Diversionary Temptations: 
Presidential Incentives and the Political Use of Force

By

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Bachelor of Arts, Government
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Submitted to the Department of Political Science on August 5, 2003, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

ABSTRACT

This dissertation assesses U.S. presidents’ incentives for diversionary war. The political benefits of the use of force were measured and compared to the benefits of other dramatic foreign policy activities. Gains from force were modest, not unique, and discounted in many circumstances of political need.

Statistical tests measured the changes in presidential approval ratings following uses of force, major diplomatic events, presidential speeches, and foreign travel by presidents, in the period 1953-2000. Historical sources and newspaper archives were used to identify and characterize uses of force and diplomatic events.

Uses of force provide only modest and short-lived approval gains (average 6% increase with 3 month half life for major uses). Approval changes were greater with more media coverage, Congressional support, or popular goals (e.g., protecting American lives, not humanitarian intervention). Approval gains were higher during recessions, but losses occurred when prior approval was low for non-economic reasons (e.g., scandals). Diplomatic events produced slightly smaller benefits, conditioned by similar variables except for retaining their popularity during scandals. Foreign travel and speeches had little impact.

The frequency of presidential activities changes in response to political variables, in ways that are consistent with maximization of political benefits. Uses of force became slightly more common during recessions, less common when approval was low for non-economic reasons. Elections reduced the rate of all activities. These results may explain previous negative findings for U.S. diversionary war: presidential incentives for diversionary force are weak because potential gains are small, other tools are available, and they are discounted during times of need. Diversionary use of force would be attractive during economic slowdowns, however.

Thesis supervisor: Harvey M. Sapolsky
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Biographical Note

Dr. Burbach's research centers on the domestic politics of foreign policy, in particular, the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy decision-making in the United States. He has previously presented papers at several national conferences. Dr. Burbach has taught courses on foreign and national security policy, as well as environmental policy. His academic background is complemented by policy analysis experience at organizations including the RAND Corporation.

At MIT, Dr. Burbach's major fields of study were International Relations and Public Policy (receiving honors in both), along with minors in Security Studies and Methodology. Dr. Burbach's coursework gave him a broad foundation in international relations and American politics, with a special focus on issues at the intersection of technology and politics, such as defense planning and environmental protection. Additionally, Dr. Burbach received training in quantitative methods such as advanced statistics, game theory, and policy analysis.

As a member of MIT's Security Studies Program, Dr. Burbach participated in seminars with senior military, academic, and private-sector experts; gained expertise on strategy, technology, and budgeting; and viewed military exercises and facilities across the country.

Dr. Burbach received a B.A. in Government with a physics minor from Pomona College in Claremont, California. He is a native of Portland, Oregon, where he attended Parkrose High School.

The author welcomes comments and questions relating to this work. It is difficult to provide contact information into the distant future, of course, but for quite some time the author will be reachable at the electronic mail address: dburbach@alum.mit.edu Current contact information should also be available from the MIT Department of Political Science, 77 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA, 02139.
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I would like to give special recognition to my parents, Jerold Burbach and Linda Burbach. They may not have expected a boy fascinated by dinosaur bones and rocket ships, but nonetheless they always encouraged me in my dreams of someday becoming a scientist at a place like MIT. This dissertation is dedicated to them.
Introduction

*Be it thy course to busy giddy minds / with foreign quarrels*

- William Shakespeare, *Henry IV*, 1598

*If a woman gives you trouble, or maybe two or three…\*  
*Pick that red phone up, it's an emergency*  
*And go to war, it's been done before, it's wag the dog!*

- Mark Russell, CNN Crossfire, 1998

Few international relations theories have such a long pedigree as diversionary war: the notion that when faced with domestic political problems, leaders will engage their nations in foreign conflicts to distract their citizen's attention and rally them in support of the nation – and the leader. American presidents have routinely been accused of using war for personal political gain: from the War of 1812 to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, diversionary accusations accompany virtually every use of the military. It would be deeply disturbing if such charges are true, but even if they are false the cynicism the charge breeds and the excess caution it might instill are problematic enough. The accusation has such power because it is almost universally believed that regardless of whether a particular president's motives have been pure, the diversionary strategy *would* work if tried. The use of force is commonly seen as a powerful, indeed, unique way to gain political support, and so we must always worry that presidents face powerful temptations wield the sword on behalf of their personal fortunes.

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As universal is as the belief in the power of diversion, there is surprisingly little evidence to support that belief. Academic studies have found little evidence that U.S. presidents use military force for political purposes. War is if anything less likely before presidential elections. Presidents with low approval ratings are less, not more likely to use the military. If diversion is so tempting, presidents have displayed admirable temperance.

Is the diversionary use of force really such an attractive strategy, however? This thesis argues that it is not: the conventional wisdom exaggerates the political power of the use of force. After measuring the political benefits of the use of force, as well as the benefits of actions other than war that presidents might use as distractions, I conclude that the benefits of the use of force are generally modest. In terms of presidential approval ratings, gains are usually modest and are not long lasting. In order to benefit at all, presidents need to find the right circumstances for intervention, and need to have the backing of Congress and media observers. Moreover, the use of force does not generally provide benefits vastly greater that what might be achieved through major diplomatic activity, or even domestic policy speeches.

On the other hand, under certain circumstances military adventures would be tempting. The use of force seems especially helpful to presidents during recessions: military intervention may not distract from scandals, elections, or other political difficulties, but it does seem able to focus national attention away from poor economic performance. Large gains are possible when a particular intervention can be tied very directly to protecting American lives. These conditions do create windows where the diversionary use of force would be an attractive strategy for presidents. The attractiveness of diversion has also increased in the wake of the September 11, 2001

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2 For a review of the literature, see Chapter 1, section 2.
attacks on America, as it is now far easier to connect foreign interventions to direct threats to U.S. citizens.

As additional confirmation of these findings, further tests that were conducted found that presidential behavior has been consistent with the incentives faced by presidents. There is no strong pattern of diversion, but what relationship there is between the timing of presidential activities and sources of political trouble shows that the activities that would be most popular in a given situation do indeed become more frequent under those conditions – exactly the pattern that would be predicted if presidents using force and other dramatic actions for political purposes.

The rest of this introduction provides an overview of the project. First the motivation for the study and its relation to the existing scholarly literature is discussed, followed by a brief description the research design, data, and methods. A summary of the results is then given. Finally, the plan of the manuscript is outlined.

*Why study diversionary incentives?*

In order to understand the temptations – or lack thereof – faced by presidents, we need to understand the potential costs and benefits of using force. The appeal of "wagging the dog" depends on the political gains that are possible from doing so – if not much benefit can be expected from launching a war, why bother? It is also important to know how the gains from the use of force compare to what might be achieved through other political strategies. If presidents can improve their standing just as much by a foreign tour full of pomp and photo ops as through airstrikes on a hapless nation, even without moral considerations one would expect a calculating executive to choose the cheaper, safer alternative.
What we need is an ability to predict what political gains would be obtained from the use of force, given the specific characteristics of that use of force and the specific political conditions of the time. It is important to know how the gains from force are affected by the conditions that create diversionary pressure in the first place. War will not be an attractive pre-election ploy even if the use of force is generally popular, for example, if the voters act as rational agents and discount obvious “October surprises”. Likewise, it is important to know how the public response to uses of force is affected by variables that can be manipulated by presidents. A scheming executive need not draw an intervention out of a hat; if airstrikes are generally popular but the use of ground troops is not, for example, then the president would select a target that requires bombers, not boots on the ground. Similarly, we want to be able to predict the political gains of other dramatic presidential activities under those same conditions so that we can assess the relative appeal of the use of force.

Unfortunately, the international relations literature does not give us the predictive tools we need. Indeed, it has become a ritual for authors writing about diversionary war to complain that we do not know enough about the underlying mechanisms of diversion to properly specify our tests of the theory. James Meernik, for example, recently wrote that instead of focusing on the question of when presidents have used force, we need a better understanding of “…costs and benefits of using force in order to explain why presidents use force.”

To cite some specific gaps in our knowledge, studies have come to contradictory conclusions on whether the use of force typically improves presidential approval ratings – that is,

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whether the so-called “rally effect” exists. As will be shown, none of the existing findings are
terribly convincing given their limitations. Even less is known about the political effects of
presidential actions other than the use of force, even for dramatic activities like major summits –
or ending wars as opposed to starting them. Moreover, existing studies have not adequately ex-
amined the variables that a president might manipulate in order to maximize the returns from
diversionary wars.

This dissertation aimed to measure the political benefits that can be obtained from the
use of force, as well as from other dramatic activities that are under presidential control. Those
benefits are measured in general, but also as a function of political conditions that would create
diversionary pressure, such as whether the president is doing poorly in the polls or elections are
pending, as well as variables that presidents could manipulate, such as the goal and the means of
a military intervention. In addition to measuring these benefits, the study went on to test
whether presidential behavior is consistent with presidential incentives.

The answers provided here are important for several reasons. First, there are of inherent
political interest – Americans ought to know how much their presidents stand to gain through
illegitimate uses of force. It appears that Americans have probably been too suspicious of their
leaders – no matter how cynical presidents might be, most of the time there are simply not large
gains to be had from politically motivated uses of force. Under certain conditions though –
conditions that apply at the time of this writing – the diversionary use of force does become
attractive. Moreover, observers should also watch for diversionary “uses of peace”: diplomatic
drama can also help presidents, sometimes more than the use of force could. The signing of a
bad arms control agreement or premature ending of a conflict may not be as disturbing as the
thought of politically-motivated war, but still represent distortions of U.S. foreign policy.
These findings will also contribute to the academic debates on diversionary war. In fact, the results here are entirely consistent with what most studies of the U.S. have found. The only politically difficult situation in which the use of force has strong, positive effects for presidents is during economic slowdowns, and what has been found both in this thesis and in previous work is that diversionary pressure does not lead to more use of force by the U.S., except for recessions, which do see greater resort to arms. This pattern has been somewhat surprising, but the results here may explain why presidents use force when they do. This study can not prove what was or was not a motivation for particular uses of force; presidents might show restraint due to moral objections or international-level factors rather than because of the domestic incentive structure that is described here. Still, this research puts the findings of earlier studies into a proper context, and suggests other factors that ought to be explored in future research.

Design of the Study

The overall strategy of the research was to measure the political effect on presidential support from dramatic activities: the use of force, but also “peace events” (diplomacy and de-escalation of conflicts), foreign travel, and major presidential speeches. Speeches, travel, and peace are not the only things presidents might try other than war, but do represent obvious examples under presidential control and so are a good place to begin testing. Political effects were measured by constructing statistical models of presidential approval and estimating the change from a baseline level of approval (determined by economic conditions and other large scale indicators) caused by uses of force, diplomatic events, foreign travel, and major speeches.

The goal was not only to measure average effects of those events, but to understand how the public reaction was shaped by the characteristics of an event and by the political con-
text in which it took place. To facilitate this, a new theoretical model of the diversionary process was developed. Traditionally diversionary war has been seen as exploitation of the "conflict-induced cohesion" effect – the supposed tendency of groups (or nations) to unify under external threat. I argue that the conflict-cohesion mechanism fails to explain the patterns we see, and instead propose the "media priming" model: a model based on public opinion and political communication theories. Diversion is seen as an exercise in changing the subject: focusing public attention away from presidential failings and towards dramatic, popular actions. This model does not predict that diversion will automatically succeed, however; instead it identifies a number of variables that will condition public support for presidential action – media coverage and reaction of elites, for example.

The variables identified by the media priming theory were included in the models that were estimated. That is, the magnitude of political gains (or losses) from events were specified as a function of those variables, and so the results allow us to predict how presidential approval would be affected by a prospective use of force, given the characteristics of that intervention and the political context in which it would take place.

The analysis was performed for the period 1953-2000, and included approximately 65 uses of force and 75 "peace events". Data on uses of force came partly from existing datasets, but with significant extensions to correct some of their limitations as well as original historical data collection on variables such as Congressional reactions. The "peace event" data is original: no dataset of politically relevant peace events, such as summits, treaties, and de-escalations of conflicts existed. A variety of historical sources and contemporary media content was used to identify and characterize these events. The statistical analysis that was done included important technical advances on previous work, the details of which are in Chapter 3.
In addition to the measurement of political effects from presidential actions, the project also included testing a “repaired” version of the diversionary theory. That is, having identified which presidential actions would be most beneficial under a given set of political circumstances, it was then possible to test whether or not those actions became more frequent during the conditions that would make them popular. This was also done statistically, using event count models to measure how the frequency of different actions changed in response to political conditions that would create diversionary pressure, such as recessions or elections.

Results in Brief

The regressions that were conducted show that uses of force provide modest benefits for presidents. For example, uses of force that appear on the front page of the New York Times for two weeks (of which there were about 25 during the study period) are followed by a 6% boost in the president's ratings, declining by half over three months. Uses of force that are any smaller (i.e., receive less coverage) have almost no effect at all. While noticeable, a 6% gain would not make up for a major scandal or recession.

The approval change from uses of force was found to vary systematically in the ways predicted by the media priming model. More coverage led to larger approval changes, for example. Congressional and press support was also highly important: Congressional reaction could mean the difference between a 10% gain or a 5% loss. The public also looks more favorably on intervention for some goals than others. Military operations that directly protected American lives were consistently popular, while “humanitarian intervention” on average cost a president approval – and even in the best case, with strong elite support, humanitarian missions would be expected to leave approval ratings unchanged.
Other dramatic activities did not provide benefits as great as the use of force. In fact, speeches and travel hardly had any effect at all. Peace initiatives did provide approval gains on average, nearly as large but shorter-lived than the gains from uses of force. The response to peace events was affected by the same variables as uses of force: coverage, Congressional support, etc. Thus an event receiving very heavy press coverage and strong backing from Congress and commentators could lead to a 10% approval boost for a president – as was the case with Nixon’s trip to China, for example.

Although the approval increases from force or peace would be useful (at least for the larger and more supported events), White House calculations are complicated by the fact that the gains from force or peace also vary with the president’s political situation. The statistical results revealed that in general, the more a president needs a political boost, the less positive the public reaction. Uses of force are significantly less popular before elections, for example, and the approval gain from both force and peace events increases as the president’s prior approval rating increases. Uses of force actually have a negative effect when the president’s approval is low even though the economy is doing well (as might be expected due to scandals, incompetence, or other dramatic policy failures). On the other hand, the use of force grows more popular as the economy falters, and so the use of force becomes especially tempting when the economy sours.

Tests of the “repaired” diversionary theory found that presidential behavior is generally consistent with presidential incentives. The use of force becomes more common when approval is low during economic downturns, and less common when approval is low for other reasons—exactly as predicted from the measured benefits. Peace events become slightly more common during low approval / good economy periods, also as predicted. Both of these effects are mod-
est, though, with significant uncertainty. Diversionary patterns appear present, but are not the principal drivers of the use of force and peace initiatives. All activities became less common before presidential elections, but surprisingly, the use of force rate increases before midterms.

**Plan of the Manuscript**

The argument is developed through the following six chapters:

**Chapter 1: The Problem of Diversionary War in American Foreign Policy**

This chapter introduces the problem: what incentives do U.S. presidents face for diversionary war? After discussing the importance of the diversionary argument to academics and to politicians, the chapter reviews existing empirical studies, and then the goals and strategy for this study are described.

**Chapter 2: Theory**

The chapter begins an argument that the traditional conflict-conhesion model of diversionary behavior is not an adequate basis for assessing political incentives. Instead, the "media priming" model is introduced, which predicts that "rallies" can be generated by "changing the subject" with events that are visible and popular. Detailed predictions are derived for variables that should condition the public response to uses of force and other dramatic events.

**Chapter 3: Methods**

After reviewing and critiquing the methods used by previous studies, this chapter develops the statistical models that will be used for measuring the benefits of dramatic actions.

**Chapter 4: Political Benefits of the Use of Force**

This chapter measures the political gains presidents can expect from the use of force. First, the relatively extensive "rally effect" literature is reviewed. The sources and methods used to create the use of force dataset are described. Then, the results from the regressions are presented and discussed.
Chapter 5: Political Benefits From Speeches, Travel, and Peace Events

This chapter measures the political gains presidents can expect from activities other than the use of force. Relatively little has been published about the effect of these actions, although memoirs and insider histories show that the White House has often seen peace initiatives as a source of political capital. The sources and methods used to create the speech, travel, and peace events datasets are described. Then, the results from the regressions are presented and discussed.

Chapter 6: Testing the Repaired Diversionary Theory

Using the results from chapters 4 and 5, a “repaired” version of the diversionary theory is described: presidents are assumed to select the action (if any) that will yield the greatest positive approval change given prevailing political conditions and opportunities available. Event count regressions are then used to estimate actual rates as a function of the relevant variables, and results presented.

Finally, a concluding section recapitulates the findings and discusses some of the broader implications of this research for U.S. politics and international relations.
Notes for the reader

Many of the statistical sections include graphs that are easier to interpret when viewed in color, due to the multidimensional data they present. In order to facilitate duplication and microfiche transcription of the manuscript, monochrome versions have been included within the text and generally they relevant patterns can be seen even in grey scale. For more detailed views, though, color versions in a larger size can be found in Appendix B.

For maximum continuity of the text, tables listing all of the events in each of the four categories (uses of force, peace events, major speeches, foreign travel) have been included together in Appendix A. Coding of the events on the variables of greatest substantive interest is noted, but for values of all variables please refer to the computer datasets.

Full datasets including all variables are available as computer data files from the author formats include Microsoft Excel 2000, Aptech GAUSS 3.0, and Insightful S-PLUS 2000. Although the ultimate goal is to make these datasets available through a standard archive, such as ICPSR or the Political Methodology repository, at the time of writing such arrangements have not been made. Inquiries regarding the datasets can be directed to the author via the MIT Department of Political Science.
Chapter 1:

Diversionary War and American Politics

Few international relations theories are as well known and widely believed as the diversionary theory of war – the notion that when faced with domestic political troubles, national leaders will instigate foreign conflicts in order to rally their nation around them and quiet their opponents. Despite its popularity, though, the diversionary theory has received surprisingly little empirical support. In the case of the United States, the gap between diversionary suspicions and the clear evidence against the traditional diversionary theory is both large and unexplained. Empirical tests suggest that the diversionary theory fails for the U.S., but they do not explain why it fails. This is symptomatic of a larger problem with studies of diversionary war: as many observers have pointed out, there has not been enough attention to identifying the causal mechanisms behind diversion, or to testing those mechanisms.

This thesis improves our understanding of the diversionary theory of war by focusing on the question of, would diversion work? That is, it asks whether (or under what conditions) uses of force do provide significant political benefits to U.S. presidents, and whether those political benefits are greater than the gains that presidents can achieve through non-military actions. The answers to those questions will tell us how attractive the strategy of diversion would be to presidents in political trouble. Presidents might choose to forgo the potential gains from diversionary wars, of course, but as our knowledge stands we do not have a clear understanding of whether “wagging the dog” would be a successful tactic or whether presidents would see little to be gained from it, however cynical they might be.
The questions are answered by looking at the details of public responses to uses of force and other dramatic actions by U.S. presidents. The study develops a model of diversion grounded in modern public opinion theory, and derives testable hypotheses from that model. Quantitative analysis of opinion changes and media content related to uses of force and other Presidential actions is then used to test those hypotheses, with the goal of determining whether and when diversion would be a preferred option for Presidents.

This chapter explains the motivation and overall approach of the study, and places it in the context of the broader literature on diversionary war. Specifically, it is divided into four sections:

1) Discussion of the importance of the diversionary hypothesis in American politics.

2) A review of the empirical literature on diversionary uses of force by the United States

3) The research question: what are the incentives for diversion faced by U.S. presidents — that is, when, if ever, will the use of force be an attractive political strategy?

4) An overview of the methods and data sources that were used for testing diversionary incentives, as well as their limitations.

1. The Enduring Relevance of the Diversionary Thesis

The diversionary theory is an ancient notion; it is impossible to try to assign credit for it to any individual. It has been popular among historians, pundits, and politicians for ages, and remains important today. It is still the subject of lively debate in academia, it is widely known and believed among society at large — even becoming a common theme in pop culture, and per-
haps most importantly, serious accusations of diversion are often levied against presidents by their opponents, with serious implications for U.S. foreign policy whether those accusations are true or baseless.

_Diversionary Theory in Academia_

The diversionary theory of war has long been popular among international relations theorists and other scholars. Many of the “classic” theorists of international relations accepted the theory. Ken Waltz, for example, found it a plausible cause of wars; Quincy Wright declared it “…such a historical commonplace as to need no elaboration”.¹ The theory has been used to “explain” a tremendous range of wars, from the Hundred Years’ War to the Crimean War to both World Wars.²

The diversionary theory continues to be of interest today. A search of the JSTOR archive of political science journals from 1990 to 2002 found more than 90 articles that referred to it.³ Approximately two dozen articles dealt directly with the diversionary theory. It is commonly invoked to explain a number of conflicts in recent decades, such as the Argentine seizure of the Falkland Islands in 1981, or for the aggressive policies pursued by Slobodan Milosevic or Franjo Tudjman in the former Yugoslavia. Prominent scholars have also expressed their belief – and

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² For examples of diversionary claims by historians and skeptical commentary on them, see Blainey, _The Causes of War_, pp 72-86.

³ JSTOR search as of January 2003, for keywords “diversionary war”, “diversionary use of force”, and “diversionary theory”. 90 is certainly an undercount. There may be articles that used different terminology, such as “scapegoating”. More importantly, the archive does not provide full coverage for the period (International Studies Quarterly only to 1997, for example), nor does it include all relevant journals. See http://www.jstor.org for more information on this archive.
their fear – that diversion takes place in American foreign policy as well. Theodore Lowi, for example, accepts the diversionary thesis and suspects that Presidents “...keep a score of international contingency plans in their tool kits”.

*Diversion as a Theme in Popular Culture*

Diversionary war is not a concept limited to academics. In fact, it may be the most popular political science “folk theory”. It is often invoked in the media, by politicians, and in popular culture as a strategy actually employed by Presidents. Diversion is certainly an accusation commonly used by war opponents or Presidential critics. Even when a President is not directly accused of diversion, the topic is still in the air: media commentary frequently questions whether a conflict is being undertaken for diversionary purposes. Even if the answer given is, “not this time”, the subject still comes up and still primes the public to be on the lookout for diversion in U.S. foreign policy. Likewise, polls often ask the public whether they trust Presidential motives for military interventions.

The diversionary idea frequently appears in popular culture. Of recent note was the 1997 movie “Wag the Dog”, in which a President confronted by a pre-election sex scandal used Hollywood production techniques to fake a war with Albania and thus rally the country around him again.\(^5\) The idea is standard fare for satirists and late-night comedians, and editorial car-

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\(^5\) Movie “Wag the Dog”, New Line Cinema, dir. Barry Levinson, 1997. One aspect of the film that did not get much attention was the fact that the “war” never happened, it was strictly a media creation. While an entire intervention could never be imaginary, the “virtual” nature of the movie’s war does connect to the argument some observers are making about the growing importance of television images rather than “real” outcomes of war in shaping the will of the mass public on either side. It is certainly possible that this media environment would make diversion easier, by allowing a White House to turn even small conflicts into carefully crafted media blockbusters. On the
toonists. The example below, for example, is a “Doonesbury” cartoon that ran in the spring of 2002 as the possibility of connections between the Bush Administration and the scandal-plagued Enron Corporation emerged. The comic suggested that war would be a way for Bush to replenish his political capital.  

![Doonesbury Cartoon](image)

**Figure 1-1 -- Doonesbury cartoon on Bush and Diversionary War**

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6 Gary Trudeau, “Doonesbury”, March 3, 2002, distributed by Universal Press Syndicate. This is a condensed version of the original 8 panels, but the basic theme is not affected (the removed panels were 1 and 2, with “establishment shots” of the White House, and 5 and 6, where the “bank” lists additional reasons that Bush has used up his political capital). Color original obtained from www.doonesbury.com
Diversionary Accusations in American Politics

Cartoonists are not the only ones who challenge presidential motives for war; serious observers and fellow politicians frequently raise that accusation. Motive questioning is so common in the press that it would be impossible to cite all the examples. For example, from the spring of 1998 to the spring of 2003 there were 395 references to the phrase “wag the dog” in five serious, nationally read newspapers. While some of those articles were only discussing the movie rather than real-world politics, it is also the case that a great many articles that discuss diversionary motives did not make that pop-culture reference and would not have appeared in the search. Accusations are not limited to the press; opposing politicians have also been quick to raise the charge against incumbent Presidents. The list below gives a number of recent examples.

1. George W. Bush was accused by leading Democrats, by columnists, and by foreign leaders critical of his policy of using the threat of war with Iraq to divert attention from the economy and corporate scandals in the run-up to the 2002 midterm elections. As the actual war against Iraq began in 2003, Bush advisor Karl Rove found it necessary to explicitly deny that the war had political purposes.

2. Bill Clinton was accused of using force on multiple instances to distract attention from the Lewinsky scandal and subsequent impeachment, including the almost-war against Iraq soon after the scandal broke in early 1998, missiles strikes on suspected terrorist facilities

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7 Dow Jones Interactive search on the Christian Science Monitor, New York Times, Wall St. Journal, Washington Post, and Washington Times, using keywords “wag the dog”, “wagging the dog”, “wagged the dog”. The mass media rarely use the academic phrase “diversionary war”, and just looking for the words “diversionary” or “diversion” would have been too broad.


10 The foreign press was particularly blunt about this, for example Robert Fisk, “A Sex Scandal in Washington Could Lead to War In The Middle East”, The Independent (London), January 27, 1998, p. 19.
in Sudan and Afghanistan the same week as his public admission of lying during the Lewinsky scandal,\textsuperscript{11} air strikes on Iraq the same day the House of Representatives was voting on articles of impeachment,\textsuperscript{12} and the Kosovo War in the spring of 1999.\textsuperscript{13}

3. Even before the major scandals struck, Clinton was accused of launching the Haiti invasion in order to divert attention from the 1994 midterm elections.\textsuperscript{14} Clinton critics also predicted that he would launch a military operation just before the 2000 election to improve Al Gore’s chances.\textsuperscript{15}

4. George Bush was charged with launching the Panama invasion as a way of boosting his own popularity, and particularly to overcome the “wimp” image some claimed he had.\textsuperscript{16}

5. Ronald Reagan was accused of invading Grenada for political purposes, either to boost his popularity in general (his ratings were low due to the recession at the time), or to distract attention from the bombing that killed over 200 Marines in Beirut.\textsuperscript{17}

6. Jimmy Carter was accused of attempting the rescue of U.S. hostages in Iran to save his reelection prospects, then damaged by the crisis, the faltering economy, and a bitter challenge from Ted Kennedy.

\textsuperscript{11} For a good summary of the response to the 1998 attacks see Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, The Age of Sacred Terror (New York: Random House, 2002), pp 357-363. As they detail, even moderate Republicans like Arlen Spector openly accused the President of using the strikes for diversionary purposes, and media accusations ranged from a lengthy New Yorker article to Seymour Hersh (“The Missiles of August”, October 12, 1998) to a “Wag the Dog!” song by satirist Mark Russell. Even after 9/11, which might have caused a reassessment of the legitimacy of attacking al-Qaeda in 1998, it is still widely believed that the strikes were diversionary: White House officials accused Clinton of it even as they denied charges of diversion themselves in 2002 (“Just because Clinton did it doesn’t mean Bush would.”, an official supposedly said, Stephen Hayes, “Wag the Dog Revisited”, National Review, August 12, 2002), and the diversionary nature of the strike is almost universally accepted by conservative columnists.


\textsuperscript{13} Frank Gaffney, “Hidden trigger on guns of intervention?”, Washington Times, March 30, 1999, p A16. For their part, the Serbs were happy to play up this suspicion: Serbian State Television aired the movie “Wag the Dog” the night NATO bombing commenced (Justin Brown, “Why Serb Chief Whips Up Anti-US Fervor”, Christian Science Monitor, April 1, 1999).


\textsuperscript{16} Jack Payton, “Bush’s Panama decision: Serving U.S. interests or his image?”, St. Petersburg Times, January 7, 1990; Steve Kurkjian, “For Bush, A New Image: Risk Taker”, Boston Globe, December 22, 1989. For an academic study that claims the intervention really was diversionary, see Jane Kellett, “Panama Invasion Paper; Title Unavailable at Time of Writing”)

\textsuperscript{17} Though an oft-made charge, the connection of Grenada to Lebanon is not credible. The invasion of Grenada happened only 2 days after the bombing (which Reagan presumably did not know about in advance). The forces were already in place and the decision to invade had been essentially made before the tragedy took place.
7. Gerald Ford was accused of acting so aggressively to rescue the Americans captured by Cambodia on the freighter Mayaguez in order to divert attention from the final loss of South Vietnam the previous month.\(^{18}\)

8. Richard Nixon was heavily criticized for placing U.S. forces on alert during the Yom Kippur War of 1973 to respond to Soviet threats of intervention, as many accused him of doing so to divert attention from Watergate.\(^ {19}\)

9. Richard Nixon was convinced that John F. Kennedy engineered the Cuban Missile Crisis in order to help Democratic candidates in the 1962 midterm elections.\(^ {20}\)

Similar examples exist for earlier Presidents: diversionary motives are commonly invoked to explain the Mexican War of 1846, or the Spanish-American War of 1898, for example. Suspicion of diversionary motives is a long-running feature of American politics.\(^ {21}\)

If these charges are true, Americans should be very troubled that their presidents are waging war for the sake of personal political gain. The direct cost in lives lost – foreign victims as well as American soldiers – would be bad enough, as would the risk of becoming involved in a much more lengthy and bloody fight than the president expected. Diversionary wars would also entail indirect costs such as drawing military resources and government attention away from real security threats, or provoking balancing behavior by other nations who perceive the U.S. as aggressive.

Even if false, diversionary accusations are not meaningless political rhetoric; the charge is serious enough that there is evidence presidents have been restrained by fear that their actions

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\(^{18}\) Criticism of Ford for this has come more from historians than contemporary critics, but observers at the time did see broader political implications, they just approved of them. Ford himself acknowledged that restoring America’s international credibility after the fall of Saigon was an important motive for the Mayaguez operation, and he understood that it improved domestic morale as well (Gerald Ford, \textit{A Time to Heal} (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), pg 267, 276) – motivations which are not “diversionary” in the self-serving sense usually meant. Even many potential critics in the media and Congress seemed happy to see a successful military operation and a strong, confident President. One Democratic leader told Ford, “It’s good to win one for a change”.


will be seen as illegitimate. A recent example can be seen in Bill Clinton’s response to attacks by the al-Queda terrorist organization in the late 1990s. The missile strikes in Sudan and Afghanistan following the embassy bombings in the summer of 1998 were apparently among at the low end of responses being considered in the administration; Secretary of Defense Cohen, among others, explicitly argued that stronger actions would be politically difficult since they would be seen as attempts to distract from the ongoing Lewinsky scandal. Clinton may also have been reluctant to take immediate action following the USS Cole bombing, fearing that it would be seen as an attempt to sway the election that was just weeks away. Richard Nixon too was restrained by elections; Kissinger claims that Nixon tried to handle the September 1970 Cienfuegos issue quietly so as not to appear to be staging his own pre-election Cuba crisis.

While the historical record can put presidential actions in context, it more important to know whether diversion would work if tried than to know whether earlier executives have employed the tactic. Whatever was done in the past, if “splendid little wars” do greatly improve presidential standing, then Americans are right to be suspicious; if the benefits of war are overrated, then our fears are exaggerated. On this question the conventional wisdom seems squarely to believe in the power of diversion: presidential defenders generally deny that the motivation was illegitimate in a given case, but politicians and pundits rarely challenge the idea that diversion is a tool that could be employed, and that would be successful. Rarely is it argued that military force does not help presidents much, or that presidents have better options available to them.

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23 Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp 641-642. The issue was that the Nixon Administration believed the Soviets were constructing a missile submarine base as Cienfuegos, Cuba, in violation of the US-Soviet understanding following the 1962 missile crisis (in violation according to the American interpretation of the understanding, at least). Following some quiet diplomacy the Soviets did not build a base, though it remains unclear whether they ever intended to do so in the first place.

Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*
Chapter 1: “Diversionary War and U.S. Politics”
Conventional wisdom is not always correct, and given the importance of the diversionary argument it is important to know what has been found by scholars: would diversion work? Has it been tried? Have those questions even been satisfactorily answered? To answer those questions, the following section reviews the relevant academic literature.

2. Searching for Diversion: Evidence from Academic Studies

Despite the long pedigree and enduring popularity of the diversionary theory, scholarly studies have found no conclusive evidence that it takes place, and for the United States at least, are converging on a view that it does not. This situation might be surprising to political observers who consider diversionary war an obvious political winner, but forty years of serious inquiry by international relations scholars have produced no consensus that it really does take place, or at least not that it is common. For the world as a whole, the results are mixed. For the United States, studies have produced fairly consistent results – more consistent than their authors acknowledge, in fact – which suggest that diversion is rare for American presidents. Even less is known with certainty about the basic attractiveness of the strategy: studies of the so-called “rally effect” arrive at contradictory conclusions, and in general those studies have not looked at all variables that would be relevant to president’s calculations, nor have they placed the political gains from war in the context of gains possible from other presidential actions.

This section proceeds to review the literature, with a relatively brief overview of the cross-national studies, followed by a detailed look at the U.S.-specific studies.
Cross-national studies have found mixed results, with none showing clear, strong evidence that diversion is a common pattern. Taking stock of a "first wave" of studies conducted in the 1960s and early 1970s that produced little in the way of consistent support for the diversionary thesis. Hazelwood concluded that "...in no other area do the arguments present in international relations theory and the results recorded through systematic empirical analysis diverge so widely as in the domestic conflict - foreign conflict hypothesis." When Jack Levy reviewed the diversionary literature in 1989, he did not find that much had changed, though he observed that qualitative case studies of particular wars had often concluded that domestic pressures were important.

Another "wave" of studies has been conducted in the late 1990s, responding to some of Levy's critiques of earlier work. These studies have tended to find that domestic conflict does increases the likelihood of participating in international conflict, although that finding is not universal and there is a great deal of disagreement among the authors.

Qualitative work has also found some evidence for diversionary behavior, most notably Jack Snyder's From Voting to Violence, which argues that elites in newly democratizing countries use appeals to nationalism and

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foreign threats sustain their support in the face of challenges to their privileged position in society. Such a finding is consistent with the quantitative studies, which largely find apparent diversionary behavior associated with violent internal conflict, major challenges to governmental institutions, and economic deprivation – conditions not often seen in the advanced industrial democracies.

_The Case of the United States: No Diversion_

If the findings are unclear for the world as a whole, the evidence for the United States is far more consistent – and argues strongly against diversionary uses of force being common for American presidents. Of nearly 20 studies published since 1984 of diversionary uses of force by the United States, only one finds that low approval ratings inspire more aggressiveness, only a few find that elections are associated with more uses of force. “October Surprises” do not happen, or at least not in the form of convenient pre-election wars; if anything uses of force are less likely just before a Presidential election. If Presidents use military interventions to boost their approval ratings, they seem no more likely to do so when they are in deep political trouble than when their poll numbers are high. There is some evidence that poor economic performance – high unemployment – is associated with greater propensity to use force, though the effect reported by most authors is small.

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TABLE 1-1: Empirical Tests for U.S. Diversionary War

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Economy</th>
<th>Elections</th>
<th>Approval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ostrom and Job</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>1949-1976</td>
<td>use of force (Blechman)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>REV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russett</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>pre-1930</td>
<td>MID</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russett</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1930-1980</td>
<td>MID</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James and Oneal</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1949-1976</td>
<td>use of force (Blechman)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>REV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan and Bickers</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1953-1976</td>
<td>Use of force (Blechman)</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oneal and Lian</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1949-19??</td>
<td>use of force (Blechman)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James and Hristoulas</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>1949-1988</td>
<td>crises (ICB)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>REV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meernik</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>1948-1988</td>
<td>use of force (Blechman), given opportunity</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeRouen</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1949-1984</td>
<td>level of force (Blechman)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoon</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1945-1989</td>
<td>intervention in third world</td>
<td>REV</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fordham</td>
<td>1998b</td>
<td>1949-1994</td>
<td>use of force (Blechman)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meernik</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1948-1990</td>
<td>Use of force, given opportunity</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fordham</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1870-1995</td>
<td>use of force (Fordham)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>no(?)</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

YES = diversionary predictions upheld; yes = weakly upheld; no = no effect; REV, rev = opposite predicted effect; . = not tested. Datasets: MID = Militarized International Disputes; ICB = International Crisis Behavior; Blechman = Force Without War; Burbach = Burbach 1995 revision of Blechman; Fordham = Fordham 1998 revision of Blechman. See text for citations.

To better illustrate these findings, Table 1-1 summarizes the results from the most important studies of the past 15 years. Full citations for the studies referenced are given in the
footnotes below.29 The "Event" column refers to the dependent variable used by each study:
what sort of event was being studied (actual uses of force, "crises", etc) and which dataset was
used.30 Independent variables are in the right three columns: "Economy" shows whether the
study found that poor economic conditions were associated with the dependent variable, like-
wise in the other two columns for elections, and Presidential approval. When the relationship
was the opposite of the one expected – i.e., the domestic troubles led to fewer events – "REV" is
shown. A dot (".") means the relevant variable was not included in that study. As noted, ap-


Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*
Chapter 1: "Diversionary War and U.S. Politics"
approval ratings have no effect, elections have inconsistent effects, but there is a tendency to find a correlation with economic variables. The remainder of this section reviews the literature in greater detail.

A “first wave” of quantitative studies argued that domestic politics did have a strong influence on the American propensity to use force. The most cited early study is Ostrom and Job (1986), which found that poor economic conditions were associated with uses of force, elections had no effect, and surprisingly, that low Presidential approval decreases the likelihood of using force significantly. That is, force is most likely when the President is strong. The James and Oneal (1991) and James and Hristoulas (1994) studies largely replicated Ostrom and Job and arrived at similar results. The unexpected finding that higher approval led to more uses of force is made suspect by the fact that all three studies measured approval in such a way that ratings after a use of force were often averaged in with the pre-event ratings. Therefore, their results may have been driven by post-event rallies.

Using similar methodology, Morgan and Bickers claimed that use of force rates were strongly influenced by partisan approval – specifically, that Presidents were much more likely to use force when approval from their own party was low, all else being equal; overall approval had a small positive correlation. It is difficult to interpret their findings – it would seem strange that own-party numbers would drive diversion (presumably, they would have nowhere else to go; independents would probably be a better measure), they include no other domestic or international control variables, and most importantly, “all else being equal” will seldom be the case.

31 This finding is so unexpected that some readers apparently misunderstood it. The Ostrom and Job article has often been cited as finding the expected approval-driven diversionary uses of force (i.e., low approval leads to war), even though it argues the opposite.
32 Specifically, the studies took quarterly averages of approval and used that as an independent variable in a probit regression, predicting whether there was a use of force in that quarter. Burbach, David T., "Wagging the Dogs? Diversionary Temptations and Presidential Decisions to Use Force". demonstrates that including post-event ratings in a similar specification shows a strong positive correlation, while using strictly pre-event polls does not.
Their model predicts significant increases in the use of force only in the relatively unusual circumstance that a President has above-average overall approval and below-average own-party approval (implying he has much better than average ratings with the opposition party). All of these studies are limited by fact that they do not use true event-count models (all use probit or something like it).33

A second wave of studies in the mid-1990s took a more skeptical view, arguing that there was little or no evidence for diversion by the United States: one study was even titled, “The Myth of the Diversionary Use of Force By U.S. Presidents”.34 More recent studies have challenged these findings, yet overall the 1990s studies have much in common: a pattern that poor economic conditions are probably associated with greater use of force, elections probably not, and approval ratings definitely not. The following section reviews the findings for each of those conditions.

Economy and Diversion.

Most, though not all of the more recent studies find a correlation between economic slowdowns and greater uses of force. This is true measured with GDP growth rate35 or unemployment,36 though not the “misery index”.37 Gowa uses GDP growth and claims that it does

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33 For example, the simple “force / no force” dichotomy of a probit specification means that the model would see no change if the rate of using force went from once per month to five times per month.
34 Meernik et. al., "The Myth of the Diversionary Use of Force by American Presidents".
37 DeRouen, "The Indirect Link: Politics, The Economy, and the Use of Force"; Meernik et. al., "The Myth of the Diversionary Use of Force by American Presidents" found no effect; Yoon, "Explaining U.S. Intervention in Third World Internal Wars" found a strong negative effect (more misery = less intervention). This is not entirely surprising. Defined as twice unemployment plus the inflation rate, the indicator has much lower variance than others due to the usual tradeoff between unemployment and inflation. Only during the “stagflation” of the 1970s was “misery” especially high, and the mid to late 1970s were also an unusually peaceful period, though this may be more...
not have an effect, however, her GDP variable does show the expected sign and is not grossly insignificant (in most of her regressions, a $p$ of about 0.15); if, as Russett claims, the economy only started having an effect in the 1930s, then Gowa too might have found economic slowdowns to be significant if she partitioned the post-1930 years from earlier ones. Meernik disagrees, arguing that the likelihood of an opportunity to use force becoming an actual use of force is unaffected by the economy, though he finds opportunities — which he believes are not subject to presidential influence — are more frequent during recessions. The overall pattern is quite consistent, but the effect is not terribly strong. Fordham and Burbach make the clearest predictions regarding the effect of changes in unemployment on the frequency of force, both predicting that a 3% rise in unemployment will increase the use-of-force rate by 15-25%.

Elections and Diversion.

Whether there are have been “October surprises” — uses of force just before an election to rally support for the incumbent — is somewhat more controversial. Two studies claim to find diversionary patterns: Russett argues that uses of force are more likely during Presidential election years during a recession, as do Hess and Orphanides. Gowa, however, finds no such interaction between elections and recessions. Both of the Meernik studies find no impact from

to post-Vietnam restraint or Carter administration doctrine (especially in the Yoon case; she looks at intervention in third world conflicts, and Carter was particularly restrained on that front).


39 Meernik, "Modeling International Crises and the Political Use of Military Force by the USA"; James Meernik, "Domestic Politics and the Political Use of Military Force by the United States", *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 4 (2001), pp 889-904. Meernik does not elaborate on his assertion that presidents can not affect the supply of opportunities, and he does not offer other reasons why the supply might vary with the state of the U.S. economy. See Chapter 6 for a general discussion of the merits of using opportunities vs. periods of time as the unit of analysis.


Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*
Chapter 1: “Diversionary War and U.S. Politics"
Presidential elections, neither do DeRouen or Yoon. One of the Fordham studies finds no greater use of force during Presidential re-election years, in general, but an increase during wartime election years (a finding that echoes Stoll). The fact that there are only two such years (1964 and 1972) make this a fragile result, as Fordham himself acknowledges. Burbach finds that the "campaign season" before a Presidential election periods actually sees a sharp decrease in uses of force. Gaubatz finds something similar in a cross-national study – democracies as a whole are abnormally peaceful during election years. Relatively few studies have looked at mid-term elections. Prins finds a lower propensity to use force during mid-term years; looking only at the three months before elections, Burbach finds a moderate increase in the frequency of force.

**Polls and Diversion.**

Presidential approval seems a likely correlate of diversionary action. In the popular press, at least, the most common reason cited for supposedly diversionary uses of force is so the President can "boost his poll numbers". Approval ratings are presumably a more direct measure of Presidential support than economic conditions. Nevertheless, studies have consistently found that controlling for economic conditions, Presidential approval ratings have no impact on the use of force rate. This excludes the "first wave" studies described above which had the post-event contamination problem, artificially correlating high approval with uses of force. Recent studies that have found no effect of approval include both Meernik studies, Burbach, Wang,

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42 "Election period" specifically meant the three months prior to an election. This passivity was not found during earlier quarters in election years, which may explain why other studies found zero effect, rather than this reverse effect; Meernik (1994) also focused on the campaign season only, but his use of a probit rather than event count may contribute to not seeing the same effect. Burbach, David T., "Wagging the Dogs? Diversionary Temptations and Presidential Decisions to Use Force".

43 Gaubatz, *Elections and War: The Electoral Incentive in the Democratic Politics of War and Peace*
Yoon, and Fordham. There are some partial exceptions. Burbach found that short-term increases in approval ratings (jumps of several percent in two to three months) were associated with uses of force. It seems unlikely that Presidents respond to a sudden jump in their support by launching wars, however; what probably is going on is that uses of force are often preceded by crisis periods in which Presidents may already be enjoying something of a “rally”.\textsuperscript{44} DeRouen (1995) did find a modest correlation between low approval and uses of force, but that study is not as convincing as the collective results of the rest.\textsuperscript{45} None of the published studies have tried to replicate Morgan and Bickers’ finding of the impact of partisan approval.\textsuperscript{46}

One aspect of Presidential politics that has not been explored in the published literature is the impact of “scandals” – it is in response to these that accusations of diversion are most common, after all. The neglect of scandals has two causes: the difficulty of defining them, and the expectation that their negative effect on a President is already captured in approval ratings (and if a scandal does not affect a President’s support, as was the case for Clinton and impeachment, why would they need to divert?). Nevertheless, one can imagine reasons a President might want to distract attention from a scandal even if poll numbers had not changed. No published work addresses this, but results presented later in this thesis by Burbach find that the three major scandals – Watergate, Iran-Contra, and Lewinsky – did not appear to increase the propensity to use force, nor did use of a broader set of scandals compiled by Jeffery Schultz.\textsuperscript{47}

It is worth noting that some qualitative studies do argue that particular uses of force were diversionary. This is mostly true of 19\textsuperscript{th} century conflicts, where several historians argue

\textsuperscript{45} DeRouen, "The Indirect Link: Politics, The Economy, and the Use of Force"
\textsuperscript{46} The lack of replication is unfortunate. Their study makes a strong claim that differs from the majority of other studies, yet its reliability is called into question by the obsolete method (probit, short time span (1953-1976), and less than ideal dataset (MIDs).
\textsuperscript{47} Jeffrey D. Schultz, Presidential Scandals (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1999)
that the Mexican or Spanish-American wars were diversionary; Secretary of State Seward also advocated a diversionary war with Spain in 1861 – the eve of the Civil War – but Lincoln rejected that advice. 48 One of the few systematic qualitative studies of a recent use of force argues that the 1989 Panama invasion was driven by George H.W. Bush’s desire to eliminate his “wimp” image. 49 Such studies are not necessarily inconsistent with the quantitative results. Statistical tests demonstrate that diversion is rare, not that there are no examples at all. The Panama invasion is particularly difficult to explain on national security grounds, and so may be an exception.

The Panama example points to one other caveat about the quantitative studies: they do not rule out the possibility that uses of force are politically motivated, but not diversionary in the traditional sense. At the time of the Panama invasion, Bush’s poll numbers were strong, the economy was doing well, and there was no election approaching. There was no need to “divert”, and in fact the motivation Kellett claims was not to boost support per se, but to counter a specific image problem. 50 If other presidents have done likewise, this would not show up in the tests described above, but neither would it be diversionary as narrowly defined; it would not imply that Presidents to launch unnecessary wars during times of political trouble. In fact, if force can be used for political gain in general, but is not actually used when Presidents most need the help, that still raises the question of why not?

To summarize, the two most obvious drivers of Presidential diversion – poor standings with the public and impending elections – do not in fact correlate with more frequent uses of force. Elections may even reduce the use of the military. Economic slowdowns do show a con-

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49 Jane Kellett, "(Panama Invasion Paper; Title Unavailable at Time of Writing)"
50 Presumably, the Bush white house feared the “wimp factor” would make Bush weak in the 1992 elections, or impair his dealings with Congress, or simply represented a vulnerability that might be exploited later. One can also imagine a national security justification relating to the “wimp” image, however: Bush may have wanted to improve his credibility with foreign leaders who doubted he would resort to force if necessary. Kellett argues the motivation was domestic, however.

Burbach, Diversionary Temptations
Chapter 1: “Diversionary War and U.S. Politics”
nection to greater use of force, though not a strong one. Diversionary intentions do not seem to be a principal determinant of the use of force by American presidents.

Would Diversion Work?

Relatively few studies have focused on the question of whether diversion would be a successful and attractive strategy for presidents as opposed to the question of whether political uses of force actually take place.

Most authors base their expectation that diversion will take place on the "conflict-induced cohesion" effect that has been observed in small, and on the supposed "rally effect" – the increase in presidential approval following uses of force.

The conflict-cohesion theory – the notion that nations will rally around their leaders in the face of foreign threats – is often invoked but rarely tested. In fact, attempts to test the theory at the national rather than small group level have produced mixed results. Even at the small group level, the cohesion effect is subject to several conditions that are often ignored by international relations scholars. The applicability of the theory at the national level is even less clear. Nations facing invasion and punishing occupation might well unify (e.g., the Soviet Union in World War II), but does that same logic apply when an American president dispatches peacekeeping troops to Haiti? The operation of the conflict-cohesion effect in the context of American presidential politics is something to examine, not to take for granted.

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52 For reviews of the empirical studies, see Levy, "The Diversionary Theory of War: a Critique".
53 Coser, for example, says the group must already have a reasonable degree of cohesion (or a threat might simply fragment it), the threat must be perceived as one that will affect the entire group, and collective action must be seen as likely to be effective. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict*. Studies by sociologists, psychologists, and anthropologists since then have put even more qualifications on the theory; for an excellent review of the literature in other disciplines, see Art Stein, "Conflict and Cohesion: A Review of the Literature", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1976), pp 143-172.
The rally effect literature does provide some evidence on the effect of military action on presidential support, but the findings are ambiguous. In fact, there is a debate over whether such an effect even exists: earlier studies found that uses of force did significantly help presidents, while a recent body of work contends that "rallies" are small or non-existent. Such studies have also focused on measuring the average effect of uses of force on presidential standing, which is not the right measure of diversionary potential. Instead, what matters are not average gains but the maximum gain that could be achieved given the circumstances – a cynical president would not draw a military intervention out of a hat, but could instead choose the target, the means, and the public justifications so as to maximize public support. It is important therefore to know how political gains from the use of force vary as a function of variables under a president's control, and as a function of the political conditions that create diversionary pressure in the first place.

Finally, we know much less about the political benefits of other presidential actions. A troubled president might take any of a tremendous range of actions; war is not the only alternative. Even if one stays in the realm of dramatic foreign policy events, presidents might an-

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56 The studies by Oneal et al. have looked at the effect of some variables, such as media coverage, but they also suffer from methodological problems that call their findings into serious question. See chapter 4 for a detailed review and critique of the rally effect literature.

57 For example, it could be the case that the public is less likely to support uses of force when presidents are already in political difficulty, precisely because they are suspicious of presidential motives. In that case, even if uses of force provided significant average gains they would not be helpful to presidents actually facing diversionary pressure, and so the tactic would not be very useful.
nounce an arms control breakthrough or the end of an unpopular conflict, or simply engage in highly publicized travel or foreign policy speechmaking. Those activities have received considerably less attention than uses of force 58 (and still less for their domestic counterparts). The diversionary use of force will be a preferred strategy only if it provides benefits that are relatively greater than other options, but as things stand we can not make that determination.

Our lack of knowledge about the incentives faced by presidents makes it difficult to place in context the lack of evidence for diversionary uses of force. It could be that we do not observe politically-motivated uses of force because presidents find the strategy morally objectionable or practically difficult. It could also be that presidential actions are politically-driven, but that presidents do not see much to be gained from diversionary wars, or at least not as much as could be gained from other courses of action.

3. The Question: Measuring Diversionary Incentives

This study attempts to expand our understanding of diversionary processes by exploring the incentives faced by U.S. presidents. Instead of focusing on the question of whether or not diversion happens, or trying to prove the negative of why diversion does not happen, the question to be addressed is:

Is the diversionary use of force an attractive strategy for U.S. Presidents to boost their standing when facing domestic political difficulty?

As described in the previous section, we do not have a sufficient understanding of the mechanisms that would make diversion operate. Specifically, we need a better understanding of the political impact of the use of force, as a function of relevant political variables and in relation to other presidential actions. The key questions are:

1) What is the expected political benefit from using force?
2) How, if at all, does that benefit change depending on the characteristics of particular uses of force (e.g., success/failure)?
3) Do uses of force serve to quiet criticism and take the focus off of negative domestic issues?
4) How do the benefits and risks of uses of force compare with alternative political actions that could be undertaken?

What will we learn from this study?
The most important contribution of the will be to fill in gaps in our knowledge about the political costs and benefits – relative and absolute – of the use of force by American presidents. In short, we will have a better sense of when, if ever, diversionary war would be the tactic of choice for a troubled president. This information will be interesting in its own right, and will also be a helpful contribution to the public discussion of diversionary possibilities: too often the unstated assumption is that diversion would be highly successful, the only variable being whether a given president is base enough to use the tactic. If diversionary wars are less tempting than imagined, it is important that the public know this; any reduction in the suspicion and cynicism of contemporary political discourse would be welcome.

Answering these questions will also advance our ability to test the diversionary theory of war. Predictions that leaders will use force to get out of domestic trouble rely on an assumption that the use of force actually will increase the leaders’ support and quell opposition (assuming reasonably well-informed\textsuperscript{59} and rational\textsuperscript{60} leaders). If military action does not do so, diversion would not be expected at all; if war only does so under particular conditions, then we would only expect diversionary action when those conditions are present. Knowing when the use of force

\textsuperscript{59} The well-informed criterion is not difficult to meet for modern U.S. presidents. In general, the presidential nomination and election process selects for individuals who have a keen sense for the public’s reaction to events, and the White House has formidable research capabilities available to it. As far back as the 1940s, FDR collected extensive public opinion data regarding war strategies and aims (Steven Casey, \textit{Cautious Crusade: Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War Against Nazi Germany} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001)). More recently, the “anti-poll” George W. Bush administration was spending $1 million per year on polling; Clinton spent twice that (Dick Morris, \textit{Behind the Oval Office} (Los Angeles: Renaissance Books, 1999); Joshua Green, “The Other War Room”, \textit{Washington Monthly}, vol. 34, no. 4 (2002), pp 11-14). Presidents are quite capable of making reasonable predictions of the political impact of their actions.

\textsuperscript{60} Although presidents are capable of being well-informed and acting according to their interests, it is possible they would not, and this does complicate any test of diversionary behavior based on actual incentives. Two possibilities are of special interest: the case of a president who has no objection to politically motivated uses of force but who incorrectly believes them to be of little benefit, in which case one could mistakenly conclude that the president was restrained from diversionary use of force by non-political factors. Also, a president who incorrectly believes force to be more effective than it really is or misunderstands the conditions in which it is useful might mistakenly be seen as not driven by political considerations – such a president would be using force politically, but not in the predicted pattern.
provides significant and unique benefits will allow for better predictions of when diversionary uses of force would be expected, and thus will allow fairer tests of the theory. By looking at dramatic presidential actions other than the use of force, this study will also identify other avenues for diversionary behavior – for example, a finding that dramatic diplomatic developments help presidents suggests that scholars should look for patterns of “diversionary peace” as well as diversionary war.

The results of this study will also contribute to other problems in international relations. For example, some variants of the “Democratic Peace” theory emphasize war aversion on the part of mass publics; it was a key piece of Kant’s original formulation of the concept. If uses of force fail to unite democratic citizens around their leaders, that adds weight to the strong version of the theory (i.e., “monadic”), that democracies are more peaceful in general. If uses of force do significantly help leaders, that points toward the weaker “dyadic” variant that democracies do not fight other democracies, but they are not war-averse in general.

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61 More precisely, it will allow tests of a narrowed version of the theory. If by “diversionary theory of war” we mean a prediction that domestic trouble leads to war, then a finding that uses of force are not always helpful would invalidate that prediction. The findings here will allow testing of a narrower theory that national leaders will initiate wars when and if it would be politically advantageous for them to do so.

62 Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace", in The Philosophy of Kant: Moral and Political Writings, Carl Friedrich, (New York: Random House, 1949). Michael Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and the Democratic Peace", in Debating the Democratic Peace, Michael Brown, Sean Lynn-Jones, and Stephen E. Miller, eds. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996) provides a good summary of Kant’s arguments. The democratic peace literature is extensive, and the “pacifist public” thesis is only one of several variants. Other important arguments include the importance of shared norms and cultural understandings between democratic publics and/or leaders; domestic institutional constraints that make it more difficult for democratic leaders to initiate wars (e.g., Presidents need Congressional approval); and the potential economic loss from foreign trade disruption (since democracy is highly correlated with liberal economic systems). For reviews of the theoretical literature, see Bruce Russett, Grasping the Democratic Peace (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1993); Spencer Weart, Never At War: Why Democracies Will Not Fight One Another (New Haven: Yale University, 1998); for more skeptical views, see Miriam Fendius Elman, "The Need for Qualitative Tests of the Democratic Peace Theory", in Paths to Peace: Is Democracy the Answer?, Miriam Fendius Elman, ed (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997); Gowa, Ballots and Bullets: The Elusive Democratic Peace.

63 Empirically, there is strong support for the dyadic variant, and weak support at best for the stronger monadic version. Gubatz explores this “pacifist public” / “passionate public” debate at length. Gubatz, Elections and War: The Electoral Incentive in the Democratic Politics of War and Peace
A deeper understanding of diversionary processes also has relevance to foreign policy debates. Being able to predict where, if anywhere, diversionary tactics are likely to succeed could be useful in anticipating future conflicts. Identifying institutional factors that make diversion less attractive may suggest policies to promote in nations going through a democratic transition.

Jack Snyder, for example, argues that nationalist violence should have been expected in the former Yugoslavia, as threatened elites exploited media monopolies and immature institutions to scapegoat foreigners or internal ethnic rivals. A finding here that independent media criticism is a key constraint on U.S. presidents would strengthen Snyder’s argument (i.e., lack of an independent media makes scapegoating attractive) and highlight the importance of strengthening press institutions in future situations.

*Explaining the U.S. Puzzle: A Possible Explanation*

A necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the diversionary use of force is that a national leader expects war to be politically beneficial. If in the case of the United States the benefits of using force are small (at least in comparison to other actions), that may well explain the apparent lack of diversionary uses of force. Likewise, if military action will help presidents only in certain circumstances, previous tests may have been too broad: diversionary activity could be taking place, albeit infrequently, but not captured by our models. A finding that the use of force is of limited value would thus make the lack of diversion in the U.S. understandable.

This study will not be able to prove that the absence of diversion is due to the absence of incentives for diversion, however. Even if war is not an effective political tool, there are other explanations that might account for restraint by the U.S. or other nations. Table 1-2 sum-

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64 Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*

Burbach, *Divisionary Temptations*  
Chapter 1: "Divisionary War and U.S. Politics"
marizes some of these alternatives, organized along Waltz's "three levels of analysis": individual, domestic, and international level factors. In Waltz' terms, this study focuses strictly on domestic-level considerations: will the use of force help or hurt with the public, and how does it compare to other presidential actions? Even if tempting domestically, though, individual or international level issues might rule out diversionary uses of force.

65 Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*. In this discussion I expand the "first images" beyond the personality of the executive himself to include aspects of a government's internal decision making, such as worries that diversionary motives would not be kept secret. Traditionally that sort of organizational behavior issue would be in the "second image", but it seems helpful here to treat the White House or its equivalent as the "individual", and reserve the "second image" label for issues relating to mass politics.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1-2: Alternative Explanations for the Lack of Diversionary War</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Level</strong> (&quot;First Image&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leaders reject for moral reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Impracticality of mobilizing bureaucracy or keeping secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International Level</strong> (&quot;Third Image&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of opportunity: no weak, accessible states to target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of opportunity: tight alliances -- states are either existing allies, or protected by other powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Avoidance of being perceived as aggressive and thus provoking balancing behavior by other states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Costs to other foreign policy goals are too large; waste of military resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strategic avoidance (or deterrence) of conflict by potential targets who recognize when diversionary pressures are present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Domestic Level</strong> (&quot;Second Image&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• External conflict divides rather than unifies groups with severe domestic splits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• War does not actually rally political support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wars do provide support, but only under particular and possible rare conditions (such as successful, low cost, for particular purposes, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wars provide support, but not during the political conditions that create diversionary pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Other political activities provide greater benefits and/or lower risks than the use of force</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the individual level, presidents or other leaders may simply find politically motivated uses of force objectionable. They might also consider it impractical due to the scale of the conspiracy required or the likelihood that the true motives would eventually be revealed to the public.\footnote{It is worth noting that memoirs and “insider histories” report virtually no instances were the use of force for political purposes was discussed, and indeed contain many disavowals by presidents and their aides that it would ever be considered (although many presidents believe that their predecessors were not so pure). Given the sensitivity of the issue, though, it would not be surprising if insiders failed to report such discussions. Two anecdotes from the Clinton administration illustrate the difficulty in relying on insider histories: pollster Dick Morris reports that he did give Clinton advice on foreign policy decisions, but that Clinton requested such reports be strictly verbal, not in writing, and that the two of them talk about foreign policy only when alone. George Stephanopoulos claims that the political advantages of bombing the Bosnian Serbs was brought up by Morris at one senior White House meet-}
International constraints might also limit the usefulness of the diversionary option. First, there needs to be a target! In the case of nations that lack power-projection capabilities and/or are weaker than their neighbors and rivals, there may not be such a target; targets would also be hard to come by in a bipolar structure with tight alliances: other nations would either be friends, or under the opposing power's protection. Potential targets might also act strategically: recognizing their plight, they might act in a very conciliatory fashion to try to head off disputes with nations facing diversionary pressure. Leaders might also worry that politically-motivated


67 Alistair Smith, "Diversification Foreign Policy in Democratic Systems", International Studies Quarterly, vol. 40 (1996), pp 133-153; Leeds et. al., "Domestic Political Vulnerability and International Disputes", Alastair Smith, "International Crises and Domestic Politics", American Political Science Review, vol. 92 (1998), pp 623-638; Ross Miller, "Regime Type, Strategic Interaction, and the Diversification Use of Force", Journal of Conflict Resolution, vol. 43 (1999), pp 388-402. For example, this logic would predict that nations would be more likely to grant concessions to the US during Presidential reelection campaigns, or that nations should have been cooperative with the US during the Watergate scandal. It seems likely that potential targets seek to deter as well as placate likely aggressors, for example, by improving air defense capabilities or building barriers to land invasion. To date, though, the strategic interaction literature has focused on conflict avoidance through conciliation, not deterrence.

Burbach, Diversionary Temptations
Chapter 1: "Diversionary War and U.S. Politics"
wars will cause their nation to be misperceived as aggressive, prompting other nations to balance against it\textsuperscript{68} and thus imposing security costs that outweigh the political gains.

This is by no means a complete review of all factors that would affect an executive’s decision to conduct a diversionary war; the point is that the domestic factors explored here are not the only relevant considerations. Even so, having a better measure of the domestic incentives for the use of force will be an important contribution to the broader study of diversionary war. If the use of force as not an optimal strategy, that might explain the apparent lack of politically-timed uses of force. If the use of force does appear to be a good strategy, then this study will point scholars to other factors, individual or international, as sources of restraint on U.S. presidents. More generally, a number of authors are exploring formal models of diversionary war that include more sophisticated treatment of costs, benefits, and strategic interactions than the traditional theory, but these efforts are hampered by the lack of real data on those costs and benefits.\textsuperscript{69} This study will help to fill in those blanks.

\textsuperscript{68} See for example Robert Jervis, \textit{Perception and Misperception in International Politics} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Steve Walt, \textit{The Origin of Alliances} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987) ch 2. on spirals. On the other hand, other nations might be perfectly correct in seeing themselves as the next diversionary target!


Burbach, \textit{Diversionary Temptations}

Chapter 1: “Diversionary War and U.S. Politics”
4. Research Strategy and Methods

To measure presidential incentives for diversion, this study examines the response of the American public to uses of force and other dramatic presidential activities from 1953 to 2000. Presidents themselves are likely to use history as a guide to predicting potential gains, and that period includes dozens of uses of force showing a wide variety of characteristics: greatly different sizes, different regions and foreign policy goals, successful and unsuccessful, supported and criticized by Congress, undertaken during periods of presidential strength and weakness, etc. This variation is critical. What matters is not only the average gains from presidential activities, but the predicted gain given the characteristics of the particular use of force being considered by a president – characteristics both inherent in the situation, and those characteristics that a president can manipulate so as to maximize political returns. Therefore, the public response is measured as a function of relevant variables about the political environment at the time and the details of a particular action.

Relevant variables are identified from a model of the diversionary process which is introduced in this study. Based on public opinion and mass media studies, this “media priming” model looks at diversion as an exercise in political communication rather than group psychology. Presidents help themselves by focusing media attention on popular, dramatic activities rather than the failures or scandals that have been harming them. The use of force is one means of doing this, but the model predicts that other actions could also be used for diversion. This model does not predict that all presidential activities are created equal, however; it predicts that a number of variables that will condition the public reaction to a given action, and the effect of these variables is tested.
To measure the political benefits of dramatic actions, presidential approval ratings are used as a proxy for overall presidential standing. Statistical models are estimated to measure the magnitude and duration of changes in approval attributable to presidential actions, controlling for other influences on approval ratings. The political effects of the use of force as a function of relevant political variables are measured first. The potential benefits of actions other than war are measured next, specifically, changes following dramatic “peace promoting” events, presidential foreign travel, and major presidential policy speeches. The changes in approval following these activities represent the political gain (or loss) presidents can achieve from them. These measured political benefits are then used to construct and test “repaired” versions of the diversionary theory. These tests are summarized in Table 1-4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does Diversion Pay?</td>
<td>Analysis of changes in Presidential approval after uses of force, in general and by characteristics of the intervention</td>
<td>Large-n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are There Better Alternatives?</td>
<td>Changes in Presidential approval obtained from other dramatic actions: “uses of peace”, travel, speeches</td>
<td>Large-n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do Presidents Act According to their Incentives?</td>
<td>Measure the frequency of diversionary activities as a function of political variables, using only the high-benefit activities identified above (i.e., a “repaired” diversionary theory)</td>
<td>Large-n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The remainder of this section gives a more detailed preview of the media priming model, followed by a discussion of the methods and data used to conduct each of the three empirical tests.
The "Media Priming" Model of Opinion Change

To assess diversionary incentives, this thesis proposes a new model of the diversion process, drawing on theories of public opinion formation and change. It looks This model is used to derive a number of hypotheses regarding diversionary incentives, which are then tested both quantitatively and qualitatively. The details of the media priming model are given in Chapter 2, but an outline is given below.

The media priming model views members of the public as boundedly-rational decision makers: they do have general, fairly consistent preferences regarding government policy and outcomes, but do not put a great deal of effort into collecting and processing political information. In general, therefore, individuals' sense of what issues are important, and the context in which they evaluate those issues is heavily influenced by mass media content. This process is observed to work with Presidential approval: the focus and framing of news coverage shapes the issues citizens look to when assessing the President, and thus media content can shift Presidential approval.

Using this model, diversion can be seen as an attempt "change the subject": divert media attention away from a poor economy, a scandal, or one's political opponents and to a foreign

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70 This is in contrast to the earlier "Almond-Lippman" view that public attitudes were highly unstable, mood-driven, ill-informed, and otherwise irrational. That understanding has been largely been supplanted by the "rational public" view over the past decade. For a summary of the Almond-Lippman view see Ole R. Holsti, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Challenges to the Almond-Lippman Consensus", *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 36 (1992), pp 439-466. The most prominent work on the "rational public" thesis is Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in American's Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992).


conflict. The use of force would have two reinforcing effects: first, media attention would shift away from whatever the "problem" area is and so reduce the depressing effect of that on Presidential support; at the same time, the focus would shift to the foreign conflict, where support for the President's position would presumably be high (if support were not high, the president would not have chosen that target for diversion).  

This model differs from the "conflict-cohesion" approach in two key ways. First, this model does not predict that uses of force will always help presidents. If media coverage frames the issue in ways critical to the president, or if the public generally opposes the president's policy, then the action might not provide any political gains at all. Instead of taking for granted that uses of force receive public support, the media priming model points us to variables that are likely to condition public support, such as quantity of coverage, reactions by political and media elites, outcome of the intervention, congruence of the goals with public preferences, etc. The effect of uses of force on presidential approval can then be measured as a function of these variables, allowing us to predict what the potential gains would be in a given set of circumstances.

The media priming model also allows for diversionary actions other than the use of force. Any Presidential activity that grabs media focus, receives favorable framing, and is generally supported by the public would have a similar effect; force is not privileged. This suggests

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73 While the full reconceptualization of the "rally" process presented in this thesis is new, it has been anticipated in some previous works. Richard A. Brody, *Assessing the President* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), in particular pointed to the importance of media signaling; Burchbach, David T., "Foreign Policy Preferences, Presidential Approval, and the Use of Force"; Baker et. al., "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership: The Nature and Origins of the Rally 'Round the Flag Effect" both tested aspects of his theory. Most recently, Karl Jr. DeRouen and Jeffery Peake, "The Dynamics of Diversion: Domestic Implications of Presidential Use of Force", *International Interactions*, vol. 28 (2002), pp 191-211 suggested suggest that uses of force reduce the salience of economic problems, and that could be a motive and mechanism for diversion.
that we look at the benefits not only of the use of force, but of other activities that are dramatic, frequently popular, and under presidential control.  

*Does Diversion Pay: Use of Force Benefits.*

After establishing a theoretical underpinning, the first empirical test (chapter 4) is to measure the political benefits of using force – what exactly can an executive gain from military intervention? As noted above this is done through statistical analysis of presidential approval changes following uses of force from 1953 to 2000. Using existing datasets and improving upon them with the use of historical sources, approximately 65 events are found where the United States initiated or escalated the use of force in a clearly identifiable, sharply focused way, generally including public presidential involvement. These events are modeled as exponentially decaying shocks that are superimposed on the general course of presidential approval that results from economic performance and other factors (chapter 3 details the statistical methods).

Each of the use of force events was coded on a number of politically relevant variables, such as Congressional support/opposition, success, purpose of the intervention, etc. The shocks caused by the events were modeled as a function of these characteristics, and of prevailing political conditions (e.g., presidential approval at the time), and thus the results allow us to forecast the magnitude and duration of the approval gains expected from future uses of force.

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74 Even without the automatic patriotism response of the conflict-cohesion theory, there are reasons to think that the use of force, or at least foreign policy broadly, would be more fertile ground for diversion than other areas. For example, the White House has an information advantage on foreign policy issues, critics have less ability to challenge the president. These considerations are discussed in greater detail in chapter 2.

Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*  
Chapter 1: "Diversionary War and U.S. Politics"
Alternative Action Benefits

A similar analysis is performed (chapter 5) for alternative actions that Presidents might pursue. Although "alternative actions" includes literally anything that a President might do, this study concentrates on the easy targets: actions that are readily accessible to presidents, and that are straightforward to identify after the fact. This approach is justified for two reasons: little work has been done on the attractiveness of alternatives to diversionary uses of force, and if it turns out that the easy, obvious alternatives provide benefits comparable to or greater than using force, that is sufficient to show that military actions are not likely to be the preferred alternative. Therefore, this study measured the impact on Presidential support from dramatic peaceful events (e.g., major summits, war termination, arms control treaties), from major foreign travel, and from Presidential speeches. All of these activities involve a high degree of Presidential control (both of the events themselves and the information flow about them), and there is reason to think they would be popular.

The measurement itself was done in exactly same manner as for uses of force. Data on foreign travel and speeches is readily available. Peace-promoting activities required the creation of a new dataset. Historical sources were used to identify approximately 80 instances where presidents conducted or announced a major diplomatic advance, de-escalation of an existing conflict, an arms control accomplishment, etc. As with uses of force, these events were coded for relevant characteristics. Peace events are not as sharply focused and well-known as uses of force, and so there may be more room to disagree with the details of the events selected, their dates and coding, etc. Nevertheless, since so little is known about their effect on presidents and since the media priming model predicts that they could be a useful diversionary tactic, this measurement is a significant advancement.
"Repaired" Diversionary Theory.

The results from the previous tests are used to derive and test modified or "repaired"\textsuperscript{75} versions of the diversion theory (Chapter 6): by assuming that diversion was not subject to any constraints, simple tests of the theory may be casting too broad a net and thus missing actually diversionary patterns. If uses of force do not always help presidents, than the prediction of diversionary activity should be conditional: only when the conditions for boosting popularity can be met should diversion take place. Likewise, the analysis of uses of force in general may not be the proper dependent variable. If only certain types of uses of force are highly supported by the public, then it should be those types only that become more common during periods of presidential need. In fact, if some military actions are popular, and some are unpopular, then it is possible what we will observe is not a change in the frequency of uses of force but a change in the balance between different types (worse political trouble, more of the popular interventions). Force may not be the right dependent variable at all. Other dramatic presidential actions may prove to be better or at least safer bets.

To test repaired theories of diversion, the results from the previous two sets of tests were used identify proper dependent variables -- actions that are promising for diversion -- and what independent variables should condition their use. Statistical analysis then measured the frequency of the use of force or other diversionary actions in response to political needs, taking into account the conditioning or mediating variables that were identified.


Burbach, \textit{Diversionary Temptations}
Chapter 1: "Diversionary War and U.S. Politics"
Caveats on Scope and Method

The focus on specific, dramatic events does leave out some Presidential strategies that would be considered “scapegoating”, but are short of actual war. Presidents might create a generalized atmosphere of foreign danger – inflating military threats, for example, or provoking diplomatic crises that stop short of actual hostilities. Threat-inflation short of actual violence would be consistent with the media priming model – or the group cohesion model – and presidents have certainly been accused of playing up foreign threats for political gain.

The threat-inflation strategy is worth studying, but a clear, narrow focus on the benefits of uses of force specifically is justified. Many academics and political observers explicitly make the argument that diversionary motives lead to actual use of force, not just scapegoating and threat inflation. Knowing the benefits available from dramatic uses of force will help place the benefits of generalized scapegoating in context in future studies. If similar benefits can be gained from rhetoric as from actual fighting, talking up threats without actually fighting would seem the prudent strategy. Moreover, the benefits of scapegoating may be measured indirectly here. A concerted effort to play up foreign threats would probably be associated with Presidential speeches, and the approval impact of foreign policy speeches is measured. If threat inflation is used for diversionary purposes, one would expect more frequent foreign policy speeches during times of domestic trouble, and this is also tested.

The approach here does not measure the potential political gain from the entire universe of non-scapegoating actions a President might take – from domestic policy initiatives to television advertising campaigns. Measuring the specific benefits from those activities would be nearly impossible, since it would be difficult to identify what “those activities” consisted of: in some sense, everything the President does is a political activity. Nevertheless, it is quite possible that...
Presidents in political difficulty respond not with a few dramatic distractions, but with old-fashioned politics: a large number of marginal changes in position, message, style, etc that collectively gain support from voters. Modern polling technology makes it especially easy to practice narrowly targeted (and thus difficult to observe) strategies.

Third, this research strategy can not rule out whether presidents can or do use force for political goals other than generally improving their level of support, and responding to macro-level political needs (such as an impending election or major scandal). If Bush successfully counteracted his "wimp" image by invading Panama without making much difference in his overall ratings, this study would not observe that benefit. Of course, this limitation applies to essentially all quantitative studies of diversionary uses of force.

Finally, as with any single-country study, the results may not travel well. Even if true, the diversionary question is important enough in the U.S. context to make the study worthwhile. It seems more likely, though, that some findings would be applicable to other countries. Advanced industrial democracies with reasonably educated citizens and universal access to mass media should demonstrate similar mechanisms at work to shape public opinion, so these results should at least have some relevance in EU countries.\(^{76}\) Beyond that, to the extent that the study finds the real limitations on diversion are such institutions as an active, critical press and strong opposition parties, that would suggest that nations without such developed institutions for challenging official stories would be more fertile ground for diversionary conflicts – and so should be expected to produce more international conflicts.

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\(^{76}\) Diversionary accusations are certainly seen on the other side of the Atlantic; many of Margaret Thatcher's critics accused her of reacting so strongly in the Falkland Island crisis to divert attention from a recession and her controversial privatization policies. On the other hand, some institutional differences are important, such as the fact that most other democracies do not have fixed electoral calendars.

Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*
Chapter 1: "Diversionary War and U.S. Politics"
Summary

Accusing the president of using war for crass political purposes has a long tradition in American politics; scholars too show strong interest and widespread belief that diversionary motives lead to uses of force. The empirical evidence suggests that just is not so in the case of the United States: elections, scandals, and low approval ratings do not lead to greater use of force, though recessions may have some effect. Existing theory does little to explain why this would be the case. The U.S. has not faced severe international constraints, so one would expect diversion to be attractive to American presidents.

This thesis argues that the attractiveness of diversion is an open question: we do not really know when domestic incentives will make diversion appealing to presidents – if ever. It is impossible to prove why U.S. presidents have not used diversionary force, but it is possible to determine whether diversionary would have worked if it had been attempted. If diversion does not bring great benefits, relative to other courses of action at least, that is a sufficient reason to expect that diversionary activity would be rare.

Therefore, this study sets out to measure the domestic incentives for diversion in the United States. What benefits will uses of force bring, and what variables condition those benefits? What other strategies are available to presidents?

To answer those questions, a new model of diversion is developed, based upon theories of public opinion and media communications. This model will allow the derivation of predictions regarding when the use of force or other dramatic presidential activities should be popular – predictions that, if true, would serve as conditions and limitations upon the simple diversionary theory. These predictions will then be tested quantitatively by analyzing the effects upon presidential approval from uses of force over the last fifty years, as well as the effects of major
“peace events” and other dramatic presidential actions. First, though, the “media priming” model of diversion and the hypotheses need to be developed, and that task is done in the following chapter.
Chapter 2:

Theory and Hypotheses on Diversionary Incentives

Despite the popularity of diversionary theories of war, the empirical record offers little support for the theory, and especially not in the U.S., as discussed in chapter 1. The gap between predictions and observations of diversionary activity is difficult to explain with our existing theoretical knowledge. In particular, the domestic-level mechanisms of diversion are not well understood. Chapter 1 identified a number of alternative explanations for the lack of diversionary activity in the United States, individual-level, domestic-level, and international level. Although the individual-level and international-level constraints on diversion are important, they seem unlikely to explain the absence of diversionary uses of force by American presidents. It seems likely that domestic-level factors are the likely cause of the observed American restraint, or at least a major part of it, but we do not have good tools for predicting what those constraints will be or how to test for them.

This chapter focuses on the theoretical basis for diversion – understanding the mechanisms by which uses of force lead to greater support for national leaders. The goal is to have a model of the diversionary process that allows us to predict the conditions (if any) under which diversion would be an attractive option for American leaders.

The first section of the chapter details current models of the diversionary process: the “conflict-cohesion” theory, and the principal-agent or “competence” theory. As they stand, nei-
ther of these theories gives a satisfactory description of domestic mechanisms, and in the case of the conflict-cohesion model, there is substantial evidence arguing against it.

A new model of the diversionary process is then proposed: the media-priming model. This model is based upon modern theories of public opinion formation and change. The underlying assumptions of the model are that of the "boundedly rational" view of public opinion developed by Zaller, Page and Shapiro, Iyengar, Popkin, and others. This model sees individuals as holding preferences on public policy issues and forming reasonable opinions based on those preferences, but, due to the cost and cognitive demands of being well informed, most people are heavily influenced by cues or "priming" from the mass media. The proposed model of diversion sees diversionary action as an exercise in changing the subject: shifting media focus away from negative issues and towards areas more favorable to the president — foreign policy, and presumably a specific military mission designed to appeal to public preferences. The chapter proceeds to the derivation of hypotheses from the model. Specifically, the model is used to identify factors that will condition the change in the president's standing with the public following a diversionary event. In the cases of uses of force, it is expected that greater public support will be seen when media coverage is more intense, when short-term success is apparent, when interventions are supported by opinion leaders and Congress, and when the events are "surprising" in some sense. Some uses of force are expected to be more popular than others: the direct protection of American lives is universally supported, while "humanitarian intervention" is expected to be less helpful to presidents.

The media priming model also predicts that dramatic activities other than the use of force can have similar beneficial effects on presidential approval. Three categories of activities that are easily accessible to presidents are hypothesized to be likely to produce increases in ap-
proval: dramatic “peace events” like the termination of wars and superpower summits; major foreign travel by presidents; and major speeches on foreign policy or new domestic initiatives. The variables that condition the responses to uses of force should do the same for these activities.

The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of how these hypotheses on the success of potentially diversionary actions relate to hypotheses on the actual occurrence of diversion. Specifically, after testing the hypotheses on the benefits of presidential activities, we can create “repaired” versions of the diversionary theory for further testing; chapter 6 presents those hypotheses and tests.

1. Mechanisms of Diversion: Assessing the Existing Models

Two models are currently found in the literature on diversionary war. The older and more popular one (sometimes used explicitly, often implied without any clear specification) is generally referred to as “conflict-induced cohesion”, or simply “conflict-cohesion”. This model predicts that the mechanisms of group psychology will cause members of a public to rally around their leadership when under external threat. The other frequently used model derives from economics rather than psychology. Principal-agent theory is used to predict that diversionary uses of force can be used to demonstrate competence to voters. When economic failures or other poor outcomes give the impression of incompetence on the part of a leader, that leader may choose to go double-or-nothing by launching a war and hoping their demonstrated competence as commander-in-chief will outweigh their domestic failures. The following section summarizes and critiques these theories in greater detail.
The Conflict-Cohesion Model

The diversionary theory has been around far longer than any social science "model" to support it. Historians and other writers have employed the concept for centuries, and even modern writers frequently refer to the alleged "fact" that polities unite when faced with foreign threats – and therefore that diversion is an available option for troubled leaders. ¹ Blainey describes it as a theory that is widely believed to have been proved true – somewhere else. Historians, sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, etc often accept it, he claims, believing that one of the other disciplines has empirically confirmed it.²

An explicit mechanism for conflict-induced cohesion comes from social psychology, where observation of small groups has demonstrated that such groups show greater unity and less dissent when confronted with an external threat. The key work on the subject is Lewis Coser’s The Function of Social Conflict, which itself relied heavily on Georg Simmel’s much earlier Conflict.³ Coser and Simmel themselves did not discuss whether this logic applied the level of nations and war, but in the political science literature it has generally be assumed that the analogy applies.⁴ The supposed "rally effect" that occurs after uses of force has often been cited to support the application of the conflict-cohesion principle at the national level.⁵ The conflict-cohesion model also fit well another line of theorizing in political science, that of the so-called

¹ See examples in Chapter 1 from Boulding, Darensdorf, Wright, Waltz, Rosecrance, Hass, and others.
³ Georg Simmel, Conflict (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1955); Lewis A Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1956). Note that "threat" is a more appropriate term than "conflict". Simmel and Coser focused on actual conflict, much of the literature on threat induced cohesion has focused on disasters – earthquakes, floods, fires, etc, as described by Stein. Art Stein, "Conflict and Cohesion: A Review of the Literature", Journal of Conflict Resolution, vol. 20, no. 1 (1976), pp 143-172 Whether there is a difference in effect between impersonal forces and conflicts with other human groups is an interesting question.
⁵ For uncritical examples of this, see Nelson Polsby, Congress and The Presidency (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964); Kenneth Waltz, "Electoral Punishment and Foreign Policy Crises", in Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy, James Rosenau, ed. (New York: Free Press, 1967).
"Almond-Lippman consensus" on the nature of public opinion. That view, which was dominant during the middle part of the 20th century, understood the public to be hopelessly ill-informed (especially on foreign policy), to hold unstable and meaningless preferences, to be governed more by "moods" and other psycho-emotional factors than rational calculation, and to therefore be easy to lead - and mislead. An unquestioning activation of group loyalty in response to a rallying call from the leadership appeared quite consistent with Almond-Lippman view of the public, reinforcing the insights drawn from sociology. The "model" was rarely spelled out in any detail, but a simple diagram of the logic implied by the conflict-cohesion model is shown in Figure 2-1, below.

![Conflict-Cohesion Model](image)

**Figure 2-1 -- Conflict-Cohesion Model**

In this simple formulation there are few domestic constraints on diversion; the unifying process is thought to apply in all cases. If so, then only international-level constraints would make diversion unattractive; individual restraint might also preclude a leader from taking advan-

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tage of the option. American restraint is particularly difficult to explain with this model, as international constraints are unlikely to have ruled out diversion by U.S. presidents. We are then left with individual restraint, and a prediction that if a president ever did attempt to use force for diversionary purposes, the attempt would be successful.

There are reasons to doubt the simple conflict-cohesion model. First, the theory as employed by political scientists oversimplified Coser, and has given insufficient attention to relevant work since then. Coser placed two caveats on the prediction that conflicts would unify groups: first, that such cohesion would only take place if there were a significant amount of solidarity already present in the group – i.e., that most group members identify with the group and wish to see it continue. Second, the external conflict has to be perceived as a threat, and a threat that affects the group, not merely certain members of it. To given an extreme example, when Germany invaded the U.S.S.R. in 1941, much of the population initially welcomed the Germans; their dislike of the Soviet regime and of long-standing Russian domination meant that conflict brought fragmentation, not unity. Once it became clear, though, that the Germans intended to mistreat all of them as a group – as conquered, Slavic people -- the population began fighting on Moscow’s side. Lott and Lott added a third qualification: the threat had to be one for which a group response appeared necessary and effective. If individuals could save themselves, or if group action appeared useless, unification would not occur.

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7 See discussion in Chapter 1, section 3.
8 Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, pp 87-110
9 A. J. Lott and B. E. Lott, "Group Cohesiveness As Interpersonal Attraction: A Review of Relationships With Antecedent and Consequent Variables", *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 64, no. 4 (1965), pp 259-309. For greater detail, see Stein, "Conflict and Cohesion: A Review of the Literature". Stein's article is a useful and under appreciated review of the conflict-cohesion literature in sociology, psychology, and anthropology
The qualifications suggest a revised version of the conflict-cohesion theory, as shown in Figure 2-2. The revised theory requires that general group cohesiveness exist, that the conflict involves a threat to the group, and that group response seems useful. In practical terms, this means that diversionary force should have a nonlinear relationship to domestic strife -- when extremely high levels of internal conflict are present, diversion would not succeed.\(^\text{10}\) Diversion would also be unlikely to succeed when the external threat only affected certain groups in society; it might then only exacerbate social cleavages.\(^\text{11}\) Some recent cross-national studies have included these and claim to find support for the predicted nonlinear relationship.\(^\text{12}\) It seems likely, though, that the American public is sufficiently cohesive and attached to its group identify that it can satisfy Coser's condition.

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\(^{10}\) Diversion would also not be useful if there are no shared goal of national identity, even if conflict is not visible. There was little visible unrest in the Soviet Union in 1940, for example, but neither was there patriotism for very many.

\(^{11}\) Croatia's leader Franjo Tudjman, for example, would not have had much luck trying to bring his countries Serb and Croat populations together by playing up the threat from Serbia.

Other evidence that the simple conflict-cohesion model does not capture the full picture comes from studies of the "rally effect".13 While the conventional wisdom has been that uses of force always bring about significant boosts in presidential popularity, that is not necessarily so. The most systematic studies find that the average boost in approval ratings from a use of force is small.14 Presidential support is also not as automatic as the conflict-cohesion theory predicts. The apparent success of an operation does matter,15 as does criticism from opinion leaders.16 It is clear that conflicts can improve a president’s poll numbers. For example, consider the year-long elevation of George W. Bush’s ratings following the September 11th, 2001 attacks, his father’s 90% rating at the end of the first Gulf War, or the 10 point boost Kennedy received after the Cuban Missile Crisis. What those memorable occasions obscure is that some uses of force have been ignored, some have actually hurt Presidents. Clinton’s ratings dipped slightly during

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14 Lian et. al., "Presidents, the Use of Force, and Public Opinion" find on average, no boost at all. Burbach, David T., "Foreign Policy Preferences, Presidential Approval, and the Use of Force". Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (Chicago, IL), September, 1995. finds a 3% boost lasting just a few months, on average.

15 Burbach, David T., "Foreign Policy Preferences, Presidential Approval, and the Use of Force".


Burbach, Diversionary Temptations
Chapter 2: “Theory and Hypotheses”
the Kosovo War in 1999, and Eisenhower lost some support during the 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis.\(^{17}\)

Two variants of the conflict-cohesion model that are worth additional study,\(^{18}\) though in practice they yield similar predictions. The "cognitive consistency" theory predicts that citizens will show unified support for their leaders not out of group loyalty, but to avoid the psychological discomfort of disagreeing with the course of action their country has chosen on so important an issue as war. Rather than be on the losing side of a debate, people change their views after the fact. To illustrate, CBS News found that from the fall of 2002 until March 15, 2003 a consistent 50% of respondents said it would be worth taking military action against Iraq; once the war began it immediately jumped to 65%.\(^{19}\) Perhaps last-minute evidence led 15% of the public to change their minds, but it is possible they switched because they found it difficult to be on the losing side of the issue.\(^{20}\) The other variant is the "expected response" theory, which proposes that whatever individuals might really feel, their response to politically loaded survey questions is often what they think they are supposed to feel. Many people would feel uncomfortable telling a stranger that they do not support the President during wartime, this version predicts, and so respondents will claim to support the President despite their actual position.

Either of these variants would produce observed behavior very much like the conflict-cohesion model, however. The cognitive consistency variant predicts the same automatic sup-

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\(^{17}\) Unless otherwise specified, all approval numbers cited are from the Gallup presidential approval series. Data to 1989 are available in Edwards, Presidential Approval, data for subsequent years was obtained from various issues of the *Gallup Poll Monthly*. Note that *Gallup Poll Monthly* usually includes cumulative data on the current President – i.e., the issue from January 1993 would include a complete tabulation of Bush’s ratings.

\(^{18}\) Conversations with Chappell Lawson and Maxine Isaacs were of great assistance in developing my ideas on these conflict-cohesion variants.

\(^{19}\) CBS News polling data reported by PollingReport on March 29, 2003 (http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq.htm)

\(^{20}\) The term "they" is being used loosely. This was not a panel study and so the respondents were different every time. The change is far greater than the sampling error in the poll however and likely reflects real opinion change; if the pre-war respondents were reinterviewed it is likely a similar fraction of them would have shifted.
port for executive decisions. The expected response variant does as well, though one could imagine that criticism of presidential decisions could be important; objections from other prominent figures could legitimize dissenting opinion. It would be very interesting to do individual-level studies to explore these effects, but at the mass opinion level these variants also seem inadequate to explain the observed patterns.

Principal-Agent or “Competence” Theory

The other principal theoretical perspective on diversion has been referred to as the “competence” thesis. Using a principal-agent framework, this perspective starts with the assumption that citizens wish to have competent leaders in office. Generally leaders will be judged on their handling of domestic issues, but if a leader has fared poorly (either due to actual incompetence or economic bad luck — voters have no way to tell the difference), initiating a war prior to their reelection opportunity gives leaders a second chance to prove themselves. If the leader appears to be a competent Commander-in-Chief, that may outweigh domestic failings and lead to reelection. Some authors predict that diversion will only be seen when leaders face marginal reelection difficulty, since truly overwhelming domestic failure would be too great for even a war to overcome, thus making the effort futile and a waste of resources. Downs and Rocke argue the opposite. Since the costs of war to the executive have a lower bound (losing


re-election), when an executive's position appears hopeless they have a greater incentive for war escalation, since things can't get any worse, and something miraculous might happen on the battlefield.\(^{23}\) Goemans takes the most nuanced position.\(^{24}\) He argues that leaders of democracies or centralized dictatorships are unlikely to gamble on resurrection through war, but leaders of “mixed” regimes (e.g., the Argentine junta in 1981; Germany in 1914) will do so.\(^{25}\)

The principal-agent approach does yield some important insights into domestic incentives for diversionary war, in particular, highlighting the importance of analyzing the incentive structures that leaders face. As it stands this literature is incomplete, however. Some problems involve relatively minor extensions of the principal-agent framework. For example, all studies using this framework argue that the costs of war are irrelevant, since voters are strictly forward-looking and will only care about having a competent leader in the future.\(^{26}\) Even if true, however, sophisticated voters might expect that a leader who got the country into war once is likely to pursue an aggressive foreign policy and do so again, and thus be less likely to reelect the leader.

\(^{23}\) Downs and Rocke specifically deal with the question of ending a war that is going badly vs. escalating, but similar logic could be applied to an executive facing failed domestic polices and considering war initiation. Their model assumes that losing reelection really is the maximum loss possible. Leaders might care about their “place in history” and not wish to be associated with an unnecessary war, they might actually consider the loss of life to be a cost, and could face impeachment or in some societies, a coup or other involuntary removal. And there is the possibility that escalating the war could raise the stakes to the point that defeat means conquest and occupation by the enemy!


\(^{25}\) The logic is this: leaders in democracies face only retirement in most cases, but launching/escalating a war to save their own skin could result in worse outcomes if the war fails badly (see previous fn); dictators can retain their position through repression in all but severe defeats. Leaders of mixed, oligarchic states occupy precarious, dangerous positions and so have little left to lose once a mild failure has taken place.

\(^{26}\) That is, even a successful war may leave a country worse off than if there had been no war at all. That is irrelevant, though, since in the future the voters would prefer to have a competent wartime leader in case another war takes place (winning the war will be less costly than losing).
after a successful war than no war at all. Similarly, wars waged by leaders who have failed domestically should be discounted by rational voters, who will expect such diversionary behavior.

Other problems with the competence approach are less technical. First, that citizens will reward leaders for successful wars is posited, not theoretically explained or demonstrated empirically. Nor does this approach say much about differences between wars, other than between successful and unsuccessful outcomes. The strict focus on reelection also ignores ongoing incentives faced by leaders: even if reelection seems impossible even after a successful war, for example, improving one's immediate standing might be important for accomplishing policy goals that are valued by the executive. Finally, why is war the only method to demonstrate competence? Other areas of activity should also matter if they are expected to be present in the next term in office. For example, voters presumably would like a leader who is skilled at international diplomacy, and a major diplomatic achievement might equally demonstrate competence. Indeed, if a leader who know they are unlikely to be good wartime executives would be likely to find other arenas in which to show off their talents.

In short, neither the traditional conflict-cohesion approach nor the emerging principal-agent models seem adequate for understanding and measuring diversionary mechanisms as they operate in the United States. To provide that basis, the next section outlines a "media priming" model based on public opinion theory.

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27 If the expected cost of a high-probability successful war is larger than that of a low-probability unsuccessful war, voters may prefer to take a chance on a new leader rather than reject a competent but bellicose one. If successful wars produce benefits for voters and not costs, this is less of a problem, but most of the "competence" authors accept that even successful wars are usually costly.

28 It could be argued that diversionary motives make no difference, since a display of competence is all that matters. That argument fails for two reasons: 1) voters may expect that a leader who resorted to diversion is likely to do so again in future periods (thus incurring the costs of another unnecessary war); and 2) the voters would expect that leaders facing diversionary pressure would find an easy target for any war, and victory therefore reveals less about the leader's competence than it would for a non-diversionary war.

29 More precisely, the principal-agent models used do include the improvement in a leader's reelection probability following a successful war as a theoretical variable, but the presumption is that its value is positive and significant.
2. The Media Priming Model

This section lays out the model to be used in this study for deriving hypotheses about the effect of diversionary uses of force (or other diversionary activities) upon presidential approval. After introducing the theory of “boundedly rational” public opinion, a model of presidential approval as a function of public policy preferences and media content is described. That model of approval is then analyzed to determine how dramatic activities could be used to alter public opinion in the president’s favor. The mechanisms for diversion that are identified are then examined to identify testable hypotheses about the impact of uses of force and other dramatic events on public opinion and the variables that will condition those effects.

The Nature of Public Opinion: Bounded Rationality

The model begins with a presumption that the public is boundedly rational. Members of the public are seen as rational in the sense that they have meaningful and somewhat stable preferences on public policy issues, that changes in those preferences are reasonably related to new information and ideas, and that responses to survey questions are answered in ways consistent with those preferences. This view of the public is in sharp contrast to the “Almond-Lippman” model that prevailed for many years, but it has come to be widely accepted over the past decade.  

Page and Shapiro’s book *The Rational Public* was a key statement of this theory, and there

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30 Page and Shapiro did not completely repudiate that other work. They note that by focusing on individual attitudes (panel studies), early studies emphasized instability. Looking at aggregate opinion, they argue, individual volatility averages out and produces a fairly coherent mass opinion. Since what a President will be interested in is being able to accurately predict how the use of force will affect aggregate opinions, that is the level at which “rationality” matters for this study.

have been many other works on the general theme,\textsuperscript{32} some specifically on foreign policy atti-
tudes.\textsuperscript{33}

The theory posits that individuals hold relatively stable preferences regarding public is-
 issues, and that changes in those preferences are reasonable responses to new information. It is
important to distinguish between preferences, general goals and values; and specific opinions, such as
support or approval for particular policy proposals: Page and Shapiro contend that there is
strong stability in preferences, such as the goal of maintaining a strong yet affordable military.
More volatile are opinions on particular policy decisions, like whether or not to build the F-22
fighter – those values clearly relate to one’s decision to support or oppose the program, but do
not in and of themselves determine an opinion. Individuals need additional information to
judge a particular issue against those goals, and some way to make tradeoffs between them.

Gathering information and making tradeoffs are neither easy nor enjoyable for most
people; the costs of information collection and integration are high enough that most citizens,
for most issues, do not form fully rational opinions. First, members of the public have incom-
plete information on public policy issues, not only incomplete in the sense that perfect knowl-
dge does not exist for a given issue (will there be a drought next year?), but incomplete in the
sense that many individuals are unaware of the information which is available in the political

\textsuperscript{32} P. M. Sniderman, Richard A. Brody, and Phillip E. Tetlock, \textit{Reasoning and Choice: Explorations in Political Psychology}
University Press, 1992); William Mayer, \textit{The Changing American Mind} (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1992); Samuel Popkin,
view of this literature, see James Kuklinski and Paul Quirk, "Reconsidering the Rational Public: Cognition, Heuristics, and Mass Opinion",
\textsuperscript{33} Bruce W. Janis\textsuperscript{e}leson, "The Pretty Prudent Public: Post-Post-Vietnam American Opinion on the Use of Military
(Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1996)
marketplace. Some individuals are attentive, most are not. Second, individuals find it costly to gather political information and therefore use shortcuts or “heuristics”. These shortcuts include strategies such as counting on the media to draw attention to important information, and taking opinion cues from recognized “experts” or visible individuals with shared values. Third, individuals do not necessarily integrate their knowledge to form definitive, stable opinions on particular questions, but instead maintain disconnected and even contradictory beliefs. For example, a person might agree that the F-22 is justified from a military perspective, and also agree that the program is too expensive, without resolving that tradeoff to arrive at a firm opinion.

John Zaller has used this bounded rationality perspective to develop what has become a widely accepted model of survey response and opinion change. When confronted with a survey question, individuals respond mentally by connecting the question to the most easily accessible information and values that appear to relate to it. They will not necessarily take into account all information they have, nor all of the different sets of preferences that might apply, nor will the most “accessible” necessarily be what upon reflection they would consider the most important factors. Instead, what is accessible is what has been thought about recently – a “top of the

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34 The literature on the lack of political knowledge of American citizens is large. For a recent synthesis, see Michael Carpini and Scott Keeter, What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996)
35 It is difficult to get a direct measure of political attentiveness, since the evidence is that people over-report this when asked directly. Instead, measures of political attentiveness are usually constructed from actual knowledge tests. Zaller, The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion, p. 44. Since most public opinion surveys do not include political trivia tests, education level is generally considered the best proxy, with higher levels of education corresponding to higher levels of attentiveness to political information and ideas, though there are also differences by gender, age, and race. Carpini and Keeter, What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters, ch. 5.
36 Popkin, The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns, ch 2, 3, 4; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, Reasoning and Choice: Explorations in Political Psychology
37 Such experts might be in the traditional sense – political officials, academics, etc, or informal, such as acquaintances who are attentive to a particular issue. Taking cues from those with similar values is particularly important: citizens may know little about particular proposals, but knowing that Ted Kennedy is for it, or that Rush Limbaugh is against it;
38 Zaller, The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion,
head” effect. It is impossible to say whether the hypothetical individual really supports or opposes the F-22, since they themselves don’t know, but on any given day they may report approval or disapproval based on whichever considerations are most accessible at the time.

Zaller’s model explains why question order and question wording have such large effects on survey responses. Asking whether someone supports increasing foreign aid immediately after asking a series of questions about the budget deficit is likely to produce a different response than asking after questions about world hunger; the earlier questions would have “primed” the respondent by making a particular consideration (budget balancing or charity) salient when they reached the foreign aid question. Questions themselves do much to “frame” responses, not only through clearly leading statements like, “do you favor X, even though it will raise your taxes?”, but subtle differences in value-loaded words, like “poor” vs “unemployed”, or wording that does or does not connect to the information an individual has available, like “Contras” vs “anti-government forces” vs “anti-communist forces”.

Survey response is affected by more than just the internal design of a questionnaire, however. Priming and framing effects operate in a much broader way, and in particular are

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42 Zaller, The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion p. 83. Most Americans were not able to remember whether the U.S. supported the government or rebel forces in Nicaragua or what precisely was happening there in the first place, but were aware that the Reagan Administration believed there was a communist threat in Central America. The amount of information contained in questions therefore had a large impact on the response, since many people could not connect “Contra” to any accessible opinions.

Burbach, Diversionary Temptations
Chapter 2: “Theory and Hypotheses”
driven by the mass media. It is well documented that items that have appeared in the media recently have much greater mental accessibility for individuals — there is a very strong priming function. This is certainly true for political issues: multiple studies have found very strong correlations between the issues given attention in the news media and the issues considered important at any given time by the public. Experimental research by Iyengar and associates has demonstrated that what the news covers is what becomes important to viewers; causality flows from the media to individuals. In short, a large body of research now confirms Bernard Cohen's 1963 observation that the news media "...may not be successful much of the time in


*Burbach, Diversionary Temptations*  
Chapter 2: "Theory and Hypotheses"
telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.⁴⁶

Media coverage also does much to “frame” the way people think about issues: to shape the context in which a decision appears, and to determine which pre-existing values and information a decision is connected to.⁴⁷ In the case of the use of force, for example, news stories that emphasized battlefield results as opposed to foreign policy implications, or the partisan politics of the action, would influence the way viewers conceptualized the issue. An individual might disagree with the particular slant of coverage -- a liberal-leaning viewer would not be led to take a conservative position -- but their criteria for judging the war would be influenced.

The importance of priming and framing is that media coverage has a tremendous impact on the responses people give on opinion surveys. The most obvious impact is the previously mentioned agenda-setting effect: the issues recently in the news become the issues that people say are important. Beyond that, media coverage influences what is accessible to respondents. A given individual is more likely to support a tax increase for schools if asked soon after seeing reports on overcrowded classrooms than if asked after seeing stories about government waste (even if not specific to schools).

The impact of priming⁴⁸ also shifts the criteria individuals use to evaluate the performance of public officials – if crime is receiving a great deal of media attention, for example, not only will crime be considered an important problem, it will be a principal basis for judging the

⁴⁸ To be precise, communications researchers often distinguish between what they call the “agenda setting” effect of shaping the public’s ranking of issue importance, and the “priming” effect of shaping criteria for judging performance. This would be an important distinction if media coverage led to only one of the two effects (e.g., shaped agendas but did not “prime” evaluations), but since both occur together for simplicity the single term “priming” will refer to both in this discussion.
performance of government officials. Zaller proposes that several other variables mediate this effect however. Political attentiveness matters a great deal: people with a high interest in public affairs will have already been exposed to a great deal of information and arguments and will have better integrated them, and so will be less affected by a given quantity of coverage. On the other hand, individuals with low attentiveness may simply miss the messages altogether and so also show little media influence.

The Basis of Presidential Approval

The first step in modeling diversionary mechanisms is to understand what determines presidential support. Using the bounded rationality theory of the public, Iyengar and others have proposed that Presidential approval can be thought of as a weighted average of individual presidential ratings on each of the issues that matter to the public. At any given time, the relative weight given to each issue is set by the recent balance of media attention to each issue. That is, one can imagine the President having distinct approval ratings on each member of the set of public issues – how the President is handling the economy, crime, pollution, etc. Approval or disapproval by an individual on each of those issues is formed by comparing presidential actions and observed outcomes to their own preferences, mediated, though, by the media.

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49 Iyengar and Kinder, News That Matters, pp 63-112, as Iyengar summarizes in a later work, "...the themes and issues that are repeated in television news coverage become the priorities of viewers. Issues and events highlighted by television news become especially influential as criteria for evaluating public officials" Iyengar, Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues, p. 2. See also John A. Krosnick and Donald R Kinder, "Altering the Foundations of Support for the President Through Priming", American Political Science Review, vol. 84 (1990), pp 497-512

50 This model has not been specifically employed in the diversionary or "rally effect" context before, but the mediadriven weighted average concept originates with Iyengar and Kinder, News That Matters. Also related is Brody, Assessing the President

51 The evidence is clear that the public is able to distinguish among policy areas like this. In November of 1989, for example, approval of G. W. Bush’s handling of issues ranged from a low of 30% on “poverty and homelessness” to 81% for “relations with the Soviet Union”. Even among foreign policy issues it varied; handling of “the situation in Central American” only was approved by 40% of respondents. George C. Edwards et. al., Explaining Presidential Approval: The Significance of Issue Salience”, American Journal of Political Science, vol. 39, pp 108-134, p. 122.
treatment of those particular issues.\footnote{For example, after a highly publicized intervention in a labor dispute (e.g., firing the air traffic controllers) approval of the president's handling of labor relations would be mostly driven by a individual's view of that action. Framing also matters, such as whether a major toxic spill is presented as an unconnected incident of wrongdoing by a firm, or was presented in a broader context of weakened regulations.} Issues receiving high levels of coverage will be considered highly salient by the public; those issues will become the most important for judging Presidential performance at the time. Coverage will not necessarily change any of the president's subscores, but will shift the weighting of them.\footnote{I am using the model here to predict aggregate ratings. Iyengar, Zaller, and others have used this concept primarily in the context of individual approval decisions. An individual can only express approval or disapproval, not a rating, of course, but one can imagine individuals mentally computing a "rating" and responding with approval if that rating is above some threshold.}

This weighted-average model of approval has received substantial empirical support. It originally evolved from Iyengar and Kinder's experimental studies, which found strong evidence of this priming effect. Iyengar's later experimental studies confirm this.\footnote{Iyengar, Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues} Several studies using panel data have also found media coverage affecting issue salience, and found that salience in turn could be used as weights to predict Presidential support as a function of issue-specific ratings.\footnote{Krosnick et al., "Altering the Foundations of Support for the President Through Priming"; Jon A. Krosnick and Laura A Brannon, "The Impact of the Gulf War on the Ingredients of Presidential Evaluations", American Political Science Review, vol. 87, no. 4 (1993), pp 963-974; Larry M. Bartels, "Messages Received: The Political Impact of Me-}

Edwards and others looked at the individual-level data from 25 polls during the G.W.
Bush Administration (25 different samples, not panel data) and also found strong support for the priming hypothesis. Unfortunately, no studies have extended this analysis to longer time periods: individual-level data is not typically available for commercial polls, questions regarding issue-specific approval have only been asked intermittently and inconsistently, and the exercise would require coding decades of media content. Nevertheless, the priming model of approval has become widely accepted.

**Mechanisms for Diversion**

Using this theory of presidential approval, we can construct a model of diversion based on media priming effects. As shown in figure 2-3, there are three pathways by which dramatic presidential action might improve presidential ratings: 1) decreasing the salience of the negative issue, 2) scoring a apparent success in another area and improving that issue-specific rating; and 3) improving the public’s assessment of the presidents personal leadership qualities.

dia Exposure", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 87 (1994), pp 267-285; Zhongdang Pan and Gerald Kosicki, "Priming and Media Impact on the Evaluations of the President’s Performance", *Communications Research*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1997), pp 3-30; Joanne Miller and Jon A. Krosnick, "News Media Impact on the Ingredients of Presidential Evaluations: Politically Knowledgable Citizens Are Guided By a Trusted Source", *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2000), pp 295-309. All used National Election Study survey data. It would be very interesting to see a replication of such work for the latter part of the Clinton administration. During 1998 media focus was overwhelming on the Lewinsky scandal and subsequent impeachment. The public had a dim view of Clinton’s integrity and character, yet his approval ratings help up or even climbed. Did many members of the public reject personal character as a basis for Presidential evaluation despite the media attention to the issue? Approval rating data alone are not adequate for answering the question, but analysis of the 1998 NES data could prove useful.

56 Edwards et. al., "Explaining Presidential Approval: The Significance of Issue Salience"

57 Miller et. al., "News Media Impact on the Ingredients of Presidential Evaluations: Politically Knowledgable Citizens Are Guided By a Trusted Source" point out that this priming effect could also be a heuristic rather than an deeper cognitive process. People think it is the job of the media to let them know what is important, Miller and Krosnick argue, and most people trust that the media do so. This is an interesting alternative explanation, but it does not generally change the predictions of the priming model. Where this alternative mechanism could matter is if some of the time the public rejects the media’s choice of focus – as suggested earlier, the null effect of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal could be an example of that. Nevertheless, the empirical studies show that whatever the mechanism, the priming model usually makes good predictions.
To illustrate how these mechanisms would work, figure 2-4 gives a hypothetical example of a president facing low ratings due to a scandal or policy failure, and shows how a diversionary activity would activate these three mechanisms and result in higher approval overall. In the example of figure 2-4, four issues make up presidential approval. Each of those issues has a share of media focus and an issue-specific rating; those are multiplied together to get a sub-score on each issue, and the sum of those subscores is overall approval.\(^\text{58}\) The model includes four dimensions of presidential evaluation: “Failed Policy” is the area of policy failure, “Diversion Issue” is a policy area in which a President might take action designed to focus attention away from the failure, “Leadership” is the public’s evaluation of the President’s personal qualities in terms of integrity, leadership ability, etc; and “Other” are all other issues averaged and combined. For each issue area, the “Rating” column shows the public satisfaction with Presidential performance in that area, and the “Media” column shows the share of media coverage relating

\(^{58}\) Media attention is the relative share of coverage to an issue. That is, total coverage has to add up to 100%.
to that issue, relative to all coverage relevant to public policy and presidential qualities.\textsuperscript{59} The “Subscore” column shows the media weight multiplied by the issue ratings, and then the sum of the subscores makes up the overall approval rating.

\textsuperscript{59} One question that has not been adequately addressed in the literature is how whether the “weighted average” effect operates on absolute or relative levels of media attention. For example, is one story per day each on the economy and foreign affairs equivalent to one story per week? In the limiting case as coverage goes to zero the simple model becomes indeterminate. Perhaps issue weighting stays fixed as coverage drops below some level, or perhaps individuals revert to some other pattern in the absence of media cues, such as relying on character/leadership qualities.
## Diversionary Mechanisms

### A. Approval after policy failure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Subscore</th>
<th>APPROVAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FAILED POLICY</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIVERSION ISSUE</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER ISSUES</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEADERSHIP</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \sum = 37 \]

### B. Media Focus Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Subscore</th>
<th>APPROVAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FAILED POLICY</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIVERSION ISSUE</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER ISSUES</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEADERSHIP</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \sum = 46 \]

### C. Popular Diversionary Action

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
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<th>Subscore</th>
<th>APPROVAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FAILED POLICY</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIVERSION ISSUE</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER ISSUES</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEADERSHIP</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \sum = 39 \]

### D. Improve Leadership Appearance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Subscore</th>
<th>APPROVAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FAILED POLICY</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIVERSION ISSUE</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER ISSUES</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEADERSHIP</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \sum = 41 \]

### E. Combined Effect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Subscore</th>
<th>APPROVAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FAILED POLICY</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIVERSION ISSUE</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER ISSUES</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEADERSHIP</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \sum = 63 \]

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Figure 2-4 Example of Diversionary Mechanisms in Practice

Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*

Chapter 2: "Theory and Hypotheses"
Part A of the figure shows the pre-diversion situation: due to a failure which is attracting 40% of the media coverage and has a much lower rating than the president’s other issues, overall approval is an unimpressive 37%.

Parts B, C, and D of the figure illustrate the three mechanisms by which diversion might help a president in this situation. For each of these parts, it is assumed that a president has taken a significant action meant to counteract the loss of support from the failure – an action in the policy category labeled, “Diversionary Issue”. One possible effect is to shift the focus of media coverage (Part B), without actually changing the public’s opinion on presidential performance on any issue (for example, the President might do something dramatic that draws attention to an existing initiative, without telling the public anything new about it). Simply changing the subject is enough to significantly improve the poll numbers. The numbers here are only notional, but the evidence is that the salience of issues can vary greatly in response to media coverage. Edwards, for example, found the weight on Bush’s economic policy rating ranged from 0.10 to 0.57, and foreign policy 0.24 to 0.65. Economic evaluations were substantially less important to Bush’s ratings during the Persian Gulf crisis, when media attention was focused on foreign issues.60

Presidential action might also improve the public’s opinion about performance in a particular policy area (Part C): issuing tax rebates, for example. Even if this action does not take media attention away from the troublesome issue, it will increase support. Finally, actions might change the perception citizens have of the president’s personal character and leadership qualities.

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60 A recently published study has also made the suggestion that changing issue salience might be the key mechanism for diversion. Karl Jr. DeRouen and Jeffery Peake, "The Dynamics of Diversion: Domestic Implications of Presidential Use of Force", *International Interactions*, vol. 28 (2002), pp 191-211
– taking particularly decisive and strong action, for example. As shown in Part D, this too would be helpful even if no other benefits accrued.

Finally, Panel E combines the three mechanisms to illustrate the effects that successful diversion might have: by taking action which will be popular in its own right, which attracts media coverage, and which reflects well upon the President’s character, a substantial boost in support might be possible.\textsuperscript{61}

The analysis demonstrates how a president might produce a short term increase in approval ratings, but how long would this boost last? The answer depends on both how long media attention remains diverted, and the duration of any increases in issue-specific or general leadership ratings. The Iyengar experimental studies suggest that changes in salience respond very quickly to changes in media focus; a few days of coverage were enough to have dramatic effects. The only long-term study of real-world data, Edwards et al., only has a resolution of a poll every one to three months, but it shows that there can be significant month-to-month changes, though gradual change is more typical.\textsuperscript{62} Issue-specific ratings immediately after the diversionary event would mostly reflect public satisfaction with that particular event, and would revert to a more balanced assessment as media focus declines. We might expect the issue-specific rating to show longer-lasting effects, though; if nothing newsworthy happens in that issue area for a time, the diversionary event will still be the most “accessible” example for individuals. Of course, if later failures or criticism cause the public to reassess their initial support of the diversionary action, that would reduce its benefits. Finally, effects on the view of a presi-

\textsuperscript{61} It is not necessary that all three of these factors operate at once. In fact, even if the diversionary act lowered the relevant issue-specific rating that could still be a net plus if it shifted media attention away from the failure and its even lower ratings.

\textsuperscript{62} Edwards et al., "Explaining Presidential Approval: The Significance of Issue Salience", p. 118. For example, they found the weight on Bush’s foreign policy rating went from 49\% in July of 1990 to 60\% in August, the month Iraq invaded Kuwait. Foreign policy salience declined gradually from a wartime 60-65\% in January-March of 1991, to the mid 30\% range six months later.
dent's personal qualities might last for some time, if the president's actions reveal something new and presumably inherent to his personality. For example, even as media attention moved on after Iran-Contra, Ronald Reagan's trustworthiness took a permanent blow. George H.W. Bush's invasion of Panama appeared to change the impression that he was reluctant to use military force.63

The benefits of diversion could vanish rapidly if media attention quickly returns to the pre-diversion pattern, or if the policy itself is quickly seen to fail. On the other hand, diversionary actions that update individual's views on Presidential character are likely to have the longest-lasting effects.

This analysis of the model shows how diversion could happen, but it does not prove that any of the three mechanisms actually work, nor does it show what those actions will best activate them. What the model suggests is that if dramatic Presidential actions can activate those mechanisms, then we should observe diversionary activity happening in response to political difficulties. Uses of force would be good candidates for diversion: they do attract heavy media coverage, issue-specific polls show they are often popular, and they are good opportunities for presidents to demonstrate desirable leadership qualities. On the other hand, the apparent lack of diversionary uses of force suggests that this view may be too simple — or, that factors outside of domestic political responses are what limit diversion.

If we were perfectly able to forecast the quantity and framing of media coverage of uses of force (or other diversionary actions), and perfectly understood public preferences, then we could use this framework to predict whether diversionary uses of force would be optimal or even useful strategies for presidents. Our forecasting ability is not that powerful, however, and

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63 With Desert Shield/Desert Storm coming less than a year after Panama, however, this may not have been a good test of the permanence of the character effect resulting from a single presidential action.
the questions of whether military intervention actually boosts a president’s ratings, whether it does so under all circumstances, and whether it is superior to other methods of increasing support all require empirical testing.

3. Diversionary Incentives: Hypotheses for Testing

The overall goal of the empirical tests is to determine whether, or under what conditions uses of force actually lead to the support-enhancing effects identified by the media priming model, and to determine whether uses of force are superior to other possible avenues for diversion.

The hypotheses begin with four master hypotheses, which will then yield several sub-hypotheses for specific testing. Since we already know that diversion in the traditional sense does not appear to happen in the U.S. case, the hypotheses are stated in terms of reasons that diversion would not be successful; the goal is to see if these reasons do indeed make diversionary war unattractive. These four hypotheses are:

Master Hypotheses

H1: Uses of force bring only small political benefits to Presidents (therefore, diversionary use of force is not attractive)

H2: Uses of force only create significant benefits for Presidents under rare conditions, or only when not needed (therefore, Presidents rarely have an opportunity for diversionary war)

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64 As discussed in chapter 1, this sort of study can not find the “real” reasons for the lack of diversionary war — what was really in the minds of presidents. There are also international constraints and the possibility of personal restraint by leaders. What this study can do is determine whether diversionary war would even appear useful, regardless of its feasibility in particular cases.
H3: Uses of force bring smaller benefits than alternative courses of action for presidents (therefore, use of force is not the method chosen for diversion)

H4: Diversionary activity by presidents will reflect benefits and constraints identified by empirical tests of H1, H2, and H3

If uses of force would be successful in certain circumstances, then it is important to identify variables that would allow a president to forecast those situations in advance. Whether diversion is attempted will depend on whether it is expected to be successful, and so refining our model of diversionary behavior requires us to have a better understanding of the calculations a president would make. Variables that are knowable, but not manipulable, will act as constraints on diversionary activity. For example, if uses of force are always unpopular just before presidential elections (because voters may mistrust presidential motives at that time), then a rational executive would not bother to use interventions for diversionary purposes during those periods. If uses of force are never popular, or are consistently less popular than alternative presidential activities, then diversionary uses of force would never be expected; the constraint would operate 100% of the time.

When relevant variables can be manipulated by presidents, however, we would expect any diversionary activity to display the characteristics that would make it popular. For example, if the use of ground troops makes interventions unpopular, then we should predict that uses of force for diversionary purposes would not involve ground commitments.

The remainder of this section fleshes out those master hypotheses, and derives sub-hypotheses regarding variables that would be expected to influence the public response to uses of force, particularly those that are knowable or manipulable by presidents. Those sub-hypotheses are summarized in table 2-1, below.
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<th><strong>Table 2-1: Hypotheses on Diversionary Incentives</strong></th>
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*Specific sub-hypotheses to be developed in Chapter 6, using results from testing H1, H2, and H3 in preceding chapters.*
Hypothesis 1: Does the Use of Force Help Presidents?

H1: Uses of force bring only small political benefits to Presidents (therefore, diversionary use of force is not attractive)

H1-A: Uses of force do not cause large increases in Presidential approval

H1-B: Uses of force do not cause increases in Presidential approval for significant periods of time.

These first hypotheses directly test the possibility that uses of force have not in fact been of great benefit to presidents – at least not consistently so. This hypothesis does not actually rely on the detailed mechanisms of the media priming model but instead tests the overall effect of uses of force. H1-A predicts that the magnitude of any increases in approval after uses is not large enough to significantly change a president’s political situation. H1-B predicts that the duration will not be long enough to matter. This second point is often overlooked in discussions of the “rally effect”. Most studies look exclusively at immediate changes, but that is clearly not all that matters to a president – a 10% approval boost that lasts only a month would be of little use; the same boost for a year would be significant. The media priming model predicts that the benefits could be quite fleeting if coverage quickly shifts to areas of poor presidential performance, so short durations might well be a reason why the benefits are not compelling to presidents.

Hypothesis 1 and its subpoints focus on the traditional “rally effect” rather than any clearly new insights of the model, but starting off by examining overall effects is still warranted. First, although some recent studies have argued that rally effects on average are small or non-
existent,\textsuperscript{65} not all studies have come to this conclusion, and the notion that force always leads to rallies is still widespread. More evidence on this question is welcome. Second, that additional evidence is particularly welcome because of the methodological deficiencies in previous studies. As detailed in the following chapter, there are significant problems with many of the previous studies, and replication is warranted. Finally, the duration of approval increases has been particularly poorly measured; most of the studies that looked specifically at rally durations were conducted in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{66} With more data and better statistical techniques available, rally durations are worth revisiting.

**Hypothesis 2: What Makes Some Uses of Force Popular?**

**H2:** Uses of force only create significant benefits for Presidents under rare conditions, or only when not needed (therefore, Presidents rarely have an opportunity for diversionary war)

**H2-A:** Greater media coverage leads to greater increases in presidential approval

**H2-B:** Successful interventions lead to greater support

**H2-C:** Support from elites (media, Congress) leads to higher approval increases; opposition to lower (or even losses)

**H2-D:** The more congruent the goals and methods of an intervention are with public preferences, the greater will be the effect on approval

**H2-E:** Surprising uses of force – those that do not emerge from long-running crises or those, which could not have been expected from current policy – will receive greater increases in support


Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*  
Chapter 2: "Theory and Hypotheses"
H2-F: When presidents are in political need (scandals, elections, low approval), they will receive less support from uses of force

Hypothesis 2 and its sub-hypotheses all relate to the possibility that uses of force will produce strong political benefits for presidents only under certain conditions. If such conditions are rare or difficult to create, then diversion would be uncommon. The subhypotheses are drawn from the media priming model itself, and from other knowledge we have about public opinion and foreign policy.

**H2-A: Media Quantity.** The media priming model predicts that higher levels of media coverage should be associated with larger changes in salience, and presumably, larger approval increases.\(^67\) There is no question that uses of force receive substantial media attention. During the first two months of the Kosovo War, for example, the three broadcast networks (ABC, NBC, CBS) carried an average of five stories per network per night about the war; during the 1991 Gulf War it was approximately 11 stories per network per night.\(^68\) Not all uses of force receive the sort of saturation coverage accorded to major wars, however. Events receiving less media attention may not have such a dramatic effect on presidential support.\(^69\)

**H2-B Success.** Whether a use of force appears initially successfully or not should affect the public response to it – if the effort appears to have failed, and citizens react reasonably

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\(^67\) This would not have to be the case. If there is a negative correlation between media coverage and the issue-specific rating for an action – i.e., the most visible uses of force are also less likely to be supported – then the media quantity effect could be canceled out by the declining issue approval. There is no reason to expect this to be the case, however.


\(^69\) It seems likely there is some sort of diminishing return as coverage increases – whether coverage is 10 stories per night or five stories per night, relatively little room is left for other issues. There is no prior theoretical or empirical basis for expecting a particular threshold, or a particular functional form for the relationship between media quantity and salience changes.
to this news, they will not give the action as high an issue rating as if it succeeds. This strictly
refers to the initial appearances as observed by the public; it does not mean historical judgment.

In the traditional conflict-cohesion view, success was not thought to be important, so this hy-
pothesis is a useful test for distinguishing between the theories.

If success is an important variable, that has two implications for Presidents. First, it
shows that there are downside risks to intervention. Second, success being important would
cause presidents to select for uses of force that are likely to succeed when using force for diver-

tionary purposes. If such opportunities are rare, then that would limit the usefulness of diver-


**H2-C Opinion Leadership.** The media priming model also predicts that public opin-

ion will be strongly influenced by the positive or negative framing of an action by the media, and

will take cues from experts and authorities. That people respond to such cues is well established.

The overall “frame” of media coverage can affect reactions to events, commentary by media

personalities and experts will affect opinion, and individuals are more likely to support policies

if they know those policies are supported by their party or the President. The conflict-

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70 Polsbys, *Congress and The Presidency*, Waltz, "Electoral Punishment and Foreign Policy Crises". Of course, presi-
dents have gained from some failures. Carter's ratings went up after the failed hostage rescue attempt. Kennedy
support went up a few percent after the Bay of Pigs failure, though it came down again very rapidly. JFK himself
remarked afterwards that taking action seemed to be all that mattered: whether a triumph or fiasco didn't seem to
matter. It is worth wondering though, how much Kennedy's support would have gone up if the invasion had suc-
ceeded and he had liberated Cuba. It is hard to imagine that the public reaction wouldn't have been any different.

71 See the sources cited in the discussion of framing, above.

72 Page and Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in American's Policy Preferences*, pp 342-348; Brody, *Assess-
this influence, Lyndon Johnson is said to have remarked after the Tet Offensive, "If we've lost Walter Cronkite
we've lost Middle America".

Responses to Out-of-Character Presidential Actions", *Political Behavior*, vol. 8 (1986), pp 262-286; Jon Hurwitz and
Mark Peffley, "The Means and Ends of Foreign Policy As Determinants of Presidential Support", *American Journal of
Political Science*, vol. 31 (1987), pp 236-258; Jon Hurwitz, "Presidential Leadership and Public Followership", in Ma-
cohesion model predicts that presidential support should dominate any criticism, but research suggests that while presidents are influential, even in foreign policy their actions are not automatically supported.\textsuperscript{74}

Support or opposition from Congress should be particularly important, for several reasons. First, the range of official debate will tend to set the boundaries of opinions expressed in media coverage. News coverage usually tracks or "indexes" the opinions of government officials and other influential authorities.\textsuperscript{75} When official Washington is united on an issue (or when Congress simply remains silent) little independent criticism appears in the mass media. Second, members of Congress are recognized as being important players on foreign policy and more likely to be privy to classified material than academics or columnists. Finally, behavior of politicians provides partisan cues to respondents. A logical case against the President's policy from an unfamiliar expert might not connect to any but the most attentive, while seeing how liberal and conservative lawmakers line up provides an easily interpretable cue.\textsuperscript{76} That will be especially true when the support violates expected partisan reaction: when the opposition party supports the President, or when the President's party joins in opposing his actions.


\textsuperscript{76} Zaller, \textit{The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion}

Burbach, \textit{Diversionary Temptations}

Chapter 2: "Theory and Hypotheses"
H2-D. Goals and Methods. Although media coverage will steer the public’s attention and can frame the way they view events, the media priming model does predict that citizens’ own preferences will also shape reactions: individuals who think that presidential actions (as portrayed in the media) further goals and values they support are likely to support the president’s decision. Therefore, when uses of force show greater consistency with aggregate foreign policy preferences, they should be more widely supported, and lead to greater increases in presidential support.77

There is strong evidence for the existence of relatively stable public preferences, as discussed earlier when introducing the “boundedly rational public” concept. We can identify some specific patterns in support for uses of force. Public support seems to track with a fairly direct measure of U.S. interests in a conflict. The more directly a use of force is seen to relate to American security (or other interests), the greater the support. This can be seen in studies using a prospective approach78—asking questions about hypothetical future conflicts—and in retrospective studies that review polling data from previous conflicts.79 Several authors have ob-

77 There are circumstances in which the approval effect would not be true. If the president is already popular among individuals whose personal preferences closely match aggregate preferences, then a use of force might not have much effect on overall presidential approval. If those who disapprove of a president’s economic performance also hold a minority foreign policy view, say isolationist preferences that oppose all military intervention, then a use of force might strengthen support among the majority (with no observed change on the simple approve/disapprove question), but would not attract any new supporters. The use of force would simply give those who disapproved of the President before a different reason for disapproving.


served that support is significantly higher for uses of force defending U.S. allies from threats, containing "enemy" regimes (e.g., USSR, China, Iraq), or dealing with threats of terrorism or WMD proliferation, than is support for uses of force that are directed primarily at internal problems in a state, such as civil wars, removal of repressive regimes, and restoring order in anarchic situations; Jentleson has termed it "foreign policy restraint" (that is, forcing another state to restrain its behavior) vs "internal political change". Therefore, we would predict that "internal" interventions are less popular than those dealing with another nation's international behavior.

Finer distinctions between types of interventions can be made, however. One distinction that has not received much attention is between interventions aimed at protecting an ally or the world in general, and uses of force directly aimed at protecting American lives or soil. Mueller argues, though, that American lives being directly at stake leads to much greater support than other causes. He notes for example the importance of POW retrieval in maintaining support for wars in Korea and Vietnam. Protection of Americans abroad receives universal support in hypothetical polling questions, and presidents have certainly invoked the issue to justify interventions in Panama, Grenada, and the Dominican Republic, among others. Therefore, we pre-


80 Jentleson, "The Pretty Prudent Public: Post Post-Vietnam American Opinion on the Use of Military Force". Surveys also show that support is higher for using the military on behalf of the "domestic" problems of stopping the flow of illegal immigrants and of drugs than it is for responding to invasions of Western Europe, Korea, or Saudi Arabia. Kohut et. al., "Arms and the People"

81 Mueller, "Public Support for Military Ventures Abroad: Evidence from the Polls". See also polls reported in Mueller, Policy and Opinion In The Gulf War, pp 244-263. These consistently showed that protection of the Western hostages in Iraq and Kuwait was the most widely supported justification for the war, and that large majorities would have considered the killing or harming of the hostages to be a casus belli. To be fair, just because the hostage protection issue was considered a good reason, that does not mean it was seen as an important reason. Almost no one considered the hostages to be the primary reason the U.S. was confronting Iraq; even before the hostages were released in December of 1990 the conflict was understood to be about liberating Kuwait first and foremost.

82 This raises the question: why did Hanoi choose to hold on to the POWs? Had they all been sent home unharmed in 1971, the polling data Mueller cites suggests that Nixon would have found it much harder to continue the conflict.

83 Kohut, America's Place in the World; Rielly, American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1999
dict that uses of force presented to the public as being directly in defense of American lives or territory will receive higher support than other uses.

If these predictions are borne out, it means that humanitarian intervention would be a poor choice for diversion. Instead, presidents will want to find opportunities to protect Americans—or at least to plausibly claim to be doing so. That would take many prospective interventions off the table as useful for diversion and so may seriously limit presidential opportunities. At the least it would mean that we should see presidents more likely to mount rescue missions and less likely to conduct humanitarian missions when in political difficulty.

The public also shows a preference for multilateral action, and an aversion to major ground combat commitments. Surveys consistently find that Americans prefer to see military action at least with the political support of allies, and better yet with a coalition doing the fighting.84 Therefore, we would expect to see the participation of allies associated with greater support. This variable is also very relevant to presidents contemplating diversion. Other nations would presumably not share the president's interest in such a war and so would be less likely to join the U.S. than they would for other conflicts.85 If allied support matters to the public, that would probably limit the possible gains from diversion.

84 This preference is clear from general questions in the prospective studies, where respondents report that they like to see the approval of the U.N. or other bodies, and strongly prefer that allies join in the fighting. Polls regarding specific conflicts show a similar pattern: in the fall of 1990, whether we would have allies fighting with us or be on our own made a large difference in support for a prospective war with Iraq; U.N. approval and allied support also were important to many Americans in deciding whether to support the second war with Iraq in 2002-2003.
85 This assumes that other nations share many of the security concerns of the United States and so are likely to agree with the U.S. when security interests lead to the use of force. If there is little alignment between U.S. interests and interests of other countries then interest-based wars might not attract any more support than diversionary ones. During the Cold War the interests of the U.S. and its allies were clearly aligned, and even in the post Cold War world share many interests and values, so this seems an reasonable assumption.
In short, the predictions from H2-d are that uses of force will be:

More popular, when
- protecting Americans
- supported by allies

Less popular, when
- related to another nation's internal problems
- require major ground force commitments

H2-E: Surprise. Uses of force will have more potential to change the public's view of the president when they demonstrate unexpected behavior. In fact, if one assumes that all members of the public are fully informed in the sense that they are aware of all publicly available information about presidents, policies, and outcomes and that their opinions incorporate all if this information, then we would only expect a use of force to change presidential approval if it was unexpected based on previous policy positions, or resulted in a better or worse outcome than expected.

To a certain extent the surprise argument has to be correct: the first post-Gulf War air strikes on Iraq in 1993 were quite newsworthy, by 2000 they were hardly noticed, and of course during the war they happened hundreds of times per day. As the term is used here, and in previous "rally effect" studies, a "use of force" generally means the initiation of an ongoing use of force, where today's major event becomes tomorrow's routine. In that sense, rally studies have by definition focused on events that represent a change of state. Such events are not necessarily surprising, though, and if a use of force merely executes what had already been known to be
policy it would not affect rational observers. For example, nothing new about George H.W.
Bush would have been revealed if Iraq had advanced into Saudi Arabia in the fall of 1990 and
U.S. forces had shot back (Iraq’s action would have been surprising, but the American response
would have been automatic).

Uses of force do appear to have dramatic effects on approval even when fully expected.
The first Gulf War is the prime example: there was nothing surprising about the war starting,
yet Bush’s approval rating went up nearly 20% overnight. More generally, the literature on prim-
ing and framing suggests that the average citizen does not act as if they are fully informed; they
receive limited information and have not integrated all the knowledge they do have, and so in-
formation will affect their opinions even if not new, simply because seeing it again improves its
cognitive accessibility.86 Alternatively, in the spirit of Popkin or Krosnick, news media attention
is itself useful information to citizens. Even if an event tells us nothing new about presidential
policy or its outcomes, media attention to that issue provides new information about the impor-
tance of an issue. That implies, though, that a use of force connected to a crisis which is already
receiving saturation media coverage may show less of a political change than one that comes out
of the blue – in the former case, the “rally” would have built up before the use of force.

Even if it is not necessary for uses of force to provide new information to affect opin-
ions, surprise could still lead to greater changes. For example, a use of force might represent a
change of policy and alter a president’s issue-specific ratings. The action might also reveal new
information about the president’s leadership qualities. For example, the invasion of Panama in
1989 seems to have led to a permanent increase in the fraction of Americans who considered
George H.W. Bush strong, confident, and “a leader”. At the time the invasion was widely

claimed to have disproved the "wimp factor". 87 Finally, the outcome of a use of force might provide new information, such as demonstrating that the costs of an intervention were lower than expected, which might increase approval of that action. While surprising actions are more likely to lead to change than routine actions, though, it is not definite that the change would be positive; battlefield outcomes might be unexpectedly bad. It does seem, though, that "out of character" actions are more likely to help than to hurt presidents. Actions that run directly counter to previous expectations of a president—Nixon going to China—can win significant support among members of the opposite party while not costing as much among own-party individuals. 88 A president who is expected to be reluctant to use force might thus have more to gain from the use of force than one known to prefer military solutions.

The prediction, then, is that uses of force which are unexpected relative to previous policy, experience, and known presidential inclinations will show larger effects than those which are not a departure from expectations. In addition, uses of force that happen suddenly without a highly visible crisis should show larger increases, though this is more a methodological concern than substantive implication. 89

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87 Mueller, Policy and Opinion In The Gulf War, pp 182-184. Interestingly, his ratings for being "warm and friendly" also went up dramatically after Panama. Ratings for other qualities such as steadiness or intelligence did not change much, but they were already at more typical numbers for a president. Bush's pre-Panama strength/leadership numbers were below average for Presidents. For a contemporary account, see Steve Kurzijan, "For Bush, A New Image: Risk Taker", Boston Globe, December 22, 1989

88 Robert E. Goodin, "Voting Through the Looking Glass", American Political Science Review, vol. 77 (1983), pp 420-434; Sigelman et. al., "Shattered Expectations: Public Responses to Out-of-Character Presidential Actions"; Hurewitz, "Presidential Leadership and Public Followship". Interestingly, Sigelman and Sigelman found the effect was not constant across the ideological spectrum. "Doves" were much more willing to support out-of-character actions by hawkish presidents than "Hawks" were to support out-of-character action by dovish presidents. Hawks believed that hawkish positions from dovish presidents must have illegitimate motives, though they trusted that out-of-character actions by fellow hawks were sincere.

89 Specifically, if media coverage is already high and nothing really changes when the shooting starts, then the media model would still predict that conflict-related increases would happen, but that they would have already been built in to the presidents ratings before actual hostilities were initiated. That wouldn't have implications for the attractiveness of diversion, but would mean that an analysis expecting changes to occur only at the point of hostilities might falsely conclude that the conflict had no effect. Previous rally studies have not accounted for this potential...
H2-F. Rational Expectations. If it is known that uses of force can boost a President’s standing, then a fully-informed and rational individual would discount uses of force observed during times of political need, since the president’s motives would be suspect. This argument has long been used to challenge the likelihood of “political business cycles” (e.g., stimulating the economy just before elections), and several authors have specifically cited rational expectations as a reason diversion would not work (and therefore, why it does not happen).  

On the other hand, the boundedly rational model of the public does not predict that individuals will make that inference, but does predict that the public might discount diversion if exposed to the rational expectations argument from credible sources. One of the key factors behind the “framing” effect is that most individuals do not automatically see the connections between different pieces of political information. Without priming, then, only highly attentive individuals would take into account the self-interest of the president in a use of force. If there were significant media attention given to critiques of presidential motives, however, then the mass public would draw a connection and might be less likely to support the president’s actions.  

Therefore, the rational expectations model predicts that uses of force will be discounted, showing lower levels of support, during times of political need. Therefore, uses of force should be less popular if they occur during election campaigns or recessions.

The relationship between presidential standing and the public response to uses of force is less clear. On the one hand, the rational expectations effect should make the response less

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problem. This study does not offer a complete solution for the problem, but does make some efforts to determine how significant the problem might be.


91 The fact that people are exposed to the rational expectations argument does not mean they will accept it and discount presidential motives. If that argument is inconsistent with an individual’s existing belief structure – if trust in presidents is a deeply ingrained value – then they likely to reject rather than receive that message.
positive when approval is low and thus a president is in political need. On the other, when approval is low there are more individuals available to change opinions, and the threshold of issue-specific approval needed is lower (e.g., when overall approval is 60%, if only 50% approve of a use of force, overall support will go down; if overall approval is 30%, then 50% approval of a use of force would increase overall ratings). Therefore, low approval ratings may correlate with the response to uses of force, but that relationship is indeterminate.  

*Hypothesis 3: Do Alternative Actions Provide Better Political Value than Force?*

**H3:** Dramatic actions other than the use of force produce comparable political benefits to the use of force

**H3-A:** “Peace promoting” actions produce such benefits, subject to the same conditions as uses of force (e.g., the variables identified in H2-A through H2-F).

**H3-B:** Prominent foreign travel produces political benefits

**H3-C:** Speeches on foreign policy (other than uses of force) or domestic initiatives should produce political benefits.

The media priming model predicts that presidential actions have diversionary value if they are visible, popular, and connected to the president. The use of force meets those criteria, but not exclusively. Non-military actions could have similar effects on salience and could also be popular, and there is reason to suspect they do. Therefore, hypothesis 3 predicts that non-military actions will provide comparable or greater benefits than uses of force. If so, that would lead presidents to use alternative courses of action when in political need. As discussed below,

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92 This indeterminacy is related to the larger issue of whether approval should be conceptualized as a linear function of whatever variables affect it. At the extremes this can not be true; if approval is already 90% a boost of 12% is impossible. The few studies that have addressed this issue have generally claimed that linear models appear adequate in practice. Robert S Erickson, Michael B MacKuen, and James A Stimson, *The Macro Polity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*

Chapter 2: “Theory and Hypotheses”
three sorts of actions that seem especially good candidates are peace-promoting foreign policy activities, major foreign travel, and major presidential speeches.

Presidential agenda-setting power extends beyond the use of force. Attention from the White House can propel almost any issue into media prominence. As a dramatic example of this, President George H. W. Bush gave a speech on drug control on September 9th, and a Gallup poll the next day found that an extraordinary 63% of the public thought drugs were the most important problem facing the country, up from 27% in the previous poll. The issue retained higher than usual salience for months. Quantitative research supports this prediction: presidential attention leads to public attention. Presidents are also likely to find actions that will be popular with the public. Given the tremendous range of options available to presidents, there is likely to be something a president would prefer the country to focus on.

The set of all possible political actions a president could take other than launching a diversionary war is too large and too ill-defined to study completely. We can, however, identify

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93 Mueller, Policy and Opinion In The Gulf War, p. 211. The previous poll was six weeks earlier in mid-July. Two months after the speech it was still at 38%. 63% is a tremendously high score for any given issue on the most important problem question: the second highest during Bush's term was 42% (for the economy in mid-1992).


95 A fascinating example is the "triangulation" done for Bill Clinton by consultant Dick Morris. After the debacle of the 1994 Congressional elections, Morris developed an agenda for 1995 and 1996 that largely consisted of relatively easy but popular initiatives (e.g., school uniforms) that specifically would lead people to think of Clinton in terms of his most popular qualities: his empathy and shared values with common citizens (shared values in terms of socio/cultural goals, not personal behavior and values). Dick Morris, Behind the Oval Office (Los Angeles: Renaissance Books, 1999); for more critical accounts of "triangulation" (but which confirm the poll-driven strategy) see Robert B. Reich, Locked In the Cabinet (New York: Vintage Books, 1997); George Stephanopoulos, All Too Human (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1999).
some actions that are particularly likely candidates to provide political dividends at a reasonable cost – activities which are under presidential control, draw media attention, are popular, and will be difficult for political opponents to challenge.

Even if the media priming model does not require that diversionary activity be a foreign conflict, there are still reasons to think foreign policy would be the most fertile ground for a president. It is commonly thought that presidents have greater strength in foreign policy than other issue areas. Aaron Wildavsky termed this the “Two Presidencies” thesis: that Presidents have fundamentally more flexibility and authority in conducting foreign affairs than domestic policy.96 Recent studies suggest foreign policy is not as immune from everyday politics as in Wildavsky’s description, but most scholars still agree that it is an area of extra presidential strength.97 This is partly due to institutional factors, but also because presidents have greater information advantages on foreign policy matters than domestic.98

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98 This is likely to be the case for several reasons. First, individuals are unable to check the "ground truth" of foreign policy statements as they can with domestic policy (e.g., claims the economy is improving vs. seeing many lay-offs happening in one’s town). Individuals are also less informed to begin with about foreign policy and so have little basis for independent interpretation of administration claims. The "beat" structure of news gathering, the expense of gathering foreign views (relative to finding domestic policy sources), and more recently the drastic reduction in foreign news bureaus and growing lack of reporters with any international expertise or language abilities make the media less likely and less able to challenge the official line (Gans, Deciding What’s News; Timothy Cook, "Domesticating a Crisis", in Taken By Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Persian Gulf War, W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994); Steven Hess, International News and Foreign Correspondents (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1996); Garrick Utley, "The Shrinking of Foreign News", Foreign Affairs, vol. 77 (1996); Brent MacGregor, Live, Direct, and Biased? Making Television News in the Satellite Age (London: Arnold, 1997). Presidents can also rely or claim to rely on secret information which the media and political opponents therefore can not verify or challenge (Page and Shapiro, The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in American's Policy Preferences). In the case of military conflicts the administration can also restrict media access to information or even implement censorship (Ted Galen Carpenter, The Captive Press (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 1995); Johanna Neuman, Lights, Camera, War (New York: St. Martin's, 1996); Miles Hudson and John Stanier, War and the Media (New York: New York University, 1998)).
Although presidential action could take a variety of forms, a focus on foreign policy seems warranted – if foreign policy actions represent “low-hanging fruit” for a troubled president, that alone suggests diversion need not be through military action. The sub-hypotheses below focus on foreign-related activity presidents can take, with the addition of one easy non-foreign measure: highly visible domestic policy initiatives.

**H3-A: Peace-Promoting Activity.** Uses of force are not the only dramatic foreign activities pursued by presidents. Superpower summits, arms control breakthroughs, and certainly the end of wars have also been occasions of great fanfare. Although Mueller and Lowi expected dramatic peaceful events as well as wars to help presidents, studies of the “rally effect” in the last 20 years have looked almost exclusively at uses of force.\(^9\) Since peace-promoting events meet the test of visibility and popularity, though, they are worth looking at again.

Dramatic peaceful events can produce tremendous media coverage. President Clinton's trip to China in the summer of 1998 generated an average of five network news stories per night for two weeks – as many as during the Kosovo War. China stories outnumbered stories about the ongoing Lewinsky scandal three to one.\(^10\) Forty years earlier, Nikita Khrushchev’s visit to the United States merited an average of three stories per day on the front page of the *New York Times*.\(^11\) Peace negotiations dominated the news during the final months of the Vietnam and

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\(^9\) Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*, pp 210-212. Theodore Lowi, *The End of Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979). One exception since then is Brace and Hinkley, who did look at the impact of events other than uses of force. Their event set did include some major “peace” events, but did not differentiate them from other events, and only included a very small number of peace events (and not the most obvious candidates at that). Paul Brace and Barbara Hinkley, *Follow The Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents* (New York: Basic Books, 1992)

\(^10\) Center for Media and Public Affairs, “Clinton’s China Syndrome”, *Media Monitor*, vol. 12, no. 4 (1998). As the Center put it, “...there was a dramatic decline in airtime for the various scandal allegations that have recently preoccupied the White House. Thus the President not only dominated the news agenda during this period, but his TV image focused largely on his accomplishments, not his problems at home.”

\(^11\) *New York Times Index*
Korean Wars, and there were nearly two front page *New York Times* articles per day during the two weeks surrounding the signing of the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1963.

It seems likely that peace events would be popular. Less polling data is available to assess public preferences on non-military foreign events, but some predictions can be made. The public should be pleased to see wars end or American involvement in them reduced. The standard view that lengthy wars become political burdens suggests that presidents engaged in such wars would see political benefits to ending or de-escalating conflicts. Throughout Nixon’s first term, for example, those who thought troops were coming home from Vietnam too slowly outnumbered those who thought the pullout was too fast by 4 to 1. Prior to the first Gulf War, large majorities wanted President Bush to make every possible effort to get Iraq out of Kuwait through negotiations. Polls have also shown consistently strong support for nuclear arms control. In general, substantial majorities support “cooperative internationalism”.

Dramatic peaceful events are also an opportunity to display presidential leadership skills, for example by appearing to be an influential mediator (e.g., Carter and Camp David; Clinton and Oslo or Northern Ireland) or a tough negotiator (e.g., Reagan achieving a complete Soviet concession to the “zero option” on Intermediate Nuclear Forces).

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106 Holsti, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*. The “cooperative internationalism” concept originated with Eugene Wittkopf
The prediction, then, is that dramatic peaceful events, such as war termination, substantial de-escalation of a conflict, arms control agreements, and summits, will be associated with changes in Presidential approval, quite possibly increases in presidential approval.

These effects will be mediated by the same variables as described for uses of force in hypothesis 2: success, elite support, and surprise. Because of the more limited polling data and the broader range of activities, it is not clear that there are public preferences that would cause particular types of peace-promoting events to be more or less supported (as opposed to the closeness of interest effect on uses of force).

**H3-B. Foreign Travel.** As noted above, foreign travel by a president can generate tremendous media attention – in the television age, such trips provide “visuals” that the networks cannot resist. Moreover, while on such trips the president’s information advantage is likely to be high: White House correspondents who follow presidents, and such correspondents are not likely to have foreign sources, nor will they have access to their non-White House U.S. sources. White House advance teams typically plan the president’s activities with media coverage in mind, even identifying camera angles for television crews to use.

The tremendous media coverage given to such trips should increase the salience of foreign affairs, and even if a trip does not affect a president’s issue-specific ratings, the shift in salience will likely be beneficial if the president is suffering from a failure in another issue area at the time. In addition, such trips might receive high issue marks. The public supports the role of the U.S. as a world-leading power, and conducting important business abroad demonstrates that the president is fulfilling that role. If the president is well-received by foreign leaders, that is also a cue that the president’s judgment and influence is respected by peers. Many foreign trips are connected to larger foreign policy events, such as attendance at superpower summits to sign
arms control treaties; in those cases, it is probably not reasonable to attribute any impact on approval to the trip alone. On the other hand, some travel is done for its own sake, such as Eisenhower's round-the-world goodwill tour in 1959, or Clinton's 10 day visit to Africa in 1998.

Therefore, H3-B predicts that presidential approval will increase after major foreign travel. If true, then foreign travel could be a relatively cheap alternative to diversionary uses of force, and we would expect to see more foreign travel when presidents are in political need.

**H3-C. Presidential Speeches.** As a final category of alternative activities, one of the easiest ways for the president to grab national attention is with a major televised speech, such as a prime time Oval Office speech, or an address before Congress. As shown with the example of Bush's drug policy speech, presidential addresses can have dramatic impacts on issue salience, at least in the short term. 107 There has been surprisingly little attention to the impact of presidential speeches on presidential popularity. The studies that have been done suggest that they can have a significant impact, but there are reasons to replicate and extend those results. 108

An important point about speeches is that they generally do not take place in isolation, but are connected with broader presidential efforts. Speeches may not have an impact only due

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107 See also the references above for quantitative studies demonstrating the correlation between presidential speeches and issue salience.

108 There are two principal sources for the effects of presidential speeches: studies by Ragsdale in the mid-1980s, and by Brace and Hinckley in the early 1990s. Both find that speeches can produce a 2 to 6% gain on average. Ragsdale's findings are difficult to interpret, though, because she reports their effect either completely aggregated (thus including many speeches that announced uses of force - in which case the speech probably does not deserve the credit for approval change), or tremendously disaggregated - by President, type of speech, and party affiliation of respondents (i.e., the effect of Ford's economic speeches on independents). Her data include the 1948-1984 period. Brace and Hinckley's 1992 book claims that speeches boost approval by 6% (p. 56, though the table reporting that result is apparently missing from Appendix B, at least in the edition viewed by this author). Another regression finds that "foreign policy speeches" have a slight negative effect; other addresses are not included in that regression (p.205). Their 1993 article presumably reports the same results, with 5.9% boost from speeches overall (though with readers referred to the book for the full results of that regression). Lynn Ragsdale, "The Politics of Presidential Speechmaking, 1949-1980", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 78 (1984), pp 972-984; Lynn Ragsdale, "Presidential Speechmaking and the Public Audience: Individual Presidents and Group Attitudes", *Journal of Politics*, vol. 49, no. 3 (1987), pp 704-736; Brace and Hinckley, *Follow The Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents*; Paul Brace and Barbara Hinckley, "Presidential Activities From Truman to Reagan: Timing and Impact", *Journal of Politics*, vol. 55, no. 2 (1993), pp 382-398
to their own effect, but may serve as proxies for other administration activities: this proxy effect makes the independent impact of some speeches questionable, but also serves as a useful way to measure presidential initiatives that are not so easy to identify. To make use of this, speeches are placed into five categories: foreign policy events, independent foreign policy, domestic policy, apologies, and other/mandatory speeches.

Two types of speeches are not likely to tell us anything new about the impact of Presidential activities on approval. Speeches that are directly associated with major foreign policy events -- uses of force and major peace events -- may have little if any independent impact. If George H.W. Bush had not announced the beginning of the first Gulf War from the Oval Office, it is unlikely that the war would then have failed to affect his poll numbers. Mandatory speeches such as the State of the Union or inaugurals are also not terribly revealing: they are forced to cover a multitude of issues, and their settings can not be repeated at will.

The other three categories of speeches may be useful proxies for presidential activities that could be used for diversion. Speeches do not take place in a vacuum; they signal that the White House considers the issue important. Communications efforts usually extend beyond the formal address: officials will testify before Congress and appear on television interview programs, the president will continue to mention the subject in other public appearances and it will probably be part of the White House "message of the day".109 Speeches may therefore serve as proxies for two broader categories of presidential activity: foreign policy initiatives, doctrines and warnings, which would be part of a broader attention to security issues and thus could signal a threat-inflation campaign. Other addresses mark the beginning of major policy initiatives and achievements, such as Clinton's health care reform proposal, or LBJ signing the Civil Rights Act,

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and so might serve as proxies for domestic activities. Finally, a number of speeches are direct responses to presidential failures and scandals, and represent yet another alternative to diversion: deal with problems directly but in a way that emphasizes the president's personal qualities, and hope to move the issue off of the agenda. Whether such speeches have the effect of mollifying the public or merely drawing attention to the failure is not known; either would be consistent with the priming model.

Foreign policy speeches (non force/peace event related), domestic policy speeches, and "apology" speeches are thus predicted to increase presidential approval. Speeches associated with force or peace events might also appear to increase approval, though most likely through correlation with the actual foreign policy event.

*Hypothesis 4: Repairing Diversionary Theory*

**H4:** Diversionary activity by presidents will reflect benefits and constraints identified by empirical tests of H1, H2, and H3

*Specific sub-hypotheses will be derived in testing H1, H2, H3, will be derived in chapter 6.*

Hypothesis 4 differs from the previous three in that it is *not* a hypothesis about diversionary incentives; it does not derive from the media priming model. H4 is instead a *consequence* of the previous three hypotheses: if they are validated, those conditions then become incorporated into a modified diversionary theory.

If presidents are rational actors, then they will only use diversionary force when it is expected to yield benefits. Theory does not require them to do so whenever it would be useful domestically; there may also be international constraints, or personal preferences that prohibit
the idea. A rational calculation does rule out diversion when it would be unproductive or when better strategies are available. The tests of hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 will allow us to predict when diversion would be productive, and so will tell us what to look for and when to look for it in the record of presidential activities.

Since the specific sub-hypotheses of H4 are logical consequences of the results from the previous three hypotheses, it makes sense to develop H4 fully only after presenting the results from the first sets of tests. Those results appear in chapters 4 and 5, and chapter 6 specifies the modified hypotheses on diversion and presents the results of empirical tests of those predictions.

Summary

This chapter has presented a model of the mechanisms by which diversionary activity could influence public opinion so as to increase support for presidents. Existing theories did little to spell out these mechanisms, and did not seem able to account for the lack of diversionary activity or the variation in response to uses of force that are observed.

The “media priming” model developed in this chapter predicts that diversion works in three independent ways: changing the balance of media coverage so as to reduce the salience of negative issues and increase the salience of strong ones (most likely foreign policy); improving the public’s rating of the president on a specific issue area by taking a popular action; enhancing the president’s overall character ratings by demonstrating desirable leadership skills.

While this model predicts that successful diversion could take place, it is far more conditional than the conflict-cohesion approach. The benefits of a diversionary act will depend on its media coverage, success, and degree of support from other political actors. The action must be
in line with public preferences; in the case of using force, humanitarian intervention is disfa-
vored, protecting Americans is best. Individuals may also discount presidential action during
times of political need due to their own suspicions, or more likely, due to media framing that
reminds people of the political context in which the act is occurring. Finally, the model predicts
that dramatic, president-focused action other than war should also produce strong boosts in
popularity, and three candidate categories that are predicted to have that effect are “peace-
promoting events”, foreign travel, and major speeches by presidents.

Chapters 4 and 5 will present the results of testing these hypotheses; chapter 4 on uses
of force, chapter 5 on alternative actions. Using those results, chapter 6 attempts to repair the
diversionary theory and test to see if diversionary action can be found when taking into account
the conditions identified in the previous two chapters. First, though, chapter 3 develops the
methodological tools for the quantitative analysis of the impact of dramatic presidential events
that will be conducted later.
Chapter 3:

Measuring the Political Benefits of Dramatic Events

This chapter details the methods that will be used for measuring the political benefits that presidents can gain from uses of force and other dramatic actions. These methods will be used in chapter 4 to assess the benefits of uses of force, and in chapter 5 to measure the benefits of diplomacy and other presidential actions.

The general strategy will be to use presidential approval ratings as a measure of the president's political standing, and to assume that the benefits obtained from dramatic activities are proportional to the gains (if any) seen in approval ratings. Approval ratings are not a perfect measure of all political goals that could go into a president's utility calculation, but it captures enough of what is important to serve as a useful proxy.

The effect of events will be measured quantitatively by developing a model of presidential approval, both the day-to-day base levels of approval, and the changes caused by uses of force or other events. The base level of approval is predicted by a linear, autoregressive model of economic and other macro-variables, as is commonly done in the literature. Events are presumed to create shocks that are superimposed on base approval, gradually decaying. This approach allows measurement of both the magnitude and duration of benefits from events, and it avoids the many problems inherent in the poll-to-poll, single-point method of measuring “rallies” that has been common in the recent literature.

The chapter consists of three sections. Section 1 explains why presidential approval ratings are being used as the measure of political costs and benefits, and some potential limitations
of this choice. Section 2 describes the conceptual approach of measuring event effects as exponentially decaying shocks superimposed on a base trajectory of approval, and the advantages of this method over other approaches. Section 3 gives the detailed mathematical form of the model, describes the variables that go into the base or "control" portion of the model, then presents results from estimating the control model only. The model produces results comparable to those found by earlier studies, providing a basic validity check on the estimation.

1. Approval Ratings as Measure of Political Support

The previous two chapters developed a theory of presidential support – the media priming model – and put it in the context of diversionary war by generating hypotheses about the conditions under which the use of force would be politically beneficial to a president. Before testing those hypotheses, though, it is important to understand what we mean by "political benefits" or "political standing". The general concepts of the diversionary theory are impossible to translate into specific indicators, but this section argues that presidential approval ratings are not only a practical measure, but capture many of the desired presidential qualities. The section begins by discussing the diversionary theory's predictions about what it is that would make presidents wish to "divert" and what they might hope to gain from such action. The next subsections introduce the approval time series, and then discuss its advantages and limitations for this study.

*Presidential Goals: Diverting To Improve What?*

One difficulty in testing diversionary theories of war is the problem of knowing what it is that would make leaders see the need to divert. The early statements of the "conflict-
cohesion" hypothesis simply said that when threatened by "internal challenges", leaders would create foreign conflicts, which would cause the nation to "rally around them". How do we recognize "internal challenges"? Do they require actual violence? The likelihood of a coup or impeachment? Having a tax cut proposal rejected by the legislature? Likewise, what exactly will it mean for the nation to "rally" around the leader - in terms of day to day politics, what changes would be observed?

Diversionary theory, unfortunately, does little to help us here.\(^1\) Cross-national tests have often used societal violence, "contested institutions", or other fairly extreme measures of internal conflicts.\(^2\) In general, these do not apply to the United States. It is possible that diversion is only seen with such high levels of domestic difficulty, but before reaching such a conclusion we should at least find the best measure of diversionary incentives in the U.S. so that the theory is given a fair test. Those authors looking at the U.S. have used macro-economic performance, presidential approval, legislative success rates.\(^3\)

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1 See chapter 1 for an extensive review of the diversionary literature.
The recent “competence”-based theories do explicitly identify a measure of diversionary pressures and rewards: reelection probability. Most focus on the need to initiate wars to secure reelection even after economic “failure”. In addition to the general criticism of such theories in Chapter 2, we are left with the problem of recognizing “failure”, and of having some way to measure executives’ perception of their reelection chances at a given time, which is not an easy task. Beyond that, reelection seems to be too limited a goal. It is possible that second term presidents would try to maximize their party’s chances at the next election, but they might also focus on selfish goals (“place in history”) to the detriment of successors. Reelection probability also leaves out other issues a president might care about. For example, presidents might wish to maximize the chances of their policy proposals being accepted by Congress, assist members of their party in getting elected to Congress, or simply value the feeling of being successful and respected on an ongoing basis.

Ideally, we would like an observable indicator that captures a president’s overall political standing – reelection probability, Congressional influence, “place in history”, overall image, etc. Periods when a president’s standing is low should be the most likely times for diversionary activity, and measuring how presidential standing is affected by uses of force and other activities would tell us the political attractiveness of such actions. No single indicator is likely to capture

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5 One could use “trial heat” polls, for example, but these have been asked sporadically and inconsistently. Very frequently they are phrased in terms of the incumbent vs. particular potential challengers, in which case the results may tell us more about the challenger than the president’s standing – or simply tell us that few in the public give any thought to reelection far in advance of campaigns.
all dimensions of presidential utility, but presidential approval ratings measured in public opinion surveys are a practical source of data that are widely considered to measure a president's overall standing, and which correlate with reelection chances and other dimensions of interest. Approval ratings will be the principal indicator of presidential standing used throughout this study.

Presidential Approval: Overview of the Data

The Gallup Organization has conducted presidential approval polls since the 1930s, with consistent wording and sampling procedures since 1945. Sampling error is 3% at a 95% confidence level. Most other polling firms have adopted Gallup's question, though polling practices do produce differences. Most importantly, Gallup attempts to measure opinion of the entire national adult population, not registered voters or likely voters as is done in some other polls. Surveys were infrequent until the late 1940s, but since 1953 have been conducted at least monthly most of the time. Since the 1980s the frequency has accelerated, reaching three to four times per month in Clinton's second term. Intervals are as small as one day (during the week of

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6 Specifically, the question is: "Do you approve of the way that [president's name] is handling his job as president?". There was significant variation in the first three years of asking about the president; polls from 1939 to 1944 were similar but not always identical to the post-1945 standard. George C. Edwards, Presidential Approval (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 3. Gallup conducts its surveys through either personal interviews at randomly selected residences or random-digit telephone dialing, with a sample size of 1,500 (telephone only since the late 1980s). Weighting is used to adjust the sample to match national demographics, and to correct for underrepresentation of non-telephone owners or those unlikely to be at home. For details on these procedures, see Edwards, pp 188-202.

7 What "national adult population" means for Gallup is all adults living in the 50 U.S. states, who are not living in an "institutional" setting, meaning prisons, hospitals, college dormitories, and military base housing. Gallup's method does include non-citizen residents. Surveys limited to registered voters or likely voters would probably be of greater relevance to politicians, but no other firm provides coverage over many decades with consistent questions and methods as does Gallup.

8 Gallup data is available from several sources. Data from 1941 (only four polls were conducted before 1941) to 1971 are in John E. Mueller, War, Presidents, and Public Opinion (New York: Wiley, 1973). Data from 1949 to 1984 are in Gary King and Lynn Ragsdale, The Elective Executive: Discovering Statistical Patterns in the Presidency (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1988). The years 1953 to 1989 are in Edwards, Presidential Approval. Edwards provides subgroup approval data (by party, gender, race, age, education, region, etc) for all polls as well as the aggregate number. More recent data can be found in a variety of sources. Each issue of the Gallup Poll Monthly is a cumulative data for the current president — i.e., the February 2001 issue has a list of all polls for Clinton. PollingReport.com
Clinton's grand jury testimony in August 1998), to as long as five months (June-November 1964).  

Figure 3-1 displays the approval ratings for each president from Eisenhower through Clinton, that is, the percentage of respondents expressing approval at each poll.

![Figure 3-1: Presidential Approval, 1953-2000](image)

Figure 3-1 – Presidential Approval Ratings, 1953-2000

...has series on the current president from all the major polling houses. Data are also available via the Roper Center's poll archive. Data in this study are from Edwards to 1990, and *Gallup Poll Monthly* thereafter.

9 Gallup used to believe that they could not get good results asking presidential "trial heat" and approval questions in the same survey, and so they dropped the approval question for a few months prior to elections when an incumbent president was running for reelection.
Presidential Approval as a General Measure of Success

One line of evidence that approval ratings capture something important about the president's standing is that presidents and other political actors say they do, and care a great deal about them. The ratings are certainly of interest to the media: the Washington Post for example had 129 stories in 2002 that mentioned George W. Bush's approval ratings, and even regional papers often mention the polls. George Edwards has compiled dozens of examples of White House officials from Eisenhower to Clinton stating how critical they believed high approval ratings were to presidential success. Presidents and their staff pay close attention to the approval numbers – the concern is obvious in memoirs of White House advisors, and Presidents themselves followed the numbers closely. There are even isolated suggestions of White House attempts to convince or coerce polling firms to issue favorable findings.

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10 LEXIS/NEXIS search for "approval rating" and "Bush". As examples of regional papers, there were 32 stories in the Chicago Sun-Times, 19 in the Seattle Times, 21 in the Fresno Bee, 64 in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 15 in the Denver Post. Some stories were undoubtedly missed, if for example they referred to "presidential popularity" or just "approval".


12 Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, "Presidential Manipulation of Polls and Public Opinion: The Nixon Administration and the Pollsters", Political Science Quarterly, vol. 110 (2002), pp 519-538. Based on White House archives Jacobs and Shapiro report one incident where the Nixon White House convinced Harris to average two approval polls taken just a week apart that showed a rapid rise and fall (on the assumption that the media would only emphasize the fall), and a more nebulous case where Gallup may have been influenced to "adjust" a July 1970 poll to keep Nixon's rating from falling below 60% (the final number reported was 61%). Former Gallup and Harris officials strongly deny the charges. In either case, the potential changes would have been within the sampling error of the polls. Jacobs and Shapiro convincingly argue that Nixon's staff used a variety of carrots and sticks with Gallup and Harris to influence question wording, suppress unfavorable results, and gain privileged access to data, but in their long list of charges, those were the only involving the basic approval question. Nixon was not alone. Gallup actively cooperated with the Roosevelt Administration (via Hadley Cantril) during World War II. Foreign governments also saw the polling agencies as important targets: Mahl documents that officials at Gallup, Roper and NORC worked with British intelligence from the late 1930s, suppressing results unfavorable to Britain, slanting questions (e.g., in favor of Lend-Lease), and attempting to discredit isolationists such as Hamilton Fish. Thomas Mahl, Desperate Deception: British Covert Operations in the United States, 1939-1944 (Dulles, VA: Brassey's, 1998); Steven Casey, Caustic Crusade: Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War Against Nazi Germany (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). See also Nicholas John Cull, Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign Against American Neutrality in World War II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp 66, 168.
Political insiders are particularly vocal in their view that presidential approval correlates with presidential power in Congress. "It's an absolute rule up here: popular presidents get what they want unpopular ones don't", said one Democratic staffer in 1993. When presidents are riding high, they "can do whatever [they] want" according to Newt Gingrich, whereas when the president's polls are sagging, "it's advantageous and even fun to kick him around", according to a Nixon aide.13 Whether approval ratings themselves generate influence, or merely track some other aspect of presidential power is irrelevant here, so long as that correlation is strong and consistent.

Presidential historians tend to agree that the White House has the most influence in Congress when poll numbers are high, whichever direction the causality flows. Nuestadt, for example, stated that Congress has to "think about the president's standing outside of Washington....[it] is another factor bearing on their willingness to give him what he wants."14 Emmett John Hughes put it starkly: "...there would appear to be only one unchallengeable truth: the dependence of Presidential authority on popular support."15 Edwards identifies general popular support as a key resource for presidents, and it figures prominently in Kernell's "going public" strategy.16 Quantitative studies have been skeptical however, finding little correlation between overall approval ratings and success in roll call votes17 or changes in member's positions on legis-

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13 Quotes from Edwards, "Aligning Tests With Theory: Presidential Approval As a Source of Influence in Congress", pp 114-115. Edwards offers many other examples from the 1950s to the 1990s, from White House and Congressional officials, from both parties, to the same effect.
lation, or the success of appeals to the public. Others respond that presidential influence is greatest in earlier, less visible phases of the legislative process, such as agenda setting or the initial drafting of proposals.

Approval ratings also provide a good proxy for presidential reelection chances, and for a president’s “place in history”. No president has been reelected when starting the election year with approval ratings below 50%. Kernell found that approval ratings in June of an election year could explain an impressive 70% of the variance in the president’s vote share that November. Each 10% increase in approval predicts a 4.8% increase in share of the popular vote. Other political scientists find the same thing: approval ratings are a good predictor of electoral success. There is also a correlation between a president’s approval ratings and evaluations after leaving office: polls consistently show that in general the presidents most popular during their time in office are also those whom the public thinks well of decades later.

In short, approval ratings seem to capture many of the aspects of political power and success that presidents would wish to maximize.

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22 Kennedy for example was the most popular president, and he dominates the other post-1945 presidents in “greatest president” surveys. Reagan’s ratings were second, and he usually comes in as #2 in such surveys. Three of the four presidents with lowest average approval – Johnson, Nixon, and Carter – show up prominently in “worst president” surveys and their presidencies are usually regarded negatively. Truman is an exception: despite lower average ratings than anyone but Nixon, Harry Truman now does fairly well in “best president” surveys, often coming in third behind Kennedy and Reagan. Bill Clinton does quite poorly compared to his approval average; whether this will be true in future decades is not known.
Limitations of Approval Ratings

Approval ratings do not account for all possible contributions to a president’s political utility. Although they do represent a generally broad measure of political standing, they do not capture opportunity costs, less tangible political benefits, or situations where a president derives utility strictly from policy outcomes and does not care about public opinion.

One problem is that we do not observe the opportunity costs of keeping approval ratings high. A president may wish to take actions that would be unpopular and thus cost approval, and therefore decide not to take those actions. In that case a president would still be suffering costs – of the forgone policy – and would have an incentive for diversionary activity, although observed approval ratings would not reflect this. Bill Clinton’s ratings during the Lewinsky scandal may demonstrate this: Clinton’s poll numbers actually improved during the scandal and remained relatively high after. It seems implausible, though, that the Clinton White House was not in any way hurt; he would not have had the influence in Congress he did in 1996 with similar ratings. Clinton made no legislative appeals to the public during his last three years in office. Clinton’s ratings might not have held up had he pursued an active agenda, rather than merely presiding over the economic boom.23

Presidents might also find benefits that are not measured by approval ratings. For example, presidents might feel that they are harmed by a particular image problem, even though approval ratings are good. They might therefore see an incentive for activities that change that image, even if approval ratings show little change. Military action might be used to counter the

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23 Two caveats are needed. First, second-term presidents are always more passive than they were in their first term. Second, Clinton’s numbers were in some sense “real” – polls show the majority of Americans distinguished between his personal failings and presidential performance, plus they had an even more unfavorable view of the Republican Congress. Clinton’s ratings would not have collapsed had he pushed more legislation, though it does seem likely they would have dropped.

Burbach, Diversionary Temptations
Chapter 3: “Measurement Methods"
impression of being indecisive or weak, even if approval ratings were already high. Eliminating that impression could be useful even if ratings don’t change, either in Congressional relations (appearing less likely to compromise) or in taking away a potential weapon for political opponents to use later. The charge that George Bush used the invasion of Panama to get rid of “the wimp factor” is an illustration of this.

Finally, presidents might just not care about their ratings, despite the connection between them and political power more broadly. Second term presidents might not care about reelection, even first term presidents could have policy goals that mattered more to them than reelection. Truman was famously indifferent to polls, and unlike other presidents who have disavowed following their ratings, Truman seems to have been sincere. He is the only such example, though, and is a fifty-year old example at that. Alternatively, a president might be so hungry for higher approval that the perceived need to improve ratings is constant – just as strong at 70% approval as 30%. In that case, approval ratings would not correlate with diversionary pressure, but such a president would still care about the impact of uses of force or alternatives on approval, choosing the activities that maximize the approval gains.

Despite these limitations, approval ratings seem to be the measure of political benefits that best combines association with a wide range of presidential goals and practical availability of good data over a long period of time. The next section describes the strategy for measuring the political benefits of dramatic events as reflected in approval ratings.


Burbach, Diversionary Temptations
Chapter 3: “Measurement Methods”
2. Measuring Political Benefits: General Strategy

The following section describes the strategy that will be used for measuring the effects of uses of force and other dramatic events on presidential approval. The approval numbers themselves are quite simple, but if we find that the president's rating is 60% on a given day, how much of that do we attribute to a use of force two months earlier? The section begins by outlining the approach that will be used – modeling rally effects as shocks that are superimposed on a base level of approval, then gradual decay – followed by a review of alternative methods that have been popular in the literature, and finally developing the detailed specification of the model used here.

General Approach: Superimposed Shocks

The general strategy to be used in this study is to assume that presidential approval has some "base level" that would be followed in the absence of any dramatic events; the trajectory of that base level can be predicted as a function of control variables, such as economic conditions. When a use of force or other dramatic event takes place that event causes a "shock" or disturbance from whatever the base level of approval is at the time. For a period of time after the shock, approval is predicted to be the sum of the base level (as it continues to evolve), and the residual effect from the shock of the event. That residual gradually decays over time, until approval is again equal to the prediction from the base model.

Figure 3-2 illustrates this conceptual model. This figure shows two cases of a sudden event taking place (at time 0 on these plots) and perturbing approval, then decaying over time. The left-hand plot shows the simple case where base approval is constant, in which case overall approval shows a simple spike and decline. The right-hand side shows a more complicated case.
where base approval changes (an increase starting at month –1, then a decrease at month 2).

The event or “rally” effects shown in the two panels (light gray) are identical, but when superimposed on changing approval in the right-hand panel a more complex overall trajectory for approval is observed. In each case, the total area in green shows the total political benefit that resulted from the event (identical in the two examples).

**Figure 3-2: Conceptual Model of Event Effects**

The strategy for the study will be to construct a model of base approval, and to estimate the deviation from the base, if any, caused by events. That is, variables in the model will allow shocks to occur at the dates of known events. If the result is that statistically significant shocks occur, we can conclude that the events do have an impact on approval, with their total effect being determined by the magnitude and duration that are measured (note that the effect could be

Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*
Chapter 3: “Measurement Methods”
negative, instead of the positive effect illustrated above). If no shocks are found when events occur, then we can conclude that particular group of events has no net effect on the president's standing.

A key assumption of this approach is that events can be reasonably modeled as having their entire effect on presidents at a single, identifiable point in time. This assumption is not novel; it is in fact the norm in the approval literature. In many cases the assumption seems warranted. Uses of force or diplomatic summits that last several days are effectively point events relative to the frequency of approval polls. Even some lengthier events show a pattern that looks remarkably like a shock-and-decay that begins when the event starts (e.g., the Gulf War). Other events are not so easy to pin down, such as the months-long Berlin Crisis in 1961. The strategy will not work for long-term presidential activities, such as Reagan's focus on the Soviet threat in 1981-1983. The approach also misses fine-scale dynamics of the response to events, such as Brody's suggestion that support will vary with day-to-day reactions in the press – this single point event assumes that the reaction to an event is 100% known at the moment the event takes place, not something that evolves over time.

The single-point assumption is not ideal, but many uses of military force do have sharp and easily identifiable beginnings, and many last days or just a few weeks. Detailed case studies tracking day-by-day developments, media content, and polling data are very welcome, but conducting that level of analysis for 125 military and diplomatic events over fifty years is not feasible within the confines of this study. Treating events as points in time is a reasonable if imperfect compromise for a macro-level study.

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An Alternative Approach: The Problematic Poll-to-Poll Method

Many previous studies have used something like the “superimposed shocks” approach described above, but in the last decade the most popular approach of studies looking at the political effect of uses of force has been to measure the poll-to-poll change between the last poll prior to a dramatic event, and the first poll subsequent. This is convenient shorthand for journalistic purposes, and has also been used by authors discussing rallies qualitatively.\(^26\) Poll-to-poll comparisons have also been the method employed by recent quantitative studies – that is, the dependent variable being explained has been the change from the last poll prior to first post after each event.\(^27\) Convenient as the measure is, it has severe drawbacks for use in modeling the rally effect relative to other approaches. Given that these articles have become the standard citations on the rally effect, largely seen as overturning earlier results, it is worth exploring the pitfalls of the poll-to-poll strategy.

One inherent limitation is that single-point changes tell us nothing about the duration of any impact from dramatic events – presidents may gain support, but does it last a week, a month, a year? The difference between increases lasting days and increases lasting months would be of tremendous substantive importance.

Even for estimating only the magnitude of “rallies”, the poll-to-poll method is problematic. The method discards a great deal of information, does not control for background trends,


is extremely sensitive to correct dating of events, and does not allow for the unevenness of polling intervals. Figure 3-3 is used in the following discussion to illustrate those problems.

**Figure 3-3: Poll-to-Poll Measurement Errors**

A) Sampling Error

B) Background Changes

C) Event Timing Error

D) Uneven Poll Intervals

Figure 3-3 -- Errors Introduced by Poll-to-Poll Measurement

Figure 3-3, graph A illustrates how the loss of information magnifies the importance of sampling error. The graph shows (black line) an actual approval change at time 0 of 5% (from a constant 47 to a constant 52%), as well as the same underlying approval change with sampling error added (green and red lines). As shown in the legend, the observed single-point approval change measured at time zero could be 3, 5, or 9%, though all come from the same 5% actual
change. In contrast, a model that included every point in its estimation would come much closer to measuring the actual 5% change even with sampling error, since those errors tend to average out.

Graph B of figure 3-3 illustrates three cases of a 5% "rally" – an immediate 5% boost the decays exponentially. In the first case (blue line) approval is a constant 47% plus the rally effect, in the next (red line) the rally is superimposed on a generally declining approval rating, in the third (green) the rally is superimposed on rising approval. Sampling error is ignored in this and the remaining examples. In this case, failing to control for the background trends causes the effect of the event to appear as 3% or 7% instead of the actual 5%. Had the first poll after the event occurred even later, say at 2 months after in this example, the differences would be even larger: an apparent effect of -2% (declining approval) or +7% (increasing approval), vs. the actual 2.5%.

Graph C of figure 3-3 illustrates the effect of misspecifying the date on which an event takes place. For all three lines 0 represents the specified date of the event, and in all three cases the boost is identical to graph B (that is, 5%). When the event is correctly dated the expected 5% magnitude is found. If the event actually occurs earlier than the specified date (red line), a decline of -2% is found, since the peak already occurred. And if the event happens later than specified (green line), no effect is observed. In contrast, a simple model fitting a shock and exponential decay is more resilient. The curves that would be fit (dashed green and red lines) would be inaccurate compared to the fit if the date were perfectly specified, but they still resemble the actual pattern.²⁸

²⁸ If the dating of an event is so far off the mark that the specified date is farther away from the actual date than the time it takes any effects to decay, then even estimates based on the whole time series will fail to pick up anything.
Finally, graph D illustrates the problem in comparing changes when poll intervals differ greatly. In all three cases a 5% change is observed, but with polls .5 months (black), 1.5 (green) or 2.5 (red) after an event. When polls are reasonably close to an event they can provide an adequate measure, but when the delay is substantial (green line), the observed single point change may significantly underestimate initial changes, assuming there was a peak-and-decay pattern (as is common). As the interval grows longer (red line), the effect of background trends and other disturbances starts to overwhelm any changes from the dramatic event.

Clearly, better results can be obtained from modeling the effects of dramatic events over many polls – best of all by modeling the entire approval time series to control for background trends to the greatest degree possible.

*Modeling Rally Events: Dynamic Structure*

The previous two sub-sections explained the general concept to be used for modeling the effect of events on approval – superimposed shocks on a base level of approval – and discussed the drawbacks of the alternative method currently in fashion in the literature. This section picks up on the modeling of event effects by explaining the specific dynamic structure that was chosen. This study assumes that events can be modeled as shocks that decay exponentially, but with a rate of decay that is different from the adjustment rate of the base model. The patterns seen after actual rally events in the past support this decision.

Most of the pre-1990 studies included rally events as part of full models of presidential approval.29 All made the simplifying assumption that events could be treated as happening at a

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single point in time, though they made different choices on handling the dynamics of rallies — how that instantaneous shock would evolve over time. Mueller posited that there was a continuous decline after rally events — no return to a base level, just a decline as a function of time since the last event. Kernell assumed a linear decay over five months. MacKuen used an exponential decay, with rallies as well as all other variables in the model having their own rates of decay. Marra, Ostrom, and Simon also used exponential decay, but with a single time constant for all variables in the model.\footnote{Exponential decay of impulse changes is equivalent to a standard AR1 autoregressive model. In such a model, the effect of a given variable at time $t$ is equal to the instantaneous effect plus from fraction of the effect from time $t$ (e.g., $\beta X_e + \phi^t \beta X_{(e+1)}$ where $t$ is between 0 and 1). For an impulse — i.e., a variable where $X$ takes on a value at the time of an event $e$, and is zero at all other times, then the initial magnitude of the shock is $\beta X_e$ and since $\beta X_e$ is zero when $t\neq e$, the effect at $t=e+1$ is $\phi \beta X_e$ then at $t=e+2$ is $\phi^2 \beta X_e$, and generally at time $t$ (where $t>e$) $\phi^{t-e} \beta X_e$, which is exponential decay.}

Figure 3-4 shows the actual approval paths for number of rally events. In each case, what is shown is the change from the approval level prior to the event, but with the changes scaled so that the initial change is set to 100%. That is, all the events are being measured on the same scale — in the case of the Gulf War that 100% represents a 20 point change, in the case of the 1986 Libya air strikes, a 6 point change. In all cases, the approval numbers are shown as of the actual polling intervals before and after the events.
Two patterns stand out. First, the larger events, such as the Gulf War, Cuba, and Iran cluster together (shown with solid markers – see Appendix B for a larger version of the graph in color); the pattern over time for these events is quite similar. Fortunately, an exponential decay model is not a bad fit: figure 3-3 shows (starred black line) the fit of an exponential model that begins at 140% at day 0, then decays with a 3 month half-life. The fit to an exponential model is not perfect, though. In all four cases the peak approval change was not seen at the first poll after the event. Instead, a large jump was seen, followed by a slightly climbing plateau for a month or two, then dropping somewhat more steeply than the exponential fit predicts before

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31 A preliminary look suggests the response to the invasion of Iraq in the spring of 2003 is following a similar pattern, though at this writing it is too early to judge.
flattening out. A simple exponential fit is likely to overstate the benefits immediately after the event, and underestimate them somewhat in the 1 to 3 month range.

Another cluster of paths (shown with open markers) declines more steeply. These are the smaller events of the group, with initial changes of 6% to 10%. The initial jump is the highest change observed, and the approval boost declines with a half life of about a month (black line with boxes). The speed of the declines may be exaggerated by background trends, as Johnson’s approval was declining about 1% per month all through 1966, and the economy was worsening for Bush in 1990. Still, the declines do seem more rapid in these cases, though an exponential fit is still a reasonable match.

Three points stand out. First, an exponential curve is a reasonable approximation to the rally decay patterns. Given the infrequency of polls and the magnitude of sampling error, it would be difficult to demonstrate that any other form was a significantly better fit, with the possible exception of the 1-3 month plateau for the largest events. Second, even if all these events were forced to have the same decay rate, the fits would be tolerable. Finally, the decay rates are significantly more rapid than those seen for macroeconomic and other factors that drive the base level of presidential approval. Most studies find a half-life of 6 to 12 months for the equilibration of changes in base approval. This implies that reactions to events have dynamics different from other variables, and models should reflect this.

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The approach here will be to model the effects of uses of force as single-point shocks that produce initial disturbances from a background approval level, and then decay exponentially. A single rate of decay will be estimated for those shocks, but this rate will be independent of the dynamics of the control variables.

3. Model Specifications and Variables

The following section details the statistical models that will be used in this study. First, the structure of the control model – the part of the model that predicts base approval – is discussed. The model is unremarkable: a simple autoregressive model based on economic and other variables, as is commonly used in the literature. The next section provides the mathematical specification of the model, including the control portion and the event effects; this section explains how the two portions are combined and how the event dynamics are implemented. Finally, results from the control portion of the model are presented. These results are comparable to those found in other studies of presidential approval, thus providing a basic validity check on the model and estimation.

Control Model Structure

There has been a great deal of attention paid to modeling presidential approval in the past, and so there is a strong foundation for selecting a control model to use for this study.33

Specifically, approval will be modeled as a linear, autoregressive function of primarily of economic variables, as well as wartime deaths, major scandals, and the early-term boost or “honeymoon” given to new presidents. The reasoning and implications of these choices are described below.

Approval ratings are bounded at 0% and 100%, and it seems intuitive that as ratings approach one of those extremes, further movement will become less and less likely. Were a president at 98% approval, there would be almost nobody left who could change their opinion.

Those characteristics would make approval a natural candidate for a logit or other model that is bounded by 0 and 1 and requires larger changes of the independent variables to move the dependent variable as it approaches those limits.34

In practice, virtually every study of presidential approval has modeled it as a simple linear function—independent variables have the same effect at 90% as 10%.

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34 Something like a logit can be motivated from a simple micro-level model of approval. Assume that presidential performance is measured on a single dimension and that any given individual has a threshold on that dimension, above which they will express approval for the president. As performance increases linearly, the fraction approving would then increase as the cumulative density function of the distribution of thresholds. If thresholds had a gaussian distribution, the cdf is very similar to a logit curve. The situation is bound to be more complicated, and in fact it is surprising that few if any attempts have been made to create a theory that builds up from individual-level decisions to predict how aggregate approval should behave. For example, in a multidimensional case we could say that an individual will express approval if the distance from their ideal point to the point where the president’s policies/outcomes are located is less than some threshold. To take into account the media framing effects on salience, there could be a set of weights across all the relevant dimensions such that they identify a hypersurface around the individual’s ideal point, inside of which presidents will be approved. Overall approval would depend on the distribution of ideal points and threshold distances (some people may be pickier than others). Hibbs attempted something like this, but without variations in perceptions/thresholds across individuals. Whether such a model can be fleshed out to yield useful insights is an excursive left for others. Douglas Hibbs, *The American Political Economy: Macroeconomics and Electoral Politics in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987) Beck, for one, doubts that such a theory would produce anything that could be usefully estimated. Beck, "Comparing Dynamic Specifications: The Case of Presidential Approval"
problems, linear models perform well. Approval rarely approaches the boundaries, and none of the models make out-of-bounds predictions, nor do they show the errors that should result from non-linearity as the boundaries are approached.\textsuperscript{35} Analysts who have tried alternative specifications report no improvement over a linear fit.

The dynamics of the approval series have received a great deal of attention over the years, with the general conclusion that it can be modeled satisfactorily as a first-order autoregressive process (AR1). That is, approval at any given time is a function of both current conditions and past conditions, with events in the past discounted more as the time since increases. The most obvious indicator of this is the autocorrelation function of the series, which shows the classic exponentially decreasing correlations with higher-order lags.\textsuperscript{36} MacKuen, Erickson and Stimson subject the series to a variety of diagnostic tests and conclude that AR1 is the correct model; they find the coefficient on the first lag of the independent variables to be around 0.9.\textsuperscript{37} Not surprisingly, the majority of studies (starting with Kernell) have used an AR1 model. There is also interest in “error-correcting” models; these offer allow somewhat more complicated dynamics than the simple autoregressive specification, but Beck shows the differences between the two forms are small in the case of presidential approval.\textsuperscript{38}

Finally, there is significant though not complete agreement on what variables should be used to predict presidential approval. All authors find economic variables to be important. Indeed, economic factors can explain more of the variance in presidential approval than all other

\textsuperscript{35} If the model really should be something like a logit, we would expect predictions to show exaggerated changes near the boundaries; this does not seem to be the case. On the other hand, if a particular variable is only present when approval is near a boundary, then a linear model would underestimate the effect it would have if it occurred when approval was near 50%.


\textsuperscript{37} Erickson, MacKuen, and Stimson, \textit{The Macro Polity}, pp 32-41.

\textsuperscript{38} Beck, "Comparing Dynamic Specifications: The Case of Presidential Approval". Beck also reviews several other techniques that have been used less commonly.
commonly used variables combined. Preferred indicators vary, however. The principal debate\(^3\) is between those who favor indicators of past outcomes -- retrospective variables -- and those who argue that public expectations about future economic conditions -- prospective variables -- are more important.\(^4\) Since that debate is irrelevant to the questions at hand, I try to maximize predictive ability and use both sorts: unemployment and inflation to measure outcomes,\(^5\) and also consumer expectations.

In addition to being judged on the past and future economy, presidents' approval ratings are affected by wartime deaths, major scandals, and generally an initial "honeymoon" period.

John Mueller demonstrated that Truman and Johnson's popularity declined as a function of casualties in Korea and Vietnam (though not apparently their successors who inherited the

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\(^3\) In addition to the retrospective / prospective debate discussed below, the other axis of debate has been whether individuals react more to their personal economic situation (whether experienced or expected), or to national conditions (called the "sociotropic" view). The debate seems to have been won by the sociotropic side; approval, voting behavior, etc., is better explained by an individual's view of national conditions and trends, not personal situation. Donald Kinder and Roderick Kiewiet, "Economic Grievances and Political Behavior: The Role of Personal Discontentments and Collective Judgments in Congressional Voting", *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 23 (1979), pp 495-527; Donald Kinder and Roderick Kiewiet, "Sociotropic Politics: The American Case", *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 11, no. 129-162 (1981); MacKuen et al., "Peasants or Bankers? The American Electorate Adm the U.S. Economy".


\(^5\) Unemployment and inflation tend to outperform other measures of economic performance in presidential approval studies; they also outperform other variables in predicting consumer estimates of current business conditions. Erickson, MacKuen, and Stimson, *The Macro Policy*. Note that it was fashionable in the 1980s and early 1990s to use the so called "misery index" as a measure of economic performance. That index is simply the sum of unemployment and inflation, and since those tend to vary inversely, the misery index eliminates much of the variance in them.
wars), and so a Vietnam factor\footnote{No wartime-loss factor is used for conflicts after Vietnam. The Gulf War was so brief that it would be impossible to discern the effect of mounting casualties – perhaps the rally would have been larger had there been 15 deaths instead of 150, but we do not (fortunately) have multiple short wars to allow such a comparison.} is needed to control for Johnson's dramatic loss of support after 1965.\footnote{Johnson himself attributed half his loss to Vietnam, half to civil rights, though the majority of the decline came in late 1966 through early 1968 – well after the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act.} Similarly, some allowance needs to be made for the Watergate scandal, which drove Nixon’s ratings below 25%. The Iran-Contra scandal also requires explicit treatment, since it caused a lengthy and significant depression of Reagan's ratings; in contrast, the Lewinsky scandal and impeachment of Clinton did not cause his ratings to differ significantly from what might have been expected otherwise.\footnote{In fact, Clinton’s ratings increased more than 5% after the initial revelations, and increased again during the impeachment trial, though the admission of lying in August of 1998 caused a short drop. It is possible that Clinton’s ratings would have been still higher than economic conditions alone would have predicted without the scandal (for example, due to progress on the budget deficit, declining crime rates, and other apparent successes beyond those captured in consumer confidence), but there is no way to know this. When included, a variable for the Lewinsky-impeachment period had a near zero and statistically insignificant value.} Finally, most presidents are more popular at the beginning of their term than at the end. There is considerable debate about whether there is a steady decline over time\footnote{Mueller argued that there is a continuous decline with time, but Kernell convincingly demonstrates why that was a spurious result of Mueller's statistical specifications; Kernell did find a significant early-term effect. Mueller, War, Presidents, and Public Opinion; Kernell, “Explaining Presidential Popularity”. Brace and Hinckley argue for using 96 individual instruments for each month in a two-term sequence; not surprisingly these are significant, though other than the first year (and interestingly, the final year) they cluster around the same value of –15% relative to the beginning of the term. Erickson, MacKuen, and Stimson find a single “honeymoon” impulse (and subsequent decay) is adequate. Brace and Hinckley, Follow The Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents; Erickson, MacKuen, and Stimson, The Macro Polity. The emphasis on continual decline has lessened since 1990 partly because recent presidents have not followed the pattern: Reagan's ratings were stationary over eight years; Bush's ratings increased for two and a half years, then plunged; Clinton shows a general upward trend over eight years.} and over the causes of such time-dependent patterns in approval, but there is general agreement that an early-term “honeymoon” exists.

Others have included the effect of a wide range of events on presidential approval. Most of these events, though, are exactly the use-of-force and other dramatic foreign policy events that are the subject of this study, and so will not be included in a “control” model. Erickson, MacKuen, and Stimson for example, identify only four events outside of foreign policy and Watergate/Iran-Contra: Ford's pardon of Nixon, the Bert Lance scandal in 1977, the attempted
assassination of Reagan, and the October 1990 budget agreement.\textsuperscript{46} Brace and Hinckley on the other hand identify a very large set of non-foreign policy presidential events – about one every three months. Relatively few of these are associated with significant changes in approval, though, and there are real problems in identifying what should be included in such a list – why the Bitburg cemetery speech controversy in 1985, for example but not the signing of the Civil Rights Act?\textsuperscript{47} With the two major scandals included, and the foreign policy events included as the study variables, it seems practical to not attempt any further controls for specific events.

Finally, many authors believe that there are administration-specific effects that require the use of dummy variables for each administration. This was tried, and the inclusion of administration-specific dummies significantly improved the fit and the dummies differed significantly from each other. Nevertheless, including administration-specific constants had little effect on the estimates for the effects of presidential events, the variables of interest. The main effect of including the dummies was to change some control variables and to reduce the standard error of the regression. To increase clarity and preserve degrees of freedom (including the dummies adds nine variables), a single constant was used.

The following section details the specific variables that were chosen, and the sources and coding rules used in creating them.

\textit{Control Variable Details}

\textbf{APPROVAL}

The share of the public indicating that they approve of the way the president is handling his job according to each Gallup survey. Expressed in percentage points – that is, 0 to 100, rather than fractions for ease of interpretation.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{46} Erickson, MacKuen, and Stimson, \textit{The Macro Polity}, p. 52. Their coverage was from 1953 to 1994.
\textsuperscript{47} Brace and Hinckley, \textit{Follow The Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents}, for their list of events see pp 185-188.
\textsuperscript{48} Data from 1953 to 1989 from Edwards; subsequent years from \textit{Gallup Poll Monthly}.
INTERVAL

Time between the current poll and previous poll, measured in standardized “months” of 30.5 days. 49

UNEMPLOYMENT

The national unemployment rate for the month in which a given poll took place.

QUARTERLY_INFLATION

Three-month moving average of the annualized change in the Consumer Price Index. A three-month moving average is used because of the high month-to-month volatility of the series, which reflects measurement error more than real economic effects. 50

CONSUMER_EXPECT

Current value for the index of “Business Conditions Expected in the Next 12 Months” item from the University of Michigan Survey of Consumers; this index ranges from approximately 30 to 180; higher values indicate more optimism. 51

INAUGURATION

Takes on 1 for the first poll after a new President takes office, zero otherwise (second-term inaugurations do not count – there is some evidence of a very short-lived approval increase around the second inauguration, but nothing like the importance of the initial honeymoon).

VIETNAM_SQRT

The square root of the cumulative casualties (in thousands) during the Vietnam War, starting at the beginning of 1965, continuing to the end of Johnson’s term; zero all other periods. Mueller advocated the log of casualties, but the decline is more gradual than that implies; square root of casualties appeared to be a better fit. 52

49 Both Edwards (1990) and the Gallup Poll Monthly provide exact survey dates. The date chosen was the middle date of the survey range, or date prior to the midpoint when the survey was being conducted for an even number of days.
50 Both unemployment and CPI figures were obtained electronically from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics. (www.bls.gov)
51 Available from the University of Michigan Survey Research Center, http://www.scr.isr.umich.edu/. The data are quarterly until 1978, monthly thereafter.
52 Data from Mueller, War, Presidents, and Public Opinion. Casualties includes wounded, POW, and missing, as well as deaths. The log specification implies that Johnson should have suffered ½ of his total Vietnam loss by the fall of 1965; the square-root specification puts the halfway point at the spring of 1967.
WATERGATE

 Dummy variable for the Watergate scandal. It takes on 1 at the time of the linkage of the scandal to White House staffers in March of 1973, and 2 from the “Saturday Night Massacre” in October of 1973 until Nixon’s resignation the following August.

IRANCONTRA

 Dummy variable for the Iran-Contra scandal; 1 from November of 1986 until the end of August 1987 (when the Congressional hearings concluded).

A few event-related variables are also introduced here for the discussion of specifications that follows:

EVENT_INTERVAL

 Delay (in standardized months) between the each event and the first poll that takes place afterwards

$X^{\text{EVNT}}$

 A vector of independent variables associated with a particular event – this will be used for describing the specifications in general in the next section; specific event related variables will be introduced in chapters 4 and 5.

Statistical Specifications

 Putting together the plans for estimating event effects discussed in section 2, and for modeling base levels of approval described above in this section, we can construct a general form for the models to be used in this study:
3 - 1: \( Approval_i = Control_i + EventEffect_i + \epsilon_i \),

where

3 - 1a: \( Control_i = \phi_1 * Control_{i-1} + \theta_5 + \theta_7 * Unemployment_i + \theta_8 * QuarterlyInflation_i + \theta_9 * ConsumerExpect_i + \theta_6 * Inauguration_i + \theta_9 * VietnamSqrt_i + \theta_7 * Watergate_i + \theta_8 * IranContra_i \),

3 - 1b: \( EventEffect_i = \left( \phi_2 \frac{Interval}{Interval} * Event_{t-1} + \sum_{t=FirstEvent}^{LastEvent_i} X_i^{EVENT} * B^{EVENT} \cdot \phi_2 \frac{Interval}{Interval} \right) \times (1 - Inauguration_i) \)

As described in the previous sections, equation 3-1 shows that approval is the sum of two distinct autoregressive series, plus a normally distributed error term. CONTROL and EVENT_EFFECT each follow the standard specification for an AR(1) process; approval is simply the sum of the two processes.\(^{53}\)

One important distinction between equation 3-1 and the approach of most previous studies is the use of actual polling intervals for the decay of event-related effects rather than forcing equal intervals, for example by using monthly averages. This is done by multiplying EVENT_EFFECT(t-1) by \( \phi_2 \) to the power of INTERVAL – the standard formula for exponential decay. As INTERVAL grows, the remaining value of EVENT_EFFECT(t-1) at time \( t \) grows smaller (since \( 0 < \phi_2 < 1 \)). Because the effect of any given event is to provide a single impulse at a known time, the remaining effect at any point in time can be computed precisely.

\(^{53}\) This is similar to the approach used by MacKuen, "Political Drama, Economic Conditions, and the Dynamics of Presidential Popularity". As Beck notes, this technically moves the model out of the category of a simple linear models into a broader category of "transfer functions". Both MacKuen and Beck find no problem theoretically with such a specification, though, and it is straightforward to estimate it using maximum likelihood methods. Beck, "Comparing Dynamic Specifications: The Case of Presidential Approval".
Unfortunately, such simple time dependency is not the case for the control variables, which exert an effect continuously. This leads to a much more complex relationship between observation intervals and effects. The control variables are thus treated as if polling intervals were identical, in which case the usual AR(1) formula works.

Treating polling intervals as even is somewhat problematic, but in most cases it is identical to the literature standard of using monthly averages. Using months as the unit of observation means that when there is one poll per month (as is the case for most decades), each observation is treated as being 30 days apart – whether the actual gap was 5 or 50. The only difference in this study, then, is the use of accurate intervals for event dynamics rather than incorrectly forcing all intervals to one month.

The main differences arise when there are gaps of more than a month (where most studies interpolate – thus inadvertently imposing a linear decay on any event effects that span the gap), or where multiple polls were conducted in a month (where taking the average means losing information on event dynamics). Here, the increase in information on event effects seems worth the possible distortion in the control model. The fact that control variable effects were found to be very similar to previous studies suggests the approach was reasonable. One adjustment that was made was that when polling frequency reached the extreme level of two or more per week, they were averaged for that week (this only happens during late 1998 and early 1999).

Equation 3-1a shows the control portion of the model, which is simply a linear function of the variables discussed in the previous section. For notational clarity, theta (θ) is used rather than beta (β) for the coefficients, so that β can be reserved for the substantive variables (so that they can be numbered from β₁, rather than β₉ each time).
Equation 3-1b represents the contribution of events during each polling period. The first term is simply the lag of Event, adjusted for the polling interval. The second term is the contribution of new events, and requires a bit of explanation. First, there is no theoretical reason preventing more than one event from taking place in between two polls, and in a few cases this will be the case. In addition, events do not happen at the same time as polls – they may take place anywhere in the polling interval.

To account for the different sequencing of polls and events, events are conceptualized as their own set of observations – that is, each observation of event the variables $X^{evnt}$ represents one event, happening at a specified date. At any given poll $t$, FirstEvent, represents the first event, if any, that takes place between poll $t-1$ and poll $t$ (that is, for a given poll $t$, the smallest $i$ (if any) such that $PollDate_{(i)} < EventDate_i < PollDate_e$), and LastEvent$tt$ is the last event between the polls (the largest $i$ such that $PollDate_{(i)} < EventDate_i < PollDate_e$). Event, is the sum of the effect of all such events. Because each event provides only an instantaneous impulse and all effects decay at the same rate, the lagged values of Event can be treated as a single number – whether the previous effect came from three events, one event, or only the residual of an event several periods ago is irrelevant.

For each event that contributes to Event, the instantaneous effect is equal to $B^{evnt} X^i$, where $B$ and $X_i$ are vectors of coefficients and variables observed for event $i$. The effect observed at poll $t$ is not equivalent to the instantaneous effect, since the event occurs some time prior to the poll. The effect at poll $t$ is equal to the instantaneous effect decaying over the interval between the event and the poll, or $\phi_{EventInterval}^t$.

Finally, Event is reset to zero at the beginning of each president's term, since rally benefits are not likely to carry over from one individual to the next. An easy way to represent this is

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Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*
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with (1-INAUGURATION): that term is equal to 1 most periods, but is zero for the first poll of a new presidency. Multiplying by (1-INAUGURATION) sets Event to 0 when a new president takes office.

Note that the control model is not reset for each new president. This is a common practice, but comparison of the predictions from various specifications showed, surprisingly, that the model performed better when effects continued from one president to the next. Each president receives an inaugural boost, but they do not simply start from scratch – a president taking office during a bad economy or an unpopular war will start out with considerably more goodwill than his predecessor, but not as much as if they took office during happier times.

The models were estimated using maximum likelihood estimation in GAUSS (version 3.0). The MAXLIK library was used for the actual maximization process, using likelihood routines written by the author.

**Control Model Results**

The control model was run by itself – i.e., with EVENTS=0 at all times, as a validity check against previous studies, and to illustrate the difference in predictive power with and without events. Results from this regression are presented in table 3-1, below.
TABLE 3-1: Control Model Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Control Model (eq 3-1a)</th>
<th>First Difference Examples</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Long-term Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
<td>Std. Err</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.409</td>
<td>0.350</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-5.912</td>
<td>1.995</td>
<td>3% increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QuarterlyInflation</td>
<td>-1.7985</td>
<td>1.041</td>
<td>+3% annualized CPI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConsumerExpectation</td>
<td>0.0154</td>
<td>0.0014</td>
<td>+25 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VietnamSqrt</td>
<td>-0.445</td>
<td>0.0374</td>
<td>1000 deaths</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watergate</td>
<td>-1.010</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>25,000 deaths</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IranContra</td>
<td>-0.950</td>
<td>0.380</td>
<td>Mid-scandal (after 10/73)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inauguration</td>
<td>21.350</td>
<td>1.130</td>
<td>Scandal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constant (ϕ)</td>
<td>0.929</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Std. Err.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Log-likelihood</strong></td>
<td>-2081.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% confidence intervals for use of force effect predictions. Variables in **bold** significant at a .05 level or above.

Table 3-1 – Control Variable Model Estimates

These results are quite consistent with those of other studies. Because the lagged effects make the coefficients somewhat difficult to interpret, the right hand column shows the predicted long-term (i.e., after 10 months) change in approval that would result from the change described in the independent variable. For example, consumer expectations dropping from their 1999 levels of 170 to spring 2003 levels of about 70 would be expected to create a 15% drop in approval, or 17% adding in the increase in unemployment during the same time.
To further illustrate the results of the control model alone, figure 3-5 below shows the approval series (as in figure 3-1), along with predicted values from eq 3-1a.

**Figure 3-5: Control Model Predictions**

Simple as it is, the control model alone does a reasonable job of predicting approval. Some periods of persistent error do stand out. Most dramatically, George H.W. Bush was far more popular than would have been predicted during the middle of his term – the period of Panama, Desert Shield, and Desert Storm. In contrast, Bill Clinton spent his first term less popular than expected. Other than a very brief honeymoon and slight recovery in early 1994, he was consistently 10-15% less popular than would have been expected. Other anomalies that...
seem associated with events include Carter’s boost in late 1979 (Iran crisis), Kennedy in late 1962 (Cuba), and Nixon in early 1973 (end of the Vietnam). Other notable exceptions less obviously event-related are Reagan’s higher than expected popularity in 1985-1986, Eisenhower’s excess popularity mid-term, and Carter’s dismal ratings in 1978-1979. Most other studies find these same exceptional periods.

Conclusion

Presidents face many dimensions along which they might judge their performance and their need for political gains, but quantifying all those factors would be impossible. Presidential approval ratings correlate with many of the qualities that will be important to presidents – the ratings may even be important in and of themselves – and so they can serve as a useful measure of presidential support. Approval ratings also have the advantage of being a long-term and well-known series, making them very practical for this purpose.

The effects of dramatic events on approval ratings will be measured by estimating models of the full series of presidential ratings, with a control model predicting base levels of approval as a function of the economy, scandals and wars, and other familiar variables. Events will be modeled as instantaneous disturbances, which superimpose exponentially decaying shocks on base approval. The magnitude of the shocks will be a function of whichever event-related variables are being used in a particular regression. The decay rate of these shocks will also be estimated.

This strategy provides appropriate controls and reasonable model for event effects, and so should be able to capture any such effects. The strategy here is definitely an improvement on what is currently being used in other studies. By determining the magnitudes and durations of
"rallies" following uses of force or other events, the political incentives provided by those events can be measured.

The benefits from diplomatic events and other non-military actions will be explored in chapter 5. Next, however, is chapter 4, which will use the framework developed in this chapter to measure the benefits of the use of force.
Chapter 4:

Political Benefits of the Use of Force

A critical assumption of the diversionary theory of war is that uses of force increase the support given to national leaders. War will only be the preferred strategy of beleaguered leaders if that benefit is present, and if is it greater than what leaders can achieve through other tools available to them. The question being addressed in this thesis is whether that possibility is correct: do political incentives make the diversionary use of force an attractive option for presidents?

This chapter contributes to the overall project by determining the political benefits that presidents can hope to achieve from a use of force, and under what conditions those benefits can be obtained. This is done by using presidential approval as an indicator of a president’s overall support, and measuring the change in approval ratings that follow uses of force. By modeling those changes as a function of the variables identified in chapter 2 – variables such as media coverage, elite opinion, success and purpose of the operation, and whether the use of force is taking place when the president is in political trouble – we can determine if substantial benefits are ever possible, and if so, what those characteristics are of the most popular uses of force. This study improves upon earlier work in its statistical methods (as described in the previous chapter), in the appropriate identification and classification of uses of force, and in testing relevant variables.

Uses of force are found to offer relatively little to presidents on average, but under the right conditions can contribute meaningful increases in support. Overall the response to uses of
force is an approval gain of 2% or less, declining over several months – not a change of much political significance.

The average change is close to zero, but the distribution of approval changes is wide, with many cases of a 5% or greater gain or loss. Presidents get larger “rallies” when uses of force get more press coverage, when they get positive press coverage and favorable reaction in Congress, and when they are on behalf of popular goals (like protecting Americans overseas) vs. less popular ones (humanitarian intervention. Force is most popular when presidents need it least: when their starting approval levels are high and when elections are not imminent. In the case of economic slowdowns, though, there is an opportunity for gain: uses of force grow more popular as economic conditions worsen. Even in the best cases, though, uses of force are expected to contribute 10-15% to presidents for a few months – a significant improvement but not enough to counteract major failures. Overall the findings support hypotheses 1 and 2: that the use of force provides limited benefits, but those benefits do vary systematically, in ways that presidents can predict and even manipulate.

The chapter is organized into the following six sections:

1) Overview of the “Rally Effect”. This section introduces the problem, and gives a quick overview of the dependent variable: changes in presidential approval after uses of force.

2) Review of Previous Research. This section reviews the existing literature on the public response to uses of force, and explains why there are major unresolved questions and some important gaps in our knowledge.

3) Methods and Data. This section briefly reviews the statistical methods from chapter 3, then describes the procedure used to create a dataset on uses of force (and why previous datasets were not adequate), and introduces variables and coding rules.

4) Analysis of Results. Results from the regressions are presented and interpreted. The results are used to assess whether hypotheses 1 and 2 (from chapter 2) are valid, in whole or in part.

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5) **Explaining the “Mega-Rallies”**. Qualitative discussion of the three cases where presidents gained far more support than typical (and far more than the models here predict), to examine why such large gains happened and whether future presidents could recreate those conditions.

6) **Implications for Diversion**. Finally, the results are summarized and their implications for the utility of military force for diversionary purposes are discussed.

These findings are used in chapter 6 to refine the diversionary theory’s predictions of when diversionary uses of force should occur, and what characteristics they would have, in order to perform properly targeted tests of the theory. An analysis similar to this study of uses of force is performed for non-military presidential activities in chapter 5 (i.e., testing hypothesis 3).

1. **Overview of the “Rally Effect”**

One of the best known “laws” of American politics is that presidential approval ratings will climb after military actions; the phenomenon is known as the “rally effect”. Among journalists, pollsters, and pundits, it is frequently invoked, whether in predicting the response to a prospective conflict, or in explaining past approval ratings seen after a war. Such a well known “law” has attracted study by scholars, and the surprising conclusion that has emerged is that there is no such law at all: uses of force do not produce changes in presidential approval ratings on average. This chapter will explore that puzzle, but to put the question in context it would be helpful to have an idea of what the data looks like; this section provides an overview of changes in presidential ratings following uses of force.

There is no doubt that some military conflicts cause dramatic increases in Presidential approval ratings – the 90% ratings reached by the two Bushes after the Gulf War and the war in Afghanistan make that clear. Such stratospheric ratings are not an automatic outcome of wars,
though; the “rally effect” is not so automatic as often believed. To illustrate, a number of uses of force and their impact on approval three polls after the event\(^1\) are shown in Table 4-1. While the Gulf War of 1991 produced a tremendous 25% boost for Bush, the range of outcomes is quite wide. The renewed focus on the Vietnam War and Johnson’s initial escalatory responses to the Tet Offensive did not rally the country around him, but instead cost him dearly. Clinton gained little from the Kosovo War, and lost support after the deployment of peacekeepers in Bosnia (and elsewhere).\(^2\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Change (3 polls)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bush (41)</td>
<td>1/91</td>
<td>Gulf War Begins</td>
<td>+25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy</td>
<td>10/62</td>
<td>Cuban Missile Crisis</td>
<td>+13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush (43)</td>
<td>3/03</td>
<td>Invasion of Iraq</td>
<td>+12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford</td>
<td>5/75</td>
<td>Mayaguez Rescue</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>4/86</td>
<td>Air strikes on Libya</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>3/99</td>
<td>Kosovo War</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>2/65</td>
<td>Bombing of N. Vietnam begins</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisenhower</td>
<td>9/54</td>
<td>First Taiwan Straits Crisis</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nixon</td>
<td>2/71</td>
<td>Vietnam: Invasion of Laos</td>
<td>-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>11/95</td>
<td>Bosnia: Deployment of IFOR Peacekeepers</td>
<td>-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>2/68</td>
<td>Vietnam: Tet Offensive</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Since polling intervals are not constant, the time between the use of force and change reported varies, but averages about 2.5 months.

\(^2\) Unless otherwise specified, all Presidential approval data cited in this chapter is from the Gallup survey. Data through 1989 are from George C. Edwards, *Presidential Approval* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); later data from various issues of *Gallup Poll Monthly*. 

Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*

Chapter 4: “Political Benefits of the Use of Force”
Figure 4.1, below, provides a more complete overview of the effect of uses of force on Presidential approval. This figure presents histograms showing the distribution of opinion change at the first and third polls after uses of force, for all uses of force 1953-2000.\textsuperscript{3} Because of unequal polling intervals the changes are not entirely comparable between events, but the chart gives a general sense of the distribution of effects.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure41}
\caption{Approval Change after Uses of Force}
\end{figure}

From 1953 to 2000 there were a total of 66 uses of force, as counted by this study (see section 3). The total range of changes runs from around -10 to +25, but the bulk of the cases fall between -5% and +5%. In fact, the mean change at the first poll after each event is 1.5% (s.d.\textsuperscript{3} “Use of force” here means politically relevant uses of force as identified as part of this study. Due to limitations of existing datasets on U.S. uses of force, one aspect of this project was to compile a more appropriate set of events. The procedure used for doing so is described in the following section; this list is similar to the Blechman-Kaplan or recent Fordham datasets, less to the MID event set.

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5.8%), and 0.8% (s.d 6.2%) three polls later. Such changes are not significantly different from the overall mean change of -0.2%, and are consistent with recent studies that argue the “rally effect” is small. At a first glance, it does not appear that military conflict always produces significant political gains for a president.

The average effect of the use of force may be small, but that is not the same as saying that uses of force always produce no change. As figure 4-1 shows, the distribution is broad, and especially so in comparison to changes from causes other than the use of force. Short-term changes of more than 10% from non-military events are almost unheard of; exceptions include dramatic developments like the Iran-Contra revelations or Eisenhower’s heart attack. Even changes of 5% in the short run are uncommon. The changes after uses of force show greater variance than the average poll-to-poll change (s.d. of 5.9% vs. 3.8%), and in particular there are more outliers on both the positive and negative ends of the spectrum.

The fact that some uses of force produce large increases in approval means that they might still would not be useful tools for a president, even if the mean effect is near zero. The key is not whether uses of force on average are highly popular, but whether the differences between favorable and unfavorable reactions are predictable. If some uses of force are popular, and if Presidents can know in advance which potential conflicts would be popular and which would not, then the diversionary use of force would still be attractive when the conditions for a popular use of force are present. Moreover, if the variables that affect popularity can be manipulated

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by a President, then the constraint is even lower – diversion simply requires that a President de-
sign the intervention so that it will be well-received by the public.\footnote{One other possible reason that an average effect near zero may still allow for diversionary incentives is the “gam-
bling for resurrection” strategy. If uses of force bring a zero average gain but have a large variance, then a president might still find diversionary war attractive: there is a chance of a big payoff. On the other hand, if the mean is zero and the variance is small, then there is hardly any chance of achieving anything politically with the use of force. On the “gambling” strategy, see George W. Downs and David M. Rocke, "Conflict, Agency, and Gambling for Resurrection", \textit{American Journal of Political Science}, vol. 28, no. 2 (1994), pp 362-280}

Determining how well the outcomes of uses of force can be predicted and by what variables is the focus of the statistical analysis in this chapter. First, though, section 2 provides a review of what existing studies tell us about rallies and variables that affect them.

2. Review of Previous Research

This study is not the first to address the “rally effect” – public responses to the use of force; in fact, one might expect such a well-known topic to have been settled long ago. In fact, the literature on the rally effect raises as many questions as it answers. Studies over the past decade directly contradict earlier ones, and the conventional wisdom, by arguing that uses of force have no benefit for presidents on average. In contrast, pre-1990 studies found average boosts of 5-10\%, and authors of those studies explicitly worried that military conflicts would be a profit-
able diversionary tactic for presidents. Relatively little is known about the variation between rallies. Some variables have had the expected effect, some not, and many variables of interest have not been tested.

The follow section attempts to synthesize our current knowledge about the effect of uses of force on presidential approval. The review is organized around the hypotheses from chapter 2 (for convenience, summarized below in Table 4-2) starting with H1, the prediction that the use of force in general brings small rewards. The contradictory findings of recent and ear-

\begin{flushright}
\textbf{Burbach, \textit{Diversionary Temptations}}
\textit{Chapter 4: “Political Benefits of the Use of Force”}
\end{flushright}
lier studies are reviewed, followed by additional detail on reasons for those differences and the methodological problems inherent in those studies. Next are previous findings relevant to hypothesis H2, on the variables that are likely to influence the public response to presidential uses of force (detailed in the sub-hypotheses of H2).

### Table 4-2: Hypotheses To Be Tested in Chapter 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>H1</strong></td>
<td>Uses of force provide benefits which are not politically significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1-a</td>
<td>Uses of force produce only small increases in presidential support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1-b</td>
<td>Uses of force produce only short-lived increases in support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H2</strong></td>
<td>Uses of force only provide substantial support under specific conditions, which may be rare or difficult to manufacture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2-A</td>
<td>Uses of force produce greater political benefits when they receive greater media attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2-B</td>
<td>Uses of force produce greater political benefits when they are generally portrayed as being successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2-C</td>
<td>Uses of force produce greater political benefits when they receive support in the media, particularly from Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2-D</td>
<td>Uses of force produce greater political benefits when they are more closely aligned with public preferences on the use of force, specifically:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-- intervention for internal political change in other countries is unpopular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-- intervention directly protecting American lives is highly popular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2-E</td>
<td>Uses of force produce greater political benefits when they are unexpected actions from a particular president or world situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2-F</td>
<td>Uses of force will be less supported when they occur during times of political need, such as pre-election periods, scandals, and low-approval periods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypothesis 1: General Benefits of Using Force

The first quantitative study of the effect of uses of force and ongoing wars on Presidential support was John Mueller's *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*. Mueller claimed that "rally events" – which he defined as significant international events – increased Presidential approval by 3-5%. Unfortunately, that analysis tells us little about the effect of uses of force today. First, only about half of Mueller's rally points are uses of force, the rest include diplomatic events (e.g., the Geneva Summit), other dramatic events (Sputnik), and inauguration of new Presidents. While not unreasonable for the time, the statistical methods used are also obsolete.

Several studies from the late 1970s to early 1990s included the impact of "rally events" as part of overall models of presidential approval. All of them found that major international events had significant positive impacts on approval ratings. Relatively few of these studies looked at the use of force specifically; like Mueller, they tested the impact of important international events, and few differences between events.

Kernell's 1978 study was the first significant follow-on to Mueller. Despite significant methodological differences Kernell echoed Mueller's finding about rally events: they consistently benefited presidents, adding 5 to 7% to their approval ratings (declining over a few months). Lee found similar results about the same time. Ostrom and Simon's 1985 study found that "crises" and "diplomatic" events gave presidents 5% to 9% immediate approval increases. Later

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7 Mueller's used simple OLS, without any correction for time-series effects.
8 Samuel Kernell, "Explaining Presidential Popularity", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 72 (1978), pp 506-522. Effects were estimated separately for each president, so there was no single value. Kernell's model assumed a linear decline over 5 months; the decay rate was fixed, not an estimated parameter.
9 J. R. Lee, "Rallying 'Round the Flag: Foreign Policy Events and Presidential Popularity", *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 7 (1977), pp 252-256
10 Charles W. Ostrom and Dennis M. Simon, "Promise and Performance: A Dynamic Model of Presidential Popularity", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 79 (1985), pp 334-358. Specifically, one of their specifications found 7% and 9% for crises and diplomacy, respectively; another found 6% and 4%. They kept Kernell's fixed five month
work by Ostrom and Simon (joined by Marra) found something similar.\textsuperscript{11} Looking specifically at uses of force, they report that "major" uses of force in "major" regions (basically, Europe and the Middle East) provide 5.4% increases to presidents, lasting a fairly long time: they report a half-life of nearly nine months. Finally, Brace and Hinckley also reported that use of force rallies led to increases in approval of 6%.\textsuperscript{12}

Benefits found by these early studies — 5% or more, lasting several months — would be useful to Presidents, but would not turn around major failures. Watergate cost Nixon 20% or more, Vietnam cost Johnson 20%, and even an increase of 5% would have made little difference to Carter or Bush as they approached elections with approval ratings in the 30s. A boost of that size might make the difference with a close election approaching, though, or tip the margins in a fight with Congress. Marra, Ostrom, and Simon explicitly state that their results demonstrate that Presidents have an attractive opportunity to increase their support through uses of force — a better opportunity than they have from any other mechanism.\textsuperscript{13}

Research in the last decade challenges these earlier studies, arguing that the benefits of using force are lower, even non-existent. Some observers warned that the conventional wisdom decay, but modeled it as exponential rather than linear. Ostrom & Simon's crisis list include some prominent uses of force but excluded others (e.g., Iran hostage rescue attempt or any escalatory moves in Vietnam), some crises short of force (e.g., Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia), and Sputnik; diplomatic events included most but not all US/Soviet summits (not Helsinki 1975 or Vienna 1978), some but not all arms control developments (no Test Ban Treaty, for example), some but not all Vietnam peace developments (Nixon's "Vietnamization" plan in November 1969 included, but not the "peace is at hand" announcement in the fall of 1972, or Johnson's Manila Summit or bombing halt.).

\textsuperscript{11} Robin Marra et. al., "Foreign Policy and Presidential Popularity", \textit{Journal of Conflict Resolution}, vol. 34 (1990), pp 588-623
\textsuperscript{13} Marra et. al., "Foreign Policy and Presidential Popularity", p. 618. Their discussion is stated in terms of "foreign events" generally, but since their detailed results show that diplomatic developments and foreign travel actually hurt presidents, the "opportunities" they see must come from uses of force.
of automatic, significant rallies overstated presidential gains,\textsuperscript{14} but the first quantitative challenge
to the "significant rally" position was by Lian and Oneal (1993),\textsuperscript{15} who claimed that on average,
uses of force brought about no change in presidential ratings, and that even the most significant
events led to only a 2 or 3\% boost. This finding was reinforced by subsequent studies by Oneal
and other coauthors: Oneal and Bryan found an average increase of 1\% from foreign policy
crises;\textsuperscript{16} Oneal and Baker find zero effect on average from militarized international disputes, and
an average loss of 1\% for MIDs in which force is used.\textsuperscript{17} The Oneal studies modeled uses of
force effects as functions of domestic and international variables, and while they did find some
systematic variation, all claim that even in the best circumstances presidents have little to gain –
5\% at the maximum.\textsuperscript{18}

Other authors in the past decade have come to similar conclusions. James and Rioux
(1998) used the same explanatory variables as Oneal to examine the public reaction to crises, but
they modeled approval as a full time series rather than looking only at point-to-point changes.
They too find essentially no effect (and a smaller effect when force is used than when it is merely
threatened).\textsuperscript{19} DeRouen (1995) also found only small increases in approval from uses of force.


\textsuperscript{15} Lian et. al., "Presidents, the Use of Force, and Public Opinion"

\textsuperscript{16} John R Oneal and Anna Lillian Bryan, "The Rally Round the Flag Effect in U.S. Foreign Policy Crises", Political Behavior, vol. 17 (1995), pp 379-401. This study used the Brecher & Wilkenfield ICB dataset for their events; not all crises involve uses of force, and not all uses of force counted as crises.


\textsuperscript{18} Baker et. al., "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership: The Nature and Origins of the Rally 'Round the Flag Effect", p. 681. For MIDs including uses of force, the gain would be even smaller.

Burbach (1995) agreed with the O'Neal studies that the benefits from uses of force defined broadly are quite small, but disagreed that the maximum possible benefits are so low.\textsuperscript{20} Most recently, Baum reports an average effect of about 4%.\textsuperscript{21} Of these later studies only Burbach made estimates of rally duration; he estimates half lives on the order of two or three months.

Substantively, such small gains from the use of force would imply that presidents have little incentive to wage war for diversionary purposes; the difference from earlier studies and the conventional is important.

\textit{The Rally is in the Details: Understanding Contradictory Findings on the Use of Force}

Methodologically, there are several reasons why the two groups of studies produced different results. Details of data selection and statistical methods seem to drive the differences between different authors’ findings, but in the literature so far there has been little attempt to compare studies to understand why the results are contradictory and which are more believable. Therefore, the following sub-section explains and evaluates the methods of the major studies; while this is more detail than necessary to follow the chapter’s argument, this debate is in need of some stock-taking, and it may help place this study’s results in context.

First, the pre-1990s studies used ad hoc sets of potential events, which could have introduced selection bias –memorable international events might have memorable in part because their effect on the president. Relatively rally events were included, typically an event every two or three years. In contrast, the recent studies have used comprehensive and independent data-
sets, with much larger numbers of events: Lian and Oneal included 102 uses of force between 1950 and 1984 (3 per year – based on Blechman & Kaplan); Baker and Oneal 136 militarized disputes from 1933 to 1992 (2.3/year, based on the MID dataset). The datasets are improvement over ad hoc selection, but have their own drawbacks. The Blechman-Kaplan events, for example (used by Marra, et al; Lian and Oneal; Oneal, Lian, and Joyner; Baum), exclude “martial” uses of force – as the title, Force Without War implies, thus excluding some operations like the hostage rescue attempt in Iran – or the Korean or Persian Gulf Wars, for that matter.\textsuperscript{22} The MID dataset includes many disputes with only a very small degree of militarization; it is not a good proxy for the use of force. MIDs also exclude many uses of force that were not interstate disputes, either because they were against non-state actors or took place with the consent of the host countries (e.g., Dominican Republic 1965).\textsuperscript{23} The ICB crisis dataset of course includes many crises in which no military force was used; it also leaves out a few cases where force was used. Additionally, the “U.S. Response” dates in the ICB dataset do not always match the data of the principal use of force involved in that crisis (e.g., the “Persian Gulf War” takes place in

\textsuperscript{22} According to the Blechman-Kaplan criteria the 1991 Gulf War would be excluded: the U.S. was no longer attempting to coerce Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait, it was actively ejecting and destroying Iraqi forces. In many cases, there were “political” uses of force that were contemporaneous with military operations. Blechman and Kaplan do not include the Korean War, for example, but do include U.S. deployments to Europe in July 1950 that were mean to deter Soviet exploitation of the conflict (event labeled “Korean War: Security of Western Europe”). Thus, they do have an event that occurs on the date of the Korean War, but, it does not have the characteristics of the Korean War. The June 1950 event is coded as a small, non-combat event happening in Europe. This is a potentially significant problem with studies that rely not only on Force Without War for variables describing uses of force (e.g., Marra, Ostrom, and Simon 1990; Lian and Oneal 1993).

\textsuperscript{23} For a critique of MIDs in particular, and also Blechman-Kaplan in the context of U.S. use of force studies, see Benjamin O. Fordham and Christopher C. Sarver, "The Militarized International Disputes Dataset and United States Uses of Force", International Studies Quarterly, vol. 45 (2001), pp 455-466. A similar critique of Blechman-Kaplan also appeared in an earlier conference paper by Burbach (1995). Burbach, David T., "Foreign Policy Preferences, Presidential Approval, and the Use of Force". It is worth noting that these datasets are quite useful and well done for their intended purposes, but they are not adequate as-is for the use of force questions being addressed here.

Burbach, Diversionary Temptations
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October, 1990 according to the ICB).\textsuperscript{24} None of these datasets included intra-war escalation; wars and other conflicts are single-point events.\textsuperscript{25}

A broader problem with the Blechman-Kaplan and MID datasets is that they are too inclusive: they include uses of force sufficiently small and unnoticed that one would not expect a public reaction to them: many of the 102 events in the Lian and Oneal (1993) study did not even receive a single mention on the front page of the New York Times, for example. The MID dataset also includes many minor disputes. Such small events may be uses of force, but are the politically relevant uses of force? In one sense casting a wide net does make sense in order to find a threshold level for an event to have any impact at all. On the other hand, it is also important to know how the public reacts to uses of force that are visible and politically relevant. The inclusion of invisible events would bias towards zero any effect from the prominent events. Since a president seeking to divert would have some control over the scale of the operation and especially over its visibility a threshold would not be difficult to meet.

The poll-to-poll approach of the Oneal and other recent studies suffers from the problems identified in chapter 3: failure to control for background trends, no adjustment for time periods between events and subsequent polls, greater susceptibility to sampling error, and greater sensitivity to choosing an incorrect date for a given event. The date sensitivity is particularly important, since the onset of events in the datasets is not always the same as the date of the most

\textsuperscript{24} Michael Brecher and Jonathon Wilkenfield, \textit{A Study of Crisis} (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1997), p. 734. To be fair, the studies using the crisis dataset do not claim that it is identical to a strict use-of-force list; James and Rioux in fact argue that crises are more appropriate candidates for rallying. James et. al., "International Crises and Linkage Politics: The Experiences of the United States, 1953-1994". Their point has some merit; the choice of crises or uses of force as a dependent variable seems reasonable to base on substantive interest, and the focus in this study is on wars and other uses of the military.

\textsuperscript{25} The MID dataset is the worst on this count, since wars do get collapsed into a single dispute. Blechman-Kaplan include some of the escalations and expansions in Vietnam (e.g., the December 1972 “Christmas” bombing of Vietnam, since it was a discrete “political” use of force). ICB is the best on this front; it breaks down the Korean War into distinct phases, and includes many of the Vietnam events as distinct crises (e.g., invasions of Cambodia and Laos, the May 1992 North Vietnamese offensive).
prominent use of force.\textsuperscript{26} The approach also gives us no data on the \textit{duration} of any benefits from uses of force, which is also important to assessing their political relevance.

The bottom line is that the earlier view that any and all uses of force lead to significant gains for Presidents overstated the case: not all uses of the military are popular and many are not even noticed. Looking at the few dozen largest events though, it seems clear that the O'Neal studies understate the potential gains. Their models predict that under the best possible circumstances a President will gain no more than 5\% from a use of force. In practice, every president since Roosevelt has experienced at a “rally” of more than 5\%, and 10 of those 12 experienced one greater than 10\%. Those large boosts may simply be statistical outliers, but it is not likely. There may well be systematic differences between those outliers and their less popular cousins, differences that could be anticipated by presidents.

\textit{Hypothesis 2: Uses of force produce large benefits, under the right conditions}

The next sections review our knowledge about the variables that influence public response to presidential uses of force, organized around the hypotheses developed in chapter 2. Specifically, the relevant hypothesis is H2, that uses of force only provide significant benefits under specific conditions that are rare or difficult to manipulate, with its sub-hypotheses (see Table 4-2) identifying those prospective conditions.

\textsuperscript{26} The MID dataset is particularly bad in this regard, the ICB crisis data less so, while Blechman-Kaplan matches fairly well with the dates that one would normally consider to be the key date in the initiation of a conflict. Even so, the single-point method is vulnerable to errors of just a few days in cases when a pol. takes place close to the date of an event.
H2-A: Media Content

A significant amount of research already argues that the response to uses of force is highly conditioned by the quantity of media coverage they receive. At the very least, heavy media coverage is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a large, positive “rally” to take place.

The O'Neal studies as well as James and Rioux all found that the more coverage in the New York Times led to significantly higher average changes in. Merely distinguishing between one front page story or headline and none may be too low a threshold, though. Events that receive a total of one or two front page stories in the Times have little noticeable effect on approval. The most significant events, such as the Gulf War or Cuban Missile Crisis, will average 2 to 3 front page stories per day for two weeks or more, so it is possible the existing findings understate the importance of media coverage.

H2-B: Success of Military Action

The traditional view was that foreign conflict would rally the public around the president regardless of success or failure. Early use-of-force effect studies did not test that proposition, though more recent ones have. Brody, for example, claims that actual outcomes are relatively unimportant, what matters instead is the framing of the president’s actions: did the president manage the conflict well even though a bad outcome was unavoidable, or did presidential in-

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28 Lee, "Rallying 'Round the Flag: Foreign Policy Events and Presidential Popularity" is a partial exception; he doubted that rallying was as automatic as described and suggested the public reacted to positive or negative information about each event, though he did not test specific variables.

Burbach, Diversionary Temptations
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competence lead to failure (or even a success only through luck)?\footnote{Brody, Assessing the President. For example, the treatment of the Iranian hostage rescue attempt in the spring of 1980 was treated positively at first—a good decision, but a failure due to unfortunate accidents. Later in the year it was viewed quite negatively, portrayed as tragic proof of the damage done by Carter’s “neglect” of the military.} Two of the O'Neal studies tested the OUTCOME variable from the ICB crisis data set, and both found small and statistically insignificant effects.\footnote{That null finding might be due in part to their operationalization of the variable: Brecher and Wilkenfield use four categories to describe outcomes (victory, stalemate, compromise, defeat), which were coded 4 though 1 in those two studies.} James and Rioux also used the ICB outcomes. In their regressions they gave each of the four categories its own dummy variable, none of them had a large effect. None of the variables was significant at a 95\% level, though all had the expected signs (e.g., positive for Victory).

**H2-C: Opinion Leadership by Elites**

The media priming model predicts that cues provided by opinion leaders should have a strong effect on how the public responds to presidential actions. The most thorough investigation of this prediction has been done by Richard Brody, whose book Assessing the President argues that the focus and framing of news stories is the principal driver of Presidential approval. He found that media variables outperform economic indicators like unemployment for explaining changes in approval, in general and during “rallies”.\footnote{That null finding might be due in part to their operationalization of the variable: Brecher and Wilkenfield use four categories to describe outcomes (victory, stalemate, compromise, defeat), which were coded 4 though 1 in those two studies.} Brody found that presidential ratings after a major event tracked media coverage well: the more support expressed, the larger the boost, and when criticism started to appear, presidential ratings fell.

\footnote{Brody, Assessing the President. If the media content method is better than others, \textit{why} is it not typically used in studies of Presidential approval? The answer is a lack of data; the only such dataset is the one Brody compiled himself, covering from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. Expanding it requires coding the content of network news and major newspapers on a daily basis, a monumental task compared to using the macroeconomic and other indicators that do a reasonable job of predicting approval.}
Other recent studies have also looked at the impact of Congressional support. Specifically, two of the Oneal studies find that the opposition party reaction in Congress has the expected effect, but fairly weakly (making a difference of about +/− 1.5%, and not with 95% significance. The small impact seems surprising, especially in light of Brody’s findings. Two issues could be the general problems with the Oneal studies — use of the Blechman-Kaplan data, and the point-to-point comparisons only (which could be especially significant for Congressional reaction, which might take some time to become evident). They also only code a position being present if it is reported on the front page of the NY Times, which might be too restrictive. Combining opposition party support and opposition in one variable with equal (but opposite) effects might not be the best strategy, since bipartisan support ought to be more meaningful than routine opposition. No published study has looked at the impact of a President’s own party on use of force reactions, or of the position of prominent media commentary.

H2-D: Public Preferences and U.S. Interests

Several studies have used a range of measures to see if the stakes for the United States affect public support for the president’s use of force. Marra, Ostrom, and Simon, looked at rally response as a function of the geographic location of the conflict, though with a relatively simple distinction between “major” and “peripheral” regions, where major includes Europe, the

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32 Oneal et. al., "The Rally Round the Flag Effect in U.S. Foreign Policy Crises"; Baker et. al., "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership: The Nature and Origins of the Rally 'Round the Flag Effect". A somewhat stronger effect was found, with statistical significance by the 1993 Lian and Oneal study, but according to the Baker and Oneal article there were a few (3 of 28) coding decisions in the 1993 study that were in error; with those corrections, the effect of the Congressional opposition declines.

33 The page one rule is not unreasonable, but it is also possible that Congressional reaction will get more notice around the country than would other news that only appears in the interior of the Times. For example, local media might cover the reaction of their own Senators and Congressmen.

34 Brody did include support and criticism of the president in his study, and found that editorial pages had far less impact on approval ratings than did Congressional support or news stories.
Middle East and North Africa, the Caribbean and Central America; peripheral includes all of Asia, Africa, and South America. They found a 6% boost in major regions vs. 0% in peripheral regions.\(^{35}\) In contrast, Oneal and Bryan; Oneal, Lian, and Joyner; and James and Rioux all found region to be unimportant.\(^{36}\) Substantively, it is difficult to know precisely what to make of the major/minor distinction – are the assignments of areas to each category fixed over time? Should location really determine stakes (e.g., intervention in a European civil war, vs. attacking anti-American terrorist camps in Africa)? It also does not seem reasonable to consider all Asian conflicts peripheral while the entire Caribbean was “major.”\(^{37}\)

In addition to the region distinction, studies using crises as their unit of analysis have tested whether the severity of the crisis as coded in the ICB dataset (a measure that supposedly captures the magnitude of U.S. interests at stake) or the participation of the Soviet Union in the crisis affected the public’s response. In general they have found that neither variable had a significant, consistent impact.\(^{38}\)

Only one study has tested the hypothesis that goal of U.S. intervention will affect the public response. Oneal, Lian, and Joyner (1996) followed Jentleson’s example\(^{39}\) and divided for-

\(^{35}\) Marra et al., "Foreign Policy and Presidential Popularity", p. 606.
\(^{37}\) Almost all observers would agree that Europe is important, and that at least in the last 40-50 years so is the Middle East. Asia in the sense of Japan and China (but not Southeast Asia) has long been included on the lists of geostrategists, from George Kennan’s vision of containment to modern advocates of “selective engagement.” During the first half of the Cold War many Republicans argued that Asia was more important than Europe.
eign policy crises into two categories: those seeking “foreign policy restraint”, and those aimed at “internal political change”. They found that the foreign policy restraint crises were indeed more popular than the internal change crises, with an average 3.8% difference between them (just significant at a 95% level) – meaningful, though not large.\(^{40}\) No study has examined whether the special case of protecting Americans shows a different response, and no study has examined conflicts after 1988, when a much larger number of “internal change” conflicts took place.\(^{41}\) An earlier conference paper by Burbach also tested this proposition, and found a somewhat stronger variation by purpose of a conflict.\(^{42}\)

**H2-E: Information and Surprise**

Hypothesis H2-E predicts that responses to uses of force will be more positive when a president behaves in unexpected ways, or when surprising new international situations emerge.

To date, no one has systematically examined the either variant of the this “surprise” hypothesis: that changes in approval will be greater when the media had not already been paying covering a particular, or when an action represents a change of policy or other unexpected action by a president. Brody does make what amounts to the surprise argument about several cases, such as the Mayaguez rescue (showing unexpected toughness by Ford) and the Tet Offen-

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\(^{41}\) In addition, I would question some of Oneal, et al.’s coding decisions. Several of their Vietnam crises, for example, were coded as “internal change” (e.g., the initiation of air strikes after Pleiku). Presumably this is because they considered the U.S. goal in the spring of 1965 to be protecting the South Vietnamese government from indigenous rebels, but while most observers today could accept that classification, at the time what was being strongly emphasized to the American public was the guerillas in the south were not indigenous and locally supported but were organized and controlled by Hanoi (and ultimately, Moscow/Beijing). In retrospect one could consider the entire conflict to be a Vietnamese civil war, but that is not how it was being portrayed to the public, or even how U.S. officials saw it at that time.

\(^{42}\) Burbach, David T., "Foreign Policy Preferences, Presidential Approval, and the Use of Force".
sive (contradicting the White House view on progress in the war). However, none of the quantitative studies have included measures of change in news focus, or any indicator of actions which were changes of policy by presidents or where outcomes were dramatically different than commonly expected.

H2-F: Rational Expectations and Discounting Uses of Force

Hypothesis H2-F predicts that responses to uses of force will be less positive when the public would expect a president to be looking for opportunities to divert (e.g., election, low approval, scandals, recession), and this possibility has received some attention in the past.

Most authors predicted the opposite from H2-F: they expected that rallies should grow smaller as the base level of approval grows higher, since there will be a smaller and smaller pool of potential converts. Empirically, several of the Oneal studies as well as the recent Baum study claim that this is the case. Two Oneal studies find that rallies decline by about 1%-2% for a 10% increase in base approval, though the use of immediate pre-crisis approval as their base level is a potential problem. The Baum claim is troublesome, since it does not follow from his reported statistical results.

43 Brody, Assessing the President
44 Edwards made this point in critiquing the traditional view that “rallies” were always positive and substantial. Edwards, Presidential Approval
45 Oneal et. al., "Are the American People 'Pretty Prudent'? Public Responses to U.S. Uses of Force, 1950-1988"; Baker et. al., "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership: The Nature and Origins of the Rally 'Round the Flag Effect'. A potential problem is that since they look only at the poll prior to each event for the “base” approval. If in a subset of crises presidential support has already started to increase before the “trigger date” used in the ICB (i.e., the rally starts with some event prior to the ICB crisis date) and therefore increases little more after the ICB date, that could create a spurious correlation between higher base approval and smaller changes post-crisis.
46 Baum, "The Constituent Foundations of the Rally-Round-The-Flag Phenomenon", see pp 290-291. Although he puts great substantive importance on the negative relationship between base approval and rallies, none of his regressions model changes as a function of approval. It seems to be an inference from his finding that larger rallies occur among presidential opponents (who start with low approval) than presidential partisans. Worse yet, the functional form of his model predicts larger rallies as base approval increases, contrary his argument. Baum's dependent variable is the change in the log of approval; the effect of a rally event is a fixed increase in that rate of change. This
Several studies suggest that rallies grow smaller as elections approach, significantly smaller during wartime, and have an unclear relationship with economic conditions. Baker and O'Neal found that rallies were smaller as elections approached, consistent with the rational expectations prediction of discounting shows of force before elections; no other study has looked at the issue.⁴⁷ All of the O'Neal studies find significantly less positive reactions to the use of force during wars – although the magnitude of this effect is much smaller in the one study that includes the Gulf War.⁴⁸

Results on economic conditions are mixed. Baker and O'Neal found a positive correlation between the current business conditions index and the reactions to militarized disputes (i.e., more confidence, larger rallies), though they suspect it is too correlated to prior approval to be meaningful. Baum, in contrast, finds higher inflation correlates with larger rallies. The theoretical prediction is also unclear: when economic conditions are poor, “changing the subject” should be very helpful to presidents, but public might also discount uses of force during economic bad times.

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means that the effect of rallies monotonically increases with base approval. For example, if approval starts at 30%, its log is -1.20. With an increase of 0.05 (the mean rally for Republican presidents, p. 287), that becomes -1.15, or an approval of 31.5% (a 1.5% increase). With a base approval of 80%, the log is -0.22, plus 0.05 is -0.17, for an approval of 84% (a 4% increase).

⁴⁷ Baker et. al., "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership: The Nature and Origins of the Rally 'Round the Flag Effect". Using a variable of the number of months to the next presidential election, they predict that the response to militarized disputes will be 1%-4% higher at the beginning of term than just before an election; the variable was significant in most but not all of their specifications.

⁴⁸ Lian et. al., "Presidents, the Use of Force, and Public Opinion"; O'Neal et. al., "The Rally Round the Flag Effect in U.S. Foreign Policy Crises"; O'Neal et. al., "Are the American People 'Pretty Prudent'? Public Responses to U.S. Uses of Force, 1950-1988"; Baker et. al., "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership: The Nature and Origins of the Rally 'Round the Flag Effect". The 1990s studies all find that war has an effect of -3% to -5% and is strongly significant – one of the very strongest effects they find, in fact. Their observation is based on Korea and Vietnam. Baker and O'Neal, using data through 1992, find a only a ~1% effect from an ongoing war. It should be noted that for the reasons described earlier, the datasets being used often leave out escalations within an ongoing war, i.e., these numbers mostly measure the effect of an ongoing war on reactions to the use of force in other conflicts, rather than dramatic changes in the existing conflict.
Given the contradictory positions in the literature and the questions raised by various methodological issues, the "rally effect" is ripe for re-examination. The following section explains the design of this study and the selection and coding of events.

3. Research Methods and Data Sources

This section describes the process that was used to conduct the analysis that follows in section 4. An overview of the research design is given first; details on the statistical approach can be found in chapter 3. The principles and practice used in selecting events to include as uses of force is then described, followed by a description of the variables used in the models and the rules used to code them for each event.

The design of the study is straightforward: in order to test the hypotheses regarding the political benefits of using force, the changes in presidential approval following uses of force were measured. As described in chapter 3, this was done by modeling presidential approval ratings from 1953 to 2000 as a function of economic and other control variables, with uses of force creating shocks that deviate from the background level and then gradually decay. This provides an estimate of the average magnitude and duration of changes following uses of force—a direct measure of the political benefits deriving from them.

The sub-hypotheses on conditions that affect the response to uses of force were tested by modeling the changes produced by uses of force as a function of variables, which operationalize the condition to be tested. When those variables have statistically significant effects, we can infer that the associated hypothesis is valid. In all cases only the initial size of the shock varied.
as a function of variables; once initiated that shock decayed in a simple exponential manner, though the overall decay rate was estimated in each regression.\textsuperscript{49}

While this design has advantages over simple poll-to-poll comparisons immediately before/after a use of force, it still has limitations. Some uses of force last a week or less and can be modeled as point events, but others continue for long periods of time. In other cases, it is not clear precisely what the date of a use of force – or how many should be counted should be when a series of small, discrete events takes place. More broadly, this study will not capture increases in approval caused by general threat inflation or diplomatic crisis that do not escalate to the use of force. The analysis will also not measure political gains from the use of force that are not reflected in approval ratings. For example, an intervention might be used to end a dispute that is not harming a president at the time, but that the White House expects could be used as a negative issue in a future reelection campaign.

The remainder of this methods section addresses two issues: the selection of uses of force for inclusion in a dataset, and the operationalization of variables and procedures used to code each event on those variables. The discussion of event selection goes into some detail on both the methods used here and those of previous studies, since the question of events to examine turns out to be the key source of differences among studies.

\textsuperscript{49} What this means is that no testing was done to see if different factors caused rallies to decay at different rates – for example, if the effect of Congressional criticism was not to reduce the initial size of the shock, but to make it decline more rapidly. Nor was there an effort to model the fine-scale dynamics of each event, such as distinguishing between a use of force on the 20\textsuperscript{th} of a month, with criticism not appearing until the 25\textsuperscript{th}, vs. criticism beginning immediately, or not for 10 days. The polling data simply do not have the resolution to make that possible; until the 1980s there was an average of one poll per month, in the 1990s and later about two per month. With rallies only lasting a few months, there is not enough data to do detailed modeling of the dynamics overall, though one might be able to so for specific, prominent events in recent years given the proliferation of polls (e.g., during the Kosovo War in 1999, if one combined the polls from different survey firms there would probably be one or two polls per week, and one could make some reasonable adjustments for differences between firms).
Selection of Events

Previous studies of the effects of uses of force have relied either on their own selection of events, or have used one of three generally available datasets: Militarized International Disputes, International Crisis Behavior, or Blechman and Kaplan's Force Without War. Unfortunately, none of these datasets is fully appropriate for the task of measuring the response to uses of force. The following section summarizes the shortcomings of those datasets, describes the procedures used to create an original dataset for this study, and then details the creation of variables relevant to the hypotheses developed in chapter 2 and the rules used to code them for each event.

Table 4-3, below, summarizes the key problems with each of the existing datasets. Most of these problems were discussed earlier in the review of the scholarly literature (see section 2, 2nd subhead). To varying degrees, the datasets suffer from including events that are irrelevant, excluding events that should belong, lumping too many uses of force together, and counting something other than the prominent U.S. use of force as the "date" of the event.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4-3: Problems with Use of Force Datasets</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Militarized International Disputes</strong> (Jones, Bremer, and Singer, 1996)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Includes many events where U.S. was a participant in a dispute that was militarized by one or more other participants, but the US itself did not make any use of its military.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dispute start date is often weeks or months before the principal U.S. use of force takes place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Many disputes are relatively obscure, receiving little publicity at the time they occurred</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Discrete uses of force within a dispute are lumped into single events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Excludes uses of force where the targets are non-state actors (terrorists, drug cartels, rebels being hit with permission of the host government)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coverage to 1992</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **International Crisis Behavior** (Brecher & Wilkenfield, 1997) |
| • Crisis start date is often weeks or months before the principal U.S. use of force takes place |
| • Discrete uses of force within a crisis are sometimes lumped into single events (though Vietnam and Korea are broken down into a series of shorter crises). |
| • Includes crises where no force was used by the U.S. (e.g., Suez 1956, Angolan civil war, 1975) |
| • Does not include non-crisis uses of force (e.g., most humanitarian operations). |
| • Coverage to 1992 |

| **Blechman-Kaplan** (Blechman and Kaplan, 1978; Zelikow, 1986) |
| • Many uses of force are extremely obscure, receiving no publicity and sometimes even being secret at the time they occurred (BK used government archives, not contemporary media accounts) |
| • “Martial” uses of force are excluded (i.e., use of force to achieve aims directly, not to influence political decisions) |
| • Some uses of force are cooperative, like port visits to signal the improvement of relations with a country. |
| • Many uses of force are symbolic, like sending a carrier group off the coast of an unfriendly country, but with no prospect of combat occurring. |
| • Time coverage is only up to 1984, with ad hoc extensions since (primary coverage to 1976, Zelikow undertook a systematic extension in 1984). |

| **Fordham and Sarver** (Fordham and Sarver, 2001) |
| • Includes many relatively obscure events |
| • Includes cooperative events |
| • Does not include intrawar escalation |
| • Coverage is 1870-1995 |
The Militarized International Dispute dataset is the least appropriate choice. Fordham and Sarver have analyzed the problems with the MID dataset at length, but fundamentally there is too little connection between U.S. uses of force and “militarized disputes”, and too little connection between the onset of disputes and the actual dates when force was employed. This International Crisis Behavior dataset is a more plausible starting point; one could argue that crises are likely rally points with or without the use of force. For substantive reasons though, and because the variables that affect support during a crisis may not be identical to those that operate with uses of force, the focus here will strictly be on uses of force (though the effect of crises without force will be included in the following chapter, on alternative presidential actions).

The Blechman-Kaplan dataset comes closest to capturing the desired dependent variable: the initiation of uses of force. Limitations of that dataset argue against using it as-is, however. First, coverage extends only to 1984 (the original data to 1976 only, in fact). Conceptually there are some problems as well, such as the exclusion of “martial” uses of force – i.e., when force is being used directly to achieve aims directly, such as ejecting Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1991. The dataset also includes “peaceful” shows of force, such as joint maneuvers to signal increased cooperation with an ally. The attempt to be comprehensive means that the Force Without War dataset includes events that were invisible when they happened. From 1953 to 1984, Blechman and Kaplan (plus Zelikow) identify 261 uses of force, 9 per year, even with “martial” uses excluded. Most events did not receive a single mention on the front page of the

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51 Despite the problems one rally effect study did use MID as the unit of analysis, oddly, the most recent: Baker and O'Neal (2001). MID’s have been commonly used by studies search for diversionary uses of force by the United States, however.

52 Fordham et. al., "The Militarized International Disputes Dataset and United States Uses of Force". In even greater detail, the documentation for their own use of force dataset describes all cases where a use of force as they have identified it is associated with an MID, and discusses the MID’s for which no use of force was associated.
New York Times, many were not mentioned in the major media at all, and some were actually secret when they took place.\textsuperscript{53} A president attempting diversion would not keep the use of force meant to divert a secret, so including such events in a measure of the potential gains from uses of force would be inappropriate.

A final dataset became available as this study was already in progress. Fordham and Sarver made a dataset generally available in 2002 that is a significant enhancement of the Blechman-Kaplan data. Fordham and Sarver extended coverage to 1995 (and back to 1870), crosschecked MIDs against the Blechman-Kaplan events, and added in the "martial" uses of force that Blechman and Kaplan excluded. While a much better starting point than Force Without War, their data still includes a many obscure or cooperative events, and leaves out intrawar escalation.\textsuperscript{54} As a practical matter, their data did not become available until the dataset for this study had already been compiled. Therefore, the Fordham and Sarver data was not used directly by itself or as a starting point for gathering new data, but it did serve as a useful, independent check on the decisions made here, as detailed later in this section.

The approach chosen for this study was to create an original dataset of uses of force, starting with the Blechman-Kaplan data but correcting its limitations. The criteria for inclusion are that an event had to be visible, dramatic, and involve the actual or reasonably likely use of military force. Those criteria were operationalized in the following ways:

\textsuperscript{53} Some were made public after they took place, others were identified by Blechman and Kaplan from official documents such as unit logs, deployment orders, etc.

\textsuperscript{54} The data was initially described in Fordham et. al., "The Militarized International Disputes Dataset and United States Uses of Force". As of early 2003, the dataset was available at \url{http://www.albany.edu/~fordham/Data.html}; it is not yet in ICPSR or other archives. It does seem that Fordham and Sarver included fewer very small and/or cooperative uses of force in their 1985-1995 extension than Blechman and Kaplan did for their years of coverage, probably because Fordham and Sarver rely on journalistic sources (NYT and Washington Post, Facts on File, Kenneth's Contemporary Archives, etc) and did not use the detailed government documents that Blechman and Kaplan did, such as fleet logs and deployment orders. For the purposes here that is irrelevant, but for some uses the data may not be fully comparable across time.
1. **Visibility:** Events had to receive at least five front page stories within a two week period in the *New York Times*.\(^{55}\)

A simple comparison of events and approval changes suggested that events receiving one or two front-page stories in the *New York Times* (the test used in most of the Oneal studies) almost never had a plausible impact on approval; they also almost never merited editorial or Congressional comment. The News Interest Index published by the Pew Center The People and The Press showed that non-front page stories receiving get almost no attention from the public.\(^{56}\) Five stories over two weeks seemed a reasonable threshold at which events might register with the public. For perspective, the Haiti invasion in 1994 generated 27 stories in 14 days; the Kosovo War nearly 50.\(^{57}\)

Is the *New York Times* an appropriate measure of visibility? It is a practical measure at least; it covers many years and its index is ready availability and highly detailed. From the 1950s through at least the 1980s, the *Times* is probably a good proxy for general media exposure: studies show the *Times* front page is a good indicator of network news attention, and of what na-

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\(^{55}\) The number was determined from various years of the *New York Times Index*. Page 1 stories were counted, as well as lead stories in the Sunday opinion section, since this tends to be a good marker for topics being discussed on political talk shows, editorial pages, etc. Generally, the Index groups stories on a given conflict under the major heading for the country where the fighting is taking place (e.g., “Vietnam”, “Iraq”, though sometimes other headings for actions against non-state actors or outside national boundaries, such as “International Terrorism”, or “Ships and Shipping” for the *Megavac* rescue).


\(^{57}\) Since the *New York Times Index* is not a strict and simple story listing (it tries to be somewhere between a bibliographic list and a daily digest), it is possible that on some occasions multiple index entries refer to the same story, where that story addresses multiple topics. Nevertheless, it is still probably a reasonable indication of daily news focus. It seems that there has been a slight upward trend in the maximum number of index entries; the most prominent events in the 1950s generated 30+ entries, vs. 50 in the 1990s. On the other hand, given the increasing power of television, even if recent years of the Times are overstated, overall those numbers probably understate the change in media impact over the decades.
tional/international stories are picked up by smaller papers. Consultation of the Vanderbilt Television News Archive demonstrated that stories that received front page treatment in the Times were generally mentioned by at least one of the networks; some non-front page stories even made it into broadcasts.

The use of the New York Times in recent years is more problematic. Changes in technology and the media business may be weakening the relationship between major newspaper coverage and coverage in other media, though whether NYT would over or understate public exposure is uncertain. Trends making the Times overstate exposure to use of force stories are the large decline in foreign news coverage by other media; the overall decline in the fraction of Americans who follow the news at all; the shift among those who do towards local television (now the modal news source for the public, and one that majorities say they trust over newspapers); and the trend towards “narrowcasting” and “pull” vs. “push” news experiences (i.e., individuals can watch cable TV niche news, or use the internet to assemble their own news stream).

Countering those trends is the fact that when television does pay attention to war, the exposure it can give is overwhelming. Banner headlines and dominance of the front page was the most the New York Times could do for a stories in 1953, and remains so in 2003. In contrast, television offers multiple channels of round-the-clock war coverage live from the battlefield in high quality video – accessible while at work or school via the internet. The greater need of

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59 Broadcast indexes were browsed around the date of a selection of events that received low NYT coverage. The Vanderbilt archive itself is not a good replacement for the NYT Index, as coverage only extends back to 1968, and the archive does not provide as much content detail.
60 If newspaper coverage were directly proportional in some sense to television coverage, NYT stories could still be a good proxy. Unfortunately, newspapers seem to saturate long before television does – making it hard to tell the difference between an event that only dominates the front page, and one that dominates the front page and receives

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television crews for official cooperation relative to print reporters might also tend to make television coverage less critical of interventions.\textsuperscript{61}

In short, it is not clear what effect these media changes are having: the NYT proxy might be under- or overestimating public exposure. One intriguing possibility is that these media changes will increase size of rallies. Exposure to foreign affairs is generally much lower than before, but the coverage of major military conflicts is much more intense, meaning there would be much sharper shifts in salience for the public. In any case, without a clear alternative in practical or theoretical terms, reliance on the newspaper index is a reasonable approach.

2. **Dramatic.** Events had to be sharply focused and represent a new or changed use of force, rather than more-of-same in an ongoing conflict.

Since the goal is to determine what sorts of gains Presidents might obtain from using force, the focus is on events that are likely to receive political notice: those which represent the initiation of new uses of force, or focused escalations in existing conflicts. The events chosen are ones where it is clear that an administration has done something (or had something done to it, in a few cases where the U.S. is the target of a foreign initiator) and the public has a chance to react to this action. It is at these times that the public is most likely to notice and to respond to presidential actions, and if a president were deliberately using force for diversionary purposes, the administration would want that event as visible and dramatic as possible.

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\textsuperscript{24} hour special programming. The Vanderbilt archive is not helpful here either, since it only records content of the regular evening news shows; it too will not distinguish between events that "merely" receive heavy coverage during nightly news, and those that become round-the-clock cable television events.

Events were included when they represented the initiation of a new conflict, or a dramatic change in an existing one that was presented at the time as such a change. For example, Nixon's expansion of the Vietnam War to Cambodia in May of 1970 is a good example: it was clearly a change, was a sharply focused change, and was presented by the President himself as such.

The most difficult applications of this rule came in deciding which uses of force to count during the extended conflicts short of war in Bosnia and Iraq. There was not a continuous, sustained use of force in these cases; instead incidents occurred sporadically (e.g., occasional air strikes on Iraqi radar sites). While some of these events did not meet the five NYT page 1 stories rule, others did due to ongoing coverage of the larger conflict (it would be hard to find a two week period in 1994-1995 when Bosnia was on the NYT front page less than half the time). When such uses of force had become routine, were not presented by the press or the president as being new, and did not generate more than five front-page stories focused specifically on the use of force, they were not included.

3. **Force or Reasonable Prospect of Force**: Events had to involve actual exchange of fire, direct involvement of American troops in combat support, or the deployment of forces into situations where hostilities are reasonably likely.

A definition of "force" had to be applied, but this is not as clear cut as it might sound. Cases that involve actual exchange of fire are easy to code, but there are grey areas. Imagine that Iraq had withdrawn its forces from Kuwait immediately after the U.S. deployed forces to Saudi Arabia in August of 1990. No shots would have been fired by the U.S., but it seems reasonable to consider that military force had been employed – the deployment to Saudi Arabia was not at all a routine maneuver or only a symbolic gesture, but entry into an potential wartime situation.

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Therefore, events were included if they involved large, non-routine, visible deployments of forces into situations where exchange of fire was reasonably likely. This category includes peace enforcement operations like Haiti or Bosnia where the U.S. took responsibility for security, though not observer missions in non-active combat zones, like the multinational force in the Sinai. Non-routine deployments into potential combat situations include the Desert Shield deployments, the October 1994 Iraqi war scare, the reflagging and escorting of tankers in the Persian Gulf in 1987, the May 1962 deployment of Marines into Thailand for potential fighting in Laos, and the 1961 Berlin Crisis.\textsuperscript{62} Finally, events were included if American forces were directly participating in combat operations with other parties, even if not pulling triggers themselves (e.g., the Taiwan Straits crises, Dien Bien Phu, the 1978 intervention to rescue Westerners in Zaire).\textsuperscript{63} These distinctions admittedly involve some subjective judgments, and some cases were not easy to code.\textsuperscript{64}

To implement these rules, the following procedure was used:

1. The “major” Blechman-Kaplan events between January 1953 and 1984 (the end of the dataset) were checked against the *New York Times Index*, and those not receiving five front-page stories were removed.

\textsuperscript{62} Not included are such things as major NATO exercises in Europe or US/Korean exercises, fleet activity off the coast of a country to whom the U.S. is “sending a message” – as with Libya, some Iraq and Iran cases, or the Taiwan Straits in March of 1996 (surprisingly, the 1996 crisis also fails the visibility test – despite the attention its gets from experts, at the time the U.S. involvement got little attention). In the 1961 Berlin Crisis, there were a number of instances of armed patrols from the West exercising “freedom of movement” in the eastern sector, and in one case two tanks facing off for hours with barrels pointing at each other.

\textsuperscript{63} This rule could also include U.S. operations with the South Vietnamese prior to 1965, but there was no focused point of escalation that would count as a dramatic event; if anything both Kennedy and Johnson chose to downplay American participation in combat operations.

\textsuperscript{64} The most difficult series of events are U.S. actions in Central America from 1981 to 1986. During that period the U.S. conducted a large number of military operations – naval displays, exercises with local militaries, etc., but never quite crossing into combat participation. The two events that come closest are the large scale exercises in early 1985 (Fordham’s #420), and in late 1986 (#441), when there were a few cases of U.S. helicopters carrying Honduran troops involved in a clash with Nicaraguan forces. The deployment of AWACS and F-15 fighters to Sudan during the Libya/Chad conflict of August 1983 is another borderline case that was decided not to count.
2. Of the remaining events, those meeting the criteria for being dramatic and involving hostilities or the prospect of hostilities were kept. Where the Blechman-Kaplan event referred to a use of force that was related to but tangential to the main conflict, the event was renamed to be consistent with the primary conflict.\(^{65}\)

3. "Martial" uses of force during the 1953-1984 period were added. This was done by consulting standard histories to identify significant U.S. uses of force that were not originally included in the Force Without War dataset.\(^{66}\)

4. Major intrawar escalation points were identified for Vietnam. Standard historical sources\(^{67}\) were consulted to identify key points of escalation in the war. There was significant agreement between sources on what those key points were. The expansion of the war to Cambodia and Laos in 1970 and 1971 are clear escalations; Fordham and Sarver also added them. Several other events emerged as major escalations from 1965 to 1970 which were not included in the other datasets.\(^{68}\)

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\(^{65}\) For example, the Blechman Kaplan entry for the start of the Korean War is actually "Korean War: Security of Western Europe". See discussion above.

\(^{66}\) Sources such as the Arthur Schlesinger, The Almanac of American History (Greenwich, CT: Brompton Books, 1993). Three such events were found other than those connected with Vietnam: the J2 shoot down, the Bay of Pigs Invasion, and the Iranian hostage rescue mission in 1980.


\(^{68}\) To review the Vietnam decisions, the March 1965 deployment of ground forces could be considered part of the earlier bombing campaign, but the introduction of regular ground forces was clearly seen by the administration and the media as a significant decision in its own right. The expansion of bombing to Hanoi was also significant, and a move the administration chose to highlight: Defense Secretary McNamara gave a press conference carried live on all the television networks to announce it, and it was the cover story of Time and Newsweek that week. Tet was a major escalation by the opposing side, but even if not by presidential choice it caused a dramatic refocusing of media attention on the war. The Son Tay raid received heavy press coverage at the time, and was clearly seen as something other than part of ongoing combat operations: the raid was the first (and only) major operation involving U.S. ground forces conducted on North Vietnamese territory, north of the DMZ.
5. Major uses of the military that met the visibility and force requirements between 1984 and 2000 were identified. This was done from general historical sources, and from consulting the “U.S. Military Operations” database maintained by GlobalSecurity.Org.69

6. Intra-conflict escalation points within the long-running disputes during the 1984-2000 were found by consulting the New York Times Index for the relevant conflict and identifying focal points.70

These procedures led to 66 uses of force being identified between 1953 and 2000.

These events are listed in Appendix A to this chapter. To put the distribution of these events over time into perspective, Figure 4-2 shows the number of events occurring per year.

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69 The database is available at http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/index.html. No author or date given (though the database contains information up through April 2003). GlobalSecurity.Org is a spinoff from the Federation of American Scientists, directed by John Pike. While the database goes back to World War II, its coverage is most extensive for the post 1985 period. For the 1990s, the database contains every named operation. A comparison with Fordham and Sarver’s data shows that virtually every use of force involving hostilities they include from 1988-1995 is included in the GlobalSecurity database (though sometimes the “operations” include multiple uses of force).

70 Most of these intra-dispute points are clear, since there was no ongoing combat; they stand out as individual events. In the case of Somalia, though, conflict was ongoing. The Somalia operation changed significantly in June of 1993, though, when U.N. and U.S. forces began actively pursuing warlord Aideed; press coverage at the time treated it as something new. The “Blackhawk Down” battle in October represented, like Tet, a dramatic escalation by the other side, which had similar focusing effects to major changes in U.S. policy.
Figure 4-2 - Uses of Force Per Year

As an independent check on event selection, Table 4-4 below lists the events added to Blechman-Kaplan, and compares them with choices made by Fordham and Sarver. Outside of the intrawar points, the only disagreement is on the U2 incident.\(^{71}\) There are many Fordham and Sarver events not included in my dataset, as expected since they are using much broader criteria. They find a total 359 events from 1953 to 1995. I consulted their events from 1984 to 2000 and found relatively few that could be considered significant uses of force (as opposed to symbolic displays) that were not included in my own dataset. Most discrepancies were related to Bosnia and Iraq, where ongoing but sporadic uses of force made it difficult to determine what should count as a new use of force and what was simply ongoing.

\(^{71}\) This seems reasonable to count as a use of force. An official American aircraft was deep over Soviet territory conducting espionage, something that could count as an act of war under international law. And there was an exchange of fire; the Soviets fired upon and downed the aircraft.

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Table 4-4: Comparison of Event Selection
(Burbach vs. Fordham)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uses of Force 1953-1984 Not Included in Blechman &amp; Kaplan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(events in italics also added by Fordham &amp; Sarver)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1960         U2 shot down over Soviet Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1961       Bay of Pigs invasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 1965         US Marines deployed to South Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun 1966         Bombing of N. Vietnam expanded to Hanoi/Haiphong area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 1968         Tet Offensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1970         Invasion of Cambodia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 1970         Son Tay POW camp rescue attempt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 1971         Invasion of Laos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 1980         Iran hostage rescue attempt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uses of Force 1984-1995 Not Included by Fordham &amp; Sarver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov 1990         Major increase in deployments to Persian Gulf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 1991         Gulf War begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 1991         Ground campaign of Gulf War begins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coding of Variables

Events were coded on variables representing the conditions predicted to affect the response to uses of force in hypothesis 2. A total of 19 variables were created; the list below identifies each (and the sub-hypothesis it relates to) and describes the sources of data and specific rules that were used for coding each event.

FORCE_EVENT (H1)

1 for each event
FORCE MAJOR (H1)

1 for each event that met the following criteria: a medium or high level of media coverage (COVERAGE = 2 or 3), and either a major presidential statement (e.g., prime-time speech) or actual hostile fire by U.S. troops; 0 otherwise

DATE

The date that the principal U.S. activity in this use of force was reported in the New York Times. This is often a few days later than the event start date listed by Fordham and Sarver, since there is often some preliminary activity.

In most cases this was not difficult to code; any ambiguity was on the order of a few days. For some events, however, there was a less well defined peak, or the peak of presidential involvement did not match up with the peak usage of force. In those cases, the best attempt was made to identify the beginning of the period of significant use of force and code that as the date.72

COVERAGE (H2a)

An ordinal variable representing coverage in the New York Times:

1 5 to 15 stories in 14 days
2 15 to 25 stories in 14 days
3 More than 25 stories in 14 days

SUCCESS (H2b)

coded +1, 0, or −1 depending on whether the event (in its initial stages, at least), appeared to be successful for the U.S. The judgment was based on actual outcomes, not assessment of Presidential activity (i.e., if the dominant media message was that the President had done well but something bad still happened, that would be coded −1).

This coding involved some subjective judgment, of course, but in cases where a use of force was also present as a crisis in the ICB dataset, there was a very high correlation between the my assignment of the SUCCESS variable and the ICB

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72 During the Berlin Crisis of 1961, for example, President Kennedy gave a major speech on Berlin in late June in which general steps to improve military readiness were announced, but no specific action was taken in Berlin. Later, in early August, the East Germans began construction of the wall and this led to several tense days when armed American patrols insisted on exercising their freedom of movement rights in the Eastern sector, and a confrontation seemed possible. The August crisis rather than the June speech was taken as the date of this event.

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“outcome” variable. “Victory” and “Defeat” were almost always coded 1 and -1, respectively; the two middle categories most often 0.

OPINION (H2c)

Variable indicating the balance of reaction in editorials and columns to each use of force, as reported in the New York Times. If the majority of editorials and columns are favorable, +1. If the majority are negative, -1; if there is no clear majority or if no opinion is expressed, 0.

The New York Times is not a perfect proxy for editorial opinion around the country, but for most of this period is not a bad proxy. NYT columnists were in the mainstream of Washington opinion, and guest op-eds came from prominent individuals on both sides (if not the extremes) of the political spectrum. The paper clearly became more liberal and more prone to challenge presidents after Vietnam, but that was true of most other media sources as well – the question is not whether the Times is biased in an abstract sense, but whether it is biased relative to the mass media average.73

CONGRESS OWN, CONGRESS OPP (H2c)

These variables capture the general Congressional reaction by the president’s own party, and by the opposition. +1 if the majority of reactions expressed by members of the party are supportive, -1 if the majority are negative, and 0 if mixed or none were recorded. The source for Congressional opinion is also the New York Times Index,74 but opinions were counted even if they were not reported on the front page.75

When there was a mixed reaction within a party, greater weight was given to party leaders – i.e., if the leadership was united but challenged by a few back-

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73 This relates to the “narrowcasting” point made earlier. It is becoming more and more difficult to speak of any general reactions in the press. Rather than taking cues from centrist journalists like James Reston or Walter Cronkite, liberals are apt to select only reinforcing views from the New York Times and National Public Radio, conservatives from the Washington Times, FOX, and talk radio. This is not exactly new – before the radio/tv era it was common for cities to have multiple newspapers with strongly partisan editorial stances. The centralization and centrist of the network news era is more the anomaly.

74 Where opinions were clearly present but ambiguous from the Index, full articles were consulted. In particular, some Index entries were of the form, "Reaction from Senators Biden, Kennedy, Dole, Helms." Usually, that shorthand signaled that the Senators in question were simply reiterating their own known beliefs or the general party line.

75 While interior-page article in the NYT suggest a level of media coverage that would not reach the average citizen, it also seems likely that Congressional opinions will be more likely to make it to the public than would other stories given the same level of coverage. For example, local media often cover reactions by their own Senators and Representatives. Opinion clearly expressed in Congress may also provide cues to local politicians and partisans who will then spread the sentiment more widely. Note that the O'Neal studies included only NYT front-page stories on Congressional opinion.
benchers, that was counted as the position taken by the leadership. If the only view expressed by a particular party came from known mavericks disagreeing in their usual way, those opinions were discounted.\textsuperscript{76}

CONGRESS\_EXPECTED, CONGRESS\_REVERSE (H2c)

Opinions expressed in Congress should carry more weight when they are not in the expected direction: when the president's own party criticizes the White House, or when the opposition supports the Administration. Therefore, an additional pair of Congressional opinion variables was created.

CONGRESS\_EXPECTED is the sum of: \begin{align*}
+1 \text{ if } & \text{CONGRESS\_OWN}=+1 \\
-1 \text{ if } & \text{CONGRESS\_OPP}=-1
\end{align*}

CONGRESS\_REVERSE is the sum of: \begin{align*}
-1 \text{ if } & \text{CONGRESS\_OWN}=-1 \\
+1 \text{ if } & \text{CONGRESS\_OPP}=+1
\end{align*}

The expected outcome would be presidential party support and a negative reaction from the opposition. In that case, both variables are zero. If there is bipartisan support, both are +1. If the president's party expresses support while the opposition is silent, CONGRESS\_EXPECTED would be 1, and CONGRESS\_REVERSE would be 0.

INTERNAL\_CHANGE, DEFENSE, PROTECT\_USA (H2d)

Each event was coded according to the primary purpose of the event, as portrayed by the President and other Administration sources. Events are coded 1 for their assigned category, 0 for the other two.

INTERNAL\_CHANGE events were involvement in civil wars, restoration of order, humanitarian assistance, or other actions focused on internal political conditions in another country (e.g., Bosnia peacekeeping, Lebanon deployment in 1982).

DEFENSE were actions aimed primarily at protecting a U.S. ally, or generally containing a known adversary in situation where the U.S. itself is not directly threatened (Gulf War, Taiwan Straits crises).

PROTECT\_USA are actions that directly protect the U.S. homeland or U.S. citizens abroad, or which are directly punitive in response to actions taken against the U.S. and its citizens (e.g., Mayaguez rescue, Libya strikes in 1986).

\textsuperscript{76} For example, if the only Republican taking a stand on a use of force was Wayne Morse (invariably against), that was not counted as republican opposition since his views were so unrepresentative (and known to be unrepresentative).

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These categorizations may be controversial; multiple justifications are offered for many interventions. In particular, Presidents like to claim that protecting American citizens is part of a mission, even when other concerns seem to be the true motivators. What matters is not the Administration's motive, but the motive seen and believed by the American people. When a conflict was largely claimed by the administration as being about protection even historians would question that claim, the event was coded as PROTECT. An important question is whether Americans believe such claims. Not all efforts to connect a conflict to America directly succeed (few citizens worried that if Vietnam fell, so inevitably would Pearl Harbor and San Francisco), but many do, as evidenced in Grenada, Panama, and the 200 Iraq situation.

ALLIES (H2d)

Coded 1 when the U.S. is conducting the operation with significant material participation by other countries. When the U.S. is acting to defend a particular target state, that state is not counted as an ally (i.e., the target presumably welcomes

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77 Even without any measure of belief, determining the response to “protection” operations is still useful, as it is still a test of joint hypothesis that Americans respond positively to protection missions and that they usually believe such claims. This study can determine that the joint hypothesis is false, but if false it can not distinguish whether the failure is because claims are doubted, or because claims are believed but the goal makes no difference to the public.

78 The Reagan Administration made publicly of the plight of American medical students on the island, and the public generally accepted this. Polls by ABC found that 40% to 50% of the public thought protecting US citizens was the main motive for the invasion, vs. 35-40% believing it was to “overthrow Marxist generals” (ABC polls on 10/26, 10/28, and 11/7 of 1983; Roper Center questions USABCWP.90A,R26; USABCWP.90B,R26; USABCWP.91.R24). Likewise, a Los Angeles Times poll found a tie between those who believed protecting Americans (22%) and “national security” (24%) were the main reasons (USLAT.73,R44). 69% thought the danger to Americans justified the invasion, vs. 51% who thought replacing the Marxist government did (USGALNEW.110783,R8; USGALNEW.110783,R9). Reagan’s speech does seem to have convinced some people of the supposed threat: before the speech 51% said they thought Americans on the island really were danger, vs. 65% after the speech (USCBSNYT102883,R6B). As for the Administration’s real thinking, it seems clear that principal concern was Grenada’s increasing pro-Soviet tilt; invention would have been on the table even without the students. Indeed, the concern for the students seemed to be not so much a threat to them in the abstract, but that they might be used as hostages against future actions by the Administration. Constaatine Menges, Inside the National Security Council (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

79 Considerably less polling was done on the reasons for invading Panama than for Grenada; no clear “what do you think was the real reason” question was asked. Still, 65% of ABC respondents believed Americans were in a “great deal” or “fair amount” of danger (only 4% said no danger), and 68% believed that in the wake of a U.S. soldier being shot, Bush really did see an immediate danger to Americans rather than using the shooting as an excuse for an invasion for other motives. (USABC.89PAN1,R14; USABC.89PAN1,R13).

80 Although the Bush Administration never made an explicit claim, let alone presented evidence, their insinuations that Saddam Hussein was involved in the Sept 11th attacks and would be involved in future attacks was quite successful. At the end of 2001 only 10% to 20% of the public thought that Saddam was involved in the attacks, but by the winter of 2003 polls showed that 60% to 70% of the public believed that Saddam Hussein was personally involved (see for example USCBSNYT.041403, R54; USCBSNYT.021303, R37; USPRSA.101902,R36F1). In one poll, 44% of respondents thought that the majority of the hijackers were Iraqi citizens. Linda Feldman, “The Impact of Bush Linking 9/11 and Iraq”, Christian Science Monitor, March 14, 2003.
the assistance, the question is whether other countries agree with the U.S. that the
target is worth helping, and contribute to that cause. 81

NEW (H2e)

This variable is meant to capture events that had been receiving little attention
prior to the use of force – events that are surprising in the sense that they “came
out of the blue”, whether or not the U.S. action once the crisis arose was surpris-
ing or what one would have expected for the situation.

Events were coded “1” if the prospective use of force received fewer than five
front page NYT stories in the two weeks prior to the start of the event. 82

UNEXPECTED (H2e)

This variable captures another aspect of surprise: information that is new in
content represents a change from previous information, whether or not it had
been receiving media attention. Thus, this variable is coded “1” when presidents
take actions that are unexpected given previous policy statements, prior U.S. his-
tory, and general expectations of presidential character. It is also coded “1”
when the outcomes of U.S. military action are dramatically better than expected
prior to the use of force, or, “-1” in the relatively few cases where events dra-
matically demonstrated that things were going much worse for the U.S. than pre-
viously believed. 83

81 There are some ambiguous cases. Australia and South Korea did contribute some combat units to the war in
Vietnam, but the numbers were quite small and the U.S. placed little emphasis on their contributions in public
statements (in contrast to Korea, where the U.S. referred to it as a “United Nations” operation consistently). There-
fore, the Vietnam uses of force were coded as unilateral.

82 A problem is posed by major changes in ongoing wars. For example, the Vietnam War in general was certainly
receiving significant news coverage prior to the invasion of Cambodia on May 1, 1970, but there had been no dis-
cussion about a possible widening of the war to include Cambodia. Whatever the public may have thought about
an invasion had not already been taken into account in their opinion of Nixon earlier that spring, nor was the public
already primed with arguments for and against the invasion when it happened. In contrast, the initiation of the
ground campaign in the 1991 Gulf War was a surprise in that the precise date was not know, but that there would
be such a campaign was widely assumed and the question of when it would start was much discussed in the media.
Cambodia was thus coded new, the 1991 ground campaign, not new.

83 The negative surprises are the Tet Offensive and the “Blackhawk Down” debacle in Somalia, October 1993. Sur-
prises that represent unexpected and unfortunate developments but did not contradict prior expectations about the
world or the president did not count: North Korea seizing the Pueblo in 1968 for example was unexpected in a
tactical sense, but did not tell us anything fundamentally different about the North Korean regime or demonstrate
any fundamental, unknown weaknesses in U.S. military capabilities. The most dramatic example of a positive sur-
prise is the 1991 Gulf War, which was widely expected to last months and produce thousands of casualties – even
by many military analysts. The actual result was far better than commonly expected. For polling data on casualty
expectations, see John Mueller, Policy and Opinion In The Gulf War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994)
This variable is ultimately a matter of subjective judgment. There are a few cases where a use of force clearly was unexpected given prior presidential statements, and cases where it was not unexpected, but others are more difficult: was Ford’s rescue mission for the Mayaguez an unexpected response to the situation? Contemporary accounts suggest it was. Clinton’s strike on Iraq in the summer of 1993 was somewhat unexpected given the prevailing dovish and indecisive image of him. Reagan’s attack on Libya in April 1986 may not have seemed out of character, but never before had the U.S. struck a foreign capital in response to terrorism; it had not previously been on the menu.

WARTIME (H2f)


ELECTIONS (H2f)

Coded 1 during the six months prior to presidential or congressional elections (i.e., May through November of even numbered years)

CONSUMER_EXPECT, UNEMPLOYMENT, 3MO_APPROVAL (H2f)

These variables were described in chapter 3 as part of the control model, but they are also used here as part of the “rational expectations” hypothesis. CONSUMER_EXPECT is the “Expectation of Future Business Conditions” index from the Univ. of Michigan’s consumer survey (range is from approximately 30 to 180); UNEMPLOYMENT is the current national unemployment rate; 3MO_APPROVAL is the average of the president’s approval rating for the last three months, up to the last poll prior to the event (scaled as 1 to 100 rather than as a fraction).

4. Statistical Analysis and Results

The following section presents results from the statistical analysis. The section is organized around the hypotheses, proceeding to examine H1 and then sub-hypotheses H2-A through

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84 The Iranian hostage rescue attempt, for example, or the U2 missions over the Soviet Union.
85 See for example Time, “A Strong But Risky Show of Force”, May 26, 1975, p. 9; Time, “A Buoyant President Heads for Europe”, June 2, 1975, p. 7. As an example of what this did for Ford’s image, the June 2 article included a highly favorable cartoon of the president portraying him as a proud body-builder type with the American seal and “Don’t Tread On Me” tattooed across his chest; a Hugh Sidey sidebar noted that even Democrats were fighting each other to get invitations to White House dinners.

Burbach, Diversionary Temptations
Chapter 4: “Political Benefits of the Use of Force”
H2-F: The section begins with a recap of the statistical method (described fully in Chapter 3), then for each hypotheses presents the equations that were estimated, regression results, and interpretation of those results.

The effects of events were modeled as exponentially decaying shocks superimposed on a base level of approval, that base level determined as a linear, autoregressive function of the economy and other control variables. The general form of the equations to be estimated was given in equation 3-1, repeated below ("EventEffect" has been changed to "ForceEffect", since we are dealing only with use of force events in this chapter):

$$3-1: \text{Approval}_t = \text{Control}_t + \text{ForceEffect}_t + \epsilon_t$$

where

$$3-1a: \text{Control}_t = \phi_1 \times \text{Control}_{t-1} + \theta_0 + \theta_1 \times \text{Unemployment}_t + \theta_2 \times \text{QuarterlyInflation}_t + \theta_4 \times \text{ConsumerEffect}_t + \theta_5 \times \text{Inauguration}_t + \theta_6 \times \text{VietnamSgt}_t + \theta_7 \times \text{Watergate}_t + \theta_8 \times \text{IranContra}_t$$

$$3-1b: \text{ForceEffect}_t = \left( \phi_{\text{Interval}} \times \text{ForceEffect}_{t-1} + \sum_{i=\text{FirstEvent}}^{\text{LastEvent}} X_i \times B_i \times \phi_{\text{Interval}} \right) \times (1 - \text{Inauguration}_t)$$

As described in chapter 3, the "ForceEffect" portion of the model (3-1b) sums up the effect of all events (if any) that occur between poll (t-1) and t. The immediate effect of event i is given by $X_iB_i$, where X is a vector of variable values for event I, and B is a vector of the corresponding coefficients. The other terms of 3-1b represent the decay from the initial magnitude of event I to the observation at poll t, sum up the effects of all events in the polling period, and adds in the residual effect of last period's ForceEffect.
This model is used in all of the regressions run in this chapter. The only thing that differs in each regression are the specific independent variables chosen to describe the initial magnitude of the shock created by each event – in other words, $X, B$. The lag structure of 3-1b and the entire control model 3-1a are identical in all cases. For brevity, the full detail of $\text{eq 3-1}$ will not be repeated to describe every model. Instead, only independent variables will be described. Let $\text{Force}_i = X, B$. Then if there are $n$ independent variables in a given case:

$$4-0: \text{Force}_i = X, B = \beta_1 * \text{Variable}_1 + \beta_2 * \text{Variable}_2 + \ldots \beta_n * \text{Variable}_N,$$

where $\text{Variable}_1$ to $\text{Variable}_N$ are the independent variables for that particular version of the model. $\text{Event}_i$ can then be plugged in to equation 3-1 (for $X, B$).

For brevity, models for the rest of this chapter will be described in the form of eq 4-0 – only the systematic component of each event's effect. It should be remembered that these event magnitudes then feed into the entire model of equation 3-1, including the decay of the effect from previous effects as well as the base approval model.

*Hypothesis H1: General Effect of the Use of Force*

To test the general effect of uses of force on presidential approval, two regressions were run using just the event flags $\text{FORCE\_EVENT}$ and $\text{FORCE\_MAJOR}$ – that is, no explanatory variables, just a measurement of the mean effects. These regressions are shown in Equation 4-1 and 4-2, below.
4–1: \( FORCEx = \beta_1 \times FORCE\_EVENT_x \)

4–2: \( FORCEx = \beta_1 \times FORCE\_EVENT + \beta_2 \times FORCE\_MAJOR \)

(note: control variable and lag structure omitted; see eq 3-1, above)

Table 4-5 below gives the estimates from regressions of equations 4-1 and 4-2.
### TABLE 4-5: General Effect of Uses of Force

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>ALL EVENTS (eq 4-1)</th>
<th></th>
<th>All vs. Major (eq 4-2)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.123</td>
<td>0.393</td>
<td>2.261</td>
<td>0.339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-5.278</td>
<td>2.105</td>
<td>-3.501</td>
<td>1.905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QuarterlyInflation</td>
<td>-0.216</td>
<td>1.313</td>
<td>-1.869</td>
<td>1.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConsumerExpectation</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VietnamSqrt</td>
<td>-0.457</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>-0.438</td>
<td>0.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watergate</td>
<td>-1.003</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>-0.956</td>
<td>0.110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IranContra</td>
<td>-1.084</td>
<td>0.391</td>
<td>-0.653</td>
<td>0.374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inauguration</td>
<td>22.042</td>
<td>1.168</td>
<td>22.393</td>
<td>1.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constant (φ)</td>
<td>0.922</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.9259</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Force Variables</td>
<td>FORCE_EVENT</td>
<td>1.954</td>
<td>0.588</td>
<td>FORCE_EVENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FORCE_MAJOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time Constant (φₚ)</td>
<td>0.7932</td>
<td>89 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(half life)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.7044</td>
<td>59 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 month effect</td>
<td>1.55 ± 0.47</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 mo. (major)</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 month effect</td>
<td>0.98 ± 0.29</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 month (major)</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Err.</td>
<td>7.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>842</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>-2072.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-2051.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% confidence intervals for use of force effect predictions. Variables in **bold** significant at a .05 level or above.

The coefficient estimates for FORCE_EVENT and FORCE_MAJOR show that uses of force do lead to increases in approval; all estimates are significant at a 95% confidence level.
A likelihood ratio test comparing model 4-1 to the control model shows inclusion of the use of force variable is clearly significant.\textsuperscript{86} The eq 4-1 results show that on average, uses of force are followed by approval increases of 2%, with a half-life of about three months. The "1 month effect" and "3 month effect" rows on the table show predicted residual effects at one month and three months after a use of force. A mean 2% increase is slightly larger than the means of essentially zero found by the O'Neal studies, but neither is it dramatically larger. The right hand columns show estimates separating the effects of all events and the 33 major events. With this distinction, the minor events are expected to cause a net loss of approval (though this coefficient is barely significant), while major events will be followed by a 5.6% gain – in the ballpark of the findings from pre-1990 studies. The minor/major model has a faster decay, with a half-life of 2 months.

To illustrate what these predict, figure 4.3 below shows the predicted change in approval due to a use of force from zero to six months after an event, for the model with all events, and for both minor and major events from eq 4-2.

\textsuperscript{86} The test statistic is $2 \times (\text{-.2072.6} - (\text{-.2081.1})) = 17.0$. The threshold value is the 95th percentile of a chi-square distribution with one degree of freedom, or 3.8. For linear models the likelihood ratio test is asymptotically equivalent to familiar F test as the number of observations increases. With $n=842$ and 10 to 20 parameters, the likelihood ratio test will be infinitesimally less conservative than the finite-sample F-test would be. J. G. Kalbfleisch, \textit{Probability and Statistical Inference} (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1985), pp 252-257.
Figure 4-3: Predicted Use-Of-Force Effects, Basic

Figure 4-3  Predicted Use of Force Effects, Basic Model

What these findings suggest is that uses of force on average do not provide large benefits, at least not uses of force as small as the ones included in the full event set. Indeed, when the 31 major events are separated out, the remaining 35 minor events cost a president a point or two on average. On the other hand, the major events do produce gains of the sort described by Kernell, MacKuen, Ostrom & Simon, and other earlier studies — 5% for several months. Is that amount significant? Major presidential failures certainly cause losses larger than 5%: Iran-Contra cost Reagan more than 10%, and Watergate and Johnson's Vietnam failure more than twice that. A recession will also cost a president significantly more than 5%. Nevertheless, an immediate 5% gain is certainly noticeable. It is relatively rare for approval to show a sustained jump of that magnitude.
Hypotheses 2-A, 2-B, 2-C: Media Content Effects

Hypotheses 2-A through 2-C predict that the media messages received by the public will strongly affect their response to presidential actions. To test this, approval was regressed on the control variables and uses of force, but this time modeling each use of force as a function of media-related variables: coverage, reported success, and opinion expressed editorially and by Congress. These equations are listed below (the superscript $^{{\text{MAJ}}}$ indicates only major events were included; for other events the variable was set to zero):

$$4 - 3: \quad \text{FORCE}_i = \beta_1 \cdot \text{FORCE}_\text{EVENT}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{COVERAGE}_i + \beta_3 \cdot \text{SUCCESS}_i$$
$$\quad + \beta_4 \cdot \text{Opinion}_i + \beta_5 \cdot \text{CongressExpect}_i + \beta_6 \cdot \text{Congress Reverse}_i$$

$$4 - 4: \quad \text{FORCE}_i = \beta_1 \cdot \text{FORCE}_\text{EVENT}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{COVERAGE}_i + \beta_3 \cdot \text{SUCCESS}_i$$
$$\quad + \beta_4 \cdot \text{OpinionIndex}_i$$

$$4 - 5: \quad \text{FORCE}_i = \beta_1 \cdot \text{MAJOR \_FORCE}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{COVERAGE}^{{\text{MAJ}}}_i + \beta_3 \cdot \text{SUCCESS}^{{\text{MAJ}}}_i$$
$$\quad + \beta_4 \cdot \text{OpinionIndex}^{{\text{MAJ}}}_i$$

Table 4-6 presents the results from regressions 4-3, 4-4, and 4-5.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Congressional Opinion (eq 4-3)</th>
<th>Opinion Index (eq 4-4)</th>
<th>Opinion Index Major Events (eq 4-5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
<td>Std. Err</td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.251</td>
<td>0.329</td>
<td>2.232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-1.894</td>
<td>1.850</td>
<td>-1.914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QuarterlyInflation</td>
<td>-2.423</td>
<td>1.094</td>
<td>-2.370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConsumerExpect</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VietnamSqrt</td>
<td>-0.465</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>-0.462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watergate</td>
<td>-0.867</td>
<td>0.110</td>
<td>-0.864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IranContra</td>
<td>-0.780</td>
<td>0.385</td>
<td>-0.746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inauguration</td>
<td>22.060</td>
<td>1.088</td>
<td>22.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constant ϕ₁</td>
<td>0.9242</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.9247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Force Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ForceMajor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage</td>
<td>6.5252</td>
<td>0.8911</td>
<td>6.4974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>-1.2193</td>
<td>0.6628</td>
<td>-1.1711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>1.4752</td>
<td>0.8657</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CongExpected</td>
<td>1.2453</td>
<td>0.9803</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CongSurprise</td>
<td>1.9964</td>
<td>1.5518</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OpinionIndex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.5387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Constant ϕ₂</td>
<td>0.7913</td>
<td></td>
<td>.7915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(half life)</td>
<td>88 days</td>
<td></td>
<td>89 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>6.590</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>842</td>
<td></td>
<td>842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>-2018.44</td>
<td></td>
<td>-2018.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% confidence intervals for effect predictions. Variables in bold significant at a .05 level or above.
As predicted, the media variables have a strong impact on the size of “rallies”\(^7\). Coverage in particular has a very strong effect: with all the other variables at zero, reaction to an event would be \(-4\%\), \(+2.5\%\), and \(+8\%\) as coverage went from 1 to 3. The effect is even larger for major events, although since \text{COVERAGE} is one of the variables that defines the major events, major events only have \text{COVERAGE}=2 or \text{COVERAGE}=3. The difference between the levels is striking: the major-only regression predictions that a level 2 event would have an approval increase of \(+2\%\), and a level 3 event \(+13.5\%\) (with success and opinion variables all at zero).\(^8\)

The success and opinion variables mostly have the expected effects. \text{SUCCESS}, surprisingly, has a negative effect, though not quite at a significant level, and causing a swing of only \(2.5\%\) from victory to defeat. The opinion variables do have the expected positive signs, though none reach a 95\% confidence level (\text{OPINION} would meet a 90\% level). Counterintuitive positions by Congress do have a stronger effect than expected ones, though the difference is within the uncertainty in the estimates.

Although the coefficients on the opinion variables were well behaved in this set of regressions, in later regressions they proved to be somewhat unstable: relatively minor specification changes would cause them to flip signs or change magnitudes. Those are classic symptoms of multicolinearity, and in fact the three variables are highly correlated (\text{CONGRESS\_EXPECTED} and \text{CONGRESS\_REVERSE} at 0.73; each correlates with \text{OPINION} at about 0.6). A test was then done of combining them into a single index:

\(^7\)These regressions easily pass likelihood ratio tests of their significance relative to the simple model using only the \text{FORCE\_EVENT} dummy variable. The test statistic for eq 4-3 is \(2 \times (2072.6 - 2018.4) = 108.4\). The critical value is 11.1

\(^8\)This does lead to the somewhat surprising prediction that low-visibility events should cause noticeable drops in approval. One possibility is that the reaction to \text{COVERAGE} is non-linear – if the “real” difference between a \text{COVERAGE}=2 event and \text{COVERAGE}=3 is significantly larger than between 1 and 2, then this specification would overstate the difference between level 1 and level 2 events. The fact that the slope of \text{COVERAGE} becomes much steeper in the major-only regressions would be consistent with non-linearity.
OPINION_INDEX, which is simply the sum of the three opinion variables. Figure 4-5 shows a histogram of the OPINION_INDEX values; they tend to cluster at 0 and 3 (i.e., full support). Most of the minor events score 0; for the major events, it becomes a trimodal distribution with peaks at −3, 0, and +3.

Figure 4-4: Opinion Index Histogram

Running the regressions with OPINION_INDEX replacing the three opinion variables, the other coefficients stay about the same, and OPINION_INDEX takes on a positive and easily significant value of 1.5. The log-likelihood shows almost no change in the goodness of fit. The swing between a use of force receiving across the board support and total opposition would be 9%. Finally, the regression is repeated using only the major events, which finds the same pat-

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89 A test statistic comparing eq 4-3 and 4-4 would be 0.3; the critical value is 5.8. The two equations differ only at a 10% confidence level.
terns but much more strongly. SUCCESS is still disturbingly negative, but OPINION_INDEX becomes even more important, creating a whopping 18% swing between total support and total opposition.

Figure 4-5 presents three scenarios, using the results from eq 4.4 (with the three separate opinion variables), ranging from a best case of a high-coverage, 100% supported, and unsuccessful war, to a low-coverage, opposed, successful war, and a middle case with all variables at their means. As opposed to the small effects found on average, taking media variables into account leads to large differences in predicted reactions: from +15% to −10% immediately (more like 13% to −8% we do not assume a “best” case of a failed war and code best/worst in the more normal way). In this case the gains can be of real political significance: in a best case, 10-15% immediately, with more than 5% gain left after four months. On the other hand, presidents who launch a war in the face of heavy criticism stand to lose up to 10%.

---

90 While the regression clearly shows that the best case from a presidents perspective is a failed war, that simply does not sound reasonable. And in fact, there is a correlation between SUCCESS and the opinion variables (about 0.35 for each). In particular, there are relatively few failures, and several of those were cases where a president was attempting something quite popular, like overthrowing Castro or rescuing the Iranian hostages — and it is difficult to imagine that even in those cases, there wouldn’t have been more support if successful (imagine the reaction if Carter had brought the hostages home...). Given how few failures in conventional uses of force there have been, I would not be comfortable recommending to presidents that as a general rule, they aim for defeat.
Figure 4-5: Use-of-Force Effects by Media/Opinion Variables

Best Case (eq 4-4)  
Worst Case (eq 4-4)  
Average Case (eq 4-4)

Figure 4-5 Predicted Use of Force Effects, Media/Opinion Variables

Hypothesis 2-D: Conflict Characteristics

Hypothesis 2-D predicts that the public response to uses of force will vary according to the purpose of a particular intervention: when in line with public preferences, support will be higher. To test this, approval was regressed with the response to force modeled as a function of the conflict type variables, as shown in equations 4-6 and 4-

4 – 6a: \[ \text{FORCE}_i = \beta_1 \times \text{PROTECT}_{USA} + \beta_2 \times \text{DEFEND}_i + \beta_3 \times \text{INTERNAL}_i \]

4 – 6b: \[ \text{FORCE}_i = \beta_1 \times \text{PROTECT}_i^{MAJ} + \beta_2 \times \text{DEFEND}^{MAJ}_i + \beta_3 \times \text{INTERNAL}^{MAJ}_i \]

4 – 7: \[ \text{FORCE}_i = \beta_1 \times \text{PROTECT}_{USA} + \beta_2 \times \text{DEFEND}_i + \beta_3 \times \text{INTERNAL}_i + \beta_4 \times \text{ALLIES}_i + \beta_5 \times \text{OPINION \_INDEX}_i \]

Results from these regressions are shown in table 4-7, below.

Burbach, Diversionary Temptations  
Chapter 4: “Political Benefits of the Use of Force”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Event Type (All Uses, eq 4-6a)</th>
<th>Event Type (Major Uses, eq 4-6b)</th>
<th>Event Type + Opinion/Allies (All Uses, eq 4-7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
<td>Std. Err</td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.962</td>
<td>0.407</td>
<td>2.6833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-5.434</td>
<td>2.209</td>
<td>-5.6891</td>
</tr>
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<td>QuarterlyInflation</td>
<td>-3.403</td>
<td>1.302</td>
<td>-3.675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConsumerExpect</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.0175</td>
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<tr>
<td>VietnamSqrt</td>
<td>-0.536</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>-0.4831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watergate</td>
<td>-1.132</td>
<td>0.131</td>
<td>-0.9757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IranContra</td>
<td>-2.132</td>
<td>0.449</td>
<td>-0.9962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inauguration</td>
<td>22.938</td>
<td>1.189</td>
<td>23.4462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constant φ₁</td>
<td>0.9107</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.9189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Force Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ProtectUS</td>
<td>5.989</td>
<td>0.939</td>
<td>11.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DefendOthers</td>
<td>4.577</td>
<td>0.734</td>
<td>6.163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InternalChange</td>
<td>-2.839</td>
<td>0.654</td>
<td>-5.468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OpinionIndex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Constant φ₂ (half life)</td>
<td>0.8507</td>
<td>.8235</td>
<td>.8235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>6.7255</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>842</td>
<td></td>
<td>842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>-2023.19</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1992.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% confidence intervals for effect predictions. Variables in **bold** significant at a .05 level or above.

The results show that the public responds differently to uses of force for different purposes. The order of the three categories is as predicted: protection of Americans first, then
defense of allies, followed by internal change – consistent with both theory and previous results from Oneal, Lian and Joyner; Jentleson; Larson; Mueller, and others. Internal change missions are particularly disfavored, with an expectation that on average, they will cost presidents support. Among all uses of force they are about 8% less popular than the other missions (the other two near 5%, internal near −3%). When looking at prominent uses of force, the gap is much wider – a 17% difference between a protection mission and an internal change mission. These differences are of clear political significance.

The right-hand column of Table 4-5 adds variables for allied participation, SUCCESS and OPINION_INDEX. SUCCESS has a positive coefficient this time, adding or subtracting one point from the immediate change; OPINION_INDEX is still positive but less significant than in the regressions without distinction by type. The ALLIES variable proves to be strongly positive – a 4% change in the public response. With these variables included the base effects of the three types keep the same order, though the gap between internal change missions and the others becomes even larger (this probably reflects the fact a larger fraction of the internal change missions were multinational than for the other two categories).

Figure 4-6 shows the predicted effects on approval of each type of use of force. In each case, three scenarios are shown: best case (allied participation, successful, 100% support), worst case (alone, failure, 100% criticism), and average (the mean of ALLIES, SUCCESS, and OPINION_INDEX for that specific type of event). Clearly, a president looking for political help would not want to engage in humanitarian intervention. Comparing the “average” lines for protection and defense of others shows that the difference between the two types is larger than the best/worst cases alone suggest. The average protection mission receives significantly more
support (i.e., higher OPINION_INDEX) and so comes closer to the best case than does the average defense mission.

![Figure 4-6: Use-of-Force Effects by Type](image)

**Figure 4-6** Predicted Use of Force Effects, by Type of Intervention

*Hypothesis 2-E, 2-F: Information and Rational Expectations*

Hypothesis 2-E suggests some corrections to the basic media-driven response, based on the political context in which citizens view the presidential decision to use force. Specifically, effects should be stronger when the action represents a change from what was previously known about presidential policies, and, uses of force should be less supported when the public would expect a president to be looking for diversionary opportunities (i.e., they will discount shows of force during such periods).

To test these hypotheses, the models shown below were estimated.
4-8a:  \[ \text{FORCE}_i = \beta_1 \times \text{FORCE}_{EVENT}, + \beta_2 \times \text{ELECTION}_{PERIOD}, + \beta_3 \times \text{WARTIME}_i \]
+ \beta_4 \times \text{NEW}_i + \beta_5 \times \text{SURPRISE}_i

4-8b:  \[ \text{FORCE}_i = \beta_1 \times \text{FORCE}_{MAJOR}, + \beta_2 \times \text{ELECTION}_{PERIOD}^{MAJ}, + \beta_3 \times \text{WARTIME}^{MAJ}, \]
+ \beta_4 \times \text{NEW}^{MAJ}_i + \beta_5 \times \text{SURPRISE}^{MAJ}_i

4-9:  \[ \text{FORCE}_i = \beta_1 \times \text{FORCE}_{EVENT}, + \beta_2 \times \text{ELECTION}_{PERIOD}, + \beta_3 \times \text{WARTIME}_i \]
+ \beta_4 \times \text{NEW}_i + \beta_5 \times \text{SURPRISE}_i + \beta_6 \times \text{CONSUMER}_{EXPECT}, + \beta_7 \times 3\text{MO}_{APPROVAL}_{(t-1)} \]
+ \beta_8 \times (3\text{MO}_{APPROVAL}_{(t-1)} / 100)^2

4-10:  \[ \text{FORCE}_i = \beta_1 \times \text{FORCE}_{EVENT}, + \beta_2 \times \text{ELECTION}_{PERIOD}, + \beta_3 \times \text{WARTIME}_i \]
+ \beta_4 \times \text{NEW}_i + \beta_5 \times \text{SURPRISE}_i + \beta_6 \times \text{CONSUMER}_{EXPECT}, + \beta_7 \times 3\text{MO}_{APPROVAL}_{(t-1)} \]
+ \beta_8 \times (3\text{MO}_{APPROVAL}_{(t-1)} / 100)^2 + \beta_9 \times (3\text{MO}_{APPROVAL}_{(t-1)} / 10000)

Equation 4-8 models rally effects as a function of four political conditions: pre-election periods, wartime, and whether the use of force represented a new focus for the media and/or a change of policy for the president. Equation 4-9 models rallies as a function of those same conditions and two macro-indicators: consumer expectations, and the president's average approval for the previous three months, measured at the last poll prior to the use of force (3MO_APPROVAL). Since the economic and approval conditions will be the same for any event happening in polling period t, these variables are specified as a function of time period rather than by event. To test for nonlinear effects from approval, both a quadratic and cubic form are estimated (the squared and cubed terms are divided by 100 and 10000 respectively, so that all are on the same scale).\textsuperscript{91} Eq. 4-10 combines all the factors. Results from these regressions are in table 4-8, below.

\textsuperscript{91} It seems plausible that the effect of approval would show a peak for mid-range approval, for example: at very low levels people would discount the use of force as diversionary; at high levels there would be too small a pool of
## Table 4-8: Use of Force Effects with Information/Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Static Conditions (eq 4-8a)</th>
<th>Approval²+Expectations (eq 4-9)</th>
<th>Approval³+Expectations (Eq 4-10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
<td>Std. Err</td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectionPeriod</td>
<td>-4.9311</td>
<td>1.1467</td>
<td>-1.5301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wartime</td>
<td>4.429</td>
<td>1.6704</td>
<td>0.2678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NewEvent</td>
<td>-0.5015</td>
<td>1.5921</td>
<td>1.2718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SurpriseEvent</td>
<td>5.0826</td>
<td>1.0702</td>
<td>1.1121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MonthApproval</td>
<td>-0.7863</td>
<td>0.0668</td>
<td>-7.0219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MonthApproval²</td>
<td>1.1727</td>
<td>0.0848</td>
<td>-0.1656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MonthApproval³</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConsumerExpect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OpinionIndex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.7327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constant φ₂</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.7903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std Err / Log-Lik</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.805</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Major Events (eq 4-8b)</th>
<th>Approval²+Unemploy</th>
<th>Approval³+ Unemploy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
<td>Std. Err</td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All(Major)Event</td>
<td>0.5347</td>
<td>1.1601</td>
<td>-1.8254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectionPeriod</td>
<td>-8.6323</td>
<td>2.3116</td>
<td>-2.5321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wartime</td>
<td>6.6314</td>
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<td>1.7089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NewEvent</td>
<td>6.3487</td>
<td>1.8484</td>
<td>0.5426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SurpriseEvent</td>
<td>7.8148</td>
<td>1.4723</td>
<td>2.9625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MonthApproval</td>
<td>-0.9744</td>
<td>0.2489</td>
<td>-0.9744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MonthApproval²</td>
<td>1.2591</td>
<td>0.2359</td>
<td>1.2591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MonthApproval³</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-10.4005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>276.5811</td>
<td>37.1842</td>
<td>276.5811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OpinionIndex</td>
<td>-0.3204</td>
<td>0.3569</td>
<td>-0.3204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constant φ₂</td>
<td>0.6750</td>
<td>52 days</td>
<td>0.7969</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Control variable estimates omitted. 95% confidence intervals for effect predictions. Variables in bold significant at a .05 level or above. N=842 in all cases.

---

non-approvers left to make much difference. Exploratory tests suggested that a cubic form would do better than quadratic, but that not much was gained from higher-order specifications.

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As seen in the leftmost column, the political context of uses of force does seem to matter: uses of force are less well received during election periods (consistent with a rational expectations hypothesis), especially for the major events. Surprisingly, wartime uses of force are predicted to be more popular than average, which conflicts with the Oneal findings. The difference probably lies in the failure to include intra-war escalations and the problems with event dates in the datasets employed. This pattern is robust; in virtually every regression that was attempted where WARTIME and ELECTION_PERIOD were included, the variables kept these signs and were frequently significant. One possible mechanism for this effect would be if elite opinion were more negative during election periods or wars. Adding OPINION_INDEX as a variable did reduce but not eliminate the magnitude of the war and election variables. Examination of OPINION_INDEX shows that coverage is indeed more negative during election periods, but is also more negative during wartime (see table 4-8) – public support for uses of force is higher during wars despite less positive elite reaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4-9: Opinion during Wars and Elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wartime</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean of OPINION_INDEX for each category; the variable is a -3 to +3 scale.

NEW and SURPRISE show that new information does, sometimes, lead to larger changes in opinion. In particular, uses of force that have been out-of-policy or out-of-character for presidents have produced substantially larger reactions. In the full event set, relatively little

\(^{92}\) On the date issue, for example, the ICB crisis dataset considers the U.S. action in the Gulf War crisis to happen in October of 1990; the actual war in 1991 does not show up as an additional event (or events).
effect is seen for interventions that come out of the blue relative to those in situations already receiving significant media coverage. On the other hand, among the major events, newness does add quite a bit. The fact that the major events receive much greater media coverage may explain this; for small uses of force, even when “new” the change is from no stories to a handful of stories, vs. no stories to weeks of headlines. These effects were not quite as robust as for WARTIME and ELECTION; in other specifications they were not always significant and sometimes changed sign.

The center and right columns of Table 4-8 give results when the economic and approval variables are added. The top center and right are results from including consumer expectations, and in either specification the economic and approval variables turn out to be quite important. The same regressions were run with unemployment rather than consumer expectations, and the same pattern was found.

The contour plots in Figure 4-7 show predicted responses to uses of force as a function of prior approval (on a 3 month average) and economic conditions. Graphs A and B show predictions based on consumer expectations and approval as a quadratic or cubic form, and graph C shows unemployment with the cubic approval form. The graphs show the predicted immediate effect of a use of force, with red indicating approval losses, yellow for near-zero effects, and green for increases in approval.

In all cases the pattern is the same: uses of force effects are more positive when economic conditions are poor and the more popular a president is already. The effect of prior approval is not linear; the steepest increase is seen from about 45% to 65%, with the effect flattening out above and below. This finding is interesting for two reasons: first, it directly conflicts
with the claims of previous studies; second, it has important substantive implications for diver-
sion.

Figure 4-7: Use of Force Effect by Approval, Economy

NOTE: See Appendix B for full-color version of figures

As discussed earlier, several of the recent studies\(^9\) claim that as approval increases so do potential increases from uses of force. Why such a different finding in this study? Figure 4-8 shows that the supposed negative relationship between prior approval and rally effects is not ob-


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vious in the data. The two scatter plots show the poll-to-poll change around uses of force, measured against either the 3-month average or the most recent single measurement prior to each event. The regression lines in both cases show a slight negative relationship, but only amounting to one or two percent as approval goes all the way from 25% to 75% – a very small effect. Given that data it’s not clear why the earlier studies found such an effect, though the differences in definitions and dates for uses of force may be a cause.

![Figure 4-8: Actual Approval Changes, by Prior Approval](image)

**Figure 4-8** Actual Approval Changes, by Prior Approval

What the predictions of Figure 4-8 mean substantively is that troubled presidents may be able to gain from diversion – some of the time. A president facing a poor economy and the low approval ratings that follow from it would benefit from uses of force. Graph 4-7c, for example, predicts that at 9% unemployment and a 40% approval rating, a gain of 6% will happen. That compares to 1% for 5% unemployment and 65% approval. If a president is doing poorly de-
spite a good economy, the situation changes: with 40% approval and 5% unemployment, a 5% 
loss is expected.

When a president is unpopular due to the economy, it appears that “changing the sub-
ject” is possible: focusing the nation’s attention on foreign conflict does improve a president’s 
standing, though even a gain of 5-10% for a few months is not enough to make up for the effect 
of a recession. When presidents are unpopular for non-economic reasons though, changing the 
subject doesn’t work, or even hurts. Presidents have suffered low approval despite decent 
economies in response to scandals, unpopular wars (Vietnam), or other demonstrations of in-
competence by the executive. In these cases, the public’s lack of confidence in the president 
does not seem to be healed by war, and the public may even be suspicious of presidential mo-
tives.

Without detailed polling data it is not entirely clear why the public treats economic fail-
ure differently than other sorts of failure, but the difference is there. It should be noted, though, 
that actual outcomes are not as simple as the predictions in the contour plots. Figure 4-7d 
shows the actual approval changes following uses of force plotted against consumer expecta-
tions and prior average approval, using the same color scale as the contour plots. While the gen-
eral relationship to economic conditions and approval is statistically robust, there have been ex-
ceptions.

Combined Effect of the Variables

Finally, Table 4-10 shows results from regressions including all of the variables used pre-
viously. The effects of each variable are of course best assessed by comparing them together, 
controlling for everything at once, but with only 66 events and 15 variables, the degrees of free-
dom are getting a little low and thus the errors somewhat wide. Nonetheless, the leftmost column of 4-10 shows that even with all variables included, most of the patterns found individually still apply.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>All Variables</th>
<th>All Variables except Approval/Economics</th>
<th>All Variables Except Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
<td>Std. Err</td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ProtectUS</td>
<td>60.877</td>
<td>5.3366</td>
<td>-9.5484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InternalChange</td>
<td>54.9278</td>
<td>4.4137</td>
<td>-25.9894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allies</td>
<td>-3.1176</td>
<td>4.2093</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>2.0511</td>
<td>2.441</td>
<td>1.5576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage</td>
<td>3.3902</td>
<td>3.0937</td>
<td>9.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OpinionIndex</td>
<td>-0.4166</td>
<td>0.796</td>
<td>2.0955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectionPeriod</td>
<td>-1.0026</td>
<td>4.1946</td>
<td>0.5574</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wartime</td>
<td>-2.6177</td>
<td>5.3311</td>
<td>2.3153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td>-1.322</td>
<td>4.3264</td>
<td>0.1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>-0.8575</td>
<td>4.3402</td>
<td>-3.5189</td>
</tr>
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<td>3mo_approval</td>
<td>-2.445</td>
<td>0.0691</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3mo_approval*2</td>
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<td>0.2571</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3mo_approval*3</td>
<td>-1.6436</td>
<td>0.1944</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConsumerExpect</td>
<td>-0.1756</td>
<td>0.0182</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Constant φ2</td>
<td>0.7838</td>
<td>.8059</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(half life)</td>
<td>85 days</td>
<td>95 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>5.5932</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.0514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>842</td>
<td></td>
<td>842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>-1873.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1937.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% confidence intervals for effect predictions. Variables in **bold** significant at a .05 level or above.

As in every specification tried, there are differences in response by type: Protection > Defend > Internal Change, though the differences between they do not all differ from each

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other at 95% confidence levels. Likewise, the effect of economic conditions and prior approval is the same: the use of force effect increasing with consumer sentiment and prior approval, though somewhat less steeply than in the earlier regression with fewer variables (see Figure 4-9). Quantity of media coverage is also very important – an event receiving heavy coverage would receive, on average, 7 points greater initial approval change than one with low coverage. ELECTION_PERIOD shows a modest negative effect (though not significant), similar to its effect in previous models.

Figure 4-9: Effect of Economy, Approval in All Variable Model

Figure 4-9 Effect of Economy, Approval in All Variable Model
Other variables are somewhat less consistent in their effect, and none are statistically significant. SUCCESS now does show a positive effect (intuitive, but different than other models), while new or surprising actions have a slight negative effect. Elite opinion also shows a small negative effect.

To better understand why some of these effects are so unstable, another regression was run without the approval/economic variables. WARTIME now changes sign, and SURPRISE becomes significant and negative – the opposite of its effect in the restricted models above. The most dramatic change was that OPINION_INDEX took on a positive and significant (statistically and substantively) value. It turns out that while the individual correlations between OPINION_INDEX and approval or consumer confidence are small, regressing OPINION_INDEX on confidence and a quadratic of prior approval does find a modest relationship: OPINION_INDEX is expected to be at a minimum around 45% approval, and to increase somewhat on either side of that – a similar relationship as between rally magnitude and approval (economic conditions had no effect). This raises an interesting substantive question, which unfortunately can’t be answered with this data: does the discounting of uses of force that happens with lower approval happen because individuals respond differently, or because other political actors feel more able to criticize the president?

Summation: Evaluating the Hypotheses

Table 4-11, below, summarizes what was found about the hypotheses. As predicted (Hypothesis 1), uses of the military do not automatically offer much gain for presidents: an immediate boost of 2%, lasting a few months on average. On the other hand, uses of force can provide meaningful increases in approval under certain conditions. Most, though not all of the sub
hypotheses from Hypothesis 2 about which conditions would lead to more positive outcomes were confirmed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Finding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1A</td>
<td>Low benefits from force</td>
<td><strong>Confirmed</strong>, on average gains are small to nil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Large gains do happen sometimes, but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Significant approval losses are almost as common as gains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1B</td>
<td>Short duration of gains</td>
<td><strong>Confirmed</strong>, effects dissipate in 3 to 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2A</td>
<td>Media attention</td>
<td><strong>Confirmed</strong>, Size of response related to coverage, but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Presidents can generate high coverage if they desire, so this is only a weak constraint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2B</td>
<td>Success is needed</td>
<td><strong>Failed</strong>, success made little difference on average, although</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- In the extremes of a long, bloody, stalemated war or a truly historic triumph, outcomes do matter, however</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2C</td>
<td>Elite support is needed</td>
<td><strong>Confirmed</strong>, support from Congress and editorial pages can significantly affect the public's response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2D</td>
<td>Purpose of interventions matter</td>
<td><strong>Confirmed</strong>, support is highest for protecting Americans, somewhat lower for defense of allies, and much lower for internal/humanitarian missions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2E</td>
<td>Surprises produce larger reactions</td>
<td><strong>Ambiguous</strong>, most regressions found small effects from surprise, but it have the expected effect in some cases, and qualitatively, surprise seems a key component of the few largest rallies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2F</td>
<td>Uses of force will be discounted when needed</td>
<td><strong>Mostly Confirmed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Uses of force are less popular prior to elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Uses of force are less popular when presidents have low approval ratings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- However, uses of force are <strong>more</strong> popular when economic conditions are bad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Large gains are to be found only from the most prominent uses of force – those receiving heavy news coverage for many days. While Presidents are able to gin up a great deal of me-
dia attention if they, this does suggest there is a threshold of importance that needs to be
crossed; little would be gained from minor actions. Elite opinion also matters. Although it was
not possible to determine which source was more important, as aggregated into the OpinionIn-
dex variable the reaction of other political actors had a strong impact on the public’s response to
events, enough to make the difference between a memorable “rally” and a presidential bust. On
the other hand, success had no consistent effect, although given the small number of fiascos
Americans have observed, it is possible presidents run larger downside risks than this finding
suggests.

As the “rational public” hypothesis predicts, Americans are able to distinguish between
uses of force on behalf of different goals. There is a large difference between humanitar-
ian/internal change missions and others; on average the operations aimed at conditions inside
another state actually cost a president support. Uses of force that are directly aimed at protect-
ing American lives get more positive reactions than those to defend allies or other strategic pur-
poses. Not only does the public distinguish between goals of military interventions, but may
distinguish between needy and less needy presidents: uses of force are significantly less popular
(and less supported by elites) before elections, and are less popular – even harmful – to presi-
dents whose approval ratings are low despite good economic conditions (due to scandals, for
example). On the other hand, uses of force during economic slumps appear quite helpful to
presidents.

Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*
Chapter 4: “Political Benefits of the Use of Force”
5. Exceptions to the Rule: Rallies that Made a Difference

While the average benefits of using force are not large, three incidents stand out where a president gained far more than usual from a conflict, and considerably more than predicted by the models analyzed here: the 1979 Iran Hostage Crisis, the 1991 Persian Gulf War, and the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001.\textsuperscript{94} In these three cases, presidents gained more than 25 percent for several months. This is illustrated in Figure 4-10, which shows approval changes for those three events.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{94} The invasion of Iraq in 2003 produced gains of 10-15%, depending on the polling firm, with an 8-10% boost left in mid-May (one month after the war ended). Such numbers are comparable to the Cuban Missile Crisis, Mayaguez, Grenada, or Panama and are well within the range of predictions from the models.

\textsuperscript{95} The change in each case is relative to the average of the president’s approval in the three polls prior to the event. The “major use” points are predicted values from equation 4-2.
The Korean War and Pearl Harbor attack did not produce changes of this magnitude. After the Pearl Harbor attack Roosevelt gained 12%, quickly declining to 7%.

After the North Korean invasion of the South, Truman gained 10%, which vanished almost immediately. Roosevelt was already at 70%, though, which is a higher base than any of these three cases. Truman was below 40% approval when the Korean War started, so in his case there was plenty of room for improvement.

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96 As John Mueller notes, the first poll was not taken until a full month after the attack, so it is likely FDR's initial boost was higher; Mueller notes that it may have been just as large as the Gulf rally. Assuming a 3 month half life – typical for the decay rates found in this study – Roosevelt's initial boost would have been 15%

97 Korea and World War II approval numbers from Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*, p 198; the detailed data in Edwards (1990) only goes back to 1953.
September 11th Attacks

Even among these three mega-rallies, the terrorist attacks of 2001 stand alone: in this case and this case only it would be fair to say that the event so increased public support as to represent a fundamental change in the nature of a presidency. George W. Bush went from a perfectly average rating in the low 50s, to a rating that stayed above 80% for six months and that as of April 2003 only briefly dropped below 65%. Such a streak is unprecedented, and Bush’s average approval is likely to be far higher than the post-Kennedy mean. There are several likely explanations for the surge.

First, the attacks provided new information to the American public that changed their priorities and expectations of future threats. Prior to the attacks, foreign affairs were not a priority for the news media or the general public. Surveys in 2000 showed foreign/defense issues to rank quite low on “most important problem” and similar surveys: below education, taxes, budget deficits, crime, social security and health care, even below energy, school shootings, welfare reform or internet pornography – but ahead of campaign finance reform. September 11th changed that. In June of 2001, for example, Gallup found just 4% of respondents indicated that any foreign/security issue was most important; in October of 2001, 68% did. Throughout 2002 and 2003 Gallup found that about 35-50% of the public chose foreign/security for MIP (with

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98 CNN/Gallup approval data obtained online from PollingReport (http://www.pollingreport.com).
99 Eisenhower’s first term and JFK’s three years in office both had approval averages just over 70% (Eisenhower’s overall average was 65%). No president since has averaged above the high 50s. Roosevelt averaged around 75% from 1941 to 1945; Truman averaged 40%.
100 This is the general pattern seen in twenty or more surveys that were examined from various polling houses in various formats: most important problem [list or volunteered], whether issue X is important to you / in your choice for President; priorities for federal spending; etc. Data obtained from the National Journal’s Polltrack service (available online from http://www.nationaljournal.com), specifically the files for “most important issue”, “defense”, and “foreign affairs”, each for years 1999 to 2003. When put in a “most important problem” form, typically 1% to 6% would choose foreign/defense issues (the low end for volunteered responses; the higher end when several different foreign/defense issues were listed on the questionnaire).
economic issues moving in a similar range). Since the attacks, security has been the #1 or #2 issue.

In terms of the media priming model, Sept 11th was a gigantic change of frame! It is not surprising that the basis upon which citizens evaluate Bush changed, and other data show why that change helped him so much. Even before the attacks, polls showed that Republicans had significantly more credibility on foreign/defense issues than Democrats. On questions like “which party do you trust to handle defense”, Republicans had a 2:1 advantage over democrats, and a significant though smaller advantage on foreign affairs generally.101 If anything, that advantage grew after 9/11.102 There was a tremendous shift from issues where the parties were tied or Democrats favored, to issues where the Bush held a tremendous advantage. That alone would be expected to lead to a large increase in approval, and was only reinforced by the opportunity for the president to display personal leadership qualities.

In addition, the 2001 attacks were more of a surprise than anything before. Even in the case of Pearl Harbor, Europe had been at war for two years, tensions with Japan were high, and FDR had launched a military buildup and draft the year before. Japan attacked an offshore military base, not the Empire State Building. Moreover, it was difficult to assign Bush any blame for the al-Qaida attacks, because he was new to office (unlike Truman and Korea) and because the attack was widely seen as due to existential hatreds, not due to policy failures.

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101 See for example CBS news of 7/20/00 – 52% trusted GOP vs. 23% Democrats. CNN/Gallup 8/10/00 on trust to handle national defense: 62% Bush, 29% Gore (a 33% spread; on no other issue was there more than 18%, and on most it was 10% or less).
102 For example, ABC on 4/20/03: who do you trust to handle national defense: Bush 63%, Democrats 32%; to handle the war on terror: Bush 72%, Democrats 21%. CBS/NYT on 3/23/03 – which party best handles terrorism: 46% GOP, 16% Democrats. CNN/Gallup on 11/10/2 – is each party “tough enough” to handle the war on terrorism: GOP 64% yes, Dems 34% yes. Newsweek 7/18/02: Who do you trust more to handle the “war on terror”: Bush 62%, Democrats, 20%. Best party to handle “homeland security” 63% GOP / 30% Dem (ABC 4/30/03). CNN/Gallup: which party can best handle foreign affairs (4/23/03): GOP 54%, Dem 31%.
This combination of factors is consistent with the media priming model, but the 9/11 attacks seem to have activated something deeper, whether psychological or consciously patriotic. Polls showed dramatic increases in sentiment about the general health of the country, despite the fact that expectations on specific policy outcomes became more negative (economic expectations plunged, for example). Views on terror illustrate the pattern: public expectations of successful terror attacks in the future grew, but so did confidence that the government would prevent such attacks. It is difficult to square these changes with the simple media priming model. They may represent psychological needs to express group cohesion and reduce fear and uncertainty and fear by projecting protective abilities onto national leaders, or “expected response” effects where respondents expressed patriotic sentiments because they believed it was socially expected. During late spring/early summer of 2002 these broad indicators returned to more normal values, the same time that Bush’s ratings came down from the 80s to the 65-70% range.

The September 11th attacks suggest that the group cohesion effect may come into play when a nation faces a truly dramatic threat to its own population and territory, but such dramatic changes in presidential fortunes will be rare. In this case it required an attack of great magnitude and its occurrence during a period of unusually low threat perception by the public, a president

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103 For example, Gallup “country on right track”: 43% (9/5/2001), 70% (12/2001) Confidence in the federal government to do the right thing always/most of the time: 40% in 10/2000, 64% in 10/2001 (WashPost). WashPost in 12/01 found that 69% felt that the 9/11 attacks had made a “lasting change for the better” in the U.S. Confidence in U.S. government to protect citizens from terrorist attack: “great deal / good deal”, 36% in June 1997 (ABC); 88% on 9/15/01, 82% in 2/2003 (Gallup). Harris: “People running the country don’t care about people like me”: 57% (1998-2000 average), 36% (12/2001). Gallup: satisfaction with the way thing are going: 51% (7/19/01), 70% (12/5/01).
who had a great deal of latent approval for handling security issues,\textsuperscript{104} as well as fortuitous timing.\textsuperscript{105}

\textit{Iran Hostage Crisis}

For all that the Carter Administration is remembered for low popularity and mishandling of the Iranian hostage crisis, when the situation first developed it led to the third-largest rally since World War II. Carter’s polls went up only marginally after the hostages were first taken, but after the imposition of sanctions and a major show of force Persian Gulf, his polls hovered in the high 50s, fully 25\% above his previous ratings. About four months after the crisis started his numbers started falling, and after a short spike following the failed rescue mission in April, Carter’s numbers were back to the low 30s by June, 1980.

Several factors made the Iranian crisis a good candidate for a “rally”. In fact, the “all variables” model predicts a substantial rally 15\%, with seven points remaining after three months. Since the incident happened at a time when Carter’s approval was dismal due to economic worries, a large increase would be expected (see figure 4-11). The crisis did focus attention away from the economy for a while. That foreign policy focus was increased by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979 (which did not involved a use of force by the U.S.). As negotiations with Iran stalled and media attention shifted from Afghanistan to the challenge from Kennedy, Carter’s numbers fell.

\textsuperscript{104} An interesting test of the cohesion effect would be if the attack had occurred a year or two earlier. Given the Democrat’s lack of credibility on defense, would Clinton have enjoyed a similar rally and Gore have easily swept the 2000 election?
\textsuperscript{105} If the attack had occurred in a hypothetical Bush second term, for example, it would have been much easier to make a case that his administration deserved blame for failing to address the threat beforehand. The fact that Bush followed an administration widely accused of being weak on national security and terrorism in particular also helped absolve the administration of any charges of unpreparedness.

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Although the “surprise” variable had little importance in the model, in the Iran case it seems clear that part of Carter’s improvement came from appearing tough and decisive, relative to his previous reputation. By appearing ready to use force, quickly imposing sanctions, and toughening his line against the Soviets in the wake of Afghanistan, Carter looked considerably more hawkish by the spring of 1980 than he had in the fall of 1979. This change of image did not last. The attempted rescue mission provided a short-term boost, but its failure was later used by Carter’s opponents to dramatize his alleged neglect of the military. The continued captivity of the Americans made it easy to claim that whatever change there may have been in Carter’s rhetoric, his foreign policy was still weak and ineffective.

The Iran hostage case confirms the argument that even the largest “rallies” are not large enough or long-lasting enough to turn around a failed presidency. On the other hand, if the April 1980 mission had rescued the Americans in Tehran, things might have gone differently for Carter in 1980. A successful mission would have eliminated two negatives: the debacle at Desert One would not have been a convenient frame for attacks on Carter’s defense record, and more importantly, the hostage issue would have vanished. The political response to the crisis was similar to a war: the shift in attention to foreign affairs benefited the president at first, but as it became a drawn out affair without visible progress by the administration, it became a liability. A successful conclusion would not necessarily have left him any better off than if the crisis had never happened, though.106

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106 Given that the economy and the energy situation had improved significantly by the summer of 1980, the fact that Carter’s ratings returned to the 50% range suggests he was worse off than if the crisis never happened; an improvement in his ratings would have been expected. Whether he would have improved enough to be reelected is doubtful, though.
The Persian Gulf War of 1991

Prior to the Sept. 11 attacks, no president had seen ratings as high as did George H.W. Bush following the Gulf War in the spring of 1991. By March of 1991, his ratings stood nearly 35 points higher than after the October, 1990 budget deal with Congress, when he broke his “no new taxes” pledge.

The models here actually do a reasonable job of forecasting the Gulf rally; eq 4-11 predicts a 25% gain from December 1990 to the first poll after the war in March, 1991, though the gains are expected to come evenly from the start of the war and the ground war (12% each), not the 20% jump seen all at once. The principal reason for such a large gain is that the war started during a period of poor consumer confidence—consumer expectations stood at 48 in the fall of 1990, their second lowest ever.\(^{107}\) Combined with Bush’s decent approval rating (55-60%), figure 4-9 shows an expected starting point of +12%. Given that the Gulf War was even more popular than predicted and its importance in establishing the rally/economy relationship statistically, it is worth considering the substantive factors that made the war so popular.\(^{108}\)

Unlike 9/11 or Iran, the Gulf War rally cannot be explained by surprise at Presidential actions. Bush may have been unexpectedly resolute in August of 1990, but by January 15, 1991 there was little doubt that he intended to go to war. Nor was the public clamoring for the war to start; surveys show large majorities were willing to allow more time for diplomacy.\(^{109}\)

\(^{107}\) The lowest was 39 during the first quarter of 1980. A more typical “recession” value would be 50-90. In the months after September 11\(^{10}\), it ranged from 70 to 95.

\(^{108}\) The fact that the Gulf and Iran Hostage rallies happened at the two low points ever for consumer confidence is worrying in terms of interpreting the predictions from the model. These two points have a great deal of leverage in shaping the approval/economy relationship as shown in Figure 4-11 (and similar ones in 4-9). Theoretically, the relationship is plausible: uses of force when the economy is doing poorly should be the best case for changing the subject. On the other hand, there may be coincidence involved with these two dominant cases, and so the relationship may be overstated.

\(^{109}\) Mueller, Policy and Opinion In The Gulf War, pp 36-37, and tables 103-109. By January 1991 most respondents thought Bush had made sufficient diplomatic efforts, but supported allowing more time (or making concessions,
of media coverage alone does not seem adequate, as the 2003 invasion of Iraq was even more
dominant, and the Kosovo War nearly so. Prior to the 1991 war opposition was larger than in
2003 (measured by polls or Congressional action), so support of the policy is unlikely to explain
the difference.

One notable difference is that the 1991 Gulf War was associated with much larger in-
creases in general measures of optimism than the 2003 war – more even than the Sept 11th at-
tacks in some cases. Gallup’s “right track” measure, for example, went from 20% in Nov/Dec
1990, to 60% after the war started; the comparable numbers in 2003 were 40% and 55%.
Consumer expectations went up 50 points in four months during the 1991 war, the fastest rise
ever. The fall of 1990 was one of the most pessimistic periods ever for the American public,
but those dark clouds largely evaporated after the Gulf War victory – something not true of
Kosovo or the 2003 Iraq war.

Given the huge increases in good feeling it is not surprising that Bush’s numbers sky-
rocketed, but why such a large uplift? One possibility is that although the outbreak of the 1991
war was not a surprise, its outcome was. Americans expected a much worse war than they got:
prior to the war only 60% were “very confident” of victory, many feared “another Vietnam”, the

like giving Iraq some Kuwaiti islands) if that was likely to head off war. The data unambiguously refute an alter-
native claim made by Tod Lindberg, that Bush’s approval in the fall of 1990 was low due to public impatience with his
diplomacy and lack of resolve, and that rally was in large part due to the public having wanted war all along and
being happy to see Bush finally acting decisively. Lindberg contends the same phenomenon was behind George W.
Bush’s ratings drop during run-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Tod Lindberg, “Do Poll Dips Show Dovish Sen-
110 See Mueller, War, Presidents, and Public Opinion, pp 70-73 for more examples; 2003 numbers from PollingRe-
port.com
111 As of this writing the earliest Conference Board or Univ. of Michigan consumer surveys available are prior to the
2003 Iraq war, but other polls suggest only a modest effect on consumer expectations. Gallup found that those
who think economic conditions are getting better went from the 25-30% range before the war to around 35% after.
112 One issue that is seldom mentioned when discussing the 1991 "rallies" is that most indicators were so low in the
fall of 1990. True, most measures of optimism, satisfaction, and evaluations of President Bush were higher in the
late spring of 1991 than they were before Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, but the difference was much narrower than
when compared to November of 1990. "Right track" numbers in June/July 1990, were 35-40%, not the 19% of
October, 1990; consumer expectations were in the 70s, not 40s.

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median guess for the length of the war was several months to a year, and the public expected to see several thousand Americans killed.\textsuperscript{113} Americans were far more optimistic in 2003: most expected the invasion to take one or two months, with perhaps 100 killed.\textsuperscript{114} When the U.S. public in 1991 saw few casualties, the debut of "smart bombs", very little criticism\textsuperscript{115} and a rapid victory instead of the long and costly war many expected, their mood brightened. Given overwhelming support for the goal of evicting Iraq from Kuwait and wide agreement that war was morally and legally justified, there may have been many who opposed the war on the basis of its expected costs. Evidence to the contrary led people to change their minds once it was clear the war was going well (support rose from 50-55\% before the war to 80\% in Gallup surveys)\textsuperscript{116}. The available polling data cannot prove that speculation, but it is consistent.\textsuperscript{117} In contrast, the 2003 invasion went about as expected and support for the war went up modestly once it began (from

\textsuperscript{113} Mueller, \textit{Policy and Opinion In The Gulf War}, pp 303-308. It is difficult to say exactly what a "median" would be, since questions were phrased in terms of categories (and not even ones at that). A Gallup poll on 1/10/91 asking about killed and injured found 15\% expecting a few hundred or less, 13\% around a thousand, 44\% "several thousand", and 18\% tens of thousands. An ABC poll the same week found even higher estimates with a median around 10,000 killed, though with 40\% choosing "don't know" (it is quite possible the Gallup respondents were thinking "killed", or at least were unaware that only 1 death typically results for every 5 or so wounded; that would make the ABC and Gallup numbers fairly close). These estimates were somewhat more pessimistic than the forecasts of most military analysts (e.g., Barry Posen and Joshua Epstein each predicted several thousand coalition casualties, with U.S. deaths perhaps 500-2,000; for a summary see Michael O'Hanlon, "Estimating Casualties in a War to Overthrow Saddam", \textit{Orbis} (2003), pp 21-41). Actual U.S. combat deaths were 147.

\textsuperscript{114} Gallup on 3/22/03 found 28\% expected less than a month of fighting, 35\% one to three months, 17\% 4-6 months, 9\% up to a year, and 7\% a year or more. ABC on 3/20/03 found 39\% expected days or weeks, 37\% months, and 18\% longer. In terms of casualties, Gallup's 3/22 poll found that 41\% expected fewer than 100 to be killed or injured, 34\% expected several hundred casualties. Only 6\% thought that more than a thousand Americans might be killed or injured. This time, the public was more optimistic than most professional analysts: O'Hanlon predicted several hundred to a few thousand U.S. killed as the most likely range, Ken Pollack 500 to 1,000, though both acknowledged that the "cakewalk" scenario of an immediate Iraqi collapse with hardly any U.S. casualties was possible.

\textsuperscript{115} One study found that of TV news sources who commented on the effectiveness of the U.S. military campaign, 95\% were positive. Mueller, \textit{Policy and Opinion In The Gulf War}. It is too early for such data on the 2003 Iraq War, but the flap over criticism from "retired generals" suggests there was more criticism in 2003, even if coverage was still highly positive overall.

\textsuperscript{116} Mueller, p. 219. Number is those who "favor going to war / having gone to war to drive Iraq from Kuwait"

\textsuperscript{117} Pre-war polls showed a strong relationship between hypothetical casualties in the conflict and support for going to war. See Mueller, pp 233-234. Most polls that asked about support at different casualty level used 1,000 U.S. killed as their lowest scenario, so it is unclear what support would have been in advance for a war with 150 fatalities. An ABC poll on 1/4/91 found 63\% supported war in general if Iraq did not leave Kuwait, 45\% if the possibility of 1,000 U.S. killed was mentioned, 36\% with 10,000 dead.

Burbach, \textit{Diversionary Temptations} 
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about 60% to 70% for Gallup).\textsuperscript{118} Group cohesion, patriotism, expected response effects,\textsuperscript{119} or other factors may have been at work as well in 1991, but deep pre-war pessimism followed by a surprisingly good outcome is the most tangible difference between the Gulf War and other conflicts of similar scale.

What lessons does the Gulf War teach future presidents? It shows that gambles can pay off. If the general expectation is that a conflict will go badly, but the president -- correctly! -- believes it can be won easily, there a potential for gains. Such a gamble could also fail badly, of course. The combination of public pessimism and an actual easy victory -- the likelihood of which is known in advance to the President but not the public -- does not seem likely to arise often.\textsuperscript{120} Since 1991, Americans have not been pessimistic about wars. Future presidents should also note that while unexpected triumphs can bring about public euphoria, that mood is short lived. Bush’s unprecedented rise was followed by an even more unprecedented fall. In 1991, the public rapidly soured as media attention shifted to other problems facing the country, and from the quick victory to the fact that Saddam Hussein was still in power.\textsuperscript{121} By the summer of 1992 his ratings were below 40% and his reelection failed.

\textsuperscript{118} Relatively few polls asked about support as a function of casualties, but Zogby (3/4/2003) found support in general 54%, support with “hundreds” of U.S. killed 46%, and “thousands” of U.S. killed 43%. Support for the war varied much more by prospective U.N. / allied support, for example, and beliefs on the fundamental issue of whether removing Saddam would directly reduce threats to America or not. In 1991 many saw the war as a worthy, important but not mandatory cause, and so expected costs mattered; in 2003, many saw the war as either essential to the safety of U.S. civilians, or as inherently wrong (due to lack of U.N. approval, general objections to preventive war, belief that it would create more terrorism, etc), and so their support or opposition was less cost-sensitive.

\textsuperscript{119} Other possible factors include the exceptionally tight control of information by the Pentagon; the fact that the war involved much larger deployments and reserve call-ups than any other post-Vietnam conflict, meaning more families had a personal stake in battlefield outcomes; or a stronger than usual “expected response” effect because there was an explicit sentiment in the country that Vietnam veterans had been treated badly and this time the military needed to be show support and appreciation once fighting began, whatever one’s true beliefs.

\textsuperscript{120} The public pessimism / presidential optimism situation was not even the case in the Gulf War. Evidence suggests the Pentagon expected higher casualties than outside analysts, and that the White House would not have been surprised if a few thousand Americans were killed.

\textsuperscript{121} Gallup found that at the end of the war, 55% to 38% believed the U.S. had achieved a victory even though Saddam was still in power. Just two months later that had reversed, with 36% thinking it was a victory and 55% not.
6. Conclusion: Implications for Diversionary Behavior

The findings of this chapter indicate that the use of force is a tool with limited application for presidents. If a president drew a prospective conflict out of a hat, he could expect to receive only a 2% increase in his ratings, and only 5% for major conflicts, lasting a few months. Such benefits would not overcome a recession, a scandal, general incompetence, or turn around a losing bid for reelection. Similar gains might be found from easier, less risky presidential activities, a possibility that will be explored in the next chapter. In that sense, this study agrees with recent articles that conclude that there is no threat of diversionary war, since there is nothing to be gained from diversionary war.

The 2% average gain from conflicts is exactly that, however – an average. In some cases substantially more has accrued to presidents, in others wielding the sword has hurt politically. The tests of hypothesis 2 show that the variation between popular and unpopular interventions has a significant systematic component; we can identify characteristics that lead to greater or lower public support. Since presidents do not have to pick wars out of a hat but instead can select opportunities that will be most advantageous, the question is what are best scenarios available at a given time.

The models all predict that under ideal circumstances a president might gain 12-15% in the polls – about what was seen after events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis or the Panama in-
vasion. Obtaining such numbers requires that several conditions be met. First, the conflict requires tremendous media attention, not much of a presidential constraint, but it does rule out very minor uses of force (downing another Libyan plane or blowing up another Iraqi radar would not be dramatic enough).

Presidents also need to find opportunities to use force on behalf of strategic purposes, and better yet, to defend Americans from imminent threats. That condition may be easy to meet during some periods of history, not during others. During an ongoing war defend an ally from invasion, for example, opportunities for escalation would not be difficult to find. During the early Cold War it was widely accepted that communist gains anywhere in the world directly increased Soviet power and thus increased the threat to U.S., so an argument could be made to become involved in almost any civil war—pitching it as protecting another country from Soviet aggression. The U.S. could have become involved in Vietnam earlier than it did, or intervened in Laos, for example. After Vietnam that argument was far less convincing, and after the Cold War there were few plausible security reasons for intervening anywhere in the world.

Protection of American citizens has been the most popular reason to use force, but presidents do not necessarily have opportunities for such missions sitting on the shelf, waiting to be used. Most protection missions come in response to situations that emerge unexpectedly. Not all opportunities have been exploited; presidents might have used force in the “Black September” crisis in Jordan, 1970 (Western planes were hijacked) or in retaliation for the Pan Am

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122 The public was generally opposed to even the relatively minor military involvement of the Reagan Administration in Central America, for example. It is very difficult to see how the Administration could have sold the public that full-scale intervention in Nicaragua or El Salvador was directly vital to American security (Reagan noting that Nicaragua was only a “24 hour drive from Harlingen, Texas” brought mostly ridicule, not fear). Direct intervention in Angola or elsewhere outside of Central America would have been even more difficult to sell, though perhaps intervention in the Libya-Chad conflict in 1983 was an option, since this could have been billed as stopping international aggression, and Khaddafi was intensely disliked by Americans.

123 The best case was the Bosnian war in the early 1990s, where many Americans perceived the conflict as international aggression by Serbia against the Bosnian Muslims.
103 or Khobar Towers bombings, but still, there are a limited number of provocations. Over
the course of a four-year term any president will see several, but given the short-lived nature of
rallies they cannot be counted upon to help a president when needed.

Consider two concrete examples: Reagan and Iran-Contra, and Clinton during the
Lewinsky-impeachment scandal. Reagan had relatively few opportunities for military action in
the fall of 1986 and first half of 1987 when the scandal was at its peak. Tensions with the Soviets
were declining, no wars or communist takeovers were threatened, no major outrages against
Americans occurred. Reagan might have tried to rescue the long-term American captives in
Lebanon, or found a pretext for action against Iran, but given the close connection of the cri-
sis to the hostages and to Iran, such action would have appeared especially cynical. In 1998,
Clinton faced even fewer options. War against Iraq was a possibility, but neither the public nor
the Congress was convinced at that point that taking on Saddam was necessary for U.S. security.
The reaction to war would not necessarily have been positive. The administration could have
provoked a confrontation over Kosovo earlier than it did, but that was an internal fight. With-
out the embassy bombings in August of that year – the deadliest terror attack of the 1990s –
there would not have been opportunities for intervention that were likely to be popular.

For diversion to be attractive the president also has to expect that the intervention will
receive support from Congress and other political actors. Outright opposition can negate any

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124 In fact, a relatively minor use of force did take place in the summer of 1987 – the use of the U.S. navy to escort
tankers in the Persian Gulf following attacks against shipping by Iran. What was done was defensive and fairly low-
key (though it encountered significant criticism nonetheless), Reagan might instead have responded to the Iranian
attacks by striking Iranian military installations.
125 Of course, a few critics allege that Clinton provoked the bombings. The Wall Street Journal editorial page, for
example, accused Clinton of deliberately taking actions designed to incite Islamic terrorists while simultaneously and
deliberately failing to improve security at U.S. overseas facilities, precisely to invite the sort of tragedy seen in Nai-
robi and the subsequent opportunity for military reprisal. Such conspiracy theories are not the sole property of
the right; some left-wing critics charge that Bush knew about the 9/11 attacks in advance and chose to do nothing, and
a widespread rumor in the Arab world is that the whole attack was really an Israeli covert operation.

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gains. The average reaction to uses of force has been mild support, but opposition does happen. This provides a meaningful check on presidential opportunities, as trumped-up cases for intervention are likely to be challenged—not only by the opposition party and commentators, but if military leaders or civilian officials are being forced to take risks and waste resources on behalf of the president's personal fortunes, criticism may leak out to the media.

Finally, presidents need credibility in order to gain from the use of force. Presidents receive less from using force precisely when the need it most—before elections, or during scandals or other failures. Economic trouble does not reduce the benefits of force, though, and there are real opportunities for presidents to change the subject during recessions. When a president is considered a scoundrel or a fool—when approval is much lower than economic conditions would normally warrant—then there is greater skepticism about recourse to arms, whether due to the public's own concerns or greater willingness of opponents to challenge weakened presidents.

In the ideal case of a trusted president facing a poor economy but confronted with an unexpected, direct threat to American citizens, then the use of force could add meaningful support for a president. This would be particularly true for a president who was considered weak on military issues (and could thus demonstrate unexpected strength), especially if the use of force would be consistent with the opposition party's known preferences, since the other party would find that action difficult to criticize. At the other extreme, as the Watergate crisis escalated in 1974 the country saw relations with the Soviets improving and no dramatic, threatening

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126 Republicans found it less comfortable criticizing Clinton for taking action against Iraq than for "humanitarian" intervention in Haiti, for example. Had Clinton found a reason to take tough action against Cuba, it would have been very difficult for Congressional Republicans to disagree. Likewise, Republicans responding to Carter's actions in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980 could complain that Carter should have understood the real Soviet threat much earlier, or insinuate that he was acting tough to make up for the Iranian debacle, but they could not easily claim that Carter's moves were fundamentally wrong.
developments taking place and inclined to distrust presidential claims about foreign threats, and to distrust anything at all claimed by Nixon. It would have been virtually impossible for Nixon to find an opportunity to use force and gain from it, let alone dig himself out of Watergate.  

The post-September 11th environment presents unusually fertile ground to presidents seeking opportunities for diversion. The attacks convinced Americans that direct threats to U.S. civilians are large, and made it plausible to connect almost any operations directly to American security – whether that be attacking terrorist groups, regimes that support terrorists, regimes developing WMD, or providing military assistance to friendly regimes fighting terrorists. The attacks made preemptive strikes far more acceptable (making it easier to create opportunities rather than waiting for them to arrive). Unlike conflicts with Soviet proxies, there is little chance that the U.S. will become involved in full-scale great power war or a nuclear exchange. One might expect evidence of terrorist conspiracies and illicit weapons programs to be shadowy, incomplete, and secret, making it easier for an administration to build a case for intervention that is insulated from criticism. This is a dramatic change from the 1990s, when opportunities for successful diversion were rare. Today, it would be easier to manufacture a popular use of force than at any other time since World War II, whether a Republican or Democrat is in the White House.

127 In fact, the media reaction to the nuclear alert during the Yom Kippur War in October, 1973 was overwhelmingly negative (no visible change occurred in Nixon’s ratings). The reaction was even highly negative to his summit in Moscow in June of 1974, despite the support in principle of the Democrats for détente and arms control.

128 The nuclear exchange point is debatable – attacking a nuclear armed “rogue state” would seem very likely to invite a nuclear response. As of 2003 at least, no minor power has a large arsenal of deliverable thermonuclear weapons as the Soviets did; none could lay waste to the American homeland as was always a possibility in Cold War conflicts. More importantly, there are plenty of potential targets who do not have nuclear weapons and who are not backed by a nuclear power.
Summary of Findings

In short, the use of force generally does not help presidents much, but can do provide moderate benefits under certain circumstances – verifying hypothesis 1 and most of hypothesis 2. Uses of force produce greater increases in presidential approval when they receive heavy press coverage, support from elites, and are directed at protecting Americans directly. Uses of force are much less popular when they receive widespread opposition, are aimed at internal change in another nation, or when they take place during periods that the president's approval rating is much lower than economic conditions alone would predict. Exceptionally large rallies have been seen in a few cases, but under conditions that are difficult to repeat, and even then two of the three recipients of such rallies were voted out of office within two years of their boost (the third has not faced reelection at the time of this writing).

These findings will be used in chapter 6 to derive predictions for when diversionary uses of force should be observed, and what the characteristics of those uses should be. First, though, chapter 5 performs an analysis parallel to what was done here to measure the impact of presidential activities other than the use of force, so that the relative benefits can be compared.
Chapter 5:

Political Benefits of Peace, Speeches, and Foreign Travel

The use of force has long been recognized as a potential tool for presidents who are seeking to distract attention and improve their standing in the wake of domestic political problems, but less attention has been given to alternatives to military action. In chapter 2, it was hypothesized that other forms of dramatic presidential action would also create a "rally" effect in the president's approval ratings and thus provide other options to politically motivated presidents. This chapter tests that proposition.

The political benefits of presidential foreign travel, televised addresses, and major peace promoting activities are measured in this chapter. The hypothesis is tested with the same methods that were used in chapter 4 for measuring the benefits of the use of force: a quantitative model of presidential approval is estimated, with the effects of these dramatic events being a component of that model. Doing so required the creation of a dataset on presidential peace initiatives, as previous research had given relatively little attention to the subject.

The results provide mixed support for the hypothesis. Policy speeches and foreign travel do not in fact help presidents very much; travel causes a loss of 2% on average. Peace events provide an increase on average, though not as large as for uses of force. The gains for particular peace events are driven by the same variables that shape differences between uses of force, as predicted by the media priming model: media coverage, elite support, and existing political conditions such as prior presidential approval. Overall peace events do not provide a superior alternative to uses of force, but they might be more attractive due to lower risks, and in certain con-
ditions (most notably, when presidential approval is low despite a good economy), would in fact have an absolute advantage over uses of force.

The chapter is organized into the following five sections:

1) **Overview: Dramatic Presidential Action as a Source of “Rallies”**. This section outlines the reasons why dramatic actions such as major diplomatic achievements, presidential addresses, and foreign travel could be expected to improve presidential standing in a way analogous to uses of force.

2) **Literature Review**. This section reviews the relatively sparse literature on the political effect of dramatic actions other than the use of force, and surveys the evidence from historical sources that presidents and their advisors have seen peace initiatives as a source of political capital.

3) **Methods and Data**. This section first reviews the predictions from chapter 2, then describes the general statistical approach to be used to test those predictions. The procedures used to identify the events in each class of activity, are described, and those for coding the events on relevant variables.

4) **Statistical Results**. Results from the regressions are presented and interpreted.

5) **Implications for Diversion**. Finally, the results are summarized, the hypotheses evaluated, and the implications for diversionary activity are discussed.

1. **Overview**

While it is taken for granted that uses of force are candidates for diversionary activity, less attention has been paid to alternatives. What other simple but dramatic actions are available to presidents to capture media attention and demonstrate their success as a statesman? As discussed in chapter 2, prospective diversionary events should meet three criteria. They should generate intense media coverage, be likely to be popular with the public, and be under presidential control.
Three candidates that were suggested as meeting those criteria were major presidential addresses (especially when the address signals the launch of a broader policy initiative), foreign travel, and major "uses of peace"—diplomacy, arms control accomplishment, de-escalation or termination of wars. These actions do not exhaust the list of possibilities, but they are at the top of the list of possibilities.

This section makes the case that major televised addresses, foreign travel, and peace-promoting events are candidates to create "rallies"—and thus to be useful for diversion. The argument proceeds by considering each of the three criteria—media attention, popularity, presidential control. The polling record is then examined, showing that peace events at least have been followed by significant changes in approval—larger than expected by chance, and of the same magnitude as uses of force.

*Non-Force Events as "Rally" Candidates: Three Criteria*

**Media Attention**

Dramatic breakthroughs in diplomacy or other "peaceful" developments receive extremely high levels of media attention, as great as for all but the very largest use-of-force events. For example, Eisenhower's 1955 summit meeting in Geneva generated 35 front-page stories in the *New York Times* in 14 days. More recently, Reagan's meetings with Gorbachev all generated 20 to 30 front page stories, and even with the end of the Cold War the Clinton-Yeltsin summits still attracted front page attention for several days. Peacemaking efforts in third-party conflicts also receive attention, such as the 20 front-page stories about Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy with Egypt and Israel in January 1974, eleven front page stories for the Dayton conference that ended

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1 As in the previous chapter, all *New York Times* data here was obtained from various years of the New York Times Index.
the Bosnian war, or the 15 stories about Clinton's unsuccessful middleast peace summit in Wye, Maryland in the fall of 1998. Not surprisingly, the end of wars in Korea and Vietnam dominated the news when those conflicts finally were over.

Foreign travel can also generate a great deal of visibility for a president. The most dramatic case is Nixon's visit to China in the spring of 1972. The trip dominated the front pages, and even more so was a television event: there was live coverage of many parts of Nixon's visit, using a satellite uplink station that had been sent to China for that very purpose. Even when not directly connected to major foreign policy developments, foreign travel draws tremendous media attention to presidents. The share of network news stories devoted to the Lewinsky scandal declined dramatically during Clinton's 10 day trip to Africa in March of 1998, and his July 1998 trip to China was by far the dominant topic for network news coverage that month.\(^2\) Foreign travel is also likely to improve the tone of coverage, given that the press corps has fewer sources of information to challenge the White House when away from Washington, and the press are particularly dependent the White House during such trips.

Presidential speeches, too, can dramatically shift media attention. Even individuals who do not normally follow the news may watch prime-time addresses that preempt other programming. Such speeches often generate stories for days as Congress reacts to the president's remarks, the media runs background stories, opinion polls are conducted, etc. A dramatic illustration of this is President George H.W. Bush's speech on drugs on September 5, 1989. During the month of August, ABC news allotted 20 minutes to drug-related stories. Although the only new

development in the “drug war” was Bush’s speech, ABC’s coverage climbed to 95 minutes, most of those stories focusing on the Administration’s plans.³

### Popularity of Peace Events, Travel, and Speeches

The other requirement for diversionary activities according to the media priming model is that the activity should be popular itself, or at least draw attention to a general issue area where the president’s positions are popular. This condition seems likely to be met for many peace events, as well as major addresses and travel.

The notion that peace would go over well with citizens is not new. One of the foundations of Kant’s democratic peace was that given the cost of war in lives and money, war would be highly unpopular to voters.⁴ Public opinion data confirms that Americans support peace, at least in the abstract. For example, arms control agreements have almost always enjoyed strong support.⁵ Even in the 1950s there was strong support for restrictions on nuclear testing, so long as both superpowers were included.⁶ Support for SALT II hit 90% in the mid-70s, and remained above 50% during the chill in US/Soviet relations later that decade. Three in four respondents

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³ Data from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive. News of the upcoming Bush speech actually broke on August 31st, and that story was moved from the August to Sept count since it was directly related to the upcoming speech.


⁵ It should be noted that while support for arms control appears high, the public is also quite poorly informed about the issue. In 1987, for example, one poll found that only 40% of the public knew that any agreements prior to the INF. For a detailed discussion of public knowledge of arms control, see Thomas W. Graham, "The Pattern and Importance of Public Knowledge in the Nuclear Age", Journal of Conflict Resolution, vol. 32 (1988), pp 319-334.

⁶ On the other hand, the lack of knowledge would work to the advantage of presidents wanting to use arms control for diversion. Since the public likes the idea but is unclear on the details, there would be ample opportunity for a president to portray an agreement as far more significant than it is, or to offer proposals that sound attractive and reasonable, but which are actually non-starters with the other side (a charge made against Reagan’s “zero option” INF proposal in 1981).

⁷ For example, a Gallup survey in the summer of 1957 found that the public by a 65-20% margin wanted Eisenhower to propose a test ban at a future U.S.-Soviet summit meeting. (Roper Center, question USGALLUP.57-585, R003A).
typically supported a nuclear freeze in the early 1980s, and large majorities approved of the INF treaty and START talks later in the decade. Support more generally for dialogue and reduction of tensions between the superpowers has also been strong.

Actions to end, avoid, or de-escalate conflicts also receive support, particular if wars are not going well. By late 1969 majorities were in favor of withdrawing from Vietnam, and throughout Nixon's first term those who thought troops were coming home too slowly outnumbered those who thought the pullout was too fast by 4 to 1. Support remained stronger for the Korean War, but polls also made it clear that by 1951 Americans were eager to see the war end. Prior to the first Gulf War, large majorities wanted President Bush to make every possible effort to get Iraq out of Kuwait through negotiations rather than war.

Foreign travel and speeches announcing new policy initiatives are also likely to receive public support. In the case of new policy initiatives, presidents seeking to divert public attention to a popular proposal would only advance proposals likely to be popular, and presidents have the tools to determine what alternatives the public would most support. Administrations routinely conduct polls about policy proposals under consideration, and it is not difficult to find popular

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8 Ronald H. Hinckley, *People, Polls, and Policymakers: American Public Opinion and National Security* (New York: Lexington Books, 1992), p 68-72. Hinckley makes the point that while support for arms control was very high in the abstract, the public also distrusted Soviet willingness to comply with agreements.
10 John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York: Wiley, 1973), pp 75-80. There is not a lot of detail in the Korea polls, most simply gave the three options of "pull out now", "continue fighting", or "attack China". Continuing the war always received the most support, with a somewhat even split between pulling out and escalating. A few polls gave a long list of policy options, but included the option of "end it – don't know how", which not surprisingly received the highest ranking. It would have been interesting to see data that probed support for continuing vs. accepting particular peace deals.
yet easy to implement ideas. Travel too is often well-received, since it highlights the president’s role as a symbol of the nation. Clinton’s trip to China in the midst of the Lewinsky scandal received 65% support, and at the end of 1959 Eisenhower’s round-the-world trip came in 2nd in a poll of the most outstanding things to have happened that year.

Presidential Control

Finally, peace events, speeches, and travel are subject to a high degree of presidential control. Foreign travel in particular is strictly under presidential control in terms of timing and destinations; many foreign leaders are eager to be seen consulting with the American president and so are happy to arrange visits full of pomp and flattering photo opportunities. Diplomacy and arms control also offer opportunities for relatively unfettered action. It is true that getting a treaty through the Senate faces an even higher hurdle than does gaining approval for the use of force, and many presidents have seen prized treaties founder in the Senate. Other peaceful actions are available, though. During the Cold War presidents could always issue a new arms control proposal or start some new round of negotiation with the Soviets. Many forms of cooperation can be conducted with executive agreements rather than formal treaties. As Commander-in-Chief, the president also has the ability make changes in military deployments and operations on his own initiative. Lyndon Johnson had a relatively free hand in stopping the bombing of

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12 This was a key part of Dick Morris’ strategy for rebuilding Bill Clinton’s political standing in the wake of the 1994 Republican takeover of Congress. Dick Morris, Behind the Oval Office (Los Angeles: Renaissance Books, 1999)
13 1959 result from Roper Center question USGALLUP59-621, Q652. The top “outstanding development” was Khrushchev’s visit to the U.S. and meetings with Eisenhower.
14 Other political actors are free to criticize presidential travel, of course. The Republican Congress in the late 1990s complained on numerous occasions about the expense involved in Clinton’s overseas jaunts, just as the Democrats before 1992 complained that George H.W. Bush was spending too much time away from pressing problems in America.
North Vietnam in October, 1968, as did George H.W. Bush when he announced significant, unilateral reductions in American tactical nuclear weapon deployments in September 1991.15

Evidence: *Quick Look at Reactions to Peace Events, Speeches, Travel.*

The logic above suggests that travel, speeches, and peace activities should be able to move presidential ratings. This section argues that peace events at least have done so, at least from a first look at the changes in approval ratings surrounding major peace events. For example, Table 5-1, below, shows a number of significant positive and negative changes in that were seen after a selection of peace events, speeches and foreign trips.

15 These actions were not immune to criticism, of course, and such executive actions can be the subject of leaks and off-the-record criticism from when others in the Administration disagree with presidential decisions. Relative to actions that require legislative authorization, new appropriations, or issue areas where power is more widely shared with Congress, state and local authorities, and interest groups, military operations are an area where the presidential can bring about real changes quickly and decisively. If LBJ wanted the bombing of Vietnam to stop on a given day, it would stop. In fact, Clark Clifford made exactly that point to Robert Kennedy when trying to dissuade him from entering the presidential primaries in the spring of 1968 – Johnson could de-escalate and pull the rug out from under Kennedy any time he wanted to. Clark Clifford, *Counsel To the President* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Approval Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>End of Vietnam War</td>
<td>1/73</td>
<td>+16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiatives to improve relations with Soviet Union</td>
<td>5/89</td>
<td>+14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Atoms for Peace&quot; proposal</td>
<td>12/53</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisenhower's 'Round the World &quot;Goodwill Tour&quot;</td>
<td>12/59</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson attends Manila Conference, offers Vietnam peace plan</td>
<td>10/66</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reagan reopens arms talks with USSR</td>
<td>11/81</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nixon's visit to China</td>
<td>2/72</td>
<td>+4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George H.W. Bush drug policy speech</td>
<td>9/89</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford attends Helsinki CSCE Summit</td>
<td>7/75</td>
<td>-8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush attends Middle East peace conference in Madrid</td>
<td>11/91</td>
<td>-10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of Korean War</td>
<td>8/53</td>
<td>-13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most dramatic impact on a president’s standing came from the end of the Vietnam War. Ending that conflict provided a significant boost to Richard Nixon. The boost appears short-lived, but since the first major developments in the Watergate scandal followed soon after it is hard to know how long it would have lasted under normal circumstances. Nixon also gained substantially from his “silent majority” speech in November of 1969, in which Vietnam troop withdrawals were announced. The end of the Cold War helped President Bush early in his term. After criticism for not doing enough to assist Gorbachev during his first months in office, in
May of 1989 Bush proposed a dramatic cut in conventional forces and spoke of wanting to help the Soviets rejoin “the family of nations”. Press coverage immediately became congratulatory and a 14% rise in approval followed.16

It is not automatic that non-force events help presidents. Eisenhower actually lost 13% at the end of the Korean War.17 President Ford was hurt by the much-criticized Helsinki Summit in 1975. George H.W. Bush’s arms control and other initiatives towards the Soviets don’t seem to have helped him at all after May of 1989. Bush’s ratings declined steadily through the Washington and NATO summits in June/July 1990, and declined 20% through several summits and nuclear weapons cuts in July-October 1991. Despite the media focus, Bush’s drug policy speech did not help his ratings – nor did Carter’s infamous “malaise” speech hurt his.18

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16 Don Oberdorfer, *The Turn* (New York: Touchstone, 1991), pp 349-352. In retrospect the proposals and the change in rhetoric seem mild, but Oberdorfer says that at the time he and other reporters felt as if Bush had been Clark Kent, then stepped into a phone booth on the way to Brussels and emerged as Superman. See also Michael Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, *At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1993)

17 This change was not a momentary blip. Eisenhower had been very steady around 72% while the war was underway, then was steady around 60% in the fall of 1953.

18 Carter’s ratings actually climbed three points in the wake of the speech – in which Carter never actually use the word “malaise”, but did speak of a national “crisis of confidence”.

Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*
Chapter 5: “Peace Events, Speeches, and Travel”
Figure 5-1: Approval Changes after Peace Events

To show the overall pattern, figure 5-1 presents a histogram of the immediate change in approval following “peace events”.\textsuperscript{19} Compared to the use of force reactions shown in figure 4-1, the reaction to peace events is more heavily clustered around zero, and shows a mean much closer to zero – though still positive. This suggests that peace events do not bring rewards comparable to uses of force, on average. Some events are followed by significant gains, though, so it is possible that under identifiable circumstances, “uses of peace” will also help presidents. In addition, the gains are not dramatically smaller than for uses of force, and if the costs and risks of peace are seen as smaller, they could still be a preferred option for presidents.

\textsuperscript{19} Events as identified by the procedures described in section 3 of this chapter. See Appendix 5-A for a full list of events.
In short, there is reason to think that events other than the use of force affect presidential standing, and so might be useful tools to presidents seeking to divert attention from their failings. The next section reviews the scholarly literature to explain what we already know – and don’t know – about the political impact of such events.

2. Literature Review and Presidential Histories

This section describes what we already know about the political benefits of speeches, foreign travel, and peace events. Academic studies are reviewed first – and it is a much shorter review than the parallel review in chapter 4, since the literature on dramatic activities other than the use of force is sparse. Next, the historical evidence is surveyed. It seems that presidents and their advisors often think that peace is a political winner, as there are many examples in memoirs and insider accounts of peace initiatives being discussed as political strategies.

_Peace Events_

Compared to the attention that has been paid to uses of force, very little is known about the public reaction to peace events: summits, treaties, international mediation, and other dramatic presidential activities. The focus in recent studies has been strictly on the use of force, and while early studies included major diplomatic events as potential “rally” points, they generally did not disaggregate their effect from the effect of military operations and other events. Only two studies have looked explicitly at dramatic yet peace-promoting events.

Early studies of the “rally effect” looked at “dramatic international events” rather than just uses of force, and so included a number of non-military activities. Unfortunately, they did not distinguish between the effects of military force and of other foreign policy activities. Müel-
ler, for example, includes U.S./Soviet summits and bombing halts in Vietnam as rally points.\textsuperscript{20} MacKuen created a more extensive list of events from 1964 to 1980, including a number of diplomatic activities, but again did not disaggregate peace events from uses of force and major domestic events.\textsuperscript{21}

Only two studies have looked explicitly at the reaction to presidential peace activities, with contradictory findings. Marra, Ostrom, and Simon found that instances of "diplomacy" cost presidents about 2%.\textsuperscript{22} Brace and Hinckley find that "Major Diplomacy", which include summits and other examples of "peacemaking", helps presidents with a 2% boost immediately, a 5% boost a month later, and a 2% boost again for the next few months. On other hand, "treaty announcements" cause a steady 2% loss for several months. Like Marra, Ostrom, and Simon, the Brace and Hinckley study does not identify the events that make up the "diplomacy" and "treaty announcement" series.\textsuperscript{23}

None of the studies to date explored the differences in reactions to peace events. As with uses of force, variables that would be expected to matter include success, Congressional support, or the type of action (e.g., the public might react differently to de-escalations of an ongoing war than to arms control proposals).

\textsuperscript{20} Mueller, \textit{War, Presidents, and Public Opinion}, p. 211. Kernell (1978) used this same set of events.
\textsuperscript{22} Robin Marra et. al., "Foreign Policy and Presidential Popularity", \textit{Journal of Conflict Resolution}, vol. 34 (1990), pp 588-623. Unfortunately Marra et. al. do not tell us what those diplomatic events were, other than that there were 18 of them from 1949 to 1984. See chapter 4, section 2 for details on their study.
\textsuperscript{23} Paul Brace and Barbara Hinckley, \textit{Follow The Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents} (New York: Basic Books, 1992), pp 90-110. Their event categories are confusing. They include a list of "positive and negative events" which may or may not be a superset of their force, diplomacy, etc sets, as well as the domestic events that clearly belong in the list. If this list (appendix A, pp 182-188) is their complete list of events, it is very incomplete: the only arms control treaty included is the INF treaty in 1987 (no PTBT, NPT, SALT I or II, etc). No summits are included, but since the text explicitly mentions them, there presumably is a "diplomacy" series separate from the "positive/negative" list. That then raises the question of why INF, Camp David, and Vietnam peace efforts are included in the positive/negative list rather than the (presumed) "diplomacy" list.
Foreign Travel

Simon and Ostrom found in 1989 that travel had no independent effect on presidential approval. Using a poll-to-poll method of comparison, they find that travel without an accompanying speech or major event had statistically insignificant effects of a 1% change or less. Changes following speeches or events were essentially identical whether or not foreign travel took place at the same time.\(^\text{24}\) In their expanded 1990 article coauthored with Marra, however, they find that major foreign travel had a significant negative effect on approval, lowering it by 4% +/- 2% on average, with a half-life of nine months.\(^\text{25}\) Brace and Hinckley echoed the earlier Simon and Ostrom study, finding that travel had no significant effect upon approval.\(^\text{26}\)

Presidential Speeches

The most comprehensive studies of the impact of speeches on approval were done by Lyn Ragsdale in the mid 1980s, which unfortunately means that the years of coverage are limited (1949-1980). Ragsdale’s 1984 study found that on average, televised addresses added 2-4% to a president’s approval; speeches were not broken down by subject.\(^\text{27}\) The follow-on study in 1987 did separate speeches by category, but also disaggregated by president and by party affiliation of respondents — that is, the regressions measure such things as the average effect of foreign policy speeches by Johnson upon Republican respondents. At that level of detail it is difficult to see


\(^{25}\) Marra et. al., "Foreign Policy and Presidential Popularity". Note that this study differs from the earlier Simon & Ostrom study in that the early study used poll-to-poll comparisons only, whereas this study included a full model of approval over time, including various control variables.

\(^{26}\) Brace and Hinckley, *Follow The Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents*, p. 56.

general patterns – which in itself suggests that the effect of speeches is not large and consistent.  

Later studies came to mixed conclusions on Ragsdale’s argument that speeches are important. Simon and Ostrom’s 1989 study found relatively little impact from speeches independent of events (that is, events without speeches had the same effect as events with speeches; speeches not attached to a dramatic event had little effect). That result changed a year later for Marra, Ostrom, and Simon, however. They found that prime-time foreign policy speeches led to a 6% (+/-2) increase in approval, with a nine month half-life – a meaningful boost for a president. In contrast, “domestic policy” speeches cost presidents about 2%. Flipping the results once again, Brace and Hinckley found that foreign policy addresses have essentially no effect on presidential approval; they did not look at other types of speeches.

**Evidence from History: What the White House Thinks**

Presidents themselves believe that dramatic peace-promoting activities are popular, and can boost their political standing. While memoirs and histories contain almost no hints of discussions of the political benefits of using force, they reveal numerous instances where the White House expected peace initiatives to boost the President’s standing – and in fact saw such political gains as a reason for the initiatives in the first place.

Eisenhower gave a speech early in 1953 urging the Soviets to join with the U.S. in disarmament, peaceful relations, and third world development programs; he received an overwhelm-

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29 Marra et. al., "Foreign Policy and Presidential Popularity". In their scheme, “domestic” speeches were all non-foreign policy speeches, with the exception of mandatory speeches (e.g., state of the union) and commemorative / memorial remarks, such as Reagan’s address after the Challenger disaster.

30 Brace and Hinckley, *Follow The Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents*, p. 108
ingly positive response. The White House had worried about the public reaction beforehand, but in fact Eisenhower was lauded by the press, by Congress, and in a flood of enthusiastic telegrams. Eisenhower aides noted that peace could be a political winner and that the administration should try to build on that momentum.\footnote{Emmet John Hughes, *The Ordeal of Power: A Political Memoir of the Eisenhower Years* (New York: H. Wolff, 1962), pp 106-117; Sherman Adams, *Firsthand Report: The Story of the Eisenhower Administrations* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1961), p. 97. The speech was given on April 16, 1953. To today’s ears the speech was startlingly “dovish” — equating the building of a bomber to stealing food from the hungry, speaking of “all mankind hanging from a cross of iron”, and urging a grand, multinational project of shifting military spending to worldwide relief and reconstruction. Of course, this vision was contingent on Soviet reciprocation, but with the recent death of Stalin, Eisenhower hoped that better relations might be possible.} Similar observations were made regarding the “Atoms for Peace” initiative late in 1953 and the 1955 Geneva Summit. In 1960 the White House explicitly sought to position Eisenhower as a “Man of Peace” in order to put Nixon and Republicans generally in the best light for elections later that year. Concrete steps were to include world travel, a summit with Khrushchev, and greater visibility at the U.N. and other diplomatic settings.\footnote{Emmet John Hughes, *The Ordeal of Power: A Political Memoir of the Eisenhower Years* (New York: H. Wolff, 1962), p. 278. Interestingly, the White House was aware that in general voters might think strategically and discount obviously self-interested activity by a president — except in this case, press secretary Haggerty argued, the very fact that Eisenhower was a lame duck meant they did not have to worry about public skepticism, and therefore could push quite hard in this “Man of Peace” strategy.}

John F. Kennedy did not emphasize arms control or improved relations with the Soviets in the 1960 campaign, and the Berlin and Cuba crises did not encourage peace initiatives in the first half of his term. Kennedy noticed in 1963 though that audiences were very enthusiastic about the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and to talk of further arms agreements and cooperation with the Soviets. The White House concluded that “peace is an issue” that could be used in during the 1964 campaign.\footnote{David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972), pp 361-363.}
Johnson saw possibilities in peace as well. During the 1964 he viewed escalation in Vietnam as a political loser.\textsuperscript{34} After the election LBJ continued to feel that the public had to see the Administration making every effort possible to find a peaceful solution — including the use of dramatic events to portray the Administration as seeking to end the war. It is noteworthy that every major public address Johnson made on Vietnam focused on peace proposals, not escalatory actions. The bombing pause in December, 1965 was openly acknowledged in the administration as primarily an attempt to assuage American public opinion,\textsuperscript{35} later pauses had similar domestic motivations. Johnson’s initial reaction to the Tet Offensive was to escalate, but he soon realized that the event had weakened him and helped his primary opponents. Therefore, to provide political cover “I’ve got to get me a peace plan”, Johnson told aides on March 20\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{36} Johnson may even have hoped to use the peace issue to get back into the race later that year: he had arranged a surprise summit and initiation of strategic arms talks with the Soviets, set to take place in August of 1968. LBJ thought that the feat might spur the Democratic Party convention to draft him, despite his earlier withdrawal from the Presidential race.\textsuperscript{37} The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia literally hours before the summit plans were to be announced to the press scuttled the summit and Johnson’s hopes.

\textsuperscript{34} Michael Beschloss, \textit{Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1964-1965} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), pp 256-257, 364-365, 397-399, 501. Johnson also worried that the right wing would damage him if he were not tough enough, but in terms of general public opinion LBJ seems to have worried more that people did not want to see U.S. troops put in harm’s way in Vietnam — “these mothers and people are afraid of war” as Senator Johnston told LBJ (p. 501, emphasis in original).


\textsuperscript{37} Michael Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, \textit{At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War} (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1993), p. 113. For background on the summit plans, see Glenn Seaborg, \textit{Stemming the Tide: Arms Control in the Johnson Years} (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987), pp 435-439. Clark Clifford does not suggest that LBJ had any thoughts of getting back into the race, but does acknowledge that Johnson thought the summit would put a positive, triumphant spin on the convention, rather than the focus being on Vietnam disagreements. \textit{Clifford, Counsel To the President}
Johnson's hopes to exploit peace initiatives may not have ended with the failed summit.

Richard Nixon was convinced that Johnson ended the bombing of North Vietnam on the eve of the 1968 election as a ploy to help Hubert Humphrey, a view shared by many others. 38 In return, Johnson blamed Nixon for actively intervening with the South Vietnamese to block the deal to begin peace talks that was nearing fruition in October of 1968. There seems to be more evidence to support the charge against Nixon, but of course that may only indicate that LBJ's people kept quieter about any such manipulation than did Nixon's contacts. 39 Nixon also believed that Johnson's peace conference in Manila in October of 1966 had been nothing but a gimmick to sway the impending midterm elections 40.

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38 Richard Nixon, RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), pp 323-329. Nixon was far from alone in suspecting this, though no evidence has been offered to prove the charge. There would not necessarily have to be much evidence, though, it was an action LBJ could order by himself without coordinating with the Humphrey campaign. It was in search for documentation on the bombing halt that Nixon aides discussed burglarizing the Brookings Institution. H. R. Haldeman, The Ends of Power (New York: Times Books, 1978), p. 278

39 The affair is reviewed in detail by William Bundy, and the details of who said what to whom when are far too much to repeat here. In short, the charge is that Nixon's camp used Anna Chennault, a Republican activist with close connection in Taiwan and Southeast Asia, to communicate to Vietnamese President Thieu Nixon's strong desire that he not agree to Johnson's plan to begin peace talks in Paris, and implying he would get a better deal from a Nixon Administration. Thieu indeed scuttled the plan at the last moment before the election, despite having given Johnson the impression earlier in October that he would agree. As part of the Johnson Administration, of course, Bundy, has an ax to grind. Clark Clifford, not surprisingly, makes the same charges in his memoirs; Bill Safire and H.R. Haldeman strenuously defend Nixon in theirs. What makes the charges somewhat credible is that they are confirmed by Chennault herself and by two Vietnamese sources -- Bui Diem, the Vietnamese ambassador to the U.S. at the time, and Nguyen Tien Hung, an advisor to president Thieu -- in their respective memoirs (all published later than the Safire or Haldeman books). William Bundy, A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), pp 28-49. Nixon himself express certainty that the 1968 bombing pause was politically motivated, but he is silent on the accusations against his own side Nixon, RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon, pp 323-329.

40 Bundy, A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency, p. 28; Nixon, RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon, pp 273-278. Nixon suspects and finds it "entirely in character" for Johnson to have done the Manila Conference as an election ploy. He supports this charge by noting that everyone saw the trip as transparently political, including "almost insinuatingly cynical" treatment by the press. That seems to overstate the skepticism, at least as reported in the New York Times. Senators Ford and Fulbright questioned Johnson's motives when the trip was first announced, and a Tom Wicker column after the meeting does refer to "widespread suspicion" that the conference was politically timed. Motive questioning was not a major theme of coverage, though, and did not appear in most of the articles reporting on the conference itself. Tom Wicker, "The Johnson Blitz", New York Times, November 2, 1966, p. 36; Tom Finney, "Johnson Accepts Asian Invitation to Vietnam Talks", New York Times, September 28, 1966, p. 1.
Nixon himself is accused of trying to consummate a Vietnam peace deal in order to sway an election. Significant progress had been made in the talks in 1972, and on October 26— one week before the election— Kissinger announced that “peace is at hand”. In practice, the proposed deal fell apart and the war continued another three months. Many observers suspect that the hints that a peace deal was imminent were designed to boost Nixon in the election (he was already far ahead); others claim that the Administration was indeed trying frantically to complete a deal before the election, and was willing to make substantial compromises to do so.41 Courting public opinion also played a role in the Administration’s troop withdrawal policy. Nixon initially resisted specific withdrawal timetables but by June of 1969 felt his public standing would be hurt if he did not; a second announcement of withdrawals and a reduction in draft calls in September was calculated to appease students as they returned to campuses.42 Defense Secretary Laird explicitly cited the satisfying public opinion in advance of the 1970 midterm elections as the basis for his recommended withdrawal rates, and Nixon did in fact announce accelerated reductions in August, 1970 in the face of the upcoming elections and controversy of the recently concluded Cambodian operation.43 During the final months of Watergate, Nixon hoped that the visible reminder of his foreign policy successes from his back-to-back trips to the Middle East and Moscow would rally support around him. He wrote about the

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41 Karnow, Vietnam: A History, p. 648; Bundy, A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency, p. 357. Karnow claims Kissinger told his aides, “I want to reach an agreement. I want this war to end before the election. It can be done and it will be done. Kissinger denies this, and in fact claims that Nixon was urging him not to pay any attention to the election and not to compromise too much, for fear that Nixon would be criticized for giving away too much in order to look good for the election. Henry Kissinger, White House Years (New York: Little, Brown, 1979). To further complicate things, Hersh argues that Nixon was indeed hoping to slow the peace talks, because White House aides thought Nixon would do better against McGovern if the war were still ongoing (the logic being that blue-collar voters preferred Nixon to McGovern’s pacifism, but would revert to their Democratic allegiance without the war). Seymour M. Hersh, The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House (New York: Summit Books, 1983), pp 589-610.
43 Kissinger, White House Years, pp 480-481.
trip’s impact on his poll numbers in his diary\textsuperscript{44} and publicly alluded to the danger to America and the world of having a weakened presidency.

Maintaining public support also factored into Nixon’s arms control initiatives. Bill Safire argued in 1969 that when the Vietnam War wound down, anti-war Democrats were likely to turn to arms control as a means of attacking the administration and recommended that the administration move faster on arms talks than it might otherwise in order to preempt such attacks.\textsuperscript{45} Likewise, the administration’s entry into the MBFR talks in 1971 was done to cater to U.S. (and European) public opinion.\textsuperscript{46}

In the Reagan administration, too, there is evidence that the White House saw political gains in pursuing peace activities. For example, they felt they had to offer proposals in the INF talks in late 1981 as a sop to public opinion, even if their “zero option” proposal was clearly non-negotiable at the time.\textsuperscript{47} The White House believed war fears and the groundswell of support for a nuclear freeze were harming Reagan’s approval rating, and the initiation of START talks and the Strategic Defense Initiative came in part to counter that threat.\textsuperscript{48} In early 1984, Reagan’s campaign advisors identified war fears as Reagan’s key vulnerability, and urged that the

\textsuperscript{44} Nixon, RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon, p. 1017.
\textsuperscript{47} Strobe Talbott, Deadly Gambits (New York: Random House, 1984)
\textsuperscript{48} Knopf, "Domestic Sources of Preferences for Arms Cooperation: The Impact of Protest"; Frances Fitzgerald, Way Out There In the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000) pp 191-215. Although SDI is often thought of as a “hawkish” policy, it is clear that Reagan himself saw it as something peaceful – a surer way to eliminate the threat of nuclear war than any freeze or treaty. Fitzgerald makes a convincing case that Reagan really did harbor the dream of a nuclear-free world and sincerely saw SDI as a contribution to world peace, not merely a way to get military advantage over the Soviets. Reagan and his aides were not unaware of the political impact the proposal might have. The day after his speech announcing SDI, Reagan wrote in his diary that he was eager to see if the polls showed an improvement in his foreign policy rating, since he thought the speech would reduce his “warmonger” image. Michael Deaver described the initiative as something that would neutralize the nuclear war issue in 1984; Robert McFarlane and other officials at first assumed the point of proposal was to divert attention from the freeze movement, since it did not seem to make sense on policy grounds.
Administration withdraw troops from Lebanon, keep the Central America issue quiet, and most especially make progress on arms control and U.S.-Soviet relations generally. Soon after, Reagan proclaimed 1984 a “year of peace”. The Administration dramatically softened its tone on Soviet relations, culminating in a September speech at the U.N. that was widely seen as taking the wind out of the sails of Democratic challenger Mondale’s criticism of Reagan’s hard-line foreign policy. One NSC staffer charges the White House was desperate for a Central America peace deal in October of that year, to create a dramatic, last-minute demonstration of Reagan’s peacemaking potential. On the other hand, there is little suggestion that the White House looked to diplomatic successes to directly distract from the Iran-Contra scandal, though the black mark may have increased Reagan’s desire for foreign policy accomplishments in his last year.

The first Bush administration began with the president facing intense pressure to take concrete steps to continue Reagan’s policy of cooperation with Mikhail Gorbachev, but the administration instead took a cautious, go-slow approach. By May of 1989 the administration faced heavy press criticism; the White House was well aware that a dramatic diplomatic move could help their faltering poll numbers. As the 1992 election neared, Clinton worried that Bush would attempt to divert attention from his economic failings with a surprise summit and arms

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control agreement, though there is no mention of anyone in the Bush white house suggesting a major foreign policy initiative to try to dig themselves out of their electoral hole.

Facing his own reelection campaign in 1996, Clinton made political use of arms control himself. Despite the general disinterest in foreign affairs, he found that one of his biggest applause lines was to claim that Russian missiles were no longer aimed at American cities. Clinton, and later Gore in 2000 both cited the 1994 “detargeting” agreement (and a similar one with China) as one of the chief accomplishments of their administration, even though most experts considered it essentially meaningless.

3. Methods and Data

The approach to measuring the political benefits of dramatic actions other than the use of force is identical to that used in the previous chapter for uses of force. A model of presidential approval is created, including variables for shocks created by speeches, travel, and peace initiatives, and the magnitude and duration of those shocks is estimated. By modeling the response to the dramatic events as a function of independent variables identified in hypothesis H3, we can test the predictions of that hypothesis. In the end, the results will identify what political gains (if any) can be achieved by each type of presidential action under any given conditions.

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54 Bush did feel that his foreign policy accomplishments outweighed whatever other failings his administration had. To the extent that we can believe insider accounts, it seems that Bush was more inclined towards an “October surprise” of unearthing damaging new information about Bill Clinton’s patriotism. The president was convinced that there was more to be found in Clinton’s draft record, passport files, and travel to Russia as a student. Bob Woodward, *Shadow: Five Presidents and the Legacy of Watergate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), pp 195-223; David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace* (New York: Scribner, 2001), pp 143-156.
55 The “detargeting” agreement is considered meaningless since both the U.S. and Russia can retarget their missiles in minutes, among other technical reasons. Bruce Blair, “Where Would All the Missiles Go?”, *Washington Post*, October 15, 1995, p. A15. It is revealing that Clinton’s principal advisor on Russia, an arms control expert who planned the summit where detargeting was discussed, does not make a single mention in his memoirs of what Clinton and Gore most frequently cite as their national security legacy. Talbott, *The Russia Hand.*
That information, along with the use of force benefits measured in chapter 4, will be used in the next chapter to predict presidential reactions to different types of diversionary pressure.

This section begins by summarizing the hypotheses to be tested, as developed from the media priming model in chapter 2. These hypotheses are essentially the same as those for uses of force, but applied to the non-military actions.

The selection of the events is discussed next. Speeches and foreign travel were easy data to assemble, as they are well defined and the raw data is readily available. The peace event dataset is an original contribution; there was no previously available compilation of political relevant peace initiatives since 1950. After discussing event selection, the independent variables are introduced, with the rules used for coding them for each event. The variables are essentially the same as for uses of force: media coverage, elite support, and other variables that stem from the media priming model.

Finally, a quick review is given of the statistical methods developed in chapter 3.

*Hypotheses to be Tested: Applying the Media-Framing Model*

Fundamentally, this chapter is testing Hypothesis 3: that presidential actions other than the use of the military provide comparable political benefits. This can be broken down into several sub-hypotheses, as was done in chapter 2. The first three sub-hypotheses, H3-A through H3-C simply predict the specific dramatic actions that ought to boost presidential approval: major “peace events”, nationally televised addresses, and major foreign travel.
### Table 5-2: Hypotheses To Be Tested in Chapter 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H3</th>
<th>Dramatic actions other than the use of force produce comparable political benefits to the use of force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H3-A</td>
<td>“Peace-promoting” events produce significant political benefits, subject to the constraints identified by the media priming model (as with uses of force, H2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3-B</td>
<td>Presidential speeches (or the policy initiatives signaled by speeches) produce significant political benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3-C</td>
<td>Presidential foreign travel produces significant political benefits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The public response to dramatic “peace events” is conditioned by the same variables as predicted by the media priming model for uses of force (Hyp. 2):
- Media Coverage
- Success
- Elite Support
- Type/Goal of Activity
- Newness/Surprise
- Discounting due to rational expectations

Sub-hypothesis H3-D expands upon H3-A. The general hypothesis on peace events predicted that the public response to them would show the same influences as uses of force: the variables identified by the media priming model. For clarity here, that part of H3-A is separated out into its own sub-hypothesis, with the specific predictions from the model spelled out (they are identical to the points of H2).

One exception to simply applying the use-of-force predictions is that there is not a clear expectation of how, if at all, public reactions should vary by the type of peace event. In the case of the use of force, clear polling data shows that the public prefers military intervention on be-
half of direct American interests over uses of force less directly related, such as humanitarian intervention. There is no comparably distinction among different types of peace events. For a first cut at possible differences, though, peace events were separated into several functional categories – arms control, war termination, war de-escalation, summits or improved relations, and third-party mediation. Although there is no theoretical reason to expect one type of be more popular than another, there may be differences, and if so that is important to know: if the only highly popular peace events are the reduction/termination of ongoing wars, for example, then the peace strategy is on available to presidents when a war is taking place.

Selection and Coding: Peace Events

Although there a number of existing datasets that are relevant to studying uses of force, that is not the case for peace initiatives. The few presidential approval studies that included diplomatic activity did not follow clear criteria for selecting events, if the event details were even available. General indices of international cooperation are available for only a small number of years, and do not capture politically relevant peace initiatives. Therefore, a new dataset was constructed. The guidelines were the same as for uses of force: the goal was to include presidential events that were visible, dramatic, and "peace promoting". The rest of this section reviews the previous literature, and then explains the process of using historical sources to identify peace events. Finally, the rules for coding specific variables are discussed.

Presidential approval studies that have included peace events provide little information on selection criteria or actual events chosen. Marra, Ostrom, and Simon, for example, as well as Brace and Hinckley, do not identify what they included in their respective "diplomacy" series. $^{56}$

$^{56}$ Marra et. al., "Foreign Policy and Presidential Popularity"; Brace and Hinckley, Follow The Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents

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Other authors have included some (but not all) summits, ends of wars, etc as part of a general category of rally events, but without systematic criteria for inclusion – by selecting only the most memorable peace events, they may be overstating their political effect.\textsuperscript{57}

There are more general international relations datasets in conflict and cooperation, but they do not provide exactly what is needed. The most commonly used dataset that captures peaceful initiatives is the Conflict and Peace Data Bank (COPDAB). This dataset codes actions taken by nations towards other nation and codes them on a scale measuring the level of conflict or cooperation reflected by the action.\textsuperscript{58} Unfortunately, COPDAB only extends to 1978, focuses on actual international actions rather than political initiatives, includes many small events, and does not code events on variables of interest here, such as media coverage, success, or elite support. The World Events/Interactions Series (WEIS) provides similar but more detailed coverage for a smaller selection of years (1966-1978).\textsuperscript{59} A list of arms control treaties and agreements would also not be satisfactory by itself, since in many cases the initiation or change of position in the talks were more politically important than the signing of the agreement.

Given the absence of an existing dataset, a set of peace events was identified and classified for this study. Parallel to the use of force criteria, such events had to be visible, dramatic, and involve "peace" developments, defined here as actions to end military conflicts, reduce armaments, or improve relations with a security competitor. More specifically, the criteria were to include events met the following criteria:


\textsuperscript{58} Azar, Edward E., Conflict and Peace Data Bank (COPDAB) 1949-1978, computer data file (ICPSR 7767). University of Maryland, Center for International Development and Conflict Management,

\textsuperscript{59} McClelland, Charles, World Event/Interaction Series (WEIS), 1966-1978, data file, ICPSR 5211. University of Southern California, 1999
- **Visibility**: events had to receive five or more New York Times front-page stories in a 14 day period.  

- **Dramatic**: events had to be.
  - A specific, significant accomplishment or action, such as completing a treaty, cessation of bombing, etc
  - A Presidential initiative that represented a new or changed policy, rather than promotion of existing policy.

- **“Peace”**: events had to involve one of the following:
  - Arms control or other steps to make nuclear war less likely (i.e., “de-targeting”).
  - De-escalation or termination of a conflict in which the U.S. is engaged, or about to be engaged.
  - Improvement of relationships with adversaries (in particular, the U.S.S.R. and China)
  - U.S. high-level involvement (president or cabinet member) to end a prominent conflict between third parties.

To identify such events, a list of candidates was compiled from a variety of sources on U.S. diplomatic and presidential history. This included identifying obvious events like super-

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60 See chapter 4, section 3 for a discussion of why the five day threshold was chosen, and explaining the overall justification and possible limitations of using the New York Times as an indicator of visibility to the public.

61 As discussed in chapter 4, section 3, the “dramatic” requirement does mean that presidential actions consisting of many small steps may be missed. For example, the Reagan administration effort to change the president’s bellicose image in 1984 did involve a few major policy initiatives, such as his “year of peace” speech at the beginning of the year, but much of it consisted of changes in tone that operated in his day-to-day statements on foreign affairs. If Reagan improved his standing, but only gradually and not immediately in response to the debut of the new, improved Reagan, then this study will miss part or all of that change. This is a significant issue and it is certainly worth looking at both “threat inflation” and “peace inflation” as strategies that operate at gradual, background levels (for example, doing large-scale content analysis of all presidential statements over a period of time).

62 This list does not include improvements in trade relations. It is possible that developments like NAFTA would also be dramatic rallying points for presidents, but that seems less likely than for peace-related developments. Trade agreements tend to be more controversial – tariffs are more popular than ICBMs – generally require lengthy negotiations (so do treaties like SALT or START, but there are actions presidents can take quickly and independently to signal better relations or demilitarization), and trade agreements generally see much greater Congressional involvement. A more likely candidate would be environmental treaties and agreements, though there are very few that received significant media attention.
power summits and major arms control treaties, or the ends of wars. In addition, these sources were used to identify arms control initiatives that represented dramatic developments that were announced domestically (i.e., not changes of position in secret negotiations). During the Vietnam War, the following were considered peace events: bombing pauses that were announced as possible peace steps by the White House, troop withdrawals, peace plans announced by presidents, and the initiation of or major progress in negotiations.

After assembling this candidate list, the *New York Times Index* was consulted to measure the number of front page stories related to each event that occurred in a 14 day period surrounding the event.64

Using these criteria a total of 85 events were selected between 1953 and 2000; they are listed in Appendix A. Figure 5-2, below, shows the distribution of the events over time.

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64 For events that were complete surprises, the 14 days began with the event itself. An event was considered a surprise only if there had been virtually no mention of it at anywhere in the Times prior to the event. For example, the January 1972 revelation that Kissinger had been conducting secret negotiations with North Vietnam. When an event had no clear focal point, the point of highest media coverage was used, or the beginning of intense media coverage of high coverage continued for several days.
Figure 5-2 -- Peace Events by Year

After identifying the events, each was coded on the following variables:

PEACE_EVENT (H3)

1 for each event

PEACE_MAJOR (H3)

1 for each event that met the following criteria: a medium or high level of media coverage (COVERAGE = 2 or 3), and either a major presidential statement (e.g., prime-time speech) or trip.

DATE

The date that the principal U.S. activity was reported in the New York Times.

In most cases this was not difficult to code; any ambiguity was on the order of a few days. For some events, however, there was a less well defined peak. In those
cases, the best attempt was made to identify the beginning of the period of significant use of force and code that as the date.\footnote{The Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty for example, had several weeks with similar levels of attention in the summer of 1963, with three possible focal points: the breakthrough in negotiations that led to the treaty, Kennedy’s signing of the treaty, and the Senate’s ratification.}

**COVERAGE**

An ordinal variable representing coverage in the New York Times:

1. 5 to 15 stories in 14 days
2. 15 to 25 stories in 14 days
3. More than 25 stories in 14 days

**SUCCESS**

coded +1, 0, or −1 depending on whether the event (in its initial stages, at least), appeared to be successful for the U.S. The judgment was based on actual outcomes, not assessment of Presidential activity (i.e., if the dominant media message was that the President had done well but something bad still happened, that would be coded −1).

This coding was not as clear-cut as for uses of force – few diplomatic events are as clearly success or failures as the Gulf War or the Bay of Pigs. Events were coded as failures if summits failed to produce the agreements that were expected in advance, if third-party mediation attempts did not produce agreements, proposals to begin talks (on arms or war termination) were rebuffed by the other side. For example, the 1960 Paris and the 1986 Reykjavik summits were failures, while the 1972 Moscow and 1987 Washington summits were successes.

**OPINION (H2c)**

Variable indicating the balance of reaction in editorials and columns to each event, as reported in the New York Times. If the majority of editorials and columns are favorable, +1. If the majority are negative, −1; if there is no clear majority or if no opinion is expressed, 0.\footnote{For a discussion of some potential limitations of using a focus on the New York Times, see the discussion in chapter 4, section 3.}

\footnote{Burbach, *Diverionary Temptations*}

Chapter 5: “Peace Events, Speeches, and Travel”
CONGRESS\_OWN, CONGRESS\_OPP (H2c)

These variables capture the general Congressional reaction by the president’s own party, and by the opposition. +1 if the majority of reactions expressed by members of the party are supportive, -1 if the majority are negative, and 0 if mixed or none were recorded. The source for Congressional opinion is also the New York Times Index,\(^67\) but opinions were counted even if they were not reported on the front page.

When there was a mixed reaction within a party, greater weight was given to party leaders – i.e., if the leadership was united but challenged by a few back-benchers, that was counted as the position taken by the leadership. If the only view expressed by a particular party came from known mavericks disagreeing in their usual way, those opinions were discounted.\(^68\)

CONGRESS\_EXPECTED, CONGRESS\_REVERSE (H2c)

Opinions expressed in Congress should carry more weight when they are not in the expected direction. To capture this effect, these two variables were coded as follows (as was done in chapter 4).

CONGRESS\_EXPECTED is the sum of:
+1 if CONGRESS\_OWN=+1
-1 if CONGRESS\_OPP=-1

CONGRESS\_REVERSE is the sum of:
-1 if CONGRESS\_OWN=-1
+1 if CONGRESS\_OPP=+1

OPINION\_INDEX

Sum of OPINION, CONGRESS\_EXPECTED, CONGRESS\_REVERSE (i.e., a -3 to +3 scale).

WAR\_TERMINATION, DE-ESCALATION, ARMS\_CONTROL, RELATIONS, MEDIATE
Each event was assigned into one of these five categories. Events are coded 1 for their assigned category, 0 for the other two.

WAR\_TERMINATION events were the termination of major wars, which meant Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and Kosovo.

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\(^67\) Where opinions were clearly present but ambiguous from the Index, full articles were consulted. In particular, some Index entries were of the form, “Reaction from Senators Biden, Kennedy, Dole, Helms”. Usually, that shorthand signaled that the Senators in question were simply reiterating their own known beliefs or the general party line.

\(^68\) For example, opposition to arms control treaties from Senator Henry Jackson did not count as unexpected Democratic opposition.

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DE-ESCALATION includes events that reduce the level of American involvement in an ongoing conflict, or which constitute dramatic steps towards a negotiated end to the conflict, such as the initiation of peace talks, or the U.S. offering a dramatic and new proposal. In practice, events in this category mostly related to Vietnam, and included: bombing pauses or suspensions, troop withdrawal announcements, progress in peace talks.69

ARMS_CONTROL events were summits where major arms control treaties or agreements took place, initiation of new talks, successful completion of treaties when they were a dramatic event in and of themselves (not taking place at a summit), or major U.S. proposals for arms control or other actions that are claimed to make nuclear war less likely.

RELATIONS are events that signify improvements in relations with nations with whom the U.S. has adversarial relations – meaning principally China and the USSR. Specifics include summits where no specific arms control agreement was reached (or was supposed to be reached, as at Reykjavik), or announcement of policy changes by the U.S. that mark improved relations (e.g., recognition of China).

MEDIATION events are those when the U.S. fully engages its prestige in serving as an intermediary in a conflict not involving the U.S. This principally means the middle east, with actions including Kissinger’s “shuttle diplomacy” after the 1973 war, and Carter and Clinton hosting Arab and Israeli leaders in the U.S. to achieve peace breakthroughs.

NEW

This variable is meant to capture events where the issue involved had been receiving little attention prior to event – events that were surprising in the sense that they “came out of the blue” as far as the public was concerned (e.g., when Kissinger’s talks with the North Vietnamese were made public in January 1972).

Events were coded “1” if the prospective use of force received fewer than five front page NYT stories in the two weeks prior to the start of the event.

69 One could also think of the withdrawal of U.S. ground troops from peacetime overseas deployments as falling in this category. The withdrawal of overseas troops is related in that it also reduces the risk and the hardships faced by American military personnel, and reduces the cost to the taxpayer (or at least this is commonly assumed by the public). In that sense, troop withdrawals are not like other arms control measures, since they deal with practical burdens carried by everyday Americans, rather than the frightening but abstract threat of nuclear war. In practice though, there have been few dramatic withdrawals other than those that happened in 1989-1991, and those withdrawals were usually announced as packages with other arms control measures; the effect of troop withdrawals specifically can not be distinguished. One exception was Carter’s proposal – never actéc upon -- to withdraw U.S. forces from Korea.

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SURPRISE (H2c)

This variable captures another aspect of surprise: information that is new in content represents a change from previous information, whether or not it had been receiving media attention. Thus, this variable is coded “1” when presidents take actions that are unexpected given previous policy statements, prior U.S. history, and general expectations of presidential character.⁷⁰

POST_COLDWAR

Coded 1 after December, 1991 (the dissolution of the Soviet Union). Many argue that arms control and foreign policy other than actual military combat lost its sense of urgency with the public after the Cold War, and this variable will be used to determine whether public responses changed after the Cold War.

ELECTION_PERIOD

Coded 1 during the six months prior to presidential or congressional elections (i.e., May through November of even numbered years)

CONSUMER_EXPECT, UNEMPLOYMENT, 3MO_APPROVAL

These variables were described in chapter 3 as part of the control model, but they are also used here as part of the “rational expectations” hypothesis. CONSUMER_EXPECT is the “Expectation of Future Business Conditions” index from the Univ. of Michigan's consumer survey (range is from approximately 30 to 180); UNEMPLOYMENT is the current national unemployment rate; 3MO_APPROVAL is the average of the president’s approval rating for the last three months, up to the last poll prior to the event (scaled as 1 to 100 rather than as a fraction).

Speeches: Identification and Coding

The identification of major presidential addresses is fairly straightforward. The speeches included were only the most prominent: speeches before joint sessions of Congress, and formal addresses from the White House carried live by the major television networks.

⁷⁰ See chapter 4 for detailed discussion of the general rules for what counts as an “unexpected” event and potential difficulties in coding.
These criteria do exclude some speeches that would be relevant. For example, Presidents occasionally give speeches from locations other than the White House that are important enough to preempt regular programming and receive live television coverage (though not all of such speeches are prime time, nor do they necessarily have the gravity connoted by an Oval Office address). Sometimes such speeches are essentially commemorative or just a part of a larger event, such as formal remarks associated with summits, or Reagan's D-Day speech from Normandy. In a few cases, though, important speeches take place outside the White House which are not connected to foreign travel or other foreign policy events, such as Johnson's speech outlining his vision for peace in Vietnam, made at Johns Hopkins University, or George W. Bush's speech on Iraq at the United Nations in September 2002. Such speeches will be missed, but they are relatively few in number, and including them would be substantially more difficult than the White House addresses.

Second, these criteria will leave out significant, dramatic policy initiatives that do not begin with a formal address. For example, a president might introduce a new program during a daytime news conference. It seems likely that the greatest effect would be from the highly visible prime-time addresses, and a president seeking diversionary gains could always choose to give such prominence to an initiative they might typically have announced more quietly. Still, some diversionary initiatives might be missed (for example, a president might feel he had given too

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71 Both of these speeches were carried live. The Johns Hopkins speech was given during prime time, and had an estimated audience of more than 60 million.
72 The difficulty is for two reasons. First, there is the question of definition – what is an “important” speech? Second is the problem of identifying such speeches. The Public Papers of the President has consistently labeled White House speeches via live radio/television as an “address to the nation”, and only such speeches have been so labeled. Since the Public Papers do not indicate which speeches were broadcast live and which not, after identifying potential non-White House speeches one would then have to consult other sources for each speech to determine whether it received coverage. This is certainly doable (for example, with the Vanderbilt archive) but with the focus on the analysis of uses of force and peace events and the White House addresses likely to capture a large majority of the relevant speeches, the additional effort did not seem warranted.

Burbach, *Diverionary Temptations*  
Chapter 5: “Peace Events, Speeches, and Travel"
many formal addresses recently, or might simply not be a gifted speaker), but if a threshold is not drawn somewhere then one ends up with the impossible situation of analyzing every single action of a president as a possibility for diversion.

To compile the actual list of speeches, several sources were used. King and Ragsdale provide a list of speeches up to 1984.73 Speeches from 1985-2000 were obtained from *Public Papers of the President*, locating all entries in the category of “address to the nation” and “addresses to a joint session of congress”.74

Speeches were coded on the following variables:

SPEECH
1 for each speech

DATE
Date speech was given

EVENT_INTERVAL
Interval in months (30.5 days) between the speech and the first subsequent poll

Speeches were divided into the following five categories:

SPEECH_FP_EVENT
1 for speeches that are directly related to either a use of force a peace event happening at the same time as the speech, 0 otherwise.

---


74 In practice, this search was done using online versions of *Public Papers*. The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library has conveniently compiled a list of Reagan’s major speeches, including all joint sessions and White House formal speeches (http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/speeches.htm). The George H.W. Bush Presidential library has the full Public Papers online; each year’s table of contents file was searched for addresses to the nation / joint sessions (http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/papers/index.html). Bill Clinton does not yet have a presidential library, but Public Papers for his administration are available as of 2003 via the National Archives (http://www.gpo.gov/para/pubpaps/photoids.html).
SPEECH_FOREIGN

1 for speeches on foreign policy issues, which are not connected to an event, 0 otherwise

SPEECH_DOMESTIC

1 for speeches relating to domestic policy, legislation, or economic/social conditions; 0 otherwise

SPEECH_APOLOGY

1 for speeches dealing directly with presidential scandals

SPEECH_OTHER

1 for State of the Union, commemorative/memorial speeches, comments on disasters and other events (unless announcing major programs for relief, as in Bush's speech following Hurricane Andrew).

In addition, some domestic speeches were coded as:

SPEECH_INITIATIVE

1 when a domestic speech is specifically used to launch a new and presumably positive presidential initiative.\(^{75}\)

Foreign Travel: Selection and Coding

Data on presidential travel was easy to collect and code. The rule was to include all foreign travel by presidents lasting three days or more. The three day limit was instituted to eliminate many one-day trips to Canada and Mexico, as well as some trips to attend funerals or other brief events. Virtually all trips of substance are three days or longer. Each trip out of the country counted as a single journey, no matter how many countries were visited.

\(^{75}\) That is, these speeches mark the unveiling of discretionary presidential initiatives, such Clinton's health care program, the elder Bush's drug policy speech, or the younger Bush's speech announcing his "homeland security" proposal.

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Travel info for the entire 1953-2000 period is available from the State Department, which has compiled a complete list of all foreign travel by U.S. Presidents; this list includes dates, countries visited, and a one-line description of the president's activity in each country.\textsuperscript{76}

Each trip was coded on the following variables:

TRAVEL
1 for each presidential trip

DATE
Starting date of the trip

EVENT\_INTERVAL
Time in months between the start of the travel and the first subsequent approval poll

DURATION
Duration of the trip in days.

\textit{Specifications of the Models}

The effects of events were modeled as exponentially decaying shocks superimposed on a base level of approval, that base level determined as a linear, autoregressive function of the economy and other control variables. This is the model that was developed in chapter 3, and it is discussed in greater detail there. For convenience, the mathematical form is repeated here:

\textsuperscript{76} U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, “Presidential Visits Abroad”, currently available electronically at http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/trvl/pres/.

Burbach, \textit{Diversionary Temptations}
Chapter 5: “Peace Events, Speeches, and Travel”
3.1: \( Approval_i = Control_i + EventEffect_i + \varepsilon_i \)

where

\begin{align*}
3.1a: \quad Control_i &= \phi_0 \cdot Control_{i-1} + \theta_0 + \theta_1 \cdot Unemployment_i + \theta_2 \cdot QuarterlyInflation_i \\
&\quad + \theta_3 \cdot ConsumerExpect_i + \theta_4 \cdot Inauguration_i + \theta_5 \cdot VietnamSqrt_i + \theta_6 \cdot Watergate_i \\
&\quad + \theta_7 \cdot IranContra_i
\end{align*}

\(3.1b:\quad EventEffect_i = \left( \phi_2 \cdot EventEffect_{i-1} + \sum_{i=FirstEvent}^{LastEvent} X_i B \cdot \phi_2 \cdot EventInterval \right) \cdot (1 - \text{Inauguration}_i) \)

As described in chapter 3, the "EventEffect" portion of the model (3.1b) sums up the effect of all events (if any) that occur between poll (t-1) and t. The immediate effect of event i is given by \( X_i B \), where \( X \) is a vector of variable values for event I, and \( B \) is a vector of the corresponding coefficients. The other terms of 3.1b represent the decay from the initial magnitude of event I to the observation at poll t, sum up the effects of all events in the polling period, and adds in the residual effect of last period's EventEffect.

This model is used in all of the regressions run in this chapter. The only thing that differs in each regression are the specific independent variables chosen to describe the initial magnitude of the shock created by each event – in other words, \( X_i B \). The lag structure of 3.1b and the entire control model 3.1a are identical in all cases. For brevity, the full detail of eq 3.1 will not be repeated to describe every model. Instead, only independent variables will be described.

Let \( Event_i = X_i B \). Then if there are n independent variables in a given specification:
$5 - 1: \ Event_i = X_iB = \beta_1 * Variable_1 + \beta_2 * Variable_2 + ... \beta_n * Variable_N,$

where Variable1 to VariableN are the independent variables for that particular version of the model. Event can then be plugged in to equation 3-1 (for $X, B$).

For brevity, models for the rest of this chapter will be described in the form of eq 5-1 – only the systematic component of each event's effect. It should be remembered that these event magnitudes then feed into the entire model of equation 3-1, including the decay of the effect from previous effects as well as the base approval model.

4. Statistical Results and Analysis

This section presents the results of various regressions that were run to test hypotheses 3-A through 3-D. The first results are from a regression that simply measured the average effect of each type of activity – including the use of force as a control – simultaneously. Peace events prove to have an effect, though not as strong as uses of force; travel and speeches do not contribute much. Next are results breaking down speeches into different categories, followed by a detailed look at how peace events vary by media/opinion variables, type, and prevailing political conditions (and thus any tendency to discount presidential action during periods of political need).

*General Effect of Non-Force Events: H3-A, B, C*

The first portions of hypothesis H3 are simply that dramatic presidential activities which focus media attention should have significant, positive impacts on presidential approval, which are comparable to those produced by uses of force.
To test this hypothesis, a regression was run treating all events in each classification as identical and measuring their average effect on approval. Since we established in chapter 4 that uses of force do have significant effects, they are also included as a control in this model. This event magnitudes were modeled as show in eq 5-2a (all events), and 5-2b (major events only):

$$5-2a: \text{Event}_i = \beta_1 \cdot \text{PEACE}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{SPEECH}_i + \beta_3 \cdot \text{TRAVEL}_i + \beta_4 \cdot \text{FORCE}_i$$

$$5-2b: \text{Event}_i = \beta_1 \cdot \text{PEACE}_{\text{MAJOR}}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{SPEECH}_i + \beta_3 \cdot \text{TRAVEL}_i + \beta_4 \cdot \text{FORCE}_{\text{MAJOR}}_i$$

The results from model 5-2 are shown below in table 5-3.
### Table 5-3: Combined Effects of Peace, Speeches, Travel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Combined Events (All Force, Peace)</th>
<th>Combined Events (Major Force, Peace)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
<td>Std. Err</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.1446</td>
<td>0.4311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-4.4637</td>
<td>2.2721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QuarterlyInflation</td>
<td>-0.7102</td>
<td>1.3306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConsumerExpect</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.0019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VietnamSqrt</td>
<td>-0.5065</td>
<td>0.0434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watergate</td>
<td>-1.0857</td>
<td>0.1251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IranContra</td>
<td>-1.3459</td>
<td>0.4153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inauguration</td>
<td>23.7671</td>
<td>1.3167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constant $\phi_1$</td>
<td>0.9179</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PeaceEvent</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>0.863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ForceEvent</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>0.803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PeaceMajor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ForceMajor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>2.2912</td>
<td>0.733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>-1.76</td>
<td>0.9924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constant $\phi_2$</td>
<td>0.7261</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(half life)</td>
<td>64 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Std. Error                   | 6.933       | 6.645    |
- N                             | 838         | 838      |
- Log-likelihood                | -2041.6     | -2006.05 |

95% confidence intervals for effect predictions. Variables in bold significant at a .05 level or above.
The results show that peace events and speeches have a small positive effect on approval – comparable to the average effect of uses of force. In fact, that the coefficient on Force_Event is similar to what was found looking at force alone in chapter 4 is reassuring; it suggests we did not spuriously find effects from force that were really caused by other events. Travel appears to have a slight negative effect on presidents.

The middle column of table 5-3 shows the same regression, but using only the major events -- PEACE_MAJOR and FORCE_MAJOR – instead of all events. Once again, uses of force are found to have almost exactly the same magnitude as was measured in chapter 4, and with a similar duration for events: a half life of three months. The largest peace events are nearly as beneficial for presidents as major uses of force, with an average benefit of 5.3% (though a higher degree of uncertainty). Speeches, on the other hand, lose most of their effect in this regression – since many of the major force/peace events have presidential addresses associated with them, most of the effect is presumably captured by those variables.

To illustrate these effects, figure 5-3 shows the predicted approval change (from base levels) over six months from each of the four types of events.
Figure 5-3: Predicted Effects of Peace, Speeches, Travel

Speeches and travel are not promising candidates for diversion. On the other hand, peace seems to be in the same league as the use of force. The next subsections briefly look at travel and speeches (hypotheses H3-B and H3-C), followed by a detailed look at peace events.

Hypothesis 3-C: Travel

Travel especially seems unhelpful. The travel variable was included in a number of regressions, and in none of them did it help presidents, nor did it hurt much. The net effect was always between 0 and −2%. This is consistent with the finding of studies done around 1990. George H.W. Bush and Clinton may have traveled more than their predecessors but they do not appear to have made any better political capital of it. It is true that some trips have boosted popularity, but those are usually connected to major diplomatic or arms control advances. These results suggest that a president would be better off holding a summit in Washington than em-

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77 Simon et. al., "The Impact of Televised Speeches and Foreign Travel on Presidential Approval"; Matra et. al., "Foreign Policy and Presidential Popularity"; Brace and Hinckley, Follow The Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents
barking on a world tour. The finding is surprising given the visibility of travel and the apparent support it receives from the public, but the null to negative effect of travel has been one of the few consistent results of presidential approval studies. Given the small impact of travel, it was dropped from future regressions, and is not analyzed in any greater depth.

Hypothesis 3-B: Presidential Speeches

Speeches show very little effect here, but as discussed in section 3, there are different categories of speeches; this regression captures only the average. Since presidents are in control of their agenda if any type of speech is generally a political winner, that would be sufficient to create a tool for diversion — the president need only avoid unpopular topics and stick to the successful sorts of speeches.

Equation 5-3 shows the event effect model used to measure the effect of different types of speeches. The model includes the five categories of speeches as well as the indicator for domestic initiatives, and peace/force events as controls.

5 – 3: \[ \text{Event}_i = \beta_1 \times \text{SPEECH\_FOREIGN}_i + \beta_2 \times \text{SPEECH\_DOMESTIC}_i + \beta_3 \times \text{SPEECH\_FP\_EVENT}_i + \beta_4 \times \text{SPEECH\_APOLOGY}_i + \beta_5 \times \text{SPEECH\_OTHER}_i + \beta_6 \times \text{SPEECH\_INITIATIVE}_i + \beta_7 \times \text{FORCE\_MAJOR}_i + \beta_8 \times \text{PEACE\_MAJOR}_i \]

Results from this regression are shown in table 5-4.
\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{Speech Effects by Type}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|}
\hline
Variable & Estimate(\(\beta\)) & Std. Err \\
\hline
\textbf{Event Variables} & & \\
SpeechForeign & 1.337 & 0.685 \\
SpeechDomestic & 6.258 & 1.027 \\
SpeechApology & -8.486 & 1.763 \\
SpeechFPEvent & 0.854 & 0.701 \\
SpeechOther & 0.197 & 0.920 \\
SpeechInitiative & -4.470 & 0.969 \\
ForceMajor & 3.734 & 0.8608 \\
PeaceMajor & 4.305 & 1.112 \\
Time Constant \(\phi_2\) & .8412 & \\
(half life) & 120 days & \\
\hline
\textbf{Std. Error} & 6.607 & \\
\textbf{N} & 838 & \\
\textbf{Log-likelihood} & -2001.34 & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

95\% confidence intervals for effect predictions. Variables in bold significant at a .05 level or above. Control variables omitted.

Different categories of speeches do have different effects. Most dramatically, “apology” speeches are followed by the loss of nearly 9\%, and for a fairly significant length of time given the 120 day half life found in this regression. This is not surprising; Nixon, Reagan, Clinton, and others have given speeches soon after scandals began (or escalated) and did not end their troubles with an explanation or apology. Of course, it is possible that those presidents would have done much worse without having spoken to the American people.

In terms of opportunities to divert attention by focusing the country on other subjects, the possibilities appear limited. Foreign policy addresses that are not connected to a use of
force or peace event do have a positive effect, but only a small one. Domestic speeches are more promising, as it appears that more than 6% are gained on average after them. What is unexpected is that when those domestic speeches mark the launch of a program or legislative initiative, they are significantly less popular; only a 2% gain is expected. It should be noted that few domestic speeches that do not fall in the “initiative” category, so that 6% gain is seldom seen.

To illustrate these effects over time, figure 5-4 shows predicted approval changes over six months from several of the speech types.

![Figure 5-4: Predicted Effects of Presidential Speeches](image)

**Figure 5-4: Predicted Effects of Presidential Speeches**

*Hypothesis 3-A: Peace-Promoting Events*

Figure 5-3 showed that major peace-promoting events are plausible alternatives to uses of force for presidents seeking to boost their standing – the average gain nearly identical. That alone does not mean that they are equally attractive, however. We know from chapter 4 that the reaction to uses of force can be predicted with greater accuracy than just taking an average: me-
dia coverage, elite support, the purpose of the action and other variables condition the public's reaction. By choosing only those options that score the highest on those variables, presidents can beat the average (if conditions allow). If peace events, however, all bring in the same or they vary in a pattern that can not be predicted with the likely variables, then 5% would be the best a president could expect – less than from uses of force.

The results presented above are enough to provide partial confirmation of hypothesis 3-A, but to do a full comparison of dramatic uses of force and dramatic “uses of peace”, the peace events were analyzed in the same way a uses of force. The sub-hypotheses of H2 derived from the media priming model about what variables should condition public responses to the use of force are equally applicable to the peace events – the media priming model of “rallies” does not rely on any special characteristics of military interventions. The following subsections thus look at the effects of media coverage, success, and elite opinion; type/goal of the action; and the prevailing political environment (e.g., elections, wartime, president has high/low approval).

Peace Events and Media/Opinion Variables

The media priming model predicts that dramatic events will enhance presidential approval to the extent that they capture the attention of the media and generate favorable commentary for opinion leaders. This was tested for uses of force and the results reported in table 4-6; as expected, media coverage and opinion leadership were strong predictors of the public response.

Equations 5-4, 5-5, and 5-6 show the models used to test the effect of media/opinion variables on peace events. They are parallel to those used for uses of force.
5 – 4: \( \text{EVENT}_i = \beta_1 \times \text{PeaceEvent}_i + \beta_2 \times \text{CoveragePE}_i + \beta_3 \times \text{SuccessPE}_i + \beta_4 \times \text{CommentPE}_i + \beta_5 \times \text{CongressOwn}_i + \beta_6 \times \text{CongressOpposePE}_i \)

5 – 5: \( \text{EVENT}_i = \beta_1 \times \text{PeaceEvent}_i + \beta_2 \times \text{CoveragePE}_i + \beta_3 \times \text{SuccessPE}_i + \beta_4 \times \text{OpinionIndexPE}_i \)

5 – 6: \( \text{EVENT}_i = \beta_1 \times \text{PeaceEvent}_i + \beta_2 \times \text{CoveragePE}_i + \beta_3 \times \text{SuccessPE}_i + \beta_4 \times \text{OpinionIndexPE}_i + \beta_5 \times \text{ForceMajor}_i \)

Note that the “PE” suffix is used to distinguish the media/opinion variables related to peace events from those on uses of force, so any difference in effect can be measured. As described above in section 3, the meaning of variables is identical to that for uses of force.

Equation 5-4 includes the full set of variables: coverage, success, and measures of editorial plus Congressional opinion. Although there are theoretical reasons to think that “expected” / “reversed” measure of Congressional opinion would perform better than own party / other party (with taking stands against one’s usual party interests counting more heavily), but in practice the own/other division performed better and so is reported here. Equation 5-5 collapses the three opinion variables into a single index, and 5-6 adds major uses of force as an additional control. Results from these regressions are in table 5-5.

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78 This does not mean that major uses of force were used to predict the magnitude of peace events; uses of force are being included to control for their independent effect on approval. Event is the change expected from event I. An event can not be both a force event and a peace event. For all peace events, then, ForceMajor is equal to zero; for uses of force, all peace variables are equal to zero. When a use of force and a peace event both happen in the same polling period, they are treated as two independent events that each contribute to the change in approval expected that period — the total new contribution to EVENT EFFECT will be EVENT;+EVENT;+1 if both I and I+1 happen during polling period t.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Congressional Opinion (eq 5-4)</th>
<th>Opinion Index (eq 5-5)</th>
<th>Opinion Index Uses of Force (eq 5-6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate(β)  Std. Err</td>
<td>Estimate(β)  Std. Err</td>
<td>Estimate(β)  Std. Err</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.2422  0.3482</td>
<td>2.039  0.3076</td>
<td>2.12  0.3739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-3.5518  2.0369</td>
<td>-3.1701  1.9658</td>
<td>-2.2267  2.2363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QuarterlyInflation</td>
<td>-1.6984  1.0733</td>
<td>0.094  0.9239</td>
<td>-1.1379  1.1202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConsumerExpect</td>
<td>0.017  0.0015</td>
<td>0.0198  0.0015</td>
<td>0.0195  0.0017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VietnamSqrt</td>
<td>-0.4509  0.0377</td>
<td>-0.4853  0.0406</td>
<td>-0.4778  0.0407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watergate</td>
<td>-1.0127  0.1162</td>
<td>-1.2416  0.1315</td>
<td>-1.0162  0.1194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IranContra</td>
<td>-1.4186  0.3969</td>
<td>-1.1306  0.3921</td>
<td>-1.3693  0.3948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inauguration</td>
<td>22.3678  1.1135</td>
<td>24.398  1.1935</td>
<td>23.5561  1.1517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constant $\phi_1$</td>
<td>0.9258  0.9249</td>
<td>0.9249  0.9193</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Event Variables</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PeaceEvent</td>
<td>-1.3956  1.5167</td>
<td>-3.1006  1.6517</td>
<td>-1.9398  1.1011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoveragePE</td>
<td>6.2569  1.5162</td>
<td>4.5896  1.2263</td>
<td>2.6199  0.8349</td>
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<tr>
<td>SuccessPE</td>
<td>1.1349  1.4517</td>
<td>0.5016  1.168</td>
<td>0.4861  1.1359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CommentPE</td>
<td>-2.2949  1.3262</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CongressOwnPE</td>
<td>0.7933  1.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CongressOppPE</td>
<td>4.7523  1.4118</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OpinionIndexPE</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.2726  0.6279</td>
<td>1.7388  0.5085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ForceMajor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.5019  0.9617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constant $\phi_2$</td>
<td>0.4950  .4107</td>
<td></td>
<td>.6489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(half life)</td>
<td>29 days  23 days</td>
<td></td>
<td>47 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% confidence intervals for effect predictions. Variables in **bold** significant at a .05 level or above.
The results show that peace events are affected by media content and elite opinion in the same manner as uses of force. One difference though is that peace effects decay more rapidly: a half life of about 30 days instead of the 90. An immediate approval change of 10% from a use of force would still have a 5% effect after 3 months, but a 10% peace event change would have only 1.5% left in three months.

Media coverage is the single best predictor of large changes in approval. The difference between low and high coverage translates to a 10 point difference in the effect on presidential approval. On the other hand, success is not a powerful variable. The SUCCESS coefficient is positive in all three regressions, but is only around 1% and is not statistically significant.

Opinion variables have a large impact on the response to peace events. When looking at the three components of opinion (eq 5-4, left), both types of congressional opinion have a positive influence, and a strongly significant one in the case of the opposition party. The public reacts inversely to the Times editorial page, though. Editorial opinion performed more poorly than Congressional opinion in most use of force regressions, and Brody also found that Congressional position taking was a much better predictor of public opinion changes than editorial stances from several print and broadcast sources. As noted earlier the own/opposition split performed slightly better than the expected/unexpected distinction. When a regression was run identical to 5-4 but with CongressExpected and CongressReverse, those coefficients were 5.6 and 0.1, respectively. With either format for Congressional opinion, the effect is significantly larger than for uses of force. The likely reaction of other political figures will be more important to presidents when considering the possible gains from peace than possible gains from war.

Due to the problem of multicolinearity of the opinion variables, an OpinionIndex variable was constructed as was done in Chapter 4 (see figure 4-4). Figure 5-5 shows the distribution of the peace opinion index. The pattern is somewhat different than for uses of force: for military actions the distribution was bimodal, with peaks at zero and +3 (i.e., 100% support); for peace events it is unimodal and centered a little above zero. The mean for OpinionIndexPE is 0.47, vs 0.8 for uses of force.

Figure 5-5: Opinion Index Histogram (Peace Events)

Using OPINION_INDEX instead of the individual opinion components creates little change in the other variables or goodness of fit. OpinionIndexPE is strongly significant in both eq 5-5 and 5-6, able to create a swing of 12% between full support and full opposition.

Figure 5-6 shows predicted best and worst cases from these models. The left panel of figure 5-6 shows predicted values from equation 5-4 (all three opinion components) assuming in
the worst case, low coverage, failure, and total opposition; in the best case, high coverage, success, total support. The center panel shows predictions from eq 5-6, using the opinion index and including the control for uses of force; this model has a slower decay rate but similar effects to 5-4. For comparison, the right hand reproduces best/worst cases for the use of force from figure 4-5.

![Figure 5-6: Best/Worst Cases with Media/Opinion Variables](image)

**Figure 5-6: Predicted Effects (Best, Worst, Mean) with Opinion Variables**

In the best cases, presidents can gain about 15%, a significant increase. On the other hand, 5 to 10% can be lost when things do not go well. Comparing eq 5-6 and eq 4-4, although both have similar initial magnitudes, the gains from uses of force decay considerably more slowly, meaning that over time the cumulative boost from base levels is greater. On the other hand, using average values for all the variables (magenta lines), the two alternatives are about the same: force and peace each yield an average initial boost of 2%. The gain from force is longer-lasting, but starting from such a low level that does not matter much.
In short, most of the predictions from the media priming model were met, and the reaction to peace events is similar to that of uses of force, though shorter-lived.

Types of Peace Events

Polling data clearly shows that the public is able to distinguish between the different types of missions assigned to American troops: some meet with strong public support, others are relatively unpopular.\(^{80}\) Distinctions between peace events are not as obvious. There is less survey data available, and what there is does not show clear patterns as with uses of force.\(^{81}\) As described in section 3, events were thus divided functionally into those to end or de-escalate conflicts, arms control, improved relations with adversaries, and third-party mediation. These categories were included in a model, along with a control for elite opinion and for the effect of uses of force. Equation 5-7 shows that model, and eq 5-8 separates out uses of force into their three categories to see if a combined regression by type effects the coefficients found individually (WarTermination is also excluded, as explained below in the text).


\(^{81}\) One might predict that moves to reduce or end conflicts that are unpopular should receive higher support than deescalating conflicts that the public thinks are worth winning. In practice, Vietnam is the only conflict that lasts long enough for there to be peace proposals during the war. Kosovo and the Gulf War lasted long enough for the end of the war to be distinguished from the beginning, but in both those cases the only "peace" event is the end of fighting itself. Reactions to the end of a conflict might not show a simple pattern. In the Gulf War, for example, the public was not demanding that the war end, believing the cause was worthwhile. Thus de-escalatory steps would not be expected to create much reaction. With the end of the war, though, people were also responding to the fact that a worthwhile goal was successfully achieved. It is also possible that the public might react poorly to a de-escalatory step during an unpopular conflict if an even larger reduction had been expected or thought possible – such as a small troop withdrawal when a full-fledged ceasefire had been seen as a possibility and discussed in the media previously.
\[ 5 - 7 : \text{EVENT}_i = \beta_1 \cdot \text{WarTermination}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{De-escalation}_i + \beta_3 \cdot \text{ArmsControl}_i \\
+ \beta_4 \cdot \text{Relations}_i + \beta_5 \cdot \text{Mediation}_i + \beta_6 \cdot \text{OpinionIndexPE}_i + \beta_7 \cdot \text{ForceMajor}_i \]

\[ 5 - 8 : \text{EVENT}_i = \beta_2 \cdot \text{De-escalation}_i + \beta_3 \cdot \text{ArmsControl}_i \\
+ \beta_4 \cdot \text{Relations}_i + \beta_5 \cdot \text{Mediation}_i + \beta_6 \cdot \text{OpinionIndexPE}_i + \beta_7 \cdot \text{ProtectAmer} \\
+ \beta_4 \cdot \text{DefendAlly}_i + \beta_5 \cdot \text{InternalChange}_i \]

Results from these regressions are presented in table 5-6. The table also includes another run of eq 5-7 using only the major peace events (center column).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Peace Event Type (eq 5-6)</th>
<th>Peace Event Type MAJOR ONLY</th>
<th>Peace/Force Type WarTermination omitted (eq 5-7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.1088 0.4126</td>
<td>2.2391 0.3441</td>
<td>2.8784 0.4571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-1.972 2.456</td>
<td>-4.0442 1.9828</td>
<td>-7.3812 2.7174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QuarterlyInflation</td>
<td>-1.1499 1.1958</td>
<td>-1.2943 1.0369</td>
<td>-3.0972 1.4101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConsumerExpect</td>
<td>0.0197 0.0018</td>
<td>0.0177 0.0015</td>
<td>0.018 0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VietnamSqrt</td>
<td>-0.4717 0.0408</td>
<td>-0.4701 0.0379</td>
<td>-0.4705 0.0489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watergate</td>
<td>-0.9608 0.1174</td>
<td>-1.014 0.1208</td>
<td>-1.0594 0.1284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IranContra</td>
<td>-1.2062 0.3872</td>
<td>-1.1245 0.3744</td>
<td>-2.3546 0.428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inauguration</td>
<td>23.0409 1.1328</td>
<td>22.5353 1.0982</td>
<td>24.0622 1.2967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constant $\phi_1$</td>
<td>0.9188 0.9248</td>
<td>0.9248 0.9140</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deescalation</td>
<td>0.2924 0.7768</td>
<td>8.9544 4.3456</td>
<td>-1.2786 0.5467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ArmsControl</td>
<td>2.0308 1.4119</td>
<td>2.9783 6.9229</td>
<td>2.2401 0.904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations</td>
<td>1.2334 1.0014</td>
<td>5.5444 2.4015</td>
<td>1.6371 0.6246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation</td>
<td>-4.6462 2.513</td>
<td>-8.072 8.4339</td>
<td>-4.6963 1.6235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WarTermination</td>
<td>23.2568 4.3921</td>
<td>33.1624 6.2376</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OpinionIndexPE</td>
<td>1.1102 0.4385</td>
<td>1.8041 1.2362</td>
<td>0.3929 0.2941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ForceMajor</td>
<td>5.5664 0.9239</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.6459 0.9496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ForceProtect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.1857 0.8119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ForceDefend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.2355 0.6792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ForceInternal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Constant $\phi_2$</td>
<td>0.6564 0.5066</td>
<td>0.5066 0.8855</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(half life)</td>
<td>49 days 31 days 170 days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% confidence intervals for effect predictions. Variables in **bold** significant at a .05 level or above.
There are some differences between types of peace events, though not as consistently as for uses of force. The most consistent effect is for ARMS_CONTROL, which has an immediate approval impact of 2% to 3% assuming no reaction from opinion leaders. The mean value of OPINION_INDEX for arms control events is 0.1, so with an average reaction the initial approval change would still be around 2.5%

RELATIONS shows a similar effect, typically giving presidents a boost of 1% to 2% before any opinion effect. The mean OPINION_INDEX for RELATIONS events is close to zero, so for a typical elite reaction the expected approval gain is about 1.5%

MEDIATION actually hurts presidents. An immediate loss of 4.6% is predicted from eq 5-6, and in all regressions MEDIATION was negative and on the order to −3% to −8%. On the other hand, elite reaction was better than for other events, with a mean OPINION_INDEX of +1.3, which in the case of eq 5-6, would make a typical approval impact of −3.5%. The negative effect of serving as a mediator for third parties is surprising, given that presidents seem eager to play that role. Looking at the data, though, only in the case of Carter and Camp David did mediation make much difference for a president.82 Given the focus of the public on direct U.S. interests in foreign policy activities, perhaps counselor to the world is not seen as part of the president’s job description.

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82 The problem is that the few attempts at mediation largely coincide with difficult periods for presidents. Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy took place in the middle of Watergate; Carter in 1978 faced high inflation, and ratings even lower than the economic variables would predict; Oslo happened after the disarray (and low ratings) of Clinton’s first six months in office; Wye took place shortly after Clinton’s admission of lying in the Lewinsky scandal. This distribution is important. If all of the events in a category take place during periods when approval ratings are lower than the control model would predict, then that event category can soak up some of the unexplained error even if the event causes an approval increase in the short run. This is a significant problem with the model. Events that are very helpful but are only observed during times of abnormally low ratings – i.e., exactly what diversion would look like! – can show a spurious harmful effect on presidents. Looking over the five cases, only Camp David 1978 is associated with a significant, sustained approval increase, and even then both inflation and unemployment were improving.
WarTermination shows a tremendous positive effect – an absurdly large effect of 20 or 30%, in fact. It seems very unlikely that finding is meaningful. There are only four cases of war termination, and their immediate approval changes were as follows: Korea –15, Vietnam +16, Gulf War +9, Kosovo 0%. Note that fairly rapid half-lives are found regression 5-6, so that the 23% immediate prediction would be more like 15-20% at the times those polls were taken. So why is WarTermination so high? Much of the effect is due to the extraordinary rally of the Gulf War in 1991. Since that rally was so much larger than ForceMajor would predict, much of it is attributed to WarTermination. We could include a special variable for the Gulf War use of force, but then that would pick up any effect of the Gulf War ceasefire as well.

With so few cases of WarTermination and with the start of the war indistinguishable from the end of the war in one, maybe two of those cases, we should not have much confidence in the reported effect. What we can say from the four cases is that the ends of wars are not automatically political winners. Even when the public is tired of a war, as in Korea, ending it may not help presidents much. On the other hand, they can be politically beneficial, as Nixon found in January of 1973.

Finally, DEESCALATION proved to have relatively small effects. In eq 5-6 and 5-7 the effects are not significantly different from zero, and in other specifications the coefficient ranged from –2% to +2%. Virtually all of these de-escalation events are related to Vietnam, and so we should be careful in generalizing to other conflicts. A few prominent cases of de-escalation did help presidents. Specifically, Johnson’s partial bombing halt in March of 1968 and the full bombing halt in October of that year were followed by significant approval gains, as was Kissinger’s “peace is at hand” announcement in October of 1972. The many bombing pauses

---

83 The Kosovo War lasted less than three months.
and troop withdrawal announcements did not help the presidents, though it is possible their approval would have suffered in the long term had they not taken such actions.

It is possible that the public perceived U.S. interests in arms control and other diplomatic activities to decline substantially with the end of the Cold War. Without the looming Soviet threat, for example, arms control probably seems less important. If the value the public attaches to peace activities has declined, then the benefits available to presidents from them may also have declined after the Cold War.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 5-7: Post-Cold War Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deescalation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ArmsControl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WarTermination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OpinionIndexPE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ForceMajor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PostColdWar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Constant φ2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(half life)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% confidence intervals for effect predictions. Variables in bold significant at a .05 level or above. Control variables omitted.
To test this, several regressions were run with the variable POST_COLDWAR included. The variable had a significant, negative effect. Table 5-7 contains results for a regression identical to eq 5-6, but with the post-cold war variable included. Peace events after 1990 produced an average approval change 6% lower than pre-1992 events. This coefficient is easily significant and a likelihood ratio test shows inclusion of the variable is warranted. What this means is that a post-1992 arms control event would be expected to cause a change of -4% in a president's ratings – a president would lose support on average. Even with 100% elite support would still lose 2%. Looking at the record, this is not surprising: since 1992 there have only been three instances when an approval increase of more than 2% was associated with a peace event. They were the April 1993 summit in Vancouver, and Moscow summits in January 1994 and May 1995.  

None of the diplomatic events that took place in the final five and one-half years of Clinton’s presidency brought him any measurable political gains.

This finding suggests that peace events have less potential than they had during the Cold War. Due to the sharp decline in the priority of foreign policy, the finding that peace events often help presidents may be limited to the pre-1992 period. A caveat is that the post-cold war period includes only a single administration, and one that gave particularly little attention to foreign policy; perhaps a different president who better communicated the importance of international affairs would have gotten more mileage out of diplomatic achievements. Likewise, in the post 9/11 environment the public is paying attention more attention to international affairs. It is possible Bush would receive more credit for a major Israeli-Palestinian breakthrough than Clinton would have.

---

84 The Oslo Accords in September of 1993 were followed by a 9% gain, but that polling period includes Clinton’s announcement of his health care reform plan before a joint session of Congress – in fact, the poll was conducted almost immediately after the speech (and the overwhelming media focus on the reform plan associated with the speech).

Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*  
Chapter 5: “Peace Events, Speeches, and Travel”
The post-cold war effect on peace events is particularly important given that there is not an comparable post-cold war effect for uses of force. On average Clinton earned little from his uses of force, but the majority of them were unpopular “humanitarian intervention”. Controlling for type of intervention, the end of the Cold War did not have much impact.

Hypothesis 3-D: Information and Expectations

Hypotheses 2-E and 2-F stated that dramatic events would have a more pronounced effect when there is a larger shift in media attention – i.e., when there is new information to the public about what is salient – and when they provide unexpected information about presidents. Conversely, the effects might be lower during times of presidential need as the public discounts presumably self-serving presidential actions. To test these same hypotheses for peace events, the following models were estimated

\[ 5 - 9: \quad EVENT_i = \beta_1 \times PEACE\_EVENT_i + \beta_2 \times OpinionIndexPE + \beta_3 \times NEW_i + \beta_4 \times SURPRISE_i + \beta_5 \times ELECTION\_PERIOD_i + \beta_6 \times WARTIME_i + \beta_7 \times ForceMajor_i \]

\[ 5 - 10: \quad EVENT_i = \beta_1 \times PEACE\_EVENT_i + \beta_3 \times CONSUMER\_EXPECT_i + \beta_4 \times 3MO\_APPROVAL_{(i-1)} + \beta_5 \times (3MO\_APPROVAL^2_{(i-1)}/100) + \beta_6 \times (3MO\_APPROVAL^3_{(i-1)}/10000) + \beta_7 \times ForceMajor_i \]

As a reminder, 3MO\_APPROVAL is the three month moving average of approval; the lagged value is used to avoid contamination from the effects of the event occurring in the current period. The division by 100 and 10000 simply puts all three terms on the same scale. Results appear in table 5-8.
Table 5-8: Peace Event Effects with Information and Expectation Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>All Events (eq 5-9)</th>
<th>Major Events Only</th>
<th>Approval/Economy Effects (eq 5-10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
<td>Std. Err</td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PeaceEvent</td>
<td>0.1006</td>
<td>0.6424</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PeaceMajor</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5.3718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OpinionIndexPE</td>
<td>-0.2755</td>
<td>0.1986</td>
<td>1.499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NewPE</td>
<td>-5.0239</td>
<td>0.6319</td>
<td>-4.2123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SurprisePE</td>
<td>3.2414</td>
<td>0.6399</td>
<td>2.4365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectionPeriod</td>
<td>0.0468</td>
<td>0.2728</td>
<td>-0.9004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wartime</td>
<td>5.0191</td>
<td>2.4336</td>
<td>1.6255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ForceMajor</td>
<td>0.8619</td>
<td>0.2935</td>
<td>5.5093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConsumerExpect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3mo approval</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3mo_approval²</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3mo_approval³</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Constant φ₂</td>
<td>0.9853</td>
<td>.7494</td>
<td>.8949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(half life)</td>
<td>1047 dy</td>
<td>72 days</td>
<td>187 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>6.418</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>838</td>
<td></td>
<td>838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>-1976.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>-2004.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% confidence intervals for effect predictions. Variables in **bold** significant at .05 level or above. Control variables omitted.

Information and expectation variables do not perform particularly well for peace events. The left column of table 5-8 does show that several of the coefficients are significant, but also that a half life of 3 years was found! In other words, effects from events would be essentially cumulative, hardly dying away at all. This is far out of range of any other estimates and
in fact the control variable coefficients changed significantly in this regression – the events were providing much of the “base” approval.

To see if better behaved results could be found, the regression was repeated with major events only (center column of table 5-9), and the results this time were meaningful. Of the information variables, only NEW was significant, and unexpectedly in a negative direction. What this could be telling us is that the most celebrated diplomatic achievements do not come out of the blue. Peace talks had been receiving heavy news coverage long before the Korean and Vietnam wars ended, for example; Cold War summits received a great deal of advance press. Events that are “new” tend to be proposals or offers, not final accomplishments, and so perhaps they are not as rewarded. This limits a president’s ability to use peace for diversion – meaningful accomplishments are not easy to manufacture on short notice.

SURPRISE had the expected positive sign and was nearly significant; this was true for a majority of specifications that were tried.

Election periods consistently had no effect on the reaction to peace events, in contrast to the lower gains from force before elections. Reactions were consistently more positive during wartime, though this requires a caveat. By definition, war termination can only happen during wartime, and since the reactions to the end of the Vietnam and Gulf wars were so strongly positive, they may case the appearance of all wartime peace events gaining more support. Even so, it seems plausible that there would be more opportunities for peace promotion when the nation is at war, and in the specific case of Vietnam the fact that the war became such a potent political issue and that so many Americans were desperate for it to end means it is not surprising that peace events would be popular. It is worth noting that the peace initiatives prior to Tet had no
impact on presidential popularity; only after support for the war had dwindled did bombing halts and peace talks provide direct political gains to the White House.

Although political and economic conditions had a significant effect on the response to uses of force, these variables did not explain much of the variance in the reaction to uses of peace. As the right hand column of table 5-9 shows, consumer expectations as well as pre-event average approval were significant in a statistical sense, but their magnitudes are much smaller than for uses of force. Moreover, the effects are not consistent under changes in model specification.
Figure 5-7 shows predicted changes after an average peace event from three different models. Plot A shows predictions from equation 5-x, the results reported in table 5-9. Plot B shows the same regression but run using only the major events, plot C is a model using all events and the same form as equation 5-x, except for using unemployment instead of consumer confidence. Plot D displays the actual data with the same axes and color scale. Two things stand out about the plots: there is not a great deal of variation with approval and the economy (visually, wide expanses of yellow-green, rather than the steep progression from red to green on the equivalent use of force plots), and the pattern of variation changes significantly with the specification, also illustrating the weak relationship. This has implications for presidents: when faced with low approval due to a low economy, force will clearly be preferred over peace; when approval is low despite a strong economy, such as during a scandal, then peace would be a better bet.

5. Discussion and Implications for Diversion

This section takes a broader look at the results from section four, beginning with an evaluation of the hypotheses, then a discussion of why presidents have sometimes seen peace as a valuable political strategy given that it does not help much with approval ratings, and finally consider that these findings mean for diversionary activity as a whole.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>H3</strong> Dramatic actions other than the use of force produce comparable</td>
<td><strong>MIXED RESULTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political benefits to the use of force</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H3-A</strong> “Peace-promoting” events produce significant political benefits</td>
<td><strong>WEAKLY PASSED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gains, but smaller than from uses of force</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H3-B</strong> Presidential speeches (or policy initiatives signaled by</td>
<td><strong>FAILED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speeches) produce significant political benefits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H3-C</strong> Presidential foreign travel produces significant</td>
<td><strong>FAILED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political benefits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The public response to dramatic “peace events” is conditioned by the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>same variables as predicted by the media priming model for uses of force</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Hyp. 2):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Coverage</td>
<td><strong>PASSED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td><strong>FAILED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Elite Support</td>
<td><strong>PASSED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H3-D</strong> Detail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Type/Goal of Activity</td>
<td><strong>FAILED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Newness/Surprise</td>
<td><strong>FAILED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Discounting due to rational expectations</td>
<td><strong>WEAKLY PASSED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5-10 lists the verdicts on the components of H3. Overall the picture is mixed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speeches and travel did not provide the expected political rewards;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presidents do not appear to have much to gain from them if they need a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boost. Peace activities did help presidents. The average gains were</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>somewhat lower, and shorter lived than for uses of force, however.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Looking at the detailed predictions about variables that should affect the public reaction to peace events, the picture is again mixed – but very similar to what was found for uses of force. As the media priming model predicts, high levels of press attention are required for peace activities to have much impact on presidential ratings. Only extremely visible events like the ends of wars, Nixon’s visit to China, or Khrushchev’s visit to America are likely to shift a president’s poll numbers, and even then not reliably.

Likewise, elite support has a strong effect on the response to peace events. In fact, the response to peace events is even more dependent on elite reaction, and Congress is more likely to oppose diplomatic developments than uses of force. In the face of strong Congressional opposition, presidents are unlikely to gain anything at all from major peace initiatives.

There are several reasons why the effect of elite opinion might be stronger for diplomacy than war. Since the dramatic part of arms control talks usually comes at their conclusion when a treaty is ready to be signed, the issues involved are not new – there is plenty of time for opposition to organize and make credible arguments against the administration’s case. This can also contribute to an expectations gap. Discussion of alternatives before a presidential decision means that the public will be primed for disappointment if a weak option is chosen, this is less likely with force – i.e., to be unhappy that Nixon is only bring home 50,000 troops instead of 100,000, vs. being unhappy that he did not invade Cambodia and Laos in 1970. The public may also defer to experts to a greater degree; it’s easier to have an opinion on whether going after Saddam is a good idea than whether SALT II is a good idea. Finally, there may actually be a patriotism effect at work.

The arguments of the preceding paragraph imply that presidents should have an easier time when their policies are surprises – there will have been little opportunity for opposition or
inflated expectations to form. Sure enough, the *Surprise* variable was found to have a significant, positive impact, although the fact that an issue was new in the sense of a sudden increase in media attention actually led to less positive reactions – contrary to what was predicted.

As with the use of force, success did not matter. This is surprising, but perhaps the *Success* variable used here is too inclusive – maybe only triumphs and catastrophes are noticed by the public, not run of the mill variations in outcome.

The public does not show as much skepticism of presidential peace initiatives in the face of political trouble as they did with uses of force. Peace events were not less popular before elections – unlike uses of force – and there was not such a high correlation between prior approval and the reaction to events. On implication in particular is that when faced with the combination of low approval and good economic conditions, peace events are expected to be only slightly less popular than average, whereas the returns to uses of force become strongly negative in that quadrant.

Finally, relatively little systematic variation was observed between different categories of peace activity. Arms control seemed slightly more popular than de-escalation, which was slightly more popular than third-party mediation. Compared to the differences between types of force, these differences were smaller, less statistically significant, and more sensitive to specification changes. War termination appeared wildly popular in some regressions, not so in others; with only four examples and such a range of outcomes – from +15 to −15 -- there is not enough data to draw a clear inference. This prediction failed, therefore, but it was acknowledged in section 3 there was no theoretical basis for predicting what should be more popular, and what less so, so not much could be read into a failure of this particular test.
Implications for Diversion

Dramatic actions other than the use of force do not provide an unambiguously superior option for presidents looking for a diversionary boost. Policy speeches and foreign trips do not help much, and while peace events do boost ratings on average, not so much as uses of force. All things being equal, uses of force would be the preferred strategy.

All things are not equal, of course. First, diplomacy might seem less costly and/or less risky than war, and presidents might consider the smaller gains to be a worthwhile tradeoff for avoiding large downside risks. Peace might also be less costly from the standpoint of implementation – instead of the mobilization required for military adventures, decisions to withdraw troops or make an arms control concession can be made quickly and easily.

Even if risks and implementation costs are identical, peace might still be preferred to force in some cases. While the average use of force helps a president more than the average peace event, specific peace initiatives might be much more popular than particular uses of force. If a president's only choices are humanitarian intervention or an arms control advance, the arms control option would be preferred. Likewise, a use of force that will meet bipartisan Congressional opposition will probably hurt a president, while diplomatic moves that receive visible bipartisan support will help, and thus be the strategy of choice if those are the only alternatives. If a president is in trouble for non-economic reasons, such as a scandal, then peace events would be the better bet on average.

One caveat is that the tests here were not an exhaustive investigation of everything a president might do other than launch an invasion. Speeches, foreign travel, and diplomacy are “low hanging fruit” both for presidents and for testing purposes, but presidents might pursue all manner of strategies to regain support in the face of political difficulty. For example, although
policy speeches in general were not very helpful, polling data might show that that in a particular case, a certainly policy initiative would be a huge win. Clinton's ratings went up 10% after his health care proposal to a joint session of Congress, for example. Presidents might also rely on large numbers of small activities – indeed, what is presidential politics if not a series of a great many small actions, designed to make the president more rather than less successful? The fact that the dramatic, presidential activities tested here proved to be of limited value does not mean that force is the only option for a president to regain lost ground.

That being said, speeches, travel, and diplomacy are unlikely to replace the diversionary use of force for politically motivated presidents. Peace initiatives and accomplishments do offer absolute advantages in some situations though, especially if presidents are not able to manufacture ideal intervention opportunities at will. At any given time, the available diplomatic options might beat the available candidates for diversionary force. Hypothesis 3 is thus partially supported, and tests in chapter 6 will determine whether peace events do indeed become more common when political incentives point to them.

*Why So Much Attention to Peace in the White House?*

One question that arises is, if diplomacy does not help presidents much, and generally less than uses of force, why do we have so many examples of presidential advisors discussing peace initiatives as overtly political strategies – but essentially no examples of the use of force being discussed in that context. One explanation may be that the taboo on the political use of force is so strong that such discussions happen only in the most private settings, and certainly do not make it into participants' memoirs. Perhaps the taboo is so strong that the option of diversionary force is never even considered, even though political uses of peace are.
The context of the discussions of politically-motivated peace suggests yet another explanation. In almost all cases, highly visible peace promotion – whether sincere or gimmick – was seen as a response not to public disapproval in general, but to a public perception that the administration was too bellicose. In the early Reagan administration, for example, the potential political benefits of arms control initiatives were not portrayed as a way to distract the nation from the ongoing recession or to boost Reagan’s image in the abstract. The motivation was quite specific: polling data showed that the public was scared that nuclear war was likely, wanted to see relations with the Soviet Union move back from the brink, and did not think Reagan was doing enough to explore arms control.\textsuperscript{85} Political advisors saw this sentiment as a threat to Reagan’s reelection – polls showed it was the only argument Mondale could make that had any traction with voters – while national security advisors were afraid that if nothing was done, public sentiment would force Congress to block the administration’s strategic arms buildup. Thus, the “year of peace” speech with which Reagan opened his 1984 campaign and the general moderation of the Administration’s stance that year.\textsuperscript{86}

Similar arguments apply in other periods. Both Johnson and Nixon had political considerations in mind with their Vietnam peace proposals, troop withdrawals, bombing pauses, etc.

\textsuperscript{85} Talbott, Deadly Gambits; Oberdorfer, The Tone; Cannon, President Reagan: Role of a Lifetime; Fitzgerald, Way Out There In the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War. Similar public discontent existed with the administration’s Central America policy, and there was apparently pressure to achieve major progress in ending the Nicaraguan and El Salvadoran conflicts before the 1984 election. Constantine Menges, Inside the National Security Council (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

\textsuperscript{86} It is clear that political advisors were pushing for such a shift and that reelection considerations were a major part of the reason for the change in tone. Substantive reasons played a role too, however. Reagan seems to have been genuinely surprised to learn how afraid the Soviet leadership was that the U.S. was gearing up for war. During NATO’s “Able Archer” exercises in November of 1983, for example, the Politburo seriously worried that a surprise U.S. nuclear strike was imminent – and were on a hair-trigger to launch their own preemptive strike. The idea that America could appear menacing does not seem to have occurred to Reagan before, but once the Kremlin’s state of mind became known to U.S. intelligence he appears to have been quite concerned that such a level of tension existed and wanted Soviet leaders to understand that the U.S. had strictly defensive goals. This prompted a series of private letters to Andropov and Chernenko, for example. See sources from the previous note, but especially Fitzgerald, Way Out There In the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War. For more on the 1983 crisis, see Peter Vincent Pry, War Scare: Russia and America on the Nuclear Brink (New York: Praeger, 1999).
but the context was how to assuage public opposition to the war, not unrelated political troubles. Even when crassly political, such as LBJ saying “I’ve got to get me a peace plan” after Eugene McCarthy’s primary election success, the response was meant to directly counter the source of public anger – Johnson wanted a peace plan to show that the war in Vietnam would not go on forever, not to distract the public from urban riots and growing inflation. Bush was responding to the heavy criticism of his Soviet policy (or lack therefore) when he made dramatic overtures to Gorbachev in May/June of 1989.

There are a few examples where diplomacy and arms control seem to have been used for general political gain. Kennedy’s discovery that “peace is an issue” in 1963 led to plans to use the issue in 1964; the administration was not reacting to an existing problem with public support for their defense policies. Likewise, public attention to arms control was so low in the 1990s that Clinton was certainly under no pressure to show progress, nor did the public think of him as warlike. Even so, Clinton repeatedly cited the “detargeting” of Russian nuclear missiles during the 1996 campaign, presumably because he believed it went over well with the public; even his own advisors do not seem to have considered it of substantive importance. An interesting question is whether expectation of these political gains were part of the motivation for reaching the agreement in the first place, but as of yet we have no evidence on the question. Clinton is also accused of putting so much effort into Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in his final years in order to leave office with an accomplishment other than surviving impeachment, but there is no evidence to support that.

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87 An alternative explanation for the observed pattern is that there were many more instances where the use of peace to distract from unrelated political problems was discussed, but, participants are not willing to acknowledge such discussions, as opposed to actions which were politically motivated, but still basically decided in a foreign policy context.

88 It is interesting to note that although Clinton’s top Russia advisor devotes 30 pages in his memoirs to the January 1994 summit where the detargeting agreement was reached, he does not mention detargeting at all – nor anywhere else in his book. Talbott, The Russia Hand
A few exceptions aside, when peace initiatives have been seen as an important political strategy, it has usually been in response to the lack of peace initiatives becoming a political problem (or, to proactively prevent such problems). The responses have not necessarily been sincere, and so whether they count as diversion is a semantic question: diversionary foreign policy has usually connoted taking foreign policy actions to distract attention from unrelated domestic issues, but even if not strictly diversionary, politically motivated foreign policy would is still troubling. An important distinction, though, is that when diplomacy is used to counter a bellicose image, the president is essentially giving the public what they want, not trying to change the subject to something else entirely. Such actions may only be symbolic – not to mention cynical and manipulative – but not strictly diversionary.

**Conclusion**

This chapter tested the hypothesis that dramatic presidential actions in the form of policy speeches, foreign travel, and major peace-promoting events would enhance presidential standing in a way comparable to uses of force. This test was done in the same manner as tests for the effects of uses of force: modeling presidential approval from Eisenhower to Clinton, with the effects of these dramatic activities creating shocks on top of base levels of approval. More detailed hypotheses on the conditions that would make some events more popular than others were also tested, by modeling the magnitude of those shocks as a function of appropriate independent variables.

The results were mixed. On the whole, speeches, travel, and peace events do not provide approval gains as large or as long lasting as from force. Speeches and travel in particular don't make much difference. Peace events are more promising from the perspective of a politically
motivated president, and they are subject to the same conditions as uses of force: higher approval gains in response to more media coverage and more elite support. On the other hand, support for peace was not as dependent on the economy, prior approval, or impending elections.

Overall these results mean that dramatic non-military actions are not a perfect substitute for diversionary war, but under certain conditions could be the preferred alternative. This is tested in the following chapter, where the results described here are used to construct and test a “repaired” diversionary theory.
Chapter 6:

Political Incentives and a "Repaired"
Divisionary Theory

The goal of the previous two chapters was to measure political incentives: what presidents stand to gain or lose from diversionary activity. The motivation was testing the overarching prediction of this thesis that the use of force is not always and not automatically the strongest political tool for presidents.

This chapter has a different purpose. Having measured incentives, the goal in this chapter is to determine whether presidents act in accordance with them. If presidents do engage in foreign policy actions to help their political fortunes, then we ought to observe them selecting the actions that will be most beneficial in a given set of circumstances. Even if political gains are not the only consideration driving presidential activity, if diversionary calculations play any role at all we should still see higher rates for the most helpful activities when presidents are in political need.

A positive finding that the predicted activities become more frequent when diversionary pressures are higher would overturn the accepted conclusion that U.S. presidents do not engage in diversionary behavior. Such behavior may not always take the form of diversionary war, but the finding will still be significant in that it would demonstrate that important presidential foreign policy decisions have been made on the basis of short-term political motivations – and may be in the future as well.
A negative finding, on the other hand, would not necessarily contradict the political incentives that were measure in previous chapters. If presidential activities do not show the predicted relationship to diversionary pressures, that could indicate any of several possibilities: presidents might reject the diversionary use of force, peace, or other actions on moral grounds; policy considerations might outweigh the modest political gains at stake; strategic interaction with the targets may limit opportunities; or presidents may alternatives even better than those tested here. A negative finding would at least show that there is still no evidence of diversionary behavior after putting the theory to a more fair test.

The actual results are mixed: the tests described in this chapter show some evidence for presidential activity consistent with the political incentives identified earlier, but not all predictions are met, and the effects are not strong. A simple event count model (i.e., Poisson) was used to estimate how the frequency of the use of force, peace events, speeches and travel varied as a function of political conditions such as elections, scandals, and presidential approval ratings. As predicted, the use of force became more common during periods of economic trouble and less common when presidential approval was low for non-economic reasons. Likewise, peace events became slightly more common during those low approval / good economy periods, as predicted.

Other predictions of the repaired theory were not met. The purpose of uses of force – protection Americans, defending allies, internal change – showed the opposite relationship to the predicted one, for example. Presidential election periods suppressed all forms of dramatic activity, although uses of force were unexpectedly common before midterm elections. These results suggest that presidents frequently pass on opportunities to use force or other dramatic actions.
for political gain, but, the results are consistent with diversionary uses of force during economic downturns.

These findings are described in detail in the rest of the chapter, which is organized into the following five sections:

1) Predictions: Repairing the Diversionary Theory. This section uses the results from chapters 4 and 5 to develop a revised theory of diversionary activity by presidents, using the assumption that presidents will choose the most politically advantageous option for diversion in a given setting.

2) Literature Review. This section mostly recaps the review of the diversionary war literature from chapter 1, and surveys what little has been published on the political timing of activities other than war, and explains the advances made by this study.

3) Methods and Data. This section describes the statistical approach used to test the revised theory from section 1, as well as the sources and coding of new variables (most of the data was described in the previous two chapters).

4) Statistical Results. Results from the regressions are presented and interpreted.

5) Discussion. The overall success of the predictions from section 1 is evaluated, and the practical significance of the results discussed.

1. Predictions: Repairing the Diversionary Theory

One of the problems in previous tests of the diversionary theory of war has been identifying what exactly presidents will be diverting from, and what sort of military adventures they would use for diversion – if war were even their choice, given all the other actions that presidents might take. If our tests are looking for diversion in the wrong places, or looking for the wrong presidential actions in response, then it is possible that diversionary policy – even diversionary war – is happening, but not being captured in our tests.
The goal of this chapter is to take the knowledge gained in the previous two chapters and construct a “repaired” diversionary theory that predicts what actions will be taken in which circumstances. Assuming that presidential actions are designed to maximize political benefits, we can use the information on benefits provided under different conditions that was measured in the previous two chapters to determine what the best response of a politically motivated president would be to different forms of diversionary pressure.

This section describes a “repaired” theory, first discussing the general approach, and then offering eight specific hypotheses to be tested later in the chapter.

_Diversionary Activity: Building a better theory_

The simple version of the diversionary war theory predicts that faced with domestic political problems, leaders will turn to foreign conflict to rally their people around them. As detailed in chapter 1, the unexamined assumption in that theory is that foreign military conflicts will always help rather than hurt a leader, and that they are superior to other methods of diversion that leaders might employ.

Chapters 4 and 5 tested the hypotheses developed in chapter 2 to determine what the political rewards really are from the use of force or other dramatic actions, as a function of the variables identified by the media priming model. Those tests supported most, though not all, of the hypotheses from the model (i.e., the subparts of H2 and H3). Uses of force can help U.S. presidents, but not greatly so in most cases, and with the benefits depending on elite support, the alignment of the intervention with public preferences, and on prevailing economic and political conditions. Major diplomatic initiatives – peace events – also helped presidents, though
not quite as consistently. Presidential policy addresses and foreign travel did not have much impact on presidential standing.

Based upon the results from chapters 4 and 5, we can predict what the response of a politically motivated president would to different political conditions that create diversionary pressure. Those findings give us enough information to predict the best action to take — if any — in response to conditions that are normally considered to be sources of diversionary pressure: low approval ratings, scandals and other dramatic failures, recessions, and impending elections. The successful sub-hypotheses from H2 and H3 can now be used to fill out H4 — when diversion should occur, and what it should look like. This can be considered a “repair” of the diversionary theory.\(^1\) Previous tests have found little evidence of diversion, but this may be because of incorrectly specified tests rather than because the general theory is false. The repaired theory will predict more precisely what behavior should be seen under what specific circumstances, and those refined predictions can be tested.

Table 6-1 presents predicts for the response to low approval ratings in general, to low approval ratings that result from non-economic problems (like scandals), economic failures, and impending elections. The predicted effect of these conditions on use of force rates — including specific types of force — as well as peace events, speeches, and travel is shown with the following symbols:

+ indicates more frequent (multiple + meaning a strong effect),

- indicates a reduced frequency

\(\ldots\) means indeterminate or no change expected.

Table 6-1: Predictions for Activity Rates vs. Diversionary Pressures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low Approval (general)</th>
<th>Low Approval - Scandal/Failure</th>
<th>Low Approval - Recession</th>
<th>Election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Force (all)</td>
<td>??</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force, Protect</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>- (rate)</td>
<td>++ (rate)</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force, Internal</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speeches</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Travel</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite Opinion (level, not rate)</td>
<td>+(?)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These predictions are based on the results found in chapters 4 and 5. Hypothesis H2-D on the benefits from different purposes of using force, for example, was correct: uses of force to directly protect U.S. citizens or territory were more popular than humanitarian intervention, and therefore we predict that “protect” interventions will be more common than humanitarian missions under diversionary pressure.

Table 6-1 can be considered one large hypothesis itself, but to highlight the important features and to provide a framework for organizing the results, seven specific hypotheses are drawn from it, along with an ancillary hypothesis. These fill out H4 into sub-hypotheses A–G.
The remainder of this section discusses these predictions in detail.

*H4-A: Speeches and Travel will not show any positive correlation with diversionary pressure.*

Since there was little gained from foreign travel or speeches not connected to a dramatic event, the frequency of these activities should not increase in response to diversionary pres-
sures. In fact, there was evidence that foreign travel was caused a slight loss on average. If so, then we would predict that it would be even less frequent during times of political trouble, so as not to make matters worse.

H4-B: The overall relationship between the use of force and approval is indeterminate

It is not clear what the prediction should be for the relationship between the use of force and prior presidential approval. There are two reasons why this is true. First, chapter 4 demonstrated that when approval is low, the use of force could have either positive or negative effects for a president, depending on the reason for the low ratings. Knowing that a president has low ratings alone is not sufficient information to know whether the use of force would help or hurt.

The second reason is more difficult to solve. The problem is that we do not know how approval ratings translate into presidential utility. Does a president at 40% attach the same importance to 5% gain as a president already at 80%? The issue is important because the evidence is that the higher a president's approval rating already, the more they stand to gain from a use of force. If a president values gains equally whether at low or high levels already, then we would predict that the use of force is more frequent with higher approval ratings.

Figure 6-1 provides a more detailed illustration of this issue. Panel A in 6-1 (upper left) reproduces a plot from figure 4-7 showing expected approval gain or loss from a use of force as a function of economic performance and prior average approval. Panel B in 6-1 shows the notional utility gain (or loss) from those changes for a president who values all approval changes.

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2 We could also predict that speeches and travel will decrease in frequency. If presidents can take a limited number of major actions in a given period of time, then when faced with political needs, they would choose to forgo travel or policy speeches in favor of more military intervention and diplomacy.
equally (a different color scheme is used to highlight the different concept: blue shows utility losses, yellow is neutral, magenta for gains). The pattern is identical to that of panel A: expected utility is directly proportional to expected approval change at all points, and so we would expect the frequency of uses of force to follow this same pattern.

Figure 6-1: Diversionary Incentive Functions

Presidents might not value all approval changes equally however; it seems natural to think that a president at 30% would be hungrier for gains than a president at 80%. Panel C shows the utility changes (and thus expected frequency of force) for a president who gives slightly more importance to low than high ratings, and Panel D shows expected frequencies for a
president who weighs approval changes heavily at low levels, and hardly at all when at high levels. In the equal weight situation (panel B), then the frequency of force increases with prior approval for all economic conditions. When economic expectations are high (top half of each plot), the utility of force always increases with prior approval. Under poor economic conditions though, small weights flatten out the increase of force with prior approval. When low ratings are heavily weighted, uses of force will show a negative correlation with approval during poor economies.

Unfortunately, we have no empirical basis for knowing how presidents weigh approval changes. More is always better, but it is not clear whether moving from “good” to “sky-high” is as important as moving from “dismal” to “not so good”. Memoirs from White House staff and other insider reports show more concern about presidential ratings when they are low, though this is not conclusive proof. It seems likely that there will be some extra weight with low approval, and so the pattern in plot C is a reasonable prediction for the frequency of uses of force as a function of the economy and approval, though patterns like B or D would also be consistent.

Given the different behavior as a function of the economy and the mapping between presidential approval and presidential utility, the simple correlation between the use of force and low ratings is indeterminate.

\(H4-C:\) Uses of force will be more common during poor economic conditions

Presidential uses of force have a significantly more positive effect as economic conditions get worse, at all levels of prior approval. Uses of force will be more attractive to presi-
dents when the economy is ailing no matter what weights they attach to different approval levels, so uses of force should increase in response to poor economic conditions.

As discussed above (H4-B), it seems likely that the highest rates of all would be seen in response to low approval and a poor economy, but this will depended on presidential preferences.

H4-D: The relationship between peace events and prior approval is indeterminate

Peace events help presidents slightly more with higher prior approval ratings. They had no consistent relationship with economic conditions. Figure 6-2 averages the results of several peace event models (specifically, the ones shown in figure 5-7) for gains/losses as a function of approval and the economy. For a politically motivated executive, in peace events should be more common at higher approval levels. There are two complications that work against that prediction, however; both come from the relative gains of peace events, when compared to uses of force.
Figure 6-2: Peace Event Incentive Function

First, in the high approval / poor economy region, uses of force have far more to offer presidents than peace initiatives. If we assume that events are costly and thus the number of dramatic actions a president may take is constrained, presidents would choose force over peace. On the other hand, in the low approval / good economy quadrant, peace events are better than uses of force – uses of force hurt presidents in that region – and so would be the diversionary tool of choice.

Considering the relative benefits of peace events, they could show a negative correlation with prior approval, despite their greater benefits with higher approval.

H4-E: Peace events will be more frequent during periods of low approval / good economic performance (e.g., scandals), uses of force less frequent

Although the general relationship between peace and approval is ambiguous, peace events do unambiguously outperform uses of force when presidents are faced with low approval despite a good economy. Uses of force in fact lead to approval losses on average, while peace
events still produce gains. Peace events should therefore be more common during such periods, and uses of force rare.

Note that this uses “scandal” as shorthand for approval ratings much lower than economic conditions would predict. That is certainly the effect of some scandals, but not all of them – Clinton became more popular during his impeachment, for example. Therefore, no strong prediction is made about the effect of scandals per se, but if the inferred principle applies generally that uses of force are taken poorly when presidential credibility/competence is in question, then the same pattern might be found.

H4-F: *There will be fewer uses of force, and more peace events, in pre-election periods.*

Uses of force were consistently less popular when taking place close to elections, enough so to rob them of much of their appeal. On the other hand, peace events had no clear relationship to elections. Even though peace events are not any more useful near elections, their relative benefits are greater. Therefore, peace should become more frequent, and force less so.

H4-G: *There will be more “Protect Americans”, fewer “Internal Change” interventions in response to diversionary pressure*

The tests in chapter 4 demonstrated that Americans do not react identically to all uses of force – some are more popular than others. Uses of force directed at “internal change” in other countries – such as humanitarian intervention, becoming involved in a civil war, etc – are actually unpopular, causing slight approval losses on average. Intervention to defend allies or support other clear strategic goals is generally a plus for presidents, and even greater gains come from action that directly protects American citizens or territory.
A president who faces diversionary pressure should exploit the differences in public reactions and seek out opportunities for intervention that involve the U.S. interests directly—best of all, protecting a particular group of Americans, such as the medical students “rescued” from Grenada. On the other hand, presidents in political trouble would not want to make the situation worse by launching humanitarian missions that will further erode their support. This has three implications.

1) The strongest specific predictions of H4-G are that protection missions will become more common during recessions, and humanitarian missions will become less common during “scandals” (low approval, good economy).

2) Irrespective of the rate, the proportion of uses of force that are “protection” should increase in response to diversionary pressure, and the proportion of “internal change” declines. In other words, even if both go up in the face of diversionary pressure, “protection” should go up more.

3) Finally, it is not clear what should happen to actual frequencies of “protection” missions during elections and scandals, as it is not known if their particular popularity outweighs the disadvantages of force in general at those times. Likewise, it is not clear if “internal change” should be more common during recessions, since the extra rewards of force then may or may not outweigh the negative response they bring, on average. As stated in point 2), though, the proportion should always shift away from “internal change” during such periods, even if all the rates go down.

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3 Unfortunately, there are not enough examples of each type of force distributed widely enough with respect to economic and political conditions to estimate how the returns of each type of force vary with those conditions. When simply including the types in a regression with approval/unemployment, though, the types showed similar differences to what was found in other regressions; the differences by type persist even when controlling for economic and political variables.
There was no such clear distinction that made a difference among peace events. Therefore, no parallel prediction is made regarding the relative frequency of different types of peace activities.

**H4-H: Force/Peace activities should show greater support during periods of diversionary pressure**

The public reaction to both force and peace events was strongly conditioned by elite support: the difference between 100% backing from congress and the press and total opposition would typically be the difference between a significant political gain, or a net approval loss.

A president facing diversionary pressures would only make matters worse by taking widely criticized actions. A politically motivated executive, then, should not take advantage of force/peace opportunities when other political actors would be expected to oppose the decision. Presidents should be able to make good forecasts of support/opposition — many potential actions will already have been discussed among political elites, and so positions will have already been announced.

This hypothesis does not predict that the frequency of congressionally supported uses of force should increase during times of political trouble for the president. Diversionary pressure will not create more favorable elite opinion; the president might even face greater than usual opposition due to suspicion of his motives. That might actually cause the frequency of force/peace actions to decline — there would be few attractive opportunities. Instead, what we should see is that of those dramatic actions we do observe in the face of diversionary pressure, the level of elite support should be higher than for force/peace events as a whole.

Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*
Chapter 6: “Diversionary Theory Repaired”
One important caveat to these predictions is that they do not account for strategic avoidance of conflict on the part of potential target states. That is, the strategic avoidance argument is that the likely targets of diversionary action by the U.S. will recognize that they are targets, and will act accordingly in advance of U.S. action. Assuming that most nations want to avoid war with the U.S., this would lead potential targets to either seek accommodation with the U.S. to make conflict more difficult to engineer, or might lead them deter the U.S. by strengthening their defenses. Therefore, if strategic avoidance is important, diversion may not happen even if presidents are politically motivated and act according the above hypotheses, because the supply of targets would dry up during diversionary periods. Whether other nations actually do this, and whether a potential target could improve its image enough to take itself off the list are empirical questions that have not been answered.

The impact of strategic interaction on peace activities is less obvious. Other nations might well want to be the target of “diversionary peace”, if that means the U.S. granting concessions it

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5 Although it is difficult to see how a target would want to provoke rather than suppress diversionary war by the U.S., one can imagine other international parties wanting to fuel the flames. For example, a party to a civil war that hopes to be the beneficiary of U.S. intervention might provoke the other side into massacres or other action that would incite the U.S. to intervene — and that they believe would be more likely to have that effect when the U.S. president was searching for opportunities to use force. Of course, the fact that “internal change” intervention doesn’t help presidents means such a strategy is not likely to work.

6 In the literature to date the focus has been entirely on avoidance through accommodation. Avoidance through deterrence is a perfectly viable strategy, however. Raising the cost of an attack should encourage the U.S. to look elsewhere for a target. Testing strategic avoidance by looking only for accommodation is not a full test of the theory.

7 One work in progress on this question is by Ben Fordham. In a paper presented in 2002 he reported very slight increases in conciliatory behavior from other nations towards the U.S. during periods that diversionary activity might be expected, but these changes were not of much substantive importance. Fordham, Benjamin, "You Can Run But You Can’t Hide: Strategic Interaction and the Diversionary Use of Force". Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association (New Orleans, LA), March 23, 2002-March 27, 2002.
otherwise would not have made. A foreign leader might hope to schedule a summit right before an election, expecting that domestic pressure would force the U.S. president to make concessions. That logic suggests that strategic interaction should enhance any tendency towards “diversionary peace”, but one can also imagine cases where foreign leaders would want to avoid peacemaking when the U.S. president is in trouble at home.  

The results of testing these hypotheses will be described in section 4; section 3 will describe the methods and data sources used for those tests. The next section, though, reviews the current state of the literature on diversionary activity by U.S. presidents.

2. Literature Review

Chapter one contained a review of the findings from the diversionary war literature, with a focus on studies of U.S. behavior. This section provides a quick recap of those findings, then reviews the methods and data employed by the recent U.S. studies and identifies areas where this thesis improves upon previous work.

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8 One possibility is that foreign leaders might expect to receive a better deal from a successor administration, and thus would do all they could to reduce the incumbent’s chances of winning. Therefore, they might refuse agreements they would ordinarily accept, reasoning that they would thus harm the incumbent and increase the probability of a more amenable administration later. The North Vietnamese seem to have been thinking this way in October of 1972. Even though McGovern had no chance of defeating Nixon, Hanoi realized that the election would add quite a few seats to the anti-war faction in the Congress, which might then force Nixon to withdraw on terms more favorable to Hanoi than what was on offer before the election. At the least a hostile Congress would make it harder for Nixon to enforce the same terms, relative to a pre-election peace triumph leading to Republican gains in Congress. Richard Nixon, RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978); Henry Kissinger, White House Years (New York: Little, Brown, 1979); William Bundy, A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998). Just the opposite happened in 1996: Clinton held a summit with much pomp and praise for Boris Yeltsin just a few months before the Russian presidential elections, with the explicit goal (explicitly discussed by both sides) of making Yeltsin look good and improving his chances, for fear of the alternatives. Strobe Talbott, The Russia Hand (New York: Random House, 2002)
Recap: Evidence for the U.S.

Overall, studies of the behavior of U.S. presidents have found relatively weak evidence for diversion, the exception being a tendency towards the increased use of force during economic downturns. Some early studies argued that the use of force was more frequent when presidential approval was high, but the consensus among more recent work is that presidential standing has little or no relationship with the propensity to use force. Likewise, election years have been found to have little impact. On the other hand, most studies have found a relationship between economic conditions and the use of force, in particular an increased use of force during economic slowdowns (measured by unemployment or GDP growth, for example).

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Gowa does not find such a relationship; Meernik argues that presidents are no more prone to use force during recessions, but that more opportunities arise since other nations challenge the U.S. during periods of economic weakness. For greater detail on recent studies of U.S. behavior, see table 1-1 in chapter 1, and the subsequent discussion in the text.

**Methods and Data from Previous Studies**

This section reviews the design, statistics, and data sources used by other recent studies, both to provide a foundation for work here and to highlight some areas where this study challenges or improves upon earlier approaches. The section is organized by discussing general strategies and methods, then selection and data of dependent variables, then independent and control variables.

**Study Design and Statistics**

The studies in question follow similar structures: they attempt to find evidence of diversion by determining whether the propensity to use force is positively correlated with political need. Generally, propensity to use force has been measured as the frequency of use of force events (defined variously) over time, with political need defined by various economic and political macroindicators. A smaller group of studies looked instead at whether or not the U.S. had chosen to become involved in conflict opportunities (i.e., opportunity rather than time as unit of analysis).


Until the mid-1990s studies measuring propensity to use force over time did not use true event-count models. Those studies most often used a dichotomous form like probit,\(^\text{14}\) with potentially serious problems for inference.\(^\text{15}\) Since then there has been general acceptance of the Poisson event count model and extensions of it.\(^\text{16}\) Most studies have not reported a great problem with under- or overdispersion (which would call for the generalized event count extensions of the basic Poisson model).\(^\text{17}\) The most significant challenge to using a standard Poisson model comes from Fordham, who argues that use of force data (however defined) needs to be modeled as a time-series process.\(^\text{18}\)

What all of the time-based studies have in common is an assumption that it is not possible to identify specific opportunities on which the U.S. might have used force, but instead that opportunities are either constant and not a constraint (especially given the global reach and global interests of the U.S.), or at least that the variation in opportunities can be predicted by broad indicators, such as U.S. military strength or the state of U.S.-Soviet relations.

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\(^{17}\) Fordham, "Another Look at 'Parties, Voters, and the Use of Force Abroad'' is an exception; he finds that the Fordham & Sarver dataset he uses has significant overdispersion.

\(^{18}\) Fordham, "Another Look at 'Parties, Voters, and the Use of Force Abroad''. He suggests the PEWMA model (a moving-average variant of Poisson)
In contrast, a smaller group of studies look at the U.S. response to identifiable opportunities. Yoon finds no evidence of diversionary behavior in U.S. decisions to intervene in third world civil wars. The principal proponent of the “opportunities” approach has been Meernik. Using a variety of journalistic sources he has identified 400 situations where the U.S. might have had a military response since World War II, with an actual military response in about half of them. Meernik contends that the correlation between the use of force and economic trouble found in other studies is spurious; instead, he argues the frequency of opportunities goes up during recessions due to other nations being more willing to challenge the U.S. at such times – a highly debatable assumption.

**Dependent Variables**

Diversionary studies suffer from the same problems of event identification as do rally effect studies, as discussed in chapter 4 (see table 4-3 for a summary). Most commonly used have been Militarized International Disputes or the Blechman-Kaplan *Force Without War* data. With

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19 Yoon, "Explaining U.S. Intervention in Third World Internal Wars"
21 Meernik's argument that opportunities are independent of U.S. presidential influence is not convincing. First, as Fordham (2002) points out, Meernik's press sources are strongly influenced by government officials - whether a foreign crisis appears in the news is affected by whether U.S. officials are interested in the situation, and so there is bound to be selection bias. More seriously, his interpretation that the increase in opportunities as the economy declines is due to the decisions of foreign leaders rather than manipulation by U.S. presidents is an assertion - his statistics say nothing about the cause of that relationship.
23 Ostrom et. al., "The President and the Political Use of Force"; Morgan et. al., "Domestic Discontent and the External Use of Force"; DeRouen, "The Indirect Link: Politics, The Economy, and the Use of Force"; Fordham,
various problems of excluding relevant uses of force, including irrelevant uses (e.g., events that were not publicly disclosed when they happened – which would be pointless for diversion!), or dating events many months away from the politically relevant use of force, all of these are problematic. The recently released Fordham & Sarver (2001) dataset does address many of these problems.

Very few studies have examined the timing of peace events. The two principal exceptions are Marra, et. al., and Brace and Hinkley. While both of them looked at the timing of "diplomatic events", neither student included a list of those events and so it is impossible to know exactly what was measured.  

Independent Variables

There has been widespread agreement that the three things that would put diversionary pressure on presidents are the economy, elections, and the president's political standing; several methods of operationalizing them have been employed. Economic growth measures – GDP change, unemployment, etc – show strong correlations with the use of force, while inflation measures do not. Interestingly, there has been little done with consumer expectations as a measure of diversionary pressure, despite their success in approval and election forecasts. Approval ratings have been an uncontroversial measure of presidential standing. As for elections, most studies have looked at presidential elections only, or lumped all elections together, and

"The Politics of Threat Perception and the Use of Force: A Political Economy Model of U.S. Uses of Force". Other studies also used the ICB crisis dataset.


25 For the best treatment of the effects of unemployment vs. inflation and potential partisan implications, see Fordham, "The Politics of Threat Perception and the Use of Force: A Political Economy Model of U.S. Uses of Force".
most code elections on a yearly basis (i.e., possibly missing election effects if they only operate for a few months before elections).

These indicators have generally been included in models as simple, non-interactive terms. This is important given the findings of chapters 4 and 5 that the political gains from uses of force (or peace) have non-linear relationships with economic performance and presidential standing. Most authors have not estimated models that would allow different effects, for example, if approval is low due to a poor economy or due to non-economic factors.

Studies have included a range of control variables. Long-term studies have controlled for the growth in U.S. power and global commitments, though most of the change on such variables happens before 1950.\textsuperscript{26} Fordham argues that "supply-side" factors need to be included: force should be more attractive when military resources are more plentiful.\textsuperscript{27} In practice, though, it is difficult to see what measure would be appropriate.\textsuperscript{28}

As for international-level factors, several studies include controls for U.S.-Soviet relations, but with little agreement on what form that should take.\textsuperscript{29} Some use the U.S.-Soviet strategic nuclear balance,\textsuperscript{30} others U.S.-Soviet cooperation data from COPDAB,\textsuperscript{31} still others Soviet


\textsuperscript{27} Fordham, "Another Look at Parties, Voters, and the Use of Force Abroad"

\textsuperscript{28} The Fordham study uses change on previous year's defense spending as a control. Current military spending does not necessarily reflect capabilities: most the aircraft used in the 2003 war against Iraq were purchased in the 1980s. Likewise, any one measure of size, such as troop strength, is inadequate given the substitutability of resources (if troops are scarce, find a diversionary target that only requires air strikes). Some measure of commitments should also be included; the U.S. Army has fewer units to spare in 2003 than in 1998, though its size has been constant. It probably is the case that a president could have felt more comfortable expending military resources in 1995 than in 1979, but additional work is needed to develop an index that captures the full picture.

\textsuperscript{29} The studies by Fordham and Gowa do not include any controls for U.S.-Soviet relations. Meemuk also does not include any, but argues that such control are not needed since he is using opportunity rather than time as a unit of analysis.

\textsuperscript{30} Ostrom et. al., "The President and the Political Use of Force"; James et. al., "The Influence of Domestic and International Politics on the President's Use of Force"; James et. al., "Domestic Policy and Foreign Policy: Evaluating a Model of Crisis Activity for the United States"
crisis behavior from ICB. In general it is hard to know what the relationship between Soviet
military activity and diversionary war should be — did it create more opportunities, or did it deter
U.S. leaders? A more general measure of relations like COPDAB seems more useful, though
that dataset in particular only covers the period to 1979 (the competing WEIS series has even

3. Methods and Data

The general approach used to test various components of H4 was to construct statistical
models of the rate of each activity type as a function of the political conditions that create di-
versionary pressures, and control variables. These models were then estimated with the 1953-
2000 data for force, peace, speeches, and travel that were described in chapters 3 and 4. Since
the predictions from H4 are in terms of relative rates, the results from the regressions can be
used to directly evaluate the hypotheses.

In terms of independent variables “political conditions that create diversionary pressure”
are relatively easy to identify. It is generally assumed that presidents will be motivated by im-
pending elections, recessions or other economic failures, or low approval ratings — although
there has not been enough attention given to the question of how the marginal utility of ap-

31 Ostrom et. al. "The President and the Political Use of Force"; James et. al. "The Influence of Domestic and In-
ternational Politics on the President's Use of Force". On COPBDAB, see Azar, Edward E, Conflict and Peace Data
Bank (COPDAB) 1949-1978, computer data file (ICPSR 7767). University of Maryland, Center for International
Development and Conflict Management,

32 James et. al. "The Influence of Domestic and International Politics on the President's Use of Force"; James et. al.,
"Domestic Policy and Foreign Policy: Evaluating a Model of Crisis Activity for the United States"; DeRouen, "The
Internal Wars"

33 Except for H4-G and H4-H, which predict the characteristics of observed events, not rates of events. In those
cases a the predicted characteristic (e.g., type) was modeled with as dichotomous variable, as a function of the re-
levant political conditions.

Burbach, Diversionary Temptations
Chapter 6: “Diversionary Theory Repaired”
proval changes at different levels of approval, as discussed in section 1 above. How such variables should be operationalized is less clear – how exactly will diversionary pressure vary as a function of time before election, for example?

The general philosophy used here was to allow relatively complicated relationships between the rate of presidential actions and the economic/approval variables, as the results from chapters 4 and 5 showed that the benefits from those actions varied in non-linear ways with those variables. So, models included approval as a third-order term as well as third-order interactions between approval and economic variables. On the other hand, it is far less clear how to handle elections, and so a simple decision was made to simply include dummy variables for the traditional three-month campaign season before each, as well as for entire election years. Likewise, a simple 1/0 variable for the presence of an ongoing scandal was included – although the effects of a scandal ought to work through approval ratings, many people accuse presidents of diversion during scandals even when their approval ratings have not suffered.34

Control variables are not so simple – what, other than political conditions, should determine the rate of the use of force and other dramatic foreign policy actions by the U.S.? Presidents clearly have different policy preferences regarding the use of force, and so dummy variables to capture president-specific effects seem justified.35 The existence of an ongoing war would also be expected to matter, as strictly on policy grounds there might be reasons for dramatic escalations or peace proposals. An ongoing war would also lower the cost of diversionary force or peace; opportunities would not need to be invented. Several authors have argued for

34 Most notably, Clinton during the Lewinsky scandal and subsequent impeachment.
35 These dummy variables should also capture any “Vietnam syndrome”. If there was a special reluctance to use force caused by that war, the Ford and Carter variables should pick it up. This does not help us distinguish between the effect of the war and any policy preferences of Ford and Carter, but that would be very difficult to do, and is not the question of interest here.
using some measure of U.S./Soviet relations, but these have generally not been convincing. For example, in theory, how should the strategic nuclear balance (a variable used by several studies)\(^{36}\) affect U.S. decisions to use force – why such wide swings in U.S. policy when that balance was basically constant from Carter to Bush Sr.? Other measures are more plausible, but only available for a small number of years (e.g., COPDAB only to 1978). Some measure of Cold War tensions seems relevant though, and so this study created a simple variable to code periods of several years of time as average, better than average, or worse than average in U.S./Soviet relations; as detailed below, there is widespread agreement on such a periodization.

Beyond presidential doctrines and wars hot and Cold, some measure of the opportunities available for presidential action would be justified as a control variable. If one assumes that opportunities are not infinite, that presidents can not create them on demand, then opportunity ought to be in the model. Unfortunately, there is no simple, agreed upon measure of opportunity. In terms of the use of force, Meernik complied a set of approximately 500 opportunities from 1950 to 1990, but it is not clear his variable measured opportunities to create opportunities, nor is the actual dataset available.\(^{37}\)

In the end, there was no good solution to the opportunities problem, and so the analysis was done as rates over time, using only the presidential effects, wartime, and US/Soviet relations variables as controls on the "non-political" rates for the use of force, peace events, and speeches

\(^{36}\) Ostrom et. al., "The President and the Political Use of Force"; James et. al., "The Influence of Domestic and International Politics on the President's Use of Force"

\(^{37}\) Meernik, "Presidential Decision-Making and the Political Use of Military Force". Meernik conducted an extensive review of historical sources such as the NY Times Index, Facts on File, Keesling's Contemporary Archives, etc., to identify situations that resembled situations in which the U.S. had used force in the past – crises, hostage taking, naval incidents, etc. That might be good measure of opportunities for the U.S. to make a decision on whether or not to use force. But, what a test of diversionary theory calls for is a measure of opportunities the U.S. has to find a target for the use of force, given that the president has already decided to use force. If none of those 500 events were happening at the time, could the U.S. not have found someone with whom to pick a fight? Possibly not, but possibly so. Meernik himself did not continue to use the "opportunities" dataset in later work.
and travel. The next subsections list the specific variables and their coding rules, first for the independent variables, then the dependent variables.

Definition and Coding of Independent Variables

USSR_Tension

Coded 1 for periods of heightened tension, -1 for periods of unusual cooperation, zero otherwise.

Well-known developments in US/Soviet relations were taken to mark the boundaries of these periods, but since some of those bounding events are also force/peace actions by U.S. presidents, the transitions were coded as occurring in at the beginning of the month prior to the event – i.e., the 1987 Washington summit is coded as occurring one month into the “Gorbachev rapprochement” period.\footnote{This coding makes sense if events follow from changes in US/Soviet relations. If the events themselves cause rather than reflect those changes, then this coding is incorrect. In general, the broad changes seem to precede rather than result from these bounding events. Even with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, while the invasion itself was certainly a shock, relations had been deteriorating already (witness the failure of SALT II, the “Soviet brigade in Cuba” affair, and growing tensions in third world conflicts). One exception would be the death of Stalin which was a cause rather than consequence of reduced tensions, but since that death happens just six week after Eisenhower took office, all of 1953 is coded as part of the “post-Stalin” period rather than distinguishing something different for the month of February. For general histories of the Cold War, see John Gaddis, Strategies of Containment (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Raymond Garthoff, Detente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations From Nixon to Reagan (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1985); McGeorge Bundy, Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years (New York: Vintage, 1988); Raymond Garthoff, The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1994)}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>START</th>
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<tr>
<td>1/1953</td>
<td>3/1955</td>
<td>Immediate Post-Stalin period</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/1959</td>
<td>6/1963</td>
<td>Crises in Berlin, Cuba, U2 (Berlin “deadline”)</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/1963</td>
<td>10/1969</td>
<td>Quiet 1960s (nuclear test ban agreement)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/1969</td>
<td>6/1975</td>
<td>Détente (SALT negotiations begin)</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/1975</td>
<td>11/1980</td>
<td>Post-Détente (Helsinki summit)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/1980</td>
<td>12/1984</td>
<td>Cold War Revival (invasion of Afghanistan)</td>
<td>+1</td>
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<td>1/1984</td>
<td>10/1987</td>
<td>Regan Thaw (“Year of peace” speech)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/1/1992</td>
<td>1/29/2001</td>
<td>End of cold war (USSR disbanded)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PostCW

1 for periods after January 1, 1992 (i.e., the dissolution of the USSR), 0 otherwise

ElectionYear

1 for the 12 months before a presidential election

ElectionMidterm
ElectionPresident

1 if the end of the poll interval is within 90 days of a midterm election, or presidential election, respectively.

There are two problems with the polling dataset as is for handling electoral timing questions. First, there is not general a poll on election day. If a polling interval ran from mid-October to mid-November, for example, there would be two choices: count it as an election period, in which case a use of force that happened on November 10th would count as a pre-election use of force, or count the entire period as post-election, in which case an “October surprise” on Halloween would count as post-election. Second, in certain presidential election years, all before 1980, Gallup did not ask presidential approval questions for several months before the election — in some cases, the gap is considerably longer than 90 days.39

39 The worst case is 1976, with a six-month gap (early June to early December). More commonly the gap was from the end of June to the week after the election. These gaps are only present in years an incumbent was running for reelection: 1956, 1964, 1972, 1976. Gallup apparently felt they could not ask both the approval question and “for whom will you vote?” without one question biasing the other. After 1976 they presumably determined this was not
These timing issues were resolved as follows:

- In all presidential election years, an extra data point was inserted on election day.
- In years when a >90 day gap existed, extra data points were inserted 45 days and 90 days before the election.

The value of ElectMidterm or ElectPresident was coded as 1 for the poll inserted on election day; for the “real” poll after election day it was coded zero.

For these artificial polls, the value of economic and other variables not including presidential approval were coded as appropriate for that date (i.e., the poll added in mid-September was coded with economic data from September).

Approval values for these artificial polls were interpolated between the June and November readings. The approval changes during that period ranged from +4% to +9%.\(^{40}\)

**Scandals**

1 during periods when a significant presidential scandal was taking place. Scandals were identified from Schultz’ Presidential Scandals\(^{41}\), but only those which were significant, impinged on the White House, and were relatively focused in term were chosen. This included Watergate, Iran-Contra, and Lewinsky, as well half a dozen others.\(^{42}\)

Eisenhower, JFK, LBJ, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush41, Clinton

Dummy variables, each coded 1 when that president was in office, 0 when not.

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\(^{40}\) Linear interpolation is not an ideal solution. We know, for example, that presidents typically see their approval rating spike after their convention – and take a short-term loss after the challenger’s convention. Still, there is no alternative that is any less arbitrary. The interpolation is unlikely to be dramatically different than the actual approval at each of those periods. There is, however, the chance of large but short-term excursions being missed: for example, Johnson’s approval dropping from 70 to 30% for August and September of 1964, then jumping back to 70% by November.


\(^{42}\) Sherman Adams 1958 (Chief of Staff, improper acceptance of gifts); TFX contract award 1962 (accusations of political influence steering a major aircraft contract); Bobby Baker 1964 (corruption charges against LBJ), Abe Fortas 1968 (machinations around Fortas’ nomination to the Supreme Court); Bert Lance 1977 (OMB director, corruption involving his bank in Georgia and the Carter campaign); EPA 1983 (several EPA officials indicted for illegal attempts to thwart Superfund law, connections to waste producers); Clarence Thomas 1991 (sexual harassment allegations against Bush’s Supreme Court nominee); “Troopergate” 1994 (Arkansas state troopers claim Clinton used them to obtain women; new Whitewater revelations occur simultaneously). The Agnew indictment/resignation would also have counted, but overlapped Watergate. The Clinton administration posed some problems, since in addition to the early 1994 and the 1998 peaks, it faced significant scandal problems on an ongoing basis, but it seemed unreasonable to code all eight years as a continuous scandal – however much both the Clintons and their accusers might agree that’s exactly how to describe his White House tenure.
Wartime

As in chapters 4 and 5, coded 1 when the U.S. is at war (Korea, Vietnam, Gulf, Kosovo)

Unemployment, ConsumerExpect, 3MO_Approval

As in previous chapters: national unemployment rate for the month of the poll, the index of “expectations of future business conditions” from the University of Michigan’s Survey of Consumers (quarterly), and the three month moving average of the president’s approval rating, computed from the poll at the beginning of the polling period in question (i.e., the moving average of the lag of Approval)

Dependent Variables

In all cases, these variables are the count of events of that category happening in the given polling period. That is, the variable Speeches is 0 during any periods in which a speech did not take place; it is 1 if a single speech took place, and 3 if three televised speeches were given.

*Speeches:* Number of Foreign/Domestic policy speeches, not connected to a use of force or peace event

*Travel:* Travel of more than three days duration outside the U.S.

*Force:* All use of force events

*ForceMajor:* Major use of force events

*ForceProtect:* Uses of force in the “Protect Americans” category

*ForceInternal:* Uses of force in the “Internal Change” category

*Peace:* All peace events

*PeaceMajor:* Major peace events

*AllEvents:* Sum of Speeches, Travel, Force, Peace

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43 Speeches not included are State of the Union and Inaugurals, speeches announcing a use of force or peace event, “apology” speeches (as defined in chapter 5), and memorial/commemorative remarks.

44 See Chapter 4, section 3 for a definitions and an explanation of how events were identified and classified.

45 Major uses received high media coverage and either actual combat or the direct involvement of the President (such as giving a televised address or special news conference).

46 See chapter 5, section 3, for definitions, sources, and coding rules.
The "optional" variables are new (not used in chapters 4 or 5), and are introduced to focus on actions taken by presidents, rather than things that happen to presidents, as discussed above.

Uses of force were coded as non-discretionary when the U.S. was subject to a surprise attack or escalation, or more generally is reacting to the other side's initiative, and the action taken in response is only that which could be considered automatic or expected. In other words, discretionary events required that the president take advantage of an opportunity, if not create the opportunity in the first place. In the 1976 Korea DMZ "tree cutting" incident, for example, U.S. troops were surprised by North Korean attackers, and U.S. actions were limited to self-defense in response, and beefing up security patrols in the days following. Other examples of non-discretionary events include the U2 shootdown in 1960, or the missile strikes following the 1998 embassy bombings. On the other hand, the Cuban Missile Crisis did not count as non-discretionary. The Soviets created the situation, but the strong U.S. response was not foreordained.

Statistical Specifications: Measuring Rates with Poisson Regression

For each polling period, the dependent variables are counts of the presidential actions of the appropriate type that took place in the interval since the previous poll. Those counts of events are modeled as a Poisson process with the expected rate of occurrence being a function of the independent and control variables. The Poisson model is a simple form that emerges naturally for processes like radioactive decay that can be viewed as a large number of independent, identical trials happening over a period of time, producing an observable count of "events" — whether that be the number of atoms of a sample that decay in any given second, or the number of decisions to use force made by a president in a given month.47

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47 Using a Poisson model carries the assumption that there is an essentially infinite and identical number of opportunities to use force in two periods of the same duration, with the probability of each opportunity leading to a use of force being a function of the independent variables at that period in time. If opportunities vary in a known way from period to period, it is easy to incorporate that in the model (just as one adjusts for the expected radioactive counts per second from a kilogram vs. a milligram of plutonium). For more on Poisson models for event count data, see King, Unifying Political Methodology: The Likelihood Theory of Statistical Inference, for general information on the derivation of the Poisson distribution and its relation to others, see Morris DeGroot, Probability and Statistics (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1975) pp 243-263. If opportunities are small in number and observed directly, however,
The systematic component of a Poisson model takes the following form:

\[ E(COUNT_i) = P_i \cdot e^{X_i \beta} \]

where \( COUNT \) is the dependent variable – the count of events in period \( i \), \( P_i \) is the length of period \( i \), and \( X_i \beta \) are vectors of independent variables and coefficients. The variance at observation \( i \) is equal to the expected value; see the references above for details on the stochastic portion of the distribution.

Note that the form of the Poisson model means that changes in the independent variables cause constant changes in the ratio of the dependent variable before and after the change, not the absolute level. That is, a coefficient of 2 on variable \( X \) in a linear model means that whenever \( X \) increases by 1, the dependent variable goes up by 2. In the exponential form of a Poisson model, coefficient of 2 means that an increase of 1 in \( X \) causes the dependent variable to increase by a factor of 7.5 – whether from 10 to 75, or .01 to .75.

Since the assumptions that motivate it are relatively loose, the Poisson model is widely applicable, and it has been shown to produce consistent estimates if the data is not strictly Poisson-generated but meets some fairly easy conditions, and will produce unbiased estimates even if the variance structure is significantly different (the standard errors will be wrong – but most often too large, so that the Poisson results will tend to be conservative rather than overstate the certainty of estimates).\(^{48}\) There are two potential problems with a basic Poisson specification that some authors have noted that are worth discussing, however.

---

\(^{48}\) Cameron and Trivendi, *Regression Analysis of Count Data*, ch. 3.
First, the variance of the basic Poisson distribution is fixed—it is equal to the mean for any given value. This will not be correct when events within a period are correlated. Consider a count of newspaper stories on a given topic in a month, including many different papers. Decisions to cover the story are not independent: if the Washington Post covers it, the New York Times is more likely to, and so on. Thus, coverage will be clustered—either very few stories, or very many stories will be counted.\(^9\) This is unlikely to be a major problem with the data at hand—uses of force are unlikely to trigger other uses of force at the same time. More plausible is underdispersion—one use of force or major diplomatic event this month may make others less likely simply due to limited executive and military resources. Since the typical rates for events are far less than 1 per period, though, it seems unlikely that there would be many “second events” preempted by other events happening in that same period.\(^9\) Others have compared the basic Poisson specification to alternatives and found that there is little difference with the use of force data.\(^1\)

Fordham has recently argued that the frequency of the use of force is not likely to be independent over time. That is, the frequency of the use of force this year cannot be predicted only with independent variables observed this year; the frequency of military action in previous

---

\(^9\) Negative correlations are also possible—meaning that an event happening makes other events in that period less likely. King gives the example of Congressional veto challenges: because attempted veto overrides are costly, each one that happens makes the next one that year less likely, and so the observed veto counts are compressed towards zero. Note again that in either of these cases, the coefficients will be unbiased; failure to account for correlations among events will bias the standard errors up, but will not bias the estimates of the effects of the variables. King, *Unifying Political Methodology: The Likelihood Theory of Statistical Inference*, p. 130.

\(^9\) One possible source of correlation of events is that presidential address often take place in conjunction with force/peace events, which means that the total count of presidential activities would be overdispersed—force/peace events would also generate speeches. In practice, the *Speeches* variable excludes those addresses given directly in connection to a force or peace event, so that such events will only appear as one event in the aggregate data.

years will affect the frequency today.\textsuperscript{52} He points out that the frequency of uses of force is not a stationary time series; there is a steady upward trend since the mid-19th century. Using recently developed methods for estimating a Poisson model with moving-average effects, Fordham claims that the failure to account for that trend explains why Gowa found that systemic international variables like U.S. relative power correlate with the frequency of militarized disputes.\textsuperscript{53}

These problems do not seem fatal. First, the use of force series has been relatively stationary since World War II; the majority of the increase was from the late 1800s to 1950. Second, plots of the autocorrelation functions for both all events and uses of force show relatively little contribution from past values (figure 6-3). Finally, as Fordham himself acknowledges, using the moving-average Poisson produces comparable, not superior results to the standard specification, and choosing between the two is largely a matter of whether one finds the time-series effects or the international system effects more theoretically plausible.\textsuperscript{54} The dynamics of nonlinear time series like use of force rates is an area dearly in need of more work, and advances in theory in computational ability are making that possible. At the moment, though, the evidence against a standard Poisson event-count model is not compelling.

\textsuperscript{52} Fordham, "Another Look at 'Parties, Voters, and the Use of Force Abroad'"

\textsuperscript{53} Gowa, "Politics at the Water's Edge: Parties, Voters and the Use of Force Abroad"; Gowa, \textit{Ballots and Bullets: The Elusive Democratic Peace}

\textsuperscript{54} Fordham, "Another Look at 'Parties, Voters, and the Use of Force Abroad'". This is different from presidential approval, for example, where the AR(1) specification strongly outperforms standard OLS in goodness of fit, seems to match the dynamics seen in the series, and has a reasonable theoretical story of the gradual diffusion of knowledge of new conditions, inertia of attitude change, etc.
Figure 6-3: Autocorrelation Functions for Event Count Series

Statistical Specifications: Event Proportions

Although the majority of the hypotheses require the estimate of rates, calling for event count models, H4-G and H4-H call for measuring the relative share of events that fall into two categories: internal change vs. protecting Americans uses of force, and high vs. low support for force and peace events. That is, the unit of analysis is not periods of time, but observed events: we want to predict which type of event happened, given that one took place. These tests are call for straightforward dichotomous variable models, for example, modeling the probability that a use of force is of the “internal change” type, given that a use of force took place. Logit regression was used for these tests.
4. Statistical Results and Analysis

This section presents results from the quantitative tests of hypotheses H4-A through H4-H. First, however, tests the effect of political variables upon rates for all events combined, to see if there are any overall patterns – do presidents become more or less active when under diversionary pressure, given that predictions from H4 call for some activities to be less frequent, and some more frequent during such periods. Next, each of the hypotheses is examined. For each of the dependent variables regression results are presented, then charts showing “first differences” – the change in predicted rates caused by changes in each of the variables in turn, while others are at their means – and finally 2D plots of predicted rates as a function of economic conditions and presidential approval. As is discussed in section 5, the results are mixed: peace events and force events generally do follow the predictions on changes in response to economic conditions and low approval ratings, although the distribution of the use of force by type does not; elections do not have the predicted effect, with all activities become less common before presidential elections.

*Combined Effects: Rates for All Events*

Although the hypotheses do not make specific predictions for the effect of political variables on the rate of events overall, since the effects on specific categories of events vary and in some cases have opposite signs. Even so, it would be of interest to see if political variables cause measurable changes in the overall distribution of events, and so regressions were run with the dependent variable AllEventsCount, which is the sum of all Speeches, Travel, Force, and Peace that occur in a given polling period. Specifically, the equation shown below was regressed
(note that the factor Interval, the duration of a given polling period, is included as a weight to adjust for the uneven lengths of the periods):

\[
AllEventsCount_i = Interval_i \times \exp \left( \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \text{Unemployment} + \beta_2 \times \text{ConsumerExpect} + \beta_3 \times \text{3MoApproval} + \beta_4 \times \text{USSR_Tension} + \beta_5 \times \text{Wartime} + \beta_6 \times \text{Scandals} + \beta_7 \times \text{ElectionYear} + \beta_8 \times \text{ElecPresident} + \beta_9 \times \text{ElectMidterm} + \beta_{10} \times \text{PostColdWar} \right)
\]

Results from this regression appear in table 6.4, below.
### Table 6-4: Rates of Combined Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>All Events</th>
<th></th>
<th>All Events w/ Presidential Effects</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
<td>Std. Err</td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
<td>Std. Err</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>-1.8569</td>
<td>0.6002</td>
<td>-0.9788</td>
<td>0.7141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>9.3166</td>
<td>5.1975</td>
<td>5.2124</td>
<td>5.8941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConsumerExpect</td>
<td>-0.0037</td>
<td>0.0022</td>
<td>-0.0030</td>
<td>0.0028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MoApproval</td>
<td>0.0202</td>
<td>0.0057</td>
<td>0.0072</td>
<td>0.0070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR_Tension</td>
<td>-0.3272</td>
<td>0.0906</td>
<td>-0.2653</td>
<td>0.1180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wartime</td>
<td>0.0849</td>
<td>0.1586</td>
<td>0.0831</td>
<td>0.2096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JFK</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.2749</td>
<td>0.2940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBJ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.1391</td>
<td>0.2848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nixon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.0902</td>
<td>0.2765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.4036</td>
<td>0.3463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.4243</td>
<td>0.3117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.1819</td>
<td>0.1790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.4816</td>
<td>0.2167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.6858</td>
<td>0.1921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandals</td>
<td>0.1570</td>
<td>0.1240</td>
<td>0.1319</td>
<td>0.1352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectionYear</td>
<td>0.1282</td>
<td>0.1303</td>
<td>0.2087</td>
<td>0.1351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectionPresident</td>
<td>-1.0598</td>
<td>0.3398</td>
<td>-1.0735</td>
<td>0.3425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectionMidterm</td>
<td>0.3788</td>
<td>0.3704</td>
<td>0.0999</td>
<td>0.1766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PostColdWar</td>
<td>0.7597</td>
<td>0.1314</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>704</td>
<td>704</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td></td>
<td>-316.6</td>
<td>-311.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood ratio</td>
<td></td>
<td>-24.15</td>
<td>-22.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Poisson regression. Variables in **bold** significant at a .05 level or above; Variables underlined at a .30 level. Dummy variable for Eisenhower dropped. Likelihood ratio test shows probability of observing these coefficients if the null model (i.e., intercept only) is true.
Table 6-4 reports results from two regressions: one with the political condition variables only, and one that includes dummy variables for each president.\textsuperscript{55} Note that there is no goodness of fit statistic equivalent to $R^2$ for a Poisson regression,\textsuperscript{56} nor a simple measure of residual variance like sigma-squared. To provide a measure of the goodness of fit, a likelihood ratio test is performed to compare each model to the null model of that data – a regression using a constant term only – and the bottom row in the table reports the natural log of the probability of finding the reported coefficients if in fact the null model is true and they all are really zero (i.e., more negative is better; anything below $-2.9$ is significant at a .05 level). In these two cases the probabilities are infinitesimal; the variables clearly do provide traction.

Individually, not many of the effects are significant, though it seems that a poor economy increases rates of activity, as does higher approval; presidential election periods decrease it. Interpreting the coefficients themselves in greater detail is difficult since this is a non-linear regression, and so figure 6-4 shows predicted rates resulting from changes in each of the variables, using the model without president-specific effects. The “mean” column shows the event rate – about 0.5/month – for average approval and economic conditions, and no scandals, wars, or election occurring (and 0 on the Soviet tension scale). The successive columns show the predict rates if the variable listed is changed: going from 0 to 1 in most cases, or from 55% to 40% for approval, and 5% to 8.5% unemployment and corresponding decrease in consumer confidence.

\textsuperscript{55} That is, a variable taking for each president JFK to Clinton was included, and took on the value 1 during their terms, 0 otherwise, with coefficients $\beta_1$ through $\beta_8$. The dummy for Eisenhower was dropped since a constant term was included. Thus, the coefficients on the other presidential dummy variables show the change in rates relative to Eisenhower; for Eisenhower rates, evaluate the model with all presidential terms set to zero. For most activities, Eisenhower’s rates were more or less in the middle of the pack.

\textsuperscript{56} The diagnostic significance of R-squared is overstated in any case. It is quite possible to have a high R-squared but an effect of no substantive importance, or for “good” model to have a low R-squared. For a critique, see Gary King et. al., “Making the Most of Statistical Analyses: Improving Interpretation and Presentation”, American Journal of Political Science, vol. 44, no. 2 (2000), pp 341-355
Most political variables do not have a strong effect on the activity rate. Presidential actions become only slightly more likely during scandals, and 15% more likely during midterm elections. Presidential election periods actually see a 60% decline in activity. Presidents are still “active” during such periods, giving campaign speeches, participating in debates, etc, but they do not overtly use the tools of the presidency vs. the tools of the presidential candidate. A decrease in approval is also associated with a slight decline in activity rates. Overall these patterns do not suggest diversion. The one exception is the economy, where recession conditions lead to a 60% increase in activity.

Given the non-linear relationships found between the gains of events and political/economic conditions, specifications allowing more complicated interactions were also regressed. These forms included prior approval as a cubic term (as done in chapters 4 and 5), as
well as interactions between approval and either unemployment or consumer expectations, as shown in equations 6-3, 6-4, and 6-5. These regressions were also run with presidential dummy terms added as well.

\[
6 - 3 : \text{(Cubic Approval Term)} \quad \text{AllEventsCount}_i = \text{Interval}_i, *
\]

\[
\beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Unemployment} + \beta_2 * \text{ConsumerExpect} + \\
\beta_3 * 3\text{MoApproval} + \beta_4 * \text{USSR _Tension} + \beta_5 * \text{Wartime} + \\
\beta_6 * \text{Scandals} + \beta_7 * \text{ElectionYear} + \beta_8 * \text{Elect President} + \\
\beta_9 * \text{ElectMidterm} + \beta_{10} * \text{PostColdWar} + \\
\beta_{11} * (3\text{MoApproval}^2 / 100) + \beta_{12} * (3\text{MoApproval}^3 / 10000)
\]

\[
6 - 4 : \text{(Cubic approval term and unemployment interaction)} \\
\text{AllEventsCount}_i = \text{Interval}_i, *
\]

\[
\beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Unemployment} + \beta_2 * \text{ConsumerExpect} + \\
\beta_3 * 3\text{MoApproval} + \beta_4 * \text{USSR _Tension} + \beta_5 * \text{Wartime} + \\
\beta_6 * \text{Scandals} + \beta_7 * \text{ElectionYear} + \beta_8 * \text{Elect President} + \\
\beta_9 * \text{ElectMidterm} + \beta_{10} * \text{PostColdWar} + \\
\beta_{11} * (3\text{MoApproval}^2 / 100) + \beta_{12} * (3\text{MoApproval}^3 / 10000) \\
+ \beta_{13} * (3\text{MoApproval} * \text{Unemployment})
\]

\[
6 - 5 : \text{(Cubic approval term and consumer expectations interaction)} \\
\text{AllEventsCount}_i = \text{Interval}_i, *
\]

\[
\beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Unemployment} + \beta_2 * \text{ConsumerExpect} + \\
\beta_3 * 3\text{MoApproval} + \beta_4 * \text{USSR _Tension} + \beta_5 * \text{Wartime} + \\
\beta_6 * \text{Scandals} + \beta_7 * \text{ElectionYear} + \beta_8 * \text{Elect President} + \\
\beta_9 * \text{ElectMidterm} + \beta_{10} * \text{PostColdWar} + \\
\beta_{11} * (3\text{MoApproval}^2 / 100) + \beta_{12} * (3\text{MoApproval}^3 / 10000) \\
+ \beta_{13} * (3\text{MoApproval} * \text{Unemployment})
\]

Figure 6-5 plots the predicted activity rates by economic conditions\(^{57}\) and 3 month approval average, based on results from equations 6-3, 604, and 6-5. What is shown in Figure 6-5

---

\(^{57}\) The graphs are set up in terms of consumer expectations, but since there is a strong correlation between unemployment and consumer expectations, instead of holding unemployment constant, it varied with consumer expecta-
are contour plots showing the predicted frequency of presidential activity, as a function of economic conditions and presidential approval. The contour lines show the natural log of the activity rate on a monthly basis: 0 means 1/month, -2 means 0.1/month, -4 is 0.02/month. The color scheme is on the same scale, with dark blue indicating a predicted activity rate of only 0.1 per year – once every decade – through yellow for about once/year to magenta for about once per month. This contour/color scheme will be used on all graphs of this type.

Figure 6-5: Total Activity Rates by Approval, Economy

Figure 6-5: Total Activity Rates by Approval, Economy
NOTE: See Appendix B or full-size, color versions of graphs

To show the sensitivity of results to the model specification, four different specifications are shown. Top left is the model of equation 6-3; top right is the same model with president-specific effects. The bottom left panel is equation 6-4 (unemployment interaction), the bottom right panel with Consumer Expect rather than unemployment, and includes president-specific effects (equation 6-5, with presidential dummy terms added). All told about 20 different interaction specifications were tried for each dependent variable. They generally did provide a better fit than models without such terms, but without any clear winners between them. The two specifications shown here for all activity, and in similar graphs for other dependent variables, give a sense of how sensitive the predictions are to specifications, but are no necessarily the best fits for that variable.

Figure 6-5 shows that economic performance and presidential support have modest effects on the overall rate of dramatic presidential actions. Over a wide range of approval and economic conditions, the predicted rate stays between 6 to 12 per year ( ). What the plots all show is a slight decrease in the activity rate as the economy improves (contours decreasing, color gradient from magenta to pink). Approval has a weak effect, possibly with a low around 40% approval, possibly decreasing again at very high levels of both approval and economic performance.  

---

58 Plot D (bottom right) also shows a sharp increase at very low approval plus very strong economic conditions. This is probably an artifact of the model – with a relatively low-order specification there is a limit to the complexity of the pattern that can be produced, and in this case the form that fit most of the data blew up in the upper left corner – there are very few data points there, and so errors have less leverage on the estimates.
Hypothesis H4-A: No diversionary patterns in speeches/travel

Since they did not appear to help presidents much, speeches and travel are not expected to show diversionary patterns. Table 6-4 shows results from regressing travel and speech rates on the same independent variables as for the “all event” regression: that is, replacing AllEvent-Count in equation 6-2 with SpeechCount, and TravelCount. As a reminder, “speeches” includes only televised domestic and foreign policy addresses not connected to a force/peace event, not all formal Presidential addresses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Speeches</th>
<th>Travel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>-1.0977 1.3926</td>
<td>-11.6129 11.8851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>3.4787 11.1985</td>
<td>-0.0008 0.0054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Expect</td>
<td>-0.0065 0.0053</td>
<td>0.0012 0.0138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MoApproval</td>
<td>0.0085 0.0144</td>
<td>0.0527 0.2434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR_Tension</td>
<td>0.0194 0.1996</td>
<td>0.1675 0.4395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wartime</td>
<td>-0.7629 0.4740</td>
<td>-0.0300 0.6516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JFK</td>
<td>-0.2009 0.4746</td>
<td>-1.0290 0.7309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBJ</td>
<td>-0.7317 0.6055</td>
<td>-0.3756 0.6272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nixon</td>
<td>0.3530 0.5710</td>
<td>0.8409 0.5946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford</td>
<td>-0.9154 0.6697</td>
<td>0.3699 0.5424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>-0.9158 0.5490</td>
<td>0.4888 0.3382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>-0.2427 0.3585</td>
<td>1.2977 0.3947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush41</td>
<td>-0.1647 0.4556</td>
<td>1.4675 0.3526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>-0.9821 0.4728</td>
<td>0.4538 0.2323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandals</td>
<td>-0.5811 0.3386</td>
<td>0.1261 0.2691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Year</td>
<td>-0.1111 0.2775</td>
<td>-1.2374 0.6742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election President</td>
<td>-0.7605 0.6349</td>
<td>-0.3840 0.3844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Midterm</td>
<td>0.0441 0.3588</td>
<td>-11.6129 11.8851</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N: 704
Log-likelihood: -313.6
Likelihood ratio test ln(Pr(Y|β=0)): -165.1

Variables in bold significant at a .05 level or above; Variables underlined at a 0.30 level. Dummy variable for Eisenhower omitted since constant included; read as if Eisenhower effect is zero.

Including president-specific effects was strongly justified for both regressions, and that makes sense. Travel has become significantly easier since Eisenhower's day, and the coefficients on presidential dummies show a generally increasing trend (the presidential variable show differ-
ences from Eisenhower, the omitted variable). Likewise, presidents have differed in their talent for and enjoyment of giving formal addresses. Eisenhower made much use of the format (most of the other coefficients are negative), as did Nixon, whereas three of the four Democrats avoided discretionary speeches (all but Kennedy). Clinton, for example gave not one discretionary policy speech during his entire second term -- he only spoke during the State of the Union address and when announcing uses of force (e.g., Kosovo), and his Lewinsky scandal apology. For easier interpretation of the results, Figures 6-6 and 6-7 show predicted effects from the variables.

Figure 6-6: Effect of Variables on Policy Speech Frequency

Figure 6-6: Effect of Political Variables on Policy Speech Frequency

Burbach, Diversionary Temptations
Chapter 6: "Diversionary Theory Repaired"
Figure 6-7: Effect of Variables on Foreign Travel Frequency

Figures 6-6 and 6-7 show that political variables do affect speech and travel rates, though generally not in the direction diversionary theory would predict. Both become significantly less frequent before presidential elections. Approval changes have very little effect. Scandals are correlated with increases in foreign travel, which could be diversionary in the sense of trying to boost ratings, or might simply be avoidance – no doubt wounded presidents have a more pleasant time engaging in high level meetings and foreign tours than facing the daily barrage in Washington. Policy speeches are less common in wartime, perhaps because there are crowded out by speeches relating to the war and associated peace efforts. On the other hand, speeches increase during recessions, which is an expected political response: the speeches might be announcing economic programs, or unrelated but popular initiatives meant to divert attention.
Figure 6-8: Economy/Approval and Rates of Speeches and Travel

Figure 6-8 illustrates the relationship between speeches, travel, and economic conditions and approval. Because presidential effects were so important for these activities, only regressions including presidential effects are shown: without interaction effects in the top row, with in the bottom (i.e., equivalent to the right hand columns only of figure 6-5). In both cases the rates do not show steep changes in the central region; approval and economic effects are not strong. What seems to be happening for speeches is that neither approval nor economic conditions have much affect when approval is high, but when approval is low, speeches are more frequent if economic conditions are bad, or less frequent if good (e.g., if approval is low due to an ongoing scandal or other policy failure). This is exactly the sort of pattern shown in figure 6-1, panel D.
Travel shows the opposite pattern. The rate stays relatively constant over a wide area, but decreases significantly in the low approval / poor economy region – a plausible outcome, since presidents in political trouble due to a poor economy might want to be seen as focusing “like a laser beam” on the economy, not foreign affairs.

*Hypothesis 4-B – 4-F: Uses of Force and Peace Events*

Hypotheses H4-B to H4-F all deal with the rates of force and peace events. The variables that are used to test these hypotheses are all included in equation 6-2, and so one set of regressions will cover all of them simultaneously. Table 6-4 gives results from regressing the use of force rate and the peace event rate on political variables (i.e., using ForceCount and PeaceCount in equation 6-2 instead of AllEventCount).
### Table 6-4: Rates of Force and Peace Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Uses of Force</th>
<th>Peace Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
<td>Std. Err</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>-5.6067</td>
<td>1.9543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>40.1074</td>
<td>15.5760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConsumerExpect</td>
<td>-0.0054</td>
<td>0.0071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MoApproval</td>
<td>0.0182</td>
<td>0.0172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR_Tension</td>
<td>-0.3015</td>
<td>0.3303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wartime</td>
<td><strong>0.9898</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.4944</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JFK</td>
<td>0.9974</td>
<td>0.7431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBJ</td>
<td>0.6993</td>
<td>0.6942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nixon</td>
<td>-0.4372</td>
<td>0.7326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford</td>
<td>-0.8570</td>
<td>0.9280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>-0.8739</td>
<td>0.9703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>-0.0483</td>
<td>0.5530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush41</td>
<td>0.2983</td>
<td>0.6529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td><strong>1.3214</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.5501</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandals</td>
<td>0.0838</td>
<td>0.3623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectionYear</td>
<td>0.3677</td>
<td>0.3418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectionPresident</td>
<td>-0.5858</td>
<td>0.7165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectionMidterm</td>
<td>0.3788</td>
<td>0.3704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>704</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>-123.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood ratio</td>
<td>-4.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variables in **bold** significant at a .05 level or above; Variables underlined at a 0.30 level. Dummy variable for Eisenhower omitted since constant included; read as if Eisenhower effect is zero.

Table 6-4 gives results from regressing the rates of force events and peace events on the same set of independent variables used previously. One immediately apparent difference from
the speech/travel regressions is that fewer coefficients are significant, and the regressions as a whole are less clearly significant (more like a .005 level than the infinitesimal levels for the former); a principal reason for this is the greater sparseness of the data: on the order of 70 events each, compared to 120 trips. Nevertheless, the regressions do pass a significance test and while not many of the coefficients are different from zero at a 95% confidence level, many of them do pass a one-tailed test (0.30). As before, to interpret the coefficients, figures 6-9 and 6-10 show predicted effects from unit changes in the variables for force rates and peace rates, respectively.

Figure 6-9: Effects of Variables on Use of Force Rates

Figure 6-9: Effects of Political Variables on Use of Force Rates
Figure 6-10: Effects of Variables on Peace Event Rates

From these results, we can make the following quick appraisals of the hypotheses:

**H4-B: Force and approval**

There is no significant relationship between the use of force and approval ratings — not in a simple way at least. A very slight reduction in the propensity to use force is expected in response to an approval decline — counter to the simple diversionary prediction. The more complicated interactions of approval and economic variables are discussed below.
H4-C: Force and the economy

As predicted, the use of force is significantly more frequent during poor economic conditions (the example here is unemployment at 8.5%, consumer expectations at 75). This is one of the very few effects that is different from the mean at greater than a 95% confidence level, in fact.

H4-D: Peace events and approval

It was impossible to make an unambiguous prediction regarding peace events and approval, and appropriately enough, the regression result is ambiguous: virtually no change in the rate of peace events is expected with a significant approval loss.

H4-E(1): Peace events and the economy

A positive relationship was predicted between economic conditions and peace events, but this was not borne out. While a very slight reduction in the frequency is expected with a recession, the change is insignificant. Clearly, though, it is different from the strong negative correlation between economic performance and the use of force.

H4-E: “Scandals”

The primary prediction of H4-E related to scandals in the sense of low popularity despite good economic conditions, but it is possible the same prediction – less force, more peace – would apply to periods when the White House is under attack even if that does not show up in the polls. This tentative prediction did not hold: scandals had no significant effect on either force or peace rates.
H4-F: War, Peace, and Elections

The predictions regarding election effects mostly failed. Force was expected to be less likely before elections, but instead the use of force is twice as likely in the period before a mid-term election as at other times. Peace events were expected to more common, yet midterms have no effect, and presidential election periods make peace events less likely. Uses of force are significantly less common before presidential elections, though, as expected. The effect is even stronger when limited to major uses of force: there have been none at all within three months of an election in the last fifty years.

This pattern with elections is interesting – why would uses of force be more likely before midterms, and less so before presidential elections, especially since they were less popular during pre-election periods than at other times? One factor may be that the suspicion of diversion is much greater before a presidential election, as opposed to the president using the military prior to a strictly congressional election. There may also be resource constraints: a president and his advisors are totally focused on campaigning during those last months, and there may be very little capacity to orchestrate a military adventure at the same time. As for midterms, presidents may value approval increases more in pre-election periods – even if the gains from force are smaller then, they may count for more. Or, even if pre-election uses of force do not help the president, it is possible they help his party in the Congressional races.

59 In addition, former officials usually claim that they did not want to tie the hands of an incoming administration, and so did not want to make major decisions until the election result was clear - presumably so that they could defer decisions should their administration defeated. Or in some cases, administrations may wait until after an election to take action, precisely because they do want to tie the hands of a successor. One author argues that the Bush administration intervened in Somalia in December, 1992 in large part to tie the incoming Clinton administration’s hands: with a major operation just launched in Somalia, Clinton would not be able to start yet another one in Bosnia at the same time. Bush officials would have preferred to not intervene in either situation, but much preferred Somalia to Bosnia.

Burbach, Diversionary Temptations
Chapter 6: “Diversionary Theory Repaired”
Finally, it is worth noting that force and peace activities are both significantly more likely during wartime – not surprisingly. The state of U.S. soviet relations does not seem to matter much, though both activities were slightly more frequent when US/Soviet relations were better.

H4-C – H4-E: Economy/Approval Interactions

Figures 6-11 and 6-12 show predicted rates of the use of force and peace events, respectively, as a function of prior average approval and economic conditions (equations 6-3 through 6-5, with ForceCount and PeaceCount instead of AllEventCount). Each chart shows four different specifications – with and without president-specific effects on from left to right, and with and without approval/economy interaction terms from top to bottom. All of the plots use the same color scale – as do all other charts of this type in this chapter. See the detailed description around figure 6-5 for more information.
Figure 6-11: Use of Force Rates by Approval, Economy

The striking thing about the plots in figure 6-11—all but the lower right, at least, is how similar they are to the charts of predicted use of force effects from chapter 4. The rates follow the benefits extremely well. As predicted, force is least likely in the low approval / good economy quadrant (upper left of each plot), and most likely in the opposite corner. In all cases, the use of force seems to hit a minimum around 40% approval. In all but plot D, the use of force rate increases monotonically as the economy gets worse. In general the relationship with approval is positive. The increase is generally shallower at high levels of economic performance, steeper at low levels.
The picture is much messier in plot D – bottom right; this model includes a third-order interaction and president-specific effects. The overall pattern is actually similar, but sharper and with strange, steep reversals in the left-side (low approval) corners. That strangeness mostly happens below 30% average approval, a virtually unheard of range for presidents. Combined with the limited degrees of freedom,\textsuperscript{60} that can result in the model over fitting the data and thus producing extreme predictions outside the sample range.\textsuperscript{61}

Predicted peace event rates are shown in figure 6-12. Peace rates are less affected by the economy and presidents’ standing than force rates. The effects that do appear partially support, partially contradict the predictions of H4. First, there is only a small relationship between peace events and approval. The direction of the relationship is not consistent across specifications, but in general rates are slightly higher at high approval than low approval. Contrary to expectations, rates generally decrease as economic conditions improve. On prediction that appears to be confirmed is that peace events become more common in the low approval / good economy quadrant, or at least do not decline as steeply as for uses of force. On the other hand, at high approval levels rates appear to be higher with poor economic conditions, contrary to expectations.

\textsuperscript{60} Although there are 700 observations, there are only 66 events, and 19 variables.

\textsuperscript{61} For the same reason, it was not possible to test interaction models for the major force events only. With higher order interactions and presidential dummies, there were nearly as many variables as events.
Figure 6-12: Peace Event Rates by Approval, Economy

Caveat: Are these actions voluntary?

Before moving on to the next hypotheses, it is worth checking whether the results so far still hold when non-discretionary events are excluded. If diversionary behavior is taking place, the effects should be even stronger when looking at events initiated by presidents, and not actions taken by other countries. Therefore, regressions were run using ForceOptional and PeaceOptional, with the same independent variables as in other cases.

Figure 6-13 shows first differences for the discretionary force model. The results are similar to what was found for all events, with a few exceptions. Election effects are slightly weaker – perhaps adversaries have a tendency to initiate conflicts before U.S. midterm elections,
for whatever reason. The post-cold war effect is much stronger, reflecting the optional nature of many U.S. uses of force since 1990. Approval has no effect at all. This is actually consistent with a greater share of discretionary uses being diversionary, since for force overall lower approval actually led to fewer uses of force. Finally, the strength of the economic variables was greater – an even higher tendency for force to be clustered in recessions and other periods of economic grief.

Figure 6-13: Effect of Variables on Discretionary Force

Figure 6-13 shows the equivalent effects for peace events.

Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*
Chapter 6: “Diversionary Theory Repaired”
Figure 6-14: Effect of Political Variables on Discretionary Peace

Relative to the effects in figure 6-10, the main differences are that rates are depressed during midterm elections, and the effect of wars is much greater. The wartime effect could be interpreted in two ways. When the U.S. is involved in a war, it naturally has reason to pursue peace initiatives. This was especially true during the Vietnam War. Both Johnson and Nixon were eager to see the war end, and so made a number of peace offers and de-escalatory moves, while the North Vietnamese had every reason to believe they would receive better terms (if not outright victory) but continuing to fight, so the U.S. was always in the position of initiating, rather than reacting to peace proposals. On the other hand, war might also increase peace efforts for cynical reasons: either to soothe American opinion about the war,\(^\text{62}\) or because the war

\(^\text{62}\) Johnson, for example, had little hope that his bombing pauses and other offers would lead to a settlement on terms the U.S. would accept, but felt they had to be done anyway to demonstrate to Americans that he was taking
creates easy opportunities for diversionary diplomacy. Scandals actually show a significant positive effect, consistent with expectations for peace events. Finally, poor economic conditions led to slightly more peace activity (vs. no effect for all events), while lower approval leads to slightly fewer (again, vs. no effect).

Regressions were also run to measure the rates of discretionary force and peace activities as a function of approval and economic interactions (i.e., using the form of eq. 6-3, 6-4, and 6-5). If discretionary uses are more likely to be diversionary, then the patterns seen earlier should be even stronger: more force when approval is low and the economy is doing poorly, less when approval is low despite a good economy, and vice versa for peace. In fact, the patterns for discretionary force and peace are similar to those for all events. Contrary to predictions, it does not appear that the diversionary patterns seen in figure 6-11 and 6-12 are stronger when looking only at discretionary events.

H4-G: Force to “protect Americans” will be more common, and “internal change” less common, under diversionary pressure.

Hypothesis H4-G predicted that rates of “protection” should increase under diversionary pressure, and rates of humanitarian intervention should decline. Figures 6-15 and 6-16 show predicted changes in the rates of uses of force of the “Protect Americans” type and the “Internal Change” type in response to changes in political conditions (note the axis break and scale change on figure 6-16).

all possible efforts to avoid escalation. These peace feelers were not totally insincere; LBJ would have been happy if Hanoi had unexpectedly agreed to the U.S. offers.

Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*  
Chapter 6: “Diversionary Theory Repaired”
Figure 6-15: Effect of Variables on Force to "Protect Americans"
The results in figures 6-15 and 6-16 provide a mixed judgment on H4-G – especially since the range of uncertainty is so large given the relatively small number of events. Evidence against the hypothesis is that protection operations become significantly less frequent during scandals, and they become only slightly more frequent under poor economic conditions – less responsive to economic conditions than other types of force. Internal change operations become dramatically more frequent in conjunction with economic trouble, whereas they are much less reduced by presidential elections or scandals than protection missions.

On the other hand, the two types do show the expected pattern with approval and midterm elections. The midterm effect is striking: "protect America" uses of force are more than four times as likely before midterms as otherwise. Frankly, that effect is so large as to be questionable. There are only four examples of midterm events, but since just under two would be
expected that does appear to give midterms a strong effect – but with a very wide confidence interval.

The approval effects also fail to be statistically significant, but it is interesting that protection missions – the ones expected to be useful for diversion – show no relationship to prior approval, whereas humanitarian missions become significantly less likely as approval drops (a 40% decrease in frequency from a 15 point drop in approval).

The response to approval and the economy can be seen better when comparing the relative share of each type of force rather than the rate. That is, given that a use of force occurs, which type is it likely to be? If "protection" helps presidents more than "internal change", we should see a shift towards it. How the share of the middle category, "defending allies" should change is less clear, but for the outside categories the predicted effect is unambiguous.

To test this, a logit regression was run on the set of all "protection" and "internal change" uses of force, using Protect.Americans as the dependent variable – it is equal to 1 for all of the protection operations, and 0 for all of the internal change operations. The results from this regression are shown in table 6-7.
Table 6-7: Type of Force Used by Political Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Probability (&quot;Protect Americans&quot; use)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>12.400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-93.823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectYear</td>
<td>0.583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectMid</td>
<td>-0.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectPres</td>
<td>-6.389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scandals</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wartime</td>
<td>-1.413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PostColdWar</td>
<td>-3.737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MonthApproval</td>
<td>-0.095</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Logit regression on all ProtectAmericans and InternalChange uses of force; dependent variable was ProtectAmericans. Variables in bold significant at a .05 level; underlined at a 0.30 level.

The share of US-focused vs. humanitarian uses of force does change in response to political conditions. The largest effect is that of the end of the Cold War – uses of force aimed at internal change have become far more common since 1990. These results also show that the balance shifts towards “internal change” during wartime (possibly an effect of the Kosovo War). The balance shifts towards “protection” during presidential election years – until the final three months, when “protection” missions are virtually unheard of. The balance shifts towards internal change as approval rises, and as unemployment rises, as illustrated in figure 6-17. This figure shows the probability that if use of force is observed in either the “protect” or “internal” cate-
gories, it will be of type "protect" (again, the "defend allies" category is ignored here); predictions as a function of approval and unemployment are made for both cold war and post-cold war periods.

Figure 6-17: "Protect" vs. "Internal Change" by Approval, Economy

As hypothesis H4-G predicted, the share of "protect" missions declines as approval goes up – internal change is seen more often when presidents are doing well. This could reflect the diversionary use of force to rescue, protect, or otherwise act directly on behalf of American citizens when presidential support is low, or, could reflect decisions to forgo humanitarian missions when approval is low. This analysis cannot determine whether presidents engage in extra "protection" missions for political purposes, or if they avoid "internal" interventions for political reasons – or both.
Economic conditions, in contrast, have the opposite effect from the H4-G prediction (though the prediction on economic variables was weaker than that for approval). Humanitarian intervention has made up larger share of uses of force when the economy is doing poorly.

**H4-H: Force/Peace activities should show greater support during periods of diversionary pressure**

Finally, one other piece of evidence predicted by the “repaired” diversionary theory is that actions during diversionary pressure should show greater elite support – since this variable mattered a great deal for both force and peace events, politically motivated presidents should seek out opportunities that they know will be well received in Congress and by the media.

To test for this, the OpinionIndex variables were modeled as a function of political conditions. Since the index variables are bounded by 3 and −3, and are frequently at those boundary values, a linear model was inappropriate. Instead, a logit specification was used. First, each index was transformed into a 0 to 1 range as follows:

\[
\text{ForceOpinion}^* = \frac{\text{OpinionIndexFORCE} + 3}{6}
\]

\[
\text{PeaceOpinion}^* = \frac{\text{OpinionIndexPEACE} + 3}{6}
\]

ForceOpinion and PeaceOpinion were then regressed on the political condition variables;\textsuperscript{63} results are given in table 6-7.

---

\textsuperscript{63} ForceOpinion and PeaceOpinion are not dichotomous variables, they range continuously from 0 to 1. Traditionally logit and probit specifications have been used for modeling dichotomous variables, but they are not limited to that application. Where the dependent variable actually does follow a logistic distribution – which is a more reasonable assumption than a normal distribution for the OpinionIndex variable – the logit specification is appropriate.
### Table 6-7: Opinion Index Regressed on Political Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>ForceOpinion</th>
<th>PeaceOpinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate(β)</td>
<td>Std. Err</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>-0.386</td>
<td>1.911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-0.887</td>
<td>18.182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectYear</td>
<td>0.183</td>
<td>0.616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectMid</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>0.787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ElectPres</td>
<td>-0.274</td>
<td>1.516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scandals</td>
<td>-0.142</td>
<td>0.561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wartime</td>
<td>0.399</td>
<td>0.600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MonthApproval</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N: 66, Log-likelihood: -13.98, Likelihood ratio test: 0.97

Neither of these regressions did at all well; neither met any sort of significance test.

Presidents do not – or cannot – limit their uses of force to only highly supported ventures during times of political trouble. Nevertheless, the results for ForceOpinion do show some interesting patterns – even if highly uncertain. Figure 6-18 shows predicted levels of ForceOpinion by different levels of approval, unemployment, and elections (other variables at their means for each group).
Figure 6-18: Predicted Opinion Index, Uses of Force

Similar predictions were made for PeaceOpinion, but the graph was essentially flat and the error bars even larger; it was not worth pursuing.

The relationship between elite response to force and the president's prior approval is the opposite of what would be expected if diversion were common: the best reactions are seen when the president is already quite popular. Likewise, uses of force are less well received before elections – when we would expect presidents to select only uses of force that Congress will support. On the other hand, average support does rise as unemployment goes up.

In the case of approval and elections, elites behave as if they are discounting presidential activity when they expect presidents to be trying to help themselves. In fact, the discounting could be even stronger than shown here. The observed elite reactions may be the best a presi-
dent can do even with strategic selection of actions, although there is no way to test that proposition with this data. When it comes to the economy, however, either discounting does not occur or presidents are better able to pick and choose their wars in response to recessions than elections.

Assuming there are any real effects shown in figure 6-18, it is not clear why elites—which mostly means Congress here—should be suspicious of presidential use of force in response to low approval (especially when low for non-economic reasons) or elections, but not the economy. The link between elections or approval and the president’s political fortunes is more direct, but the link from a recession to a failed presidency is obvious enough suspicion should still be present. One possibility is that Congress too might benefit from diversion. Blame for a bad economy might extend beyond the president to Congress—especially during periods of divided government—and contribute to general sentiment against incumbents. If so, even opposition party legislators could have an interest in changing the subject. On the other hand, when presidents are up for election or wounded due to a scandal, failure, or other problem within their own administration, the reaction should be more clearly partisan: the opposition has every incentive to focus on the president’s problems.64 This proposition goes far beyond what can be tested with the data at hand, but at the least it does seem that the political effects of elections and non-economic approval losses are different from the effects of economic trouble, and the reason for that difference is worth exploring.

64 Within limits, at least. After Watergate and the collapse of South Vietnam, even many Democrats seemed to feel the nation had been so traumatized, its international standing so reduced, and the credibility of American government in general so eroded that they were not inclined to attack Ford aggressively, and joined rather than criticized the administration’s political use of the Mayaguez success. Gerald Ford, A Time to Heal (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

Burbach, Diversionary Temptations
Chapter 6: “Diversionary Theory Repaired”
5. Discussion and Implications

Table 6-8 summarizes the results from section 4. The table consists of the same matrix of diversionary pressures (columns) and activities (rows) as the predictions shown in table 6-1, but this time shows the observed effect. Predictions that were met are shaded, while those that failed are marked with a heavy border.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6-8: Summary Results – Effect of Diversionary Pressures on Activity Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Approval (general)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force (all)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force, Protect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force, Internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite Opinion (level, not rate)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: Prediction Confirmed | Prediction Failed | Mixed result, or no prediction made

This repaired version of the diversionary theory had mixed results. On the positive side, it did not fail any predictions for how dramatic presidential activity would respond to low presidential approval ratings in general. While the basic diversionary theory predicts an increase in the use of force when presidents are doing poorly, the repaired theory predicted this effect would be balanced by the greater rewards to using force when approval is already high. Indeed,
force overall shows a positive correlation with approval – any diversionary tendencies are even weaker than expected. Peace events show the expected lack of a relationship, and also as expected, the unpopular internal change uses of force become less frequent. Speeches and travel also show no correlation, and none was expected.

The theory also correctly predicts how force and peace events in general will respond to specific situations of presidential weakness: more force, less peace during economic downturns, and the reverse when approval is low due to scandals, failures, etc. This is consistent with presidents selecting actions based on their expected political benefits. The distinction between scandals and recessions does less well in other areas, though. Non-economic weakness has the expected effect of increasing the proportion of “protecting Americans” with force. Recessions were expected to have the same relationship, or perhaps no relationship, but instead they show a strong relationship in the other direction: humanitarian intervention is far more likely when the economy is doing poorly.

Speeches and travel also show unexpected relationships to recessions and scandals. Whereas no prediction was made regarding speech rates – they had no political effect, and so no reason for political conditions to affect their frequency – there is a clear tendency to give more policy speeches in response to economic trouble, and fewer during scandals. Foreign travel follows the opposite pattern.

While not strictly predicted from the benefits measured in chapter 5, this pattern does have a plausible explanation that fits in the political incentive story. How might a president appear to be fixing an ailing economy? By presenting an “economic recovery plan” with much fanfare, of course, but certainly not by leaving the voters to their unemployment checks while flying off to foreign summits. Major scandals and White House failures can less clearly be over-
come through new policy initiatives, and while foreign travel may not help politically, it at least might be more pleasant than remaining in Washington. Two other factors might also be relevant: first, wounded presidents could see a foreign policy benefit from demonstrating to foreign leaders that the administration was still active and engaged internationally. Second, non-economic approval loss has also happened due to unpopular wars, and international conferences might be portrayed as part of the effort to end those conflicts. These explanations can not be proved from the data, but the observed relationship of speeches and travel to recessions vs. scandals is more plausibly explained by political incentives than if the reverse had been found.

The predictions on election effects did not fare well. Uses of force were expected to become less common, and peace events more common, in the run-up to elections. Instead, peace events became less common, and the use of force showed a mixed relationship: more common before midterms, and significantly less common before presidential elections. Policy speeches and foreign travel become significantly less common, where no effect was predicted. One possible explanation is that presidents are simply too busy for anything else when they are campaigning – note that all activities become significantly less common in the three months before presidential elections. That does suggest, though, that presidents expect to gain more from traditional campaigning than from “October surprises”. That could be due to the benefits of dramatic actions being small in general, the benefits of campaign activities being large, or due to the expectation that any dramatic actions during that period would be discounted as an election ploy.

The increase in use of force rates before midterms is interesting, especially since it is only true for the use of force – other activities are unaffected or become less frequent. This

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65 In this context, it is worth noting that a significant part of Nixon’s announced goals for his summits in Moscow and Beijing was to enlist Soviet and Chinese help to end the Vietnam War.
correlation could be due to chance – the rate change was not quite different from the base rate at a 95% confidence level – but it could also show diversionary motivation.

Finally, elite support for the use of force did not show the expected pattern of higher support when facing diversionary pressure. Congressional support varied only weakly with political conditions, but it appears that support is lower during elections and scandals, or when approval is low. This might show that presidents are not picking only the most popular conflicts during such periods – as the theory would predict – or it could indicate that discounting due to distrust of presidential motives is so strong that the best situations presidents can find still earn less support than is seen during normal times. This could explain the drop in uses of force before presidential elections. If so, it should have the same effect on midterms – but in fact uses of force are more common before midterms. While discounting seems to happen, it isn’t clear whether or when presidents are anticipating it in their decisions.

To sum up the expected effects, table 6-9 describes the changes that are expected in response to each source of diversionary pressure. These are the actual effects, the same as reported in table 6-8, but organized to highlight the situation -> response relationship. Only expected changes are reported; null effects are left out.
Table 6-9: Observed Effects for Diversionary Pressures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Observed Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Election</td>
<td>• More uses of force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More uses of force are of the “protection” type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Decrease in the rate of all other activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential</td>
<td>• Large decrease in the rate of all activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election (general)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Trouble</td>
<td>• More frequent use of force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More uses of force are of the “internal change” type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Slight decrease in peace events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More policy speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Less foreign travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandals and</td>
<td>• Less use of force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failures</td>
<td>• More uses of force are of the “protection” type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Slightly more peace events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fewer policy speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More foreign travel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Half-full or half-empty: How much diversion takes place?

The conclusions in tables 6-8 and 6-9 show that on balance, U.S. presidents behave consistently with political incentives: we observe more military activity when it would help most, and rates of peace activities, speeches, and travel that are generally consistent with the incentives found in chapters 4 and 5. Where predictions failed, there is generally a plausible incentive story when one takes into account additional factors, like the correlation of policy speeches with economic downturns, and foreign travel with scandals. The two perplexing observations are on
election effects -- force is so much more common before midterms, yet much less frequent before presidential elections -- and the fact that the type of military activity does not vary in the expected way (particularly with economic conditions). The fit is not perfect, but the on the whole presidents are behaving more in line with their political interests than against them.

That the predictions about diversionary incentives fared well does not mean that diversion is a major phenomenon, however. Recall that several of the predictions were for activities to become less frequent, such as the use of force during low approval / good economy periods. In fact, such “scandal” periods depress the use of force while provoking only a small increase in the rate of peace events, and a moderate increase in travel (which is not likely to help in any case). All activities become less common before presidential elections. The use of force is more common before midterms, but given the lower returns to force in election periods it is not clear what that does.

The only situation in which diversionary activity is expected to help a president, and actually does appear to happen, is the case of uses of force during periods of economic trouble. Other authors have found the same thing: the use of force becomes more frequent during poor economies.\(^66\) There has been some surprise that recessions rather than low approval or elections is the one thing that correlates with more military activity, but this study provides an answer: uses of force are helpful during economic trouble, not otherwise. This finding is troubling, as it is consistent with the use of force for diversionary purposes – and that relationship would only be stronger if the post 9/11 military actions were included. On the other hand, “October sur-


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Burbach, *Diversionary Temptations*  
Chapter 6: “Diversionary Theory Repaired”
prises” and “wagging the dog” in the narrow sense of distracting from short-term scandals and crises do not appear to be a real worry.

Conclusion

In chapters 4 and 5 the benefits of using force, diplomacy, and other activities were measured as a function of various characteristics suggested by the media priming model. Based on those results, we could make predictions regarding the relationships that should exist between the frequency of presidential actions and the presence of specific diversionary pressures. These predictions were tested quantitatively by using event-count regressions, estimating the rates of those activities as a function of the relevant independent and control variables.

The predictions from this repaired diversionary theory were mostly, though not entirely met. In particular, the rate of the use of force increased during economic downturns when presidential approval was low, whereas it declined when approval was low for non-economic reasons. Peace activities did not appear to be as much an alternative to the use of force as expected, but diplomacy still did show the general pattern that was expected – higher rates in the low approval / poor economy periods, the opposite of what was seen for force. On the other hand, predictions for elections were not met: force becomes much more likely before midterms, and all activities become far less likely just before presidential elections.

The results suggest that presidents do act in accordance with political incentives, but not to the extent that they are the only factor affecting the frequency of dramatic activities. It also seems that the discounting of presidential motives during elections and scandals is quite high, but during recessions, Congress is inclined to go along with the president (the example of Iraq and the Democrats in 2002/2003 notwithstanding). The net result is that diversion can not be
ruled out as a factor in the high rate of the use of force during economic bad times, although diversionary war seems very unlikely in response to other political conditions.
Conclusion

This thesis was motivated by a puzzle: how do we explain the apparent absence of the diversionary use of force by the United States? As described in chapter 1, the hypothesized answer was that presidents did not resort to the diversionary use of force because it was not advantageous for them to do so: the supposed benefits of force must be limited, available only in rare conditions, or provide no more assistance than other presidential actions (which would likely be less risky and costly than war). Rather than trying to prove the negative of why force is not used, this thesis set out to test the hypothesis that the diversionary use of force would not be an attractive strategy for presidents.

The media priming model of chapter 2 provided a stronger theoretical basis for diversion than the traditional conflict-cohesion approach, and demonstrated how dramatic activities other than the use of force might help presidents in the same way – by "changing the subject" of media attention from national problems to successful and hopefully popular presidential action. That shift in attention would change the basis for individual’s judgment of the president – but would also require conditions not imposed by the conflict-cohesion model, such as high levels of media coverage, elite support, and alignment between the president’s action and public preferences in that policy area.

To test this theory, the political benefits from the use of force and other dramatic actions were measured in terms of the magnitude and duration of changes they caused in presidential approval ratings from Eisenhower to Clinton, and as a function of the independent variables identified from the media priming model. Datasets on uses of force, peace events, televised addresses and foreign travel were created, and the effects of events estimated with the statistical

Burbach, Diversionary Temptations

Conclusion
techniques described in chapter 3. Results these tests were presented in chapters 4, 5, and 6, and the section below summarizes the key findings.

**Key Findings**

1. The use of force does boost presidential ratings, but not by much on average, and while larger gains are possible, so are significant losses (**Hypothesis 1 confirmed**)

2. Peace activities also provide political boosts, but smaller and shorter lived than for the use of force (**Hypothesis 3-A is confirmed**)

3. Televised addresses and foreign travel do not help presidents (**Hypotheses 3-B and 3-C fail**)

4. The “media priming” model was moderately successful in predicting the gains (or losses) from each event (**Hypothesis 2 mostly confirmed, likewise H3-D mostly confirmed**)

5. Considering findings 1 through 4, there are opportunities for diversionary activity by presidents, including the use of force during recessions, or peace events during scandals.

6. There is some evidence that presidential action follows political incentives (notably an increase in military action during recessions), but presidents do not exploit all available opportunities. (**Hypothesis 4 partially confirmed**)

1. **Use of force boosts presidential ratings**

   On average, a use of force event was followed by a 2% gain in approval; if restricted to only the most visible events, the average was about 7%, decaying by half every three months. While a significant immediate change, those sorts of gains are considerably smaller than the losses due to a recession or major failure, and do not last very long.

   Considerably higher gains are possible when a use of force has the right characteristics. As predicted by the media priming model, uses of force provide larger gains for a president when they receive high levels of media attention, support from Congress and other elites, and
are on behalf of a goal the American public supports, such as directly protecting American citizens or territory. When uses of force are criticized or are on behalf of unpopular goals (e.g., humanitarian intervention), they may actually cause a president to lose support. Those two factors significantly constrain a president’s ability to manufacture “splendid little wars”.

Presidents are even more constrained by the fact that the gains from the use of force grow smaller precisely when a boost would be most helpful – before elections, and when their approval ratings are already low. Congressional opposition is more likely in those situations, but even controlling for elite opinion the public’s reaction is less positive. In fact, uses of force when the president’s approval ratings are low but the economy is doing well (most likely signaling a scandal, demonstrations of incompetence, or ongoing unpopular wars) are expected to cause approval to drop even lower. This pattern is consistent with elites and the public at large doubting presidential motives at such times and thus discounting their actions as political gestures.

Overall, the use of force has limited utility, but the situation where diversionary war seems attractive is when the economy is performing poorly. Uses of force are more popular as the economy grows worse, and remain popular even when the president’s ratings are low. Elite criticism is also less likely when the economy is doing badly. Americans appear to be suspicious of the use of force when presidents have a direct personal reason for diversion, but changing the subject works during recessions.

2. **Peace activities can provide gains for presidents, though less than uses of force**

Peace activities overall averaged a 2% approval increase, and about 5% for the most publicized events; these gains decayed almost twice as fast as those from uses of force did. In gen-
eral, peace initiatives do not provide a superior alternative to the use of force, but the benefits are in the same ballpark, and so considerations of risk, ease of implementation, etc. could make the strategies equally attractive.

The gains from peace activities also varied systematically in similar but not identical patterns to use of force. Media and opinion variables had even stronger effects than for the use of force, and that importance is magnified by the fact that Congress is more willing to oppose peace initiatives than uses of force. On the other hand, the returns from peace events were not as affected by elections or prior approval levels – not as much discounting took place.

3. **Televised addresses and foreign travel do not lead to significant gains**

Contrary to expectations, major policy addresses and foreign travel did not help presidents very much. Although these activities are highly visible, and while significant approval gains have been seen in a few cases, on average they are not a very promising strategy for presidents who want to improve their standing.

4. **The “media priming” model was moderately successful in predicting the gains (or losses) from each event, and definitely superior to the conflict-cohesion approach**

As mentioned above, variables from the media priming model had a significant influence on the public response to uses of force and peace events. As predicted, more visibility, more elite backing, and more support for the underlying policy goal all led to larger gains for presidents. This is clearly not what is predicted by the traditional conflict-cohesion theory. The group cohesion model predicts that conflict will generate national unity, not peace. Adherents of the conflict-cohesion approach have explicitly predicted that elite criticism would not matter, nor would the foreign policy objectives at stake. The fact that force is not a uniquely privileged
action, that the public responds to criticism and policy goals, and that media coverage was by far the most important predictor of the magnitude of approval changes all argue for the superiority of an model grounded in public opinion theory, not group psychology.

The model's predictions did not score a perfect record, however. Most notable was that the appearance of success did not matter for either military force or peace. Larger changes in information, measured as sharper changes in news focus or from surprising changes of presidential policy, did not have consistent effects.

5. **Findings 1 through 4 show that there are opportunities for diversion, especially the use of force during recessions, or peace events during scandals.**

The bottom line is that presidents face relatively small incentives for diversionary activity overall, but there are certain circumstances were significant political gains are possible.

First, the strongest case for diversion is the use of force during economic downturns. Uses of force provide higher benefits as the economy gets worse, and elite reaction improves as the economy gets worse. If a president facing a poor economy is able to find opportunities to use force on behalf of popular goals, and can reasonably expected Congressional support, significant gains are possible.

If good opportunities do not exist and if Congress is unlikely to go along, military intervention will not pay off. For example, consumer confidence was low 1994, but Bill Clinton did not help himself with the occupation of Haiti – the public questioned the goal, and the impending invasion was loudly criticized by the Republicans (and even liberal editorial pages).

When presidential approval is low for non-economic reasons, though, the use of force is more likely to hurt than to help (though the right combination of circumstances can still lead to
a positive expected return). If a president is in trouble due to general incompetence, scandal, or non-economic policy failures, moderate gains would be possible from peace activities — if the initiatives in question will receive support from other political figures.

Note that in both of these situations, the prospective gains are not large — not enough to make up for an Iran-Contra scandal or full-blown recessions, certainly not enough to make up for Watergate or Johnson’s standing after the Tet Offensive. There have been a few examples of much larger rallies, such as the Iranian hostage crisis or the 1991 Gulf War, but it is noteworthy that in both those cases incumbents went on to lose elections the following year. Only the September 11, 2001 attacks led to a presidency-transforming increase in public support (World War II may be another example, though FDR already had high ratings).

6. There is some evidence that presidential action follows political incentives (notably an increase in military action during recessions), but presidents do not exploit all available opportunities.

The principal goal of this thesis was to measure the political incentives for diversion, and the key findings on that front were listed in points 1 through 5. Further tests were done (chapter 6) to see if actual presidential behavior has been consistent with these incentives. The results were mixed. Most importantly, the use of force does become more common during economic downturns, as predicted, but not when presidential approval is low for other reasons, also as predicted. This pattern has been observed in earlier studies, but this is the first to explain the pattern: diversion from a bad economy works, diversion from other political trouble does not. The effect was not dramatic, though, and overall the use of force increases slightly as presidential approval increases.
Peace events showed weaker patterns, but were still consistent with the measured incentives. Peace initiatives became slightly more common as approval increased, but did roll off as quickly in the low approval / good economy case – just as predicted, though the effect was weak, and was not seen with all specifications. Travel and policy speeches actually showed unexpected correlations with political pressures, but the observed pattern seems consistent with political needs: more policy speeches during economic downturns, more foreign travel during scandals.

On the other hand, elections did not have the expected effect. The three months before presidential elections see a dramatic decline in all classes of activity. Presidents focus on traditional campaign activities apparently, but that does imply that they see such activities as more effective than dramatic foreign policy actions – perhaps because of the criticism and discounting that may follow any dramatic action that close to an election. Midterm elections see a significant increase in the use of force, however. Finally, the type of military intervention used did not vary in the expected way. There was a slight tendency towards “protection” missions over humanitarian ones as approval declined (as expected), but there was much stronger shift towards internal change as the economy grew worse (the opposite of the predicted effect).

Broader Implications for U.S. and International Politics

This section concludes the thesis with some broader observations about the meaning of the results for American politics, and international relations more broadly. Four general points are made:
1. Suspicion of diversion by U.S. presidents is exaggerated, and may lead to the politically motivated non-use of force.

2. The apparent connection between recessions and the use of force is troubling.

3. International implications: Where will diversion work?


As the long list of examples in chapter 1 demonstrated, suspicion of diversionary motives is common in American politics – and has been since the founding of the Republic. This thesis shows that those fears are exaggerated. Only in the most exceptional circumstances have international events of any kind drastically changed a president’s fortunes. More often, such events provide a noticeable but short-lived boost, and in some cases, they can actually hurt. Richard Nixon would have been crazy to think that a one-day nuclear alert in the fall of 1973 could save him from Watergate, and Bill Clinton was far off the mark if he thought the invasion of Haiti would help Democratic candidates in the 1994 midterms (indeed, attacking Clinton’s “humanitarian intervention” was a key part of the GOP message that fall, and it resonated with the voters). It is possible that presidents are misguided and think that such actions will help them politically, but it is hard to believe modern White House operations lack the political acuity and polling data to make better forecasts of approval changes. The expectation that presidents will resort to military force for diversion is particularly exaggerated, given that the gains from force are in most cases not that much greater than what could be achieved by less risky measures.

It is possible that suspicions run high enough that instead of diversion, we see the politically motivated non-use of force, or avoidance of peace. There are several examples where it appears that presidents chose not to use force or precipitate a crisis during an election campaign.
or a scandal. For example, the first Bush administration was reluctant to intervene in Somalia before the 1992 election, Nixon kept the Cienfuegos submarine base issue quiet during the 1970 midterm campaign to avoid charges of it being politically motivated,\(^1\) the Clinton administration did not respond to the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole shortly before the 2000 presidential election,\(^2\) and if anything the Lewinsky scandal moderated the U.S. response to the 1998 embassy bombings.\(^3\)

1. **The correlation of recessions with uses of force is troubling.**

While diversionary fears seem overblown overall, it is disturbing that the use of force becomes more common during recessions, exactly in line with domestic political incentives. The association is clearly there: it was the strongest finding on use of force rates in this study, as it has been in previous studies. There are, however, some alternative hypotheses that could link recessions and military intervention without any explicitly diversionary behavior by presidents.

One possibility is that causality flows in the other direction: economic performance suffers during periods of international violence. It appears that the uptick in uses of force generally happens after recessions begin, however: the 1981 recession preceded the uses of force in 1981-1983; the economy was in recession before the Gulf War, and a downturn had started in 2001 before the 9/11 attacks. Carter's inflation crisis preceded the Iran crisis. Consumer confidence was depressed in the three months before the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 Iraq invasion,

\(^1\) Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (New York: Little, Brown, 1979)
\(^2\) One wonders if al-Qaeda considered the election in their timing. Since port visits were not an everyday occurrence, their choice of date was not completely free. It is also not clear what they expected and wanted: did they want to avoid a U.S. response and thus attacked just before the election because they expected no response during the campaign, or, did they hope to provoke a U.S. attack (which seems to be part of their grand strategy) and thus attacked during the campaign, expecting that the administration would act even more aggressively due to the impending election.
\(^3\) Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002)
but those were drops from already low levels: the impending wars exacerbated but did not create weak economies.

Another possibility is that the correlation is because recessions and wars are independently affected by the electoral calendar. If presidents are able to manipulate the business cycle so that recessions generally do not happen during election years, and if presidents also avoid starting wars during election years, then downturns and interventions would appear to cluster together early in presidential terms, even if not directly related. It is not clear that electoral cycle effects can account for all of the correlation between the economy and the use of force, but it certainly may be part of the explanation.

The increase in the uses of force during economic trouble is consistent with the repaired diversionary theory. There are possible non-diversionary explanations, but the pattern is strong enough that the implications are disquieting. The recession-war link will be an important focus for future research.

2. **International Implications: Where will diversion work?**

Although the tests in this thesis were conducted exclusively on the U.S., we can make some tentative extensions of this theory to other countries. Specifically, if the same media-driven process of opinion change operates in other countries, we can identify several conditions that would make diversionary war a more attractive option. First, successful diversion will be much easier if opposition politicians and press commentators are unable to challenge government actions, either because no such opposition exists, because media controls prevent such views from being disseminated, or because the principal cleavages in the society are elites vs. the

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4 I am indebted to Harvey Sapolsky for this suggestion.
mass public, in which case the entire political/business/media class may have a shared interest in diversion.\(^5\) Diversionary war should be more common in nations without a free and critical media, and without effective political opposition.

Diversion may also be a viable strategy when nations feel more immediately and directly threatened than the U.S. typically has. The results in chapter 4 show that the use of force is significantly more popular when used very directly on behalf of American interests — particularly for the lives of U.S. citizens. Given the U.S. nuclear deterrent and geographic isolation, however, threats to America were usually distant and abstract. That is not the case for every nation, however. Israelis, for example, have long faced danger from their neighbors and Palestinian terrorist groups and military action against those threats can easily be imagined to be saving lives in the near term. They are thus likely to be both highly salient and highly popular, and thus good candidates for diversionary activity. Several studies find that Israeli retaliation to Arab attacks were more severe when elections were imminent (e.g., the 1996 “Operation Grapes of Wrath” in Lebanon just four weeks prior to national elections).

By identifying constraints on the attractiveness of diversionary war for American presidents, this study suggests that the low level of diversionary activity by the U.S. may not apply universally — when domestic political constraints are weak, or international opportunities larger, the diversionary strategy could be important.

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\(^5\) The shared elite interests variant is essentially Jack Snyder’s argument to explain the generation of foreign (or ethnic) conflicts in democratizing states, such as the Nazi takeover of Weimar Germany, or the emergence of the Serbo-Croat conflict in 1991. Jack Snyder, From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000)
3. **American use of force after 9/11**

Finally, the September 11th attacks created new opportunities for the political use of force by American presidents. It is now far easier to plausibly connect uses of force abroad to the protection of Americans at home. In 1998, for example, Bill Clinton had little success convincing the nation that Iraq’s WMD programs posed a threat that required American action. In 2003, the Bush administration found that an easy case to make – indeed, Americans found it easy to believe that Saddam Hussein might give such weapons to terrorists, or even that he had a role in the 9/11 attacks themselves. While many justifications were put forward, the one the public found convincing was that if Saddam were not stopped, there would eventually be an attack on American soil with Iraqi-supplied WMD. During the Cold War, the connection from a use of force to a nuclear attack on the U.S. was relatively easy to imagine – an intervention gone wrong that escalates to U.S./Soviet (or Chinese) hostilities – and fear of that outcome was a restraint on the use of force. Now, the link between the use of force and attacks on the U.S. is less direct, while the link between inaction and threats to the U.S. seems clear.

A tremendous range of potential conflicts can now be linked directly to the safety of American citizens, from fighting Islamic rebel groups in the Philippines to destroying North Korea’s nuclear facilities. Moreover, these claims are difficult for political opponents or outside commentators to challenge. By their nature, claims about the activities of shadowy non-state actors rarely come with evidence comparable to photos of Soviet missile sites in Cuba – or even a Soviet/Cuban “airbase” being constructed on Grenada. Evidence is understood to be more fragmentary and subjective, the need to keep sources and methods secret even greater, and so

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6 The belief that Saddam was connected to 9/11 was not spontaneous. At the end of 2001, only 10 to 20% of respondents typically thought Iraq was involved in the 9/11 attacks. In the fall of 2002, when the administration had shifted its attention to Iraq, 50-70% believed so.
the administration's information advantage increases. To put this in terms of the model from chapter 4, it becomes easier to find opportunities that can be labeled "protecting Americans", average elite opinion is likely to be more positive, and so uses of force produce higher rewards. The use of force for political purposes thus becomes more attractive – especially when one adds in the fact that the U.S. is current in a recession.

In the case of the Iraq invasion, the Bush administration's motives were clearly not primarily political; key officials had been pushing for action against Iraq on policy grounds even before 9/11. Even so, this new environment has dramatically increased the domestic political incentives favoring the use of force, and at the margins this could tilt some decisions towards force that otherwise would have gone against. These incentives are not unique to the Bush administration. Had Al Gore been elected in 2000, the incentives for force would be even greater since as a Democrat, he would be starting without much confidence in his ability to "get tough"; the surprise factor would be working in his favor.

Overall, the results from this thesis suggest that the lack of diversionary war in U.S. foreign policy has a firmer basis than moral restraint in the White House. A purely rational (but cynical) president would still find diversionary war of limited attractiveness due to the modest benefits, the limited conditions under which uses of force are helpful, and the availability of alternatives that in some cases would bring greater political rewards. Presidential behavior has been consistent with these incentives over the last few decades. The attractiveness of the use of

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7 Willingness to trust White House claims may be weakened, though, if the Bush Administration's claims about Iraqi weapons programs are not ultimately verified. As of this writing, it is not known what the ultimate solution to the Iraqi WMD mystery will be.

8 In addition, there is not such an obvious "peace track" to pursue as during the Cold War when arms control always provided ready opportunities for visible diplomacy. Even in Vietnam, one could offer bombing pauses as an invitation to negotiate, or accelerate talks once they were underway. It is not at all clear what opportunities for cooperation or negotiation exist with al-Qaeda, let alone who one would even talk to. On the other hand, the Israeli/Palestinian dispute does provide opportunities for diplomacy, though in the past third-party mediation has not been rewarding politically.
force went up with the September 11th attacks, however, so if presidents continue to follow the incentives they face, the political use of force is likely to increase.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03/20/64</td>
<td>Assistance to French at Dienbienphu</td>
<td>08/05/64</td>
<td>US/Chinese clashes after BOAC shoot down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/01/64</td>
<td>US Marines deployed to Lebanon</td>
<td>07/16/68</td>
<td>First Taiwan Straits crisis (US soldiers killed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/25/68</td>
<td>Second Taiwan Straits Crisis</td>
<td>02/14/69</td>
<td>U2 shot down over Soviet Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/12/69</td>
<td>Bay of Pigs Invasion</td>
<td>04/21/61</td>
<td>Dominican Republic show of force against Trujillo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/23/61</td>
<td>Berlin Wall Crisis</td>
<td>10/25/62</td>
<td>Cuban Missile Crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/20/61</td>
<td>Laos civil war, US deployment to Thailand</td>
<td>02/19/63</td>
<td>Tonkin Gulf Resolution, Strikes on N.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/10/62</td>
<td>Vietnam: US troops defend bases from rioters</td>
<td>10/25/63</td>
<td>Vietnam: US begins bombing campaign (&quot;Rolling Thunder&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/08/64</td>
<td>Vietnam: US ground troops deployed</td>
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Table A-4: Presidential Foreign Travel

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<tr>
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<td>Clinton</td>
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<td>Russia (Summit), Portugal (US/EU Summit), Germany</td>
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<td>07/21/00</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
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<td>Japan (G7 Summit)</td>
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<td>08/26/00</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
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<td>Nigeria, Tanzania</td>
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# Appendix B: Color Figures

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Pages 440 - 458 contain color graphics that may not scan/reproduce well.
Figure 3-1: Presidential Approval, 1953-2000
Figure 3-2: Conceptual Model of Event Effects

Base Approval Constant

Event Date

Base Approval Event Effect ("Rally")

Observed Approval

Month

-2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Approval

70 65 60 55 50 45 40

70 65 60 55 50 45 40
Figure 3-2: Poll-to-Poll Method Problems
Figure 4-6: Use-of-Force Effects by Type

Protect USA

Defend Allies

Internal Change

% Approval Change

Months

△ Best
▼ Worst
● Average

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Figure 4-7: Use of Force Effect by Approval, Economy

A) Consumer Expectations, Approval (Quadratic)

B) Consumer Expectations, Approval (Cubic)

C) Unemployment, Approval (Cubic)

D) Actual Use of Force Reactions (1 poll change)
Figure 4.9: Effect of Economy, Approval in All Variable Model
Figure 4-10: Use of Force Outliers
Figure 5-6: Best/Worst Cases with Media/Opinion Variables

- eq 4-4 (Use of Force)
- eq 5-6 (Peace/Force in model)
- eq 5-4 (Peace Events only)

- Worst case
- Best case

% Approval Change vs. Months

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Figure 6-1: Incentive Functions

A) Approval Change from Use of Force
B) Utility gain, even weight
C) Utility gain, slight weight on low approval
D) Utility gain, steep negative weight
Figure 6-5: Total Activity Rates by Approval, Economy

ALL events w/Presidential effects

ALL events w/Cons.Exp. Interact., Presidential effects (eq 6-5)

ALL events w/Unemployment Interact (eq 6-4)

Consumer Expectations

Note: Contour labels show log of predicted monthly rate
Figure 6-11: Use of Force Rates by Approval, Economy

A) Uses of Force (all)

B) Force w/Presidential effects

C) Force w/unemployment Interact

D) Force w/expectations interact, Presidential effects

Note: Contour labels show log of predicted monthly rate