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## Analyzing policy issues in presidential speeches and the media: An Agenda-setting study

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ANALYZING POLICY ISSUES IN PRESIDENTIAL SPEECHES AND THE MEDIA:  
AN AGENDA-SETTING STUDY

by

Jessica Lynne Hughes

Bachelor of Arts  
University of Cincinnati  
2007

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

**Master of Arts Degree in Journalism and Media Studies  
Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies  
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs**

**Graduate College  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
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\_\_\_\_ Analyzing Policy Issues in Presidential Speeches and the Media: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ An Agenda Setting Study \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_ Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies \_\_\_\_\_

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## ABSTRACT

### **Analyzing Policy Issues in Presidential Speeches and the Media: An Agenda-Setting Study**

by

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Professor of Journalism  
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For decades, researchers have maintained that the president has a significant role in setting the policymaking agenda. In this study, a grounded theory approach was applied to determine President George W. Bush's success in focusing the media's attention toward policies mentioned in his State of the Union Addresses (2002-2008). Bush's issue priorities were determined by coding individual paragraphs as themes. To identify the frequency of these same themes in the media, the front pages of *The L.A. Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* were analyzed one week before and after each address. Coding was limited to every other speech year. Once themes were collapsed, Pearson's chi square tests indicate changes in theme frequency for subsequent media coverage of speech issues in 2002 and 2006: Results suggest, however, that the speech only seemed to affect media coverage in 2002, which could be attributed to Bush's waning public approval.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Influencing the policy agenda has long been viewed as the most important source of presidential authority (Cohen, 1995; Johnson, Wanta, Byrd & Lee, 1995; Schaefer, 1997; Edwards & Wood, 1999; Peake, 2001; Eschbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2005, 2008; Young & Perkins, 2005)<sup>1</sup>. For many years, most agenda-setting researchers have maintained that the president has a significant role in setting the policymaking agenda. Peake and Eschbaugh-Soha (2008) found that, “Agenda setting, or the influence over the attention given to policy issues by other institutions, is perhaps the most important source of presidential power” (p. 113). It is widely believed that presidents have the ability to influence the priorities of government, the media, and the American people by setting the agenda (Peake & Eschbaugh-Soha, 2008).

As Peake and Eschbaugh-Soha (2008) concluded, presidents are uniquely situated to affect the national agenda including what Congress addresses and the issues considered important to the American public and the media. Presidents are often looked to for leadership and they have the advantage of making the news through their speeches and policy pronouncements. In fact, no other political leader is believed to have the ability to focus attention as clearly, or change the motivation of other actors in the political system

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<sup>1</sup> The policy agenda refers to those issues to which political institutions give serious consideration devote a lot of attention.

than the president (Edwards & Wood, 1999). Studies have shown that “presidential success and power is likely to increase if the president is able to influence congressional, media and public attention to issues” (Peake, 2001, p. 70). Therefore, persuading others to focus on presidential priorities is of primary importance in presidential leadership and influence (Peake, 2001).

### *The Purpose of the Study*

Given the popularity and impact of presidential rhetoric on the national agenda and numerous amounts of studies devoted to the understanding of presidential speech, it appears that presidents are in a position to have a lot of influence on the policy agenda. Research has also suggested that national addresses, like the State of the Union address, have a huge impact on the policy agenda. Studying national addresses can provide an account of presidential priorities during their presidency. These studies are important because, by examining presidential rhetoric, researchers can use the data to determine if the president’s issue agenda has an influence on legislation, the public or the media. Such findings could be beneficial to future agenda-setting researchers studying presidential influence.

In this study, an analysis of the most recent president’s rhetoric was conducted. As Bush’s second term has recently come to an end, it is interesting and relevant to discuss his presidential policies and influence during his time in office. Also, given Bush’s waning popularity throughout his presidency, it is interesting to determine whether his decreasing popularity correlated with the media’s attention cycle toward certain issues. It is possible that, as Bush’s popularity decreased, his influence in the media decreased as well.

Grounded theory was used to examine George W. Bush's State of the Union addresses to determine the extent to which some policy issues took precedence over others. To gain a better understanding of the president's policy issue priorities, the current study first examined Bush's speeches from 2002 to 2008. The speeches were coded according to content within each paragraph to determine what themes were present. Once a codebook was developed and the speeches were coded, Pearson's Chi square tests were used to calculate the results.

### *Research Questions*

The results are then compared with media coverage before and after four of the speeches to determine if the president's speech influenced the media. Newspaper articles one week before and one week after the speeches were coded using themes found in the speeches to determine whether the president's issue agenda correlated with subsequent coverage. The front pages of three major newspapers were examined in this study, including *The L.A. Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*. These newspapers have been found in past studies to reflect the agenda of many major media outlets. The study addressed three major research questions:

RQ1: What was Bush's issue agenda during his seven State of the Union speeches?

RQ2: Did Bush's issue agenda seem to influence press coverage following the speech?

RQ3: Did the influence of Bush's issue priorities on the media seem to change as his public approval rate decreased?

In addition this study explored whether there were any differences across the newspapers studied in frequency of themes covered in the speeches.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

According to recent research regarding presidential influence, presidents have the ability to set policy agendas according to issues that they consider important. Many researchers have studied this process using the concept of agenda setting. Agenda setting is described as a process by which one is able to influence the policy issues considered important to other institutions (Peake & Eschbaugh-Soha, 2008). Entman (2007) finds that agenda-setting can be thought of as “successfully performing the first function of framing: defining problems worthy of public and government action” (p. 164). And what other political leader has more power to influence such action than the president? In fact, research suggests that presidents are known to be very effective agenda setters who often influence the salience of issues (Peake & Eschbaugh-Soha, 2008; Schaeffer, 2008).

Entman (2007) finds that agenda-setting is part of the process of framing. Therefore, framing is an important concept to consider. While agenda-setting allows the president to tell institutions what to think about, framing allows for them to influence *how* the media thinks about those issues. Yet, while this is an important concept to consider when studying presidential influence, one limitation to this study is that the concept of framing was not directly addressed. Because of the wealth of amount of work involved to partake in a framing analysis, analysis was based solely on the presence of themes found in the speeches and the media. Future studies should consider analyzing

how Bush discussed issue priorities. In this study of presidential influence over policy issues, a thematic analysis was conducted to examine the influence of the Bush's State of the Union speeches on the media.

### *Background on Presidential Influence*

*The President and Legislation.* The president's national addresses are, in part, meant to address important policy issues in order to influence Congress's agenda. When considering presidential influence on legislation, however, researchers' findings vary. Some studies reveal that researchers are skeptical of the president's ability to set the policy agenda easily because, as they find, the president is very constrained in the decisions he can make, as Congress has a continuing agenda of its own (Edwards & Wood, 1999). Since Congress creates new policies for issues they consider important, they hold a significant role in determining the issue agenda.

But, as researchers also find, presidents can construct the agenda so that legislation is more likely to enact certain policies favored by the president (Steger, 1997). While Congress holds a significant power to influence what the president discusses, the president often uses the knowledge of Congress's issue priorities to influence legislation. In his study, on presidential legislative success, Steger (1997) writes that administrations try to frame the debate and establish the premises on which legislators will base their decisions. In this case, an administration's agenda-setting and policy-initiating activities provide a means of influencing legislator's choices. By proposing legislation, the president is exercising the ability to influence the legislative process that is nonexistent when the administration fails to propose legislation (Steger, 1997).

Thus, manipulating or controlling the agenda for political advantage may help the president to secure success with Congress. The president may be able to advance issues that he favors while keeping those he dislikes from the agenda. Presidents can also boost their popularity by portraying legislative success. Cohen (1995) finds that, “He can use the agenda setting power strategically, promoting issues that Congress is likely to pass, demoting those that are controversial” (p. 88). Therefore, administrations sometimes make strategic alterations in their proposal in response to conferences, anticipations of Congressional responses, and trial balloons floated in the media (Steger, 1997).

*The President and Public Opinion.* Along with the ability to influence legislation, there is a plethora of research dedicated to the president’s ability to lead public opinion (Edwards, 1983; Kernell, 1993; Cohen, 1995). Researchers find that the most important variable in determining presidential influence is popularity, whose possession may enhance the president’s credibility with the public, thereby increasing his ability to influence public opinion. As noted previously, presidents sometimes alter their agenda according to legislative interests and public concerns in order to portray success and boost their popularity with the public.

Cohen (1995) finds that popular presidents have an even greater ability to “influence the public’s policy agenda” (p. 88). The popularity of the president plays an important role in determining the president’s success in focusing attention on certain policy issues. In his study of the president’s ability to lead public opinion on specific policies, Cohen (1995) writes that past research suggests that only popular presidents can influence policies. In fact, unpopular presidents are found to have little influence and may even repel public opinion. While there are limitations in studies of presidential



popularity and the influence on public opinion, presidents can influence public opinion through other means.

Presidents often construct the agenda so that specific policy problems proposed describe necessary measures to alleviate problems. As research shows, “perhaps only popular presidents can get the public to support a policy direction on a specific policy, but the public may respond less discriminately when presidents identify a problem as something that the government should take action on” (Cohen, 1995, p. 88). By proposing action needed to be taken, the public is more likely to approve of the president’s strategies. Researchers find that when popular presidents give attention to certain policy areas in their State of the Union Addresses, the public grows more concerned with those policy areas. As Cohen (1995) writes, increases in presidential attention to economic, foreign and civil rights policy lead to increases in public concern for those policies. Research also suggests that when a president’s major speeches are dedicated to a single policy problem, the public responds. The president just has to mention a policy area to elicit public response. Therefore, presidents do not necessarily have to resort to substantive arguments to sway public opinion.

Other factors may be involved that help determine the public agenda beyond presidential rhetoric such as the state of the economy and the presence of war. Cohen (1995) finds that “when the economy is faltering, people may feel more vulnerable economically, and their attentions will turn in that direction” (p. 93). Therefore, when U.S. is involved in a major war, public concern should turn towards international concerns. Also, as people can attend to only so many policy items at once, trade-offs in attention to different policy issues is expected. When a nation is at war attention to

economic and civil rights should decline. Similarly when the economy is souring, attention to other policy areas should dip. Pre-existing attitudes, real-life experience and the media can also compete with the president for influence over public opinion (Cohen, 1995). For example, those with pre-existing attitudes may be hard to persuade, whereas those without pre-existing attitudes may be impartial to politics. Both may be slightly impervious to the president's message, requiring extra presidential effort.

Presidents must resort to substantive arguments to persuade public opinion rather than merely relying on rhetorical symbolism (Cohen, 1995). Generally, the public is disinterested in politics, therefore, to gain the public's attention a president may have to indicate that a policy problem is significant. The president may have to explain the reasons he/she took certain positions, thereby providing justification to the public and reinforcing the importance of that policy. Cohen (1995) suggests that taking positions on issues that raise ideological debate or adding explicit details about a policy is a form of substantiveness. As Cohen (1995) finds, "policy detail [was] conspicuously lacking in the State of the Union Addresses" he examined from 1953-89 (p. 97). The most apparent trends were found to be presidential positions on issues that divide liberals from conservatives such as reducing or increasing taxes. Substantiveness is also important when considering the media, as the media are known to interpret issues and disseminate important information for the public.

Researchers also find that presidents can manipulate their popularity ratings through the media with political drama, like nationally televised speeches (Edwards & Wood, 1999). Cohen finds that "Presidential influence over the public's policy agenda was found to be a function of his resources and the public's receptivity to his influence

attempts” (1995, p. 88). All presidents have easy access to the public. No other politician or office is given such a prestigious role as the president (Edwards & Wood, 1999). In fact, “none can compete effectively with the president in terms of prestige, status, media access, public attention and interest” (Cohen, 1995, p. 89). Because of the president’s role as the leader of the U.S., he is given more attention from the media. That attention is directly broadcast to millions of homes across the country allowing the president greater power to influence the public

*The President and the Media.* While past researchers examine the impact of presidential rhetoric on the public’s agenda (Cohen, 1995), other studies emphasize the significance of presidents influencing media coverage of their policy priorities (Johnson, Wanta, Byrd & Lee, 1995; Schaefer, 1997; Peake, 2001; Peake & Eschbaugh-Soha, 2008). The media play an important role in influencing the public’s policy agendas. Peake and Eschbaugh-Soha (2008) find that the media are important because they serve as a gateway between presidents and the public. Schaeffer writes, “Even national speeches are conveyed to the public by and often through media; few Americans probably experience a presidential speech directly or without commentary of any kind” (1997, p. 98). Because the media influence which issues the public considers to be pertinent, as well as the public’s familiarity with policy issues, it is the media that the presidents must affect first. The media’s job is to interpret information and disseminate it to the public. As research suggests, there is rarely an instance where the public received information from the president that has not been filtered through the media. Schaefer (1997) finds, “If the president’s main power is the power to persuade and, in the

television age, persuade the public, he is rarely able to do so directly. Presidents must rely on the media to get their message across” (p. 98).

Studies devoted to the examination of the president and the media find that presidential rhetoric affects the media’s policy agenda in a number of ways. For instance, studies reveal that the media may interpret the important policy agendas in accordance with what the president outlines in his agenda (Dutta-Bergman, 2005; Eschbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2005; Kellner, 2007). Given this fact, it is pertinent to the study of the presidential agenda-setting research to consider the relationship between the press and the presidency (Peake & Eschbaugh-Soha, 2008). Since presidential speeches play a key role in influencing how the media promote the agenda, research needs to study specifically what degree the president’s issue agenda is reflected in subsequent media coverage.

Other research contradicts the notion that the president influences the media. Other researchers who examine the effects of presidential speeches on the media find that, rather than the president influencing the media, the media influenced the president. Edwards and Wood (1999) conduct a systematic analysis examining the relationship between what presidents say and what the media cover and conclude that presidents are responsive to the media. In a similar study, Johnson, Wanta, Byrd and Lee (1995) analyze Franklin D. Roosevelt’s first seven State of the Union Addresses to determine what themes were present. Following an analysis of the addresses, they then calculate the degree to which newspaper headlines correlated with issues FDR emphasized in his addresses.

Johnson et al. (1995) examine press coverage both before and after the speeches. If subsequent media coverage of the speech correlated more strongly with the president’s

issue agenda, then this would suggest that the president's State of the Union address affected media coverage. They also calculate the degree to which policy issues in the address correlated with coverage news before the speeches. Johnson et al. (1995) find that FDR reacted to, rather than influenced, coverage in newspapers he read and influenced coverage in newspapers he did not read. These results were found to be connected to historical conditions, amount of exposure to the newspaper, and political leanings of the newspaper.

Given the findings of past studies devoted to the relationship between the president and the media, it is important to continue such research to determine if the president-press relationship has changed. More specifically, as this study intended, more research needs to be conducted on recent presidential rhetoric to determine to what degree the media are influenced by the president, as the media are known to be a gateway for information from the president to the public. Such research would help researchers to determine the degree to which the president influences the national policy agenda.

*The Impact of Presidential Speeches.* Presidential speeches provide the most effective source for examining the effect of presidential rhetoric on legislation, the public, or the media. Presidential speeches, "together with other public events, are used to bolster the political image of, and boost public support for, the president and the president's policies. Studies show that modern presidents, since FDR, now regularly use the power of the pulpit as an important political and governing instrument" (Schaefer, 1997, p. 97). Many scholars who have examined the impact of presidential speeches on the media, find that they are highly important in the study of policy agenda-setting (Johnson et al., 1995; Schaefer, 1997; Kellner, 2007; Peake & Eschbaugh-Soha, 2008).

According to Shaeffer (1997), “Speeches to the nation are the most prominent and potentially influential weapon in the President’s political arsenal” (p. 97). In fact, national speeches provide an excellent resource for studying the influence of the president’s political agenda.

More specifically, scholars find that the president’s State of the Union Address provides an excellent context for studying the relationship between presidential rhetoric and media response. As Schaefer (1997) writes, the State of the Union address is useful because all presidents deliver the speech and it is given around the same time every year, which provides a control for the basis of analysis of presidential rhetoric. The president has little control when to give the addresses, which reduces the possibility that the impact of the speech will be confounded by a dramatic event related to it. Of course there are always outside factors that will affect what the media and the president cover, such as natural disasters, wars and major financial crises.

State of the Union speeches are also important resources for researching political discourse because they are traditionally targeted toward Congress and develop the core of the president’s legislative agenda. Schaffer (1997) finds “They are by necessity important political and policy instruments” (p. 98). State of the Union Addresses are also major events in themselves and, therefore, attract a wealth of media attention both before and after the speeches are delivered. Peake and Eschbaugh-Soha (2008) find that presidents hope to affect the media’s, as well as the public’s, attention to issues through their high-profile speeches, which may be useful in affecting congressional attention to their policy priorities or improving their approval ratings. As Peake and Eschbaugh-Soha

(2008) also find, “the president’s greatest resource to affect news coverage is the national address, given the spectacle that accompanies a much anticipated speech” (p. 114).

Researchers who have studied the impact of presidential rhetoric express the belief that the president’s role allows him an almost unlimited power to influence policy agendas in his favor. This power has been identified in studies examining the affect of the State of the Union Addresses on legislation, the public (Cohen, 2005) and the media (Johnson et al., 1995). As researchers find, the presidents have a number of tools they use that directly affect what the news media cover. Peake and Eschbaugh-Soha (2008) note that presidents routinely hold press conferences, travel abroad and domestically, and make policy statements to affect the coverage they receive. But the president’s greatest resource to affect news coverage is the national address. Therefore, to conduct an analysis of the influence of presidential rhetoric this study first examined President George W. Bush’s seven State of the Union Addresses.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Speeches*

To answer RQ1, what Bush's issue agenda entailed, an examination of Bush's State of the Union Addresses was conducted to determine what themes were present in the speeches. Grounded theory was used to establish the categories (themes) contained in seven speeches from January 2002 until January 2008.<sup>2</sup> A grounded theory approach was chosen to analyze the themes Bush prioritized in his speeches presented to the nation, because, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued, grounded theory is "the best approach for an initial, systematic discovery of theory from the data of social research" (p. 3). Instead of merely starting with a theory and looking for examples to support it or verify it, grounded theory allows the researcher to discover categories based on a systematic examination of the data. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated, "Theory based on data can usually not be completely refuted by more data or replaced by another theory. Since it is too intimately linked to data, it is destined to last despite its inevitable modification and reformulation" (p. 4). Therefore, in order to employ the best method for understanding the context of Bush's speeches, this study took a grounded theory approach and established categories based on the data itself.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix I



Johnson et al. (1995) also used theme analysis in an earlier study in which FDR's State of the Union speeches were coded for dominant themes present. However, instead of examining each line, the unit of analysis for this study was each individual paragraph in each speech. Paragraphs in each speech were chosen as the units of analysis because they reflect the manner in which the president delivers each address. After viewing the televised delivery of each speech, it is apparent that President Bush articulated the address according to the way in which the paragraphs were structured. For example, after every paragraph there was break for a brief pause to allow the audience to applaud. All paragraphs were coded, excluding most introductory paragraphs and all concluding paragraphs as these units do not contain any substantive information useful to this study.

Grounded theory was used to identify discrete concepts that could easily be labeled and sorted in the speeches, such as descriptions of the terrorist threat against the United States, descriptions of action needed to be taken to prevent further attacks at home and abroad, and descriptions of economic issues. Subsequently, the minor themes associated with the same phenomenon were grouped under broader conceptual categories. For instance, minor themes *U.S. Action to Reform the Housing Market* and *U.S. Action to Promote Energy Conservation* were both grouped under the main theme 1 titled *Economic Growth and Reform*.

After examining all seven State of the Union speeches, this study found 60 total individual minor themes. Because of the large variation of themes prevalent in this study, the themes were grouped into 11 main themes. Main themes include: (1) *Economic Growth and Reform*, (2) *Protecting the Social Welfare of U.S. Citizens*, (3) *Support for the Economy/the War or U.S. Troops and Veterans*, (4) *Affordable Health Care*, (5)

*Upholding Morality, (6) Immigration Reform, (7) Humanitarian Aid, (8) Protecting the U.S. from Future Terrorist Attacks, (9) Establishing a Peaceful Democracy in the Middle East, (10) U.S. Exceptionalism, and (11) U.S. Priorities.* SPSS software was used to calculate the frequency of different themes for each speech and the results were displayed using cross-tabulation and a bar cluster chart.<sup>3</sup>

To test for intercoder reliability in the speeches, one independent coder coded four (2002-2005) of the seven speeches. The coder was told to code using the main themes and minor themes in 10% of the speeches.<sup>4</sup> The coder was also told to read the paragraph before each sample paragraph to determine the context in which the paragraph was located. In some cases, reading only the sample paragraph was not sufficient enough information to determine the theme present. A systematic random sample was taken to determine which articles the intercoder should categorize. To calculate intercoder reliability, Cohen's kappa was used. Intercoder reliability from the sample was  $\kappa=.91$ .

Four of the seven speech years were chosen for later comparison with the media. Analysis was restricted to every other speech year (2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008). Choosing every other year seemed like a logical decision rather than to choose four consecutive years as it provides a better reflection of change over time. However, this reduced the number of cases present to analyze. Also, each speech year was considered separately on a case by case basis when calculating results. By analyzing each year separately, it allows the researcher to measure changes in theme frequencies year to year, as the historical context of each speech changes. In other words, in examining the data, it

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix II

<sup>4</sup> Sampling procedure included picking a random number (4) and coding every tenth article following including 4, 14, 24, and so on.

is important to consider outside factors that may affect what is covered in the speech and the media.

### *Newspapers*

In order to answer RQ2, newspaper coverage was examined to determine whether or not press coverage of speech themes changed following each speech. To determine the structure of the policy agenda within the media, the front pages of three newspapers were examined, including *The L.A. Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*. Larger newspapers like the *Times* and the *Post* have been found by past researchers to set the agenda for topics the rest of the media tend to cover. Lexis-Nexis search engine was used to find the articles included in this study. Similar to Johnson et al.'s (1995) study, newspaper coverage was coded one week before and one week after *four* of the seven State of the Union addresses, in order to determine what percentage of newspaper coverage was devoted to topics discussed in the speeches. Articles coded as "Before" included seven days before the speech as well as the speech day, as speeches generally took place at night after the newspaper was published. Articles coded as "After" included seven days after each speech.

Each news article served as a unit of analysis for this study. Articles were coded for the most dominant theme present. An article was defined as any article that contains at least 130 words of the story. In some cases, some of the articles that were defined as front page news were jumps for a story that took place on a different page. After a preliminary examination of the articles, this researcher determined that 130 words were sufficient to determine the main theme of the story. Articles less than 130 words were

rarely developed enough to identify a theme. If any article jumped before 130 words, it was decided that it would not be productive to code.

The constant comparative grounded theory was also used to develop any additional themes found following an examination of the media, as the media discuss issues that would not be found in the national address. Main themes found in the news only include (12) *Local/Regional Coverage*, (13) *U.S. Corporate Monetary Issues*, (14) *Foreign Affairs*, (15) *U.S Political Campaigns*, (16) *Online Fraud*, (17) *Entertainment Issues*, (18) *U.S. Congressional Investigations into Corporate Scandal*, (19) *Environmental Issues*, (20) *Animal Issues*, (21) *Foreign Aid*, (22) *U.S. Health Issues*, (23) *State of the Union Coverage*, (24) *Space Exploration* and (25) *Other*.

A second coder was trained using the codebook developed for both the speeches and the media.<sup>5</sup> The coder read 10 percent of the articles, using systematic random sampling and coded them accordingly.<sup>6</sup> The coder was told to read the entire article and choose the most prevalent theme. In some cases when coding, more than one theme was present. However, the coder was told to code the theme that seemed most dominant throughout. Intercoder reliability would have been much harder to establish as well, as coding units into more than one category can become complicated. Intercoder reliability was checked in all three newspapers for the years 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008. To determine intercoder reliability, this study employed Cohen's kappa to each speech year. Results are as follows: for 2002,  $\kappa = .96$ , 2004,  $\kappa = .95$ , 2006,  $\kappa = .97$ , and 2008,  $\kappa = .87$ .

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix I

<sup>6</sup> Sampling procedure included picking a random number (8) and coding every tenth article following including 8, 18, 28, and so on.

An analysis across newspapers was also conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in issue priorities between each of the three newspapers. Chi square tests show, however, that there was no significant difference between newspapers. Therefore, for this study, all newspaper results were combined together for analysis.

#### *Gallup Poll*

To answer RQ3, the speech and media results were compared to national Gallup Poll results of Bush's job approval rating (2001 to 2009) to determine if public approval trends seem to be reflected in the media coverage of speech issues. Approval ratings were then compared to trends in media coverage of speech issues to determine to what degree media interest in Bush's issue priorities correlated with the American public's approval rating of Bush's job performance. As discussed by Cohen (1995), the public's approval can weigh heavily on the president's influence over the policy agenda.

#### *Procedure for Data Analysis*

Pearson's chi square was used to determine the relationship between the media's and Bush's agendas. SPSS software was used to create a cross-tabulation chart to examine patterns in theme frequency and results from chi square analysis. In order to determine if there was a change in media coverage after the speech, this study first examined the frequency of the 11 main themes derived from the speeches as they appeared in the media before and after the speeches. Following an initial examination of the data, chi square was unable to achieve a valid calculation as the instances of each theme were limited to only four speech years.

In order to achieve a valid chi square calculation, main themes 2 through 7 were collapsed into theme group 2, titled *Social Issues at Home and Abroad*. Main theme 1

was highly predominant so it remained a theme group in itself. Main themes 8 and 9 were combined together into theme group 8 titled *Protecting the U.S. from Future Terrorist Attacks and Establishing a Peaceful Democracy in the Middle-East*, as they both discuss topics related to the war and establishing democracy in the Middle-East. Main themes 10 and 11 were themes that were only present in the speeches and were coded into theme group 25 titled *Other*. Also included in theme group 25, themes 12 through 25 include themes found only in the news. Because this study is only calculating the frequency of themes found in both the news and the speeches together, main theme 25 was disregarded when analyzing results.

While the press-president relationship was the main focus of this study, it is not assumed that the press is the only influence on Bush's agenda. Obviously, the press would have responded to outside events and advisors when drafting their stories. However, the influence of outside events on the media's agenda was not tested in this study. While important, the September 11 events, along with other outside events, go beyond the scope of this study. These factors were discussed qualitatively following the content analysis to help explain fluctuations in correlations between the media and the president.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### *Speech Analysis*

Descriptive analysis of President Bush's seven State of the Union speeches revealed an interesting pattern in frequency of 11 main themes.<sup>7</sup> As the results show, Bush spent a significant amount of time in his speeches addressing four main priorities, including: theme 1: *Economic Growth and Reform*, theme 10: *U.S. Exceptionalism*, theme 8: *Protecting the U.S. from Future Terrorist Attacks*, and theme 2: *Protecting the Social Welfare of U.S. Citizens*.

With respect to main theme 1, *Economic Growth and Reform*, the pattern interestingly fluctuated up and down throughout the years.<sup>8</sup> For instance, results indicate that Bush discussed *Economic Growth and Reform* about 17% of the time in 2003, then interest dropped to about 9% in 2004, but had risen to 23% by 2008. This shows that the priority Bush placed on the economy varied.

Main theme 10, *U.S. Exceptionalism*, which was defined by minor themes *U.S. Progress* and *U.S. Strength*, is also found to be prevalent in Bush's speeches. These themes were indicated whenever Bush discussed U.S. accomplishments or U.S. willpower, courage and strength. Throughout the years, theme 10 was addressed in more

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix I

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix II

than 20% of each speech. This suggests that Bush expressed a high interest in boasting about U.S accomplishments in a significant portion of each of his speeches. This suggests that Bush may have felt it necessary to encourage the public about the success of U.S. policies and initiatives.

Another highly discussed topic included main theme 8, *Protecting the U.S. from Future Terrorist Attacks*. This was not surprising as the U.S. has been involved in war against terrorism since the beginning of Bush's presidency. However, interestingly, attention to theme 8 varied across speech years. The cross-tabulation chart identifies frequent changes in the frequency of this theme from year to year. While presence of this theme remained high in 2002 and 2003 (between 30% and 27%), interestingly, it dropped considerably lower in the following years. By 2005, the frequency fell to about 6% of the speech. Theme 8 then rose to 28% by 2007, but dropped back down to about 13% in 2008.

Main theme 2, *Protecting the Social Welfare of U.S. Citizens*, however, did not fluctuate up and down like the other main themes in the speeches. In fact, the presence of discussion about social welfare seems to be scarce in most of Bush's speeches. In 2002, social welfare issues are discussed in about 11% of the speech and, by 2005, interest in social welfare issues tripled to about 30% of the speech. But, by 2008, interest in theme 2 dropped to just 6%.

#### *Collapsed Themes*

While these results are interesting and may provide data for a future study of presidential speeches, as discussed previously, in order to gain significance in chi square comparisons, this study



collapsed all main themes present in the speeches and the media (themes 1 to 25) into theme groups (theme groups 1, 2, 8, 25).

Table 1 reveals that 2002 speech coverage of theme group 1, *Economic Growth and Reform*, increased from about 11% to 23% by 2008, indicating an increase in attention to economic issues over the years. These results did not change after collapsing themes as theme group 1 remained the same as main theme 1. However, main themes 2 through 7 were collapsed together in to theme group 2 as explained previously. The State of the Union speech discussed theme group 2, *Social Issues at Home and Abroad*, in varying amounts. Interest in theme group 2 increased significantly (about 22%) from 2002 to 2004, and then decreased by about 16% in 2008. Sporadic shifts indicate a rise in interest in social issues at home and abroad in 2004, and a slow decrease in interest over the next few years.

Theme group 8, *Protecting the U.S. from Future Terrorist Attacks and Establishing a Peaceful Democracy in the Middle-East*, was discussed about 38% in 2002 and discussion decreased sharply (by about 20%) in 2004. In 2008, theme group 8 remained about the same as it was in 2004, indicating a huge drop in interest in the war from 2002 to 2008. These results might suggest that the administration had shifted its focus from the war to concerns about the economy and social welfare.

For the speech results, main theme 10, *U.S. Exceptionalism*, and main theme 11, *U.S. Priorities*, were combined into theme 25. In Table 1, theme 25 was titled *Boastful Statements in the Speech*. Results suggest that Bush boasted about U.S. accomplishments in more than 26% of each speech, indicating that Bush may have felt it necessary to

encourage the public that his policies were successful and persuade them to enact new policies proposed by his administration.

**Table 1: Comparing Theme Coverage in Speeches across Speech Years**

<b>Theme Group</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2008</b>
Economic Growth & Reform	7 (11.1%)	6 (8.8%)	12 (17.9%)	16 (22.9%)
Social Issues at Home & Abroad	11 (17.5%)	27 (39.7%)	22 (32.8%)	17 (24.3%)
Protecting the U.S. from Terrorism	24 (38.1%)	12 (17.6%)	15 (22.4%)	15 (21.4%)
Boastful Statements in the Speech	21 (33.3%)	23 (33.8%)	18 (26.9%)	22 (31.4%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>68</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>67</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>70</b> <b>(100%)</b>

\* $\chi^2=19.064$ ,  $df=9$ ,  $p=.025$  (two-sided)

\*For a visual comparison of results see Figure 2

### *Newspaper Analysis*

As discussed previously, this study reviewed media coverage for every other speech year. Using chi square analysis, this study reviewed news coverage before and after four of the seven State of the Union speeches. A cross-tabulation chart was created for each year (2002, 2004, 2006 and 2008), using SPSS software, to identify the frequency in which the theme groups are present before and after the speeches (see Table 2). Calculations indicate statistical significance in years 2002 and 2006.

In 2002, media coverage of speech issues increased by about 8%. Table 2 shows that media coverage of theme 25, *Issues not from the Speech*, decreased, while coverage of speech issues increased. Interestingly, however, coverage of the issue Bush placed the least emphasis on in his 2002 speech, *Economic Growth and Reform*, increased from about 4% before the speech to about 11% after the speech. News coverage for theme 2, *Social Issues at Home and Abroad*, increased slightly by about 3% after the speech. However, news coverage of theme 8, *Protecting the U.S. from Future Terrorist Attacks and Establishing a Peaceful Democracy in the Middle East*, decreased slightly from about 28% to 26%, which is interesting, considering the emphasis Bush placed on the war throughout his speech.

**Table 2: Comparing Media Coverage Before and After the Speech, 2002**

<b>Theme Group</b>	<b>Before speech</b>	<b>After Speech</b>	<b>Speech</b>
Economic Growth & Reform	8 (3.9%)	16 (10.7%)	7 (11.1%)
Social Issues at Home & Abroad	8 (3.9%)	10 (6.7%)	11 (17.5%)
Protecting the U.S. from Terrorism	58 (28%)	38 (25.5%)	24 (38.1%)
Issues not from the Speech	133 (64.3%)	85 (57%)	N/A
Boastful statements in the Speech	N/A	N/A	21 (33.3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>207 (100%)</b>	<b>149 (100%)</b>	<b>63 100%</b>

\* $\chi^2=8.398$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.038$  (two-sided)

In 2004, news coverage of speech issues remained stable. Chi square tests show no statistical significance. Table 3 shows theme changes from before to after the speech

were slight. *Economic Growth and Reform* and *Social Issues at Home and Abroad* decreased slightly, even though Bush emphasized social issues the most. Coverage of *Protecting the U.S. from Future Terrorist Attacks and Establishing a Peaceful Democracy in the Middle-East* remained the same after the speech, despite the fact that Bush spent about 20% of his speech discussing it. Coverage of theme group 25, *Issues not from the Speech*, increased by about 2%.

**Table 3: Comparing Media Coverage Before and After the Speech, 2004**

<b>Theme Group</b>	<b>Before speech</b>	<b>After Speech</b>	<b>Speech</b>
Economic Growth & Reform	9 (5.0%)	4 (2.9%)	6 (8.8%)
Social Issues at Home/Abroad	16 (8.9%)	12 (8.7%)	27 (39.7%)
Protecting the U.S. from Terrorism	30 (16.8%)	23 (16.7%)	12 (17.6%)
Issues not from the Speech	124 (69.3%)	99 (71.7%)	N/A
Boastful Statements in Speech	N/A	N/A	23 (33.8%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>179 (100%)</b>	<b>138 (100%)</b>	<b>68(100%)</b>

\* $\chi^2=.877$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.831$  (two-sided)

However, Chi square calculation shows statistical significance in results for 2006. Table 4 shows that the frequencies in most themes change after the speech. Results indicate that media coverage of *Economic Growth and Reform* increased from 0% before the speech to about 6% after the speech. When discussing *Social Issues at Home and Abroad*, cross-tabulation shows only a slight decrease in media coverage, which is interesting as Bush spent most of his speech discussing this issue in 2006. Coverage of

*Protecting the U.S. from Future Terrorist Attacks and Establishing a Peaceful*

*Democracy in the Middle-East*, however, decreased by about 10%, indicating the media's attention to issues regarding the war waned, which is significant considering Bush's emphasis on protecting the U.S. was high. However, coverage of newspaper issues, *Issues not from the Speech*, increased by about 5% after the speech.

**Table 4: Comparing Media Coverage Before and After the Speech, 2006**

<b>Theme Group</b>	<b>Before Speech</b>	<b>After Speech</b>	<b>Speech</b>
Economic Growth & Reform	0 (0%)	9 (6.3%)	12 (17.9%)
Social Issues at Home/Abroad	16 (11.7%)	14 (9.9%)	22 (32.8%)
Protecting the U.S. from Terrorism	33 (24.1%)	21 (14.8%)	15 (22.4%)
Issues not from the Speech	88 (64.2%)	98 (69%)	N/A
Boastful Statements in the Speech	N/A	N/A	18(26.0%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>137 (100%)</b>	<b>142 (100%)</b>	<b>67 (100%)</b>

\* $\chi^2=12.252$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.007$  (two-sided)

In 2008, Chi square analysis reveals little statistical significance in results.

Results indicate that news coverage changed only slightly after the speech. Table 5 shows a 5% decrease in coverage of *Economic Growth and Reform* after the speech.

There was little to no change in coverage of *Social Issues at Home and Abroad* and *Protecting the U.S. from Future Terrorist Attacks and Establishing a Peaceful*

*Democracy in the Middle-East*, which were covered heavily previously. Yet, coverage of

*Issues not from the Speech* increased from about 70% to 78% after the speech, indicating an increase in attention to newspaper issues.

**Table 5: Comparing Media Coverage Before and After the Speech, 2008**

<b>Theme Group</b>	<b>Before Speech</b>	<b>After Speech</b>	<b>Speech</b>
Economic Growth & Reform	21 (14.6%)	12 (9.3%)	16 (22.9%)
Social Issues at Home/Abroad	7 (4.9%)	6 (4.7%)	17 (24.3%)
Protecting the U.S. from Terrorism	16 (11.1%)	11 (8.5%)	15 (21.4%)
Issues not from the Speech	100 (69.4%)	100 (77.5%)	N/A
Boastful Statements in the Speech	N/A	N/A	22 (31.4%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>144 (100%)</b>	<b>129 (100%)</b>	<b>70 (100%)</b>

\* $\chi^2=2.641$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.450$  (two-sided)

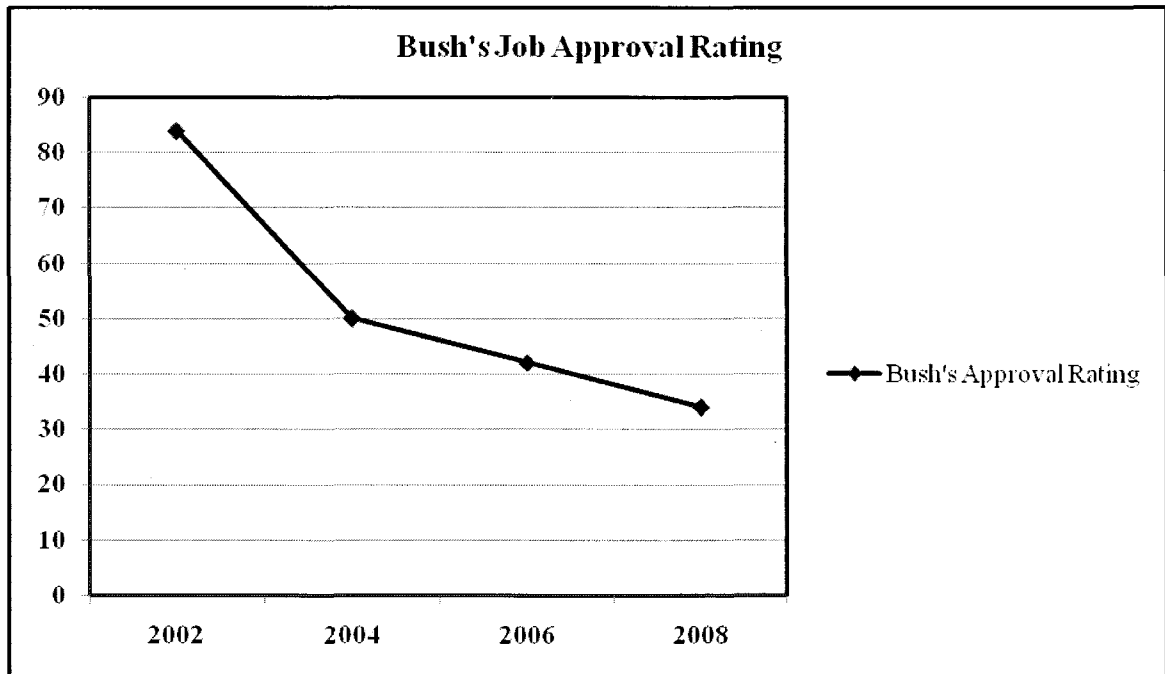
#### *Gallup Poll Analysis*

Gallup Poll results of Bush's job approval rating suggest the public's opinion of his job performance dissipated consistently over the years. While his approval rating average about 62% in his first term, by his second term it averaged a mere 37%. In fact, Bush's approval rating went from one of the highest presidential approval ratings of all time to the lowest approval rating in history.

In January 2002, during the week Bush presented his national address, Gallup Poll results indicate Bush's approval rating was at about 84% (see Figure 1). In January 2004, during the week the address was delivered, Gallup Poll results indicate that Bush's approval rating was at between 53% and 49% indicating a huge decrease in public

approval from 2002. In January 2006, Gallup Poll results suggest that Bush's approval rating continued to decrease. By the time the speech was delivered, results indicate Bush's job approval rating was about 42%, down another 10% from 2004. In January 2008, Gallup Poll results show Bush's approval rating decreased even further to about 34%, which was, yet, another 10% decrease in public approval of Bush's job performance.

**Figure 1: Gallup Poll Results of George W. Bush's Job Approval Rating**



\*Information for this figure was taken from the national Gallup Poll Web Site.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

Results indicate that the president does have some weight over issues the media cover. Coverage following the speech seems to be influenced by Bush's speech in 2002, while subsequent years seem to reflect a shift in media attention away from speech issues. This decreasing pattern is also reflected in result from the Gallup Poll, which shows Bush's popularity shift from the highest presidential approval rating to the lowest. Evidence suggests that a president's popularity can have an effect on his ability to influence the policy agenda.

#### *Speech Results*

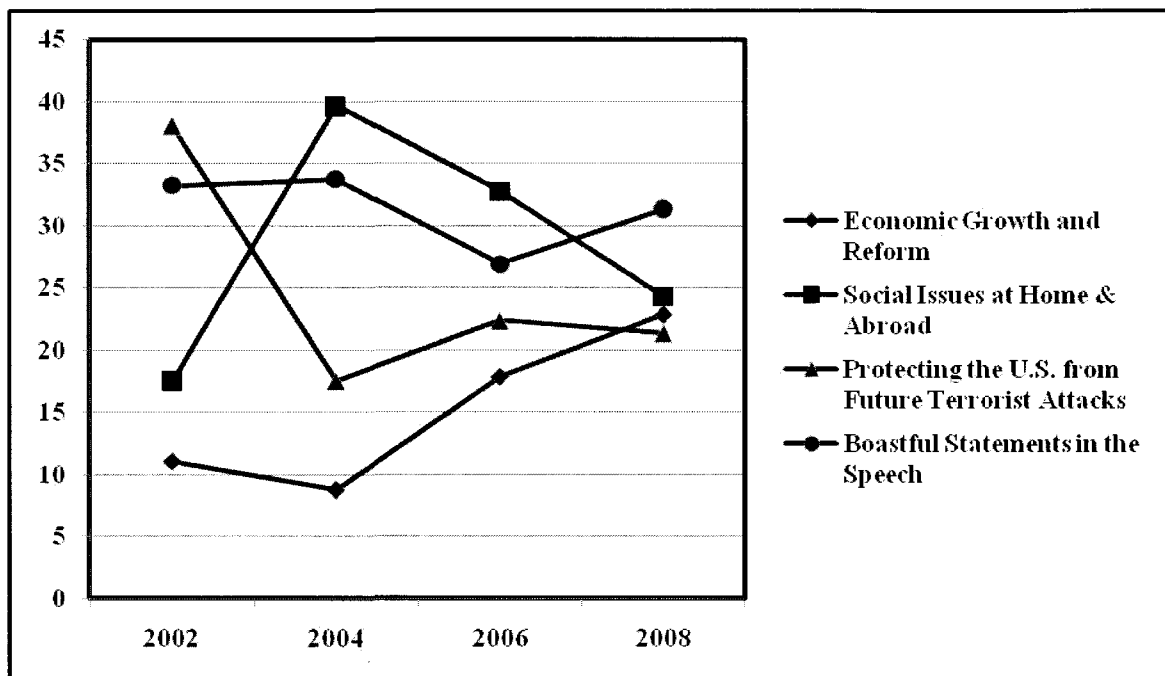
As research suggests, as the leader of the United States, the president holds a central position in the policymaking process. The president can exercise his ability to influence the national policy agenda through nationally televised speeches, like the State of the Union Address. More specifically, presidential speeches may affect what issues Congress, the public, and the media consider priorities. Speech issues addressed are determined by the historical context of the speeches. Therefore, the following analysis addresses external factors from each speech year that may have influenced Bush's issue agenda.

Results from the speech analysis suggest that Bush placed priority on certain issues while giving less attention to others. The most prevalent themes in his speeches



were *Economic Growth and Reform*, *Boastful Statements in the Speech*, *Protecting the U.S. from Future Terrorist Attacks* and *Establishing a Peaceful Democracy*, and *Social Issues at Home and Abroad*. Yet, while these themes were discussed heavily, the priority Bush places on these issues change from over time. Figure 2 provides a visual comparison of the frequency of themes in the speeches.

**Figure 2: Comparing Speech Theme Frequencies across Speech years**



These fluctuations in theme frequencies were mostly likely the result of historical conditions of the time. For instance, Bush discussed *Protecting the U.S. from Future Terrorist Attacks* very frequently in 2002. This is not surprising as the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001 and Bush's State of the Union was delivered only months later on January 29, 2002. But by 2004, election year, Bush's emphasis on

protecting the U.S. from future terrorist attacks dropped dramatically. This could be explained by the fact that the American public seemed to disapprove of Bush's handling of the situation in Iraq. So, as discussed previously, Bush may have decided to discuss policy issues that he seemed to have more success with to appear more successful in implementing his policies.

While Bush may have thought discussing the war less would be more helpful to his political agenda, other external factors may also have affected Bush issue agenda in 2004. As Bush's policy priorities shifted away from the war, they shifted more toward the economy and social concerns. This could be related to the public's growing concern about the progress of the war. At the time, the American public may have believed that the high price of the war was starting to affect the U.S. economy and U.S. citizens' social welfare. As one CBS public opinion poll from January 2004 suggests, 51% of the public believed "the war was not worth the costs" (Arak, 2004, para 3). Two years later, only 30 percent of people approved of how Bush was handling the war in Iraq (Roberts, 2006, para 8).

By 2006, Bush shifted attention from his progress in Iraq toward what the public was really concerned with at the time: social conditions. For instance, in August 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit the United States causing the worst devastation from a hurricane in United States history. By 2006, damages in the United States were estimated to cost about \$150 billion to repair. Affected areas included Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Florida and the Gulf Coast. Katrina also displaced more than one million people in the United States causing the largest diaspora in the history of the United States. These damages also weighed heavily on the economy. The Gulf Coast highway infrastructure

used to export commodities was destroyed as well. Katrina damaged or destroyed 30 oil platforms and caused the closing of nine oil refineries, which created an interruption in the country's oil supply. All the devastation was followed by very harsh criticisms of the government's response to Hurricane Katrina, which consisted of condemnations of mismanagement and lack of leadership. Many people believed Bush was directly responsible for the disaster, deciding that the administration failed to react promptly and adequately to Hurricane Katrina. One CBS News poll found that "two out of three Americans said they do not think President Bush has responded adequately to the needs of Katrina victims. Only 32 percent approve of the way Bush is responding to those needs" (Roberts, 2006, para 5). Therefore, it is not surprising that Bush's issue agenda emphasized policy initiatives regarding social concerns.

By 2008, Bush began to spend more time addressing economic concerns of the time. People grew more concerned with the economy as the housing market slump seemed to continue, job losses continued to rise and federal banks were in disarray or on the verge of bankruptcy. At the time, a CBS News poll indicates that the economy was a top concern for 37% of Americans (CBS News, 2008, para 5). The poll also indicates that 66% of Americans believed the United States was in a recession (CBS News, 2008, para 4). Bush spent more time than in any other speech previously discussing economic concerns. Perhaps as his presidency came to a close, Bush decided that he would finish his term trying to mend the economy since his term would not see the end of the war.

#### *Speech and Media Results Comparison*

After reviewing the results of news coverage of speech themes before and after the speeches, evidence seems to suggest that the State of the Union address did influence

subsequent media coverage to some degree. According to the results, media coverage following the 2002 speech seemed to shift away from issues found in the news toward speech issues. This is not surprising considering polls at the time seemed to express a high public approval rating for Bush's job performance at the time, higher than any previous president. A 2002 CBS News poll, taken just two weeks before the national address, indicated that 82% of the American public approved of Bush's performance (CBS News 2002, para 5). Media coverage of speech issues was the highest during this year because at the time Bush was seen as a great leader and, therefore, the media probably followed his lead. This could also be explained by the "rally round the flag" effect that researchers have found to occur when a nation is at war (Bishop, 2005, p. 130). As Bishop (2005) finds, after September 11 people seemed to have a higher approval of the government and its policies.

Yet, in 2002, results also show that the media did not necessarily place the same emphasis on speech issues as the year's speech did. Although Bush emphasized protecting the U.S. more than any other issue his speech, the media actually discussed the issue slightly less than they did before the speech. But outside factors could have contributed to this decrease in attention to war coverage. This could be explained by the fact that media was paying more attention to more local news issues at the time. For instance, Enron's corporate scandal investigations dominated much of the news coverage throughout 2002. And, with the collapse of Enron, the media also became more concerned with social welfare and the economy, as Enron's collapse affected both areas.

By 2004, media coverage after the speech remained the same as coverage before the speech. Little changes occurred in coverage of any issue. Media coverage was

completely unaffected by the speech. The media seemed to disregard the speech. Yet, media coverage did seem to place the same amount of importance on issues that Bush discussed in his 2004 speech. Table 3 shows that, considering speech issues only, the media spent the most time discussing *Protecting the U.S. from Future Terrorist Attacks and Establishing a Peaceful Democracy* and *Social Issues at Home and Abroad*, which correlated with the amount of attention Bush devoted to the issues during that year. Just as the media paid the least amount of attention to the economy, Bush issue agenda followed suit. This does not necessarily mean that Bush influenced the media in any way, but simply that the media and the president were on the same page.

Media coverage in 2006, however, changed significantly following the speech. Yet, while analysis of media coverage shows significant changes, those changes do not seem to be influenced by the speech. For instance, as Table 4 shows, the media increased coverage of *Issues not from the Speech*. And, while Bush placed more emphasis on social issues than any other issue, the media decreased their coverage of these issues. Also, while Bush spent a good portion of his speech discussing the war, media coverage of the issue decreased significantly. Furthermore, although Bush placed the least attention on *Economic Growth and Reform*, media coverage of the issue increased.

By 2008, however, the media seem to be completely ignoring Bush. Coverage of *Issues not from the Speech* increased significantly. Although Bush covered each theme group about equally, the media seemed to move their attention in a different direction, continuing the trend toward more local issues rather than national issues. Most of the stories in the three newspapers examined covered economic and social issues specific to their areas. For instance, *The Washington Post* began to cover local issues like school

levies, the local job market and the housing crisis in Washington. Concern with national affairs seemed to dissipate after the speech. It seems that the media wanted to highlight the conditions of the area in which the newspaper resides. Perhaps they began to adjust news coverage in order to personalize the news so that it catered to the regional community. Or, perhaps the media was just following the historical context of the time. For instance, during the examination of the newspapers, the media were found to spend the most time covering local politics as it was an election year. This shift in coverage seems to indicate that the media were not affected at all by Bush's 2008 speech, even though coverage before and after the speech differed.

#### *Gallup Poll and Media Results Comparison*

As research suggests, a president's popularity can also determine the amount of attention given to certain policy issues. Or, as this study seems to show, the public's opinion of the president may influence whether or not the media give attention to issues the president considers important. When the president did not seem to perform his job well, the media seem to have decreased their attention to presidential policy priorities and covered what they considered important.

Gallup Poll results show Bush's popularity decreased significantly over the years. The decrease in popularity tracks the media's attention following the speech. In January 2002, when Bush's popularity was at an all-time high, the news seemed to reflect an increase in speech issues after the speech. Media coverage of *Issues not from the Speech* decreased. Perhaps Bush's high popularity rate allowed him greater influence over the media's agenda. By 2004, there was a 30% drop in Bush's popularity as the public grew more concerned with Bush's handling of the war in Iraq. Subsequently, media coverage

remained unaffected by the speech. This could be attributed to the fact that the media were growing less interested in Bush's agenda issues.

Gallup Poll results then show another 10% decrease in public approval following Bush's 2006 speech. As discussed previously, the public was greatly dissatisfied with Bush's response to Hurricane Katrina. Media results seem to follow the public's disapproval of Bush by demonstrating a lack of interest in speech issues. Media coverage of *Issues not from the Speech* increased significantly. While media coverage began to turn toward speech issues following the speech, the newspapers seemed to have a different opinion about the degree to which issues should be covered. While Bush spent more than 20% of his speech discussing the war, media coverage of the war decreased by 10%. And, while Bush spent the least amount of time of all the issues that year discussing economic concerns, media coverage of economic issues increased significantly. Furthermore, although Bush discussed *Social Issues at Home and Abroad* the most, media coverage of social issues decreased. It seemed as though the media were trying to emphasize issues more important to them, showing that the media were disagreeing with how Bush prioritized his speeches.

By 2008, Gallup Poll results indicate that Bush's approval rating had dropped to just 34%, yet another 10% decrease from the previous year. Following this decrease in popularity, the media seemed to be influenced even less by Bush's speech. After the speech, coverage of *Issues not from the Speech* increased even more than they had two years prior. Media coverage also seemed to disregard Bush's emphasis on the remaining three themes by, instead, covering issues in varying amounts that seem utterly unrelated to the speech. So as Bush's popularity decreased, the media's attention to his issue

priorities decreased as well, indicating Bush's popularity may have lessened his influence on the media.

### *Conclusions and Implications for Further Study*

These findings shed light on the capability of presidents to influence the policy agenda. While some researchers find that the president does not seem to influence the media, this study shows that the presidential speech does seem to have some impact on subsequent media coverage. But those same researchers fail to address the issue of public opinion in their studies, which may have affected the way they viewed the results. While this study only indicates that Bush had an influence on the media in 2002, it also factors in the decreasing public approval of Bush's job performance. By including the Gallup results in this analysis, this study was able to conclude that Bush's influence may have been affected by the public's growing disapproval. As results show, while media attention to speech issues decreased over the years, that decrease paralleled the public opinion of Bush's job performance. The media seem to reflect Bush's issue agenda in 2002, during the peak of Bush's presidency when his popularity was the highest. As his approval rating dropped, the media's attention continued to shift away from speech issues.

While this study provides interesting findings for future studies regarding presidential agenda-setting, it is not without limitations. This study only examined media coverage for four of the seven speech years. This limited the amount of cases to examine in the study. Further analysis would be able to provide an assessment of media coverage throughout Bush's entire presidency. The years that were not included here may provide interesting findings that could allow for a more thorough evaluation of Bush's influence



on subsequent media coverage. Future researchers who seek to analyze Bush's impact on the media may want to consider analyzing media coverage in all seven speech years to gain a more complete idea of the media's responsiveness to Bush's issue agenda.

Also a limitation, when analyzing the speeches and the media, only the frequencies of themes as they appear in the speeches and the media were considered. A framing analysis of how Bush or the media discussed the issues was not included. As Entman (1993) finds, agenda-setting is considered to be step one of the framing process as it allows researchers to identify specific issues addressed. Including an analysis of how the speeches were framed would provide future researchers a better indication of the influence of the president on the media. This way, instead of merely recognizing that they discuss the same issues, which could be attributed to historical or external factors, results would show if Bush influenced *how* the media addressed the issues.

## APPENDIX I

### COLLAPSED THEMES CODEBOOK

**Theme Group 1:** same as main theme 1.

*Main theme 1:* Economic Growth and/or Reform: a discussion regarding the growth and reform of the U.S. economy, including such topics as the job market, U.S. spending, tax relief, protecting small business, trade, research and technology, U.S. energy production and research, use and independence, the U.S. housing market, and/or balancing the federal budget.

**Theme Group 2:** Social Issues at Home and Abroad: a combination of main themes 2 through 7, which all discuss improving the social welfare of U.S. citizens and as well as citizens of different countries.

*Main theme 2:* Protecting the Social Welfare of U.S. Citizens: discussion of improving the social welfare of U.S. citizens, including protecting the welfare of children, protecting civil rights and liberties (such as surveillance issues presented in 2006), fair treatment of workers, protecting citizen's rights, reforming or improving education, educational issues, protecting retirement benefits, and/or preventing the use of illegal or harmful drugs.

*Main theme 3:* Support for U.S. Policies, the War and/or U.S. Troops and Veterans: discussion of support from U.S. citizens for U.S. policies, programs and international affairs, as well as support from U.S. allies, or lack thereof, and/or a discussion of the unity of political parties on important decisions.

*Main theme 4:* Affordable Health Care: discussion of current health care issues such as creating affordable health care for all U.S. citizens.

*Main theme 5:* Upholding Morality: discussion of protecting morality including such issues as abortion, cloning, religious causes, and gay marriage.

*Main theme 6:* Immigration Reform: discussion of issues regarding immigration and immigration policies in the U.S.

*Main theme 7:* Humanitarian Aid: discussion of humanitarian aid, including such issues as personal donations, Red Cross donations, alleviating poverty, ending starvation, charities, decreasing the spread of STD's like AIDs and/or response to, and issues regarding national disasters.

**Theme Group 8:** a combination of main themes 8 and 9, which both discuss topics related to the war against terrorism and U.S. policies in the Middle-East.

*Main theme 8:* Protecting the U.S. from Future Terrorist Attacks: includes topics related to the war against terrorism in the Middle East including Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Iran, Lebanon; and Asia including Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Sept. 11 attacks, homeland security, nuclear energy, the terrorist threat, implementing policies related to the war on terror, and/or discussing oppressive regimes in other countries that may pose a threat to the U.S like North Korea, Iran, Burma, Zimbabwe and Syria.

*Main theme 9:* Establishing a Peaceful Democracy in the Middle-East: a discussion of issues related to U.S. policy in the Middle East, including establishing a democracy in the Middle East and other regions, which may include a discussion of elections.

**Theme Group 25:** a combination of topics that were not discussed in both the media and the president's speeches, which included main themes 10 and 11 from the speech and main themes 12 to 25 from the newspapers.

*Main theme 10:* U.S Exceptionalism: Promoting U.S. Strength and Accomplishments: a discussion of the success of U.S. policies related to alleviating the terrorist threat, social welfare, retirement benefits, affordable health care, immigration reform, humanitarian aid, democratic reform in the middle east and/or protecting morality.

*Main theme 11:* Promoting Presidential Priorities as U.S. Priorities: discussion of U.S. main objectives.

#### **News Codebook**

*Main theme 12:* Regional/Local Issues: articles that discuss issues related to specific cities in which the newspaper resides including such issues as land issues, traffic accidents and safety, pollution specific to that area, political campaigns, crime or other issues such as urban growth, education and economic issues within that region.

*Main theme 13:* U.S Corporate Monetary Issues: articles that discuss corporate scandals and/or bankruptcy, such as the collapse of Enron in 2002, as well as discuss the current monetary situation of national businesses, organizations, corporations, associations, and agencies.

*Main theme 14:* Foreign Affairs: articles that discuss foreign affairs including such issues as China's coal mining industry (LAT Jan. 23 2002), crime and local acts of violence, as well as economic conditions in other countries. Topics might also include information about a country's financial situation, as well as the current state of each country's policies and programs or events, illnesses or various other topics in other countries not related to the war.

*Main theme 15:* U.S Political Campaigns: articles that discuss current political campaigns, including topics where the candidates stand on certain issues (such as gay marriage LAT Jan. 23, 2002 and health care LAT Jan. 27 2002) and campaign scandals, or any other information pertaining to voting, political campaigns and/or political donations, or political staff appointments.

*Main theme 16:* Online Fraud: articles that discuss scams, fraud or pirating on the internet.

*Main theme 17:* Entertainment Issues: articles that mainly discuss sports, the Olympics, musicians, actors, or any kind of performances, events, attractions or shows that entertain the U.S. public.

*Main theme 18:* U.S. Congressional Investigations into Corporate Scandal: articles that discuss the government's current investigations into corporate scandals.

*Main theme 19:* Environmental Issues: articles that discuss environmental issues such as oil spills or deforestation or protecting national monuments and global warming.

*Main theme 20:* Animal Issues: articles that discuss issues related to treatment of animals, both domesticated and wild.

*Main theme 21:* Foreign Aid: articles that discuss any kind of U.S. aid to other countries, such as reconstruction efforts and monetary aid.

*Main theme 22:* U.S Health Issues: articles that discuss issues related to health such as illness, disease and other health concerns or discuss health organization issues and the quality of health care.

*Main theme 23:* State of the Union Coverage: articles that cover the State of the Union Speeches themselves or discuss the upcoming speech.

*Main theme 24:* Space Exploration: articles that discuss NASA or any topic related to outer space.

*Main theme 25:* Other: articles that do not fall under any of the previous themes that may talk about national crime issues, loss of life, historical events, ect.

APPENDIX II

COMPARISON OF SPEECH THEMES ACROSS ALL SEVEN SPEECH YEARS

		Speech Years						
		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<b>Main Theme</b>	<b>1</b>	7	13	6	5	12	9	16
		11.1%	16.7%	8.8%	9.4%	17.9%	15.5%	22.9%
	<b>2</b>	3	6	7	16	8	2	4
		4.8%	7.7%	10.3%	30.2%	11.9%	3.4%	5.7%
	<b>3</b>	7	5	5	4	6	3	4
		11.1%	6.4%	7.4%	7.5%	9.0%	5.2%	5.7%
	<b>4</b>	1	6	7	1	2	4	2
		1.6%	7.7%	10.3%	1.9%	3.0%	6.9%	2.9%
	<b>5</b>	0	2	5	3	1	0	2
		.0%	2.6%	7.4%	5.7%	1.5%	.0%	2.9%
	<b>6</b>	0	0	2	1	1	3	2
		.0%	.0%	2.9%	1.9%	1.5%	5.2%	2.9%
	<b>7</b>	0	6	1	1	4	2	3
		.0%	7.7%	1.5%	1.9%	6.0%	3.4%	4.3%
	<b>8</b>	19	21	7	3	10	16	9
		30.2%	26.9%	10.3%	5.7%	14.9%	27.6%	12.9%
	<b>9</b>	5	1	5	6	5	4	6
		7.9%	1.3%	7.4%	11.3%	7.5%	6.9%	8.6%
	<b>10</b>	14	17	22	11	15	12	21
		22.2%	21.8%	32.4%	20.8%	22.4%	20.7%	30.0%
	<b>11</b>	7	1	1	2	3	3	1
		11.1%	1.3%	1.5%	3.8%	4.5%	5.2%	1.4%
	<b>Total</b>	63	78	68	53	67	58	70
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

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