

**PERSUASION IS NOT POWER**  
**The Nature of Presidential Leadership**

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**Abstract**

After briefly reviewing the theory and evidence regarding the impact of presidential persuasion, I provide an alternative view of presidential leadership as facilitating change. Next, I analyze current issues to show that the different orientations lead us to ask different questions about the president's leadership efforts and to arrive at different conclusions about their consequences. Finally, I suggest avenues for studying leadership without persuasion that will enhance the prospects of our making progress in understanding presidential power.

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Leadership is perhaps the most commonly employed concept in politics. Politicians, pundits, journalists, and scholars critique and analyze public officials, attributing both success and failure to the quality of their leadership. When times are bad, as people often perceive them to be, the reflexive call is for new—and better—leadership.

The president is the most prominent focus of political leadership in the United States, and the notion of the dominant president who moves the country and the government by means of strong, effective leadership has deep roots in American political culture. Those chief executives whom Americans revere have taken on mythic proportions as leaders. Anecdotes abound about their remarkable persuasive powers, fed by the hagiography that envelops presidents and distorts both our memories and our critical faculties.

Even though both the public and commentators are frequently disillusioned with the performance of individual presidents and recognize that stalemate is common in the political system, Americans eagerly accept what appears to be effective presidential leadership as evidence on which to renew their faith in the potential presidential persuasion to engender change. After all, if presidential leadership works some of the time, why not all of the time? Thus, it seems quite natural for liberal commentators to complain that President Obama was failing to exploit the potential of the bully pulpit.<sup>1</sup>

## **Leadership as Persuasion**

Despite all the attention to leadership, it remains an elusive concept, and there is little consensus even on what leadership is. According to James MacGregor Burns, “Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.”<sup>2</sup> Writers and commentators employ the term “leadership” to mean just about everything a person who occupies what we often refer to as a position of leadership does—or should do. When we define a term so broadly, however, it loses its utility. Making tough decisions, establishing an administration’s priorities, and appointing good people to implement policy are core functions of the presidency. Yet these activities are quite different from, say, obtaining the support of the public, the Congress, or other nations for the president’s policies.

There is no question that the Constitution and federal laws invest significant discretionary authority in the president. Making decisions and issuing commands are important, and doing them well requires courage, wisdom, and skill. At times, the exercise of unilateral authority may lead to historic changes in the politics and policy of the country. In the extreme case, the president can choose to launch a nuclear attack at his discretion. The consequences would be vast. Most people, however, would not view such an act as one of leadership. In exercising discretionary authority, the president, in effect, acts alone. He does not have to *lead*. At its core, decision making represents a different dimension of the job of the chief executive than obtaining the support of others.

Persuasion refers to causing others to do something by reasoning, urging, or inducement. Influencing others is central to the conception of leadership of most political scientists. Scholars of the presidency want to know whether the chief executive can affect the output of government by influencing the actions and attitudes of others. In a democracy, we are particularly attuned to

efforts to persuade, especially when most potentially significant policy changes require the assent of multiple power holders.

An important element of a chief executive's job may be creating the organizational and personal conditions that promote innovative thinking, the frank and open presentation and analysis of alternatives, and effective implementation of decisions by advisers and members of the bureaucracy. We may reasonably view such actions as leadership, and there is no doubt that the processes of decision making and policy implementation are critical to governing. For purposes of this paper, however, I focus on leadership of those who are not directly on the president's team and who are thus less obligated to support his initiatives.

### **Richard Neustadt and the Power to Persuade**

Perhaps the best-known dictum regarding the American presidency is that "presidential power is the power to persuade."<sup>3</sup> It is the wonderfully felicitous phrase that captures the essence Richard Neustadt's argument in *Presidential Power*. Neustadt argued that the American political system is not a fertile field for the exercise of presidential leadership. Most political actors, from the average citizen to members of Congress, are free to choose whether to follow the chief executive's lead; the president cannot force them to act. At the same time, the sharing of powers established by the Constitution's checks and balances prevents the president from acting unilaterally on most important matters and gives other power holders different perspectives on issues and policy proposals. Thus, the political system compels the president to attempt to lead while inhibiting his ability to do so. He has to rely on persuasion.

For more than half a century, scholars and students—and many presidents—have viewed the presidency through the lens of Neustadt's core premise. Published in 1960, his framework was strikingly different from those of Edward S. Corwin<sup>4</sup> and Clinton Rossiter<sup>5</sup> that had dominated presidential scholarship. These differences were to have important consequences for the way many scholars would examine the presidency over the ensuing decades, as the emphasis on persuasion encouraged moving beyond Corwin's focus on the formal powers of the presidency and Rossiter's stress on roles. In Neustadt's words, "'powers' are no guarantee of power"<sup>6</sup> and "[t]he probabilities of power do not derive from the literary theory of the Constitution."<sup>7</sup>

Power, then, is a function of personal politics rather than of formal authority or position. Neustadt placed people and politics in the center of research, and the core activity on which he focused was leadership. Indeed, the subtitle of *Presidential Power* is *The Politics of Leadership*. In essence, presidential leadership is the power to persuade.

Following Neustadt's lead, scholars began to study the people within institutions and their relationships with each other rather than to focus primarily on the institutions themselves and their formalities. It was not the roles of the president but the performance of those roles that mattered. It was not the boundaries of behavior but the actions within those boundaries that warranted the attention of scholars. In other words, scholars began to study presidents attempting to lead by persuading others to follow them. The president's need to exercise influence in several arenas led those who follow Neustadt's power perspective to adopt an expansive view of presidential politics that includes both governmental institutions and actors,

such as the Congress, bureaucracy, and White House staff, and those outside of government, such as the public, the press, and interest groups.<sup>8</sup>

Three critical premises underlay Neustadt's argument that presidential power is the power to persuade. Both have had a powerful impact on studying the presidency. The first stems from the fact that power is a concept that involves relationships between people. By focusing on relationships and suggesting why people respond to the president as they do, Neustadt shifted us into a more analytical mode. To understand relationships, we must *explain* behavior.

Equally important, Neustadt was concerned with the strategic level of power:

There are two ways to study "presidential power." One way is to focus on the tactics . . . of influencing certain men in given situations. . . . The other way is to step back from tactics on those "givens" and to deal with influence in more strategic terms: what is its nature and what are its sources? . . . Strategically, [for example] the question is not how he masters Congress in a peculiar instance, but what he does to boost his chance for mastery in any instance.<sup>9</sup>

Neustadt, then, was less interested in what causes something to happen in one instance than in what affects the probabilities of something happening in every instance. To think strategically about power, we must search for generalizations and calculate probabilities. Although he employed neither the language nor the methods of modern social science, Neustadt was clearly a forerunner. His emphasis on reaching generalizations about presidential power discouraged ad hoc explanations and may have been his greatest contribution of all.

Neustadt's second premise was that presidents would have to struggle to get their way. He began with analyzing what presidential power was not. It was not the power to command. Indeed, it was the inherent weakness of the presidency that made it necessary for presidents to understand how to use their resources most effectively. As he put it, "The power to persuade is the power to bargain."<sup>10</sup>

The third premise has had a less benign impact. There is an important a prescriptive element in *Presidential Power*. Neustadt's central motivation for writing the book was to offer advice to presidents to help them help themselves with their strategic problem of power. Implicit in his effort to aid presidents in leading was the implication that they *could succeed* in persuading others if they were skilled enough at recognizing and protecting their interests and exploiting critical resources.

To be fair, Neustadt was a brilliant analyst who had no illusions about the difficulty of leading. He even provided a nice endorsement for *On Deaf Ears*. As he saw it, "If the President envisages substantial innovations, whether conservative or liberal, then almost everything in modern history cries caution to such hopes unless accompanied by crises with potential for consensus."<sup>11</sup> Certainly this insight goes to the core of the American presidency.

Not everyone has such a restrained view of leadership, however. Many observers accepted the premise that presidents *could succeed* in persuading others. The view that

presidents not only need to persuade but that they also can succeed at it has led scholars and other observers of the presidency to focus on the question of *how* presidents persuade rather than the more fundamental question of *whether they can do so*. Many scholars and other commentators on the presidency have fallen prey to the personalization of politics and have uncritically accepted, for example, an exaggerated concept of the potential for using the “bully pulpit” to win public support or twisting congressional arms to pass policies in the legislature. Many such views, as we will see, are the products of a misremembered past.

*Presidential Power* has remained the most influential, and most admired, book on the American presidency—and for good reason. Its focus on the influence relationships of presidents was a critical intellectual breakthrough that forced us to broaden and clarify our thinking and encouraged us to emphasize explanation and generalization in our research. His insight regarding the limitations of command has encouraged us to move beyond the formal powers of the office. Yet we must not *assume* the power to persuade. Instead, we need to explore the basic premises of presidential leadership.

### **A Less Restrained View**

The tenacity with which many commentators embrace the persuasive potential of political leadership is striking. They routinely explain historic shifts in public policy such as those in the 1930s, 1960s, and 1980s in terms of the extraordinary persuasiveness of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, and Ronald Reagan.

Perhaps faith in the potential of persuasive leadership persists because such a view simplifies political analysis. Because broader forces that may influence changes in policy are complex, and perhaps even intractable, focusing primarily on the individual as leader eases the burden of explaining policy change. Faith in the persuasive presidency also simplifies the evaluation of the problems of governing. If it is reasonable to expect the White House to create opportunities for change, then failures of leadership must be personal deficiencies. If problems arise because the leader lacks the proper will, skills, or understanding, then the solution to our need for leadership is straightforward and simple: Elect presidents who are willing and able to lead. Because the system is responsive to appropriate leadership, it will function smoothly with the right leader in the Oval Office. The blame for unsuccessful leadership lies with the leader rather than with the opportunities for change in the leader’s environment.

A common premise underlying the widespread emphasis on political leadership as the wellspring of change is that some leaders have the capability to *transform* policy by reshaping the influences on it. An Internet search of the phrase “transformational leadership” will quickly produce more than three million hits. Web sites, institutes, and research studies focus on understanding—and teaching—the principles of transformational leadership.<sup>12</sup>

Writing on the private sector views transformational leaders as visionaries and catalysts for change who sell their ideas and reshape their organizations. Common to most applications of the concept in the public sector is a belief in the potential of transformational leadership to change the opinions and behavior of followers in the public and actors in institutions and thus effect major change.

James MacGregor Burns, who brought the concept of transformational leadership to prominence, asserts at various points that transformational leaders have an “extraordinary potential influence over followers” and “immense” potential for influence over them. They are event-making individuals who define the forks in history.<sup>13</sup> Arguing that leaders can change contextual forces under certain conditions, he criticized Franklin D. Roosevelt for being only an “eventful man.”<sup>14</sup>

There is an important difference between the politician who is simply an able tactician, and the politician who is a creative political leader. The former accepts political conditions as given and fashions a campaign and a set of policies best suited to the existing conditions. The latter tries consciously to change the matrix of political forces amid which he operates, in order that he may better lead the people in the direction he wants to go. The former operates within slender margins; the latter, through sheer will and conviction as well as political skill, tries to widen the margins with which he operates. He seeks not merely to win votes but consciously to alter basic political forces such as public opinion, party power, interest group pressure, the governmental system.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Lack of Persuasiveness**

Given the lack of evidence of persuasive success, faith in the power of persuasive leadership is striking. Observers in both the press and the academy base their claims about the impact of such leadership on little or no systematic evidence and seemingly little reflection. There is not a single systematic study that demonstrates that presidents can reliably persuade others to support them.

### **Leading the Public**

Presidents invest heavily in leading the public in the hope of leveraging public support to win backing in Congress. Nevertheless, there is overwhelming evidence that presidents rarely move the public in their direction. Most observers view Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton as excellent communicators. Nevertheless, pluralities, and often majorities, of the public opposed them on most of their policy initiatives. Moreover, public opinion typically moved away from rather than toward the position they favored.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the favorable context of the national trauma resulting from the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the long-term disdain of the public for Saddam Hussein, and the lack of organized opposition, George W. Bush made little headway in moving public to support the war in Iraq, and once the war was over, the rally resulting from the quick US victory quickly dissipated.<sup>17</sup> Despite his eloquence, Barack Obama could not obtain the public’s support for his initiatives that were not already popular. For example, his health care reform lacked majority support even three years after it passed.<sup>18</sup>

Even Franklin D. Roosevelt, the president often viewed as the greatest politician of the twentieth century, faced constant frustration in his efforts to move the public to prepare for entry into World War II, and his failure to persuade the public regarding his plan to pack the Supreme Court effectively marked the end of the New Deal.<sup>19</sup> George Washington, who was better positioned than any of his successors to dominate American politics because of the widespread

view of his possessing exceptional personal qualities, did not find the public particularly deferential.<sup>20</sup>

The evidence is clear. The president has a very difficult time persuading the public and usually fails to do so. Nevertheless, the myth of the bully pulpit persists. As one blogger put it,

If you want definitive proof that the bully pulpit is a pretty ineffective tool for convincing or persuading people, one need only look at the fact that political scientists keep on seizing *their* bully pulpit to point out how little impact the bully pulpit has, and they've failed to convince people! For once, we have a tautology that you can believe in.<sup>21</sup>

Presidents find it difficult to focus the public's attention on a policy because the White House must deal with so many issues and faces competition in agenda setting from Congress and the media. In addition, the White House finds it increasingly difficult to obtain an audience for its views—or even airtime on television to express them. Moreover, many people who do pay attention miss the president's points. Because the president rarely speaks directly to the American people as a whole, the White House is dependent on the press to transmit its messages, but the media are unlikely to adopt consistently either the White House's priorities or its framing of issues. Moreover, committed, well-organized, and well-funded opponents offer competing frames.

***Predispositions.*** The president must overcome the public's predispositions if he is to change people's minds about his policies or his performance. However, most people seek out information confirming their preexisting opinions and ignore or reject arguments contrary to their predispositions. When exposed to competing arguments, they typically accept the confirming ones and dismiss or argue against the opposing ones.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the president is likely to be more credible to those predisposed to support him than to adherents of the opposition party.<sup>23</sup>

Partisan leanings significantly influence perceptions of and interpretations and responses to politics—and contribute to misperceptions. Even the most basic facts are often in contention between adherents of the parties, such as whether inflation, tax rates or the budget deficit had risen or fallen or whether there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.<sup>24</sup> Partisan bias and the misperceptions it causes are often most prevalent among those who are generally well informed about politics. Political knowledge neither corrects nor mitigates partisan bias in perception of objective conditions. Instead, it enhances it.

Those who pay close attention to politics and policy are likely to have well-developed views and thus be less susceptible to persuasion. Better-informed citizens possess the information and sophistication necessary to identify the implications of presidential messages and reject communications inconsistent with their values. They are best able to construct counterarguments to evidence that they are emotionally inclined to resist. In the typical situation of competing views offered by elites, reinforcement and polarization of views are more likely than conversion among attentive citizens.<sup>25</sup>

Those with less interest and knowledge cannot resist presidential arguments if they do not possess information about the implications of those arguments for their values, interests, and other predispositions. However, these people are also less likely to be aware of the president's messages. To the extent that they do receive the messages, they will also hear from the opposition how the president's views are inconsistent with their predispositions. In addition, even if their predispositions make them sympathetic to the president's arguments, they may lack the understanding to make the connection between the president's arguments and their own underlying values.<sup>26</sup>

John Zaller argues that those in the public most susceptible to presidential influence are those attentive to public affairs (and thus who receive messages) but who lack strong views (and thus who are less likely to resist messages).<sup>27</sup> Such persons are a small portion of the population. In addition, these persons receive competing messages, and there is no basis for inferring that they will find the president's messages the most persuasive.

More broadly, public opinion usually moves contrary to the president's position. Because public officials have policy beliefs as well as an interest in reelection, they are not likely to calibrate their policy stances exactly to match those of the public. Thus, a moderate public usually receives too much liberalism from Democrats and too much conservatism from Republicans.<sup>28</sup>

***Misinformation and Misperceptions.*** In addition, people are frequently *misinformed* (as opposed to uninformed) about policy, and the less they know, the more confidence they have in their beliefs. Even when others present them with factual information, they resist changing their opinions.<sup>29</sup> Relying on media that share their beliefs makes it less likely people will encounter information that could correct their misperceptions.

Negations (e.g., "I am not a crook") often reinforce the perception they are intended to counter.<sup>30</sup> In addition, even if people initially accept corrections debunking a false statement, they may eventually fall victim to an "illusion of truth" effect in which people misremember false statements as true over time.<sup>31</sup> Finally, misleading statements about politics continue to influence people's beliefs even after the statements have been discredited.<sup>32</sup>

The media play a large role in creating misperceptions. The Internet, cable television, and talk radio facilitate selective exposure to information through "narrowcasting" to particular audiences. They create a distrust of information from other sources. Moreover, the highly charged nature of discourse on these venues magnifies the impression of partisan conflict, heightening viewers' and listeners' emotional engagement with politics and lessening the accuracy of their political perceptions.<sup>33</sup>

***Loss Aversion.*** People have a broad predisposition to avoid loss<sup>34</sup> and place more emphasis on avoiding potential losses than on obtaining potential gains. In their decision making, they place more weight on information that has negative, as opposed to positive, implications for their interests. Similarly, when individuals form impressions of situations or other people, they weigh

negative information more heavily than positive. Impressions formed on the basis of negative information, moreover, tend to be more lasting and more resistant to change.<sup>35</sup>

Risk and loss aversion and distrust of government make people wary of policy initiatives, especially when they are complex and their consequences are uncertain. Since uncertainty accompanies virtually every proposal for a major shift in public policy, it is not surprising that people are naturally inclined against change.<sup>36</sup> Further encouraging this predisposition is the media's focus on political conflict and strategy, which elevates the prominence of political wheeling-dealing in individuals' evaluations of political leaders and policy proposals. The resulting increase in public cynicism highlights the risk of altering the status quo.

Presidents proposing new directions in policy encounter a more formidable task than advocates of the status quo. Those opposing change have a more modest task of emphasizing the negative to increase the public's uncertainty and anxiety to avoid risk.<sup>37</sup> In addition, fear and anger, which negative arguments presumably evoke, are among the strongest emotions and serve as readily available shortcuts for decision making when people evaluate an impending policy initiative.<sup>38</sup>

## Leading Congress

Presidents invest an enormous amount of time trying to lead Congress. They know that their legacies are highly dependent on their proposals passing the legislature. Are presidents persuasive with senators and representatives? The best evidence is that presidential persuasion is effective only at the margins of congressional decision making. There is little relationship between presidential legislative leadership skills and success in winning votes. Even presidents who appeared to dominate Congress understood their own limitations and explicitly took advantage of opportunities in their environments. Working at the margins, they successfully guided legislation through Congress. When their opportunities lessened, they reverted to the more typical stalemate that usually characterizes presidential–congressional relations.<sup>39</sup>

We can illustrate this relationship by looking at three of the most famous periods of presidential success in Congress.<sup>40</sup>

***The Hundred Days.*** Perhaps the twentieth century's most famous period of presidential-congressional relations was the Hundred Days of 1933, when Congress passed 15 major pieces of legislation proposed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. FDR won a clear electoral victory and the Democrats gained large majorities in both houses of Congress. The day after his inauguration in 1933, FDR called a special session of Congress to deal with the economic crisis. All he planned to ask from Congress was to pass legislation to regulate the resumption of banking (he had closed the banks three days *after* taking office), amend the Volstead Act to legalize beer (a very popular policy), and cut the budget. He expected to reassemble the legislature when he was ready with permanent and more constructive legislation.

The first piece of legislation Roosevelt proposed was a bill regarding the resumption of banking. He found that he did not have to persuade anyone to support his bill, which passed unanimously in the House after only thirty-eight minutes of debate and without a roll call vote (although few members had seen the bill—there was only one copy for the chamber)—and by a

margin of 73 to 7 in the Senate, which simply adopted the House bill while waiting for printed copies. An hour later, the bill arrived at the White House for the president's signature. The whole affair took less than eight hours.

Much to his surprise, the president found a situation ripe for change. The country was in such a state of desperation that it was eager to follow a leader who would try something new. Thus, FDR decided to keep Congress in session and exploit the favorable environment by sending it the legislation that became known as the New Deal.

FDR went on to serve in the White House longer than anyone else, but most of these years were not legislatively productive. James MacGregor Burns entitles his discussion of presidential-congressional relations in the late 1930s "Deadlock on the Potomac." Either Roosevelt had lost his persuasive skills, which is not a reasonable proposition, or other factors were more significant in determining congressional support. By 1937, despite the president's great reelection victory, his coalition was falling apart.<sup>41</sup>

***The Great Society.*** The next great period of legislative productivity for a president was Lyndon Johnson's success with the 89<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1965–1966. The 1964 election occurred in the shadow of the traumatic national tragedy of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and Johnson won a smashing victory. With it, opposition to his proposals melted. For the first and only time since the New Deal, liberals gained majorities in both houses of Congress.

Johnson did not have to convince these liberals to support policies that had been on their agenda for a generation. He even received substantial Republican support for some of his major initiatives. Civil rights was the most contentious issue of the time, and it was Johnson's political genius to realize that the time for change had arrived. He chose the moment when the civil rights movement was peaking in its appeal to the nation's conscience to pass the Voting Rights Act in 1965. This was a widely supported policy, however. Even some members of Congress from the Deep South supported it.

No one understood Congress better than LBJ, and he knew that his personal leadership could not sustain congressional support for his policies. He believed that he had a rare window of opportunity in Congress, and he pushed as much legislation as possible through Congress to exploit fully the favorable political environment. In the 1966 midterm elections, the Democrats lost forty-seven seats in the House and four in the Senate. Legislating became much more difficult as a result. Sixteen months later, in March 1968, the president declared that he would not seek reelection. Johnson had lost neither his leadership skills nor his passion for change. Instead, he had lost the opportunity to exploit a favorable environment.

***The Reagan Revolution.*** It was the Republicans' turn in 1981. Ronald Reagan beat incumbent Jimmy Carter by 10 percentage points, and the Republicans won a majority in the Senate for the first time since the 1952 election. The unexpectedly large size of Reagan's victory and the equally surprising outcomes in the Senate elections created the perception of an electoral mandate. Reagan's victory placed a stigma on big government and exalted the unregulated

marketplace and large defense budgets. He had won on much of his agenda before Congress took a single vote.

The new president also benefited from the nature of the times. Although 1981 was hardly a repeat of 1933, there was a definite sense of the need for immediate action to meet urgent problems. David Stockman, a principal architect and proponent of Reagan's budgeting and tax proposals, remembers that when the president announced his "Program for Economic Recovery" to a joint session of Congress in February 1981, "the plan already had momentum and few were standing in the way." Reagan was "speaking to an assembly of desperate politicians who . . . were predisposed to grant him extraordinary latitude in finding a new remedy for the nation's economic ills . . . not because they understood the plan or even accepted it, but because they had lost all faith in the remedies tried before."<sup>42</sup>

The president's advisers recognized immediately that it had a window of opportunity to effect major changes in public policy. Like LBJ, the White House knew it had to move quickly before the environment became less favorable. Thus, the president was ready with legislation, even though it was complex and hastily written. Moreover, within a week of the March 30, 1981, assassination attempt on Reagan, his aide Michael Deaver convened a meeting of other high-ranking officials at the White House to determine how best to take advantage of the new political capital the shooting had created.

The Reagan administration also knew it lacked the political capital to pass a broad program. Thus, it enforced a rigorous focus on the president's economic plan and defense spending, its priority legislation, and essentially ignored divisive social issues and tried to keep the issue of communist advances in Central America on the back burner. By focusing its political resources on its priorities, the administration succeeded in using the budget to pass sweeping changes in taxation and defense policy.

It was wise for Reagan to exploit his opportunities. The going was much tougher the next year as the United States suffered a severe recession, and for the rest of his tenure, commentators frequently described Reagan's budgets as DOA: Dead on Arrival.

***Broader Considerations.*** Despite the prestige of their office, their position as party leader, their personal persuasiveness, and their strong personalities, presidents often meet resistance from members of Congress to their appeals for support. Personal appeals by themselves are useful but unreliable instruments for passing legislation. As a result, one-on-one lobbying by the president is the exception rather than the rule. The White House conserves appeals for obtaining the last few votes to issues of special significance, recognition that presidents cannot personally persuade members of Congress with any frequency.<sup>43</sup>

In his important work on pivotal politics, Keith Krehbiel examined votes to override presidential vetoes, focusing on those members of Congress who switched their votes from their original votes on the bill. He found that presidents attracted the support of 10 percent of those members who originally opposed the president's preferred position but lost 11 percent of those who originally supported the president's position. Those closest in ideology to the president were most likely to switch to his side, which may indicate they voted their true views, rather than

responding to other interests, when it really counted. Even among those most likely to agree with the White House, the net swing was only 1 in 8. The majority of switchers were from the president's party, indicating that the desire to avoid a party embarrassment rather than presidential persuasiveness may have motivated their votes.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, presidential legislative leadership is more useful in exploiting discrete opportunities than in creating broad possibilities for policy change. It operates in an environment largely beyond the president's control and must compete with other, more stable factors that affect voting in Congress in addition to party. These include ideology, personal views and commitments on specific policies, and the interests of constituencies. By the time a president tries to exercise influence on a vote, most members of Congress have made up their minds on the basis of these other factors.

As a result, a president's legislative leadership is likely to be critical only for those members of Congress who remain open to conversion after other influences have had their impact. Although the size and composition of this group varies from issue to issue, it will almost always be a minority in each chamber. Whatever the circumstances, the impact of persuasion on the outcome will usually be relatively modest. Therefore, conversion is likely to be at the margins of coalition building in Congress rather than at the core of policy change.

### **Leadership as Facilitation**

Although presidents typically fail to persuade others to support them, they sometimes do succeed in achieving changes in public policy, some of which are of historic significance. Thus, we are faced with a conundrum. What explains presidents' success when they have it? If persuasion is not the key, then what is? Can presidents transform policy without persuasion?

I have argued that the most effective presidents do not create opportunities by reshaping the political landscape. Instead, they exploit opportunities already present in their environments to facilitate significant changes in public policy. Recognizing and exploiting opportunities for change, rather than persuasion, are the essential presidential leadership skills.

In some cases, presidents may not need to try to persuade others because there is already sufficient support for their policy stances. In other instances, there may be latent support that requires activation by the president and his supporters. In all cases, presidents who are successful in obtaining support for their agendas have to evaluate the opportunities for change in their environments carefully and orchestrate existing and potential support skillfully.

It is important not to underrate this role. Change is not inevitable, and facilitators make things happen that otherwise would not. Effective facilitators are skilled leaders who must recognize the opportunities that exist in their environments, choose which opportunities to pursue, when and in what order, and exploit them with skill, energy, perseverance, and will.

I am *not* suggesting that presidents do not have transformative effects or that they are not independent agents in producing them. Stephen Skowronek maintains that the presidency's capacity to transform American government and politics results from its blunt and disruptive effects. Andrew Jackson forced the submission of the nullifiers and undermined the Bank of the

United States, Franklin Pierce deployed the resources of his office on behalf of the Kansas Nebraska Act, and Lincoln bludgeoned the South into submission. All were transformative acts that changed the landscape of American government and politics. I agree. And Skowronek agrees that persuasion was not central to any of these actions.<sup>45</sup>

In addition, Skowronek argues that presidential failures can be as transformative as their successes, with retribution for failure driving political change, jarring loose governing coalitions, opening unforeseen alternatives, shifting the balance of power, and passing to successors an entirely new set of opportunities and constraints.<sup>46</sup> Again, I agree. My focus, however, is on presidents attempting to obtain support for policies that *they* want.

The question of the relative influence of context and personal skills has also occupied some scholars of leadership within Congress. In their innovative examination of leadership in the House of Representatives, Joseph Cooper and David Brady concluded that institutional context is more important than personal skills or traits in determining the influence of leaders. They found no relationship between leadership style and effectiveness and argue that the institutional context, especially party strength, in which leaders find themselves, determines their leadership style more than do their own personal traits.<sup>47</sup>

### Different Questions

The belief that presidents not only need to persuade but that they can also do so has led scholars, commentators, and other observers of the presidency to focus on the question of *how* presidents persuade rather than the more fundamental question of *whether they can do so*. In addition, an emphasis on the personal in politics—and the potential success of persuasion—has led some scholars to overlook the importance of the context in which the president operates as well as his institutional setting. Ironically, this focus has encouraged ad hoc explanations and discouraged reaching generalizations about the strategic level of power. Reaching such generalizations should be central to our enterprise, however.

If the fundamental premise underlying one's approach to presidential leadership is that presidents can persuade the public or members of Congress to support of them, then certain questions will be at the core of research. One set of questions would deal with the impact of characteristics of the president on his persuasiveness.

1. Is the president an articulate and verbally dexterous speaker?
2. Can the president relate well to average Americans?
3. Is the president skilled in social interactions with members of Congress?
4. Is the president personally persuasive?
5. Can the president effectively apply pressure to individual members of Congress?

Other questions would focus on the means of persuasion.

1. Are some rhetorical devices more useful in persuasion than others?
2. Does the quality of speechmaking affect the president's success in persuasion?
3. Are some presidents more effective speakers than others?
4. Are presidents more persuasive with the public when they speak on a topic more frequently?

5. Does spending social time with members of Congress increase the president's persuasion with them?
6. Is the venue of a speech, such as a joint session of Congress, important in its impact?

If presidential power is not the power to persuade, however, scholars should ask a different set of questions. Understanding the nature and possibilities of leadership puts us in a better position to evaluate both the performance of presidents and the opportunities for change. Equally important, we have a better sense of where to look for explanations of the success and consequences of presidential leadership. If there are significant limits on presidential persuasion, it follows that major changes in public policy will not necessarily turn on a president's persuasive skills or his willingness to use them.

Exploiting opportunities requires a different set of skills than creating them. If exploiting opportunities to steer true believers is more critical to engendering change than persuading the skeptical, much less converting the opposition, it follows that we should focus more on maintaining and managing coalitions and less on the verbal dexterity or interpersonal persuasiveness that is hypothetically necessary to expand coalitions and thus transform the political landscape. As a result, we will ask different questions about presidential characteristics, focusing on how presidents actually marshal forces to bring about change.

1. Does the president have the analytical insight necessary to evaluate his strategic position correctly?
2. Does the president have the skill to take advantage of the possibilities in their environments?
3. Does the president have the commitment, resolution, and strength to persevere and take full advantage of opportunities that exist?
4. Does the president have the energy and resiliency to exploit opportunities for change?

We should study the president's strategic position, his opportunity structure. Regarding the public, we want to know where it stands independent of the president and the potential for attracting nascent support.

1. What is the degree of partisan polarization in the public?
2. Are the president's initiatives already popular with the public?
3. Are popular initiatives salient to the public?
4. Is the president's initiative one on which public opinion is not well established?
5. What proportion of the public is composed of partisans and partisan leaners of the president's party?
6. Is the president high in the approval polls?
7. Does the public perceive the president as a competent chief executive?
8. Does the president enjoy the public's trust?
9. Do a notable percentage of identifiers with the other party already agree with the president's initiatives?

Personalizing politics can distract our attention from factors that play a larger role in explaining presidential success in Congress and greatly oversimplify our understanding of executive-legislative relations. If presidents typically operate at the margins of coalition building and exercise their legislative skills primarily to exploit rather than create opportunities for

leadership, we should devote more effort to examining broader influences on Congress and less on personal skills. For example,

1. What is the degree of ideological polarization in Congress?
2. Does the president's party enjoy a majority in a chamber? If so, how large is it?
3. Are there slack resources in the budget or is the deficit a major constraint on initiatives?
4. Is there a perception that the president received an electoral mandate?
5. Is there is a perception the president had long coattails?
6. Did the president run well in a member's state or district?
7. Is the president in his first term?
8. Is the president high in the job approval polls?
9. Is the president governing in the period immediately following his election or reelection?
10. Does the president's proposal deal with national security rather than domestic policy?
11. Is the president serving during wartime?
12. Does the structure of the decision facing Congress favor the president?

Because the president will persuade few opposition party adherents to support him and his initiatives, most of our attention should focus on those predisposed to support his initiatives. Nevertheless, we need to be attentive to the potential for exploiting opportunities such as the opposition's preexisting agreement with the president's proposals or the structure of a decision facing Congress favoring the president.

The president's dependency on existing opportunities implies a critical interdependence between leaders and followers, which we miss when we focus only on the pinnacle of power. Moreover, there are many influences on followers and potential followers and many obstacles to influencing them. The president is an important agenda setter,<sup>48</sup> for example, but there are other key influences on the agenda as well.<sup>49</sup> Thus, we need to devote more attention to thinking about politics from the bottom up as well as the top down and to the context in which the president seeks to lead.

### **Different Answers**

Analyzing three recent issues illustrates the utility of viewing presidential leadership through the lens of facilitation rather than persuasion. I show how the two approaches provide different explanations for both the president's success and failures. If we assume high probabilities of persuasion, we are led in one direction for an explanation. If we do not make such an assumption, we are led to seek other explanations and make different predictions of ultimate outcomes. For the president's success, we want to know the contribution of persuasion and whether other factors offer more powerful explanations. For his failures, we want to investigate whether a dependency on persuasion contributed to them, whether aspects of his strategic position were critical in the outcome, and whether we can gain analytical leverage by asking if the president understood and effectively exploited his strategic position.

In the interests of space, I focus on two aspects of Obama's opportunity structure: public opinion before the president's public relations efforts began and the advantages or disadvantages for the White House of the structure of the decision facing Congress. Needless to say, broader

considerations, such as polarized partisan politics and the ideological center of the House of Representatives determined the basic parameters of the battles over policy.

## **Fiscal Cliff, 2012**

The first issue President Obama faced following his reelection was an urgent one: impending tax increases as the Bush-era tax cuts were set to expire on December 31, 2012. Obama wished to maintain the tax cuts for most Americans, but to increase taxes on families with more than \$250,000 of taxable income. In the end, the president obtained some of what he wanted, as Congress increased taxes on families with more than \$450,000 of taxable income.

How can we explain this outcome? Was it the product of the president taking his case to the public and winning widespread support for his policy? Was it an example of the president convincing congressional Republicans that his proposal was worth supporting?

It is not surprising that the president initially emphasized going public over closed-door negotiations after he felt burned by failed debt talks in 2011.<sup>50</sup> On November 27, the president met at the White House with 15 small business owners to argue that his tax proposals would help such firms. The next day, he hosted an event in which middle class Americans talked about how the automatic tax increases slated for the end of the year would affect them. He also met separately that day with corporate leaders. On November 30, the president flew to Pennsylvania to tour a toy manufacturer that he argued would be hurt if automatic tax increases took effect at the end of the year.

The president did a number of television interviews, his preferred form of interaction with the press. The White House focused these interviews in media markets in heavily urban areas that included House districts that elected Republicans to the House but were competitive for Obama in 2012 and who might, therefore be vulnerable to pressure from the president's supporters in their districts.<sup>51</sup> In addition, Obama and White House aide David Plouffe asked supporters to engage in the tax fight directly by sending emails and beginning a social-media campaign on Twitter and Facebook.

Did public opinion change as a result of the president's public relations efforts? The time Congress considered the fiscal cliff was quite short, so there is not a long time series data set to examine. We do know that major poll organizations had shown majority public support for the substance of the president's proposal for some time, and before the president's public relations offensive.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, the public has generally been supportive of increasing taxes on the wealthy, a policy on which Bill Clinton campaigned in 1992. Although it is possible that in the afterglow of his reelection victory opinion may have shifted a bit in the president's direction,<sup>53</sup> the public supported the thrust of the president's proposal from the beginning of his legislative effort.

We can also obtain a sense of public opinion on taxing the wealthy by examining Table 1. There data show there has been little variation in the public's view on whether the wealthy are paying their fair share of taxes over the entire Obama administration.

**Insert Table 1 here**

Despite the general public support for taxing the wealthy, the White House could not win the ultimate battle for public opinion. Gallup found that only 46 percent of the public approved of the president's handling of the negotiations while 48 percent disapproved, and only 43 percent approved of the result while 45 percent disapproved.<sup>54</sup> Another poll found that only 29 percent of the public favored the president's proposal to raise taxes starting at families making over \$250,000 (as opposed to \$450,000).<sup>55</sup>

In the House, Democrats voted 172-16 in favor of the tax agreement while Republicans votes 151-85 against. The measure passed the Senate by a lopsided 89-8 vote; only three Democrats and five Republicans voted against the agreement. There is no evidence, however, that Republicans welcomed the opportunity to increase taxes on high-income families. Indeed, one will look in vain for a Republican arguing that increasing taxes was a good idea. On the other hand, there is plenty of testimony that Republicans held their noses to support the agreement and thus avoid falling off the fiscal cliff. I will have more to say about this below. Nevertheless, the president still was not able to obtain all he wanted, as Congress increased taxes only on families with more than \$450,000 of taxable income.

If we focus on the president's ability to change public opinion during the consideration of the bill, we will conclude that the president was a failure. If we try to explain congressional action as a result of presidential persuasion, we will be in error. Examining the president's strategic position and his exploitation of it offers us a better explanation for winning a tax increase.

***Increasing the Salience of Issues.*** Even if the president cannot change the public's views on issues, he may be able to influence *what* it is thinking about. Instead of seeking to change public opinion regarding an issue, presidents may make appeals on policies that already have public support in an attempt to make them more salient to the public and thus encourage members of Congress to support White House initiatives to please the public.

Brandice Canes-Wrone has pioneered in exploring this aspect of presidential leadership area. She found that presidents "almost never appeal to the public about an initiative likely to mobilize popular opposition." "Only on popular domestic proposals can presidents increase their prospects for legislative success by going public." Presidents are also more likely to publicize foreign policy initiatives if a majority of the public favors them and will generally avoid going public on initiatives that face mass opposition.<sup>56</sup>

The conditions for successfully employing such a strategy were favorable in the matter of the fiscal cliff.

1. The public was following the negotiations over the fiscal cliff issue closely.<sup>57</sup>
2. The public felt it was important to resolve the problem to prevent tax increases for the middle class,<sup>58</sup>
3. The public wanted to do so through a compromise between the parties<sup>59</sup>
4. The public wanted this compromise to include increasing taxes on the wealthy.<sup>60</sup>
5. Even many of the nation's leading chief executives dropped their opposition to tax increases on the wealthiest Americans.<sup>61</sup>

6. Equally important, the public was more likely to assign blame to the Republicans than to the Democrats if the two sides failed to reach an agreement.<sup>62</sup>
7. Throughout the negotiations, the president held an advantage over House Speaker John Boehner in the public's evaluations of their performance on them.<sup>63</sup>

The president had a winning hand in arguing that Republicans were holding hostage a tax cut for the middle class to preserve tax cuts for the wealthy. Thus, his basic strategy was not to persuade the public that something needed to be done and that it was important to raise taxes on the wealthy as part of the resolution of the issue. The public already agreed, by substantial margins. His goal was to make the issue more salient and thus pressure Republicans to respond. At the same time, cuts to domestic policies were not popular.<sup>64</sup> It should not be surprising that Obama studiously avoided discussing details of spending cuts, the other part of the budgetary equation.

***Default Position: Advantage Obama.*** The structure of the choices facing Congress can help or hinder the president. Which side benefits from a failure to act? Are there broad political incentives to act on an issue?

There can be little doubt that a unique aspect of the “fiscal cliff” issue was of invaluable aid to the president. The default position, the broad tax increases that would occur if no new policy was enacted, was unacceptable and highly salient to Republicans. Thus, they had incentives to negotiate and pass a bill to avoid being blamed for tax increases and undermining their long held economic beliefs. If the only thing an analyst knew about the entire fiscal cliff issue was the default position, she would predict correctly that the Republicans would have to support a tax increase on the wealthy.

## Sequestration

The next major issue for the White House was sequestration. As a result of the 2011 budget deal between the president and Congress, \$85 billion in automatic budget cuts would go into effect for both defense and domestic discretionary (not entitlement) programs unless the two branches could agree on a new budget bill.

The president hoped to spark a public revolt against Republicans over sequester-induced budget cuts. On February 20, 2013, he conducted interviews with eight local television stations in an attempt to intensify pressure on congressional Republicans. He and his aides played hardball, warning of a parade of horrors — long waits at airports, private sector job losses resulting from voided federal contracts, public teacher job losses.

Although pluralities favored avoiding the sequestration as a general principle,<sup>65</sup> the president could obtain not majority support for avoiding spending cuts much less public mobilization on his behalf. His dire warnings of the consequences of the spending cuts had little impact. By March 1, Obama acknowledged that his campaign of highlighting fallout from the cuts had failed to persuade Republicans to consider tax increases as part of a package to avert the reductions resulting from the sequester.<sup>66</sup> Even five months following the sequestration, Gallup found that a majority of the public, including majorities of both Democrats and Independents, did not know enough to say whether it was good or bad for themselves or the country.<sup>67</sup>

If we assume that the president had the potential to rally the public to his side, we would blame the president for failing to do so. Such a conclusion would be incorrect. In response to a question from the press, Obama playfully replied, “Well, I’d like to think I’ve still got some persuasive power left. Let me check. (Laughter.) Look, the issue is not my persuasive power.”<sup>68</sup> He was right. Persuasion was not the issue.

***Lack of Public Support.*** Conversely, if we understand that going public rarely succeeds, we would have predicted that the president would not convince the public to support his policy of raising additional revenue to avoid a sequester. The problem was not the president’s lack of persuasiveness. No president has it. The problem for Obama was his dependence on persuasiveness as his core strategy

***Default Position: Advantage Deficit Hawks.*** The White House thought the automatic cuts to defense spending would gain it leverage to obtain Republican support for more revenues and thus prevent the sequestration. Much to the White House’s surprise, the Republicans called the president’s bluff, and the budget cuts occurred.

Actually, the president’s strategic position was weak because the default position was more acceptable to Republican deficit hawks than seeking revenue to pay for discretionary programs. Moreover, the White House could not fully employ its leverage. The president would not risk a government shutdown by demanding a sequester fix out of fear the public would blame Democrats for the shutdown.<sup>69</sup> Again, the president misunderstood his strategic position. Moreover, focusing on the default position would lead an analyst to correctly predict the outcome no matter how much the president tried to persuade the public and Congress.

## **Gun Control**

On a Friday night in December 2012, after 20 schoolchildren and 6 adults were gunned down at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, President Obama convened his top aides in the Oval Office and weighed whether he should make a major push for new gun control laws, even though he had planned to start the second term focused on immigration reform. No one thought it would be easy, but aides counseled that Obama had little choice but to try. They said that it would rightly be seen as a failure of leadership if he did not and that a grieving nation, especially his supporters, would demand action. Obama edited the speech he would give that Sunday at the memorial for the Newtown victims and inserted a phrase promising to use “whatever power this office holds” to confront gun violence, locking in his commitment.<sup>70</sup>

On January 16, 2013, at a White House event advocating gun control, the president proclaimed that his proposal would not pass “unless the people demand it.” Shortly before the event, former White House press secretary Robert Gibbs told MSNBC, “The president has the most exciting campaign apparatus ever built. It’s time to turn that loose.” “If the NRA has a list,” Gibbs declared, “then Obama for America [OFA] has a bigger list.” (OFA is the president’s personal political operation, affiliated with the Democratic National Committee.)<sup>71</sup>

Thus, President Obama vowed to rally public opinion to press a reluctant Congress to ban military-style assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, expand background checks, and

toughen gun-trafficking laws. “I will put everything I’ve got into this,” Obama said, “and so will Joe [Biden].” The White House believed the massacre had changed the dynamics on gun control. “I have never seen the nation’s conscience so shaken by what happened at Sandy Hook,” Biden said. “The world has changed and is demanding action.”<sup>72</sup>

To exploit the opportunity he perceived to exist, the president was good to his word and aggressively took his case to the public. Table 2 provides examples of his efforts. In addition, the vice president and other administration officials were active in promoting the president’s proposals.

### **Insert Table 2 here**

In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, the public favored stricter gun control laws in general (Table 3). Despite the president’s efforts, this support *diminished* in the period leading up to the Senate’s votes on gun control provisions. The most widely supported form of gun control was background checks on potential purchasers of guns. Ninety percent or more of the public supported such checks (Table 4). This percentage remained unchanged during the gun control debate. Opinion on more controversial proposals such as banning assault rifles and large magazines for automatic weapons displayed a similar immobility (Tables 5 and 6). To the extent there was any movement in public opinion, it was not in the president’s direction.

### **Insert Tables 3-6 here**

***Limits of Persuasion.*** Although the president could not move opinion, a majority of the public supported many proposals for stricter gun control, in some instance dating from previous years and in all of them before the president began his public relations efforts. A bigger problem for the president was the heavily partisan tilt to opinion on gun control. It was his inability to persuade Republicans, the core constituency of Republican members of Congress, that undermined his ability to win stricter gun controls. Actually, it was a lost cause.

In January, Gallup surveyed the public as to its satisfaction with 17 policy areas. Guns sparked the greatest difference between Republicans and Democrats. Fifty-nine percent of Republicans and 28 percent of Democrats were satisfied with U.S. gun laws, a difference of 31 percentage points.<sup>73</sup> It is not surprising, then, that there were great differences between party identifiers in their support for stricter gun control. Gallup’s initial surveying of the president’s proposals elicited 53 percent support overall as opposed to 41 percent in opposition. Eight-two percent of Democrats supported Obama’s initiative, but only 22 percent of Republicans did so.<sup>74</sup> Table 7 presents results from the March 20-24 CBS poll on support for the general notion of stricter gun laws, disaggregated by party identification. The gap in support for stricter gun laws was 37 percentage points.

### **Insert Table 7 here**

In addition, polls showing 90 percent or more support for background checks were somewhat misleading. Following the Senate’s votes, the Pew Research Center asked a national sample whether they were very happy, relieved, disappointed, or angry at the outcome, specifically mentioning background checks (Table 8). Forty-seven percent expressed negative feelings about the vote (15 percent were angry and 32 percent were disappointed) while 39 percent had a positive reaction (20 percent were happy and 19 percent were relieved) to the Senate’s actions. Only Democrats had a majority of negative reactions (67 percent to 22

percent). Republicans had positive reactions by 51 to 34 percent, and Independents had positive reactions by 48 to 41 percent.<sup>75</sup> Thus, the overall balance of positive and negative reactions to the Senate votes tracked more closely to measures of the public's broad views on gun control than to attitudes toward background checks.

### **Insert Table 8 here**

In the 16 states where both senators voted against the president's proposals, 46 percent of the public were very happy or relieved that the bill did not pass; 37 percent said they were angry or disappointed. By contrast, in the 21 states where both senators supported the legislation, 51 percent responded they were either angry or disappointed that the legislation failed, while 38 percent were very happy or relieved about the outcome. Just 16 percent of people in these states said they were angry Congress voted down the legislation, while 35 percent were simply disappointed.<sup>76</sup> In addition, in a poll taken the month following the Senate votes, only 40 percent of Republicans (as opposed to 73 percent of Democrats) listed curbing gun violence as a high priority.<sup>77</sup>

All but four Republican senators voted against more rigorous background checks. Three of them (Susan Collins of Maine, Ronald Kirk of Illinois, and Patrick Toomey of Pennsylvania) represent blue states. The four Democrats who voted against the background check proposal are from red states with high rates of gun ownership: Max Baucus of Montana, Mark Pryor of Arkansas, Mark Begich of Alaska, and Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota.

Many commentators were horrified at the president's failure to obtain stricter gun control laws.<sup>78</sup> They, like the White House, thought the president could rally the public and twist enough congressional arms to achieve policy change. In the end, Obama was unable to persuade those opposed to gun control—Republicans—in either the public or Congress. His failure to do so must be his own fault.

***The Default Position: Advantage to Guns Rights.*** The critics were wrong. In this case, as with most policy initiatives, the default position favored those opposed to change. There was very little possibility that the president, any president, could change opinion among those in the public with long commitments to gun rights. In addition, Republicans in the public are much more likely than Democrats to own guns,<sup>79</sup> and those who place a high priority on maintaining gun rights are more likely to be active politically than those who do not.<sup>80</sup> Thus, the senators who voted against the president, all but four of whom were Republicans, acted pragmatically and did not risk alienating their constituents.

Moreover, just how would a president twist congressional Republicans' arms to insist that they vote against the wishes of their constituents and their own long-held views on gun control? With what could he threaten them, given his lack of support in their constituencies and their fear of a challenge from the right? How could he buy their votes in an era of extraordinarily scarce resources and divided government? Suggestions of presidential pressure were illusory.

## **New Avenues for Research**

If recognizing and exploiting opportunities are critical leadership skills, we need to understand how presidents exercise them. There are possible means of presidential leadership that do not require persuasion that deserve our attention. Moreover, it is important to differentiate between leadership and persuasion. If we are going to develop theory about leadership, we need to understand the mechanisms at work. If we mistake leadership for persuasion, we will offer the wrong explanation for behavior and also apply our theory inappropriately.

To illustrate new avenues for research, I will focus on presidential leadership of the public. One means of leadership concerns setting the terms of debate over issues. Two others involve communicating to the public what the president is all about. One influence is over the long-term and the other has a more immediate effect. For purposes of convenience, I have labeled the long-term influence “channeling” and the short-term influence “signaling.”

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### **Setting the Terms of Discourse**

Stephen Skowronek has called our attention to the role presidents may play in reconstituting the terms of discourse and thus structuring the choices of citizens and legislators,<sup>81</sup> arguing that “to establish a common sense of the times . . . is the primal act of leadership.” His sweeping view of presidential history leads him to conclude, “All presidents change American politics, but rarely do they change it even roughly in the manner they intended.”<sup>82</sup>

For example, the typical political effect of such high-impact presidents as James Polk, Theodore Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, and George W. Bush has been “schismatic.” Thus, he argues, “the political world seldom conforms to definitions and formulas; no matter how tight, skilled, or hands-on the controls exerted, events can be orchestrated to set terms only for so long.” The president’s opponents are unlikely to accept his terms of debate and “relentlessly and ruthlessly” provide an alternative view.<sup>83</sup> Skowronek is correct about the importance of the terms of discourse, but we lack systematic understanding of the influence presidents may have on them and need to devote more attention to the topic.<sup>84</sup>

### **Channeling the Public**

Channeling the public to support a broader party program may have significant consequences for politics and public policy. Channeling involves parties and leaders communicating to voters a commonality of interests and increasing the salience of these shared interests in voting decisions.

The rise of new issues has the potential to destabilize or even destroy party coalitions, and effective leaders recognize and channel this potential to build new governing coalitions. The

most dramatic example of such leadership in the past half century occurred after pressure from the civil rights movement, along with Lyndon Johnson's unwavering commitment and legislative acumen, resulted in the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Edward Carmines and James Stimson have shown how the emergence of race as a new issue cleavage in the 1960s caused many Americans to change their party allegiances.<sup>85</sup> Republican Barry Goldwater's victory in five southern states in the 1964 presidential election marked a critical stage in the transformation in the political allegiance and voting behavior of the South. Republicans, led by Richard Nixon, saw that the alienation of many southerners from their former home in the Democratic Party provided them the opportunity to engage in a "southern strategy" to win converts among conservative white southerners—and they did.

Although race was the issue that pushed many conservative Democrats toward the Republican Party, Republican leaders also attracted support by stressing patriotism, religious values, and traditional (and thus conservative) positions on social issues to attract voters alienated by the Democrats' anti-war stances and apparent sympathy for views ranging from support for greater protections for alleged criminals to a wide separation between church and state. Republicans also began stressing economic issues,<sup>86</sup> which the emerging white middle class in the South found especially attractive.<sup>87</sup> After the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, opposition to abortion fit seamlessly with the Republicans' emphasis and further defined the parties, attracting additional adherents and mobilizing new legions of activists.

The result of the party realignment was Republican domination of presidential elections for two generations after 1964. Only two Democrats won in the four decades following that election, and only one, Jimmy Carter in 1976, running on the heels of Watergate, received a majority of the vote. The changes in party identification that aided Republican candidates did not occur overnight, nor even within the period of one presidency. Nevertheless, by recognizing and exploiting the opportunity to build a new governing coalition, Republican leaders profoundly influenced the direction of public policy.

The political landscape did not change because leaders persuaded people to alter their views about race, abortion, or other issues. (It is noteworthy that grassroots organizations and local protests of ordinary people had more impact in shaping public opinion on civil rights than did elites.<sup>88</sup>) As Gary Jacobson put it, "as strategic vote-seekers, candidates and parties anticipate voters' potential responses to their political initiatives and so are constrained by them. . . . In adopting positions, politicians are guided by the opportunities and constraints presented by existing configurations of public opinion on political issues."<sup>89</sup>

Instead of changing the public's opinions, leaders acted consistent with Morris Fiorina's view that leaders can take positions that split the public in a new way without the public changing its opinions.<sup>90</sup> Republican leaders attracted new voters to their party by reacting to events that were not of their making, such as the war in Vietnam, urban riots, and Supreme Court decisions. They responded by articulating views with which the voters agreed and making these views more salient in voting decisions.

There is a substantial literature on party coalitions. We know who is in them and how their allegiances have changed over time. However, we have just scratched the surface of understanding the role of presidents and their top supporters in exploiting the potential of channeling the public and thus facilitating change.

## **Signaling**

One of the most interesting phenomena of polarized politics is the apparent rapid change in the opinions of partisans regarding some policies. One example is opinion regarding the National Security Agency's (NSA) surveillance programs. Table 1 shows that Republican support was high when questioned under a Republican president, George W. Bush, in 2006. That support declined 23 percentage points when queried under Democrat Barack Obama seven years later (note that the questions are slightly different in the two years). Similarly, only 37 percent of Democrats found the NSA surveillance acceptable under Bush, but their support increased 27 percentage points under Obama. There is no question that underlying ideologies affected the partisans' responses, but the change in partisan opinion in response to the president's party is striking.

### **Insert Table 9 here**

A week after the 2013 poll shown in Table 1, 58 percent of Democrats approved the government's collection of phone and internet data as part of its anti-terrorism efforts while only 45 percent of Republicans gave the same response. Only 29 percent of those who agreed with the Tea Party, Obama's staunchest foes, approved of these policies.<sup>91</sup> Gallup found considerably lower levels of approval, but the same patterns of partisan differences (Table 10).

### **Insert Table 10 here**

Similarly, there was a large partisan shift in those who would feel their personal privacy had been violated if they knew the government had collected data on them. In 2006, Gallup found that 77 percent of Democrats said they would feel their privacy had been violated, compared with just 28 percent of Republicans.<sup>92</sup> Pew found that in 2013, only about half of Democrats (53 percent) say they would feel their privacy had been violated if they knew the government had collected their personal data. By contrast, the percentage of Republicans who feel their privacy would be violated had more than doubled to 68 percent.

The current debate over immigration reform is also instructive regarding signaling. Republican antipathy for Obama is so great that he has had to avoid proposing his own immigration bill, because doing so makes it more difficult for Republican members of Congress to support reform. Because Republicans in Congress come from solidly Republican states or districts, it is easier for them to support an immigration bill that has broad-based support in the business and farming communities (and that also happens to be supported by Obama and the Democratic leadership) than to back a bill so popularly identified with the other side.

After outlining in a general fashion what he wanted in an immigration bill, the president has adopted a hands-off approach to designing the legislation, deferring to negotiations among a bipartisan group of senators known as the Gang of Eight. He adopted this strategy soon after his inauguration, as he was preparing to introduce his own bill during a January 29, visit to Las Vegas. Several Democratic senators among the Gang of Eight member told the White House the group was close to reaching consensus on a bill and asked Obama to hold off on announcing his

own plan in order to avoid disrupting the talks. Obama agreed.<sup>93</sup> The imperative of avoiding a Republican backlash only increased when the House took up the issue. Thus, in July the White House released reports and videos that argued the economic benefits of an immigration overhaul but that used neither the president's image nor his voice.<sup>94</sup>

Senate Democrats feared that an Obama bill would scare off Republicans like Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, who has presidential ambitions. Indeed, Rubio's office once issued a statement to deny that he was discussing immigration policy "with anyone in the White House," even as it criticized the president for not consulting Republicans. Republican antipathy puts the president in a Catch-22 bind. If he stays aloof from legislative action, Republicans and others accuse him of a lack of leadership. If he gets involved, they complain that they cannot support any bill so closely identified with him without risking the contempt of conservative voters.<sup>95</sup>

The public's response to partisan clues is not new. During the consideration of George W. Bush's proposal to reform Social Security, the Pew Research Center found that the president's association with a plan to limit the growth of Social Security benefits appeared to undermine support for the concept. Pew split its large sample and, as Table 3 shows, by a 53 percent to 36 percent margin most Americans said they would support limiting the growth of benefits for wealthy and middle income retirees, while keeping the current system intact for lower income people. This was a considerably higher figure than the 38 percent level of support Gallup found about two weeks earlier. However, the public's support was significantly lower when Pew explicitly associated the proposal with Bush. When the phrase "George W. Bush has proposed . . ." preceded the idea, the public was divided (45 percent in favor, 43 percent opposed).

#### **Insert Table 11 here**

Equally striking were the responses of different partisan groups. Without any mention of Bush, the proposal was slightly more popular among Democrats than among Republicans (54 percent to 47 percent). When pollsters attributed the proposal to Bush, however, Republican support increased 15 percentage points to 62 percent while Democratic support dropped 20 points to 34 percent. Support among Independents for limiting future benefit growth for wealthy and middle-income retirees dropped 12 percentage points, from 55 percent to 43 percent, when the poll question attributed the proposal to the president.<sup>96</sup>

Lee and Carol Sigelman asked sample groups whether they supported two proposals, a domestic policy proposal dealing with welfare and a proposal dealing with foreign aid. One of the groups was told that President Carter supported the proposals, while the president was not mentioned to the other group. The authors found that attaching the president's name to either proposal not only failed to increase support for it, but actually had a negative effect because those who disapproved of Carter reacted very strongly against proposals they thought were his.<sup>97</sup>

In another experiment during the Reagan presidency, Dan Thomas and Lee Sigelman posed policy proposals to sample subjects. When informed that the president was the source of the proposals, enthusiastic supporters of Reagan evaluated them in favorable terms, but when the source was withheld, Reagan supporters evaluated these same proposals unfavorably.<sup>98</sup>

Motivated reasoning is a central concept in the study of political behavior. It refers to the confirmation bias (seeking out information that confirms prior beliefs), a prior attitude effect (viewing evidence consistent with prior opinions as more compelling than evidence that is inconsistent), and the disconfirmation bias (challenging and dismissing evidence inconsistent with prior opinions, regardless of objective accuracy). Motivated reasoning may distort a person's perception of new information and the conclusions they reach about it.

Partisan identification is a primary anchor of political behavior<sup>99</sup> and the basis for much motivated reasoning. We have seen that partisan leanings significantly influence perceptions of conditions and policies and interpretations and responses to politics. Even the most basic facts are often in contention between adherents of the parties. Individuals interpret a policy, ranging from war to the budget deficit, in light of existing opinions concerning the policy's sponsor.<sup>100</sup> Thus, "when partisan elites debate an issue and the news media cover it, partisan predispositions are activated in the minds of citizens and subsequently constrain their policy preferences."<sup>101</sup> In times of highly polarized politics, the incentive to be loyal to one's own group and maximize differences with the outgroup is likely to be especially strong.<sup>102</sup>

It is not surprising that Bullock found that party cues influence opinion.<sup>103</sup> Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus found that polarized environments intensify the impact of party endorsements on opinions, decrease the impact of substantive information, and, ironically, stimulate greater confidence in those—less substantively grounded—opinions. Under conditions of high polarization, when presented with opposing frames, regardless of strength, partisans' opinions move only in the direction of the frame endorsed by their party.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, when individuals engage in strong partisan motivated reasoning, they develop increased confidence in their opinions. Thus, they are less likely to consider alternative positions and more likely to take action based on their opinions, such as attempting to persuade others.<sup>105</sup>

Analysts often misunderstand the dynamics here. Signaling does not involve persuasion. Urging is not required. In the case of NSA surveillance, most Republican leaders *supported* the surveillance programs. Republican opinion change toward *opposition* to surveillance programs was the response of grassroots Republicans to a Democrat in the White House. We find the same type of reaction in the experimental studies and split surveys I discussed earlier.

The president defended the surveillance programs, of course, offering reassurance about the protection of civil liberties. However, he did not engage in the kind of campaigning he employed, for example, on behalf of health care reform or fiscal cliff-related tax increases. Unsurprisingly, some, although certainly not all, Democrats in the public were reassured. There is no reason to believe that Democrats changed their concerns for either privacy or security. They simply were more likely to trust the government to make the appropriate trade-off with one of their own in the White House. Their initial response was to the party rather than the president.

Yet signaling also does not emphasize reasoning. Instead, it provides cues to those predisposed to support the signaler that serve to short-circuit their reasoning processes, trigger motivated reasoning, and thus shape how they process information provided by different sides, including largely ignoring arguments from the opposition.<sup>106</sup> The signaler is showing supporters

where their predispositions should take them on a particular matter. Persuasion begins *after* people have expressed their predispositions.

The fact that signaling does not involve persuasion does not make it any less useful as a tool of presidential leadership. Because the core of presidential leadership is facilitating coalitions of the willing, we need to know much more about how the White House can obtain support by sending signals to its potential supporters. To better understand signaling, we need to develop theory and test its propositions in real world situations that present respondents with visible and strong alternative frames of an issue. Experiments that simply compare two different treatments are not likely to take us very far in this endeavor. In addition, we should not assume that the initial response is the result of presidential influence. Ignoring predispositions is a fatal logical flaw.

## Conclusion

Presidential power is *not* the power to persuade. Presidents cannot reshape the contours of the political landscape to pave the way for change by establishing an agenda and persuading the public, Congress, and others to support their policies. Instead, successful presidents facilitate change by recognizing opportunities in their environments and fashioning strategies and tactics to exploit them.

Facilitators are not weak or inept leaders. It takes considerable skill to fashion strategies and tactics to exploit opportunities. Not everyone who occupies the Oval Office will be adept at these tasks. The president may be a vital centralizing force, providing direction and energy for the nation's policymaking. In essence, facilitators can make crucial contributions to transforming policy without performing transformational leadership.

If we turn our attention to leading without persuading, we can make substantial headway in understanding the vital role of presidential leadership in American politics.

**Table 1**  
**Are the Wealthy Paying Too Little in Taxes?**

<b>Date</b>	<b>% Fair Share</b>	<b>% Too Much</b>	<b>% Too Little</b>	<b>% Unsure</b>
April 6-9, 2009	23	11	61	2
April 8-11, 2010	26	10	62	3
April 7-11, 2011	25	13	59	2
April 9-12, 2012	25	15	55	4
April 4-7, 2013	26	13	60	3

*Source:* Gallup Poll.

*Question:* “As I read off some different groups, please tell me if you think they are paying their fair share in federal taxes, paying too much, or paying too little. How about upper-income people?”

**Table 2**  
**President Obama's Going Public on Gun Control**

<u>Type of Communication</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>
State of the Union Message	February 12, 2013	Joint Session of Congress
Weekly Radio Address	January 19, 2013	White House
	March 23, 2013	White House
	April 13, 2013*	White House
Press Conferences	December 19, 2012	White House
	March 1, 2013	White House
	April 16, 2013**	White House
Unveiling of Gun Control Proposals	January 16, 2013	White House
Meeting with Police Chiefs and Sheriffs	January 28, 2013	White House
Speech in East Room	March 28, 2013	White House
Statements	March 14, 2013	White House
	April 10, 2013	White House
	April 17, 2013	White House
Speeches Outside DC	February 4, 2013	Minneapolis
	April 3, 2013	Denver
	April 8, 2013	Hartford

Source: [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)

\* Delivered by the mother of a Newtown victim

\*\*Joint press conference with president of Mexico

**Table 3**  
**Support for Stricter Gun Control Laws**

<b><u>Poll Date</u></b>	<b><u>% More Strict</u></b>	<b><u>% Less Strict</u></b>	<b><u>% Kept as They Are</u></b>	<b><u>% Unsure/NA</u></b>
December 14-16, 2012	57	9	30	4
January 11-15, 2013	54	9	34	3
February 6-10, 2013	53	10	34	3
March 20-24, 2013	47	11	39	3
April 24-28, 2013	54	10	33	3

*Source:* CBS News Poll and CBS News/*New York Times* Poll

*Question:* “In general, do you think gun control laws should be made more strict, less strict, or kept as they are now?”

**Table 4**  
**Support for Background for Gun Purchases**

<b><u>Poll Date</u></b>	<b><u>% Favor</u></b>	<b><u>% Oppose</u></b>	<b><u>% Unsure/NA</u></b>
January 11-15, 2013	92	7	1
February 6-10, 2013	91	7	2
March 20-24, 2013	90	8	2
April 24-28, 2013	88	11	1

*Source:* CBS News Poll and CBS News/*New York Times* Poll

*Question:* “Do you favor or oppose a federal law requiring background checks on all potential gun buyers?”

**Table 5**  
**Support for Banning Assault Weapons**

<b><u>Poll Date</u></b>	<b><u>% Favor</u></b>	<b><u>% Oppose</u></b>	<b><u>% Unsure/NA</u></b>
January 10-13, 2013	58	39	3
March 7-10, 2013	57	41	2
April 11-14, 2013	56	42	2

*Source:* ABC News/Washington Post Poll

*Question:* “Would you support or oppose a law requiring a nationwide ban on the sale of assault weapons?”

**Table 6**  
**Support for Banning Large Ammunition Clips**

<b><u>Poll Date</u></b>	<b><u>% Favor</u></b>	<b><u>% Oppose</u></b>	<b><u>% Unsure/NA</u></b>
December 14-16, 2012	59	38	2
January 10-13, 2013	65	32	3
April 14-16, 2013	56	41	3

*Source:* ABC News/Washington Post Poll

*Question:* “Would you support or oppose a law requiring a nationwide ban on high-capacity ammunition clips, meaning those containing more than 10 bullets”

**Table 7**  
**Party Support for Stricter Gun Laws**

<b>Group</b>	<b>% More Strict</b>	<b>% Less Strict</b>	<b>% Kept as They Are</b>	<b>% Unsure/NA</b>
Overall	47	11	39	3
Democrats	66	2	30	2
Independents	43	15	39	3
Republicans	29	16	52	3

*Source:* CBS News Poll, March 20-24, 2013.

*Question:* “In general, do you think gun control laws should be made more strict, less strict, or kept as they are now?”

**Table 8**  
**Public Responses to Senate Votes on Gun Control**

<b>Response</b>	<b>% Overall</b>	<b>% Democrats</b>	<b>% Independents</b>	<b>% Republicans</b>
Very Happy	20	9	26	29
Relieved	19	13	22	23
Disappointed	32	41	28	26
Angry	15	26	13	8

*Source:* Pew Research Center poll, April 18-21, 2013.

*Question:* “What word best describes how you feel about the Senate voting down new gun control legislation that included background checks on gun purchases?”

**Table 9**  
**Partisan Views of NSA Surveillance Programs**

	January 2006		June 2013		Change
	% <u>Acceptable</u>	% <u>Unacceptable</u>	% <u>Acceptable</u>	% <u>Unacceptable</u>	% <u>Unacceptable</u>
Total	51	47	56	41	+5
Republican	75	23	52	47	-23
Democrat	37	61	64	34	+27
Independent	44	55	53	44	+9

*Source:* Pew Research Center polls, January 4-8, 2006 and June 6-9, 2013.

*Question:* January 2006: “NSA has been investigating people suspected of terrorist involvement by secretly listening in on phone calls and reading emails without prior court approval . . .”

June, 2013: NSA has been getting secret court orders to track calls of millions of Americans to investigate terrorism . . .

Don’t know/Refused responses not shown.

**Table 10**  
**Partisan Approval of NSA Surveillance Programs**

<b><u>Partisan Group</u></b>	<b><u>% Approve</u></b>	<b><u>% Disapprove</u></b>	<b><u>% No Opinion</u></b>
Total	37	53	10
Democrats	49	40	11
Independents	34	56	10
Republicans	32	63	5

*Source:* Gallup poll, June 10-11, 2013.

*Question:* “As you may know, as part of its efforts to investigate terrorism, a federal agency obtained records from larger U.S. telephone and Internet companies in order to compile telephone call logs and Internet communications. Based on what you have heard or read about the program, would you say you approve or disapprove of this government program?”

**Table 11**  
**Effect of Bush Association with Social Security Indexing**

	<b>All %</b>	<b>Republicans %</b>	<b>Democrats %</b>	<b>Independents %</b>
<b>Described without Bush's Name<sup>1</sup></b>				
Favor	53	47	54	55
Oppose	36	41	37	36
Don't know	11	12	9	9
<b>Described as Bush's Proposal<sup>2</sup></b>				
Favor	45	62	34	43
Oppose	43	27	57	47
Don't know	12	11	9	10
<b>Change in Support</b>				
	-8	+15	-20	-12

*Source:* Pew Research Center for the People and the Press poll, May 11–15, 2005.

*Questions:*

<sup>1</sup> “One proposal for dealing with Social Security’s financial situation is to keep the system as it is now for lower income retirees, but limit the growth of future benefits for wealthy and middle income retirees. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?”

<sup>2</sup> “George W. Bush has proposed dealing with Social Security’s financial situation by keeping the system as it is now for lower income retirees, but limiting the growth of future benefits for wealthy and middle income retirees. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?”

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Andrew Goldman, “Cornel West Flunks the President,” *New York Times*, July 22, 2011; Robert Reich, “The Empty Bully Pulpit,” *The American Prospect*, July 27, 2011; Drew Westen, “What Happened to Obama?” *New York Times*, August 6, 2011; Maureen Dowd, “No Bully Pulpit,” *New York Times*, April 20, 2013; Jonathan Alter, *The Center Holds: Obama and His Enemies* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (New York: Free Press, 1990), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Edward S. Corwin, *The President, Office and Powers, 1787–1957*, 4th rev. ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1957).

<sup>5</sup> Clinton L. Rossiter, *The American Presidency*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960).

<sup>6</sup> Neustadt, *Presidential Power*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37. Italics in original.

<sup>8</sup> Much of my own work has followed this path. See, for example, George C. Edwards III, *Overreach: Leadership in the Obama Presidency* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); *The Strategic President* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); *At the Margins: Presidential Leadership of Congress* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); *The Public Presidency* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1983); *Implementing Public Policy* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1980); and *Presidential Influence in Congress* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1980).

<sup>9</sup> Neustadt, *Presidential Power*, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>12</sup> The most prominent advocate of transformational leadership is James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership*. Also see, for example, James MacGregor Burns, *Transforming Leadership* (New York: Grove Press, 2003); and James MacGregor Burns and Susan Dunn, *The Three Roosevelts: The Leaders Who Transformed America* (London: Atlantic Books, 2001). The dust jacket of the latter work claims that these three leaders “reshaped dramatically the political, social, and moral landscape of the United States.”

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, *Leadership*, pp. 13, 20, 33–34, 39–40, 43–44, 68–69, 454.

<sup>14</sup> James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1956), pp. 399–402, 487.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 401–402.

<sup>16</sup> George C. Edwards III, *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> George C. Edwards III, *Governing by Campaigning: The Politics of the Bush Presidency* 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> George C. Edwards III, *Overreach: Leadership in the Obama Presidency* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

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<sup>19</sup> George C. Edwards III, *The Strategic President: Persuasion and Opportunity in Presidential Leadership* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*.

<sup>20</sup> See Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, chap. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Jason Linkins, “Bully Pulpit Myth Reveals Limits of Presidential Persuasion,” *Huffington Post*, June 25, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Rune Slothuus and Claes H. de Vreese, “Political Parties, Motivated Reasoning, and Issue Framing Effects,” *Journal of Politics* (July 2010): 630–645; Charles S. Taber, Damon Cann, and Simona Kucsova, “The Motivated Processing of Political Arguments,” *Political Behavior* 31 (June 2009): 137–155; Charles S. Taber and Milton Lodge, “Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs,” *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (July 2006): 755–769; John T. Jost, “The End of the End of Ideology,” *American Psychologist* 61, no. 7 (2006): 651–670; Richard R. Lau and David P. Redlawsk, *How Voters Decide: Information Processing in Election Campaigns* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Milton Lodge and Charles S. Taber, “The Automaticity of Affect for Political Leaders, Groups, and Issues: An experimental Test of the Hot Cognition Hypothesis,” *Political Psychology* 26 (June 2005): 455–482; David P. Redlawsk, “Hot Cognition or Cool Consideration: Testing the Effects of Motivated Reasoning on Political Decision Making,” *Journal of Politics* 64 (November 2002): 1021–1044; Milton Lodge and Ruth Hamill, “A Partisan Schema for Political Information Processing,” *American Political Science Review* 80 (June 1986): 505–519; Charles Lord, Lee Ross, and Mark R. Lepper, “Biased Assimilation and Attitude Polarization: The Effects of Prior Theories on Subsequently Considered Evidence,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37 (November 1979): 2098–2109.

<sup>23</sup> On the importance of source credibility, see James N. Druckman, “Using Credible Advice to Overcome Framing Effects,” *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 17, no. 1(2001): 62–82; James N. Druckman, “On the Limits of Framing Effects: Who Can Frame?” *Journal of Politics* 63 (November 2001): 1041–1066; Joanne M. Miller and Jon A. Krosnick, “News Media Impact on the Ingredients of Presidential Evaluations: Politically Knowledgeable Citizens Are Guided by a Trusted Source,” *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (April 2000): 301–315.

<sup>24</sup> See Howard Lavine, Christopher Johnston, and Marco Steenbergen, *The Ambivalent Partisan*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press 2012); Paul Goren, Christopher M. Federico, and Miki Caul Kittilson, “Source Cues, Partisan Identities, and Political Value Expression,” *American Journal of Political Science* 55 (October 2009): 805–820; Brian J. Gaines, James H. Kuklinski, Paul J. Quirk, Buddy Peyton, and Jay Verkuilen, “Same Facts, Different Interpretations: Partisan Motivation and Opinion on Iraq,” *Journal of Politics* 69 (November 2007): 957–974; Edwards, *On Deaf Ears*, chap. 9; Larry Bartels, “Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions,” *Political Behavior* 24 (June 2002): 117–150; Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, “It Feels Like We’re Thinking: The Rationalizing Voter and Electoral Democracy,” paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, 2006; Larry M. Bartels, *Unequal Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), chap. 5; Mathew J. Lebo and Daniel Cassino, “The Aggregated Consequences of Motivated Reasoning and the Dynamics of Partisan Presidential Approval,” *Political Psychology* 28 (December 2007): 719–746; Gary C. Jacobson, *A Divider, Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American Public*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 2011); DeBoef and Kellstedt, “The Political (and Economic) Origins of Consumer Confidence”; Steven

Kull, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis, “Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War,” *Political Science Quarterly* 118 (Winter 2003–2004): 569–598; Edwards, *Governing by Campaigning*, chap. 3; Paul D. Sweeney and Kathy L. Gruber, “Selective Exposure: Voter Information Preferences and the Watergate Affair,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 46, no. 6 (1984): 1208–1221; Mark Fischle, “Mass Response to the Lewinsky Scandal: Motivated Reasoning or Bayesian Updating?” *Political Psychology* 21 (March 2000): 135–159.

<sup>25</sup> John R. Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 102–113; Danielle Shani, “Knowing Your Colors: Can Knowledge Correct for Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions?” paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, p. 48; William G. Jacoby, “The Sources of Liberal–Conservative Thinking: Education and Conceptualization,” *Political Behavior* 10 (December 1988): 316–332; Robert C. Luskin, “Measuring Political Sophistication,” *American Journal of Political Science* 31 (November 1987): 856–899; W. Russell Neuman, *The Paradox of Mass Politics: Knowledge and Opinion in the American Electorate* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson, “The Two Faces of Issue Voting,” *American Political Science Review* 74 (March 1980): 78–91; Philip E. Converse, “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics,” in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter (New York: Free Press, 1964).

<sup>27</sup> John R. Zaller, “Elite Leadership of Mass Opinion: New Evidence from the Gulf War,” in *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*, ed. W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*.

<sup>28</sup> Robert S. Erikson, Michael B. MacKuen, and James A. Stimson, *The Macro Polity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). See also Stuart N. Soroka and Christopher Wlezien, *Degrees of Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> James H. Kuklinski, Paul J. Quirk, Jennifer Jerit, David Schwieder, and Robert F. Rich, “Misinformation and the Currency of Democratic Citizenship,” *Journal of Politics* 62 (August 2000): 790–816. See also Brendan Nyhan, “Why the ‘Death Panel’ Myth Wouldn’t Die: Misinformation in the Health Care Reform Debate,” *The Forum* 8, no. 1 (2010). Accessed at [www.bepress.com/forum/vol8/iss1/art5](http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol8/iss1/art5); Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler, “When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions,” *Political Behavior* 32 (June 2010): 303–330; David P. Redlawsk, Andrew J. W. Civettini, and Karen M. Emmerson, “The Affective Tipping Point: Do Motivated Reasoners Ever ‘Get It’?” *Political Psychology* 31 (August 2010): 563–593.

<sup>30</sup> Ruth Mayo, Yaacov Schul, and Eugene Burnstein, “‘I Am Not Guilty’ vs ‘I Am Innocent’: Successful Negation May Depend on the Schema Used for Its Encoding,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 40 (July 2004): 433–449.

<sup>31</sup> Norbert Schwarz, Lawrence J. Sanna, Ian Skurnik, and Carolyn Yoon, “Metacognitive Experiences and the Intricacies of Setting People Straight: Implications for Debiasing and Public Information Campaigns,” *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 39 (2007): 127–161; Ian Skurnik, Carolyn Yoon, Denise C. Park, and Norbert Schwarz, “How Warnings about False Claims Become Recommendations,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 31 (March 2005): 713–724.

<sup>32</sup> John Bullock, “Experiments on Partisanship and Public Opinion: Party Cues, False Beliefs, and Bayesian Updating,” Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Y. Shapiro and Lawrence R. Jacobs, “The Democratic Paradox: The Waning of Popular Sovereignty and the Pathologies of American Politics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of*

*American Public Opinion and the Media*, ed. Robert Y. Shapiro and Lawrence R. Jacobs (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> David Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "Choices, Values, and Frames," *American Psychologist* 39 (April 1984): 341–350; David Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk," *Econometrica* 47 (March 1979): 263–292.

<sup>35</sup> Susan T. Fiske, "Attention and Weight in Person Perception: The Impact of Negative and Extreme Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 38, no. 6 (1980): 889–906; David L. Hamilton and Mark P. Zanna, "Differential Weighting of Favorable and Unfavorable Attributes in Impressions of Personality," *Journal of Experimental Research in Personality* 6, nos. 2–3 (1972): 204–212.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Lau, "Two Explanations for Negativity Effects in Political Behavior," *American Journal of Political Science* 29 (February 1985): 119–138.

<sup>37</sup> Michael D. Cobb and James H. Kuklinski, "Changing Minds: Political Arguments and Political Persuasion," *American Journal of Political Science* 41 (January 1997): 88–121; David W. Brady and Daniel P. Kessler, "Who Supports Health Reform?" *PS: Political Science and Politics* 43 (January 2010): 1–5.

<sup>38</sup> See Joanne M. Miller, "Examining the Mediators of Agenda Setting: A New Experimental Paradigm Reveals the Role of Emotions," *Political Psychology* 28 (December 2007): 689–717; George E. Marcus, W. Russell Neuman, and Michael MacKuen, *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); George E. Marcus, *The Sentimental Citizen* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Michael MacKuen, Jennifer Wolak, Luke Keele, and George E. Marcus, "Civic Engagements: Resolute Partisanship or Reflective Deliberation," *American Journal of Political Science* 54 (April 2010): 440–458.

<sup>39</sup> George C. Edwards III, *At the Margins: Presidential Leadership of Congress* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); Edwards, *The Strategic President*; Jon R. Bond and Richard Fleisher, *The President in the Legislative Arena* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), chap. 8; Richard Fleisher, Jon R. Bond, and B. Dan Wood, "Which Presidents Are Uncommonly Successful in Congress?" in *Presidential Leadership: The Vortex of Presidential Power*, ed. Bert Rockman and Richard W. Waterman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> This discussion relies on Edwards, *The Strategic President*, chap. 4.

<sup>41</sup> James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1956), pp. 310–315, 321, 337–352, 366–370.

<sup>42</sup> David A. Stockman, *The Triumph of Politics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 79–80; see also p. 120.

<sup>43</sup> Edwards, *The Strategic President*, pp. 139–145.

<sup>44</sup> Keith Krehbiel, *Pivotal Politics: A Theory of U.S. Lawmaking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). It is possible that there is selection bias in votes on veto overrides. Presidents do not veto the same number of bills, and some veto no bills at all. Moreover, presidents may often choose to veto bills on which they are likely to prevail. In addition, most override votes are not close, allowing members of Congress more flexibility in their voting. Whatever the case, Krehbiel's data do not provide a basis for inferring successful presidential persuasion.

<sup>45</sup> The fullest treatment of his sweeping view of the presidency is in Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to George Bush* (Cambridge, MA:

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Harvard University Press, 1993). See also his remarks at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 2006.

<sup>46</sup> Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make*.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Cooper and David W. Brady, "Institutional Context and Leadership Style: The House from Cannon to Rayburn," *American Political Science Review* 75 (June 1981): 411–25. See also David W. Rohde and Kenneth A. Shepsle, "Leaders and Followers in the House of Representatives: Reflections on Woodrow Wilson's Congressional Government," *Congress and the Presidency* 14 (Autumn 1987): 111–13; and Barbara Sinclair, "Party Leadership and Policy Change," in Gerald C. Wright, Jr., Leroy N. Rieselbach, and Lawrence C. Dodd, eds., *Congress and Policy Change* (New York: Agathon, 1986).

<sup>48</sup> George C. Edwards III and Andrew Barrett, "Presidential Agenda Setting in Congress," in Jon R. Bond and Richard Fleisher, eds., *Polarized Politics: Congress and the President in a Partisan* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 2000).

<sup>49</sup> George C. Edwards III and B. Dan Wood, "Who Influences Whom? The President, Congress, and the Media," *American Political Science Review* 93 (June 1999): 327–44.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Baker, "Obama Goes Back on the Trail Ahead of Debt Talks," *New York Times*, November 27, 2012.

<sup>51</sup> Baker, "Obama Goes Back on the Trail Ahead of Debt Talks."

<sup>52</sup> NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll, December 6-9, 2012; *Washington Post*-ABC News polls, November 21-25 and December 13-16, 2012; Fox News poll, December 9-11, 2012; Bloomberg National Poll, December 7-10, 2012; CBS News poll, December 12-16, 2012; CBS News/*New York Times* polls, September 8-12, October 25-28, and December 12-16, 2012; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press polls, October 4-7 and December 5-9, 2012; McClatchy-Marist polls, July 9-11 and December 4-6, 2012; United Technologies/*National Journal* Congressional Connection polls conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, October 12-14 and November 17-20, 2012; Dan Friedman, "Axelrod: Obama Has Tax Mandate," *New York Times*, November 12, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> See Pew Research Center for the People & the Press polls, October 4-7 and December 5-9, 2012.

<sup>54</sup> Gallup poll, January 3, 2013. See also Pew Research Center poll, January 3-6, 2013. The ABC News/*Washington Post* poll of January 2-6, 2013, found 45 percent approval of the agreement, but only 38 percent disapproval with 17 percent unsure.

<sup>55</sup> United Technologies/*National Journal* Congressional Connection Poll conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International. January 10-13, 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Brandice Canes-Wrone, *Who Leads Whom? Presidents, Policy, and the Public* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 80, chaps. 3–4.

<sup>57</sup> Pew Research Center/*Washington Post* poll, November 29-December 2, 2012; Fox News poll, December 9-11, 2012; Gallup polls of December 1-2, 8-9, and 15-16, 2012; CBS News poll, December 12-16, 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Pew Research Center/*Washington Post* poll, November 8-11, 2012; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press poll, November 29-December 2, 2012; Fox News poll, December 9-11, 2012; Gallup polls of December 1-2, 8-9, and 15-16, 2012; NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll, December 6-9, 2012; CBS News poll, December 12-16, 2012; CNN/ORC poll, November 16-18, 2012.

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<sup>59</sup> Gallup polls of December 1-2, 8-9, 15-16, and 21-22, 2012; *Washington Post*-ABC News poll December 13-16, 2012; NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll, December 6-9, 2012; CBS News poll, December 12-16, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> See sources in footnote 52.

<sup>61</sup> Nelson D. Schwartz and Jonathan Weisman, “Unlikely Backers in a Battle Over Taxes,” *New York Times*, December 11, 2012.

<sup>62</sup> *Washington Post*-ABC News poll December 13-16, 2012; NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll, December 6-9, 2012; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press poll, November 8-11, 2012; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press poll, November 29-December 2, 2012; McClatchy-Marist poll, December 4-6, 2012.

<sup>63</sup> ABC News/*Washington Post* poll, December 13-16, 2012; CBS News poll, December 12-16, 2012; NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll, December 6-9, 2012; Gallup poll, December 21-22, 2012.

<sup>64</sup> ABC News/*Washington Post* polls, December 13-16, 2012, and April 11-14, 2013; CBS News poll, December 12-16, 2012; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press poll, December 5-9, 2012; McClatchy-Marist poll, December 4-6, 2012; AP-GfK poll, November 29-December 3, 2012; United Technologies/National Journal Congressional Connection Poll conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International. November 29-December 2, 2012.

<sup>65</sup> Gallup tracking polls, February 25-26, 2013; Pew Research Center/*USA Today* poll, February 13-18, 2013.

<sup>66</sup> Transcript, “Statement by the President on the Sequester,” White House, March 1, 2013.

<sup>67</sup> Gallup polls, March 2-3, March 11-12, April 6-7, April 29-30, and July 27-28, 2013.

<sup>68</sup> Transcript, “Statement by the President on the Sequester,” White House, March 1, 2013.

<sup>69</sup> Steven T. Dennis and Daniel Newhauser, “Obama’s Lost Leverage,” *Roll Call*, March 1, 2013.

<sup>70</sup> Jennifer Steinhauer, “For Gun Bill Born in Tragedy, a Tangled Path to Defeat,” *New York Times*, April 18, 2013.

<sup>71</sup> Ron Fournier, “From Guns to Immigration, Obama Circumventing GOP,” *National Journal*, January 16, 2013.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Baker and Michael D. Shear, “Obama to ‘Put Everything I’ve Got’ Into Gun Control,” *New York Times*, January 16, 2013. Also see, Scott Wilson and Zachary A. Goldfarb, “With Domestic Legacy in Lawmakers’ Hands, Obama Considers His Options,” *New York Times*, April 13, 2013.

<sup>73</sup> Gallup poll, January 7-10, 2013.

<sup>74</sup> Gallup poll, January 17, 2013. See also Pew Research Center poll, January 9-13, 2013.

<sup>75</sup> Pew Research Center/*Washington Post* poll, April 18-21, 2013.

<sup>76</sup> Pew Research Center/*Washington Post* poll, April 18-21, 2013.

<sup>77</sup> Gallup poll, May 4-5, 2013.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Maureen Dowd, “No Bully Pulpit,” *New York Times*, April 20, 2013.

<sup>79</sup> Nate Silver, “In Gun Ownership Statistics, Partisan Divide Is Sharp,” *New York Times*, December 18, 2012.

<sup>80</sup> Pew Research Center poll, January 9-13, 2013.

<sup>81</sup> Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make*.

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<sup>82</sup> Stephen Skowronek, "Leadership by Definition: First Term Reflections on George W. Bush's Political Stance," *Perspectives on Politics* 3 (December 2005): 818, 826.

<sup>83</sup> Skowronek, "Leadership by Definition," pp. 818, 821, 826–827.

<sup>84</sup> But see Daniel J. Hopkins, "The Exaggerated Life of Death Panels: The Limits of Framing Effects in the 2009-2012 Health Care Debate," Georgetown University, April 5, 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson, *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

<sup>86</sup> Mark Smith, *The Right Talk: How Conservatives Transformed the Great Society into the Economic Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>87</sup> Byron E. Shafer and Richard Johnston, *The End of Southern Exceptionalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>88</sup> Taeku Lee, *Mobilizing Public Opinion: Black Insurgency and Racial Attitudes in the Civil Rights Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>89</sup> Gary C. Jacobson, *A Divider, Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American Public*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 2007), p. 36.

<sup>90</sup> Morris P. Fiorina, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 2006).

<sup>91</sup> Pew Research Center poll, June 12-16, 2013. See also Pew Research Center poll, July 17-21, 2013.

<sup>92</sup> Gallup poll, May 12-13, 2006.

<sup>93</sup> Scott Wilson and Zachary A. Goldfarb, "With Domestic Legacy in Lawmakers' Hands, Obama Considers His Options," *New York Times*, April 13, 2013; Ryan Lizza, "Getting to Maybe: Inside the Gang of Eight's Immigration Deal," *New Yorker*, June 24, 2013. For a similar example, see Bob Woodward, *The Price of Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), pp. 255-256.

<sup>94</sup> Michael D. Shear, "Difficult Spot for Obama on Immigration Push," *New York Times*, July 11, 2013.

<sup>95</sup> Jackie Calmes, "Obama Must Walk Fine Line as Congress Takes Up Agenda," *New York Times*, April 7, 2013.

<sup>96</sup> For another example of divergent partisan responses to the president, see ABC/*Washington Post* poll, March 10–13, 2005.

<sup>97</sup> Lee Sigelman and Carol K. Sigelman, "Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion: From 'Benevolent Leader' to Kiss of Death?" *Experimental Study of Politics* 7, no. 3, (1981): 1–22.

<sup>98</sup> Dan Thomas and Lee Sigelman, "Presidential Identification and Policy Leadership: Experimental Evidence on the Reagan Case," in Edwards, et al, *The Presidency and Public Policy Making*, pp. 37-49. See also a poll of Utah residents found that although two-thirds of them opposed deploying MX missiles in Utah and Nevada, an equal number said they would either "definitely" or "probably" support President Reagan if he decided to go ahead and base the missiles in those states.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Green, Donald P. Green, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler, *Partisan Hearts and Minds* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

<sup>100</sup> James N. Druckman and Toby Bolsen, "Framing, Motivated Reasoning, and Opinions about Emergent Technologies," *Journal of Communication* 61 (August 2011): 659–88.

<sup>101</sup> Logan Dancy and Paul Goren, "Party Identification, Issue Attitudes, and the Dynamics of Political Debate," *American Journal of Political Science* 54 (July 2010): 686–699.

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<sup>102</sup> Stephen P. Nicholson, “Polarizing Cues,” *American Journal of Political Science* 56 (January 2012): 52–66; Joanne R. Smith, Deborah J. Terry, Timothy R. Crosier, and Julie M. Duck, “The Importance of the Relevance of the Issue to the Group in Voting Intentions,” *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 27 no. 2 (2005): 163–170.

<sup>103</sup> John G. Bullock, “Elite Influence on Public Opinion in an Informed Electorate,” *American Political Science Review* 105 (August 2011): 496–515.

<sup>104</sup> James N. Druckman, Erik Peterson, and Rune Slothuus, “How Elite Partisan Polarization Affects Public Opinion Formation,” *American Political Science Review* 107 (February 2013): 57-79. Party endorsements, particularly under conditions of polarization, do not appear to simply serve as cues people follow. Instead, cues seem to shape how the public views arguments put forth by different sides.

<sup>105</sup> Penny S. Visser, George Y. Bizer, and Jon A. Krosnick, “Exploring the Latent Structure of Strength-Related Attitude Attributes,” in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38, ed. Mark P. Zanna, (San Diego: Academic Press, 2006).

<sup>106</sup> See Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus, “How Elite Partisan Polarization Affects Public Opinion Formation.”