

# **Do Executives Keep Their Promises? The Transmission of the Policy Agendas of the Speech from the Throne to Acts of UK Parliament**

\*Shaun Bevan ([shaun.bevan@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:shaun.bevan@manchester.ac.uk))

\*Peter John ([peter.john@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:peter.john@manchester.ac.uk))

\*Will Jennings ([will.jennings@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:will.jennings@manchester.ac.uk))

\* School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester

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## **Abstract**

In the United Kingdom, the transmission between policy promises and statutes is assumed to be both rapid and efficient because of the tradition of party discipline, relative stability of government, absence of coalitions and the limited powers of legislative revision in the second chamber. Even in the UK political system such a transmission mechanism is not perfect since legislative priorities and outputs are susceptible to changes in public opinion or media coverage, unanticipated events in the external world, backbench rebellions and the practical constraints of administering policies or programmes. This paper investigates the strength of the connection between executive priorities and legislative outputs; measured in the form of the Speech from the Throne<sup>1</sup> and Acts of Parliament from 1911 to 2007. These are categorised according to the policy content coding system of the UK Policy Agendas Project ([www.policyagendas.org.uk](http://www.policyagendas.org.uk)). The paper finds through time series cross-sectional analyses that the transmission from the speech to acts is generally strong. However, this relationship has declined over time and is much stronger in the parliamentary year immediately following an election.

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as the Queen's Speech in contemporary times or the King's Speech during a King's reign.

Political systems are structured in time. Policy-making follows an institutionalized sequence as the policies themselves proceed through government, but this process is not continuous. The political process has moments where decisions and agendas are aggregated and priorities are established for a period of time, such as manifestos prior to an election or State of the Union type addresses for the legislative year ahead. So while there is much in public policy that is fluid, there are sequences that structure the agenda and force decision-makers to establish priorities.

Almost all political systems have these decision points, which structure the behaviour of government and provide information to the public. These decision points are often a function of the schedule set by institutional rules, such as the sitting periods of parliaments or the terms of office of governments. These institutionalised moments of attention make the government's policy agenda public. The promises made during these periods act as a means of credible commitment where the government commits to a particular course of action, encouraging it to make effective policies, but also allowing it to take credit for successful policies so it may be rewarded for them.

The expectation then is that when government uses these decision points to make promises, it does so with the intention of fulfilling its commitments. However, governments respond to broad and often unrelated concerns, such as crime, health and the economy, and these can change in priority over time as new issues emerge. Implementation or bureaucratic control problems may bedevil the ability of governments to keep their commitments and it may make sense to delay or break these promises in response to changes or emergencies. Therefore, we expect the transmission from commitments to policy to be less than one-to-one in most political systems, but still significant and noticeable.

The case we use for exploring commitment is the United Kingdom over the most recent ninety-nine parliaments. The UK is a unitary majoritarian political system with few veto points making it a good general case for analysis (Lijphart 1984; 1999; Tsebelis 1995). Other things being equal we expect decision-making to be reflected strongly in outputs. The decision point considered is the Speech from the Throne, which is an annual event containing policy promises. The outputs we consider are Acts of the UK of the Parliament. Through time series cross-sectional analyses of the ninety-nine parliamentary sessions between 1911 and 2007, we demonstrate a strong relationship between policy promises and outputs in the UK. However, this relationship has declined overtime and is significantly larger immediately following an election.

The rest of this paper takes the following format. First we discuss the importance of the Speech from the Throne, the logical transmission from speech to Acts and why and how the promises made in the speech matter. We then present three hypotheses based on this discussion, the data used to test these hypotheses and the results of time series cross-sectional analyses of the data. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of these results and suggested directions for future research.

### **The Institutional Structure of UK Decision-Making – From Statements to Actions**

The Speech from the Throne is an integral feature of the State Opening of Parliament as the sovereign addresses the chamber of the House of Lords with members of the House of Commons watching from the galleries. Such an institutionalised ritual is characteristic of what Bagehot (1867) described as the dignified part of the British constitution, in which political custom and tradition

perform a stabilizing function in contrast to its functional efficient aspects. Since 1901, the Speech from the Throne has been a permanent fixture of the parliamentary calendar and has occurred at regular times since the 1930s, delivered at the start of a new parliamentary session which comes at the end of the calendar year or just after an election when a new government enters office. The speech performs the function of highlighting matters of importance and detailing the legislative programme that government intends to enact in the forthcoming year. By highlighting certain issues and ignoring others, the Speech from the Throne provides an annual platform for government to shape the national agenda. The unification of executive and legislative powers in the British political system, combined with its longstanding tradition of party discipline, means a close link between manifesto pledges, the legislative proposals of governing parties and actual policy outputs is expected (Bara 2005). The speech acts as a form of credible commitment (North and Weingast 1989) forcing the governing party to stick to their commitments or risk damaging their reputation and political power. The speech also enables government to 'go public' (Kernell 1997; Canes-Wrone 2001; 2005) either to set the tone of national debate over a particular issue or to highlight promises that it intends to later claim credit for keeping (Strøm 2000; 2001; Bara 2005). Studies show that despite the separation of powers in the U.S., presidents can influence the Congressional agenda through public appeals and through the annual State of the Union address, the American equivalent of the Speech from the Throne (see Rudalevige 2002; Canes-Wrone 2005; Bevan n.d.). Such effects should, in theory, be stronger under the unified executive and legislative powers of the British political system. The Speech from the Throne integrates both the executive and legislative agendas of the prime minister and cabinet, providing an annual signal

of executive priorities, as well as an indication of its commitment to specific legislative proposals.

The speech has been used in analyses as a measure of policy-making (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2005; 2008; Jennings and John 2009; 2010; Jennings, Bevan and John n.d.) and political-cultural dynamics (Namenwirth and Weber 1987), as well as in comparison with similar executive speeches delivered by the head of state or head of government in a number of different countries across Western Europe and in the U.S. (see Green-Pedersen et al. 2009; Jennings et al. 2009). This measure of the agenda of British government therefore provides a means for testing theories about the nature of agenda-setting in British politics and for assessing its institutional function as a signal of executive priorities and legislative proposals.

### **Credible Commitment, Why do it?**

The Speech from the Throne is in bargaining terms a costly signal, meaning that promises made in the Speech create future potential costs for the prime minister and their government if the promises made in the speech were not fulfilled. In this way, the Speech from the Throne ties the government's hands to the issues mentioned in the speech and conveys a credible signal to their party, the rest of parliament, and the public that these issues will be dealt with. By mentioning policies in the speech it is very difficult for the government to back down from those issues without paying some political cost that may jeopardize their party's ability to hold power (see Fearon 1997, Kernell 1997, Canes-Wrone 2001 and 2005, and Bevan n.d.). Given that the speech also contains many manifesto commitments, not following the agenda of the party may involve even greater internal costs. Because of these costs, the government

wants the majority of issues mentioned in the Speech from the Throne to translate directly into policy outputs in the form of Acts of Parliament.

Given the potential costs associated with commitment the question remains, why make such commitments in the Speech from the Throne in the first place? The simplest and perhaps least satisfying answer is the tradition of the Speech itself, which ceremoniously opens a new parliament and is intended to inform members of the issues they will face in the year ahead (Bagehot 1872). The real advantage to the speech however is political in nature. While there is a risk that policies mentioned in the speech will not be implemented, a government that does not make promises cannot take credit for delivering on them and can gain a reputation as a government without ideas or a purpose. This is a mechanism for government to cultivate the trust and confidence of the public. Not making promises and not fulfilling those promises made can both damage the impression of the government with the electorate and make it easily assailable by its political opponents. As Laver observes, "...If party leaders cannot deliver on commitments that their parties will behave in certain ways, then the entire system of parliamentary government has the potential to become chaotic and unpredictable" (1999: 11). The electorate are known to punish government for its failure to perform (e.g. Fiorina 1981; Anderson 1995). Far better is to gain a reputation as a strong government that implements its promises, but this is a balancing act and only those promises likely to be fulfilled are also likely to be made (Cohen 1995; 1997). In a unitary system, it is even more imperative to act credibly, since there is no other branch of government to deflect blame onto if promises are not kept (e.g. Anderson 1995).

The most logical explanation for the correspondence between promises and actions is the idea of credit-taking and the fulfilment of manifesto and platform

promises (Strøm 2000; 2001; Bara 2005). There is an advantage to claiming policy, not only in terms of reputation, but in tangible terms that lead to re-election and the maintaining of political power, which is particularly important in a unified system of government like the UK. But this concept of credit-taking is not unique to parliaments and prime ministers either, as even presidents often choose to go public to claim a desired outcome, although they are often more strategic in attaching themselves to policies due to the separation of powers (Kernell 1997; Canes-Wrone 2001; 2005).

Keeping promises may also serve a wider purpose. The notion of government accountability and transparency is at the heart of democratic ideal. If politicians do not keep their promises how can the public know that the election manifesto promises are genuine? Moreover, the public will not be in a position to judge them at the next election. Representative government depends on there being a chain of responsibility from citizen to government back to government. This is the essence of responsible party government (Ranney 1954) upon which parties seek to take control of policy in the legislature (Cox and McCubbins 2005), and from which they seek an electoral reward. Democracy is about the mandate that electors place on parties to implement their preferences: “what distinguishes democracy from benevolent despotism are precisely the institutional mechanisms for ensuring a *necessary* correspondence between government policy and individual preferences” (Budge and MacDonald 2005: 4).

So how well does the government keep its commitments and how well does the most public face of the UK Parliament match the reality of what the government does in terms of legislation? What factors logically strengthen the relationship between promises on issues and outputs and what factors decrease this same

relationship? If credit-claiming is the causal mechanism, what particular relationships do we expect?

On average we expect the relationship between the commitments contained in the Speech from the Throne and Acts of Parliament to be strong. This is due to the power of the prime minister and cabinet in British politics who leads the party with a monopoly of power over the legislature, with access to Crown powers of appointment, and the typically single party and strong governments of the U.K. historically among other factors (Cox 1987; Strøm 2000). The relationship will never be perfect though, as timing and the opening of policy windows is a factor when it comes to agenda-setting (Goodin 1982; Kingdon 1984). Events and public opinion may also shift the necessary legislative outputs in a given year away from the commitments made at the start of a parliamentary session (Cohen 1995; 1997; Hobolt and Klemmensen 2005, 2008; Jennings and John 2009; John, Bevan and Jennings n.d.).

One particular event is likely to focus priorities and therefore increase the strength of the relationship between commitments in the Speech from the Throne and Acts of Parliament. Election years, in particular the parliamentary session immediately following an election, are important times for parties in British politics. These mark the beginning point of fulfilling a new party manifesto, and potentially a new agenda entirely if a new government has come into power. Governments like to make a clear start to their administrations for this when the public and even the party is scrutinizing their actions, seeing how well they fulfil their promises. Later on in an administration the government may find it hard to keep its promises because the environment they face has changed since being elected to power, causing it to focus on new problems and agendas. It is also likely that the government does not have to

always keep its promises in future years as the reputation gained from their previous actions allow them some flexibility without harming their credibility.

Besides those ever present influences, many factors may have weakened this relationship in British politics, which are associated with long term partisan change and changes in the policy environment. Historically in Britain political parties have tended to be centralised with control by elites over their members and their representatives flying the party flag. This has however declined over time due to the prevalence of ideology and the decline of deference in the wider society, which means party whips exercise less control than they did in the past. The cohesiveness of parties trying to push their legislation through parliament has weakened since the 1970s (Norton 1975, 1978, 1980), partly due to MPs gaining the habit of rebelling (Cowley 1999, 2002). Other studies suggest both that the growth in what government does and the fact that ministers do not have total control over their departments have led to a decrease in executive control over time, if not necessarily a decline in executive power (Mueller 1987; Huber 2000). The growth of complexity of government (Hecklo 1980) and the demands of a globalised economy may have reduced the control that executives had over policy. The expansion of the activities of interest groups politics and the growth in the venues for policy-making, such as the European Union may be another explanation (Richardson 2000). On the other hand, it is possible that the power of the executive has increased alongside prime ministerial powers (Foley 1993) and because of ministerial activism.

## **Hypotheses**

Due to the power of the prime minister and cabinet and the nature of British politics the relationship between the Speech from the Throne and Acts of Parliament

should be strong. Where the commitments made in the Speech are a good predictor of the legislative outputs in the parliamentary year following the Speech.

**H1:** There is a significant positive relationship between the Speech from the Throne and Acts of the Parliament.

Over time, the power of the executive may have declined in British politics for many reasons, such as the growth of rebellions by party supporters in parliament. The growth of government, the rise of the welfare state, and the ever growing number of complex tasks required of the government, also means that much of what government does requires little of a public face. As such the effect of Speech from the Throne on Acts of Parliament should decrease over time.

**H2:** The effect of the Speech from the Throne on Acts of Parliament declines over time, and this decline is significant.

The effect of the Speech from the Throne on Acts of parliament will be greater in an election year, as a government enacts its new programmes and in particular has a greater incentive to keep commitments it has stated and restated during the election campaign.

**H3:** The relationship between the Speech from the Throne and Acts of Parliament is significantly greater during the parliamentary year immediately following an election.

## **Data and Methods**

The data used to test this paper's hypotheses come from the UK Policy Agenda Project ([www.policyagendas.org.uk](http://www.policyagendas.org.uk)) and include data from 1911 to 2007, spanning ninety-nine parliamentary sessions and covering 19 different major topic codes that encompass all the issues the UK Parliament deals with. Furthermore, the topic code for Health, like the 19 other topic codes, has been made comparable across all datasets such that what is health policy in the Speech from the Throne, is health policy for acts, is health policy for public opinion. This universal coding scheme for

policy makes comparing the whole of government policy activity over the time span of the project quite easy and allows for the testing of a time bound population of all activities, rather than just a sample of those activities. This paper makes use of that trait of the data to test for a general pattern between the Speech from the Throne and Acts of the UK Parliament, rather than for an issue specific one.

To conduct our analyses, we employed a time series cross-sectional design using panel corrected standard errors. In our analyses, each parliamentary year is the time value and each major topic is treated as an individual panel, which lead to a total N of 1862 (99-1 parliamentary years (T) \* 19 major topics (n)) observations for the time bound population. Employing a pooled time series cross-sectional not only allows us to address the autoregressive nature and trend in acts over time, but also such an analysis allows for the proper inclusion of multiple panels, which in turn allows for the discovery of common effects between all speech/acts relationships in the 1911-2007 time period.

The dependent variable used for this papers analyses are acts, specifically acts by policy topic, parliamentary session. For example, the number of acts on healthcare in 30<sup>th</sup> session in our dataset is one observation, as is the number of acts on healthcare in 31<sup>st</sup>, and so is the number of acts on Defence in 31<sup>st</sup>, and so forth. By using parliamentary sessions rather than calendar years, differences in when parliamentary sessions open and the fact that multiple sessions have occasionally occurred in a single year do not affect the analysis. The aggregated acts measure has been generated from our database of acts which has been blind-coded by two researchers according to each act's long and short-title. This procedure led to eighty-five per cent inter-coder reliability for most years. The remaining differences were resolved through discussion and the project leaders made the final decision in the few cases where coders could

not agree. For each act the date of royal assent of Acts of the UK is the observed time point, and since all acts receive assent prior to the start of a new parliamentary session, which is marked by the Speech from the Throne, we are certain that all Acts are properly attributed to the correct parliamentary year and subsequently the correct Speech from the Throne.

Two primary independent variables are used in this paper. The first is the number of mentions in the Speech from the Throne by policy topic, parliamentary year. The second is the number of mentions in the legislative section of the Speech from the Throne also by policy topic, parliamentary year. With a few exceptions most speeches have two parts,<sup>2</sup> one focused on an executive agenda, primarily composed of international affairs, defence, as well as colonial and territorial issues, but almost all issues can and do receive some attention in this part of the Speech from the Throne at some point in our dataset.<sup>3</sup> The other half of the speech marks the legislative agenda and is full of policy promises, including nonspecific mentions of forthcoming bills, and other general legislative intentions directed toward the House of Commons. The split between these two sections is generally obvious and marked by formal non-policy statements indicating the shift in attention. Historically, the first section of the speech has contained the executive agenda, however this was changed under the Labour Government in 1997, which has put the legislative section of the speech first. However, the transition between the two can still be clearly seen in direct and formalized non-policy statements.<sup>4</sup> Both of these variables have been aggregated from our database of Speeches from the Throne which has been blind-coded by two

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<sup>2</sup> In 1921 a second speech was given that only focused on the executive portion of the agenda, in particular the Irish Free State.

<sup>3</sup> With the exception of 15 and 17 all issues are mentioned at least once in the executive part of the Speech from the Throne over the 99 speeches contained in our dataset.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this and the other characteristics of the Speech from the Throne mentioned herein see Jennings, Bevan, and John n.d.

researchers with each speech broken up into quasi-sentences,<sup>5</sup> which represent complete thoughts, but not necessarily complete sentences. The total mentions and legislative mentions variables are presented in two separate versions of this paper's analyses, to highlight how the two parts of the Speech affect policy outputs differently.

A graphical inspection of the total, the legislative half Speech from the Throne and Acts of the UK parliament overall is presented in Figure 1.

[insert Figure 1 about here]

The number of mentions in the Speech from the Throne overall and in the legislative half has grown slightly and the number of Acts of the UK Parliament has decreased from 1911 to 2007, although these processes are not without momentary shifts as evidenced by Figure 1. For example, the World Wars greatly decreased the number of mentions in the Speech from the Throne, particularly in terms of legislative mentions. During the same time periods the number of acts was higher than average, none clearer than in 1914 when parliament remained in session until 1916, meaning a single parliamentary session contained two calendar years worth of acts.

As illustrated in Figure 1, Acts of the UK parliament tend to decline slightly over time. In time series terms this represents a trend in the data. This makes sense as the delegation of powers, devolution, and other changes such as omnibus legislation have decreased the need for acts (see John, Bevan, and Jennings n.d.). To address this decline a time variable is included in this papers models, counting from 1 for the first parliamentary session in our time span to 99 at the last as a control and constitutive term in the model.

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<sup>5</sup> A quasi-sentence (or policy statement) constitutes an expression of a single policy idea or issue (see Volkens 2002). Often this unit of analysis is identifiable from the use of punctuation, though it is possible for sentences to include multiple references to policy content (in particular those which address a series of major policy issues in a list).

As stated in hypothesis 2 we suspect that the effect of the Speech from the Throne on Acts of the UK parliament will decline over time. To test for this we include an interaction between time and the Speech from the Throne, this is done for both versions of this variable in the separate models they are presented in. Time of course only varies by parliamentary year, while the Speech from the Throne mentions vary by policy topic, parliamentary year.

Parliamentary years immediately following elections, in particular those election years in which party control changes, are likely to have a higher number of acts than the average during none election years. As such, an elections variable is therefore included in the model as a control. The election variable is coded 1 for parliamentary sessions immediately following an election and 0 otherwise.

The parliamentary year immediately following an election is a time for fulfilling commitments for parties to maintain their credibility and political capital, as well as to enact the programs they campaigned on that resulted in a successful election. Therefore, as stated in hypothesis 3, we expect the effect of the Speech from the Throne on Acts of Parliament to be greater during election years. An interaction between the Speech from the Throne and the election dummy is included in both versions of the model.

There is reason to believe that parties use Acts not only differently, but to different degrees.<sup>6</sup> As such we include a dummy variable for the Conservative party, coded 1 when the Conservatives are in control of Parliament and 0 when there is a Labour, Liberal or National/Coalition government as a control in the model. The reason we use this particular coding is simple, the Conservatives are both in power at

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<sup>6</sup> There is some reason to believe that parties also fulfil the commitments differently as well. However the marginal effects of an interaction between our various codings of the party variable and the Speech from the Throne measures never approached significance and did not significantly alter the other results of our analyses.

various times throughout the time span we investigate, and are theoretically different than the other parties that have controlled Parliament from 1911-2007.<sup>7</sup>

The World Wars are two major events during the 1911-2007 period that we suspect fundamentally alter the policy outputs of the UK. This is not just by topic, but overall as well. Evidence of this can be seen in Figure 1. As such, a dummy variable coded as 1 during wartime (1914-1918 and 1939-1945) and 0 otherwise is included as a control for changes in the number of Acts passed due to these two major events in world history.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, there is a strong reason to believe that acts follow an autoregressive process.<sup>9</sup> In other words, one of the best possible predictors for the number of acts on healthcare in a given year is the number of acts on healthcare in the previous year. Like most autoregressive processes, the transmission will not be perfect and only a percentage of acts in the previous year should transmit to the current year. To control and test for the autoregressive nature of acts we include a lagged acts variable in this paper's analyses.

## Results

The results for each time series cross-sectional model using the different Speech from the Throne variables are presented below in Table 1.

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<sup>7</sup> Other coding options for party we also investigated, including dummies for each party with Conservative omitted, and a left to right variable, with parties coded from -1 to 1 according to their relative positioning on the liberal to conservative dimension. Both of these of these options were unsatisfactory and their inclusion or exclusion did not alter the other findings presented in this paper, leading to minor alterations in coefficients, but not signs or significances.

<sup>8</sup> As also seen in Figure 1, the World Wars also led to a significant decline in the length of the Speech from the Throne, in particular the legislative section of the speech. It is therefore logical to assume that an interaction between the Speech from the Throne measures and our war dummy would be negative and significant. However, during model specification tests this interaction proved to be positive and insignificant. This is because the transmission from speech to acts remained strong for those issues that still received attention in the speech during wartime, and those issues which did not receive attention in the speech represented true 0's which had no effect on the calculation of the coefficients.

<sup>9</sup> Analyses of each policy areas autocorrelation and partial autocorrelation functions confirmed that acts do follow an AR(1) process for the majority of topics.

[insert Table 1 about here]

In Table 1, the positive and highly significant coefficients for lagged Acts of the UK parliament, indicates that acts are indeed autoregressive, meaning that on average if there were two acts on education in the previous year, holding all else constant there will be at least one act in the current year, simply due to inertia. The strong positive coefficient for the speech in both versions of the analysis indicates the average effect of a mention in the Speech from the Throne on acts across all 19 policy topics. In other words, on average a mention in the legislative half of the Speech on agriculture will result in 0.552 Acts holding the Speech\*Time interaction to 0, a value it never takes however. To understand this variable's marginal effects and the strong negative coefficient for the Speech\*Time variable, a graph of marginal effects for the Speech from the Throne over parliamentary year is presented in Figure 2.

[insert Figure 2 about here]

Understanding the results presented in Figure 2 is straightforward. The Y axis indicates the marginal effect of the Speech while the X axis indicates which parliamentary year it is. Therefore, the two lines indicate the combined effects for the Speech variable and Speech\*Time interaction at a given point in time. Calculating these effects is as simple as taking the coefficient for the Speech variable in each sample, minus the coefficient for the Speech\*Time interaction which has multiplied by each parliamentary year, from 2-99 as the first parliamentary year was dropped from the analyses with the inclusion of a lagged Acts variable. In both cases the effect of the speech declines over time, and that decline is slightly sharper in the legislative version of the analysis. However, it is interesting to note that not only do the marginal effects for the legislative mentions remain higher than even the initial effect of the total mentions for roughly 90 parliaments, but that the effects for the legislative

mentions, while constantly decreasing, also remain significant throughout the 99 parliaments contained in this analysis.

The Speech\*Election interaction is positive in both models, and is significant in the analysis utilizing the legislative mentions version of the speech variable. Interpretation of this result is simpler than the previous interaction, as the election dummy only takes on two values, 0 or 1. As such, during a nonelection year, the Speech operates in the same way as discussed above; however, during an election year, 0.205 is added to the effect of the speech, indicating the average increase in the strength of an election over the 99 parliaments contained in the analysis. In other words, during an election year, a mention in the legislative section of the speech results in 0.205 of an act, in addition to the other effect it generally has on Acts.

Time is negative in the legislative mentions analysis as we would expect given the decline in the number of acts historically, but this is not significant, suggesting that the year-to-year change has been minor. However, from the first parliamentary session to the last in our dataset, the number of acts, when considering the legislative version of the model, decreases by 0.3 for each issue area, meaning that holding all else constant, there are 5.6 fewer acts of parliament now than there were in 1911.

The Conservative variable is positive in both models, indicating that on average Conservatives have passed more acts than other parties, but this difference is insignificant. The war variable is also positive and nears significance in both versions of the model, indicating that more acts have been passed during the World Wars than the average number of acts in all other parliamentary years.

Beyond the findings that acts are indeed autoregressive, that the Speech from the Throne is a significant predictor of acts (H1), that this relationship has declined slightly overtime (H2), and that the speech has a stronger relationship with Acts

immediately following an election (H3) the most important thing to take away from these results is that the transmission mechanism from Speech mentions to Acts is stronger when looking at the just the legislative section of the Speech from the Throne. Of course the effect for the lagged acts variable is weaker too in this model, while the effects for the Speech\*Time and Speech\*Election interactions are higher, along with the Conservative and war dummy variables, as well as a weakened election dummy. Before explaining each of these differences in turn, it is important to note, that not only do the three variables which test this papers hypotheses have higher coefficients in this version of the analysis, but that the model's fit has improved, suggesting that since the only variable to change was our operationalization of the Speech from the Throne variable this is the more appropriate model specification.

There are logical reasons for the differences between the results in these two models. The decline in the lagged Acts variable is mostly methodological, as the increase in the explanatory power of other variables in the model means that this variable does a poorer job in explaining the variance in acts in the current year. The large increase in the effect of the speech variable and similarly large increase in the Speech\*Time and Speech\*Election interactions is likely because the legislative half of the Speech from the Throne contains actual legislative promises, going so far as to say that an act, without giving its title, will be passed on civil rights, housing, etc. The slight increase in the size of the Conservative variable is most likely because Conservatives generally make more mentions on issues such as international relations overall (see Jennings, Bevan, and John n.d.), which is heavily tied to the first half of the Speech from the Throne in most instances. The increase in the war dummy variable in size and that it nears significance is again likely because the front half of the speech contains many mentions about war, and the speech variable no longer no

longer helps as well in explaining the increase in acts during wartime, in particular acts related to defence in the World War periods. Finally, the decrease in the elections dummy is likely similar to the reason behind the decline in the lagged acts variable, simply the other variables in the model have gained predictive power, in particular the Speech\*Election interaction which has soaked up some of the variance of this dummy.

## **Conclusions**

The transmission of the executive's policy agenda to legislative outputs in the UK is strong in general, acting as both a significant and substantial predictor of Acts of Parliament according to the model. However, this relationship has declined over time and while the effects remain significant when considering only legislative mentions in the Speech from the Throne. It now takes many more mentions in the speech for a resulting act to be passed. Also, the effect of the Speech on Acts is greater immediately following an election, when the desire and need to maintain commitments is higher than during the rest of a government's term. The results presented in this paper further show that the transmission of mentions in the speech to Acts of Parliament is far stronger when only the legislative section of the speech is considered. This makes logical sense, but shows that the Speech from the Throne has two distinct focuses, namely an executive focus concerned primarily with international relations, territorial issues, and defence, and a legislative focus that highlights all of the legislation the government intends to see through in the coming parliamentary year (Jennings, Bevan and John n.d.). It further indicates that while the Speech from the Throne is used to open parliament, it represents the wider executive agenda in the UK, and not just a legislative or domestic focus.

This paper uses time as a proxy for many of the changes that have occurred in British politics over the last hundred years, from the changing nature of parliament to the supposed decline in executive power. However, none of the factors discussed in this paper and which might help explain why the connection between policy promises contained in the Speech from the Throne and legislative outputs in the form of Acts of Parliament are tested here. While investigating whether certain factors, such as backbench rebellions and increasing bureaucratic complexity, are significant determinants for this decline is important, this was not the goal of this paper. Many possible circumstances may explain the weakened relationship between the Speech from the Throne and Acts of Parliament. One goal for future research will be to investigate the supposed decline in executive power and the changing nature of parliament as they relates to acts. Such research will further elucidate the evolution of the complex relationship between the executive and the legislature in British politics.

British governments keep fewer of their legislative commitments than they once did. The institution of the Speech from the Throne is now no longer such a strong indicator of the focus of legislative action in the subsequent session of Parliament. Elections matter, as newly elected and re-elected governments tend to implement their promised programmes to a greater degree than serving governments. The degree to which the Speech from the Throne sets the parliamentary agenda has declined. This might reflect a historical erosion of this institution of Bagehot's dignified part of the constitution. It could also reflect the increased pressure from the media and exogenous factors on legislation, as the programme of government has to respond to fast and immediate pressures from media, the public, interest groups and events. It could indicate a decrease in the power of the government to fulfil the promises made in the Speech from the Throne. Regardless of the mechanism

governments are less likely to keep their promises now than they have been in the past suggesting a decline in the transparency and accountability of the UK Parliament.

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Figure 1: Acts of Parliament, All Mentions, and Legislative Mentions in the Speech from the Throne.

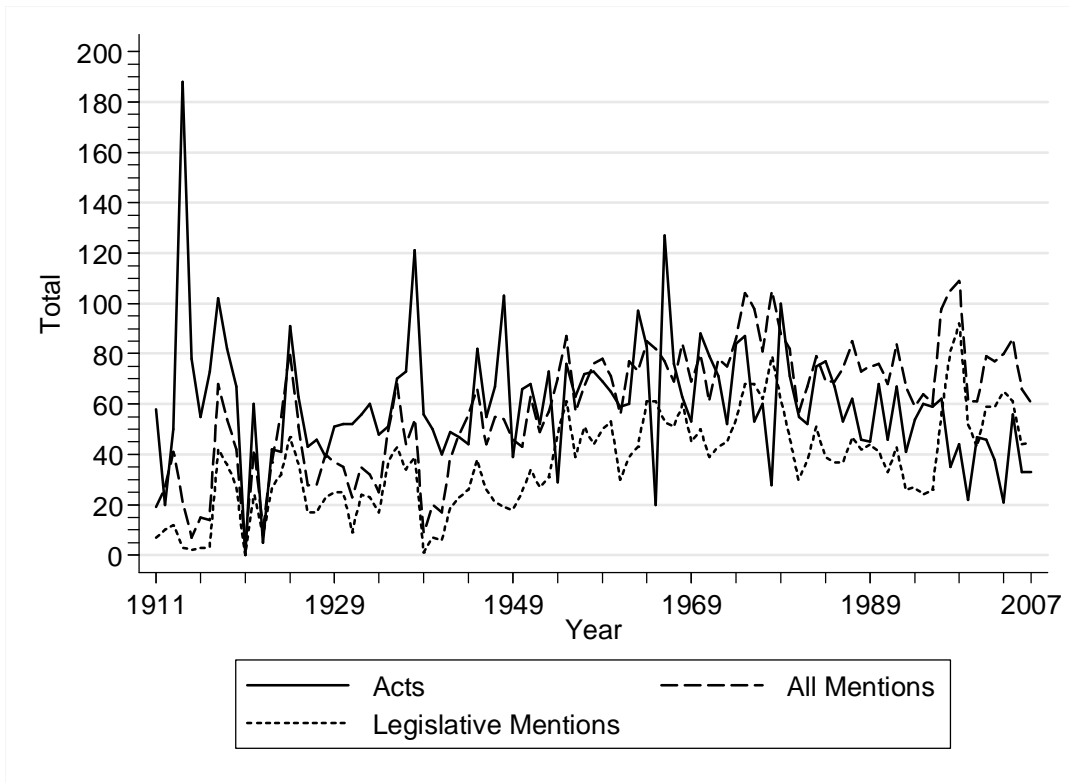


Table 1: Acts of Parliament by Major Topic

	All Mentions <sup>10</sup>	Legislative Mentions
Lagged Acts	0.534*** (0.039)	0.476*** (0.039)
Speech	0.233*** (0.053)	0.552*** (0.114)
Speech*Time	-0.002*** (0.001)	-0.004** (0.002)
Speech*Election	0.070† (0.039)	0.205* (0.081)
Time	0.001 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.005)
Election	0.841** (0.305)	0.504 (0.307)
Conservative	0.094 (0.281)	0.173 (0.275)
War	0.540 (0.467)	0.793† (0.456)
Constant	0.752* (0.338)	0.803* (0.333)
R <sup>2</sup>	.333	.365

Note: \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ , N=1862

<sup>10</sup> All panels except agriculture exhibited no autocorrelation in their residuals. Dropping agriculture from the data and running the analysis on the remaining cases did not alter the signs or significances of the results.

Figure 2: Marginal Effects of Speech from the Throne Mentions Over Time

