

PRESIDENTIAL INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC OPINION

BY

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In 2005, President George W. Bush sought support for his plan to reform Social Security through governing by campaigning. Bush focused his campaign on getting the backing of conservatives and Republicans to push reform through the GOP led Congress. My thesis examines the strategy and effectiveness of the Bush administration's attempt to reform Social Security through governing by campaigning.

Traditionally, the American public has been highly receptive and psychologically reliant on the presidency and its leadership. Behr and Iyengar (1985) contend that when presidents deliver major speeches dedicated to a single policy problem, the public responds (see also Cohen 1995). The presidency gives the President the power to act as an agenda gate keeper. This position allows him to steer public attention to or away from an issue. The same can be said when dealing with Congress. In controlling the agenda the president also may increase his chances of success with Congress by ignoring issues that he opposes and promoting issues he supports. Through this process the president can build a strong Washington D.C. reputation and also increase his popularity with the public.

Mueller showed that intense focus on one event can produce a rally effect that will result in a short lived increase in public support for the president and his agenda (Simon and Ostrom Jr. 1989). Given that approval polls on presidential popularity have become an increasingly important component of the president's political capital- extravagant rhetoric, illustrations, and other forms of public relations are likely to be used when advocating a presidential agenda. Kernell (1986) notes that dramatic forms of going public have become more common in recent years and the more recent the president, the more often he goes public (Simon and Ostrom Jr. 1989). However, massive public relations campaigns and strict agenda setting are not the only phenomenon that can impact the public's approval of a president's policy agenda. The

public can be easily swayed by opposition efforts and uncontrollable events and crises (Cohen 1995).

In his attempt to reform Social Security in 2005, President Bush and his administration decided to go public to gain public support for reform. However, unlike Edwards (2007) and others, I argue that President Bush parted from previous administrations tactics in going public. The Administration did not attempt to rally the public in general to support its proposed reforms. Instead the focus was on rallying its conservative Republican base. By relying on Republican activists and the Republican majority in Congress, the Bush Administration hoped that strong Republican support combined with a majority in Congress would force enough Democratic members of Congress to pass Social Security reform.

Thus, my thesis provides a detailed examination of President Bush's attempt to gain support for his reforms and specifically examines the president's ability to influence the attitudes of the general public as well as his party base. Simply put: can the President influence public opinion and the opinions of partisans?

Literature Review

Policy, Public Opinion, & Responsiveness

At the core of democracy is public opinion. It serves as the indicator of the public mood towards a specific policy and guides the government on what actions it should take or not take to address public problems. More specifically it directly contributes to the boldness of a President's policy agenda. If public opinion is supportive of a President then his policy agenda will be more aggressive than if public support was weak

(Burstein 2003). Strong public opinion provides presidents with the political leeway that is needed for action on their policies (Burstein 2003). The reliance of the presidency on public opinion has positives and negatives. The American public tends to judge policies based on the perceived costs and benefits of the policy to individuals, their family, friends, and to the nation. Unemployment, inflation, economic growth, flagrant violations of public trust, the human toll of war, sharply focused international crises, and dramatic displays of presidential authority all affect the president's standing with the public at large (Krosnick and Kinder 1990).

The modern presidency forces presidents to pursue their agendas in an environment of continuous scrutiny and evaluation from the public. Presidents, regardless of their political affiliation, tend to have similar responses to public opinion. Rather than leading the public, presidents may choose to take positions on or make policy that responds to public preferences. However, there are times when attempts to minimize public influence occur in the governing process.

Jacobs and Shapiro (2000) claim the influence of public opinion on governmental policy is weaker than it has been in the past because politicians have discovered how to avoid accountability with voters (Burstein 2003). If the president's position is not reflective of the public's then they may not be accepting of his influence. Therefore, failing to understand the public lessens the impact of the president on the public.

Presidents have the attention of the public and the media, which potentially gives them influence over the agenda and public opinion. However, research indicates that presidents may have a hard time keeping the issue on the public agenda, unless they

repeatedly rally the public (Cohen 1995). Keeping public attention on a specific issue is often difficult because attention is easily diverted. Public concern can evaporate rapidly as other problems and crises come into the spotlight. The complexity of modern politics also makes responsiveness a problem as favorable public opinion may not influence Congress to approve the president's agenda. Even when public opinion and policy are tightly associated, the power of the constituency may be more of an illusion and those who believe they are getting what they desire, are not (Burstein 2003).

Some scholars argue democracy works as it was intended to do, with public officials constantly responding to the shifts in public opinion. According to Burstein, public opinion influences policy three-quarters of the time (2003). Furthermore, there is significant evidence that indicates that public opinion has substantial proximate effects upon policy making in the United States (Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey 1987). Widespread public support augments a president's ability to bargain and persuade with members of Congress, which influences his ability to be successful with his legislative agenda (Kinder 1981; Bond and Fleisher 1980).

Not only can the president impact public opinion but so can the salience of an issue, news media, citizen knowledge, political parties, presidential popularity, and political drama. Each can have a positive or negative influence on the message the president is trying to send to the public (Cohen 1995).

Issue Salience

Issue salience has implications on political issues and government responsiveness because it impacts public opinion on policy (Burstein 2003). Only a few issues at a time can be salient to the public because of their easily diverted attention. Typically, when an issue is highly salient, government response to that issue will be high as well. Low-salience issues are often complicated and include elected officials and the politically elite in order to keep policy from drifting too far from its original problem. The more salient an issue, the more public opinion will have an impact on the government response.

News Media

A majority of American's rely on information and interpretation of the news from the media for political knowledge (Krosnick and Kinder 1990). Media has the capability to impact the information given to the public by presenting information or news that undercuts the president's aims, emphasizes different issues or puts a different 'spin' on stories (Cohen 1995). The more attention the media pays to an issue the more it will impact the belief of the viewer. In bringing certain issues to the public's attention and downplaying others, called priming, the media has the ability to alter public opinion concerning the government, public policy, and the president. Priming allows for shifts in news media content to alter the political importance that the public attaches to the events (Krosnick and Kinder 1990).

The relationship between priming and public opinion is most distinct when news coverage includes political experts and elites. According to Krosnick and Kinder's (1990) priming theory, when faced with a judgment or choice, people ordinarily do not

take all plausible considerations into account or carefully examine and weigh all their implications and then integrate them all into a summary decision. People instead, typically forgo exhaustive analyses and employ intuitive shortcuts and simple rules of thumb to make a decision (Krosnick and Kinder 1990). Therefore the more attention an individual pays to a particular news source and the more they are primed by that news source, the more citizens will integrate what they have been primed with into their overall perception of the president.

Citizen Knowledge

Jones (1994) argues there are inherent limitations in the cognitive capabilities of individuals and the organizational capabilities of government. He argues that government responsiveness is likely on only the few issues that the public cares greatly about at a given time (Burstein 2003). Those who care about a topic are more likely to hold elected officials accountable because they are more involved and informed about the issue. Voters without pre-existing attitudes are more likely to be persuaded than those with pre-existing attitudes. However, those with and without pre-existing attitudes pose a problem to a president trying to gain support for his policies. Both, for different reasons, are somewhat immune from the president's message and require extra effort and attention from the president (Cohen 1995).

Politics is rarely an overriding and daily concern for most people because private and personal concerns constrain the role and place of politics and policy in people's lives (Cohen 1995). Krosnick and Kinder (1990) suggest that change over time in presidential approval and power depends heavily on members of the public who are the least

informed. Individuals who know the least respond most to media and presidential priming.

Political Parties

The success of a president's administration depends in large part on legislative success with Congress. Public opinion is something elected officials must keep in mind when making policy decisions. High approval in presidential performance will influence congressional support for presidential positions on roll calls, policy initiatives, and presidential vetoes. However, Edwards (1976) found weak correlations between overall presidential prestige and presidential support in the House (Burstein 2003). His reasoning was that members of Congress respond, not to overall presidential popularity but to presidential popularity among political subgroups like Democrats or Republicans.

If the opposition party controls Congress, positive public opinion may not help the president's success due to conflicting messages sent to the public by the opposition party. Members of the opposing party will likely combat a majority of the president's proposals because they have little to gain from supporting him. Opposition party members may be somewhat less inclined to support a popular president for two reasons 1.) Popularity with the public may cause presidents to be less compromising in their dealings with Congress and 2.) Members of the opposition party are more threatened by a popular president because they are in a better position to claim party credit for those policies popular with the public (Burstein 2003).

When the president's party controls Congress, positive public opinion could increase the presidential success rate because president's gain support from members of

their own party at a quicker pace than they lose support from the opposition party. Additionally, members of the president's party stand to receive credit from constituents, even if they choose to oppose the president's policy because of their party affiliation with him. Opposition party members do not have this benefit because they will likely not receive credit even if they support the president. However, members of the president's party must consider that when running for re-election they run on the president's record as well as their own (Bond and Fleisher 1980).

Presidential Popularity

Recent research has questioned the president's ability to influence public opinion. Voters tend to be predisposed to accept presidential leadership on public policies because they have a demand and appetite for presidential leadership (Cohen 1995). The public will wait for presidential guidance and discussion on an issue. Presidential approval ratings have created a pseudo parliamentary situation, in which the president faces a continuous vote of confidence from the public and other politicians as an indicator of his popularity and ability to govern the nation (Simon and Ostrom Jr. 1989). When confronted with a popular president, Congress, the private sector, and bureaucracy become more accommodating to presidential initiatives (Kinder 1981).

Presidential popularity impacts members of the president's party and opposition party members when supporting the president's policy agenda. Overall, presidential popularity may sway support for the president in Congress but the relationship is likely to differ for members of his party and members of the opposition party. As presidential popularity increases, the president will likely receive more support from his own party in

Congress. When popular, the president's party benefits from being associated with him. The positive impact that presidential popularity has on his partisans is greater than the negative impact it has on members of the opposition (Burstein 2003). However, when unpopular, voters will punish not only the President but members of his party. Presidents with greater public support have greater success in shaping the nation's political agenda than those without public support.

Early research shows that presidents can temporarily boost their popularity through activities like televised speeches and travels. Some believe that only popular presidents gain public support for their policy agendas. The public may be less hesitant when a popular president identifies a problem within the government then presents a plan of action on how to fix it. Popular presidents will likely have a greater impact on public opinion than unpopular ones. This popularity can give credence and weight to what the president says, increasing his overall leverage on public opinion (Cohen 1995).

Popularity is a vital political resource and one of the president's single, most important power resources. Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey (1987) reported the relationship between presidents and public opinion is reciprocal, with each influencing the other. They found numerous cases to support the notion that popular presidents' actions and statements reported in the media make a difference with public opinion. Popular presidents, perceived as representing the values and goals of the public, are better able to influence public opinion on policy. This suggests that objective information from the media may play a crucial role in the evolution of public opinion in determining if a president is popular or unpopular. Even though unpopular presidents tend to not have as

much success in gaining approval with the public, it has not stopped unpopular presidents like President's Ford and George W. Bush from trying.

Political Drama

Political drama is important because it can cast the president in a positive light. The president has the capability to control the timing and circumstances of political drama. It is a device that performs the homeostatic function of maintaining public support for the president (Simon and Ostrom Jr. 1989). Publicity stemming from political drama can redirect public attention from presidential liabilities to issues that will put the President in a favorable light thus generating positive public approval. Typically it gives the president an increase in approval and helps refuel his power. Political drama creates windows of opportunity for the introduction, promotion, and passage of policies designed to influence and buy time for presidential policies to produce their intended results.

Presidential travel and speeches

Two of the most significant weapons the president and his administration can use to gain public support are easy access to travel and television. This access has led to an increase in presidential speeches and travel because of the positive impact it has on presidential support. Speeches and trips are used as approval enhancing events by president's to gain public support for their agendas. Travels capture considerable media attention and provide sufficient opportunities for the president to look presidential.

Although travels and speeches are helpful to a president in swaying his public standing, they are not the only weapon used to gain public support. In recent years presidents have appeared with increasing frequency on television to explain their policies, mobilize support, go over the heads of the Congress and political parties, and to speak directly to the people for their cause (Simon and Ostrom Jr. 1989). Televised speeches give the president the opportunity to promote his policies uninterrupted by the media or opposition party. It gives him the opportunity to temporarily be the sole informing voice to American public of his proposal, giving him an important advantage with the public's attention.

The modern era has presented the president with an important ally in his presidency, the broadcast media. Television provides the president with the opportunity to be more direct and irresistible with the American public. Presidential speeches on T.V. put forth a considerable and positive impact on public support. Harris (1970) reached the conclusion that there is a definite and distinct pattern of increasing support for a president after he has taken to television to appeal his positions (Simon and Ostrom Jr. 1989). Televised speech gives the president the ability to gain or get back public support that he has lost or yet to receive.

President George W. Bush's Quest to Reform Social Security

Governing Strategy of George W. Bush

The 2000 presidential campaign between Vice President Al Gore and Texas Governor George W. Bush was a hotly contested election. Gore won the popular vote while Bush won the electoral vote leading many to believe Bush stole the election.

Additionally, the close results left Bush entering office without a popular mandate. Even without the mandate, President Bush decided to aggressively pursue his political agenda even though he had a slim Republican majority in Congress. The president's forceful leadership and the strategy adopted to promote his policies lead to an increase in the bitter partisan divide in Washington D.C. As a result, to accomplish his goals and overcome the adamant resistance of his opponents, Bush decided to hit the road and present his 2005 Social Security reform plan in a way that was similar to his re-election efforts (Edwards 2007).

The decision to govern by campaigning by President Bush is not a new strategy. For most modern president's policies and politics revolve around intense attempts to gain public support for their administration and its policies. Instead of going straight to the public for an increase in support, President Bush has relied on strong Republican congressional leadership to carry his legislative initiatives. The Bush administration approach is to design policy proposals with great secrecy in the White House so any internal disagreements are debated and resolved before going public so when presented, the plan is done so in a unified way. Next, Bush announces his proposal and he, his staff, and Republican allies in Congress work on turning it into policy. The public campaign of the Bush administration takes the form of a sales pitch. The whole purpose is to sell the product and not explain it. All individuals are expected to remain on message and loyal to the President because the message is what the President's strategists think will sway the public. In general the idea is to control the agenda, the framing, language, and definition of what counts as relevant facts to the issue at hand (Jacobson 2007).

The governing by campaigning strategy worked successfully during President Bush's first term because the events of September 11th gave the president a huge surge in public approval. Typically, Republicans were supportive of the President's ideas while Democrats could be ignored or swayed with minor concessions as long as GOP leadership in Congress kept the Republicans unified (Jacobson 2007). However, this strategy came with risks. If congressional Republicans did not provide 100 percent support, Democrats could not be counted on to help.

Social Security Reform

In his first press conference after winning re-election in 2004, George W. Bush discussed his intentions for an aggressive second-term domestic policy agenda that included partial privatization of Social Security. "I earned capital in the campaign, political capital," he told reporters, "and now I intend to spend it (Jacobson 2007)." Bush won re-election in 2004 with a majority of the popular vote and Electoral College vote, leading him to believe that he had finally secured a popular mandate. Additionally, the 2004 elections had increased the number of Republican held seats in the House of Representatives and the Senate. The increase in the Republican majority enhanced the likelihood that President Bush's policies would triumph in Congress.

Prior to inauguration, the White House announced plans to reactivate Bush's network of donors and activists to pressure lawmakers to allow workers to invest part of their Social Security taxes in the stock market (Edwards 2007). While Democrats and their allies mounted a defense to Social Security through op-ed pieces, internet blogs, and TV ads, President Bush presented himself as a leader who dared to reform Social

Security when other politicians were too cowardly to do so. The public did not appear to be convinced. A Time Magazine/SRBI poll taken from December 2004 found that only 33 percent of respondents felt Bush had a mandate to partially privatize Social Security (Jacobson 2007).

The Social Security campaign, designed to drum up support for privatization of Social Security, was planned by senior Bush strategist Karl Rove. It involved a highly publicized “60 stops in 60 days” tour of the country, later expanded to 90 days, that took Bush to a series of local meetings where he spoke in front of friendly, carefully screened audiences and panelists, who could be counted on to stay on topic. The message was that the Social Security system was in a crisis, on its way to bankruptcy in less than 40 years, and that younger workers would not be given Social Security benefits (Jacobson 2007).

Congressional Republicans were by and large supportive of President Bush’s Social Security reform agenda, however, it was not by a margin wide enough to make up for a concentrated Democratic opposition. The Social Security reform campaign intensified the feelings of those who were not Bush supporters and who did not believe that his proposals for reform could be trusted. Even though the “60 stops in 60 days” tour raised public awareness of the long-term problems of Social Security, it failed to gain substantial public support for the reform proposal or the President. Despite the skill and discipline of Bush administration public relations and the extraordinary investment of time and energy in seeking public support, the public was largely unresponsive to the White House.

Governing by Campaigning, Bush Style, According to Edwards

In his 2007 book *Governing by Campaigning: the Politics of the Bush Presidency* George C. Edwards III examines President George W. Bush's strategy of governing by campaigning. By exploring the politics of the Bush presidency, Edwards focuses on how the administration has attempted to make sweeping changes in public policy without having broad support for doing so, like reforming Social Security. Even though administrations before Bush have used governing by campaigning, Edwards notes that there is an increasing public hostility to permanent campaigns. Critics argue that governing by campaigning produces incivility, undermines coalition building, misleads the public, discourages serious debate, increases the role of special interests, feeds intense partisan feelings, and produces legislative stalemates and increased public cynicism (Edwards 2007). According to Edwards the most intensive case of governing by campaigning in American history was the Bush administration's attempt to reform Social Security.

Bush began his campaign for Social Security reform in January 2005 even though widespread polling showed the overall public mood was against reform. Gallup polls found that support for reform dropped from 48 percent in December 2004 to 40 percent in January 2005. When Social Security reform was associated with Bush, 27 percent of Republicans, 57 percent of Democrats, and 47 percent of Independents were against reform, respectively (Edwards 2007). Support for Social Security reform increased when not associated with Bush to 41 percent of Republicans, 37 percent of Democrats, and 36 percent of Independents approving (Edwards 2007).

Edwards (2007) also argued the least informed members of the public were the most supportive of President Bush's plan while the most informed were the least supportive. A poll conducted by the Pew Research Center from March 18 to March 21, 2005 found that awareness of Social Security reform fueled opposition. Only 41 percent of those who reported they had heard or read a lot about the proposal supported it, while 52 percent opposed it. In contrast, 47 percent of those who knew less about reform supported it while 30 percent opposed it (Edwards 2007). Awareness was also a significant indicator for individuals under the age of 30. People under 30 who had heard a considerable amount about Bush's proposal were more than two times as likely as their less engaged peers to oppose Social Security reform (Edwards 2007). In short, the more people heard about the President's plans the more they opposed it.

A May 11 to 15, 2005 poll by the Pew Research Center that showed 59 percent of people had negative opinions on how the President handled Social Security reform (Edwards 2007). The main strategy of President Bush was to discuss the benefits of his proposal and to leave the details to Republicans in Congress. However, this weakened the strategy because it left Republican legislators with no presidential direction on how to make difficult and potentially politically risky choices regarding Social Security reform. As time passed an increasing amount of Republican members decided to not support President Bush's Social Security reform due to the strong negative public response.

Empirical Analysis of Main Research Questions

Although Edwards (2007) highlighted the significant areas of weakness of the Bush administrations political Social Security reform strategy, I argue the weaknesses were 1.) the attempts to appeal largely to Bush's partisan and ideological base rather than the broader public, 2.) an overestimation of the appeal of the reform plan, and 3.) President Bush's overestimation of his own political capital.

I illustrate these points by examining two polls conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press from December 2004 and February 2005 to see what influence, if any, President Bush had on general public opinion and the attitudes of sub-groups of the population, including Bush supporters and Republicans (full question wording and descriptive statistics are in the Appendix). Both surveys asked questions on Social Security reform and I used them to mark the difference in public attitude before and after the start of the public campaign to reform began with the February 2005 State of the Union Address. For the purpose of this study surveys in February were coded one and those in December were zero. Additionally, controls for respondent characteristics such as age, gender, race, education, income, religiosity, and having children were all included to account for the potential impact they have on respondent attitudes about Social Security reform. My expectation is the February 2005 survey will show that if Bush's appeal to the base is successful, Bush supporters and Republicans should be more favorable of the reform plan than Bush supporters and Republicans in December 2004. Because President Bush made specific appeals to his party base to support his reforms my focus on the attitudes of sub-groups centers on whether members of the Republican Party

were more responsive to the President than were Democrats or Independents, and conservatives were more responsive to Bush than were liberals or moderates.

In addition, I used a third survey from the Pew Research Center from May 2005 which included an experimental component to examine the impact of the President's Bully Pulpit. With this case, to assess the impact of crediting the reform plan with Bush versus a reform plan attributed to no specific messenger (full question wording and coding are in the Appendix). Recall that President Bush believed he had gained political capital from the 2004 election. By attaching himself to a specific reform proposal the administration believed that support for Bush's Social Security reform plan would increase. The thought was that when reform had Bush's name attached to it, it was a cue and his supporters would fall in line. Liberals, Democrats, and individuals not supportive of Bush would be less supportive of Social Security reform when attributed to President Bush, but since the Bush plan was to govern by rallying his party, the preferences of Democrats and Independents were of lesser importance.

I am able to test this notion with the third survey because the survey design included an experimental component. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of two treatments. As shown below, for one treatment half of the respondents were asked if they approved of a Bush supported Social Security reform proposal, while the other half of respondents assigned to the other treatment were asked the same question with no mention of President Bush.

Treatment 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?”

Treatment 2: “George W. Bush has proposed dealing with Social Security’s financial situation by keeping the systems 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? (new)”

Those who approved of reform were coded with a one while those who disapproved were coded zero.

To test for the influence of each treatment those respondents exposed to the Social Security reform attributed to President Bush were coded one and those exposed to the reform proposal not attributed to George W. Bush were coded with a zero. In this model I include an additional control—whether or not the respondent had an alternative retirement plan other than Social Security. This question was unique to this poll and I expect those who have other retirement plans, such as a private pension, would be more willing to reform Social Security since they will not be as likely to rely on Social Security for income.

Central of the Bush administrations strategy to reform Social Security were Bush supporters or his “base.” This core group had been critical to Bush’s re-election campaign and the administration felt this group would once again come to his aid in achieving Social Security reform. Comprised of mostly religious, educated, and conservative Republican’s the belief was these individuals would respond to Bush’s governing campaign and assist him in forcing Congress to take action on Social Security. Strategically, Bush’s advisors felt those who approved of the job the President was doing, were Republican, and knowledgeable about the reform plan would be in support of Social Security reform, especially as the campaign went on.

Testing this will require estimating interaction effects. For the pooled December 2004 and February 2005 surveys, I would expect the Bush supporters will be more supportive of reform in February, following Bush's State of the Union Address, than were Bush supporters in December.

Results and Discussion

Because each of the dependent variables in my analysis are dichotomous all models were estimated as maximum likelihood Logit models. The results of the Logit equation using data from the December 2004/February 2005 surveys are displayed in Tables 1 and 2. In the first table, I estimated the base model to test whether there was a change in support for Bush's Social Security reform plan following his February 2005 State of the Union Address. The results clearly indicate that even controlling for partisanship, ideology, Bush approval, and a variety of other respondent characteristics, support for the Bush reform proposal was lower after he explained it in the State of the Union than before. Thus the Bully Pulpit appeared to be limited with this case.

Table 1: Approval of Private Retirement Plan, December 2004 & February 2005

Independent Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error	Probability
February Survey	-.3753714**	.101803	0.000
Heard About Bush SS Reform Plan	-.2824517**	.0765001	0.000
Female	-.0551789	.1017803	0.588
Age	-.0352189**	.0035355	0.000
Education	.0290637	.0355219	0.413
Black	.0042708	.1642498	0.979
Have Children	-.0829155	.113777	0.466
Born again	.110289	.1174607	0.348
Church Attendance	.0129344	.03522284	0.713
Income	.053922*	.0253397	0.033
Republican	.85745**	.1430723	0.000
Democrat	-.2314408#	.1207608	0.055
Conservative_Liberal	-.1477644*	.0606377	0.015
Bush Favorability	1.311498**	.1262931	0.000
Constant	2.065904**	.3504558	0.000

Log likelihood= -1246.8957
Number of Observations= 2358
LR chi2(14)= 682.39
Prob>chi2= 0.0000
Pseudo R2= 0.2148

Notes: Appendix contains full questions and coding. Sig. p.<.01**; <.05*; <.10#

However, I argue that Bush's intention was to influence his base and not general public opinion. To test this idea I created interaction variables between the variable for each survey period and approval of the job President Bush was doing. The results of the model with this interaction are in column one of Table 2 and suggest that, as expected, those who approved of Bush were more likely to support the plan after Bush's State of the Union Address in February 2005 than they were in December 2004. Therefore, this narrow test found Bush's strategy worked.

Next, I tested Bush's strategy of appealing to his base by interacting respondent knowledge of the Bush reform proposal with 1.) Bush approval (Column 1), and 2.) being Republican (Column 2). The results of the models estimating equations with these interactions suggest that respondents who were Republican and heard more about the proposal were more likely to approve of the proposal (Column 3). Respondents who approved of Bush were more likely to have favorable views of the reform plan as they received more information about it. Thus, the grouping of results indicated that Bush's strategy to influence the attitudes of his core supporters through governing by campaigning had a significant influence on the likelihood of support for Bush's reform among Bush supporters and Republicans.

Table 2: Approval of Social Security Reform Plan, December 2004 & February 2005

Independent Variables	Question 32	Question 32	Question 32
February Survey	-.5431092** <i>.1351216</i> (0.000)	-.3871708** <i>.1031701</i> (0.000)	-.3830664** <i>.1047808</i> (0.000)
Heard about Bush SS reform plan	-.2797742** <i>.0764588</i> (0.000)	-.5073101** <i>.0859162</i> (0.000)	-.8170104** <i>-.8170104</i> (0.000)
Female	-.0504188 <i>.1019666</i> (0.621)	-.05176 <i>.1029403</i> (0.615)	-.0438931 <i>.1043011</i> (0.674)
Age	-.0351136** <i>.0035398</i> (0.000)	-.355585** <i>.0035571</i> (0.000)	-.0363787** <i>.0036026</i> (0.000)
Education	.0279463 <i>.0355623</i> (0.432)	.0252949 <i>.0358458</i> (0.480)	.0173001 <i>.0362652</i> (0.633)
Black	.00489 <i>.1646276</i> (0.976)	-.0398772 <i>.1658871</i> (0.810)	-.1433728 <i>.1695345</i> (0.398)
Children	-.0809254 <i>.1139822</i> (0.478)	-.0743826 <i>.1143059</i> (0.515)	-.0891931 <i>.1155007</i> (0.440)
Born Again	.1071434 <i>.1175664</i> (0.362)	.1113457 <i>.1185594</i> (0.348)	.1110711 <i>.1199255</i> (0.354)
Church Attendance	.0139486 <i>.0352832</i> (0.693)	.0222019 <i>.0357416</i> (0.534)	.0300148 <i>.0363192</i> (0.409)
Income	.0529232* <i>.0253877</i> (0.037)	.056023* <i>.0255591</i> (0.028)	.0571594* <i>.0258875</i> (0.027)
Republican	.8466424** <i>.1429532</i> (0.000)	-1.324577** <i>.368864</i> (0.000)	.7496723** <i>.1438419</i> (0.000)
Democrat	-.2409765* <i>.1210906</i> (0.047)	-.2603239* <i>.122775</i> (0.034)	-.2449406* <i>.1240755</i> (0.048)
Conservative_Liberal	-.1510307* <i>.0607222</i> (0.013)	-.1228212* <i>.0611569</i> (0.045)	-.080107 <i>.0621741</i> (0.198)
Bush Favorability	1.145589** <i>.1526297</i> (0.000)	1.311728** <i>.1276038</i> (0.000)	-1.342069** <i>.3139527</i> (0.000)
Bush Approval Survey	.3823219# <i>.2010251</i> (0.057)	----- ----- -----	----- ----- -----
Republican heard	----- ----- -----	.9589576** <i>.154585</i> (0.000)	----- ----- -----
Bush approval*heard	----- ----- -----	----- ----- -----	1.259064** <i>.1390435</i> (0.000)
Constant	2.147592** <i>.3541</i> (0.000)	2.478293** <i>.361784</i> (0.000)	3.049601** <i>.3805399</i> (0.000)
Log Likelihood	-1245.0801	-1228.0653	-1204.9094
Chi-Square	686.02	720.05	766.36
Pseudo R2	0.2160	0.2267	0.2413
Number of Cases	2358	2358	2358

Notes: Coefficient top line. Standard error in italics. Probability in parenthesis. Appendix contains full questions and coding. Sig. p.<.01**;
<.05*; <.10#

The final test stems from the May 2005 Pew poll discussed earlier. Recall this poll randomly divided respondents into two experimental conditions, one where a reform plan is attributed to President Bush and one where the reform plan is not attributed to anyone. First, I estimate a base model predicting support for Social Security reform controlling for exposure to the experimental conditions and a number of respondent characteristics, including partisanship and ideology. Table 3 displays the results of this first base model. Results show, when controlling for a variety of respondent characteristics, those respondents exposed to the reform plan attributed to President Bush were less supportive of Social Security reform than those exposed to the reform plan with no individual attribution. This pattern aligns with my previous analysis that suggests that President Bush’s public appeals decreased support for Social Security reform.

Table 3: Approval of Bush’s Social Security Reform Plan

Independent Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error	Probability
Attribute reform to Bush	-.3241366*	.1403787	0.021
Female	-.1745575	.1424749	0.221
Age	.0017529	.0047943	0.715
Bush Approve	.1760973	.185998	0.344
Heard Bush SS Proposal	.1088005	.1102482	0.324
Yes, retirement plan not SS	.0017344	.0902732	0.985
Education	.0508366	.0510954	0.320
Black	-.37142	.2494836	0.137
Have Children	.0725398	.1652916	0.661
Born again	.3248742*	.1657489	0.050
Church Attendance	-.1026108*	.051981	0.048
Income	-.114983**	.0388518	0.003
Republican	.1219066	.1946856	0.531
Democrat	-.2930556	.1833493	0.110
Conservative_Liberal	.022292	.0889522	0.802
Constant	.8092066	.5270826	0.125

Log likelihood= -583.56739
Number of Observations= 887
LR chi2(15)= 37.36
Prob>chi2= 0.0011
Pseudo R2= 0.0310

Notes: Appendix contains full questions and coding. Sig. p.<.01**; <.05*; <.10#

Again, President Bush’s strategy was to influence his core supporters, not the general public. Those who approved of President Bush should have been supportive of reform when it was attributed to the President and individuals who disapproved of Bush

should have been less supportive of Social Security reform when attributed to Bush. As such we need to examine how Bush supporters responded to the experiment with interaction variables.

With the final test, I interact exposure to the reform plan attributed to Bush with 1.) Bush approval, 2.) being Republican, 3.) being Democrat, and 4.) political ideology. Table 4 displays the results for these analyses. First, when Social Security reform is attributed to Bush, I expect that his supporters will have been more likely to support it (Column 1). The results support this hypothesis since individuals who approved of President Bush were more likely to support the Bush Social Security reform plan when it was attributed to him.

Second, I examined to see if Republican's were likely to be supportive of reform when it was attributed to George Bush (Column 2). The results indicate that when reform had Bush's attached to it Republican's were more likely to support it and less likely to support the reform attributed to no one. In Column 3, I examined whether Democrats were less likely to support Social Security reform when it was credited to President Bush. The results do suggest that Democrats were less likely to support Social Security reform if it had Bush's name attached to it than when it did not.

Table 4: Public Support for Social Security Reform (experimental conditions)

Independent Variables	Question 24	Question 24	Question 24	Question 24
Attribute reform	<i>-.9893895**</i>	<i>-.9141789**</i>	<i>.1589108</i>	<i>1.77063**</i>
to Bush	<i>.2040294</i> <i>(0.000)</i>	<i>.17790143</i> <i>(0.000)</i>	<i>.1738547</i> <i>(0.361)</i>	<i>.4668001</i> <i>(0.000)</i>
Female	<i>-.2140833</i> <i>.1444935</i> <i>(0.138)</i>	<i>-.1988371</i> <i>.1453165</i> <i>(0.171)</i>	<i>-.2142633</i> <i>.1446611</i> <i>(0.139)</i>	<i>-.1916656</i> <i>.1444252</i> <i>(0.184)</i>
Age	<i>.0018813</i> <i>.0048401</i> <i>(0.698)</i>	<i>.0017286</i> <i>.0048761</i> <i>(0.723)</i>	<i>.0028149</i> <i>.0048628</i> <i>(0.563)</i>	<i>.002606</i> <i>.0048763</i> <i>(0.593)</i>
Bush Approve	<i>-.4619787*</i> <i>.2330427</i> <i>(0.047)</i>	<i>.1837549</i> <i>.1891687</i> <i>(0.331)</i>	<i>.1365018</i> <i>.1884807</i> <i>(0.469)</i>	<i>.1761764</i> <i>.1879605</i> <i>(0.349)</i>
Heard Bush SS Proposal	<i>.1245311</i> <i>.111643</i> <i>(0.265)</i>	<i>.1266806</i> <i>.1125619</i> <i>(0.260)</i>	<i>.1089672</i> <i>.1120309</i> <i>(0.331)</i>	<i>.1142398</i> <i>.1119331</i> <i>(0.307)</i>
Yes Ret. Plan, not SS	<i>-.0102031</i> <i>.0913762</i> <i>(0.911)</i>	<i>-.0239692</i> <i>.0921674</i> <i>(0.795)</i>	<i>.0175806</i> <i>.0915137</i> <i>(0.848)</i>	<i>-.0110925</i> <i>.0915669</i> <i>(0.904)</i>
Education	<i>.0422799</i> <i>.0519973</i> <i>(0.416)</i>	<i>.0549111</i> <i>.0524192</i> <i>(0.295)</i>	<i>.0397429</i> <i>.0519945</i> <i>(0.445)</i>	<i>.0439005</i> <i>.0520315</i> <i>(0.399)</i>
Black	<i>-.3683949</i> <i>.2553011</i> <i>(0.149)</i>	<i>-.340723</i> <i>.2541754</i> <i>(0.180)</i>	<i>-.3415972</i> <i>.2566511</i> <i>(0.183)</i>	<i>-.3223541</i> <i>.2527222</i> <i>(0.202)</i>
Have Children	<i>.0920957</i> <i>.1673362</i> <i>(0.582)</i>	<i>.0644564</i> <i>.1684769</i> <i>(0.702)</i>	<i>.1128469</i> <i>.1676921</i> <i>(0.501)</i>	<i>.131117</i> <i>.1680447</i> <i>(0.435)</i>
Born Again	<i>.30006#</i> <i>.1677528</i> <i>(0.074)</i>	<i>.2907397#</i> <i>.1688882</i> <i>(0.085)</i>	<i>.2613401</i> <i>.168086</i> <i>(0.120)</i>	<i>.29892#</i> <i>.1674999</i> <i>(0.074)</i>
Church Attendance	<i>-.1036107*</i> <i>.0526064</i> <i>(0.049)</i>	<i>-.0903836#</i> <i>.0529612</i> <i>(0.088)</i>	<i>-.102794*</i> <i>.052488</i> <i>(0.050)</i>	<i>-.1041358*</i> <i>.0526444</i> <i>(.048)</i>
Income	<i>-.1161361**</i> <i>.0394027</i> <i>(0.003)</i>	<i>-.1166765**</i> <i>.0395808</i> <i>(0.003)</i>	<i>-.1179983**</i> <i>.0394029</i> <i>(0.003)</i>	<i>-.1147794**</i> <i>.0394462</i> <i>(0.004)</i>
Republican	<i>.127368</i> <i>.1960184</i> <i>(0.516)</i>	<i>-.7372982**</i> <i>.2462804</i> <i>(0.003)</i>	<i>.1385241</i> <i>.1948142</i> <i>(0.477)</i>	<i>.1352876</i> <i>.1961573</i> <i>(0.490)</i>
Democrat	<i>-.2567396</i> <i>.1866173</i> <i>(0.169)</i>	<i>-.3092935#</i> <i>.1872597</i> <i>(0.099)</i>	<i>.3989422#</i> <i>.2384339</i> <i>(0.094)</i>	<i>-.295861</i> <i>.1865024</i> <i>(0.113)</i>
Conservative_Liberal	<i>.026291</i> <i>.0900794</i> <i>(0.770)</i>	<i>.0199456</i> <i>.0906488</i> <i>(0.826)</i>	<i>.0217049</i> <i>.0904141</i> <i>(.810)</i>	<i>.4173274**</i> <i>.1253208</i> <i>(0.001)</i>
Bush approve*Form 2	<i>1.305711**</i> <i>.2837676</i> <i>(0.000)</i>	----- ----- -----	----- ----- -----	----- ----- -----
Republican*Form 2	----- ----- -----	<i>1.694815**</i> <i>.2994537</i> <i>(0.000)</i>	----- ----- -----	----- ----- -----
Democrat*Form 2	----- ----- -----	----- ----- -----	<i>-1.410737**</i> <i>.3025172</i> <i>(0.000)</i>	----- ----- -----
Conservative_Liberal*Form 2	----- ----- -----	----- ----- -----	----- ----- -----	<i>-.7690331**</i> <i>.1638322</i> <i>(0.000)</i>
Constant	<i>1.158552*</i> <i>.5404579</i> <i>(0.032)</i>	<i>1.104322*</i> <i>.5390299</i> <i>(0.040)</i>	<i>.5967902</i> <i>.5344453</i> <i>(0.264)</i>	<i>-.2666842</i> <i>.575817</i> <i>(0.643)</i>
Log Likelihood	<i>-572.83587</i>	<i>-567.16426</i>	<i>-572.41575</i>	<i>-572.03791</i>
Chi-Square	<i>58.82</i>	<i>70.17</i>	<i>59.66</i>	<i>60.42</i>
Pseudo R2	<i>0.0488</i>	<i>0.0583</i>	<i>0.0495</i>	<i>0.0502</i>
Number of Cases	<i>887</i>	<i>887</i>	<i>887</i>	<i>887</i>

Notes: Coefficient top line. Standard error in italics. Probability in parenthesis. Appendix contains full questions and coding. Sig. p.<.01**;
<.05*; <.10#

Finally, I examined an interaction between ideology and exposure to the experimental treatments. The results in Column 4 indicate that conservatives who were exposed to the reform plan were more likely to support the plan when attributed to Bush, while liberals were more likely to oppose Social Security reform when attributed to the President.

Conclusion

The purpose of my thesis was to ask: can the President influence public opinion and the opinion of partisans? To test this question I examined the public campaign to reform Social Security by President George W. Bush. Bush's strategy was to focus on rallying its conservative Republican base and not the general public. In his book, Edwards highlighted several significant areas of weakness of the reform strategy, however, I argue the weaknesses were 1.) the attempt to appeal largely to Bush's partisan and ideological base rather than the broader public, 2.) an overestimation of the appeal of the reform plan, and 3.) President Bush's own overestimation of his political capital.

My analysis focused on the change in support for Bush's reform plan from December 2004 to after Bush's State of the Union speech in February 2005. I also measured the support for Social Security reform when it was attributed to the President and to when it was not. The results found that general public support for Bush's reform proposal was lower after the State of the Union than before. However, those who approved of Bush were more likely to support the plan after the State of the Union in February 2005 than in December 2004. In addition, the results indicate that Bush's public appeals to influence his base through governing by campaigning had a significant

influence on the likelihood of support for his reform plan among Bush supporters and Republicans while diminishing support among the general public. Finally, the results found respondents who approved of the President, respondents who were Republican, and conservative respondents were more likely to support reform when attributed to Bush than when presented with a reform plan without Bush's name attached. Democrat respondents and respondents who were liberal were more likely to oppose Social Security reform when attributed to President Bush.

This thesis finds that governing by campaigning to a specific constituency is not enough to pass monumental legislative initiatives because of the need for bi-partisan support. Regardless of its limited potential, modern presidents have used governing by campaigning with increasing frequency. President Bush narrowed this approach by using his influence and most of his re-election capital to round up the support of his base rather than the general American public. While President Bush was successful in rallying the base to support reform it was not enough to overcome staunch opposition to reform Social Security.

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Appendix A

Pew Research Center December 2004 Political Typology Survey

February Survey December= 0 February= 1

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} Nothing at all= 1 A little= 2 A lot= 3

Q.32 *Generally, do you favor or oppose this proposal?* {9-04 RVs; 9-00 RVs}
Oppose= 0 Favor= 1

Appendix B

Pew Research Center May 2005 News Interest Index

Q.21 *How much, if anything, have you heard about a proposal that would allow younger workers to invest a portion of their Social Security taxes in private retirement accounts, which might include stocks or mutual funds- have you heard a lot, a little or nothing at all?* {3-05NII, 3-05 Typology Callback}

Nothing at all= 1 A little= 2 A lot= 3

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?* {new}

Oppose= 0 Favor= 1

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?* {new}

Oppose= 0 Favor= 1

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}

No, no retirement plan= 1 Yes, but not in stock market= 2 Yes, retirement plan in the stock market= 3

Sex: Male= 1 Female= 2

Age: ____ years 97 or older= 97 Don't know/Refused= 99

Education: None, or grade 1-8= 1
High school incomplete (Grades 9-11)= 2
High school graduate (Grade 12 or GED)= 3
Technical, trade, or vocational school AFTER high school= 4
Some college, no 4-year degree (including associate degree)= 5
College graduate (B.S., B.A., or other 4 year degree)= 6
Post-graduate training or professional schooling after college= 7

Race: *Are you white Hispanic, black Hispanic, or some other race? (If NON-HISPANIC ASK: What is your race? Are you white, black, Asian, or some other?)*

White= 0 Black= 1 Asian= 3 Other or Mixed= 4

Parent: *Are you the parent or guardian of any children under 18 now living in your household?* No= 0 Yes= 1

Religion: *Would you describe yourself as "born again" or evangelical Christian, or not?*
No, would not= 0 Yes, would= 2

Attend: *Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services...more than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, or never?* Never= 0 Seldom= 1 A few times a year= 2
Once or twice a month= 3 Once a week= 4 More than once a week= 5

Income: *Last year, that is in 2004, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes? Just stop me when I get to the right category.*
Less than \$10,000= 1 10 to under \$20,000= 2 20 to under \$30,000= 3
30 to under \$40,000= 4 40 to under \$50,000= 5 50 to under \$75,000= 6
75 to under \$100,000= 7 100 to under \$150,000= 8 \$150,000 or more= 9
Don't know/Refused= 10

Party: *In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent?* Republican= 1 Democrat= 2 Independent= 3
No preference= 4 Other party= 5 Don't know/Refused= 9

Ideology: *In general, would you describe you political views as...*
Very Conservative= 1 Conservative= 2 Moderate= 3
Liberal= 4 Very Liberal= 5