

3-2009

## Vote for Me: Appeals to Voters in Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speeches

Donna R. Hoffman  
*University of Northern Iowa*

Alison D. Howard  
*Department of Political Science and International Studies, Dominican University of California,*  
alison.howard@dominican.edu

**Survey: Let us know how this paper benefits you.**

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Hoffman, Donna R. and Howard, Alison D., "Vote for Me: Appeals to Voters in Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speeches" (2009). *Collected Faculty and Staff Scholarship*. 2.  
<https://scholar.dominican.edu/all-faculty/2>

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty and Staff Scholarship at Dominican Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Collected Faculty and Staff Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Dominican Scholar. For more information, please contact [michael.pujals@dominican.edu](mailto:michael.pujals@dominican.edu).

**Vote for Me: Appeals to Voters in Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speeches**

Donna R. Hoffman  
Department of Political Science  
University of Northern Iowa  
Curris Business Building, 5E  
Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0404  
[donna.hoffman@uni.edu](mailto:donna.hoffman@uni.edu)

Alison D. Howard  
Dominican University of California  
50 Acacia Avenue  
San Rafael, CA 94901  
[ahoward@dominican.edu](mailto:ahoward@dominican.edu)

Prepared for presentation at the Western Political Science Association annual meeting, March 19-21, 2009, Vancouver, BC, Canada .

## **Vote for Me: Appeals to Voters in Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speeches**

With the proliferation of primary elections, party conventions began to ratify the choice of nominee typically already long decided. Conventions, however, still provide a forum to highlight and promote the parties' respective nominees. Above all, the convention offers a chance to convince (or, at least begin convincing) the general electorate that it should cast a ballot for the party's nominee. A candidate's nomination speech signals the launch of the general election campaign and provides each party's nominee with a significant rhetorical opportunity. Up to this point in the presidential contest, primarily partisans have been engaged, the general electorate has not. From these speeches, the public can gauge what kind of a president the nominee might be.

We examine the nature of the rhetoric used in nomination acceptance speeches given by Democratic and Republican presidential nominees since 1960. During the time period under study, much changed in the electoral landscape. For example, the general electorate became less partisan, religious voters began to exert their influence in presidential politics, and presidential campaigns became much more candidate centered. What effects, if any, did these changes have on the rhetoric nominees used during this time period? As presidential campaigns became more candidate centered, did nominees begin including more biographical narrative? With the rise of the religious right, did candidates include more religious rhetoric? As the general electorate became less partisan, did candidates seek to rally the partisan troops, or appeal to bipartisanship? These questions will be explored using content analysis of nomination acceptance speeches that codes for biographical rhetoric, credit claiming, religious rhetoric and symbolism, and partisan appeals. As the electorate changed, how responsive did candidates prove to be to large-scale changes? Did candidates adjust their rhetoric? Our results indicate that in some instances, candidates were very adaptive, but in other areas, the changes we expected to see reflected in

candidates' rhetoric did not appear.

### **The Use of Acceptance Speeches in the Literature**

This research is developed through the lens of what Jeffrey Tulis (1987) has labeled the rhetorical presidency. Tulis identifies the rhetorical presidency as crystalizing with Woodrow Wilson and continuing to the present day. It is different from earlier presidencies; a rhetorical president appeals directly to the public, thus becoming a popular leader. In the nineteenth century, this mode of address was unseemly for presidents. The Founders did not envision the president as popular leader, and indeed, would have feared such a leader becoming a demagogue. Today, popular appeals are regularly used by presidents to gain support for presidential initiatives in attempts to “go over the heads” of Congress (Kernell 1997). Acceptance speeches can be treated as “presidential” documents in that the presidential candidate is directly appealing to the public to vote for them. As the rhetorical presidency developed in the institution of the presidency, presidential aspirants also became more active and involved in their own campaigns. Furthermore, our research treats nomination acceptance speeches as a genre of rhetoric (Campbell and Jamieson 1990), that is, as a unique type of rhetoric that standing alone can aid in illuminating aspects of, in this case, presidential aspirants' positioning themselves vis-à-vis the electorate. Political scientists tend to study the rhetorical presidency, while communication scholars tend to study presidential rhetoric. Political scientists are inclined to approach the subject from an institutional angle, while communication scholars mainly approach the subject by way of rhetorical criticism (Medhurst 1996). This research attempts to bridge the divide that often exists between these two scholarly disciplines. Thus, we proceed mainly from the institutional perspective of the rhetorical presidency, but utilize the concept of genres from

communication studies to shed light on how candidates rhetorically navigate the electoral environment.

Previous research on nomination acceptance speeches encompasses several scholarly disciplines besides the aforementioned political science and communications. Psychologists have used nomination acceptance speeches to analyze what is called “pessimistic rumination,” a combination of having a pessimistic explanatory style and dwelling on bad news, two psychological variables that are used to predict depression and one’s susceptibility to helplessness (Zullo and Seligman 1990). It was found that during the twelve elections Zullo and Seligman analyzed, the candidate who was the most pessimistic in his acceptance speech lost the election in nine instances. Miller and Stiles (1986) used acceptance speeches to examine the degree of familiarity found in acceptance and inaugural speeches. Sociologists have used nomination speeches to examine particular concepts across time, such as the concept of liberty (Easter 2008).

Communication scholars have been active in examining acceptance speeches. Several analyze one particular acceptance speech for narratives and themes (Norvold 1970; Smith 1971; Scheele 1984; Renz 1992). Others have approached the genre from a functional perspective by assessing the acclamations, attacks, and defenses candidates employ (Benoit 1999). Still other communication scholars have compared the two candidates’ speeches within the same election cycle to assess the way each candidate approached the other (Gustainis and Benoit 1988). The communication scholar whose research is most useful for this examination is Jarvis (2001), who analyzed both the partisan and personal language used by candidates over time and found that partisan language decreased and personal appeals increased. Valley (1988) conducted a largely

historical analysis of the Democratic Party's nominees. A serious limitation of this analysis is that it only covered one of the two major parties. In addition, while it documented the various mechanisms that candidates have used historically to accept their party's nomination, the subsequent comparisons over time failed to take into account the extent to which comparing the issues addressed, or the nature of the rhetoric, would differ depending on the form. Initially, candidates accepted nominations in letters. Next, speeches before a special ceremony after the convention became the norm. Finally, Franklin Roosevelt began the tradition of the nominee actually appearing in person before the convention to accept the nomination. In addition the dissemination of the speech to the public (through newspaper accounts, radio, or television) can also change the function and nature of the communication.

Political scientists have been less active in examining nomination acceptance speeches than communication scholars. Political scientists will often use other forms of communication with nomination speeches (such as television ads, or with other types of campaign speeches) to address particular questions; political scientists are less likely to utilize acceptance speeches as a genre, the perspective that communication scholars are more likely to use. Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen (2003) utilize acceptance speeches (with television ads) to analyze how candidates approach issues from the perspective of issue ownership; certain issues are "Democratic" ones and others are "Republican" in nature and candidates will use the voters' conception of issue ownership to try and make salient with the public issues on which they hold an advantage. Burden and Sandburg (2003) utilize acceptance speeches (with other campaign rhetoric) to assess how candidates have addressed budgetary issues in their campaigns.

What is missing from much of the literature on nomination acceptance speeches is a

consistent treatment of the form of the speech used by candidates from both parties. A second thing missing from much of the literature on nomination acceptance speeches, is the lack of a multi-dimensional analysis of acceptance speeches. Our research begins with 1960 because 1) both parties candidates are accepting the nomination in person at the convention, 2) the acceptance speeches were televised, and 3) 1960 allows us to capture the critical points at which scholars have documented several types of electoral change. In this way, therefore, we can assess how nominees have appealed to the dynamic electorate in their quest for the presidency.

In particular, we are interested in three electoral changes during this period and how these changes may have effected nominees' rhetoric. First, we examine whether candidates' rhetoric began to reflect the rise of candidate-centered campaigns. Second, we examine whether nomination speeches were affected by the rise of the religious right. Finally, we assess the nature of the nominees' partisan appeals as the electorate as a whole became less partisan.

## **Electoral Change**

### **The Rise of Candidate-Centered Elections**

As Martin Wattenburg (1991) documented, as parties were declining in the latter half of the twentieth century, there was a rise in candidate-centered campaigns. “[T]he elections of the 1980s mark a critical threshold in the emergence of the candidate-centered era in American electoral politics. This change in focus from parties to candidates is an important historical trend, which has been *gradually taking place* over the last several decades” (1, emphasis added). Thus, because this change has been gradual, we would expect that over the time period under study, we would see secular change in nominees' use of biography in their speeches. In addition, as candidates become more focused on selling themselves as potential presidents, we would also

expect the use of credit-claiming rhetoric to increase over time, particularly the use of rhetoric that claims credit for individual accomplishments.

### **The Rise of the Religious Right**

In the 1970s, the block of voters that came to be known as the Religious Right or Christian Right emerged (Fowler and Hertzke 1995; Wilcox 2000). As Wilcox (2000) notes, the newly formed Moral Majority mobilized for Ronald Reagan in 1980 (8). His Democratic opponent Carter was himself a Christian evangelical, and had activated the evangelical vote in 1976 (Brooks and Manza 2005). This block of voters continues to be influential, and while they are most often associated today with the Republican Party, many southern evangelicals in the 1980s and 90s, maintained their Democratic Party identification (Wilcox 2000, 7). As the Religious Right developed as an electoral force, we would expect to see candidates of both parties incorporate more religious references in their acceptance speech rhetoric over time. In addition, we also expect that 1980 would be a critical juncture that would affect both parties as the Christian Right becomes a recognizable, cohesive, and significant voting block.

### **Less Partisan Electorate/Dealignment**

As several researchers have noted, the electorate in the United States began a period of dealignment in the mid-1960s (Norpoth and Rusk 1982; Carmines, McIver, Stimson 1987; Dalton, McAllister, and Wattenberg 2002). During a period of dealignment, voters' ties to political parties weaken. They are more likely to split their tickets, and more voters self-identify as independents rather than partisans. Therefore, as dealignment develops in the American electorate, we expect that candidates over time will de-emphasize their own partisanship in acceptance speeches in order to potentially appeal to nonpartisans and others with weak party



attachments, who will become critical in securing general election victories.

### **Methodology**

We utilize quantitative content analysis for this project, as well as some qualitative analysis of acceptance speeches from 1960-2008. Speeches were quantitatively analyzed along four dimensions: biography, credit claiming, religious symbolism, and partisanship. Both authors coded each individual speech along these dimensions. Coding was compared and any discrepancies resolved on a case by case basis (see Appendix for coding criteria). In addition, a qualitative assessment of partisanship was also conducted.

Both the candidates' use of biography and their reliance on claiming credit for individual accomplishments (vs. broad accomplishments) are used to assess the effects of candidate-centered campaigns on rhetoric. The unit of analysis for each of these aspects was the sentence. For biography, sentences relating to the candidates' childhood, upbringing, life story, and background were identified. The percent of the speech devoted to biographical sentences was then calculated. Credit-claiming rhetoric involves a political actor highlighting accomplishments to claim credit for them (Mayhew 1974). Sentences in which the candidate claims credit for accomplishments (mutually exclusive of biography) were also identified and a distinction was made as to whether the candidate was claiming credit for individual accomplishments or broad accomplishments (such as for the party, administration, state, or Congress). Political actors may claim credit for broad accomplishments, such as "we have balanced the federal budget;" credit is claimed for some collective entity, which in this hypothetical example, could be an administration, a party, or even Congress. Additionally, this type of rhetoric may also involve one advertising an individual accomplishment, such as "I have consistently balanced my state's

budget.” We coded both types of credit-claiming (individual and broad). However, we expect that over time, as campaigns become increasingly candidate-centered, there will be an increase in individual credit-claiming. Time is captured by a temporal counter that increases by one every electoral cycle.

Religious symbolism is captured by coding mentions of a religious deity (God, Lord, Creator, etc.), as well as any religious references utilized, such as Bible verses, and references to things such as saints, prayer, or religions (see Appendix for other formulations). The unit of analysis is the reference. We hypothesize that both parties will seek to incorporate more religious references over time as the religious right becomes a cohesive and active voting block. In addition, given that 1980 is a significant year in the development of the Christian Right as a recognizable and influential group, we also gauge the effects of 1980 as a critical event, coded as a dummy variable (0 for years 1960-1976, and 1 for years 1980-2008).

To quantitatively gauge the use of partisanship, explicit references to the candidates’ party name (or version of the name e.g., Democrat, Democrats, Democratic) were coded, as well as the use of the opposition party’s name. Other references to the party (such as “our party,” and pronouns such as “we,” “us,” or “they” where the referent was clearly the party) were also coded. As party becomes less important to the general electorate over time, we expect that a candidate will often seek to de-emphasize his party. Because partisan tone is very difficult to gauge in a quantitative way, we also utilized qualitative analysis in our attempt to assess the way candidates addressed partisanship over time.

## **Findings**

### **The Rise of Candidate-Centered Elections**

*(Figure 1 about here)*

Figure 1 presents the results of our analysis regarding the percentage of the speech a candidate devotes to biography. A simple visual assessment shows progressive movement of nominees use of biography since 1960. As the first column of Table 1 indicates, OLS regression analysis indicates that over time, there has been a statistically significant increase in the candidates' use of biography. As the candidate-centered campaign has developed, nominees did incorporate more sentences in their speeches devoted to talking about their background, life-story, and experiences.

*(Table 1 about here)*

*(Figure 2 about here)*

We also hypothesized that because of increasingly candidate oriented presidential elections, we would see an accompanying increase in candidates claiming credit for individual accomplishments over time. Figure 2 shows the percentage of each nominee's speech devoted to claiming credit for individual accomplishments. As the second column of Table 1 indicates, there is not, however, a significant change over time in an individual's propensity to include this type of rhetoric in his speech.

### **The Rise of the Religious Right**

*(Figure 3 about here)*

Figure 3 shows the use of religious references by each nominee. We hypothesized that as the religious right emerged over time that candidates would begin incorporating more religious references in their speeches. As the third column of Table 1 indicates, neither our expectation that there would be growth over time in the use of religious references, nor that 1980 would

prove to be a critical year is substantiated by our regression analysis. The fact that there has always been some minimal level of religious references used during our time period should be noted and likely is why the model did not attain any statistical significance. In further analysis of our data, we also tested this hypothesis on the two partisan groups separately; there was not a difference in the way the different parties' nominees used religious references, although care must be taken with this result given the small number of cases we had.

### **Less Partisan Electorate/Dealignment**

*(Figure 4 about here)*

Figure 4 indicates the number of references to their own party each of the nominees made. We hypothesized that over time, as partisan ties in the electorate have declined, that candidates would de-emphasize their party by referring to it less in their acceptance speech. As the last column of Table 1 indicates, our regression analysis reveals that there has been a statistically significant decline in candidates' references to their own party. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in the 13 election cycles we studied, the winner of 10 of these contests was the nominee that referred to his party the least in that cycle.

### **Qualitative Assessment of the Use of Partisanship**

As our quantitative results indicate, presidential nominees over time have made significantly fewer references to their own political party in their acceptance speeches. However, there are many aspects about the tone of partisanship in these speeches that are not adequately captured by simple quantitative analysis. Do the parties specifically appeal to independents (directly and indirectly)? Is there evidence of bipartisan language?

References to "independents" first appeared in the 1972 campaign, with both McGovern

and Nixon using the term once. It is not, perhaps, surprising that this term first appears in acceptance speeches in 1972, the year which for the first time since being asked in 1952, fully 1/3 of National Election Studies (NES) respondents indicated to the initial question, “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?” that they were “independent.” (American National Election Studies 2004). However, after 1972, there is only sporadic mention of independents by nominees until 2008. Ford mentions them twice in 1976, and Reagan (1980) and Mondale (1984) each mention once. They are the last two candidates to specifically mention independents until 2008 when each of the nominees makes two references to this group. Even though independents make up approximately one-third of the electorate during this time period (and in 2000 40%), there is no mention of them by the nominees between 1984 and 2008.

In the elections of 1960, 1964, and 1968, only Nixon in 1968 offers a speech that is unique for its lack of partisan “red meat.” While Nixon takes to task the “current administration,” he does so in a way that does not refer specifically to Democrats. Both of Carter’s speeches in 1976 and 1980 stress his connection to the Democratic Party, even as he was not a traditional party elite and did not campaign as one. It is with Reagan’s 1980 speech that there is a lasting shift away from both parties’ partisan tone. Even though Reagan ran a particularly partisan campaign, he opened his 1980 acceptance speech by reaching out “to every American, regardless of party affiliation, who is a member of this community of shared values” (Reagan 1980). Reagan continues his speech using a values-oriented rhetoric to explain his vision of government emphasizing the fact that he “places trust not in one person or one party, but in those values that transcend person and parties” (Reagan 1980). Through historical

examples, Reagan reminds his listeners of the current state of America, what it has been, and what it can be with new leadership and a different policy program. For example, near the end of his speech, Reagan extols

Everywhere we have met thousands of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans from all economic conditions and walks of life bound together in that community of shared values of family, work, neighborhood, peace and freedom. They are concerned, yes, but they are not frightened. They are disturbed, but not dismayed. They are the kind of men and women Tom Paine had in mind when he wrote—during the darkest days of the American Revolution— “We have it in our power to begin the world over again” (Reagan 1980).

Even though Reagan’s rhetoric emphasizes the “shared values” of all Americans and makes overtures to those who may not be Republicans, he does, in fact, sprinkle in partisan statements to remind the public that the Republican Party can better solve the problems of the country. While Reagan draws a clear distinction between the two major parties, specifically the failures of Democratic leadership over the past four years, what is most apparent is the fact that he focuses most of his criticism and attacks directly at President Carter, rather than at the larger Democratic Party. Fully 22% of Reagan’s speech is devoted to attacks on his opponent, the most of any nominee in our time series. (See Figure 5).

*(Figure 5 about here)*

Bill Clinton is also significant in the way he approached his acceptance speech in 1992. With the introduction of his “New Covenant,” Clinton appeared to be almost non-partisan.

We will build an American community again. The choice we offer is not conservative or liberal. In many ways, it is not even Republican or Democratic. It is different. It is new. And it will work. It will work because it is rooted in the vision and the values of the American people (Clinton 1992).

Much like Reagan, Clinton rooted his appeal to American values. We also see Clinton highlight the differences between his opponent and himself. Unlike in 1960 when Kennedy drew distinctions and referenced the opposition party specifically when he stated “His party is the party of the past. . . Their platform, made up of left-over Democratic planks, has the courage of our old convictions. Their pledge is a pledge to the status-quo– and today there can be no status quo” (Kennedy 1960). This distinction Clinton made with his opponent was not partisan, rather it was personal.

He promised to balance the budget, but he hasn't even tried. In fact, the budgets he has submitted to Congress nearly doubled the debt. Even worse, he wasted billions and reduced our investments in education and jobs. We can do better.

So if you are sick and tired of a government that doesn't work to create jobs, if you're sick and tired of a tax system that's stacked against you, if you're sick and tired of exploding debt and reduced investments in our future, or if, like the great civil rights pioneer Fannie Lou Hamer, you're just plain old sick and tired of being sick and tired , then join us, work with us, win with us, and we can make our country the country it was meant to be.

Now, George Bush talks a good game, but he has no game plan to rebuild America, from the cities to the suburbs to the countryside, so that we can compete and win again in the global economy. I do (Clinton 1992).

Gore’s 2000 acceptance speech epitomizes our quantitative finding that nominees are de-emphasizing references to their own party over time. Gore does not use his own party’s name at all, making only a fairly oblique reference to the party at one point. His speech concentrates on presenting himself as a candidate for president and distancing himself from Clinton, despite the fact that the economy was strong, the country was at peace, and he was part of the first Democratic administration to be re-elected since Roosevelt.

In 2008, both Obama and McCain make clear bipartisan references in their speeches.

McCain's speech not only separates him from the past 8 years of Republican leadership under George W. Bush, but also highlights his experience and record of working in a bipartisan manner as a Senator.

Instead of rejecting good ideas because we didn't think of them first, let's use the best ideas from both sides. Instead of fighting over who gets the credit, let's try sharing it. This amazing country can do anything we put our minds to. I will ask Democrats and Independents to serve with me (McCain 2008).

Bipartisanship is presented as part of McCain's governing philosophy and he reminds his audience of this.

The constant partisan rancor that stops us from solving these problems isn't a cause, it's a symptom. It's what happens when people go to Washington to work for themselves and not you.

Again and again, I've worked with members of both parties to fix problems that need to be fixed. That's how I will govern as President. I will reach out my hand to anyone to help me get this country moving again (McCain 2008).

Having regained their majority in Congress in the 2006 midterm elections and public approval for the Bush Administration at an all time low, it seems as though the timing would be ripe for a resurgence in partisanship from the Democratic Party's nominee. While Obama does provide many distinctions between the two parties on policy and past performance, he calls for a "new way" – a bipartisan effort.

The challenges we face require tough choices, and Democrats as well as Republicans will need to cast off the worn-out ideas and politics of the past. We may not agree on abortion, but surely we can agree on reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies in this country (Obama 2008).

In addition, he reaches out to all Americans, almost in a manner similar to Reagan in 1980 with reference to the "shared values" of Americans regardless of party when he states



The men and women who serve in our battlefields may be Democrats and Republicans and Independents, but they have fought together and bled together and some died together under the same proud flag. They have not served a Red America or a Blue America – they have served the United States of America (Obama 2008).

Breaking down the barriers between Democrats and Republicans to focus on policies, ideas, and not partisanship rings true throughout Obama’s speech. He even reminds his audience that during the primary there were “Republicans who never thought they'd pick up a Democratic ballot, but did” (Obama 2008).

### **Conclusions**

Our quantitative results indicate that as the electorate went through some well-documented changes in the last several decades, candidates adjusted some of their rhetoric in ways that we expected. As elections were becoming more candidate focused and less focused on parties as a whole, nominees began incorporating more biographical information about themselves in their speeches. At the same time, they also began to refer to their party less in their speeches. Even as they were addressing a very partisan live audience, they chose to de-emphasize references to their party. We did not find, however, any evidence that candidates have begun to incorporate more individual credit-claiming in their speeches, or incorporate more religious references over time.

As party nominees appear before a live partisan audience, it is not surprising that there are some consistently partisan aspects to all of these speeches, even as they made less reference to their own party. However, qualitatively, one can see two things. First, beginning with Reagan, there was more reliance on personal attacks than in earlier speeches. While the speeches have typically (though not always) included some level of attack on the opponent, Reagan specifically

made them personal, and others after him often followed. Secondly, appeals to bipartisanship goes in fits and starts, that is, it is not consistent, but largely bound to the specific circumstances of that election.

We see evidence that over the last forty years as the electorate changed, nominees began asking for the general electorate to vote for them based on who they were as individuals. At the same time, nominees did not ramp up their individual credit-claiming, providing some evidence that nominees have reacted to the rise of candidate-centered campaigns by stressing their individual story, but not necessarily their individual substantive record. As candidates began to stress their own partisanship less, we also see some evidence that opponents were attacked more individually, than in a partisan fashion. This analysis is only the first step in making a thorough examination of acceptance speeches. In the future, it will be important to examine the policy aspects, or substantive nature of how the nominees seek to appeal to voters by looking specifically at the actions they say they will take and the policies they will support as president.

## Appendix: Acceptance Speeches Coding

**Year:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Type of Election:** **Incumbent Pres**                      **Incumbent VP**                      **No Incumbent**

**Nominee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Party:** \_\_\_\_\_ **City of Convention:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Total # of sentences in speech** \_\_\_\_\_

**# of sentences devoted to:**

**Biography:** \_\_\_\_\_ **% of total speech devoted to biography** \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Childhood, upbringing, life story, background)  
 (Mutually exclusive of credit claiming)

**Qualitative assessment of Biography:**

**Policy Substance:(# of Sentences devoted to)**

**Credit Claiming for policy** \_\_\_\_\_ **% of total speech devoted to credit claiming** \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Mutually exclusive of biography)

**Individual accomplishments** \_\_\_\_\_

**Broad accomplishments** \_\_\_\_\_ (as in party, admin, state, Congress, etc.,  
 NOT country)

**Symbolism:**

**Religious words** \_\_\_\_\_ (**# of words**)

**Mentions of Deity** \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Almighty, Creator, God, He, Him, One, Supreme Being)

**Religious References** \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Amen, angels, biblical mentions and verses, blessings, Christmas, Christian, church(es),  
 clergy, creation (in religious context), day of reckoning, divine, faith (in religious  
 context), gospel, Islam, Islamic, Jewish, Judeo-Christian, Muslim, miracle, pray,  
 prayer(s), prophesy, Puritan, religion, religious, sacred, spiritual (not spirit), temples,  
 worship)

**Partisanship:**

# of Sentences devoted to attacking opponent \_\_\_\_\_ % of speech \_\_\_\_\_

Use of own party's name \_\_\_\_\_ (# of times) TOTAL REF: \_\_\_\_\_  
 other references to: \_\_\_\_\_

Use of opposition party's name \_\_\_\_\_ (# of times) TOTAL REF: \_\_\_\_\_  
 other references to: \_\_\_\_\_

Use of "independents" \_\_\_\_\_ (# of times)

Use of opponent's name \_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL REF: \_\_\_\_\_  
 use of "opponent" or variation of (something other than name) \_\_\_\_\_

Use of incumbent president's name \_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL REF: \_\_\_\_\_  
 use of "the president" or variation of (something other than name) \_\_\_\_\_

Use of historical presidents from own party \_\_\_\_\_  
 list names and context:

Use of historical presidents from opposition party \_\_\_\_\_  
 list names and context:

Reference to "platform" \_\_\_\_\_

**Qualitative assessment of partisanship (draws definite distinctions, appeals to bipartisanship, etc):**

## References

- American National Election Studies. 2004. Party Identification 7-Point Scale, 1952-2004. The ANES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior [online]. Available from [http://www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/toptable/tab2a\\_1.htm](http://www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/toptable/tab2a_1.htm). [25 February 2009].
- Benoit, William L. 1999. Acclaiming, Attacking, and Defending in Presidential Nominating Acceptance Addresses, 1960-1996. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85:247-267.
- Benoit, William L., Kevin A. Stein, and Glenn J. Hansen. 2004. *Newspaper Research Journal* 25:83-89.
- Brooks, Clem, and Jeff Manza. 2005. A Great Divide? Religion and Political Change in U.S. National Elections, 1972-2000. *Sociological Quarterly* 45: 421-450.
- Burden, Barry C., and Joseph Neal Rice Sandburg. 2003. Budget Rhetoric in Presidential Campaigns from 1952 to 2000. *Political Behavior* 25: 97-118.
- Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. 1990. *Deeds Done in Words: Presidential Rhetoric and the Genres of Governance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Carmines, Edward G., John P. McIver, and James A. Stimson. 1987. Unrealized partisanship: A Theory of Dealignment. *Journal of Politics* 46:376-400.
- Clinton, William J. 1992. Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in New York. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project [online]. Available from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25958>. [10 January 2009].
- Dalton, Russell J., Ian McAllister, and Martin P. Wattenberg. 2002. The Consequences of Partisan Dealignment. In *Parties without Partisans*, eds. Russell J. Dalton and Martin P. Wattenberg. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Easter, Michele M. 2008. Freedom in Speech: Freedom and Liberty in U.S. Presidential Campaign Discourse, 1952-2004. *Poetics* 26:265-286.
- Fowler, Robert Booth, and Allen D. Hertzke. 1995. *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture, and Strategic Choices*. Boulder, CO: Westview
- Gustainis, J.J., and Benoit, William L. 1988. Analogic Analysis of the Presidential Candidates' Acceptance Speeches at the 1980 National Nominating Conventions. *Speaker and Gavel* 25:14-23.
- Jarvis, Sharon E. 2001. Campaigning Alone: Partisan Versus Personal Language in the Presidential Nominating Convention Acceptance Addresses, 1948-2000. *American Behavioral Scientist* 44:2152-2171.

- Kennedy, John F. 1960. Address of Senator John F. Kennedy Accepting the Democratic Party Nomination for the Presidency of the United States. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project [online]. Available from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25966>. [10 January 2009].
- Kernell, Samuel. 1997. *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.
- Mayhew, David R. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- McCain, John. 2008. Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Saint Paul. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project [online]. Available from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=78576>. [10 January 2009].
- Medhurst, Martin J. 1996. A Tale of Two Constructs: The Rhetorical Presidency Versus Presidential Rhetoric, introd. in *Beyond the Rhetorical Presidency*, ed. Martin J. Medhurst. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.
- Miller, Nancy L., and William B. Stiles. 1986. Verbal Familiarity in American Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speeches and Inaugural Addresses. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 49: 72-81.
- Norpoth, Helmut and Jerrold G. Rusk. 1982. Partisan dealignment in the American Electorate: Itemizing the deductions since 1964. *American Political Science Review* 76:522-37.
- Norvold, R.O. 1970. Rhetoric as ritual: Hubert H. Humphrey's acceptance address at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. *Today's Speech*, 18:34-38.
- Obama, Barack. 2008. Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in Denver: "The American Promise." John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project [online]. Available from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=78284>. [10 January 2009].
- Petrocik, John R., William L. Benoit, and Glenn J. Hansen. 2003-04. Issue Ownership and Presidential Campaigning, 1952-2000. *Political Science Quarterly* 118:599-626.
- Reagan, Ronald W. 1980. Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Detroit. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project [online]. Available from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25970>. [10 January 2009].
- Renz, Mary Ann. 1992. The Stories in George Bush's Acceptance Speech. *National Forensic Journal* X:123-134.
- Scheele, Henry Z. 1984. Ronald Reagan's 1980 Acceptance Address: A Focus on American Values. *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 48:51-61.

Smith, C.R. 1971. Richard Nixon's 1968 Acceptance Speech as Model of Dual Audience Adaption. *Today's Speech* 19:15-22.

Tulis, Jeffrey K. 1987. *The Rhetorical Presidency*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Valley, David P. 1988. *A History and Analysis of Democratic Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speeches to 1968*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Wattenberg, Martin P. 1991. *The Rise of Candidate-Centered Politics: Presidential Elections of the 1980s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Wilcox, Clyde. 2000. *Onward Christian Soldiers?*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Zullo, Harold M. and Martin E.P. Seligman. 1990. Pessimistic Rumination Predicts Defeat of Presidential Candidates, 1900 to 1984. *Psychological Inquiry* 1:52-61.

**Table 1****Secular and Punctuated Effects and Nomination Acceptance Speeches, 1960-2008 (OLS Regression Results)**

	<i>Biography</i>	<i>Credit Claiming</i>	<i>Religious References</i> <sup>1</sup>	<i>Reference to Own Party</i>
Intercept	-2.42	.45 (1.23)	5.01	29.06
Time	1.52 (.27)**	.25 (.16)	.36 (.29)	-1.78 (.79)*
Post 1976			1.98 (2.21)	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.56	.06	.36	.14
Durbin-Watson	2.12	1.83	2.13	1.63

\*p ≤ .05

\*\*p ≤ .001

<sup>1</sup>Estimates adjusted to correct for first-order autocorrelation using GLS regression.

N = 26, standard errors in parentheses, all VIFs &lt; 5.



Figure 1: Use of Biography, 1960-2008

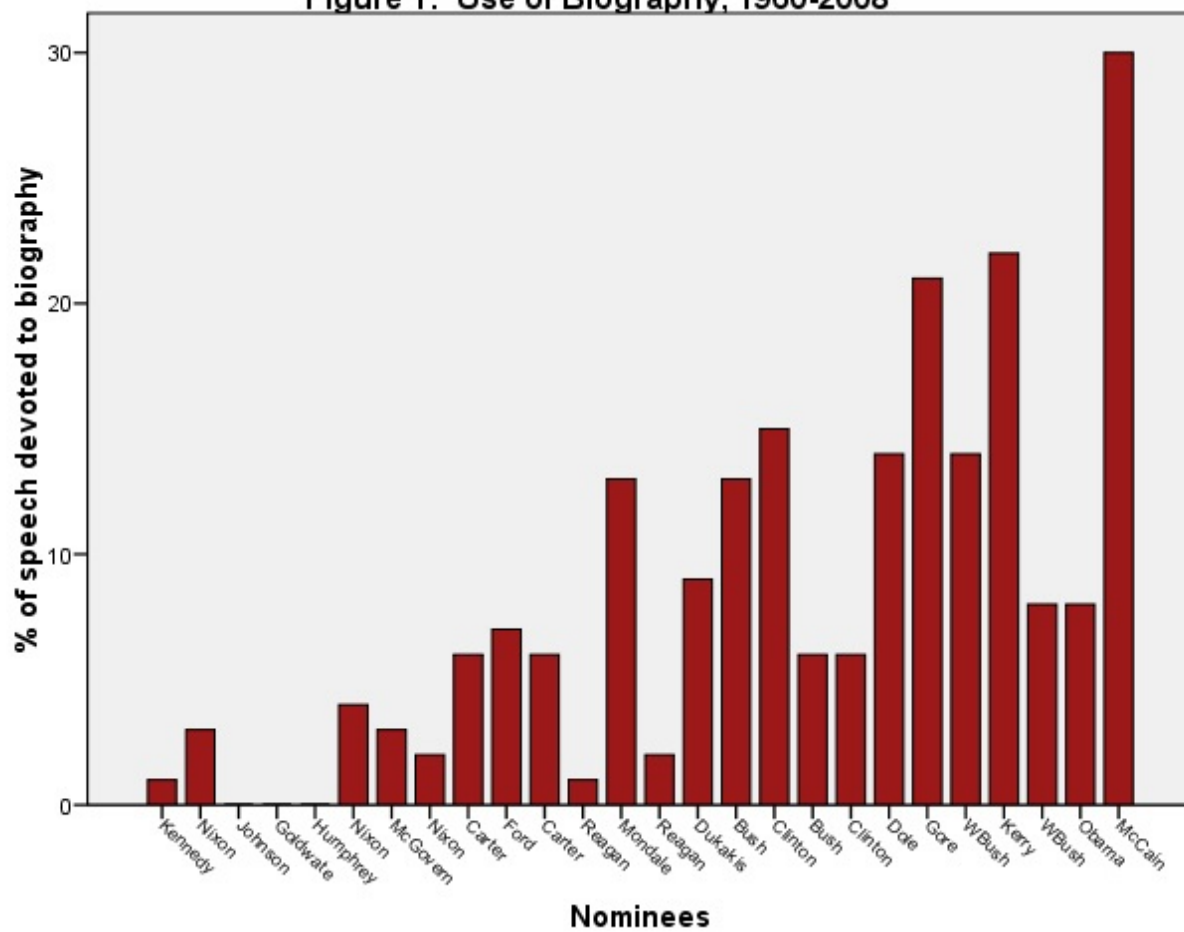
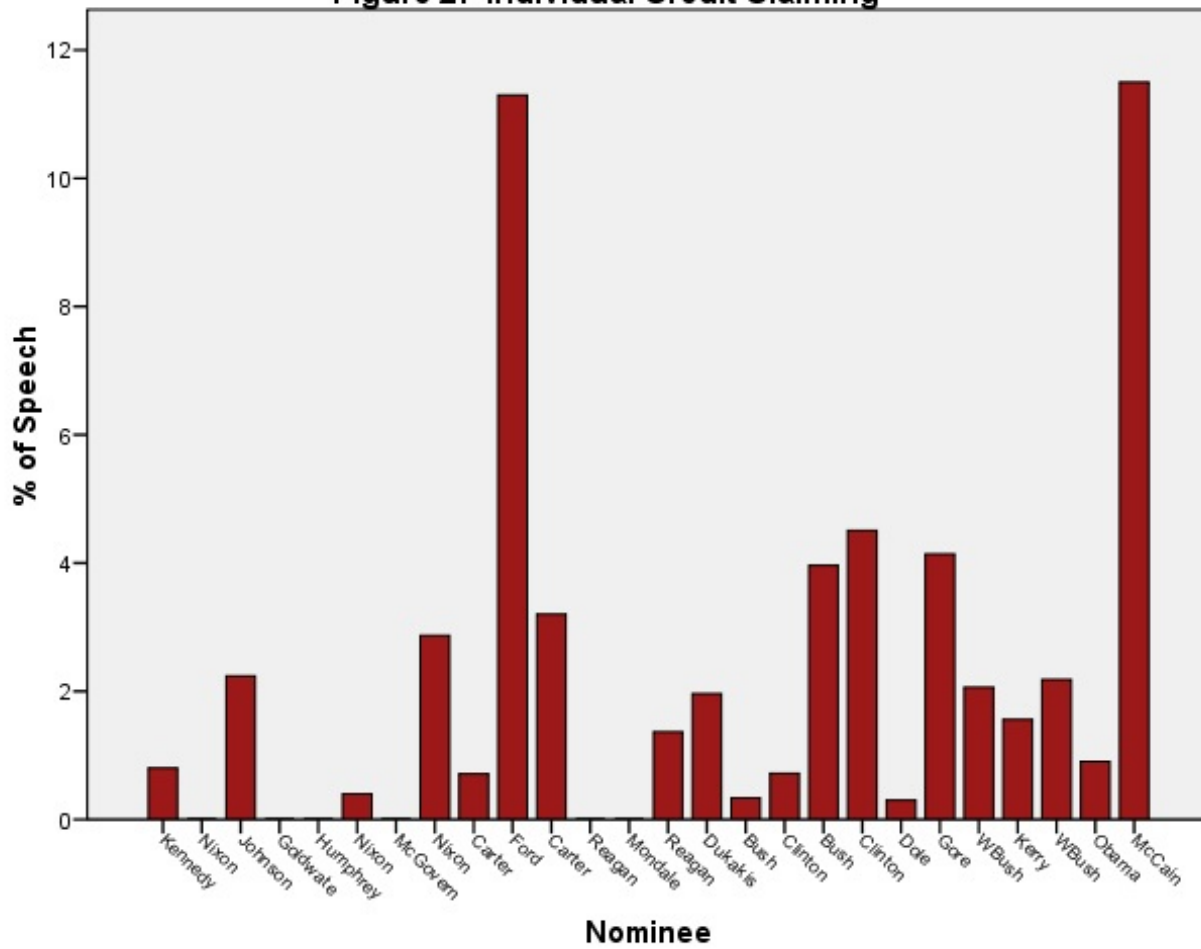


Figure 2: Individual Credit Claiming



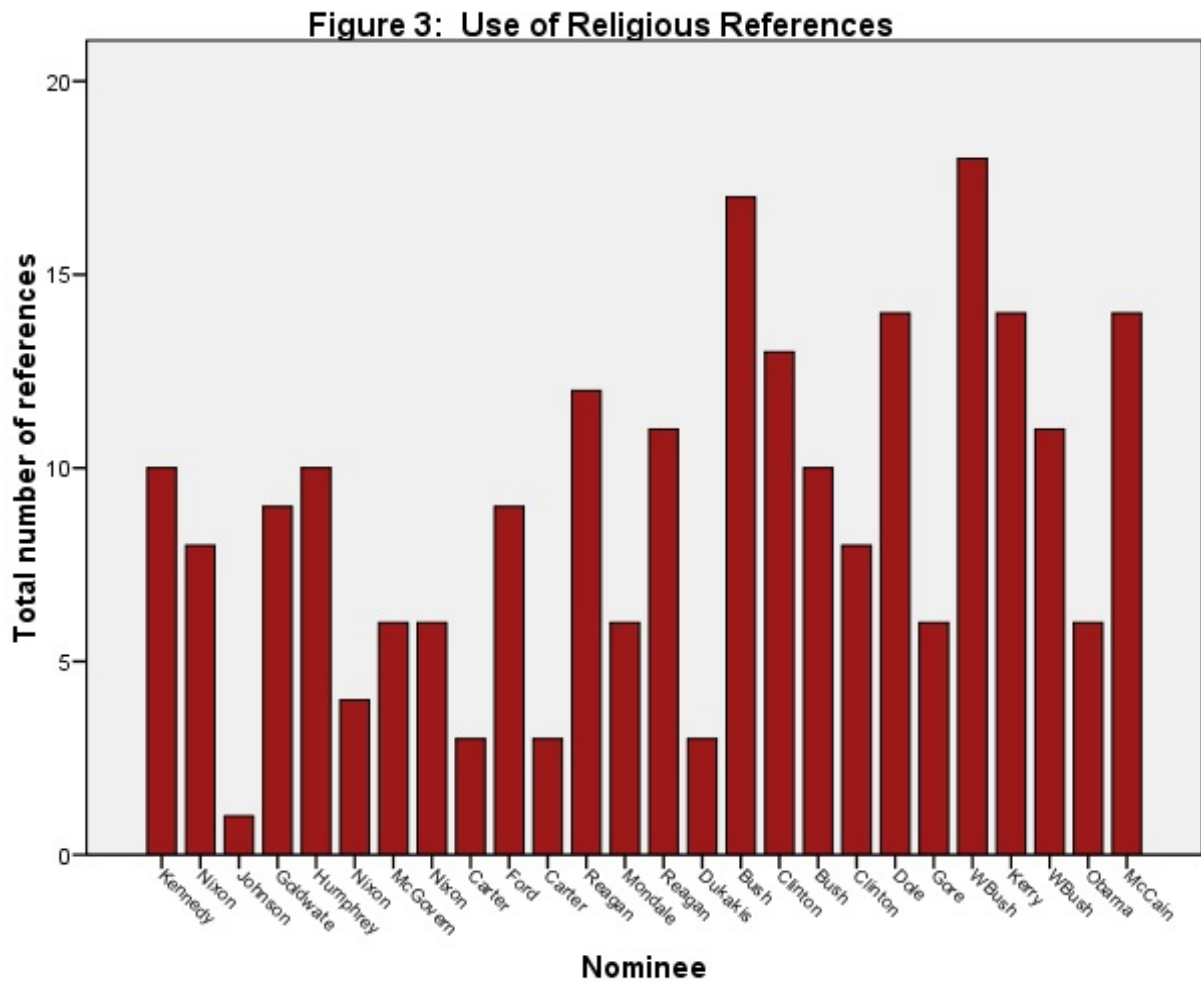


Figure 4: References to Own Party, 1960-2008

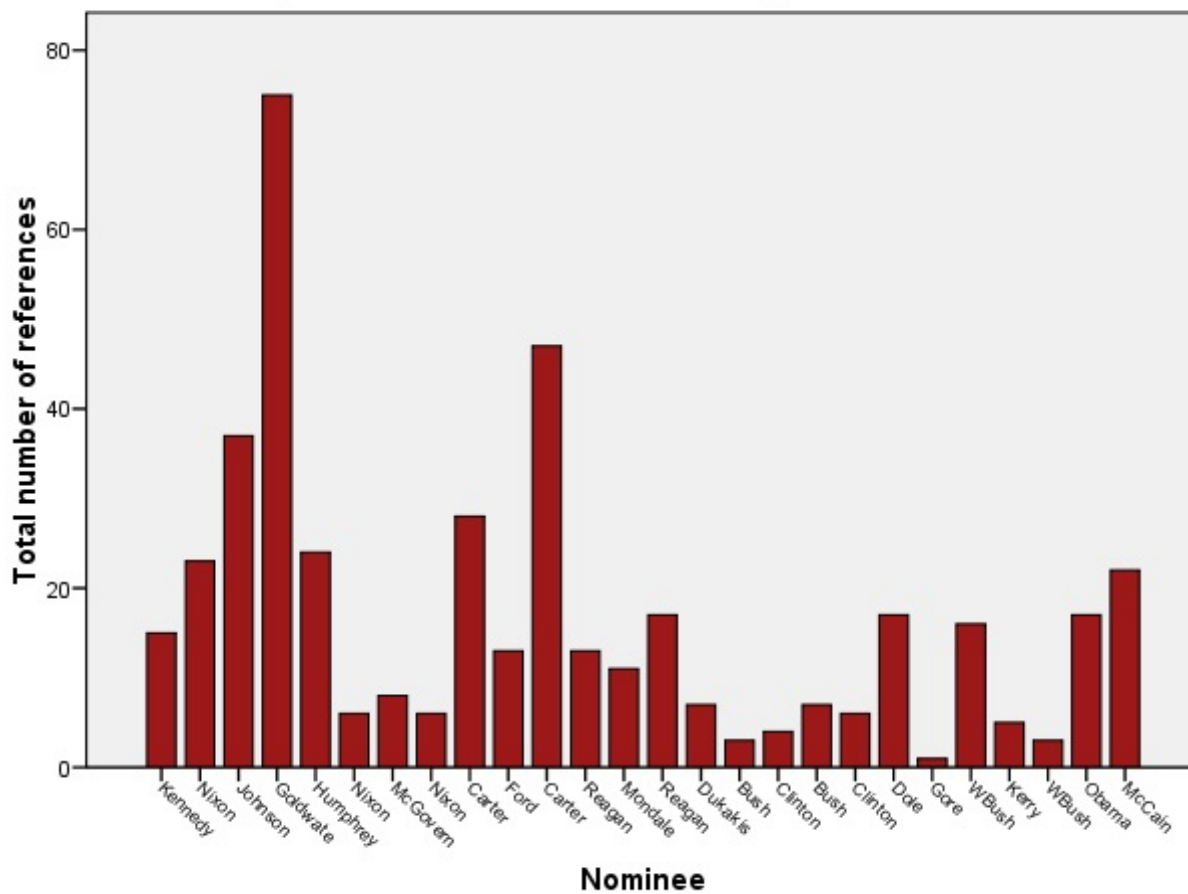


Figure 5: Percent of Speech Devoted to Attacks

