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Going Private

PUBLIC OPINION, PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC, AND THE *DOMESTIC* POLITICS OF AUDIENCE COSTS IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY CRISES

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This study investigates why, despite the potential credibility enhancement associated with generating domestic audience costs, leaders (in this instance, U.S. presidents) frequently opt to “go private” by conducting foreign policy out of the public spotlight. The author argues that they do so for two primary reasons: (1) public scrutiny disproportionately raises the potential political price of a bad outcome, and (2) leaders’ efforts to generate audience costs can sometimes backfire, as the reactions of the domestic “audience”—once engaged—are not entirely predictable. An analysis of U.S. behavior in all international crises between 1946 and 1994 shows that when national security interests in a crisis are modest, American presidents are indeed less likely to speak publicly about potential adversaries, unless they are quite confident of success if a fight ensues.

Keywords: *foreign policy; audience costs; president; war; public opinion; international conflict*

In recent years, scholars have increasingly sought to pry open the black box of domestic politics to determine whether and how domestic political incentives influence leaders in international conflict situations. In particular, recent research has focused on the processes through which leaders’ expectations regarding the domestic political consequences of policy successes or failures abroad either inhibit or enhance their ability to conduct foreign policy. Several of the most prominent literatures in this area explore the effects of regime type on conflict propensity (Gowa 1999; Russett 1993), the possible use of military force as a means of diverting public attention from domestic problems (Russett 1990; Smith 1996; Stoll 1984), and the role of electoral institutions and incentives in conditioning the outcomes of international disputes.¹

1. For convenience, I employ the terms *crisis* and *dispute* interchangeably.

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According to the latter theoretical perspective, for instance, democratic leaders can enhance their bargaining positions in international negotiations or disputes by “going public” (Kernell 1997) with their threats or promises (Fearon 1994; Smith 1998; Schultz 2001). By doing so and risking political punishment at home, a leader can effectively tie her hands, thereby enhancing her credibility abroad. This is because, when she publicly issues a threat, a democratic leader who is accountable to her domestic population ups the domestic political ante by generating domestic audience costs, making it more difficult to back down (Fearon 1994). In addition, because backing down from a public threat is politically costly for democratic leaders, an adversary will recognize that democratic leaders only have incentives to invoke audience costs when they are likely to follow through on their threats (Smith 1998; Schultz 2001). Consequently, audience costs can help a democratic leader signal her resolve. Once a leader makes a public threat, the adversary is likely to view it as credible and so will be more likely to back down without a fight (Fearon 1994; Smith 1998; Schultz 2001).

This logic implies that democratic leaders will be selective in making public threats because doing so and subsequently backing down can result in substantial domestic political costs, such as losing the next election (Smith 1998; Schultz 2001). It also implies, however, that once a democratic leader elects to engage in a confrontation with a foreign adversary, she ought to prefer to maximize domestic political risks because this improves her odds of prevailing without a fight. In other words, previous studies (e.g., Smith 1998; Schultz 2001) have shown that democratic leaders face domestic political incentives to be selective in engaging in risky (and publicly visible) foreign policy activities. They have also shown that the effectiveness of audience costs as a signaling device may vary for a variety of reasons, such as the presence or absence of signals of support from the opposition party (Schultz 2001) or variations in institutional constraints on leaders’ policy-making flexibility (Leeds 1999). Yet, this literature lacks a fully specified theory regarding the role of the ultimate source of domestic audience costs: public opinion. Such arguments recognize that downside domestic political risks may sometimes outweigh the potential benefits derived from generating audience costs. But they do not explain the circumstances under which this is likely to be the case. Nor has this general proposition been subjected to rigorous empirical testing.

In this study, I systematically explore the role of domestic public opinion in influencing leaders’ decisions to seek to invoke audience costs, as well as in determining the extent to which they emerge. I do so by integrating existing audience-cost theories with a more nuanced specification than is present in the extant literature of the role of public opinion in conditioning democratic leaders’ incentives and expectations in international disputes. Like Schultz (2001), I argue that democratic leaders have

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incentives to be selective in attracting public scrutiny and thereby invoking audience costs. I extend Schultz's argument, however, by delineating conditions under which leaders are likely to be willing to risk the public's wrath. I thereby highlight the inherent tradeoff that frequently confronts a democratic leader between enhancing her credibility and her potential political upside by attracting greater public scrutiny, and the resulting increased potential political consequences of failure. By highlighting this tradeoff, I show that a leader will not always prefer an attentive public and may quite consciously seek to avoid attracting the public eye, especially when the strategic stakes in a foreign policy dispute are modest and she is not particularly confident of success.

Why would a leader ever deliberately forego the opportunity to enhance her credibility and her potential political reward for a foreign policy success by attracting public scrutiny? The answer, in short, is that going to war is a politically risky proposition. Research has shown that leaders—especially in democracies—who lose military conflicts pay a substantial political price at home, sometimes including removal from office (Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson 1995; Smith 1996; Downs and Rocke 1994). Even threatening to use force can be risky. A democratic leader who backs down from a public threat abroad may pay a political price at home (Fearon 1994), especially if the public views this as a sign of incompetence (Smith 1998; Guisinger and Smith 2002). Hence, in determining whether to issue a threat, a leader must weigh not only the political consequences of backing down should her bluff be called, but also whether the potential reward is worth the risk of a military defeat. Yet, democratic leaders do sometimes issue threats or undertake aggressive actions abroad. Sometimes the reward for winning a confrontation, even if doing so requires a war, outweighs the downside risk. Judiciously employed threats, in turn, may increase the odds of winning without firing a shot (Fearon 1994, 1997; Smith 1998; Schultz 2001). Hence, a more complete understanding of the influence of leaders' domestic political calculations on their international conflict behavior requires more fully specifying the nature and influence of public opinion.

The remainder of this study is divided into three sections. In the next section, I present my theory. I argue that democratic leaders are cross-pressured by the simultaneous advantages and disadvantages of public scrutiny. The greater the public's attention to a dispute, the greater is the leader's potential political upside, given success, but also the greater the political downside, given failure. With respect to foreign policy, domestic political risks usually outweigh any potential political rewards. Hence, when important national security interests are *not* at stake, democratic leaders will frequently prefer to conduct their foreign policies free from excessive public scrutiny (i.e., "go private"), thereby minimizing the potential political costs of bad outcomes.

I then test several hypotheses derived from the theory through a series of statistical investigations, based on data concerning all international crises between 1946 and 1994 included in Brecher and Wilkenfeld's (1998) International Crisis Behavior (ICB) data set. I find that when the strategic stakes are relatively modest, but not when important U.S. national security interests are involved, presidents' propensity to "go public" (Kernell 1997) in an international dispute is positively related to the likelihood of success, given a military conflict. Although the remainder of this study focuses on the U.S. case, my findings carry broader implications for how domestic political con-

cerns, manifested through public opinion, can, under certain conditions, influence democratic leaders' crisis decision making. The final section concludes.

A THEORY OF PUBLIC OPINION, AUDIENCE COSTS, AND FOREIGN CRISES

PUBLIC OPINION AND THE LOGIC OF AUDIENCE COSTS

When will a president prefer to attract public attention and when will she wish to pursue foreign policy out of the public eye? To answer these questions, I revisit the logic of domestic audience costs, which Fearon (1994) defines as the domestic political punishment (e.g., losing the next election) a leader suffers if she issues a public threat to a foreign actor and subsequently backs down. Such costs are *generated* whenever a leader issues a public threat, but their negative consequences are *suffered* only if the leader backs down and the public is aware of the threat and is institutionally capable of inflicting punishment. By this same logic, of course, a leader ought to receive some domestic political benefit if she stands firm and is successful (i.e., if the adversary backs down, or if she wins a fight).

If a leader makes a threat and the adversary does not back down, then she must decide whether to follow through and risk losing a military conflict. If she uses force and loses, she is likely to suffer even greater political (and material) harm—possibly including expulsion from office—than if she had backed down upon having her bluff called (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999; Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson 1995; Bueno de Mesquita, Siverson, and Woller 1992). This inherent tension between, on one hand, the political costs of backing down (Smith 1998; Guisinger and Smith 2002; Fearon 1994), combined with the potential political benefit from a foreign policy success, and, on the other, the risk of potentially suffering even greater retribution at home in the event of losing a military conflict, creates a dilemma for democratic leaders who are considering whether to engage in public diplomacy by going public and, in doing so, effectively *seek* audience costs.²

WHY PUBLIC ATTENTIVENESS MATTERS TO PRESIDENTS

Consistent with much of the literature on public opinion and foreign policy (Zaller 1994; Powlick and Katz 1998; Rosenau 1961; Holsti 1996; Key 1961), I argue that presidents are concerned less with what the public thinks about a policy today than with what it is likely to think over the long run, especially at the time of the next election. This, in turn, implies that it is the anticipation of possible long-term public disapproval that gives domestic audience costs political meaning. After all, only a disap-

2. Consistent with the literature cited above, I anticipate that political risks (and rewards) increase when military force is employed. Absent enhanced political consequences for losing a war, leaders should always follow through on their threats. The potential material and strategic price of a military defeat (that is, in blood, treasure, or territory) may be sufficient to deter a leader from using force. Yet, strategic and material costs matter to a leader, at least in part, because of their political implications (for example, a military coup or electoral defeat).

proving public is likely to impose a meaningful political cost on a president for backing down from a threat.

Consequently, an attentive public raises the political stakes for a president regardless of whether the public initially approves or disapproves of a policy. This does not imply that public approval or disapproval does not matter to presidents. Indeed, a voluminous amount of scholarly literature clearly indicates that it does (e.g., Simon and Ostrom 1989; Edwards 1976; Ragsdale 1984; Kernell 1997; Cohen 1995; Baum and Kernell 2001; Ostrom and Job 1986). Rather, the key distinction is between short- and long-term public opinion. The former is frequently volatile and hence of limited political significance. Indeed, public approval of a president's foreign policy, especially in the early stages of a crisis, is fickle (Rosenau 1961). Any rally effect following initiation of a crisis can quickly erode in the face of a perceived failure (Meernik and Waterman 1996; Brody 1991; Mueller 1973). Should a crisis turn out badly, even strong initial public support may rapidly turn into equally strong disapproval of the president's performance.

In contrast, longer term public approval or disapproval are likely to be more considered and stable, and hence more politically meaningful. As the duration of a crisis increases, and the public learns more about it, support or opposition will tend to solidify. Hence, over the long term, public approval or disapproval of a policy will matter more to presidents, and attentiveness less. Similarly, the more intensely held the public's short-term support for or opposition to a policy, the less likely the public mood is to reverse course (Key 1961), and hence the more likely that this will trump attentiveness as a signal of a policy's likely long-term political implications.

Most important, the public will punish a president less severely for backing down or losing a fight if it is inattentive than if it is highly engaged. In this sense, initial public attentiveness is a useful gauge of the likely long-term political stakes in a crisis. If the public is attentive throughout, including early on, it is likely to care more about the eventual outcome than if it is uninterested.³ This is because peoples' opinions are likely to be more accessible (Iyengar 1992; Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida 1989) in the long run if they are engaged for an extended period of time than if they tune in only briefly or not at all. Research in cognitive psychology has shown that for an attitude to influence an individual's opinion, it must be both available (stored in memory) and accessible (retrievable from memory) (Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida 1989; Ottati and Wyer 1990). The more attentive an individual is during a crisis, the more considerations about the crisis will be available in memory, and thus the more likely that one or more such considerations will be accessible if later primed by a political entrepreneur (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Zaller and Feldman 1992). Indeed, additional research (D. Hill 1985) has shown that information about an issue (say, in the form of a TV news story) is more likely to influence an individual if she possesses a prior awareness of the issue.

By the same token, although a president's political opponents will most likely seek to exploit any foreign policy failure to help defeat him or his party in the next election, the more attention the public pays to a crisis, the easier it will be for his opponents to

3. As a crisis increases in duration, however, the link between initial public attentiveness and the eventual salience of the crisis to the public is likely to recede.

exploit a poor outcome. An attentive public will possess a context for understanding accusations by the opposition party concerning the president's performance (Popkin 1994; Iyengar 1990). Indeed, an implication of the research in cognitive psychology cited above (e.g., see also Converse 1962; Price and Zaller 1993) is that it is easier to remind people of something they previously knew about (that is, induce them to retrieve an item from memory) than to convince them to pay attention to something in the first instance (that is, convince them to commit something to memory).

Moreover, although many people may rapidly forget *why* they supported or opposed a policy as it fades from the public spotlight, having paid attention in the first instance, they are likely to remember how they *felt* about it if an entrepreneur later primes the issue (Lodge and McGraw 1995; Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau 1995). Such attacks are therefore more likely to resonate with an attentive public. Hence, criticism of the president is more politically effective if the public is attentive to a given issue than if it is largely uninterested in the issue. This suggests that attentiveness, including in the early stages of a crisis, is a useful, although by no means perfect, predictor of the likely domestic political price of failure. In other words, the magnitude of political risk appears to derive more from the extent to which the public is paying attention than from initial support for or opposition to a policy. As a result, an attentive public forces a president to operate under greater constraints.

Of course, circumstances will undoubtedly arise in which, for whatever reason, backing down from a threat is the wisest course of action. This raises the question of whether voters would, under such circumstances, have an incentive to punish a president for doing so. After all, one might expect that rational voters would recognize that a competent leader will pursue the course of action that best furthers the national interest, even if that means suffering the political embarrassment associated with backing down from a public threat. Nevertheless, consistent with previous audience cost arguments (e.g., Smith 1998; Guisinger and Smith 2002), I argue that voters will indeed have an incentive to punish a president for making a threat and subsequently backing down. This is true even if they recognize that bluffing is a legitimate foreign policy strategy, and even if doing so was, by some objective standard, the wisest course of action in a given situation. The logic is analogous to bluffing in poker. A skilled poker player can win, even with a weak hand, by occasionally employing a well-executed bluff. To be skilled in poker implies usually not having one's bluff called. Indeed, a player who regularly has her bluff exposed as such will most likely lose her money in short order. Similarly, in international interactions, although voters might understand that a well-executed bluff is an important tool in a president's foreign policy arsenal, they will presumably expect that a skilled president will not have his bluffs called. If a president's bluff is called, voters are likely to interpret this as a sign of incompetence.

THE AUDIENCE-COST DILEMMA

The preceding discussion suggests that an inattentive public is both a hindrance and a help to a president. On one hand, because he faces fewer domestic constraints, a president can alter his policies without worrying about the public's reaction. He will also, in many instances, be punished less severely in the event of failure. On the other hand,

given a success, his reward will be smaller and his threats may be less credible and, as a result, his policies less effective (Fearon 1994). If the adversary observes the president not going public, she is more likely to doubt his resolve. This may embolden her to resist more firmly. The president is thus more likely to need to risk using military force. In contrast, once the public's attention is drawn to a crisis, the president inevitably confronts the possibility of substantial political harm should the public see him as backing away from a commitment or if he stands firm and loses a fight. It is precisely this possibility of domestic political punishment that enhances a president's credibility in the eyes of an adversary and thereby increases the likelihood of winning a confrontation without a fight.

Consequently, a president who is considering whether to make a public threat faces a dilemma. If he does so and the public is attentive, he may enhance his credibility and improve his chances of winning without a fight. Yet, the price of enhanced credibility is that his hands will be politically tied if the adversary does not blink. Ironically, the more successful the president is at raising the domestic political stakes, the greater the pressure to take the even larger gamble of further escalating to the use of military force if his bluff is called.⁴ For, if he uses military force and loses, he will likely suffer even more at home. And depending on the adversary's assessment of her chances of success in a fight (however she defines success), she may not be deterred even if the president goes public and succeeds in attracting public scrutiny. So, the greater the public's attentiveness to a crisis, the greater will be the president's potential for winning without a fight and reaping the corresponding political windfall, but, at the same time, the greater will be the likely political cost of backing down or following through and failing.

The potential political quandary that this creates for presidents is exacerbated by an asymmetry in potential risks and rewards associated with foreign policy initiatives. Unless the public perceives a crisis to involve an important national security interest, the potential political costs to a president of either backing down or losing a fight typically exceed the potential benefits he can expect to derive from a foreign policy success. In the words of presidential historian Allan J. Lichtman, "foreign policy is more likely to defeat than re-elect a president" (quoted in Purdum 2003). This differential results, in part, from widespread public cynicism about politics (S. Bennett 1986; Nye, Zelikow, and King 1997), the predominantly negative tone of media coverage of the president (Groeling and Kernell 1998; Brody 1991), and the fickleness of public support (Powlick and Katz 1998; Brody 1991; Mueller 1973; Rosenau 1961).

Along these lines, *Time* magazine's chief political correspondent, Margaret Carlson, commented in June 1999 that, although she expected President Clinton to reap a political windfall from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) victory in Kosovo, "it's [the potential benefit] not as big a plus as it would have been a minus [had the conflict turned out badly for NATO]" (Cable News Network [CNN], "The Capital Gang," June 5, 1999). Similarly, CNN's chief political commentator, Jeff Greenfield, observed: "The engagement of Americans in harm's way usually . . . produces more of a downside threat to a president than an upside possibility of rallying around the flag" (CNN, "Larry King Live," April 25, 1999). In fact, President

4. This is similar to what Downs and Rocke (1994) refer to as "gambling for resurrection."

Clinton's public approval remained flat following NATO's victory in Kosovo. In contrast, most political observers at the time agreed that his public support would have plummeted had the air war in Kosovo ended in failure. Speaking on NBC's "Meet the Press" program, Senator Charles Hagel (R-Nebraska) offered a similar observation with respect to President George W. Bush's management of the war in Iraq and its aftermath, commenting: "A president rarely gets much credit in an election year for any kind of efforts on the foreign relations side" (May 25, 2003).

In addition, because citizens care and know less about foreign than domestic policy (Holsti 1996; Kegley and Wittkopf 1996; Graber 1984), they are more likely to assume, in the absence of contrary information, that their presidents are competent in foreign policy. After all, the public places its greater faith in a president's competence in foreign policy than in domestic policy, where Congress traditionally plays a larger role. So, in the face of a foreign policy success, many citizens cannot revise their already positive evaluation upward. In contrast, a foreign policy failure is likely to induce many more citizens to revise their evaluations downward. Hence, there ought to be more downside room to fall than upside room to climb.

Empirical evidence in support of this latter point is available from both the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations. Both presidents campaigned almost exclusively on domestic issues: Clinton's 1992 campaign slogan was, "It's the economy, stupid;" Bush's primary 2000 campaign issue was tax reform. Nevertheless, despite their widely reported lack of foreign policy experience, during their respective initial months in office both presidents consistently enjoyed their highest approval ratings for their handling of foreign affairs.

A final factor contributing to the asymmetry between expected risks and rewards associated with going public is the unpredictability of the public's response. Presidents enjoy, at most, partial control over public opinion and any political risks or rewards that follow from public scrutiny. A president can incur a political reward or punishment only if the public is paying attention when he issues a threat, wins a confrontation, or suffers a defeat. If the public is uninterested, then the president cannot credibly tie his hands through public pronouncements.⁵

Public attentiveness, in turn, may vary across different crises for any number of reasons, such as geographic location, the salience of the actors involved, the existence of other issues competing for the public's attention, and so forth. Some interventions, such as Panama in 1989, Iraq in 1991 and 2003, and Afghanistan in 2001, attract sustained and intense public scrutiny, whereas others, such as the Dominican Republic in 1965, Haiti in 1994, and Bosnia in 1995, attract only moderate and fleeting public interest. Indeed, although as many as 74% of the American public reported following Operation Desert Storm "very closely," the corresponding maximum for Operation Restore Hope in Somalia was just 52%.⁶

5. Interestingly, Schultz (2001) argues that even absent audience costs (that is, if the public is inattentive), support for the leader's policies by the opposition party can still serve as an informative signal to an adversary of the leader's resolve. I would, however, argue that this represents a distinct form of communicating resolve. After all, absent some actual, or at least potential, effect on public attitudes, signals from opposition party members will carry little informative value.

6. Sources: Princeton Survey Research Associates (1993) and CBS News/*New York Times* (1991).

Research (L. Bennett 1990; Cook 1994; Hallin 1986; Mueller 1973) has shown that media coverage of foreign policy, especially in wartime, is significantly, although not entirely, indexed to public statements by the president and his representatives. Indeed, although presidents cannot perfectly control whether, or to what extent, the media—the public's primary source of information about foreign policy (Meernik and Ault 2001; Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida 1989; Jordan and Page 1992; Iyengar and Kinder 1987)—will cover a given story, they can in many instances raise or lower an issue's public profile by modulating their public discussion of it (Hallin 1986). In other words, by either speaking out publicly on an issue (going public) or, alternatively, eschewing the public spotlight in favor of quiet diplomacy (going private), a president can increase or decrease the likelihood that the public will be attentive to it (Kernell 1997; Key 1961; Ansolabehere, Behr, and Iyengar 1993; Cohen 1995; K. Hill 1998). Yet, regardless of their rhetorical strategies, presidents cannot unilaterally command public opinion, including the extent of public interest (Edwards 2003; Baum and Kernell 1999; Edwards and Wood 1999; Key 1961; Wood and Peake 1998; Neustadt 1980). As Neustadt (1980, 72) comments: "One never should underestimate the public's power to ignore, to acquiesce, and to forget."

This raises the distinct possibility that even if a president goes public to generate domestic audience costs, an adversary may not receive the intended signal. If a president's attempt to invoke audience costs fails to attract public attention, or if the public responds with sustained hostility to the president's policy, the result may be a signal to the adversary of weakness rather than resolve. Along these lines, in his classic study of public opinion, Key (1961, 267) notes: "The ultimate crystallization of dominant opinion may be governed by an appraisal of events over which government has no control and the response to which is utterly unpredictable." He adds, "governments cannot control the circumstances that activate hostile opinion" (270).

For instance, on February 18, 1998, President Clinton dispatched his senior national security advisors to Ohio to conduct a town hall meeting to rally public support for using military force in response to Iraq's refusal to cooperate with UN weapon inspectors. Yet, a boisterous protest by 13 of the several thousand audience members received far more media coverage than the arguments of the president's advisors. The result was reduced public support for the president's hawkish policy. This suggests that as presidents weigh the pros and cons of going public in foreign crises, they must consider the possibility that an attempt to invoke audience costs may backfire and embolden, rather than deter, the adversary.

Given these tradeoffs and asymmetries, I argue that unless he is either confident of success or important national security interests are in jeopardy, a president will wish to minimize the potential political costs of a foreign policy failure. After all, confident adversaries are unlikely to be deterred by public posturing from the president. Absent either of these two conditions, the president will be less concerned with enhancing his credibility than with minimizing the political consequences of failure. In other words, in a low-stakes crisis, if a president is confident of success in a military conflict, he may welcome public scrutiny as an opportunity to enhance his potential political windfall rather than view it as a political risk factor to be avoided.

Recognizing the president's domestic political calculus, adversaries are likely to view going public as a signal of the importance to the president of the issue at stake. Indeed, given the political risks inherent in domestic audience costs, presidents are unlikely to seek them unless they either place a reasonably high degree of importance on the issue in dispute or they are confident that they will never have to "pay." This would appear to open a window for the president to successfully bluff by going public even though the stakes are not particularly high or he is not particularly confident of a successful outcome in a fight. Yet, as discussed earlier, bluffing is a high-risk strategy. The consequences of having one's bluff called may be severe (Guisinger and Smith 2002). Hence, for the president, when important strategic interests are not at stake, unless the likelihood of failure is relatively remote, domestic political considerations will loom large. After all, why risk paying the substantial price of failure for an uncertain, and at best relatively modest, potential political gain? And if, despite his efforts to lower the profile of a dispute, the public nevertheless tunes in, the president is likely to feel constrained in his policy options.⁷ Along these lines, in an interview with the author, Brent Scowcroft—the former National Security Advisor to President George H. W. Bush—commented, "Ideally, the best way to [conduct a military intervention] . . . would be to . . . initiate a response to a problem before most people knew it was a problem, because then you can mold the public response and build . . . acceptance, rather than start out with a shock."⁸

In contrast, when important national security interests are at stake, the benefit of attracting public attention to enhance the president's credibility and thereby increasing the likelihood of winning without a fight and, as a bonus, reaping a political windfall, may outweigh any aversion to the increased political risk inherent in using force in the face of public scrutiny. In short, presidents will seek to use public scrutiny to their benefit when significant national security interests are at stake and, unless confident of success, will prefer to insulate themselves from potential political costs when a foreign policy success is less imperative.⁹

HYPOTHESES

A variety of hypotheses concerning the incentives and behavior of presidents and their adversaries can be derived from the theory. For instance, elsewhere (Baum 2004) I investigate several hypotheses concerning the conditions under which public scrutiny can constrain presidents' willingness to employ military force as a tool of foreign

7. This logic suggests that when a strategic adversary observes the president pursuing a strategy of avoiding public scrutiny, she is likely to infer that the issue is not particularly important to the president (and perhaps also that the president is not too confident of success). Hence, if the adversary is reasonably confident of success (however she defines it), she may seek to up the domestic political ante for the president by taking actions geared toward attracting the attention of the American public, thereby hopefully inhibiting the president from further escalating the dispute.

8. Interview conducted in Washington, D.C., in June 1999.

9. It is worth noting that anecdotal evidence suggests presidents always consider the political implications of their foreign policies. For instance, even in the midst of the Cuban Missile Crisis, arguably one of the highest stakes foreign policy crises in U.S. history, President Kennedy discussed with his senior advisors the likely ramifications of various policy alternatives for the 1962 midterm elections. Kennedy also wondered aloud whether the Soviets had provoked the crisis to influence the outcome of the election.

policy. For the present study, however, I focus on the president's rhetorical strategies and in particular the decision to go public or private. Hence, in the next section, I test the following three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: *Ceteris paribus*, presidents are more likely to go public (private) when the strategic stakes in a dispute are relatively high (low). As the president's expected probability of success increases, however, the difference in presidential rhetoric between high- and low-stakes crises will recede.

Hypothesis 2: When the strategic stakes in a dispute are low, as the president's expected probability of success increases (decreases), he will be more likely to go public (private).

Hypothesis 3: The effects of variations in the probability of success will be greater when the strategic stakes are low than when they are high.

STATISTICAL INVESTIGATIONS

DATA

Cases. Between 1946 and 1994, the ICB data set includes 635 actor-level observations across 304 distinct international crises. (This represents an average of a little less than 2.1 actors per crisis.) Disregarding the initial decision to engage in a dispute (that is, truncating the dependent variable) could potentially bias my statistical results. Given the U.S. status as a superpower with global reach throughout the post-World War II era, the United States is one of only two states during this period (the other is, of course, the Soviet Union prior to its dissolution) that had the capacity to become directly involved in any crisis in the world at any time. Hence, I include in my data set all crisis actor observations for all international crises, including 160 actor-level observations (spanning 99 distinct crises), in which the United States remained entirely uninvolved. By including observations for crises in which the United States did not participate, as well as those in which it did, I am able to account for all circumstances in which the United States arguably had a reasonable likelihood of becoming engaged in a crisis with another nation (at least according to the ICB coders).

One could make a principled argument for treating either individual crisis actors or the crises themselves as the most appropriate units of analysis. I emphasize (primarily, although not exclusively) the former, focusing on individual crisis actors, for several reasons. First, if the units of analysis were crises (that is, one observation per crisis, rather than one observation per crisis actor), it is unclear how to appropriately measure the characteristics of crisis actors (that is, relative power, U.S. ally status, regime repression, distance to United States, and democracy status). For instance, the ICB data set does not indicate which states participated on which side in a given crisis. Hence, for any crisis involving more than two states in which the United States is a crisis actor, there is no clear way to definitively identify the actual or potential U.S. adversary (or adversaries). Even if such information were available, there would still be numerous circumstances involving more than one U.S. adversary, in which cases it would be necessary to aggregate in some fashion the individual crisis actors' charac-

teristics. Virtually any such aggregation, in turn, would raise questions regarding the validity of these indicators.

Second, and more important, for the 99 crises (accounting for one-third of all crises in the data set) in which the United States did not become involved in any way, it is unclear how one could determine who should be treated as potential adversaries if crises were the units of analysis. When the United States considers whether to enter an international crisis, there is no compelling *ex ante* reason to assume that the United States will do so on one side or another. One could, hypothetically, assume hypothetically that states formally allied with the United States were *never* U.S. adversaries, or that states formally allied with the Soviet Union were *always* U.S. adversaries. Yet, both of these assumptions are empirically false. The United States has at times found itself in international crises on the opposing side of its closest allies or allied with its erstwhile enemies. It is certainly true that the United States is less likely to oppose an ally in a crisis, relative to a nonally. Yet this differential is explicitly accounted for by controlling for whether each crisis actor was a U.S. ally at the time of a given crisis. Hence, by employing, as my units of analysis in my primary investigation, all individual crisis actors, rather than the crises themselves, I impose fewer arbitrary assumptions concerning whether and against whom the United States will engage in a foreign crisis. Instead, I let the data speak for themselves. In doing so, I allow for the possibility that the United States might potentially choose to engage in a dispute against any actor involved in any crisis at any time. I also avoid the potential necessity of discarding one-third of my observations (that is, all crises in which the United States remained uninvolved, and, hence, for which there is no way to identify, *ex ante*, a potential adversary, or adversaries).

Of course, because most international crises involve more than one state, the data include multiple observations—one for each crisis actor—for nearly all crises. In such cases, the standard errors for each observation concerning a given crisis are presumably not independent. In other words, within any single crisis, the factors that the U.S. president considers in determining whether to intervene either as an ally or adversary vis-a-vis any individual crisis actor are presumably not entirely distinct from the factors that influence the president's decision making vis-à-vis the other actors involved in the crisis. Hence, I cluster the errors at the level of the individual crises rather than the individual actors.

Nevertheless, there are admittedly some advantages to treating crises as the units of analysis. For one thing, as the preceding discussion implies, one might reasonably argue that presidents make their decisions regarding whether to talk publicly about, become involved in, or avoid altogether, a given international crisis by considering the circumstances surrounding the crisis as a whole rather than by separately assessing policies toward each individual actor involved. Similarly, one might argue that a president's assessment of the strategic stakes in a crisis and perhaps also the probability of success pertain more to the crisis as a whole than to the individual actors involved. Hence, although I believe the advantages of employing individual crisis actors as my units of analysis outweigh the disadvantages, as a robustness test, I nonetheless replicate my investigation, employing crises as the units of analysis. In doing so, I am

forced to confront the several problems outlined above. Notwithstanding these potential concerns, to preserve the data on actor-level characteristics, I aggregate the actor characteristic variables, based on several admittedly imperfect decision rules. These are described in detail in the course of reporting my findings. Although I am hesitant to employ aggregated data for my primary investigation, I consider this an acceptable compromise for a secondary robustness check.

For obvious reasons, I exclude the 53 observations in which the United States is coded as the crisis actor. (These crises are, of course, included in the data set through the other actors involved.) This yields a total universe of 582 actor-level observations across 301 distinct international crises. Missing data for several events on the precise start dates, the number of days between the start date and the date of the crisis actor's major response, or on one of the other key causal variables further reduce the number of available actor-level observations to 501, across 286 international crises (for the fully specified model).¹⁰

Going public. To determine whether the president has sought to attract public attention to a dispute, I tally the number of times, in the *Public Papers of the President of the United States* (1998) (in speeches, verbal or written statements and press conferences), that the president mentions a potential adversary nation (that is, a crisis actor) in a national security or defense-related context.¹¹ To construct my indicator, I tally three separate values. The first is the average number of times per day that the president mentions a crisis actor between the date on which the crisis is first perceived by the crisis actor (t) to the date on which the actor initiates her major response (t + number of days to major response). The second is the daily average number of such mentions during the month prior to the perceived start of the crisis (from $t - 1$ month to $t - 1$ day), and the third is the daily average in that same calendar month during the previous year (from $t - 13$ months to $t - 12$ months). I then calculate the average across the latter two periods ($[t - 1 \text{ month} + t - 13 \text{ months}] \div 2$). Finally, my summary indicator consists of the difference in the period between crisis initiation and response, on one hand, and the precrisis average on the other. By employing this difference, rather than the precrisis level of presidential rhetoric, I am able to account for the likelihood that presidents will tend to mention some countries, such as the Soviet Union, more than others, regardless of whether they are currently embroiled in a dispute with the United

10. The precise number of observations for my actor-level investigation varies between 501 and 525, depending on the control variables included in each model.

11. The latter restriction excludes mentions that are unambiguously unrelated to a given crisis. For two reasons, I chose not limit my indicator to mentions of a given country that were directly and unambiguously related to a given crisis and that constituted clear "threats." First, it seems highly probable that if the president draws public attention to a given nation and its relationship to U.S. national security, then this will heighten public attention to any security-related foreign policy dispute with that nation that arises at the same time. Second, at a more practical level, parsing the data in such a refined manner proved to be problematic because multiple coders found it difficult to agree on precisely which presidential mentions were directly and unambiguously related to a specific dispute with a given nation, or which constituted clear "threats." Hence, for both conceptual and practical reasons, I broadened my search to include all mentions of a crisis actor in the context of a discussion of U.S. national security or defense.

TABLE 1
Average Number of Presidential Mentions of Potential Adversary per Day

A		B		C		Final "Going Public" Indicator	
From $t - 13$ Months to $t - 12$ Months		From $t - 1$ Month to $t - 1$ Day		From t to $t - 1$ Day ^a		$C - [(A + B) / 2]$	
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
.08	.31	.10	.39	.43	2.09	.34	2.03

NOTE: t = date of crisis initiation. r = date of crisis actor's major response.

a. For crises in which the major crisis response took place on the same day as the crisis was initiated, C is set equal to the number of presidential mentions on that date.

States.¹² Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation for each element of my going public indicator, as well as the final summary variable.

I also include the precrisis average level of presidential rhetoric (that is, the average across cells A and B in Table 1), because the public, as well as a given adversary, can only recognize that the president is going public and thereby seeking to signal resolve, by comparing his rhetorical efforts against some baseline. For instance, a relatively small increase of, say, two mentions of the Soviet Union, may have far less significance than the same increase with respect to another country less central to U.S. security concerns. The precrisis level of rhetoric accounts for this important distinction.

Of course, it is possible that presidents may face domestic political pressure to speak publicly about a crisis. To the extent that the president's decision to go public is reactive rather than proactive, then the true cause of his rhetorical efforts may be unrelated to my theoretical argument. To account for this possibility, I include an additional variable that measures the difference in the total number of articles in *The New York Times* that mention each crisis actor in the context of U.S. foreign policy between the date the crisis actor first perceived the crisis and the date of her major response, on one hand, and the average across the same two precrisis months in which I calculated total presidential rhetoric, on the other. In other words, this variable is constructed in exactly the same manner as my going-public indicator.¹³

12. I employ the average of 2 precrisis months, separated in time by a full year, to mitigate the potential bias introduced if another crisis with the same adversary was underway during either precrisis period. This, of course, could skew my precrisis observation. In fact, in a few instances, the prior-year observation did indeed take place during another crisis involving the same adversary. Conceptually, these observations ought to weaken my results. Empirically, however, excluding them had no appreciable impact on the results. It is also worth noting that the results remain robust if I employ as the dependent variable the level of presidential rhetoric between day t and the date of the crisis actor's major response. Yet, this latter operationalization suffers from the limitations described in the text. Hence, I do not report these latter results in the study.

13. Data on coverage by *The New York Times* was gathered from Lexis-Nexis for 1970 to 1994, and from *The New York Times Index* for 1946 to 1969. Testing indicated that data from these two sources performed similarly in my models. In my data set, presidential rhetoric and *The New York Times* coverage correlate at .57. This indicates that although the two variables are, not surprisingly, fairly strongly related to one another, they are not substitutes.

Strategic stakes. Objectively measuring strategic stakes is extremely difficult. After all, one leader may assess the importance of a given issue quite differently than another. Similarly, a dispute that does not involve intrinsically important national security interests may, once force is employed, become strategically important due to such intangible strategic goals as preserving the national honor or the leader's reputation for resolve. For instance, although many foreign policy experts, including many congressional leaders, argued *ex ante* that the situation in Kosovo in 1999 was of little strategic importance to the United States, once President Clinton committed U.S. and NATO forces to the conflict, even opponents of intervention, such as Republican Senator John McCain, conceded that the strategic stakes were high *ex post* because the NATO alliance could not afford to be defeated in its own backyard.

However, given the difficulty of observing, *ex ante*, intangible or leader-specific sources of strategic stakes, I am forced to rely on an observable empirical indicator. Hence, to estimate the strategic stakes of each crisis to the United States, I employ the so-called geostrategic salience variable from the ICB data set. This variable measures "the significance of the location of an international crisis in terms of its natural resources, distance from power centers, etc., measured by the number of international systems which are affected by a crisis" (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 1998, 47-48). To highlight the key distinction in my theory between crises where traditional national security concerns are least likely to predominate and those that potentially involve at least some significant U.S. national security interests, I dichotomize this variable as follows: 0 = *only one subsystem affected by crisis* and 1 = *more than one subsystem, dominant system, or global system affected by crisis*.

One consequence of the U.S. status throughout the post-World War II era as a superpower with global reach and near universal interests is that virtually any dispute involving more than one subsystem seems quite likely, almost by definition, to have been considered at least *potentially* strategically significant by U.S. policy makers. Hence, this appears to be the clearest breakpoint between crises in which U.S. leaders are relatively likely to perceive the United States as having no important national security interests and those in which leaders are likely to perceive the United States as having at least some significant strategic concerns.¹⁴ Based on this metric, approximately 35% of the observations in the ICB actor-level data set in which the United States is not the crisis actor are coded as involving low strategic stakes for the United States.¹⁵

Probability of success. For my indicator of the U.S. probability of success, I focus on traditional measures of relative power (for a discussion of the pros and cons of this operationalization, see Stam 1996), which have been described as representing a central factor "guiding basic foreign policy choices toward other actors" and as lying "at the foundation of realist theory [because] it constrains the options decision makers can

14. It is worth noting, however, that the results remain similar, albeit predictably modestly weaker—given the logic of the theoretical argument—if I expand the number of categories in this variable to treat multiple subsystems and dominant or global systems as distinct categories.

15. Overall, the United States is coded as being involved, in some manner, in about 27% of the observations in which it is not the crisis actor. As one might expect, the United States is substantially more likely to become involved in high-stakes crises. My strategic stakes indicator correlates with the propensity of the United States to become involved in a given crisis at .31.

seriously consider pursuing” (Herrmann et al. 1997, 407-08). I employ the Correlates of War (COW) National Material Capabilities summary statistic, which combines a variety of factors into a single scale of national strength. Following standard practice, my capabilities indicator is based on the following formula: $C_A / (C_A + C_B)$, where C_A and C_B represent the capabilities of state A (in my case, the United States) and state B (the non-U.S. crisis actor), respectively. The resulting indicator represents the power of the United States as a proportion of the combined power of the two states.

Of course, countries can, and often do, compensate for their own weakness by forming alliances with more powerful states. When states consider whether to engage in a crisis with another state, they must consider not only that state’s internal strength but also the likelihood that others would come to its aid. Hence, I weight the capability ratio by the overall alliance capability of each non-U.S. actor at the time of a given crisis, as defined in the ICB data (based on the so-called allycap variable). The allycap variable does not measure a crisis actor’s alliances specific to any given crisis (that is, the states on the same side as the crisis actor in a given crisis). Rather, it measures the capability of each crisis actor’s overall alliance portfolio at a given point in time based on a 4-category Likert-type scale (which I normalize to a 0-1 interval), where 1 = *nonaligned or neutral*, 2 = *informal alliance with superpower or great power*, 3 = *formal alliance with superpower or great power*, and 4 = *alliance leader—superpower or great power* (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 1998, 51).

I believe the overall alliance portfolio summary measure is preferable to a crisis-specific indicator because, in deciding whether to become involved in a dispute with some crisis actor, a U.S. president must consider not only who is currently involved in the crisis supporting that crisis actor, but also who might potentially become involved in support of that crisis actor. For instance, such considerations frequently played a critical role in U.S. decision making vis-a-vis states allied with the Soviet Union during the cold war, even in circumstances, such as the Korean War, where the Soviet Union was not directly involved at the time the United States decided whether and how to intervene in a given international crisis. My summary indicator (potential values of which range from 0 to 1, with 1 representing maximum U.S. relative power) thus takes the following form: U.S. capability ratio ÷ crisis-actor alliance capability. This indicator yields an overall average U.S. relative power score between 1946 and 1994 of .61, with a standard deviation of .30.

Control variables. I include a variety of control variables, intended to account for a range of domestic and international factors that previous studies have proposed as explanations for U.S. foreign policy and, more broadly, for international conflict behavior. The control variables fall into three general categories: U.S. domestic political and economic circumstances, crisis-actor characteristics, and the international security environment at the time of the crisis. The controls and their definitions, as well as the predicted signs on their coefficients, are listed in Table 2.

The rationale for the predicted effects follows from a fairly straightforward calculus. That is, any factor that raises the expected political downside risk or reduces the expected political benefits to the president associated with public attentiveness to his foreign policy actions will cause him to be more hesitant to engage the public. Con-

TABLE 2
Control Variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Predicted Sign on Coefficient</i>
Domestic political and economic circumstances		
Precrisis approval	Percentage of public approving president's job performance in Gallup presidential approval poll prior to crisis initiation	+
New administration	Dummy variable coded 1 for first 3 months of each new administration, or the so-called "honeymoon" period	+
Divided government	3-category scale, coded 0 = <i>unified government</i> , 1 = <i>divided Congress</i> , and 2 = <i>unified opposition control of Congress</i>	-
Presidential election year	Dummy variable coded 1 in presidential election years	+
Domestic economy	Monthly percentage change in U.S. personal income, minus monthly percent change in the Consumer Price Index. ^a	+
Crisis-actor characteristics		
Democracy	Dummy variable coded 1 if the crisis actor was a democracy (according to the International Crisis Behavior data set at the time of the crisis)	-
Distance to United States	9-category scale measuring distance of crisis actor's region from United States	-
Regime repression	3-category scale measuring the extent of repression exercised by the regime of the crisis actor prior to the crisis period, with 3 representing minimum repression	+
U.S. ally	Dummy variable coded 1 if a crisis actor was a U.S. ally, in any formal alliance, at the time of a given crisis (according to the Correlates of War Alliance data set)	-
International security environment		
Cold war	Dummy variable coded 0 from 1949 to 1988 ^b	-
U.S. crises	Number of crises under way in which the United States is coded as a crisis actor during the same year as a given crisis in which the United States is involved in some manner	-
Regional security organization	Dummy variable coded 1 if a regional security organization is involved in the crisis	+
Global security organization	Dummy variable coded 1 if a global security organization, such as the UN, is involved in the crisis	+

a. I employ this economic performance indicator, rather than the more widely employed misery index (unemployment minus inflation), because appropriate unemployment data are unavailable for some of the early observations in my data set. The results, however, differ only modestly when I employ the standard misery index in my models.

b. Recoding the end of the cold war as beginning in any year between 1989 and 1991 did not materially affect the reported results.

versely, any factor that reduces the downside risk or raises the expected benefits to the president will embolden him to invite public scrutiny. Similarly, the stronger the president's domestic political position, or the more urgently the president needs a foreign policy success, the more likely he is to be willing to go public and thereby accept the risk of incurring a given level of political costs. Consequently, those factors that are either positively related to a president's *ex ante* domestic political capital, such as high approval ratings, a strong economy, and presidential honeymoon periods, or that heighten the urgency of success in a foreign crisis, such as an impending presidential election, should be positively associated with going public. Similarly, factors that raise the likelihood of public support for the president's policy, such as the involvement of regional or global organizations, or a potential adversary's status as a repressive regime, are also likely to embolden the president to go public.

In contrast, factors that heighten the president's sensitivity to political risks, including divided government (which gives the opposition party a high-profile platform from which to attack the president, should his policies fail), remote crisis locales (which may be more difficult to justify to the public or to sustain operationally), concurrent involvement in other international crises or situations in which the United States finds itself in the politically distasteful position of opposing fellow democracies or erstwhile allies, will render the president more hesitant to invite public scrutiny of his actions. Similarly, exogenous factors that heighten the president's credibility, such as the cold war, will tend to mitigate the need to invoke audience costs in order to signal resolve.

STATISTICAL RESULTS

Recall that hypothesis 1 predicts that presidents are more likely to go public when the strategic stakes in a crisis are high, but that the differential will recede as the president's expectation of success rises. Hypothesis 2, in turn, holds that when the stakes are low, presidents will be increasingly emboldened to go public as their expected probability of success increases. Finally, hypothesis 3 predicts that these relationships will be weaker if the stakes are high. Table 3 presents the results of a series of ordinary least squares analyses testing all three hypotheses.

To assess the robustness of my results, the first model in Table 3 excludes all control variables except the difference in coverage by *The New York Times*, which is important for ensuring that the effects of my key causal variables on presidential rhetoric are exogenous to media coverage. The second model adds the remaining controls, except for the president dummies. Finally, the third model adds the president dummies (with President Truman as the excluded category). To account for any differences in the effects of the probability of a successful outcome on presidential rhetoric in disputes with varying national security implications for the United States, I include in each model an interaction between relative power and strategic stakes. Although the coefficients on the key causal variables differ modestly across the several models, they are broadly consistent in each instance. In fact, the key coefficients increase in magnitude

TABLE 3
OLS Analyses of Effect of Variations in Strategic Stakes and U.S. Relative Power on President's Public Rhetoric
During International Crises, 1946 to 1994

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Coefficient	t Statistic	Coefficient	t Statistic	Coefficient	t Statistic	Coefficient	t Statistic	Coefficient	t Statistic
Domestic political and economic circumstances										
Precrisis presidential rhetoric	0.862	1.20	0.996	1.35	1.081	1.48	1.510	2.49***	1.562	2.64***
<i>The New York Times</i> coverage	0.644	2.44**	0.654	2.60***	0.634	2.84***	0.238	1.81*	0.234	1.82*
Precrisis approval	—	—	-1.003	-1.38	-0.676	-1.06	-1.913	-1.78*	-1.874	-1.79*
Divided government	—	—	-0.230	-1.83*	-0.034	-0.59	0.010	0.13	0.017	0.22
Presidential election year	—	—	0.591	1.96**	0.566	1.92*	0.418	1.48	0.388	1.37
New administration	—	—	-0.422	-1.49	-0.406	-1.42	-0.470	-1.36	-0.447	-1.32
Domestic economy	—	—	0.950	1.17	22.63	1.65*	40.59	1.77*	39.694	1.83*
Crisis actor characteristics										
Regime repression	—	—	0.145	1.22	0.099	0.96	0.254	1.38	0.242	1.35
U.S. ally	—	—	0.205	0.81	0.090	0.40	-0.133	-0.27	-0.172	-0.37
Democracy	—	—	-0.430	-2.20**	-0.431	-2.14**	-1.170	-2.4**	-1.112	-2.47***
Distance to United States	—	—	-0.091	-1.22	-0.107	-1.40	-0.337	-2.35**	-0.337	-2.39**
International security environment										
U.S. relative power scale	0.006	1.68*	0.010	1.97**	0.011	2.28**	0.018	2.05**	0.018	2.05**
Strategic stakes	0.577	1.75*	0.742	1.75*	0.874	2.03**	1.180	2.08**	0.966	1.97**
Strategic stakes × U.S. relative power scale	-0.008	-1.79*	-0.009	-1.83*	-0.010	-1.99**	-0.019	-2.28**	-0.018	-2.01**
Regional security organization	—	—	0.118	0.70	0.165	1.11	0.208	0.87	0.234	1.02
Global security organization	—	—	0.078	0.74	0.095	0.67	0.049	0.27	0.080	0.46
Cold war	—	—	-0.538	-0.70	-0.316	-1.11	-0.641	-1.05	-0.513	-0.98
Number of U.S. crises per year	—	—	-0.078	-0.64	-0.047	-0.43	0.156	1.43	0.151	1.43

(continued)

TABLE 3 (continued)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Coefficient	t Statistic	Coefficient	t Statistic	Coefficient	t Statistic	Coefficient	t Statistic	Coefficient	t Statistic
President dummy variables										
Eisenhower	—	—	—	—	0.105	0.60	0.421	1.59	0.443	1.67*
Kennedy	—	—	—	—	-0.091	-0.34	0.181	0.35	0.312	0.61
Johnson	—	—	—	—	-0.159	-0.50	0.111	0.22	0.237	0.44
Nixon	—	—	—	—	-0.480	-1.05	-0.444	-0.77	-0.464	-0.81
Ford	—	—	—	—	-0.449	-1.30	-0.334	-0.93	-0.343	-0.92
Carter	—	—	—	—	0.671	1.17	0.006	0.02	0.110	0.31
Reagan	—	—	—	—	0.154	0.46	0.561	1.11	0.535	1.07
Bush	—	—	—	—	-0.943	-1.85*	-1.168	-1.44	-1.110	-1.45
Clinton	—	—	—	—	4.233	1.35	5.516	1.32	5.976	1.41
Constant	-474	-1.78*	.658	0.73	.041	0.06	1.529	1.33	1.466	1.29
Pseudo R^2	.24 ^a		.31 ^b		.36 ^c		.36 ^d		.37 ^e	

NOTE: All models employ heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors. For actor-level models (1-3), standard errors are clustered by individual crises.

* $p \leq .10$. ** $p \leq .05$. *** $p \leq .01$.

a. $N = 525$.

b. $N = 501$.

c. $N = 501$.

d. $N = 285$.

e. $N = 285$.

to variations in model specification. Hence, I focus the remainder of my discussion only on the fully specified model (model 3).

Beginning with the controls, most, although not all, are insignificant. In large measure, this is most likely attributable to the different role of political considerations in low- versus high-stakes crises. In the latter cases, although not the former, my theory implies that presidents are likely to go public almost regardless of the political risks associated with doing so. Hence, for the nearly two-thirds of the observations in my data set that involve relatively high strategic stakes, any relationship between the causal and dependent variables is likely to be fairly weak. Indeed, it is conceivable that in at least some circumstances, the effects of the controls may move in opposing directions in low- versus high-stakes crises. After all, presidents presumably weight the pros and cons of various considerations differently under qualitatively different circumstances. Because the effects on low- versus high-stakes crises are not separately accounted for in my research design (doing so is beyond the scope of this project), this is likely to substantially weaken all but the strongest statistical relationships. Nevertheless, the signs on the coefficients are consistent with my predictions (see Table 1) for 10 of the 13 variables, including all that achieve statistical significance at $p < .10$ or better (domestic economy, democracy, and presidential election year). All three exceptions—precrisis approval, new administration, and U.S. ally—are statistically insignificant. Hence, overall, the control variables appear to perform largely as predicted.

Turning to the key causal variables, because of the substantial multicollinearity frequently associated with interaction terms, the statistical significance, or lack thereof, of the coefficients on such terms can be misleading. Instead, the key factor in evaluating my results is the statistical significance of the predicted substantive differences between presidential rhetorical strategies in low- and high-stakes crises, as U.S. relative power varies. To determine whether my key causal variables are associated with statistically significant substantive effects on my dependent variable, I employ a simulation methodology developed by King, Tomz, and Wittenberg (2000) to translate the key coefficients into expected values and derive confidence intervals. The results from the fully specified model are illustrated in the top graphic in Figure 1.¹⁶

To begin with, the curves in Figure 1 offer clear empirical support for my first hypothesis. The entire high-stakes curve is located in the positive region of the figure, indicating that presidents always increase their public rhetoric regarding actual or potential adversaries (that is, the actors involved in a given international crisis), to at least some extent, when the stakes are high. Indeed, presidents are nearly always more likely to increase their public rhetoric regarding potential adversaries, and to do so by to a greater extent, when the stakes are high than when they are low. Overall, in these data, the average predicted increase in presidential rhetoric in high-stakes crises is more than five times larger than in low-stakes crises (+.47 vs. +.09 mentions per day). However, as also predicted by hypothesis 1, the gap in presidential rhetoric between low- and high-stakes crises declines as the U.S. power advantage rises. In cases in

16. These results exclude three influential outlier observations (crisis actor numbers 425, 6,270, and 9,599). Including these observations somewhat weakens, but does not fundamentally alter, the results.

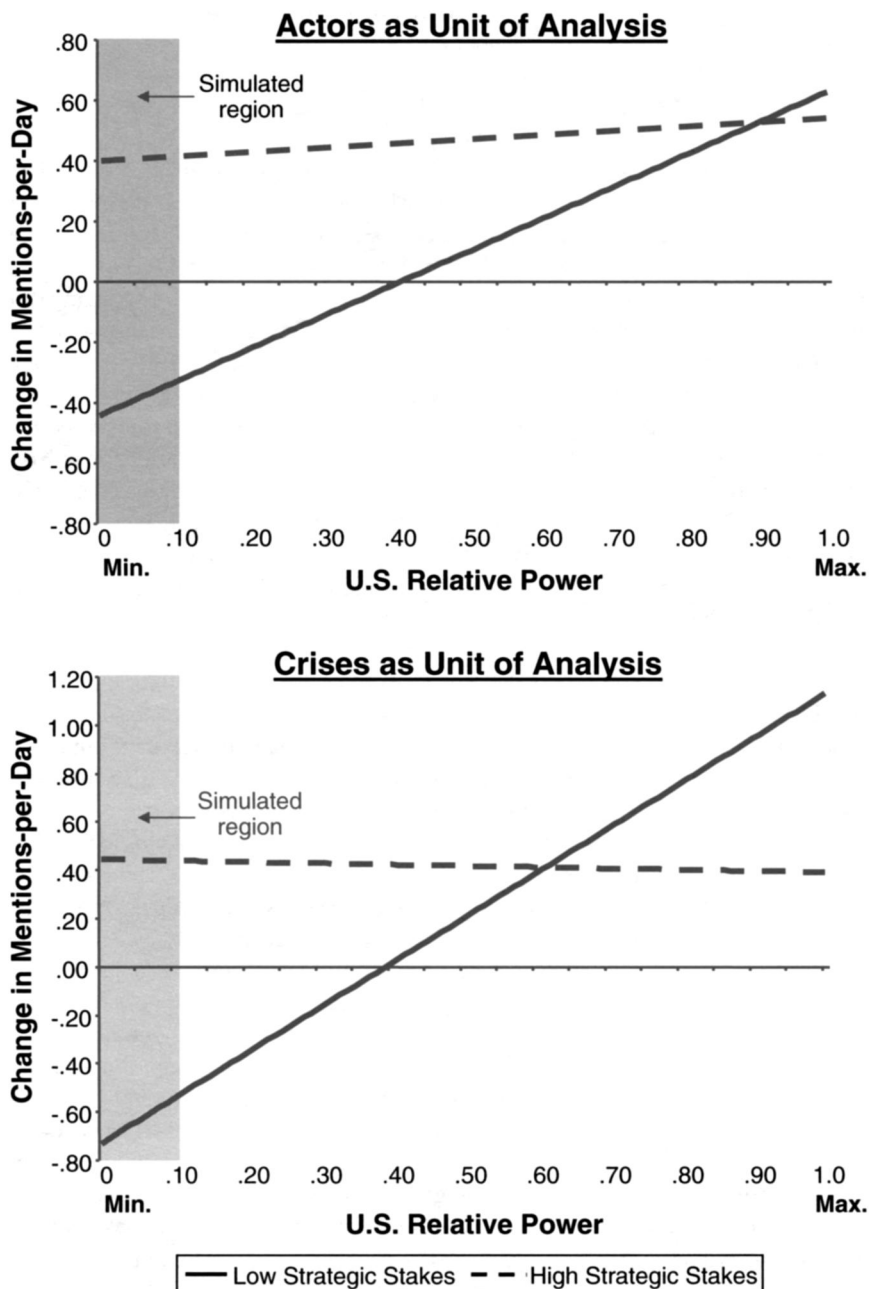


Figure 1: Predicted Change in Presidential Mentions of Potential Adversaries per Day as Strategic Stakes and U.S. Relative Power Vary

which the United States is essentially certain of success, presidents employ similar rhetorical efforts regardless of the strategic stakes.

Turning to hypothesis 2, for crises in which the strategic stakes are low, as U.S. relative power increases from its minimum to maximum values, the average number of presidential mentions of the adversary rises by almost 1.1 mentions per day ($p < .05$), moving from a decline of nearly .45 mentions per day, compared to precrisis rhetoric levels (i.e., going private), when the U.S. relative power score is at its minimum level, to slightly more than a .62 mention-per-day increase in public rhetoric (i.e., going public) when the United States enjoys a maximum power advantage. This represents an increase in presidential rhetoric of approximately one-half of a standard deviation (for low-stakes crises). In contrast, consistent with hypothesis 3, when the stakes are high, a maximum increase in relative U.S. power is associated with a statistically insignificant increase of .07 mentions per day (from .40 to .47). This latter increase is equivalent to just under .027 standard deviations (for high-stakes crises). Hence, on a mentions-per-day basis, the effects of a maximum increase in U.S. relative power on presidential rhetoric are approximately 9 times larger when the strategic stakes are low. In addition, the overall difference between the effects of variations in relative power in low- versus high-stakes crises is itself statistically significant ($p < .05$).¹⁷

Finally, in the ICB data, the lowest value on the U.S. relative power scale, if both national capabilities and alliance capability are taken into consideration, is about .11 (on a 0-1 scale), whereas the maximum value is nearly 1.0.¹⁸ The King, Tomz, and Wittenberg (2000) methodology makes it possible to simulate expected values beyond the actual range of U.S. relative power in the data set. Hence, Figure 1 presents the complete range of possible values on the U.S. relative power scale, including the simulated region (0-.10). (The simulated region is shaded in the figure.) The results, however, remain substantively comparable and statistically significant even if we restrict the range to the actual values in the data set.

CRISIS-LEVEL REPLICATION

As a robustness check, I replicate my fully specified model, employing individual crises, rather than crisis actors, as my units of analysis. This, of course, requires aggregating or otherwise modifying the causal variables that measure actor-specific (including U.S.-specific) characteristics, which are critical for my study. For my presidential rhetoric and *The New York Times* coverage indicators, I employ the sum of the values for all non-U.S. actors involved in a given crisis. The logic is simply that by speaking publicly about (or reporting on) any actor in a crisis, even an ally, the presi-

17. It is possible that the effects of variations in the U.S. probability of success on presidential rhetoric might not be monotonic or even linear. To investigate this possibility, I added the quadratic of U.S. relative power, as well as an additional interaction between strategic stakes and the quadratic term, to my models. The results (not shown) differ only modestly from the linear model. I therefore report only the results from the simpler, linear model.

18. The .11 value is for the Soviet Union, which, between 1979 and 1983, the Correlates of War data codes as being slightly more powerful than the United States. The relative power value during that period is just below .44. Because the Soviet Union is also coded as having a maximum alliance capability (level 4), this yields the following relative power equation: $.44 \div 4 = .11$

dent (or *The New York Times*) is raising the profile of the crisis and thereby increasing the magnitude of any domestic audience costs that may emerge.

For the non-U.S. component of the U.S. relative power indicator, in turn, I employ two different values: (1) the average capabilities of the non-U.S. actors involved in each crisis and (2) the capabilities of the most powerful of the non-U.S. actors involved in each crisis. Although far from ideal, I consider these the least bad options. The central problem is that there is no reliable means of determining which actor (or actors) should be emphasized. One could include separate observations for each crisis actor. Yet it is unclear which actor(s) should be treated as the potential adversary (or adversaries). By employing the overall average and the most powerful actor in each crisis, I make the admittedly imperfect assumption that crises involving powerful actors (individually or in the aggregate) are more risky for the United States than those involving weak actors. Bearing in mind that the United States is coded as a crisis actor in only 53 out of 301 international crises, and is entirely uninvolved in one-third of all crises, this assumption has the important benefit of allowing me to avoid making any arbitrary assumptions regarding which states are likely to be on which side in a given crisis.

For the other actor-level control variables, I employ the overall means across the actor-level observations associated with each crisis. Although again far from ideal, the overall averages seem intuitively plausible as control variables. For instance, earlier I conjectured, and my conjecture was supported by the data, that presidents would be more hesitant to seek audience costs vis-à-vis fellow democracies. For the same reason, I would anticipate that presidents will employ less public rhetoric as the average level of democracy rises among the actors involved in a crisis. After all, the higher the overall average level of democracy among the crisis actors, presumably the greater will be the likelihood that any potential U.S. adversary (or adversaries) would be a democracy.¹⁹ Indeed, as we shall see, all of the actor-characteristic control variables that approach or achieve statistical significance perform similarly, or in several instances more strongly, in the crisis-level model than in the actor-level model. Finally, because different actors enter crises at different times, some of the controls vary across the actors involved in a given crisis. For the administration dummies, I set any president dummy equal to 1 if at least one actor entered a given crisis on his watch. Similarly, if at least one actor entered a crisis during a new administration or a presidential election year, I set that observation on those dummies equal to 1. Most of the strategic/international environment controls do not vary across the actors within a given crisis.

The results from the two crisis-level analyses are shown in models 4 and 5 of Table 3, which replicate the fully specified actor-level model.²⁰ Model 4 employs the overall average capabilities of the non-U.S. crisis actors, whereas model 5 employs the capabilities of only the most powerful non-U.S. actor in each crisis. The two models differ hardly at all. Hence, to conserve space, for the remainder of this section I focus on model 4. Beginning with the controls, all those variables that were statistically signifi-

19. I tested two additional variations of the U.S. ally and democracy dummies. Specifically, for both indicators, I created two separate dummy variables, one each for crises in which either all or none of the crisis actors were U.S. allies or democracies. All four resulting dummies performed similarly to the overall averages. Hence, I include only the averages in the reported results.

20. These results also exclude three influential outlier observations (crisis numbers 317, 346, and 391). As before, including these observations weakens somewhat, but does not fundamentally alter, the results.

cant before remain significant and identically signed. Interestingly, several controls that were insignificant in the actor-level model are significant here. In each instance, they too remain identically signed. The coefficients on several controls differ substantially in magnitude from the actor-level model, and several even reverse direction (although the latter coefficients are insignificant). Overall, however, the results largely replicate my findings from the actor-level data.

The key relationships from model 4 are plotted in the lower graphic of Figure 1. As before and consistent with hypothesis 1, the entire high-stakes curve lies in the positive region of the figure. Once again, in these data, presidents appear to always increase their public rhetoric regarding the actors involved in high-stakes crises. The overall average predicted increase in presidential rhetoric in high-stakes crises is more than twice as large as in low-stakes crises (+.41 vs. +.20 mentions per day). Although not as large as the gap in the actor-level data, this differential is nonetheless substantial in magnitude and statistically significant ($p < .05$). Also as predicted by hypothesis 1, the gap in presidential rhetoric between low- and high-stakes crises declines as the U.S. power advantage rises. Interestingly, to a greater extent than in the actor-level model—although this pattern emerges, to varying degrees, in each model—when presidents are fairly confident of success, they employ somewhat more public rhetoric when the stakes are low than when they are high. This may reflect the greater rhetorical effort required to signal resolve in low-stakes crises, combined with a greater willingness to go public, given a high probability of success. When the stakes are high, if a U.S. adversary recognizes the magnitude of the stakes, presidents may more easily gain the benefits of audience costs without needing to resort to comparably high levels of rhetoric. However, because this latter reversal is statistically insignificant, it should be interpreted with caution.

Turning to hypothesis 2, for crises in which the strategic stakes are low, as U.S. relative power increases from its minimum to maximum values, the average number of presidential mentions of the adversary rises by more than 1.8 mentions per day ($p < .05$), moving from a decline of about .73 mentions per day, compared to precrisis rhetoric levels, when U.S. relative power is at its minimum, to more than a 1.1 mention-per-day increase in public rhetoric when the U.S. enjoys a maximum power advantage. This increase is somewhat larger than in the actor-level analysis. In contrast, once again consistent with my third hypothesis, when the stakes are high, a maximum increase in U.S. relative power is associated with a small and statistically insignificant decrease in public rhetoric of about .05 mentions per day (from +.44 to +.39). Overall, these results largely mirror those from the actor-level investigation.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that public scrutiny increases the potential political fallout for a president in the event of a foreign policy failure. Therefore, when the United States has no significant national security interests at stake, presidents will be hesitant to seek the public spotlight unless they are fairly confident of success. According to Figure 1, in the actor-level model, the low-stakes curve moves into the positive region—represent-

ing an increase in public rhetoric following the onset of a crisis—only when the United States' relative power score exceeds about .42 (or about .40 in the crisis-level model). This indicates that when the strategic stakes involved are relatively modest, presidents increase their public rhetoric regarding a potential adversary during times of crisis only if the United States enjoys at least a reasonable likelihood of success (that is, no lower than .6 standard deviations below the mean in the data set). I tested three hypotheses derived from the theory against all international crises between 1946 and 1994. The evidence confirmed each hypothesis across both individual actor-level and crisis-level analyses, thereby strongly supporting the theory.

At one level, my results support Fearon's (1994) argument that domestic audience costs can reduce the likelihood of conflict, at least among democracies. In this sense, my findings may offer some further clarification of the mechanisms driving the democratic peace. Yet, they also raise the possibility that, in an era of real-time global news coverage of virtually every significant U.S. foreign military activity, the United States, and possibly other democratic states as well, may encounter increasing difficulty in gaining the necessary public support or freedom of maneuver for an assertive foreign policy. They may also find it more difficult to conduct foreign policy out of the public spotlight. Given their apparent preference under many circumstances for quiet diplomacy, this suggests that U.S. presidents, and perhaps other democratic leaders, may be losing an important tool in their diplomatic arsenal.

Indeed, my findings suggest that the range of circumstances under which democratic leaders are likely to seek audience costs is limited. In at least some and perhaps many situations, leaders are likely to do their best to avoid them. In these instances, if the audience tunes in despite a leader's efforts to avoid public scrutiny, she may be less inclined to incur the heightened political risk associated with employing military force. Hence, given a strategic adversary who understands a democratic leader's domestic political constraints, audience costs may in fact sometimes reduce rather than enhance a leader's credibility.

Conversely, if a leader actively courts public scrutiny to create audience costs and the audience fails to respond, she may find herself in a weaker position vis-à-vis the adversary than if she had not gone public in the first place. This gives leaders further incentive to be judicious in determining when to *seek* to invoke audience costs.

What seems clear is that to the extent audience costs matter in international politics, so too does public opinion in democracies. In other words, my findings indicate that domestic politics in general, and public opinion in particular, do indeed affect foreign policy, even in the decidedly high-politics arena of military conflict. Manifestations of public attentiveness appear to represent an important means by which policymakers estimate the domestic political implications of their foreign policy activities.

In this regard, my findings complement a substantial body of scholarly research that has shown that public opinion can influence foreign policy, at least in democracies (e.g., Risse-Kappen 1991; Ostrom and Job 1986; Page and Shapiro 1983). Yet, previous studies of the influence of domestic politics in general, and audience costs in particular, on international conflict have presented at most an incomplete picture of the relationship between public opinion and democratic leaders' foreign policy decision making. The evidence presented in this study suggests that when one takes into

account how public scrutiny influences democratic politicians' domestic political calculations, a more complete picture of the nature and influence of leaders' domestic political risk assessments emerges. By recognizing that the domestic political consequences of successes and failures abroad, and leaders' resulting incentives regarding the risks and rewards associated with such outcomes, may vary in fairly predictable ways, it is possible to improve our understanding of the relationship between domestic politics and international conflict, including the role of domestic audience costs as a tool in democratic leaders' foreign policy arsenals.

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