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Marcus Braymer

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COMEDY OF POLITICS: HOW  
SATIRE AFFECTS THE  
ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
A POLITICIAN

by

MARCUS BRAYMER

Presented to the Faculty of the Honors College of  
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

HONORS BACHELOR OF ARTS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

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December 7, 2016

## ABSTRACT

### COMEDY OF POLITICS: HOW SATIRE AFFECTS THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS A POLITICIAN

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The University of Texas at Arlington, 2016

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Throughout history, satirists have mocked politicians. However, in recent years politicians have involved themselves in satire, making appearances on shows like *Saturday Night Live* and *The Daily Show*. These appearances and the increasing interest in satire has led to one question, does satire affect the public opinion of politicians? In order to answer this question an experiment was designed by creating three original videos. The videos showed a fictional politician's support of an issue, a satirist making fun of this politician, and the politician making an appearance with the satirist to make fun of himself. Participants watched these videos and answered a series of questions that were designed to gauge the politician's likeability. Estimated results based on similar

experiments are that these videos have no significant impact on the public opinion of the politician.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Satire is everywhere. There are multiple satirical television shows, different satirical websites, and satire can easily be found while someone is on their phone. While satire has been around since ancient Greece, it can be said that it is more popular today than ever (Dagnes, 2012). Some even consider watching satirical shows like *The Daily Show* as a way to consume news (Kohut, 2004). Furthermore, while satire's popularity has grown, so has the number of politicians' appearances on satirical shows. Politicians like John McCain, Hillary Clinton, Joseph Lieberman, and President Barack Obama have all appeared on satirical shows (Huddleston, 2015 & Jones, 2005 & Martinez, 2015). One should ask if satire affects the attitudes toward a politician.

There is a limited amount of research on this topic. Baumgartner, Morris, & Walth (2012) studied "the Fey effect." Their article investigated if Tina Fey's impersonation of Vice-Presidential nominee Sarah Palin impacted the likelihood to vote for the McCain/Palin ticket. Baumgartner (2012) found that the nomination of Palin made it less likely to vote for McCain after viewing the *SNL* skit in Republican and Independent respondents. However, the researchers state that this could have been because of Palin's performance in campaign events, debates, and interviews. Moreover, the authors also note that a Vice-Presidential nominee has been proven to have little effect on someone's presidential vote (Baumgartner, 2012). Thus, the satire of Palin most likely did not affect the election. Baumgartner (2008) also investigated how political

cartoons affect a candidate's evaluation. He found that after reviewing satire, respondents had a negative view of candidates, but that view did not affect their candidate preferences (Baumgartner, 2008).

This paper aims to add to this limited scholarship and observe if satire can harm or help the attitudes toward a politician. In order to answer this question, this project developed an experiment with different conditions. These conditions simulated a politician giving a position speech, a politician being satirized by a comedian, and the politician appearing with a comedian to satirize himself. This paper will explore the history of satire in America, then will explain the methodology behind the experiment. Lastly, this paper will show the results and discuss how these results can be applied to the current rule of politics.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORY OF SATIRE IN AMERICA

#### 2.1 Satire and the Revolution

Satire has a long history. It was influential in ancient civilizations like Greece with Aristophanes and ancient Rome with Juvenal (Danges, 2012). As history progressed, satire progressed with it. In the Age of Enlightenment satire was dominated by British writers like John Gay, Alexander Pope, and Jonathon Swift. However, satire in America gained popularity in the years before the Revolutionary War, specifically “after the year 1773 when the British Tea Act triggered the Boston Tea Party, the First Continental Congress..., and [the signing of] the Declaration of Independence” (Danges, 2012, pg. 82). Satire in this period consisted of several components, including “pamphlets, plays, songs, poems, and newspaper articles” (Dagnes, 2012, pg. 83). During this time, satire was split between Loyalist (pro-British) and Patriot (anti-British) satire. Patriots portrayed the Loyalists as “Anglified dandies and fops” (Dagnes, 2012, pg. 83. in reference to Olsen, 2005) and Loyalists portrayed Patriots “as unsophisticated and unskilled in the area of politics” (Dagnes, 2012, pg. 83). One of the most famous of the satirists in this era was Benjamin Franklin. Franklin published his own newspaper, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, in which he used satire to demonstrate his point in his articles. Moreover, Franklin published America’s first political cartoon with his famous “Join or Die” cartoon.

## 2.2 Satire and Early America

After the Revolutionary War, satire was defined by the political cartoon. During the Revolutionary period, there were not many political cartoons. Notable were the “Join or Die” cartoon by Benjamin Franklin and a depiction of George Washington, the first to depict a president in the United States (Dagnes, 2012). Political cartoons became more popular with the introduction of lithography in the United States during the early nineteenth century (Dagnes, 2012). The first newspaper to use political cartoons commonly was the *United States Telegraph* in 1832. This anti-Andrew Jackson newspaper used their cartoons for the sole purpose of “complement[ing] the editorials against Jackson” (Dagnes, 2012, pg. 86). One of the cartoons that was used to mock Jackson was the “jackass” or donkey symbol. In a clever retort, which was described by Dagnes (2012) as perhaps one of the “first (and most effective) cases (sic) of political spin control” (pg. 86), Jackson co-opted the “jackass” symbol by saying it represented his “mule-like dedication and stubbornness in fighting for his policies” (Dagnes, 2012, pg. 86 in reference to Dewey 2007). This could also be the first case of a politician involving himself in satire. The “jackass” cartoon was later adopted by the Democratic Party as their symbol (Dagnes, 2012). In addition to cartoons that mocked and criticized Jackson, there were fictional satirical stories. One of these featured a character named Major Jack Downing. Downing was used to represent Jackson and showed Jackson’s “inadequacies and the feeble-mindedness of his supporters” (Dagnes, 2012, pg. 86). The Jack Downing character was so popular that he was even used in different political cartoons.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, satire became more common, and as its popularity grew, satirical mediums changed. At this time, satirical magazines became to

grow in popularity. One of the more famous satirical magazines at this time was *Puck* magazine. Instead of criticizing one politician or candidate, *Puck* magazine aimed to be nonpartisan and to criticize and satirize “the patronage that riddled the American political systems with fraud” (Dagnes, 2012, pg. 88). *Puck* magazine and others like it were not only popular but also influential. Later in the century, *Puck* magazine did get involved with presidential politics when it opposed Republican presidential candidate James Blaine in his race against Grover Cleveland (Dagnes, 2012). In order to satirize Blaine, *Puck* magazine created the “tattooed man” cartoon. This cartoon depicted Blaine with tattoos of the corrupt acts he had committed. These cartoons were published more than 20 times and were credited with shifting popular opinion to Grover Cleveland (Dagnes, 2012, in reference to Thomas, 1986).

Due to the popularity of the magazine and their cartoonist Joseph Keppler, *Puck* inspired several competitors including *Harper’s Weekly’s* Thomas Nast, who is considered “America’s first great cartoonist” (Dagnes, 2012, pg. 89). Nast’s work consisted of support for African American’s rights and criticism of Democrats for racism during the Civil War and the Reconstruction period. During this time, the Republican Party credited Nast for his support of the Union. Abraham Lincoln even claimed that Nast’s cartoons aided the recruiting effort for soldiers in the Civil War (Dagnes, 2012, in reference to Dewey, 2007). Nast has also created the Republican Party’s elephant symbol. Nast also gained notoriety for his work against William Marcy Tweed and Tweed’s New York City’s Tammany Hall. Nast commonly used animals to represent those in Tammany Hall. His cartoons were so popular and effective that they drove Tweed to say, “Let’s stop them damned pictures. I

don't care what the people write about me – My constituents can't read; but damn it, they can see pictures” (Dagnes, 2012, pg. 90).

During this era, the literacy rates for Americans started to increase. This led to the increase in popularity of satirical books. One of the most famous writers during this period was Mark Twain, who produced several books and other writings that highlighted social injustice and satirized the American political system. Some of his most famous satirical work included “Banquet for a Senator,” *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and “The War Prayer” (Dagnes, 2012). Another famous writer and contemporary of Twain was Henry Adams. One of Adams most famous satirical works was a book entitled *Democracy*, which criticized many of the politicians in Washington. Both Twain and Adams used humor to criticize the political establishment, society, and even human nature (Dagnes, 2012).

### 2.3 The World Wars and Satire

As the post-Reconstruction era ended, the early twentieth century began. During World War I, satire and humor was not popular. In fact, cartoons during World War I were supportive of soldiers and the war effort (Dagnes, 2012). However, the popularity of satire surged after the war. One post-war satirist was Will Rogers. He wrote in a folksy tone that made him popular among the people (Dagnes, 2012). Furthermore, journalists began to adapt satirical qualities during the height of muckraking journalism. One of these satirists was Henry Louis Mencken. Mencken gained notoriety for his coverage of the Scopes Monkey Trial, where he used some elements of satire. Mencken continued to use satire to cover difficult topics like anti-Semitism during the Holocaust, foreign relations leading up to World War II, and the New Deal under Franklin D. Roosevelt. However, Mencken's

popularity decreased when covering these difficult topics, because many in America did not seek out comedy during World War II and FDR was immensely popular (Dagnes, 2012).

Mencken learned a difficult lesson during his time as a satirist: the public has to be receptive of the critique of the government. During World War II (and World War I) most satirists abandoned criticizing government, because the public did not want a critique of government during a war that many believed in and had family in (Dagnes, 2012). Political cartoons during World War II and World War I were instead largely to be supportive of soldiers. For example, the Uncle Sam “I want you” poster was created by a political cartoonist and was used as a reinforcing message to Americans (Dagnes, 2012). Furthermore, political cartoonist during World War II would create cartoons that were supportive of the US and Allied soldiers (showing their bravery and their “gritty life” (Dagnes, 2012, pg. 96)) and would demonize German and Japanese governments and soldiers. In other words, during World War II many of the famous cartoonists, including Theodore Geisel (Dr. Seuss), were humorless, but analytical and patriotic (Dagnes, 2012).

This humorlessness support of the government in satire extended throughout the 1950s. The only notable exception during this time was the emergence of the comic book and magazines like *MAD*. *MAD* focused on social commentary but famously critiqued Senator Joseph McCarthy and the Red Scare (Dagnes, 2012). Moreover, *MAD*'s legacy was introducing satire to a new generation and paving the way for this generation of satirists to create some of the most groundbreaking satire that changed politics in the years to come (Dagnes, 2012). In addition to *MAD*, some stand-up comedians were also engaging in satire during the 1950s. Two of the most influential were Mort Sahl and Lenny Bruce,

both of whom criticized the conservative culture of the time with irreverence. Bruce, in particular, performed so indecently (by 1950s standards) that he was arrested. These comedians and *MAD* magazine paved the way for a re-emergence of satire in the 60s (Dagnes, 2012).

#### 2.4 Satire and the “Protest Era”

As the 1960s started, faith in the government dwindled, and this allowed satirist and comedians to freely criticize the government and society in a variety of ways. During this time, there was a tremendous racial strife in this country, and Dick Gregory and Richard Pryor brought this to the front of American culture. They did this by talking about racism comedically, but harshly. Some have considered these two comedians as an important part of the civil rights era and defining voices in black culture (Dagnes, 2012). Furthermore, this time period also allowed satire to emerge in the theatre. One of these plays was entitled *MacBird!*, which stated that Lyndon B. Johnson was responsible for the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The play was panned by critics but popular with audiences (Dagnes, 2012).

The biggest revolution in satire during the 1960s was the emergence of satire on television. One of the first instances of this was *Tonight*, which debuted in 1954 with host Steve Allen but was taken over by Jack Paar in the late 50s. This program was changed to the *Jack Paar Program* in 1962 and was fertile ground for satire (Dagnes, 2012). One instance was when an impressionist named Vaughn Meader appeared in a skit where he played John F. Kennedy at a press conference, or in another skit in which Meader played Kennedy at dinner with his family. These sketches made fun of Kennedy’s accent but not necessarily his politics (Dagnes, 2012). The other instances in satirical television were less



gentle. For example, *This Was the Week That Was* or *TW3* premiered in the United States in 1964. This American version of the English satire show of the same name was canceled because of fear that it would affect elections (Day, 2011). *TW3* in the US was controversial and was written by writers who wanted to be controversial. Repeatedly and intentionally writers would submit scripts that would be “too far” for network censors (Danges, 2012). Nevertheless, the show was popular among the audience, and NBC (the network airing the show) got a positive response. However, NBC executives feared that the show would offend its viewers and create a controversy (Crawley, 2005). Thus, *TW3* was put on hiatus during the primary elections and returned to a non-desirable time slot. The time slot change led to the cancellation of *TW3* (Day, 2011).

In 1967 *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* premiered on CBS. *Comedy Hour* was perhaps the most stinging and edgy satire on television during this time. The show premiered with a couple of non-controversial episodes and gained popularity (Dagnes, 2012). However, with the show’s popularity the *Smothers Brothers* decided to push the envelope when it came to censors and criticizing the government. The brothers would critique many issues in America, including the Vietnam War and race (Dagnes, 2012). Furthermore, the show would invite comedians who also would make political points. For example, the show invited comedian Pat Paulsen, who announced that he would be running for president in order to critique the political process (Crawley, 2005). Another example was when the show invited singer Pete Seeger, a black-listed artist, to sing his controversial anti-war song “Knee Deep in the Big Muddy.” That performance was censored (Dagnes, 2012; Crawley, 2005). Acts like the censorship of Seeger created an anti-government feeling among *Comedy Hour*’s audience, and the *Smothers Brothers* were able to voice that

feeling. However, they were hampered by CBS executives, who would require advance screening and final cut on all episodes (Dagnes, 2012). While Seeger did perform his song a year later, CBS cancelled the show after many arguments with the brothers over content (Dagnes, 2012). After *Comedy Hour* was cancelled, *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-in* premiered and became the home for satire of the day. *Laugh-in* was faced-paced and energetic. In one famous sketch the comedians treated campus protests as sporting events, with law enforcement being one team and protesters being the other (Day, 2011).

These shows provided a funny critique of government. However, they also provided an outlet for politicians to make appearances on satirical shows. One of the first appearances of a politician on a comedy show was then presidential candidate John F. Kennedy on *Tonight Staring Jack Paar* in 1960 (Martinez, 2015). Kennedy's rival in the presidential race was Richard Nixon, and he made an appearance on *Tonight* soon after (Martinez, 2015). Nixon changed satire and political history when he appeared on *Laugh-in* in 1968. *Laugh-in* had a popular segment called "sock it to me!" where guests and actors would say "sock it to me!" followed by some physical gag. This segment was usually performed by comedienne Judy Carne (Maslon & Kantor, 2008). However, then presidential-candidate Richard Nixon appeared on this segment and said the popular phrase "sock it to me?" Nixon was on camera for only six seconds, but it may have changed the election. Producer of *Laugh-in* George Schlatter says that Nixon believed that this appearance got him elected. This may or may not be true, but it did change people's feelings toward Nixon and led to the FCC instituting the equal time rule on non-news shows (Maslon & Kantor, 2008).

Nixon was elected in 1968, which created fodder for many satirists in this time, many of whom did not like Nixon. The Watergate controversy in particular created material for many satirists, especially cartoonists. The most famous cartoon that depicted Watergate was Gary Trudeau's *Doonesbury* (Dagnes, 2012). *Doonesbury* became an opinion maker, and Gerald Ford even called it one of the vehicles to be informed about Washington (Dagnes, 2012). The cartoonists' work on Nixon was so devastating, even before Watergate, that it created a caricature of the president that he was not able to recover from. The Watergate scandal just confirmed what cartoonists had portrayed for years: Nixon was corrupt and evil (Dagnes, 2012).

After Nixon resigned, Ford became president and the institution of satire known as *Saturday Night Live* (*SNL*) premiered. *SNL* was a hit from the start and dived into satire almost immediately. One of their early satirical segments was "Point-Counterpoint" with Jane Curtin and Dan Aykroyd. The segment satirized not only topics in news but also news shows like *60 minutes*, which had a segment of the same name (Day, 2011). However, the most famous satirical segment during this era on *SNL* was Chevy Chase, who portrayed Gerald Ford as a clumsy fool. Chase as Ford would trip over his desk, staple things to his head, or answer a glass of water as a phone (Dagnes, 2012). Chase's impersonation made the White House take notice. This led to Ford's press secretary, Ron Neeson, to appear on the show as a guest host (Crawley, 2005 & Dagnes, 2012). Furthermore, President Ford himself taped segments for the show (Day, 2012). Ford lost the election in 1976, and some in his administration, including Dick Cheney, believed *SNL* played a part in his demise (Crawley, 2005). Ford's actions showed the power of satire. *SNL* and Chevy Chase forced the President of the United States to come on a show because of the thought that satire

could damage his image. This is just another example of politicians and a president involving themselves in satire.

As the years progressed, satire also continued. *Saturday Night Live* mocked Jimmy Carter, and *The Tonight Show* would continue to invite comics to engage in satire (Dagnes, 2012). However, there were a few developments in the satire genre. For example, Mark Russell began to grow in popularity with his political satirical songs about Ronald Reagan (Dagnes, 2012). Further, a cabaret act named *The Capital Steps* was founded in 1981 by White House staffers. They were constantly booked and made fun of politicians to their face. They even released an album that made fun of Ronald Reagan with songs like “Thank God I’m a Contra Boy” and “We Arm the World” (Dagnes, 2012).

### 2.5 Satire Today

With the state of cable television in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s many more channels and satirical programs were broadcasting into America’s living room. One of the most famous satirical program to premier was *The Daily Show* in 1996. *The Daily Show* was first hosted by Craig Kilborn, but in 1999 Jon Stewart took over the hosting duties for the show (Day, 2011). Under Stewart, *The Daily Show* had a sharp political edge. Many of the writers and performers on his shows went on to form their own spinoff on Comedy Central or other networks (Day, 2011). These spinoffs include *The Colbert Report*, *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, *The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore*, and *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*. All of these shows and *The Daily Show* have contributed to edgy satirical jokes which some say have not only entertained but informed (Kohut, 2004).

The internet age allowed for other avenues of satire. One famous example of this is the satirical online newspaper *The Onion*. *The Onion* started in 1988 at the University of

Wisconsin as a published newspaper. The newspaper started around Wisconsin and then to the Midwest, and eventually became an online satirical source (Dagnes, 2012). It gained popularity after the attacks on 9/11. Many satirical shows were hesitant to make jokes, especially because some of the comedic shows were filmed in New York (*Saturday Night Live*, *The Late Show*, and *The Daily Show*). However, *The Onion* was ready to add humor to a country that was in grief. Some of their post-9/11 headlines included, “Bush Sr. Apologizes to Son for Funding Bin Laden in ‘80s,” “Hugging up 76,000 Percent,” and “We Must Retaliate with Blind Rage vs. We Must Retaliate With Measured, Focused Rage” (Dagnes, 2012, pg. 127). In 2007, *The Onion* launched a fake news network, *The Onion News Network* online (Day, 2011). Moreover, the internet has allowed for professional comedians and amateurs to engage in satire. For example, comedian Zach Galifianakis has an internet show named *Between Two Ferns*, which will occasionally engage in satire. Another example is “creators” on YouTube. From the YouTube channel *Alphacat* (who has a rapping President Obama) to *Epic Rap Battles of History* (which has had actors who appear as presidential candidates rap battling) to *College Humor* (an internet sketch show which will have a variety of political sketches) all engage in satire. The internet made satire more popular and easier for people to engage in it and consume.

## 2.6 Politicians Involved with Satire

As satire and its popularity grew with more channels, more programs, and the internet, politicians began to make appearances on satirical and comedic shows at an increasing rate. While Kennedy, Nixon, and Ford did make appearances on satirical shows, it was still very rare. Reagan did appear on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*;

however, it was in 1976 (during his failed primary race) (Martinez, 2015). Reagan, Carter, and George H. W. Bush did not appear in any late night shows even though they were commonly mocked and satirized (Martinez, 2015). However, their successors embraced satire in ways that changed the office of the presidency. For example, during the 1992 presidential campaign Bill Clinton appeared on the *Arsenio Hall Show* (Martinez, 2015 & Crawley, 2005). During his appearance, Clinton not only discussed the Los Angeles Riots, but famously played the saxophone with the show's band. With this appearance Clinton was able to reach a different audience and show another side of himself (Crawley, 2005). This was in sharp contrast to his opponent George H.W. Bush, who could not remember the price for a gallon of milk during a debate (Martinez, 2015). After Clinton's appearance, most presidential candidates appeared on different comedy and satire-based shows.

After Clinton, presidential candidates and other politicians came on satirical and comedic based shows. For example, presidential candidate George W. Bush appeared on *The Late Show with David Letterman*, where he performed a top 10 things he would do when he is president, among them having his brother wash his car (Martinez, 2015). Furthermore, both Bush and Al Gore appeared on a prime time special edition of *Saturday Night Live* a day before the election (Crawley, 2005 & Day, 2011). Interestingly, Gore was actually forced to watch *SNL* and their satire of him in preparation for the debate. Moreover, in 2003 Arnold Schwarzenegger announced his candidacy for governor of California on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, and in the same year John Edwards announced that he would run for president on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (Jones, 2005). Additionally, Senator John McCain hosted *Saturday Night Live* and many other politicians have appeared on the show (including George H. W. Bush in 1994) (Serico,

2015). Furthermore, many politicians have gone to shows like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and different Bill Maher shows to be interviewed. Some of these politicians include Madeline Albright, Joe Biden, and R. James Woolsey (former CIA director) (Jones, 2005).

Although it became more commonplace for presidential candidates and other politicians to appear on satire-based shows, it would not compare for the presidential election in 2008. Four major presidential candidates made appearances on *Saturday Night Live* and took part in jokes. Examples of this includes Barack Obama's appearance in 2007 during the Democratic primary in a sketch where he showed up to a Hillary Clinton (Amy Poehler) costume party, Mike Huckabee made an appearance in 2008 on *SNL*'s "Weekend Update" when he was mathematically eliminated from the primary process but had not dropped out yet; he joked about being eliminated. Hillary Clinton also made an appearance on *SNL* with Amy Poehler (acting as Hillary Clinton) during a sketch. Republican nominee Senator John McCain made an appearance during a sketch where he all but admitted defeat days before the election (Huddleston, 2015). Moreover, the nominees that year, Obama and McCain, appeared on several different late shows that have a satirical bent. McCain appeared on 13 shows in 2008 and four in 2007. Obama appeared on 11 shows in 2008 and four in 2007 (Lichter, 2008). All of these appearances had presidential candidates making jokes about themselves or others in front of millions of people. However, the most historical moment involving a politician and *Saturday Night Live* involved the Vice President nominee Sarah Palin. Palin was a relatively unknown Alaska Governor when McCain picked her as his vice president nominee. When Palin was thrust onto the ticket and into national prominence, the producers of *SNL* took notice. *SNL* alum and comedienne Tina Fey was asked back to impersonate Palin, and because of the physical resemblance

and Fey's spot on impersonation it was a massive success. Sketches featuring Fey were not only a hit on the show but also viewed millions of times on NBC's website (Flowers & Young, 2010). The sketches were not just popular, they were also harsh. They unapologetically painted Palin as uninformed, unqualified, and dumb (Day, 2011). The sketches were even more damning because many of them used Palin's direct quotes (Day, 2011). These skits became so popular that it forced Sarah Palin to appear on the show alongside with Tina Fey.

Barack Obama won the election in 2008 (and again in 2012) and during his presidency used different satirical and comedic avenues in order to portray his message. For example, Obama made an appearance on an internet comedic program, *Between Two Ferns*. The *Between Two Ferns* appearance was an effort by President Obama to reach young people to sign up for health insurance on "healthcare.gov" (Martinez, 2015). Additionally, President Obama has made several appearances on satirical and comedy based shows, including *The Colbert Report*, *Tonight Show*, *The Late Show*, *The Daily Show*, and *The Ellen Degeneres Show* (IMDB, 2016). President Obama has appeared on these shows multiple times. This has possibly changed how future presidents will interact with satire and the public.

The 2012 Presidential race was less interesting in regards to politicians on satirical shows, although Mitt Romney did appear with Jimmy Fallon on a segment called "Slow Jam the News" (Martinez, 2015). The 2016 race, however, was riddled with politicians and presidential candidates appearing on satirical shows. For example, during the primaries presidential candidates Bernie Sanders (*Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore*), Rand Paul (*The Daily Show*), Hillary Clinton (*Saturday Night Live*), and Jeb Bush (*The Late Show with*



*Stephen Colbert*) appeared on different satirical based shows (IMDb, 2016 & IMDb, 2016 & Heddleston, 2015 & IMDb, 2016). Moreover, an unprecedented step was taken during this election. Donald Trump hosted *Saturday Night Live*, and this was only the second time that a presidential candidate was invited to host *SNL* (the first being Rev. Al Sharpton) (Moore, 2015). Lastly, Hillary Clinton, when she was the official Democratic nominee, appeared on *Between Two Ferns*, a few months during the general election. During this appearance, Clinton was made fun of ruthlessly by the host Zach Galifianakis. Galifianakis asked questions like how fast she could type during her secretary job (she was Secretary of State) and making fun of her having pneumonia (Rogers, 2016).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

There were three short videos filmed for this experiment. The first is the control. This video, which will be referred to as Video A, is a short speech that a fictional politician gave on a fictional nonpartisan, relatively noncontroversial issue. The issue is an Arlington City Councilman asking for support of a bond to increase funding for an animal shelter to build a play area for cats. The councilman's name is Jerry O. Blalock, and that name was created by a random name generator found on the internet. Video A starts with a title-card (white font on a black screen) that says "A message from Arlington City Councilman Jerry O. Blalock." The title and black screen fades into the background, and the actor playing Jerry O. Blalock appears in an office. Blalock then gives a speech imploring people to vote for a bond that will build a play area for cats in a city shelter. Here is Video A's transcript:

Politician (Jerry O. Blalock): In the October city election, the citizens of the city have a choice to vote for a bond that will institute an indoor play area on behalf of kittens and cats for our city animal shelters. This play area will give these homeless kittens an opportunity to interact with their hopeful new families, which will ultimately result in more adoptions. This is a noble cause that I must endorse, because it will lead to a reduction in the population of the animal shelter that will save the city money in the long run. In short, I believe this bond is the morally and fiscally (takes sip of water) responsible thing to do.

The second video, which will be referred as Video B, is video of a satirist (comedian) making fun of the politician or Jerry O. Blalock. The satirist was named Bruce Lane, a name again created by a random name generator. The video starts with a title card (with white font and black back drop) that states: “The Arlington Daily Show Hosted by: Bruce Lane.” Lane then says “an interesting development for the next election.” This introduces a clip from Video A of Blalock endorsing the bond for the cat play area. After that clip concludes the video continues with a cut back to Bruce Lane, who proceeds to satirize Blalock. The impersonation of the politician in Video A satirized the councilman’s speech, mannerisms, personality, and the fictional issue itself. Lane satirizes Blalock’s position by claiming that Blalock’s support for the bond comes from a love of cats instead of a concern for the policy problem. Lane also mocks Blalock’s drink of water. The transcript of Video B is as follows:

Satirist (Bruce Lane): An interesting development for the next election in October.

[cut to video A]

Politician (Blalock): In the October city election, the citizens of the city have a choice to vote for a bond that will institute an indoor play area on behalf of kittens and cats for our city animal shelters. This play area will give these homeless kittens an opportunity to interact with their hopeful new families, which will ultimately result in more adoptions. This is a noble cause that I must endorse, because it will lead to a reduction in the population of the animal shelter that will save (takes sip of water) the city money in the long run. In short, I believe this bond is the morally and fiscally responsible thing to do.

[cut back to satirist]

Satirist (Lane): Yes, of course I want to expand the area for cats because of “moral and fiscal responsibility.” Definitely not because cats are the dominant house pet and deserve love, attention, and ultimately adoption more than dogs. Or, in short, because cats rule and dogs drool. Yes, Mr. Snuggles, our plan for domination has (takes a sip of water) started.

The third and final clip, which will be referred to as Video C, involves Blalock (the politician) making fun of himself with Lane. The structure of Video C is similar to that of Video B. The video starts off with a black screen and a title card that states “The Arlington Daily Show hosted by: Bruce Lane” in white font. It then cuts to a shot of Bruce Lane and he states, “an interesting development for the next election in October.” Video C then cuts back to Video A where Blalock expresses his support for the bond. After the clip is over Video C cuts back to Bruce Lane. Lane then satirizes Blalock’s position with similar jokes from Video B. However, during Lane’s monologue, he is cut off by an appearance by Councilman Jerry O. Blalock. Both of the actors then enter in a dialogue where Blalock defends his position on the bond. During this dialogue, Lane pokes fun at Blalock, and Blalock makes fun of himself. A transcript of Video C is as follows:

Satirist (Lane): An interesting development for the next election in October.

[cut to video A]

Politician (Blalock): In the October city election, the citizens of the city have a choice to vote for a bond that will institute an indoor play area on behalf of kittens and cats for our city animal shelters. This play area will give these homeless kittens an opportunity to interact with their hopeful new families, which will ultimately result in more adoptions. This is a noble cause that I must endorse, because it will

lead to a reduction in the population of the animal shelter that will save (takes sip of water) the city money in the long run. In short, I believe this bond is the morally and fiscally responsible thing to do.

Satirist (Lane) (in an imitation of politician): yes, of course I want to expand the area for cats because of “moral and fiscal responsibility.” Definitely not because cats are the dominant house pet and deserve love, attention, and ultimately adoption more than dogs. Or, in short, because cats rule and dogs drool. Yes, Mr. Snuggles, our plan for domination has begun....

Politician (Blalock): Excuse me...

Satirist (Lane): Oh... Councilman, I didn't see you there. How did you get here?

Politician (Blalock): Don't worry about that, I am here today to defend my position on the bond. Yes, I am a cat person, but to insinuate that I have an agenda in order to make Mr. Snug... I mean cats the dominant housing pet is simply ridiculous.

Satirist (Lane): Um ok... but man you really sneaked up here. You should (smirks to self) wear a bell or something.

Politician (Blalock): (laughs)

Satirist (Lane): So you truly believe that this bond will ultimately reduce the population of the animal shelter and save the city money.

Politician (Blalock): Yes, I just believe if perspective families and kittens have a chance to interact will increase the chances of a family falling in love with the cat. Like I did with mine.

Satirist (Lane): oh well okay...Hey while you are here (smirks to self) do you want something to drink.

Politician (Blalock): Don't be silly...I brought my own (drinks water)

These videos were presented to 85 University of Texas at Arlington students, with about 28 students in each experimental group. The students were asked to volunteer to participate from Introduction to Political Science classes for small amounts of extra credit. The students were assigned to watch the videos systematically. For example, the first student watched Video A; the second student watched Video B; the third student watched Video C; the fourth student watched Video A; and so on. After watching the video, the students were asked questions that are designed to measure the favorability of the politician by measuring the politician's intelligence, likeability, believability, honesty, and sincerity on a Likert Scale. These questions were at the top of the page, and at the bottom of the page were control questions. One of the control questions were for the respondent to select their classification with possible responses being freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior. They were then asked to select their gender with options being male or female. The respondents were also asked open ended questions about their age and major.

For this experiment, we hypothesize that there will be no significant differences between the results from Video A, Video B, Video C. This is a weak hypothesis because of the limited research on the subject.

CHAPTER 4  
RESULTS

In order to examine the differences in the responses of the three conditions a means test was applied to the results. The results of the test are seen in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Means Test Results

Video		Likeable	Intelligent	Believable	Honest	Sincere
A- Politician	Mean	2.64	3.25	2.71	3.07	2.25
	N	28	28	28	28	28
	Std. Deviation	.911	1.076	1.301	.940	1.076
B- Comedian	Mean	3.29	2.96	2.50	2.96	2.43
	N	28	28	28	28	28
	Std. Deviation	1.084	.962	1.106	1.170	1.168
C- Politician & Satirist	Mean	3.52*	3.38	3.03	3.34	3.10**
	N	29	29	29	29	29
	Std. Deviation	.986	.942	1.117	.936	1.113
Total	Mean	3.15	3.20	2.75	3.13	2.60
	N	85	85	85	85	85
	Std. Deviation	1.052	.998	1.184	1.021	1.167
*Significant at .05 **Significant at .01						

First, the means test shows that the mocking of a politician by a satirist has almost no effect on the attitudes toward the politician. The difference between the results for Video A and Video B were not consistent on any of the variables. However, those who watched Video C had consistently higher means on every variable compared to those

who watched Videos A and B. The means for Video C were always the highest, or most favorable, of any group. In other words, when the politician and satirist both appeared in the same video (Video C) and the politician made fun of himself, attitude towards the politician were more favorable than for any of the other two groups. Moreover, the variables of likeability and sincerity were statistically significantly different (and higher) at the .01 level in this group. There is a 99 out of 100 chance that these differences are real in the general population. In order to determine this information an one-way analysis of variance (or Anova) test was conducted and the results are shown in Table 4.2. This result proves the hypothesis wrong and that a politician appearing on a satirical show improves the attitude towards a politician.

Table 4.2: One-way ANOVA Test for Significant Variables

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Likeable	Between Groups	11.628	2	5.814	5.858	.004
	Within Groups	81.384	82	.992		
	Total	93.012	84			
Intelligent	Between Groups	2.558	2	1.279	1.294	.280
	Within Groups	81.042	82	.988		
	Total	83.600	84			
Believable	Between Groups	4.132	2	2.066	1.490	.231
	Within Groups	113.680	82	1.386		
	Total	117.812	84			
Honest	Between Groups	2.203	2	1.102	1.058	.352
	Within Groups	85.373	82	1.041		
	Total	87.576	84			
Sincere	Between Groups	11.603	2	5.802	4.628	.012
	Within Groups	102.797	82	1.254		



#### 4.1 Limitations

There were a few limitations in this study. First, there was a small group of respondents. In total, there were 85 respondents with 28 for Video A, 28 for Video B, and 29 respondents for Video C. Second, many respondents were of the same generation, most of them in their late teens and early 20s. While younger people are more likely to watch satirical shows, this limitation prevents the results being applied to the general public (Baumgartner, et al. 2012, in reference to Kohut, 2004). Another possible limitation is that both actors in the videos were male. It is possible that the gender of the satirist and/or politician may play a factor if attitudes are changed by satire. Lastly, the videos were not of a professional quality. The scripts were not written by a professional comedian; the actors were volunteers and had no experience in acting or comedy; the settings were in an office (Video A) and a classroom (Video B and C); and the video was shot on an iPhone and edited using Adobe software by an amateur (myself) who has limited experience in making videos. This limitation is important when you consider that the humor on shows like *Saturday Night Live* and *The Daily Show* have a great deal to do with comedic timing by the performer and comedic writing. The comedy on a satirical based show does not compare with the comedy and satire put forth for the videos in this experiment.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The results of the means test show that satire can actually increase a politician's favorable public opinion if the politician appears on satirical based shows to make fun of himself or herself. This experiment shows that the attitudes toward a candidate or politician increase on all five dimensions tested here (likeable, intelligent, believable, honest, and sincere). These results may explain why politicians make it a priority to appear on shows like *The Tonight Show*, *The Daily Show*, and *Saturday Night Live*. Politicians may see these appearances as a way to improve their images with the electorate.

This study should be retested with a more diverse group of participants. In other tests the participants might be older and the experiment should have more participants. If it is possible, other tests similar to this should invest in better production quality of the videos, for example hiring experienced actors and writers. Moreover, there should be studies to see if an actual politician's appearance on satirical shows improves their public opinion. One suggestion is to conduct a survey of a politician before they appear on a show, and then after the appearance. This would allow comparing the baseline of the public opinion of the politician with post-appearance attitudes towards the politician. Studies should be also conducted analyzing how politicians conduct their appearance on a show. Are the politicians using it as an outlet to get their message out? Are they mocking

themselves or mocking opponents? Questions like this will answer how politicians use satire.

In conclusion, satire has played an important part of American political culture from the Revolution to today. While satire has been used to mock politicians and the government; it has also become more likely that politicians today will appear on satirical shows. The results in this study may show why. If a politician's favorable public opinion ratings are improved by appearing on a satirical show, a politician would have nothing to lose and much to gain by making an appearance. An appearance has the potential to get a politician elected, buy a politician political power, or distract from a political scandal.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Marcus Braymer graduates in December 2016 with an Honors Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice. After transferring from two other institutions, Marcus found a home at The University of Texas at Arlington. During his time at UTA he has served as an Honors Advocate, Transition Leader, and a Peer Academic Leader. He currently lives with his loving family, and looks forward to serving the community after graduation.