

Appendix B for

**“Rethinking Presidential Responsiveness: The Public Presidency and Rhetorical
Congruency, 1953-2001.”**

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This appendix spells out the specific methodological choices made in the process of selecting policy statement and matching public opinion polls to these statements to construct a “congruency” database.

Random Selection of Cases. A random selection of cases is the cornerstone of the case selection process for the project. As noted in the text of the article, a randomly selected percent of the pages of the *Public Papers of the President* from Dwight Eisenhower to Bill Clinton (1953-2001) were used as the universe for the total statements. This necessitated using the hard copy of the papers, since the sample element was the page itself (although, as of this writing, an online, page-specific searchable version is available for the years 1992 to 2002 (George H.W. Bush to George W. Bush). The *Public Papers* data are a standard and traditional source of presidential statements, and a favorite among political scientists seeking to catalogue presidential rhetoric (see Hart 1987; Cohen 1995; Cohen 1999; Edwards and Wood 1999; Vaughn 2005). The *Papers* are reliable because each president since Harry Truman has systematically recorded every public statement (no matter how trivial).¹ The data are also easily available and comparable over time. Beginning with President Carter, the *Public Papers* also included information printed in the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*.² In order to systematize the data, the information from the *Weekly Compilation* documents had to be excluded since these documents only appear after 1977 in the *Public Papers*. In any event, based upon the search parameters described below, these documents tended

¹ President Roosevelt was the first to publish the collected public statements of his presidency and the selection procedures are not uniform and do not match those of the government-printed versions including President Hoover and Presidents Truman to George W. Bush.

² These documents contain presidential proclamations, messages, executive orders, communications to Congress and Federal agencies, retirements, resignations, nominations sent to the Senate or other acts approved by the president

to be excluded anyway since these documents were generally procedural rather than policy-related.

Once a page was randomly selected, the *first statement* on that page that qualified under the coding rubric (see below) was utilized as the statement for the case in question. This process was thought to be the most systematic, consistent and relatively simple manner in which to select a case on the page. The *Public Papers* themselves are organized chronologically, but there seems to be no logical way that there would be a consistent bias in selecting the first such statement on the page in question. Although the placement of the page break from page to page in the president's speech is not technically or purely random, it is various and unpredictable enough to not present any consistent selection bias. If the end of a sentence was continued from a previous page, the *first full sentence* on the sampled page was the starting point for searching for assertions. If the final sentence on the page was the only policy statement (and it was selected for coding), the ending of the sentence on the subsequent page was fully coded.³

The primary trouble with this method of selection is that the text size per page is larger (that is, fewer words) for the *Public Papers* of Presidents Eisenhower and Ford than other presidents. To remedy this disparity, a three percent sample was used for the statements of Presidents Eisenhower and Ford and a four percent sample was used for the statements of all of the other presidents. Because the unit of analysis is the policy statement on the page, counting the same percentage of pages for dense and less dense number of statements per page runs the risk of undercounting the total number of statements per president. Under this "under sample" of less dense pages rule, there is an

³ If it was the case that a bill or policy is mentioned on a page without reference to the exact nature of the bill, an effort was made to seek out the content of the bill by searching through the previous pages.

equal probability of selecting a page (and a statement) to determine whether or not there is a valid statement on the page. Since each denser page provides more words among which one might find a statement, these pages must be weighted upward so there is greater chance of providing an equal “codable” assertion to a given number of words that the president utters. Table 1 below identifies the total pages and total sample pages searched for each president in the sample.

[Appendix B Table 1 Here]

“Selection” Error. As with any random sample, there is some error surrounding the selection of the particular cases. However, because of the massive range of pages (and even more massive number of statements), this tended to not be a problem. But, to be certain, a complete count of the total statements for each page (subsequent to the selection of the statement which was coded as the dependent variable) was kept to identify the precise sample error. We are interested in the error associated with selecting a particular statement on a particular page. Table 2 reports the total statement for each president, the average assertions per page and the average standard error per president. In order to tabulate the standard error, the following equation was used ($se = \sqrt{(pq)/(N)}$), where p is the proportion of pages selected and q is the proportion of pages not selected (calculated by taking the total number of sampled pages from Table A and dividing it by the number of ultimate cases coded in the dataset which contained viable matched opinion data) and N is the total number of assertions per president. This provides a sense of the probability of selecting a particular page and a particular statement within that page. The standard errors, as reported in this appendix, Table 2, are reasonably approximate to each other, making the probability across presidents close, and are all

small enough to suggest that the probability of selecting the coded statement in question is within reason.

[Appendix B Table 2 Here]

“Valid” Statements. As noted, on each page, several statements ultimately would qualify as a “valid statement, among those, the first appearing sequentially on the page was coded. The most basic desire in the statement coding was to capture an opinion on a particular policy matter. An item was considered valid if it came from the President (not subordinates, other actors or attributions to other actors), was directly or tacitly endorsed by the president (both “I stand by my decision to send troops to Haiti” and “I applaud the efforts of the Republicans in Congress in passing minimum wage raising” would count), was U.S. government-based action, the issue occurred within the confines of the president’s term in office (*e.g.*, discussions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 not coded during the Clinton Administration) and advocated a *specific policy issue* (even if particular action on the issue was vague).⁴ Thus, the policy issue had to be specific (*e.g.*, “we need to reduce the deficit” or “I support a raise in the minimum wage”) rather than vague (*e.g.*, “we need to work for peace in the world” or “we need to help the neediest people with our programs” or “we need to make government smarter”) and/or make clear (or reasonably clear) the president’s advocacy of a particular policy approach. However, if the intended effect or assisted group was vague but was attached to a policy, the president was coded as supporting the policy (*e.g.*, “we need to pass my health care bill to protect our kids”). The line drawn here is between specific issue and vague solution in order to capture the most specific issue possible.

⁴ Advocacy of a policy came in several different forms, including taking credit for the effects of legislation or a program, signing a bill, promoting a treaty or agreement, requesting action from Congress, identifying “problem” issues, vetoing or directing executive agencies to take action.

Of course, because presidents talk about a wide range of topics generally, and often within the same speech, special rules had to be developed for when an individual statement would count as valid. At the sentence level, if a sentence referred to several advantages or several reasons for presidential support in a statement, the first such advantage listed was coded as the dependent variable and the additional advantages within the sentence were counted as individual statements for purposes of calculating standard errors (on the assumption that the president would desire to individually enumerate them).⁵ For instance, if the president said, “Our tax bill will reduce the deficit, give tax cuts to the middle class and remove the capital gains restrictions,” the tax bill “reducing the deficit” was the coded statement and the remaining two were counted in the list of total statements. Similarly, at the paragraph level, if the president listed ten separate advantages (or features) of the same bill, the first sentence was coded and the remaining nine were counted in the list of total assertions. If the president mentioned a policy in a sentence without explicitly mentioning he opposed it (such as a particular tax cut legislation, Medicare reform, etc.), it was assumed he was in favor of the policy (and it was coded this way for poll-matching purposes).

This process also required excluding several types of statements that violated this general principle. Generally, statements that were not coded include those that were too vague, procedural statements, ceremonial statements, political speculation, economic predictions, observations on the general state of the economy, conditional statements (“might” or “maybe” or “considering”)⁶ or personnel decisions. Statements specifically and systematically excluded were: the announcement of the creation of or findings of a

⁵ If two adjectives were used to describe a policy or bill or program, the policy was only coded once. For instance, “this health care bill is the right thing to do and is smart” would only count once.

⁶ Rhetorical questions, popular with President Clinton, were excluded for this reason.

task force or commission, raw economic data, specific military victories or actors, information on earnings, appointments, nominations, general “thank you” or “welcome” letters (to Members of Congress or foreign dignitaries), treaty “transfers” to the Senate, veto statements (unless spoken in a speech), quarterly reports (economic or foreign policy), mandatory reports to Congress on budget matters, the president’s schedule or potential schedule, the announcement of a “ceremonial week” (such as “Nurse Appreciation Week”). Since these were not statements and espoused no particular policy, they were excluded from the analysis. Although these actions might be congruent (or incongruent) with public opinion, our goal in this project was to capture policy statements to link our findings to the broader literature on the opinion-policy connection (see Page 1994).

Special considerations needed to be developed for particular kinds of statements which presented coding complications. Statements dealing with relations between the United States and other countries were generally straight-forward enough to be coded based upon the coding rules. Specifically, if the president visited another country (or another country’s rulers visited with the president), the president would often make statements to the effect that the “relationship with country X is strong and valuable.” However, presidents are statutorily obligated to inform Congress of emerging or continuing “emergencies” (generally enemies, such as Iran or Iraq), and these “emergency declarations” were considered procedural and were not coded. Trade negotiations were also occasionally spoken of by the president. When this occurred, the issue was coded as “trade” and the specific proposal in question was also coded. For instance, if the president indicated the administration’s stance was that tariffs on Japanese

goods needed to be raised, the general issue is trade and the specific issue is the president supporting increased tariffs on Japan.

Discussion of economic conditions and the effect of economic policy also complicated the coding of economic policy statements. The reason is that when presidents speak of an economic policy, especially a successful one, they generally combine the endorsement of the policy with an evaluation of how it affected (or will affect) the nation's economy (cf. Wood 2004). Generally, the stated policy, proposal or stance the president took on a particular proposal was isolated from the president's interpretation of the effects. So, taking credit for reducing unemployment or lowering interest rates were not coded, however, if the president indicated his economic plan caused these economic results, the president's support of his economic plan was coded. If the president took credit in a speech for "lowering the deficit" or "lowering inflation" and it was not linked to any discernable policy proposal or support for a particular plan, it was not considered a "valid" statement.

Limitations. The issue of timing and cataloging of speeches opens several questions. Opinion may have fluctuated in the time before or after the final coded poll was recorded and this may reflect previous presidential statements. Presidents may also have attempted to shape the opinion environment before taking a "congruent" stand on the matter. For instance, Hill and Hinton-Andersson (1995) argue that reciprocal opinion between elites and the mass public shape liberal policies at the state level. Ultimately, we are concerned with opinion-statement congruency and with this measure we are unable to capture this possible "shaping" trend. Our search method, however, balances this out since we explore a continuous speech trend (rather than single speeches) across a

president's term, so any "pre-statement priming" is reasonably likely to be included in our data.

These findings might also be mitigated somewhat because these trends operate within the boundaries of only poll-gauged (and therefore presumably reasonably salient) opinion. Concurrent with Schattschneider's (1960) argument concerning low visibility issues lessening popular control of certain issues, lack of public attention may lessen congruency. The measures here capture these larger issues, which likely describe most of the president's public agenda. Therefore, the congruency measure may be slightly inflated because of this. However, given our focus is to examine trends in purposive public presidential discussions, this research design is necessary and telling.

Matching Polls to Statements

Great care was taken to search all of the germane polling data to ensure that the policy expressed in the president's statement matched the policy in the poll. This process was usually uneventful because the issues in the statements were specific enough that poll questions tended to be clear about whether or not the public favored the policy, favored spending more money on the issue or favored a particular country. But, if no poll was found to match the policy or there was ambiguity about the connection, no data were coded for that entry. Of course, certain interpretations or evaluations had to be made by the author in cases where the poll data and statement did not *perfectly* match. Many of these conditions are described below, along with examples of "easy" and "hard" matches.

To utilize a wide range of both dates and polling organizations, the online polling archive at the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut was used to search for public polling data that could be matched up with the randomly

selected presidential policy statements. The Roper Center houses all major polls released publicly, including Gallup, Harris, Roper, ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *USA Today* and the *Wall Street Journal*, as well as many university sponsored or independent polls from NORC, NES and GSS. In addition, frequently several “special topics” polls (longer polls on particular issues or events) and other polls conducted by private contractors were included. The Roper Center has a comprehensive archive dating back to 1930 and is the most complete record of all public opinion polling available to researchers. The online searchable component makes selecting the most appropriate poll to match to a statement a relatively easy enterprise. In addition, each poll is assigned an ascension number that can be easily referenced.

Matching examples. To demonstrate the process of matching, we have selected an “easy” case and a more challenging case to provide perspective on the data. First, the easy case – on December 5, 1994, President Clinton indicated he endorsed “opening up NATO membership to eastern bloc countries” (page 2145). On October 25, 1994, a Gallup poll queried the public: “Some people believe that NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) should be expanded to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, thereby committing the United States to defend them against attack in the same way as we are committed to defending Western Europe. Do you think NATO should or should not be expanded to include those three countries?,” to which 46% of the public responded affirmatively. This presented a straightforward statement of support for a doctrinal policy choice and was coded as “congruent.”

For the more difficult case – on July 26, 1994, President Clinton indicated he was “proud of the role the United States played in fostering peace in the Middle East” (page

1315). On September 10, 1993, a CNN/USA Today Poll queried the public: “Israel and the P.L.O. (Palestine Liberation Organization) have reached a new (peace) agreement in the Middle East. It would give the Palestinians control over some land in the occupied territories. In return, the P.L.O. has agreed to end terrorism and recognize Israel's right to exist. Do you generally favor or oppose this agreement?,” to which 80% responded affirmatively. This presents a slightly more tenuous matching connection because, although the Clinton Administration helped to initiate the proceedings, they did not explicitly draft the agreement. We coded this as “congruent” because it seemed clear that the President was asking for (and receiving) credit for this accomplishment.

The polls that counted. Poll responses were grouped together to reflect a dichotomous, majoritarian viewpoint. For instance, poll answers which divided responses into “very favorable” and “favorable” were collapsed into one category, similar to answers responding that an issue required “great urgency” and “some urgency” or policies that were “strongly approved” or “somewhat approved.” When matching statements about the “closeness” or “importance” of a country to the United States, and the poll in question had a feeling thermometer or some other larger range of options, the response categories were split directly in half to preserve the dichotomy of the coded categories. Occasionally a question inquired about a respondent’s knowledge about a subject and their approval of the subject (for instance, “have you heard about President Carter’s plan to combat inflation and do you strongly approve, somewhat approve, somewhat disapprove, strongly disapprove or don’t you know?”). If this was the case, only the percentages of individuals claiming they had “heard” or had knowledge of the

policy (depending on how it was worded) were coded. Those respondents responding “don’t know” or “no opinion” were left out of the evaluations.

Poll data was sought which reflected the exact language of the policy statement which necessitated excluding poll results to questions that were loaded or biased (that is, linking policies like inflation and taxes together).⁷ Of course, if a particular contingency was specified in the president’s statement (*e.g.*, “we need to save Social Security before we cut taxes”), polling questions that reflected that contingency were sought. A challenge to this process was matching the *language* used by the president and the *language* used by the pollsters. The politicization of legislation or policy choices along with clever phrasings by the White House made this issue difficult on certain issues (see Jacobs and Shapiro 2000). Generally, several analogous words were searched in the Roper archive to ensure that the poll ultimately recorded best reflected the language used by the president. For instance, presidential references to “smarter” government or “rethinking government” were treated the same as “efficiency” of government in poll questions. Presidential references to “clean water” or “clean air” were treated as tantamount to poll language referencing “natural resources” or “environment.” Similarly, descriptions of “tax relief” (or even more specific references to “death taxes” or “marriage penalties”) were treated as “tax cut” since pollsters generally favor this language.

As with isolating a particular policy statement, particular cases necessitated creating a unique rule to deal with a matching case. Periodically, presidents would use

⁷ Modest exceptions here are cases where presidents stood for reelection after their first term. If polling questions referenced the election in a general way, the poll could be included, assuming it met the standard criteria. Such poll questions were not used if the question mentioned the president’s opponent or his opponent’s policies.

language in their speeches that reflected the desire to end (or diminish) something, such as inflation or unemployment or violence. If this was the case, poll questions which asked “if the government is doing enough to solve” the particular problem were permitted to be coded as a positive (pro) response. Also, poll questions referring to the number one “economic problem” (from a list of such problems) was considered usable if the president spoke in a general way about the economy. Such polls were limited to instances where presidents used this language.

Statements addressing issues concerning “trust” in a world organization or “partnership” or “important relationships” with another country were all coded in the same way. The intent was to capture (via the poll data) the public’s trust or support for the organization or country in question. For the purposes of these statements, if the president indicated that “the U.S. needs to work with U.N.” (in a general way), poll data which gauged the public’s approval of the U.N. was matched to it. Similarly, if the president indicated in a speech “the U.S. needs a strong ally in Poland,” poll questions that gauged the public’s approval (or trust or general feelings) toward Poland were sought out.

Searching for Salience. The category utilized in the text of the project concerning issue “salience” was based upon the question pollsters ask regarding “what is the most important problem facing the country today.” This poll question came in several forms and with several questions, generally every few months, but only questions that were (1) open ended to the respondent and (2) requested only one (rather than two or three) “top issues” were coded. This preserved the spontaneous and singular “problem” nature of the issue in question. In general, policy statements on an issue were matched in a general

way to polling posing questions on the salience of the issue.⁸ This was usually a straightforward connection but occasionally required searching for a broader category of poll salience. For instance, policy statements regarding conflicts between Israel and other nations or Soviet involvement in Central America were captured in general categories such as “Mideast peace” or “Latin America” rather than by specific topic. The most specific category was used where possible.

⁸ When counting the position of the issue (the order in an ascending list), “miscellaneous” issues, “don’t know” or other general categories (“health care issues”) were excluded. These tended to be rather small percentages.

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Appendix B TABLE 1
Total Pages and Random Selection of Pages

President	Total Pages in Papers	Percent of Pages	Total Sample Pages
Eisenhower	5,784	3 %	221
Kennedy	2,637	4	102
Johnson	6,873	4	257
Nixon	6,995	4	232
Ford	5,784	3	171
Carter	9,878	4	416
Reagan	13,023	4	507
Bush	7,521	4	284
Clinton	17,968	4	667

NOTE: Data compiled by the author. As noted, because of density of word differences, smaller percentages of the Public Papers of Eisenhower and Ford were taken.

Appendix B TABLE 2
Policy Statements and Standard Errors

President	Total Statements	Average Statements Per Page Selected	Proportion of Pages Selected	Standard Error
Eisenhower	821	5.78	64 %	.089
Kennedy	675	8.04	82	.075
Johnson	1,201	7.70	61	.082
Nixon	1,508	9.61	68	.074
Ford	859	6.66	75	.079
Carter	1,601	5.93	65	.075
Reagan	2,009	6.11	65	.071
Bush	1,390	6.38	77	.068
Clinton	3,392	6.91	74	.057
Total	10,054	5.08		

NOTE: Data compiled by the author. In order to tabulate the standard error, the following equation was used ($se = \sqrt{(pq)/(\sqrt{N})}$), where p is the proportion of pages selected and q is the proportion of pages not selected (calculated by taking the total number of sampled pages and dividing it by the number of ultimate cases coded in the dataset which contained viable matched opinion data) and N is the total number of assertions per president.