

The Public Presidency: Increasing Return on Investment

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Abstract

Despite greater access to the media, greater resources to craft the perfect message and greater knowledge of the contours of public opinion (Heith 2000), presidents seem to be less persuasive (Edwards 2003, 2007, 2009). Paradoxically, modern presidents are *more* likely to take their message to the public than their predecessors. This paradox motivates continued exploration of the persuasive capacity of modern presidents, despite the flaws in the original “going public” paradigm. This dissertation explores several aspects of this paradox and in some instances clarifies and in others innovates on the existing literature. The focus of the existing literature on speech content and the tone of news coverage neglects individual level causal mechanisms that influence public acceptance of presidential messages. Sometimes persuasion is *less* a matter of the content of the message and more related to psychological motivations that influence how individuals respond to the person presenting the message. This dissertation adds both breadth and precision to the existing literature by exploring the influence of these psychological mechanisms on individual acceptance of presidential messages. In addition, this dissertation shows that sometimes our myopic focus on presidential persuasion is misplaced. Under certain conditions, presidents may use a public campaign for policy as a diversion, rather than an attempt to persuade the public. Thus, modern presidents may use the bully pulpit to exercise negative control of the public agenda rather than to persuade potential political converts.

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Introduction

Among the most important of the modern presidential powers is the power to persuade (Neustadt 1960). U.S. Presidents cannot simply impose their will upon members of their own cabinet, the White House staff, and especially members of Congress; they must persuade them to cooperate. The most effective presidents are those that bargain and negotiate well (Neustadt 1960, 32). When negotiations with Congress fail, some presidents directly appeal to the people as a tactic to urge Congress to comply with the president's agenda. The mid-20th century saw presidents, both popular and unpopular, moving their agenda through Congress by appealing to the public for support. For example, despite low public approval, President Truman negotiated passage of the Marshall Plan through a public campaign in 1947-48. At the time, Congress was dominated by Republicans that were anxious to defeat Truman, a Democrat, in the next election. Though Congress was controlled by another party and was reluctant to cooperate with the President, Truman's public campaign effectively forced Congress to pass the Marshall Plan--a significant legislative achievement (Neustadt 1960, 45). Indeed, from Teddy Roosevelt to Bill Clinton, history is full of examples of presidents going public in attempts to cajole Congress to act on legislation that the president supports (Kernell 1986).

More recently, however, some have argued that going public is not and never has been an effective tactic (Edwards 2003; 2007; 2009). The abundance of news and media outlets makes it increasingly difficult for the president to speak to the entire nation at once (Baum and Kernell 1999; Edwards 2003; Patterson 2003). In addition, fewer people pay attention to presidential speeches than in the past and fewer people get their political information from traditional news sources (Baum and Kernell 1999; Edwards 2007; Kernell and Rice 2011). This makes it more difficult for the president to control his message and more expensive to reach those that might be

persuaded by his message. As such, some argue that presidents are no longer able to persuade the public through direct appeals (Edwards 2003, 2009). Using polls conducted immediately before and after major presidential addresses from Eisenhower to George W. Bush, Edwards documents the inability of modern presidents to influence the public, generally. Although many think of Reagan and Clinton as presidents who effectively marshaled public support for their policies, Edwards (2003, 2009) shows that they did not persuade the public to support their policies.

Despite this, modern presidents go public more frequently than their predecessors. This paradox serves as the foundation of this dissertation. Why do modern presidents go public more often than their predecessors? Currently, this paradox has been examined through one of three lenses. Some focus on the television audience. Presidential rhetorical power has not diminished, they argue, presidents simply lack the captive audience they once had. Yet, if a president were able to reach those that tune out presidential messages, he would be able to persuade them to support his policy agenda (Baum and Kernell 1999; Kernell and Rice 2011). Presidents go public more often, they argue, because the fragmented audience requires him to give more speeches in order to reach the same number of people that presidents of an earlier era reached in a single speech.

Others focus on the amount of control a President has on the message. The more control over the message, the greater the power of the president to persuade the public. Presidents, they argue, are less persuasive because their message is diluted by the modern media environment. When Presidents speak directly to the public, they seem to be just as persuasive as Presidents of a former era. Thus, presidents go public more often because an increase in news outlets requires more speeches to ensure that the message is properly framed across news outlets (Cohen 2008,

2010; Rottinghaus 2010). Finally, some argue that presidents go public in support of policies because it is expected of them. Whether or not the public campaign generates actual support for his policies, if presidents do not publicly support policy proposals they are certain to fail. Since proposals to change the status quo typically meet significant opposition, presidents may use public campaigns to neutralize the opposition even when these campaigns will not generate any additional support (Edwards 2003, 244).

The three chapters of this dissertation examine the public presidency in a polarized political environment. The research in these chapters leads to three broad revisions and contributions to the literature. First, I argue that resistance to presidential appeals is rooted, in part, in group-based psychological mechanisms. Aside from changes in the media environment and television audiences, political polarization of the public creates an environment in which the number of potential converts is smaller now than it was in the past. A smaller group of persuadable people in the public requires different tactics for presidential public campaigns. Second, I argue that this leads some presidents to adopt a strategy of governing from their base. If a campaign is less likely to persuade the opposition *a priori*, it makes sense for a president to focus his attention on mobilizing his core supporters; those that can be persuaded. In some cases, a presidential public campaign tactically seeks to persuade the president's base to support his policy agenda and overwhelm the opposition. Finally, I argue that some public campaigns may have a focus completely different than persuading the public. Presidents benefit from changes in the content of the national news. Even when the public is not persuaded by a presidential appeal, the president may benefit from altering the attention of the national news media. Not every presidential public campaign for policy seeks to force Congress to pass

legislation that reflects the policy agenda of the president. Different situations call for different tactics.

The first chapter establishes how political polarization of the electorate diminishes the receptiveness of certain segments of the public to presidential messages. Though some argue that a captive audience or greater control of the message would lead to higher rates of presidential success persuading the public (Cohen 2008; Kernell and Rice 2011; Rottinghaus 2010; Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers 2010), I propose that partisans are more psychologically resistant to messages from a President of the opposing political party. Thus, some of the partisan resistance to presidential appeals results from political polarization of the electorate rather than a fragmented media environment. Chapter 1 uses survey experiments on a national sample of adults to demonstrate that when members of the public are presented with novel information about a US president, they rely on partisan cues to determine the veracity of that information. This is particularly true of those with strong partisan attachments. In short, even if the president had the captive audiences of the 1950's and 1960's, his message would not be as broadly persuasive as those of an earlier era because party polarization among the citizenry has diminished the potential impact. Indeed, I provide evidence in the chapter that supports the view that political polarization of the voting public is the primary reason that modern presidents are no longer able to persuade the public.

The traditional view of presidential public campaigns is that presidents use public campaigns to persuade the *opposition* to support their policy (Kernell 1986). However, presidents are most persuasive to individuals that approve of the job he is doing in office; thus presidents tailor their message to appeal to narrow groups of supporters (Heith 2004). In the second chapter, I demonstrate that when the president lacks broad national support, he will

appeal to the pockets of supporters that already approve of the job his is doing. Using national survey data gathered during George W. Bush's campaign for Social Security reform in 2005, I demonstrate that the strategic purpose of this campaign was to solidify support for the president's policy agenda *among the core constituents* of his own party. This public campaign was not an attempt to appeal to the opposition and the campaign reflected the ideology of the core constituents rather than the median voter. The strategic aim of this campaign was to persuade MC to support legislation by influencing the joint constituents of both the President and the MC. Modern presidents may be less persuasive in the aggregate, but they may have more persuasive power in specific segments of society. This chapter demonstrates that presidents go public more often because the power of the bully pulpit has not diminished among a president's core supporters.

Finally, I show that the opportunity to significantly and substantively change the content of national news may be worth the efforts of a public campaign even when presidents do not persuade the public. The third chapter of this dissertation examines news coverage from George W. Bush's campaign for the Troop Surge in Iraq and President Obama's campaign for a budget deal in 2011. President Bush had just suffered an electoral blow following the midterm elections of 2006. In early January, 2007 the national news focused on the new Democratic majorities in Congress. The first female Speaker of the House had recently been sworn in, and many interpreted the Republican defeat in the elections as a mandate for changes in Iraq policy. As such, President Bush likely understood that there would be significant negotiations with Congress over the funding of the Iraq War and was strategic about both the timing and the content of this speech. Though the plan was formulated and finalized months before, he waited

until *after* the swearing in of the new Congress and he chose a policy that he could implement *without* the support of Congress.

This final chapter begins as do most analyses of presidential rhetorical power and demonstrates that President Bush failed to persuade the public in his televised addresses proposing a troop surge. After the speech, opinion about the clarity of President Bush's plan for Iraq, support for the plan, and how well President Bush was handling the Iraq war was unchanged from before the speech. However, analysis of the content of major television, internet, cable, and print news sources demonstrates that President Bush's public campaign successfully shifted news coverage from the Democrats to his policy agenda. Thus, presidential public campaigns can be a relatively inexpensive means to bring about dramatic changes in news coverage. As such, a president has an incentive to engage in a public campaign for policy even when it will not lead to public or congressional support for the policy. While some argue that too much scholarly attention has been focused on a presidential power that never existed and rarely, if ever, was effective (Edwards 2003; Edwards 2007; Edwards 2009), this dissertation demonstrates that the bully pulpit continues to be a powerful tool the president can use to persuade the public and set the policy agenda.

Chapter 1

Why Partisans Believe the Unbelievable

Introduction

The capacity of the public to meet the minimum benchmarks of political knowledge and interest required by democratic theory has been debated at least since the founding of the United States (Hamilton et al. 1981). On the one hand, those that are interested in politics and are educated are those on whom the highest expectations have been placed (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1991; Kuklinski et al. 2001; Neuman 1986). This group has the cognitive capacity and interest sufficient to sift through various media sources, identify the credible information and formulate informed opinions (Feldman 1989; Graber 1993; Zaller 1992). On the other hand, identifying with a political party can create a perceptual bias in the processing of political information (Bartels 2002). When presented with identical pieces of information partisans tend to interpret it differently (Gaines et al. 2007). When the political climate is polarized such that those who are most interested in and informed about politics are also those with the strongest attachments to a political party, it is unclear how individuals will process information about US Presidents from the opposing political party.

National surveys conducted in late 2010 exposed widely held political attitudes that seemed incongruent with easily-obtainable facts. Despite the controversy in the spring of 2009 surrounding some of the sermons preached at the Christian church Barack Obama was attending, one year later, approximately 20% of Americans believed that President Obama was a Muslim (Kohut, Lugo, and Keeter 2010). In August, a similar number reported that they were not sure if President Obama met the constitutional requirement of being born in the United States (Travis

2010). Reason suggests that Hillary Clinton and John McCain had both the resources and the motivation to expose Barack Obama if he was not constitutionally eligible for the presidency, yet several different polls affirm the rigidity of this belief among about 20% of Americans. Obama, however, is not the first president to experience this phenomenon--in 2007 22% of Americans reported a belief that George W. Bush knew about the September 11 attacks in advance (Elder 2007). In 1999, 30% of Americans believed that Bill Clinton had raped Juanita Broadrick while he was governor of Arkansas (Elsner 1999).

We know something about the capacity of media in general to influence political attitudes. For instance, we now know that media consumption influences political attitudes (Cohen 1963, McCombs and Shaw 1972, Iyengar and Kinder 1987, Iyengar 1991, Zaller 1992, Hetherington 1996, Nelson, et al. 1997). In addition, cognitive sophistication influences how likely a person is to believe misinformation presented in the media. While many people know very little about politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), College educated people are more likely to be politically sophisticated (Converse 1964, Sniderman, et al. 1991), express tolerance toward minority groups (Sniderman, et al. 1991), pay attention to and be knowledgeable about political activities (Zaller 1992, Bennett 1996, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). However, we know less about how these mechanisms operate in a more democratized media environment. For instance, must a YouTube video be professionally produced and provide some sense of credibility in order to persuade?

In addition to the psychological motivation for accuracy alluded to in the previous paragraph, self-enhancing motivations also play a role in how political information is processed. People derive meaning, esteem, and guidance on how to live from the groups to which they belong and membership in groups influences the way people think about members of other

groups (Tajfel and Turner 1986, Hogg and Abrams 1988). In the United States, party identification is an example of a group-based psychological attachment (Campbell, et al. 1960). Indeed, strong political party identification has been shown to project a group-based interpretation on individual political attitudes (Bartels 2002, Cohen 2003, Gaines, et al. 2007). However, we know less about how group based partisan identity influences *nonpolitical* attitudes about political figures.

This chapter explores all of these issues in a unified framework. Psychological advances in rumor transmission research suggest that under certain conditions both accuracy and self-enhancing motivations will influence the rumor acceptance calculation (Bordia and Difonzo 2004, 2005, Difonzo and Bordia 2007). Based on these previous findings, this paper proposes a conditional relationship between cognitive sophistication, partisan identification and rumor acceptance. I propose that in environments without sufficient information to make an accurate decision, the rumor acceptance calculation is driven primarily by self-enhancing motivations. However, when people have sufficient information to arrive at an accurate conclusion, cognitive sophistication will be the primary influence on the rumor acceptance calculation. Finally, persistent, politicized rumors challenge the resolve of individuals with high cognitive sophistication *and* partisan attachment. Under particular circumstances, these individuals can arrive at the correct conclusion, but partisan attachment exerts a more powerful influence than we might expect. The following section more fully develops the framework.

The Psychology of Rumor Transmission

We know that party identification influences how people evaluate political information (Brady and Sniderman 1985, Bartels 2002, Gaines, et al. 2007). However, party identification could also influence how people evaluate *nonpolitical* information about members of the

opposing political party. In the absence of confirmatory evidence, how do partisans respond to negative rumors about members of the opposing political party? One way to understand attitude formation is to explore the psychological function that holding an attitude performs for the individual (Katz 1960, Rokeach 1968). In the United States, partisanship is a psychological attachment to a social group that could explain the tendency for some individuals to believe false rumors (Campbell, et al. 1960).

People have a psychological need to feel positive about themselves which motivates a variety of behaviors and cognitive activities designed to enhance self-esteem (Mutz 1992). They use stored knowledge to create narratives about their world and generate causal theories about the positive or negative events in their lives in a self-serving manner (Hicks 1988). For example, those who think of themselves as successful students tend to emphasize the academic successes they have had in life and downplay the academic failures in life. Indeed, people can generate causal theories linking almost any attribute to any outcome (Guger 1992) and continue to believe these narratives without any confirming information (Crepaz 1992). “Through the repeated exercise of self-serving generation and evaluation of causal theories, people may come to possess a biased set of theories according to which their own attributes can cause desirable outcomes and deter undesirable ones” (Hicks 1988). This also influences how people process new information. People are more likely to believe information favorable to the self and consistent with favorable judgments about themselves (Kunda 1990, Kunda and Sinclair 1999). Since people view the groups they belong to as extensions of themselves, the same mechanisms apply to group-based attitudes.

People derive meaning, esteem, and guidance on how to live from the groups to which they belong (Tajfel and Turner 1986, Hogg and Abrams 1988). People tend to join groups that

are in high status or prestige (Tullock 1980). Once affiliated with a social group, membership influences the way that individuals perceive members of other groups. Over time, derogatory attitudes and stereotypes towards members of other groups (the out-group) tend to crystallize. Studies show that people perceive members of their own group in a positive way, and make villainous attributions to members of the out-group (Clawson, et al. 1992). As membership becomes salient, there is a tendency to accentuate intergroup similarities and intra-group differences. Negative information about the in-group is more carefully scrutinized than positive information (Crouch 1983, Dietz-Uhler 1999). Success of the out-group is interpreted as an exception, while failure is attributed to their internal, stable features (Almond 1983). Individuals who belong to a group tend to internalize the group's norms and use these as a guide for their own attitudes and behaviors (Franz 2008). Group identity influences the way that individuals interact with members of other groups (Browne 1991) and form attitudes (Wertheimer and Manes 1994, Hasen 1996, Persily and Lammie 2004).

Social psychologists study group influence on attitude formation in a minimal group setting. People are given a series of pretend examinations to create the illusion that individuals share something in common with other members of the group to which they are randomly assigned. Though group identities are manufactured, and in some cases imagined (Turner, et al. 2007), they influence the attitudes of members in the group relative to the other group (Tajfel, et al. 1971, Hertel and Kerr 2001, Pinter and Greenwald 2011). In one experiment, members of manufactured groups were willing to receive less monetary compensation for their own group if it resulted in a comparative advantage relative to the other group (Turner, et al. 1979). Group membership exerts a powerful influence on attitudes and behaviors toward members of other groups.

In the first serious study on rumor transmission and beliefs, Allport and Postman (1947) noted that rumor “firms pre-existing attitudes rather than forming new ones”. Meta analytic analyses of rumor research over the past 50 years confirm that little has changed since 1947. People believe rumors that are consistent with their prior beliefs (Bordia and Difonzo 2005). When people try to determine the accuracy of a rumor, they do not engage in some form of rational hypothesis testing. Instead, they evaluate the rumor in the context of their existing worldviews. To the extent that the rumor conforms to these worldviews it is accepted (Almond 1983, Bordia, et al. 1999). As such, self-enhancing motivations influence the acceptance of rumors. Rumors help people to rationalize and justify their prior attitudes about themselves and members of other groups (Allport and Postman 1946, Kashima 2000, Bordia and Difonzo 2004, 2005). In most cases, given the choice of two rumors of equal credibility, people will prefer a rumor that enhances their sense of self (Difonzo and Bordia 2007).

If manufactured groups influence the attitudes of members, self- identifying with a political party could certainly influence the way that people process information (Brady and Sniderman 1985, Bartels 2002, Gaines, et al. 2007). Negative information about one’s own party could receive *more* scrutiny than positive, while negative information about the other political party could receive *less* scrutiny and information that enhances the status of the party could be believed in the absence of confirming data (Crepaz 1992). In the United States, Republicans may be more likely to believe something negative about a Democrat and to retain that belief even when there is no evidence to support the belief. The same might be true of Democrats’ attitudes towards Republicans. If so, we should expect that Republicans will be more likely to believe negative rumors about Democrats in the absence of confirmatory evidence and vice-versa (H1).

Cognitive Skills as a Moderator

However, cognitive capacity should have some influence on rumor acceptance. Concern about media propaganda motivated research that demonstrated that education provides individuals with the cognitive skills necessary to sift through information and arrive at accurate conclusions and discard false information (McGuire 1969, Lasswell 1971). College educated people are more likely to be politically sophisticated (Converse 1964, Sniderman, et al. 1991), express tolerance toward minority groups (Sniderman, et al. 1991) and pay attention to and be knowledgeable about political activities (Zaller 1992, Bennett 1996, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Indeed, the uneducated are “more susceptible to political propaganda and less receptive to relevant new information” (Delli-Carpini and Keeter 1996, 265). Though education does not prevent prejudice, in general the educated possess cognitive abilities that surpass those of the broader public which equips them to carefully evaluate information and reach unbiased conclusions (Sniderman, et al. 1991, Lau and Redlawsk 2001). Those with the cognitive capacity to sift through information and arrive at an accurate conclusion should do so when such information exists (H2).

However, possessing a greater capacity to engage in systematic information processing does not mean that the educated will do so (Barker and Hansen 2005). Education brings not only the tools, but also the motivation to reach accurate conclusions about the political world (Kam 2005, Arceneaux 2008, Doherty and Wolak 2011). Yet, affiliation with a political party brings with it self-enhancing motivations that may trump the motivation to arrive at an accurate conclusion. Generally, accuracy motives restrain directional motives, but “people are just as willing to devote extensive thought to *themselves* and *their relations* with others as they are to *informational concerns* of determining the truth about an issue” (Prislin and Wood 2005, 676). The dominant view predicts that educated people without a strong attachment to a political party

will systematically process political information and exhibit less partisan bias in their political attitudes. Yet, educated people with strong attachments to political parties would experience greater dissonance expressing views that are factually correct if members of their own political party express factually inaccurate views. They may choose to express a view contrary to that held by the majority of their political party, but the discomfort associated with this would make it more likely that they would either express less certainty in their opinion (McGarty, et al. 1993, Rudolph and Popp 2007) or change their attitude to reflect the reasoning of the majority (van Knippenberg 1999).

This suggests a conditional relationship between cognitive capacity, partisanship and beliefs about nonpolitical rumors about members of the opposing political party. Since weak partisans should experience less dissonance expressing an attitude contrary to that of their political party, educated people with *weak* attachment should be more likely to formulate attitudes consistent with the factual evidence (Gaines, et al. 2007). However, the cognitive tools provided by an education could lead educated individuals to be more resistant to information that does not conform to their partisan world-view. Instead of leading partisans to accurate conclusions, high levels of education could lead them to inaccurate conclusions that reflect the majority view of their party. Individuals often employ mental gymnastics to avoid the implications of facts that challenge their political view (Kuklinski 2007). Indeed, strong partisan attachment tends to narrow the information environment (Iyengar and Hahn 2009). Thus, in an environment where the majority view of the party is highly politicized, those *high* in education and *strong* in their attachment to a political party could either adopt the view of the majority, or express greater uncertainty in their opinion (H3) while those *low* in education and *strong* in their commitment to their political party should adopt the view held by the majority of the party.

Data and Methods

These hypotheses are tested via two survey instruments. I hope to demonstrate how people respond to rumors presented in a non-professional video hosted on YouTube. When the rumor concerns a novel idea about a political figure, and people lack sufficient information to reach an accurate conclusion, I expect partisan affiliation to influence rumor acceptance (H1). However, when the rumor is not new, I expect cognitive sophistication (education) to influence rumor acceptance (H2). These rumors are embedded in a survey experiment in which participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. In addition, I am interested in the conditional relationship between education, partisanship, and rumor acceptance when the views of the party majority are politicized (H3). To test this, I use a national survey to explore how education and partisanship influence beliefs about President Obama's place of birth. This survey is a probability survey conducted by CBS News and the New York Times the week before President Obama officially presented his full form birth certificate and a week before the survey experiment was fielded. Combining the two surveys provides a snapshot in time about how people respond to nonpolitical information about members of political parties.

The Survey Experiment

Operationally, the procedure works as follows. After responding to some demographic information and measures of political interest, the respondents were randomly assigned to one of three groups.¹ The video control group in experiment 1 viewed a 45 second video that contained an image of Lindsay Lohan with a finger in her nose and text that suggested she was a nose-picker and text attributed to Ms. Lohan's press assistant calling that suggestion absurd.

¹ Full video and question wording available in the appendix

Respondents were then asked to respond on a scale from 1 to 7 with the statement “Lindsay Lohan regularly picks her nose”. Those assigned to the treatment group viewed a video with an identical length; however this video contained an image of President Obama with his finger in his nose and identical text to that of the Lohan video. Following the video, participants indicated on a scale from 1 to 7 their level of agreement with the statement “President Obama regularly picks his nose”.² The control group did not view a video, they simply responded to the same questions related to President Obama.

² All of the videos used in these experiments are available at youtube.com via these private links:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Chqe0cGQ8bQ>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEPP6leoh7M>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5fQ-aGVUnE>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erQ0RGfmN8g>

Table 1: Experimental Design

	Nose-Picking	Smoking
Control Group (No Video)	Participants indicate how much they agree with the statement “President Obama regularly picks his nose.”	Participants indicate how much they agree with the statement “President Obama regularly smokes cigarettes.”
Celebrity Treatment Group	After viewing a video with an image of Lindsay Lohan engaging in an unpleasant activity and pro/con statements, respondents indicate how much they agree that Lindsay Lohan regularly picks her nose.	After viewing a video with an image of Brad Pitt smoking with pro/con statements, respondents indicate how much they agree that Brad Pitt regularly smokes cigarettes.
Obama Video Treatment	After viewing a video including an image of President Obama engaging in an unpleasant activity and pro/con statements, respondents indicate how much they agree that President Obama regularly picks his nose.	After viewing a video with an image of President Obama smoking with pro/con statements, respondents indicate how much they agree that President Obama regularly smokes cigarettes.

Following this experimental treatment, all respondents participated in a distraction exercise in which they viewed an ad portraying Charles Barkley and Dwayne Wade talk about T-Mobile telephone service. Participants responded to some questions concerning how much they like Charles Barkley, Dwayne Wade, and T-Mobile.

Participants were then randomly assigned to the next treatment condition. Participants either saw a video containing an image of Brad Pitt or President Obama, or they were assigned to the non-video control group. Participants indicated how much they agreed with the statement,

”Barack Obama (Brad Pitt) regularly smokes cigarettes.” The videos were exactly the same length. Each showed an image downloaded from the internet with language indicating that Brad Pitt (President Obama) regularly smokes cigarettes. Each also included a statement from their representative (White House Press Secretary) stating that the rumor is ridiculous. One randomly selected group did not view a video and simply responded to the questions.

Results and Analyses

Novel Rumor Acceptance via YouTube Videos

I was intentional about the rumors. I am interested in partisan responses to *new* rumors. The first experiment proposes that the party leader of the Democratic Party regularly picks his nose, but this particular rumor is completely novel. There is no external information that might lead to an accurate conclusion, because the accuracy of the rumor is unknown. Objective examination of the photo provides no evidence about the authenticity of the image. The image of President Obama shows him standing in a room with a teleprompter in front of him, arms folded, and one finger prominently stuck in his nose. One could easily believe it is the result of carefully editing the photo or that it is a real photograph.

I expect strong Republicans to be more likely than members of any other group to state that Obama regularly picks his nose when there is no evidence to support the idea (no-video control group). However, they should be more likely to state that Obama regularly engages in this unpleasant activity after seeing some confirmatory evidence in the form of a YouTube video (treatment group). I do not expect partisanship to have any effect on the likelihood of an individual responding that Lindsay Lohan picks her nose, since she is not a political figure.

Though individuals may have negative attitudes about Ms. Lohan, they would not be motivated by affiliation with a political party

Table 2: Overall Effect of Treatment on Rumor Acceptance

	Nose Picking			Smoking		
	Control Group	Obama Treatment	Lohan Treatment	Control Group	Obama Treatment	Pitt Treatment
Mean	3.08	3.84	4.41	4.09	3.79	4.15
Variance	3.39	2.94	2.16	2.14	2.42	0.87
Difference	0	0.75	1.34	0	-0.31	0.05
T-score	0	4.37	8.23	0	-2.05	0.38
N	213	206	209	201	199	198

Table 2 shows the average change in supportive replies for groups that viewed a video. On average, viewing the video showing president Obama's image increased support for the proposition that Obama engages in this unpleasant activity ($t=4.36$, $p=0.000$) compared to the control group that did not see a video. Compared to those that viewed the Lindsay Lohan video, those in the Obama video treatment group were significantly *less* likely to respond affirmatively ($t=-3.68$, $p=0.000$). The video of Lindsay Lohan (or respondents' propensity to believe something negative about Ms. Lohan) persuaded a larger portion to believe that she picks her nose, compared to the other groups.

What role does partisanship play, if any, in people's belief about this novel rumor? In an environment with no information about the veracity of a negative rumor, we expect individuals to rely on partisan cues when evaluating the information. This is tested using a pooled regression model with dummies indicating which condition the participant received. Consistent with (H1) I expect the interaction between partisanship and viewing the Obama video to be statistically significant. However, since Lindsay Lohan's foremost identity is not associated with

a political party ³, I do not expect the interaction with the Lohan treatment and partisanship to be statistically significant.

Table 3: Pooled Regression of the Influence of Party Identification and Video Treatment on Rumor Acceptance.

Independent Variables	Nose Picking		Smoking	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Celebrity Treatment Dummy	1.350*** (0.159)	2.697*** (0.312)	0.025 (0.133)	0.596* (0.265)
Obama Treatment Dummy	0.766*** (0.160)	1.310*** (0.314)	-0.311* (0.133)	-0.179 (0.261)
Party Identification	0.168*** (0.040)	0.327*** (0.056)	0.053 (0.034)	0.118* (0.048)
Education	-0.032 (0.063)	-0.012 (0.062)	0.113* (0.053)	0.117* (0.052)
Ideology (1=Very Conservative)	0.045 (0.053)	0.052 (0.052)	0.064 (0.044)	0.059 (0.044)
Obama Treatment * Party ID		-0.148*** (0.073)		-0.038 (0.063)
Celebrity Treatment * Party ID		-0.372*** (0.074)		-0.153* (0.063)
Constant	2.401*** (0.320)	1.708*** (0.355)	3.239*** (0.265)	3.014*** (0.290)
R-squared	0.150	0.18	.04	.05
N	626	626	597	597

Source: Author's Data.

Note: Entries are coefficients estimated using OLS regression in R 2.14. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, *p<0.1

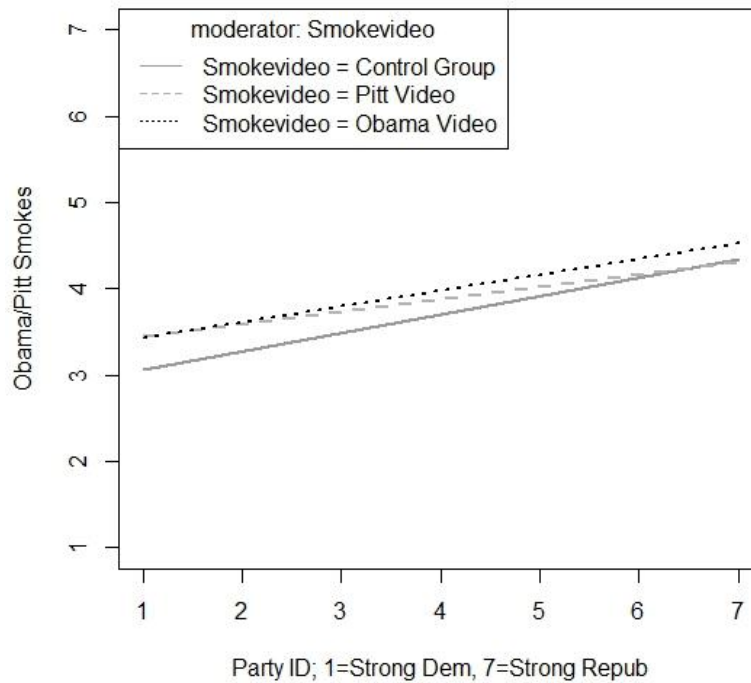
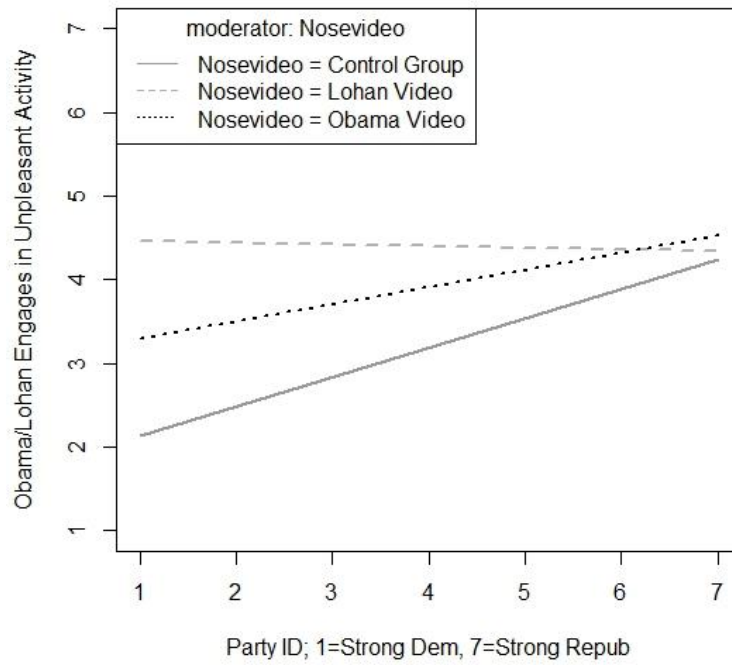
Table 3 model 2 displays the coefficients for the interactive model. There is a statistically significant relationship for both treatment dummies (with the control group as the baseline). This indicates that the relationship between partisanship and support for

³ Some might argue that Lindsay Lohan is a political figure. This is one reason that she is an appropriate control. I do not expect ideology or education to influence rumor acceptance about an individual who is not clearly representative of a political party. Individuals may have more negative attitudes towards her generally, but political attitudes and political group identity should not influence rumor acceptance about celebrities.

Obama/Lohan engaging in an unpleasant activity *depends* on which video an individual viewed. Figure 1 plots the simple slopes of party identification on support for Obama/Lohan regularly picking their nose by treatment group (Aiken, et al. 1991). The statistical significance of the coefficients in Table 3 model 2 give the misleading appearance that partisans in the Lohan treatment condition gave significantly more supportive responses than those in the Obama treatment group; confounding (H1). However, the plot in Figure 1 clearly illustrates the significant role of partisanship on supportive responses. A t-test of the simple slopes confirms that partisanship has a statistically significant influence on responses depending on treatment group different from the other (Preacher, et al. 2006).⁴ The slope of the line for the control group is significantly more positive than the one for the Lohan treatment group. This means that when partisans have no information (not even a video), group affiliation influences rumor acceptance.

⁴ Estimates calculated using the rockchalk package in R 2.14. Control group T=7.03, Lohan T=-0.33, Obama T=3.89

Figure 1: Effect of Videos on Rumor Acceptance



Note: Predicted probabilities calculated using the rockchalk package in R 2.14.

This substantiates two important themes of this paper. First, group affiliation significantly influences rumor acceptance about novel rumors, even in the absence of any confirmatory evidence. All things being equal, a Republican is more likely to believe a negative rumor about a Democrat. Second, amateur YouTube videos can be persuasive. The videos used in the treatments are low-quality videos that are not particularly entertaining, yet those that viewed the videos about this novel rumor were persuaded.

Accuracy Motivations and Rumor Acceptance via YouTube Videos

When the rumor is more pervasive (not so novel) how persuasive is an amateur video? The second experiment tests rumor acceptance about Obama's smoking habit. Accuracy motivations should exert more of an influence when the rumor involves an issue about which there is more external information that helps the educated reach accurate conclusions (H2). Partisanship should still influence rumor acceptance, but it should be less influential.

Table 2 shows the effect of viewing the Obama smoking video compared to the control group that saw no video. As a whole, those that saw the Obama smoking video were significantly *less* likely to believe that President Obama regularly smokes cigarettes ($t=-2.05$, $p=0.02$). This suggests that the video was not persuasive. Overall, viewing the video caused *fewer* people to accept the rumor that President regularly smokes cigarettes. The video had a bit of a backlash effect. Whether it was a result of the provocative text suggesting that Obama smokes 10 packs of cigarettes a day or the poor quality of the amateur video, the video was not persuasive.

Table 3 displays the results from a pooled regression analysis with experimental conditions assigned dummies. Again, model 3 indicates that the Obama video had a negative

impact on rumor acceptance. Models 3 and 4 also show the expected difference between the smoking experiment and the nose picking experiment. In the smoking experiment, party identification is *not* a statistically significant predictor of rumor acceptance, but education is. This indicates that when educated people have some information about a rumor they are *less* likely to rely on partisan cues in their rumor acceptance calculation. This reaffirming evidence suggests that accuracy motivations influence educated people's rumor acceptance calculation.

Do partisans respond differently to rumors about Brad Pitt than they do to rumors about President Obama? The statistically significant coefficient for the interaction between celebrity treatment and party identification in model 4 (Table 4) seems to indicate that they do. Since the control group is the baseline, the negative coefficient on this interaction means that the slope for the celebrity treatment is significantly less steep than the slope for the control group. Figure 1 illustrates this relationship. The slope for the Obama video group and the control group are steeper than the slope of the line for the Pitt video group. Partisanship clearly had a stronger influence on rumor acceptance about President Obama than it did about Brad Pitt, but the effect of partisanship on the control group was nearly the same as it was on the Obama video treatment group. The effect of partisanship was significantly less in the Brad Pitt video treatment. This is additional evidence confirming that partisanship was not the driving force behind rumor acceptance in the smoking treatment, education was (H2).

When people lack sufficient cognitive capacity to overcome misinformation, they will rely on group identity to formulate attitudes that enhance their sense of self (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). However, given sufficient cognitive capacity and information, their rumor acceptance calculation is motivated less by the need to self-enhance and more by the desire for accuracy.

Moreover, in this instance, the non-professional YouTube video was not persuasive and even created a backlash effect.

The National Survey

Is the rumor acceptance calculation different for educated partisans when expressing an accurate view would create dissonance between themselves and the majority of their group? In early 2011, a majority of Republicans expressed the belief that President Obama was not a natural born US citizen. I expect that when politically sophisticated partisans formulated their attitudes on this issue, they either adopted the view of their party majority or expressed less certainty in their opinions (H3).

This hypothesis is tested using data from a national survey conducted by CBS News and the New York Times from April 5-12, 2011. Using a telephone survey instrument, they asked 1,591 participants several questions about the political environment and the Tea Party movement in particular. One of the questions asked participants, "According to the Constitution, American Presidents must be "natural born citizens." Some people say Barack Obama was not born in the United States, but was born in another country. Do you think Barack Obama was born in the United States, or do you think he was born in another country? "

In 2010, the constitutional eligibility of President Obama to serve in that office was a highly salient issue. In this particular survey, close to 24% responded that they thought President Obama was born in another country, and 24% were unsure. The Tea Party protests against healthcare reform in the summer of 2009 included several individuals who carried signs that questioned President Obama's birth origin. In July of 2009, polls indicated that 77% of Americans believed that Obama was born in the United States, but when broken down by party

affiliation, only 42% of Republicans reported that they thought that he was (Thrush 2009). Two weeks after this survey was conducted, President Obama released his full form birth certificate showing that he was, in fact, a natural born US citizen which largely removed attention from the issue from the national agenda (Morales 2011). This survey was conducted when significant attention was focused on the issue. By the time of this survey, individuals had enough information to come to an accurate conclusion about the authenticity of the claims, despite the lack of access to the full form birth certificate.

To test the influence of partisan motivations on the evaluation of negative information about the US President, I conducted regression analysis using the standard control variables. The dependent variable is responses to the question regarding Obama's origin of birth. Hypothesis 3 concerns the level of uncertainty sophisticates may express if their view does not conform to the majority view of the group. For this reason, I treat "I don't know." as a meaningful response and use multinomial logistic regression to estimate the equation. Since I hypothesize that partisanship mediates the relationship between education and attitudes about Obama's birth origin, I include an interaction between the two to explore this relationship.

Table 4: Beliefs about President Obama's Location of Birth

Independent Variables	United States	Another Country	United States	Another Country
Party ID (1=Democrat, 5=Republican)	-0.478** (0.0528)	0.189** (0.0648)	-0.168 (0.146)	0.379* (0.170)
Ideology (1=Liberal, 3=Conservative)	-0.244** (0.0490)	-0.0917+ (0.0488)	-0.236** (0.0497)	-0.0882+ (0.0492)
Education	0.220** (0.0658)	-0.192** (0.0734)	0.570** (0.175)	0.0449 (0.234)
Income	-0.0306 (0.0402)	-0.0871* (0.0438)	-0.0323 (0.0402)	-0.0885* (0.0439)
Age	-0.00703+ (0.00416)	-0.00566 (0.00446)	-0.00730+ (0.00416)	-0.00590 (0.00446)
Party ID * Education			-0.0973* (0.0439)	-0.0614 (0.0544)
Constant	2.999** (0.394)	1.004* (0.450)	1.916** (0.624)	0.298 (0.767)
Observations	1,332	1,332	1,332	1,332

Source: CBS News / NY Times Survey.

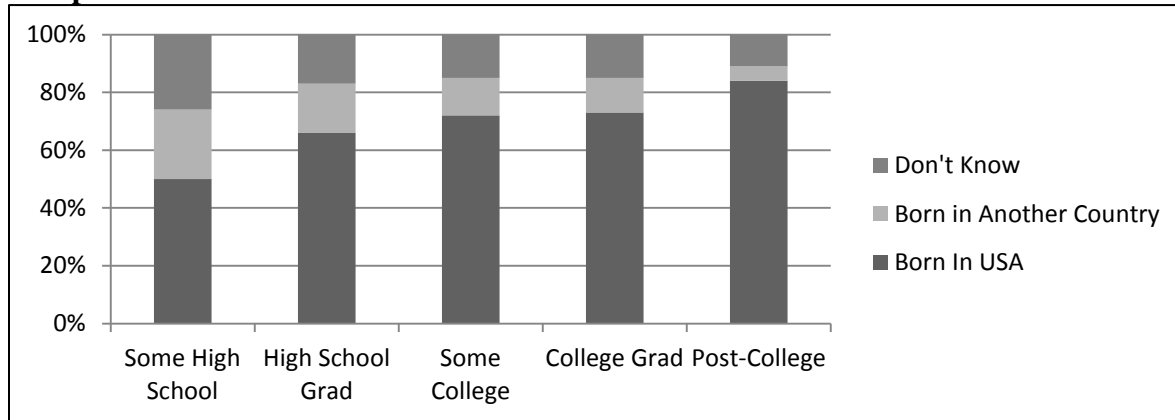
Note: Entries from mlogit command estimated in Stata 11. Baseline model is Don't Know. Standard errors in parentheses. ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

Table 4 displays the regression coefficients for the models. Each model is relative to the baseline model that predicts the probability of saying that the respondents does not know if President Obama was born in the USA. The significant negative relationship between party identification and the dependent variable in model 1 and the significant positive relationship between the two in model 2 indicates that the stronger the attachment to the Republican Party, the more likely an individual is to respond that Obama was born in another country. Consistent with the theoretical expectations, education has a significant, positive relationship with the dependent variable in models 1 and 3, but a negative relationship in model 2. This indicates that

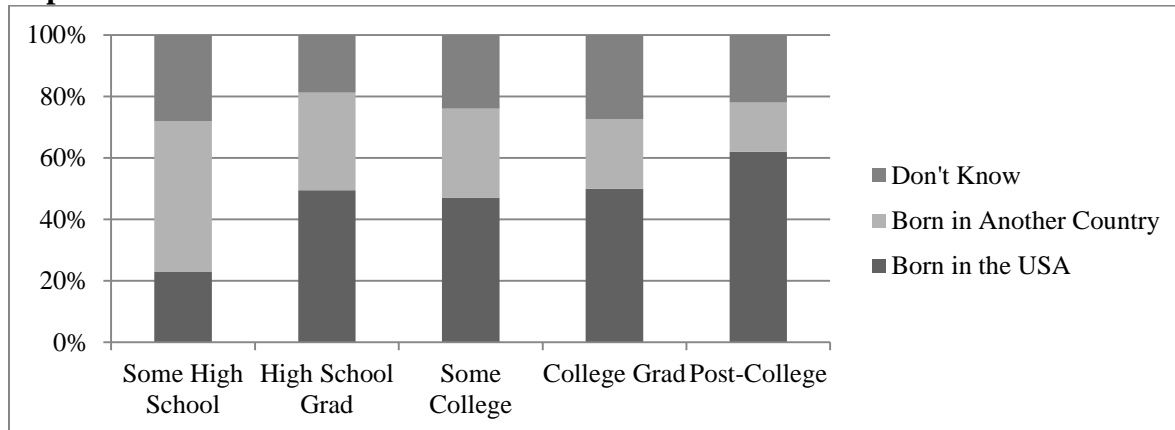
the more educated an individual, the more likely they are to respond that Obama was born in the United States. This is completely congruent with the dominant view that cognitive sophistication tempers irrational political beliefs. The significant interaction between education and partisan identification in model 3 indicates that the conditional relationship hypothesized has a statistically significant influence on attitudes about President Obama's birthplace. When the majority of one's social group expresses particular beliefs this places cognitive pressure on individuals to conform their attitudes to that of the majority (H3). To evaluate how cognitively sophisticated partisans responded to this pressure, I employed post-estimation techniques to probe the relationship between education and the dependent variable by various levels of partisan affiliation. Figure 2 displays the predicted probability of believing that Obama was born in the US by partisan affiliation and level of education.

Figure 2: Probability of Responding that Obama was born in the United States by Party Identification and Education Level

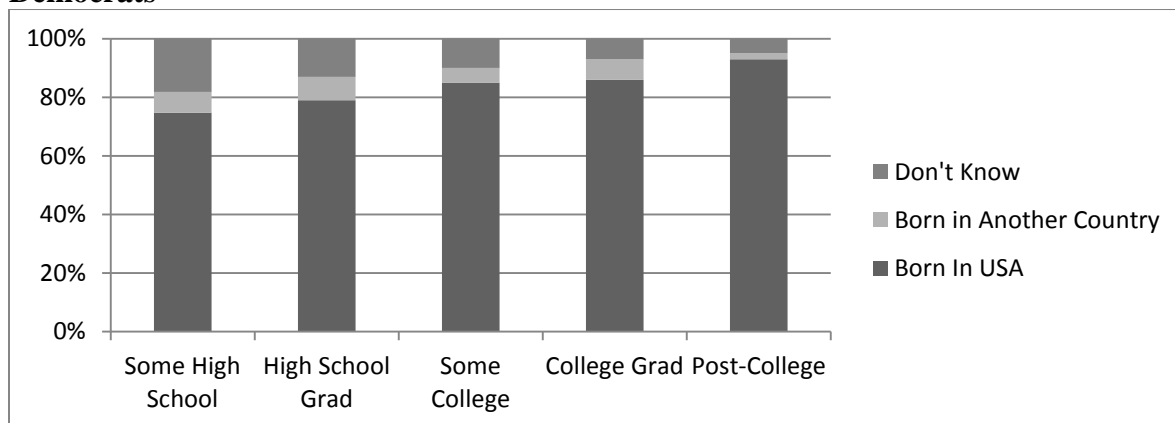
Independents



Republicans



Democrats



Note: Education is categorized such that 1 means no high-school, 3 means some college and 5 means post-graduate education. Predicted probabilities from Spost command in Stata 11.

Figure 2 confirms that Independents conform to the dominant view. Independents with little education express uncertainty about President Obama's birth location. Yet, each incremental increase in the level of education diminishes the uncertainty about Obama's birth location and at the highest level; Independents have a probability of 0.78 of responding that Obama was born in the USA. The contrast between Democrats and Republicans illustrates the influence of group membership on attitude formation. Even at low levels of political sophistication, Democrats are the most likely to respond accurately, in part because the information derogates their party leader and receives greater scrutiny than information favorable to their leader would receive. A Democrat at the lowest level of political sophistication is nearly three times as likely ($P=0.42$) as a Republican with the same level of political sophistication ($P=0.15$) to believe that President Obama was born in the USA. In addition, as the level of political sophistication increases Democrats express far less uncertainty in their responses; the probability of thinking that Obama was not born in the USA is less than 0.14. This indicates that cognitive sophistication enhances the level of certainty in information evaluation when both the dominant group attitude and the external information lead to the same conclusion.

Figure 2 also illustrates the influence that group membership has on attitudes when the majority of the group expresses a view inconsistent with external evidence. Republicans low in cognitive sophistication have no difficulty expressing the view that President Obama was born in another country ($P=0.55$), indeed these Republicans have a higher probability of saying that they do not know his birthplace ($P=0.29$) than responding that he was born in the USA ($P=0.15$). This confirms the long-held view that cognitively unsophisticated individuals tend to evaluate information heuristically and when elites send misleading cues, the *unsophisticated* can be misled.

How do cognitive sophisticates with strong partisan attachments formulate attitudes when expressing an accurate view would create dissonance between themselves and the majority of their group? Some take the path of least resistance and respond that they do not know where President Obama was born ($P=0.12$). However, they are twice as likely to express the view held by the majority of their group ($P=0.27$). Though a majority of cognitively sophisticated Republicans are likely to respond that President Obama was born in the USA ($P=0.62$), this predicted probability is sufficiently low to question the dominant view that relatively few cognitive sophisticates will be highly prejudicial (Sniderman, et al. 1991). When the majority of the group to which one belongs expresses one view, the dissonance created by expressing an alternative view is sufficient to lead significant numbers of cognitive sophisticates to adopt the view of the majority (H3).

Conclusion

The analyses presented in this chapter show significant partisan effects when individuals attempt to determine the veracity of rumors spread through internet videos. The stronger the individual partisan attachment, the more likely they are to believe a rumor that derogates members of the other political party. Though the effect was demonstrated using Democrats as the out-group, theory suggests that the similar effects would be found amongst Democrats using Republicans as the out-group. Though normative democratic theory posits that politically sophisticated individuals should have the strongest capacity to view new information deliberatively—weighing the evidence from multiple perspectives—the framework presented in this chapter posits that partisan motivations make this unlikely in hyper-polarized political conditions. When the view of the majority is clear, the psychological need to self-enhance

overrides the need for accuracy and causes people to believe things that do not have a factual basis.

Can amateur videos hosted on YouTube persuade people to believe a rumor and do the same mechanisms that influence how people evaluate political information govern the rumor acceptance calculation regarding non-political information about political figures? The evidence presented in this paper suggests that, yes, when the rumor is novel, amateur videos hosted on YouTube can persuade people to accept rumors that appeal to their baser instincts. When exposed to completely novel rumor about a political figure, the rumor acceptance calculation reflected partisan leanings. The stronger the affiliation with the opposing political party, the more likely an individual was to accept the rumor. This was true in a control group, that completely lacked confirmatory evidence, but partisans that viewed the YouTube clip were more likely to accept the rumor. All things being equal, when presented with a novel rumor via a YouTube video, self-enhancing motivations play a strong role in the rumor acceptance calculation.

The evidence presented in this paper also suggests that amateur videos hosted on YouTube are not persuasive. If the amateur video presents a rumor that is not novel, it is not persuasive. In such instances, accuracy motivations lead the cognitively sophisticated to the correct response. Partisanship may play some insignificant role in the rumor acceptance calculation for the less educated, but an amateur video will not persuade people to accept the rumor; even those low in cognitive sophistication. However, this seems to be true of issues that are not highly politicized. Barack Obama's smoking behavior never became the type of political issue that rumors about his origin of birth became. It seems that the same mechanisms that govern how political information is processed also influence the rumor acceptance calculus.

Finally, the evidence presented in this paper suggests that the political context matters. Persistent, politicized rumors, like that of President Obama's birth origin, have the capacity to challenge the resolve of cognitive sophisticates with strong partisan attachment. At the height of the political drama surrounding President Obama's birthplace, a Republican with less than a college diploma had less than a 50-50 chance of correctly responding that the President was constitutionally eligible to be the President. A Republican with some post-graduate training had more than a 33% chance of getting it wrong. Many of these chose the "Don't Know" path of least resistance, but this is staggering. Rather than interpret this as an indication that highly educated Republicans are less cognitively sophisticated than the rest, the analyses presented in this paper suggests that group membership influences rumor acceptance. When presented with two rumors of equal credibility, people tend to choose the rumor that enhances their sense of self (Bordia and Difonzo 2005). Generally speaking, cognitive sophistication gives people the tools to overcome misinformation, but when the group majority expresses a contrary view, people tend to accept the rumor congruent with the majority of the group. Cognitive sophistication moderates the influence of group attitudes, but does not remove it completely.

When nonpolitical information about political figures is presented in the form of a rumor, partisan motivations significantly influence the rumor acceptance calculation. The same mechanisms that govern the processing of political information seem to influence how *non*political information regarding political figures is processed. This suggests that the broad acceptance of bizarre rumors about President Obama's birth origin and religion, and other rumors about George W. Bush's foreknowledge of the September 11 attacks have their roots in the individual psyche. Though these analyses represent a snapshot in time, we should expect that acceptance of bizarre rumors about political figures will continue in the future and may have

been a feature of our political system from the beginning and this is not a peculiar era. Future work might consider the temporal element of rumor acceptance.

In addition, it is impossible to determine how long these effects continued. Possibly, individuals stopped believing that Obama engaged in an unpleasant activity from the moment they read the deception disclosure statement at the end of the survey. Again, this is beyond the scope of this project, but future work could examine the longevity of these effects. Perhaps believing a rumor once makes someone more likely to believe a similar rumor again. Political misperceptions can be difficult to correct (Nyhan and Reifler 2010).

Chapter 2

Targeted Presidential Appeals under Unified Government.

Introduction

Conventional wisdom suggests that public support has historically been a strategic asset for the president in pursuing his policy goals with Congress. The classic literature posits that some of our most effective presidents achieved their policy goals because they were adept in their appeals to the public for support (Neustadt 1960). And indeed some evidence shows that a president has considerable ability to move public attention through a well-crafted public address (Cohen 1995; Tulis 1987). But more recently a number of studies suggest that the conventional wisdom is misguided or at least not accurate--it seems that presidents may not be very effective in their appeals to the public (Edwards 2003; G. C. Edwards 2007; Edwards 2009).

In part, we may have witnessed a decline in presidential influence over public attention and opinion that may be the result of developments in the modern era. The proliferation of different media sources has made it increasingly difficult for the President to speak directly to the American public without the filter of the media. For example, the major television networks are unlikely to broadcast live presidential addresses aside from messages regarding scandals, military actions, or the State of the Union address, and even when the networks do broadcast presidential speeches the audience has continued to shrink over the last 30 years (Edwards 2003; Kernell 2007).

In addition, there are segments of the population that presidents have a difficult time reaching. Partisanship can have considerable influence on how individuals process information (Rahn 1993; Sears and Funk 1999). Partisanship acts as a perceptual filter, screening new information and rejecting information that is inconsistent with partisan predispositions (Bartels

2002; Gaines et al. 2007). In addition, core supporters of a president might disregard new information. For example, people who previously approved of President Clinton maintained their high approval ratings of his presidency during the Monica Lewinsky scandal (Fischle 2000). In short, although the promise of shaping public opinion through public addresses exists, the public is more difficult to reach, less likely to tune in, and very unlikely to be moved by a president from a different party.

But if some partisans tune out a president who does not share their party label, then it is possible that presidential appeals to the public can still have an influence on those who belong to the president's party, and perhaps even some independents (Rottinghaus 2009, 2010; Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers 2010). In fact, although analysis of national polls often shows little change following presidential appeals, population sub-groups, such as partisans, may simply be shifting in opposite directions, and even cancelling each other out at the aggregate level (Rottinghaus 2010).

This chapter engages the ongoing debate over the president's bully pulpit by exploring the influence of George W. Bush's 2005 public campaign to reform Social Security on public opinion among his core constituents. In this chapter, I argue that although it is unlikely that Bush's mini-campaign increased support for his proposal among the general population—indeed the proposal was decidedly a failure—President Bush may have largely been trying to influence support amongst his core constituents, and that is where our attention should be focused.

This chapter begins with an overview of the literature on presidential rhetorical power and the use of issue framing. This chapter then describes the 2005 mini-campaign by George W. Bush to generate support for his plan to reform Social Security. President Bush thought he had a mandate after the 2004 election to reform Social Security. His mini-campaign was an integral

part of his effort to frame the issue and garner support among his core constituents (Edwards 2007; Jacobson 2008; Weiner 2007). This chapter then examines individual-level support for Bush's proposal to reform Social Security by employing data from two national surveys; one conducted before Bush began his mini-campaign and the other shortly after he began his mini-campaign. In addition, this chapter examines data from a national survey that was conducted at the end of the mini-campaign because it contains a unique experimental treatment concerning Social Security reform.

The analysis suggests that overall public support for President Bush's proposal declined after his public campaign. However, among Bush's core constituents his mini-campaign appears to have increased support. This pattern was confirmed with an experimental treatment. This chapter concludes that models of presidential rhetorical powers that focus exclusively on overall public opinion are too constrained. This chapter explores the implications of the findings and offers suggestions for future research.

Presidential Rhetorical Influence

Going public on an issue is a risky proposition for any president. Once an issue becomes publicized, defeat is also publicized (Kernell 1997). 'Staying private,' or limiting the scope of conflict, may be the best option, depending on the goal a president seeks to achieve (Covington 1987). Typically a president chooses to go public when he hopes to indirectly influence Congress by either increasing public support for his policy positions or increasing his approval rating with the public (Kernell 2007). Canes-Wrone (2006) argues that under certain conditions a president can use his rhetorical skills to affect policy outcomes in Congress. However, a president's success in appealing to the public depends on strategically choosing initiatives that

are complex and salient (Canes-Wrone and de Marchi 2008). For example, the president has incentive to publicize already popular initiatives in order to bolster his approval ratings. Of course, presidents should avoid publicizing unpopular initiatives if citizens perceive that his policy goals differ from their own.

But even with these strategic considerations, increases in partisanship among members of Congress and the electorate have made presidential appeals less likely to be successful (Kernell 2007). Jacobson (2006) shows a polarized electorate has dramatically decreased presidential approval by opposition party identifiers. Thus, an insular Congress and partisan electorate mean a lower likelihood of successful presidential persuasion.

As party opponents have become more resistant to presidential appeals, presidents have apparently increased their focus on addressing their supporters. Diane Heith (2000) used archived documents from the Nixon, Ford, Carter and Reagan administrations to examine how presidents use internal polls. Each of these administrations used internal polls to identify their core constituents and their preferences; each also used polls to craft messages that would be most appealing to core constituents and increase approval ratings (Heith 2000). Shapiro and Jacobs (2002) reached similar conclusions, documenting the tremendous increase in White House polling, and suggest that modern presidents are in a better position to influence at least some segments of the populace.

Even though modern presidents make public appeals more frequently than early presidents the evidence on presidential rhetorical power⁵ is mixed (Kernell 2007). Some argue (Collier and Sullivan 1995; Edwards 2003; G. C. Edwards 2007; Kernell 2007) that presidents do not have the ability to move public opinion through public addresses, especially with major

⁵ “Rhetorical powers,” “going public,” “public appeals,” and the “Bully Pulpit” all refer to the same phenomenon of a president using a public address in an attempt to sway public opinion. For convenience, we use the term “rhetorical powers.”

addresses (Rottinghaus 2009, 2010), others argue that the president can, under certain conditions, move public opinion and change the public's policy preferences by effectively appealing to the public (Cohen 1995; Druckman and Holmes 2004). But even those willing to make this argument suggest that the ability of presidents to lead public opinion has declined relative to their predecessors since the 1970s (Rottinghaus 2009, 2010).

Continuing the work of Neustadt, many scholars focus on the president's ability to use presidential rhetorical powers to indirectly influence Congress and bring about his desired policy outcomes. Here too this research has produced mixed results with some arguing that high presidential approval ratings increase congressional passage of presidential proposals (Brace and Hinckley 1992; Ostrom Jr and Simon 1985; Rivers and Rose 1985), and others finding support for a more nuanced view of presidential rhetorical powers that includes the dynamics of Congress and issue salience (Borrelli and Simmons 1993; Canes-Wrone 2006; Lockerbie, Borrelli, and Hedger 1998).

Rottinghaus (2010) and Tedin et al. (2010) uncover compelling evidence that presidents can shift attitudes among segments of the population; Tedin et al. (2010) even find that a president's *opponents* in the populace might actually be the most likely to be persuaded by presidential appeals. Meanwhile Edwards (2003, 2009) goes so far as to contend that presidential rhetorical powers should no longer be considered an element of presidential leadership, since presidents lack the ability to persuade the public.

The paradox of increasing efforts by presidents to influence the public along with increased evidence of little actual influence can be explained with a more precise understanding of the purpose behind presidential appeals to the public. The current literature emphasizes the presidents' ability to move general public opinion. This chapter argues for a different

interpretation of presidential rhetorical powers. Similar to Tedin et al. (2010) this chapter posits that when presidents appeal to the public, they are not fundamentally trying to appeal to the general population; most often they are appealing to particular population segments. Usually this sub-population would be their core constituents—the party base and those who were strong and early supporters of the president.

Presidential Influence: The Case of President George W. Bush

The discussion provides a foundation for thinking about a president's use of his rhetorical powers to solidify support among his core constituents. If a president were to detect from an internal poll that certain members of his core constituency were ambivalent toward a particular issue, the president could use a presidential address, or a series of presidential addresses to frame the issue in a way that increased support among his base for a particular policy issue. The issue would have to be a familiar and uncomplicated issue that his base constituents believe the president is capable of handling, or it would have to be a bold foreign policy initiative (Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier 2008). Since people are less susceptible to framing influences when the issue is highly familiar and preexisting beliefs moderate framing effects (Iyengar 1991), the President chose a novel approach to a partisan issue.

This is precisely what happened during President Bush's 2005 mini-campaign for Social Security reform. By the end of 2004, the public was growing tired of the war in Iraq, and support was fading. Rather than focus on foreign policy initiatives, as many previous presidents have in their second terms, Bush had campaigned in 2004 on his domestic policy agenda and thought he had a mandate to reform Social Security (Alberts 2005). Late 2004 polls appeared to bolster Bush's call for reforming Social Security. A *Fox News* poll conducted Dec. 14-15, 2009

showed that 60 percent of adults thought that people should have the choice to invest their Social Security contributions. In addition, 74% of those surveyed by *ABC News/Washington Post* between Dec. 16-19, 2004 thought that the Social Security program was either “in crisis” or had “major problems” (Report 2009).

For a president that has political capital to spend and is looking for an area in which to solidify his base leave a lasting policy legacy, Social Security seemed to be a good issue. It was a salient, simply understood issue and the public’s support of Bush in the previous election seemed to confirm that they trusted him on this issue. Thus, President Bush used frequent, public appeals to frame the issues in the Social Security debate in a way that would increase support for his policy proposal among his core constituency.

The 2005 Mini-Campaign to Reform Social Security

Edwards (2007) documents the attempt by President Bush in 2005 to move public opinion on Social Security Reform. President Bush began his second term with less public support than other recently elected incumbents, without a clear mandate, and saw a dramatic decrease in his approval ratings drop as he tried to advance his domestic agenda. Congruent with the dominant view on presidential rhetoric, Edwards (2007) argues that Bush failed because he misread the public agenda and did not have high enough approval ratings to move public opinion. The strongest empirical evidence to support Edwards claim is a poll conducted by Pew Research Group in May 2005. They found, that by a 53 to 36 percent margin, Americans generally favored the idea of privatized Social Security accounts, but when the same idea is preceded by the phrase "George W. Bush has proposed..." the public was divided (45 percent in favor, 43 percent opposed) (Pew 2005). Indeed, the 60 plus day mini-campaign Bush pursued in

early 2005 seemed to increase public opposition to reform rather than decrease it. And at the end of his second term, Bush seems to agree with Edwards' assessment. In his final press briefing at the White House, when asked about mistakes he made as President, George W. Bush replied:

I believe that running the Social Security idea right after the '04 elections was a mistake. I should have argued for immigration reform. And the reason why is, is that -- you know, one of the lessons I learned as governor of Texas, by the way, is legislative branches tend to be risk-adverse. In other words, sometimes legislatures have the tendency to ask, why should I take on a hard task when a crisis is not imminent? And the crisis was not imminent for Social Security as far as many members of Congress was concerned (Bush 2009).

It seems clear that Bush believed he had a mandate from the public following the 2004 presidential election; his only error was in interpreting that nature of that mandate. It is also likely that Bush wanted to shift the public's focus away from the Iraq War and to establish a conservative legacy by reforming Social Security.

And the next sentence from Bush's statement above confirms that by 2009 he still thought that the 2004 presidential campaign was about Social Security:

As an aside, one thing I proved is that you can actually campaign on the issue and get elected. In other words, I don't believe talking about Social Security is the third rail of American politics. I, matter of fact, think that in the future, not talking about how you intend to fix Social Security is going to be the third rail of American politics (Bush 2009).

George W. Bush spent much of the 2004 presidential election campaigning on his domestic policy agenda. It is not astonishing, therefore, that he interpreted his victory in the election as a mandate to implement his domestic policy agenda. He had become the first president since his father to win the presidential election with a majority, his party gained seats in the House and Senate, and rightfully felt like he had earned some "political capital" (Lindberg 2004; Monitor 2004). When Bush said that he would "spend it," he meant that he was going to implement the domestic agenda on which he had campaigned.

His strategy for enacting Social Security reform, including a partial privatization plan, involved a mini-campaign beginning with the State of the Union Address and lasting for 60 days in a series of public addresses, town hall meetings, and targeted rallies. President Bush used internal polls to identify the language and symbols he should use to construct his message, and then used a series of carefully constructed town hall style meetings to frame the issue for his core constituents.

The careful vetting of audience members for the town hall meetings helped to ensure that the President and participants would stay ‘on message’ about the need to reform the system and the desirability of partially privatized accounts. And although I would not argue that Bush *only* intended to rally his core supporters in these meetings, the targeted nature of where and when these events were held clearly suggests that Bush was focused on his supporters and Republican supporters in key congressional districts and states around the country (see Edwards 2007; Weiner 2007).

This discussion leads to specific hypotheses. The dominant view concerning presidential rhetorical skill does not differentiate between support for the president among core constituents and support for the president among the general public, but it should not be taken as a given that a president’s base will support the president. Consistent with the dominant view, I expect that as general support for the president declines, broad support for his proposal will also decline (H1). However, if the campaign was a targeted appeal to his core constituents, support for the proposal should *increase* among his base (H2).

These two hypotheses propose tests on the notion that President Bush was appealing directly to his base as opposed to the general public. This perspective is consistent with Jacobson’s (2008) argument that Bush consistently tried to govern from his base rather than from the middle

in the electorate, and it fits the patterns of public appearances Bush made during his 2005 mini-campaign. Although a decline in general public support for President Bush's Social Security reform package has been documented (Edwards 2007; Jacobson 2008), an increase in support for this proposal among his base would show that his appeals to his core constituents were effective, all other factors considered. Such a finding would support the perspective that presidential rhetorical powers have not diminished over time; they are simply most effective among the core constituents of a president. Here I am suggesting that even in the absence of a specific instance of the president going public on an issue, attributing a proposal to a president mimics an actual appeal by a president for a proposal. As such, and as with the first two hypotheses, proposals attributed to the president should receive less support amongst the general public (H3), but greater support among his core constituents (H4).

Data and Methods

The tests for the first two hypothesis comes from a dataset that was created by pooling responses from two different surveys collected for the Pew Research Center by Princeton Survey Research International. The first survey was conducted from December 1 to 16, 2004 by telephone with a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults in the U.S. The second survey was conducted from February 16 to 21, 2005 by telephone with a nationally representative sample of 1,502 adults in the U.S. Each survey asked: How much, if anything, have you heard about a proposal which would allow younger workers to invest a portion of their Social Security taxes in private retirement accounts, which might include stocks or mutual funds — a lot, a little or nothing at all?" Respondents were then asked: "Generally, do you favor or oppose this

proposal?” The responses for this question were coded one if they favored the proposal and zero if they do not.

Central to the analysis is that the survey in December 2004 was conducted before Bush began his mini-campaign for his Social Security reform proposal. The second survey was taken in February 2005, just after President Bush gave his State of the Union address, which kicked off his “60 stops in 60 days” campaign to promote his Social Security proposal (Edwards and King 2007). By pooling the two surveys I am able to assess the change, if any, in levels of support for the proposal overall and among segments of the population following the start of Bush’s mini-campaign.

Independent Variables

Edwards (2007) and others have already clearly documented the decline in general public support for Bush’s proposal during and following the min-campaign. Here I am especially interested in the effect of the kickoff of the campaign on Bush’s core constituents. I measure the effect of Bush’s State of the Union address and the start of the mini-campaign with a variable coded zero for respondents who took the December 2004 survey, and one for respondents who took the February 2005 survey. Overall I expect that Bush’s attempt at going public will be associated with lower support for Social Security reform among those surveyed in February.

I measure Bush’s core constituency in two ways. First with variables for partisanship; I code respondents identifying as Democrat as one, with all others at zero, and respondents identifying as Republican as one, with all others at zero. With these two variables in each model the coefficients are interpreted relative to independents. Second, I account for core constituents

based on approval of President Bush. For those respondents who approved of the job the president was doing I assign a one, for those who disapproved I assigned a two.

I include other variables that might include Bush's core constituents. In the 2004 presidential election, four out of five of those who attended church at least once a week voted for Bush (Langfitt 2004). I measure church attendance with a scale from one to six, with one indicating that the respondent never attends church and a six indicating that the respondent attends church once a week or more. Likewise, born-again Christians and evangelicals were some of Bush's strongest supporters in 2000 and 2004 (Goodstein, Yardley, and Marjorie Connelly contributed reporting for this 2004). I measure evangelical Christians with a variable coded one for those identifying as born-again Christians and zero for all others. Finally, the Bush coalition was decidedly conservative. I capture respondent ideology with a seven-point scale, with one being very conservative and seven being very liberal. I expect that those who attend church often, are born-again, and conservative will be more likely to support Social Security reform.

Although I combine a pre-State of the Union survey with a post-State of the Union survey to assess exposure at the start of the Bush mini-campaign on Social Security reform, I do not have a direct measure of exposure to the State of the Union Address. However, I include a surrogate measure of exposure to the Social Security reform campaign with responses to the question: "How much, if anything, have you heard about a proposal which would allow younger workers to invest a portion of their Social Security taxes in private retirement accounts, which might include stocks or mutual funds — a lot (coded three), a little (coded 2), or nothing at all (coded one)?"

Central to my assessment of the impact of presidential appeals is the notion that the president might be targeting his core constituency rather than the general public. To assess Bush's impact on core constituents I interact respondent sub-groups with the exposure measures; in short, the hypotheses are conditional and therefore require that inclusion of interactive terms in the model (Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006). To test whether Bush's 2005 State of the Union address influenced the attitudes of his core constituents I test four interaction variables: 1) an interaction between survey period and Republican, 2) an interaction between hearing about the proposal and Republican, 3) an interaction between survey period and Bush approval, and 4) an interaction between hearing about the proposal and Bush approval.

Beyond the theoretical variables of interest I also included a variety of traditional control variables in the models. These include variables for gender, age, education, race, income, and parental status.

Table 1: Support for Social Security Reform: Before and after 2005 State of the Union

Independent Variables	Support Proposal
Exposure to SoU: February Respondent	-0.375** (0.101)
Heard about Proposal	-0.282** (0.077)
Female	-0.055 (0.102)
Age	-0.035** (0.004)
Education	0.029 (0.036)
African American	0.004 (0.164)
Born Again Christian	0.110

	(0.117)
Have Children	-0.083
	(0.114)
Church Attendance	0.013
	(0.035)
Income	0.054*
	(0.025)
Republican	0.857**
	(0.143)
Democrat	-0.231#
	(0.121)
Ideology: ^ liberal	-0.148*
	(0.061)
Approve of Bush	1.311**
	(0.126)
Chi Square	682.39**
Pseudo R2	.22
N	2358

Note: Coefficients are logit estimates. Standard errors are in parentheses. The Dependent variable is whether the respondent favors or opposes a plan to put some Social Security benefits into individual retirement accounts. **p<.01; *p<.05; #p<.10; Data are from December 2004 and February 2005 Pew Research Center surveys of national adults.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 displays the logit coefficients of the base model that did not include any interactions and the results of the full models with interactions included are displayed in Table 2. The results in Table 1 fit the expectations. The measures of exposure to Bush's appeals—being surveyed after the State of the Union and whether the respondent had heard much about the reform proposal--both are statistically significant and negative. Respondents that had heard more about the Social Security proposal were less likely to support the proposal and those that were surveyed after the State of the Union address in February 2005 were less likely to support the proposal. In short, the president's effort to build support for reform may have actually decreased support in the general public.

At the same time, the president's core constituents, Republicans and those who approved of the job he was doing, were more likely to support the reform proposal. Other potential core constituents, including those identifying as Born-again and conservatives, were also more likely to support the reform proposal. This pattern is consistent with my expectations, but the key question remains: did the president influence his core constituents with his public appeal?

Table 2 displays the model with the interaction variables that account for Bush's core constituents and exposure to the president's reform campaign. In model 1 (column 1) the coefficient for the interaction of Republican and exposure to the State of the Union address does not achieve statistical significance. In other words, Republicans were not any more or less likely to support the proposal following the State of the Union. So although Bush apparently did not increase support among Republicans, he also did not lose it as he did with the general public. Model 2 (column 2) shows the interaction between exposure to the State of the Union and Bush approval. Here the interaction approached the standard .05 probability level and is statistically significant in a one-tailed test. The coefficient suggests that those who approved of Bush were more likely to support the reform proposal following the president's appeal than they were before the appeal. But as noted, I do not know if respondents were directly exposed to the State of the Union address or not.

Table 2: Support for the Social Security Reform: Interacting Exposure and Sub-Groups

Independent Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Exposure to SoU: February Resp.	-0.442 (0.000)	-0.543 (0.000)	-0.387 (0.000)	-0.383 (0.000)
Heard about Proposal	-0.281 (0.000)	-0.279 (0.000)	-0.507 (0.000)	-0.817 (0.000)
Interaction: Republican and Exposure to SoU	.262 (.253)			

Interaction: Bush Approval and Exposure to SoU	0.382 (0.057)	
Interaction: Republican and Heard about Proposal		0.959 (0.000)
Interaction: Approve of Bush and Heard about Proposal		1.259 (0.000)

Note: Coefficients are Logit coefficients; models estimated with all variables from Table 1. P-values are in parentheses below the estimate for the coefficient from each model. Data are from December 2004 and February 2005 Pew Research Center surveys of national adults.

The second set of interactions might better capture exposure to Bush's appeal for Social Security reform. Model 3 (column 3) displays the coefficient for the interaction between Republican and how much the respondent had heard about the proposal. The interaction term is statistically significant and positive, suggesting that Republicans who had been exposed to more information about the measure were more likely to support relative to Republicans who had less exposure. This indirect measure of Bush's mini-campaign suggests that the president's appeal may have increased support among some of his core constituents. Model 4 (column 4) supports this notion—the interaction between how much the respondent had heard about the proposal and approval of Bush is also statistically significant and positive. This finding suggests that Bush supporters were more likely to support the proposal the more they heard about it. Thus, in both cases I find evidence that Bush may have been able to increase support among particular core constituent groups by going public.⁶

⁶ I also included interactions between the variable measuring how much respondents had heard about the Social Security reform proposal and ideology (interaction coefficient $-.477$, $p=.000$) and born-again (interaction coefficient

Additional Analyses

The evidence thus far supports the first two hypotheses—President Bush’s kickoff of the mini-campaign to appeal to the public on his proposal for Social Security reform did not serve to increase support in the general public but appears to increased support among his core constituents. Given that Bush’s appeal actually seemed to decrease support among the general public I also hope to test how much of a factor the messenger played in shaping public attitudes. In other words, was the general public less likely to support a reform proposal attributed to Bush versus the same proposal not attributed to anyone? On the other hand, were core constituents of the president more likely to support a reform proposal if it was attributed to Bush?

A unique survey conducted following Bush’s mini-campaign in the spring of 2005 offers an opportunity to test this specific component of presidential influence. From May 11-15, 2005 Princeton Survey Research Associates conducted a national telephone survey of 1,502 adults for the Pew Research Center. The survey contained an embedded experiment. A randomly selected portion of the respondents was asked if they favored a particular proposal for reforming Social Security with no attribution to President Bush (N=758). Another randomly selected portion of the respondents was asked if they favored a particular proposal for reforming Social Security with a specific attribution to President Bush (N=744). Thus the experiment allows us to assess support for the proposal as a Bush proposal as well as the proposal unconnected to President

.469, $p=.001$). Recall that conservatives and born-again evangelicals were a key part of the Bush coalition. Estimating interaction variables with these sub-groups and exposure suggests that conservatives who had heard more about the proposal were more likely to support it than conservatives who had heard less, and born-again respondents who had heard more about the proposal were more likely to support it than born-again respondents who had heard less. These results are consistent with the pattern we observed among Republicans and those who approved of President Bush.

Bush. In short, the experiment allows us to test whether a Bush appeal can garner more support than the same proposal without a specific messenger.

Respondents were randomly asked one of the following two questions: 1) “*One proposal* for dealing with Social Security's financial situation is to keep the system as it is now for lower income retirees, but limit the growth of future benefits for wealthy and middle income retirees. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?” or 2) “*George W. Bush has proposed* dealing with Social Security's financial situation by keeping the system as it is now for lower income retirees, but limiting the growth of future benefits for wealthy and middle income retirees. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?” [emphasis added in each question]. Those favoring the proposal were coded as one, those opposing as zero.

Table 3: Support for Social Security Reform: Embedded Survey Experimental Treatment with Attribution to Bush and No Attribution, May 2005

Independent Variables	Support Proposal
Exposure: Bush Proposal	-0.324* (0.140)
Heard About Proposal	0.109 (0.110)
Female	-0.175 (0.142)
Age	0.002 (0.004)
Education	0.051 (0.051)
African American	-0.371 (0.249)
Born-Again Christian	0.325* (0.166)
Have Children	0.073 (0.165)
Church Attendance	-0.103* (0.052)
Income	-0.115** (0.039)
Republican	0.122 (0.195)
Democrat	-0.293 (0.183)
Ideology ^ liberal	0.022 (0.089)
Approve of Bush	0.176 (0.186)
Have a Retirement Plan Other than Social Security	0.002 (0.090)
Constant	0.809 (0.527)
Chi Square	37.36**
Pseudo R2	.03
N	887

Note: Coefficients are logit coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. The Dependent variable is whether the respondent favors or opposes a plan to put some Social Security benefits into individual retirement accounts.

**p<.01; *p,.05; #p<.10. Data are from a May 2005 Pew Research Center survey of national adults.

The central variable of interest measures the effect of the experimental treatment. I include a dichotomous variable coded one for those who were exposed to the Social Security proposal question attributed to Bush, and zero for those who were read that same question without attribution to Bush. I use the same independent variables employed in the analysis above (questions wording and coding are the same), with one exception; the May 2005 survey contained an additional relevant question on retirement plans. Respondents were asked: “Do you have a retirement plan besides Social Security?” Possible responses were yes, in the stock market through stocks, mutual funds or a 401k plan (coded three), yes, but not in the stock market (coded two), and no (coded one). Because the reform proposal specifically dealt with the issue of allowing individuals to take some portion of their Social Security benefits and invest them in the stock market I expected that those people that already held such investments would be more supportive of the plan.

Table 3 displays the results from a Logit model predicting support for the proposal in May 2005. Consistent with the findings above, attributing the Social Security proposal to President Bush did not increase general support for the proposal. Indeed, those respondents exposed to the treatment attributing the reform proposal to President Bush were actually less likely to support the plan than respondents who heard the proposal with no attribution to any specific messenger. Interestingly, in this model the best predictors of support for the proposal were somewhat different than in the analyses above. Besides the treatment variable, only church attendance, being born-again, and income had a statistically significant influence on the likelihood of support. Meanwhile, partisanship, approval of Bush, ideology, and how much the respondent had heard about the proposal did not significantly influence the likelihood of a particular response. In large part I suspect that general dispositions toward the proposal were so

solidified by May 2005 that the group differences no longer exerted a main effect on support for the proposal (see also Edwards 2007; Jacobson 2008).

But the main concern here is whether the president can increase support for his proposals among his core constituents. Given the experimental conditions in the survey I expect that core constituents who heard the proposal attributed to President Bush should be more likely to support the reform than core constituents who heard the proposal with no attribution. To assess Bush's impact on core constituents I need to interact respondent sub-groups with the exposure measures; in short, the hypotheses are conditional and require that inclusion of interactive terms in the model (Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006). To test whether the Bush attribution influenced the attitudes I test four interaction variables: 1) an interaction between the experimental condition and Republican, 2) an interaction between the experimental condition and Bush approval, 3) an interaction between the experimental condition and Democrat, and 4) an interaction between the experimental condition and ideology. I include interactions with exposure and Democrats as well as ideology in this test simply because I suspect that the overall negative response I observed (above) in attitudes towards Bush's Social Security reform was largely driven by Democrats and liberals.

Table 4: Support for the Social Security Proposal When Attributed to Bush:

IV	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Proposal Attributed to Bush	-0.989 (0.000)	-0.914 (0.000)	0.159 (0.361)	1.771 (0.000)
Approve of Bush * Attributed to Bush	1.306 (0.000)			
Republican * Attributed to Bush		1.695 (0.000)		
Democrat * Attributed to Bush			-1.411 (0.000)	
Conservative- Liberal * Attributed to Bush				-0.770 (0.000)

Note: Full results available in Appendix. Table reports coefficients with p-values in parentheses.

The full model from Table 3 was used to estimate the interaction models displayed in Table 4, but in the table I only display the coefficients for each of the interactions. Model 1 (column one) shows the coefficient for the interactive term that combines the treatment variable with Bush approval. The coefficient is statistically significant and positive, suggesting that Bush supporters exposed to the proposal that was attributed to Bush were more likely to support the reform proposal than were Bush supporters that were exposed to the proposal with no attribution. Model 2 (column two) displays the coefficient for the interactive term that combines the treatment variable with Republican. The coefficient is statistically significant and positive, suggesting that Republicans exposed to the proposal that was attributed to Bush were more likely

to support the reform proposal than were Republicans that were exposed to the proposal with no attribution. This pattern of findings supports hypotheses three and four, which suggested that a president's core consistency would be more likely to support policies that are linked to or advocated for by the president.

Model 3 (column three) shows the coefficient for the interaction between Democrat and the treatment attribution. The coefficient is statistically significant and negative, suggesting that Democrats exposed to the proposal that was attributed to Bush were less likely to support the reform proposal than were Democrats that were exposed to the proposal with no attribution. It has been firmly established that Democrats were more likely to oppose the reform proposal in the first place, but this finding makes it clear that the attachment to President Bush made Democrats even more likely to oppose the measure. In part I suspect this interaction reflects what occurred during the Bush min-campaign—as Bush advocated for the reform measure, Democrats became increasingly opposed to the measure.

Finally, Model 4 (column four) shows the coefficient for the interaction between ideology and the treatment attribution. The coefficient is statistically significant and negative, suggesting that liberals exposed to the proposal that was attributed to Bush were less likely to support the reform proposal than were liberals that were exposed to the proposal with no attribution. As we observed with Democrats, the attachment of Bush to the reform proposal appears to have increased the likelihood that liberals would oppose the measure.

Table 5: Predicted Levels of Support for Plan after State of the Union Address

Independent Variable	Probability of Supporting Proposal in Feb. 2005	Margin of Error
Approve of Bush	0.79	0.02
<u>Interaction:</u> Approve of Bush and Exposure to State of the Union	0.70	0.03
<u>Interaction:</u> Republican and Heard About Proposal	0.76	0.03
<u>Interaction:</u> Approval of Bush and Heard About Proposal	0.75	0.03
Moderate	0.57	0.02

Notes: Post estimation using the Zelig package in R to simulate predicted probabilities and margin of error. Based on full model and interactions from Tables 1 and 2.

Post Estimation

To get a better sense of some of these relationships I used the Zelig package in R to simulate predicted probabilities for each independent variable in the models. I use the software to simulate the predicted probabilities of support based on the models presented in tables 2 and 4 (Kosuke Imai 2008). I used the mean value for each independent variable in the model and changed the value for the independent variables reported in Tables 5 and 6. For example, the predicted level of support for someone identified as “very conservative” from Model 3 of Table 4 was derived by placing values for all independent variables at their mean and placing the value for the interactive variable (ideology and attribution to Bush) at 1, to represent those that were “very conservative.” I ran the simulation 100,000 times to generate predicted levels of support for George W. Bush’s Social Security proposal and a margin of error. The same method was used to calculate the predicted level of support for each independent variable listed in Tables 5 and 6.

Tables 5 and 6 present the results of the simulations. As shown in Table 5, the probability that an individual who approved of Bush would also support his plan to reform Social Security in February 2005 is 0.79 with a margin of error of plus or minus 0.02. Likewise, the probability that someone who identified herself as ideologically moderate would support President Bush’s proposal to reform Social Security in February 2005 was 0.57 with a margin of error of plus or minus 0.02.

As shown in Table 6, the probability that someone who identified herself as very conservative and received the treatment would support President Bush’s proposal was 0.66 with a margin of error of plus or minus 0.02. Conversely, the probability that an individual that identified herself as very liberal and received the treatment would support President Bush’s proposal was 0.09 with a margin of error of plus or minus 0.05.

Table 6: Predicted Levels of Support for Social Security Plan and Attribution to Bush

Independent Variable	Probability of Supporting	Margin of Error
<u>Interaction</u> : “Very Conservative” and Attributed to Bush	0.66	0.02
<u>Interaction</u> : Approve of Bush and Attributed to Bush	0.78	0.04
<u>Interaction</u> : Republican and Attributed to Bush	0.85	0.03
<u>Interaction</u> : “Very Liberal” * Attributed to Bush	0.09	0.05
Democrat * Attributed to Bush	0.31	0.05

Notes: Post estimation using the Zelig package in R to simulate predicted probabilities and margin of error. Based on full model and interactions from Tables 3 and 4.

Overall the predicted probabilities suggest that the differences I observed among sub-groups and exposure conditions are substantively large and not simply statistically significant differences. I fairly consistently find that Bush's public appeals and attachment to the Social Security reform proposal drove down general public support for the proposal, and drove away potential supporters among liberals and Democrats. However, Bush's efforts on going public for the measure also tended to increase support among his core constituents, especially when they heard more about the measure and it was specifically attributed to President Bush.

Discussion and Conclusion

The traditional view on presidential rhetorical powers has shifted away from powerful bully pulpit perspective. Richard Neustadt illustrated how President Truman was able to pressure Congress to pass the expensive Marshall Plan, despite his abysmal approval ratings, in part because of his appeals to the public (Neustadt 1980). Others, such as Cohen (1995), found that U.S. presidents, regardless of popularity are able to sway public opinion through the State of the Union. But Edwards (2003; 2007; 2009), among others, has shown that since the 1970s American presidents seem to have little influence on public opinion.

I do not disagree with either perspective and suggest much of the literature fails to recognize an important element of presidential rhetorical powers—that presidents are just as likely to try and mobilize their base in pursuit of policy goals as they are the general public (but see Rottinghaus 2009, 2010; Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers 2010). I focus on George W. Bush's 2005 mini-campaign for a Social Security reform proposal that would have allowed citizens to put at least some of their funds in private investments. Bush's public campaign to reform Social Security was seen as a failure by himself and others, but it demonstrates one realm

in which U.S. presidents can potentially effectively exercise rhetorical powers—in moving core constituents.

To explore these issues I developed several hypotheses related to Bush's ability to shift opinions of the general public and his core constituents on Social Security reform. This chapter examines individual-level support for Bush's proposal to reform Social Security by employing data from two national surveys; one conducted before Bush began his mini-campaign and the other shortly after he began his mini-campaign. In addition, I examine data from a national survey that was conducted at the end of the mini-campaign because it contains a unique experimental treatment concerning Social Security reform. These findings allow me to draw several important conclusions.

First, consistent with the conventional wisdom, the results show that the longer President Bush campaigned to reform Social Security, the more the general public disliked his plan. And the attachment of the plan to Bush appears to have especially alienated Democrats and liberals. In May of 2005 Democrats were 14 percent more likely to oppose a plan that was attributed to Bush and those who described themselves as very liberal were 36 percent less likely to support the Social Security reform plan when it was attributed to President Bush.

Second, and more importantly, the results also demonstrate that George W. Bush's mini-campaign to reform Social Security was effective among his base. In May 2005, a conservative was 21 percent more likely to support a plan that included Bush's name than the rest of the population. Likewise, those who approved of George W. Bush's performance as president were 33 percent more likely to approve of a plan that was attributed to Bush and Republicans were 40 percent more likely to approve of a plan that was attributed to Bush.

Third, specific appeals by the president, such as the State of the Union address, can influence the attitudes of core constituents. In the analysis, members of George W. Bush's core constituency were 20 percent more likely to approve of the Bush proposal after the February 2005 State of the Union address. Those that approved of George W. Bush were more likely to approve of his plan after the State of the Union address, while most others were likely to disapprove of his plan after the State of the Union address.

The pattern of findings suggests that while general public opinion headed in one direction the opinions of Bush's core constituents went strongly in the opposite direction. This finding not only confirms my hypotheses that George W. Bush was effective at framing the Social Security issue for his core constituents to increase support for his proposal. It also suggests scholars looking for evidence of presidential influence need to examine core constituencies as well as the general public.

Thus, instead of concluding that the powers do not exist because presidents fail to move overall public opinion (Edwards 2009), this chapter suggest that it is beneficial to look for the contingent and specific benefits presidents receive from appeals to the public. As Edwards (2007) has documented modern presidents appeal to the public with greater frequency than their predecessors. Yet, the evidence in this chapter demonstrates that examining aggregate opinion may be misleading, especially given the specific strategy employed by an administration. Modern technology and heavy use of internal polls give American presidents opportunities to frame public addresses to their core constituents. Presidential rhetorical powers should be measured by the effect of going public on the opinion of the president's core constituents and not just the effect on general public opinion.

Since U.S. presidents are unlikely to be able to move overall public opinion much in the future, further research could attempt to explore the conditions under which a president would fail to move public opinion among his core constituents. Likewise, given the pattern I observed with Bush's 2005 mini-campaign, it would also seem prudent to examine how much going public, or expanding the scope of conflict, might gain support among core constituents, but cost among moderates and those who are not generally supportive of the President. As this chapter demonstrates, even when the president is able to mobilize his base on a policy proposal, the result of governing from your base might be to divide the public and members of Congress, thereby insuring legislative defeat.

Chapter 3

Divided Government and Media Coverage

Introduction

The power to persuade the public, members of Congress and the media to support his policy agenda is among the most studied of the informal presidential powers. Indeed, the public presidency has occupied scholarly interest at least since Neustadt (1960). In the US system, the public often holds the president accountable for legislative outcomes over which he may have little control. Kernell (1986) and Tulis (1987) argue that through public addresses presidents can persuade the public to support his policy agenda and put pressure on members of Congress to pass legislation. The growth of mass media in the United States mirrors the growth of this informal presidential power.

However, some argue that modern presidents no longer wield the power of persuasion. Public opinion polls conducted before and after major speeches from the Reagan administration through the presidency of George W. Bush suggest that the public is no longer persuaded by presidential public appeals (Edwards 2003; Edwards and King 2007). Indeed Edwards (2009) argues that “presidents cannot reshape the contours of the political landscape to pave the way for change by establishing an agenda and persuading the public, Congress, and others to support their policies.”(p.188). Despite the diminishing returns on public campaigns, presidents are going public much more than in the past (Edwards 2003)

A growing body of literature seeks to explain this paradox. One approach emphasizes presidential popularity as the key to persuading the public. Popular presidents are more likely to persuade the public than unpopular presidents (Mondak 1993; Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey

1987). Though the president is limited in which policies he can advocate by the policy preferences of his supporters, popular presidents can use their popularity in the polls to force some members of Congress to support his policy agenda (Canes-Wrone 2006). The paradox is explained by differences in presidential popularity. Another approach assumes that presidents have the same capacity to persuade the public, but changes in the media environment make it more difficult for the president to present an undiluted message to the public (Baum and Kernell 1999; Cohen 2008, 2010; Kernell and Rice 2011; Patterson 2003; Rottinghaus 2010; Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers 2010). If modern presidents' audiences were as captive as those of earlier eras, they would be just as persuaded as the public of a former era (Kernell and Rice 2011; Rosenblatt 1998; Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers 2010). According to this view, the reason that modern presidents go public more often is that the current media environment forces them to give multiple addresses to reach the same number of people that earlier presidents could reach in a single address (Cohen 2008, 2010; Edwards 2003).

The majority of this research begins with the assumption that the purpose behind presidential public campaigns is to persuade the public to support the presidents' policy agenda. However, some argue that presidents may publicly campaign for policies, not to generate additional public support, but to prevent existing support from deteriorating. Since proposals to change the status quo typically meet significant opposition, presidents may use public campaigns to neutralize the opposition even when these campaigns will not generate any additional support (Edwards 2003, 244).

In this chapter, I begin with the assumption that not every presidential public campaign is designed to generate support for the policy advocated in the public campaign. Though additional public support would be welcome, some campaigns may be designed to accomplish no other

purpose than to shift the focus of the national media from an undesirable topic to a more desirable one. That the president can influence the quantity of news coverage is hardly disputed, however the scholarly focus is too often placed on the tone of the coverage or presidential control of the message content. In this chapter, I argue that the strategic purpose of some presidential campaigns may not extend beyond merely altering the topics covered by the national media.

This chapter makes two contributions to the literature. First, it provides a framework for understanding the public presidency beyond the dominant assumption that presidents seek to persuade the public. This framework could be used to explain why modern presidents are more likely to go public, despite diminishing public support for policies following the public campaign. Second, this chapter uses a methodological innovation to model how media content changes over time. It is now common practice to use multilevel regression models to examine change over time (Curran and Bollen 2001; Snijders and Bosker 2011); however this is the first use of the approach to examine change in content over time. In the following section I provide a theoretical framework that explains why presidents would seek to change the content of national news coverage based on the literature and formulate testable hypotheses. The penultimate section tests these hypotheses using George W. Bush's public campaign for a troop surge in Iraq in 2007 as a test case.

The Golden Age of Going Public

The rise of presidential rhetorical power coincides with the advent of mass communications (Kernell 1986). In the early twentieth century, President Theodore Roosevelt used his powerful voice and personality to persuade the public to support his policy initiatives.

One example is the passage of the Hepburn Act of 1906. Despite the opposition of his party, the business community and major newspaper outlets, Roosevelt undertook a cross-country tour in which he pressed Congress to support his reform of the railroads. After more than a year of campaigning, this legislation passed with wide margins and is the first time a president successfully used public support to force Congress to comply with a presidential policy initiative (Tulis 1987, 106). The early twentieth century presidents that understood how to influence news coverage used this medium to garner public support for their policy proposals, which gave them significant leverage in their negotiations with Congress. In addition, the weekly radio address was an integral element of Franklin Roosevelt's strategy to implement his New Deal agenda.

The rise of television gave the president another medium to speak directly to the American people. Early in his presidency, John F. Kennedy broadcast his press conferences to a live television audience of nearly sixty-five million viewers. In addition, Kennedy often gave live interviews and public addresses that focused on his policy agenda. He used the satellite system at the White House to broadcast his televised messages to local stations throughout the US. Since television allowed presidents complete control over the message conveyed to the US public, it is no wonder that from Kennedy on the number of televised addresses has steadily risen (Kernell 2007, 110-27). In a primetime address on the four major networks, a US president had the potential to deliver an undiluted message to the entire television viewing audience.

In the first depiction of this informal presidential power, Neustadt (1960) described how Truman was able to pressure Congress into passing the Marshall Plan despite his low approval ratings with the public and congressional disdain for his presidency. Empirical work confirmed that popular presidents had the ability to move certain segments of the US public to support their policy agenda, suggesting that the President could manipulate the public to force congressional

compliance with his policy agenda (Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt 1998; Mondak 1993; Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey 1987). Though some presidents clearly failed to persuade the public to support their policy agenda (Carter's Crisis of Confidence Speech and Wilson's League of Nations Campaign), the preponderance of evidence seemed to suggest that "Going Public" was a viable tool the president could use to persuade Congress to pass significant legislation (Kernell 1997; Neustadt 1960; Tulis 1987).

Perhaps the best example of a successful public campaign for policy is Ronald Reagan's 1981 tax cut. Though he had support for his agenda in the Republican controlled Senate, powerful Democrats in the House were determined to defeat Reagan's new economic policy. Reagan packaged defense spending increases, cuts to social programs and income tax cuts into one bill and began a public campaign to persuade the House to pass it. After a couple of months of television appearances and pleas to the public to contact their member of Congress and urge them to support the bill, Reagan faced the lowest approval ratings ever recorded for a president in his second month of office (Kernell 2007, 153). The press and the public were critical of the bill and it seemed unlikely that the House would support the proposal. However, a surge in popularity following an attempt on President Reagan's life combined with a grassroots campaign to mobilize support in districts of Democratic representatives with large pockets of Reagan supporters helped sway public opinion in Reagan's direction. In April, Reagan addressed a joint-session of Congress (his first public address after the shooting) and focused his remarks on the passage of his economic agenda. A week later, enough Democrats crossed party lines to pass Reagan's landmark legislation (Canes-Wrone 2006, 20).

Questioning the Power of the Public Presidency

Despite Reagan's successful campaign for his policy agenda, some dispute his ability to persuade the public and force the compliance of Congress. Edwards (2003) argues that Reagan was not able to persuade the public aside from unusual circumstances. Using national public opinion surveys before and after major televised addresses, Edwards (2003) demonstrates that Reagan only successfully lead public opinion when the public was misinformed about an issue or when an increase in press coverage raised the salience of the issue (Edwards 2003, 73). Edward's analyses of public opinion data did not stop with Reagan; he continued through George W. Bush and ultimately concluded that, "Presidents cannot reshape the contours of the political landscape to pave the way for change by establishing an agenda and persuading the public, Congress, and others to support their policies." (Edwards 2009, 188).

Although Bill Clinton's governing strategy was premised on the idea that he could move the public to support his policy agenda, the evidence suggests that he spent much of his presidency maintaining existing support and did very little to convert skeptics to support his policy agenda (Edwards 2003, 44). Despite the permanent campaign approach that George W. Bush took to governing and his high approval ratings following the September 11 attacks, he was unable to rally the public behind major domestic policy initiatives (Edwards 2007, 171).

Even with these diminishing returns on public campaigns, modern presidents appeal to the public more often than their predecessors. This has led to revised expectations of the going public thesis. One revision is premised on the idea that the public no longer pays attention to presidential addresses. During the golden age of presidential rhetorical power the president had a captive audience; those that watched television also tuned in to presidential addresses. The rise

of cable television and the fragmented media environment has given viewers other options. Typically those that watch presidential addresses are those that are strong supporters of the president while those that are the most susceptible to presidential persuasion are the most likely to change channels during the address. If modern president's audiences were as captive as those of earlier eras, modern presidents would be equally persuasive (Kernell and Rice 2011; Rosenblatt 1998). The reason that modern presidents go public more often is that the current media environment forces them to give multiple addresses to reach the same number of people that earlier presidents could reach in a single address (Cohen 2008).

Some argue that the fragmented media environment causes modern presidents to be less persuasive (Cohen 2008, 2010; Rottinghaus 2010; Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers 2010). The less control a president has over how the message is delivered to the public, the less power the president will have to persuade the public. One way presidents may control their message is by travelling to smaller cities in an attempt to manipulate local news coverage. Since a presidential visit is likely to generate considerable local attention, a president is more likely to generate local news coverage of his speeches in smaller markets. By influencing the content of local stories, the president can potentially change the tone of national news outlets that may recirculate local coverage of a presidential speech (Cohen 2010). This change in national coverage that follows local coverage may result in broader public support for the president's policy proposals (Cohen 2010). Empirical evidence based on a random sample of speeches from Eisenhower to Clinton suggests that the more control a president has over the content of the media coverage of his speech, the more likely the public is to support his message after a presidential address (Rottinghaus 2010). Presidents use internal polls to identify the language that will lead the public to support their policy agenda and craft messages designed to inspire public support

(Heith 2000; Heith 2004; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000). A State of the Union address is a particularly effective opportunity for presidents to persuade the public because it is a venue in which the president has complete control over the message and is one of the few opportunities the president has to speak directly to the public (Druckman and Holmes 2004; Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers 2010).

Others argue that presidential popularity is the key to persuading the public. The president is most likely to persuade individuals that approve of the job he is doing in office, thus presidents tailor their message to appeal to narrow groups of supporters (Heith 2004). When the president lacks broad national support, he will appeal to the pockets of supporters that like him. According to this view, the strategic purpose behind a public campaign is to mobilize existing supporters and overwhelm the opposition (Canes-Wrone 2006; Kernell 2007; Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers 2010; Wood 2009).

The emerging view of presidential rhetorical power narrows the focus from persuading the general public to persuading narrower groups comprised of core supporters. Edwards (2009) argues that presidential power is not as much about persuasion as it is about recognizing opportunities and fashioning strategies and tactics to exploit them. He proposes that future research should focus on how presidents mobilize coalitions to support their political agenda (Edwards 2009, 190-1). In this view, the public presidency is less about persuading the public and more about mobilizing support (Edwards 2009). Wood (2009) formalizes this approach and explains why presidents are incentivized to pursue policies close to the preferences of their core constituents.

A New Approach

In the current presidential public campaign framework, most public campaigns are assumed to have the same goal: cajoling Congress to pass legislation by persuading the public to support the president's policy agenda. In reality this rarely occurs. Despite the situational effectiveness of public campaigns for policy, instances in which a president successfully persuades Congress to pass his policy agenda by persuading the public to support his policy agenda are rare. Hundreds of bills are signed in the typical presidential administration and only a handful of examples in the past hundred years fit the going public thesis. In addition, there is not a unified framework for understanding the purpose behind presidential public campaigns for policy. Surely modern presidents are aware of the statistical improbability that they will persuade members of the opposition to support their policy agenda, and certainly there are circumstances that warrant a public campaign for a policy that the president knows *a priori* has very little chance of success. However, if the only examples of successful public campaigns are rare, the framework must be modified to properly explain the purpose behind presidential public campaigns.

A public campaign for policy is an ineffective negotiation strategy. Going public is likely to harden the relationship between Congress and the President and make future negotiations less likely. When the presidency and Congress are controlled by the same party, the president and Congress should be more willing to bargain in policy negotiations behind closed doors (Kernell 2007, 64). However, under divided government the bargaining environment is already spoiled. Consequently, the president should be more likely to use a public campaign to mobilize the public to urge a Congress dominated by the opposing political party to cooperate. This is precisely what happened when Truman negotiated the passage of the Marshall Plan.

Indeed, presidential veto threats and public requests for members of Congress to yield on policy initiatives are more frequent under divided government conditions (Kernell 2007, 65).

Strategically, a president need not limit the use of the bully pulpit to swaying congressional votes. Reconstituting the terms of the debate is the primal act of presidential leadership (Skowronek 2011). Under divided control of Congress, the strategic purpose of a public campaign could be to control media coverage; either appeal to core constituents to show that the President is fighting for them, or change news coverage to something more positive about the President. Especially when members of Congress and the president lack a *shared* constituency, members of the opposition party in Congress would be unresponsive to moves in public opinion generated by presidents of the opposing political party (Jacobson 2011). In addition, they may not want to risk upsetting their constituents by negotiating with the opposition. Though the President likely comprehends that Congress is unlikely to pass his policy proposal, changing the content or focus of news coverage purchases political influence at a relatively small political price. Though defeat of the legislation would be more public following a campaign (Canes-Wrone 2006), the president can score political points among his core constituents simply by advocating policies that appeal to them (Wood 2009).

The Troop Surge

The early 2007 campaign for a troop surge in Iraq serves as a test case for this proposed framework. The 2006 elections were a referendum on President Bush's strategy in Iraq and resulted in serious losses in both the House and the Senate (Slavin 2006; Yaukey 2006). In one election, the Republicans lost control of both Houses and many of the newly elected Democratic

majority were anxious to reverse strategy in Iraq and begin withdrawing troops. Following the 2004 elections, George W. Bush felt like he had earned some political capital and focused his attention on reforming the Social Security program. Following a crushing mid-term defeat, it was essential for President Bush to gain some leverage in the upcoming debates regarding his strategy in Iraq. It is clear that George W. Bush had devised his new Iraq War strategy by early December of 2006, yet he waited to present it to the public until after the newly elected Democratic majority had been sworn in (Bush 2010).

Why did President Bush choose to go public over this issue? As Commander-in-Chief, President Bush did not need support from Congress to change his Iraq strategy or to reallocate troops from one region or another. Indeed, he could have taken slow, measured action that might have gone unnoticed by the news media and avoided conflict with Congress and the potential shame that would accompany defeat if his policy failed (Canes-Wrone 2006). I contend that President Bush chose a public campaign over this issue for two reasons: first, he knew he could implement the policy without congressional approval (it was a power struggle he would win). Second, he wanted to change the focus of the national media from his defeat in the 2006 election to his new strategy in Iraq.

Thus, not only the timing of the public campaign, but the content would benefit the President in two ways. First, by allowing the media to cover the change in party control Congress for a couple of days, President Bush's proposed change in strategy would receive coverage over a longer period of time. The people hear about the change in Congress and their attention is quickly drawn to a new topic. Second, selecting a policy that could be implemented without congressional approval allowed the president to move the focus of the debate from Congress to the White House. Members of Congress in the newly elected majority spent much

of the period between the election and the official change of power offering to compromise with the President in shaping future policies in Iraq (Yaukey 2006). By taking control of the issue, the terms of the future debate over the appropriate levels of spending in Iraq would take place on the President's rather than members' of Congress terms.

Though the campaign for the troop surge is unlikely to have changed public support for the policy, the previous discussion predicts that news coverage would shift.

Hypothesis 1: Consistent with the dominant view, the public campaign for a troop surge in Iraq will not persuade the public to support the proposed policy.

Hypothesis 2: Following the public campaign for the troop surge, the focus of the national news media will shift from coverage about the 2006 midterm elections to President Bush's proposal to send more troops to Iraq.

Data and Methods

Hypothesis 1 is tested using a variety of national polls conducted before and after the troop surge speech. Consistent with the dominant view, those that viewed the speech were not persuaded to support the troop surge plan outlined in the speech. Table 1 shows that in the aggregate, the troop surge speech was not persuasive. Support before and after the speech is identical. The president did not persuade the public that he had a clear plan for Iraq or that more troops should be sent to Iraq... the primary focus of the speech. Moreover, the public did not express more confidence in the way that George W. Bush was handling the situation in Iraq. In addition, I conducted regression analyses of several polls taken immediately after the speech which confirm that viewing the speech had no effect on public support for the troop surge proposal. The dominant approach for measuring success in a public campaign rates this campaign as an abysmal failure, like most presidential public campaigns.

Table 1: Public Support for Iraq Policy Pre/Post-Televised Address

	Before Speech		After Speech	
	Approve	Disapprove	Approve	Disapprove
How President Bush is handling the situation in Iraq	27	71	29	68
Set a timetable for withdrawal of US troops	59	38	54	41
President Bush has a clear plan for Iraq	19	70	22	70
Send more troops to Iraq	36	61	36	61

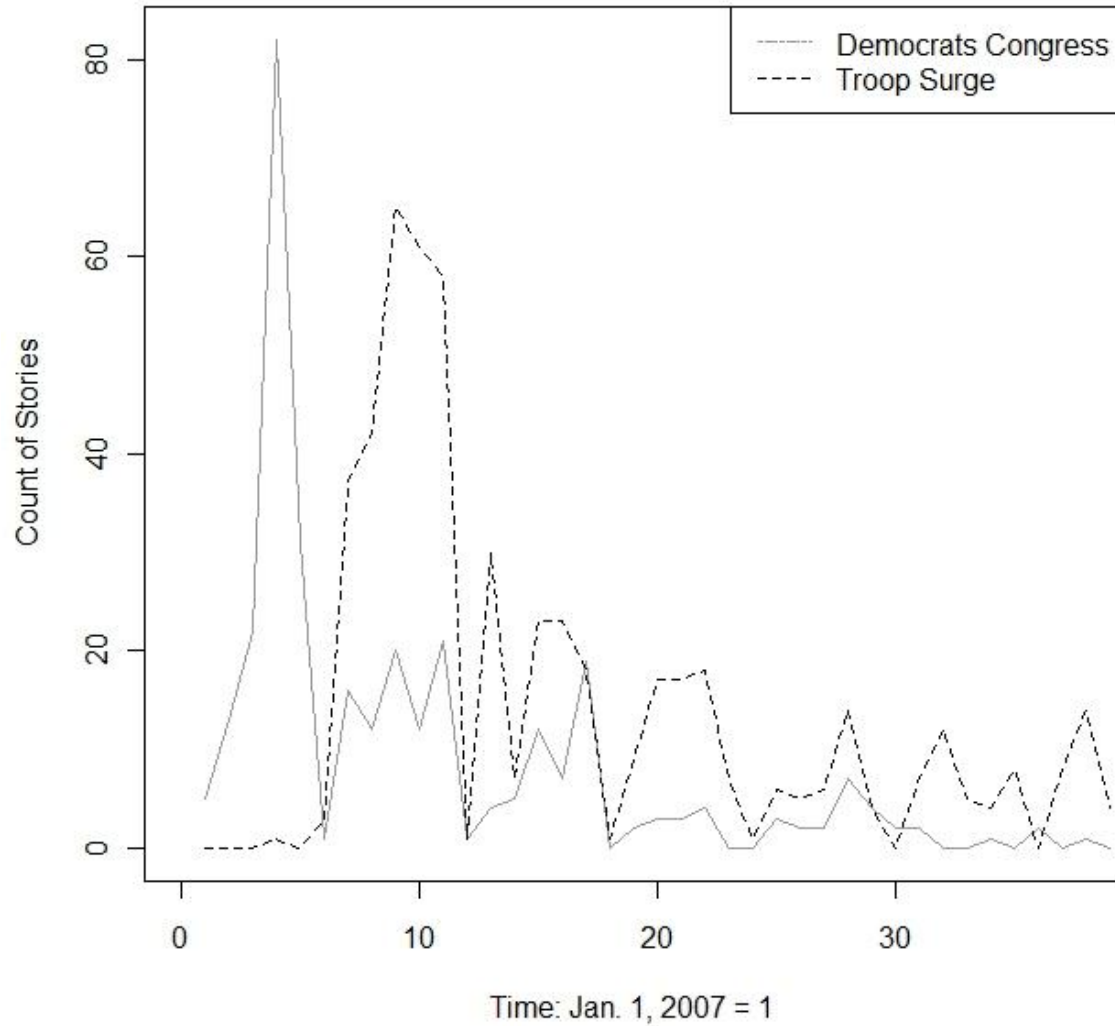
Source: www.pollingreport.com. National polls conducted by various national polling firms and aggregated on the website.

The second hypothesis is tested using content analyzed stories provided by the Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index. The Index examines more than four dozen news outlets in real time to determine what is being covered and what is not. The outlets studied come from the five main sectors of mainstream media—print, network TV, cable, online, and radio. They include evening and morning network news, several hours of daytime and prime time cable news each day, newspapers from around the country, the top online news sites, and radio, including headlines, long form programs and talk. In all, the Index sample includes a daily average of 900 stories from 52 outlets (27 to 30 each week-day with some rotation), every Monday through Sunday. Within each media sector, the number of outlets and individual programs vary considerably, as do the number of stories and size of the audience. They began by first identifying the various media sectors, then identifying the news media outlets within each, then the specific news programs and finally the stories within those.

Figure 1 shows the count of stories by topic and day for the 40 day period that this paper examines. The number of stories on the change in control of Congress is very high beginning just before the inauguration and spikes just before it falls precipitously 9 days after January 1, 2007. One of the causes for the precipitous decline is the weekend news cycle. In Figure 1, the

number of stories on any topic dips to zero on Saturdays before beginning a small increase on Sundays, when the topic is newsworthy. However, Figure 1 reveals another pattern that may be related to the precipitous decline in stories about the change in congressional control. Following January 9, 2007, news coverage shifts from stories about the change in congressional control to the proposed troop surge. Over the course of a single weekend, the number of stories on change in congressional control drops four-fold and the number of stories on the troop surge increases by the same margin. The most probable explanation for the large shift in the focus of the national news agenda is that President Bush gave a speech outlining his troop surge strategy over the weekend. This is an empirical question which is tested in the following section.

Figure 2: Change in News Coverage over Time



Note: The x-axis is the count of days since January 1, 2007. The large dips in stories are a result of weekend news coverage. Saturday stories were not coded and Sundays have generally fewer news stories.

The analysis of the data involves several steps. First, I model the influence of the January 10, 2007 speech outlining the troop surge strategy on the story content using a regression model with topic dummies. The dependent variable is the count of the number of stories on a topic and

the dependent variable has significant over dispersion, so the models are estimated using maximum likelihood estimation with a negative binomial link (Agresti 2007; Kosuke, King, and Lau 2007; Long 1997). Since Hypothesis 2 concerns the influence of a presidential speech on a particular topic, each of the topics of interest was dummy coded. In addition, Hypothesis 2 is inherently conditional in nature; a speech on the topic predicts a change in news coverage, but no speech on the topic predicts no change in news coverage. For this reason, each of the story topics is interacted with the dummy codes for the speeches (Aiken, West, and Reno 1991; Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006). This models the effect of a presidential speech on the number of stories on a given topic after the speech

Table 2 displays the results of the regression models. The first model in Table 2 is the naïve regression model with dummies for each story topic. This model demonstrates that the troop surge speech had a statistically significant effect on news coverage. However, this is just a preliminary step. The subsequent models include interaction terms for each of these dummies with presidential speeches, but only statistically significant results are included in Table 2. Model 2 in Table 2 builds on the first model by including story topic interactions with the State of the Union address. This address had a statistically significant negative effect on the number of stories on both President Ford's death and the change in congressional control. I will address the substantive impact of these findings in the next section. The decrease in Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) indicates that this model is a better fit than the first model.

Model 3 in Table 2 is the full model that tests the second hypothesis. The full model (available in the appendix) includes interaction terms for each of the story topics included in model 1 with a dummy for the State of the Union address and the Troop Surge speech. Only the statistically significant results are presented in Table 2. Model 3 demonstrates that the troop

surge speech had a statistically significant positive effect on the number of stories in the national news media about the troop surge. It also had a statistically significant negative effect on the number of stories about President Ford's death. The coefficient for the interaction between the State of the Union address and President Ford's death is not significant in this model, because the change in news coverage was a result of the troop surge speech, not the State of the Union address. Model 3 is a better fitting model, demonstrated by the increase in r-square and the decreased AIC.

Table 2: How Presidential Speeches Affect News Coverage

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
SOU	0.099	0.253	0.189	0.550*
	-0.163	-0.175	-0.175	-0.249
Troop Surge Speech	0.742**	0.995***	1.266***	1.345**
	-0.232	-0.229	-0.262	-0.454
Troop Surge	1.963***	2.418***	0.178	0.667
	-0.404	-0.546	-1.083	-1.365
Democrats Congress	1.874***	2.721***	3.829***	4.639***
	-0.404	-0.545	-0.964	-1.01
Ford Death	1.408***	2.389***	3.775***	4.839***
	-0.406	-0.546	-0.965	-1.03
Dem Pres. Candidates	1.370***	1.260*	0.178	-0.118
	-0.406	-0.553	-1.083	-1.338
Iraq Policy	2.013***	2.363***	3.211***	4.714***
	-0.404	-0.546	-0.967	-1.01
Combat in Iraq	1.629***	1.794**	2.429*	3.529***
	-0.405	-0.549	-0.975	-1.023
SOU x Troop Surge		-1.262	-1.524	-1.793*
		-0.784	-0.831	-0.838
SOU x Democrats Congress		-3.011***	-1.895*	-2.635**
		-0.798	-0.847	-0.881
SOU x Ford Death		-6.175***	-1.187	-1.204
		-1.268	-1.477	-2.455
Troop Surge Speech x Troop Surge			2.472*	3.473*
			-1.252	-1.505
Troop Surge Speech x Democrats Congress			-2.252	-2.113
			-1.153	-1.197

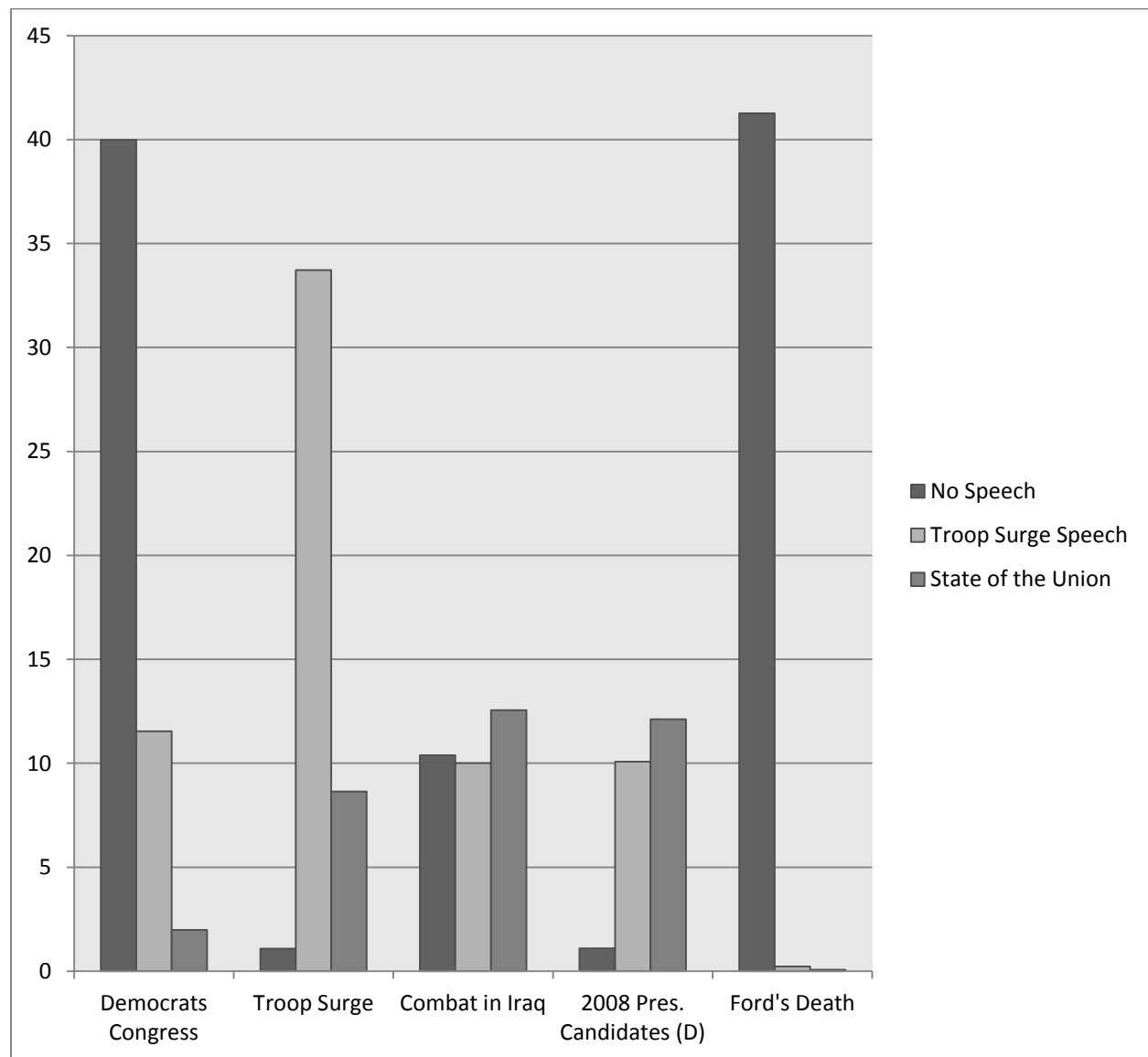
Troop Surge Speech x Ford			-6.403***	-7.116***
			-1.35	-1.901
obs.effect				-0.003***
				0
McFadden R-square	0.115	0.154	0.193	
-2(Log-Likelihood)	4030.1	3993.1	3954.86	2257.66
χ^2				1697.2***
AIC	4050.095	4025.097	4004.85	2311.651
N	1170	1170	1170	1170

Source: The Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2007 News Coverage Index, www.journalism.org.

Note: Entries are coefficients from negative binomial regression models. Models 1-3 estimated using the Zelig package in R. Model 2 estimated using the lmer package in R version 2.14. Standard Errors are below coefficients. *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

The speech on the troop surge was given on January 10, 2007; just six days after the first ever woman Speaker of the House of Representatives was sworn in. Given the historical importance of this event, the sudden change in news coverage is somewhat surprising. The next step of the analysis calculates the predicted number of stories by topic given certain conditions. Though it is impossible to re-write history and see what might have happened if President Bush did not deliver the troop surge speech, we can manipulate the values of variables in the statistical model to examine the difference in predicted outcomes. For example, to determine the expected level of stories related to the change in congressional control if no speeches had been given, I use a Monte-Carlo simulation procedure. Figure 2 displays the predicted number of stories by topic.

Figure 2: Model Predicted Number of Stories by Topic.



Source: The Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2007 News Coverage Index, www.journalism.org
Note: Entries are the model predicted number of stories on a given topic under particular conditions. Predicted probabilities calculated using the Zelig package in R 2.14.

Statistical significance tells us little about the substantive change that a presidential address has on the content of national news coverage. I used post-estimation techniques from the Zelig package in R to generate predicted number of stories given different scenarios (Kosuke,

King, and Lau 2007). Figure 2 displays the predicted number of stories by topic generated from the regression model. The predicted count of stories from the full model provides additional support for Hypothesis 2. If President Bush had never given a speech on the troop surge or the State of the Union address in 2007, the predicted number of stories on the change in congressional control is 20 times higher than the predicted number of stories on the troop surge. Following the January 10 speech, the model predicted number of stories on the change in congressional control is four times *less* than the predicted number of stories on the troop surge. This demonstrates that one speech on a topic significantly and substantively changed the content of the national news.

Following the troop surge speech, the model predicts 11 stories in the national media on the topic of the change in congressional control. This is nearly eight times fewer than the number of stories that actually occurred on the topic on the day that congressional control officially changed hands and half as many as the day before the speech. In addition, coverage on this story nearly vanishes after the State of the Union address. Coverage about Iraq policy dramatically increases following the speech on the new strategy, the model predicts more than 40 stories in national news outlets on the topic. Fewer stories on Iraq policy are predicted following the State of the Union address, but this topic clearly dominated the news coverage. The predictions for the number of stories on combat in Iraq and Democratic Presidential Candidates in 2008 are included for comparison. The speeches did not have a statistically significant effect on the number of stories on these topics, but the *substantive* effect of the speeches is displayed for comparison. It is clear that the speeches did not influence the number of stories on combat in Iraq, but the model predicts a substantive change in focus on coverage about Democratic presidential candidates for 2008. In addition, Figure 2 shows the change in coverage

surrounding President Ford's death. It is unlikely that this story would have dominated the news much beyond the funeral. However, the troop surge speech had a statistical and substantive impact on the number of stories about President Ford's death. Although the news cycle may not change indefinitely in response to presidential addresses, a single presidential address can significantly and speedily change the focus of the national news media.

As an additional confirmation of the findings in Model 3, I conducted a multilevel negative binomial regression model. Standard negative binomial regression models do not account for the covariance that the first time point might share with the second (Biesanz et al. 2004). It is reasonable to assume that something occurring at one time point will be highly correlated with the occurrence of the event at a subsequent time point. My estimation strategy involves recognizing that each of the 24 unique time points in the dataset is nested within the story topics. A multilevel regression model appropriately accounts for the systematic error that may occur when the error structure of the data may be influenced by group characteristics (Curran and Bollen 2001; Duncan, Duncan, and Strycker 2006; Snijders and Bosker 2011). The full database contains variables for the date of the story, the story's placement and prominence, and the length of the story. I recoded the data to long format to include a count for the number of stories on a given date/topic. This nests each time point story within a topic. For purposes of multilevel regression, each time point is a level one variable nested in a level two group (topic). Comparing the variance between level-two groups (topic) yields robust estimates for how the coverage of each story topic changes over time. I estimated both a standard negative binomial regression model and a multilevel negative binomial regression model with a random intercept that varies for each of the 24 time points to compare the results from each model (Agresti 2007; Min and Agresti 2005).

Model 4 in Table 2 displays the results from the multilevel model. These results largely confirm the results estimated with a standard negative binomial regression model. The statistical significance of the coefficients for the interactions is consistent with the findings from model 3. The only change in statistical significance is the interaction between the State of the Union address and stories about the troop surge. In the full model, the State of the Union address significantly *decreased* the amount of news coverage on the topic.

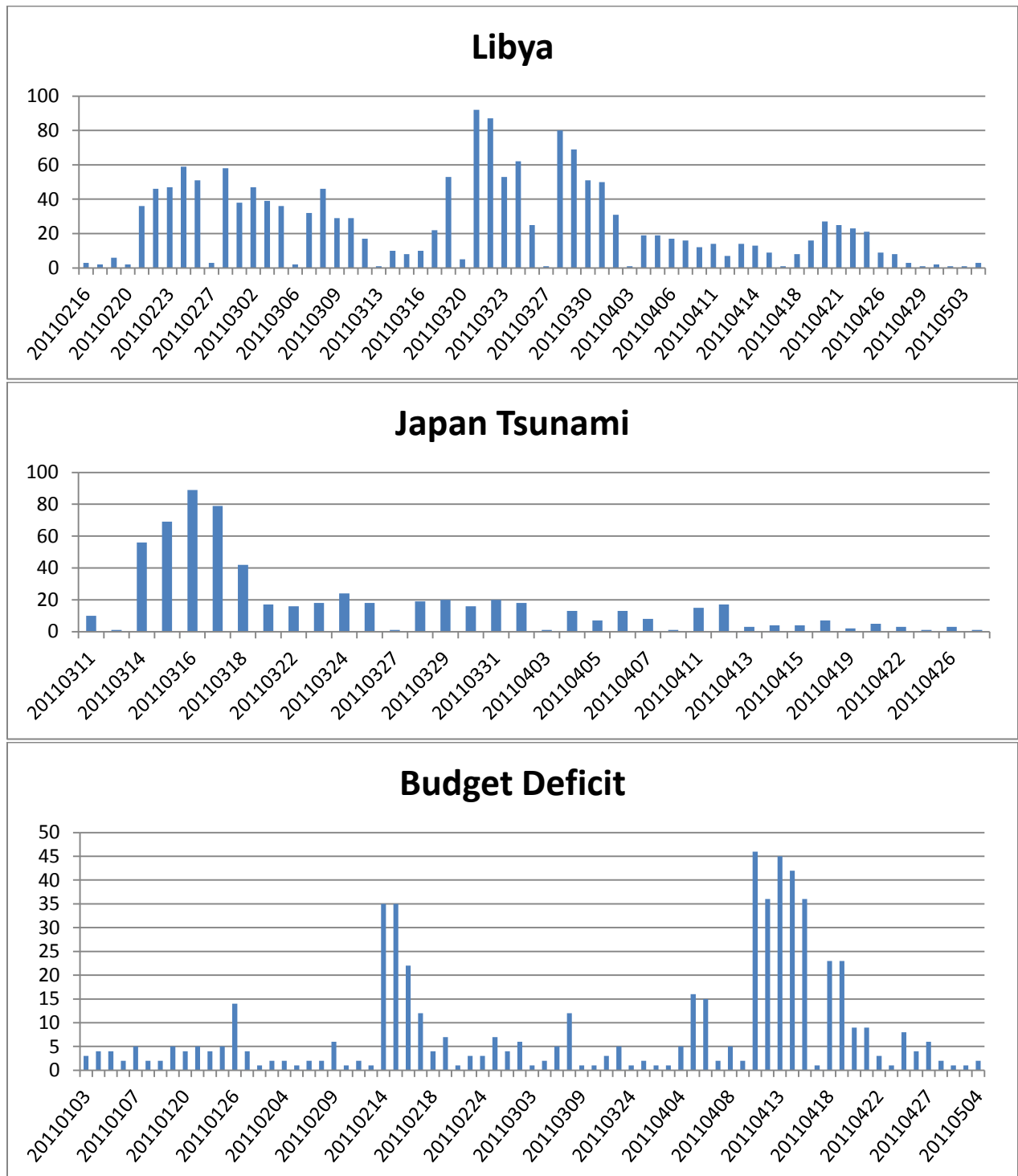
Two indications from model 4 suggest that the multilevel negative binomial model generates more robust predictions than the standard model. The AIC is much lower for the multilevel model than for the model which does not account for the influence of time on the regression coefficients. Explicitly accounting for the likely relationship between an occurrence at time one and the occurrence of the same event at a later time point yields more robust estimates. In addition, the deviance test for model fit indicates that the multilevel model is superior (Gelman and Hill 2007; Hox 2002). Adding a random intercept to the model increases the degrees of freedom by one, thus the difference in deviance is chi-square distributed with 1 degree of freedom and indicates that the multilevel model is statistically significantly better than the standard regression model. Moreover, the statistical significance of the regression coefficients of interest and does not differ from the standard regression model to the multilevel regression model. The most robust model yields the same predictions about the influence of presidential speeches on news coverage as the standard negative binomial regression model. Hypothesis 2 has been tested using multiple methods and the findings are robust to various specifications.

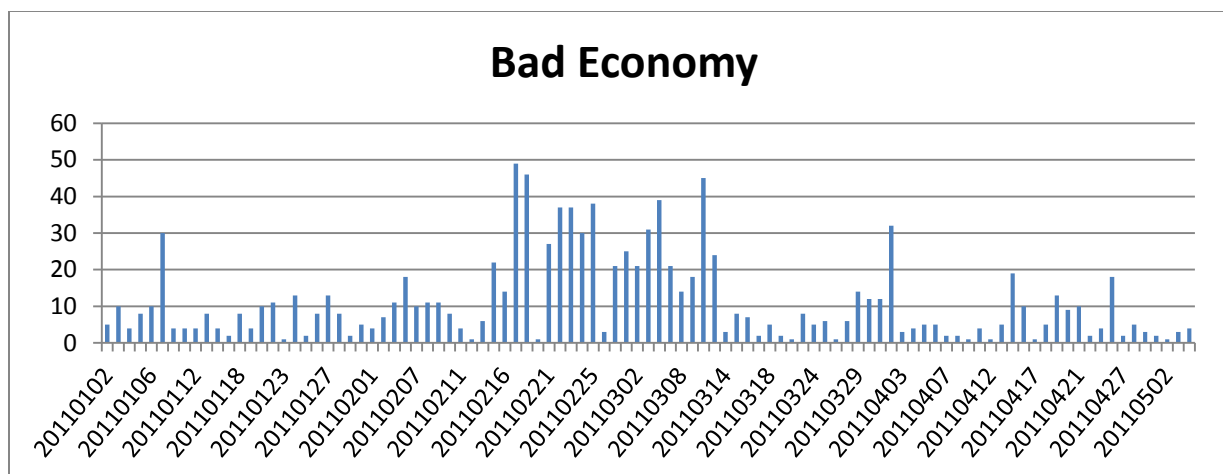
Obama's 2011 Campaign for Reducing the Budget Deficit

The troop surge example offers dramatic and compelling evidence that a single speech by the President can alter the number of stories dedicated by news outlets to particular topics. However, different presidents facing different conditions may not have similar success. There are two good reasons to explore Obama's 2011 campaign for a budget policy as a second test. First, Obama had no clear motive in this public campaign other than changing the focus of the news coverage. He had just reached a compromise with the Republicans on a budget deal and there was no imminent need for negotiating a new budget. Second, news coverage was dominated by topics outside of the president's control. International conflicts and natural disasters quickly caught the attention of the media. Thus, this case provides a "hard" test for the theory. If President Obama could change the focus of the news media given these circumstances, it strongly suggests that presidential public campaigns effectively alter the attention of the national news media.

Clearly factors other than presidential addresses influence news coverage. An earthquake in Japan caused a tsunami and damaged nuclear power plants in March, 2011. In addition, President Obama committed military troops to assist the uprising in Libya, which dominated the news coverage for the first several months of 2011. Figure 3 shows the number of stories across the major news outlets that focused on these two topics, for each day of early 2011.

Figure 3: The Top Stories of 2011 by Topic/Date





Source: The Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2011 News Coverage Index, www.journalism.org. Entries are the number of stories on that topic for the given date (yyyymmdd).

Though the events in the Middle East and Japan accounted for 33% of the total news coverage during the week of March 7-13, 2011, the national economy was the leading domestic topic. The confrontation between unions and the governor of Wisconsin led the news outlets to devote significant coverage to the negative impact that the national economy was having on the states. This pattern of news coverage continued through the end of March and into April. The primary focus of the news was on international events with domestic coverage being dominated by negative news about the national economy. Though this story did not dominate news coverage, persistent negative economic news can have adverse effects on public attitudes towards the President and his job performance (Krosnick and Kinder 1990; Patterson 1996).

In early April, 2011 President Obama officially launched his reelection campaign with an email to supporters and a video posted on his website. From the beginning of his reelection effort, Obama made it clear that his strategy would emphasize the differences between his approach and that of the Republicans (Epstein and Thrush 2011). Two days later, on April 6, the

Washington Post ran a story that outlined Congressman Ryan's plan for balancing the budget which included significant cuts to Medicare and Medicaid. On April 8, President Obama made his first public address on fiscal policy and stated that he would only support spending cuts that were "necessary" and would not jeopardize "social issues like women's health and the protection of our air and water." (Obama 2011). Five days later, Obama gave a much more detailed address at George Washington University in which he more fully articulated the differences between his and the Republican's proposal. Figure 3 displays the change in focus of news coverage from negativity about the national economy to coverage about the budget deficit that occurred following these public addresses.

Consistent with the argument and evidence presented in the previous section, President Obama chose to go public on this issue at this time to accomplish a strategic purpose other than cajoling Congress into supporting his position by persuading the public. I don't expect any significant change in public opinion as a result of this public campaign for fiscal policy (H3). The compromise to avoid a government shutdown was reached one day *prior* to the beginning of this public campaign. Why then did President Obama choose to engage in a public campaign over the proper way to reduce the deficit, if he no longer needed congressional support for a particular policy? President Obama hoped to move the national news agenda's focus away from negative coverage about the economy toward the contrasting proposals about how to fix the economy (H4).

I use the same estimation strategy for hypotheses 3,4 as I used in the previous analyses. I created dummies for the dominant topics of news coverage as well as dummies for the April 8 & 13th presidential addresses. Since these hypotheses are conditional in nature, the coefficients of primary interest are the interaction terms (Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006). For instance, I

hypothesize a significant *increase* in news coverage for the budget deficit topic *after* a presidential address (H3). In addition, I hypothesize a significant *decrease* in news coverage for the struggling economy topic *after* President Obama's address on the budget deficit (H4).

Table 3: Presidential Speeches Influence on National News Coverage

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
(Intercept)	-0.061	-0.634***	-0.634*	-2.672***
	-0.133	-0.166	-0.297	-0.311
4/8 Speech	-0.326	0.108	0.108	-0.136
	-0.217	-0.274	-0.48	-0.492
4/13 Speech	0.652***	0.916***	0.916*	0.788
	-0.188	-0.232	-0.389	-0.424
Bad Economy	-0.248	0.922**	0.922*	1.027***
	-0.143	-0.309	-0.445	-0.307
Budget Deficit	2.188***	2.175**	2.175***	2.322***
	-0.303	-0.667	-0.555	-0.573
Japan Tsunami	1.522***	3.191***	3.191***	3.721***
	-0.306	-0.656	-0.409	-0.529
Republican Campaign	1.544***	0.229	0.229	0.343
	-0.306	-0.767	-1.276	-0.719
Libya	2.453***	4.047***	4.047***	4.164***
	-0.302	-0.652	-0.349	-0.53
Obama Campaign	0.087	1.433**	1.433*	0.995
	-0.328	-0.686	-0.742	-0.661
4/8 Speech x Bad Economy		-1.466**	-1.466	-1.046*
		-0.573	-1.054	-0.582
4/8 Speech x Budget Deficit		1.64	1.640**	2.168**
		-1.1	-0.721	-0.912
4/8 Speech x Japan Tsunami		-0.69	-0.69	-1.053
		-1.102	-0.753	-0.918
4/8 Speech x Republican Campaign		0.885	0.885	0.834
		-1.206	-1.673	-1.132
4/8 Speech x Libya		-1.28	-1.28*	-1.177
		-1.097	-0.679	-0.898
4/13 Speech x Obama Campaign		-2.516*	-2.516	-2.039
		-1.493	-3.152	-1.593
4/13 Speech x Bad Economy		-0.01	-0.01	0.048
		-0.509	-0.985	-0.52
4/13 Speech x Budget Deficit		-2.263**	-2.263***	-2.473***
		-0.941	-0.511	-0.768

4/13 Speech x Japan Tsunami	-2.485***	-2.485***	-2.373***
	-0.96	-0.775	-0.823
4/13 Speech x Republican Campaign	0.568	0.568	1.183
	-0.994	-1.102	-0.92
4/13 Speech x Libya	-1.185	-1.185*	-1.26
	-0.948	-0.623	-0.786
4/13 Speech x Obama Campaign	0.811	0.811	1.095
	-1.379	-3.106	-1.493
Dispersion Parameter			0.001***
			0
Nagelkerke R-square	0.235	0.298	0.894
Log-likelihood	-2307.74	-2277.5	-1321.91
AIC	4635.478	4598.997	2691.814
BIC	4689.028	4716.807	2820.334
N	1564	1564	1564

Source: The Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2011 News Coverage Index, www.journalism.org.

Note: Entries are coefficients from negative binomial regression models. Models 1 & 2 estimated using the Zelig package, model 3 estimated using the pscl package, model 4 estimated using the lmer package in R version 2.14. Standard Errors are below coefficients. *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Table 3 displays the results from each of the models, for comparison. Model 4 is the most robust, since it accurately accounts for the influence of time and this is confirmed by significantly lower AIC and BIC from the previous models. President Obama's April 8 speech on the budget deficit significantly increased the number of news stories about the budget deficit (p=0.017, H3). This speech also had the intended effect of decreasing the number of stories on the poor national economic situation (p=0.07, H4). The speech did not have a statistically significant effect on the number of stories on any other topic. Statistically, this means that this single speech significantly increased the number of news stories dedicated to the budget deficit topic in the beginning of April, but the speech did not significantly decrease the number of stories on the other topics that had previously dominated news coverage except for decreasing the number of stories about the negative economic situation.

There are events beyond the control of the President that influence the national news agenda. Within a couple of weeks of the debate over the budget deficit, President Obama would announce the death of Osama Bin Laden. A couple of weeks later, near the end of May, a devastating tornado struck Joplin, Missouri. Just like the trouble in the Middle East and the Tsunami in Japan, these events dominated the national news agenda for several days. However, during the week prior to Obama's reelection campaign launch, the domestic news focused on the negative impact the national economy was having on housing, business investment, and state and local government. Through a strategically timed series of public addresses, President Obama changed the focus of the national news media away from the state of the economy and toward the differences between his and the Republican's approach to solving the economic crisis.

Conclusion

In the dominant view of presidential rhetorical powers, an attempt by a president to appeal to the public in support of a policy proposal is assumed to be an attempt to cajole Congress to pass legislation by persuading the public to support the president's policy agenda. Yet this rarely occurs. Despite the situational effectiveness of public campaigns for policy, instances in which a president successfully forces Congress to pass his policy agenda by persuading the public to support his policy agenda are rare. However, modern presidents use public campaigns for policy more often than their predecessors. This chapter demonstrates that the dominant view ignores the significant effect that public campaigns have on national news coverage. Not every public campaign is designed to generate support. Presidents benefit from changes in the content of the national news, even if the change cannot be directly connected to increases in support for the proposed policy.

The issue on which President Bush decided to go public is equally instructive. He did not need congressional approval to reallocate troops in Iraq. He may have faced scrutiny in upcoming war funding battles if he did not articulate a clear policy in Iraq, but he did not need members of Congress to change their congressional voting patterns to implement the proposed policy. President Bush chose the timing and the content of this public campaign to change the content of the national news. Though public support for the proposed policy did not change, this public campaign was a resounding success. Following this speech, the number of stories about the change in congressional control dropped precipitously and the number of stories about Bush's proposed policy in Iraq dramatically increased.

Moreover, presidents seem to be able to alter the focus of the national news media when a variety of topics compete for news coverage. In April, 2011 natural disasters, poor economic conditions, and conflict in the Middle East dominated news coverage for nearly a month. President Obama chose to launch his reelection campaign in the middle of this turmoil and hoped to highlight the differences between his and the Republican's approach to solving the economic crises as a central feature of his campaign. A single speech on the topic given just after he concluded budget negotiations with Congress was sufficient to significantly alter the attention of the national news media. Overnight, the attention shifted from poor economic performance to the Obama/Ryan plans for fixing the budget deficit. This demonstrates the power of the public presidency and illustrates one reason that modern presidents use the bully pulpit despite the difficulty they face persuading the public.

This chapter also demonstrates a potential pitfall of presidential public campaigns. The president cannot wield complete control over the content of the national news. Increased coverage of preferred topics may bring more coverage on topics the President would prefer the

media ignore. Thus, presidents should be judicious about the use of public presidency to change the content of national news.

The focus of this chapter is on how presidential public campaigns influence the number of stories on a particular topic. This paper does not measure the change in tone of the coverage. News tone may play a significant role in determining the level of public support for the proposed policies (Cohen 2010). Future work could examine if the president is able to change the content of the national news both in number of stories and tone of those stories.

Dissertation Conclusion

The “going public” concept as articulated by Kernell (1986) seems to apply to an earlier era. Instances in which a president successfully persuades Congress to pass his policy agenda by persuading the public to support his policy agenda are rare. Hundreds of bills are signed in the typical presidential administration and only a handful of examples in the past hundred years fit the going public thesis. Moreover, modern presidents are not able to persuade members of the *opposition* to support their policy agenda, they *occasionally* persuade some that were indifferent about the policy before the public campaign and the president’s *core* supporters are often more enthusiastic about a policy proposal *after* a public campaign. Given this, one might wonder why so much scholarly attention is paid to a concept that seems not to fit with the modern political world.

Despite greater access to the media, greater resources to craft the perfect message and greater knowledge of the contours of public opinion (Heith 2000), presidents seem to be less persuasive (Edwards 2003,2007,2009). Paradoxically, modern presidents are *more* likely to take their message to the public than their predecessors. This paradox motivates continued exploration of the persuasive capacity of modern presidents, despite the flaws in the original going public paradigm. This dissertation explores several aspects of this paradox and in some instances clarifies and in others innovates on the existing literature.

Those that explore this paradox fall into one of three camps. Some argue that presidents are persuasive, but since people tune in to presidential addresses (Baum and Kernell 1999; Kernell and Rice 2011; Patterson 2003), fewer people have the opportunity to be persuaded by the President. The rise of cable television and the fragmented media environment has given viewers other options. Typically those that watch presidential addresses are those that are strong

supporters of the president while those that are the most susceptible to presidential persuasion are the most likely to change channels during the address. If modern president's audiences were as captive as those of earlier eras, they would be just as persuasive (Kernell and Rice 2011; Rosenblatt 1998). The reason that modern presidents go public more often is that the current media environment forces them to give multiple addresses to reach the same number of people that earlier presidents could reach in a single address (Cohen 2008).

Others argue that the observed decline in presidential rhetorical power is the result of a fragmented media environment that gives the president less control over how his message is disseminated (Cohen 2008, 2010; Rottinghaus 2010; Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers 2010). The less control a president has over how the message is delivered to the public, the less power the president will have to persuade the public (Rottinghaus 2010). In this view, presidents control their message by travelling to smaller cities in an attempt to manipulate local news coverage. Since a presidential visit is likely to generate considerable local attention, a president is more likely to generate local news coverage of his speeches in smaller markets. By manipulating the content of local stories, the president can potentially change the tone of national news outlets that may recirculate local coverage of a presidential speech (Cohen 2010). The uptick in public campaigns is a result of the increased travelling required to maintain control of the message.

Finally, some argue that presidents go public in support of policies because it is expected of them. Whether or not the public campaign generates actual support for his policies, if presidents do not publicly support policy proposals it is certain to fail. Since proposals to change the status quo typically meet significant opposition, presidents may use public campaigns to

neutralize the opposition even when these campaigns will not generate any additional support (Edwards 2003, 244).

In fact, each of these perspectives is partially correct, but the focus on speech content, and the tone of news coverage neglects individual level causal mechanisms that influence public acceptance of presidential messages. Sometimes persuasion is *less* a matter of the content of the message and more related to psychological motivations that influence how individuals respond to the person giving the message. This dissertation adds both breadth and precision to the existing literature by exploring the influence of these psychological mechanisms on individual acceptance of presidential messages. In addition, this dissertation shows that sometimes our myopic focus on persuasion is misplaced. Under certain conditions, presidents may use a public campaign for policy as a diversion, rather than an attempt to persuade the public.

The first chapter of this dissertation explores how psychological motivations influence how partisans process *non*political information about presidents from the opposing party. Using amateur videos hosted on YouTube and a national survey I demonstrate that when the views of the majority of a political party are publicized, two psychological motivations pressure cognitive sophisticates' rumor acceptance calculation. Though they are motivated to arrive at an accurate conclusion, the self-enhancing motivation that accompanies partisan identification leads many to inaccurate conclusions about presidents from the opposing party. This suggests that certain segments of the population are not likely to be persuaded by a president from the opposing political party. Even if the president had complete control over his message content and delivery, those with strong attachment to the opposing political party would be less likely to respond favorably.

In addition, the going public thesis expects presidents to use public campaigns as an attempt to persuade the opposition to support their policy. Under united government, the president and MC from the same political party should conduct their policy negotiations in private and minimize the publicity of the issue (Kernell 2007). However, the second chapter of this dissertation demonstrates that presidents go public under unified government hoping to persuade their core constituents. Much of the literature fails to recognize an important element of presidential rhetorical powers—that presidents are just as likely to try and mobilize their base in pursuit of policy goals as they are the general public. Bush’s public campaign to reform Social Security was seen as a failure by himself and others, but it demonstrates one realm in which U.S. presidents can potentially effectively exercise rhetorical powers—in moving core constituents.

Consistent with the conventional wisdom, the results in the second chapter show that the longer President Bush campaigned to reform Social Security, the more the general public disliked his plan. And the attachment of the plan to Bush appears to have especially alienated Democrats and liberals. This suggests scholars looking for evidence of presidential influence need to examine core constituencies as well as the general public. Thus, instead of concluding that the powers do not exist because presidents fail to move overall public opinion (Edwards 2009), it is beneficial to look for the contingent and specific benefits presidents receive from appeals to the public. The evidence in Chapter 2 demonstrates that examining aggregate opinion may be misleading, especially given the specific strategy employed by an administration. Modern technology and heavy use of internal polls give American presidents opportunities to frame public addresses to their core constituents. Presidential rhetorical powers should be

measured by the effect of going public on the opinion of the president's core constituents and not just the effect on general public opinion.

Since U.S. presidents are unlikely to be able to move overall public opinion much in the future, further research could attempt to explore the conditions under which a president would fail to move public opinion among his core constituents. Likewise, given the pattern observed with Bush's 2005 mini-campaign, it would also seem prudent to examine how much going public, or expanding the scope of conflict, might gain support among core constituents, but cost among moderates and those who are not generally supportive of the President. Even when the president is able to mobilize his base on a policy proposal, the result of governing from your base might be to divide the public and members of Congress, thereby insuring legislative defeat.

Moreover, not every presidential public campaign is designed to persuade the public or Congress to pursue the president's policy agenda. Presidents benefit from changes in the content of the national news, even if the change cannot be directly connected to increases in support for the proposed policy. In early January 2007, the national news predominately focused on the change in congressional control of the Congress from the Republicans to the Democrats. The first woman Speaker of the House had just been sworn in and Democrats in Congress were poised to take control of the Iraq policy agenda. President Bush's speech on the troop surge was strategically timed to allow him to wrest control of the news agenda and focus attention on his proposed changes in Iraq policy. The president did not need approval from Congress and the speech did not influence public opinion. However, the speech had a significant substantive impact on the content of the national news media. The bully pulpit is not exclusively a tool of public persuasion, as chapter three demonstrates; it wields significant agenda setting power. The president cannot wield complete control over the content of the national news. Increased

coverage of preferred topics may bring more coverage on topics the President would prefer the media ignore. Thus, presidents should be judicious about the use of public presidency to change the content of national news.

Much has been done to address the paradox of more presidential public campaigns despite diminishing returns on persuading the public. This dissertation contributes to and offers further avenues for exploration in this literature. First, the diminishing returns on presidential effectiveness are not due solely to changes in the media environment. Even if modern presidents had the captive television audiences of the 1960's, political polarization of the electorate causes some people to resist messages from out-party Presidents. In addition, control of the message is not as important if people process the same information differently. Strong attachment to political parties leads some individuals (even political sophisticates) to interpret information through partisan lenses. Though it is more likely to happen when the information is novel, once an attitude is expressed, it is difficult to overcome through subsequent persuasion. Thus, control over the media environment and the message is not and possibly never was the exclusive mechanism through which presidents persuade the public.

Second, presidents may be less persuasive in the aggregate, but they can be more persuasive to specific segments of society. Given this, presidents may choose to target their public campaigns to specific groups among whom additional support would be particularly beneficial. Thus, presidential rhetorical powers may be useful as a targeted means of persuasion and presidents continue to go public because there are no diminishing returns. Scholars may have misinterpreted a change in aggregate persuasion power as diminished persuasion power, when this change should be interpreted as targeted persuasion power.

Finally, future research will benefit from recognizing that presidential public campaigns differ in strategic purpose. Even if presidents are no longer able to persuade the public, the opportunity to significantly and substantively change the content of national news at such a small cost is irresistible. One strategically timed speech on a strategic topic can change the focus of the national news media overnight. While some argue that too much scholarly attention has been focused on a presidential power that never existed and rarely, if ever, was effective (Edwards 2003,2007,2009), this dissertation demonstrates that the bully pulpit continues to be a powerful tool the president can use to persuade the public and set the policy agenda.

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Methodological Appendix A: Chapter 1

Controls and Question Wording for the National Survey

Education: Categorical 1-5; 1 = no high school and 5 = post-graduate degree.

Party Identification: Coded 1-5 with party leaners coded as 2 or 4.

Dependent Variable: Question Wording: “According to the Constitution, American Presidents must be “natural born citizens.” Some people say Barack Obama was not born in the United States, but was born in another country. Do you think Barack Obama was born in the United States, or do you think he was born in another country? “

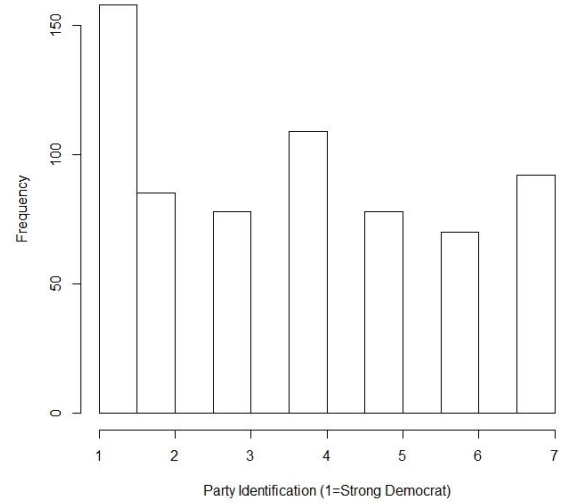
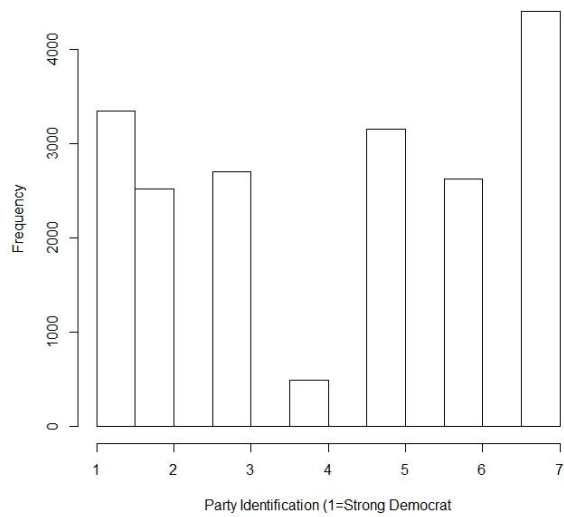
For the multinomial logit model, the categories remain intact, 1=Born in the United States, 2= Another Country, 3= I don’t know.

Non-Probability Survey Experiment

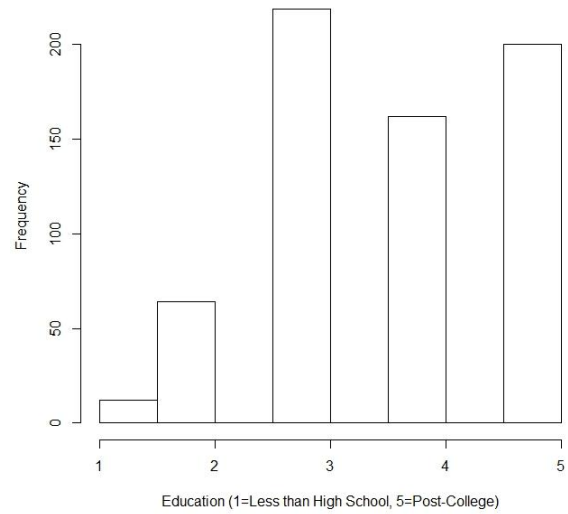
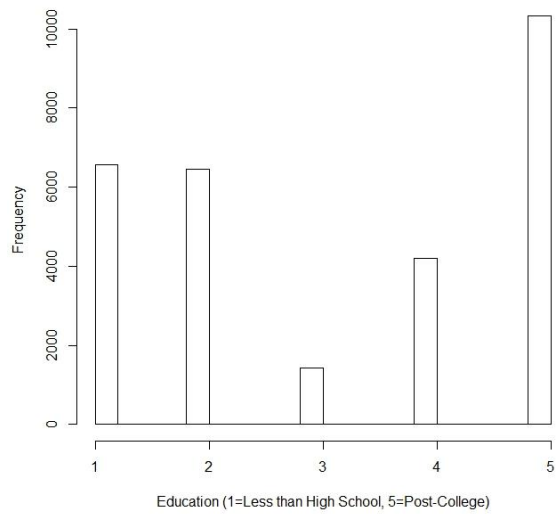
The non-probability online survey was administered between April 19, 2011 and April 27, 2011. Close to 500 thousand emails were sent to a random group of US adults requesting that they follow a link and participate in a research project. A total of 751 surveys were completed. After following the link included in the email, participants were taken to a page with the disclosure statement. Participants were informed that they would be contributing to a project that was seeking to measure the influence of internet videos on attitudes. In addition to survey items that included demographic information and measures of political knowledge and political activity, respondents viewed a maximum of four videos and answered questions about their attitudes after viewing the videos. Since all four videos were embedded links from Youtube.com, participants were aware of the video source. The average length of a completed survey was 15.6 minutes. The response rate for this sample is poor, and significant weighting of the variables would need to be included before making probabilistic assumptions regarding some under-represented demographics. However, this sample of US adults is superior to a sample of college students because it has more variation on important demographics. Nearly 62% of these respondents reported that they watch or read political news 2-3 times a week or more. Nearly half of them (42%) are daily news consumers. Political ideology is somewhat bell-shaped in its distribution with 30% calling themselves moderate 15% saying they are somewhat conservative, and 14% somewhat liberal. Nearly 80% of the respondents say that they are somewhat or very interested in politics and 88% of the respondents have at least “some college” education. 76% of respondents got at least four of the five political knowledge questions correct. Finally, 16% identify themselves as Independents and the rest are fairly evenly dispersed as either Democrats or Republicans.

The poor response rate might lead some to question the external validity of the findings. To alleviate such concerns I include comparisons of the demographics in the non-probability experiment with those found in the 2008 National Annenberg Election Study (N=28k). NAES survey is on the **left** author’s survey is on the **right**

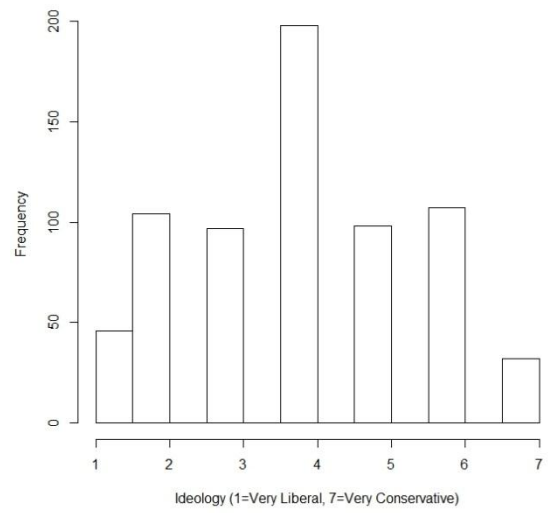
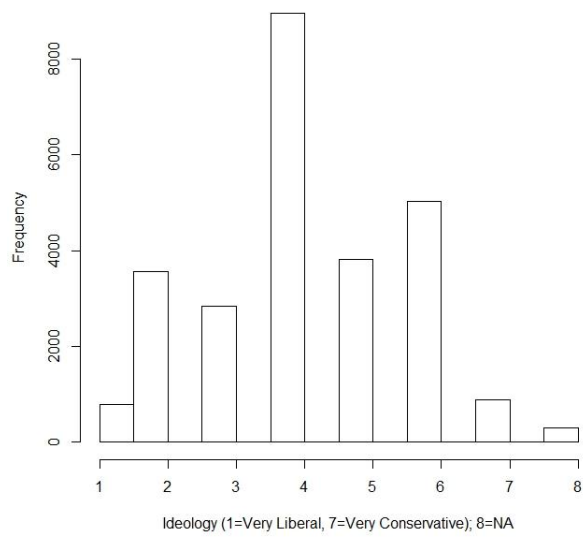
Party Identification



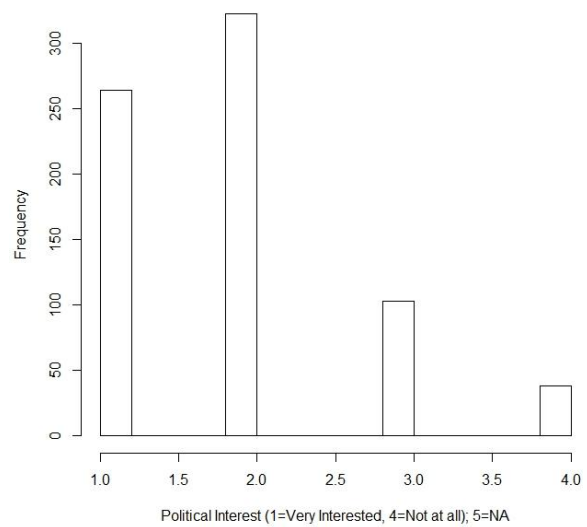
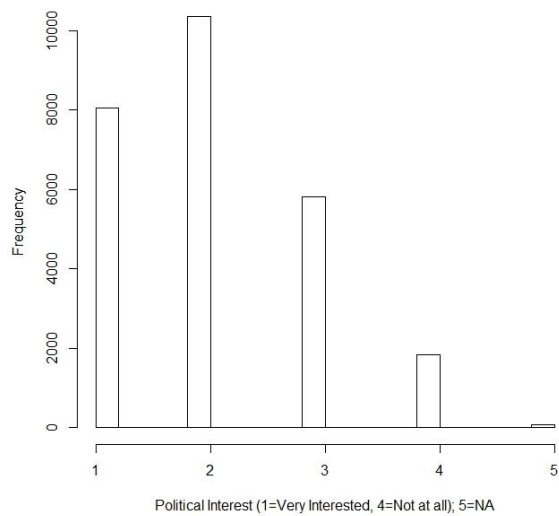
Education



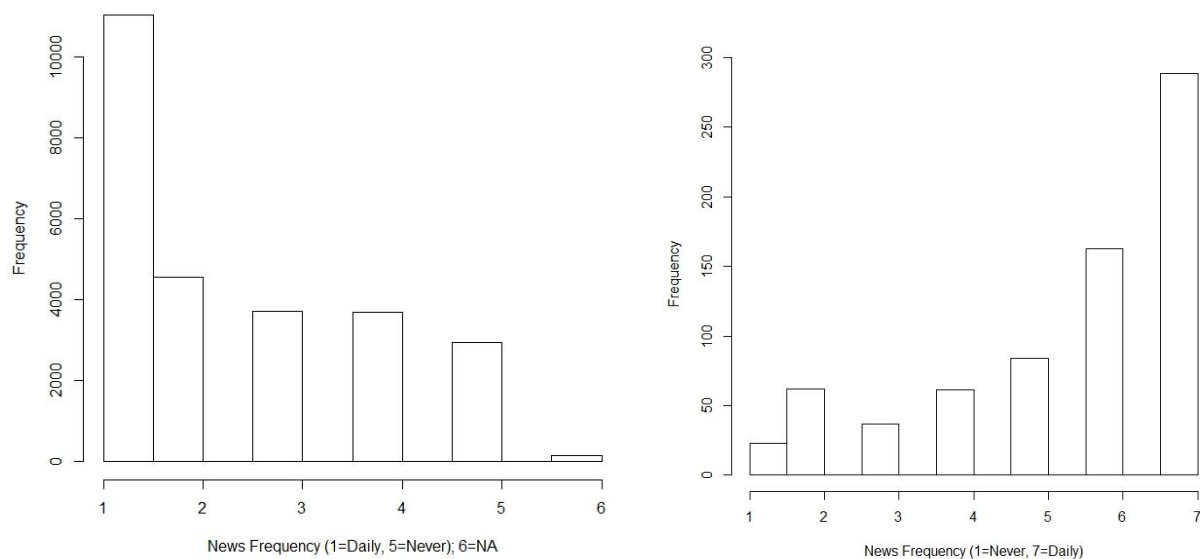
Ideology



Political Interest



News Frequency (Reverse Coded)



Following is a brief description of the experimental treatments:

- I. Treatment 1: Image of President Obama with his finger in his nose. Text: *“Guess What? Obama is a nose-picker. This footage was captured by an anonymous member of the media who was offered a substantial amount of money to destroy the image. They refused the offer out of a sense of duty as a member of the media. Naturally, Press Secretary Gibbs from the White House denies this. Gibbs says that the image is “clearly photoshopped” and is part of an attempt to make the president look foolish.”*

Control 1: Image of Lindsay Lohan with her finger in her nose. Text: *“Guess What? Lindsay Lohan is a nose-picker. This footage was captured by an anonymous member of the media who was offered a substantial amount of money to destroy the image. They refused the offer out of a sense of duty as a member of the media. Naturally, her press secretary denies this. Lohan’s press secretary says that the image is “clearly photoshopped” and is part of an attempt to make the Ms. Lohan look foolish.”*

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements on a scale from 1-7, with 1 meaning "Strongly Disagree" and 7 meaning "Strongly Agree".

President Obama is a nose picker/ Lindsay Lohan is a nose picker

Obama is doing a good job as President/ I like Lindsay Lohan

The media hide information from the public, because they are biased

- II. Treatment 2: Image of President Obama smoking a cigarette. Text: *President Obama has a dirty secret... It has been hidden from the public...Now we provide evidence of Obama's hidden life. He smokes 10 packs a day. When asked for comment, White House Press secretary Gibbs said that this image and images like it are fake. He said that the president wishes that people would find something better to do with their time than create false rumors about his life.*

Control 2: Image of Brad Pitt smoking a cigarette. Text: *"Brad Pitt has a dirty secret... It has been hidden from the public...Now we provide evidence of Brad's hidden life. He smokes 10 packs a day. When asked for comment, Brad Pitt's publicist said that this image, and images like it are fake. He said that the Mr. Pitt wishes that people would find something better to do with their time than create false rumors about his life."*

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements on a scale from 1-7, with 1 meaning "Strongly Disagree" and 7 meaning "Strongly Agree".

Obama regularly smokes cigarettes/Brad Pitt regularly smokes cigarettes

Obama is doing a good job as president/I like Brad Pitt

The media hide information from the public, because they are biased

Images Used in Videos



Methodological Appendix B: Chapter 2

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS DECEMBER 2004 POLITICAL TYPOLOGY SURVEY FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Poll 1 was a telephone survey conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a nationwide sample of 2,000 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period Dec. 1-16, 2004.

On another subject...

Q.31 How much, if anything, have you heard about a proposal which would allow younger workers to invest a portion of their Social Security taxes in private retirement accounts, which might include stocks or mutual funds — a lot, a little or nothing at all? *{9-04 RVs modified}*

- 1 A lot
- 2 A little
- 3 Nothing at all
- 9 Don't know/Refused

Q.32 Generally, do you favor or oppose this proposal? *{9-04 RVs; 9-00 RVs}*

- 1 Favor
- 2 Oppose
- 9 Don't know/Refused

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS MAY 2005 NEWS INTEREST INDEX FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

The poll I call May, 2005 was based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a nationwide sample of 1,502 adults, 18 years of age or older, from May 11-15, 2005.

ASK FORM 1 [N=758]:

Q.24F1 One proposal for dealing with Social Security's financial situation is to keep the system as it is now for lower income retirees, but limit the growth of future benefits for wealthy and middle income retirees. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?

ASK FORM 2 [N=744]:

Q.24F2 George W. Bush has proposed dealing with Social Security's financial situation by keeping the system as it is now for lower income retirees, but limiting the growth of future benefits for wealthy and middle income retirees. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?

Q.39 Do you have a retirement plan besides Social Security? [IF YES: Is any of your retirement money in the stock market through stocks, mutual funds or a 401k plan?]
{early 10-02}

- 1 Yes, retirement plan in the stock market
- 2 Yes, but not in stock market
- 3 No, no retirement plan
- 9 Don't know/Refused