

Presidential Rhetoric and Congressional Support: A Case Study of the Impact of Presidential Rhetoric on Foreign Policy

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Abstract: This paper builds on the theory of *The Rhetorical Presidency* to examine how rhetoric has served as a vehicle for presidents to use their approval ratings and bipartisanship to win support from Congress. It contains a case study of the State of the Union Addresses of five presidents from 1960 to 2010 and looks specifically at their rhetoric on foreign affairs. Overall, although the findings support the literature that presidents can prime their approval ratings, they also suggest that the volume of rhetoric is not a key determinant of the success of such efforts. Additionally, the findings support the literature that bipartisan rhetoric is ineffective in promoting bipartisanship in the roll call votes by Congress and further suggests that it is equally ineffective in influencing other stages of the legislative process.

Keywords: *bipartisanship, congressional approval, presidential rhetoric, priming, State of the Union*

I. Introduction:

A president has three forms of power: legal, political, and power of public opinion (Windt, 1986). An influential work studying this third form of power is Jeffrey Tulis's *The Rhetorical Presidency*, published in 1987. In this seminal piece of scholarship, Tulis argues that the use of presidential rhetoric began with Woodrow Wilson, who believed that presidents needed to be less formal than the Constitution required them to be while governing a democracy. Evidently, Wilson's approach stuck and rhetoric has played a crucial aspect of all presidencies following his. Tulis argues that this use of presidential rhetoric reflects a profound and fundamental shift of the presidency from a "constitutional, administrative office to an executive, rhetorical office" (Windt, 1986, p. 103). He also asserts that this change to a rhetorical office allows presidents to appeal directly to the public and effectively bypass Congress, thereby tilting the balance of power between the president and the Congress towards the president.

The idea that rhetoric gives the president greater powers at the expense of the Congress is particularly interesting to explore in the domain of foreign affairs. The division of power between the president and Congress on foreign affairs is ambiguous in the Constitution. This was an intentional decision by America's Founding Fathers to promote a power struggle that would keep both branches of government in check (Masters, 2017). It would be interesting to explore the role that rhetoric has played in this struggle between the president and Congress. Furthermore, the president's word is particularly powerful in foreign affairs. Since the president has significant unilateral powers in conducting foreign policy (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2019), his word on foreign affairs is often seen as the policy of the United States. Given the significance of presidential rhetoric on foreign policy, it is especially important to understand its nature and impacts.

In this paper, I conduct a case study of the impact of presidential rhetoric on foreign affairs on congressional approval for the president's agenda. Specifically, I look at the effectiveness of two types of presidential rhetoric used to influence Congress: priming rhetoric and bipartisan rhetoric. The objective of priming

rhetoric is to shape the criteria the public uses to evaluate the president's overall performance. This is done in the hopes of bolstering the president's approval ratings, which would then incentivize Congress to support his agenda. The objective of bipartisan rhetoric is to encourage congressmen from both political parties to support the president's agenda. Based on previous studies on priming and bipartisan rhetoric, I hypothesize that although presidential priming rhetoric is effective, bipartisan rhetoric is not. If it is true that presidential rhetoric is not completely effective, this would moderate Tulis's argument that presidential rhetoric has irreversibly tilted the balance of power away from Congress and towards the president.

To test this hypothesis, I begin with a review of previous studies conducted on the impact of priming and bipartisan rhetoric. Next, I explain the parameters of my dataset of presidential rhetoric and how I conducted the case study. Following this discussion on methodology, I present my findings on the effectiveness of priming and bipartisan rhetoric. After discussing the significance of my findings to the study of the impact of presidential rhetoric, I conclude with some thoughts on the role of rhetoric in the balance of power between the president and the Congress.

II. Literature Review

A. Priming Rhetoric

Priming refers to the process of using media attention to shape the criteria people use to evaluate a president's overall performance (Druckman & Holmes, 2004). It includes both issue and image priming. Issue priming occurs when significant media attention on an event causes it to become an important criterion in the public's overall evaluation of the president (Miller & Krosnick, 2000). Image priming describes a similar process where specific personal qualities, such as integrity or empathy, become a pertinent criterion of the president's overall approval ratings (Funk, 1999).

An important study from 2004 found that presidential rhetoric can successfully prime presidential approval (Druckman & Holmes, 2004). This study conducted a content analysis of George Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address and identified

that foreign affairs received far more attention than the economy in terms of volume of rhetoric. The researchers then conducted a lab experiment on 265 participants; some completed a survey about their approval of the president before watching the address, while others completed it after watching the address. The study also conducted a nationally representative survey with a similar objective. The authors found evidence of issue priming in both the experiment and the survey, as issues which were covered with a greater volume of rhetoric were more influential in determining Bush's approval ratings. They also found evidence of image priming, through which the emphasis on foreign affairs influenced participants to rate leadership qualities as an important criterion in their overall assessment of Bush. Although they did not find similar evidence of image priming in the survey, the authors believe that presidents can use issues to prime their image (Druckman & Holmes, 2004).

This study examines presidential priming rhetoric because previous studies have found that presidential approval ratings impact the support they receive from Congress. Edwards (1989) found that higher presidential approval ratings increase the likelihood of support from Congress. This sentiment is reflected in a quote by Lyndon Johnson: "Without question, public support is a primary resource for presidential leadership of Congress" (p. 101). The literature suggests two mechanisms for how presidential approval ratings translate to congressional approval. The first mechanism is through public support for his policies (Rivers & Rose, 1985). Since Congressmen face elections, they are incentivized to support the president when they believe his policies have significant public support. The second mechanism is that popular presidents can change public opinions on a policy by publicly supporting it, because his supporters are likely to adopt his position on policy issues (Page & Shapiro, 1992). Thus, congressmen who want to be on the same side as the public are incentivized to side with a popular president (Page & Shapiro, 1992). A more recent study from 2002 reaffirmed the theory that presidential approval increases the likelihood of support from Congress; however, it found this is only applicable to policies that are complex and salient (Canes-Wrone & de Marchi). Since

foreign policy is almost always complex, and its saliency is heightened through speeches like the State of the Union (Canes-Wrone & de Marchi, 2002), the causal link between presidential approval and congressional support applies to my dataset. Thus, this paper only tests whether presidential rhetoric translates to presidential approval and assumes, based on the literature, that presidential approval translates to congressional support.

B. Bipartisan Rhetoric

Another form of presidential rhetoric this paper examines is bipartisan rhetoric. A study by Azari et al. (2012) compared the impact of rhetoric on how policy substance influenced roll call votes by Congress. Roll call votes are the votes on a bill that both the House and Senate must pass before the bill can be signed into law by the president. The study analyzed the votes on 496 presidential policy initiatives over the twelve administrations from 1949 to 2010. It looked at two forms of rhetoric: mandate rhetoric, which is language that references the genuine public support the president has for a policy, and bipartisan rhetoric, which references the ethos of working together across political party lines to serve the public. The authors found that both mandate and bipartisan rhetoric had no impact on roll call votes. Since the authors of the study qualified their results by stating that presidential rhetoric may have affected policy outcomes at other stages of the legislative process outside of the roll call vote, this study will also consider stages outside the votes. It will also only consider bipartisan rhetoric and not mandate rhetoric, which is relatively scarce in major addresses such as the State of the Union (Azari, 2014).

III. Methods

One challenge in researching presidential rhetoric is defining the dataset. Since there are no clear parameters of what constitutes presidential rhetoric, scholars have to decide how to define the scope of their analysis. According to Coe & Neumann (2011), there are four types of datasets that have been used. The first type studies inaugural addresses and the second type studies State of the Union Addresses. The advantages of this approach

is that there are clear parameters and a manageable volume of data; however, the frequency of such speeches are low. The third type of dataset includes every form and instance of presidential rhetoric. While this type provides a large sample of data to work with, it is inconsistent across presidencies and poses significant logistical challenges. The fourth category is datasets which are collated using clearly defined criteria. These criteria may relate to the medium, length, content, target audience, time of broadcast, or other characteristics of the rhetoric.

In this paper, I look at the State of the Union Addresses of five presidents between 1960-2020. The presidents I studied are Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard M. Nixon, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama. These presidents were selected to support a broad scope of analysis: each served in a different decade defined by distinct foreign policy landscapes and reflect a balance between the two political parties. The transcripts of their addresses were obtained from an online database of presidential speeches managed by the Miller Center at the University of Virginia. Restricting the analysis of rhetoric to these addresses is appropriate for a study on the impact of presidential rhetoric on the balance of power between the president and Congress since the State of the Union is a platform that no congressman has access to. It also makes the process of data collection consistent, provides a manageable volume of data, and is a common practice within the study of presidential rhetoric.

To test my hypothesis on the effectiveness of priming and bipartisan rhetoric, I conducted primary research by collecting data from the State of the Union Addresses of each of my chosen presidents. Specifically, I identified instances of priming and bipartisan rhetoric on foreign policy issues. I then conducted secondary research to explore whether or not these instances of rhetoric were effective in influencing the president's approval ratings or in promoting bipartisanship.

IV. Findings

A. Priming Rhetoric

Issue Priming

President Bill Clinton's rhetoric on Japan offers an

example of successful issue priming. Across his addresses, Clinton mentioned Japan thrice: once regarding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and twice regarding international trade. At the beginning of his 1995 address, Clinton celebrated positive macroeconomic trends – record low unemployment, decreased inflation, eight million new jobs, and a surge in new businesses. He then followed this by mentioning that “America is selling more cars than Japan for the first time since the 1970s” (Clinton, 1995). The placement of this specific fact in an introduction discussing broad macroeconomic achievements seems jarring, but suggests that competition with Japan in the automobile industry was a politically salient issue. Several years later, in 1999, Clinton made a more aggressive statement on the topic: “We must enforce our trade laws when imports unlawfully flood our nation. I have already informed the government of Japan that if the nation's sudden surge of steel imports into our country is not reversed, America will respond” (Clinton, 1999). Clinton’s rhetoric on Japan is noteworthy because the US’ trade relations with Japan were not unique. During the Clinton presidency, the US had large trade deficits with numerous other countries, such as Canada. In fact, the US’ deficit with Canada increased at a greater rate than its deficit with Japan during both of Clinton’s terms (Burden & Mughan, 2003). However, Japan was the only country that Clinton singled out for allegedly engaging in unfair trade practices across all his addresses, prompting a closer look at the impact of this rhetoric.

Although the volume of Clinton’s rhetoric on Japan was low, further research revealed that it successfully primed this issue, perhaps unintentionally, as trade relations with Japan affected his overall approval ratings negatively. A study by Burden and Mughan (2003) found that disadvantageous trade relations do not necessarily matter in the public’s evaluation of this president’s overall performance. For instance, the US’ trade deficit with Canada had no impact on Clinton’s overall approval ratings. However, the deficit with Japan did. Specifically, the study found that for every percentage point that the trade deficit between the US and Japan widened, Clinton’s approval ratings decreased by seven points (p. 570). The authors attributed this

outcome to the significant media attention on trade tensions with Japan. Clinton had engaged in “Japan Bashing” in public by using assertive rhetoric to address alleged unfair trade practices by Japan, as illustrated in the quote earlier. His rhetoric on Japan was propagated by the media, which then “stoked public frustration with Japan, and this unabated frustration in turn lowered his standing with the public” (p. 575). The findings from this study therefore provide evidence that Clinton’s rhetoric on trade with Japan resulted in issue priming, although it did not work in his favor.

Another example of issue priming is provided by President Lyndon Johnson’s rhetoric on Vietnam. Under Johnson, key foreign policy initiatives were the Vietnam War, arms control with the Soviet Union, and relations with Cuba and the Dominican Republic (Germany, 2019). On the domestic front, Johnson’s major initiatives related to the Great Society, the War on Poverty, and civil rights (Germany, 2019). Figure 1 contains keyword counts to approximate the relative attention Johnson gave to each of these six key policies. This method of approximating the level of priming through the volume of rhetoric is modelled after the approach in Druckman & Holmes’ study (2004). In Johnson’s speeches, the frequency that “Vietnam” was mentioned dwarfs the frequency of other initiatives, indicating that Johnson gave the most attention to the Vietnam War in his addresses. This was not surprising, as Johnson’s approach on Vietnam was to make policy independently and move the public towards it. A key strategy to achieve that was through a calculated framing of developments using platforms such as the State of the Union (Jacobs & Shapiro, 1999).

The article continues with Figure 1 on the following page

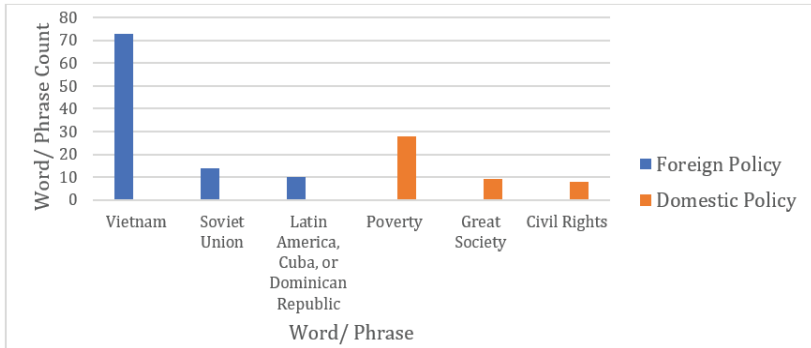


Fig. 1: Content Analysis of Johnson's Addresses. Source: Miller Center, 2019

Further research into polls conducted during Johnson's presidency reveals that his approval ratings were closely associated with the public's perception of the Vietnam War. At the beginning of Johnson's presidency, his approval ratings often rose after there was an escalation in the Vietnam War (Gelb & Betts, 2016). For example, his approval rating increased by 14% following the US' increased military involvement in Vietnam after the confrontations in the Gulf of Tonkin (Windchy, 1971, p. 25). This association is further demonstrated by the fact that Johnson's approval plummeted towards the end of his presidency due to the War. A study by Jacobs & Shapiro (1999) found that "the public's dissatisfaction with Johnson's overall performance and its dissatisfaction with his handling of Vietnam are closely interrelated" (p. 607). This assessment was based on numerous polls, including a 1966 Gallup Poll which concluded that the public's dissatisfaction with Johnson's policy on Vietnam was a "chief reason" the public expected Republicans to win in the 1968 elections (p. 607). This close association between Johnson's approval ratings and the public's perception of an issue that he gave significant media coverage to provides further support to the hypothesis that priming rhetoric is effective.

President Ronald Reagan provides a clear contrast to Johnson's rhetorical strategy by prioritizing domestic policy

over foreign affairs in his speeches. Unlike Johnson, who had limited experience and interest in foreign affairs (Gelb & Betts, 2016), Reagan had strong opinions on foreign policy and foreign affairs, which were featured significantly in his presidency (Cannon, 2019). Key foreign policy initiatives during his presidency included a more aggressive stance towards the Soviet Union, his relationship with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, and strong support for anti-communist revolutions in Nicaragua and Afghanistan, known today as the Reagan Doctrine (Cannon, 2019). On the domestic front, key initiatives included lowered taxes, reduced government spending, and a balanced budget (Cannon, 2019). Despite the significance of foreign affairs in Reagan’s presidency, only a small proportion of Reagan’s addresses was devoted to foreign policy. A content analysis of his seven speeches revealed that the word count on domestic issues was over 3.5 times more than the word count on foreign issues. As shown in Figure 2, Reagan gave significantly more attention to these domestic policy initiatives than foreign policies. According to the approach taken by Druckman & Holmes (2004) to correlate volume of rhetoric with level of priming, this content analysis suggests that Reagan primed attention away from foreign policy issues.

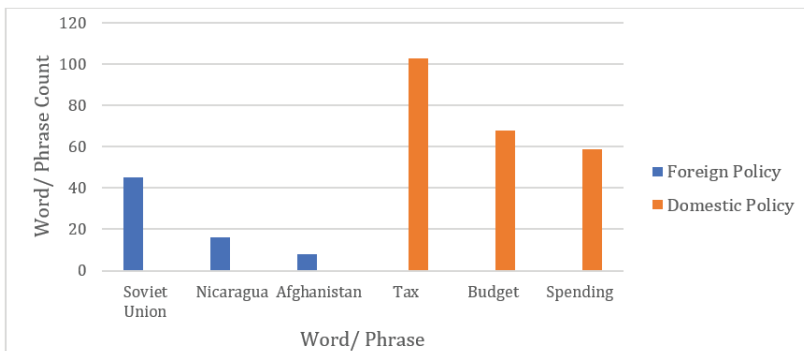


Fig. 2: Content Analysis of Reagan’s Addresses. Source: Miller Center, 2019

Although Reagan primed attention away from foreign issues, these foreign issues still had significant influence

over his approval ratings. Wilcox & Allsop (1991) found that domestic factors, specifically economic factors, were generally the stronger determinant of Reagan's approval ratings; however, foreign policy still had a significant and independent impact on the public's rating of his overall performance throughout his presidency. The importance of foreign affairs was observed even during the economic recession in 1983 and was most pronounced during foreign crises. In fact, during crises such as the US bombing of Libya and the Iran-Contra affair, these issues of foreign affairs were more influential than economic factors in determining Reagan's overall approval ratings. Although my content analysis suggested that Reagan had primed attention away from foreign policy issues, these matters were an important criterion of Reagan's overall approval ratings. Reagan's case thus suggests that volume of rhetoric might be an inaccurate way to reflect the level of priming. This case might also refute my original hypothesis that priming rhetoric is effective.

Image Priming

President Richard Nixon's presidency provides an example of image priming. Similar to Reagan, Nixon devoted very little of his addresses to foreign policy. An analysis revealed that across his four addresses, the content on domestic affairs was almost three times that on foreign affairs. This was an intentional decision by his administration. Since Nixon's team believed that shifting attention away from the politically salient Vietnam War to other foreign policy issues would prove to be futile, they chose to focus issue priming on domestic policy instead of foreign policy (Druckman et al., 2004).

Although the volume of foreign policy rhetoric was low, it clearly sought to prime an image of Nixon as a bold but measured leader. In his first address in 1970, Nixon emphasized the courage in his policy towards Vietnam and China. He stated that his decision to end the Vietnam War represented "courage and character to win the kind of a just peace that the next generation was able to keep" and it was "with this same spirit that we have resumed discussions with Communist China" despite it being a "difficult and dangerous" endeavor (Nixon, 1970). Nixon also

adopted a strong military posture in his rhetoric on foreign policy. For instance, in 1974, he asserted that he would “never allow America to become the second strongest nation in the world... The world's peace, as well as our own, depends on our remaining as strong as we need to be as long as we need to be” (Nixon, 1974). To balance the boldness in his rhetoric on foreign affairs, in the same speech, Nixon also emphasized his diplomatic successes:

In our relations with the Soviet Union, we have turned away from a policy of confrontation to one of negotiation. For the first time since World War II, the world's two strongest powers are working together toward peace in the world... And we will take another giant stride toward lasting peace in the world... by continuing our policy of negotiation rather than confrontation... toward the achievement of a just and lasting settlement in the Middle East.

These quotes provide a sense of the theme of bold but measured leadership in foreign affairs that was central in Nixon’s foreign policy rhetoric.

This theme of bold and measured leadership was an intentional strategy by the Nixon administration to use foreign policy issues to prime his image. Nixon was not well liked by the public and he knew he needed help to improve his approval ratings (Collier, 1997). Leading up to his re-election, Nixon ran an intense public relations campaign from 1969 to 1972 that sought to improve his popularity amongst the public. One objective of this strategy was to strengthen his position in battles against Congress (Collier, 1997). This campaign was unique in its emphasis on improving the president’s personal popularity rather than improving the popularity of his policies (Collier, 1997). To this end, the campaign did not attempt to reverse the public’s perception that Nixon lacked interpersonal skills. Instead, it focused on publicizing Nixon’s achievements in foreign affairs to highlight his competence and strength (Druckman et al., 2004). For instance, as my content analysis found, Nixon’s team

actively promoted the idea that his trip to China was a bold act of leadership (Duckman et al, 2004).

However, the Nixon administration's efforts to prime his image did not pay off. Since competence and strength are qualities that political psychologists have identified as performance traits that voters value the most (Druckman et al., 2004), if Nixon's attempt to prime his image was successful, we would expect to observe his approval ratings to improve from 1969 to 1972, when his team was actively priming his image. In fact, this did not happen. Figure 3 contains a chart of Gallup Polls from Nixon's presidency. It shows that from 1969 to 1972, Nixon's approval ratings generally declined while his disapproval ratings generally increased. Not surprisingly then, Nixon's approval ratings never improved his standing in battles with Congress as he had hoped for (Collier, 1997). Overall, Nixon's case provides a clear example of ineffective image priming and further moderates Druckman & Holmes' (2004) finding that presidential rhetoric effectively primes public approval.

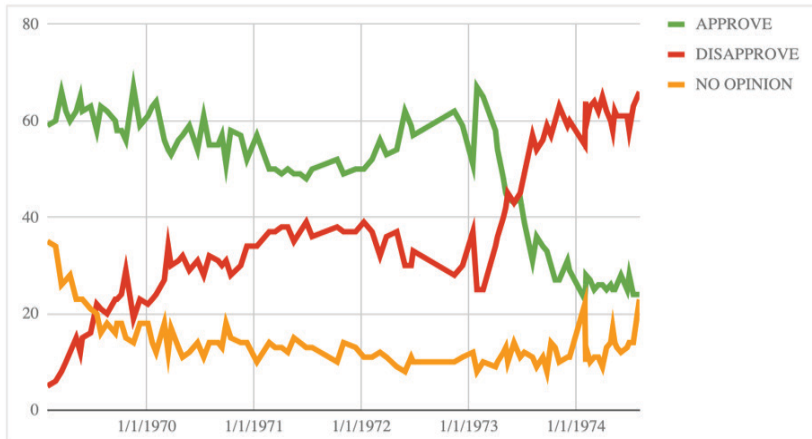


Fig. 3: Nixon's Declining Approval Ratings. Source: Coleman, 2019

B. Bipartisan Rhetoric

An analysis of all State of the Union addresses across the five presidencies reveals that the use of bipartisan rhetoric

generally increased over the administrations studied. Figure 4 contains the average number of times each president said “partisan,” “bipartisan,” or a phrase equivalent to “regardless Republican or Democrat” per address. It indicates that the use of bipartisan rhetoric on both domestic and foreign affairs was generally more prominent in the more recent administrations studied, though it was the greatest during Clinton’s administration. Since the five presidents range from the time period 1960 to 2010, Figure 4 shows the use of bipartisan rhetoric generally increased over those five decades.

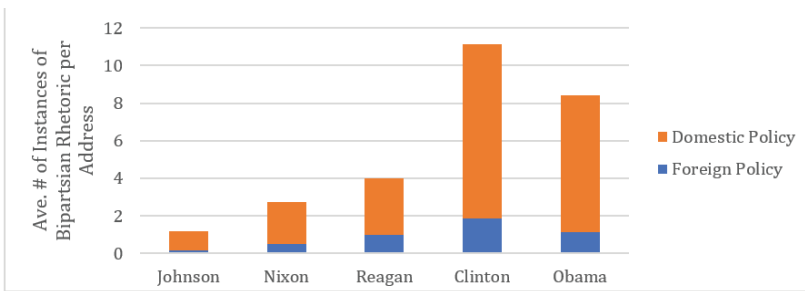


Fig. 4: Level of Bipartisan Rhetoric by Presidency. Source: Miller Center, 2019

Additionally, I found that bipartisanship was most emphasized through Reagan and Clinton’s rhetoric on foreign affairs. Figure 5 contains the average number of times each president used the same, aforementioned set of bipartisan keywords per 1000 words he spoke about foreign affairs. It shows that Clinton, followed by Reagan, had the highest rate of bipartisan rhetoric when speaking about foreign affairs. This suggests that appeals to Congress for bipartisanship on foreign affairs was strongest during these two presidencies. It is not surprising that Clinton made such strong appeals for bipartisanship to Congress; he faced a Republican House and Senate for six out of the eight years in his presidency (Nelson, 2016). It is also not surprising that Reagan made frequent appeals for bipartisanship since he was the first president to serve after the end of the Vietnam War, an event that is widely believed to have caused significant partisan and ideological divides in Congress over foreign affairs (Beinart,

2008).

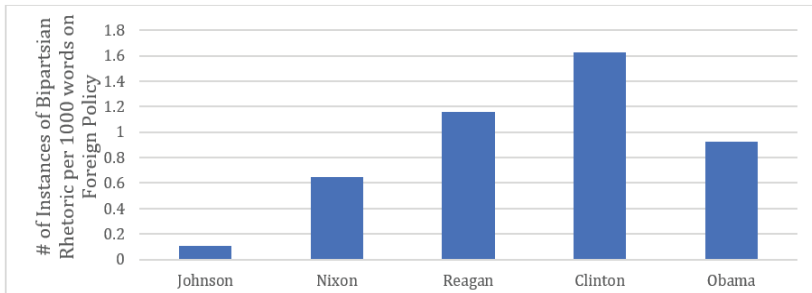


Fig. 5: Level of Bipartisan Rhetoric on Foreign Policy by Presidency. Source: Miller Center, 2019

However, both Clinton and Reagan’s significant use of bipartisan rhetoric was ineffective in promoting bipartisan support through roll call votes by Congress on foreign policy. Figure 6 contains a bar graph of the percentage of roll call votes on foreign policy issues in which the majority of Republicans and Democrats sided with the president, as well as a line graph of the average number of times each president used the same set of bipartisan keywords per 1000 words he spoke about foreign affairs (as in Figure 5). It shows that although the use of bipartisan rhetoric on foreign policy increased almost linearly across the presidencies, there was no correlated increase in bipartisanship in roll call votes by Congress on foreign affairs. In both Johnson and Nixon’s presidencies, approximately 45% of roll call votes on foreign policy received Congress’ bipartisan support. This figure almost halves to approximately 25% during Reagan’s presidency and Clinton’s first term. Since congressional bipartisanship on foreign affairs only rose marginally in Clinton’s second term (Beinart, 2008), it is fair to assume that bipartisan support over Clinton’s entire presidency was also approximately 25%. These findings suggest that presidential bipartisan rhetoric is ineffective in influencing roll call votes by Congress, which supports the conclusion made by Azari et al (2012).

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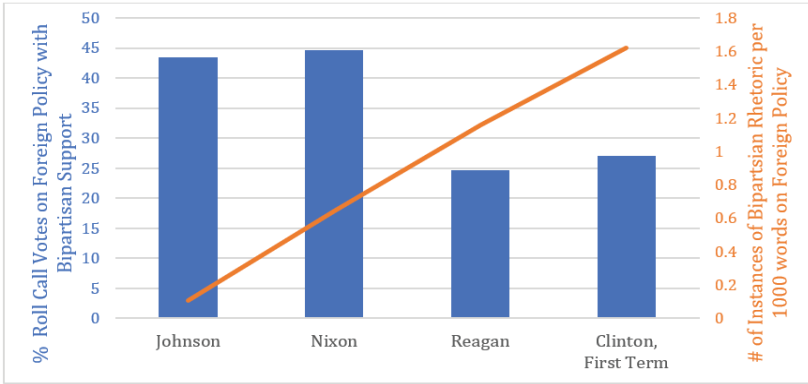


Fig. 6: Bipartisan Rhetoric versus Bipartisan Support on Foreign Affairs. Sources: Meernik, 1993; McCormick, Wittkopf & Dana, 1997

To consider the effectiveness of bipartisan rhetoric on general congressional behavior rather than on just the roll call vote, we examine the impact of President Barack Obama’s bipartisan rhetoric on a specific issue of foreign affairs. This is based on the limitation that Azari et al. (2012) identified in their own study, which only considered roll call votes. Figure 7 breaks down Obama’s bipartisan rhetoric on foreign affairs by topic. It shows that Obama used bipartisan rhetoric on issues related to cybersecurity, foreign aid, the military, and trade.

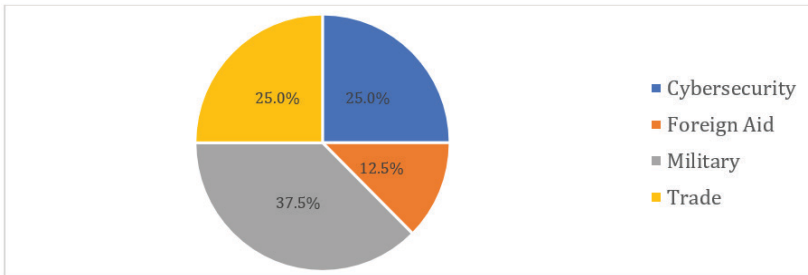


Fig. 7: Obama’s Bipartisan Rhetoric on Foreign Affairs, by Topic

Out of all these instances of bipartisan rhetoric, Obama only made two appeals for Congress to provide support on specific legislative issues regardless of political party. Both appeals related to cybersecurity, a topic that his administration treated as foreign policy (Obama White House, 2020). According to Aiken (2014), tackling cybersecurity threats was a key priority for Obama. However, since efforts to pass legislation had “largely stagnated” due to “congressional inaction,” Obama resorted to signing Executive Order 13636, Improving Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity, in 2013 (p. 1). Several hours after signing this order, Obama urged Congress in his 2013 address to “act as well, by passing legislation to give our government a greater capacity to secure our networks and deter attacks. This is something we should be able to get done on a bipartisan basis” (Obama, 2013). He made another appeal for bipartisanship on the matter in 2015, urging Congress to “*finally* pass the legislation we need to better meet the evolving threat of cyberattacks, combat identity theft, and protect our children’s information. That should be a bipartisan effort” (Obama, 2015). These appeals fell on deaf ears; in 2016, Obama passed two more executive orders to form the Commission on Enhancing National Cybersecurity and the Federal Privacy Council (Aiken, 2014). According to Michael Daniel, Obama’s cybersecurity adviser, the purpose of this “liberal use of executive authority” was to create a structure that allowed the administration to tackle cybersecurity threats without needing to secure additional support from Congress (Korte, 2016). This indicates that Obama never received the bipartisan support from Congress he had appealed for. Obama had asked Congress, regardless of political party, for their support in passing legislation on cybersecurity and not for their support on specific roll call votes. The fact that Obama resorted to three executive orders, two of which sought to reduce congressional powers in cybersecurity, indicates that Obama’s use of bipartisan rhetoric was ineffective. This suggests that bipartisan rhetoric on foreign affairs is ineffective in influencing congressional behavior not just in terms of the roll call vote, but throughout the legislative process.

V. Discussion

Overall, this study is consistent with the current literature that presidents can use issues to prime their approval ratings. The 2004 study by Druckman and Holmes, which formed the basis of the first portion of my hypothesis, was the first to analyze the impact of presidential rhetoric on approval ratings. The authors used a content analysis of Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address to identify the issues he paid the most attention to. They then conducted an experiment and a survey to show that these issues became more important in the public's evaluation of the president's overall performance. My study identified a similar case in Johnson's presidency. A content analysis revealed that Johnson had focused a significant amount of coverage in his addresses on developments in Vietnam. Further research also revealed that his overall approval ratings were closely associated with the public's perceptions of his management of the Vietnam War. Since this case is remarkably similar to Bush's case, it both suggests that issue priming had occurred during Johnson's presidency and lends support to the hypothesis that priming rhetoric is effective.

However, this study finds that the volume of rhetoric is not a key determinant of whether or not an issue is successfully primed. In Druckman and Holmes, the content analysis was conducted to calculate the percentage of speech devoted to each topic to identify the issues which received the most coverage. These issues were then tested and found to have successfully primed Bush's approval. This implies that the volume of rhetoric determines which issues are primed. However, the cases provided by Clinton and Reagan suggest otherwise. Specific foreign policy issues were significant determinants of Reagan's overall approval ratings, despite the fact that a content analysis evaluating the volume of rhetoric suggested that he had primed attention away from those issues. This finding could mean that issue priming is relatively ineffective compared to other factors that determine a president's approval ratings. It could also mean that volume of rhetoric is not a key determinant of the success of issue priming. The latter possibility is supported by Clinton's case. The volume of Clinton's rhetoric on trading relations with Japan was relatively low. However, because of the amplification of his

rhetoric by the media and the public's general sentiments towards Japan, the issue became an important criterion that the public used to evaluate his overall performance (Burden & Mughan, 2003). Considering these two cases together suggests that the volume of presidential rhetoric is not a key factor that determines which issues are primed. This inference seems plausible because presidents face great difficulties directing the public's attention and repeatedly mentioning an issue does not compel the public to care about it (Edwards, 2012). It would make sense if the success of presidential rhetoric depends on other factors too, such as whether or not the media amplifies his message and whether it resonates with the public. This then suggests that Druckman & Holmes' (2004) approach of using volume of rhetoric to indicate the level of priming is incomplete, as there are other important factors to consider.

This argument that the effectiveness of priming rhetoric depends on more than just the volume of rhetoric is strengthened by the findings on image priming. Druckman and Holmes had mixed results on image priming; they found evidence of image priming in their experiment, but not in their national survey. Nixon's case supports the findings of the survey. Although Nixon is only one example, it is a strong case because Nixon's team was unique for its focus on priming the public to support Nixon himself rather than the more common approach of priming the public to support the president's policies. Despite the extensive efforts to prime Nixon's image, Nixon's approval ratings generally decreased throughout his presidency, indicating that the image priming was unsuccessful. Drawing on my findings, which suggest that factors other than the volume of rhetoric can determine the effectiveness of priming rhetoric, I believe that while image priming could theoretically be effective, it failed in both Bush and Nixon's cases because of other unidentified factors. Thus, considering all the cases together, this study lends support to the hypothesis that priming rhetoric is effective. It contributes to the literature by concluding that the extent of this effectiveness likely depends on more than just the volume of rhetoric. For priming to be an effective strategy to win congressional support, further research should be done on the key determinants of success for priming

rhetoric.

This study also supports the literature that bipartisan rhetoric is ineffective in promoting bipartisanship in roll call votes by the Congress. Clinton, followed by Reagan, made the greatest appeals for bipartisanship to Congress regarding foreign affairs. However, the proportion of roll call votes by Congress on foreign policy which received bipartisan support during the presidencies of Clinton and Reagan was approximately half of what it was during the presidencies of Johnson and Nixon. This clearly shows that there is no positive correlation between bipartisan rhetoric and bipartisan roll call votes by Congress. Additionally, this study contributes to the literature by suggesting that bipartisan rhetoric may be ineffective in influencing congressional behavior in general, not just in terms of the roll call vote. Despite Obama's repeated appeals for bipartisan support to pass legislation on cybersecurity, he eventually resorted to passing executive orders to reduce congressional powers in the domain of cybersecurity, indicating that he did not receive the bipartisan support he had asked for. Since Obama's appeals were not for Congress to support him in a specific roll call vote, but for their support on cybersecurity legislation, this case suggests that bipartisan rhetoric may be ineffective in promoting bipartisan support throughout the legislative process. Overall, my findings strongly support the hypothesis that bipartisan rhetoric is ineffective.

One popular theory that explains the ineffectiveness of bipartisan rhetoric in foreign policy is the breakdown of bipartisanship in foreign affairs following the Vietnam War. This theory posits that between World War II and the Vietnam War, there was a strong consensus on America's role in the world and thus strong bipartisanship in Congress over matters of foreign affairs (Meernik, 1993). However, this consensus was shattered and replaced with an unprecedented level of partisanship and ideology in Congress over foreign policy in the wake of the Vietnam War (Wittkopf, 1990). This theory is supported by my finding that bipartisanship in Congress was relatively similar during Johnson and Nixon's presidencies and declined dramatically during Reagan's presidency, which Clinton's presidency later matched. The entrenched partisanship in Congress over foreign affairs

since Vietnam provides an explanation for why the president's rhetoric is so ineffective in promoting bipartisanship in Congress.

Although this study and prior literature provide ample evidence that bipartisan rhetoric is ineffective in influencing Congress on an aggregate level, it may be worth exploring whether it can be effective at the margins. This possibility is based on the ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention by the Senate in 1997 during Clinton's presidency. The Senate's vote to ratify this treaty only passed after the Republican Majority Leader, Senator Trent Lott, came out in support of it and encouraged a few other senators to follow suit (Clymer, 1997). In explaining his change of heart, Lott said that the deciding factor was a letter from President Clinton which contained an "ironclad commitment" that mitigated his concerns over the treaty (Clymer, 1997). Lott also explained his change of heart by adding that "the credibility of commitments made by two presidents of our country—one Republican and one Democrat—is at stake" (Leklem, 2019), suggesting that bipartisanship factored into his decision as well. This incident demonstrates that even in the midst of significant partisanship in politics, the president's efforts to reach across the aisle can be effective. Although I did not find a similar case in my dataset to illustrate the impact of bipartisan rhetoric on individual congressmen, I encourage further study on the matter.

Even if bipartisan rhetoric proves to be as ineffective on the individual level as it is on the aggregate level, the rise in partisanship in Congress ironically may not be disadvantageous for the president's ability to obtain congressional support. A study from 2013 found that entrenched partisanship in Congress and the public solidifies the support the president has from congressmen from his party and his supporters in the public (Sides & Vavreck, 2013). Thus, moving forward, rather than using bipartisan rhetoric to win congressional support, a more effective strategy may be to use partisan rhetoric to cement the support from congressmen in the president's own political party.

VI. Conclusion

This study explores the role that presidential rhetoric on foreign policy plays in the struggle for power between the president and Congress. Although presidential rhetoric can be used effectively to influence Congress to support the president's agenda, it is not a silver bullet. The president's voice is not heard in a vacuum, but instead competes against a multitude of other forces for the attention and support of the public and Congress. As a natural result, many instances of presidential rhetoric fall on deaf ears, even amongst presidents who were known for their popularity and rhetorical skills. This finding weakens Tulis's argument that the use of presidential rhetoric since the twentieth century has allowed presidents to bypass Congress and has irreversibly tilted the balance of power away from Congress and towards the president.

To advance our understanding of the impact of rhetoric on the power dynamic between the president and Congress, further research could explore other types of presidential rhetoric, such as press conferences and social media posts, and the factors which determine their effectiveness. It may also be interesting to explore the impact of rhetoric by congressmen on the president's actions. Since the Internet and social media have evened out the gap between presidential and congressional access to rhetorical platforms, congressional rhetoric is likely to have become more impactful in recent years. Thus, studying the impact of congressional rhetoric may be important for developing a more complete understanding of the nuanced power dynamics between these two branches of government.

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