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## **“There Goes that Relationship”: Journalistic Aggression and Political Equivocation in Joint Press Conferences**

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“There Goes that Relationship”:  
Journalistic Aggression and Political Equivocation in Joint Press Conferences

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Political Science

by

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## Abstract

This study evaluates the relationship between the press and political leaders during joint press conferences. Aggressive journalistic questioning in press conferences has increased over time (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Clayman, Elliott, Heritage, & McDonald, 2004; Clayman, Elliott, Heritage, & McDonald, 2007), but recent scholarship shows that journalists present less aggressive questions when a foreign head of state is present (Banning & Billingsley, 2007). Joint press conferences hosted in the United States by President Donald Trump between Prime Minister Theresa May of the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, respectively, were analyzed via conversation analysis based on a question analysis framework by Clayman, Elliott, Heritage, and McDonald (2004) and equivocation typologies by Bull and Mayer (1993). First, journalists' questions were evaluated on five different measures – initiative, directness, assertiveness, adversarialness, and accountability. Next, political leaders' answers were assessed on three different categories – replies, intermediate replies, and non-replies. Results of the study showed foreign journalists in these joint press conferences aggressively pursued politicians more than their U.S. counterparts. Additionally, political leaders were less likely to respond to journalists' questions with a reply than with intermediate or non-replies. This study provides perspective on the current state of press-state relations in democratic systems and the way journalists conduct themselves on the international stage with U.S. and foreign leaders.

*Keywords:* aggressive journalism, content analysis, conversation analysis, joint press conferences, journalistic questioning, political discourse analysis, press-politician relationship, watchdog journalism

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## **Dedication**

You instilled in me a spirit of tenacity and the confidence to speak my mind. You sacrificed to give me the gift of education. You taught me about selflessness, to believe in myself, and to love

God deeply during all times, in all things, and above all else.

To my beloved parents,

Steven and Tammie Russell

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## Introduction & Literature Review

More than a year into Donald Trump's presidency, it is clear the U.S. president does not enjoy dealing with news professionals. To date, he has held only one solo press conference with the press corps. He frequently labels media coverage of his presidency as unfair and decries news organizations such as CNN, the Washington Post, and the New York Times as "fake news" (Britzky, 2017). Instead of interacting with media outlets directly, Trump frequently takes to Twitter to "correct" facts and give statements to the public about his policies and beliefs as opposed to working through traditional media channels. It seems that Trump does not trust the media to convey his messages and attempts to usurp the media's control of his political narratives as a result.

Outside of his Twitter presence and solitary solo press conference, Trump does interact with the media via another type of political communication event – joint press conferences. Since taking office, Trump has held 27 joint press conferences as of May 2018 (Gerhard, 2018). Considering he does not do one-on-one interviews with journalists and has only held one official solo press conference since taking office, these joint press conference appearances are some of the only instances where journalists and the U.S. president interact directly. In comparison, President Barack Obama held eleven solo and sixteen joint, President George W. Bush held five solo and fourteen joint, and President Bill Clinton held twelve solo and twenty-six joint press conferences in their first years respectively (Gerhard, 2018).

On January 27, 2017, Trump held his first press conference – a joint press conference with Prime Minister Theresa May of the United Kingdom (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-British relations*). The press conference gave the world a first look at what President Trump's diplomatic aptitude would be, accompanied by his ability to handle interactions with press



professionals from U.S. and U.K. news outlets. Leading up to the press event, President Trump spoke of his “special relationship” with Prime Minister May and applauded the passing of Brexit by the people of the U.K. (Kuenssberg, 2017). Many in the media posited that President Trump would use the press conference to build upon the “America First” narrative his administration was touting concerning NAFTA and U.S. trade agreements with other countries.

Both Trump and May called on journalists from their respective countries, following the traditional protocol for joint press conferences. One question posed to President Trump during the conference came from British journalist Laura Kuenssberg of the *BBC*:

Mr. President, you've said before that torture works. You've praised Russia. You've said you want to ban some Muslims from coming to America. You've suggested there should be punishment for abortion. For many people in Britain, those sound like alarming beliefs. What do you say to our viewers at home who are worried about some of your views and worried about you becoming the leader of the free world? (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-British relations*)

Trump responded to Kuenssberg’s question with an attacking non-reply – “This was your choice of a question? There goes that relationship.” Trump then went on to talk about the “great appointment” of General Mattis, the possibility of a relationship between Russia and the U.S., and that he will be “representing the American people very strongly” abroad (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-British relations*).

As can be seen from this exchange, direct interactions with journalists leave politicians vulnerable to questioning that could mar their public image or damage their policy narratives. A politician works hard to craft and manage their messages when presenting them to the public. Journalists are either the conduits or the contributors to those narratives – either passing along that message to the public or altering the narrative before presenting it to the public through their own storytelling (Shanahan, McBeth, Hathaway, & Arnell, 2008).

Journalists are actively trying to set specific narratives through their questioning in press conference. While casting journalistic storytelling and fact-gathering in an ominous light undermines the profession, journalists are not present in the joint press conference merely to listen to what the politician has to say. Each journalist has specific questions they want public officials to answer – perhaps having to do with their own underlying agenda or the agenda of their news organization – has more to do with a story the journalist has in mind than the politician’s message. The differing narratives politicians and journalists present in these interactions produce conflict, and this contention colors the environment not only of these diplomatic events but of the relationship between press professionals and the politicians they cover.

Clearly, both Trump and journalists in the press conference were battling for control over a narrative on Trump’s policies. Just looking at the media coverage after the U.S.-U.K. press conference, media outlets put a particular twist on the messages conveyed by the politicians and the interactions between the two leaders. Kuenssberg’s follow-up story on *BBC* entitled “Donald Trump and Theresa May – Do opposites attract?” (Kuenssberg, 2017), espoused a narrative of a strong-willed May who is looking to work with an unpredictable U.S. president for the good of the U.K. Two U.S. journalists – Steve Holland of *Reuters* (Holland & Piper, 2017) and John Roberts of *FOX News* (Roberts, 2017) – both focused on remarks President Trump made about wanting to lift sanctions from Russia. Despite their differences, neither journalists talked much about the international relationship between the U.S. and the U.K., instead focusing on domestic politics.

The main differences between Kuenssberg’s article and her U.S. counterparts’ coverage post-press conference is, of course, their respective audiences. Both Holland and Roberts cater to

a widely U.S.-centered audience that is mainly concerned with domestic politics. Alternatively, Kuenssberg provided coverage for an international audience, but largely a U.K. based one. For U.K. readers, a comparison between Trump and May during the uncertainty of Brexit gives much needed context for coming diplomatic exchanges between the two new leaders.

Kuenssberg's article has heavy analysis on May as prime minister, a note that a U.S. audience would not be interested in. While Kuenssberg's article pointed out the difference between the two political leaders, playing up Trump's "reality TV star billionaire" persona against May's "working vicar's daughter" identity (Kuenssberg, 2017), Holland and Roberts used the joint press conferences merely as a timeline topic to bring in a discussion of Trump's domestic policy (Holland & Piper, 2017; Roberts, 2017).

While none of these stories were particularly negative to either President Trump's or Prime Minister May's policy narratives or public personas, neither politician could anticipate what was printed in the news coverage and the narrative that emerged. The uncertainty of presenting political messages in this way is what drives politicians to control interactions with the press as much as possible (Iyengar, 2015; Kumar, 2003; Manheim, 1979). This uncertainty might explain the rise in U.S. presidents' reliance on joint press conferences over solo press conferences since President Roosevelt (Banning & Billingsley, 2007). Additionally, journalists during joint press conferences pose less aggressive questioning to political officials, allowing politicians to interact with journalists in one of the most constrained press events in the political arena (Banning & Billingsley, 2007; Kumar, 2010; Eshbaugh-Soha, 2012).

## Journalistic Aggressiveness

Studies have been conducted on the press-politician relationship in broadcast political interviews, debates, and speeches, however research surrounding joint press conferences are one of the most understudied of mediated political communication events (Sanders, 1965; Masters & Sullivan, 1989; Bull, 2008). Scholars in the field of political communication and press-politician relationships have studied the institutionalization of the press conference with President Woodrow Wilson (Ryfe, 1999; Cornwell, 1960), the press conferences decline and rise in the TV era with President Kennedy to present day (Sanders, 1965), and the amount of times modern presidents have used press conferences during their presidencies (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 752).

However, not until researchers Steven Clayman and John Heritage's study of aggressive journalistic questioning in U.S. press conferences (Clayman, Elliott, Heritage, & McDonald, 2004, 2007; Clayman, Elliott, Heritage, & Beckett, 2010) had any studies been conducted on the nature of journalistic phrasing and structure of questions in these types of press events. What Clayman and Heritage found was an increasingly aggressive press corps that was more direct, took more initiative in their questioning, and did not back down from presenting follow-up questions to politicians. Specifically, Clayman and Heritage (2002) and later Clayman, Elliot, Heritage, and McDonald (2004, 2007), found that journalistic aggressiveness had risen from President Eisenhower to President Clinton and become customary in presidential press conferences. Clayman and Heritage defined *journalistic aggression* as questioning from journalists that lacks deference and takes great enterprise in pursuing answers from political leaders through different aspects of question design (2004). While they found these features of question design – initiative, directness, assertiveness, adversarialness, and accountability – were

more popular at different times over the years, overall journalists are more aggressive today than they were when press conferences were first introduced into the chain of political communications by U.S. presidents (2007, 2010).

The majority of research on aggressive news coverage in journalism studies and political communication focuses on the content of news stories. Studying the content of news stories, though, does not focus on the news norms and practices of journalists. While the press might pursue a news story covering a political scandal, the way journalists cover the story is difficult to ascertain if the main focus is on the content as opposed to the practices used to gather the information. Because of the difficulty in studying the content of news stories, Clayman and Heritage looked to the study of question structure to further understand aggressive journalistic techniques. Aggressiveness shows up in the “details of linguistic and discursive behavior ... that exert varying degrees of pressure and constraint on politicians” (Clayman, Elliott, Heritage, McDonald, 2007, p. 536). Clayman and Heritage first applied their Question Analysis System on President Eisenhower and President Reagan’s press conferences. They then followed up with a longitudinal analysis of press conferences from Eisenhower to Clinton, which replicated the results of the initial study and proved journalistic aggression has increased since the inception of the press conference (Clayman, Elliott, Heritage, McDonald, 2004).

As the self-proclaimed “voice of the people” in the political system, journalists are an integral part of democracies (Paletz & Entman, 1981; Grossman & Kumar, 1981; French, 1982; Iyengar, 2015). The role of the press is no longer to gather rudimentary facts and present the “truth” of an event (Weaver, 1974); instead, journalists are now responsible for holding politicians accountable for their actions and uncovering wrongdoings. A journalist’s “watchdog” duty is to hold the government and political leaders accountable for their actions and responsible

to their constituents, which creates a contentious environment between journalists and politicians (Entman, 1981).

At the most basic level, journalists report on events, interpret those events, and provide the gathered information with context to the public (Press & Verburg, 1988; Sparrow, 1999). As an industry, the norms of journalism are professional objectivity, judgment of events as worthy of the public's attention, use of official sources, and a presentation of both sides of a subject (assuming there are only two) (Press & Verburg, 1988). Journalists strive to abide by these professional norms in every published news story in order to maintain their reputation. Structurally, the news industry revolves around these professional norms of objectivity, judgment, fairness, and accuracy; journalists, editors, and ombudsmen actively work to keep their news organizations abiding by these values. Because of an adherence to these professional tenets, journalists' must aggressively question political leaders. Journalists must decide what tactics and setting to use when approaching politicians in order to reach their end goal of receiving complete answers to their questions.

### **Political Equivocation**

Try as they might, political leaders do not define what will be the political news of the day. Politicians need journalists to communicate messages to the public; of course, even after taking their message public, they would rather the news directly espouse their policies than scrutinize and criticize them (Iyengar, 2015; Bull, 2008). To combat any negative exposure, political leaders want to control the stories involving them (Linksy, 1986), and attempt to accomplish this goal by managing the press (Press & VerBurg, 1988). Politicians do this by leaking specific pieces of information they want to the press, withholding information they are

not ready to reveal, and holding press conferences in which they set as many of the terms as possible (Kumar, 2010; Sabato, 1991).

Alternatively, journalists cede some of their autonomous rights by attending press conferences. While political debates are arranged and controlled by the governing news organization, in the case of press conferences, journalists must abide by the norms of the event, typically cloaking their questions in polite speech to get answers out of politicians (Kumar, 2010; Eshbaugh-Soha, 2012; Manheim, 1979). Bull and Mayer's 1993 study of Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock categorize political leader responses into varying types of equivocation. *Political equivocation* is defined as a politician's hesitancy, inability, or unwillingness to completely answer a question (Bull & Mayer, 1993). Politicians equivocate when they do not want to provide a complete answer to a journalist; they may do through several different means of rhetorical tricks, but in general politicians will provide an answer they want to give as opposed to actually answering the question posed.

Press and VerBurg in their book *American Politicians and Journalists*, say that press conferences have become "a game of hounds chasing a fox, of reporters trying to corner the president before a national audience" (1988, p. 199). While the press conference is a way of communicating with the public, the event can be more of a headache to political figures than help. There are, for political leaders, perhaps better ways of communicating with the public. Joint press conferences are highly structured but leave the politician vulnerable to unknown questions by the press. Political officials are risk-averse, and televised press conferences leave a politician vulnerable to news-hungry journalists (Press & VerBurg, 1988). Not only are journalists endeavoring to get information from political leaders, but political leaders are attempting to give answers that benefit their own personal message.

Dan Rather, in his book *The Camera Never Blinks*, says presidents most often try to not answer questions posed by the press – Eisenhower used his “peculiar syntax”, Kennedy used humor, Johnson used biting critiques, and Nixon equivocated (Rather & Diehl, 2012, p. 292). Some critics say the interactions in press conferences have become so contentious that the practice should be done away with altogether because seldom does any actual news come out of the conference and little context is ever given to issues and topics of the day (Johnson-Cartee, 2005; Linksy, 1986). Instead, it provides a place for politicians to equivocate and journalists to grandstand. Larry Speakes, President Ronald Reagan’s Press Secretary, said the tradition of press conferences “in its present form is ... East Room extravaganza ... [and] a battle of wits ... [where] too much of it boils down to: How can we get ‘em to say what they don’t want to say? Somehow, we need to get away from this ‘I gotcha’ syndrome” (Johnson-Cartee, 2005, p. 200).

Even though politicians feel powerless to control the press, Press and VerBurg make the argument that politicians have the greater advantage over the press in many ways. They control the information channels and many of the normative ways the press accesses their sources, which they need to write high-quality and reliable stories (1988), and even though press conference can seem like a risky choice to reveal their message, the politician is still the one in control of the setting ultimately.

### **Joint Press Conferences**

Joint press conferences are one of the only international relations and foreign policy events where the public is able to see diplomacy in action. While disagreement exists in the literature on the substantive value of joint press conferences to political leaders and journalists, which is often decided by the speaker and his or her staff (Kumar, 2005; Eshbaugh-Soha, 2012), the optics of two heads of state coming together to take questions benefits political leader’s



combined diplomatic agendas. Within the context of joint press conferences, the most important narrative political leaders can espouse is one of unity between their countries. Journalists, for their part, may want to test this narrative of unity between political leaders via their questioning or focus on domestic issues for their respective audiences. Certainly, though, journalists may choose to accept the narratives politicians promote in press conferences; journalists may also develop a more aggressive line of questioning that does not hold to the politician's narrative but attempt to create their own.

The study of presidential press conferences has been the subject of works in political communication, political psychology, and journalism scholarly research since before the presidency of John F. Kennedy (Manheim, 1979; Press & VerBurg, 1988), who was the first president to allow for a live broadcast of press conferences and truly solidified the presidential press conference in U.S. politics (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Kumar, 2003). The presidential joint press conference is a political institution that political leaders use more as a place for diplomatic discourse with a foreign leader than serious one-on-one interactions with journalists (Kumar, 2003; Manheim, 1979).

Analysis of joint press conference is, in general, the study of interpersonal communication. In communication studies, interactions (verbal and non-verbal) between two people are called *interpersonal communication* (Masters & Sullivan, 1989; Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Bull, 2003). The interpersonal relationship between the press and politicians is one defined by a *turn-taking* process (French, 1982; Bull & Mayer, 1993; Clayman & Heritage, 2002). *Turn-taking* communication is defined as a formalized communication event where an individual is prompted by another individual for a response, a response is made, and then a transition is made to another speaker (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Bull, 2003).

In studying turn-taking interactions, it is important to understand how the interactions normally take place and then look for interactions that are not normal. Joint press conferences are defined by several characteristics. At the beginning of the press conference, both political leaders address the crowd and viewers. The domestic political leader speaks first, setting the context of the press conferences for the host country. The foreign leader then gives thanks for the welcome by the host country and talks some about what brought the leaders together and what kind of relationship the two countries have or are wanting to forge. Occasionally, other pleasantries are exchanged between the two political leaders, and then the host country begins the press conference portion of the event by calling on the first journalist (Kumar, 2003).

Turns are taken when calling on journalists; as a rule, each political leader takes turns calling on journalists from their home countries (Kumar, 2003). Political leaders pick two journalists to call on during the joint press conference; when a journalist is called on, they pose a question to each political figure and then wait for their responses. For the journalists, they must remain seated until called on and do not call out questions at random to the political leaders. If a political leader seems to be struggling with what journalist to call on, it is appropriate for a journalist to raise their hand to signal to the political leader. Journalists only receive an opportunity for one question and are generally not given follow-up questions (Kumar, 2003). The turn-taking process in joint press conferences are highly constrained, putting more pressure on journalists to ask the right questions that meets their information gathering needs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical basis of this study is grounded in the theory of *conversation analysis (CA)*. The theory, established by Harvey Sacks in association with Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson, developed in the late 1960s. At the core, CA posits that individual actions are not

disorderly but produce patterns “action by action, move by move” that should be studied as an institutional entity in its own right (Clayman, Elliott, Heritage, & Beckett, 2012). From this, the study of talk-in-interaction becomes important in all instances and provides perspective on human communications from ordinary conversation to “non-conversational” interactions, such as exchanges in law courts and news interviews (Clayman & Heritage, 2011). CA also emphasizes the importance of recorded interactions; researchers looking to further understand the talk-in-interactions must be able to analyze and reanalyze naturally occurring talk.

Conversation analysis of journalistic questioning techniques is necessary for the study of news behaviors in joint press conferences and press-politician interactions. In order to address both research questions, content analysis was conducted on recent joint press conference between President Donald Trump and four foreign leaders – Prime Minister Theresa May of the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany. First, journalists’ questions were evaluated on the five different aggression dimensions – initiative, directness, assertiveness, adversarialness, and accountability. Next, political leaders’ answers were assessed on three different categories – replies, intermediate replies, and non-replies. The goal of this study is not only to produce reliable replication the frameworks created by Clayman and Heritage (2004, 2007, 2010) and Bull and Mayer (1993) individually, but also to expand press-politician scholarship by synthesizing results and implications of these frameworks.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

In the current media environment, where much is labeled as “fake news” (Burkhardt, 2017), it is important to analyze journalistic practices and the ways political leaders respond to them – the institutional talk of press and politician interactions. This is particularly important

when the public gets fewer and fewer opportunities to see politicians answer questions in earnest from journalists. In this study, the theory of *conversation analysis* connects past scholarship on the increasing nature of aggressive journalistic questioning in joint press conferences with a new look on the differences between U.S and foreign journalists questioning techniques. While this study is microanalytic in nature, the combination of two conversation analytic frameworks provides a new look at press-politician interactions: Clayman and Heritage's Question Analysis System (2004, 2007) and Bull and Mayer's Political Equivocation Typologies (1993). This study is centered around two research questions with accompanying hypotheses (Table 1).

Both conversation analytic frameworks have their roots in Atkinson's analysis of political speeches (1984). The presence of dimensions of journalistic aggressiveness based on Clayman and Heritage's framework (2007) indicate a premeditated effort by journalists to aggressively question political leaders. Similarly, political leader responses that fit within the intermediate and non-reply classifications in Bull and Mayer's (1993) framework indicate a premeditated effort by politicians to evade fully responding to questions posed by journalists. Evasive answers indicate a need by political leaders to correct facts or reframe narratives touted by journalists through their questioning.

**Table 1.** Research questions and hypotheses

Research questions	Hypotheses
<i>RQ<sub>1</sub></i> : How does journalistic questioning differ from U.S. to foreign journalists in joint press conferences?	<i>H<sub>1</sub></i> : Foreign journalists will present more aggressive lines of questioning than U.S. journalists.
<i>RQ<sub>2</sub></i> : How does different journalistic questioning affect political leader replies?	<i>H<sub>2</sub></i> : More aggressive journalistic questioning leads to fewer complete replies from political leaders and more intermediate and non-replies overall.

***RQ<sub>1</sub>*: How does journalistic questioning differ from U.S. to foreign journalists in joint press conferences?**

Research question one is a logical progression from Banning and Billingsley's 2007 study. By breaking down the interworking's of the press even further from just a group of journalists to two distinct groups of journalists with different tactics and wants, this gets an even closer look at the complicated relationship between the press and politicians. Never before has a research question focused on analyzing the difference in interactions between these two groups. Analysis of this research question will provide much needed perspective on the current state of the media in the time on "fake news" and the aggressive tendencies of the U.S. and foreign press.

***H<sub>1</sub>*: Foreign journalists will present more aggressive lines of questioning than U.S. journalists.**

A study by Banning and Billingsley took the Question Analysis System and applied it to eight press conferences, four solo and four joint, finding that journalists present less aggressive questioning in joint press conferences than solo press conferences (2007). And even with Clayman and Heritage's study showing that the press has gotten more aggressive over time, the U.S. press is still deferential in their questioning of political leaders. CA theory guides the knowledge of norms in institutional interactions, showing that players in a particular institution are more likely to go along with the norms of the interaction than break the rule of turn-at-talk (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). With the power structure of joint press conferences being in the politician's control, U.S. journalists would therefore be more likely to be deferential and less aggressive than foreign journalists who spends less time in these interactions overall.

***RQ<sub>2</sub>*: How does different journalistic questioning affect political leader replies?**

The second research question is a logical second step in the research process based on the combination of the Question Analysis System and the Political Equivocation Typologies. By combining the two frameworks into one study, this research question allows the analysis to explore the possibility of patterns and/or relationships between journalistic aggression and political equivocation. This research question, never being assessed before in the literature, would again further the field in trying to understand why political leaders respond the way they do toward journalists in these communication environments.

***H*<sub>2</sub>: More aggressive journalistic questioning leads to fewer complete replies from political leaders and more intermediate and non-replies overall.**

Bull and Mayer's typologies leads this research to make assumptions about political leader equivocation – when hesitancy exists in a political leader's response to a question there is a reason for it. While it is impossible to gauge for all the factors that play into making a political leader hesitant to answer a question, surely aggressive questioning from journalists does not make it easier. In fact, a journalist trying to take control of their turn-at-talk in a press environment where politicians are glad to have control might experience push-back in the form of political equivocation from politicians. This hypothesis looks to test that assumption. Original to this study is the combination of the Question Analysis System and the Political Equivocation Typology. Neither framework has been combined in this way to study interactions between journalists and political leaders. The combinations of these frameworks open a new way of looking to make associations between patterns and analyze relationships in political communication even more than before.

## Methodology

The majority of studies conducted regarding press conferences have utilized conversation analysis and microanalysis. Clayman and Heritage (2002) and later Clayman, Heritage, Elliot, and McDonald (2007) and Bull and Mayer (1993) used conversation analysis and microanalysis in their studies of U.S. presidential press conferences and news interviews. Similarly, this study used both conversation analysis and microanalysis to examine journalist questioning of political leaders and the respective responses in joint press conferences. The Question Analysis System (Clayman & Heritage, 2004) and the Political Equivocation Typology (Bull & Mayer, 1993) discussed in chapter 2 (Journalistic Aggressiveness) and 3 (Political Equivocation) is used to carry out the conversational and microanalytic nature of this study.

Specifically, *conversation analysis* looks to understand specific dimensions of interactional and “turn-at-talk” dialogue going on between two or more individuals (Atkinson, 1984; Masters & Sullivan, 1989). Instead of solely focusing on the topical content of the journalist’s question, analysis of the question structure is considered. Focusing on the structure and design of questions controls for content that may be influenced by the political climate or scandals of the time (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). In this study, President Donald Trump’s joint press conference activity was analyzed. Primary data came from a systematic sample of joint press conferences between Trump and foreign leaders during the first 100 days of President Trump’s presidency.

*Microanalysis* is defined as the study of the fine details in “social interactions through analysis of film, audiotape and videotape recordings” (Bull, 2012, p. 79). Microanalysis research has been conducted broadcast interviews, political speeches, and press conferences (Bull, 2012). Because of the originality of this study, a small sample was chosen to conduct microanalysis in



order to understand the norms and interactions during joint press conferences. Working with conversation analysis as a theoretical basis, this study is less concerned with generalizable results and more concerned with assess instances and frequencies of interactions within these cases.

### **Dataset**

Due to the microanalytic nature of this study, the selection of joint press conferences from the beginning of President Trump’s presidency is limited with care taken in selecting conferences that had a range of political figures with varying degrees and types of interpersonal relationships. Two female and two male political leaders were chosen; of those four political leaders, two are considered politically “conservative” and two are considered politically “liberal” – Prime Minister Theresa May of the United Kingdom and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel; Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, respectively.

Within CA, emphasis is made on being able to document practices and single case studies. From these interactions assumptions can be made about larger groups of interactions and build up to larger studies (Clayman & Heritage, 2011). In this way, a smaller sample size is allowable in this study. Ultimately, being a pilot study for larger endeavors in the future, the main concern of this study is to take a deeper, microanalytic look at current instances of joint press conference to further understand the environment and practice original application of two content analytic frameworks.

**Table 2.** Dataset

Date	Countries	Political Leader	Journalists	Organization
January 27, 2017	U.S. & U.K.	President Trump	Steve Holland	Reuters
			John Roberts	FOX News
		Prime Minister May	Laura Kuenssberg	BBC
			Tom Newton Dunn	The Sun
February 13, 2017	U.S. & Israel	President Trump	David Brody	CBN
			Katie Pavlich	Townhall.com
		Prime Minister Netanyahu	Udi Segal	Channel 2 of Israel
			Moav Vardi	Channel 10 of Israel
February 15, 2017	U.S. & Canada	President Trump	Scott Thurman	ABC News
			Kaitlan Collins	The Daily Caller
		Prime Minister Trudeau	Tonda McCharles	Toronto Star
			Richard Latendresse	TVA Nouvelles
March 17, 2017	U.S. & Germany	President Trump	Mark Halperin	MSNBC News
			Kevin Cirilli	Bloomberg News
		Chancellor Merkel	Kristina Dunz	German News Agency
			Ansgar Graw	The World

All countries represented have a degree of press freedom; Israel being the only exception with Freedom House’s Press Freedom Index listing the country as having a “partially free” press (Freedom House, 2017). The democratic tradition of a free press is important to this study because of the norms the journalists are representing in these press conferences. A journalist from more authoritarian governmental structures could operate under different news norms in press conferences and have an agenda outside of the “watchdog” reporting of journalists in democratic societies.

## **Codebook**

One of the most important aspects of valid and reliable content analysis is establishing standard definitions. Without definitions of content and rhetorical devices, it is difficult to find consistent results. A codebook with variable definitions was created before conducting the microanalysis (Appendix). This study used a combination of measures from the Question Analysis System by Clayman and Heritage (2007) for definitions and examples of journalistic aggression within joint press conference questioning. Bull and Mayer's (1993) Political Equivocation Typology was used to analyze political leader responses in the joint press conferences.

Following the specific coding approach was outlined and followed by all coders. Several steps were taken in analyzing the data for this study. The first step was purchasing and downloading all joint press conferences from the CSPAN archives (<https://www.c-span.org/organization/?4031/Archives>). Additionally, transcripts of the question and answer portion of the joint press conferences were downloaded and checked for accuracy. Transcripts were taken from [www.cspan.org](http://www.cspan.org) and then cross-referenced with transcripts from NPR's press conference analysis series as well as White House press briefing transcripts.

For the content analysis, transcripts were compiled and analyzed in Microsoft Word. The coder made notes and comments regarding process, coding for the different journalistic aggression dimensions and political equivocation categories laid out in the codebook. After coding the text, data was compiled into a .CSV document to use for data visualization and further analysis.

Before coding began on the current study, the codebook was applied to a dataset from Foster and Stewart (2011); the researches took the broadcast interview between Armstrong and

Winfrey and looked for observational data, including nonverbal behavior, to further explain Armstrong's answer to questions posed by Winfrey. Applying the current coding scheme to this broadcast interview allowed for testing of the codebook and a further understanding of turn-taking interactions.

The main considerations taken away from the application of the codebook to the Armstrong-Oprah study concerned turns-at-talk and coding procedure. The researcher exchanged correspondence with Steven Clayman for assistance with identifying follow-up questions and their importance in the current study. At times in communication environments such as broadcast interviews and press conferences, it is difficult to understand when a turn has finished for one individual and another has started. By working with this initial study, coding on turns-at-talk was a guide and more easily understood in joint press conferences after coding the Armstrong-Winfrey interview.

### **Intercoder Reliability**

Analysis of thematic content categories is highly interpretive (Krippendorff, 1980), and while analysis of question structure and design is more concrete, inter-coder reliability (ICR) is used to validate the results of this coding approach. Alexandra Johnson, secondary coder for this research project, was an undergraduate student in the Department of Political Science at the University of Arkansas for the duration of this study. Johnson will pursue graduate studies at the University of Arkansas in political science in August 2018, potentially carrying on this study with a nonverbal analysis. Johnson specializes in political psychology, political campaigns, and political communication.

The secondary coder analyzed all press conferences due to the small sample size, and both coders reached agreement in coding decisions. After initial analysis, agreement was

assessed, and mediation sessions were used in the case of definition disagreement in the codebook or coding correction between the two coders.

An initial meeting and two mediation sessions were held between coders. The two mediation sessions covered one press conference in the first session and the remaining three in the following session. Instead of coding for only a portion of the press conferences like in Clayman and Heritage (2004, 2007) studies, secondary coding was conducted on the entire data set. Initial agreement was at 68.75% for Clayman and Heritage's framework and 60.6% for Bull and Mayer's typologies. After the second mediation, complete agreement was reached on all joint press conferences.

Initially, main areas of disagreement concerned the scoring of the directness dimension (46.15%) and definition disagreement between the assertiveness (30.77%) and adversarialness (25%) dimensions within the Question Analysis System; likewise, the definitions of intermediate (40%) and non-replies (44.3%) within the Political Equivocation Typology caused confusion between coders. Initially, the scoring of the directness dimension caused issues between coders based on the degree of directness. While clearly stated in the Question Analysis System, applying the scoring proved to be difficult in the beginning due to the nature of the dimension measuring indirectness as opposed to directness overall. Coming to agreement on the scoring of the directness dimension was easily cleared up after mediation. Definition disagreement between the assertiveness and adversarial dimension took more mediation between coders to reach agreement.

Definition disagreement between intermediate replies and non-replies was easily cleared up after mediation and a discussion of the codebook; initial low levels of agree, though, resulted because of the confines of the typology. While types of political leader responses are clearly

defined in Bull and Mayer's typology, political leaders do at times respond to questions with multiple types of responses as opposed to just one type of response. The Political Equivocation Typology does not allow for coding of multiple responses depending on the number of questions asked by journalists or question type. Within the framework, political leaders are coded for a specific typology based on speaking turn only, instead of breaking the answer down into varying response types. Coders were able to reach agreement after the second mediation session, but this discrepancy in the typology accounts for the lower rate of initial agreement in the data set for Bull and Mayer's typology (60.6%). For further study, amendments to the original typology could be made to anticipate this issue; additionally, allowing coders to account for varying combinations of responses and multiple subcategories in political leaders' answers would provide a more robust understanding of political equivocation and the factors that provoke it from politicians.

## **Journalistic Aggressiveness**

Arguably, the art of questioning is at the core of journalists' communication skills (Manheim, 1979). A skilled practitioner of journalistic questioning is not only concerned with what questions to ask but also how to ask them. Since the 1950s, scholars of press-presidential relations concluded that journalists have become increasingly independent, direct, and aggressive towards political figures (Entman, 2003; Patterson, 1993; Sabato, 1991). Additionally, scholars have determined that understanding question design via conversation analysis provides a systematically comparative and historically significant way to study journalistic norms (Clayman, 1988, 1992, 2002; Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Heritage, 2002; Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991; Heritage & Roth, 1995; Roth, 1994). This chapter seeks to address the first research question (*RQ1*) – How does journalistic questioning differ from U.S. to foreign journalists in U.S. joint press conferences?

### **Question Analysis System**

Clayman and Heritage (2002) are attributed with creating the first framework to measure journalistic norms. The question analysis system measures journalistic aggressiveness, which shows up in the “details of linguistic and discursive behavior ... that exert varying degrees of pressure and constraint on politicians” (Clayman, Elliott, Heritage, & McDonald, 2007, p. 536). Applying the system to press conferences from President Eisenhower and President Reagan, Clayman and Heritage found journalists were less deferential and more aggressive toward U.S. presidents over time (2002). While there was evidence of an increasing evolutionary process of journalistic aggressiveness, the researchers asserted that high levels of aggressiveness did not provide evidence of biased and politically driven journalists. Instead, this increased aggressiveness suggested journalists became more comfortable and practiced at pressing

politician on “problematic or unflattering” issues in a public setting (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 771).

*Journalistic aggressiveness* is broadly conceptualized as questioning from journalists that lacks deference and takes great enterprise in pursuing answers from the political leaders through different aspects of question design. Instead of only focusing on the content of the questions, Clayman and Heritage (2002), Clayman, Elliot, Heritage, and McDonald (2004, 2007), and Clayman, Elliott, Heritage, and Beckett (2010, 2012) focused on defining and measuring different question designs to rate questioning on dimensions of journalistic aggressiveness: initiative, directness, assertiveness, adversarialness, and accountability. This question analysis system takes the field of interaction and turn-taking studies closer to a deeper understanding of the dynamic press-politician relationship.

**WH versus Yes/No Questions.** Clayman and Heritage (2002) make a distinction between questions asking for “who, what, where, when, and how” (*WH questions*) responses and questions asking for a “yes or no” (*Y/N questions*) response. Based on question framing, Y/N questions are set up for more aggressive questioning because political leaders could be forced to disagree with underlying implications in question. In this way, Y/N questions have a greater potential to be aggressive in nature. WH questions are inherently easier for a politician to respond to because this type of question lacks an affirmative or negative response (Bull, 2009). Additionally, Y/N and WH questions can be joined into Combination questions, where a journalist asks for both types of answers to a question, further complicating the politicians answer. Combination questions also have a greater potential for journalistic aggression.

**Initiative.** One aspect of aggressiveness from journalists comes in the amount of *initiative* taken to craft the question. Journalists that show initiative produce questions with “a



more enterprising role, building their questions in such a way to set a more independent and constraining agenda for response” (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 754). By creating elaborate prefatory statements and multiple questions, journalists attempt to shake the politician from any statement they may have prepared for the press conference. Rhetorical indicators of varying degrees of initiative are *question complexity*, *question cascades*, and *follow-up questions*.

*Question complexity* involves a journalist using prefatory or introductory statements to provide context or other important information for the question posed. Journalists may provide specific pieces of background information to set up the question and establish context. Additionally, journalists may quote other political leaders, critiques, or breaking news facts to build up the coming question. This complexity makes it harder for the politician to answer the question by introducing additional facts for a politician to either validate or discredit before answering a question. If a journalist poses a question that is too complex, a politician may have difficulty in deciding what part of the question to answer first, making it even more difficult to answer (Clayman, 1993, p. 165). Clayman points out that although this background information presented by journalists might be helpful to give context to the question being asked, prefatory statements might very well presuppose a politically damaging point for the politician (Clayman, 1993, p. 168). In this way, journalists can aggressively use facts to push a specific agenda via the initiative dimension of question design.

An example of this occurred during a press conference between President Trump and Chancellor Merkel as U.S. journalist Mark Halperin of *MSNBC News* used a prefatory statement to his question regarding the U.S. president’s healthcare policy expectations:

1 Mr. President, thank you. There are a lot of Americans who have anxiety now like  
 2 they did eight years ago as the government debates what to do about healthcare.  
 3 I'm wondering if you can tell people what your bottom lines are, what's non-  
 4 negotiable? You've talked in the past saying no one should be denied health  
 5 insurance if they can't afford it. You've talked about no cuts to Medicaid and  
 6 Medicare. Are those your bottom lines and would you veto legislation that  
 7 violated those? (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-German relations*)

In the first line of his questioning, Halperin begins with a prefatory statement followed by various questions for President Trump about his interaction with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Question complexity is introduced in beginning of the question with the combination of the questions and the prefatory statement.

*Question cascades* occur when a journalist follows one question with another, and sometimes a third, that are essentially asking different versions of the same question (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 757). Multiple questions require a political leader to process more information and address several different points from the journalist. Journalists will at times combine question complexity with a question cascade to put even more pressure on the political leader. Because of the constraint on their questioning structure, journalists are more likely to layer on multiple statements and question components within one turn (Clayman, 1993).

Udi Segal, a journalist from *Channel 2* of Israel, uses a question cascade in his questioning of President Trump during a joint press conference between the U.S. and Israel:

1 Thank you very much. Mr. President, in your vision for the new Middle East  
 2 peace, are you ready to give up the notion of two-state solution that was adopted  
 3 by previous administration? And will you be willing to hear different ideas from  
 4 the Prime Minister, as some of his partners are asking him to do, for example,  
 5 annexation of parts of the West Bank and unrestricted settlement constructions?  
 6 And one more question: Are you going to fulfill your promise to move the U.S.  
 7 embassy in Israel to Jerusalem? And if so, when? (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-Israeli relations*)

Segal began his question cascade in line 1 without any preceding statement besides thanking the president. Four separate questions are posed to President Trump, putting significant pressure on him to decide what question to answer first.

A third way journalists take initiative in questioning is by posing *follow-up questions*. If a journalist is displeased with the way the political leader responds to a prior question and senses evasion, the journalist will take back control of the turn-taking process of the press conferences in order to clarify a statement by the political leader or question the statement given (Clayman, 1993; Heritage & Greatbatch, 1999). During the politician's answer, the journalist focuses on the core of their questioning and assess whether the political leader has actually given an answer to their query. If not, a follow-up question is perhaps not far behind.

A journalist might use this verbal interaction tactic either before or after the politician is finished answering. Clayman in his 1993 study of the 1988 U.S presidential debates found that while journalists would follow-up after a politician was finished with their answer, there were times where journalists could ascertain evasion within the politician's response before it was finished and either interrupt the politician or follow-up with a question specifically about the equivocal answer. Journalists do risk their own public image by coming off as rude or overly aggressive when cutting politicians off; however, if the evasive rhetorical tactics are deemed serious enough the interruption might be considered warranted by the journalist (Greatbatch, 1988).

In joint press conference, as discussed in Chapter I, follow-up questions are not the norm and are therefore very uncommon (Clayman, 1993). Follow-up questions are discouraged in the institutional norms of joint press conferences, so a journalist who stops the forward motion of the event for another question would be taking great initiative in questioning the political leader

(Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 757). This questioning tactic is certainly more common in interactions where journalists control the flow of the turn taking as opposed to communication events where the politician is in control like press conferences.

An example of a follow-up question comes again from the U.S. and German joint press conferences from Halperin of *MSNBC* initiating one of the only follow-up questions observed in the data set: “May I ask what’s non-negotiable for you, Mr. President?” (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-British relations*). Halperin, not satisfied with the president’s response, followed-up with another question to clarify Trump’s ambiguous and evasive answer. Halperin did so by holding President Trump accountable to the main question posed on lifting sanctions for Russia. While this question does lack in other dimensions of aggressiveness, Halperin took great initiative in his questioning of the president. By asking the president several questions in succession, it provides more hurdles for the president to rhetorically work around when answering.

**Directness.** In the study of turn-taking behavior, establishing how direct or indirect a mode of expression is leads to a deeper understanding of relationship dynamics (Clark & Schunk, 1980; Levinson, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Indirect questioning is a device of polite speech and “reduces the magnitude or forcefulness of the imposition” by the journalist (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 759). When posing a question, a journalist must decide upon the degree of frankness in their questioning. Instead of asking a question of the political leader, a journalist might want to soften the forcefulness of the question by asking for permission or gauging the willingness of the politician to answer the question (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 759). According to the journalistic aggression framework, understanding directness involves measuring the indirectness of questioning. The indicators of *directness* are *other-referencing* and *self-referencing frames*.

*Other-referencing questions* use phrases such as “can you,” and “could you,” which gauge the political leaders ability to answer the question, leaving them with the option of saying no. Additionally, the journalist could use phrases like “will you,” or “would you” which give the political figure a way to verbally sidestep the question by saying they are not currently willing to answer the question (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 760).

Many times, journalists will use an indirect question structure to lessen the aggression of their question, so it is commonly combined with other dimensions of aggressiveness. Katie Pavlich of *Townhall.com* in the United States used an other-referencing frame when posing a question to President Trump during a press conference between the U.S. president and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel:

- 1 Thank you, Mr. President. You said in your earlier remarks that both sides
- 2 will have to make compromises when it comes to a peace deal. You've
- 3 mentioned a halt on settlements. Can you lay out a few more specific
- 4 compromises that you have in mind, both for the Israelis and for the
- 5 Palestinians? (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-Israeli relations*)

Pavlich asks if the president “can” give specifics on potential compromises he foresees in a peace deal between Israel and Palestine (Line 3-5). As previously discussed, this phrasing allows the political leader to give an insufficient answer to the question posed merely based on the fact that they “cannot” answer the question currently. The question would be more aggressive if Pavlich had asked the president to give specifics on compromises without the use of an other-referencing frame.

*Self-referencing questions*, which reference the journalist themselves, use phrases like “Can I,” “Could I,” or “May I ask” (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 761). A self-referencing frame shows intention to ask a question, but it also asks permission; self-referencing typically

shows a rhetorical submission by the journalist. By using this frame, the journalist diminishes their status of dominance below the politician's in the press conference.

Journalist David Brady of the *Christian Broadcasting Network* uses a self-referencing frame while addressing President Trump in a press conference between the U.S. and Israel:

1 Thank you, Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister. Both of you have criticized the  
 2 Iran nuclear deal, and at times even called for its repeal. I'm wondering if you're  
 3 concerned at all as it relates to not just the National Security Advisor, Michael  
 4 Flynn, who is recently no longer here, but also some of those events that have  
 5 been going on with communication in Russia -- if that is going to hamper this deal  
 6 at all, and whether or not it would keep Iran from becoming a nuclear state? And  
 7 secondly, on the settlement issue, are you both on the same page? How do you  
 8 exactly term that as it relates to the settlement issue? Thank you. (CSPAN, 2017,  
*U.S.-Israeli relations*)

The deference in this question is obvious, particularly with the coupling of polite speech with the beginning (Line 1) and the ending "thank you" (Line 8). Brady uses the phrase "I'm wondering" (Line 2) to preface his question to Trump. These indirect frames were prevalent in early press conferences interactions (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Clayman, Elliott, Heritage, Beckett, 2010, 2012). These frames are now not typical because of the leveling of the power dynamic between political leaders and journalists.

While there is a rhetorical distinction between the two different kinds of indirect speech, the result of such structure might not be the most "polite" question. Some critics suggest there is a significant difference between indirectness and politeness (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Clark & Schunk, 1980; Van der Wijst, 1995). Studies found, though, while there was a perception of greater politeness with inherently "polite" speech over indirect speech, specific indirect verbal cues resulted from a deferential attitude from the speaker.

**Assertiveness.** In their questioning, journalists may also attempt to assert facts or statements they deem important without asking for confirmation from the political leader.

Assertive questioning “invites a particular answer [by the political leader] and are in that sense opinionated rather than neutral” (Clayman, Elliott, Heritage, & McDonald, 2006). Journalists assert specific facts and make assumptions foundational to the question, forcing the politician to interact with assertions they may disagree with in order to answer the question. For this measure, Clayman and Heritage focus questions with a Yes/No question structures combined with an introductory statement as opposed to a WH question because of the effect the prefatory statement has on the politician’s answer (Clayman, Elliot, Heritage, & McDonald, 2010; Heritage, 2002). Preface tilt and negatively formulated questions are indicators of assertive questioning.

*Preface tilt* refers to a prefatory statement slanting in the opposite direction of the political leader’s interests (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 763). *Negatively formulated questions* begin with a phrase such as “Isn’t it,” “Aren’t you,” or “Don’t you think,” which rhetorically push the political leader to answer with a response that would undermine their interests (Pomerantz, 1988).

Assertive prefatory statements appear in journalistic questioning even in joint press conferences. One example of an assertive prefatory statement is found in a question from Kaitlan Collins from the *Daily Caller* in the United States posed to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada. Here Collins questions Prime Minister Trudeau’s opinion on one aspect of President Trump’s immigration policy:

- 1 And, Prime Minister Trudeau, you've made very clear that Canada has an
- 2 open-door policy for Syrian refugees. Do you believe that President
- 3 Trump’s moratorium on immigration has merit on national security
- 4 grounds? (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-Canadian relations*)

Here, Collins uses a prefatory statement to frame a Yes/No question for Prime Minister Trudeau. She puts the Canadian leader in a difficult situation; she has reminded him of his previous

statements on immigration and the refugee crisis, which align closely with values he has touted throughout his political career. This statement, though, is in opposition to President Trump's position on the refugee crisis and force the Prime Minister to either correct the reporter's prefatory statement or correct President Trump, neither of which are good rhetorical options for the political stage Trudeau is on. The question could have been stated without the prefatory statement, but with the reporter setting the question up with a particular tilt, it makes the question significantly more aggressive than a question without a preface statement.

An example of a negative question comes from Kristina Dunz of the *German News Agency* with her question for President Trump during the U.S. and German joint press conference:

- 1 And then, Mr. President, America First -- don't you think that this is going to
- 2 weaken also the European Union? And why are you so scared of diversity? In the
- 3 news and in the media, you speak so awful of fake news and that things, also,
- 4 cannot be proven. For example, the fact that you have been wiretapped by Mr.
- 5 Obama. (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-German relations*)

Even without accounting for other dimensions of aggressiveness in Dunz's question, the initial framing of the question in a grammatically negative way rhetorically sets the U.S. president up for a question he will have to say "no" to. By forcing a politician to disagree with a fact stated in a question, the journalists are placing more pressure on the politician even outside of the negative connotations of their question content.

**Adversarialness.** Adversarial questioning by journalists describes questions that pursue "an agenda in opposition" to the political leader's administration and looks at the question content (Clayman, Elliot, Heritage, & McDonald, 2006, p. 568). Adversarial question indicators are adversarial prefaces and global adversarialness. *Adversarial prefaces* assume a fact not verified by the politician in the question; the fact assumed goes directly against either something



a political leader has stated or their explicit interests (Clayman, Elliot, Heritage, & McDonald, 2006, p. 568). *Global adversarialness* applies to the entire question design; these questions would have “oppositional or critical posture” running throughout the question (Clayman, Elliot, Heritage, & McDonald, 2006, p. 568-69).

The excerpt, again from Kristina Dunz, shows not only negative questioning but also the use of global adversarialness in a question directed towards President Trump:

- 1 And then, Mr. President, America First -- don't you think that this is going
- 2 to weaken also the European Union? And why are you so scared of
- 3 diversity? In the news and in the media, you speak so awful of fake news
- 4 and that things, also, cannot be proven. For example, the fact that you
- 5 have been wiretapped by Mr. Obama. (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-German relations*)

Dunz does not begin her question with a prefatory statement here, instead using a negative question structure with a “don’t” to set the initial tone of the question (Line 1). Typically, when a journalist poses an adversarial question one of the previous mentioned dimension of aggression are present, which is clearly seen in this question. Dunz’s question has a globally adversarial structure even without a prefatory statement (Line 2). Each question she poses directly attacks the president’s narrative in his statements in the beginning of the press conference. Dunz finishes her question with a non-interrogative question cascade referring the President Trump’s statements about the news media and the actuality of facts (Line 3-5). From looking at the question structure and content, it is clear Dunz’s question was designed to present adversarial facts and critically question the president.

Journalist Richard Latendresse of *TVA Nouvelles* uses an adversarial preface in his questioning of President Trump during a joint press conference between the U.S. and Canada:

1 Mr. President, again, during the last three months, you have denounced NAFTA.  
 2 You have talked over and over about the Mexican portion of the agreement, very  
 3 little about the Canadian one. My question is in two short part is, is Canada a fair  
 4 trader? And when you talk about changes to NAFTA concerning Canada, are you  
 5 talking about big changes or small changes? Thank you. (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-  
 Canadian relations*)

Latendresse reminds President Trump of statements he has made in the past, but also points out a negative part of his rhetoric and policy framing on NAFTA. While the president spent the majority of his time speaking about the pitfalls of NAFTA based off of trade with Mexico, NAFTA also affects trade relations between Canada and the United States. Latendresse sets up his following questions with Trump's negative statements on NAFTA and lack of focus on Canada, putting the U.S. president in a difficult diplomatic situation, standing next to the Canadian prime minister.

**Accountability.** When a journalist asks for a politician to provide an explanation or account of their actions, the implication is that the politician has done something worthy of correcting (Heritage, 1988; Scott & Lyman, 1968). In using the accountability dimension, journalist will ask a politician to explain their actions or policy decisions.

*Accountability questions* involve asking the political leader to take responsibility for some action or position that is negatively correlated to their own stated position or interest. Questions with high levels of accountability would involve phrases like "Why would you" and "How could you" (Clayman, Elliot, Heritage, & McDonald, 2006, p. 569). Specifically, "How could you" lines of questioning are more aggressive in their accounting for improper actions (Heritage, 1988).

During a joint press conference between President Trump and President Netanyahu, journalist Moav Vardi of *Channel 10 News of Israel* posed an accountability question to

President Trump in which he questioned the president's responsiveness to the U.S. Jewish community for statements made during the campaign:

- 1 Mr. President, since your election campaign and even after your victory,
- 2 we've seen a sharp rise in anti-Semitic incidents across the United States.
- 3 And I wonder what you say to those among the Jewish community in the
- 4 States, and in Israel, and maybe around the world who believe and feel
- 5 that your administration is playing with xenophobia and maybe racist
- 6 tones? (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-Israeli relations*)

In this question, Vardi used an indirect question structure with a self-referencing frame to ask the president his question, most likely to soften the accountability element and content of the question (Line 3). This variant of an accountability question shows up several times in the four joint press conferences analyzed. Instead of the typical accountability question phrasing, journalists ask for a statement from the political leader that takes responsibility for something she/he said or she/he did to a group of people who were affected by the statements or actions. Here, Vardi asks President Trump to not only address the anti-Semitic criticisms against him, but also asks him to give a statement on his actions (Line 3-6). Clayman and Heritage do not specifically address this type of accountability questions, but these types of questions were coded for accountability in this study due to the multiple appearances of the phrasing and structure in the questions.

## **Results**

In each of the four joint press conferences conducted, President Trump and the other respective political leaders taking part took four questions each from the press; in total, 33 questions were posed to political leaders. Journalists were separated into two groups – U.S. journalists and foreign journalists. Each group of journalists posed questions to political leaders, meaning President Trump received 8 questions from U.S. journalists and 9 questions from

foreign journalists; foreign heads of state received 8 questions from U.S. journalists and 8 questions from foreign journalists.

**Table 3.** Frequency of aggression dimensions by U.S. and foreign journalists

<i>Journalists</i>	<i>Dimension</i>	<i>N*</i>
U.S. journalists	Initiative	8
	Directness	9
	Assertiveness	6
	Adversarialness	4
	Accountability	2
Foreign journalists	Initiative	9
	Directness	4
	Assertiveness	7
	Adversarialness	8
	Accountability	5

\**N* represents the number of instances of each dimension in the dataset. Some questions may have multiple dimensions of aggression, which is not indicative of this table.

### **U.S. & U.K. Joint Press Conference – January 27, 2017**

President Donald Trump’s first joint press conference of his presidency was with Prime Minister Theresa May of the United Kingdom. The press conference was important for several diplomatic reasons; not only was it the first time President Trump would be seen in his presidential role with another political leader, but it also came right after the British people had voted to leave the European Union (EU) via Brexit. Severing economic ties with the EU, the United Kingdom needed to keep an open and optimistic trade relationship with the United States to securely reenter the global economy independent of any European partners. Prime Minister May consistently responded to questions about her relationship with President Trump by calling it a “special relationship”, making a concerted effort to portray a strong relationship between the

two countries. Trump, in turn, consistently complimented May and the praised the U.K.'s move away from the EU.

May fielded questions from reporters about Trump's "brash" behavior and questions of his ability to compromise on international issues. One U.K. journalists asked May if Trump seemed willing to "listen" to her on controversial topics. Journalists also asked May's opinion on Trump's comments on Russian sanctions and the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-British relations*). Journalists questioned Trump on topics relating directly to himself, asking about his "controversial" views and his relationship and perception of Russia and Mexico. Clearly, journalists were very concerned with questioning President Trump and gauging Prime Minister May's opinion of the new U.S. president.

The U.S. and U.K. joint press conference consisted of twelve speaking turns total. Three journalists, two U.S. and one U.K., posed two questions each within their turn. One U.K. journalists posed one question to President Trump and another question to both President Trump and Prime Minister May within their turn. Splitting the combination question into two separate questions resulted in nine questions in the joint press conference (U.S. journalists –  $N=4$ ; U.K. journalists –  $N=5$ ); President Trump gave one response for both questions. President Trump and Prime Minister May had a turn for each question (Trump –  $N=5$ ; May –  $N=4$ ) that were given in response to journalists' questions, resulting in nine responses in the joint press conference. President Trump received two WH questions from U.S. journalists and two from U.K. journalists. The president also received one Yes/No question from a U.K. journalist. Prime Minister May received two Yes/No questions from U.S. journalists, a Yes/No question from a U.K. journalist, and one Combination question from a U.K. journalist.

There were three instances of *initiative* in questioning (37.5%) during the U.S. and U.K. joint press conference. Prime Minister May received one question with evidence of initiative, from a U.K. journalist. President Trump received two questions with evidence of initiative, both coming from U.S. based journalists. On the other hand, four questions did not show evidence of initiative. All questions with evidence of initiative combined question complexity and question cascades to meet the aggression threshold ( $N=3$ ; U.S. – 2; U.K. – 1).

The directness dimension, which measures indirectness, was present in three questions (37.5%). One U.S. reporter used a self-referencing frame with President Trump. Prime Minister May received two questions with indirect frames – one question with a self-referencing frame, and one question with an other-referencing frame.

Only two questions showed evidence of assertiveness (25%). Both questions used assertive preface tilts; there were no negative questions. The question posed by a U.K. journalist to both President Trump and Prime Minister May used a preface tilt, and Prime Minister May also received a tilted question from a U.K. journalist.

Two questions (12.5%) showed evidence of adversarialness and were both posed to President Trump. Both questions were globally adversarial in nature and posed by U.K. journalists. Prime Minister May did not receive any questions with an adversarial dimension.

Three questions (37.5%) showed evidence of accountability and were all posed to President Trump. A U.S. journalist posed one question to President Trump, while two U.K. journalists posed accountability questions to the U.S. president.

### **U.S. & Canadian Joint Press Conference – February 13, 2017**

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and President Trump met at the White House during Trudeau's visit to the U.S. While Trump had made positive comments about Trudeau and their

relationship prior to the scheduled diplomatic meeting, the media narrative prior to the press conference was skeptical of the two leaders ability to agree. Trudeau had been on a national campaign in Canada in support of accepting Syrian refugees, while Trump touted large scale changes to immigration policy and a travel ban on several countries from the Middle East, specifically affecting Syria and its refugees. Even with these differing views, both leaders represented a strong and long relationship between the two neighboring countries.

Journalists in the joint press conference focus on points of contentions between the two leaders – refugee resettlement, NAFTA, and the leader’s differing political ideologies. Journalists specifically questioned President Trump on his faith in border security between Canada and the U.S. and his view of Canada as a trade partner. Prime Minister Trudeau was reminded by journalists of the concerns of Canadians concerning NAFTA and Trump’s immigration policy (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-Canadian relations*). President Trump made several efforts to point to the long-held relationship between the U.S. and Canada, but spent more time defending his immigration policies, while not commenting on Canada’s acceptance of refugees. Trudeau spent the majority of his time responding to journalists’ questions reassuring Canadian’s that his stance on key areas such as refugee resettlement had not changed after conversations with President Trump, but also that his and the U.S. president’s relationship remained healthy and open.

The U.S. and Canadian joint press conference consisted of twelve speaking turns total. Of those turns, journalists had four turns with two questions per turn (U.S. journalists –  $N=4$ ; Canadian journalists –  $N=4$ ), resulting in eight questions in the joint press conference. President Trump and Prime Minister Trudeau had four turns each (Trump –  $N=4$ ; Trudeau –  $N=4$ ) that were given in response to journalists’ questions, resulting in eight responses in the joint press

conference. President Trump received two WH questions from U.S. journalists, one Yes/No question from a Canadian journalist and one Combination question from a Canadian journalist. Prime Minister Trudeau received two WH questions, one from a U.S. journalist and one from a Canadian journalist, and two Yes/No questions, one from a U.S. journalist and one from a Canadian journalist.

There were four instances of initiative in questioning (50%) during the U.S. and Canadian joint press conference. One U.S. journalist used initiative in questioning President Trump and did not use initiative when questioning Prime Minister Trudeau. Two Canadian journalists used initiative when questioning President Trump and asked one question with initiative when questioning Prime Minister Trudeau. However, four questions did not show evidence of initiative. All questions with evidence of initiative combined question complexity and question cascades to meet the initiative indicator threshold ( $N=4$ ; U.S. – 1; Canadian – 3).

Journalists posed three questions (37.5%) with evidence of the directness dimension to President Trump and Prime Minister Trudeau. All questions used self-referencing frames. President Trump received one question from a U.S. journalist, and one question from a Canadian journalist. Prime Minister Trudeau received one indirect question from a Canadian journalist.

Journalists posed four questions (50%) with evidence of assertiveness. No negative questions were present, instead journalists used preface tilts in their Yes/No questions. President Trump received both of his assertive questions from Canadian journalists. Prime Minister Trudeau received two assertive questions; one question was posed by a U.S. journalist, and one question was posed by a Canadian journalist.

Three questions (37.5%) showed evidence of adversarialness. All adversarial questions were posed by Canadian journalists using an adversarial preface. No questions showed evidence



of global adversarialness. One question was posed to President Trump, and two questions were posed to Prime Minister Trudeau. No questions showed evidence of accountability from any journalists toward either political leader.

### **U.S. & Israeli Joint Press Conference – February 15, 2017**

The main topic of conversation between President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu during the press conference surrounded the issue of settlements, a two-state option in Israel for Palestinian refugees, and the Iran nuclear deal. President Trump spent much of his time reassuring the public of coming peace deals with Netanyahu, while the Israeli prime minister stayed close to prepared statements on the settlement and two-state issue putting the onus of peace on Palestinian refugees (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-Israeli relations*). Journalists also questioned President Trump about a rise in anti-Semitic discrimination in the U.S. after his election. Netanyahu continually supported President Trump and attacked negative questions from reporters referring to the president's demeanor and rhetoric.

The U.S. and Israel joint press conference consisted of twelve speaking turns total. Of those turns, journalists had four turns with two questions per turn (U.S. journalists –  $N=4$ ; Israeli journalists –  $N=4$ ), resulting in eight questions in the joint press conference. President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu had four turns each (Trump –  $N=4$ ; Netanyahu –  $N=4$ ) that were given in response to journalists' questions, resulting in eight responses in the joint press conference. President Trump received two WH questions, one from a U.S. journalist and one from an Israeli journalist; Trump also received two Combination questions from U.S. journalists and one from an Israeli journalist. Prime Minister Netanyahu received two Yes/No questions from Israeli journalists, one WH question from a U.S. journalist, and one Combination question from a U.S. journalist.

There were two instances of initiative in questioning (25%) during the U.S. and Israeli joint press conference. One U.S. journalist used initiative in questioning President Trump, and one U.S. journalist used initiative in questioning Netanyahu. Israeli journalists did not use any initiative when questioning the two politicians. Six questions did not show evidence of initiative. All questions with evidence of initiative combined question complexity and question cascades to meet the initiative indicator threshold ( $N=2$ ; U.S. - 2; Israeli - 0).

Four questions (50%) showed evidence of indirect framing. President Trump received two questions with indirect framing evidence; both questions were posed by U.S. journalists, one with a self-referencing frame, and one with an other-referencing frame. Prime Minister Netanyahu also received two questions with indirect framing. Both questions used self-referencing frames and were posed by a U.S. journalist and an Israeli journalist, respectively.

President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu both received one question each with an assertive dimension (25%). Both questions had preface tilt and were posed by U.S. journalists. Only one question (12.5%) showed evidence of adversarialness with an Israeli journalist posing a globally adversarial question to President Trump. Additionally, President Trump received one accountability question (12.5%); the question was posed by an Israeli journalist.

### **U.S. & German Joint Press Conference – March 17, 2017**

Due to President Trump's comments about the E.U. and U.S. trading relationship, the expectations for a joint press conference between Trump and Chancellor Merkel was that the two leaders would focus on their ability to negotiate a trade deal. Journalists asked President Trump about some domestic issues (healthcare and the unity of the Republican party), as well as his "America First" foreign policy and provocative Twitter habits (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-German relations*). Chancellor Merkel took questions from journalists that centered around her opinion

on Trump's presidential leader style, the U.S.'s "isolationist" foreign policy, and her attitude toward a trade deal with the U.S. outside of the T-TIP with the E.U. (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-German relations*). President Trump attempted to build upon his relationship with Merkel but spent the majority of his response time countering statements from journalists and touting specific policy positions. Merkel took to speaking about the German people's wants and needs, and defended the position of the E.U.

The U.S. and German joint press conference consisted of twelve speaking turns total. Of those turns, journalists had four turns with two questions per turn (U.S. journalists –  $N=4$ ; German journalists –  $N=4$ ), resulting in eight questions in the joint press conference. President Trump and Chancellor Merkel had four turns each (Trump –  $N=4$ ; Merkel –  $N=4$ ) that were given in response to journalists' questions, resulting in eight responses in the joint press conference. President Trump received two Combination questions from German journalists, one Combination question from a U.S. journalist, and one WH question from a U.S. journalist. Chancellor Merkel received two WH questions, one from a U.S. journalist and one from a German journalist, one Combination question from a U.S. journalist, and one Yes/No question from a German journalist.

There were seven instances of initiative in questioning (87.5%) during the U.S. and German joint press conference. All questions posed to President Trump showed evidence of initiative; both U.S. and German journalists used initiative in their questioning of Trump. Chancellor Merkel received three questions with initiative – one U.S. journalist and two German journalists. Of the questions with evidence of initiative, five question had evidence of question complexity and question cascades and two questions had evidence of question complexity, question cascade, and follow up questions ( $N=7$ ; U.S. – 3; German – 4).

Three questions (37.5%) were posed with evidence of indirectness all with self-referencing frames. President Trump received two indirect questions, one from a U.S. journalist, and one question from a German journalist. Chancellor Merkel received one question from a U.S. journalist.

Five questions (62.5%) posed by journalists showed evidence of assertiveness. Four questions used preface tilts, and one negative question. President Trump received three assertive questions. One question from a U.S. journalist using a preface tilt, and two questions from German journalists – one question used a preface tilt, and the other used a preface tilt and was negatively posed. Chancellor Merkel received two assertive questions – one question from a U.S. journalist and one question from a German journalist.

Two questions (25%) showed evidence of adversarialness. Both questions were posed by German journalists to President Trump and used a combination an adversarial preface and global adversarialness. One question (12.5%) used an adversarial preface, while another used a preface. President Trump received one accountability question (12.5%); the question was posed by a German journalist.

### **Political Equivocation**

If questioning is an essential skill for journalists, politicians must be adept at answering their queries. Political leaders must be skilled at self-presentation when facing any kind of confrontation that could affect their public persona (Bull, 2008), particularly when presenting their policies and issue positions (Iyengar, 2015; Bull, 2008). Broadcast press and politician interactions provide opportunities for politicians to speak directly to a mediated audience (Heritage, 1985; Bull & Mayer, 1993) with the possibility of convincing or influencing them. Mediated political events provide a medium for politicians to explain their “motives, objectives, and policy positions, to justify their activities, and to affect the standards by which citizens evaluate political groups, policies, and issues” (Feldman, Kinoshita, & Bull, 2016).

Fundamentally, politicians use political communication events, such as public appearances, interviews, and press conferences, to persuade the public and promote their political stances. To do so, they must rhetorically navigate questioning by journalists, which at times could threaten their public face (Bull, 2008). Political leaders must persuade an audience who, during joint press conferences, is not in the room by navigating questioning from a press corps they cannot control. Press conferences are beneficial for public leaders because they are able to verbally deliver exactly the message they want their audience to receive without mediation from a journalist.

Due to their power in joint press conferences, a political leader’s response moves the conversation forward, initiating and finishing turns at talk (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). If the journalist is not satisfied with an answer, they may resort to more aggressive questioning to receive information; again, though, follow-up questions are abnormal in joint press conferences, leaving politicians with more power to answer question how they want. Even so, political leaders

typically strive to answer a question as fully and completely as possible, which creates less conflict with journalists.

In order to fully understand the different types of political equivocation, Bull and Mayer created a typology of answer types that could be applied to political leader answers in interviews, debates, and press conferences. Bull and Mayer conducted content analysis of eight televised political interviews during the 1987 British General Election between Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock by categorizing their answers into three categories – replies, intermediate replies, and non-replies. The study showed that both politicians gave proportionately fewer replies than non-replies throughout the interviews (Margaret Thatcher 56%; Neil Kinnock 59%). The dataset included four different interviews where Thatcher and Kinnock each received 94 questions. Bull and Mayer also point out that while both politicians equivocated in response to questions from journalists, there were stylistic differences in their answers.

The study also indicated a need for a spectrum of political leader responses to include intermediate replies, instead of the previous dichotomy between replies and non-replies. Bull and Mayer's study found that while political leaders do have stylistic differences in rhetorical style, politicians use equivocative language when responding to questions they would rather not answer either due to aggressive questioning and self-preservation (Bull & Mayer, 1993; Bull, 2008). Earlier work by Harris (1991) discussed the need for a study on indirect replies from political leaders, stating that these types of responses also show evidence of political equivocation. Bull (1994), after studying political leader replies and non-replies, concluded there are three types of replies politician can give to questioning, and those replies exist on a continuum between complete replies and non-replies, adding intermediate replies to the Political

Leader Typology (Bull & Mayer, 1993). Therefore, this study will use the original typology with the addition of intermediate replies.

While research by Bull and Mayer (1993) and Bull (1994) studied political leader equivocation, no research has been conducted specifically on political leader replies in joint press conference. This chapter strives to fill gaps in existing literature on how politicians in joint press conference cope with journalistic questioning alongside other foreign heads of state. In addition to analyzing journalist's questions for aggressive indicators, this study seeks to connect political leader responses with aggressive journalistic questioning by addressing the second research question ( $RQ_2$ ) – How does different journalistic questioning affect political leader replies?

### **Political Equivocation**

*Political equivocation* is defined as a politician's hesitancy, inability, or unwillingness to completely answer a question (Bull & Mayer, 1993). Bull and Mayer's Political Equivocation Typology is used in this study to understand varying degree of political leader responses and gauge for political equivocation. The typology does not assess truthfulness, instead estimating the completeness of a politician's answer based on the question posed by journalists. Before comparing different response types with questioning by journalists, a clear understanding of replies, intermediate replies, and non-replies is needed. The following definitional explanations were used in the coding of this study and examples of the categories are taken from the press conferences analyzed.

### **Replies**

*Replies* in this study refer to a comprehensive and direct response to all aspects of a question posed by a journalist (Bull & Mayer, 1993). It is in a politician's best interest to answer questions as fully as possible (Bull, 2016), with equivocation in answering questions being costly

for a political leaders' public persona (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Bull, 2008). Replies not only reinforce the political leader's credibility, but this response type also helps to eliminate any contention with journalists present at the press conference (Clayman & Heritage, 2002).

Political leaders do, at times, give replies to a journalist's question. It is in a politician's best interest to answer questions as fully as possible (Bull, 2016). Equivocation in answering questions is costly for a political leaders' public persona because it could raise questions about their credibility or knowledge of a particular subject (Bull, 2008; Bull, 2010); it is therefore not the preferred way to respond to a journalist's question (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Bull, 2008). A *reply* not only reinforces the political leader's credibility but also helps to eliminate any contention with journalists present at the press conference by providing them with direct responses to their queries (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). By giving a *reply*, a political leader seems compliant with the press and honest to the overhearing audience.

*Replies* do not mean a political leader is being truthful; the politician could reply to a posed question with a lie – an untruth or purposeful misdirection of facts. Due to joint press conferences norms, it would be difficult for a journalist to challenge a political leader who completely replied to a posed question with an untruth. Bull and Mayer's equivocation typology (1993) does not gauge for the truthfulness of a political leader's response; instead the framework assesses a political leader's willingness to respond with a complete reply.

In the U.S. and Israeli joint press conference, Prime Minister Netanyahu provided a reply to a question from U.S. journalist Katie Pavlich from *Townhall.com*. Pavlich posed a question to Netanyahu about (1) his expectations of President Trump's administration to amend the Iran nuclear deal and (2) how he and the president will handle Iran's increasing aggression toward Israel. In response, Netanyahu said the following:



1 You asked about Iran. One thing is preventing Iran from getting nuclear  
2 weapons – something that President Trump and I think are deeply  
3 committed to do. And we are obviously going to discuss that. I think,  
4 beyond that, President Trump has led a very important effort in the past  
5 few weeks, just coming into the presidency. He pointed out there are  
6 violations, Iranian violations on ballistic missile tests ... So challenging  
7 Iran on its violations of ballistic missiles, imposing sanctions on  
8 Hezbollah, preventing them, making them pay for the terrorism that they  
9 commit throughout the Middle East and beyond, well beyond – I think  
10 that's a change that is clearly evident since President Trump took office ...  
(CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-Israeli relations*)

Netanyahu responded to Pavlich's first question saying his expectations of the Trump administration concerning Iran is that the U.S. will prevent that country from acquiring nuclear weapons (Line 1-3). Concerning the second question about Iran's increasing aggression toward Israel, Netanyahu lays out how he and President Trump will put pressure on Iran to reduce the expansion of its nuclear program (Line 6-9). In general, Netanyahu projects a positive relationship with Trump throughout his response by going further to say not only what he expects of the president but how Trump has already improved U.S. condemnation of Iran's nuclear activity and promised to change the Iran nuclear deal.

This response by Netanyahu not only answered the question posed, but it also provided a connected and united view of the prime minister and the U.S. president. Both heads of state were there to show their respective publics the relationship between the two countries, and ultimately, the two political leaders. Pavlich's question was an opportunity for Netanyahu to build upon his public relationship with Trump, but it is also a question the prime minister should want to answer completely. Due to the U.S. transition of power and Trump's new tenor for foreign policy, Netanyahu does not want to equivocate the Israeli-U.S. relationship; only a complete reply would suffice.

### Intermediate replies

At times, political leaders respond to only one part of a journalist's question but does not reply to the entirety of the question resulting in *intermediate replies*. Harris (1991) refers to these responses as indirect replies, which "can be placed midway on a scale of evasiveness between direct answers and outright evasion." Intermediate replies show hesitancy by the political leader to answer a certain part of the query. Characteristically, this type of reply enables the political leader to direct attention to a particular point or statement they want to make. By partially answering the question, a political leader's intermediate reply might satisfy a journalist enough for them to not challenge the answer. The politician still risks the journalist taking initiative in following up with a clarification question in retaliation of the incomplete response.

In Bull and Mayer's 1993 study, Thatcher and Kinnock only responded to journalists' questions with intermediate replies 6% and 1%, respectively, making it the answer type used the least by both politicians (Table 4). Bull and Mayer posited this observation could have resulted because of the great hesitancy in answering the types of questions posed by the interviews or because during broadcast interviews a journalist controls the setting and has more power when controlling the turns-at-talk. With the journalist in control of the conversation, they are freely able to ask questions and follow-up without breaking norms of the political communication interaction.

**Table 4.** Responses to questions by Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock

Response type	Margaret Thatcher	Neil Kinnock
Replies	37	39
Intermediate replies	6	1
Non-replies	56	59

Note: All figures represent a percentage of the total number of questions put to each politician in all four interviews; coincidentally, this was 94 in each case (Bull & Mayer, 1993).

Intermediate replies are broken down into three superordinate categories: incomplete answers, implication answers, and interrupted answers. All three superordinate categories have varying subcategories within the typology, but only these three superordinate categories are discussed here.

**Incomplete answers.** An *incomplete answer* occurs when a political leader only responds completely to one part of a question posed (Bull & Mayer, 1993); plainly, a political leader chooses a single part of a journalist's question to address and ignores the rest of the query. Whether to a single question or question cascade (a question technique where a journalist follows one question with several others in succession), this answer type shows initiative on the politician's part to answer specific parts of a question. Although a politician could be answering the part of the question they remember if multiple questions are posed in a turn (Clayman & Heritage, 2002), typically this type of responses indicates hesitancy by the politicians to give a straight-forward answer to a journalist (Bull & Mayer, 1993).

An example of this occurred when President Trump provided an incomplete answer to Israeli journalist Udi Segal of *Channel 2 of Israel* during the Israeli-U.S. joint press conference. Segal posed three questions to Trump, asking him to (1) explain his opinion on a two-state option in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, (2) whether he is open to hearing about other policy options for peace from the Israeli prime minister, and (3) when does the president expects to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem as he said he would. In response, President Trump says:

1 So, I'm looking at two-state and one-state, and I like the one that both  
 2 parties like. I'm very happy with the one that both parties like. I can live  
 3 with either one. I thought for a while the two-state looked like it may be  
 4 the easier of the two. But honestly, if Bibi and if the Palestinians – if Israel  
 5 and the Palestinians are happy, I'm happy with the one they like the best.  
 6 As far as the embassy moving to Jerusalem, I'd love to see that happen.  
 7 We're looking at it very, very strongly. We're looking at it with great care  
 8 – great care, believe me. And we'll see what happens. Okay? (CSPAN, 2017,  
*U.S.-Israeli relations*)

Trump clearly responded to the first question (Line 1-6), as well as the third question (Line 7-9), but neglected to address Segal's second question. Here, it appears Trump believed he answered all of the questions posed, and perhaps forgot to answer the second query. Based on Trump's other responses in the joint press conference, there is no indication that he disagrees with Netanyahu on Israeli-Palestinian foreign policy, so there is a chance that Trump made an error when he did not answer the second question. The possibility of President Trump wanting to keep the focus of the question on a one- or two-state option instead of another option Segal suggested is still likely, though. Political leaders in joint press conferences are highly scripted, so rhetoric can be difficult to analyze based on content alone.

**Implication answers.** *Implication answers* occur when a politician implies or suggests an answer to what a journalist is asking but does not explicitly give their opinion or answer the question (Bull & Mayer, 1993). In many ways, this type of response does provide a reply to a journalist's query because of the implications of the answer. This type of intermediate reply is not as direct, though, because the journalist and the overhearing audience must infer from the reply what the politicians believes, which shows a great deal of hesitancy from the political leader that is answering the question and might not provide the requisite copy or quotes needed.

For example, May received a question from U.K. journalist Laura Kuenssberg of the *BBC*, asking the prime minister about any disagreements she has had with the U.S. president. Instead of answering completely, Prime Minister May responded with an implication answer:

1 On the issue that you raised with me, Laura, can I confirm that the  
2 president – I've been listening to the president and the president has been  
3 listening to me. That's the point of having a conversation and a dialogue.  
4 And we have been discussing a number of topics. We'll carry on after this  
5 press conference meeting and discussing a number of other topics. And  
6 there will be times when we disagree and issues on which we disagree.  
7 The point of the special relationship is that we are able to have that open  
8 and frank discussion, so that we are able to – to make that clear when it  
9 happens. (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-British relations*)

May implies that she and the president have had conversations of which there are points they agree and disagree on (Line 2-4). Instead of fully responding to the posed question, though, Prime Minister May goes into a discussion of the working relationship she and the president have together (Line 6-9). Therefore, this would be considered an answer by implication.

Presumably, it would not be in the May's best interest to discuss disagreements she has had with the president, especially when hosting a diplomatic event with Trump. Although she does respond with an implication instead of just ignoring that portion of the question, this implication answer could cause tension between May and the journalist.

**Interrupted answers.** At times, a journalist will interrupt a political leader before they finish responding to a question. In this instance, the response would be coded as an *interrupted answer*. These intermediate replies typically occur in one-on-one broadcast interviews and political debates where journalists have more power to control the flow of talking turns (Bull & Mayer, 1993) and would not be an expected approach from journalists in the highly structured environment of joint press conferences. As was expected, journalists did not interrupt politicians in the joint press conferences analyzed here. Furthermore, Bull and Mayer do not provide a specific example of this type of answer in their 1993 study, so an example is not provided in this study.

### **Non-replies**

*Non-replies* occur when a political leader decides a question posed by a journalist leaves no positive outcome, and they instead choose to equivocate rather than give a complete answer (Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullet, 1990). These non-replies do not answer the intended question, instead refocusing the subject of the question on a topic the politician wants to answer (Bull & Mayer, 1993; Bull, 1994). Whether specific politicians tend to be inherently evasive or the political situations faced by them requires them to be evasive (Bavelas, Black, Bryson, & Mullett, 1988; Bavelas et al., 1990), instances of non-replies provide a means for politicians to respond to questions but also avoid uncomfortable or impolitic answers they are unable or unwilling to give.

Non-replies show the greatest hesitancy by politicians to answer a given question and create an atmosphere of contention between the politicians and journalists. While non-replies may benefit the politician immediately, they might create a contentious relationship with journalists expecting complete answers to their questions (Bull & Mayer, 1993). Unlike intermediate replies, non-replies from politicians do not meet the needs of the journalist; if used, political leaders risk follow-up and future aggressive questioning from journalists.

In Bull and Mayer's 1993 study breaking the responses down into 10 superordinate categories: (1) ignores the question, (2) acknowledges the question, (3) questions the question, (4) attacks the question, (5) attacks the interviewer, (6) declines to answer, (7) makes a political point, (8) repeats a previous answer, (9) states/implies they have already answered the question, and (10) apologizes (Bull & Mayer, 1993, p. 662). The majority of superordinate categories have subcategories, but only the superordinate categories are considered in this chapter.

**Table 5.** Superordinate categories for non-replies in Political Equivocation Typologies

Ignores the question	The politician simply ignores the question without making any attempt to answer it or even to acknowledge that the interviewer has asked a question (p. 656).
Acknowledges the question	The politician acknowledges that the interviewer has asked a question but then fails to give an answer (p. 656).
Questions the question	The politician either requests clarification on a question or reflects the question back to the interviewer (p. 656-657).
Attacks the question	The politician attacks or criticizes the question (p. 657).
Attacks the interviewer	The politician criticizes the interviewer as distinct from attacking the question (p. 658).
Declines to answer	The politician declines to answer a question with a refusal on grounds of inability or an unwillingness to answer (p. 658).
Makes a political point	The politician responds to a question by making a political point (i.e. an external attack, justifies policy, appeals to nationalism, etc.) (p. 659).
Repeats a previous answer	The politician repeats a previous answer to the interviewer (p. 661).
States/implies they have already answered the question	The politician states or implies that they have already answered the question posed by the interviewer (p. 661).
Apologizes	The politician apologizes to the interviewer (p. 661).

*Note:* Definitions of superordinate categories take from Bull & Mayer (1993).

Within the current study, the superordinate categories identified as occurring were *ignores the question* ( $N=1$ ), *acknowledges the question* ( $N=1$ ), *attacks the question* ( $N=3$ ), *attacks the interviewer* ( $N=1$ ), *declines to answer* ( $N=1$ ), *makes political point* ( $N=7$ ), and *states/implies the question has already been answered* ( $N=1$ ). Bull and Mayer identified making a political point and attacking the question as the most frequent non-replies in their study of Thatcher and Kinnock's interview responses (1993). The following observations will only encompass the superordinate categories present in the dataset and use examples from Bull and Mayer's 1993 study to supplement.

**Ignores the question.** At times, political leaders may completely disregard the question posed to them and respond with a topic they deem more important by *ignoring the question* (Bull

& Mayer, 1993). An example from Bull and Mayer's study comes from Thatcher in response to British journalist David Frost. Frost prompted Thatcher with a question about a previous comment she made on British elections; he then followed up with another question trying to direct her comments back to the original point, but Thatcher disregarded the question completely:

- 1 Thatcher: ...that is the only power you have the power from the ballot box at every
- 2 election you submit yourself to the judgement of your people on your
- 3 stewardism...
- 4 Frost: but that back on January 27th though why did you say that?
- 5 Thatcher: and then don't forget I also have another submission to make to
- 6 the judgement of my party and that is every single year I'm the first leader
- 7 to whom that's happened... (Bull & Mayer, 1993, p. 7)

In an example from the joint press conference, Prime Minister Netanyahu ignored a question posed by U.S. journalist David Brody of the *Christian Broadcasting Network*, instead responding to a previous statement made by President Trump. Brody asked Netanyahu about where he and the U.S. president agree on Palestinian settlements in Israel. After waiting for President Trump to give his response, Netanyahu answered with, "Let's try it" (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-Israeli relations*). The Israeli prime minister did not address Brody or even acknowledge the question; alternatively, he decided to engage President Trump in a sidebar conversation about the issue. Brody did not follow-up on his question, and Netanyahu moved to call on another journalist.

Here, Netanyahu exerted his power within the joint press conference over the turn-taking interaction. He deemed President Trump's answer more important to respond to, ignoring the question posed to him by Brody. Because of the difficulty of any response he may give to the question, which could make him look weak, a response and conversation with Trump could be



more valuable to Netanyahu than an interaction with a journalist. The topic of settlements remains a sensitive policy issue Netanyahu has been explicit in answering in other places to the press; it is clear that during this interaction Netanyahu wants to appear agreeable with Trump but obviously avoided talking about other alternatives to the issue.

**Acknowledges the question.** Politicians *acknowledge the question* posed to them by commenting on a topic mentioned in the question but not explicitly answering the question posed (Bull & Mayer, 1993). By failing to give an answer to the question, the politician leaves themselves vulnerable to a follow up question, but they might placate the journalist enough depending on the answer. In Bull and Mayer's study, Thatcher acknowledged a question posed by Jonathan Dimbleby but continues on with a prior point, inferring it is more important than the question asked:

- 1 Thatcher: ...they also will get housing benefit which meets their rent they
- 2 will also get rate rebate and also may I point out that when we come to...
- 3 Dimbleby: [interrupts] would you accept they live in poverty Prime
- 4 Minister?
- 5 Thatcher: please there's just one other thing when we get bad weather the
- 6 Labour Party only gave 90 million pounds a year on heating allowances
- 7 with us it's up over 400 million... (Bull & Mayer, 1993, p. 8)

President Trump, in the U.S. and German joint press conference, responded to a U.S. journalist, Mark Halperin of *MSNBC*, by acknowledging the question without actually answering. Halperin asked Trump what is non-negotiable in an update to the healthcare bill. Trump, instead of giving specifics to his policy expectations, began to talk about the potential passing of a new healthcare bill:

1 Thank you, Mark. We just have a really wonderful group of people  
 2 meeting later. We met with 12 pretty much “no’s” in Congress — you saw  
 3 that a little while ago — and they went from all “no’s” to all “yeses” and  
 4 we have a lot of “yeses” coming in. It’s all coming together. We’re going  
 5 to have great healthcare. It’s going to be passed, I believe, I think  
 6 substantially, pretty quickly. It’s coming together beautifully. You have  
 7 conservative groups, you have other groups. Everybody wants certain  
 8 things. In the end, we’re going to have a great healthcare plan ... (CSPAN,  
 2017, *U.S.-German relations*)

Trump expressed optimism about the new healthcare bill passing Congress (Line 2-6) and talked about the collaborative effort between Republicans and other coalitions in their support of the bill (Line 6-8). Trump did not go into policy details, though, which is what Halperin specifically asked for.

**Questions the question.** A politician who *questions the question* from a journalist may be looking for clarification or could be reflecting the question back to the journalists. No instances of this subordinate category were present in the data set, but an example is taken from Bull and Mayer’s study. In the interviews analyzed, British journalist Day asked a question of Kinnock; the politician deflected the question back at the journalist instead of answering:

1 Day: If you have an overall majority Mr. Kinnock say with about 350 M.P.s what  
 2 proportion of those will be on the hard left?  
 3 Kinnock: Well you tell me. (Bull & Mayer, 1993, p. 9)

No instances of this type of non-reply in the Trump joint press conferences matches the low rate in Bull and Mayer’s study. Thatcher and Kinnock only questioned the question 1.85% and 1.75%, respectively, during their broadcast interviews (p. 16).

**Attacks the question.** Instead of answering the question posed, a politician may *attack the question*, stating the journalist presented an incorrect premise in their question (Bull & Mayer 1993). Israeli journalist Moav Vardi of *Channel 10 News of Israel* asked Prime Minister Netanyahu to give his opinion on the issue of settlements in the West Bank. Without giving

specifics on his opinion of settlements, Netanyahu corrected what he believed to be Vardi's assumptions on settlements being at the heart of the conflict between Israel and Palestine:

1 I believe that the issue of the settlements is not the core of the conflict, nor  
 2 does it really drive the conflict. I think it's an issue, it has to be resolved in  
 3 the context of peace negotiations. And I think we also are going to speak  
 4 about it, President Trump and I, so we can arrive at an understanding so  
 5 we don't keep on bumping into each other all the time on this issue. And  
 6 we're going to discuss this ... I told you what are the conditions that I  
 7 believe are necessary for an agreement: It's the recognition of the Jewish  
 8 state and it's Israel's – Israel's – security control of the entire area.  
 9 Otherwise we're just fantasizing. Otherwise we'll get another failed state,  
 10 another terrorist Islamist dictatorship that will not work for peace but work  
 11 to destroy us but also destroy any hope – any hope – for a peaceful future  
 12 for our people. (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-Israeli relations*)

Netanyahu went on at length about what he believed the conversation surrounding peace negotiations should be (Line 7-13), but first corrected Vardi's assertion (Line 1-2). He then went on to clarify that he and President Trump would come to consensus on the topic of settlements and their place in peace negotiations between Israel and Palestinians (Line 3-6).

Another example of a politician attacking the question comes from British journalists Jonathan Dimbleby and Neil Kinnock. Dimbleby asked Kinnock a question about a statement made about the Labour party:

1 Dimbleby: what do you make of this statement if I can quote it to you  
 2 irrespective of whether or not we win the election there's a major struggle coming  
 3 about the kind of Labour Party we want to see...

5 Kinnock: I've read the piece and you've got it out of context (Bull & Mayer, 1993, p. 9)

Kinnock addressed the quotation by attacking Dimbleby's interpretation of it. By attacking the question, Kinnock would then be able to either bypass the question all together or redirect his answer to address his own interpretation of the quotation. This style of political equivocation attempts to take the onus of directly answering the question off of the politician by questioning

the motives and credibility of the assertion made by the journalist in the question. In Bull and Mayer's study (1993), the second most used type of non-reply was attacks the question (Thatcher 25.9%; Kinnock 36.8%).

**Attacks the interviewer.** There are times where the question posed to a politician presents such a risk or is so offensive that the political leader will *attack the journalist*. This tactic by the political leader calls for the journalist's character to be scrutinized and gives the politician an opportunity to correct whatever untrue facts they believe the journalist has asserted (Bull & Mayer, 1993). German journalist Kristina Dunz of the *German News Agency* asked Trump (1) how he thinks his "America First" foreign policy is helping the rest of the world, primarily the European Union, and (2) why he seems to be so "scared of diversity" (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-German relations*). President Trump responded by attacking Dunz and then correcting her assertions:

1 Nice, friendly reporter. First of all, I don't believe in an isolationist policy,  
 2 but I also believe a policy of trade should be a fair policy. And the United  
 3 States has been treated very, very unfairly by many countries over the  
 4 years. And that's going to stop. But I'm not an isolationist. I'm a free  
 5 trader, but I'm also a fair trader. And free trade has led to a lot of bad  
 6 things happening – you look at the deficits that we have and you look at  
 7 all of the accumulation of debt. We're a very powerful company – country.  
 8 We're a very strong, very strong country. We'll soon be at a level that we  
 9 perhaps have never been before. Our military is going to be strengthened –  
 10 it's been depleted. But I am a trader. I am a fair trader. I am a trader that  
 11 wants to see good for everybody, worldwide. But I am not an isolationist  
 12 by any stretch of the imagination. So, I don't know what newspaper you're  
 13 reading, but I guess that would be another example of, as you say, fake  
 14 news. (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-German relations*)

Trump's initial attack is seen in Line 1. Trump makes it clear to the audience, both present and mediated, that he is not pleased with Dunz as a journalist by using sarcasm (Line 1) and

correcting her initial assertions. He refutes Dunz's assertions of his isolationist policy (Line 5-10) and his record on free and fair trade (Line 11-14).

A politician could also more directly chastise a journalist. Thatcher attacks journalist Dimbleby when he asked her a question about a tax on children's clothes in a broadcast news interview:

- 1 Thatcher: look if anyone tried to put Value Added Tax on children's clothes and
- 2 shoes they would never, never, never get it through the House.
- 3 Dimbleby: so that's out?
- 4 Margaret Thatcher: ...now I'm not going any further than that Mr. Dimbleby for a
- 5 very good reason. Yes, people like you will try to go on and on and the moment
- 6 we say one thing you'll find another and then another. (Bull & Mayer, 1993, p.
- 11)

Here, Thatcher attacks Dimbleby's credibility as a journalist, inferring that he does not intend to ask her an honest answer, instead just prolonging a controversial topic.

**Declines to answer.** In a press conference, a politician may *decline to answer* a question. Instead of ignoring the question or acknowledging the question, a politician may verbally decline to answer by saying they are either unable or unwilling to answer (Bull & Mayer, 1993).

Chancellor Merkel declines to answer a question posed to her from U.S. journalist Kevin Cirilli of *Bloomberg News*:

- 1 When we speak about trade agreements, and the European Union is
- 2 negotiating those agreements for all of the member states of the European
- 3 Union, but obviously there's also input by the member states – they bring
- 4 to the table what's important to them ... That's the purpose of concluding
- 5 agreements – that both sides win. And that is the sort of spirit, I think, in
- 6 which we ought to be guided in negotiating any agreement between the
- 7 United States of America and the EU. I hope that we can resume the
- 8 agreement that we started. We have just now concluded our agreement
- 9 with Canada, and I hope that we will come back to the table and talk about
- 10 the agreement between the EU and the U.S. again. (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-German relations*)

While Chancellor Merkel talks of the importance of compromises, she does not respond to Cirilli's question about what concessions she is willing to make to the U.S. in a trade agreement. Instead, Merkel refused to answer by mentioning that trade agreements between countries in the European Union are handled by the governing body and not through each individual country.

Another example of declining to answer a question from a journalist comes from an interaction between British journalist Robin Day and Thatcher:

- 1 Day: The hypothesis I was discussing, wouldn't you regard that as a defeat?
- 2 Thatcher: I am not going to prophesy what will happen on Thursday, and I'm not
- 3 going to be tempted along this route (Bull & Mayer, 1993, p. 11)

Thatcher declined to answer the question in order to not "prophesy" the results. The prime minister attempted to subvert the pressure of responding to Day by stating she was unwilling to answer the question at this time.

**Makes political point.** Many times, political leaders will take great liberties with the questions posed to them and *make a political point* rather than explicitly answer the question (Bull & Mayer, 1993). Bull and Mayer list several different types of political points a politician could use to equivocate an answer to a journalist through a non-reply. In Bull and Mayer's study, Thatcher and Kinnock made political points the most when responding with a non-reply (Thatcher 76%; Kinnock 66.7%).

One example of this type of response is when Thatcher used nationalism to equivocate a response to Dimbleby:

- 1 Dimbleby: Wouldn't it lead to they should have the right to do so as well?
- 2 Thatcher: No, I'm not talking about the logic. I'm talking about Britain's history.
- 3 I'm talking about the fact that Britain hung on when the rest of Europe
- 4 surrendered. I'm talking about the fact that Britain was right in the beginning of
- 5 the atomic weapon. (Bull & Mayer, 1993, p. 12)

Thatcher did not answer Dimbleby's question, instead using nationalistic rhetoric to make a point about Britain as a country.

Prime Minister Trudeau responded to a question from U.S. journalist Scott Thurman of *ABC News* by making a point about Canada's immigration policy. Thurman asked Trudeau how he sees the U.S. and Canadian relationship being different with President Trump in office than when President Obama. Trudeau responds by stating:

1        One of the things we spoke about was the fact that security and  
 2        immigration need to work very well together. And certainly, Canada has  
 3        emphasized security as we look towards improving our immigration  
 4        system and remaining true to the values that we have. And we had a very  
 5        strong and fruitful discussion on exactly that. There's plenty that we can  
 6        draw on each other from in terms of how we move forward with a very  
 7        similar goal, which is to create free, open societies that keep our citizens  
 8        safe. And that's certainly something that we're very much in agreement on.  
 (CSPAN, 2017, *U.S.-Canadian relations*)

Trudeau immediately pointed to immigration, a policy area where he and the president disagree and attempted to portray a cordial and compromising tone to the relationship between the two leaders (Line 1-2). The prime minister did not comment on any differences between the Trump and Obama administrations, and nor did he mention any differences in his relationship with the two leaders. Instead, Trudeau focused on the growing relationship he and President Trump were working to build (Line 6-9).

**Repeats a previous answer.** A politician may *repeat a previous answer* when responding to a question in a press conference or political interview; this tactic is typically used when a journalist follows up with a question (Bull & Mayer, 1993). While the journalist may be looking for a different response to a posed question, the politician could use this tactic to subvert the pressure to reply to the follow up question. Bull and Mayer provide an example of this type of political leader response in their 1993 study. Dimbleby attempted to get a hypothetical

response to a question from Kinnock. Instead of answering the new question, Kinnock repeated the answer he gave before the follow up question:

- 1 Kinnock: What I've said is that the U.S. President whoever the U.S. President was
- 2 would only take a decision to commence or to respond to nuclear war according
- 3 to United States priorities.
- 4 Dimbleby: Well supposing he decided to respond, what would you do then?
- 5 Kinnock: ...even our strongest allies the United States of America would only take
- 6 a decision to use their nuclear weapons either for themselves or on behalf of
- 7 others according to their own priorities. (Bull & Mayer, 1993, p. 14)

No instances of this type of political leader response were present in the data set from Trump or any other political leaders. Thatcher and Kinnock used this tactic only 5.5% and 3.5% of the time during their interviews, respectively (Bull & Mayer, 1993, p. 16).

**States/implies the question has already been answered.** Instead of directly answering a question, a political leader may refer back to a previous answer they gave in the conference by *stating/implies the question had already been answered* (Bull & Mayer, 1993). Prime Minister Theresa May responded to U.S. journalist John Roberts of *FOX News*, who asked for her opinion on the U.S. and Mexico relationship that President Trump had already answered this particular question: “As the President himself has said, the relationship of the United States with Mexico is a matter for the United States and Mexico.” May implied that she did not need to speak further on the topic but did acknowledge the question asked of her and provided a reiteration of the previous statement by President Trump.

Similarly, Kinnock used this tactic when he responded to a question from Dimbleby in a broadcast interview:

- 1 Kinnock: ...as far as secondary picketing is concerned in pursuit of a trade dispute
- 2 in connection with that trade dispute the same kind of right that workers enjoyed
- 3 for seventy years in this country is a right that should be enjoyed in order to be
- 4 able to do that and the reason why it was awarded...



5 Dimbleby: [interrupts] that means you do approve of secondary picketing being  
6 restored or not?

6 Kinnock: To, well, I think I made that pretty clear. (Bull & Mayer, 1993, p. 14).

**Apologize.** A politician *apologizing* in response to a question by a journalist is uncommon in political communication events. Bull and Mayer found that Kinnock did not apologize at all during the eight broadcast interviews they analyzed; they found Thatcher only apologized 1.85% of the time during her own interviews. One specific instance occurred when Dimbleby asked a question of the prime minister:

1 Dimbleby: ...isn't one of the difficulties for the Tories that your way of governing  
2 and talking about government gets up the noses of a lot of voters?

3 Thatcher: Well I'm sorry if it does. It's not intended to. I'm very sorry if it does.  
(Bull & Mayer, 1993, p. 14).

Perhaps the abrasive nature of this question by Dimbleby caught Thatcher off guard, or the prime minister decided the best way to answer this question was to apologize without defending herself. Either way, political leaders rarely use this type of equivocation, perhaps because of the power shift an apology could provide to a journalist – a signal for them to follow up with an even more aggressive question.

### Results

Within the dataset, 33 political leader responses were coded (President Trump,  $N = 17$ ; Prime Minister May,  $N = 4$ ; Prime Minister Trudeau,  $N = 4$ ; Prime Minister Netanyahu,  $N = 4$ ; Chancellor Merkel,  $N = 4$ ). Of those responses, there were 8 replies (24.2%), 10 intermediate replies (30.3%), and 15 non-replies (45.5%). As previously stated, any combination questions posed by journalists were coded individually for each political leader. Even though some

questions were combined, political leaders answer independently of each other, resulting in different responses to the same question.

The five political leaders in this sample had a difficult time providing direct, complete replies to journalists – of the 33 utterances by political leaders only 8 were coded as complete replies. Half ( $N=4$ , 50%) of the replies given by political leaders were in response to questions without any evidence of aggression dimensions. The other 25 utterances were either intermediate or non-replies, indicating great hesitancy and caution on the part of political leaders to respond to journalist's questions.

**Table 6.** Response type by political leader in joint press conferences

	<i>Replies</i>	<i>Intermediate replies</i>	<i>Non-replies</i>
U.S.-U.K. Conference			
Trump	2	1	2
May	2	1	1
U.S.-Canada Conference			
Trump	2	2	.
Trudeau	.	.	4
U.S.-Israel Conference			
Trump	1	2	1
Netanyahu	1	.	3
U.S.-German Conference			
Trump	.	2	2
Merkel	.	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>8 (5/3)</b>	<b>10 (7/3)</b>	<b>15 (5/10)</b>

#### **U.S. & U.K. Joint Press Conference – January 27, 2017**

Within President Trump and Prime Minister May's first press conference together, they gave a combined total of four replies, two intermediate replies, and three non-replies. President Trump gave two full replies, one to a U.S. journalist and one to a U.K. journalist. He gave one intermediate reply to a U.S. journalist, which was an incomplete answer. Lastly, he gave two non-replies to U.K. journalists one in which he attacked the question and one where he made a political point. Prime Minister May gave two full replies to a U.S. and U.K. journalist,

respectively. She gave one intermediate reply to a U.K. journalist – an implication answer; and one non-reply to a U.S. journalist stating she had already addressed the question in a previous statement.

#### **U.S. & Canadian Joint Press Conference – February 13, 2017**

President Trump and Prime Minister Trudeau had four responses each in the U.S. and Canadian joint press conference, giving a combined total of two replies, two intermediate replies, and four non-replies. President Trump gave two replies – one to a U.S. journalist and one to a Canadian journalist. Trump also gave two intermediate replies – one incomplete answer to a U.S. journalist and one incomplete answer to a Canadian journalist. Prime Minister Trudeau gave no complete replies or intermediate replies but gave four non-replies – two to U.S. journalists and two to Canadian journalists. Trudeau gave three non-replies where he made political points; one to a U.S. journalist and two to Canadian journalists. Trudeau also attacked the question posed by a U.S. journalist.

#### **U.S. & Israeli Joint Press Conference – February 15, 2017**

With four responses each, President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu gave a combined total of two replies, two intermediate replies, and four non-replies. President Trump gave one complete reply to a U.S. journalist. Trump gave two intermediate replies – one incomplete answer to a U.S. journalist and one incomplete answer to an Israeli journalist. President Trump gave one non-reply to an Israeli journalist, where he made a political point. Prime Minister Netanyahu gave one reply to a U.S. journalist. Netanyahu gave no intermediate replies; he instead gave three non-replies – one to a U.S. journalist where he ignored the question, one to an Israeli journalist where he attacked the question, and one to an Israeli journalist where he made a political point.

**U.S. & German Joint Press Conference – March 17, 2017**

In total, President Trump and Prime Minister Merkel gave four responses each in their joint press conference. No full replies were given from either political leader. President Trump gave two intermediate replies – one incomplete answer to a U.S. journalist and another incomplete answer to a German journalist. Trump gave one non-reply to a U.S. journalist where he acknowledged the question without answering and gave one non-reply to a German journalist where he attacked the interviewer. Prime Minister Merkel also gave two intermediate replies with one each to a U.S. journalist, an implication answer, and German journalist, an incomplete answer. Chancellor Merkel also gave two non-replies – one to a U.S. journalist where she declined to answer the question posed and another to a German journalist where she made a political point. No replies were given in the U.S. and German joint press conference with majority of aggression dimensions should in questions, which received intermediate replies.

## Conclusion

The relationship between the press and politicians is interdependent but aggressive in nature; both parties interact and cooperate with each other but are often at odds over the way information is conveyed to the public. While political leaders look to disseminate a specific narrative of their policies and view of their administrations, journalists in democratic societies are tasked with holding politicians accountable to the public and questioning their tactics, decisions, and words (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1981). The use of narratives by both the media and political leaders affect public opinion, making the study of these narratives and interactions between the press and politicians integral to the furthering of democratic societies.

The present study explored the relationship between the press and political leaders in joint press conferences by looking at instances of journalistic aggressiveness and political leader equivocation and what relationship, if any, might exist. Guided by the proposed research questions, this study partially supported the proposed hypotheses: U.S. journalists produced fewer instances of aggressive question dimensions with foreign journalists using more aggressive techniques in their questioning of political figures; additionally, political leaders equivocated more than they provided complete answers to journalists questioning.

**Table 7.** Research questions and hypotheses

Research questions	Hypotheses
<i>RQ<sub>1</sub></i> : How does journalistic questioning differ from U.S. to foreign journalists in joint press conferences?	<i>H<sub>1</sub></i> : Foreign journalists will present more aggressive lines of questioning than U.S. journalists.
<i>RQ<sub>2</sub></i> : How do political leaders respond to journalistic questioning in joint press conferences?	<i>H<sub>2</sub></i> : More aggressive journalistic questioning will lead to fewer replies from political leaders and more intermediate and non-replies overall.

**RQ<sub>1</sub> – How does journalistic questioning differ from U.S. to foreign journalists in joint press conferences?**

Based on conversation analysis via the question analysis system, a range of journalistic aggression dimensions were present in the data set. Across the four sampled joint press conferences, a pattern emerged between foreign journalists and aggressive questions with U.S. journalists being more deferential than their foreign counterparts. Concerning *H<sub>1</sub>*, based on descriptive statistical analysis, foreign journalists did produce more aggressive questioning techniques than their U.S. counterparts.

**Initiative.** Half of all questions posed in the joint press conferences showed evidence of initiative (53.13%). Seventeen questions showed evidence of initiative. Of those seventeen questions, nine were from foreign journalists and eight were from U.S. journalists. Journalists are

likely to use initiative judiciously in press conferences because of having to work within the time constraints of the conference (Clayman & Heritage, 2002), so little difference between foreign and U.S. journalists is likely to be present in the data set. Of interest, Trump received more questions with initiative throughout the press conferences (62.5%).

**Directness.** For the directness dimension, nineteen questions were direct, while thirteen questions were indirect modes of expression. Foreign journalists posed twelve questions directly (37.5%) and four questions indirectly (12.5%). U.S. journalists posed seven questions directly (21.88%) and nine indirectly (28.13%).

**Assertiveness.** The results for the assertiveness dimension demonstrate a trend toward foreign journalists using more aggressive question techniques than U.S. journalists. Fourteen questions in the data set used the assertive dimension, four of which were from U.S. journalists (12.5%) and 10 posed by foreign journalists (31.25%).

**Adversarialness.** The second least used dimension in the data set was adversarialness. Foreign journalists used more adversarialness (N = 8; 28.13%) than U.S. journalists (N = 4; 12.5%).

**Accountability.** Accountability was the least used dimension in the data set. U.S. journalists posed two questions with the accountability dimension (6.25%), whereas foreign journalists posed five questions with the accountability dimension (15.63%).

In conclusion,  $H_1$  is supported in this study through the frequency of journalistic aggressiveness in foreign journalists' questions. While U.S. journalists did use aggressive questioning techniques in the studied joint press conferences, the rates of those dimensions were less than their foreign counterparts and the question structure was more indirect overall. Because of the small sample size analyzed in this data set, generalizable conclusions of joint press

conferences is not possible. U.S. journalists were consistently less aggressive in their questioning of politicians, while foreign journalists used more instances of aggressive questioning techniques in this data set, but a larger sample with more observations is needed before being able to apply these conclusions reliably.

**RQ2: How does different journalistic questioning affect political leader replies?**

Concerning  $H_2$ , the data only partially supported the hypothesis. Political leaders did use more *intermediate* and *non-replies* in this study than *replies*. Foreign journalists received less complete replies (U.S., 31.25%; foreign, 17.64%) and more non-replies than U.S. journalists (U.S., 37.5%; foreign, 52.94%), suggesting a relationship between aggressive questioning techniques and political leader replies considering foreign journalists used more dimensions of aggressiveness in their questioning of political leaders.

While more intermediate and non-replies were expected with higher rates of journalistic aggressiveness, Chi-square analysis did not provide significant results across all dimensions for responses types. A Chi-square test of independence was calculated comparing the frequency of the five aggressiveness dimensions by political leader response type. A significant interaction was found for the initiative dimension ( $\chi^2(2) = 9.352, p < 0.01$ ) and the assertiveness dimension ( $\chi^2(2) = 2.309, p < 0.05$ ). Both results indicate that these dimension types do have a relationship with responses type – that questions with instances of initiative and assertiveness were more likely to result in an intermediate or non-reply from political leaders. For directness, adversarialness, and accountability p-values did not result in levels of significance at  $< 0.05$ .

Interestingly, Bull and Mayer (1993) found the majority of political leader responses to be *non-replies* (57.5%), and this study produced similar results with *non-replies* being the most used response type (45.45%). Interestingly, Bull and Mayer's study resulted in very few



*intermediate replies* (5%), whereas this study found the distribution of *intermediate replies* to be higher than the original study (30.30%). Further research is needed to validate these results but also to understand the dynamics at play that lead political leaders to give more *intermediate replies* in these joint press conferences.

### **Limitations**

Due to the microanalytic nature of this study, a small sample of joint press conferences were analyzed. Five political leaders were examined in this study, and while care was taken in choosing which political leaders to include, these political leader communication styles could have affect the study. The inclusion of more joint press conferences, which would include more political leaders and journalists, would provide more conclusive results regarding press and political interactions in joint press conferences.

Additionally, it is difficult to consider personal belief systems and biases of individual journalists when considering journalistic questioning. While journalists claim adherence to certain norms in their reporting, further understanding of how personal belief systems affects reporting is needed. A way to control for this variable has not been addressed in the literature; further research is need in the area of press-politician interactions.

Furthermore, additional coders would greatly increase the reliability of this study. When conducting content analysis of any kind, the more coders present and the higher agreement on the coding of the dataset the more reliable the results.

### **Future Study**

While the current study looked to further understanding of joint press conferences in general, several areas of interest arose from the results and accompanying conclusions. Many of

the proposed areas of further research would fill holes in current research surrounding journalist and political leader interactions.

### **Combinations of aggressiveness dimensions**

This study did not focus on the nature of the combining aggressiveness dimensions. Journalists in joint press conferences, because of the norms of turn-at-talk, to combine aggression dimension in their single turn-at-talk. Dimension combinations were present in the study and should be explored to look for the impact on political leader equivocation.

### **Composite journalistic aggression score**

Compiling a composite journalistic aggression score for each question posed by journalists would enable researchers to more easily study the implication of combined dimensions of aggressive questioning by journalists on political leader responses. Currently, the strength for each dimension are set to different scales, as well as the directness dimension measuring for the deference of a question as opposed to applying a higher score for directness. Dimension scores would need to be standardized and the directness dimension score would need to be inverted for this composite score to have real statistical merit. This composite score would enable the researcher to create a scale of aggressive questioning not only within one dimension, but across the dimensions.

### **Differing political leaders**

Certainly, the different political leaders in this study communicate in vastly different ways not only between the five political leaders present here, but also with other political leader throughout history. Each political leader represents a slightly different person and communication style, as well as a different political system. In future studies, these aspects should be taken into consideration. For instance, concerning the current U.S. president, Trump

has been said to be an outlier of sorts in the political realm. Because of this, future studies should bolster sample sizes with past presidents, even connecting longitudinal studies conducted by Clayman and Heritage to press conferences since President Roosevelt. Clayman and Heritage's last presidential press conference study considered President Eisenhower to President Clinton; presidents since Clinton have increasingly turned to joint press conferences as their preferred exchange with journalists and should be considered in future study. The addition of more U.S. presidents and other political leaders will only strengthen the current research and provide more perspective on institutional talk.

### **Differing press corps**

While the current study combines all press corps outside of the U.S. as foreign, more examination is needed into the specific norms operating in each country's press environment. While the Freedom House Press Freedom index was a good test of press freedoms, press norms certainly play a part in journalist and politician interactions. Studies of this nature would need to be extensive case studies in which different countries press corps norms are not only assessed in the current climate but historically as well.

### **Extension of sample size**

The most obvious place for further study is the extension of the current study to include more joint press conferences not only from the Trump administration, but also to include other U.S. presidents. Including more joint press conferences into this study would control for different political leader communication styles as well as any external contributing factors such as a presidential honeymoon period or deteriorating diplomatic relationships between political leaders. While the current study is needed as a first look at the specifics of joint press conference interactions, a large sample of these interactions would make for more generalizable conclusions.

Further research is needed to find more robust results and further reliability and validity of the current study.

### **Intermediate replies**

Due to the result of this study showing higher instances of intermediate replies than Bull and Mayer's study (1993), further investigation is needed into political leader's use of this type of response. Intermediate replies, being a combination of replies and non-replies, are an interesting point of research – what makes a political leader respond with a reply to one part of a question but equivocate another? A deeper look into these response types is needed and is currently missing in the literature.

### **Nonverbal behavior**

Nonverbal behavior should be considered in future studies. While completeness of replies was coded for this study, the accuracy of those responses and the truthfulness statements cannot be studied. Including nonverbal behavior in the current study would give researchers a fuller understanding of political leader equivocation in press conferences, as well as understanding dishonest communication tendencies in political leaders. While content analysis of verbal speech conveys much about talk-at-turn interactions, these interactions do not begin or end with verbal cues, therefore nonverbal interactions should be considered.

### **Practical application**

Practical application of the current study in single case interactions not only provides scientific perspective on social interactions but builds importance for the future research in the field. The current research provided guidance for think pieces in *The Conversation* (Russell & Stewart, 2018, "Reading Zuckerberg's face") about equivocation and nonverbal behavior by Mark Zuckerberg during the Facebook House and Senate hearing on Capital Hill, as well as a

Washington Post opinion piece (Russell & Stewart, 2018, “Why do we care about Trump’s body language?”) about President Trump’s odd press conference behavior. Analysis of current event provides perspective and context for the public when viewing institutional talk and should be acknowledged when talking about journalist and political leader interactions moving forward.

Additionally, there is an importance in being able to teach press professionals and political leaders about how their words and interactions with each other in institutions such as press conferences can either build up or break down their relationships with each other. Journalists and politicians rely on each other for information, and both have a common audience in the democratic public. While they may be at odds over the presentation of information, they must work together to communicate information to the public and should be mindful of this relationship for the good of democracy.

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## Appendix

**Table 8.** Question Analysis System

Measure	Indicator	Description	Value	Score
Initiative	Question Complexity	Statement prefaces; a statement followed by a question	0 – No preface 1 – Preface	1 if any two of three items are "1"; 0 otherwise
	Question Cascade	Multiple questions posed in succession	0 – Single question 1 – Multiple questions	
	Follow Up Question	Additional questions after the political figure has respond to the first question	0 – No follow up 1 – Follow up	
Directness	Self-referencing Frame	Frame that refers to the journalist's intention or desire to ask the question	0 – No self-referencing frame 1 – Self-referencing frame	Sum of scores
	Other-referencing Frame	Frame that asks about the political leader's capacity or willingness to answer the question	0 – No other-referencing frame 1 – Other-referencing frame	
Assertiveness	Preface Tilt	Preface to the question favors a "yes" or "no" answer for the political leader	0 – No preface tilt 1 – Preface tilt	Sum of scores
	Negative Question	Question involves a grammatical negative; e.g., "Isn't it/Couldn't you...?"	0 – No negative question 1 – Negative question	
Adversarialness	Adversarial Preface	Statement preface is oppositional to what would be in political figure's best interest	0 – No adversarial preface 1 – Adversarial Preface	Sum of scores
	Global Adversarialness	Overall question is adversarial in nature	0 – No global adversarialness 1 – Global adversarialness	
Accountability	Accountability Question	Question pursues an explanation for the political leader's action or policy		0 – Not an accountability question 1 – Accountability question

Source: Clayman, S. E., Heritage, J., Elliott, M. N., & McDonald, L. L. (2007, February). When does the watchdog bark? Conditions of aggressive questioning in presidential news conferences. *American Sociological Review*, 72(1), 23-41.

**Table 9.** Political Equivocation Typology

Category	Superordinate category	Subcategory	Description
Reply			Answers the question asked
Intermediate reply	Incomplete reply	Partial	Makes comment about aspect of single questions
		Fractional	Makes comment about one part of multi-part questions
		Half	Makes comment about only one part of question with two parts
	Implication reply	Responds without explicitly stating their own opinion, but implies answer	
	Interrupted reply	Cannot finish response because interrupted by interviewer	
Non-reply	Ignores the question		Does not acknowledge or answer the question
	Acknowledges the question		Acknowledges the question asked but continues with another point
	Questions the question	Request for clarification	Answer seeks further information before answering
		Reflects the question back	Answer turns the question around on the interviewer
	Attacks the question	Fails to tackle the issue	Answer does not address the main issue of the question
		Questions is hypothetical/speculative	Answers with a theoretical or abstract answer
		Question is based on a false premise	Answer states the question is based on a false premise
		Question is factually inaccurate	Answer states a fact in the question is inaccurate
		Question includes a misquotation	Answer states the quotation was misquoted
		Questions was taken out of context	Answer states the quotation used was taken out of context
		Question is objectionable	Answer states the question is unacceptable or offensive
		False alternative	Political leader refuses to answer the question because of the false alternatives posed from the question
	Attacks the interviewer		Specifically attacks the interviewer as opposed to the question

**Table 9.** Political Equivocation Typology (Cont.)

Category	Superordinate category	Subcategory	Description	
Non-replies	Declines to answer	Inability	Cannot answer the question because they either do not know or do not currently have the ability to answer with certain facts/opinions	
		Unwillingness	Will not answer the question posed	
	Makes political point	External attack	Attacks others and/or their affiliations	
		Presents policy	Gives policy points	
		Justifies policy	Rationalizes the policy as opposed to answering the question	
		Gives reassurance	Answers with assurance of own skills or positivity of affiliations	
		Appeals to nationalism	Answer tries to bridge some difficulty with a call to nationalism and/or feelings of patriotism	
		Offers political analysis	Answers with analysis of political situation or policy	
		Self-justification	Rationalizes/vindicates own actions or opinions	
	Repeats the answer to a previous question	Talks up one's own side	Uses boastful/affirmative language about self or affiliations	
		States or implies the question has already been answered		Takes answer from a previous question in the interview and repeats themselves
				States or implies that the particular question has already been answered
	Apologizes		Apologizes for something in question but neither confirms nor denies question context	

Source: Bull, P. and Mayer, K. (1993, December). How not to answer questions in political interviews. *International Society of Political Psychology*. 14(4), 651-666.