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# Rallying Around the Flag in the Era of the Traditional Presidency

John Todsén

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John Patrick Todsen

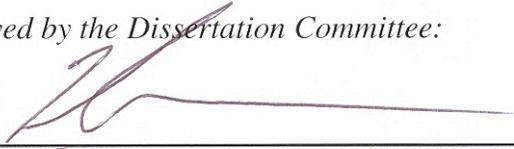
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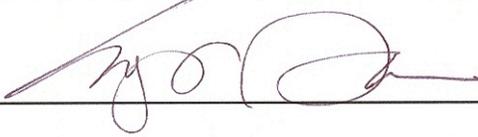
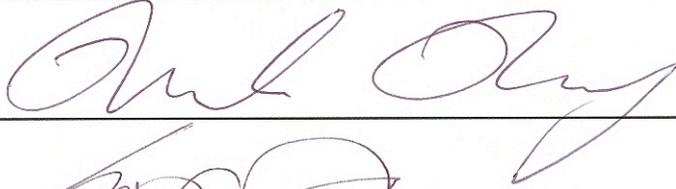
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This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

*Approved by the Dissertation Committee:*



, Chairperson



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**RALLYING AROUND THE FLAG  
IN THE ERA OF THE TRADITIONAL PRESIDENCY**

**BY**

**JOHN PATRICK TODSEN**

B.A., Government, English, German, New Mexico State University, 1997  
M.A., Government, New Mexico State University, 1999

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy  
Political Science**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**July, 2010**

## Dedication

This work is dedicated to the women who, past and present, have had the biggest roles in shaping my life, academic and otherwise:

My Paternal Grandmother, Margaret, who gave me a deep-seated drive to investigate and question;

My Mother, Sharon, who gave me at an early age an enduring love of reading;

My two Daughters, Anna and Aubrey, for whom this project was finally brought to a successful conclusion;

And more than anyone else,

My Wife, Andrea, but for whose patience, understanding and support, none of this would have been possible.

*My best chosen friend, companion, guide, to walk through life,  
linked hand-in-hand, two equal, loving friends, true husband and true wife.*

*-- Sir Charles Gavan Duffy*

## **Acknowledgements**

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First and foremost, I heartily acknowledge and owe a debt of gratitude for the aid and contributions of Dr. Michael Rocca, my advisor and dissertation chair, for his continual encouragement and for reminding me exactly what I was doing, why and for whom it was being done.

I also thank the balance of my committee, Dr. Mark Peceny and Dr. Timothy Krebs, both from the University of New Mexico, and Dr. Nancy Baker, Regents Professor of Government at New Mexico State University, for their valuable contributions and suggestions for this project and my own more general professional development.

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Finally, I owe my thanks, my love, my apologies and, now that I have more of it, my time to my family, Andrea, Anna and Aubrey. I have put you three through a lot, over the last year especially. Thank you so much for sticking by me.

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**ABSTRACT**

The rally around the flag effect describes the president's increase in job approval during and immediately after an international crisis. This project has been built as an attempt to explain why that effect occurs. The literature on the presidency and public opinion point at two determinants for the rally effect: the acceptance of the President as the symbolic leader of the nation and the center of action in the government, and opinion leadership, especially that given by the independent mass media. By examining the development of the rally effect, I tested the relative importance of these two factors.

To test these factors, I used a mixed methods approach to analyze the existence of rally effects in each of three cases. The quantitative portion included development of a proxy measure for public approval through the content analysis of newspapers before, during and after potential rally events. Applying a bivariate analysis to this measure, I could show when there were changes in the patterns of mentions of and attitudes towards the President, the Congress, and public opinion. I added to this analysis a qualitative narrative, adding depth to the analysis and showing where the determinants were and why the numbers were telling the story that they did.

I selected three potential historical cases of rallies. The first, focused on the Thornton Affair and the Mexican-American War, was designed to be a least-likely case, with neither factor present. The third event, the publication of the Zimmerman Telegram and the First World War, was a most-likely case, with both present. The second case, the sinking of the battleship *USS Maine* and the Spanish-American War, involved one of the determinants, the independent media, being present, with the other, the symbolic presidency, not yet fully developed.

My results showed no rally in the first case and a modern rally in the third. In the second case I found a lagged increase in approval, linked with the policy change rather than with the rally event itself. This supports the idea that it is indeed the symbolic presidency that drives people the rally around the flag.

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*[The President] is the only national voice in affairs. Let him once win the admiration and confidence of the country, and no other single force can withstand him, no combination of forces will easily overpower him.*

--- Woodrow Wilson

## **Chapter 1:**

### **Why Do We Rally Around the Flag?**

On the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush arrived in a Florida elementary school classroom, visiting in support of early reading programs. Selected by the Electoral College against the popular vote of the nation, President Bush's approval rating stood at 51%. He was a prime example of a weakened President, hampered by lingering questions of his electoral legitimacy and a narrowly divided Congress. No President who had been selected by the Electoral College against the popular vote had ever been re-elected. That morning would change his legacy forever as the attacks in New York and Washington materialized. Without any substantive action on his part besides speeches, President Bush's job approval rating suddenly jumped to 86%, the biggest single change in Gallup history, and continued the next week by going to 90%, the highest score any President has registered since Gallup began asking the job approval question.<sup>1</sup> With this surge of political capital, he launched the invasion of Afghanistan with little to no dissent, was able to pass the USA-PATRIOT Act, criticized by key members of both parties as infringing on fundamental civil liberties, by huge margins in both houses,<sup>2</sup> and enacted, in the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the largest restructuring of the federal government since WWII. He capped this whirlwind year off with a rare mid-term seat gain in both chambers of Congress,

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Gallup Polls taken September 7-10, 14-15 and 21-22, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> The Senate vote was 98-1 and the House vote was 357-66.

returning the evenly split Senate to solid Republican control and widening his party's narrow majority in the House.

If there is a law in presidential and public opinion studies, it is that international crises, like the attacks on September 11, cause surges in a president's approval ratings. The above story is the quintessence of that phenomenon, known as the rally-around-the-flag effect, and an excellent example of how a president can use it to his political benefit; this is a critical fact because an increase in approval with the public at large can, as it did with President Bush, contribute greatly to the political capital and thus to the power of the president. This work is a story of that effect's development.

Richard Neustadt said that the power of the president is "the power to persuade."<sup>3</sup> When Presidents are able to draw directly on the public for support, the effectiveness of the bully pulpit<sup>4</sup> allows them to 'persuade' the other members of government more forcefully. Being the sole officer of the national government elected from the whole nation, albeit indirectly, the President is uniquely able to draw on that national support. The rally effect has a direct effect on the president's approval score and because of that is an important contribution to the executive's power base.

This is an important time in which to examine this phenomenon. President Bush gained much of his political capital, at least prima facie, from rally events: first the

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<sup>3</sup> Neustadt, 1990, pg. 11.

<sup>4</sup> The term 'bully pulpit,' first coined by President Teddy Roosevelt, is the ability of the President to 'bully' other actors in the system, especially Congress, by stepping up to the 'pulpit' and going public with an appeal to the people. As a single actor with a national constituency and reputation, not to mention a symbolic position, this works much more effectively for the President than members of Congress.

September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, subsequently the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>5</sup> Rarely in the history of the United States has US soil been directly attacked; the number of times in the last century can be counted on one hand, one finger if you count only the contiguous 48 states. Attacks by subnational actors, like the terrorists of Al-Qaeda, on the scale of the September 11 attacks were unprecedented.<sup>6</sup> In this sort of context, it should come as no surprise that most people were quickly united in their opposition to the perceived source of these attacks and that their support largely translated into nearly unconditional support for executive action. The question, though, still remains: *why*?

### **The Puzzle**

This project revolves around that single central question: *why* does the rally around the flag effect happen? The academic literature in presidential studies and public behavior posit that the rally effect is a result of two essentially modern phenomenon: the symbolic status of the executive as leader of the nation and the ability of the media to affect public opinion with massive amounts of information, serving to focus public attention on certain events. These two are articulated as mutually exclusive alternatives to each other in the vast majority of publications. The ideal way to examine the role of these two variables is to vary the existence or strength of one or both and see what sort of effect it then has on the rally around the flag itself. This not being possible in a real-world situation, the best alternative is to look for a time before the mass media and the president's symbolic status were facts taken for granted in the nation's day-to-day life.

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<sup>5</sup> While they gave him a large reserve of political capital initially, President Bush was subsequently criticized and lost a lot of political capital over both of these invasions, though much more from Iraq than from Afghanistan.

<sup>6</sup> Pancho Villa's raid on Columbus, NM on March 9, 1916 was the last attack on the US mainland before 9/11 and like 9/11 was also conducted by a subnational actor.

This work tries to uncover whether the Presidents that served before the modern era experienced the same sort of rally effect that their modern successors to the office enjoy. Is it the power and camera lights of the modern era, or is it something else, that makes people rally around the flag and the President? It seems logical to the modern citizen thinking about the question that the president might have always gotten this sort of support. After all, the office holder is both the leader of the government and the leader of the nation. If the office received the same kind of support before the advent of the modern presidency, this creates a major problem in the literature's acceptance of the two main determinants of the rally effect. A rally in the absence of those factors calls them into doubt. However, if the rally effect does not exist in the pre-modern era of presidential politics, it will not only provide support for the existing research, but also expand the understanding of how the rally effect itself changed over time as the determinants of the effect developed. The two determinants are fairly cut and dry in two of my cases. During the Mexican-American War, neither is present while during World War I both are fully developed. However, in my middle case, the Spanish-American War, I found a break in the development of the factors. The mass media at the end of the nineteenth century had broken free of the political parties' control. It was sensational, it was yellow,<sup>7</sup> but most importantly it was independent. The same cannot be said about the symbolic nature of the presidency. During this time, the presidency was beginning to develop a power base, but the connection to the people had not yet been made. It is this connection that gives the presidency its position among the great symbols of American patriotism. Being

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<sup>7</sup> The term 'yellow journalism' refers to the sensationalist coverage that gripped many newspapers around the turn of the twentieth century. The term comes from an early colored comic strip, "The Yellow Kid," and is generally considered pejorative.

able to examine the effect of the media without the existence of the symbolic presidency will be extremely illuminating.

To investigate this development, I looked back into American history and selected events that would, given modern circumstances, create a rally effect for the chief executive. In the absence of hard polling data, not available until the appearance of Gallup in the early 1930s, I decided on a mixed methods approach to the project. The first part of this approach was the development of and testing with a proxy measurement for public opinion. I constructed this by examining the mentions of and attitudes towards the President and administration policy in the media of the day: the newspaper. I chose three papers in the New York market for each of my three cases, based on recognized leanings with regards to the administration: one supportive, one critical, and one considered generally neutral. Moving from there, I utilized Kam and Ramos' methodology<sup>8</sup> for analyzing qualitative data for opinions, selecting randomly ten issues from the month before my identified rally event, then an additional ten from each of the following six months. For each of these issues, I coded whether or not they mentioned the President or the administration and what the article's apparent slant on the topic, if any. For the sake of depth, I also coded mentions and attitudes towards Congress and public opinion; this allowed me to comment on whether or not the public, in my measure, was rallying to Congress as opposed to the President, as well as how the papers were treating open expressions of popular sentiment.

The goal of this work is two-fold. The first and primary of these is an examination of the rally effect and its determinants, the emergence of the symbolic presidency and the independent mass media, and, to a lesser extent, the effect of those determinants on the

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<sup>8</sup> Kam and Ramos, 2008.

executive branch. The rally effect is important to understand in the American political system because rallies have a nearly unique ability to facilitate surges, albeit temporary, in presidential power. The design of the executive branch allows this to happen, as it was written into the Constitution of 1787 in such a way as to be the center of action. The Constitution, intentionally or not, vested the new executive branch with all executive functions, in contrast to vesting of Congress with only those “legislative powers herein [the Constitution] granted,” an explicit limitation. It was made to be the source from which appointments to all offices in the system flow. It was given control over the armed forces of the United States and charged with the “faithful execution”<sup>9</sup> of the laws. The rally around the flag effect lends credence to the idea that Presidents, faced with such crises, accrue a certain amount of power, at least when measured in the terms of short-term public support, and if not support and cooperation then complicity from other institutional actors.<sup>10</sup> In modern times, this support is unconditional and nearly unquestioned, without regard to the success or failure of the President’s specific actions in response to the crisis. The fact that these two items cause this sort of surge in public approval during crises lends power to the President.<sup>11</sup> Understanding where the rally effect comes from and how it develops contributes to the understanding of presidential power, especially as it operates during times of crisis.

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<sup>9</sup> Constitution of the United States: Article 2, Section 3. While this is more of a duty than a power in and of itself, the Supreme Court has interpreted this clause similarly as the necessary and proper clause in Article 1, giving the President broad discretion to do what he needs to do to execute the laws, even without a specific grant of statutory power. See *In re Nagel* (135 US 1) and *In re Debs* (158 US 564) for the Court’s opinions on the ‘general grant’ principle of this section of the Constitution.

<sup>10</sup> Muller, 1973, pg. 208.

<sup>11</sup> Regan, 2002, pg. 15.

Before the executive could call on the people to support his actions against Congressional opposition, most Presidents were restrained from using their power in such a way that might make them seem too far outside of a constitutional system in which Congress controlled the declarations of war and in practice many of the foreign policy decisions. This restraint came from various sources: Congress, the Courts, and even the Presidents' own philosophical understandings of the proper relationship between the executive and the rest of the government. They continually came to Congress with their actions for ratification. Polk, as an example, requested from Congress a declaration of war for a conflict that he triggered by his own movement of troops into a disputed border region in Texas. Lincoln petitioned Congress for retroactive approval of his use of the federal military in the early days of the Civil War, as Congress was out of session when the crisis struck. In fact, he had precipitated Southern action by moving to resupply Fort Sumter despite the threat of Confederate guns. This deference to Congress changed as the President became more connected to the public and could use their support as ammunition against his opposition.

After the Second World War, major advances in weapons technology made the world a much smaller place and the United States was forced by security concerns to become more involved on the international stage. Almost any crisis anywhere in the world had implications for the United States. In response to President Harry Truman's seizure of steel mills during the Korean War, Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson wrote that "when the President acts pursuant to an express or implied authorization of Congress, his authority is at its

maximum”<sup>12</sup>; foreign policy is one of those areas that Congress has given more and more over the last century and a half to the executive branch. As the post-World War II world settled into a world-wide struggle between the superpowers, this combined preeminence in both foreign policy and the use of force allowed the Presidency to gain an enormous amount of power in relationship to Congress.<sup>13</sup> It can be said that the same things that facilitate the rally around the flag also have made the Presidency into the fiercely independent and nearly autonomous actor on the world stage that it has become.

The second goal of this work is to trace the development of the modern presidency in relation to the president’s connection to the people as a source of power. While the modern presidency has long been seen as the seat of popular leadership, this was not always the case. In fact, it was not until Andrew Jackson’s election that popular leadership was really understood as a proper role for the Chief Executive. Most of the presidents who followed Jackson, however, disavowed this precedent for much of the nineteenth century. There was significant worry about the threat that the executive as demagogue might pose to the system as a whole. Policy messages, therefore, were addressed directly to Congress, when written at all. This rule restricted information about most legislation to those within the government. When these messages were published, they were only really accessible to those who could understand the finer points of the rhetorical and policy-focused language in which they were written. Elections were conducted similarly, with the candidates speaking through spokesmen and the parties rather than campaigning themselves. On the other hand, when the President

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<sup>12</sup> *Youngstown Sheet and Tube v Sawyer*, 343 US 579 (1952). Jackson’s concurring opinion is not the opinion of the Court, but is the most cited in legal circles with regards to the limits of presidential powers vis-à-vis Congress. See Epstein and Walker, pg. 293.

<sup>13</sup> See McCormick, 1980, pgs. 81-2, and Mullen, 1976, pg. 40.

did address his constituents directly, the vast majority of those speeches were instructional in form, focusing on patriotism and the responsibilities of the day. It was not until the first President Roosevelt that this began to change. Roosevelt used the popular appeal as a bully pulpit, gaining support from the people and using it directly against those, especially in Congress, who opposed him on points of legislation or policy.

### **The Lessons**

What can we learn about rallies from this research? There are a few possible outcomes from this study. The first is that rallies are not found. In an absence of the prevailing factors discussed before, the symbolic presidency and the independent mass media, the President did not seem to gain any major public support from the occurrences of international crises. Perhaps the support for the government went to some other part of the system. It is possible that rallies did not happen at all. The second possibility is that rallies still occurred in this period despite the lack of the accepted factors. If this were the case, the hunt would be on for another variable or combination of variables that cause the rallies to emerge even for what is considered a fairly limited institution.

The first possibility, that rallies did not occur before the modern presidency, comes with a set of implications. Schlesinger sums up this possibility in a short paragraph:

As the parties wasted away, the Presidency stood out in solitary majesty as the central focus of political emotion, the ever potent symbol of national community. When parties were strong and media weak, Presidents were objects of respect but not of veneration. There were no great personal cults of Rutherford B. Hayes and Benjamin Harrison.<sup>14</sup>

Both the strong independent mass media and what Tulis would call the rhetorical presidency, with its emphasis on “direct popular appeal” and “the doctrine that the president ought to be a

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<sup>14</sup> Schlesinger, 1973, pg. 210.

popular leader,”<sup>15</sup> only emerge in the era of the modern presidency. If these are absent, one might expect that rally effects would fade as well. The executive would draw its power from the Constitution”<sup>16</sup> directly, resting not only on their powers but on their independent constitutional position, until the more modern presidents, beginning with Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, felt appeals to the people were appropriate when contending with the other branches, especially the Congress. To understand how these factors affect rallies, we need to understand how both of these independent variables, the existence of the mass media and the president as the symbolic and actual leader of government, develop during the era of the traditional presidency and through the transformation of that office into its modern incarnation.

The second possibility, that rallies do occur in this period of history, begs the most obvious question: why? It is possible that the Framers intended the president to be able to draw support from the public during times of crisis. As Publius lays out in the *Federalist Papers*, a strong executive “is essential to the protection of the community from foreign attacks,”<sup>17</sup> because of his ability as a single actor to react with speed and purpose and “the qualities... indispensable in the management of foreign negotiations point out the executive as the most fit agent in those transactions.”<sup>18</sup> Tulis, describing how different objectives were placed into different branches as they were designed, points out that “‘self-preservation’ or national security [is] of utmost concern to the president,”<sup>19</sup> which places foreign relations solidly within the sphere of the executive’s accepted activities from the beginning. Two

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<sup>15</sup> Tulis, 1984, pg. 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 40.

<sup>17</sup> Hamilton, et. al., 1999, pg. 421.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 449.

<sup>19</sup> Tulis, 1987, pg. 42

examples from the early years of the Republic set this precedent in action, beyond Publius' theoretical arguments: the Neutrality Proclamation, issued in 1793, and the Jay Treaty of 1794.

The Neutrality Proclamation declared that the former colonies would not take sides in the conflict between France and England after the execution of Louis XVI. The right of President Washington, and by association any other president, to declare neutrality in the face of the war power given to Congress was hotly debated between Hamilton and Madison. Under the respective pennames Pacificus and Helvidius, the former stating that it was the responsibility of the President to preserve peace until Congress decided otherwise and the latter arguing from a strict constructionist view that Congress, not the President, held the central authority over foreign policy except where those powers were granted to the President by the Constitution.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately the proclamation was issued and set the precedent that decisions on official foreign policy stances would be made from the executive. This proclamation is sometimes pointed to as a forerunner to Washington's Farewell Address warning against entangling alliances.

The second precedent, also set by Washington, came from the discussion in Congress of the 1794 Treaty of London, the treaty officially ending the American War of Independence. The Jay Treaty, as it is more commonly known, was denounced by the emerging Democratic-Republicans as being too friendly to England. The House of Representatives passed a resolution calling on President Washington to hand over all documents and correspondence relating to the negotiations. Washington refused, stating that

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<sup>20</sup> Hamilton and Madison, 1845. This is a classic discussion on the relative power of the executive and legislative branches in foreign policy matters.

foreign policy was the province of the executive and while the Senate certainly had a role, the House did not.<sup>21</sup> By providing the papers to the Senate alone and excluding the House, he established the pattern that the President, with the Senate in an advisory role, was the initiator of foreign policy in the constitutional system.

A third possibility is that, should one of the determinants of the rally develop without the other, the effect will behave differently. It is this possibility that could bring the most value to this project. It will allow me to see what role the two factors have on the rally effect in isolation from one another.

Working from these three possible results for the study, finding rallies, finding none or some sort of altered rally effect, I find that rallies do not seem to occur in the same way that they do in the modern era. However it is not quite as simple as they do or do not occur; as the determinants of the rally effect developed, the rally around the flag effect emerged and changed over time. As the nineteenth century progressed, it became more and more pronounced and began to conform to the modern expectations of the rally by the time of the First World War. It is, in fact, the third possible result that occurs.

In the earliest case for this work, the rally effect was non-existent. The fact that the public did not yet identify the President as the main center of policy and reactions to crises, coupled with the lack of a coherent mass media to disseminate information quickly, the rally as we know it did not form. In fact, my case study shows that the partisan-driven media used the issue to largely political ends, both for and against the administration. President Polk ended up with a statistically insignificant downturn in his approval as a result of the initiation of the Mexican-American War.

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<sup>21</sup> Koenig, 1975, pg. 31 and Milkis and Nelson, pg. 87.

By the time of my last case study, Congressional resistance to the executive's claim on foreign policy was gone and Presidents were recognized the prime mover in that area. They were recognized by the public and by the elites as the setters of foreign policy and responders to international crises. This is not to say that the Congress, especially the Senate, completely deferred to the executive in all things dealing with foreign policy. However, it typically remained silent until it was presented with a question, usually a treaty, and then responded. It was at this point that Congress might rebel; the failure of Treaty of Versailles is a prime example of this sometimes-rebellious streak of the Senate against presidential leadership in foreign policy matters. This is not fundamentally different than recent years.

During the Spanish-American War, my second case study, the media was more developed and had divorced itself largely from the direct control of the political parties. In fact, one might say that the newspapers were radically independent; it had swung so far away from the control of the political parties and towards the pursuit of circulation that they were willing to do anything, print anything, just to sell a few extra issues. In fact, it was this sensationalist journalism, called 'yellow journalism,' that many credit with forcing the nation into the Spanish-American War. The President's power was rebounding after its nadir near the end of the Grant administration and the White House was becoming more able to set its own policy and drive it into action. Foreign policy was one of the areas that the executive had regained the most power. Congress, on the other hand, had not yet come to accept this completely during this period. McKinley faced a major rebellion among the members of his party in Congress against his policy of non-intervention in Cuba. This intra-party split was a major contributing factor to his being forced to ask for permission to intervene; the alternative was an inter-branch battle with Congress and an internecine struggle within his

own party going into the midterm elections. If a party were to rebel or even threaten to rebel against their own president in this way during a time of international crisis, the dissenters were be attacked as disloyal, but not against the party; it would be seen as disloyalty towards the nation. In the late nineteenth century, however, this was not a problem as the president was not yet that symbol of the country. The fact that this determinant lagged behind the emergence of the independent media points to this case as the one with the most potential action. What happens when only the media is present? Does it still result in a rally effect? If it does, then opinion leadership from the media is supported as the primary determinant of the rally effect. If none emerges, then it supports the symbolic position of the White House as being the primary reason that the president enjoys a bump in approval from crises. My analysis shows that the latter of these two is what occurred. When you remove the symbolic presidency from the equation, the rally becomes tied not to the event itself but to a change in policy and/or action on the president's part. This is not the modern understanding of the rally around the flag phenomenon.

This work supports the idea that the rally around the flag effect is essentially a modern phenomenon. Its development coincides with the development of the mass media and the understanding of the presidency as the proper actor on the foreign stage. In contrast to the two opposing camps of patriotism and elite opinion leadership, it is in fact the development of both that creates the effect, not either one in isolation. That said, this work also points at the symbolic nature of the chief executive as the leader of the nation as being essential for the effect to materialize.

## Dissertation Overview

This work, in its search for the rally effect in the pre-modern era of the presidency, does a number of things. First, it lays out in chapter 2 the literature on the modern rally effect, including a discussion of the most widely discussed determinants of the effect. This is a very broad set of literature, including pieces from presidential power studies,<sup>22</sup> foreign policy,<sup>23</sup> public opinion,<sup>24</sup> and institutional relations.<sup>25</sup> This is in addition to writings specifically on the rally effect.<sup>26</sup>

Chapter 2 continues on to describe my methodology, with mixed qualitative and quantitative analyses, and data collection scheme, as well as addressing some potential methodological concerns with the project. It also discusses the methods by which I selected my cases. The chapter goes on to lay out a developmental theory of the rally effect. I describe the progression of the rally effect through my three case studies and discuss those cases in relation to the development of the two main determinants of the rally effect.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 examine three potential historical cases of the rally effect: the Thornton Affair at the beginning of the Mexican-American War, the sinking of the battleship *USS Maine* which touched off the Spanish-American War, and the publication of the Zimmerman Telegram in the weeks leading up to the U.S. entry into the First World War, respectively. Each of these three case studies is examined in an attempt to quantify public opinion and the effect of the rally event on that opinion. These analyses combine the quantitative analysis of my public opinion proxy measure, developed from content analysis

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<sup>22</sup> Rossiter 1956; Neustadt 1990; Crenson and Ginsberg 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Wildavsky 1996; Green 1939; McCormick 1985; James and Oneal 1991.

<sup>24</sup> Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Zaller 1992; Crespi 1997.

<sup>25</sup> Polsby 1986; Edwards 1989; Dickenson 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Oneal and Bryan 1995; Hetherington and Nelson 2003; Kam and Ramos 2008.

of newspaper coverage, with a deeper qualitative narrative describing the decisions made by the administration and the role of public opinion in those choices.

Chapter 6 summarizes the major findings of the project and sets them in the context of the broader literatures and debates on the relationships of the executive branch and public opinion. It asserts that the rally effect is an essentially modern phenomenon. It also calls closer attention to the Spanish-American War as an important case because of the disconnection in the development of the two determinants, supporting the emergence of the symbolic presidency as the primary determinant of the rally around the flag effect. However, it also argues that to fully understand the rally around the flag effect, the literature needs to be more willing to combine the competing camps of patriotism and media and understand that both have a role to play in the explanation of the causes of rallies.

## Chapter 2:

### Literature, Theory and Methodology

The Office of the President has always had every constitutional characteristic it does now. Two and a quarter centuries and twenty-seven amendments later, the President is still the only nationally elected leader, albeit indirectly; the Twelfth Amendment changed the minutia of the Electoral College, but not its basic character. The President is still a unitary executive, still not beholden to any sort of formal council, still the commander-in-chief of the military and still in possession of significant powers of persuasion. The only constitutional limitation on the President passed has been the Truman-era limit of two terms enacted by the Twenty-Second Amendment. Passed in the aftermath of FDR's unprecedented four election victories, this created a lame duck situation for second-term presidents in which their grip on power was lessened by their own impending exit; some argue, however, that the divorce of a second-term President from electoral consequences actually increases the tendency to act unilaterally.<sup>27</sup> Other members of the government, like in the early years of the Republic, are still under no fundamental obligation to support administration policies at any time, including times of national or international crisis. There have been no constitutional changes to expand the powers of the executive branch; why then has it expanded so greatly since the turn of the twentieth century?

This work argues that the expansion has come because of changes around the office rather than within it. The effective marriage of presidential power to public opinion and support employed by Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson and the effective legislative leadership utilized by William Taft created precedents that the second Roosevelt combined

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<sup>27</sup> The historical discussion of this idea is especially good in Sundquist, 1992, pgs 46-54.

and used to full advantage during the New Deal, ushering in the era of the modern presidency. The power of public support in an elected system, coupled with a list of overlapping crises, the Great Depression, World War II and the Cold War, has lent the President a huge reserve of power that could be used essentially as desired. In the modern era, the height of this combination of crisis and public support is best typified in the rally around the flag effect.

This work is a story of the development of that effect. Generally put, the idea behind a rally effect is that in a time of threat, the country will pull together and support whatever the President does in response to that threat. This is expressed as a significant increase in public support in opinion polls for the President's job performance. The idea of a "rally around the flag" effect has been widely accepted since the idea was first dealt with in the 1960s by, among others, Polsby (1964) and Waltz (1967). Rally events received their first systematic definition from John Mueller in 1973 as an event that "is international... involves the United States and particularly the President directly..." and is "specific, dramatic, and sharply focused."<sup>28</sup> What is it, though, that makes rallies happen? That is the central question for this work and the one that this chapter seeks to frame.

### **Rallying in the Modern Era**

Students of both presidential studies and of public opinion measure the rally effect across numerous presidential administrations. Edwards points out that the President receives support from the rally phenomenon "because he is the symbol of the country and the primary

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<sup>28</sup> Mueller (1973), pg. 209.

focus of attention at such times,”<sup>29</sup> that attention coming from the mass media. Without these two factors, the rally effect would, according to contemporary literature, not occur.

**Patriotism and the President as center of action.** Academic literature points to two major contributing factors for the rally effect in the modern era. The first of these is a patriotic attachment to the national government that accompanies a view of the presidency as the proper source for action. Mueller discusses those people who are “inclined to rally to the support of the president no matter what he does,” particularly in the area of international relations.<sup>30</sup> These people, he says, strongly identify with the nation itself and tend to see the president, even from a very young age,<sup>31</sup> as the embodiment of the country. As such, they have a wellspring of loyalty and support for the president. He points this out by measuring support for the bombing campaign against Hanoi and Haiphong Harbor pursued by President Lyndon Johnson during the Vietnam War. While opinion on the question varied from forty points against in September 1965 to even in May 1966, polling showed a seventy-point margin of support for the expansion after it started just 2 months later.<sup>32</sup> Polsby notes that the “popular response to a president during an international crisis is favorable, regardless of the wisdom of the possibilities he pursues.”<sup>33</sup> Even Operation Eagle Claw, President Carter’s disastrous attempt to rescue of the Iranian hostages, resulted in a jump in his approval ratings. In contrast to domestic disorder such as labor disruptions, public protests, and general civil unrest that all tend to inflame internal domestic tensions, the rally effect comes

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<sup>29</sup> Edwards 1983, pg 242.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pg. 69.

<sup>31</sup> This is noted as early as Hess and Easton (1960).

<sup>32</sup> Mueller (1973), pg 70. The actual poll numbers break down as follows: September 1965 - 30% support, 70% opposition; May 1966 - 50-50; July 1966 - 85% support, 15% opposition.

<sup>33</sup> Polsby (1986), pg 75.

exclusively from the occurrence of foreign emergencies. Those presidents who have been able to effectively mobilize the nation against specific external threats have, at least in the modern era of the presidency, been rated favorably because of it.<sup>34</sup>

O’Conner and Sabato state that “a significant portion of the president’s power comes from “his position as the symbolic leader of the nation... When the president speaks... he speaks for the nation in one voice.”<sup>35</sup> Cohen agrees, but points out that though the president’s ability to move public opinion on foreign policy was significant, he failed to affect domestic issues in the same way.<sup>36</sup> Meernik and Ault find that this influence translates into roughly a six-point shift towards the president’s opinion; issues that involve military intervention get even larger support.<sup>37</sup> Parker sees a broader support for the entire system, with the president especially important, arising from patriotic feelings surrounding a rally event. She states that this patriotic feeling can even cause citizens to maintain “more positive evaluations [of the President] than the economic conditions” might otherwise warrant.<sup>38</sup>

Rossiter states that the foundation for the greatness of the presidency lies not only in the fact of its “incredible power but [that it is] a breeding ground of indestructible myth.”<sup>39</sup> That statement is well supported as scholars and citizens alike can clearly see that through much of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, the President has become solidly entrenched as the symbolic leader of the nation. The development of that symbolic nature has its main roots in the Progressive movement of the turn of the twentieth century. The agrarian

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<sup>34</sup> For more on this point, see Mueller (1970),

<sup>35</sup> O’Conner and Sabato (1993), pg. 232.

<sup>36</sup> Cohen (1999)

<sup>37</sup> Mueller (1973), Brody and Page (1975) and MacKuen (1983) all agree on this.

<sup>38</sup> Parker (1995), pg. 540.

<sup>39</sup> Rossiter (1956), pg 81.

discontent with the existing role of government was “enlarged and redirected,” as Hofstadter pointed out, by the Progressives near the end of the nineteenth century, causing a major change in what was accepted as the role of government in the United States. In turn, this altered fundamentally the “whole tone of American political life,”<sup>40</sup> leading directly to a new understanding of the responsibility of the national government to the people who lived under it.

The first Roosevelt was committed to the idea that government could and should be a force for good in society. He pursued his policies actively, something that most presidents before him had been unable or unwilling to do in the era of congressional government that had dominated the federal government in the decades after the end of the Civil War.

Goldsmith writes in support of this point that TR “transformed the presidential office from its inert nineteenth century pattern into a veritable cockpit of political leadership for social reform.”<sup>41</sup> Wilson, who would later come to the office, saw Roosevelt as a good model for the presidency and, despite his own differences with TR on specifics of politics, admired his ability to use the office as a leadership position. He said that the President was “the only national leader” and was “the representative of no constituency, but of the whole people.”<sup>42</sup>

To facilitate what would come to be called the stewardship theory of the presidency, in which the President was “bound actively and affirmatively to do all he could for the people,”<sup>43</sup> Roosevelt fostered ties to the people as a base of support. While other leaders in the nineteenth century had done this as well, Jefferson, Jackson and Lincoln chief among

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<sup>40</sup> Hofstadter (1955), pg. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Goldsmith (1974), pg. 1293.

<sup>42</sup> Wilson (1907), pg. 68.

<sup>43</sup> Roosevelt (2004), pg. 614.

them, those leaders had used the mechanism of their political parties. This limited the symbolic role of the president itself in the minds of the people. Roosevelt, however, directly connected himself to the people in a way that the earlier presidents had shunned as demagoguery in an effort to move the entrenched interests of the Republican Old Guard. For example, TR made a campaign swing through the West and Southwest in support of a change to the Interstate Commerce Commission, giving it the power to force rate equity for shippers on the railroads. While the Senate version of the bill had died in committee when Congress adjourned in the summer of 1905, Roosevelt's impassioned campaign for the regulatory expansion was so powerful that, when the bill came back to the Senate the next spring, only three senators voted against it.<sup>44</sup>

Modern presidents enjoy this symbolic position without much effort on their own part, though they have come to support that symbolism themselves. As Hinckley points out, "it is not only the public that sees the president as symbol of the nation – the presidents themselves are encouraging this view."<sup>45</sup> The fact is, however, that it has not always been so. It is to their benefit in terms of power that in the modern era they are able call down upon themselves the symbolic mantle of national leadership.

**Opinion leadership and the mass media.** The other main factor pointed to by the literature is opinion leadership, most often articulated through coverage by the mass media and with the coverage of elite discourse (or the lack of it) specifically included. Kernell accepts Mueller's ideas of patriotism as a causal factor for rallies generally, but adds to the

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<sup>44</sup> This campaign is discussed in Tulis (1987), Crenson and Ginsberg (2007), and Milkis and Nelson (2008), as well as others, as one of the best examples of presidential appeals to the public to force policy change on Congress.

<sup>45</sup> Hinckley (1990), pg. 39.

concept a further criteria to the earlier definition of a rally event that the event must appear on “the front page for at least five consecutive days... to guarantee widespread public awareness” of the event before people can really react to it.<sup>46</sup> Brody and Shapiro make this media involvement criteria more systematic, introducing what they call the opinion leadership hypothesis as an alternate explanation to the patriotism explanation.<sup>47</sup> Based on literature on the priming of public opinion, they argue that it is the publication or the lack of publication of elite criticism that drives rallies. Brody reinforces these arguments later, stating that in the early stages of a crisis the president is the primary source of information for the media and, as such, gets almost exclusive coverage on the subject.<sup>48</sup> Noelle-Neumann points out that politicians are less willing to oppose a popular president. This lack of dissent causes a higher perceived popularity, which in turn further depresses dissent. This creates a downward spiral that silences opposition speech;<sup>49</sup> the combination of this spiral of silence and the President’s monopoly on information causes the country to listen to and believe the President’s assessment of the situation. The administration’s reactions to the facts on the ground become widely trusted to be the best course for the nation, in no small part because these assessments as to the situation and the proper reactions are the *only* ones available, especially early in the crisis.

Media, in the form of newspapers, have been around for centuries. Even in the early years of the United States, the newspaper played an active role in shaping the opinions of the people, often funded directly by partisan politicians. It was not until the end of the nineteenth

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<sup>46</sup> Kernell, 1978, pg. 513.

<sup>47</sup> Brody and Shapiro, 1989, pg. 354.

<sup>48</sup> Brody, 1991.

<sup>49</sup> Noelle-Neumann, 1993.

century with the advent of the wireless telegraph (1897) and its subsequent widespread adoption that the media truly became ‘mass,’ with major nation-wide newspaper circulation - the New York papers reaching more than two million near the end of the nineteenth century - and radio, invented in 1916.

As a result, people rely heavily on the media for political information. Walter Lippmann described the relationship of people to political events in his work by pointing out that “our opinions cover a bigger space... than we can directly observe. They have, therefore, to be pieced together out of what others have reported and what we can imagine.”<sup>50</sup> Downs reemphasizes this by pointing out “information which is used by one citizen is often gathered, transmitted and analyzed by others.”<sup>51</sup> This is done in part to reduce the procurement costs of political information, trading some control over selection for the ease of “subsidized information,”<sup>52</sup> collecting the least expensive information in an effort to “1- help them decide how to vote, and 2- to form opinions with which they can influence government policy between elections.”<sup>53</sup> The idea is a fundamental one; we cannot, as individuals, be personal observers of all things in the world that we might have an opinion on. Therefore, we are forced to develop those opinions by using information gained from others; those sources are typically elites. People also tend to lean strongly towards presentations of the news that are “short, simple and highly thematic – in a word, stereotyped.”<sup>54</sup> Even when presented with the chance to collect more detailed political information from special news coverage, people

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<sup>50</sup> Lippmann (1940), pg. 59.

<sup>51</sup> Downs (1957), pg. 219.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 237.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 238.

<sup>54</sup> Zaller (1998), pg. 7.

for the most part are unwilling to invest the time, despite their opinions that the news is oversimplified.<sup>55</sup>

The idea that an informed elite might strongly influence or even dictate public opinions is by no means new. A century ago, Edward Ross wrote that “the source of public opinion in a healthy community is not an amorphous crowd, but an organic combination” of those being influenced and those with influence, the latter of whom serve as guideposts to public opinion.<sup>56</sup> James Bryce said that the formation of that public opinion is for the most part the work of a small minority.<sup>57</sup> It is their ability to control, or at least strongly influence, communication that allows these informed opinion leaders to foster group identity and, therefore, group opinions. If the papers bias their coverage towards support of the administration, the people would very likely be disposed to move that way as well, thus creating a rally effect.

However, the point is made by Cantril, and reemphasized by Crespi, that “people are active, thinking, feeling agents whose perceptions of the world... are always subject to change as a consequence of how they experience an external world that is itself always subject to change.”<sup>58</sup> Page and Shapiro also work this into their examination of polling results,<sup>59</sup> finding that people react to specific trends, both economic and social, specific events and the acquisition of new information with changes in their opinions. Phillip Converse observes that there are important differences in how people think about politics,

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<sup>55</sup> Graber (1984), especially pg. 105.

<sup>56</sup> Ross (1901), pgs 102-3.

<sup>57</sup> Bryce (1891).

<sup>58</sup> Cantril (1961). The quote is from Crespi (1997), pg. 11.

<sup>59</sup> Page and Shapiro (1992).

depending on how far down in what he calls the “belief strata.”<sup>60</sup> As one goes down through those strata away from elites and towards the mass public, he states, the consistency of those beliefs tends to degrade. This is due in large part to the common person’s inability to draw connections between specific fragmented policy positions.<sup>61</sup> The reason for their support of those elite ideologues, he says, often has little to do with the reasons that the ideologues themselves have those opinions. Some use this last point to argue that the opinions of the public at large develop, at some level, in a different way than those of elites.<sup>62</sup> However, people often accept the ideas of those who are closest to them ideologically, an idea put forth by Zaller,<sup>63</sup> and then each of them “reacts to it creatively – and on its own terms. In this way, ...mass opinion turns out to be a selective distillation of expert” opinions.<sup>64</sup> Ultimately, that connection of the people and the press serves to give the President the ability to play the role of “guardian of national morale... [and] an animate symbol for American sovereignty.”<sup>65</sup>

**The rally effect as power.** If we accept Neustadt’s argument and the supporting words of Eisenhower that the job of the president is to sit in the Oval Office “all day trying to persuade people to do the things they ought to have sense enough to do without”<sup>66</sup> having to be persuaded, we should ask what gives the President the power to do so in the first place. These people who need persuading are more or less independent, depending on their relationship to both the President and to Congress. In some cases they are able to strongly resist administration directives. Neustadt argues that, while presidents can do some things

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<sup>60</sup> Converse (1964), pg 206.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 246.

<sup>62</sup> Tichenor, Donohue & Olien, 1970 and Ettema, Brown & Luepker, 1983.

<sup>63</sup> Zaller (1992), pg. 311.

<sup>64</sup> Crespi (1997), pg. 127.

<sup>65</sup> Polsby (1986), pg. 16.

<sup>66</sup> Eisenhower, quoted in Neustadt (1990), pg 10.

through direct command, they have the potential to wield the most power through bargaining and persuasion. In a system founded on the concept of popular sovereignty, being able to use personal popular appeal to bolster support for policy choices can give significant backing to actors in the system. This is true even when used during conflict with other parts of the system, such as a dispute between the executive and legislative branches. This is exactly how the rally effect has the potential to give power to the president. Edwards observes that, as the other major institutional actor in our government, Congress pays very close attention to the president's approval ratings. Pointing out "widespread support gives [the President] leeway and weakens resistance to his policies,"<sup>67</sup> he tempers this by saying that, while public approval is not a guarantee of control, it is "an important background resource for leadership"<sup>68</sup> on policy in general.

The fact is that, with the United States more and more tied to foreign nations through trade and bilateral executive agreements,<sup>69</sup> the power to conduct foreign policy lends an immense amount of power to the executive in practice. Corwin states that the Constitution is ambiguous on this subject, including some powers in both the legislative and executive branches, though he grants that the circumstances of the Cold War shifted the balance solidly towards the White House.<sup>70</sup> However, Powell puts forth a convincing argument that the Constitution places this power solidly in the President's hands from the beginning of the Republic, though it gives to Congress the power to block presidential actions if it so desires

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<sup>67</sup> Edwards (1989), pg. 113.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, pg. 125.

<sup>69</sup> As opposed to formal treaties, which are becoming less common and the process for which gives the Senate formal roles in the debate.

<sup>70</sup> Corwin (1957).

through the funding process or by specifically prohibiting governmental action on an issue.<sup>71</sup> Presidents of no less stature or philosophical difference than Jefferson and Truman would likely have both agreed with Powell that foreign policy is something that comes directly from the executive.<sup>72</sup> Koenig argues that the presidency is somewhat bipolar on the subject of foreign policy. One aspect of the presidency emphasizes autonomy and unilateralism, even the exclusion of the Congress and the public, while the other emphasizes cooperation, accommodation and working with Congress and the people. He makes the argument that the former has gained rapidly over the latter in recent decades.<sup>73</sup> Fisher roundly criticizes Congress for abdicating the power over foreign policy and war making to the President,<sup>74</sup> but also recognizes that the people see the president as the leader in such areas. The rally effect, coming during times of foreign policy crises, magnifies the president's power in the very areas that the executive is strongest in and grants the ability in the short term to persuade the government forcefully of the appropriateness of certain policy positions, much as President Bush was able to do in the aftermath of 9/11.

### **The Development of the Rally Effect**

Because of this reliance on the mass media and the symbolic nature of the office as a base for the rally effect, there are significant reasons to doubt the existence the rally effect, at least in the modern understanding of that term, during the period of the traditional presidency. Neither of the accepted determinants existed in anything more than nascent form before the end of the nineteenth century. The executive office was seen as a clerk, doing the

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<sup>71</sup> Powell (2002).

<sup>72</sup> Koenig (1975), pg. 213.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pgs 213-214.

<sup>74</sup> Fisher (1995). This is a recurring theme throughout this work and not tied to one section or quote.

business of the government, rather than a popular leader from whom policy initiation was expected. While the mass media is becoming much more independent in the years following the Civil War, what Tulis would call the rhetorical presidency, with its emphasis on “direct popular appeal” and “the doctrine that the president ought to be a popular leader,”<sup>75</sup> only fully emerges after the century. If both of these factors are absent, one might expect that rally effects would fade as well. To understand how these causes affect rallies, we need to understand how both of these independent variables, the existence of the mass media and the president as the symbolic and actual leader of government, develop during the era of the traditional presidency and through the transformation of that office into its modern incarnation.

**Three stages of rally development.** Tracing the concurrent development of the determinants of the rally effect divides its development into three distinct periods: a pre-development era, a transitional period and a fully developed period. With the major determinants of the rally effect non-existent, or at best in a very nascent form, the rally should not occur in the first period. During this time, while the President was certainly the focus of action in a military sense and, to some extent at least, in a diplomatic sense, he was not understood to be the leader of the nation. At the time of its founding, the United States was significantly different from the countries of Europe. It had no true identity of its own. To be ‘American’ was to be a British subject who lived on or near the East coast of British North America. Even in July of 1776, however, this was something of a misnomer. While English transplants constituted a sizable majority in the colonies, every northern European country was represented. There was little religious conformity, no truly national capital, and no

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<sup>75</sup> Tulis (1987), pg 4.

established ruling or military castes.<sup>76</sup> In the early years of the Republic, it was Congress that primarily played that symbolic leadership role. “We forget too easily,” Rossiter says, “that Congress... was the focus of the people’s interest in their government through most of the first century under the Constitution. The Presidency carried with it little of the magic that is now so notable an element in its strength.”<sup>77</sup> Washington especially, but also the first Adams to a lesser extent, was the symbol of the nation and acted the role. Both saw a symbolic role for the office of the President of the United States, a person who was the singular leader of the entire country, the only person whose electoral constituency was every voter in the nation. They felt that a certain dignity and grandness was needed in the office and both set out to imbue their job with that grandeur.

The presidents who followed them, beginning with Jefferson, sought to downplay this role and return the office to something closer to the common man. Jefferson began sending the constitutionally required message on the State of the Union to Congress, rather than delivering it himself, something that would become precedent. Until Woodrow Wilson came to office. While Jefferson embraced the executive power, realizing the need for a strong leader, he governed through his leadership of the *party*, not through his own stature as executive. Madison further abdicated the power of the executive by allowing leadership of the government to pass from his hands into that of the party leadership in the House of Representatives, and especially Speaker of the House Henry Clay. When the War of 1812 came, though Madison tried to rally the people to the flag, “the rapid decline of the

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<sup>76</sup> Zelinsky (1988).

<sup>77</sup> Rossiter (1956), pg 61-2.

presidency after Jefferson's tenure left Madison in a poor position to rally either Congress or the American people."<sup>78</sup>

Andrew Jackson represented a new invigoration of the executive office, linking for the first time the office to the people themselves rather than simply taking a backseat clerk-style approach to government, as had the previous three presidents. While executive power enjoyed something of a resurgence through the Age of Jackson, especially with Tyler and Polk, the issue of slavery tied up the presidency with weak compromise Democrats that were at the same time unwilling and unable to express strong leadership in the face of the divisions that would lead the country into the Civil War.

Lincoln was Jackson-like in his leadership. He mobilized the Union to face the Confederacy on the battlefield, exercising many powers not explicitly given to him by the Constitution. He justified this by pointing out that it would be pointless to defend the letter of the document if the country fell apart because of it. However, he recognized the primacy of Congress in this period, coming to the legislative branch for retroactive approval of his actions during their recess and deferring to their opinions on the subject; both chambers, sans Southern delegations, gave their approval.

Looking next at the mass media during this time, we can see an openly political role. The first media emerged in the ancient world, with drama and early books, and many of these were explicitly political in nature. The media was already a force in society; as Thomas Carlyle pointed out as early as the 1840s, "there were three Estates in Parliament, but in the

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<sup>78</sup> Milkis and Nelson (2008), pg 111. In fact, this became such a problem that five New England states threatened to leave the Union over Madison's handling of the War of 1812. Only Andrew Jackson's late victory over the British in New Orleans may have saved the President's term.

Reporters Gallery yonder, there sat a fourth Estate more important than they all.”<sup>79</sup> However, it was not until the nineteenth century and further improvements in mechanical reproduction, such as the rotary steam press, that the newspaper truly became a mass media. During this period, the newspaper was not yet a power that could really directly affect politics, being mostly a creature of the political factions in the country, serving largely as mouthpieces for partisan politics.

As late as the turn of the nineteenth century, “editorializing was seen as not quite the business of a newspaper. One, the *New York Journal*, went so far as to print editorials in italics (itself as indicator of a personal hand).”<sup>80</sup> The law even recognized these differences in some places, such as in England, where opinion papers were not subject to the newspaper stamp taxes. James Bennett founded the *New York Herald* in May 1835, and introduced a new form of reporting: the interview. This allowed him to beat out his competitors with new material because in a way he was creating the news that he was reporting.<sup>81</sup> This was the change that started the media on the road to political force free from direct party dominance. During this period, however, it had not broken those ties and was not independent.

The second period, the emergent period, has some of the signs of a rally, but will not be full-blown or unconditional. After Lincoln’s active use of the executive office during the conflict, Congress began reasserting itself. This began with the impeachment of Andrew Johnson on largely political grounds, and continued for much of the rest of the century. During this era, the President was better understood to be the leader of the nation’s foreign policy, but even in this did not go unchallenged by the legislative branch. The Senate

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<sup>79</sup> Carlyle (1901), pg 188.

<sup>80</sup> Winston (2005), pg 104.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, pg.106.

sometimes rejected treaties simply because they had not been consulted extensively enough during the negotiation process. For the most part, the executives drew what little power they did from the Constitution,<sup>82</sup> relying on their expressed powers and their independent constitutional position as opposed to a connection to the people. They did not hold the symbolic national leadership position that modern presidents enjoy.

Near the end of the century, technology was developing for the printing of newspapers such that tens of thousands of copies could be printed, folded and cut every hour. The newspaper was becoming a truly mass media with the potential to be a real player in the political landscape. The innovation that finally allowed the newspapers to divorce themselves from the parties was advertising. Before the mid-nineteenth century, a major supplementary source of income for most newspapers was a combination of subventions and blackmail, the former paid by the government or parties to foster favorable reporting and the latter paid by those who did not wish their names and/or situations to be published. It was a move away from sources, what modern sensibilities would deem disreputable at best, towards advertising as a major source of secondary income that would finally usher in the era of the independent press. The *New York World* was symbolic of this stage of the newspaper's development. When Joseph Pulitzer bought the *World* in 1883, it only had a circulation of about 15,000. Pulitzer, though, dedicated the paper to "the cause of the people" and to exposing "all public evils and abuses,"<sup>83</sup> those crusades becoming the cornerstone of its success. Successes like the funding for the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty brought lots of attention, but the paper was just as well if not better known for muckraking and yellow journalism. The battle

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<sup>82</sup> Tulis (1987), pg 40.

<sup>83</sup> Mott (1969), pg 434.

between the *World* and William Randolph Hearst's *Journal* for the publishing market in New York drove both papers to sensationalism, appealing to people's desire for scandal to gain circulation numbers and the advertising dollars that came with them. While the sensationalism eventually faded and both publishers later regretted their "yellow sins,"<sup>84</sup> the power of the newspaper as crusader for truth still remained.

Finally, the third period is that of the modern rally. Rallies during this period will be focused on the President and, as Polsby says, occur "regardless of the wisdom of the policies he pursues."<sup>85</sup> In this era, the media have fully developed into an independent political force, at times pursuing their own goals, at others supportive or critical of the administration's agenda. The rise of the *New York Times* serves as the hallmark for the final stage of mass media development in the pre-New Deal era. As a counterpoint to the rabid, one-upping sensationalism of the *World* and the *Journal*, the *Times* was early on "recognized... as a solid and reliable paper... independent of financial and political power brokers." The new owner Adolph Ochs was convinced "that what New York wanted and needed was more and better straight news."<sup>86</sup> On taking over, he immediately expanded the local and national news in amount and depth, as well as covering the business and financial sectors of the city, something that no one else at the time was doing. With a skilled editorial staff blessed with foresight, the *Times* scooped its competitors time and time again, reporting the Russian Navy's annihilation at the hands of the Imperial Japanese Fleet at the Battle of the Tsushima Strait and later the sinking of the Titanic correctly and hours before the other major newspapers got reliable information. It is this sort of solid, independent and reliable news

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<sup>84</sup> Emery and Smith (1954), pg 295.

<sup>85</sup> Tulis (1987), pg. 75.

<sup>86</sup> Douglas (1999), pg 125.

reporting that has become the industry standard for the media, both print and broadcast, in the modern era.

The presidency itself by this time had become acknowledged as the symbolic leader of the nation, one that should be supported without question in a time of crisis. The more modern presidents, beginning with Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, felt appeals to the people was appropriate when contending with the other branches, especially the Congress. Every president in the modern era claims an exclusive power over foreign policy and, for the most part, the Congress has largely abdicated that power. With this relinquishing of power by the legislative branch, presidents are in a unique position in the field of foreign policy to dominate as both the substantive and the symbolic leader, allowing them to be the focus of the people's patriotic attachments and identification.

If this theory bears out, it will support the existing literature in the idea that modern rallies are just that: modern. It will not only supply weight to the idea that the combination of the symbolic presidency and the opinion mobilization of the mass media combine to create this rally around the flag and around the president in particular, but also that the symbolic presidency in particular is what gives the rally its start. That contribution would be important and interesting to be sure. Just as interesting and possibly more so, however, is the possibility that these cases fail to support the theory as laid out above. If these cases show full-blown rally effects in such a time, this creates a number of problems for the current literature on the early presidency, on the rally effect or both. Questions such as 'how responsive to public opinion was the traditional presidency?' and 'does the traditional presidency gain power from its connection to public approval?' become valid in this sort of situation.

## Testing the Theory

To test this developmental theory of the rally effect, I decided to select one case from each of what I expected to be the three different periods in the development of my determinants. Speaking generally, each of the cases selected need to fit with Mueller's definition of a rally event: "an event which (1) is international and (2) involves the United States and particularly the president directly; and [is]... (3) specific, dramatic and sharply focused."<sup>87</sup> The first case will represent a least-likely case study.<sup>88</sup> By choosing a pre-Civil War event and coding the reactions to that event, my theory assumes that I will find no significant rally, as the public doesn't interact with the elites through mass media on the same scale, nor do they have the same patriotic allegiance to the president as the proper source for action. With the second case, I expect to see some form of rally, as the mass media is emerging, especially in the New York market with the struggle between the Hearst and Pulitzer publishing empires, and the concept of national consciousness is beginning to exert its dominance over more local identities with one consequence being the acceptance of the President as the national leader. It is this middle case that I expect to be the most interesting. While the mass media is fully independent at this time, the idea of the president as symbolic leader of the nation is lagging well behind his ability to lead in the terms administrative functions. This lag in development allows for the analysis of the rally effect during a time when one factor, and not the other, is developed. My third case will be early in what I expect to be the modern era of the rally effect, after the acceptance of the President as the public and legislative leader in the government operating directly for the interests of the people as a

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<sup>87</sup> Mueller (1970), pg 21.

<sup>88</sup> Here I am using the term from Eckstein (1975), as described in George and Bennett (2005), pg. 121.

whole. Furthermore, placing my third case within the transition period between the two modes of presidential leadership,<sup>89</sup> roughly between the beginnings of the two Roosevelt administrations, I will be able to further look at the evolution of the rally effect as a contributor to executive - in contrast to legislative - power.

With these items in mind, my final case selections were the opening months of the Mexican-American War, the Spanish-American War and the mobilization of the US for World War I (1917). The three specific rally events, arranged sequentially, will be the reporting of the Thornton Affair (May 10, 1846), the explosion and sinking of the battleship *USS Maine* (February 15, 1898), and the publication of the Zimmerman Telegram (March 1, 1917).

The methods employed in this work will be mixed. The first portion of each case will be a quantitative analysis that will attempt to measure public opinion on the President and on Congress. These are the two logical institutional targets for any rally of public opinion coming from the crises examined. I will also look to see how the papers are treating public opinion as well. This last piece contributes to the analysis by giving insight on how the elites, represented by the editorial staffs of the papers, are discussing the actions and beliefs of the non-elite members of society.

In the absence of hard public opinion poll data from the time, decades before Gallup and Roper looked at FDR's presidential approval ratings in the first scientific polls, this work needed some sort of equivalent proxy measure. To develop this, I looked at the discussion of the government in the available media of the time, the newspaper. Specifically, I used the

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<sup>89</sup> For further discussion of these two modes, see Tulis (1987 and 2006).

most vibrant media market in the country: New York. I chose this specific city, as opposed to other possibilities, due to previous usage in various research projects.<sup>90</sup>

First, I selected three specific potential rally events, one from each of the three periods I expected to find in the rally effect's development. More specifically, I had to select the date for each, namely the first date that the event would start affecting the papers' coverage of the President, Congress and public opinion. Related to this selection, I had to select papers from which to code based, as I mentioned before, on their partisan leanings. In two of my cases, this was relatively easy to do via third-party sources independent of the papers themselves. However, in one case, I read a full month's worth of editorials from six different publications to determine the leanings myself.<sup>91</sup> While I developed a contingency plan to account for situations in which acceptable papers were not present in the New York market, this come into play and that plan will not be outlined here.

Next I selected ten issues of each paper for the month before and for the six months after the rally event, giving me a set of seventy issues for each, for a total of two hundred ten individual issues from which to code for each case. For example, the Thornton Affair, the event that sparked the Mexican-American War, occurred on April 25 and the President was notified late on May 9. The event was not publically reported in Washington until May 10. Under the coding scheme, I coded from April 10 – May 9 as pre-rally, with May 10- November 10 as my post-rally period.

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<sup>90</sup> Baker and Oneal (2001), Powlick and Katz (1998), Oneal and Bryan (1995) and others.

<sup>91</sup> The case mentioned here is my third study, World War I. I selected the month of September 1916; This was particularly attractive because, being the month immediately prior to the presidential elections, it had the most potential to show the papers' support or criticism for Wilson and his policies.

After reading each article, I coded it for two things: mentions of the President, Congress and public opinion; and attitude towards those three targets. Each article was coded as mention (1) or no mention (0). Thus, for the Spanish-American War, a direct reference to President McKinley, “the president’s policy towards Cuba” or “the current administration’s relations with Spain” were all coded as mentions. At the same time, simple mentions of the state of Cuba, the movements of military assets, or members of Congress, without the above mentions, were not coded as referring to the President, though the last may have been, depending on the specific mention, coded as a mention of Congress. Finally, the tone of the article was assessed and coded as to whether it was generally supportive of or positive towards the specific institution’s goals, antagonistic or in opposition to those stated goals, or neutral. Separately they were coded as supportive (1), neutral (0) or unsupportive (-1). Individual articles could and, in some cases, were coded for mentions of and attitude towards more than one of my areas. If an article had both positive and negative statements in it, which some did, they were summed up, with negative scores becoming -1, positive scores becoming 1, and zero sums being left at that score.

Two potential criticisms arise from this method of data collection. The first is the idea that this creates a construct validity problem. This posits that the measure used does not in fact capture public opinion at all, but rather elite discourse. This problem is recognized and understood. However, there is no way to differentiate between elite and broader public discourse without scientific polling data, which does not exist for the time period in question. With this concern in mind, I have taken a number of steps in an attempt to account for this problem. The papers that were selected for coding all have large readerships for their respective times, indicating that they are written with a wider non-elite market in mind; this

is especially true in the latter two cases. I am also coding published letters to the editor as separate articles, allowing for some capture of direct public opinion statements, albeit screened by the editorial staff.

The second criticism is the problem of using media-based textual analysis as my central data source, while arguing that there is no mass media in (at least some of) the time periods under examination. This critique is less concerning than that outlined above. The media that will be coded are not mass media in the modern sense and have local circulation in the New York area, typically of less than 150,000 daily, rather than the modern circulation of the *New York Times* Sunday edition, numbering nearly 1.7 million nationwide. In the last case, as the circulation of the New York papers increases drastically after the turn of the century, this criticism becomes more of a concern. However, as this is a study intended to examine the concurrent development of the rally effect with the emergence of the mass media and the attachment to the presidency as a symbolic leader for the country, the development of the mass media is expected and furthermore understood as an asset rather than a point of weakness.

I examined the collected data in an attempt to see any change in the patterns of support in the media outlets for the president and Congress. As hard quantitative methods, such as regression, that would be available for use on modern data are not appropriate for proxy data such as I used, much of each of the three substantive chapters will be analysis of summary statistics, with some light quantitative analysis, such as T-tests, to show possible differences from the norm. A concern with this quantitative measure, as with proxy measures coming from qualitative sources, is not a hard enough measure to do any substantive quantitative work on. This is a valid criticism, but in the absence of rigorous scientifically

collected data, this sort of textual analysis is the best proxy measure of public opinion available for the time. The idea that quantitative analysis is always the best is not necessarily valid, either. As Salmon (1990) pointed out, “causal concepts cannot be fully explicated in terms of statistical relationships” (pg 168). The addition of a qualitative examination works to address much of the problem.

In that connected qualitative analysis, I told the story of the periods in question, trying to reconstruct the shifting patterns of support for the national government and for the president in particular. Process tracing “attempts to trace the links between possible causes and observed outcomes.”<sup>92</sup> By looking at as detailed a historical record as possible, including interview transcripts, historical accounts, and other sources, the researcher tries to draw a link between the story as his or her theory says it should be and the history that is recorded.

Kingdon’s look at public policies, Putnam’s study of Italian civic tradition and Allison and Zelikow’s examination of the Cuban Missile Crisis are all good examples of process tracing.<sup>93</sup> The scope of this paper, covering three discrete events in depth, will not be as in-depth as these studies. This portion of the analysis will be detailed enough to examine the trends in public opinion of the executive and how the events changed or did not change how the public saw the office and how the office dealt with that perception.

A final methodological concern comes from the use of the media and the connection of the newspapers to the parties. Early in their history, as I have stated earlier in this chapter, the newspapers functioned essentially as mouthpieces of the parties that sponsored them, strictly toeing the party line. In some cases, the Presidents even changed the staff to put into

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<sup>92</sup> George and Bennett, (2005), pg. 6.

<sup>93</sup> See Kingdon (1984), Putnam (1993) and Allison and Zelikow (1999).

place editors more to their own liking and more amenable to their policies. This practice changes over the course of time as the papers make a break from the partisan identifications that their earlier incarnations had embodied. As the papers move away from partisan control, this becomes more problematic for the selection criteria laid out for this project. This is especially relevant in the case of President Wilson, the Zimmerman Telegram and US entry into WWI. Before this change, Democratic papers would always support a Democratic President, Republican papers would always support a Republican President, and they would each always report more negatively on a President of the opposition party. After this change, the papers would find themselves freer to change the tone of their reporting based on how well the President is lining up with the issue preferences of the specific editorial staff. The only situation in which the two methods of selecting the coded papers for the case study would differ is if the President himself changes his stated policy in response to the rally event. If this occurs, the party-affiliated papers would presumably not alter their coverage. They are either supportive or in opposition to the White House based on their partisan attachments. However, if the President changes policy in a time where the papers are supportive or critical based on policy preferences, the papers would be expected to flip, with a paper supporting an earlier policy now being critical and vice versa. While there is a difference in the outcomes of these two coding schemes, the changes cancel themselves out. In other words, it is presumed that, assuming no rally of public support, one paper will remain supportive, one critical and one neutral no matter what the President does. If he makes no change, the papers will remain the same before and after the rally event. In a situation where the President changes policy in an era of issue-preferring editorial staffs (as opposed to partisan-preferring staffs), the papers will simply flip-flop, with the previously

supportive paper being critical, the critical becoming supportive and the neutral remaining the same. Since the spirit of the selection criteria is an attempt get a broad sample of the political spectrum of the time, it is just as appropriate to select the papers in the sample based on their policy preferences as it is to select them on the partisan identifications. This move from partisan alliances to ideological alliances might be expected to increase the rally effect as editorial staffs find themselves more able to change their opinions based on the ‘facts on the ground.’ This would become an expected outcome of the evolution of the independent mass media and lend strength to the developmental theory of the rally effect that I am testing.

There are a number of potential concerns with regards to the specific cases chosen and how the circumstances of those analyses work into the theory. Discussion of those issues, as they are specific to the cases in question and less concerning for the project as a whole, is deferred here and will be addressed within those chapters.

## Chapter 3:

### The Rally Effect in Infancy: The Mexican-American War

#### Introduction

On April 25, 1846, Captain Seth Thornton, a regular Army veteran of the Florida Indian Wars, rode at the head of a group of 63 dragoons into a Mexican ranch just on the American side of the Rio Grande. As Thornton and some of his officers questioned a Mexican civilian, looking for information on the reported movement of Mexican forces nearby, gunfire erupted from hundreds of Mexican soldiers hidden in the brush around the ranch. Trapped in a corral with no cover and taking murderous fire from all sides, the American soldiers quickly surrendered, with 11 men dead and 6 others wounded. The first shots of the Mexican-American War had been fired. This predictably sent a shockwave of anti-Mexican sentiment and patriotic fervor through the population of the young nation. A hundred years later, Presidents could have counted on this sort of incident for a surge in public approval for them and an accompanying increase in their political capital and, as Neustadt puts it, their “power to persuade.”<sup>94</sup> Did it, however, send the same support to President James Polk’s aid?

Recapping from my theory chapter, the causes of rallies are identified throughout the academic literature as centering around two general items: patriotism and elite behavior. Especially important for this work are the existence of both the symbolic presidency, the recognized target for that patriotism and center for action, and a coherent and independent mass media to codify and express that elite opinion to the mass of the American public. During the period of the Mexican-American War, the above causes for the modern rally

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<sup>94</sup> Neustadt (1990), pg 11.

around the flag effect were lacking or, at best, in their infancy. The twin issues of slavery and states' rights were increasingly dividing the nation and the occupants of the White House had been, since the departure of Andrew Jackson, largely weak compromise candidates<sup>95</sup>; Polk was no exception to this rule. In fact, he had made himself something of a lame duck by pledging at the divided Democratic National Convention to serve only a single term, the only President to date to do so.<sup>96</sup> Regional identities were still strong, with many people identifying themselves first as citizens of their states rather than of the United States. In fact, the way that the "United States" as a name of the country was indicative of this difference; at this time it was considered a plural term ("The United States *are*" or "The United States *see*") as opposed the singular ("The United States *is*" or "The United States *sees*") used in later years.

The media as an independent political force did not exist at all. It was only a few years before the war, in 1843, that Richard Hoe invented the rotary steam press, creating the penny-press industry in the US and Europe.<sup>97</sup> While numerous, especially in the large cities of the country, the vast majority of newspapers were essentially political mouthpieces of the major parties and packaged the 'news' in favor of their supporters. Their main sources of income were subventions and blackmail, the former coming from government and the parties directly and the latter from people who didn't want certain issues, especially social indiscretions, reported on.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Green (1939), pg 14.

<sup>96</sup> Wheelan (2007), pg 6. For an extended discussion of the compromise and divided nature of Polk's administration, see Skowronek (2006), pgs 104-9.

<sup>97</sup> Eisenstein (1979), pg. 127.

<sup>98</sup> Winston (2005), pg 99-100.

The Mexican-American War was the country's first experience in aggressive war, where the US actually invaded the territory of another nation and defeated them by forcing them into submission. While wars of aggression were defined much later by the United Nations, it is fairly clear to historians that, while some of the actions taken by General Taylor on the Rio Grande would have been justified as self-defense, assuming that the border claim itself was legitimate, but that the later campaigns into what would become the American Southwest and central Mexico could not be so easily legitimized. This is especially true with a hindsight understanding of the Mexican army's capabilities. It will be interesting to see if and how much this fact will play out in the analysis of public opinion.

### **Case Selection**

As explained in an earlier chapter, one of the case studies included in this work needed to be solidly within the era of the traditional presidency. An examination of the rally around the flag effect in this period is essential as it captures the presidency during a period when it was still in its developmental infancy and, despite having some powerful men in residence, was far from the prime mover of American politics that it is in the modern era. I chose the Mexican-American War because it clearly does not have the hallmarks of modernity that the literature points to as being responsible for the rally effect.

Communications across the country still took weeks at this time, even during crises such as the outbreak of military hostilities. Most interests were still regional, with allegiances more to state identity than to a national one. This is a perfect example of a least-likely case, using Eckstein's terminology.<sup>99</sup> There should not be a significant rally to the president in this time.

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<sup>99</sup> Eckstein, 1975.

The concern when setting a rally point upon which to base the textual research for the Mexican-American War comes in the lag of communication during the time. Under modern circumstances, the actual event causing the rally effect would easily and logically be chosen as the point from which to mark our rally. This is not a good point to mark public opinion from in this case. The telegraph, the first real method of near-instant long-distance communication, was less than ten years old in the United States and had not yet reached all parts of the more developed East Coast, much less the untamed and disputed frontier of Texas. Because of this, news of the Thornton Affair, which occurred on April 24, did not reach Washington until the late evening of May 9, more than 2 weeks later. By this point, Mexican artillery had traded fire with the border encampment Fort Texas (later renamed Fort Brown, then Brownsville) and General Zachary Taylor had fought two battles with Mexican forces. The official resolution of war, attached to appropriation bills and passed by Congress on May 13, is a much better point from which to count. This information would have almost certainly reached the New York papers on the same day of the President's signature, quickly put into print then distributed to the public. In the end, though, I decided against this as well. Because the attack had not been kept secret from the public, most papers began publishing on it in advance of the declaration. I decided, instead, to place the rally event for the purposes of coding on the date of its first possible mention in the papers. The report from General Taylor came to the President late in the evening on Saturday May 9. As none of the papers published late enough in the evening to print the news that day, I chose to count from May 10.

Selecting papers from this period of history for the quantitative component of this chapter posed its own special problem. The papers of the time were essentially arms of their supporting political parties and served largely as their mouthpieces. The *New York Sun*,

edited by Moses Beach and best known for its much later “Is there a Santa Claus” editorial, was the major Democratic paper in New York City, already by then the largest city and news market in the Union. The *Sun* was, as Nelson describes it, “expansionist, bellicose ‘Young America’ personified,”<sup>100</sup> and went as far as to advocate throughout the war for the inclusion of all of Mexico into the United States. The *New York Herald*, edited by James Gordon Bennett Sr., serves this study as the opposition Whig paper, though it had originally supported Polk’s Democratic nomination for President. Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune*, belying its strong political ties of the future to the radical faction of the Republican Party, was politically independent at the time. It, like the *Herald*, was very strongly anti-war, though not necessarily anti-administration. This fact highlights my original reason for spreading out my selection of papers beyond simply one; a range must be sought that will balance out, ideally, the strong partisan leanings of the papers, both for and against the administration and the policy that is being examined, in this case the annexation of Texas, the desire to acquire California, the wish of the South to acquire new slave territory,<sup>101</sup> and the dream behind ‘Manifest Destiny,’ that of a country stretching “from sea to shining sea.”

### **Polk and the Early Presidency**

James Polk came into the Oval Office at the time in which the power of the presidency was at a crossroads. To really understand the office that Polk stepped into, we need to understand the program of the strongest executive to that time, Andrew Jackson, and

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<sup>100</sup> Nelson, 1988, pg. 74.

<sup>101</sup> Polk himself did not seem to pay much attention to this as a possible side effect of the war, as he did not openly object to the Wilmot Proviso banning slavery in any territory gained from Mexico.

how he had altered fundamentally the understanding of the relationship of the presidency to both Congress and to the people themselves.

Andrew Jackson, the hard-driving Revolutionary War veteran, had changed the executive into a popular leader. The theme of the Jackson presidency from a political point of view was equality of opportunity, the idea that no person should have special privileges beyond that afforded to everyone. Keeping in mind that this was a philosophy of its time in that it excluded African-Americans, Native Americans and women, this was still a significant shift.

Jackson had what might seem to us today to be a contradictory view of government. He directly attacked national institutions and expenditures, seeking to shrink the power of Washington. He eliminated the national bank, pulled federal subsidies from highways and canals, and constrained the size of the national military, especially the army. His pronouncements on the subject would warm the hearts of modern-day Republicans. While it came from his successor, Martin Van Buren's first message to Congress summed up beautifully Jackson's ideas towards government's interaction with the people:

All communities are apt to look to government for too much... the less government interferes with private pursuits the better for the general prosperity... its real duty is to leave every citizen and every interest to reap under its benign protection the rewards of virtue, industry and prudence.<sup>102</sup>

At the same time, he argued that the president was the true representative of the people themselves. The Jeffersonian wing of the Democratic party, lead by John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay, adhered to the old party principles of legislative supremacy. In the pre-Jackson era, presidents had reached out to the people, but with the understanding that the Congress

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<sup>102</sup> Van Buren's first annual message to Congress, 1837.

was the true representative body of the citizenry. Jackson, however, pointed to the fact that people voted, albeit indirectly, as a great mass for the chief executive and as such he was the representative of the whole people, rather than any one district or state. This was a direct challenge to the idea that Congress was the holder of that title. It gave to the White House a new potential source of power: popular power.

A number of changes in the electoral system gave a lot of credence to this new popular appeal made by “Old Hickory.” By the time of Jackson’s first election in 1828, only two states, Delaware and South Carolina, still used legislative selection to name electors for president. The others all had direct election by the public of their electors.<sup>103</sup> With the exception of George Washington, the parties had until that time nominated presidential candidates in congressional caucuses, a practice informally and somewhat derisively known as “King Caucus.” After Adams had been elected in 1824 without the caucus’ approval, the practice collapsed and was replaced by the practice of having national presidential nominating conventions, a practice that exists to this day. However, Jackson became the first president since Washington to come to the office with no involvement, direct or indirect, from the Congress. Combined, these structural changes meant that, for the first time, the President had valid grounds to argue that he had a mandate from the people. Taking this new source of power solidly in hand, Jackson moved to expand the power of the executive branch greatly.

This shift had infuriated the Whig party, but they could not deny the power of the Jacksonian popular tactics that had won him reelection and ushered his Vice-President, Martin Van Buren, into the executive mansion as well. Adopting the populist appeals of the

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<sup>103</sup> Milkis and Nelson (2008), pg. 124.

Jacksonian campaign strategies helped the Whigs elect William Henry Harrison, a hero of the Indian Wars, to office in 1840.<sup>104</sup> Some scholars think that Harrison planned on giving up control of many of the executive functions to Congress, taking on a sort of figurehead status.<sup>105</sup> Whatever plans for the office Harrison may have had, they did not come to fruition, as he died one month into his term, leaving John Tyler to the office. Tyler's place on the party ticket had been an effort to balance the divided Whig party's larger wing in the north, with its nationalist leanings, and its smaller states' rights southern faction. Tyler, a "lapsed Democrat who relapsed after assuming" the presidency,<sup>106</sup> took the reins of power in a time when the succession to the presidency was not certain, setting the precedent that the Vice-President becomes President *in his own right*. He also resisted much of his own party's domestic agenda, including vetoes of two Congressional attempts to revive a national bank in 1841.

While Tyler was successful in preventing a Whig-backed evisceration of executive power, he was not able to prevent Congress from taking back some powers. In foreign policy, the Senate began to more jealously guard the 'advice' portion of the "advice and consent" clause of the treaty-making power, repeatedly defeating treaties on which they had not been consulted.<sup>107</sup> Congress began demanding more information on executive actions, though Polk himself denied these.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, pg 135-7.

<sup>105</sup> Binkley (1947), pg 89.

<sup>106</sup> Crenson (2007), pg 91.

<sup>107</sup> Cheever and Haviland (1952), pg 48. The advice and consent clause of treaty confirmation is laid out in Article II, Section 2 of the US Constitution.

<sup>108</sup> Schlesinger (1973), pgs 47-9.

Polk, when he came into office, was a worthy successor to the Jacksonian concept of the executive. He was one of if not the hardest working chief executives in the history of the United States. He was poor at delegating responsibilities and took much of the work of the office onto himself. He had a single secretary, Joseph Walker, whom he paid out of his own pocket and, when Walker went on vacation, the eleventh President of the United States did double-duty. “Young Hickory,” as Polk was called by some, upheld all of the rights and privileges that Jackson had won for the office, and even expanded the power of the presidency in some areas, especially with regards to day-to-day management of the various departments. Meeting with his Cabinet over 350 times in the course of his single term, Polk made his six department heads work full-time year-round, eschewing the practice of giving the secretaries long vacations during Congressional recesses.<sup>109</sup> While later presidents in the nineteenth century did not follow his example with regards to the direct and close supervision of the budget (with the exception of Lincoln), Polk asserted the right of the president to directly supervise and control the activities of the various departments, something that would become the norm in the twentieth century.

If the presidency itself was at a junction, the country was as well. Much of the young country was still agricultural in nature, with Southern cotton being by far its biggest export, but the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution can be seen, especially in the northeast. The number of Americans employed in the manufacturing sector was approaching a million in 1845, more than doubling over the course of the decade. The boom of the railroads was beginning. Even in agriculture, manufacturing advances in machine tools were advancing

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<sup>109</sup> Wheelan (2007), pg 72-3.

production. As a whole, the nation was beginning fundamental changes that would change the course of its history.

## **Background**

The root causes of the Mexican-American War, as with so many conflicts between neighbors, go back many years before the guns actually started firing in April of 1846. In 1823, shortly after overthrowing her first post-Spanish government, Mexico allowed Stephen Austin's father Moses and a band of American settlers to start a colony in the far-flung border province where it had little luck setting up outposts of its own. The only conditions were that they had to learn Spanish, become Roman Catholic and renounce slavery, though the last rule was modified to allow the importation of adult slaves, but not their sale. In less than ten years, there were more Americans in Texas than Mexicans, many of whom remained Protestants and traded in slaves, defying official government policy.

By 1830, the head of the Mexican Boundary Commission, Manuel de Mier y Teran, warned that if American immigration was not curtailed, that Texas would be "lost forever."<sup>110</sup> The Mexican Congress banned further US immigration and the importation of any further slaves. They also moved to encourage settlements by other groups in the area and built military outposts designed to extend the country's hold into the area more solidly. In 1833, the Texans held their first convention and subsequently requested full status as an autonomous state in Mexico. When they realized that autonomy was not going to happen, the leaders of the province determined that nothing short of full independence would satisfy them. When Sam Houston went to Washington to drum up support, President Andrew Jackson was sympathetic, but was not willing to offer any direct assistance. Texas declared

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<sup>110</sup> Wheelan (2007), pg 44.

its independence in 1836 and, with tacit American support but not much more, managed to win that independence through force of arms. It cemented its place as a recognized independent nation by establishing diplomatic ties to Great Britain, France and the United States over the next few years.

President Tyler made it a goal for his administration to get Texas into the Union, but the treaty of annexation failed to get the needed two-thirds support in the Senate, northern senators worried about the extension of slavery and everyone concerned about the war that Mexico promised if annexation became a reality. In the wake of the election of Polk, a candidate that ran in strong support of the annexation of Texas, the outgoing president tried again, this time as a joint resolution. This time it worked and in the last days of Tyler's administration Texas became a state.

The annexation ultimately created the border dispute that would touch off the war. By the vast majority of historical precedents, the Nueces River was the southern border of Texas. Spain drew the boundary between Texas and Coahuila on that line in 1816 and it remained so for the next two decades on maps and atlases, including Moses Austin's own map when he was colonizing Texas at the invitation of the newly independent Mexican government.

It was not until the rebellion against Mexican rule and the never-ratified Treaties of Velasco that Texas made a claim to the land between the two rivers; it was made less for the arid snake-filled waste at the lower end of the Rio Grande and more in support of a claim on eastern New Mexico and especially Santa Fe. The Texas Congress declared the Rio Grande as the border shortly after independence. Once statehood came in December of 1845, the White House began recognizing the border at the Rio Grande and Secretary of War William Marcy ordered Taylor to move to occupy the disputed area until the boundary had been

finalized. Clearly the Mexican did not have an opinion on this issue, as it considered all of Texas to still be part of Mexico.

### **Rally Event: The Thornton Affair**

In the days and weeks leading up to the Thornton Affair, the New York papers didn't deal with the Texas issue deeply. Most articles dealing with the President at all were concerned with Oregon. They focused around the negotiations on and subsequent passage of permission for Polk to serve notice to Great Britain that the US was pulling out of the treaty for joint administration of Oregon, negotiated in 1827. What little was said in the opposition papers about the Texas boundary question was predictably put in scornful terms, declaring that the President had not provided General Taylor with enough troops to accomplish the goals set forth.<sup>111</sup>

News of the April 25 attack took until May 9 to reach Washington and was reported publicly to Congress at noon on May 11. The President's message boldly asserted that "a state of war now exists" and that Mexico had "invaded our territory and shed American blood on American soil."<sup>112</sup> It touched off a firestorm when it was finally publicized. The evening supplement of the anti-war *Herald* described Taylor's position as "most disastrous and perilous," surrounded by thousands of Mexican troops and cut off from his supply base. "Such imbecility, incoherence and inconsistency," the same editorial went on to say, "have never been visible in any administration, as now appear to mark the conduct of the present one in relation to foreign affairs."<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> *Herald*, 4/23/1846.

<sup>112</sup> President Polk's May 11 message to Congress, quoted in Wheelan (2007), pg 95.

<sup>113</sup> *Herald*, 5/11/1846.

The vast majority of the country's citizens were caught up in the war fever. There was strong opposition in New England, remote from the frontier and strongly anti-slavery. However, this was tempered once war was declared by the recognition that the nation's troops in harm's way needed support even in the midst of opposition to the policy that put them there. That aside, support was strong everywhere else in the nation. However, Congress was strangely divided, at least in regards to what we would consider 'strange' in the terms of modern rally effects. The Democrats, controlling both chambers of Congress, brought the President's message to the floor quickly. However, it hit solid Whig opposition, most of which cried foul, arguing that Polk had begun the war himself by moving Taylor's force into the disputed region. The Democratic leadership attached a preamble that stated that war existed to an appropriation for ten million dollars and fifty thousand men. While nearly every Whig supported striking this statement from the bill, they were overruled on a party-line vote.<sup>114</sup> Outmaneuvered, the Whigs found themselves caught between a political rock and hard place: they could oppose money designated for the troops in the field and already in combat or support a bill that recognized the state of war. In the end, only 16 votes, 14 in the House and 2 in the Senate, opposed the appropriations bill. The war was now a fact by Congressional resolution.

The papers reacted predictably to this. The *Sun* managed to take both sides in a strange way; in the same article, the editors commended the independent course and attention to principles of the opposition, especially Senator John Calhoun of South Carolina, but still discussed the opposition as misguided and dangerous to the unity of the nation in a time of

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<sup>114</sup> The Twenty-Ninth Congress had solid Democratic majorities in both chambers. The Senate had 34 Democrats to 24 Whigs, while the House had 142 Democrats, 79 Whigs, and 6 American Party members, better known as the "Know Nothing" Party.

crisis. The Whigs railed against the bill and lauded Calhoun by name. “Our admiration of [Sen. Calhoun],” wrote the *Herald*’s editorial page, “increases from the fact that... he refused to vote upon the question as it was presented,” being a completely unfair and blatantly partisan tactic.<sup>115</sup> The *Tribune* attacked the move to war, saying that while the war would undoubtedly “afford an opportunity for the display of patriotism and valor,” any value would be overwhelmed by increased government centralization, a huge national debt and the exposure of the nation’s financial weaknesses. If it went on long enough, it could also lead “to the interference of the Great Powers [of Europe].”<sup>116</sup> They went on to say that Congress had been forced to vote “not merely on *confidence*, which is bad enough on great matters of public concern, but on *faith* which... is the evidence of things unseen.”<sup>117</sup>

The media, as members of Congress had, reacted along party lines. Democrat-leaning papers denied accusations of aggressive war and described the conflict in a combination of ways. The *Sun* stated that it was “an acknowledged law of nations that when a country sinks into a state of anarchy... it becomes the duty of the most powerful of [its] neighbors to... settle its affairs.”<sup>118</sup> The *Sun*’s editorial staff was making the basic argument that, because Mexico could not control its northern territories, the United States should step in and help by divesting its southern neighbor of them. Others emphasized the abuses that the government had put up with over time and to which the country was now honor bound to respond.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *Herald*, 5/15/1846.

<sup>116</sup> *Tribune*, both from 5/15/1846.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 5/16/1846, emphasis in the original.

<sup>118</sup> *Sun*, 5/28/1846.

<sup>119</sup> While not in this portion of study for purposes of the quantitative data, the *New York Evening Post* and the *Washington Union* both ran stories to this effect on 5/12/1846.

They also accused the Whigs of being “willing to tie up the hands of the president in such a manner as must ultimately bring disgrace upon the nation.”<sup>120</sup>

The anti-war papers denounced the move as a simple case of an unjust imperialist land-grab. “No true honor, no national benefit, can possibly accrue from an unjust war,” penned the politically independent *Tribune*. “Shut your eyes to the whole course of events,” Greeley wrote sarcastically, “and it will be come easy to prove we are a ... ill-used people and Mexico has... greatly imposed upon us.”<sup>121</sup> If one looked at the full balance of the facts, he said, it was obvious that the administration was acting both unjustly and imperialistically towards Mexico.

Bennett’s *Herald*, despite its strong Whig leanings, changed its tune in the days right after Congress acted. Its editor mused, almost prophetically it seems, that the war could lay the “foundation of a new age... affecting both this continent and... Europe.”<sup>122</sup> This mirrors to an extent the tension that was felt in the Whig members in Congress, caught between two undesirable choices. However, both the Whig and the independent anti-war papers continually attacked President Polk himself and the pro-war faction in Congress while taking care to remind readers that they did in fact support the soldiers in the field. “Never,” railed the *Herald* in reference to the way that Congress had slipped the declaration of war in as a preamble to a military appropriation bill, had a party placed “its sordid purposes into the arena of necessary legislation with a front more impudent, unjust and unjustifiable.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> *Sun*, 5/11 and 5/12/1846.

<sup>121</sup> *Tribune*, 5/15 and 5/13/1846.

<sup>122</sup> *Herald*, 5/13/1846.

<sup>123</sup> *Herald*, 5/18/46

The public, for its part, seems to have largely signed on to the war effort. Even in New England, the center of anti-war opposition at the government level, volunteer companies were quickly formed. Calhoun recognized this, writing disappointedly that the public was like “a young man of 18, full of health and vigor and disposed for adventure of any description, but without wisdom or experience to guide him.”<sup>124</sup>

The Polk administration may have in fact used the war and the awkward position that it was forcing its political opponents into as a lever by which to force through measures that might not have otherwise passed, something that modern presidents enjoying a rally would certainly find familiar as a legislative strategy. After several hectic weeks of foreign policy legislation, Polk managed to prod the Congress into addressing his domestic agenda, specifically the independent treasury and a lowering of the tariff. The Whigs tried to use the war as a means of opposition to the domestic bills. They argued that it was foolish to, at the very time that the nation’s budget needs were exploded due to war expenses, lower customs duties. The administration countered by saying that encouraged imports would more than make up for the loss in per-import income. The latter argument carried the day.<sup>125</sup>

Looking to the quantitative data, there is not much to support a finding of a rally. Rally events show an immediate and nearly unconditional increase in the focus on and support for the president in the modern era. This occurs with regularity despite the success or failures of the President’s actions. While mentions of the president should increase after the publication of the Thornton Affair, they do not; in fact, while not statistically significant, they actually *decrease* slightly in the months after the beginning of the war. Mentions of

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<sup>124</sup> Calhoun, quoted in the *Tribune*, 5/28/1846.

<sup>125</sup> Schroeder, pgs. 41-42.

public reaction towards the war and commentary on public opinion by the papers increases slightly, but again not in a statistically significant manner. The only statistically significant increase in mentions comes for Congress. Mentions of the legislative branch increase by more than a third on average over the six months after the first mentions of the Thornton Affair, as compared to the month before.<sup>126</sup>

When understood in the context of the strong political parties that were centered in the Congress, this is not a significant surprise. Much of the division over the war was along partisan lines and, with the party leadership in Congress, the debates in that body would become the most fertile ground from which to cover government action on the topic. What does this mean? I believe the increase in mentions of Congress has to do with a party system that, at least in comparison to today, was relatively disciplined. The partisan debates of the day were played out in the chambers of Congress. Executive direction of these battles during the early years of the nation came from behind the scenes and as such did not make for juicy headlines. If you wanted to see and cover the root of politics in 1846, you looked to Capitol Hill, not to the White House, and the data presented in this case bear this out.

To see evidence of a rally, I looked at the attitude of those mentions. The coverage of the president, surprisingly from a modern standpoint, goes more negative in general, though it misses statistical significance (except at the 0.2 level). While mentions of public opinion also dip into the negative, this change is even less significant than the one for the president. Again, we see that the only significant change comes in the attitude towards Congress; the approval *drops* by over a quarter of a point (on a 2-point scale).

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<sup>126</sup> See Table 1 for more on this.

It does seem that the press became more antagonistic towards government in this time of crisis. My examination turned to see if this was an effect of the papers themselves, rather than a change in opinions. While both the *Herald* and the *Sun* moved towards their respective bases, the *Tribune*, which had endorsed Polk in the election, switched from moderately supportive of Polk to full-out anti-war mode, blasting away at both the President and the Congressional leadership, run by the Democrats. It is exactly this major shift, while the other two papers move to their partisan extremes, which concerned me. Is this shift masking an actual rally? In fact, it could be obscuring a statistically significant shift in the patterns of mentions as well. I felt this was plausible enough to warrant a closer look, especially since the *Tribune* had nearly double the count of articles that the *Sun* had, and consistently half again the number that the *Herald* published.

When I reexamined the data and excluded the *Tribune* from the model, I found a completely different story. The significance of changes in Congress, both in mentions and in attitude, disappears. The only statistically significant finding is on the papers' attitudes towards public opinion.<sup>127</sup> The papers reported on opinion more favorably after the Thornton Affair hit the market. Much of this was reporting on public rallies and the like related to the war. While impossible to prove, it seems reasonable to think that this represented at least to some extent editorial pandering to the readers. It is a brave editor that is willing to tell their own readers that they are wrong on a topic the readers feel strong about. Any changes in the number of mentions of and the attitude towards President Polk and his policies remained insignificant.

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<sup>127</sup> See Table 2 for more on this.

In the modern era, people rally to both the Congress and the President. The old adage, “politics end at the water’s edge” hold true in contemporary times, but apparently not during the Mexican-American War for Polk and the Twenty-ninth Congress. Even though patriotic fervor was sweeping the nation, it does not seem that the Democrats, whether in Congress or in the White House, managed to gain any additional support from this rally event. In fact the Democrats lost control of the House in the 1846 midterm elections, despite significant military victories in the ongoing war. The people certainly supported the troops and the war itself. It appears that there was a disconnect in the minds of the voting public between the fortunes of the Democratic party and the President in the elections on the one hand, and their patriotic support of the troops in the field and of the country as a whole in a time of war. Looking into the historical literature,<sup>128</sup> it seems that the midterms were dominated by a number of issues, only one of which was the war itself. Even in strongly anti-war districts, the vast majority of those members who had voted for the war measures were sent back to Washington.

### **The War**

When General Taylor moved to occupy the disputed region between the Rio Grande and the Nueces River, it was evident that this would cause a reaction from Mexican forces. This possibility was discussed at length in cabinet meetings. When the hostilities began, General Taylor found himself on the border with most of the tiny United States standing army, around 4,000 men. He quickly sent a report to Washington and penned urgent requests to the governors of Texas and Louisiana for volunteer troops, four regiments each, totaling about five thousand men.

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<sup>128</sup> Schoeder (1973), pgs 57-62 discusses this at length.

On May 9, word reached Washington that the expected “collision between the American and Mexican forces” had occurred.<sup>129</sup> Two days later, the delay owing to the fact that May 10 was a Sunday, Polk sent a strongly worded message to Congress stating that Mexico had “shed American blood upon American soil.”<sup>130</sup> Congress, amid some debate, voted to approve an appropriations bill that contained a statement of war by large majorities in both chambers and the president signed it on May 13. Senator Calhoun, who refused to vote on the measure because of the preamble, stated bluntly with a touch of prophesy:

It [Polk’s actions leading to the war] sets the example which will enable all future Presidents to bring about a state of things, in which Congress shall be forced, without deliberation, or reflection, to declare war, however opposed to its convictions of justice or expediency.<sup>131</sup>

Polk himself took an unprecedented role in the direction of the war. He showed what the presidency could do administratively in a time of war and established “that a president without previous military experience could provide decisive wartime leadership.”<sup>132</sup>

However, Polk was a loyal Democrat and worried about the reputation that Taylor, a Whig, was getting from his victories and tried to remove General Winfield Scott, another Whig, from overall command by the creation of rank above him.

Political intrigue and partisan bickering aside, the people were vastly in favor of the war. “Nothing could dim the enthusiasm,” wrote Johannsen, “of that spring in 1846 when the first reports of victory on the Rio Grande were confirmed.”<sup>133</sup> Even the opposition papers, like the *Herald*, recognized this unity: “How is this to be accounted for, this almost perfect

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<sup>129</sup> Diary of James Polk.

<sup>130</sup> President Polk’s May 11 message to Congress, quoted in Wheelan (2007), pg 95.

<sup>131</sup> Calhoun to Commodore David Conner, quoted in Schroeder (1973), pg 24.

<sup>132</sup> Milkis and Nelson (2008), pg. 142.

<sup>133</sup> Johannsen, 1985, pg. 25.

union throughout the national mind... this sublime spectacle of military preparation, and military transition.”<sup>134</sup> The *Herald’s* editors attributed it to the power of the press, though others, including the Democratic *Sun*, stated that it was a mere fact of the republic: each person who shared in the government of the country “feels that the defense of his native land or of his country’s rights depends upon himself,” and that each time “the language of menace, or an act of outrage or insult” was directed at the government, it became a personal issue.<sup>135</sup>

The public was warned by the government and the media that Taylor’s position was precarious, facing as he was more than double his own numbers. The *Sun*, echoing stories from the Democrat flagship paper *Washington Union*, reported that the news of the victories at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma might be premature and exaggerated.<sup>136</sup> Taylor’s own dispatches, coming two days later, dispelled the public alarm and Washington “immediately assumed an air of celebration.”<sup>137</sup>

The government’s authorization for fifty thousand volunteers was filled within a few weeks, in some places as much as ten times over, such that lotteries had to be held to sort out which of the volunteers would be allowed to enlist. A few Whig papers, in the wake of the quick victories in the war’s first two battles, charged that the President had summoned too many volunteers to only be worried about Mexico and really intended to use them instead against Great Britain in Oregon.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> *Herald* 5/22/1846.

<sup>135</sup> *Sun* 5/20/1846.

<sup>136</sup> Reprinted from the *Washington Union* in the *New York Sun*, 5/23/1846.

<sup>137</sup> Johannsen, 1985, pg. 10.

<sup>138</sup> Reprinted from the *Washington National Intelligencer* in the *New York Herald*, 6/2/1846.

Over the six months after the initial attack on the Rio Grande, the time period covered in this study, Gen. Taylor repeatedly won stunning victories against numerically superior forces, relieving the Mexican siege of Fort Texas and occupying the northern Mexican cities of Matamoros, Camargo and Monterrey. News of other victories in New Mexico and California helped popular support as well. Despite this support for the troops, the vocal opposition to the war *policy* continued and got stronger. According to the Whigs, General Zachary Taylor and his “valiant band of intrepid adventurers [had] won brilliant victories [at Pala Alto and Resaca de la Palma], the logistical incompetence of the current administration notwithstanding.”<sup>139</sup> The *Tribune* suggested Polk’s impeachment as “an indemnity to the American people for the loss of... lives, which have been sacrificed in Mexico...”<sup>140</sup> Putting that into the modern context illuminates the difference in the political climate between the 1840s and the modern era of American government. Imagine the firestorm had a paper suggested the impeachment of FDR after Pearl Harbor or Bush after 9/11; it would certainly have paid a high retributive price in circulation numbers and advertising.

A significant partisan move on the part of the administration in September came when General Taylor negotiated an eight-week cease-fire with Mexican authorities. Polk was enraged by this and promptly ordered Taylor to continue his advance and moved to set up a second front invasion by sea. Whig congressional candidates had a useful argument that the President was interfering with the commanders in the field and therefore unnecessarily lengthening the conflict. Polk, for his part, had a deep distrust of the Whig generals, Taylor

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<sup>139</sup> *Herald*, 6/23/1846

<sup>140</sup> *Tribune*, 9/30/1846.

and Scott, and their political ambitions,<sup>141</sup> so much so that he sought unsuccessfully to create a new general rank above both of them, into which he could place a loyal Democrat.

As the data show, there may have been a disconnect in the minds of the people of the United States between support for the war against Mexico and support for the administration, especially when they got to the ballot boxes. In the modern era, these two ideas often become conflated. Because of the perception and often-explicit charges that any opposition to the administration's policies is unpatriotic, expressions of dissent become suppressed, either through a lack of expression or through a lack of reporting on those disagreeing messages. The aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks is a good example of this conflation. During the 2002, bucking the historical trend of the president's party losing seats in midterm elections, President George W. Bush and the Republican Party in general were able to marshal significant electoral gains against the Democratic Party both in Congress and at the state level throughout the nation. However, during the period under examination this was not yet the case. Early on, Polk seemed to be able to railroad Congress by "fusing Polk's partisan objectives with national patriotism."<sup>142</sup> However, as the war went on, political elites and citizens alike were more and more able see a separation between the administration and their loyalty to the country itself. The Democratic losses in the Congressional midterm elections in

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<sup>141</sup> Polk's suspicions would be quickly confirmed, as both Taylor and Scott would campaign for President in short order after the war, Taylor being elected to succeed Polk and Scott running unsuccessfully against Franklin Pierce in 1852.

<sup>142</sup> Schroeder, 1973, pg 40.

the fall and spring of 1846-47<sup>143</sup> are especially illuminating with regards to this separation between public support for the war and support for the president.

These particular midterm elections do show a widespread dissatisfaction with the Polk administration, but the popularity of the war itself was not in question. While the war was plainly the most important single issue when taken from a nation-wide perspective, a huge number of more regional issues played a large role in the election. Throughout the western states, Polk's settlement of the Oregon dispute in June with England at the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, breaking his famous "54'40" or Fight" pledge of the campaign, and his veto of the Rivers and Harbors Bill in August were very unpopular. In protectionist areas, including the South, the passage of the Walker Tariff was denounced. The conservative financial sector, without regard to region, attacked the establishment of the independent treasury. Finally, the growing internal divisions of the party, especially on the issue of slavery, weakened the Democrats going into the elections.

One interesting feature of the Congressional elections of the time was that the lame duck session of Congress lasted almost a full year after most of the elections were finished. Those elected early in the fall of 1846 and the following spring didn't take office until the Thirtieth Congress began its first session in December 1847. This gave Polk and the Democrats in the House of Representatives time to bring the war to a favorable conclusion before the partisan reactions that caused them to lose control of the House in the elections bore fruit with the Thirtieth Congress.

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<sup>143</sup> During this time, the states had not yet regularized a nation-wide election day for Congress or even President. The first election day as we know it didn't occur until 1872 as part of the Apportionment Act following the 1870 Census. See the US Code, 17 Stat. 28.

## Conclusions

With the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, ending the Mexican-American War, and the subsequent Gadsden Purchase, the United States increased its land area by a third, second only in expansion to the Louisiana Purchase. One of the most important acquisitions for the history of the young nation would be California and the excellent Pacific ports, especially San Francisco, which Polk and presidents before him had long sought. Though it was the land that sparked the conflict in the first place, the strip of dusty wasteland in Texas between the Nueces and the Rio Grande became almost an afterthought, even more so after the California Gold Rush began.

Polk was the last man to occupy the White House whose administration was not dominated by the slavery question. As a result of the massive expansion of American territory in the West, the “debate over what to do with the spoils of the Mexican-American War”<sup>144</sup> made it impossible to reconcile the internal divisions of the Democratic Party over the issue. The party would survive the charges of treason against it after the Civil War only because of its strong base in the South, but would take nearly a century to return to anything like its former power on the national stage; Woodrow Wilson would be the next Democrat after Jackson to be elected to the White House for consecutive terms. The Whigs, standing firm for national unity, would soon find themselves rendered irrelevant, marginalized and subsequently replaced within a decade by the Republican Party. Slavery would dog the next four presidents, evenly divided between deferential Whigs (Taylor and Fillmore), who left the issue to Congress, and weak Northern Democrats (Pierce and Buchanan) willing to leave

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, pg. 144.

slavery as a political issue to the states, as they tried to diffuse rather to solve the problem. It would subsequently define the presidency of the fifth.

The power of the executive was coming into its own in the mid-1840s, owing much to the expansion of power that came from the Jackson administration. However, the presidency does not yet have the position as a symbolic leader to whom the public looks, nor does it yet have the support of a politically independent and strong mass media. Because of that, I did not expect to find any significant rally. In fact, nothing was exactly what I got. While modern rallies seem to give an unconditional rise in support, coverage of Polk and the rest of the government seemed to stay the same or even decrease slightly in approval. Even with what is anecdotally strong public support for the war,<sup>145</sup> the President and even his party in Congress do not seem to be able to garner any political benefit from that support. While the war certainly was a topic of much discussion, domestic issues also played as big a role, if not bigger. Polk's veto of the Rivers and Harbors Bill made the West feel betrayed, the possible expansion of slavery upset the North<sup>146</sup> and the lower tariff irked businesses that would have to compete with cheaper imports; it all came out at the ballot box. In fact in the 1846-7 mid-term elections, conducted while the war was going on, the Democrats managed to lose 32 seats and control of the House of Representatives to the Whig Party, which included a freshman representative from Illinois with an important but as of yet unforeseen destiny ahead of him. No modern President, actively engaged in a popular war, would have to worry about midterm results such as these. Here, there is no rally to be seen; let us look elsewhere.

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<sup>145</sup> Wheelan (2007), pg 99.

<sup>146</sup> At least until the passage of the Wilmot Proviso, promising that slavery would not be expanded into any territories acquired from Mexico.

Table 1:

*Examining Press Accounts, Pre- and Post-Publication of the Thornton Affair*

	<u>N (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>N (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Mentions of:</u>				
President	39	220 (36.67/month)	0.5389	0.5905
Congress	41	329 (54.83/month)	2.3808	0.0182
Public Opinion	48	320 (53.33/month)	0.9525	0.3419
	<u>Mean (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>Mean (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Attitude on:</u>				
President	-0.0514	-0.2550	1.3840	0.1676
Congress	0.0975	-0.1843	2.0420	0.0420
Public Opinion	0.1256	-0.0367	1.2643	0.2071

Note: The dates are April 10-May 9 (Pre-) and May 10-Nov 10 (Post-). This will affect the count comparisons for mentions only, but not the T-test results.

Table 2:

*Examining Press Accounts, Pre- and Post-Publication of the Thornton Affair*

*(excluding NY Tribune)*

	<u>N (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>N (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Mentions of:</u>				
President	24	112 (18.67/month)	1.4999	0.1359
Congress	25	155 (25.83/month)	0.1354	0.8925
Public Opinion	29	147 (24.5/month)	1.1417	0.2555
	<u>Mean (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>Mean (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Attitude on:</u>				
President	0.0417	0.0625	0.1006	0.9200
Congress	0.1667	-0.0387	0.8474	0.3979
Public Opinion	0.2917	0.4497	2.1720	0.0312

Note: The dates are April 10-May 9 (Pre-) and May 10-Nov 10 (Post-). This will affect the count comparisons for mentions only, but not the T-test results.

*If I can only go out of office...with the knowledge that I have done everything in my power to avert [war with Spain] with the success that has crowned your patience... I shall be the happiest man in the world.*

*-- William McKinley, to outgoing President Grover Cleveland,  
on the eve of his inauguration*

## **Chapter 4:**

### **The Rally Effect Transitional -- The Spanish-American War**

#### **Introduction**

On the evening of February 15, 1898, the American battleship *USS Maine* sat peacefully at her anchorage in Havana, Cuba. Suddenly and unexpectedly, a massive explosion split the night. The front third of the ship disintegrated as her forward magazines exploded, five tons of gunpowder stored for her main guns, killing almost three-quarters of her crew and sending her quickly to the bottom of the harbor. If this had happened fifty, seventy-five, or a hundred years later, there would have been little doubt that Presidents Truman, Nixon or Clinton would have seen a significant jump in their approval ratings, this being a classic rally event. However, we are still dealing, at the end of the nineteenth century, with a different time and understanding of the office of the Chief Executive. Did President *McKinley* get a rally from the loss of *Maine*?

In this chapter, I will be looking at this question. After discussing the particular methodological advantages of selecting this event and conflict, I will examine the nature of the presidency at the turn of the twentieth century in general and McKinley's administration in particular. I'll then move on to the event itself, looking at both the media and administration reactions to the event and how those affected and were affected by public opinion.

Touching briefly on earlier material, the causes of rallies are identified throughout the academic literature as centering around two general items: patriotism and elite behavior. Especially important for this work are the existence of both the symbolic presidency, the recognized target for that patriotism and center for action, and a coherent and independent mass media to codify and express that elite opinion to the mass of the American public. The Spanish-American War represents a period in which these determinants for the modern-style rally effect are emerging, though at different paces. As advertising replaced subventions and blackmail<sup>147</sup> as the chief source of newspapers income, the media of the time was becoming much more free to tell its own stories. Often these stories were embarrassing to the political elites, but many of the papers did not care, as they had decided to be crusaders for the public good. The media retains a touch of this crusade even today, but it was more important for many papers nearer the turn of the twentieth century. The embarrassment of the elites made for good headlines that sold papers; circulation numbers, and the accompanying advertising revenue, drove the papers to print more and more lurid and more marginally truthful stories. This is the age of ultimate media freedom, that of yellow journalism.

Not only was the media maturing into a credible political force, especially in the New York market with the circulation war raging between the Hearst and Pulitzer publishing empires, but the presidency was changing as well. In the years after the Civil War and Lincoln's expansive use of executive power, Congress had reasserted itself in a number of ways. Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's hapless successor, was rendered nearly superfluous by impeachment and near-miss at being removed by the Senate, a single vote determining the

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<sup>147</sup> The former was paid by the government or parties to foster favorable reporting and the latter paid by those who did not wish their names and/or situations to be published. Winston, 2005, discusses this at length.

outcome; never before had a president been impeached and, in the one time since, the vote for removal was nowhere near as close. Ulysses Grant, though a forceful battlefield leader, repeatedly capitulated to Congressional leaders, especially in the Senate, leading to the nadir of executive power.<sup>148</sup> However, his successors in office, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur and Cleveland, would each contribute to the reemergence of a strong independent executive branch. Despite this reemergence of executive power, the office was still constrained in the scope of its power vis-à-vis Congress. By the time that McKinley confided in his secretary that he could “no longer be called the President of a party [but instead] the President of the whole people,”<sup>149</sup> the executive branch was independent and ready again to take a leading role in government. It did not, however, occupy a *symbolic* leadership role. It was accepted as the source of national action, but not the symbol of the nation. That symbolic role would not come until the White House was able to link itself directly to the people, both rhetorically and in the terms of explicit leadership. McKinley was still very much tied to the Republican Party, unwilling to go to the people directly without that intermediary.

The Spanish-American War, being the first unifying conflict after the bloody internal one, also served to unify the nation around the flag and to distract it from the lingering memories of its own self-destructive paroxysm.<sup>150</sup> This case represents a peculiar case in the pre-modern era of the Presidency. There was a significant delay between the event that would, in modern times, tend to cause a rally to the President and the actual declaration of war. Thus, the Spanish-American War gives us an opportunity to see what the struggle within

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<sup>148</sup> Milkis and Nelson, 2009, pgs. 180-5.

<sup>149</sup> Quoted in Olcott, 1916, 2:296.

<sup>150</sup> Torruella, 2007, pg. 35-8 discusses at length the effects of the Civil War and its aftermath on the lead-up to the Spanish-American conflict.

the government itself and between the President and public opinion can do to presidential approval. It gives us a chance to see what a delay in definitive presidential action on the rally event might do to his approval and also affords the opportunity to see the two factors of the modern rally in separate effect. During this period, there was, putting aside its sensational tendencies, an independent media, but the White House was not yet the symbolic leader of the people as a whole. If the data analysis shows a rally occurred based around the event itself, it lends support to the media as the source of the rally effect. This would suggest that the people are being moved to supporting McKinley by opinion leadership coming from the newspapers. However, if it is focused around the change in the president's actions, then it lends support for the symbolic nature of the presidency being the main determinant. In this situation, the increase in approval is due to the president's actions, not a reaction to the event itself, in the absence of the symbolic president. The latter would not be a rally in the modern sense; it is instead is the expression of a policy preference.

### **Case Selection**

When deciding on cases, one was needed during the period from the Civil War to the beginning of the first Roosevelt administration. This period is important in particular because it is a time when the media maturing into a force, especially in the New York market with the circulation war raging between the Hearst and Pulitzer publishing empires, but the symbolic position of the presidency is lagging behind. Therefore, this case presents the best opportunity to examine which of the two has a stronger causal impact. To fulfill this role, I chose the Spanish-American War, setting the rally event as the explosion and subsequent sinking of *USS Maine* on February 15, 1898 in the harbor at Havana, Cuba. The Republican Party, despite solidly controlling both houses of Congress and the White House, was

internally divided and had problems resisting the push of public opinion towards war.

President McKinley, despite his own aversions, emotional, economic and political, ended up having to declare war in the face of a massive groundswell of both public and Congressional opinion against Spain and in sympathy with *Cuba Libre*.

For the quantitative portion of my analysis, I chose three prominent newspapers from the New York market, using the methodology described at more length in chapter 2. Relying heavily on Wisan to provide for my selection criteria, I settled on Whitelaw Reid's *Tribune*, Edwin Godkin's *Evening Post* and William Randolph Hearst's flagship paper, the *Journal*. While these papers agreed sometimes with each other and other times vehemently disagreed about the Cuban question, they represent a fairly accurate spread of the political spectrum of the time. Hearst was a staunch Democrat, very supportive of intervention against the alleged atrocities being committed by the Spanish government in Cuba. Reid was basically a mouthpiece for the Republican Party. Reid's *Tribune* tended very strongly to march reliably to whatever tune the Republican leadership was playing. Godkin, while conservative, generally advocated moderation both on Cuba specifically and politics more generally.<sup>151</sup> He argued, right up until the declaration of war passed, for staying out of the conflict. It should be pointed out that, while both the *Tribune* and the *Evening Post* were considered conservative papers, the spectrum that I am trying to best represent is the range on the Cuban issue, not the larger partisan spectrum in American politics of the time, though the latter is important as well. The importance of this spread on the subject cannot be overemphasized, as any person is affected strongly by his or her own preconceived notions on a specific topic.

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<sup>151</sup> For the *Tribune*, see pgs. 27-9, the *Evening Post* pgs. 29-31, and the *Journal* 24-26, all from Wisan 1968.

## **McKinley and the Transitional Presidency**

The presidency of the late nineteenth century, like the country itself, was one that was in transition. The United States at the time was coming into its own as a world economic power; the country's output overtook the entire British Empire in the last quarter of the century. Railroads tied the country from coast to coast and a strong navy helped its merchant fleet into new markets overseas. Despite the Monroe Doctrine's codification of Washington's warning against 'entangling alliances,' nothing was said against economic expansion. It was that expansion that was bringing the US onto the world political stage. In the Western Hemisphere, with no opposing major power and no Monroe Doctrine limits, the US acted as big brother, intervening both diplomatically and directly throughout the region. Directed by the president as Commander-in-Chief, we can see all of the modern war powers, albeit written smaller at this time.

When it came to major power foreign policy, however, Congress still laid claim to a significant role. Congress had in fact become accustomed to a measure of dominance in the post-Civil War era, especially with regards to the development of that area of policy. Since the end of the Jackson administration, the White House had been largely occupied by compromise Presidents, mostly weak and ineffective, which had served to tip the balance of power towards Congress.<sup>152</sup> The Senate regularly defeated even some of the most important and publicly supported treaties during this period. The best example of this was the failure in of the 1897 Olney-Pauncefote Treaty, an agreement between the U.S. and Great Britain to submit any future disputes to arbitration. Despite strong administration and public support, the Senate stood firm that it should be able to decide on a case-by-case basis whether or not a

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<sup>152</sup> Cheever & Haviland, 1952, pg. 48.

specific issue should be submitted to arbitration. Congress sometimes even worked at cross-purposes to the administration. At the height of the Civil War, the House unanimously passed a resolution decrying the overthrow of the Mexican government and the installation of Emperor Maximilian by France. The administration, understandably occupied by domestic matters and not wishing to further antagonize the French who were already sympathetic to the Confederate cause, went so far as to have Secretary of State Seward write a note to Paris disavowing the House resolution.<sup>153</sup>

In the era of the modern presidency, the president has a near monopoly on the decision to use military force overseas. The rally literature points this out as a reason why the president is afforded the benefits of a rally effect.<sup>154</sup> However, during the run-up to the Spanish-American War, it was not the president who chose to use force in his own right. Instead Congress and public opinion, the latter expressed largely but not exclusively by the press, pushed him to take control. Had McKinley not stepped in and taken the reins, he might very well have had Congress declare war in spite of him and thus lost much control over the development and resolution of the conflict. Had the President abdicated this initiative to Congress, it could have changed the entire course of American politics with regards to the Commander-in-Chief clause and war powers. The ability of Congress to interfere in major ways in what we consider today to be a nearly exclusive domain of the executive hints at something that is lacking in presidency of that time: a symbolic claim to be the representative of the nation as a whole.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, pgs. 51-2, and Schlesinger, 1973, pg. 68.

<sup>154</sup> Mueller 1973, McCormick 1985, and Avella 2000, among others.

The role of the media in politics was changing as well. For most of the history of the nation up to the time of the Cuban crisis, the media had played the role of reinforcing party politics, usually serving as the public mouthpieces for the various parties, and reinforcing the norms of upper-middle class and elite society.<sup>155</sup> Two innovations would cut the strings that the parties and elites used to control the press and turn them into their own political force: the interview and advertising.

The interview as a new way of reporting started in 1835 with James Bennett's *New York Morning Herald*. In a way, Bennett was creating the news he was reporting, rather than relying on it being fed to him.<sup>156</sup> This would be essential later in the century when the yellow press of Hearst and Pulitzer would thrill the nation with intricate, lurid and often completely fictional accounts from Cuba. Advertising served to give the newspapers an independent source of funds. Like the independence from Congress that a protected salary affords to the Chief Executive, the move away from less reputable sources of funding, as described earlier, allowed the press to finally come into its own as a politically independent force in the American system.

We have an interesting case and an opportunity in McKinley and the Spanish-American War, in that one of the accepted modern determinants is not fully developed at this time. There is an independent, albeit sensationalist, mass media. We do not have, however, a symbolic pedestal from what President McKinley can act with impunity against his political opponents in the government, namely Congress. This poses an important opportunity with regards to the development of the rally effect. To be able to test one of the two determinants

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<sup>155</sup> See Lippmann's extended discussion of this, 1946, pgs. 148-73.

<sup>156</sup> Winston, 2005, pg 98.

in the absence of the other is to be able to see whether it can create a rally effect on its own. If it does, it calls into question the importance of the other factor at all; if it does not, it calls into question its own influence on the rally effect.

### **Rally Event: The *Maine* Explosion**

Early in January of 1898, riots in Havana erupted and three newspapers that had been anti-Weyler<sup>157</sup> had their offices destroyed. While there was no overt threat to American businesses or citizens, the administration dispatched *USS Maine* to Cuba on a goodwill visit. It was a thinly veiled reminder that the US was watching events very closely and would not tolerate threats to its citizens. The press generally approved of this action by the administration,<sup>158</sup> though some questioned the timing, stating that “a warship is a curious kind of oil on troubled waters,” one that might stir up tensions despite the avowed peaceful nature of the visit.<sup>159</sup> The officers were welcomed by Spanish officials and treated with all the normal courtesies shown to visiting dignitaries, including visits to the ship by Spanish officials, a banquet for the officers hosted by Fitzhugh Lee, the US Consul-General in Havana, and the hosting of Captain Charles Sigsbee, the ship’s Commanding Officer, at a bullfight.<sup>160</sup>

One occurrence did serve to spoil the apparent atmosphere of studied courtesy. On February 9, the *Journal* published a private letter, written by the Spanish minister to the United States Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, to an influential Spanish editor and politician. This

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<sup>157</sup> For more information on General Valeriano Weyler and why the destruction of anti-Weyler newspapers’ offices would concern the US government, see the background section later in this chapter.

<sup>158</sup> Wisan, 1968, pg. 385.

<sup>159</sup> *Evening Post*, 1/25/1898.

<sup>160</sup> Wisan, 1968, pg. 388.

letter contained a number of very disparaging references to the President; these references included that McKinley was weak, played his politics to the mob, and was the equivalent of a political hack. While the *Journal* itself had used far more derogatory references to the Chief Executive itself, it charged de Lôme with “the greatest offense with which a diplomatic officer can be accused” and demanded that he be sent “home at once in disgrace.”<sup>161</sup> While Reid’s *Tribune* was not as vindictive, it too called for the Spanish diplomat’s expulsion and declared that his usefulness in Washington was at an end. The editorial page stated bluntly “the necessary preliminaries to his departure cannot be too speedy to satisfy public opinion... Senor de Lôme, the door stands open!”<sup>162</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, the *Evening Post* was in complete agreement that de Lôme had to go, but was much more sympathetic to the minister’s predicament. Godkin wrote that the “chances were a million to one that this particular letter would never see the light, but it was de Lôme’s bad luck to have the one chance go against him, and here he is with his diplomatic career cut short” in disgrace.<sup>163</sup>

At 9:40PM, February 15, the forward third of the *Maine* disintegrated in an enormous explosion caused by the ignition of her magazines. Two hundred and sixty-six men, almost three-quarters of the crew, lost their lives and eight more died later of resulting injuries. Despite calls for calm from both Captain Sigsbee and Counsel-General Lee, the media frenzy began immediately, led by Hearst and Pulitzer. The *Journal’s* circulation went from less than half a million per day in the first week of the year to over a million during the week after the *Maine’s* explosion. Hearst’s headlines appeared to be blatant attempts to stir up anti-Spanish sentiment in the readers. Some examples included “THE WHOLE COUNTRY THRILLS

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<sup>161</sup> *Journal*, 2/9.

<sup>162</sup> *Tribune*, 2/12.

<sup>163</sup> *Evening Post*, 2/10.

WITH THE WAR FEVER,” “Captain Sigsbee practically declares that his ship was blown up by a mine or torpedo,” (which he had not) “Proof of a submarine mine,” (which the article never mentioned) and “THE MAINE WAS DESTROYED BY TREACHERY.”<sup>164</sup> In fact, the *Journal* went on with these sorts of headlines for weeks after the sinking.

The *Tribune* accepted the accident theory, warning against early “guess-work” as to the causes of the explosion. While Spain should not be morally accountable “for the crime of an irresponsible wretch,”<sup>165</sup> Reid’s paper did argue that the colonial power could be held financially responsible for a failure of reasonable diligence if the cause turned out to be external in nature. In line with expectations for the pro-administration paper in my sample, the paper repeatedly expressed confidence in McKinley’s ability to handle the situation: “the honor of the nation is in safe hands. The President will never suffer a stain to be put upon it nor will he hurry on a war that may with honor be avoided.”<sup>166</sup> It also pointed out in a thinly veiled swipe at the melodramatic articles coming from the *Journal* and the *World* that, considering the ambiguity of the causes, that the situation imposed “upon the people of both countries the duty of not allowing themselves to become excited by criminally sensational newspapers...”<sup>167</sup>

Godkin’s *Evening Post* spent a good amount of space debunking the lurid headlines of its yellow competitors. It attacked the *World* for its interference in the investigation with its own divers and ship and blasted the *Journal* for its headlines and reward offer. Godkin wrote that “a thousand different explanations have been offered by editors and reporters who

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<sup>164</sup> *Journal*, 2/17, 2/18, 2/20 and 2/23, respectively, emphases included from the original.

<sup>165</sup> *Tribune*, 2/17.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid*, 2/26.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*, 2/17.

were not there and a thousand different [pictures] given by persons who did not see it.” It quoted a professor of the Ordinance Bureau that no torpedo could possibly have done so much damage and an engineer who, having been involved in the ship’s design and construction, stated that the design itself invited disasters such as the one that had just happened.<sup>168</sup>

Amidst all of what would be called today ‘hype’ over the sinking of the *Maine*, was there really a change? Rally events show an immediate and nearly unconditional increase in support for the president in the modern era; do they do the same at the end of the nineteenth century? Looking at the qualitative data, it seems that the country is singing loudly for war, but do the quantitative data play the same tune?

Using content analysis, I examined the change in tenor of the papers before and after the destruction of *Maine*. As shown in Table 3, mentions of the President in the month before the first reports on the Maine nearly doubled during the month after in the papers examined.<sup>169</sup> This was expected and presages the way that the modern presidency is treated. When the rally event happened, the nation looked to the president for action. At this point in time, the country was still largely parochial in its concerns, but an earlier event pointed out a coming change in the wind. The Venezuelan Border Crisis in 1895 resulted in an “explosion of jingo feeling” and made the Cleveland administration remain quiet about the whole situation until the popular sentiment had calmed down. With the Cuban crisis, the public was being whipped up by the yellow press and would not be calmed.<sup>170</sup> McKinley was brought

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<sup>168</sup> *Evening Post*, 2/18. The two later references come from 2/19 and 2/21 respectively.

<sup>169</sup> See Tables 3 (comparing data before and after the *Maine* sinking) and 4 (comparing the same data before and after the declaration of war) at the end of the chapter.

<sup>170</sup> Linderman, \*\*\* pg. 150-1.

into the front because the people knew that issues of foreign policy generally, and the military more specifically, are his portfolio. A strong proponent of public opinion and its primacy in governmental policy, he found himself pushed in a direction that he found personally unacceptable.

However, during the same two months, there was no statistical difference in how those mentions actually treated the president and his policies towards Cuba. This is in fact very similar to the results that Offner found when looking at correspondence sent to McKinley.<sup>171</sup> It seems that, though the people were looking to the president for action, they are at the same time more ambivalent towards his policy choices and, unlike the modern public, not by and large supporting him unconditionally. They looked to the White House to carry into action what *they* thought should happen, rather than trusting the president to know and do what is best. The modern president is dealt with as the symbol of the nation. Dissent with him during a time of national crisis is deemed unpatriotic and dangerous to political careers. During McKinley's time, this was obviously not yet the case; he did not yet occupy that symbolic position that would have made him unquestionable, at least in the short term, in the way that the modern president does.

Similar trends exist with regards to Congress, but mentions by the press of public opinion change significantly. While the anti-McKinley papers continued extolling how the public "thrills with the war fever," the lone pro-administration paper in the sample, the *Tribune*, began to back away from public opinion, mentioning it very sparingly until after war was declared more than two months later. Modern media are important in supporting the rally effect. Dissent is curtailed, either by opposition leaders choosing not to express it or the

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<sup>171</sup> Offner, 1999, pg. 31.

media not reporting it when they do, dubbed “the spiral of silence” in modern literature.<sup>172</sup>

During the run-up to the Spanish-American War, however, some of the papers were happily reporting dissent among the Democratic opposition to the administration’s policies on the Cuban crisis. In the era of the symbolic presidency, this would be unpatriotic; during the era of the traditional presidency, this was simply business as usual.

### **Background**

Looking at the qualitative data, I find a lagged increase in support for McKinley, based not on the sinking of *USS Maine* but on the declaration of war, a concrete action on his part rather than an event external to the administration. It seems that McKinley is not benefitting from the increase in attention on him. Patriotism is everywhere, but he is not the focus of it. To better understand the shifting patterns and to support the quantitative data, we need to better understand the qualitative study around the numbers.

For that understanding of why the sinking of the *Maine* was such a watershed moment, we need to understand the roots of the simmering conflict. February of 1898 was far from the beginning of the problems between Spain and the United States. The causes of the Spanish-American War go back more than two decades to the Ten-Years War, a Cuban insurrection in the 1870s that, despite being settled by some unfulfilled promises of autonomy from Madrid, never fully ended. The insurrection of 1895, which directly led to the war, simply represented a major up-tick in the ongoing anti-colonial insurgency. It was this increase in violence that really brought the issue into the newspapers and thus the American public’s view.

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<sup>172</sup> Noelle-Neumann, 1984. The quote is the title of her book.

Finally, the Spanish government, resolved to put this ongoing rebellion down by any means, appointed General Valeriano Weyler to do so. Weyler was an effective anti-guerrilla general. He quickly countered the insurgent's tactics by isolating them from each other and from less troubled areas by means of fortifications. He put out counter-guerrilla groups, allowing them to search out and attack the insurgents under their own rules. These groups would become more feared than the regular Spanish army. What would earn him demonization in the American media, however, was his plan to isolate the guerillas from their popular support by gathering the civilian population into 'reconcentration' camps. He pulled the farmers off the land and put them into camps in and around the cities. This was supposed to both protect them from the insurgents and deprive the rebels of their support. In the end, he was not able to provide for the hundreds of thousands of people moved and the camps became rife with hunger and disease; tens and possibly hundreds of thousands died. Lurid stories of these camps and other humanitarian problems all over the island did much to move American public opinion against the Spaniards.

Beset on one side by the insurgents and by the loyalists on the other, Cuba itself was being destroyed. Cuban insurgent General Maximo Gomez instituted a scorched earth policy. He was convinced that the reason that the Ten Years' War has failed was that the more affluent Cubans had not been affected directly by it. By targeting the island's rich agricultural industry, the loyalists on the island would be forced to accept the revolution and Spain would ultimately grant Cuba independence as the cost of maintaining control would quickly exceed the benefits of the income from her colony. Cuban agriculture was devastated almost immediately. While the cane fields had produced more than a million long tons of sugar in 1895, they only managed barely a fifth of that amount the next year. American

businessmen, strongly invested in plantations on the island, felt the pinch as their fields were not immune to being burned simply because they were foreign owned. While the “Butcher,” as Weyler became to be known, and his atrocities against the ‘innocent Cubans’ made good front page news in the newspapers in the era of yellow journalism, economic interests were turning decidedly sour of the subject of the continuing struggle in Cuba as well, but for different reasons; these reasons were more about pocketbooks and less about the reported suffering of the Cuban people.

The emergence into the American consciousness was in large part a consequence of the method used to support the Cuban rebels. The Cuban poet, philosopher and nationalist José Martí spent several years organizing Cuban expatriates in numerous countries into a huge network of support while encouraging generals from the Ten Years’ War to recruit actual combatants. The support network, coming from foreign sources, could supply the rebels logistically without having to deal with direct Spanish intervention. Filibustering ships, as the small fast supply ships were called, set sail from ports in various Latin American countries and Great Britain, but the majority of them came from the United States. At the repeated insistence of Spain, the United States made an active effort to curb these revolutionary supplies from reaching Cuba, but enough evaded the Revenue Cutter Service (the forerunner of the modern Coast Guard) that Spain complained loudly that the US was not doing enough. The need to patrol aggravated the Americans, the ships that made it through aggravated the Spanish and mutual aggravation made them distrust and dislike each other.

Despite Spanish complaints to the contrary, it is not clear that much aid reached the rebels by this method. Trask states that, out of 71 documented filibustering expeditions that

set out for Cuba from various ports, only 27 can be confirmed as having reached the island. Of the ships that failed in their attempt, U.S. naval forces in fact intercepted the vast majority.<sup>173</sup> The papers were somewhat divided on this subject. The *Tribune* argued that the responsibility for stopping filibustering was on Spain and that she ought to be able to control her own ports and coasts, especially if there in fact was no war as Madrid claimed. The *Evening Post* was much more solidly against the practice and found it “reassuring to know that the Administration has no sympathy with filibusters...”<sup>174</sup>

A New York City-based group that called itself the Junta coordinated the pro-Cuban groups responsible for supplying the revolutionaries with the material of war. While its contribution of war material to the effort was not insubstantial, the main contribution of this committee came in the form of propaganda, swaying public opinion to the support of the rebel cause. The group constantly fed a stream of print-ready dispatches to the New York press that only told of Spanish cruelty. With *Heart's Journal* and Pulitzer's *World* in a major circulation war, the presses ran hard trying to be the first to publish the sensational stories. The *Journal* gave the Junta a full column of front page space to report about how in a recent battle, “the Spaniards, at first victorious, stabbed to death all Cubans who came under their power.”<sup>175</sup> They also repeatedly published letters from alleged eyewitnesses about attacks on defenseless peasants, women and children. Wisan points out that, of the stories of atrocities in Cuba published in the *Journal* for the whole month of December, 1897, not a single one

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<sup>173</sup> Trask, 1981, pg. 5. While Trask's math is a bit lacking (his successes and failures do not add up to the number of attempts), the numbers are included here as an illustration of his general point that filibustering was not exceedingly effective as a means of supply for the rebels.

<sup>174</sup> *Tribune*, 6/11, and *Post*, 3/15.

<sup>175</sup> *Journal*, 10/15/1897.

came from the observations of an impartial third party or from one of the *Journal's* own reporters. Published as reports of “recently arrived Cubans” or letters to the editor, it was generally known that these came almost exclusively from the Junta.<sup>176</sup>

The yellow papers were not alone in their publications from the Junta. Though the *Tribune* hoped early on that the failures of the attempts to put down the rebellion would not push the Spanish into harsh measures, they subsequently published a report about Spanish cruelty at Baire obtained from the Cubans. The *Evening Post* even printed a comparatively mild story about wholesale prisoner executions.<sup>177</sup>

This biasing of the press by the Junta was bad enough for Spain’s image with the American public, but Madrid complicated the matter by banning press coverage of the conflict in Cuba. This further biased the press against them and made reporters even more inclined to rely on first-person accounts from pro-rebel sources that were, because of the ban, the only sources willing to talk to them. Throughout the struggle before American intervention, the major papers railed against Weyler’s policies towards the Cuban insurgency. The *Journal* described the inhumane treatment of political prisoners and the burning alive of suspected sympathizers.<sup>178</sup>

Because of this media biasing, the public was early on sympathetic to the Cuban cause. Parallels were drawn repeatedly to the United States’ own struggle for independence against Great Britain. The *Tribune* outlined this sentiment early in the crisis, stating bluntly that “Spain [is] an inert nationality... It is only a question of time when their [Cuba’s and Puerto Rico’s] independence will be established and power given to them to determine their

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<sup>176</sup> Wisan, 1968, pg. 66.

<sup>177</sup> *Post*, 10/23.

<sup>178</sup> *Journal*, 4/15 and 4/18, 1898.

future. They are as much entitled to it as our American colonies were in their revolt from British rule.”<sup>179</sup> That said, there was little enthusiasm with the public for direct intervention in Cuba early in the rebellion. “The American people deeply sympathize with the misgoverned Cubans,” the *Tribune* stated, “but they are not anxious to fight for them or to obtain that island by conquest.”<sup>180</sup>

The *Allianca* incident, however, in March of 1895, did much to touch off sensational reporting and rabid anti-Spanish sentiment within the press and subsequently the public as a whole. On March 8, a Spanish gunboat attempted to stop an American merchant ship, the *Allianca*, on suspicion of filibustering, or smuggling arms to the Cuban insurgents, off the coast of Cape Maisi at the eastern end of Cuba. The American vessel refused to stop and the gunboat fired upon her unsuccessfully several times during a chase of about 20 miles. Here we see the first signs of interventionist sentiment. The governor of Georgia stated quite bluntly to the *Tribune* that “Cuba should cease to be Spanish and become American.”<sup>181</sup> While not pro-*Cuba Libre*, it certainly indicates a desire in some parts of the country to intervene in the insurrection. The *Evening Post* was angry as well, but not about the incident itself. Godkin wrote with his typical biting sarcasm that the other papers were playing up the incident into “a deadly insult which cannot be wiped out, except in double-lettered editorials and a sale of at least eleven extra copies.”<sup>182</sup> The incident was handled through the office of the Spanish Foreign minister and resolved, but had done damage in the eyes of the public. The yellow journals did not let the incident go unremembered.

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<sup>179</sup> *Tribune*, 3/21/1895.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, 3/27/1895.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid* 3/14/1895.

<sup>182</sup> *Evening Post*, 3/14.

Despite the distinct move towards anti-Spanish and pro-Cuban sentiments in the press and the public, the Cleveland administration resisted successfully the pressure to intervene. However, in his last message to Congress, the outgoing President hinted that American patience on the Cuban issue had its limits. If things continued on the way they were, “a situation will be presented where our obligations to... Spain will be superseded by higher obligations, which we can hardly hesitate to recognize or discharge.”<sup>183</sup>

President-elect William McKinley, at the same time that President Cleveland was delivering that message to Congress, was being viewed with some enthusiasm by both those who desired intervention and those that desired exactly the opposite. The pro-Cuban press outlets looked for a more aggressive stance from him. The *Journal* stated as much as only three days after the election. As December began, it became quite blunt in its assessment: “The present... administration is far more pacific... in its foreign policy than the incoming... one is likely to be.”<sup>184</sup> However, the anti-interventionists were also hopeful that McKinley would not change the fundamentals of the Cleveland administration’s policy toward the island. Godkin editorialized that McKinley “will do everything in his power to restrain the wrath” of the pro-war Republicans, but at the same time wondered if he could resist indefinitely.<sup>185</sup> Several papers reported that McKinley had responded favorably to Cleveland’s last message to Congress and the conservatives hoped that this meant patience would be the order of the day. The announcement that John Sherman, an ardent interventionist, would be Secretary of State was followed by Sherman’s quick repudiation of

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<sup>183</sup> Cleveland, 12/7/1896.

<sup>184</sup> *New York Journal*, 12/8/1896.

<sup>185</sup> *New York Evening Post*, 2/5/1897.

his earlier views; this sudden change heartened opponents of interference with regards to McKinley's future plans towards Cuba.<sup>186</sup>

If the Democrats in Congress were willing to beat up President Cleveland, one of their party members, they were more than happy to use “increasingly expansive liberal rhetoric to launch partisan attacks on McKinley's policies.”<sup>187</sup> McKinley made his position known very early after inauguration, as one of the first Cabinet meetings “resulted with the understanding that the policy hitherto pursued [towards Spain], of strict neutrality and enforcement of neutrality laws, would be adhered to so long as the conditions remained” fundamentally unchanged.<sup>188</sup> McKinley himself stated as much in no uncertain terms: “We want no wars of conquest, [and] we must avoid the temptation of territorial aggression. War should never be entered upon until every agency for peace has failed.”<sup>189</sup> The problems came for Republicans, however, who had happily lambasted Cleveland on Cuba. They were now faced with the choice of either supporting their president or supporting Cuban independence, something for which they had already come out strongly. They chose the latter and an administration committed to non-intervention found itself battling its own partisan allies on the issue for the next year.

This internal struggle was reflected in the press as well as in the halls of the Capitol building. The Hearst-Pulitzer rivalry went on as strong as ever. In September, the new ambassador to Spain, Stewart Woodford, arrived in Madrid and presented a note to the Queen-Regent of Spain that stated plainly that if Spain did not bring peace to Cuba by the

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<sup>186</sup> *New York Journal*, 1/17/1897.

<sup>187</sup> Peceny, pg 61.

<sup>188</sup> *New York Herald*, 4/4/1897.

<sup>189</sup> McKinley, quoted in Trask, 1981, pg. 13.

end of October, the United States would feel itself at liberty to do whatever was needed to do just that. As with other policy pronouncements, this began a new round of journalistic sensationalism. The *Journal* accused the administration of trying to affect elections, with votes going to the polls only two days after the new deadline.<sup>190</sup>

Within two weeks of the note's delivery, the Spanish government had fallen and Práxedes Sagasta, leader of the Liberal Party and a former Prime Minister himself, moved Spanish policy towards the left. He acted to recall Weyler, to soften the reconcentration policies and worked towards a settlement with the rebels that was hoped would lead to home rule. The people of the US and the press seemed honestly happy about this result. The *Tribune* thought that he would be willing to grant a measure of autonomy to Cuba like "that which Canada now enjoys."<sup>191</sup> Despite praise for new Prime Minister Sagasta and Segismundo Moret, his choice for Minister of Overseas Colonies, the papers were generally pessimistic about the chances he had for actually resolving the conflict without granting full independence to the Cubans. The *Journal* said that "the retirement of the Azcarraga Ministry will put renewed strength into the struggling patriots"<sup>192</sup> and that they would not quit until they won their freedom.

### **The Interim Period**

The press fired up public opinion after the sinking of the battleship *Maine* in favor of everything from intervention to relieve suffering Cubans to revenge against the perpetrators

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<sup>190</sup> *Journal*, 9/21/1897.

<sup>191</sup> *Tribune*, 10/1/1897

<sup>192</sup> *Journal*, 10/1/1897.

of an “act of dirty treachery on the part of the Spaniards,”<sup>193</sup> “Intervention,” the *Journal* railed three days after the explosion, “. . . was our duty before the *Maine* was destroyed; it was our duty before De Lôme wrote his letter, and it is our duty now.”<sup>194</sup> They reported on numerous public demonstrations adding to the clamor for war. In New York, many theaters began to play the national anthem before performances to popular acclamation. The press also began extensive reporting on the preparations for war. Even the *Post* covered the expedited orders for rifles made to the Winchester Company, the movement of massive shipments of gunpowder and the Bethlehem Iron Works’ acceleration of government contracts. This all had the effect of making hostilities feel all the more inevitable. Patriotism was in full swing, but McKinley, without being the symbol of the nation, was not reaping the benefits.

The government, for its part, was torn. At this period in time, Congress in general, and especially the Senate, still held for itself a stronger role in foreign policy than it now claims and it took to reminding President McKinley of this numerous times. Before the *Maine* incident, Congress had actually cut the budget of the War Department for coastal defenses by half a million dollars, four million short of the requested amount. Afterwards, however, the Congress unanimously passed a fifty million dollar defense appropriation, something universally lauded in the press. The *Journal* immediately began speculating as to what it might be spent. The other papers of my sample were more prudent. The *Tribune* opined that the bill was “proof of the spread of patriotic prudence” among Congress and that the best way to preserve peace was to prepare for war. The *Evening Post* was in agreement,

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<sup>193</sup> Assistant Secretary of the Navy and future President Theodore Roosevelt, quoted in Mayo (1923).

<sup>194</sup> *Journal*, 2/18/10.

saying that Spain “will want [war] less than ever when she sees that American sentiment is united in the support of the President.”<sup>195</sup> This last quote is interesting, as it hints at the beginning of the recognition of the President in the mind as the symbol of the country. They could just as easily said “in support of the Cuban people” or “in support of Congress,” but they pointed to the President specifically. The *Tribune*, however, was a bit premature in its ascribing to the president the unity of American sentiment. With McKinley being burned in effigy and his portrait torn down across the nation, the country may have been united, but it was definitely not in its support for McKinley.

Cleveland had had significant problems controlling Congressional Democrats who became increasingly vocal about their support for the Cuban insurgency. McKinley stepped into the Oval Office with essentially the same wait-and-see policies that the previous administration had followed, but with a much more pro-independence party than the Democrats had ever been. While the Democrats now could attack the administration on partisan grounds, Republicans found themselves torn between supporting their man in the White House and sticking to their previous policy positions. For the next year, McKinley would fight with both Democrats and Republicans on Cuba; this fight would also be played out in paper editorials.

Three events changed the way that the administration handled Cuban policy in the interim period. The first was a speech by Senator Redfield Proctor (R-VT) on March 17. Proctor’s speech was significant for a number of reasons. He was very influential with the business interests of the nation, the strongest group in the nation against the use of force in Cuba. He was seen as a calm and contemplative Senator, one that did not speak often and

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<sup>195</sup> *Journal, Tribune and Post*, all 3/8.

who was certainly not a firebrand even when he did make speeches. Proctor was a former secretary of war, giving him authority both on military matters and as a party insider. Journalists widely reported that he had been prompted to visit Cuba by the administration, though the White House repeatedly denied this. His calm and skeptical approach to the subject lent authority to the information he gave. The account focused most of its time on the condition of the people and the prospect for the success of the Spanish reforms. Proctor's speech was sent by the Associated Press in full to be published all over the world. His account of the reconcentration camps and the dismal chance for Spanish success moved many towards intervention. As Linderman points out, Proctor "offered war founded on an undiluted humanitarianism" and "invited the nation's willingness to act unselfishly as an agent of civilization." The speech was given significant attention in many of the papers. The *Journal* reprinted the entire speech and stated that the senator had "unconsciously or adroitly [made] an argument for intervention," and that through his speech had "administered the finishing blow to the self-styled 'better element' that has allied itself with tyranny and inhumanity in Cuba for the sake of increasing its dividends," an obvious swipe at McKinley's anti-intervention business supporters. The pro-administration *Tribune* was impressed as well, saying that "a note of absolute sincerity rings true in every word... his words are not the first to be spoken on the point, nor... the last, but... no others are likely to exercise a more convincing force" that they would be in favor of intervention. The *Post*, however, barely covered the speech at all, and only said editorially that the manner of Proctor's speech brought the topic "before us with more vividness than ever."<sup>196</sup> With his pro-business followers shifting into the pro-interventionist camp due at least in part to the

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<sup>196</sup> *Journal*, 3/18, *Tribune*, 3/19, and *Post*, 3/17.

speech the speech left McKinley and the Speaker of the House, Thomas Reed, nearly alone in opposition.

The second event was the publication of the report of the Navy's Court of Inquiry into the destruction of the *Maine*. The report arrived in Washington on March 24 and the President and the cabinet spent much of the next day studying the 400-page document, subsequently passing it along to Congress on March 28. The document, fixing blame on an external explosion for the destruction of the battleship, did much to fuel the war fever, despite the fact that it explicitly stated "the court has been unable to obtain evidence fixing the responsibility for the destruction of the *Maine* upon any person or persons."<sup>197</sup> All of the papers in my sample covered the four hundred-page report extensively, but it was their reactions to the accompanying message that were the most interesting for this project. Unsurprisingly, the *Journal* came out swinging at the President, illustrating the message as a rope binding Uncle Sam's hands as Spain threw bombs at him labeled "Maine disaster," "De Lôme letter," and others. It reported on McKinley being hung in effigy in Colorado and Spain's flag being burned by students in Omaha.<sup>198</sup> The *Tribune* and the *Post* both stood for peace. The former, predictably supporting the President's every move, said, "reparation for the Maine could be made peacefully" and warned against "jingoism who want war for war's sake."<sup>199</sup> The *Post* took a similar tack, saying that the war hysteria was being driven by the publishers of the yellow papers to sell papers and encouraged members of Congress to resist the "hysteria which goes by the name of patriotism."<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Report on the Sinking of *USS Maine*.

<sup>198</sup> *Journal*, 3/30.

<sup>199</sup> *Tribune*, 3/30 and 4/1.

<sup>200</sup> *Post*, 3/31.

Finally, the day after the report came to them, a revolt materialized among House Republicans, attentive to the press and the fact that the people read the newspapers extensively; they began demanding action on Cuba and threatening, without action, to vote for a resolution that would recognize Cuban independence and declare war in spite of the President's and the Congressional leadership's desires to the contrary. Even in the Senate, rebellion was simmering and Vice-President Hobart told McKinley that he could "no longer hold back action by the Senate; they will act without you if you do not act at once."<sup>201</sup> This reduced McKinley's ability to maneuver diplomatically, as Congress was threatening to take the initiative away from him in a short amount of time. If this had happened, his ability to control the war and the aftermath would have been severely curtailed and the unity of the party, needed to compete successfully in the fall midterm elections, would have been threatened.<sup>202</sup> Coverage of this in the media was very sparse as this happened behind closed doors. However, one might imagine the negative backlash had the Republican Party revolted in a similar way against President Bush in the weeks after the September 11 attacks; it is harder to imagine that the House members would have participated in the intraparty revolt in 1898 had they thought the results against them would have been as bad.

The president resisted the push for war during this period for a number of reasons. The first of these was his personal aversion to war. As a Civil War veteran and a participant of some of the bloodiest battles of the conflict, he knew the terrible cost it had on the people who fought in it. Second, he was painfully aware of the inadequacy of the American military to fight even a declining power as Spain. The standing army was virtually non-existent and

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<sup>201</sup> Magie, 1910, pg 173-4.

<sup>202</sup> Offner, 1992, pgs. 150-154.

organized to fight wars against the Native American tribes, not a modern military. Third, McKinley worried that a war would hurt the economy, something that was his primary focus during the campaign and in office to date. Finally was his idea of what path the country should take forward. He wanted to make sure future generations did not look back at this intervention as unjust. It had to be linked “in meaning and purpose to the enduring values and interests of the country.”<sup>203</sup>

Armed with his reasoning, McKinley was able to resist immense public pressure to intervene on behalf of the Cubans. In March 1898, McKinley gave an interview to the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* in which he laid out some of his reasons for resisting the public push for war. He knew that the longer he resisted, the less popular he became, both in the public and in Congress. However, he firmly stated he would not lead the country into war based on public opinion alone. Because of this resistance, the papers on the Democratic side lampooned him as a man driven by the business interests. The Republican papers defended him as patient and peace seeking. However, by the last days of March, the House Republicans began rebelling against the administration and, when intervention and war became inevitable, the Republican papers lined up with the pro-intervention camp as well; Godkin of the *Evening Post* summed it up quote well in an editorial:

We have done everything in our power to prevent this lamentable result. Now that war seems inevitable, every interest of the nation and the world demands that the shortest possible job should be made of it.”<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> McCartney, 2006, pg. 121.

<sup>204</sup> *Post*, 4/20/09

The public, too, was in state of war fever. In Virginia, McKinley was burned in effigy, something that would be unheard of in the modern day US.<sup>205</sup> Public demonstrations called for war, with crowds chanting, “Remember the Maine! To Hell with Spain!” The President’s picture was booed in theaters and removed completely in some places.

The President was stuck without support; between the public, whipped up by the sensational journalism of Hearst and Pulitzer, and Congress, revolting against his leadership based in large part on pressure from their constituents, he had almost no one on his side. He had a choice to make; on one hand he could go with public opinion into war against Spain, something he found personally distasteful and morally objectionable or he could, on the other hand, attempt to turn the tide of public sentiment, to “move beyond his limited conception of his office” and make a “serious attempt to alter the substance of public opinion’s demands upon him.”<sup>206</sup> This latter choice would have been something much more available to him had he enjoyed a more robust symbolic position from which to advocate, but he did not. Many have made the argument that, “left alone, McKinley would probably have avoided a war, as he was a peaceful and gentle man... Congress was bent on war... the populace clamored for war”<sup>207</sup> and because of this, McKinley was forced into a conflict that he didn’t want. Croly points out that

Up to the last moment, the President sought to find some middle ground...He sought to placate American public opinion by acting energetically on behalf of American citizens in Cuba and by pressing Spain to improve its conduct of the war and to redress the grievances of its Cuban subjects. If the Maine had not blown up, he might have succeeded... As it was,

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<sup>205</sup> McCartney, 2006, pg. 127.

<sup>206</sup> Linderman, pg 31.

<sup>207</sup> Adams, 1926, pg. 274.

the President risked his popularity and confidence of the country by his reluctance to abandon a peaceful solution.<sup>208</sup>

It would not have been so much of an issue if the public had the notion of McKinley as the symbol of the nation; his choice of policies, peace or war, would have been much more readily accepted and trusted. Peace would have been much easier for him to pursue. McKinley finally delivered a moderate message to Congress on April 11, asking for permission “to take measures to secure a full and final termination of hostilities between... Spain and... Cuba... and to use the military and naval forces of the United States... for these purposes.”<sup>209</sup> It is interesting to note that the war message McKinley sent to Congress made it clear that American intervention was in American interests and meant to impose “hostile constraint on both parties to the contest,” meaning both the Spanish army and the Cuban insurgents.<sup>210</sup> Congress passed what amounted to an ultimatum to Spain; McKinley signed it on April 21. As expected, Spain almost immediately declared war and Congress reciprocated on April 25, backdating the beginning of the war McKinley’s signature on their resolution.

### **The War**

The circumstances of the Spanish-American War’s beginning gives us, in the form of a significant interval between the rally event and the declaration of war, a unique opportunity to see the effect of public opinion on the actions of a President who is reluctant to conform to the desires of the electorate, namely to go to war. The quantitative data show in Table 3 that, while the President was becoming more important in the press’ discussion of the Cuban question after the destruction of the *Maine*, there was no significant difference in the way

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<sup>208</sup> Croly, 1912, pgs. 277-278.

<sup>209</sup> McKinley’s message to Congress.

<sup>210</sup> McKinley, quoted in Perez, 1982, pg. 181.

they actually *treated* him. He is the mover of action in the country and the papers understand this, so they are covering him more. He is not the symbolic leader of the nation, however, and is not yet unassailable, so they are still covering him in the same way. Whether positive or negative, they are simply doing more coverage. It seems the event that triggers the surge of support consistent with the rally effect is not the *Maine* sinking but the declaration of war itself. Once war was declared, the newspapers began immediately lining up behind the President. Public opinion was widely reported and nearly unanimous in support of the administration and its Cuban policies. The shift in the qualitative data is clear in Table 4. While mentions of the White House, already significantly increased in the wake of the *Maine* incident, do not increase significantly beyond that point, the increase in support for the President is substantial, significant to the 0.05 level. Patriotism seems to be grabbing the nation now in a way that it had not during the Mexican-American War in that the President is getting a benefit from the crisis, but it only materializes after he changes policies to be in line with public desires that he receives it.

The methodological concern here becomes whether the observed shift in the data is due to an actual shift to the President's support from opposition or whether it comes from the shift in the President to a policy that is more amenable to the editorial staffs of the papers in question. To address this issue specifically, I examined how the papers behaved with regards to specific policies. Did they change their attitudes towards specific policies? If the President is seeing a surge in support because of his change in actions, the papers will not change their attitudes towards Cuba; they will simply note the President's change and go on.

Alternatively, if it the papers are lining up behind him, there will be a shift in how they talk

about the Cuban issue. Earlier indiscretions will fall away from mention or be redefined as virtues.

In fact, both of these things happened. The conservative papers in my sample, the *Tribune* and the *Post*, changed how they were covering the conflict. The *Evening Post*, having been anti-war, did not substantively alter the way it reported on Cuba, but did begin to report more positively on the military and public opinion towards the conflict. The *Tribune* jumped sides completely, going from stating that “It would not be a pleasant thing, nor a thing to be done lightly or hastily, for this country to interfere in Spain’s domestic troubles” to saying that the House, in passing a resolution calling for the President to intervene in Cuba, had “acted wisely” and complaining about Senate delays: “A week ago the Senate was ready to act...all that was wanted was for the President to get out of the way. Yet the Senate still deliberates.”<sup>211</sup> The opposition paper in the data set, Pulitzer’s *Journal*, was both anti-administration and anti-war to begin with. They swung hard at McKinley throughout the period before the *Maine* disaster and ran what would be called irresponsibly sensational stories today, many of which called out the White House for failures to respond to the often-fictional atrocities and dishonors. After the declaration of war, the *Journal* doesn’t suddenly find its journalistic ethics, but does refocus its rhetoric onto the Spanish and away from domestic targets. The change comes, then, as a reaction to favorable policy changes and not as a rally. McKinley is still a traditional president: a clerk, expected to fulfill the wishes of the people as expressed by their representatives in Congress and, while not punished explicitly, certainly not rewarded for forging his own path politically. He is not yet the non-

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<sup>211</sup> *Tribune*, 5/15/1897, 4/15/1898.

partisan symbol of the nation from whom the people can accept on a gut-level essentially anything dealing with an us-versus-them sort of crisis that foreign policy situations present.

The focus of the government once the war began was the successful prosecution of the war, and rightly so. However, the President took care to frame the conflict in such a way that it would not be seen either overseas or at home as an imperialistic land-grab. The president, as described by future Speaker of the House Joe Cannon (D-IL), kept his ear “so close to the ground it was full of grasshoppers.”<sup>212</sup> That ear was telling him that the people were fired up about the destiny of the nation and what they saw as the country’s duty to the rest of the world. The idea of crusade was in line with their opinions, not conquest.

The first engagement of the war came not 90 miles off the American coast but on the other side of the world. Commodore George Dewey’s squadron took a leisurely morning to dismember the entire Spanish Asiatic fleet in Manila Bay, the Philippines. While more than 300 Spaniards and all seven Spanish ships went to the bottom of the bay, not a single casualty was suffered on the American side. Public opinion soared. Surely this lopsided victory was proof of the rightness of the American cause, the papers proclaimed. Despite crusade leading them to war, conquest was the result, and some of the overseas holdings taken from Spain are still in American hands.<sup>213</sup> McKinley and most of the Cabinet found that, especially in the Philippines, taking the most valuable part of the archipelago (Luzon Island, with the harbor and coaling station at Manila) would invariably lead directly to having to acquire the entire island chain. They were unwilling to share the strategically

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<sup>212</sup> Quoted in McCartney, pg 117.

<sup>213</sup> Guam and Puerto Rico were directly ceded to the US from Spain, but the non-Spanish territories of American Samoa and Hawaii came into American hands indirectly because of the war.

important islands with other powers, such as Germany and Japan, and Spain was in such a position after the conclusion of the war that they could not hope to defend any of their holdings there. The choice became take nothing and step away, allowing the Filipinos to have their try at independence, or take on the entire chain and inherit Spain's war to put down the insurrection.<sup>214</sup> The latter became official policy and it wasn't until 1902 that the conflict was ended. McKinley managed to sell this to the American public as a crusade nonetheless, portraying America's role as a missionary one, one that would bring civilization to the Filipinos.

### **Conclusions**

The Spanish-American War heralded the emergence of the United States from regional power into great power status, gaining for the first time overseas colonies. This would also set the stage for a President who became increasingly engaged in the development of foreign policy and as a result increasingly seen as the proper location for that power. While Congress pushed McKinley hard for war and support of the Cuban cause before the war, the President was able to capitalize on public support in the post-war months, leading to huge electoral victories in the 1898 midterms, the 1900 presidential election and legislative victories that expanded American territorial holdings for the first time overseas and tacit approval for participation in the 1899 Hague Conferences on international peace.

In a transitional case for the development of both the idea of the President as a center of political action and for the mass media, I expected to see a small rally. However, the case is odd due to the reluctance of the President to act in accord with the demands of public, and Congressional, opinion. After the destruction of the *Maine*, the president suddenly became

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<sup>214</sup> See Offner 1999, pgs 35-38.

much more important to the public and the press. Even though the attention McKinley was getting was negative largely in the public's eyes, as he was not acting the way they in large part wish him to, it was attention. That negative pressure became positive approval as soon as the President, in the wake of the Proctor speech, the Navy report on the *Maine* and the rebellion of the Republican rank-and-file in Congress, finally requested what amounted to a declaration of war from Congress. Thus, the expected rally did materialize, but only after the President changed his policy to one more in line with that of the public and the rest of government.

The President is becoming the accepted center for action, as indicated by the major increase in attention on McKinley as soon as the *Maine* incident occurs. However, the idea of the President as a symbolic leader for the nation seems to be lagging behind and does not yet warrant the unqualified support, regardless of specific policy actions, that our contemporary chief executives receive. That is the interesting finding in this case specifically. Without that symbolic position for President McKinley to operate from, he was not able to control the flow of the public debate on the Cuban crisis to the extent that modern presidents can. He was unable to appeal directly to the public for support, his presidency being of the traditional era and those sorts of connections directly to the public not yet being acceptable. Likewise, the public did not see his position as necessarily a leadership one for the entire nation and, seeing him as an executor of Congressional policy, do not defer to his information and position as a leader on foreign policy.

Modern rallies, however, do not behave in this way. They seem to be unconditional surges in support; McKinley did not enjoy that luxury. The support he received was predicated on his switch in policy, not on the event. The newspapers certainly cover the

administration more following the disaster in Havana harbor. They do not line up definitively behind the President until war is imminent. Without the symbolic position, he does not receive the deference and benefit of the doubt that modern presidents receive. There is a rally, but in the absence of the symbolism of the executive, it is not modern.

Table 3:

*Examining Press Accounts, 1 month Pre- and Post-Maine*

	<u>N (Pre-event)</u>	<u>N (Post-event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Mentions of</u>				
President	36	62	5.57	> 0.0001
Congress	128	90	0.219	0.8275
Public Opinion	60	43	0.012	0.9906
	<u>Mean (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>Mean (Post Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Attitude on</u>				
President	0.2	0.115	0.46	0.6466
Congress	0.07	0.1	0.4447	0.6557
Public Opinion	0.083	0.116	0.3626	0.7179

Table 4:

*Examining Press Accounts, Pre- and Post-Declaration*

	<u>N (Pre-event)</u>	<u>N (Post-event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Mentions of</u>				
President	150	172	0.9614	0.3375
Congress	362	448	0.5338	0.5941
Public Opinion	169	232	0.6287	0.5302
	<u>Mean (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>Mean (Post Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Attitude on</u>				
President	0.1689	0.3488	2.1105	0.0356
Congress	0.0967	0.3213	5.2179	> 0.0001
Public Opinion	0.1273	0.75	15.2712	> 0.0001

Note: The dates are Jan 15-Apr 21 (Pre-), Apr 22-Aug 15 (Post-). This will affect the count comparisons for mentions only, but not the T-test results.

*]It would be an irony of fate if my administration had to deal with foreign problems, for all my preparation has been in domestic matters.  
-- Woodrow Wilson*

## **Chapter 5:**

### **The Rally Effect Ascendant -- World War I**

#### **Introduction**

On January 16, 1917, Arthur Zimmermann, Foreign Secretary of the German Empire, sent a coded telegram to the German ambassador in Washington, DC, to be relayed to the ambassador in Mexico City. The telegram instructed Ambassador to Mexico Heinrich von Eckardt, in the case that it appeared likely the US was about to enter the war, to approach the Mexican government with an offer of a military alliance. In exchange for this alliance, Mexico would receive “generous” financial aid and a substantial portion of the territories lost at the end of the Mexican-American War, specifically the southwestern states of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. Such a direct threat, an incitement for Mexico to enter the war against the United States in a secret military alliance with Germany, would have most certainly caused a major up-tick in the approval ratings of modern presidents. The question for this chapter centers on whether or not President Woodrow Wilson gets the same sort of surge in support from the publication of the telegram.

Touching briefly on earlier material, the causes of rallies are identified throughout the academic literature as centering around two general items: patriotism and elite behavior. Especially important for this work are the existence of both the symbolic presidency, the recognized target for that patriotism and center for action, and a coherent and independent mass media to codify and express that elite opinion to the mass of the American public. By the eve of American entry into the First World War, the media had changed radically. It was

now a truly independent political force; they had divorced themselves from the party control that had almost exclusively dictated news coverage for much of the nineteenth century. That said, however, they were not the objective reporters of news that the profession aspires to be today. Journalism historian Michael Schudson points to the intra-war era, especially the 1920s, as the time in which journalistic codes of ethics and objectivity were born. These came about as a result of skepticism concerning the shapers of public opinion from the war years. War propaganda had showed that facts were not indisputable, but were subject to opinion and interpretation. While not as strong as the press at the turn of the century, the papers still strongly reflected the sometimes deeply partisan opinions of the editors. It wasn't until the idea of what he calls the "democratic market society," in which ideas are advocated and debated until a 'truth' is decided on, "was radically questioned..." that "the ideal of objectivity as consensually validated statements about the world, predicated on a radical separation of facts and values" came into being.<sup>215</sup> Until that point, he observes, the focus was on printing facts, without much heed to the opinions of the writers that would necessarily color those facts.

Wilson entered the White House in the aftermath of major changes brought about by the first President Roosevelt. Roosevelt had done two major things to alter the way that the executive branch was understood. First, he had explicitly returned to the long-abandoned Federalist ideas of executive power, combining it with a popular leadership that was reminiscent of Jackson. He felt that the right way to govern was to be "Hamiltonian in [the] belief in a strong and efficient national government and Jeffersonian in [the] belief in the people as the ultimate authority and in the welfare of the people as the end of

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<sup>215</sup> Schudson (1978), pg. 122.

government.”<sup>216</sup> Second, he ushered in a new style, as Tulis describes it, of leading the government: rhetorical leadership. While remaining within the appearances of the traditional presidential roles, TR made manifest James Bryce’s 1891 prediction that “the tendency everywhere in America is to concentrate power and responsibility in one man”<sup>217</sup> would lead to a strong executive. Roosevelt made the people the ultimate authority in the political system; he was willing to appeal to the ‘boss’ during inter-branch struggles. This made him a very effective and popular leader and cemented the place of the presidency as the symbolic leader of the nation and, as such, the proper initiator of action at the federal level.

### **Case Selection**

The final case for my study of the development of the rally around the flag effect needed to be one in which the modern presidency was coming into its own. World War was an ideal case to select, as both of the determinants of the rally effect, the symbolic presidency and the independent mass media were present by the second decade of the new century.

When setting a rally event from which to select coding dates, I realized that, unlike my first two cases, the entry of the United States into the Great War did not have a single causal event. The Mexican American War had the Thornton Affair, the Spanish-American War had the *Maine*, and later WWII would have Pearl Harbor, but WWI did not have this. There were a number of good reasons for American entry into the war: the sinking of various American-flagged passenger and commercial ships and British ships that carried significant

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<sup>216</sup> Roosevelt, 1926, 20: 414.

<sup>217</sup> Bryce (1891), 2: 712.

numbers of American citizens,<sup>218</sup> German sabotage leading to the massive munitions explosions at Black Tom and Kingsland, the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917 and the Zimmermann Telegram, published in March 1917. This myriad of events posed a significant problem; coding from each of these events would create a set of data all its own and, depending on the cases specifically, those time periods might not overlap or even cover any non-neutral American involvement in the war.

To resolve the issue, I selected the event closest to the declaration of war, the Zimmermann Telegram. This event is methodologically attractive for a number of reasons. First, its proximity to the declaration of war, five weeks, hints at its importance in Wilson's decision to finally enter the war that he had been reelected to keep the United States out of. Second, when it did become public, the reactions ran the full gambit from accusations of being a forgery perpetrated by British Intelligence to trick the United States into the conflict to immediate calls for war. None of the other events caused this sort of outrage across the political spectrum. Finally, looking back to Mueller's definition of a rally event, he stated that a rally event "is international... involves the United States and particularly the President directly..." and is "specific, dramatic, and sharply focused."<sup>219</sup> Of all the events that I considered as possible rally events, the Zimmermann Telegram is the most specific and sharply focused, and one of if not the most dramatic. It directly threatened the United States with invasion from a country in whose own civil war the US had been both indirectly and directly involved. As a military threat, it most intimately involved the United States and the

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<sup>218</sup> Included in this list are the SS *Gulflight* (5/1/1915) with 3 dead, all Americans, RMS *Lusitania* (5/7/1915) with 1,195 dead (128 Americans), SS *Arabic* (8/15/1915) with 44 dead (3 Americans), as well as several American flagged freighters where the submarine captains allowed the evacuation of passengers and crew before sinking them.

<sup>219</sup> Mueller (1973), pg. 209.

President in his role as Commander-in-Chief. Mirroring the coding decisions for the Thornton Affair in my chapter on the Mexican-American War, I decided to code from the date of the message's publication, March 1, rather than the actual date of the transmission, as this would be the time at which public opinion would be affected.

This event and date selection created a possible endogeneity problem. Coding from March 1, the data would be affected by an exogenous event, the announcement of the German intent to renounce their pledge to avoid the unnecessary sinking of neutral shipping and the resulting deaths and resume unrestricted submarine warfare. This resumption, announced on January 31, occurred just on the other side of what would be my collected data. If I were unable to account for the possible effect of this additional event, the validity of the entire analysis could be in doubt. To address this problem, I collected and coded data from January 1-31, providing me with the means to code outside of the period influenced by the German announcement as well. This extra data will strengthen the analysis by allowing me to see what, if any, effect the additional provocation by the German Empire against the neutral shipping rights of the United States might have on the attitudes towards the President and the Congress.

When I moved on to selecting papers from which to code, I was faced with another problem. The literature on the history of journalism has a significant gap during the period from about the turn of the twentieth century to the early twenties when it comes to identifying the partisan leanings of various publications. Once the age of yellow journalism was over in the very early years of the century, the media began to move away from overt partisanship and as a result the literature does not identify them nearly so clearly. To address this problem, I was forced to rate their political preferences myself. To this end, I decided to

code for a month of editorials, the most likely place to see overt partisanship crop up. In an effort to avoid biasing my data by coding from the period of the rally, these coding dates came from September 1916, six months before the rally event that this study examines. I chose randomly ten editorial sections from that month for each of the major New York papers, continuing through them in order of their circulation numbers, from highest to lowest, until I got three papers that would fulfill the needs of my model. The three papers that I settled on were the *American*, the *Tribune* and the *Times*.

The *Times* serves as the pro-administration paper in my dataset. The editorials from September 1916 showed a distinct favoring of Wilson and Wilsonian policies in the run-up to his race for re-election against Supreme Court Justice Charles Evans Hughes, who was drafted by the divided GOP convention. In fact, in my reading of the editorial articles the only thing said in support of Justice Hughes was a defense of his right to speak against hecklers who disrupted a campaign speech in Nashville, TN. Other than that, those editorials that discussed national politics were decidedly pro-administration. It is not clear that this is the beginning of the *Times* reputed liberal leanings, but the paper did lean towards the Democrats at this time.

Throughout September 1916, Hearst's *New York American* made clear its anti-Ally (and especially anti-British) sentiment, accusing the English of blockading American ports,<sup>220</sup> and arguing that the civilization of the Balkans under German influence would be better than "Russia's degrading and brutal tyranny."<sup>221</sup> It also detested Wilson himself, accusing him of caving in to British pressure against American neutral rights, backing away

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<sup>220</sup> *Times*, 9/23/1916

<sup>221</sup> *American*, 9/5/1916

from promises to the Philippine people and wanting to leave them to be taken over by the Japanese after the country's significant investment in their "civilization."<sup>222</sup> This was so prevalent and obvious a bias that only a month later, in November 1916, the British and French governments banned the use of their mail and telegraph cables by Hearst-run papers.<sup>223</sup>

The *Tribune* did not seem to like much of anyone particularly well. It repeatedly attacked Wilson's position on the Eight-Hour Bill. The editors of the *Tribune* saw it as a "disgraceful surrender to the railroad brotherhoods..."<sup>224</sup> On foreign policy, it treated him sarcastically at times; on Mexico, it pointed out that, since the railroads had managed to get a concession from the administration, why should Mexico not try to get a piece of the action, to a rumored tune of \$200 million?<sup>225</sup> However, the *Tribune*'s editorial staff set this against a strong anti-German bias in the war as well. The paper supported Congressional authorization for the president to enact trade reprisals against the Allied powers for infractions against American neutrality, but expressed its support over and over for those same Allies "because it [believed] that American interests, American principles and American ideals [were] being served by the nations who [were] fighting Germany, and... that German defeat [was] as essential to America as to Europe."<sup>226</sup> Because the editors of the *Tribune* seemed fairly evenhanded in the dislike for all parties I included this paper as the neutral contribution to my sample.

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 9/12/1916

<sup>223</sup> Mott, (1972), pg. 617.

<sup>224</sup> *Tribune*, 9/4/1916

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, 9/11/1916.

<sup>226</sup> *Tribune*, 9/7/1916

This change in the selection criteria for the papers included in the sample was made necessary by the evolution of the papers away from being what amounted to in the nineteenth century partisan opinion papers. They became independent of the parties that had heretofore sponsored them and, in some cases, directly selected their editorial staffs and instead expressed the ideological and issue-based policies of their owners and editors. While the change from expressly partisan criteria to policy/ideological preferences is a significant one, the effect of it is much less so. The effect of a presidential policy change would predict no difference under partisan selection criteria, as the partisan papers would shift their coverage to simply mirror the president's new policies. This retains the essential nature of the selections, with one paper on each of the ends of the spectrum and one near the center. Under ideological criteria, the papers flip on their opinions of the president when he changes policy, but here again are predicted to remain on the ends of the policy spectrum, with one supportive, one critical and one neutral paper.

### **Wilson and the Nearly-Modern Presidency**

The Office of the President of the United States in 1917 had come a long way in the seventy years since Polk and the Mexican-American War. Lincoln had expanded the implied powers and responsibility of the executive branch to include the preservation of the republic. McKinley had laid the foundations for international involvement as the US gained its first overseas territories. Roosevelt had shown the ability of the office to be a popular leader, ushered in the stewardship theory of the presidency, demonstrated the power of the bully pulpit and the ability of popular appeals to lend support to the president politically.

Wilson, the only political scientist to date elected President, came to the White House with a cogent theory of how to reform the executive. As a student and professor, he described

what he felt was a lack of energy and consistency in government. To address this, he favored in his early writing a shift in power from the President to an executive board analogous to the British Cabinet, addressing what he felt was the uselessness of the post-Civil War Presidency.<sup>227</sup> Wilson changed his mind, however, with the example of Theodore Roosevelt's vigorous leadership, and he came into office believing that the best hope for national leadership laid in a vigorous, powerful president. While Wilson fought vehemently with Roosevelt over specifics of policy, he also admitted that Roosevelt was an effective leader, one that led Congress rather than being led by it. He modified the earlier President's call for the direct popular rule, which he felt was the beginning of a slope that would lead to demagoguery, into the idea that the executive should be a strong party leader; this would tie the executive and legislative branches together, would contribute to the ability of both branches to govern more effectively and vigorously, and not run the risks that a vast expansion of executive power might.<sup>228</sup>

Wilson changed a number of things with regards to the office. For the first time since John Adams was in office, he fulfilled the constitutional mandate for a State of the Union message by appearing on Capitol Hill and speaking to Congress. The President did not, as had been customary since Washington, address his message to Congress. He made clear that his audience was the citizenry of the nation and that he would deal with Congress through the people.<sup>229</sup>

The people had changed their view of the role of the presidency as well. One of the most telling articles on how much the ideas on the presidency had changed since Polk and the

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<sup>227</sup> Milkis and Nelson (2008), pg.s 239-41.

<sup>228</sup> Wilson (1908), pg.s 71-2.

<sup>229</sup> Tulis (1987), pg. 133.

Mexican-American War came from a paper not in this study. On February 3<sup>rd</sup>, the *Cleveland Press* editorialized that “Germany must understand – and every other nation in the world must understand – that the voice of the president is the voice of the United States of America; and that the whole hundred million of us STAND BY THE PRESIDENT.”<sup>230</sup> The President was now accepted as the leader of the country, at least with regards to foreign policy, no matter what the actual politics of the individual citizens or, in this case, newspapers happened to be.

### **Background**

When the Zimmermann Telegram was published, the European War was nearly three years old, with no end in sight. The lightning-fast German offensive in September 1914 had been barely stopped by the last line of Allied reserve forces on the Marne River and the Western Front quickly settled into the grinding attrition of trench warfare. However, the causes of the telegram reach back to the eighteenth century and the delicate web of political and military alliances that formed the balance of power and kept the peace in Europe for a century. By reaching out in this way to Mexico, Germany was seeking to balance the weight of the United States on the Allied side with the possible addition of Mexico and Japan to the Central Powers. This was classic nineteenth-century balance of power strategy.

The US, on the other side of the Atlantic from the fighting, had stayed true to Washington’s warning against entangling alliances and the tenets of the Monroe Doctrine and had remained neutral in the conflict. The nation professed neutrality, though many scholars have seen definite Allied sympathies. Jim Powell points to the American reaction to Germany’s announcement that it would sink all ships in the war zone around the British Isles

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<sup>230</sup> *Cleveland Press*, 2/3/1917. The emphasis is included in the original.

as an example of this one-sided neutrality.<sup>231</sup> Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, the strongest anti-war voice in Wilson's cabinet, urged the president to prohibit Americans from traveling in the war zone, worried that the loss of American lives, whether on neutral or belligerent vessels, would lead to the public demand for vengeance for those lives, leading in turn to vast numbers of more deaths. Wilson advised citizens in Mexico during the civil war south of the border that they remained at their own risk, but no such advice was coming for those in the European war zones.<sup>232</sup> This gave the implication, later made explicit by the President in notes to Germany, that the Central Powers would held to a different standard on the High Seas than Mexico was: namely, being held responsible for the deaths of American civilians in the war zone. This is pointed to as evidence of Allied sympathies in the Wilson administration because the fact was that the only ships crossing the Atlantic for Americans to ride on flew Allied flags. Great Britain used her massive navy to impose a blockade on Europe. Eventually, the declared contraband goods that would be excluded by the British blockade was expanded gradually from explicitly war material, such as guns and ammunition, to include even food and other essentials, threatening the non-combatant enemies of the British Empire with starvation. Germany, unable to lift the blockade by the force of her own traditional surface navy, responded by employing a new weapon: the submarine. Because the submarine's vulnerability on the surface made it much more effective as a surprise weapon, the Germans endeavored to advise neutrals of the dangers of the war zone, even paying for full-page advertisements in New York papers, before commencing to sink ships in the areas blockaded by the British. Wilson strongly criticized

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<sup>231</sup> For a discussion of what he calls "Wilson's Phony Neutrality," see Powell (2005), pgs. 88-91.

<sup>232</sup> Karp (1979), pg. 186.

German for her uncivilized submarine warfare, but remained curiously silent on British violations of neutral shipping rights.

When the British steamer *Lusitania* was attacked and sunk on May 7, 1915 off the coast of Ireland, with the loss of 128 American lives, Secretary Bryan urged Wilson to avoid the appearance of official partiality to the Allies. Citizens who enter the war zone aboard Allied vessels should do so at their own risk, he argued. Furthermore, shielding war contraband by having passengers aboard was not to his mind morally justifiable, likening the practice to putting women and children in front of an army. Wilson instead listened to the advice of Robert Lansing, then the Legal Advisor to the State Department, that the accountability of the German government to the neutral nations included the loss of American lives even on Allied passenger vessels. After Bryan resigned over the issue on June 9, Lansing replaced his former boss as Secretary of State. Bryan intended to use his resignation and newly found position as a private citizen to advocate for peace and against what he saw as Wilson's partiality towards the Allies. The press sharply criticized him for abandoning his post in the government at such a critical time. They went further and praised Wilson for his patient and deliberative handling of the tense situation.

The Germans responded to the American government's protests by limiting their use of the U-boat for two years. However, no such American criticism was levied against England for her blockade of all materials from reaching her foes on the continent.<sup>233</sup> In fact, on Lansing's advice, the president explicitly rejected the German arguments that the blockade was illegal and an attack on innocent civilians; this rejection, considering extremely provocative by Bryan, was the ultimate cause of his resignation from office. Wilson, for his

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<sup>233</sup> Powell (2005), pg. 90.

part, would take great lengths to avoid getting “swept by emotion into belligerency: ‘there is such a thing as a man too proud to fight... a nation being so right that it does not need to convince others by force that it is right.’”<sup>234</sup> He was resisting what he thought was public opinion in favor of what he felt was right.

In August, the torpedoing of another British vessel, the *Arabic*, caused calls for harsh measures from members of the cabinet. Wilson, aware of the deep divisions between those incensed by the loss of American lives to the German U-boats and those who stood for the support of national rights and honor but wanted peace, felt that the latter was in the strong majority. He directed his new Secretary of State to enter direct negotiations over the issue with the German ambassador, Johann von Bernstorff. Supported by the German military leaders who were understandably worried about the vast manpower and industrial resources of the US coming into the war on the side of the Allies, the German government pledged not to sink passenger liners of any nation without warning and provision for the safety of the passengers aboard.

In mid-March, a German submarine sank the unarmed French channel steamer *Sussex*. Clearly a violation of the *Arabic* pledge, the president threatened to sever diplomatic relations with Germany if such attacks continued. Again the Imperial diplomatic corps managed to avoid a rupture and renewed the earlier pledge to not sink unresisting passenger and merchant vessels without warning and providing for the safety of the passengers. However, this promise reserved the right to return to unrestricted warfare if the Americans did not obtain concessions from the Allies for neutrals to trade with either side; Wilson pointedly ignored this portion of the communiqué.

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<sup>234</sup> Siracusa (1993), pg. 11.

Throughout the first two years of the war, President Wilson pushed both the Allies and the Central Powers for peace, sending envoys repeatedly across the ocean to get the powers to talk to each other somewhere other than the battlefield. As early as the fall of 1915, the US was advocating peace. The British welcomed the Americans effort towards peace. However, they offered terms to end the war so blatantly pro-Ally that Germany would certainly reject them. Noting that if anyone rejected the terms that the Americans should enter the war on the other side, it was an obvious effort on the part of the Allies to merely get the Americans into the war on their side. The initiative failed primarily because the Allied leaders dead-set against a negotiated peace so long as it seemed that they could still win on the battlefield.

The public seemed to appreciate these efforts, as well. Wilson campaigned for re-election largely on the fact that he had kept the country out of the war. Hughes himself made a point of conferring extensively with German-American and Irish-American leaders, giving the impression that he was at least listening to leaders on both sides of the issue of the conflict. His public pronouncements on the subject advocated strict neutrality, as opposed to the one-sided neutrality that he argued was coming from the administration. However, with the collapse of the Progressive Party, Theodore Roosevelt had returned to the Republican fold. Roosevelt's much more bellicose attitude towards Germany allowed the Democrats to paint Hughes and the Republicans as pro-war. Early returns indicated an impending win for Hughes; Wilson went to bed too early to hear the first reports that the western states had given him a slim victory, 277-254 in the Electoral College and a razor-thin margin of less than 600,000 votes in the popular tally.

After his reelection, Wilson still held out hope for peace. He made two more efforts on that path. The first of these the request for a list of war aims from all of the powers. The idea behind this was that such lists might be used as the basis for a negotiation. The Allies published a list that was punitive towards Germany. This list included demands for restitution and reparations to the Allies, as well as assumption by Germany and the Central Powers of complete responsibility for beginning the war. While the Kaiser's government stated generally that they would be willing to enter into negotiations, they did not outline their objectives because it would likely have weakened their position at the negotiating table and had a negative effect on public opinion at home.<sup>235</sup> While Fischer argues that the war aims of Germany were expansive,<sup>236</sup> the publication of these aims would have likely been a no-starter for any peace negotiations. His second attempt was an appeal, made in a speech to the Senate, for a "peace without victory," in which neither side would impose terms upon the other that would cause lasting resentment and cause for future war. While generally applauded as an admirable statement of principle and mentioned by the Germans as a possible path to peace in the same breath that announced the resumption of the submarine campaign against England, this message was also essentially ignored by the powers.

In the month before the publishing of the Zimmermann Telegram, the situation with regards to American neutrality was becoming more and more precarious. On February 1, the German Foreign Minister gave public notice that the Imperial Navy would again begin unrestricted submarine warfare, something that they had previous repudiated under the

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<sup>235</sup> Brunauer (1932), pgs. 566-7.

<sup>236</sup> Fischer (1967) makes the argument that Germany started WWI as a means to become one of the great powers, with a German-dominated central Europe and a major expansion of the Reich's colonial holdings, especially in Africa, at the expense of France.

Sussex Pledge in May 1916. All of the papers in the sample reported on Congress, but rather than comment on the issuance of the opening on unrestricted warfare, the members that the papers talked to all stated that the issue was properly in the hands of the President and the State Department, something that likely would not have happened during earlier periods in this study. During the run-up to the Spanish American War, members of Congress excoriated President McKinley repeatedly, both before and after the explosion of *USS Maine*. Frank Cannon, a Republican Senator from Utah, asked bluntly “what is it that stays the hand of McKinley? We have waited long, but our waiting has been in vain and our cup of waiting is now full.”<sup>237</sup> After the Mexican-American War was in full swing, Congressional Whigs repeatedly attacked President Polk as having started an immoral and aggressive war; the House would later censure him for it. This would have been unthinkable in the build-up to the U.S. entry into WWI.

The New York papers, in their editorial treatment of the situation, were united and not nearly as reluctant to comment as the members of Congress. The *Times* put out that there was no way that “the Government and the people of the United States [would] put up with this German order forbidding to them the open pathways of the seas.”<sup>238</sup> The *Tribune*, normally measured in its attitude, stated clearly that the US could not, “without the completest loss of self respect, accept the conditions which Germany” announced would be imposed on neutral shipping. They did take the opportunity to take a small dig at the President, saying that the “country must... face the situation which he tried for so long to avoid facing,” suffering

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<sup>237</sup> *New York Journal*, 2/9/1898.

<sup>238</sup> *Times*, 2/1/1917

instead in “humiliation and sycophancy”<sup>239</sup> as the Germans broke their diplomatic promises again and again. However, the tone of the paper was decidedly patriotic and supportive of American rights on the high seas. The *American*, in its typically anti-Allied way, stated that “no sensible American expected [the Germans] would continue to submit to seeing their women and children starved by sea warfare” without striking back. However, even the editors of that paper, “profoundly hopeful that... peace [might] be maintained...with honor,” stated that if Wilson could not find another path but by the sword, that they would “walk loyally in that way with him.”<sup>240</sup>

When I began analyzing the quantitative data for this event, it seemed as though the announcement of Germany’s return to unrestricted submarine warfare was very significant to both the mentions of and the approval for the President. It also appeared that this effect was limited, as one might expect from the rally effect, to the executive. Mentions increased on average by nearly a third after the announcement. The mean approval rate went from slightly negative to relatively positive. While both of these were very statistically significant, the announcement appeared to be a strong candidate for the rally event in this study. However, I isolated the announcement from the effect of the Zimmerman Telegram by comparing the month before the announcement at the end of January only with that period of time between the two events; the significance crumbled. The apparent increase in mentions of the President became extremely insignificant and, while the change in approval remained slightly significant at the 0.1 level, it did not nearly approach the 0.001 level of the broader analysis.

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<sup>239</sup> *Tribune*, 2/1/1917

<sup>240</sup> *American*, 2/1/1917

Two days later, Wilson announced in a speech to Congress that diplomatic ties with Germany would be broken. One article shows that the rally effect was beginning to move on the issue. While the note accompanying Polk's request for war in 1841 was met with a fierce and partisan debate, "President Wilson must have been gratified," the *Tribune* opined, "to find such unanimity of support. There was no thought or breath of partisanship."<sup>241</sup> While the House did soon pass the Armed Ship Bill, a congressional authorization for the President to place naval guns and gun crews to man them aboard merchant vessels, twelve anti-war Senators managed to filibuster the bill until it died at the end of the session; Wilson immediately moved to arm merchant vessels on his authority as Commander-in-Chief.

### **Rally Event: The Zimmermann Telegram**

Ironically, the event that may have been the largest single impetus for American entry into World War I was made possible by efforts to broker peace in that same conflict. The United States was secretly allowing Germany to send messages to its diplomats in the Western Hemisphere under the cover of American consular traffic, as President Wilson held out hope that retaining contact with the Germans would help in the peace process. However, this specific telegraph line, crossing British soil, was being monitored by British intelligence and the code that encrypted it had been partially broken. Originally intercepted on January 19, the British hid the fact that they were monitoring neutral consular communications by getting an original of the coded message from Mexico City; the message had been relayed from Washington to Mexico City via commercial telegraph lines and a bribe gave them a copy of the message from the telegraph office's records. On February 23, the British Foreign Minister Arthur Balfour met with US Ambassador to Britain Walter Page and gave him the

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<sup>241</sup> *Tribune*, 2/4/1917.

text of the message. Page forwarded it immediately to Secretary Lansing. As soon as a corroborating copy of the original telegram was obtained from the telegraph office, Lansing went to the White House to show the message to the President. While Wilson initially felt that the document might have been a forgery perpetrated by the British to bring the US into the war, Lansing soon convinced him of its authenticity. He decided that the document should be leaked to the press; the head of the Associated Press, sworn to secrecy about the source, was given the text of the message and allowed to publish it.

The message inviting Mexico to enter the war was front-page news in every paper across the country on March 1. It immediately touched off a firestorm. One paper included a political cartoon showing the telegram as a bomb blowing up in the hands of the German foreign minister. Another paper printed an editorial that bluntly stated “Germany has been making war upon the United States for more than two years. It has not been an open and honorable war but a sneaking and despicable war... in all the history of nations there is no other record of such a lying friendship as that which Germany has professed for the United States.”<sup>242</sup> As a further sign of how powerful an effect this publication had on the American people came in the form of an overwhelming and almost immediate passage of Wilson’s long-floundering Armed Ship Bill. When Senator Robert La Follette Sr. filibustered the bill to death in the Senate at the end of the previous Congress, the Wisconsin liberal’s actions were so unpopular that the next Senate created cloture, a parliamentary means to overcome a filibuster and force a vote on bills. For the first time in the chamber’s history, the filibuster was not absolute.

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<sup>242</sup> The cartoon and quote are from the *New York World* and the *New York Times* respectively, both 3/1/1917.

American public opinion was already running strongly anti-German and anti-Mexican at the time of the telegram's publication. The former was due to the German policy of submarine warfare that had sunk American ships in British waters and killed American citizens sailing on British ships, including most notably RMS *Lusitania* a year and a half earlier, coupled with the recent announcement that Germany would return to unrestricted use of that tactic, breaking a promise to Wilson to respect neutral rights on the high seas. The latter was largely because of the ongoing revolution in which the Wilson administration had switched sides several times and a number of cross-border raids conducted by former Mexican General-turned-rebel-leader Francisco "Pancho" Villa in the Southwest; in fact, a force of 10,000 troops under General John "Black Jack" Pershing had only recently left northern Mexico after spending ten months in pursuit of rebel general.

This is not to say by any means that all emotion in the country was pro-Allies or even pro-war; much of the opposition came from the Midwest, led by Wisconsin's Sen. La Follette, a dozen Senators resisted the drive for war, destroying the principle of the unlimited filibuster in the US Senate in their opposition. Substantial numbers of people in the Midwest and West, an area that had been heavily settled by immigrants from the Central Powers, were still in favor of peace and neutrality. The *Chicago Tribune* repeatedly praised Wilson for his stand against the "drums of war" being pounded by the Allies,<sup>243</sup> though it did move to moderate support for intervention in the war after the publication of the Zimmerman Telegram. To the left of Wilson on the political spectrum, Eugene Debs called for organized labor to stand against the war. Debs and the American Socialist Party argued that the industrialists and the financiers were manipulating public opinion into war with a mind to the

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<sup>243</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 11/19/1916

big military contracts that would come their way if the country entered the conflict. He called for a general strike if war did come. Debs would later be jailed for speaking out against the draft and serve three and a half years in prison.

After the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare, the Germans had not wasted any efforts on encouraging the US to stay out of the war. In February, submarines sank more than three-quarters of a million tons of Allied and neutral shipping, including two American ships that were warned and went down with no loss of life. When the liner *RMS Laconia*, a British armed merchant cruiser, went down near the end of the month, two American women lost their lives. This continued even after the publication of the Zimmermann note. Three more American ships were sunk through March, with the loss on one of them of 15 lives. All of the newspapers in my sample carried multiple reports of public meetings calling for war. Thousands demonstrated in Philadelphia's Independence Square for war. Even in Chicago, the heartland of the neutrality and isolationist movements, the Governor of Illinois addressed a massive public meeting that was followed by a protest march urging the government to declare war.

Wilson lamented to a friend, even at the end, that joining the war "would mean that a majority of the people in this hemisphere would go war mad... and devote their energies to destruction... Once lead this people into war and they'll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance... If there is any alternative for God's sake let's take it."<sup>244</sup> Wilson finally found himself forced to call a special session of Congress for April 2.

His earnest wish aside, he addressed Congress in cool and confident tones. He described his efforts for peace and German's increasingly belligerent moves towards the

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<sup>244</sup> Quoted in Dos Passos (1962), pg. 201.

country. He described the remaining options but also stated that “there is one choice we cannot make, we are incapable of making: we will not choose the path of submission.” It is telling about the state of public opinion that it was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Edward White that touched off, with a single resounding slap of his hands over his head, the thunderous applause that answered this line. It is just as telling of the President’s deep sadness over the nation’s entry to the war that, upon returning to the White House that evening, he confided to his personal secretary that his “message today was a message of death for our young men. How strange it seems to applaud that.”<sup>245</sup>

### **The Data**

When the time to select actual data came, I was faced with a major methodological problem that the two cases in my preceding chapters had not posed. Coding from March 1, much of my post-event data would fall into the time period after the passage of the Espionage Act of 1917. Passed June 17, 1917, about 2 months after the US officially entered the war, the act was to be enforced against anyone who had opinions that ran contrary to the national war effort, especially the German-language and socialist presses, on the basis that it would interfere with the success of the armed forces of the U.S. or promote the success of its enemies. In this atmosphere, political dissent, such as unsupportive coverage in the press, might have been looked upon as giving aid and comfort to the enemy. At the very least the passage of this act could have had a chilling effect; editors, concerned about consequences, may have toned down opposition to the administration’s war policies. The later Sedition Act of 1918, outside of the time period examined in this study, made the implicit suppression of opposition speech under the Espionage Act explicit, punishing “any disloyal, profane,

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid, pg. 202-3.

scurrilous, or abusive language” about the government, the military or the flag. The typical punishment for violations of either law was denial of use of second-class mail rates, but could range up, at the sole discretion of the Postmaster General, to denial of access to the mail system completely or even refusal to deliver any incoming mail to the editors. The latter two punishments typically spelled death for publications. This would certainly support a rally, as it would have had the potential to squash any dissent immediately.

Keeping this in mind, I decided to analyze my collected data in a number of ways. The first two would be similar to the Spanish-American War data, comparing the data before and after the publication of the telegram, with a second set run before and after the declaration of war on April 6. Like that in my previous chapter, it would give me the opportunity to examine independently the effect of the rally event and that of the declaration of war itself. I also resolved that, if there were a rally apparent in the data from the pre- and post-event analysis, I would further examine the effect of the declaration within the rally period; this would work to reduce the problem of the internal validity of pre- and post-declaration analysis being affected by the intervention of the rally event itself.

Finally, a comparison of the data from before and after the passage of the Espionage Act will attempt to account for the effect of that legislation on my dataset. Once the first two analyses are complete, a specific date range for the third would be determined. If there was a rally, as expected, I decided to run data from the largest period of ‘rally’ time, from the rally event or the declaration, through to the Espionage Act and compare that to media accounts after the act’s passage. By only running it during the period of the rally itself, I hope to find out if the Espionage Act creates an artifact in the data set by having a chilling effect on dissent from the official government policy.

When I examined the data before and after the rally event itself, the President suddenly received a surge of mentions in press coverage. The press became much more interested in the actions and the opinions of the President when, much like in the modern era, the nation perceived an external threat. The German telegram posed just such a potential threat. Discussion of the President and Congress, especially on the issue of arming merchant vessels and the telegram itself, dominated the front page of each paper in my sample for days after its initial publication, nearly to the exclusion of all other topics. The coverage became much more positive as well, with a high level of significance in this change. An illustrative example comes with Wilson's efforts to place naval guns and gun crews on American merchant vessels for protection against the submarine threat. Before the rally event the Republican members of both chambers had serious reservations with portions of the armed neutrality bill, especially the portion giving the President the power to interpret and react to future events without the approval of Congress. Enter the Zimmermann Telegram and the accompanying public outcry against Germany. The bill, including the controversial provisions, passed quickly on a large majority in the House within a few days after the publication of the telegram. The *Times* pointed out that "patriotic zeal was at fever heat in the House... and was responsible for the passage... by the overwhelming vote of 402-13" of the bill to arm the merchant ships.<sup>246</sup>

Public opinion also increased in coverage, with the overwhelming portion of that coverage coming from reports of protests and from letters to the editors. An example of this was the publication of a letter from the faculty of Brown University, up until that time hold-outs for peace, that stated they were "anxious for peace, but [believed] that permanent peace,

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<sup>246</sup> *Times*, 3/2/1917.

or even peace in the immediate future, is impossible if for the United States if militarism is victorious in Europe.”<sup>247</sup> An early article reported on a secret German propaganda press thought to be operating in New York and printing “scurrilous circulars attacking [President] Wilson... by thousands.”<sup>248</sup> Reports of public meetings and demonstrations all across the country were reported throughout the sample articles. Those that came from the Midwest and West were sometimes remarked on by the newspapers as being indicative of the true American nature of those largely immigrant populations that had heretofore been anti-war or pro-German in sentiment. An interesting side-feature was that the average number of mentions of Congress over the same period seemed to drop, though the coverage was more positive; neither of these results managed to reach statistical significance.<sup>249</sup>

As I moved to the next section of my analysis, the effect of the actual declaration of war,<sup>250</sup> it seemed that the attention on President Wilson was not affected by the Congressional action, though the coverage did, again, jump in its support for him. This increased approval can be seen in the type of things were being covered. Elihu Root was covered telling the Republican Club of New York that “it was the duty of all Republicans to stand behind the President in the present war, no matter what mistakes might be made...” Root was particularly authoritative on this topic as he had been Secretary of War under McKinley and Roosevelt, as well as Secretary of State under the latter, before being elected

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<sup>247</sup> *Times*, 3/1/1917

<sup>248</sup> *Times*, 3/1/1917.

<sup>249</sup> For the results referred to in this paragraph, see Table 5 at the end of the chapter.

<sup>250</sup> See Table 6.

to the Senate for a single term from New York in 1909. Others at the same meeting expressed similar feelings.<sup>251</sup>

Coverage did not appear to increase for Congress or for public opinion, either. Much of the coverage of the legislative branch became a simple listing of actions taken without much commentary, indicating that the papers considered the legislative branch to be taking a backseat role to the executive. One noted exception was the proposal for a joint Congressional committee on the prosecution of the war. Mentioned in April, it never moved very far in the proposal stage, as Wilson was adamantly against it.<sup>252</sup> This mention, however, was very matter of fact and did not betray the thoughts of the paper on the proposal itself and was consequently coded as a neutral portion of a neutral article on Congress. However, while Congress saw no increase in support, the public saw another jump, similar to the rally event itself. A representative example comes from Hearst's *American*, quoting a representative from New York who had been on a speaking tour of the Midwest: "Upon leaving for the West I had misgivings as to the feeling regarding the war which I should find in that section of our country... I am convinced that the people of the Middle West are... American to the core."<sup>253</sup> It is telling that such a supportive comment would be published in the paper that played the role of anti-Wilson and anti-Allied exemplar in the sample. New York Senator William Calder was quoted on the subject of public opinion towards the war; before the President's war message, he had received more than ten thousand letters on the subject of the war, two-thirds of them being against. However, after the message, the tone of the letters

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<sup>251</sup> *Tribune*, 4/10/1917.

<sup>252</sup> *Times*, 4/10/1917.

<sup>253</sup> *American*, 4/16/1917

changed dramatically, with “many Americans [coming] to him and [saying] that the country could depend on them to fight for it.”<sup>254</sup>

When I took the period of time before the revelation of the telegram out of the analysis, isolating the effect of the declaration itself within the rally period, the results changed in a number of important ways.<sup>255</sup> The increase in coverage of Congress became significant, probably reflecting the focus of Congress on putting the country on a war footing. This included the debate over arming merchant vessels, giving to the President the hotly contested power to judge and react to future events and the acrimonious debate over arming merchant ships that had led to the demise of the unlimited filibuster rule in the Senate. This assumption is supported by the fact that the opinions of Congress did not change significantly. The tone of the coverage of public opinion had a significant increase, though the amount of it did not. The *Tribune* covered a significant change of tone from one of the German-American weekly papers: “It is not unpatriotic for an honest paper or an honest man to oppose going to war... We have opposed war. Our side has lost. We are American and while our heart goes out to Germany... we feel that our common duty demands we stand behind our government.”<sup>256</sup> One surprise was the fact that the attitudes towards the President only barely made it to significance at the 0.1 level, hinting that the declaration itself was not nearly as important an event in the support for the President as was the publication. Comparing the way in which the papers discuss the two topics with regards to the two events is supportive of this finding. The *American*, on the day after the Zimmermann Telegram was

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<sup>254</sup> *Tribune*, 4/10/1917. This quote comes from the same article that quoted Elihu Root, also mentioned in this section.

<sup>255</sup> See Table 7.

<sup>256</sup> *Tribune*, 4/7/1917.

published, talked about a hypothetical alliance of Japan, Mexico and Russia that “would set back a hundred years” the progress of the United States and reduce the country “from the first nation in the whole world to a second rate nation, impoverished...surrounded, with only one coastline and that turned towards the... Old World and not towards the New.” In contrast, the same paper barely mentions the actual declaration, stating that it is a “mere statement, affirming the state of affairs that already exists” between the two nations.<sup>257</sup>

The last event that I examined was the passage of the Espionage Act, looking for a possible chilling effect on any dissent in the model and causing a rally to show where none might otherwise. While sound as an assumption on the face of it, the Act seemed to have very little effect on the way the government was being covered, with the President and Congress failing to change significantly in either amount or tone. Interestingly, however, the tone of public opinion coverage changed somewhat. The main change comes with reference to the socialist papers’ protests against restrictions placed on them under the Espionage Act. They began to be referred to as “seditious,” “incendiary” and “radical,”<sup>258</sup> as well as the general tone of the coverage being much supportive of the government position on the publications.

## **The War**

World War I, especially on the Western Front, was brutal in the minds of American readers. The papers had carried the details of the war, relayed by trans-Atlantic telegraph cable, since the outbreak of the fighting in August 1914. The American public, however, hungered for the news of the war and the papers increased their coverage accordingly, with

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<sup>257</sup> *American*, 4/6/1917.

<sup>258</sup> *Times*, 7/10/1917, among others.

most of the larger papers, including all three in my sample, printing five to eight pages of war coverage by the end of 1914.

In the six months after the publication of the Zimmermann Telegram covered by this study, not much happened in France with regards to the American Expeditionary Force. When war was declared, the US Army had only about 200,000 men in uniform. By the end of the war, nearly four million would have served in some capacity. In mid-May, General Pershing was named as the commanding officer of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF). The first units of the AEF landed on the continent in late June 1917. Under orders from Washington to retain the identity of his units as a “distinct and separate component of the combined forces,” Pershing resisted the efforts of the British and French commanders to use the newly arrived doughboys as replacements for their own depleted regiments. He won out and by September, just after the time period covered in this work, the American commander had set up his field headquarters and American forces shortly thereafter stepped into the line against the German Army. When Secretary of War Newton Baker was visited by Pershing just before his departure for Europe, Baker told the general that he had almost complete *carte blanche* when it came to the prosecution of the war in Europe; Washington would only issue two orders: go to France and come home. It was success or failure that would be the hallmark of his tenure as seen by the American public. “If you make good,” Baker told him, “the people will forgive almost any mistake. If you do not make good, they will probably hang us both from the first lamppost they can find.”<sup>259</sup>

While the Army took time to draft and train soldiers to fill out its woefully inadequate ranks, the US Navy was far better equipped for the war and saw action immediately in the

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<sup>259</sup> Quoted in Dos Passos (1962), pg. 245.

Atlantic. A large portion of the American Atlantic battleship fleet was attached to the British Grand Fleet in early December and for the remainder of the war, helping to keep the German High Seas Fleet bottled up in their main base, Kiel. The main contribution of the American Navy came in action against the submarine menace. When Admiral William Sims, commander of the American Atlantic destroyer forces, arrived in England on attached duty to the British Admiralty, he was given the uncensored count of British merchant losses. He immediately saw the danger; Britain very quickly would begin to lose the war if the submarines continued to be such a threat. He quickly advocated the use of destroyers against the U-boats. When the British bluntly told him that the Royal Navy did not have enough to cover the merchant lanes outside the Channel, Sims cabled home for his own forces. When they were shown to be effective by escorting a convoy from Gibraltar to England with no losses, the Admiralty finally acted on the convoy-escort system; shipping losses dropped by a third that very month and continued on a downward trend for the rest of the war. By the middle of the summer, three dozen American destroyers were operating in British waters and Sims was a hero among the ruling circles and the public of the kingdom.

Once the United States entered the war, the government almost immediately moved to regulate the coverage of the conflict. On April 13, the Secretaries of State, War and the Navy jointly asked President Wilson to create a Committee for Public Information, which he did the next day.<sup>260</sup> The popular image of the Committee for Public Information (CPI) is that of a censorship committee; however, Creel himself repeatedly denied that label repeatedly. He was “strongly opposed to the censorship bill,” a separate bill that would have created restrictions and criminal penalties on the press for the publication of certain subject

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<sup>260</sup> Teel (2006), pg. 74.

matters.<sup>261</sup> Instead, the CPI published a short list, relative to the European censored subjects, of 18 points that the press was requested to keep secret and the “enforcement [was] a matter for the press itself,” leaving the various editors to judge the content of various stories against the list and consider the needs of the armed forces and the safety of the men in uniform.<sup>262</sup>

An example of this self-regulation and independence came as the US forces arrived in France. The last of the four groups of troop transports landed July 3 and that fact was promptly put out on the presses to the media, along with the report that two submarine attacks on the transports had been fought off with no American losses and at least one submarine sunk. Concern arose, however, when the AP published a dispatch reporting that unnamed American naval officers in England had declared that the attacks on the troop convoys had been exaggerated stories of driftwood and large fish or whales. Creel and the CPI quickly put out the report of the commanding admiral of the cruisers and destroyers tasked with escorting the transports, Admiral Albert Gleaves, confirming and elaborating on the reports of the submarine attacks. All three of the papers in the sample carried the initial reports of the attacks and the subsequent safe arrival, but they all carried strong editorial questions about the authenticity of the reports after the AP published the anonymous dispatch casting doubt on the report. A comparatively evenhanded editorial from the *Times* titled “The Committee of Public Misinformation” exclaimed that while the “American people may pardon for a time the suppression of news” in the interest of the safety of the armed forces, they “will never pardon expanded, adorned exaggerated and untruthful accounts.” It went on

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<sup>261</sup> Creel (1920), pg. 16.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, pgs. 21-23.

to call in no uncertain terms for Creel's removal.<sup>263</sup> Testifying perhaps to the independence of the media, none of the papers carried any sort of retraction of this doubt, even after the military authorities came out in support of the CPI's accounts.

Other portions of the American public at large were not so reticent as the press to bow to government regulations. The War Industries Board, established in July 1917, was tasked with responsibility over war production, prices and purchasing whatever was needed to keep the military supplied in the war effort. The public had to make do with less variety amid the demand for war material. In August, the Food and Fuel Control Act (also known as the Lever Act after its author) created two agencies, the Food Administration and the Fuel Administration. These two agencies were very effective at eliciting voluntary compliancy with rationing efforts. Under future president Herbert Hoover, the Food Administration organized "Meatless Tuesdays" and "Wheatless Wednesdays." Running the Fuel Administration, Harry Garfield, the eldest son of assassinated President, instituted "Gasless Sundays" and "Heatless Mondays." The latter administrator even closed all factories east of the Mississippi River for a day to get fuel to idle ships on the East Coast. The public took all of these measures in stride and the citizens were remarkably willing to accept the war restrictions on the staples of their everyday lives. If this were asked of modern Americans, the answer might be decidedly more negative. However, with the requests coming on the basis of patriotism and honor, Americans were willing to give.

The newspaper was not the only means by which the public mind was reached out to. The new motion picture industry, though still silent at this time, made its opinion known, showing blatantly propagandist films. Any evidence of German war crimes was put in the

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<sup>263</sup> *Times*, 7/7/1917.

worst light possible. The captions reinforced the messages of the flickering black-and-white films.

## **Conclusions**

Despite being given near-complete legislative carte blanche during the conflict, the President was not yet able to enjoy the near-absolute supremacy in foreign policy matters claimed by modern holders of the title. Wilson, one of the main architects of the peace, could not get Congress to ratify the Treaty of Versailles. He found Congress, even members of his own party, stonewalling the treaty into which he had sunk much of his own energy and political capital. Even with major popularity in Europe and the political capital he had gained at home, he could not get the Allies to agree to any of his points except the League of Nations. When it came time for the United States to join the League, he could not achieve even that. The Senate, without any representation on the peace delegation, felt snubbed by Wilson and this bitter feeling may have led some senators to vote against the treaty negotiated without them, re-emphasizing the role that the Senate claimed in foreign policy throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

All the ingredients of the rally around the flag effect were in place by the second decade of the twentieth century. The press had been divorced from its role as a mouthpiece of the parties in the political system, maturing into a political force in and of itself. The yellow-journalism years of the late 1890s and the early 1900s had fallen behind them, leaving something in its wake that “had become a forceful and undeniable participant in the body politic.”<sup>264</sup> The papers were the source of reform throughout their history. The editorials and the investigative journalists of their time gave “birth to civic reform and to the progressive

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<sup>264</sup> Douglas (1999), pg. 191.

era,” rather than the government. As they developed into independent and reliable sources of information and opinion, divorced from partisanship, the citizens looked more and more to the papers “as guides to the drift of public affairs.”<sup>265</sup> The papers became a main source of not only information, but also analysis, and this gave them a certain amount of power in regards to shaping public opinion. If anything, the media may have become more liable to the rally effect, as they were not yet recognizing its own tendency towards subjectivity as a fault as it would do in the next decade.<sup>266</sup>

Just as the press had come into its own right by this point in American history, so too had the symbolic presidency. Rossiter points out that both Wilson and TR had come to the office directly “from a successful tenure as a governor of a progressive state... measured in terms of his leadership of the legislature” and that neither of them had been “strangled by wearing the ‘old school tie’ of either house of Congress.”<sup>267</sup> Wilson wrote at the end of TR’s presidency that the nation “can never hide our President again as a mere domestic officer... he must stand at the front of our affairs,” being the actual and the symbolic leader of the country, especially when dealing with other countries. By this point, the president has become a symbol of the nation; an outlet for affect – a way of feeling good about one’s country; a cognitive aid, allowing a single individual to symbolize... government; and a means of vicarious participation through which people can feel more a part of events occurring around them.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid, pg. 192.

<sup>266</sup> Schudson (1978), pg. 120.

<sup>267</sup> Rossiter (1956), pg. 83.

<sup>268</sup> Greenstein (1974), summarized in Hinckley (1990), pg. 9.

Because of this concurrent development, I expected a robust rally of popular approval to the president in the papers and was not disappointed. Even the papers that were generally anti-Wilson acknowledged his role as the symbol of the nation. The President had become the focus of action when it came to US foreign policy. The President was now recognized as the central actor in a military and foreign policy sense. This is well demonstrated by a marked increase in the mentions of the executive in the papers as soon as the crisis is published. Unlike the Spanish-American War experience, however, the surge in public approval that was withheld early from McKinley personally was not kept from Wilson. Both the increase in positive coverage and the discussion of Wilson as the symbol of the country and the spokesman for the nation show that the twentieth century presidency, even as early as Wilson, had become symbolic of the country itself. Here was, in the modern sense, the first rally around the flag.

Table 5:

*Examining Press Accounts, Pre- and Post-Resumption Announcement*

	<u>N (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>N (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Mentions of:</u>				
President	98	768 (128/month)	2.4639	0.0146
Congress	119	720 (120/month)	0.0885	0.9296
Public Opinion	92	627 (104.5/month)	1.2281	0.2208
	<u>Mean (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>Mean (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Attitude on:</u>				
President	-0.0707	0.2632	5.4874	>0.0001
Congress	0.1092	0.1528	0.9167	0.3596
Public Opinion	0.1075	0.2488	2.2361	0.0257

Table 6:

*Examining Press Accounts, Pre- and Post-Resumption Announcement, Before the*

*Zimmermann Telegram*

	<u>N (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>N (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Mentions of:</u>				
President	98	97	0.0719	0.9430
Congress	119	136	1.1987	0.2355
Public Opinion	92	95	0.0804	0.9362
	<u>Mean (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>Mean (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Attitude on:</u>				
President	-0.0707	0.0619	1.9028	0.0586
Congress	0.1092	0.1029	0.1030	0.9181
Public Opinion	0.1075	0.1895	0.9189	0.3593

Table 7:

*Examining Press Accounts, Pre- and Post-Publication of the Zimmermann Telegram*

	<u>N (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>N (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Mentions of:</u>				
President	97	799	3.0035	0.0030
Congress	136	717	1.4762	0.1414
Public Opinion	95	658	1.6915	0.0922
	<u>Mean (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>Mean (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Attitude on:</u>				
President	0.0619	0.2866	3.6145	0.0003
Congress	0.1029	0.1534	0.0978	0.2726
Public Opinion	0.1809	0.2716	1.2996	0.1941

Table 8:

*Examining Press Accounts, Pre-and Post-Declaration of War*

	<u>N (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>N (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Mentions of:</u>				
President	273	623	0.9181	0.3596
Congress	256	597	1.2636	0.2078
Public Opinion	225	528	1.5379	0.1256
	<u>Mean (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>Mean (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Attitude on:</u>				
President	0.1648	0.3050	2.7845	0.0055
Congress	0.1250	0.1541	0.7921	0.4285
Public Opinion	0.1778	0.2955	2.6103	0.0092

Table 9:

*Examining Press Accounts after the Zimmermann Telegram, Pre- and Post-Declaration of War*

	<u>N (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>N (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Mentions of:</u>				
President	176	623	1.0365	0.3014
Congress	120	597	2.6859	0.0079
Public Opinion	130	528	0.6672	0.5055
	<u>Mean (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>Mean (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Attitude on:</u>				
President	0.2216	0.3050	1.6468	0.1000
Congress	0.1500	0.1541	0.0848	0.9324
Public Opinion	0.1692	0.2955	2.3222	0.0205

Table 10:

*Examining Press Accounts during the Rally Period, Pre- and Post-Passage of the Espionage Act*

	<u>N (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>N (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Mentions of:</u>				
President	482	317	0.5094	0.6111
Congress	422	295	0.3338	0.7389
Public Opinion	245	283	1.5454	0.1245
	<u>Mean (Pre-Event)</u>	<u>Mean (Post-Event)</u>	<u>T-Value</u>	<u>P-Value</u>
<u>Attitude on:</u>				
President	0.2656	0.3186	1.2359	0.2169
Congress	0.1588	0.1458	0.3545	0.7231
Public Opinion	0.2293	0.3251	2.1895	0.0289

*War is... the true nurse of executive aggrandizement. In war... it is the executive will which is to direct [the forces]... it is the executive hand which is to dispense [the public treasures]... it is the executive patronage under which [the honors and emoluments of office] are to be enjoyed... and it is the executive brow [the laurels] are to encircle.*

*-- Helvidius (James Madison)*

## **Chapter 6:**

### **Conclusions – A Story of the Rally Around the Flag**

This project is a story of rallies, but not *the* story. It is not exhaustive, nor can or should it be considered the definitive work on the subject. It is an effort to show the truth of Madison's statement on executive aggrandizement: that crises, and war in particular, lead to expanded executive power. Primarily it is an effort to foster a better understanding of the rally effect by analyzing the development of that phenomenon.

The rally-around-the-flag is the descriptive term for the fact that presidents see a noticeable increase in their job approval scores when the nation is faced with an international crisis. In the era of the modern presidency, this jump in popular approval occurs with little regard to the success or failure of the president's substantive actions in reaction to the crisis. Kennedy received a surge for the Cuban Missile Crisis in the same way that Carter received one for the unsuccessful rescue attempt of the Iranian-held hostages. The political capital gained from a rally event tends to be fleeting. Kennedy, had he lived, would likely have faced a tough reelection battle considering the shifting partisan patterns in the South over the issue of civil rights. Carter lost his reelection bid in an electoral college landslide against Ronald Reagan based largely on economic conditions.

## **The Project**

The puzzle around which this project revolves began with a deceptively straightforward, simple question from an Introduction to American government student: why does the rally around the flag effect happen? In answer, the academic literature points to two main causes. The first of these is the idea of patriotism. This school of thought holds that presidents, with dual roles as Head of Nation and Head of Government, hold a position in the national psyche as a symbol of unity. People rally to them because they see them as symbolic for the nation as a whole and, because of the singular leadership position, they are accepted as the locus for action on the international stage. Politics stop at the water's edge and people tend to support whatever the President does, regardless of the corresponding success or failure of the actual actions undertaken.

The second idea revolves around the idea of opinion leadership, especially that of the media and the coverage of opposition opinions therein. The fact that the president is a unitary actor and in charge of foreign policy makes coverage easy and appropriate, especially when compared to more than five hundred members of Congress. This gives the executive branch an unparalleled stage and, because of this, people give the president the benefit of the doubt when it comes to foreign policy. This is reinforced by two supporting trends. Opposition viewpoints tend to be silenced, with a lack of media coverage, or to silence themselves, not wanting to seem out of step with a popular president or policy choice. This silence causes feedback into the rally, in that people interpret the lack of coverage of opposition views as a lack of opposition, further increasing the popularity of the president. This in turn furthers silencing and so on.

## The Goal

The purpose of the project was to better explain how these two accepted determinants interact. The current literature generally seems to position the two as mutually exclusive, with little effort to integrate the two into a single unified theory. I disagree with this tendency. Without the opinion leadership of the independent media, the presidency would never have reached its prominence as a symbolic leadership role, independent of the political parties. If the presidency hadn't changed, becoming instead of, as McKinley said, "the President of a party... the President of the whole people,"<sup>269</sup> the media would not have had this singular actor on which to focus.

I selected cases from a wide range of time periods, based on the development of the presidency as a symbol of the nation and the independence of the media. Beyond this, the case selection was strategic. The first of my cases was designed as a least-likely case study, one in which the academically accepted determinants were not present. If a rally had been found in this case, it would have caused serious problems for the academic literature in that it would call into question the foundations of the rally effect. My second case needed to be after the Civil War, as the outcome of this conflict redefined the identity of the nation into a singular, rather than plural. However, it needed to occur before the understanding of the president's role in government with regards to his relationship to Congress and the people began to change, the rough date for this being 1901, the first year of Theodore Roosevelt's presidency. This would allowed me analyze the effect of the media, independent by this time, without having the symbolic nature of the executive branch interfering in the data. Finally, my last case, a most-likely case, had to fit into the period between the first Roosevelt and his

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<sup>269</sup> Quoted in Olcott, 1916, 2:296.

younger cousin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, when the modern presidency is accepted to have begun. This case would serve as one in which, if the rally were not found, would cast doubt on the determinants as well.

The first challenge for this framework was to quantify public approval during a time when scientific polling was non-existent. To this end, I developed a proxy measure with which to measure public opinion and the attention given to the two main governing institutions of the Republic. This measure was built from content analysis of a set of newspapers in the New York market, carefully selected to cover the full range of partisanship during the specific time period. By counting and evaluating the articles mentioning the President, the Congress and public opinion, I was able to approximate a two-point approval score for the administration. Armed with this score, I could start looking at the changes that specific events made in the approval of the presidency.

The statistical data was supplemented with a qualitative narrative. This served to tell the story around the data. While useful for generalizations, the proxy measure is admittedly blunt. It does not tell specifically how things were affecting public opinion, only that the patterns of opinion were changing generally. The narrative, however, is much better and able to tell in richer detail the story of shifting opinions and how the event in particular changed the discourse of politics in its own time.

### **The Findings**

This project represents the first attempt to set the rally around the flag effect in a historical context and beyond a single case. By using the traditional presidency to study an effect discussed exclusively in the literature on the modern presidency, it gives us a sense of where the modern office has come from. It also helps us to understand better why the

presidency gains these sudden and short-lived increases in popular support. It also contributes to the explanation of why, when given much the same institutional characteristics, the traditional presidency operates in a much different and more constrained way than its modern counterpart. Crisis begets executive power in our system. Why, and how? This project has tried to answer those questions, and the answer is because of the patriotic rush to the symbol of the nation and the mass media shaping of public opinion in support of that rush.

Summing up the findings of this work can be done in a single sentence. The rally around the flag effect is an artifact of the modern symbolic nature of the presidency. It does not seem to occur in the absence of the symbolic presidency and the independent media. It does occur when both are present. However, when the symbolic position of the White House in the public psyche is removed from the equation but the media remains that the most interesting finding for this work occurs; during the Spanish-American War, the rally effect lags behind the rally event until the President takes action. The action is what garners the support.

In my first case, centered on the Mexican-American War, I found little evidence of a rally around the flag effect. The Thornton Affair represented what would be a perfect impetus for the rally effect in the modern era. A unit of the U.S. Army was ambushed and all of members were either killed or captured; one was later returned on humanitarian grounds for medical treatment that the Mexicans did not have the ability to give. President Polk reacted quickly once word reached Washington about the attack, asking Congress for military authority and appropriations. He and his Congressional allies out-maneuvered the opposition party, forcing them into choosing between support for the troops in the field and

expressing their opposition to the war; they chose the former, being very cognizant of the political dangers of that choice. Polk, however, does not seem to receive any sort of political support from the event or the war. Mentions of and support for him does not vary significantly between the time before the battle on the Rio Grande and the time after. Even rerunning the data excluding the moderate paper from the sample because it had such a huge number of articles and moved in a sudden and extremely anti-administration direction showed no significant change in mentions or in attitude of the papers. Whatever change there might have been was cancelled out by an accompanying move in the opposite direction by the other papers.

In my third case, dealing with the U.S. entry into the First World War, the rally effect was fully developed. The rally event that was selected for this case was the publication of the Zimmerman Telegram. Germany's announcement that they planned to resume unrestricted submarine warfare was tested separately from the publication to account for a possible endogeneity problem, but was not found to have a significant effect independent of my selected event. The telegram, on the other hand, seems to have caused an immediate and significant effect on President Wilson's approval. Mentions of Wilson personally and the administration increase dramatically, as does the supportive tone of the articles published. Wilson seems to receive another boost after the declaration of war in the supportiveness of the articles, though not in the amount of coverage; the best explanation for this disconnect is that the press is already covering him extensively and can not increase that coverage, rather than any sort of unwillingness to do so on their part. I also found that, while having a good amount of face validity, the Espionage Act did not seem to affect the way that the papers covered the administration. When the qualitative story is consulted on this fact, however, it

can be seen that the Act was enforced in a somewhat less than even-handed manner. The Hearst papers, for instance, were left almost completely alone, despite being anti-Allied enough in tone for England and France to ban the publications from their mails. At the same time, Socialist and German-language newspapers were being shut down for infractions that, if committed by the larger papers, would have been more likely to have received a warning or completely ignored. The concern that the Act would affect the data with regards to the rally effect turned out to be unfounded.

It was in my second case that a very different and the most interesting story of the three was to be told. The explosion and sinking of the battleship *Maine* in harbor of Havana, Cuba, just like the Thornton Affair fifty years earlier, would have created a rally effect if it had occurred even a few decades later. The Mexican-American War had neither of the two determinants, while World War I had both. It is in this case that one of the academically accepted factors, the symbolic position of the presidency, lags behind the other, the independent media, in its development.

This case was different than the Thornton Affair in two other significant ways. First, word of the incident came almost instantly. Telegraph technology made instantaneous communication possible in the 1890s while during the 1840s word took more than two weeks to get to the capital from the frontier, by which time General Taylor had fought two pitched battles with the Mexican Army. The newspapers of the late nineteenth century could play up the drama of the events, working the public into a frenzy. Second, the nature of the events was different. There was no question that the Mexican Army had attacked the dragoons on the Rio Grande in 1843. There was significant debate, some of which is still not settled to this day, over who or what caused the *Maine* disaster. Was it a mine? Was it a coal fire? We

may never know, but the development of the report from the Navy's Court of Inquiry, which settled on the external explosion theory as the cause, took time. Immediately after the explosion, President McKinley received a surge of attention in the press; this attention was focused solely on the President rather than on Congress or on public opinion. The press became suddenly very interested in what the executive branch was doing. However, unlike modern rallies, it was not until after the declaration of war that support began to accrue to the President. Because of this lagged rally effect, tied to the policy change rather than to the event, this case strongly suggests that it is the symbolic presidency that primarily supports the emergence of the rally around the flag.

### **Future Research**

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, this is a story of rallies; it is not *the* story of rallies. There are a couple of significant ways that this research can be expanded. The first of these would be to include a wider range of newspapers into my proxy measure for public approval. Throughout the history of the United States, different regions have had significantly different approaches to questions. During the Mexican-American War, the South saw the expansion of the country as a protection for their 'peculiar institution' and way of life, while the New England states, opposed to slavery, argued that it was an immoral land-grab, designed to further expand the power of the Slave States, and weakly justified by forcing Mexican honor into firing the first shot. As the country found itself moving closer and closer to entering the First World War, the Midwest especially pushed long and hard for peace, arguing that the points made against Germany for violations of international law regulating the rights of neutrals could be justly made against the Allies as well, especially England and its blockade of the continent. I believe that expanding the Mexican-American

War sample to include a Southern paper, perhaps from Atlanta, and a New England paper, maybe from Boston, would make that analysis stronger. My other two cases would benefit similarly from the inclusion of Midwest and Western papers; the Chicago, St. Louis, San Francisco and Los Angeles markets could provide good candidates for inclusion.

The second potential expansion is one of methodology. This project employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. While the statistical methods used were enough to show a trend and contributed well enough for this project, future collection of data could be expanded such that more explanatory statistics could be drawn upon. My measure of mentions is blunt. Making finer distinctions about who exactly is being mentioned would improve the explanatory ability of the measure as well. For example, is it the president himself that is being spoken of, or is a more general mention of the administration? With regards to the tone of the coverage itself, an ordinal scale of how positive or negative the article was might be added, rather than a simple dummy variable with positive, negative, and neutral distinctions.

A potential contributing factor hinted at itself early in the project but did not emerge full-blown until it was too late for it to be included. I focused on the relative importance of the institutions, the president and Congress, and of public opinion and how those three interacted. I examined the media and the acceptance of the president as the prime mover in the area of foreign affairs. However, I left out one other institution that has emerged in every democracy in the modern international era: the political party. The effect of the party in the American system should not be discounted. While it arguably did not come into full effect until the election of 1800 and the battle between Adams and Jefferson, the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans, it became increasingly more powerful over the following years.

Arthur Schlesinger pointed out that “as the parties wasted away, the Presidency stood out in solitary majesty as the central focus of political emotion, the ever potent symbol of national community.”<sup>270</sup> The parties essentially controlled the government until after the turn of the twentieth century. After this point, the executive started pulling away from party control with the introduction of the primary and the rhetorical presidency and its acceptance of public appeals as appropriate. The President became the leader of the people first and the leader of the party second rather than the other way around. However, Schlesinger’s quote leaves the possibility of party strength, or the lack thereof, having a direct influence on the acceptance of the president as the “symbol of national community.” The faltering power of the parties over politics in the nation may also be a contributing influence on the independence of the media. A deeper examination of this contributing factor would be a logical and likely fruitful extension of this work as well.

While examining the effect of the rally around the flag phenomenon on the executive branch is the more apparent application of this sort of study, the rally does affect others in the system. Noelle-Neumann’s spiral of silence theory states that the other key decision makers are essentially frightened into silence in the face of a popular president in the midst of a crisis. Congress is a key player in politics in this country. Understanding how it reacts to a President in the midst of a rally is key to understanding its behavior. Do members of the House and Senate behave differently, considering the differences in their institutional positions? Does the rally effect manifest itself differently if we are operating under a unified or divided government?

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<sup>270</sup> Schlesinger (1973), pg. 210.

These last two considerations also give this research the potential to cross over the lines between the subfields of political science, especially into comparative politics. How does the rally effect work, if it does at all, in democracies where the chief executive is a member of the legislature and beholden to his or her party for power? Do Chancellor Angela Merkel or Prime Minister Gordon Brown receive a similar increase during times of crisis? A brief look at history might hint that they do not, even in cases of situations dealing directly with foreign relations. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's government dissolved quickly as Germany's war machine rolled over the Low Countries in the spring of 1940; Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama of Japan was recently forced to resign over a campaign promise on foreign relations on which he attempted to go back. A comparative examination of the rally effect over democracies with different governmental and electoral systems would bring additional light to the subject of our own peculiar system.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

James Madison observed during a written exchange with his erstwhile *Federalist Papers* co-author Alexander Hamilton "war is... the true nurse of executive aggrandizement."<sup>271</sup> It is the executive that directs the military, that fights the war, and that collects the laurels at the end of the struggle. Thus, it is during times of crisis, and war is the epitome of crisis, that the president is most able to step up and take a hold of the reins of power. Keeping this fact in mind, it is not surprising that the rally effect occurs. While one might expect it to occur throughout the history of the country, it is not until the modern era of the presidency that the chief executive begins to really benefit in a substantive way from the public opinion surge that accompanies the rally around the flag effect.

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<sup>271</sup> Hamilton and Madison, 1845, pg 89.

Much has been made in recent years of the apparently increasing polarization of the political parties. Overt partisanship has been coming back into style on both sides of the political spectrum, Fox on the right and MSNBC on the left being the best examples. This may signal a reemergence of the parties as a significant player in the political drama of the nation. Before the decline of the parties in the early twentieth century, they essentially ran government in the United States: caucuses selected candidates with little to no input from the public, patronage filled the majority of government jobs, and the success of an administration was predicated on how well it worked with Congressional party leadership. It wasn't until after the parties faded that the president came to prominence. Schlesinger's quote about the decline of the parties being accompanied by the rise of the executive is very telling on this point. This work hints at the possibility that, if the parties regain control of the workings of government, we may see a fading or even an altogether disappearance of the rally around the flag phenomenon.

This project began with the September 11 terrorist attacks; I think that a comment on those attacks and their effect on the presidency are appropriate, to close the loop in a manner of speaking. George W. Bush began his first term as a weak president without any electoral mandate outside of the Electoral College. He ended that term with some of the greatest claims to executive discretion and power articulated since the founding of the Republic. While the 9/11 attacks were extraordinary in their effect and the length of the rally that they created, the fact that President Bush benefited from them and was able to use the political capital from them to produce such significant results is a testament to the potential of the rally effect.

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## Notes to Appendices

The term 'articles,' used below and throughout the work, should not be confused with the term 'issues.' By articles I mean individual stories written within each daily issue of the paper in question. Dates to code were randomly selected using the random number sequence generator available online at <http://www.random.org>.

Articles coded pre-event mean those articles read and coded from the issues that occurred prior to the first possible mention of the rally event in the papers in question. As an example, the sinking of the battleship *USS Maine* in Havana Harbor, Cuba, occurred on February 15, 1898. 'Pre-event,' therefore, covers the period from January 15, 1898 through February 14, 1898. Post-event covers the six-month period after the rally event, in this example February 15 through August 15. In the monthly breakdown, I termed the months with reference to the event (i.e. "1 month post," "2 months post," etc). These reference the month following the event. Therefore, "1 month post" refers to a date range in this example from February 15 to March 14, while "2 months post" refers to March 15 through April 14, and so on.

In the number that I termed "President mentioned," this tracks the number of articles for the period in question in which the President was mentioned. Rather than coding each mention of the President, each article is coded as a single mention. Some articles were coded as mentioned without actually mentioning President McKinley by name. These articles all made specific reference to the administration's policies or to the policies of the executive branch or the government's foreign policy in general. The same rule holds true for Congress. Public opinion mentions were only coded for specific events, such as demonstrations, public meetings and advertisements in the papers for such, as well as reactions by the papers to those events, such as an editorial discussing a peace protest.

Please note as well that, while only 10 issues per paper per month were coded, the dates in the table below are arranged by calendar month rather than in correspondence to the event. Therefore some months appear to have more or fewer than the ten described in the coding scheme; this is simply an effect of that distribution.

## Appendix A: Coding

The following terms were used to code articles mentioning the President, Congress or public opinion with regards to attitude. Occasionally, especially in the editorials that were coded, an article would be written in such a way that the tone was clearly the opposite of what the coding cues would suggest, such as satire or sarcasm. These, when detected, were coded in the proper way as opposed to how the cues might have otherwise dictated. Furthermore, there were times when the general tone of the article was positive or negative while no one specific word could be pointed to as positive or negative. These were coded on a case-by-case basis.

*Positive statement queues:* acclaim, admire, advocate, aggrandize, applaud, appreciate, appreciate, approve, celebrate, cheer, cite, clap, commend, compliment, decisive, endorse, extol, give thanks, hope, laud, hail, proclaim, rave over, recommend, resound, sanction, standing by, support, tout.

*Negative statement queues:* accuse, bash, blame, blast, challenge, chastise, chide, condemn, counter, denounce, disbelieve, disparage, disgrace, dishonor, dispute, distrust, find fault, imbecility, imprudent, incoherence, inconsistency, jump on, knock, lambaste, mistrust, oppose, outraged, pan, question, reproach, reprove, scathe, slam, take down, unjust, unjustifiable

## Appendix B: Mexican-American War Data

This is the data from April 10 through November 10, 1846, representing the time period specified for the Mexican-American War.

None of the papers in this case published on Sundays during this time period. If one of the random selections fell on a Sunday, the previous Saturday was coded. If it was already selected, the following Monday was coded. If both were already coded, the extra issue was randomly redistributed. On the table below, the number listed inside of parentheses is the date *selected*, while the date outside is the date that was *coded*.

<b>Mexican-American War: Coded Issue Dates</b>			
	<u>Herald</u>	<u>Sun</u>	<u>Tribune</u>
April	13, 17, 22, 25, 30	14, 18, 20, 22, 26 27, 28	12, 17, 19, 20, 22 24, 28
May	2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 16, 17, 18 19, 21, 25, 27, 31	1, 2, 9, 11, 22, 23 25, 26, 27	4, 6, 10, 11, 17, 18 19, 21, 25, 27, 29
June	6, 11, 12, 13, 21, 22 23, 29	2, 5, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15 17, 20, 22, 27, 28	2, 3, 12, 13 20, 21, 23, 28
July	1, 6, 8, 11, 13, 14 16, 18 30	2, 3, 11, 15, 16, 19 21, 22, 25, 27, 28	1, 3, 4, 5, 11, 13 19, 22, 23, 29, 31
August	4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 15 16, 24, 25, 26	1, 15, 16, 19, 23, 24 28	2, 9, 10, 12, 16, 17 19, 23, 24, 30, 31
September	1, 2, 8, 9, 14, 16 18, 20, 22, 29	1, 4, 6, 8, 11, 17, 19 20, 26, 28	6, 7, 15, 16, 29, 30
October	4, 5, 6, 10, 13, 16 22, 25, 26, 28, 31	1, 5, 6, 8, 13, 14 20, 24, 27, 28, 29, 31	1, 3, 6, 7, 10, 11 21, 23, 26
November	2, 5, 10	6, 10	3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10

<b>Mexican-American War: Coded Data</b>			
	<u>Herald</u>	<u>Sun</u>	<u>Tribune</u>
<u>Articles Pre-Event</u>	768	579	1106
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	13/12/17	11/13/12	15/17/19
-- Positive	1/1/6	10/9/1	3/5/7
-- Neutral	2/5/10	1/3/11	6/8/6
-- Negative	10/6/1	0/1/1	6/4/6
<u>Articles 1 Month Post</u>	730	579	1095
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	9/12/10	11/12/10	16/22/19
-- Positive	3/0/5	9/8/8	1/3/1
-- Neutral	2/1/5	2/4/2	5/7/5
-- Negative	4/11/0	0/0/2	10/12/13

<u>Articles 2 Months Post</u>	806	550	1150
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	14/19/13	11/12/9	12/20/16
-- Positive	1/0/5	9/10/7	2/6/0
-- Neutral	4/4/7	2/2/1	2/6/7
-- Negative	9/15/1	0/0/1	8/8/9
<u>Articles 3 Months Post</u>	745	585	1139
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	13/12/15	8/10/14	15/25/17
-- Positive	0/1/4	8/8/10	1/3/0
-- Neutral	2/2/9	0/2/1	7/5/5
-- Negative	11/9/2	0/0/3	7/17/12
<u>Articles 4 Months Post</u>	730	597	1139
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	9/16/10	8/14/12	21/19/21
-- Positive	0/1/2	8/7/11	2/2/1
-- Neutral	3/5/7	0/6/1	7/5/6
-- Negative	6/10/1	0/1/0	12/12/14
<u>Articles 5 Months Post</u>	707	521	1161
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	7/14/17	6/12/12	22/29/25
-- Positive	1/2/6	5/9/9	0/6/2
-- Neutral	1/5/8	1/3/2	7/12/4
-- Negative	5/7/3	0/0/1	15/11/19
<u>Articles 6 Months Post</u>	707	538	1139
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	9/13/14	7/9/11	22/18/27
-- Positive	1/2/4	5/8/11	0/2/4
-- Neutral	0/2/9	2/1/0	5/7/5
-- Negative	8/9/1	0/0/0	17/9/18

## Appendix C: Spanish-American War Data

This is the data from January 15 through August 15, 1898, representing the time period specified for the Spanish-American War.

The *Evening Post* did not publish on Sundays during this time period, so if one of the random selections fell on a Sunday, the previous Saturday was coded. If it was already selected, the following Monday was coded. If both were already coded, the extra issue was randomly selected. On the table below, the number listed inside of parentheses is the date *selected*, while the date outside is the date that was *coded*.

<b>Spanish-American War: Coded Issues Dates</b>			
	<u>Evening Post</u>	<u>Journal</u>	<u>Tribune</u>
January	15, 20, 22, 29 (30), 31	21, 24, 25, 26, 28	15, 17, 22, 23, 24
February	2, 4, 11, 12, 14 (13) 18, 24, 25, 26, 28	1, 2, 6, 8, 9 10, 16, 18, 23, 28	5, 6, 7, 8, 10 12, 16, 23, 24, 28
March	5, 10, 11, 16, 17 18, 19, 21 (20), 22, 26	3, 7, 14, 18, 19 22, 23, 28, 30, 31	1, 4, 5, 8, 18 19, 22, 24, 25, 31
April	1, 5, 8 (24), 13, 14 15, 23, 25, 26, 27	11, 13, 14, 18, 21 24, 25, 27, 28, 30	1, 3, 4, 7, 10 13, 16, 23, 27, 30
May	1 (2), 3, 7, 12, 16 19, 20, 25, 26, 29 (28)	4, 9, 16, 18, 19 21, 22, 23, 27, 29	1, 7, 8, 10, 12 14, 17, 18, 21, 23
June	2, 3, 8, 12, 15 17, 21, 26, 29, 30	7, 8, 12, 13, 14 16, 21, 22, 24, 25	2, 7, 8, 10, 11 13, 18, 23, 27, 28
July	6 (31), 8, 9 (10), 12, 15 16, 18 (17), 19, 22, 30	9, 10, 17, 18, 19 20, 21, 22, 23, 30	2, 5, 10, 11, 13 14, 18, 21, 22, 26
August	6, 8, 9, 11, 13	3, 6, 9, 11, 13	1, 3, 6, 12, 15

<b>Spanish American War: Coded Data</b>			
	<u>Journal</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Tribune</u>
Articles Pre-Event	561	1205	1157
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	9/44/31	12/36/11	14/48/18
-- Positive	0/9/0	3/2/2	12/7/12
-- Neutral	1/34/12	9/31/9	2/36/6
-- Negative	8/1/19	0/3/0	0/5/0
Articles 1 Month Post	754	1365	1496
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	19/32/22	16/28/17	26/29/4
-- Positive	0/5/1	9/6/3	20/6/4
-- Neutral	2/24/10	7/21/12	1/20/0
-- Negative	17/3/11	0/1/2	5/3/0
Articles 2 Months Post	778	1376	1552
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	15/34/28	17/47/23	13/47/7

-- Positive	6/12/0	6/4/8	8/8/5
-- Neutral	2/19/12	9/40/10	4/36/2
-- Negative	7/3/16	2/3/5	1/5/0
Articles 3 Months Post	841	1320	1509
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	17/27/21	17/38/10	27/39/11
-- Positive	3/9/7	1/8/8	23/25/7
-- Neutral	12/16/7	6/28/1	4/11/4
-- Negative	2/2/7	10/2/1	0/3/0
Articles 4 Months Post	749	1333	1496
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	10/48/44	13/37/17	16/40/10
-- Positive	2/17/36	3/9/11	12/18/8
-- Neutral	6/29/7	7/25/6	4/16/2
-- Negative	2/2/1	3/3/0	0/6/0
Articles 5 Months Post	715	1272	1448
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	8/30/16	12/38/17	18/34/14
-- Positive	1/13/13	1/7/15	13/16/14
-- Neutral	4/15/3	11/31/2	5/12/0
-- Negative	3/2/0	0/0/0	0/6/0

## Appendix D: World War I Data

This is the data from February 1 through September 15 1898, representing the time period specified for World War I. This data further included January 1-31 to deal with an endogeneity concern, discussed in Chapter 5.

<b>World War I: Coded Issue Dates</b>			
	<i>American</i>	<i>Times</i>	<i>Tribune</i>
January	5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16 25, 26, 27, 31	2, 8, 14, 15, 18, 19 20, 23, 28, 29	4, 6, 12, 13, 16, 17 21, 23, 25, 30
February	2, 7, 8, 11, 17, 20 22, 26, 27, 28	2, 3, 10, 12, 13, 16 22, 26, 27, 28	1, 2, 7, 15, 17, 18 19, 20, 22, 26
March	3, 4, 6, 7, 11, 13 14, 17, 24, 28	2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 15 16, 20, 21, 26	1, 2, 11, 14, 15, 17 18, 19, 22, 25
April	3, 5, 11, 19, 20, 24 26, 27, 28, 30	1, 4, 5, 6, 14, 17 21, 25, 27, 30	1, 5, 11, 14, 17, 18 21, 25, 27, 29
May	1, 6, 9, 10, 14, 15 19, 20, 22, 28	1, 2, 4, 9, 11, 15 16, 20, 25, 31	2, 3, 6, 8, 11, 14 15, 18, 25, 27
June	4, 7, 8, 12, 13, 18 21, 22, 23, 30	1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 11 14, 20, 28, 30	1, 4, 5, 11, 12, 17 23, 25, 27, 30
July	1, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13 18, 22, 23, 24	5, 10, 12, 15, 19, 24 28, 29, 30, 31	4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 16 19, 21, 25, 31
August	2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10 15, 27, 29, 30	1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 12 14, 15, 27, 31	1, 2, 4, 8, 13, 15 17, 26, 28, 30

<b>World War 1: Coded Data</b>			
	<i>American</i>	<i>Times</i>	<i>Tribune</i>
<u>Articles Coded Pre-Event</u>	527	479	554
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	20/38/21	27/38/40	50/60/34
-- Positive	1/7/3	8/7/16	3/13/11
-- Negative	3/4/4	0/4/3	3/5/5
-- Neutral	16/27/14	19/27/21	44/42/18
<u>Articles 1 Month Post</u>	580	461	593
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	26/23/33	58/20/30	58/41/43
-- Positive	6/4/6	31/6/10	11/11/8
-- Negative	5/3/1	0/2/3	11/2/0
-- Neutral	15/18/24	27/12/17	36/28/25
<u>Articles 2 Months Post</u>	610	457	513
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	23/53/36	56/34/36	50/51/38
-- Positive	7/9/6	28/5/14	12/16/14
-- Negative	6/1/7	0/5/2	6/4/0
-- Neutral	10/43/24	28/24/20	32/31/24

<u>Articles 3 Months Post</u>	445	529	578
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	20/51/30	56/35/31	55/43/32
-- Positive	4/13/9	24/6/17	16/7/14
-- Negative	5/2/5	0/1/0	1/2/0
-- Neutral	11/36/16	32/28/14	38/34/18
<u>Articles 4 Months Post</u>	595	536	553
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	27/34/26	53/39/47	56/35/37
-- Positive	5/6/2	23/8/19	24/10/13
-- Negative	10/2/7	0/0/0	0/0/0
-- Neutral	12/26/17	30/31/28	32/45/24
<u>Articles 5 Months Post</u>	531	572	543
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	21/23/25	54/25/41	58/47/46
-- Positive	3/5/3	20/3/12	35/13/21
-- Negative	9/0/3	0/1/0	0/3/0
-- Neutral	9/18/19	34/21/19	33/41/25
<u>Articles 6 Months Post</u>	563	412	435
President/Congress/Public Mentioned	22/52/37	52/30/46	54/51/43
-- Positive	7/7/9	23/6/17	19/12/21
-- Negative	6/1/7	0/4/0	0/6/0
-- Neutral	4/44/21	29/20/29	35/33/22

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