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Inflating the Terror Threat Since 2001

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Chapter One

Inflating the Terror Threat Since 2001

When tragic events occur, people turn to their government leaders for reassurance, information and direction. After the initial information-gathering phase, people in the public will want to know how leadership will prevent similar tragedies from occurring in future. Identifying what went wrong and who or what is at fault is critical to preventing future crises. This identification period allows for interpretation. How leaders communicate colors how the public will view events. What information trickles out to the public dictates how the tragedy is viewed.

Assigning blame and crafting appropriate responses gets particularly cloudy when a tragedy is driven by terrorists for a number of reasons. First, definitional issues obfuscate who is a terrorist or what terrorism is. While politically motivated violence is an accepted definition of terrorism, governments may simply label groups they don't like as terrorists[1].

Second, information asymmetries between the government and the public obscure the true nature of the terrorist threat. As Marc Sageman notes, terrorism scholars rarely gather first-hand data or even engage in interviews with relevant parties. Instead, governments and intelligence agencies hold these bits of information to themselves and many times withhold access to the accused as well as to important documents[2]. Knowing how real a threat is when confidential information is used to determine the threat level is akin to projecting the weather from a windowless basement. Further there is a level of subjectivity to threat evaluation; the scary looking creature in the shadows could be a bear or a pile of sheets—on some level we don't know until we turn on the lights. To this end, scholars can, many times in retrospect, determine whether a terrorist threat is being oversold to the public, but terrorism scholars do not have the certainty of chemists in their findings. Hindsight also is no great recourse in a scientific endeavor; it would be nice to have more foreknowledge of mischaracterized threats.

Finally, a high-casualty or high-publicity terrorist incident doesn't yield much clarity about how to prevent future attacks. Are there similar operatives out there? Are they in position to conduct attacks? What policies or practices might stop them from achieving their violent ends—if, indeed, they are determined to conduct violence? Hypotheticals fill the answers to these questions. The American government may view an actor as a ticking time bomb when in fact the individual is just going through growing pains[3].

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[1] Hocking, Lori. *Terror Laws: ASIO, Counter-Terrorism and The Threat to Democracy*. (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press 2004).

[2] Sageman, Marc. *Misunderstanding Terrorism*. (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press 2017).

[3] Sageman, *Misunderstanding Terrorism*. See the case of Mohammed Mohammud on pg. 85.

The words of our leaders are critical in this sphere due to the wide latitude governments have in defining and interpreting the threat of terrorism. Leaders can play down or ratchet up threats[4]. These words are not just one scrap of a ball of information that media-consumers ingest. Presidential rhetoric on terrorism serves to frame how the issue is viewed, how fearful people are of the terrorist threat, and how the government is bound to react to it. Public opinion, as will be seen, is one piece of the puzzle, but one that crafty presidents can push in their favor. As Anthony DiMaggio shows, modern presidents have typically determined policy with regard to the terrorist threat. One way they have done this is by successfully convincing legislators and the government to pursue their desired actions[5].

This book asks two sets of questions about this process of how presidential rhetoric defines the terror threat. The first set is:

- Why do Presidents talk the way they do about terrorism? What themes do they use? What factors determine the frequency and content of their pronouncements about terrorism?

In order to answer the first set of questions, a database of presidential speeches made by Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump since the 9/11 attacks will be examined and compared. It will be shown that presidents use their rhetoric to set the political agenda and to sell policies. These questions will be dealt with theoretically here in the first chapter and in more fine-grained detail in the three empirical chapters on each individual President.

The second set of questions will be dealt with at the conclusion, but will also be touched on throughout the book, these are:

- How should Presidents calibrate the threat? Do they overinflate it? Are there risks to downplaying it? Are there any policy proposals that can be derived from the comparison of post-9/11 presidential rhetoric?

Obviously, answering these questions is more an exercise in analysis and projection. The policy proposals on how best to calibrate the terrorist threat will be based on appropriate comparisons from the empirical chapters.

Presidential rhetoric is critically important in guiding American foreign and domestic policy as well as in determining which threats are pursued by the American government[6]. After the September 11 attacks, terrorism was touted as a threat that would "never again" be ignored. Previous to the attacks, the terror threat flitted into and out of American public consciousness, gaining attention when attacks occurred and then fading away[7].

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[4] Rubin, Gabriel. *Freedom and Order: How Democratic Governments Restrict Civil Liberties after Terrorist Attacks—and Why Sometimes They Don't*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books 2011).

[5] DiMaggio, Anthony R. *Selling War, Selling Hope: Presidential Rhetoric, the News Media, and U.S. Foreign Policy since 9/11*. (Albany, NY: SUNY Press 2015).

[6] Rubin, *Freedom and Order*; Saunders, Elizabeth N. *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2011).

[7] Nacos, Brigitte L. *Terrorism & the Media: From the Iran Hostage Crisis to the Oklahoma City Bombing*. (New York: Columbia University Press 1994).

This study examines how the terror threat is constructed and sold to the public by American presidents. Other studies have examined how public opinion is moved by the terror threat[8]. Here presidential rhetoric will be examined as an *independent variable* that leads to the main *dependent variable* of foreign and domestic policy regarding terrorism. Public opinion, as will be seen below, is a factor in the passage of foreign policy but it is not a critical piece. If the public truly hates a president's policies, they can surely vote him or her[9] out of office, but the public has a smaller role in the legislative process than most people believe.

While the Bush administration employed rhetoric to foment wars in the Middle East and South Asia, the Obama administration's reticence on the issue and the Trump administration's linking of the issue to immigration and Islam-as-a-religion provide for some significant side-effects that will be explored in the chapters on those presidents. Barack Obama's light speech-making on the terror threat, while still conducting a rather robust war on terror including unprecedented drone strikes, shows that presidential rhetoric to defend policies is not necessary when policies have already been passed by Congress. Obama's dismissal of the terror threat from ISIS, however, shows that there is more reality to the terror threat and that it cannot be rhetorically downplayed into extinction. For Donald Trump, the terror threat is about his "Muslim immigration ban" and about vilifying immigrants. These intolerant statements have led to a spike in Islamophobia and hate crimes that will be examined in the chapter on Trump.

Why Study Rhetoric?

The terror threat could certainly be studied from a multitude of different angles. Threat assessments based upon military capabilities of non-state actors, public opinion studies conducted on how fearful the public is of terrorism, and connect-the-dot approaches gleaned from incidences of terrorism can all provide some insight into a threat that Americans have, since 9/11, consistently seen as one of—if not the—most important threats they faced[10]. This is surely partly due to the attacks of September 11, 2001, which sent the United States on a war footing against terrorist enemies. But it is

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[8] Rubin, *Freedom and Order*; DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*; Mueller, John. *Overblown: How Politicians and the Terrorism Industry Inflate National Security Threats, and Why We Believe Them*. (New York: Free Press 2006).

[9] Authors as far back as Neustadt in the 1950s have noted the antiquated nature of the practice of using the male-pronoun when referring to our leaders (Neustadt, Richard E. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. (New York: The Free Press 1990)). Of course, it is not a fact lost on anyone that all of the American Presidents from Washington to Trump have been male. Many quotes, for this reason, regarding presidents and the presidency coming from the extant literature use the male-pronoun. When speaking of the presidency, wherever appropriate, I will avoid using the male-pronoun referring instead to both female- and male-pronouns. This is meant to be both a nod toward gender egalitarianism and an acknowledgment that the chief executive position is not reserved for males. A byproduct of this practice will hopefully be that the book's prose will not become suddenly stale upon the eventual (or forthcoming?) election of America's first female President.

[10] The Gallup polling agency consistently has found that Americans perceive terrorism to be one of the top threats to the country. See Gallup News, "Terrorism," https://news.gallup.com/poll/4909/terrorism-united-states.aspx, retrieved 5 July 2019.

also due to presidential rhetoric. Presidents can emphasize or downplay the terror threat—and they can also link it to various other foreign or domestic issues.

The objective importance of events is not as patently obvious as one might believe. As opinion leaders, presidents supply meaning to events by interpreting them[11]. This crucial interpretive role serves to align governing coalitions[12]. How do they provide meaning? Through language and communication. Adam Hodges emphasizes that "only through language" do events get constructed into a narrative[13]. Hodges notes that the discourse, the "way of representing the knowledge about…a particular topic at a particular historical moment,"[14] of the war on terror "govern[ed] public discussion and debate on the topic"[15]. Presidents have the power to concoct myths or narratives that suffuse public understanding of a topic. Ivie emphasizes that leaders can manufacture truths simply by "speaking of them as true"[16]. Drawing on Murray Edelman's seminal work, Anthony DiMaggio states that, "Public policy is not about objectively recognized problems, but rather about interpretations of alleged problems—which are presented as 'fact'—and driven by political ideologies"[17].

As Jeffrey Tulis laments, our constitutional government, which was meant to facilitate deliberation and debate, is now driven by rhetoric aimed at inflaming passions[18]. The many politically inflammatory stories passed around Facebook on a daily basis are a good example of this fact. The central figure in this rhetorical storm is the President of the United States, who Craig and Kathy Smith note, "has the symbolic function of representing all of America"[19]. To wit, John Mueller finds that the President (or a President) is frequently mentioned when Americans were asked by Gallup for the name of a man they admire[20].

Politics is about mobilizing the public and legislators, and rhetoric serves that purpose. Smith and Smith argue that "mobilizing is persuasion"[21]. Governments can

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[11] Brody, Richard A. *The Media, Elite Opinion, and Public Support*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1991), pg. 9.

[12] Smith, Craig Allen and Kathy B. Smith, *The White House Speaks: Presidential Leadership as Persuasion*. (Westport, CT: Praeger 1994), pg. 230.

[13] Hodges, Adam. *The "War on Terror" Narrative: Discourse and Intertextuality in the Construction and Contestation of Sociopolitical Reality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2011), pgs. 3-4.

[14] Hall, Stuart, "The Work of Representation" in *Representation* 1997: 44 cited in Hodges, *The "War on Terror" Narrative*, pg. 6.

[15] Hodges, *The "War on Terror" Narrative*, pg. 7.

[16] Ivie, Robert, "Fighting Terror by Rite of Redemption and Reconciliation," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10: 2 (Summer 2007), pg. 239; also see Astrada, Scott and Marvin Astrada, "Truth in Crisis: Critically Re-examining Immigration Rhetoric & Policy Under the Trump Administration," the *Harvard Latinx Law Review* (Summer 2019).

[17] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 3; Edelman, Murray. *Constructing the Political Spectacle*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1988).

[18] Tulis, Jeffrey K. *The Rhetorical Presidency*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2017); Kernell, Samuel. *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership* (Washington, DC: CQ Press 2007), pg. 188.

[19] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pg. 166.

[20] Mueller John E. *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley & Sons 1973), pg. 185.

[21] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pg. 167.

mobilize people through coercion or through a policy of seeking voluntary compliance. Either way, rhetoric is used to explain, defend and define policies. Voluntary compliance can be cajoled through a number of rhetorical arguments including pressing the public to employ self-improvement measures that help the public good, appealing to the public's humanitarian urges, or claiming that inaction will lead to some sort of danger or cataclysm[22].

Presidents struggle with whether they should act as the head of the government or the leader of the people[23]. As Tulis writes, "Since the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, popular or mass rhetoric has become a principal tool of presidential governance"[24]. What Tulis calls the rhetorical presidency represents a "fundamental transformation" of the institution of the presidency[25].

The new role of the President, as a leader of mass opinion, who actively and frequently speaks to the public via the media contradicts the Founder's vision and the Constitution[26]. Indeed, "For most federalists, 'demagogue' and 'popular leader' were synonyms, and nearly all references to popular leaders in their writings are pejorative[27]. They worried that a "leader of the people" (the original Greek meaning of "demagogue") would be particularly adept at swaying the passions of the masses and thus could not only become a tyrant but could also subvert the carefully built institutional structures they created[28]. In the spirit of political scientists, the Founders believed that the right institutional structures would produce sound policy[29]. The Founders did not have great faith in direct democracy, instead they sought to create a system where the people (really, a portion of the people given the limited suffrage of the time) indirectly selected leaders. According to Tulis, "They worried that the dynamics of mass politics would at best produce poorly qualified presidents and at worst open the door to demagoguery and regime instability"[30]. They also created the Electoral College to attenuate the power of the people and fashioned term-lengths that would allow the President and Senators space and time to make decisions without worrying too much about oncoming elections. They also saw the Constitution, in conjunction with the people, as the locus of "authority and formal power"[31].

The presidency was meant to be independent as, in Thomas Jefferson's words, he or she would be "the only national officer 'who commanded a view of the whole ground'"[32]. Each branch of government was meant to control its own sphere of influence, though those spheres of influence overlapped[33]. The first presidents made

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[22] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pgs. 169-170.
[23] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 3.
[24] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 4.
[25] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pgs. 4, 7.
[26] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 18.
[27] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 27.
[28] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pgs. 28, 33.
[29] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 33.
[30] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 34.
[31] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 35.
[32] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 40.
[33] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 41.

written communiques (sometimes spoken) to Congress and, when they spoke directly to the people such as during an inaugural address, made sure to defer to constitutional principles[34]. Still, George Washington, the first President, "established the practice of 'going on tour'" to speak to the citizenry. Though, at that stage, speech-making was less important than simply making a public appearance[35].

Woodrow Wilson ushered in a new way of viewing the presidency as he saw his role as one of interpreting the people's desires[36]. While people's feelings and opinions are fleeting and many times convoluted, a leader can bring clarity through this style of interpretation. Tulis writes that this involves two skills: "First, the leader must understand the true majority sentiment underneath the contradictory positions of factions and the discordant views of the mass. Second, the leader must explain the people's true desires to them in a way that is easily comprehended and convincing"[37]. In the twentieth century, presidential speeches became inspirational or policy-oriented and moved from mostly written communication to oratory[38]. The rhetorical presidency "substituted passionate appeal and argument by metaphor for deliberation"[39].

Tulis emphasizes that there are limits to the powers of even the most skilled president[40]. After all, "rhetorical strategies do not always work as expected, nor are they cost-free as the conventional wisdom implies"[41]. Further, the rhetorical presidency has brought with it "systemic costs, among them an increasing lack of 'fit' between institution and occupant, a greater mutability of policy, an erosion of the processes of deliberation, and a decay of political discourse"[42]. Presidents today are expected to possess exceptional oratorical skills as well as the abilities to negotiate with Congress[43]. "Changes in the presidential selection system," particularly the advent of the partisan primary system, in addition to "the institutionalization of the White House speechwriting staff, and the development of the mass media all contribute to the blessings and burdens of rhetorical governance"[44].

Today, presidents have little time for leadership with campaigns starting sooner and sooner—and as will be seen in Trump's case, presumably never ending. "The overlap of the electoral campaign with the process of governing," Tulis writes, "means that the distinction between campaigning and governing is being effaced"[45]. Whereas in the past campaigning was beneath leaders, today leaders make popular appeals as they constantly hone their campaigning skills[46].

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[34] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pgs. 46-47.
[35] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 69.
[36] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 125.
[37] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 129.
[38] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 138-139.
[39] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 172.
[40] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pgs. 146-147.
[41] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 174.
[42] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 176.
[43] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 177.
[44] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 182.
[45] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 183.
[46] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 183.

Smith and Smith's discussion of the jeremiad provides insight into the content and import of modern presidential rhetoric. As they define it, "The jeremiad is a rhetorical form that frames troublesome social problems in the logic of God's covenant with a chosen people"[47]. They note that jeremiads have their positive aspects: they can "enhance social cohesion," "provide a sense of order and security," "justify change in society," and "elevate the president relative to other political actors"[48]. Jeremiads are an increasingly important facet of what Smith and Smith call "the sermonic presidency"[49].

Jeremiads serve to rally the people, framing them as a chosen people that needs to mobilize for a political purpose[50]. To this end, jeremiads can be dangerous. They elevate the executive beyond the role envisioned in the Constitution, they stifle dissent, and they "loosen constitutional checks on the president by reconstituting legal-political issues as tests of faith"[51]. Bush's jeremiads about good versus evil after 9/11 transmuted into Obama's jeremiads about change and a hopeful future.

To sum up, the President is the central figure in American politics. During crises, the public looks to their leader for guidance, interpretation and direction. Where terrorism is concerned, information assymetries also lead the public to play follow-the-leader due to their lack of knowledge on the level of threat[52]. Rhetoric, as will be further established, is the main method presidents use to mobilize the public and legislators. How this is done will be elaborated in the following sections.

Policy Selling and Agenda-Setting: The Power of Presidential Rhetoric

As the previous section exhibited, presidential rhetoric is a critically important component of governance in the American system. Presidential speeches can inspire or provoke the public, they can explain policy proposals, they can move opinion, and they can also set the government's agenda. This section will delve into this latter category: agenda-setting, and show how important presidential rhetoric is to setting the government agenda particularly with regard to terrorism and foreign policy.

The President has eminent importance in the policy making process. As one lobbyist recounted, "Obviously, when a president sends up a bill, it takes first place in the queue. All other bills take second place"[53]. Jon Kingdon writes that the process of making public policy involves (1) agenda setting, (2) delineating what alternatives to choose from, (3) making a selection from among available alternatives, and (4)

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[47] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pg. 134.
[48] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pgs. 158-159.
[49] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pg. 159.
[50] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pg. 138.
[51] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pgs. 160-161.
[52] See McCabe, Andrew. *The Threat: How the FBI Protects America in the Age of Terror and Trump*. (New York: St. Martin's Press 2019).
[53] Kingdon, John W. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. (New York: Longman 2002), pg. 23.

implementation of a decision[54]. As Kingdon emphasizes, a President can bring great salience to a topic or an idea. President Carter made hospital cost containment a major theme of his presidency, and the term went from being mentioned in 18 percent of health interviews in 1976 to 81 percent in 1977. A similar presidentially-enacted turnaround happened with trucking deregulation (going from being mentioned in 16 percent of transportation interviews in 1977 to 83 percent in 1978). Kingdon makes sure to reiterate that, "The president, of course, does not totally control the policy agenda." Indeed, "Setting the agenda and getting one's way… are two very different things"[55].

The President sets the agenda for three reasons. Firstly, are his or her institutional resources: the power to hire and fire appointees as well as the power to veto legislation. Second come the President's organizational resources—as a unitary decision-maker the President has more individual sway than do the 535 members of Congress. Third, the President has "a command of public attention, which can be converted into pressure on governmental officials to adopt the president's agenda"[56].

Agenda-setting, Jeffrey Cohen explains, is the "initial stage of the policy-making process." During this stage, "problems are identified, converted into issues, and issues are prioritized." There are two major constraints on this process: the short attention span of politicians and the public as well as budgetary and other resource constraints[57]. Cohen hypothesized that public concern with a policy area rises with presidential emphasis on that same area, though presidential concern is not the sole factor in raising public concern[58]. Cohen's analysis finds that "not only does the president seem able to affect what problems people think are important, but he also seems to be able to affect what policy solutions they prefer"[59]. In order for the President to lead the public, he or she must employ rhetoric to affect people's policy positions and concerns[60]. In order to keep an issue on the public's minds, a President needs to repeat his or her concerns often[61].

The power of the presidency to set the agenda is exhibited in this excerpt from Kingdon on the Reagan administration:

"The new Reagan administration, for instance, structured the governmental policy agenda to include items on which it placed a high priority, but in the process made it virtually impossible to get other potential initiatives seriously considered. Thus people in and around government worked on such subjects as cuts in domestic spending and school prayer, but did not devote serious attention to such subjects as comprehensive national health insurance. Among the easily recognizable products of a new administration or a shift in ideological or partisan balance in Congress is

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[54] Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, pgs. 2-3.
[55] Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, pg. 23.
[56] Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, pgs. 24-25.
[57] Cohen, Jeffrey E. *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making: The Public and the Policies That Presidents Choose* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press 1997), pg. 31
[58] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 55.
[59] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 133.
[60] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 164.
[61] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 237.

the rise to agenda prominence of some agenda items. Less recognizable but fully as
important is the fact that other items do *not* rise, as a new administration makes their
consideration impossible"[62].

Kingdon emphasizes that the road to policy formation is rife with "messiness, accident,
fortuitous coupling, and dumb luck"[63]. Presidents can set agendas, but there is a
healthy dose of randomness involved in what policies get passed and even what rises to
the top of the government's agenda[64]. The media, interest groups, external events,
negotiations with and within Congress, political appointees, and academics and policy
experts all play a role in the process. As Kingdon finds, "The processes by which public
policies are formed are exceedingly complex. Agenda-setting, the development of
alternatives, and choices among those alternatives seem to be governed by different
forces. Each of them is complicated by itself, and the relations among them add more
complications. These processes are dynamic, fluid, and loosely joined"[65].

Terrorism fits the description of a topic that can be capitalized upon when a
policy window opens. Policy windows open due to political occurrences (such as a mid-
term election changing the composition of Congress) or due to the rise of new,
compelling problems[66]. Terrorism fits this second condition. It opens a window for
presidents to forward their preferred policies.

If presidents set agendas, then what is the role of the public? Doesn't public
opinion play an important role? One might believe so, but public opinion's role is
limited in the legislative process and, as will be seen, it can be conformed to the desires
of the President. Richard Sobel finds that "public opinion constrains, but does not set,
American foreign intervention policy"[67]. Sobel notes that foreign policy is determined
by a narrow group consisting of three main officers, as mandated by the Constitution
these are: the President, the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State[68]. As Page
and Shapiro find, repeated presidential pronouncements can move public opinion 5 to
10 percentage points over a few months[69]. Moreover, a factor in the President's favor is
that a large portion of the public does not even know what it thinks about issues, citing
that they "Don't Know" when asked what they think[70]. Leadership could view this
group as one that can be easily swayed or ignored.

So what is the role of speech-making? After all, if the public acts, at best, as a
constraint on policy, then why does the President need to try to convince them of

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[62] Kingdon, *Agendas*, *Alternatives, and Public Policies*, pg. 154.
[63] Kingdon, *Agendas*, *Alternatives, and Public Policies*, pg. 206.
[64] Kingdon, *Agendas*, *Alternatives, and Public Policies*, pg. 225.
[65] Kingdon, *Agendas*, *Alternatives, and Public Policies*, pg. 230.
[66] Kingdon, *Agendas*, *Alternatives, and Public Policies*, pg. 194.
[67] Sobel, Richard. *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press 2001), pg. 5.
[68] Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*, pg. 4.
[69] Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*, pg. 21; Page, Benjamin I. and Shapiro, Robert Y. "Educating and Manipulating the Public," in Margolis, Michael and Gary A. Mausar eds., *Manipulating Public Opinion*. (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole 1989), pg. 306.
[70] Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*, pg. 144; Berinsky, Adam. *Silent Voices: Public Opinion and Political Participation in America*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2006).

anything? Firstly, presidential rhetoric is meant to persuade both the public and legislators. Secondly, having public support for a policy certainly does not hurt its chances of being passed. In Cohen's words, leadership is important, but public support is necessary for it can be "converted into political influence." To this end, the leader must "connect with the public, convincing it that he stands for them, that he has their best interests in mind"[71]. Both of these points will be elaborated upon further in this chapter.

For now, it's important to note that, "speaking and governing have merged" since "presidents use speech to mobilize the public behind their policy efforts"[72]. Presidents also "have considerable latitude in how they define the relevant constituency for each policy problem that arises" because they represent the nation as a whole, a country made up of a great multitude of publics[73]. This power amounts to the power to set the agenda and frame events on one's own terms[74]. As DiMaggio finds, politicians don't seek to conform to public whims. Instead, "Presidents retain their own political agendas, which they attempt to 'sell' to the public"[75]. Presidents' agenda-setting role includes the "power to construct narratives," which a media that is dependent on political statements for information often parrots[76]. The public needs a leader to interpret and encapsulate their disparate opinions; in the United States, the President serves this role.

An important case study on how U.S. Presidents can set agendas to sell wars comes from John Mueller's book *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*. Mueller catalogues how the first George Bush set America toward a course of war with Iraq through his rhetoric. Mueller is careful to note that Bush did not achieve his goal by persuading the public to support war. Instead, *he sold the war by setting the agenda*. In Mueller's words, "he managed to lead the country to war because, as President, he was able to keep the issue brewing as an important one; because he could unilaterally commit the country to a path that dramatically increased a sense of fatalism about war and perhaps convinced many that there was no honorable alternative to war; because he could credibly promise a short, beneficial, and relatively painless war; because he and his top aides enjoyed a fair amount of trust in matters of foreign policy at the time; and because Saddam Hussein played the role of a villain with such consummate skill"[77]. While George H.W. Bush successfully placed Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on the political agenda, and convinced the public of its importance, the wisdom of military action against Iraq was not initially shared by everyday Americans[78]. Indeed, the public was split on military

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[71] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 23.
[72] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 34.
[73] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 21.
[74] Hodges, *The "War on Terror" Narrative*, pg. 159.
[75] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 179.
[76] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 187.
[77] Mueller, John. *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1994), pg. 58.
[78] Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*, pgs. 144-145; Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*.

action even after troops were deployed, protests broke out in at least fifteen U.S. cities on October 20, 1990 and the public did not support the restoration of the Kuwaiti royal family to power as a reason for going to war[79]. Despite public apprehensions in October, by January Congress had approved of military action[80]. This was due partly to Bush's characterization of Saddam Hussein as worse than Hitler[81], and partly to Hussein's own antics including threats to use chemical weapons and to attack Israel in addition to appearing on television with hostages[82]. Public opinion served as a guardrail for Bush, but one he successfully manipulated[83]. To this end, Mueller finds that presidential rhetoric, where no great credibility gap exists, can effectively set the foreign policy agenda. Mueller bolsters his findings with evidence from World War II showing that Franklin D. Roosevelt successfully moved the country toward war[84].

Presidents, then, can set agendas and try to sell policies through concerted rhetoric, but the results of their work always lie in question. Presidents act like television or streaming networks whose platform gives them great power through their viewership. These networks set the agenda by providing a suite of programs viewers can watch, but not all programs are successful. The whims of viewers, competition from other channels, the weather outside, and other factors play a part. Networks try to project what viewers will watch, but they also forward programming that they think might be important for artistic, political or other reasons. The fact that not all programs succeed, doesn't mean that Netflix or NBC aren't powerful, just that they can't dictate exactly what a person chooses to watch—though they can delineate the alternatives.

To wit, Smith and Smith find that "Presidential leadership in the modern era entails persuasion"[85]. Effective persuasion entails speaking at the right moment and choosing messages carefully. Timing is, of course, critical in presidential persuasion. As is well known among human relationships, timing is critical when trying to convey an argument meant to convince someone else[86]. Presidential rhetoric also exists in a world where various rhetors compete for attention and compete to define the political agenda. To this end, while the President may be the most visible figure in this marketplace of ideas, he or she must vie with numerous competing streams for attention including those from other politicians and the media[87]. Smith and Smith also note that successful presidents must change their rhetoric as circumstances shift[88]. Those who stick to the same story for too long could fall into credibility gaps (more on these later) or simply lose their audience.

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[79] Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*, pgs. 145, 149; Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*, pg. 15.
[80] Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*, pg. 151.
[81] Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*, pg. 41.
[82] Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*, pgs. 150-151.
[83] Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*, pgs. 159, 163.
[84] Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*, pg. 61.
[85] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pg. 229.
[86] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pg. 232.
[87] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pg. 233.
[88] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pg. 234.

Smith and Smith see presidential persuasion as critical to the functioning of American democracy. The authors believe that for the federal government to work in governing a large and heterogeneous society the White House must speak[89]. For this reasons, Smith and Smith hold not only that understanding presidential rhetoric is critical to understanding the workings and motivations of the American government, but that presidential rhetoric itself is critical to the implementation of policies through agenda-setting, prioritization, persuasion, and policy-selling.

Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha gives agenda-setting an interesting twist: noting that leaders set the agenda for legislators as well as attempting to do so for the public. Presidential rhetoric is a powerful tool. As presidents increasingly rely on "crisis politics" to generate interest, they may face an erosion in their credibility as citizens start to question the legitimacy of rhetorically-constructed crises[90]. The permanent campaign is a symptom of the unending pursuit of public approval[91]. As Eshbaugh-Soha writes, citing Kingdon, "Presidents are adept agenda setters because they are the focal point of US politics"[92]. He goes on to state that, "presidents can and do influence the adoption and implementation of policy through direct signaling even though this source of influence varies by policy area and across institutions." He further posits that, "legislators and bureaucrats should respond to presidential signals because they have a need for cognitive efficiency, and the president's role in the policy process gives them reason to respond to his signals"[93].

Even George Edwards, who is skeptical of the importance of presidential rhetoric, contends that, "presidents are facilitators who reflect, and may intensify, widely held views." He goes on to acknowledge that chief executives "may endow the views of their supporters with structure and purpose"[94]. Edwards asserts that presidents have broad authority to craft their political messages as they see fit[95]. To this end, the President serves an important agenda setting function. Edwards tries to downplay this fact by emphasizing that the mass media is clogged with competing messages and information flows and that the mass public is not particularly interested in politics[96]. Further, events can and do interrupt the sustained persuasion of any chief executives, as Edwards traces with Bill Clinton's difficulty in passing healthcare legislation[97]. Edwards, who we will return to later this chapter, finds that, "the president often provides competition for himself as he addresses other issues"[98].

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[89] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pgs. 246-247.

[90] Eshbaugh-Soha, Matthew. *The President's Speeches: Beyond 'Going Public'* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rennier 2006), pg. 4; Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 181.

[91] Eshbaugh-Soha, *The President's Speeches*, pg. 5.

[92] Kingdon, *Agendas*, *Alternatives, and Public Policies*; Eshbaugh-Soha, *The President's Speeches*, pg. 44.

[93] Eshbaugh-Soha, *The President's Speeches*, pg. 157.

[94] Edwards III, George C. *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2003), pg. 74.

[95] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 127.

[96] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 128.

[97] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pgs. 153-154.

[98] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 155.

Presidents set the agenda by framing issues. As Edwards writes, "Through framing, the president attempts to define what a public policy issue is about." He defines a frame as "as central organizing idea for making sense of an issue or conflict and suggests what the controversy is about and what is at stake"[99]. Presidents also set the agenda by framing debates internally, within their own administrations, as, for instance, Barack Obama did when he discussed how extensive the overall mission should be in the Afghanistan war[100]. Feaver and Gelpi highlight how presidents can frame an outcome to try to bend the public and government toward support for the President's preferred policies. The authors write, for instance, that a commander-in-chief could seek to "galvanize the public and to demonize the enemy" after a high-casualty event rather than admitting defeat. Such a rhetorical strategy would be an attempt to benefit from the rally round the flag effect, an effect which posits that the public will rally behind their leaders during crises[101].

War rhetoric is a particularly powerful form of persuasion for leaders seeking to move public beliefs[102]. In *Leaders at War*, Elizabeth Saunders finds that despite the complexity and bureaucracy endemic in the American democratic system, presidents play a critical role in electing to intervene in other countries militarily. The threat perceptions of the President also determine the extent of the military intervention[103].

Policy Selling

Policy selling is a slightly different story. Here policies are discussed as being "sold" because the President works to enact laws or policies against the context of an often skeptical and increasingly divided public and Congress. Persuasion is certainly a key element of selling and that term is appropriate at certain points of the process, but selling better captures the reality that once a policy is enacted, the public and government have (often quite literally) "bought" the President's proposals. Further, once a policy becomes a reality, it is difficult to unwind—as will be seen throughout this book with regard to the counterterrorism agenda.

Policies and the spending that supports them have to be sold to voters, particularly when the policies begin. The justification need not match the motivation. Whether our policies aim to promote liberty, serve bureaucratic interests, or occur out of inertia, policymakers can justify them with arguments about security. Ideological arguments are made too, but danger is a better pitch. People see threats as more legitimate justifications for policies than ideological ends.[104] As Winkler concludes, "portraying foreign leaders

[99] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 159.

[100] Saunders, *Leaders at War*, pgs. 216-7.

[101] Feaver, Peter D. and Christopher Gelpi. *Choosing Your Battles: American Civil-Military Relations and the Use of Force* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2004), pg. 101.

[102] Winkler, Carol, "Parallels in Preemptive War Rhetoric: Reagan on Libya, Bush 43 on Iraq," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10: 2 (Summer 2007), pg. 304.

[103] Saunders, *Leaders at War*, pgs. 212-3.

[104] Similar arguments are John A. Thompson, "The Exaggeration of American Vulnerability: The Anatomy of a Tradition," *Diplomatic History* 16 (Winter 1992): 23–44; John Schuessler, "Necessity or Choice? Securing Public

both as terrorists and as state sponsors of terrorism were the public communication strategies" of both Reagan and Bush 43's preemptive war efforts[105].

Terrorism is another enemy presidents can use to sell overseas commitments and domestic security policies. Of course, terrorism will be more useful in selling policies to the extent they are legitimately linked to it—evoking the al Qaeda or ISIS threat will not convince many people to support NASA exploration, presumably. Policies will need the most selling when they are costly, especially if the costs concentrate opposing interest groups[106]. They will also tend to need public defense when they are new and require a legislative and bureaucratic departure from the status quo.

Carol Winkler finds that both Presidents George W. Bush and Ronald Reagan reacted similarly in response to the threat of terror. Both focused on preemptive war, both sought to tie terrorism to state sponsors, and both sought retaliation against enemies they framed as aggressors[107]. Both also covertly tried to destabilize their opponent's regimes and, in turn, sought to provoke them into an act of aggression while also hiding behind contentions that they gave non-military measures a chance before moving to the use of force[108]. Reagan and George W. Bush "further blurred the line between offense and defense by adjusting their narrative timelines. Both administrations maintained that their uses of force were continuations of ongoing wars that had existed for years, not the initiation of new conflicts"[109]. American Presidents also consistently omit the goals of terrorists or mischaracterize them as being against "freedom, democracy or liberty"[110]. This serves to dehumanize the terrorist Other[111]. The many-times narrow political objectives of terrorists get lost in this framing.

The agenda setting and policy selling components of presidential rhetoric work together. Presidents choose what to speak about, selecting from a large array of potential threats or policy goals: climate change, the economy, peace in the Middle East, immigration, and so on could all be the subjects of focus. By choosing certain themes or frames, the President sets the country's agenda. President Bill Clinton famously did this when he pivoted away from discussing terrorism after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing so that he could continue his narrative of economic growth[112]. Setting the agenda allows presidents to sell the policies that they want to pursue. Rhetoric involves choice, the choice to select certain words, phrases, or themes in the pursuit of

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Consent for War," paper presented to the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, 15 April 2004; Michael Desch, "America's Liberal Illiberalism: The Ideological Origins of Overreaction in U.S. Foreign Policy," *International Security* 32 (Winter 2007–2008): 7–43.

[105] Winkler, "Parallels in Preemptive War Rhetoric," pg. 321.

[106] On the tendency of concentrated costs to cause political action, see Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*; Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

[107] Winkler, "Parallels in Preemptive War Rhetoric," pgs. 305-308.

[108] Winkler, "Parallels in Preemptive War Rhetoric," pg. 322.

[109] Winkler, "Parallels in Preemptive War Rhetoric," pg. 323.

[110] Winkler, Carol K. *In the Name of Terrorism: Presidents on Political Violence in the Post-World War II Era* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press 2006), pg. 198.

[111] Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism*, pg. 199.

[112] See Rubin, *Freedom and Order*, chapter 7.

persuasion[113]. Framing serves to simplify issues. As Edwards elaborates, "Instead of trying to persuade the public directly on the merits of a proposal…, the White House often uses public statements and the press coverage they generate to articulate *relatively simple themes*"[114]. It is these themes where they regard terrorism, be they simple or not, that we tried to capture in this study.

As this section has shown, agenda-setting and policy selling are critical components of governance and important characteristics of presidential rhetoric. If a President wants to discuss a carbon tax, he or she might choose to focus on the environment. If a President wants to sell a war with Syria, he or she might set the agenda by discussing ISIS or the brutality of Middle Eastern dictatorships. Agenda-setting helps sell policies and policy selling is the goal of agenda-setting. Together, policy selling and agenda-setting serve to mobilize people, be they politicians or the public, through persuasion[115]. Feaver and Gelpi find that the US public is not opposed to military casualties, they are opposed to military conflicts they think can't be won[116].

In this light, Edwards admits that presidents may go public with their policy arguments to consolidate "core supporters" or to influence "elite debate, journalistic coverage, or congressional deliberation"[117]. Consolidating core supporters helps sell policies, influencing elites sets the country's agenda. Each leader has the tools to choose what items to focus more time and effort on. Certainly crises and surprises do occur—an environmental catastrophe could divert the attention of a President seeking to focus on something else—but by and large Presidents use rhetoric, bargaining and their bully pulpit to set agendas and sell policies. This is what Neustadt means when he says that presidents have the power to persuade[118]. How Presidents talk, what themes they use, and how they define crises, drive national security goals and inform policy debates. National policies are, thusly, formed by rhetoric.

Presidential Power and Weakness: The Need for Rhetoric

Now that the power of presidential rhetoric to set agendas and set policies has been established, some important constraints to presidents getting their way will be examined in this section. We will begin with a discussion of presidential powers and weaknesses, then move to a discussion of congressional partisanship, presidential popularity, and the role of the media. This will lead into a more focused discussion

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[113] Zarefsky, "Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition," pgs. 608-610.
[114] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 160, italics mine.
[115] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pg. 167.
[116] Feaver and Gelpi, *Choosing Your Battles*, pg. 97.
[117] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 245.
[118] Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*.

countering the *On Deaf Ears* thesis that presidents are not nearly as powerful as many believe.

Richard Neustadt's seminal book on the modern presidency proposes that presidential power amounts to "personal influence." Since the President needs so many others to consent to his or her desires, the theme of Neustadt's book is "presidential weakness"[119]. Neustadt, who worked on President Harry S Truman's staff, writes that, "Everybody now expects the man inside the White House to do something about everything"[120]. Brody agrees, finding that the presidency has become increasingly central to American politics as political elites and the public continually expand the number of policy issues they expect the leader to manage[121]. To this end, Neustadt asks whether Presidents are leaders or clerks[122].

The need to bargain circumscribes presidential power[123]. Neustadt underlines the frustrations that President Dwight Eisenhower had when he became the country's leader after a career in the military. Eisenhower expressed his great frustration in the need to convince and coordinate so many other people to get anything done[124]. This is due to the constitutional government in the United States where separate institutions share power[125]. This situation leads a President to lean on rhetoric to lead the people and accomplish his or her goals. Neustadt notes that a President's power is "persuasive power" and that his or her "status" and "authority" add to this power of persuasion[126]. A President must also employ his or her reputation as politicians and bureaucrats need to believe that the leader "has the skill and will enough to use his advantages" if they are to take the President's words seriously[127].

Presidents are not, however, prime ministers. Tulis writes that the modern presidency has many powers including "the regular active initiation and supervision of a legislative program; the use of the veto to propose legislation as a matter of partisan policy rather than of constitutional propriety; the development and 'institutionalization' of a large White House staff; and the development and use of 'unilateral' powers, such as executive agreements in place of treaties, or withholding of documents from Congress under doctrines of 'executive privilege'"[128]. Presidents also command a massive executive branch and act as the commander-in-chief of the most powerful military in world history. Neustadt emphasizes the heavy burden of maintaining and controlling the world's second largest nuclear arsenal on the President of the United States. The President's power to potentially start a nuclear war that could "incinerate a hemisphere" surely puts his or her power into context[129]. So that while presidents may

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[119] Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, pgs. ix-x.
[120] Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, pg. 7.
[121] Brody, *The Media, Elite Opinion, and Public Support*, pg. 115.
[122] Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, pg. 7.
[123] Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, pg. 191.
[124] Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, pg. 10.
[125] Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, pg. 29.
[126] Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, pg. 30.
[127] Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, pg. 50.
[128] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 7.
[129] Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, pg. 231.

seem hemmed in by constitutional constraints, it is critical to keep in mind the vast power held in this office.

Relatedly, William Howell and Jon Pevehouse aim to show the limits of presidential war powers. While the President's war powers have limits as, for instance, the Supreme Court in July 2006 struck down Bush's anti-terrorism military tribunals, presidents have many options in enacting foreign policy[130]. In this case, Bush went on to mobilize Congress to pass the Military Commissions Act which maintained the anti-terrorist CIA detention program he had initiated[131].

Congressional Partisanship

By design, the legislature represents an obstacle to presidential agenda-setting leading directly to policy. The chief executive's policy goals need to be filtered through a bicameral legislature that is further divided by two increasingly recalcitrant main political parties. For these reasons, presidential signals may have little effect on Congress members[132]. Indeed, legislators may choose to simply ignore the President— as they did with President Obama's final Supreme Court nominee Merrick Garland. Going even further, Jon Kingdon argues that legislators rarely take their cues from presidents[133]. Eshbaugh-Soha finds that while presidential signals can have an agenda-setting effect, the current state of increased partisanship has "decreased the possibility for bipartisanship and compromise"[134]. That said, by repeatedly addressing a topic, presidents do increase its salience. Eshbaugh-Soha finds this to be the most consistent explanation for why presidents have influence over policy[135].

Congressionally-focused theorists surely have a point to some of their arguments, but they gloss over the power of the executive by narrowing their expectations of what a president's words are meant to accomplish. That said, partisan polarization is a very real impediment to presidential policy-making. Partisan polarization occurs when governing elites themselves are polarized[136]. As Adam Berinsky's elite cue theory holds, "members of the public will look to prominent political actors as guides for their positions on… war"[137]. Richard Brody's findings support Berinsky's theory. Brody finds that the public is sensitive to governmental opinion leaders. When opposition politicians support the President's policies, or at least are quiescent in their regard, public support for the leader increases. When the

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[130] Howell, William G. and Jon C. Pevehouse. *While Dangers Gather: Congressional Checks on Presidential War Power*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2007), pg. xvi.

[131] Howell and Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather*, pg. xvii.

[132] Eshbaugh-Soha, *The President's Speeches*, pg. 42.

[133] Kingdon, Jon. *Congressmen's Voting Decisions*. (New York: Harper 1981), chapter 6; Eshbaugh-Soha, *The President's Speeches*, pg. 42.

[134] Eshbaugh-Soha, *The President's Speeches*, pgs. 161-162.

[135] Eshbaugh-Soha, *The President's Speeches*, pg. 166.

[136] Mueller, *Presidents and Public Opinion*, pg. 120.

[137] Berinsky, Adam. *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2009), pg. 108.

opposition criticizes the policies of the leadership, even in the face of an international crisis, the opposite can occur[138].

John Zaller's work on polarization and public opinion is especially instructive here. Citizen opinions are predicated upon the information provided by elites—including politicians, specialists and journalists[139]. People with more education are more susceptible to elite cues as they are exposed to more elite discourse[140]. This is a fancy way of saying that since those with more education read more news, they are more susceptible to aligning their beliefs with those of elites. But, of course, both the public and elites have political predispositions and biases[141]. Further, elites are not unified in their messaging. Zaller notes that political messages have "cognitive and affective elements." For instance, a person seen lying on the sidewalk can be framed as a "'bum'" or as "'a person like myself who has unfortunately lost his job.'" Political messages also contain persuasive and cueing messages. Zaller defines persuasive messages as "arguments or images providing a reason for taking a position or point of view"[142]. Cueing messages provide context that allows listeners to derive partisan ramifications for accepting a certain point of view[143].

Given the power of elite cues, Zaller finds that popular presidents can have huge effects on the opinions of their supporters and, to a lesser extent, the public as a whole. He notes that a Nixon speech in 1971 on imposing wage and price controls swung an additional 45 percent of Republican partisans and 10 percent of the public as a whole toward the President's position, according to Gallup, but had little effect on Democratic partisans[144]. This speaks to the polarization endemic in American society today. Attuned conservatives seek out information consistent with their viewpoints and attuned liberals do the same[145]. This does not mean that American public opinion is always split, but rather that the public takes its cues from partisan sources. When these sources deviate from one another, public opinion does the same[146]. In some cases, Zaller states, "elite cues functioned to activate ideological predispositions among the politically aware." Yet there are cases, such as contested elections, where "the entire mass public…relies heavily on partisan cues"[147]. Zaller concludes that elites dominate the opinions of the public, basically defining these opinions. "Many citizens…," Zaller writes, "pay too little attention to public affairs to be able to respond critically to the political communications they encounter; rather, they are blown about by whatever current of information manages to develop the greatest intensity. The minority of citizens who are highly attentive to public affairs are scarcely more critical: They

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[138] Brody, *The Media, Elite Opinion, and Public Support*, pgs. 169-170.
[139] Zaller, John R. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1992), pg. 6.
[140] Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, pg. 11.
[141] Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, pg. 14, 24.
[142] Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, pg. 41.
[143] Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, pg. 42.
[144] Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, pg. 97.
[145] Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, pg. 101.
[146] Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, pgs. 101, 104; Berinsky, *In Time of War*.
[147] Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, pg. 275.

respond to new issues mainly on the basis of the partisanship and ideology of the elite sources of the messages"[148]. Basically, Zaller sees two potential opinion landscapes. One where elites are more-or-less unified in their views leading to a more united public and one where elites are divided leading to a public divided "along lines that mirror the elite ideological conflict"[149].

Howell and Pevehouse find that unfavorable partisan composition of Congress can constrain presidential war efforts, but, as previously mentioned, presidents can also sidestep Congress[150]. Harry Truman, by declaring the Korean War "a police action," set a precedent for presidents to subvert Congress in their war efforts—efforts which now did not require a formal declaration of war[151]. The authors, whose argument is that Congress can rein in presidents who seek military adventure, admit that checks and balances exist in a "diminished" state[152]. Presidents can circumvent Congress by approving of smaller military missions[153]—a critical point for the fight against terrorism, which is full of these sorts of small, asymmetric strikes. For their part, Congressional representatives may not oppose the President's war efforts due to worries about seeming anti-military[154]. The authors conclude that, where war is concerned, "the executive, by and large, determines the scope and nature of the debate"[155], once again emphasizing the executive's agenda-setting role.

John Mueller finds that some of the public supports war because "they are inclined to support their country and its leadership"[156]. Public opinion is not easy to sway particularly because many people are stuck in their positions. Feaver and Gelpi note that 30-35 percent of the American public are "solid hawks," supporting the government's war efforts in almost all cases, while 10-30 percent of the American public are "solid doves," opposing war in almost all cases[157]. For partisan issues, the same is true. A sizeable portion of the public is solidly committed to their party. This landscape means that convincing the public through persuasion can only go so far, but mobilizing the public—staunch supporters as well as independents—is truly critical to getting a president's agenda accomplished.

Relatedly, George Edwards, whose arguments we will return to shortly, argues that presidents have little effect on public opinion due to hardened partisan positions, a media landscape not conducive to the public receiving presidential messages, and a public that is not that interested in politics to begin with. Yet, he rightfully notes that, "Not all of the White House's public relations efforts are designed to alter opinions"[158].

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[148] Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, pg. 311.
[149] Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, pg. 327.
[150] Howell and Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather*, pg. xxii.
[151] Howell and Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather*, pg. 3.
[152] Howell and Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather*, pg. 6.
[153] Howell and Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather*, pg. 8.
[154] Howell and Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather*, pg. 7.
[155] Howell and Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather*, pg. 9; Dahl, Ronald. *Congress and Foreign Policy*. (New York: Harcourt Brace 1983).
[156] Mueller, *Presidents and Public Opinion*, pg. 128.
[157] Feaver and Gelpi, *Choosing Your Battles*, pg. 145.
[158] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 244.

Instead, the chief executive can frame or agenda-set by structuring the various, amorphous opinions of the public. Mass opinion "requires leadership to tap into it effectively, give it direction, and use it to bring about policy change"[159]. That said, this section has shown that partisan polarization, while less restrictive in the realm of military strikes, acts as a constraint on presidential power—one that leaders will try to break through with policy-selling and agenda-setting rhetoric.

Presidential Popularity

A rich scholarship on the subject has established the importance of presidential popularity in passing policy. The main thrust of this scholarship is that more popular presidents are more able to achieve their policy goals because they have the public behind them. The research on presidential popularity will be explored in this section.

The President's popularity, like the popularity of anyone, is based upon expectations[160]. A president who achieves average outcomes may benefit from low expectations in the realm of popularity while a president who the public thinks the world of, Obama comes to mind, may suffer from unrealistic public hopes. Brody writes that presidential popularity, meaning support from the public, "is said to be a political resource that can help [the President] achieve his program, keep challengers at bay, and guides his and other political leaders' expectations about the president's party's prospects in presidential and congressional elections"[161]. Samuel Kernell shows that President Reagan was more effective in pressuring Congress on his budget proposals with a strategy of public rhetorical pressure when the President himself was more popular[162].

Presidential popularity and war are deeply intertwined. In describing the rally-round-the-flag effect, John Mueller notes that the American public is apt to support their government once a commitment to go to war has been decided upon. He surmises that a public vote on war even before any government commitment would probably "be heavily influenced by the position of the leadership"[163]. Mueller finds that exogenously-caused crises can lead people to rally around the President simply because the President is in charge[164]. Mueller notes that such a bump in popularity is, however, short-lived[165].

Studies have repeatedly shown that popular presidents can move public opinion[166], but unpopular leaders either don't move opinion or actually repel public

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[159] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 245.
[160] Brody, *The Media, Elite Opinion, and Public Support*, pg. 121.
[161] Brody, *The Media, Elite Opinion, and Public Support*, pg. 3.
[162] Kernell, *Going Public*, pg. 174.
[163] Mueller, *Presidents and Public Opinion*, pg. 58.
[164] Mueller, *Presidents and Public Opinion*, pg. 208.
[165] Mueller, *Presidents and Public Opinion*, pg. 240; this is also proven in Rubin, *Freedom and Order*, chapter 3.
[166] Page, Benjamin and Robert Shapiro, "Presidents as Opinion Leaders: Some New Evidence," *Policy Studies Journal* 12: 649-661 (1984).

opinion away from their policy goals[167]. Eshbaugh-Soha, citing scholarly literature, holds that "presidents will be more successful in Congress during their first-year honeymoons than during other years"[168]. Anthony DiMaggio finds that U.S. presidents are more successful in selling foreign policy goals earlier in their presidencies[169].

Public opinion, then, is not an exogenous factor completely independent of the chief executive. Instead, it is something that leaders can mold and mobilize, particularly when they are popular. As Jeffrey Cohen emphasizes, "Presidents do not seem to construct policies with any systematic attention to the public in mind. When we consider the ideological leanings of presidents on specific policy areas, little responsiveness to the public is noted"[170]. President Trump's first-term tax cut is a case in point. The public supported a tax cut, but many did not like the final bill which capped state-and-local tax deductions. Cohen explains that as policies move toward more detailed legislating phases, the effect of public opinion on the President drifts away for two main reasons. First, the President needs to bargain with Congress. Second, the public serves as "a poor guide" at this stage of the policy-making process due to its lack of detailed knowledge on legislating or the relevant issues[171].

Presidential popularity is certainly important for a leader taking the temperature of whether he will win a second term in office. Leaders know that disaffecting too large a portion of the electorate could lead to their loss of power (either directly through a president losing an election or indirectly through a president's party losing seats in Congress). They also know that political opposition and media criticism can erode a president's popularity[172]. Consequently, public approval of their policies can serve as a constraint on their behavior[173].

Unlike congressional partisanship, though, presidential popularity, today a daily news item, does not dictate whether policy will be passed or what that policy will contain. A leader can look to popularity figures for some insights into how the public sees his or her performance, but, given the current hyper-partisan landscape, leaders can just as easily ignore these numbers. Further, the public is not involved in the legislative process, so popularity may only be important in agenda-setting not in the actual writing of policy.

The Role of the Media

Presidential rhetoric is almost always received by the public via the mass media. Few members of the public have the opportunity to view presidential statements first-

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[167] Sigelman, Lee and Carol Sigelman, "Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion: From 'Benevolent Leader' to 'Kiss of Death'?" *Experimental Study of Politics* 7: 1-22 (1981); Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 58.

[168] Eshbaugh-Soha, *The President's Speeches*, pg. 46.

[169] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 285.

[170] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 185.

[171] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 159.

[172] Brody, *The Media, Elite Opinion, and Public Support*, pgs. 74-77.

[173] Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*, pgs. 64-65..

hand and only select members of the media witness multiple presidential statements firsthand. As Brody writes, "Most of the world, if known at all, is known vicariously, through the media of mass communication"[174]. One could, then, argue that the media plays a very large role in what messages reach the public. Media framing, the way journalists present stories, is also critically important[175]. The media chooses what stories it wants to tell and how to portray presidential statements. It also can clip statements down to sound bites that paint the President in a sympathetic or unfavorable light. As this section will show, the President's power to manipulate the media counteracts the media's power to distort the chief executive's words.

        Presidential communication has always had to swim through the media's filter to reach the public's ears. For instance, Andrew Johnson had no trouble communicating his messages via speeches that were reported on via newspapers and pamphlets[176]. These old forms have been replaced by Youtube and Twitter but before Facebook became the town square actual town squares existed.

        Today, the White House and the press occupy a relationship "in which each side anticipates and responds to distant possibly exploitive actions of the other." The White House staff actively tries to shape the news and get out the "line for the day"[177]. Meanwhile, news agencies, seeking to maintain their independence, emphasize presidential failures more than successes and edit presidential statements as they see fit[178] (Enter: The "Sound Bite"). While Tulis notes the immediate national audience that the mass media provides the President, he also observes that the media increasingly gives the President less and less control over the communication process[179]. This may be why Donald Trump has arrived at using social media for communicating with his supporters.

        Yet while politicians and the public decry a biased news media affecting how each views the other, scholarship shows that the media has a more limited role in framing presidential rhetoric. Jon Kingdon finds that mass media has a smaller effect on the government agenda than most give it credit for as the media usually just reports events[180]. Relatedly, interest groups and academics affect the alternatives that are considered but don't set the agenda[181]. John Mueller agrees with Kingdon. He notes that the media does not have an independent impact on events, rather mediating (literally, playing a middle role) communication between the government and the public[182]. To the extent that the media is a business predicated upon viewership, the public sets the media's agenda rather than vice versa[183].

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[174] Brody, *The Media, Elite Opinion, and Public Support*, pg. 107.
[175] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 4.
[176] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 16.
[177] Kernell, *Going Public*, pg. 103.
[178] Kernell, *Going Public*, pgs. 103-104.
[179] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 186.
[180] Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, pg. 68.
[181] Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, pgs. 67-68.
[182] Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*, pg. 130.
[183] Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*, pg. 133

Contrary to popular belief, Anthony DiMaggio finds that journalists simply parrot official narratives as their professional goal of maintaining objectivity leads them to blankly quote the words of official sources such as the President[184]. DiMaggio emphasizes that journalistic objectivity many times "translate[s] into deference to official sources" particularly because reporters may be starved of other relevant sources on matters where politicians are involved. DiMaggio finds that Americans do pay attention to important foreign policy issues and that they typically align behind the President in light of one-sided media coverage[185]. Zaller concurs that journalists simply report upon the views of elites[186]. As DiMaggio recounts, "Communication research emphasizes the official source bias present in the mass media"[187]. To wit, the author finds that journalists are loath to challenge political officials—a finding contrary to common wisdom which holds that the media is relentlessly critical and apt to report on "bad news"[188]. DiMaggio finds, in analyzing numerous media sources, that "coverage reiterated administration rhetoric" in the run up to the Iraq War with Fox News adding attacks on those who opposed war[189]. One big reason reporters may have failed to critically analyze presidential statements was that inter-media competition led them to hurry to "scoop" one another[190]. DiMaggio finds that a staggering 73.6 percent of *New York Times* stories the month following Bush's September 2002 speech on Iraq "suggested Iraq did or may have WMDs"[191].

George Edwards hits on a different problem—it's not that media distorts the President's words, it's that no one cares what the President has to say. Edwards finds that, "The White House finds it increasingly difficult to obtain an audience for its views." Yet Edwards examines old media such as newspapers, major television stations and *Newsweek* magazine (which has since ceased print publication)[192]. Further, while Edwards argues that leaders cannot appeal to only one segment of the public, new media technology, employed gleefully by Donald Trump, counters this supposition[193]. Even though Edwards decries the media's role in covering presidential speeches, noting the trend is toward less coverage and more attenuated sound bites, new media may have turned the tables on this dynamic[194]. After all, Donald Trump's use of Twitter and Barack Obama's use of Youtube to speak to the public have allowed these leaders unfiltered access to the citizenry.

As will be discussed further in chapter four, the social media era has been a boon for politicians such as Donald Trump, who uses social media to speak directly to his

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[184] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pgs. 86-87.
[185] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 245.
[186] Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, pg. 315.
[187] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 4.
[188] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 7.
[189] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pgs. 78, 79.
[190] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 76.
[191] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 77; DiMaggio, Anthony. *Mass Media, Mass Propaganda: Examining American News in the "War on Terror"*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books 2008).
[192] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 216.
[193] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 75.
[194] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pgs. 174, 177.

followers. This allows Trump to break through the media "noise" and set his own agenda. That said, Trump's innovative use of Twitter has since been adopted by other politicians so that presumably future politicians looking to dictate terms via social media will be met by a multitude of competing voices. One important aspect to note about Trump's use of social media is that his demagogic style has granted him diehard followers who are willing to swallow his messages whole. Other politicians are less likely to benefit from such a dynamic, so social media may become just one of many tools politicians use to convey information to the public. Insofar as social media provides an "unfiltered" view from politicians, the public will likely view such pronouncements as biased and partisan or even as marketing or public relations efforts. Still, it must be taken into account that the public increasingly leans on social media for their news meaning that the public is choosing primary, but biased sources over secondary, edited ones. How this will affect the presidency's ability to shape policy remains to be seen. Barack Obama's social media and Youtube pleas fell flat due to a recalcitrant Congress, while Donald Trump's cult of personality has been well served by his extemporaneous and unpolished social media forays.

Finally, it is important to emphasize the critical importance of the media where terrorism is concerned. After all, "Acts of terrorist violence are communication phenomena"[195]. Terrorists aim to manipulate the media to amplify their violent acts and concomitantly their political goals. As Brigitte Nacos shows, the public adjusts its opinions on the terror threat as new information regarding the fight against terror reaches it[196]. In this realm, the media is beholden to the government, which holds much of the information on terrorists and efforts against them secret.

Contending with George Edwards' *On Deaf Ears*

The previous sections reiterated the power of the chief executive to frame the political agenda and the role of rhetoric in doing so. Yet, there are those who believe that presidential speeches have little effect. George Edwards' book *On Deaf Ears* does a good job of summarizing these views. This section will be devoted to his work in order to show where this study deviates from his views.

Edwards holds that presidents usually fail in moving public opinion[197]. He contends that due to divided government (borne of a divided country) and increasingly ideologically-homogeneous political parties, public opinion in America is very difficult to move in the President's favor[198]. In other words, Republicans—at home or in Congress—are not going to be moved by the words of a Democratic President no matter

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[195] Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism*, pg. 189.
[196] Nacos, Brigitte L. *Terrorism & the Media: From the Iran Hostage Crisis to the Oklahoma City Bombing.* (New York: Columbia University Press), pg. 14.
[197] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. ix.
[198] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pgs. 11-12.

how eloquent he or she is and vice versa. Even though presidents "go public" more than ever, Edwards contends that they are not able to persuade or mobilize the public in most cases[199]. That said, Edwards writes that presidents believe that they need public approval to move Congress[200], though this obviously is not the case. Public approval could pressure Congress, but it isn't actually necessary to pass legislation. Further, as seen in the section on congressional partisanship, public opinion can be moved in an environment that is not politically polarized.

To show the weakness of presidential rhetoric, Edwards examines major presidential initiatives from 1953 to 1996 and finds that "only" 41 percent became law[201]. Surely, this evidence can be seen in a number of ways. Edwards knocks presidents for passing less-than half of their initiatives, but to pass two-fifths of their major initiatives through a laborious congressional process—meant to slow the passage of legislation—in a country that is frequently divided is not something to cough at. Indeed, Edwards notes that the executive and legislative branches exhibited "divided control…nearly two-thirds of the time" over the fifty-year period he examined[202], further exemplifying the impressiveness of the 41% figure he means to cite as inadequate.

Edwards makes a strong point when he writes that, "The president transmits his messages in an environment clogged with competing communications from a wide variety of sources, through a wide range of media, and on a staggering array of subjects" to a largely disinterested public[203]. To this end, presidents have to frame issues using "relatively simple themes"[204]—a point we will return to in the methodology section. Yet as John Zaller shows, when elite discourse is divided, as it nearly always is, the public normally retreats to their partisan predispositions[205]. While the partisan environment, which presidents cannot control, leads chief executives to seek out public approval for support, legislators do not often listen to the public— instead, Edwards contends, they stick to their partisan stances[206]. Only in extreme moments, like after the September 11, 2001 attacks, do American elites unify their voices—if temporarily—and a concomitant public show of approval supplies them a tailwind. In these moments, according to Zaller, "a popular president backed by a unified Washington community can have a powerful effect on public opinion, especially that part of the public that is most attentive to politics"[207]. Edwards further emphasizes Kuklinski, et al.'s disenchanting research finding that shows that the more

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[199] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pgs. 4, 6.
[200] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 8.
[201] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 9.
[202] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 12.
[203] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 128.
[204] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 160.
[205] Zaller, John R. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1992), pg. 99.
[206] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pgs. 14, 20.
[207] Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, pg. 97.

misinformed a person is about politics, the more confident that person will be in their beliefs[208]. Additionally, Edwards shows that the national television and print news media, the period after 9/11 notwithstanding, has been trending away from covering the President[209]. These contentions certainly have their flaws—the growing Progressive/Democratic Socialist movement in the Democratic Party and the Tea Party Movement in the Republican Party speak to intraparty ideological heterogeneity. Further, among the American public, studies continuously show a large group of Independents—Pew finds that about 4 in 10 Americans define themselves in this way[210].

Edwards' views are also time-bound despite his work being published in 2003. For instance, he writes that, "there is no way for the president to segment his appeals so that only a select, but sizable, audience hears them"[211]. Yet, Donald Trump's rallies and tweets appear to do just that—speaking to a select group of individuals. Of course, anyone could read the President's Twitter feed but, for the most part, those who read it diligently are supporters and reporters. The rallies are another matter as the President can take care to admit only supporters to such events—after all, political opponents and protestors have been kicked out of Trump's rallies[212].

Edwards provides good fodder for those who view presidential statements as unimportant. But his argument is lacking in a few respects. First, today's mass media environment is different than the one that existed during the time of Edwards' writing. Partisans can tune in to FoxNews or MSNBC and reliably receive "red meat" to get them cursing at their television screens for the rest of the day at the follies of their political opponents. Second, President Donald Trump certainly reversed the trend of lesser coverage for presidential messages. In fact, the media has been accused of over-coverage of Trump[213], which may have helped him rise above a crowded Republican primary field. To some, Trump's over-the-top rhetoric served a canny purpose: it got him to the top of the headlines. Trump certainly puts the test to the phrase "any publicity is good publicity" as media coverage of the President has been much more

[208] Kuklinski, James H., Paul J. Quirk, Jennifer Jerit, David Schwieder, and Robert F. Rich, "Misinformation and the Currency of Democratic Citizenship," *The Journal of Politics*, 62: 3 (August 2000), pp. 790-816.

[209] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 174.

[210] Laloggia, John. "6 facts about U.S. political independents," the Pew Research Center, 15 May 2019, Laloggia, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/15/facts-about-us-political-independents/.

[211] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 75.

[212] See, for instance, NBC 12 News, "Student wearing BLM shirt says she was kicked out of Trump rally," NBC 12 News, 2 October 2018, https://www.nbc12.com/2018/10/03/student-wearing-blm-shirt-says-she-was-kicked-out-trump-rally/ and ABC Action News, "Protestors get kicked out of Trump rally in Tampa," 31 July 2018, Posted to Youtube.com, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DS7YpoNPuUE.

[213] See Leetaru, Kalev, "Measuring the Media's Obsession with Trump," RealClearPolitics.com, 6 December 2018, https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2018/12/06/measuring_the_medias_obsession_with_trump_138848.html.

negative than that of past leaders—particularly when compared to the decidedly positive coverage granted Barack Obama[214].

     While Edwards' contentions are important to note, other scholars have found taking their cases to the public to be an effective strategy especially in the realm of national security. For instance, Anthony DiMaggio shows, through careful case studies, that "presidents benefit from the power to construct narratives"[215]. DiMaggio shows that, time and again in the modern era, presidents pushed the politics of fear and/or the politics of hope to slowly move the public toward support of their desired national security initiatives most of which were broadly attached to the Global War on Terror. These included the campaigns and troop surges in Afghanistan and Iraq and limited campaigns against Iran and Syria. DiMaggio argues that despite a partisan environment[216], presidential rhetoric—filtered through the mass media—has been largely successful in moving the public toward supporting the commander-in-chief's preferred foreign policies. DiMaggio, in fact, counts eight "rhetorical successes" for recent presidents including: the 2001 Afghanistan war, the 2003 Iraq War, the 2011 intervention in Libya, and the 2014 war against ISIS in Syria and Iraq[217].

     While Edwards holds that presidents are rarely able to move public opinion, implying that presidential rhetoric has little use, many other studies counter this finding. David Zarefsky contends that Edwards views the effect of rhetoric too narrowly, looking for immediate public opinion effects rather than acknowledging that "attitudes are seldom changed on the basis of a single message"[218]. It takes time and repetition for messages to shift opinion as DiMaggio confirms[219]. Further presidential rhetoric could serve to reinforce opinions[220]. It could also, as will be seen in this study, "create associations with other terms"[221]. Presidents, thus, are able to define events through their rhetoric[222]. Consequently, "Public opinion polls and other empirical surveys of audience response are not likely to measure the effectiveness of presidential

[214] Kurtzleben, Daniele, "Study: News Coverage of Trump More Negative than for Other Presidents," NPR.com, 2 October 2017, https://www.npr.org/2017/10/02/555092743/study-news-coverage-of-trump-more-negative-than-for-other-presidents and Bedard, Paul, " Pew: Trump media three times more negative than for Obama, just 5 percent positive," *The Washington Examiner*, 27 December 2017, https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/pew-trump-media-three-times-more-negative-than-for-obama-just-5-percent-positive.

[215] DiMaggio, Anthony R. *Selling War, Selling Hope: Presidential Rhetoric, the News Media, and U.S. Foreign Policy Since 9/11.* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press 2015), pg. 187.

[216] See Berinsky, *In Time of War*.

[217] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 303.

[218] Zarefsky, David, "Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34: 3 (Sept. 2004), pg. 608.

[219] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*.

[220] Zarefsky, "Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition," pg. 608.

[221] Zarefsky, "Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition," pg. 612.

[222] Zarefsky, "Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition," pg. 617.

definitions, *because the definition affects the whole frame of reference within which the question is discussed*. Caught up in the shifting frame, people are likely to see it as natural reality rather than the product of rhetorical choice"[223].

Moreover, Jeffrey Cohen's case studies of presidential response to public opinion show that the relationship is mixed. Sometimes presidents do respond to public opinion—or to their anticipation of that opinion's effects. Other times, presidents resist or oppose public opinion. Still other times, presidents compromise with the findings of opinion polls, adjusting their approaches accordingly. A determining factor in this relationship is the level of commitment a president has to the given policy area. If a president is committed to a certain policy, he or she will likely resist countervailing opinion. However, if he or she has lost control of the policy agenda, the President then may be more likely to cede to public pressure[224]. If the President's words sometimes fall on deaf ears, as Edwards argues, the public's opinions sometimes fall on deaf ears too, as Cohen shows. This is because the public expects the President "to lead and to follow"[225].

DiMaggio challenges works that find the President to be a weak actor in foreign policy. To the contrary, DiMaggio's research shows that presidents are able to gain a great deal of public support for their international agendas by "going public"[226]. DiMaggio is able to show that presidential rhetoric on foreign policy has an effect on the public by providing for a lag between presidential words and public reaction. He notes that there is not an immediate change in public opinion after a president speaks, but that, instead, presidential rhetoric is filtered through the media and affects the public over a longer period of time[227].

Cohen goes further, holding that leaders will feign agreement with the public while acting as they see fit. The author finds that the President typically reiterates public concerns—a form of symbolic responsiveness—while forgoing more substantive forms of responding to the public[228]. Cohen holds that, "Presidents will be symbolically responsive to the public when doing so does not constrain substantive choices about policies; however, responsiveness to the public declines as decisions become more substantive"[229].

Going Public: How Rhetoric Succeeds and Fails

The Constitution does not prescribe that presidents employ public rhetoric to get things done. In fact, as was seen in the discussion on the rhetorical presidency, the

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[223] Zarefsky, "Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition," pg. 618, italics mine.
[224] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 229.
[225] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 233.
[226] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 5.
[227] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 6.
[228] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 133.
[229] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 27.

opposite is more true. So what has changed? Why do presidents "go public" to try to achieve their goals? What is effective or ineffective about such a strategy?

In a study examining about 200 years of presidential statements, Elvin Lim discovered five trends in presidential speech-making. First, presidential rhetoric has become more anti-intellectual, meaning it is more colloquial and less formal. Second, it has become more abstract: it relies on more "religious, poetic and idealistic references." Third, it is more assertive. This means that presidential speech today is more aggressive and speaks more readily of "the language of power" dictated by the Realist school of International Relations. Fourth, it is more democratic, meaning "people-oriented" and "inclusive," today than it was in the past. Finally, it is conversational and attempts to build a bond built on trust between the speaker and the audience[230]. Lim concludes by defending these trends against those who might wax nostalgic for more formal times. He notes that Hitler was fond of "biological facts" that supported his racist views and that Presidents need to speak to the societies from which they come in language those societies understand[231]. George Washington would likely sound stilted as a 21st century orator and Donald Trump would surely sound brash (to choose a generous term) to 18th century patricians.

The Constitutions' Framers sought to create a system that was insulated from public opinion. They did this through staggered elections which forced the public to keep their passions at bay between elections. The idea was to forge a government based upon, in theory, the exchange of pluralistic ideas and, in practice, a rich society of bargaining insulated from popular opinion[232].

Instead, what we see today is a presidency whose power sits in its centrality and its ability to pressure through rhetoric. The Office of the President comes with many powers none, according to Neustadt, as venerable as the power to persuade. As Richard Neustadt writes, "Presidential 'powers' may be inconclusive when a president commands, but always remain relevant as he persuades. The status and authority inherent in his office reinforce his logic and his charm"[233]. The President of the United States, despite all of the checks-and-balances constitutionally installed in the American system, stands as the central figure in American politics. As a unitary actor, the President combines his or her personality with an office that sits atop the hierarchy of American democracy. The President can nominate Supreme Court justices, sign executive orders and veto legislation—in addition to his or her role as the commander-in-chief of the most powerful military in human history. The veto-threat has become an oft-used form of presidential rhetoric as it is a powerful signal presidents wield which "may affect the president's success in Congress"[234].

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[230] Lim, Elvin. "Five trends in presidential rhetoric: An analysis of rhetoric from George Washington to Bill Clinton," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32: 2 (June 2002), pg. 346.
[231] Lim, "Five trends in presidential rhetoric," pgs. 347-348.
[232] Kernell, *Going Public*, pgs. 11-13.
[233] Neustadt, Richard E. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. (New York: The Free Press 1990), pg. 30.
[234] Eshbaugh-Soha, *The President's Speeches*, pg. 46.

With all of these tools at a president's disposal, what might be the point of rhetoric? After all, President Obama conducted a rather fulsome assassination campaign across multiple countries, as chapter 3 examines, without having to "go public." With terrorism in particular, covert operations may justify a quiescent approach. Yet, presidents are called upon to talk about terrorism (among other subjects) and sometimes even choose to speak about the topic.

To begin then, it is important to note why Presidents "go public." Sam Kernell coined the term "going public" in his seminal eponymous book[235]. Going public entails the enlistment of public opinion in a president's quest to pass policies or legislation by directly speaking to the citizenry[236]. What began as speeches now manifests itself in tweets, which not only circumvent Congress but also circumvent the mass media. In matters of national security especially, the President may not need public approval for his or her actions. The aforementioned drone campaign conducted by Barack Obama is proof of that fact.

If a president may act in many instances without public support and if the public is fickle and divided, then why seek to move the public at all? Two key reasons are to *set the agenda* and to *sell policies*. The President is one of the most important people in the world. Statements by the President, via social media or mass media sound bites, do reach the broader public. These statements serve to set the political agenda domestically and globally. As Kingdon notes, the President is a key figure among many who set the political agenda and he or she has strong institutional resources to do so, including control of the executive branch, the veto and the unitary leadership of the executive branch[237]. The President has, in Bourdieu's term[238], "the delegated power of the spokesperson"[239]. This power amounts to the power to set the agenda and frame events on one's own terms. Through speech-making, the President moves his or her policies forward against alternatives.

Smith and Smith view all politics as communication[240]. To this end, presidents define the structure of politics through the rhetorical choices they make[241]. The authors note that communication has many roles in government. Communication expresses concepts to the public regarding how society should be structured and thus legitimizes power distributions. Examples of this are Bush's discussions of good versus evil in the world or speeches referring to "the doctrines of Divine Right, Social Darwinism, and Consent of the Governed." Communication also orients society by "defining objectives and problems in coherent narratives." These narratives compete with one another, but

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[235] Kernell, Samuel. *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership* (Washington, DC: CQ Press 2007)

[236] Kernell, *Going Public*, pgs. 1-4.

[237] Kingdon, John W. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. (New York: Longman 2002).

[238] Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1991), pg. 107.

[239] Hodges, *The "War on Terror" Narrative*, pg. 159.

[240] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pg. 29.

[241] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pg. 1.

normally one rises to ascendancy and is accepted as it "frames an agenda for ordering society's priorities"[242]. Communication resolves conflicts "by drawing new distinctions, by transcending differences, by verifying factual claims, by weighing arguments, by adjudicating arguments, and by choosing between prospective futures." Finally, communication "serves to implement policies by mobilizing or by narcotizing others"[243]. Presidents make choices with their words and many of those choices are meant to persuade either the public or politicians[244].

Kernell does his share of hand-wringing regarding the current state of affairs, noting that presidents are meant to bargain with Congress and the "rhetorical presidency" (to use Tulis' oft-used phrase) has frayed the intended role of the commander-in-chief[245]. To Kernell, going public destroys the fabric of the bargaining society the Constitution intended to create. Such a society is deliberative, careful and weighs policy matters on their merits rather than caving to outside pressures[246]. Going public goes against the President's role in bargaining. It is non-deliberative, it does not include benefits for compliance "but freely imposes costs for noncompliance", it "entails public posturing," and it "undermines the legitimacy of other politicians"[247]. Kernell writes that, "Going public has become routine"[248], but it wasn't always this way.

Today, "regardless of the political climate in Washington," presidents go public[249]. The worry of presidential scholars is that chief executives will grab ever more power, leading the country into democratic backsliding[250]. These worries are not without merit as will be seen in the case studies. In *Freedom and Order*, I show how crises have consistently been used by democratic chief executives to expand their power.

Here again, Kernell provides useful insights. He notes that presidents go public as a way of pressuring other politicians into submitting to the President's demands on policy. Such a strategy works best when public opinion is in the President's favor[251]. Eshbaugh-Soha argues that presidential rhetoric is employed to move legislators not the public. He writes that, "the president uses his speeches…to put public pressure on legislators to succumb to the president's wishes"[252]. Eshbaugh-Soha argues that public opinion matters little in the policy-making process. Instead, Eshbaugh-Soha contends that the import of presidential rhetoric lies in the signals it confers to influence legislators[253]. Kernell also notes that as presidents have increasingly filled the role of

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[242] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pg. 18.
[243] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pgs. 18-19.
[244] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pg. 17.
[245] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*; Kernell, *Going Public*.
[246] Kernell, *Going Public*, pg. 40.
[247] Kernell, *Going Public*, pg. 3.
[248] Kernell, *Going Public*, pg. 2.
[249] Kernell, *Going Public*, pg. 3.
[250] Huq, Aziz and Tom Ginsburg, "How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy," *UCLA Law Review* 65: 78 (2018).
[251] Kernell, *Going Public*, pgs. 192-193.
[252] Eshbaugh-Soha, *The President's Speeches*, pg. 2.
[253] Eshbaugh-Soha, *The President's Speeches*, pg. 3.

political outsiders, they have lost the art of bargaining with legislators as they lack the appropriate training and experience[254].

Like Kernell, Edwards argues that the real effect of presidential rhetoric may be on elite discourse and debate[255]. Edwards, going even further than Tulis, decries the "antideliberative propensities of the permanent campaign" and calls for a return to a presidency based upon quiet bargaining[256]. The permanent campaign is a symptom of the unending pursuit of public approval[257]. This leads Kernell to equate the going public strategy of governing with campaigning[258]. And, indeed, the endless campaign has been mentioned repeatedly by media and scholars alike[259].

"Bargaining presidents require the sage advice of politicians familiar with the bargaining game," Kernell writes, "presidents who go public need pollsters." To this end, public opinion has become a critical concern of modern presidents. As Kernell notes, "presidents from Carter through Bush have all had in-house pollsters taking continuous—weekly, even daily—readings of public opinion." While George H.W. Bush spent $216,000 of RNC money on in-house polling, which seemed extravagant at the time, Bill Clinton spent ten times that amount in 1993[260]. Further, trends toward stronger partisanship make going public more a "preaching to the choir" strategy than it was in the past[261]. The strategy also has become less effective due to the crowding of the media marketplace[262].

Thus we see President Donald Trump, a complete political novice occupying the most important political office in the land, turning to social media tweets to communicate with the public and engaging in publicly televised conversations with legislators rather than doing the hard, behind-the-scenes work of bargaining. President Trump goes public not only because he means to pressure his political opponents but also because it is all he knows. Like President Reagan before him, Trump's career as an entertainer informs his political strategies. To President Trump, going public is what one does to market one's self and one's policies. Further, for a president whose campaign truly never ends, going public is a method for detracting his political opponents and for denouncing policies with which he disagrees.

Being the President is not necessarily becoming an easier job, even if more powers are being accrued by the Office. Increasingly, the public expects the President to be everything to everyone. Jeffrey Cohen laments that, "Modern presidents face not only high but contradictory expectations. The contradiction between providing active policy leadership for the mass public while also being responsive to its policy preferences

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[254] Kernell, *Going Public*, pg. 56.
[255] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pg. 245.
[256] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pgs. 248, 254.
[257] Eshbaugh-Soha, *The President's Speeches*, pg. 5.
[258] Kernell, *Going Public*, pg. 175.
[259] Eshbaugh-Soha, *The President's Speeches*, pg. 5.
[260] Kernell, *Going Public*, pg. 41.
[261] Kernell, *Going Public*, pg. 216.
[262] Kernell, *Going Public*, pg. 217.

strikes at the core of the modern presidency"[263]. As Cohen states, the President must be "responsive to the public," but "is also expected to lead." While public responsiveness lends short-term support, leadership is still necessary to "control the policy-making process." How do presidents square this circle? By symbolically responding to public demands. Cohen shows that the public "holds the president responsible for the policies" he or she implements and gives credit, in the form of support, when those policies prove effective[264]. George Edwards in *The Public Presidency* writes that, "We expect the president to be a leader, an independent figure who speaks out and takes stands on the issues even if his views are unpopular…In sharp contrast to our expectations for presidential leadership is our expectation that the chief executive be responsive to public opinion and that he be constrained by majority rule as represented by Congress"[265]. The President's resources and authority are insufficient to fulfill the expectations placed on him or her, so, as Neustadt argues, the commander-in-chief is forced to persuade others in order to achieve his or her policy goals[266].

Since presidents symbolically respond to the people without actually changing the substance of their policies, Cohen believes that the executive "may be the least policy responsive" branch of the American government[267]. Cohen concludes by lamenting the pressures on presidents to cave to public demands "in this media-saturated age"[268]. Still, like any leader, presidents have found ways to get their constituents "off their backs" by symbolically feigning agreement while acting as they see fit.

Terrorism and Going Public

Many studies look at how terrorism changes public opinion[269], this study instead examines how presidents drive terrorism policy through their rhetoric. To this end, the focus will be on what leaders say and not what surveys say about mass opinion. Carol Winkler shares this approach. She focuses on presidential discourse on terrorism because the public "turns to the president during times of national crisis." Because the president is commander-in-chief and plays a vital role on the world stage, his or her words are highly significant when discussing terrorism[270]. Anthony DiMaggio, further, finds that "presidents are more successful in socially constructing public support for

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[263] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 1.

[264] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 2.

[265] Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, pgs. 196-197; Edwards, George, *The Public Presidency: The Pursuit of Popular Support*. (New York: St. Martin's 1983).

[266] Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, pg. 87; Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 163.

[267] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 240.

[268] Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-making*, pg. 248.

[269] Davis, Darren W. *Negative Liberty: Public Opinion and the Terrorist Attacks on America*. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation 2007); Nacos, *Terrorism & the Media*; Rubin, Gabriel and Christopher Salvatore, "Spitting Bullets: Anger's Long-Ignored Role in Reactions to Terror: An Examination of College Students' Fear and Anger Responses to Terrorism," *International Social Science Review* 95: 2 (September 2019).

[270] Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism*, pg. 4.

U.S. foreign policy than many scholars previously recognized"[271]. As DiMaggio summarizes, "presidential rhetoric remains central to the successful selling of U.S. foreign policy"[272]. Mass fear of terrorism led the public to support the president in conducting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and in approving the troop surge in Afghanistan in 2009[273], but this fear was sown by presidential constructions of the terrorist threat[274]—as can be patently seen in the selling of the 2003 Iraq War.

Academics and media alike studying or reporting on terrorism turn to the government for news as access to information on terrorist plots or to individual terrorists is difficult or impossible obtain[275]. Still it is important to note that the terrorism label has been used by presidents to describe "antiwar protests, computer hacking, domestic violence, protests against US governmental policies, and political disagreements between presidential candidates"[276]. Presidents also twist the motivations of terrorists, frequently making them out to seek world domination or the end of democracy[277]. In sum, access to information about terrorism is highly restricted by the government, forcing the public to rely on government statements and suppositions[278]. For this reason, evaluating presidential rhetoric and how presidents construct terror threats is critical.

Wesley Windmaier argues that, "[P]residential constructions of foreign policy crises have legitimated recurring transformations of U.S. national interests." For instance, "Presidents Harry Truman and George W. Bush constructed crises that justified liberal crusades in the Cold War and the War on Terror." Eisenhower counseled for the "need to maintain balance." Eisenhower warned against "a recurring temptation to feel that some spectacular and costly action could become the miraculous solution"[279]. In what Windmaier calls the "fast thinking" phase, "crusading views cast liberal ideals as values to be exported, to win over the 'hearts and minds' of others"[280]. For example, Truman framed the Cold War as a fight over basic values, justifying an aggressive stance against the U.S.S.R.[281]. Truman coupled this existential framework with an alarmism that equated minor losses with large, global consequences[282]. Windmaier states that "the Truman administration found itself caught in a rhetorical trap of its own making"[283], precisely because it had based its analysis "on Soviet

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[271] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 283.

[272] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 284.

[273] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pg. 285.

[274] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*; Rubin, *Freedom and Order*.

[275] Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism*, pgs. 6-7.

[276] Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism*, pg. 8.

[277] Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism*, pg. 9.

[278] Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism*, pg. 5.

[279] Windmaier, Wesley W. *Presidential Rhetoric from Wilson to Obama: Constructing Crises, Fast and Slow* (New York, NY: Routledge 2015), pg. 1.

[280] Windmaier, *Presidential Rhetoric from Wilson to Obama*, pg. 15.

[281] Windmaier, *Presidential Rhetoric from Wilson to Obama*, pg. 43.

[282] Windmaier, *Presidential Rhetoric from Wilson to Obama*, pg. 41.

[283] Windmaier, *Presidential Rhetoric from Wilson to Obama*, pg. 45.

capabilities, rather than intentions"[284]. Still, it was Eisenhower who coined the term "domino theory," which set the foundation and modus operandi for the Cold War[285]. Eisenhower's "realist restraint" pulled back some of Truman's liberal crusading forcing a recalibration of U.S. foreign policy[286]. This cycle of overreaction and recalibration is evident in the examination of Bush, Obama and Trump speeches made in this book—though here it will be shown that the wax and wane of rhetoric is more superficial once policies are taken into account.

Credibility Gaps: Where Rhetoric Fails

A final note on rhetoric. Credibility is critically important to the effectiveness of presidential rhetoric. Credibility gaps erode the effectiveness of presidential rhetoric. Smith and Smith hold that presidents' claims to legitimacy are three fold. Leaders must be trustworthy, competent and their words must align with reality as the public sees it[287]. Neustadt emphasizes that presidents need to be credible and trusted in order for people to (potentially) follow their lead. He writes that, "A gap in credibility so large as to cast doubt upon the king's legitimacy threatens the throne precisely because commoners and court perceive it and react in the same terms"[288]. Since presidents increasingly rely on "crisis politics" to generate interest, they subject themselves to a potential wearing away of their credibility as citizens begin to question the legitimacy of rhetorically-constructed crises[289].

Presidents lose their legitimacy when the public begins worrying about their fitness for office leading to a loss in the public's trust in the leader. This many times leads to inconsistent rhetoric and logical inconsistencies which send the President into a downward spiral—a strategy predicated on desperation[290]. Windmaier notes that credibility gaps transition presidential policies from crusades to more cool-headed policy orientations as policy inflexibility and popular-will force leaders to move away from realist overcorrections and back to liberal overreactions[291].

An important example of a credibility gap forming comes from the case of Bill Clinton who established a leadership style wherein he set the agenda by dictating the direction and priorities of the government through major speeches. He then had the executive branch prepare the details of his policies. Congress then revised, refined or completely replaced those policies[292]. Clinton, however, tried to get out of the Monica Lewinsky scandal using rhetoric; his denial reduced his credibility with the public[293].

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[284] Windmaier, *Presidential Rhetoric from Wilson to Obama*, pg. 46.
[285] Windmaier, *Presidential Rhetoric from Wilson to Obama*, pg. 48.
[286] Windmaier, *Presidential Rhetoric from Wilson to Obama*, pg. 54.
[287] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pgs. 191-192.
[288] Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, pg. 188.
[289] Eshbaugh-Soha, *The President's Speeches*, pg. 4; Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 181.
[290] Smith and Smith, *The White House Speaks*, pg. 192.
[291] Windmaier, *Presidential Rhetoric from Wilson to Obama*, pg. 9.
[292] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 214.
[293] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pg. 217.

As previously mentioned, John Mueller finds that presidential rhetoric, where no great credibility gap exists, can effectively set the foreign policy agenda. President George HW Bush saw a great rise in approval for his job as President due to the Gulf War[294]. Mueller, like DiMaggio, found that the media—due to public demand—was uncritical of the Gulf War effort, even at times ignoring the presence of antiwar protests[295]. Yet, the first Bush lost public approval just like his son would—famously dropping the 1992 election to Bill Clinton. One reason for this was that he allowed Saddam Hussein to stay in power in Iraq after framing him as a dangerous villain[296]. This created a credibility gap for George HW Bush. Relatedly, President Reagan's charisma and oratory were effective, but their effectiveness did not survive the credibility gap created by Iran-Contra[297]. Clinton's credibility gap due to personal conduct and lying about said conduct can be added to these examples.

In sum, credibility gaps erode presidents' abilities to sell policies. Due to credibility gaps, the George W. Bush administration had great difficulty selling the occupation of Iraq while the Obama administration was unable to garner support for action against Syria from a war-weary public[298]. Credibility gaps will be explored further in the empirical chapters.

Methodology

The original data for this book comes from a content analysis-derived database collected by the author and his research assistants. The database contains information from presidential speeches on terrorism from September 2001 to February 2019. Rather than employing a quantitative, "word count" approach, the determination was made to explore "themes" hit on by Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump since 9/11. The reason for this was that searching for themes, though more time-consuming, would retain context and allow for a more substantive, robust comparison.

The unit of analysis in this database is the presidential speech. This is because the notion is to capture what themes each president seeks to convey to the public. Whether a speech conveys a specific theme once or three hundred times, the study codes the theme as present. This is to insure that repetition within a single speech does not skew the findings. The idea here is to search for trends in presidential speech-making. One speech where a theme or statement is oft-repeated could have undo effect on the data if themes or words were tallied from each speech. Individual statements will be examined to add qualitative evidence to the database findings.

Not every utterance made by each president over this time period is examined. In order to determine what speeches to examine, the research team collected speeches where some derivation of the word "terror" was used three times. This allowed for the

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[294] Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*, pg. 72.
[295] Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*, pgs. 74-75.
[296] Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*, pg. 105.
[297] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, pgs. 190, 197.
[298] DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope*, pgs. 286-287.

rhetor to define terrorism for himself. This also cut out speeches where terrorism was discussed tangentially or not at all. The source for the speeches was the whitehouse.gov web site. Where months-long gaps in speeches were found, the research team searched alternative sources for transcribed presidential speeches and included the relevant terrorism-related speeches in the study. This means that the speeches that are included are mostly formal ones. Most of the analysis comes from formal speeches or remarks, but some interviews are included as these were either published on whitehouse.gov or discovered by the research team as we searched for gaps in our database. An effort was made to be exhaustive and, to this end, we added Twitter to our examination when it was made plain that President Trump preferred this mode of communication.

Suffice it to say, not every statement on terrorism by each president is guaranteed to be included here for a number of reasons. First, we do not include statements by the presidents from when they were candidates or presidents-elect in the database, though some of these statements are qualitatively examined in this book. Second, not every interview or utterance or document created by the President is included here. Finally, there could have been statements that were missed given our method of searching for three utterances of "terror." To correct for this, we added the term "extremist" into our searches to try to scrape more speeches. That said, there are some speeches that will be examined anecdotally that are not part of the database given its guidelines, but that we deemed important.

What the database contains, then, is the only systematic examination of presidential rhetorical themes on terrorism that exists to my knowledge. Other studies have examined presidential rhetoric on terrorism by looking at speeches, at case studies or by quantitatively counting words or concepts, but none draw from a database that systematically collects a content analysis examining thematic elements of these speeches.

A "theme" is an idea or concept that is touched upon in a given speech. To this end, saying "terrorism is nothing to fear" implies a different thematic element than saying "terrorism is the great enemy of our time." A word count analysis would count the word "terrorism" or "enemy" but would not know the context. Even "enemy" might not be of great use for counting since it can be used in the negative sense: "the Palestinians are our friends, not our enemies." Since context is important in any statement, the research team decided that we would search for themes rather than exploring the topic through word count or a different quantitative method. That said, the themes are counted so the qualitative analysis yields quantitative data.

The content analysis entailed reading each speech to identify themes that indicate either alarm about terrorism or attempts to calm fears[299]. We scored the themes in binary fashion, noting "Yes" if a theme was present or "No" if it was absent. For some themes, qualitative data was noted such as *what conflict or issue* a president linked terrorism to or *what terms* a president used to refer to terrorists. The research team

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[299] Please note that each empirical chapter presents relevant evidence so that not all themes are touched upon in each chapter.

identified speeches that related to terrorism and then went through a checklist of themes to see which were present in the relevant speeches.

The themes were selected with an eye toward examining how presidents calibrate—inflate or ratchet down—the terrorist threat. To this end, the themes all speak to how the threat and America's terrorist adversaries are defined. Most of the themes involve inflating the terror threat, though their absence could show that the President is toning down the threat. Deflationary themes, such as tolerance toward Muslims, are also examined.

The **first five types of themes** we looked for are **descriptions of the campaign against terrorism** (or "war on terror"). The first theme regarded the duration of the conflict. We coded a "Yes" if the rhetor emphasized the long duration of the war on terror and "No" if the speaker did not do so. The second theme looked to see whether the speaker emphasized the necessity of the war on terror. The third thematic element explored whether the speaker said that the effort to fight terrorism post-9/11 was unlike other wars due to its interminability or the nature of the enemy or some other factor. The fourth theme looked for what conflicts or other issues the speaker linked the fight against terrorism to—here the specific linkages were also noted. Finally, the last theme that described the terrorism campaign looked for whether the speaker mentioned jihad or violent jihad against America.

The **next four themes** concern the **nature of America's terrorist adversaries**. We looked for speeches that included the following elements: first, describing a worldwide conspiracy or worldwide operatives; second, describing terrorist adversaries as "persistent," "resilient," "determined" or some other related adjective; third, talking about plots involving weapons of mass destruction; and fourth stating that terrorists pose an existential threat to America or comparing terrorists to Nazis or the Soviet Union. Together, these themes capture the perceived goals and capabilities of America's terrorist opponents in the eyes of the nation's leader.

We also looked for **attempts to play down the terror threat**. We asked whether the President stated that the threat had diminished and whether he or she recommended tolerance toward Muslims. With the tolerance toward Muslims question, we asked whether the president distinguished between American Muslims and America's jihadist enemies.

Finally, we made a **list of the terms each president used to describe terrorists** and counted the use of prominent terms. Here the research team sought to analyze whether speeches described terrorists in grandiose or mundane terms. Terms like "terrorists" or "al-Qaeda" are more precise and potentially less alarming than terms like "evil-doers."

In total, this study analyzed 82 speeches made by President Donald Trump (through February 2019), 135 speeches made by President Barack Obama and 446 speeches made by President George W. Bush (all from September 11, 2001 and later). In total, this study analyzed 663 presidential speeches—the most definitive such study that presently exists. The database will be used in this book not only to analyze presidential rhetoric but also for purposes of comparison. Chart 1.1 depicts the frequency of formal

presidential speeches about terrorism post-9/11. Note that after a period of extremely heavy focus on the issue (George W. Bush had 85 terrorism-focused speeches after 9/11 in 2001 and 169 in 2002), the frequency of speeches settled down to about thirty per year with a low of 9 in 2012 under Obama. Bush's third highest year for frequency of speeches was 2006 with 46 terrorism-related speeches. Note the higher incidence of speeches under Donald Trump (in 2017 and 2018) as compared to the ten years prior.

[Insert Chart 1.1 Here]

The purpose of this study is to compare presidential responses to terrorism after 9/11. To this end, speeches of presidents serving before the attacks are not included. To be sure, historical context and evidence regarding how previous presidents—such as Ronald Reagan—viewed terrorism are included in the discussions. Expanding the database beyond 9/11 would certainly provide for more data, but it also would shift the focus. Here the focus is: how did the three post-9/11 presidents calibrate the terror threat after a dramatic attack that caused drastic change? Focusing on the Gulf War or Ronald Reagan's dealings with Muammar Qaddafi, both of which are mentioned repeatedly in this book, would move the topic from how the terror threat is framed in a post-9/11 world to one of how presidents speak about terrorism generally. Adding pre-9/11 speeches to the database is surely an area for future research that could lead to new findings. Of course, the most obvious inclusion would be Bill Clinton (since he came before George W. Bush) who parried away from discussing terrorism until the end of his term[300]. Such an inclusion might imply that the "baseline" for discussing terrorism is low, when a more expansive study of pre-9/11 presidential rhetoric would have to be done to get at the true "baseline" figure.

There is strong evidence that terrorism has been a concern of presidents well before 9/11. Bill Clinton made two speeches justifying air strikes against Sudan and Afghanistan on the grounds that the sites that were bombed supported terrorism. In those speeches, he mentioned Osama bin-Laden by name and stated that "terrorism is one of the greatest dangers we face in this new global era." Clinton described terrorists as having distorted their religion and stated that their mission was "murder." Presaging 9/11 and the rhetoric that would follow, Clinton declared:

> "My fellow Americans, our battle against terrorism did not begin with the bombing of our embassies in Africa, nor will it end with today's strike. It will require strength, courage, and endurance. We will not yield to this threat. We will meet it no matter how long it may take. This will be a long, ongoing struggle between freedom and fanaticism, between the rule of law and terrorism. We must be prepared to do all that we can for as long as we must. America is and will remain a target of terrorists precisely because we are leaders; because we act to advance peace, democracy, and basic human values; because we're the most

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[300] On this, see Rubin, *Freedom and Order*, chapter 7 and Windmaier, *Presidential Rhetoric from Wilson to Obama*.

open society on earth; and because, as we have shown yet again, we take an uncompromising stand against terrorism"[301].

A Note on Definition

By now it is old hat that the definition of terrorism is a contentious one[302]. Much has been made of the linking of violence committed by Muslims or Arabs to the term "terrorism," and that avenue will be explored throughout the book in analyzing each president's rhetoric. For purposes of this study, a literary analysis of terrorism definitions is unnecessary because how terrorism is defined by the post-9/11 Presidents will be the focus. The pitfalls of these definitions will be examined as well. How presidents discuss terrorism will help us see how they define the term. After 9/11, a global war on terror has been conducted pitting the American armed forces and intelligence agencies against largely Muslim opponents. This campaign certainly colors many of the statements on terrorism made by the presidents, but given the 17.5-year length of the study there is ample room for divergence. Ramifications of narrowly defining terrorism as a phenomenon endemic to Islam or to certain Arab or Muslim extremists will be discussed in the empirical chapters and the conclusion.

Plan of the Book

The following summarizes where the next few chapters will take us. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are empirical chapters examining the rhetoric of Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump respectively. These chapters will include some comparison between cases. The final chapter offers conclusions on the topic.

Chapter Two: George W. Bush, Policy Selling and the Post-9/11 Years

In this chapter the way President George W. Bush discussed the terror threat in the years after 9/11 will be discussed. President Bush's role is critical in this study because he established the main thematic elements regarding the terrorist threat that others would agree with or oppose. President Obama's approach, then, can be seen as an (attempted) antithesis of Bush's. While Trump's approach can be seen as a return to Bush's thesis.

Further, George W. Bush's speeches were important in that they served to sell policies he linked to the counterterror effort such as civil liberty-abridging legislation and wars abroad. Bush was put in an unenviable position after the attacks in 2001, when by far the most deadly terror attacks to date (and, thankfully, since) took place.

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[301] Totman, Sally-Ann. *How Hollywood Projects Foreign Policy*. (New York: Palgrave 2009), Appendix 1.

[302] See Hocking, Jenny. *Terror Laws: ASIO, Counter-Terrorism and the Threat to Democracy*. (Sydney: UNSW Press 2004); Hoffman, Bruce. *Inside Terrorism*, Revised and Expanded Edition. (New York: Columbia University Press 2006); Rubin, Gabriel, "Terrorism, Defined," in *Encyclopedia of Transnational Crime and Justice*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage 2012).

Even though the threat was real, Bush's speeches—as the data will show—inflated the threat and exacerbated the problem. The chapter will show how Bush pushed an inflated view of the terror threat to forward an expansive war on terror in America and abroad. By linking the threat to rogue regimes, Bush also got the public behind his plans to invade Iraq. The Bush administration's rhetoric so muddied the waters that a majority of the American public came to believe that Osama bin-Laden and Saddam Hussein were linked[303].

Chapter Three: Barack Obama: From an End to Terror to Drone Wars and ISIS

Barack Obama ran in 2008 on an anti-Bush and anti-Iraq War platform. In the first 100 days of his first term, Obama famously issued an executive order to close the detention center housing terrorist suspects in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The mainstream news proclaimed the President "No Drama Obama" and he was feted with a Nobel Peace Prize in addition to being lauded for a more tolerant approach to Muslims highlighted by his June 4, 2009 Cairo speech. Cass Sunstein, who wrote *Laws of Fear: Beyond the Precautionary Principle* to counter the Bush administration's approach to the terror threat[304], was, after all, Obama's top regulatory official.

The study's data shows that Obama downplayed the terror threat. He made significantly fewer speeches about terrorism than did Bush. Further, the content of his speeches was more frank and specific. While he did not do as much to inflate the threat, Obama never did close Guantanamo and he carried out a large targeted killing campaign in numerous Muslim countries[305]. This speaks to the fact that Obama did not have to sell policy as Bush had already done the policy selling for him. Obama did relish in the killing of Osama bin-Laden.

A further factor in the Obama administration came with the rise of ISIS/the Islamic State who Obama famously called "the JV team." Obama's approach to the terror threat was so rigid in its anti-Bush stance that his administration found itself flat-footed as a new, more tech-savvy version of al Qaeda rose to prominence. This chapter will show the promise and pitfall in Obama's approach. President Obama's attempt to downplay the threat eventually would be replaced by a re-visitation of Bush-era policies.

Chapter Four: Donald Trump, Twitter, and Islamophobia: The End of Dignity in Presidential Rhetoric about Terrorism

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[303] Althaus, Scott and Devon Largio, "When Osama Became Saddam: Origins and Consequences of the Change in America's Public Enemy #1" *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 37: 4 (October 2004), pgs. 795-799.

[304] Sunstein, Cass. *Laws of Fear: Beyond the Precautionary Principle*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2005).

[305] See Scahill, Jeremy. *The Assassination Complex: Inside the Government's Secret Drone Warfare Program*. (New York: Simon & Schuster 2016).

The rise of Donald Trump, with his famed use of Twitter as a platform for connecting with the public, has seemingly turned presidential rhetoric on its head. Trump is less polished and more direct in his speeches. His Islamophobic rhetoric goes beyond anything stated by Obama or Bush, and he ties anti-immigration rhetoric to the terror threat. The effects of Trump's Islamophobia and xenophobia and his concomitant blindspot for white nationalist terrorism will be the main subject of chapter four, which will examine Trump's speeches and Twitter use in his first two years in office.

Chapter Five: How Do We Properly Calibrate the Terror Threat?

The final chapter will wrap up the issues discussed in the book. First, the roles of presidential rhetoric in agenda-setting and policy selling will be reconsidered. Second, the proper calibration of the terror threat will be discussed as Bush overshot the issue and Obama undershot it (at least in the case of ISIS/the Islamic State). Third, policy proposals for how the public and presidents should view and calibrate the terror threat will be explored.

The chapter will make the following conclusions. First, it will reinforce the link between frequency of speeches on an issue and policy selling. Second, it will emphasize the importance of rhetoric in pushing a president's favored policies, with border security and the Iraq War being seminal examples. Third, it will show that, contrary to the talk of a change since Obama, the terror threat has been viewed similarly by all three post-9/11 presidents and that Obama and Trump have borrowed from the agenda and narrative set by George W. Bush. Lastly, the book will end with policy proposals including more narrowly defining terrorism and a call for more tolerance especially toward domestic minority groups in presidential speeches.