that there are elections in which the president does not campaign for the candidate from his party. On the other hand, the maximum is 11 and thus it is seen that out of the nine observed elections cycles, the president has dedicated multiple visits to certain candidates, one of whom the president visited 11 times over the course of the observed election cycle.

When looking at my dependent variable, the vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party, there a couple of descriptive observations to note. The mean of vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party is 0.444 meaning that out of all midterm elections in the data set the average vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party on average is 44.4 percent. The minimum is zero, and because the maximum is 0.734, that means that over the nine observed elections cycles the vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party ranges from 0 percent to 73.4 percent. The standard deviation is 0.109 or 10.9% of the vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party.

This type of observation can also be made for the other main independent variables like other visits, which have a mean of 0.683 with a minimum of zero and a maximum of nine. This makes other visits the most common type of visit when they are separated out into types, which makes sense in conjunction with the theoretical expectation I would expect. This is based on the time commitment by the president as explained earlier. Because other visits have an even lower time commitment than both a rally and a fundraiser, it should be easier to employ these types of visits and thus they should be the most frequently seen type of visit. Next fundraiser visits have a mean of 0.308 with a minimum of zero and a maximum of six, which once again makes sense in conjunction with the theoretical expectation I would expect.

This is because of the time commitment by the president. Fundraisers may require less presidential time than rally visits but more than other visits so it should be expected to happen the second most following other visits which have the lowest time commitment. Then there are rally visits, which have a mean of 0.191 with a minimum of zero, and a maximum of three, which makes sense in conjunction with the theoretical expectation. This is because rally visits are the most time-consuming event for a president and as a result, these should probably be the fewest type of visit observed. Though in the regression analysis, they should have the highest degree of a payoff since rallies are the most publicly visible events and they maximize the public exposure of the president.

### **Methodology**

With these variables, in order to test my hypotheses, I will employ two sets of models. The first set tests my first hypothesis while the second set tests the second hypothesis. In order to employ my models, the methodology I will use is first a cross-

sectional regression specification, which allows for a simple ordinary least squares model. The use of the cross-sectional regression allows an examination of the existence and magnitude of the effects of visits on vote share regardless of time and place.

A potential issue with the cross-sectional specifications that it could potentially suffer from omitted variable bias based on the amount of variation being explained by the variables in the model.<sup>5</sup> This demonstrates a need for further examination to ensure consistency and reliability in results of the regression. As it seems apparent that omitted variable bias is prevalent as the multiple regression is clearly missing relevant control variables. In addition, because these omitted factors are not adequately controlled for in the cross-sectional specification that could lead to endogeneity in the results. One of the ways to control for omitted variable bias and to ensure there is not endogeneity is to use a panel model. Thus, I will employ a panel regression specification in order to help control for omitted variable bias.<sup>6</sup> By employing both specifications, the results can be examined

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<sup>5</sup> The cross-sectional regression specification models are defined as the following:

Model 1:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot TV_i + \beta_2 \cdot PA_i + \beta_3 \cdot IVPA_i + \beta_4 \cdot UnR_i + \beta_5 \cdot MI_i + \beta_6 \cdot EC_i + \beta_7 \cdot PA_i + \beta_8 \cdot PP_i + e$$

Model 2:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot RV_i + \beta_2 \cdot FV_i + \beta_3 \cdot OV_i + \beta_4 \cdot PA_i + \beta_3 \cdot IVPA_i + \beta_5 \cdot UnR_i + \beta_6 \cdot MI_i + \beta_7 \cdot EC_i + \beta_8 \cdot PA_i + \beta_9 \cdot PP_i + e$$

where Y represents vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party, TV represents "Total" Visits, RV represents "Rally" Visits, FV represents "Fundraiser" Visits, OV represents "Other" Visits, PA represents Partisan Affiliation, IVPA represents an Interaction between Visits and Partisan Affiliation which is conceptualized by multiplying a type of visit with the partisan affiliation measure, UnR represents Unemployment Rate, MI represents Median Income, EC represents Won Electoral College votes in Previous Election, PA represents presidential Approval, and PP represents Years the president's Party has controlled the White House.

<sup>6</sup> The panel regression specification models with fixed effects are defined as:

Model 1:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot TV_{it} + \beta_2 \cdot PA_{it} + \beta_3 \cdot IVPA_{it} + \beta_4 \cdot UnR_{it} + \beta_5 \cdot MI_{it} + \beta_6 \cdot EC_{it} + \beta_7 \cdot PA_{it} + \beta_8 \cdot PP_{it} + e$$

Model 2:

for consistency both in terms of statistical and economic significance. A panel regression specification allows the data as a whole to be used without omitting time and place, which allows for the creation of a baseline to see how visits effect the expectation vs. the actual vote share. Thus, the data set is a panel data set when the panel variable is set to the state and the time variable is set to the year of the election, which allows for the use of a panel regression.

This regression type also offers other advantages over the cross-sectional regression such as being able to control for effects between units, in this case, states, and/or effects between time points, in this case, different years. As discussed by Lang, Rottinghaus, and Peters (2011), the proper type of panel regression model to use in this case is fixed effects as this type of panel regression model allows for the creation of parameters, in this case, individual states, and is appropriate because it appears there are effects of the individual state characteristics that could be related. Thus, fixed-effects and not a random effects model is employed as it examines state-level variables that may be correlated to vote share. Another reason for the use of a fixed effects model is the theoretical belief that the results are not subject to random variation and that they do not vary across time.

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$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot RV_{it} + \beta_2 \cdot FV_{it} + \beta_3 \cdot OV_{it} + \beta_4 \cdot PA_{it} + \beta_5 \cdot IVPA_{it} + \beta_6 \cdot UnR_{it} + \beta_7 \cdot MI_{it} + \beta_8 \cdot EC_{it} + \beta_9 \cdot PA_{it} + \beta_{10} \cdot PP_{it} + e$$

where Y represents: The vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party, TV represents "Total" Visits, RV represents "Rally" Visits, FV represents "Fundraiser" Visits, OV represents "Other" Visits, PA represents Partisan Affiliation, IVPA represents an Interaction between Visits and Partisan Affiliation which is conceptualized by multiplying a type of visit with the partisan affiliation measure, UnR represents Unemployment Rate, MI represents Median Income, EC represents Won Electoral College votes in Previous Election, PA represents presidential Approval, and PP represents Years the president's Party has controlled the White House.

Also, I believe that it could be important to include in my model an interaction between visits and partisanship to further enhance the understanding of the impact of a visit. By adding this interaction with partisanship, I will be able to see what the impact of a visit will be at varying levels of partisanship, which I measure as the percentage of seats in the lower state house from the president's party. Based on this analysis I will see in which states visits are more effective. Also, I will see what the expected impact of a visit will be at any level of partisanship. For example, this analysis could demonstrate the effects of a visit at lower levels of partisanship in the president's party: perhaps the visits effect on the vote share of the candidate from their party at this level is negative. Perhaps if there are higher levels of partisanship of the president's party the effect of a visit on the vote share of the candidate from their party is nonexistent. These findings will further demonstrate the impact of a visit and how a president can maximize the effect of a visit and the impact for their candidate.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

In order to view the impact of presidential visits, my results section will proceed in two parts. First, I examine to what extent a visit by the president changes the vote share of a candidate from their party leads in Table 2. Second, when distinguishing among types of visits, an examination of Table 3 demonstrates what types of visits by the president do impact a candidate from his party. This two-stage approach allows us to first understand how presidential visits matter in Table 2. Table 3 then builds upon this understanding by distinguishing among types of visits to see what types of visits matter and which do not. After a discussion of which results in these tables are significant, I then turn to an interpretation of the results. I will then discuss the findings and why control variables may or may not be significant and explanatory factors, and how this might depend on the employed model specification.

Table 2 presents the results of my empirical analysis when the main independent variable is total visits or when I summed all campaign visit activity together. Table 2 is a summary table of the impact of total visits on the vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party. Although each column is similar, some differences are important to note in order to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the consistency and validity of the findings. Thus, each of the columns represented by a different model specification will be discussed.

**Table 2 Summary Table of Impact of Total Visits**

<b>Dependent Variable: The Vote Share of the Gubernatorial Candidate from the president's Party</b>			
	Cross-Sectional	Cross-Sectional with total visits Interaction	Panel with total visits Interaction
Constant	0.383*** (0.06)	0.361*** (0.062)	0.284*** (0.064)
Total Visits	0.004** (0.002)	0.023*** (0.009)	0.021*** (0.007)
Partisanship	0.024 (0.037)	0.059* (0.044)	0.1*** (0.042)
(Total Visits)*( Partisanship)		-0.0382*** (0.0159)	-0.038*** (0.013)
Unemployment rate	-0.005* (0.0032)	-0.004* (0.003)	0.001 (0.004)
Median income	3.68E-07 (5.37E-07)	4.37e-07 (5.35e-07)	6.78E-07* (5.30E-07)
Won State in the previous election	0.035*** (0.015)	0.035** (0.015)	0.03** (0.014)
Presidential Approval	0.001** (0.001)	.001** (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)
Number of Years President's Party has held the White House	-0.005** (0.003)	-0.005** (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)
Observations	325	325	325
State-by-Year Fixed Effects Panel Analysis	No	No	Yes
Prob > F	0.000***	0.000***	0.002***

R <sup>2</sup>	0.061	0.071	0.079
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Notes: The dependent variable is vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party, which is the percentage of total vote share obtained by the candidate of the party of the president. Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

\*\*\* indicates statistical significance at  $p < .01$

\*\* indicates statistical significance at  $p < .05$

\* indicates statistical significance at  $p < .10$

The first column uses the cross-sectional model with all campaign visit activity summed together. The results of this model show that a total visit is a significant factor. Along with total visits, significant variables in the specification include the unemployment rate, whether a president won a state in the previous election, presidential approval, and the number of years the president's party has held the White House. This means that each of these variables is a predictive factor of vote share. Along with what is significant, it is also important to note what is found to not be significant, such as partisanship, and median income. This tells us that in this specification the things that affect the vote share of a gubernatorial candidate from the president's party include visits by the president, unemployment rate, whether a president won a state in the previous election, presidential approval, and the number of years the president's party has held the White House. This demonstrates that there could be a statistical method to predict and potentially influence the vote share of those candidates. From this, we can infer that certain factors influence the voting behaviors of the electorate more than others do. For example, it is seen that the unemployment rate (-.005) has an influence five times greater on vote share than presidential approval (.001). This means a one unit change in the presidential approval causes a smaller effect than a one unit change in unemployment rate.

In the second column, there is a cross-sectional model with the interaction term when all campaign visits are summed together. The results of this model show that total visits are once again a significant factor. Along with total visits, other things in this model that are found to be significant include partisanship, the interaction term, unemployment rate, won state in the previous election, presidential approval, and the number of years the president's party has held the White House. Along with what is significant, it is also important to note what is not found to be significant. In this model, it is seen that once again median income is found to not be significant. This tells us that when adding the interaction between visits and partisanship that while the significance of visits remains constant, a new factor gains significance. This factor is partisanship, which is part of the interaction, which appears too significant as a whole.

In the third column, impact of total visits on the vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party, the panel model with fixed effect that includes the interaction term when all campaign visits are summed together. The results demonstrate that total visits are once again significant. Along with total visits, other significant variables include partisanship, the interaction term, median income, won a state in the previous election, presidential approval, and the number of years the president's party has held the White House.

Along with what is significant, it is also important to note what is found to not be significant, which in this model is found to be only unemployment rate. This tells us that when the interaction remains constant and when the panel specification is used instead of the cross-sectional specification, visits are still significant. However, it demonstrates that while employing this specification the other factors that contribute to vote share differ as

the unemployment rate and the number of years the president's party has held the White House are not significant while median income does matter.

Table 2 tells us that a presidential visit provides a vote share boost for the candidate that they campaign for. These results support my first hypothesis as well my expectations for the control variables. Other factors differ depending on the model specification but each factor is significant in at least one specification. This variation in the significance of control variables could potentially be a weakness of the utilized data when the panel specification is employed, which I will discuss in further detail in the discussion section. However, in order to determine whether my second hypothesis and expectations of the control variables are correct, I need to examine the results in Table 3 to see if different types of visits have different expectations.

Table 3 presents the results of my empirical analysis when distinguishing between the different types of visits. The results demonstrate that different types of visits are associated with variation in vote share. Table 3 also presents a summary of the impacts of different visits on the vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party. Although each column is similar, some differences are important to note in order to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the consistency and validity of the findings. Thus, each of the columns represented by a different model specification will be discussed.

The first column uses a cross-sectional model with all campaign visits split out into rally, fundraiser, and other visits. When running this model, rally is the only type of visit that is significant while fundraiser and other visits are found to be not significant. Along with rally visits, other variables in this model that are found to be significant

include unemployment rate, won state in the previous election, presidential approval, and the number of years the president's party has held the White House. These results allow for a good baseline model specification upon which the other model specifications can be compared to see how those differences can be explained by both the data and the analytical approach.

**Table 3 Summary Table of Impact of Split Visits**

<b>Dependent Variable: The Vote Share of the Gubernatorial Candidate from the president's Party</b>					
	<b>Cross-Sectional</b>	<b>Panel</b>	<b>Panel with rally visits Interaction</b>	<b>Panel with fundraiser visits Interaction</b>	<b>Panel with other visits Interaction</b>
Constant	0.381*** (0.06)	0.305*** (0.058)	0.293*** (0.062)	0.295 (0.061)	0.292*** (0.06)
Rally Visits	0.014* (0.011)	0.016* (0.012)	0.066*** (0.022)	0.018* (0.012)	0.016* (0.012)
Fundraiser Visits	0.008 (0.009)	-0.0003 (0.011)	-9.82e-06 (0.011)	0.036 (0.037)	-0.002 (0.011)
Other Visits	0.001 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.005)	-.0002 (0.005)	0.00002 (0.005)	0.019** (0.009)
Partisanship	0.026 (0.037)	0.067** (0.035)	.082** (0.037)	0.076** (0.037)	0.089** (0.04)
(Rally Visits)*(Partisanship)			-0.11** (0.049)		
(Fundraiser Visits)*(Partisanship)				-0.086* (0.077)	
(Other Visits)*(Partisanship)					-0.037** (0.015)

Unemployment rate	-0.005* (0.003)	-0.0004 (0.004)	0.0001** (0.005)	-0.0004 (0.004)	0.0001 (0.004)
Median income	3.60E-07 (5.39E-07)	5.71E-07 (5.36E-07)	6.87e-07*** (5.51e-07)	6.28e-07 (5.42e-07)	5.49E-07 (5.24E-07)
Won State in previous election	0.034*** (0.014)	0.028** (0.014)	0.026 (0.014)	0.027** (0.014)	0.027** (0.014)
Presidential Approval	0.001** (0.000665)	0.002** (0.001)	0.002*** (0.0006)	0.002*** (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)
Number of Years President's Party has held the White House	-0.005** (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)
Observations	325	325	325	325	325
State-by-Year Fixed Effects Panel Analysis	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Prob > F	0.002***	0.001***	0.001***	0.001***	0.000***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.064	.072	0.081	0.077	0.077

Notes: The dependent variable is vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party, which is the percentage of total vote share obtained by the candidate of the party of the president. Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

\*\*\* indicates statistical significance at  $p < .01$

\*\* indicates statistical significance at  $p < .05$

\* indicates statistical significance at  $p < .10$

In the second column of Table 3, the impact of split visits on the vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party, the panel model with fixed effects includes all campaign visits split out into the rally, fundraiser, and other visits. When running this model, rally is the only type of visit that is found to be significant while fundraiser and other visits are found to be insignificant. Along with rally visits, other variables in this model that are significant include partisanship, won state in the previous

election, and presidential approval. The variables found in this model to be insignificant include the unemployment rate, the number of years the president's party has held the White House, and median income. However, when the panel specification is employed, the unemployment rate and the number of years the president's party has held the White House are not significant, while partisanship is significant. From which we can really infer from this model is that when looking at rally visits are consistently significant and positive while the other types of visits are consistently not significantly.

In the third column of Table 3, the impact of total visits on the vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party, are the results from the panel model with fixed effects, which includes all campaign visits split out as well as an interaction term that uses rally visits with partisanship. When running this model, the rally partisanship interaction is significant as demonstrated in figure 3. However, fundraiser and other visits are found to be not significant. Along with rally visits, other variables in this model that are found to be significant include the unemployment rate, median income, presidential approval, and the number of years the president's party has held the White House. The only control variable that is not significant is whether the president won the state in the previous election. This tells us that rally visits seem to have a strong interaction with partisanship. From the results, it is also seen that the control variables also matter more when controlling for the interaction between rally visits and partisanship.

However, the fourth and fifth columns in Table 3, appear to be similar. Each column represents the impact of split visits on the vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party, both with panel models with fixed effects which

includes all campaign visits split out and includes an interaction between fundraiser visits (in the fourth column) or other visits (in the fifth column) and partisanship. In the fourth column, the interaction between the fundraiser visits and partisanship is significant as demonstrated in figure 4. Then in the fifth column, it is seen that the interaction between the other visits and partisanship is not significant. However, the control variables that are found to be significant in both of these model specifications include partisanship, the interaction term, won state in the previous election, and presidential approval. The variables found to not be significant include unemployment rate, median income, and the number of years the president's party has held the White House. From these models, we can infer that rally visits are significant not only in these two models but also over the course of all five models. With that being said, over the course of these models, there is consistency in the control variables, which heavily relate to the specification in column two.

### **Discussion**

The estimates for the models displayed above in Tables 2 and 3 present numerous findings that are worth identifying. Table 2 presents analyses for the findings related to elections using total visits while the analyses for the findings for elections when distinguishing among types of visits is in Table 3. In general, this research suggests there can be a vote share boost from a presidential visit that is real and can affect the outcome of elections. Based on the data analysis, the findings include that visits generally have a positive impact on vote share. In fact, visits by presidents help the candidates of their parties by increasing the vote share that the candidates of the president's party receive which improves their opportunity for both election and reelection. This demonstrates that

when a president strategically decides when, where and for whom to campaign for, their efforts do in fact pay off which demonstrates external validity to the findings of Cohen et al. However, once an interaction term is introduced to see the relationship between visits and partisanship, the impact of a visit in terms of both its significance and its magnitude is seen to be dependent upon the partisan makeup of a state. Third, I find that other control variables have unique and differing impacts on a candidates' vote share.

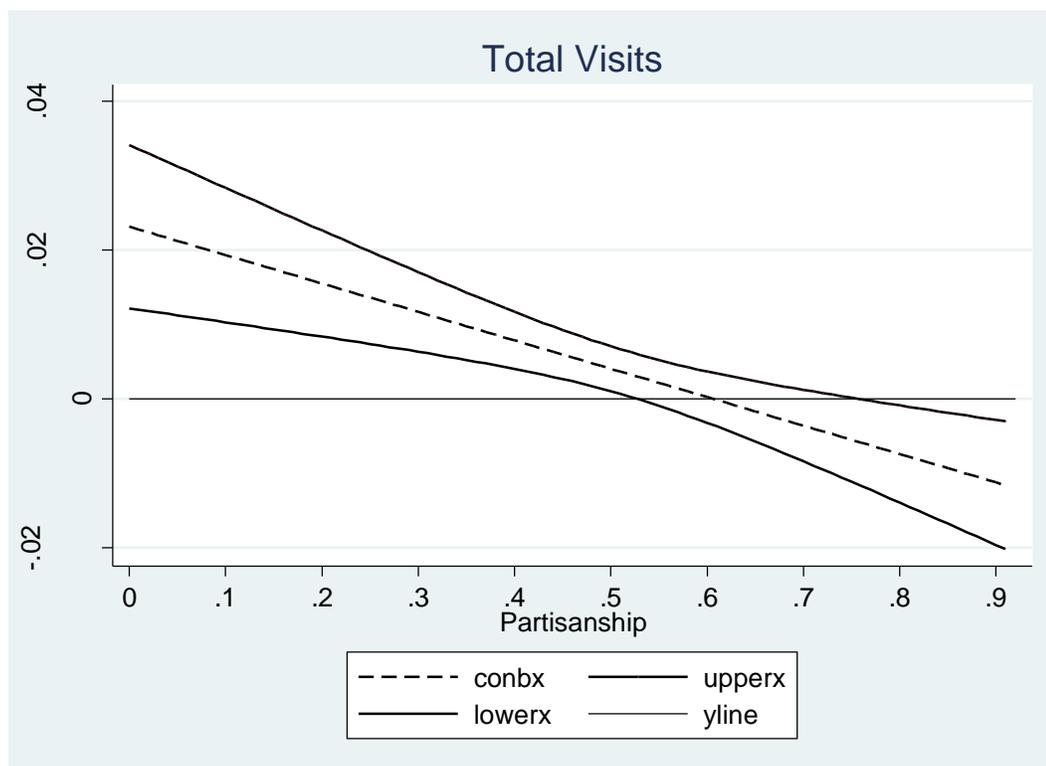
Focusing on the total visits models, it is clear that certain determinates are consistently significant which demonstrates that there are certain factors that are more important than other factors. Table 2 shows determinates of the vote share of the gubernatorial candidate from the president's party. First, when focusing on total visits or the summation, of all the different types of visits, in all three of the model specifications, visits are always significant and consistently positive when not accounting for the interaction term. The nature of the positive relationship tells us that there is a direct relationship between visits and vote share, which was the expected relationship based on my hypothesis and theory. This signifies an important finding that candidates of the president's party that receive visits from the president do receive a higher percentage of vote share than they would have if they had they not received a visit by the president. This means that candidates that receive a visit from the president are more likely to be elected than those who do not receive a visit.

When interpreting the coefficient based on an examination of the coefficient of total visits in the cross-sectional model column, when there is a visit by a president to a gubernatorial candidate, the expected percentage of the vote share received by that gubernatorial candidate is predicted to increase by 0.4%. The finding that the average

visit improves a candidate's vote share by around nearly 0.4% . percentage points on average is important because it suggests that this vote share boost from a presidential visit is real and can affect the outcome of elections if enough attention is paid by a candidate. In application, when looking at just the close gubernatorial election states from the 2014-midterm elections and focusing only on the 11 states that President Obama won in the preceding general election; the Democratic Party's candidate only won four elections.<sup>7</sup> Based upon the estimated 0.4 percent increase in vote share that the president can bring with a visit, there are at least two elections in which the president could have potentially flipped the election. These states are Florida and Massachusetts in which there were no visits by the president, rather candidates in those states distanced themselves from the president. If there had been just a few visits, the president to either candidate could have changed the outcome of the election and there could have been a Democrat elected instead of a Republican. This finding would provide evidence for my first hypothesis.

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<sup>7</sup> These states are Colorado, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island.



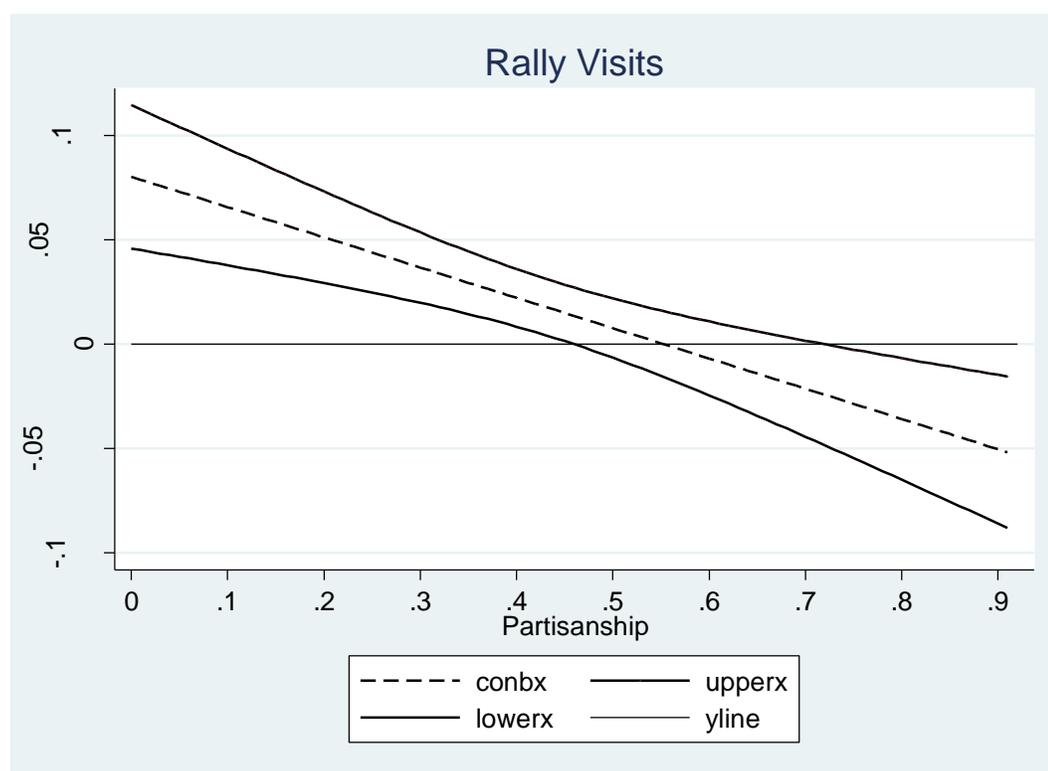
**Figure 2 Total Visits and Partisanship Interaction**

This picture changes when the model includes an interaction term between total visits and partisanship, the picture changes as demonstrated in Figure 2. At lower levels of partisanship of the president's party: total visits effect on the vote share of the candidate from their party is about two percent of additional vote share per visit. However, when the levels of partisanship of the president's party increase to about .55: total visits effect on the vote share of the candidate from their party is indistinguishable from zero. Furthermore, when the levels of partisanship of the president's party increase past .75: total visits effect on the vote share of the candidate from their party is, in fact, negative. This finding is both interesting and important that when accounting for the relationship between visits and partisanship, the impact is contingent upon the partisan makeup of a state.

Rally visits, like total visits, when not accounting for the interaction between visits and partisanship are consistently significant and positive. The positive coefficient tells us that there is a direct relationship between rally visits and vote share, which was the expected relationship based on my hypothesis and theory. This demonstrates that candidates of the president's party that receive rally visits from the president receive a higher percentage of vote share than they would have if they had not received a visit from the president. The coefficient of rally visits in my cross-sectional column signifies that when there is a rally visit by a president to a gubernatorial candidate, the expected percentage of the vote share received by that gubernatorial candidate is predicted to increase by 1.4%. In my panel model, the coefficient signifies that when there is a visit by a president to a gubernatorial candidate, the expected percentage of the vote share received by that gubernatorial candidate is predicted to increase by 1.6%. While in the panel model with the fundraiser visits and partisanship interaction, the coefficient signifies that when there is a visit by a president to a gubernatorial candidate, the expected percentage of the vote share received by that gubernatorial candidate is predicted to increase by 1.8%. Although in the panel model with the other visits and partisanship interaction, the slope coefficient is 0.016, which signifies that when there is a visit by a president to a gubernatorial candidate, the expected percentage of the vote share received by that gubernatorial candidate is predicted to increase by 1.6%. This difference in vote share from a presidential visit has the ability to affect the outcome of close elections.

Thus, the type of visit matters when distinguishing between types of visits. I find that in terms of increasing vote share when distinguishing between types of visits that

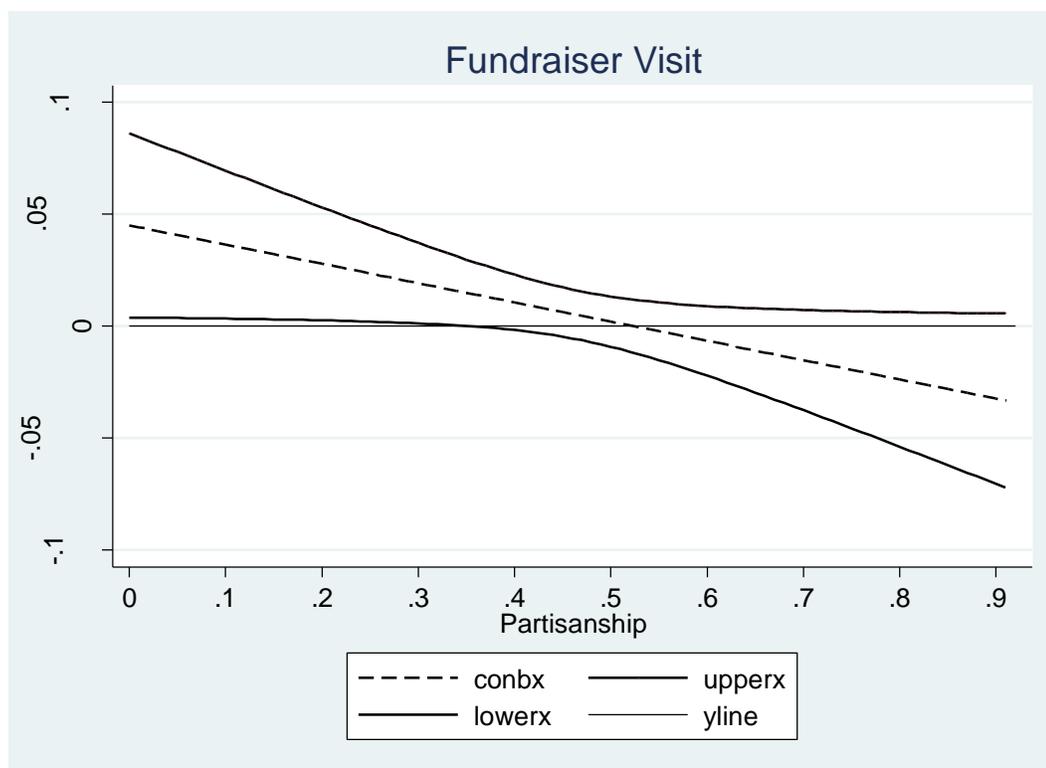
rally visits are the best. Although other visits do matter, when the interaction term is introduced, it shows that rally visits are consistently significant and consistently help candidates of the president's party. This finding of rally visits improving a candidate's vote share by around one and a half percentage points on average is another important discovery. When observing those same close gubernatorial elections from the 2014 midterm elections and focusing only on the states that President Obama won in the preceding general election, there were eleven states to focus on.<sup>8</sup> Based upon the estimated one and a half percentage point increase in the vote share that the president can bring with a rally visit, only one seat is flipped, and that state is Florida. While multiple rally visits could have potentially changed the outcome for multiple states.



**Figure 3 Rally Visits and Partisanship Interaction**

<sup>8</sup> These states are Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin.

However, once again the picture differs when the interaction term between rally visits and partisanship interaction is introduced in column 3 as seen in Figure 3. At lower levels of partisanship of the president's party: rally visits effect on the vote share of the candidate from their party is about seven percent of additional vote share per visit. Although, when the levels of partisanship of the president's party increase to about .45: rally visits effect on the vote share of the candidate from their party is indistinguishable from zero. Furthermore, when the levels of partisanship of the president's party increase past .73: rally visits effect on the vote share of the candidate from their party is, in fact, negative. This, like total visit, is both interesting and important when accounting for the relationship between visits and partisanship impact is contingent upon the partisan makeup of a state.



**Figure 4 Fundraisers Visits and Partisanship Interaction**

When distinguishing between the types of visits, some of the findings I expected while others I did not. For example, fundraiser visits were consistently not significant. However, this demonstrates that different types of visits have different impacts like those that I expected. However, as seen in Figure 4, there is some significance for fundraisers when the interaction term is introduced to the model specification between fundraiser visits and partisanship. At lower levels of partisanship of the president's party: fundraisers visits effect on the vote share of the candidate from their party is about 4.5 percent of additional vote share per visit. Although, when the levels of partisanship of the president's party increase to .35: rally visits effect on the vote share of the candidate from their party is indistinguishable from zero and remains so. This is interesting and important as there appears to be a lack of significance overall for fundraiser visits. However, when accounting for the interaction between visits and partisanship, the impact is contingent upon the partisan makeup of a state where there is slight significance when the partisan makeup is below .35.

However different from the previous three interaction visit specifications, other visits were not statistically significance in any of the model specifications; this once again demonstrates that different types of visits have different impacts. These results are consistent with the five model specifications. This lack of significance in all of the models including the model where the interaction term shows a finding of consistency. This finding could be demonstrating that there is a lack of consistency in the categorization of what is another visit. This is seen at all levels of partisanship of the president's party: rally visits effect on the vote share of the candidate from their party is indistinguishable from zero. This finding of non-significance is large as the results

indicate that in terms of final vote share, other visits have no impact. This means that there is no difference on vote share whether this visit by the president occurs.

When looking at other determinates of vote share in the total visits model specifications found in Table 2 there are two factors I find are consistently significant in all of the models in which they are included. First, whether the president won Electoral College votes in the previous election. Second, I find that the national approval of the president in September of the midterm election year is consistently significant. The approval being significant is an interesting finding because Eshbaugh-Soha et al. and Lang et al. find that approval is not a significant factor while observing the strategic motivations of a president. They surmise that perhaps this is because national popularity may not drive local visiting trends. While national popularity may not drive local visiting trends, it does, in fact, affect the vote share as originally demonstrated by Simon. This seems to demonstrate the common finding that midterm gubernatorial elections have some sort of referenda effect on the party of the president.

Other predictors of vote share that are somewhat consistently significant in the models, meaning they are significant in two of the three models, including first partisanship. Another variable that is significant is unemployment rate, which has significance in two of the three models. Perhaps it is not significant in the panel model because there is not enough variation in these types of variables such as national unemployment rate when controlling for the state. Then the number of years the president's party held the White House is significant in two-thirds of the models. Perhaps this is a similar explanation as the variables that are constant over an election cycle do not allow for enough variation once controlling for the state. Only one predictor is found to

be slightly significant, meaning that it is only significant in one of the three models. That predictor is median income, which is only found to be significant in the models that control for the state, perhaps demonstrating that the variation between states is only seen once the state is controlled for. Overall, these findings are consistent with previous research as well as the expected relationships discussed in my data section.

Other determinates of vote share that are found to be significant in Table 3 when distinguishing between types include two multiple factors. The first factor I find is significant is the national approval of the president in September of the midterm election year. Other predictors of vote share that are found to be somewhat consistently significant meaning that they are significant in at least three of the five models include another two factors. The first of these determinates is partisanship. The second of these determinates is if the president won Electoral College votes in the previous election. However, three determinants are found to be only slightly significant meaning they are only significant in between one and three of the model specifications. The first of those factors with slight significance is unemployment rate. The unemployment rate is significant in two of the five specifications. What is even more interesting is that one of the two results actually has a coefficient that was positive as opposed to the expected negative coefficient. A reason for this might be the same as discussed above for the total visit models in which the data used as is a national level indicator, thus it may not have enough variation once controlling for the location to show significance. The second of the three determinates with slight significance is median income which is only significant in one of the five specifications. Then finally, the numbers of years the president's party has held the White House only has slight significance in two of the five model specifications perhaps for

similar reasons to the unemployment rate. For the most part, these are consistent with the findings from other studies and in accordance with the expected relationship as discussed above.

My research suggests that this vote share boost from a presidential visit is real and can affect the outcome of close elections. However, it is also clear that the effectiveness and the nature of an impact is based on the partisan composition of a state. Also based on my findings it appears that a candidate may not win, but without presidential visits, candidates could have ended up with a lower amount of vote share, in fact losing worse than the final result. This finding is significant as it shows external validity for the work of Cohen et al. However, there is a large caveat in this finding that vote share is boosted by presidential visits. The stipulation of my findings is that the impact of a visit is dependent on the strategic calculation component discussed in previous research. While the states I discuss in regards to the 2014 election are only competitive states that the president had previously won. This is because they are closest to being flipped in terms of vote share. However, as seen in my discussion above the largest potential impact a president such as President Obama could have is in a state such as Kansas or Wyoming as the impact would not be the same. This is contrary to conventional wisdom that surmises that those types of visits would have a negative impact. However, as demonstrated above that is incorrect. Moreover, this is not to say that Kansas or Wyoming would be flipped from red to blue it would just make the margin of victory for the winning party smaller.

## CONCLUSION

Presidential visits can have a significant and positive relationship on midterm gubernatorial elections. The change in vote share seems to occur because presidential visits help gubernatorial candidates reestablish enthusiasm among their key constituencies. This means presidential visits increase the vote share of midterm gubernatorial candidates of his party. This finding demonstrates that the work of Cohen et al. has external validity, as their finding related to Senate elections is applicable to gubernatorial elections. My findings support my second hypothesis that different types of presidential visits in fact have different impacts on candidates. However, when looking at the interaction between visits and partisanship, the impact of visits is seen to be dependent upon on the partisan composition of a state. I further demonstrate that rally visits have a consistently significant and typically positive impact on midterm gubernatorial elections, although the interacting term shows some variation in the impact. My work also shows that fundraiser visits have a less significant and a much more limited effect on midterm gubernatorial elections. My work further demonstrates that different types of visits do in fact have varying impacts on candidates as it shows that other visits have no significance and no effect on midterm gubernatorial elections.

This thesis has multiple contributions to presidential scholarship. The impact of visits by the president on midterm gubernatorial elections is consistently positive for the candidates of the president's party meaning that visits improve the vote share obtained by those candidates while not using any interactions. However, I demonstrate the importance

of considering the partisan nature of a state when determining the expected impact of a visit to the state. This is not only a significant contribution to scholarship but it is also a significant contribution to campaign management. This is because it demonstrates that campaigns under the circumstances outlined by the study of the strategic calculation should want the sitting president to come campaign for their candidate. In addition, presidents should be able to campaign knowing that their efforts have a positive impact on the vote share of those candidates they strategically select.

Based on the findings and contributions of my thesis, there are a few different implications that could be discussed. Out of all of these implications, perhaps the most interesting is based on a finding of slight significance and non-significance. This is seen as out of all the visit types, the one type that seems to have very slim significance as it is only partially significant in one of the five models is fundraiser visits. However, perhaps there is an actual explanation for why fundraiser visits only have this level of significance. Remembering that the dependent variable in the analysis is the vote share of the candidate from the president's party, fundraisers do not have a direct impact and while this is not the purpose of this paper, perhaps there is a simple theory to demonstrate why this might, in fact, be the case. This potential theory is perhaps best illustrated by an example involving President Obama and former Illinois Governor Quinn. In leading up to the 2014 midterm elections, President Obama held a fundraiser on the behalf of Governor Quinn. There was in total 25 attendees each paying \$50,000 to attend the event. Perhaps it is not such a surprise that there is not a direct effect on vote share as a fundraiser has thousands of people less in attendance than a rally, and perhaps the direct purpose of a

fundraiser visit is not to effect vote share. This different purpose of fundraiser visits and their impact on elections could be looked at in further research.

Other implications of my thesis seem to further illustrate other aspects of scholarship. For example, Cohen et al. found that visits have a positive impact for Senate candidates, and I was able to find that visits have without the interaction also have a positive impact on gubernatorial candidates. The implication of this finding is that perhaps elections are very closely related. This could be particularly true as the same constituencies elect both Senators and Governors, and often at the same time. This is an idea that has been examined in previous literature related to the different determinates of gubernatorial elections. Another implication as previously discussed is that different types of visits have different types of impacts, for example, fundraisers have a slight statistical impact. Based upon this, perhaps presidents need to focus more on rally visits in the future for candidates than any other types of visits.

A different, yet important set of implications based on the findings and contributions of this research is that it has demonstrated future directions of research. One example of what future research could look at is the different ways of separating out types of visits. This could be done by looking at a division between candidate-centered visits and committee-centered visits to see if there is any different effect on vote share for an individual candidate when there is more than one candidate in attendance. Another direction of future research could potentially be to look at one of the other different definitions of visits to see if the results remain constant.

Finally, among many other things, future research could potentially look at other types of measures of impacts as I only looked at the final vote share of the candidate from

the president's party. One way impact could be measured is taking into account both actual vote in the election and the average performance in that election over several previous elections. This allows for an estimate of how well the party did in the states the president visited relative to how it should do. In so doing, the difference between the actual vote and the expected vote would be the impact of the visit by the president while controlling for other factors. Other types of measures of impacts could include a binary variable for a win or a loss for the candidate of the president's party. Another variable that could be looked at is fundraising numbers for candidates. Another direction of future research could be looking at poll numbers and using them to try to measure the impact of a visit. Another thing that future research should look at is if the casual mechanism to whether the president does, in fact, increase turnout for candidates that they visit. This line of inquiry is even more necessary in determining the causal mechanism as I find that partisanship affects the type of impact that a visit has even leading a president to potentially having a negative impact on the gubernatorial candidate from their party.

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