Alan Fortuna
Polarization

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Polarization

Rhetorical Strategies in the Tea Party Network

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For my grandfathers:
The one who never finished and the one who inspired it all.

Foreword

This work was submitted as a doctoral dissertation to the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Tübingen in the fall of 2018. I would like to thank my advisor Professor Joachim Knape (Department of General Rhetoric, Tübingen) for his input along the way and his help in getting it finished.

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Contents

most importantly) the strategic considerations that an orator should make before implementing polarizing strategies.

2.2 Rhetorical Theories of Polarization

While all three of the disciplines discussed until now contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon of polarization, the fields of rhetoric and communication studies are obviously the most relevant to the theory building and analysis of this work.[43] And there is a solid body of research on polarization in communicative situations. For the most part, existing research falls into two categories: 1) case studies and analyses of particular political campaigns and individual orators that have used polarizing strategies, and 2) case studies of diffuse political movements and relatively uncoordinated groups that have utilized polarizing communication.

From the former category, case studies dealing with the strategic calculi and textual structures found in the polarizing rhetoric of American politicians such as George C. Wallace, President Richard Nixon and his Vice President, Spiro Agnew, as well as Presidents George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush will be evaluated here.[44] These studies provide theoretical definitions of polarizing rhetoric, illustrate specific polarizing textual structures and frameworks, describe situational characteristics in which polarizing rhetoric can be successful, and provide insight into the internal motivations of individual orators employing polarizing strategies. At the same time, studies of polarization in social movements have shown how polarization can be utilized by a network of orators within the broader context of social and political campaigns. Studies on the use of polarizing strategies by a loose network of senators in the halls of Congress and by multiple groups on both sides of the environmental movement will be reviewed in the current analysis.[45]

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, American society was in the midst of a cultural revolution that brought on rapid changes in the sociopolitical environment of the day. Between the dramatic Civil Rights Movement, the contentious Vietnam War, the assassination of a number of high-profile political and social figures, the continuing fervor of anti-communist Cold War politics, the rise of an experimental drug culture, new ideas about the nuclear family and monogamy,

43 Cf. Knape 2017.

44 See: King/Anderson 1971; Raum/Measell 1974; Smith/Smith 1994; Coe et al. 2004.

45 See: Lange 1997; Short 1997; and Brasted 2012; among others.

and an ever more vocal women's rights movement, significant unrest and political division could be found throughout the body politic. Many of the protests and movements were directly critical of the established political and social order of the post-war period and used provocative and even destructive tactics to gain attention, highlight issues that the protesters deemed important or unjust, and to influence politicians and the American public to change policies in a number of areas.

As a result of this division within the broader society, the concept of polarization received significant attention from researchers across a range of social scientific fields. The work of Merton, Lanigan, and Meyers discussed above, for instance, emerged during this period. And this era also generated some of the first explicit analyses of polarization as a communicative phenomenon: although opinion polarization been obliquely discussed before the early 1970s[46], the works covered here were much more explicit and systematic in their discussion of polarization as a rhetorical strategy.

2.2.1 The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control

In 1970, John W. Bowers and Donovan J. Ochs published a highly influential book, *The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control*, which was one of the first to directly use the term "polarization" in the context of strategic communication.[47] According to the authors, the "rhetoric of agitation" occurs "when people outside the normal decision-making establishment advocate significant social change and encounter a degree of resistance within the establishment such as to require more than the normal discursive means of persuasion."[48] Thus, the strategies described by Bowers and Ochs become necessary when certain individuals or groups feel they are not being heard or accepted by established channels and decision makers. The rhetoric of agitation involves the utilization of communicative tactics outside of the normally acceptable parameters of public discourse and

46 Perhaps most famously in Kenneth Burke's 1939 essay on "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle." Cf. Burke 1974.

47 Bowers et al. 2010, 3rd Ed. This book has been cited so often since its publication that independent research has been done to assess its influence in academics; see: Schmidt 2013. Later editions of the work after 1970 added material from Richard J. Jensen and David Schultz. The third and most recent edition, published in 2010, is cited here.

48 Bowers et al. 2010, 4.

represents a provocative act designed to gain attention for the speaker and their cause from the wider public.

Within this framework, Bowers and Ochs discussed the concept of polarization as one of a series of "Strategies of Agitation." They defined polarization as a strategy that "encompasses tactics designed to move the individual into the agitation ranks—to force a conscious choice between agitation and control."[49] Polarizing strategies seek to "move" listeners and to compel them to make a choice between the speaker's chosen cause (agitation) and that of their opponents (control). This forceful strategy "assumes that any individual who has not [yet] committed to the agitation supports the establishment," and thus, orators that utilize polarization "are no longer interested in addressing nuances. The fact that the uncommitted might agree with their ideology but not their tactics [...] is not of interest. In using polarization, the agitator forces individuals to choose between the agitator and the establishment."[50] Bowers and Ochs cite Eldridge Cleaver's famous line "You are either part of the problem or part of the solution," to illustrate a typical example of polarizing communication.

This work provides an important starting point in an analysis of the existing literature on polarizing rhetoric, and Bowers and Ochs' book is frequently cited in many of the studies that will be discussed here. Their definition of polarization provides insight into orator psychology and intentionality: by the time an orator is prepared to use polarization, other less-destructive methods of persuasion have often been tried and have failed. By eliminating nuance and detail from their argumentation, orators using polarization offer a simplified version of a debate in the strongest possible terms in order to force audience members to confront the issue. The authors note that polarizing rhetoric represents something of a scorched-earth strategy: not only does it seek to demonize the opponent, but often also those who might be sympathetic to the position advocated by the speaker but uncommitted to action.

Bowers and Ochs also detail specific elements that speakers can use to formulate polarizing texts: the use of *flag individuals*, focusing on *flag issues*, and "the invention of derogatory jargon."[51] Flagging individuals and issues serves to demarcate the in-groups and out-groups as the polarizing speaker conceives of them, to focus public discourse into a dichotomous "black-and-white" choice for the audience and, perhaps most importantly, to garner wider attention for their communication. As Bowers and Ochs put it:

49 Bowers et al. 2010, 40.
50 Bowers et al. 2010, 41.
51 Bowers et al. 2010, 41–42.

> Attacking these issues or individuals (sometimes a group or an organization, rather than a person) attracts media attention. The targets of attack generally make it easier for potential converts to choose the agitators rather than the establishment [...] The choice of flag individuals is important to the success of the movement.[52]

In the third edition of the book, they highlight examples from real-world demonstrations against the Dow Chemical Company during the Vietnam War and against political figures throughout late twentieth century American politics, and identify individuals such as Presidents Johnson, Nixon, and George W. Bush (as well as members of their administrations) as the targets of polarizing campaigns by activist demonstrators. Their analysis of these real-world cases helps shed light on both the internal motivation of polarizing speakers as well as the practical intent of polarizing communication:

> They were intent on polarizing uncommitted individuals. The agitators hope to accomplish the polarization by forcing such a strong negative reaction to the emotionally charged flag individual or issue that condemnation of those flag individuals and groups would follow.[53]

Similarly, the use of derogatory language belittles and dehumanizes a speaker's opponents and makes it more difficult for those in the audience to identify themselves with the *other*, particularly if their attitudes and opinions tend to sympathize with the speaker's chosen issue.[54] "This specialized vocabulary attacks the establishment while at the same time building internal cohesiveness. Words are chosen for powerful images or sentiments they evoke."[55]

Although Bowers and Ochs provided significant insight into the concept of polarization as a rhetorical strategy, their contribution was limited to about two pages of definitions and conceptual work. And although they provided plausible real-world examples, the lack of in-depth analysis provided little methodological indication of how real-world examples of polarization should be identified and studied. At most, their analysis suggested that real-world communication should be studied for specific textual patterns that indicate the presence of polarizing

52 Bowers et al. 2010, 41.

53 Bowers et al. 2010, 41–42.

54 Bowers and Ochs' discussion of creating a negative category of the 'other' directly parallels Kenneth Burke's earlier 1939 analysis. As Burke wrote then: "If a movement must have its Rome, it must also have its devil." Indeed, although Burke never describes it explicitly as 'polarizing', Hitler's rhetoric—and of his use of the term "Jew" as a "unifying devil-function"—can be seen as a typical example of the rhetorical strategy of polarization. Burke 1974, 193, 196. Parallels to Burke's analysis can be found in much of the research on polarizing rhetoric discussed in this chapter.

55 Bowers et al. 2010, 42.

elements and for circumstances in which the polarizing strategy could be helpful to a potential communicator. Finally, Bowers and Ochs' concept of polarization was constrained by their insistence that the strategy be limited to groups of agitators seeking to gain attention in public forums for their fight against established interests, systems, and individuals. As we will soon see, however, the strategy of polarization can easily be found in establishment rhetoric as well.

2.2.2 Nixon, Agnew, and the Rhetoric of Polarization

In 1971, communications scholars Andrew A. King and Floyd Douglas Anderson undertook a systematic analysis of what they called "the rhetoric of polarization" based on public statements made by President Richard Nixon and his Vice President, Spiro Agnew following the 1968 presidential campaign.[56] Considering that only one year prior, Bowers and Ochs had cited Nixon as a prime example of a targeted *flag individual* in the polarizing rhetoric of anti-establishment protesters, it is somewhat ironic that this in-depth analysis illustrated how Nixon's 'establishment' administration utilized polarizing strategies between his election as president in 1968 and the 1970 congressional elections. And although they leaned heavily on Bowers and Ochs' initial conception, King and Anderson's definition of polarization and their methodology in analyzing it were significantly more detailed and nuanced. Because this work (like that of Bowers and Ochs) proved to be highly influential for later works on polarizing rhetoric, it is important to provide a detailed overview of their theories and analytical methodology.

King and Anderson defined polarization as "a rhetorical phenomenon," as "the process by which an extremely diversified public is coalesced into two or more highly contrasting, mutually exclusive groups sharing a high degree of internal solidarity in those beliefs which the persuader considers salient."[57] This definition paralleled that of Bowers and Ochs and emphasized that speakers consciously seek to create a dichotomous division of public opinion. More explicitly, King and Anderson asserted that the two dichotomous social groups are (at least partially) *created* by the polarizing strategy, which seeks out preexisting differences in public opinion and intensifies them to such an extent that social division appears. This "intensification of real differences" occurs through the use of explicit communicative structures and strategies, and King and Anderson identified two "dimensions" of rhetorical polarization that these strategies seek to create:

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56 King/Anderson 1971.

57 King/Anderson 1971, 244.

> On the one hand, [polarization] implies a powerful feeling of solidarity—strong group cohesiveness, unity, we feeling, human homogenization. On the other hand, polarization also presupposes the existence of a "common foe" which the group must oppose.[58]

Even though the concept of polarization is more often associated with a process of division, King and Anderson's emphasize the idea of solidarity. This is important for a terminologically distinct definition of the polarization as a rhetorical phenomenon: while neighboring strategies such as polemics also seek to tear down and attack opponents, polarizing strategies simultaneously attempt to create an ideologically coherent in-group.[59] Thus, "a rhetoric of polarization always encompasses two principle strategies: a strategy of affirmation and a strategy of subversion."[60] While the former uses imagery and language that will promote internal group solidarity and cohesion, the latter "is concerned with the careful selection of those images that will undermine the *ethos* of competing groups, ideologies, or institutions."[61] Importantly, King and Anderson assert that "both strategies are always present, in varying degrees, in all rhetorical situations which may be termed 'polarized.'"[62]

The remainder of their essay is devoted to a case study illustrating the use of such strategies by the Nixon administration to create a polarized electorate during the years between the 1968 presidential election and the 1970 midterm elections. Describing and examining King and Anderson's methodology provides insights that can be used to develop an approach to the tea party case study to come in Chapter 3. More specifically, King and Anderson describe both affirmative and

58 King/Anderson 1971, 244. Here too, we can clearly see shades of Hitler's rhetoric as described by Burke. Cf. Burke 1974.

59 For more on the definition of polemics, see: Stauffer 2003. It should be noted here that the term polemics has a long and complicated history and has had different meanings in different contexts. For this reason, "Polemic does not exist as a specialized rhetorical term, nor is there a developed theory of it as a type speech." (Stauffer 2003), 143. To briefly summarize the relationship between the related rhetorical strategies of polarization and polemics, we can say that polemic communication can constitute a provocative element of polarizing strategies. The importance of such provocation will be discussed later in this chapter.

60 King/Anderson 1971, 244. King and Anderson's use of the term "subversion" to describe Richard Nixon's rhetoric may seem ironic to cultural theoretical observers today; as understood in contemporary cultural and social theory, the concept of subversion involves upending or reversing established values and systems of power and has been largely associated with Marxist thought. From this perspective, a conservative president of the United States could hardly be called subversive. In order to avoid terminological confusion, unless directly quoted this study will use the term *marginalization* in place of subversion. Cf. Grindon 2011, Agnoli 2014.

61 King/Anderson 1971, 244.

62 King/Anderson 1971, 245.

marginalizing strategies, illustrate overarching frameworks addressed by members of the administration and Nixon himself, identify individual orators responsible for disseminating polarizing texts and ideas, and analyze specific rhetorical situations and the textual markers of polarizing communication associated with them.

The most common polarizing framework of the Nixon administration was the idea of the "Silent Majority" in American society of the late 1960s and early 1970s. As King and Anderson describe it, Nixon sought to establish a new group identity under which he could unify disparate elements of the electorate into one cohesive in-group. These people, generally skeptical of the tumultuous social changes taking place in American society at the end of the 1960s, came from a number of different backgrounds, and for the most part had no common political identity. Using a clear strategy of affirmation, Nixon often described such citizens as the "broad and vital center," as "the good people," "the decent people" who "pay their taxes," and who were a part of "Middle America." Nixon claimed that these people had become "the forgotten Americans," in comparison to the vociferous critics of the Vietnam War or the flamboyant leading figures of the Cultural Revolution.[63] Although no common political identity had yet existed to coalesce such voters into one bloc, Nixon was able to do just that by "providing them with a political image which they could perceive as being legitimate, coherent, and significant."[64] This gave disaffected individuals a "ready-made group identity," and prompted "self-protective responses" that made the identity a reality.[65]

Although such language was consistently used by Nixon throughout his 1968 presidential campaign and after his election, King and Anderson identify a specific rhetorical situation in which Nixon first clearly branded this coalition the "Silent Majority." Facing increased pressure from antiwar groups and ever growing public protests in late 1969, President Nixon gave a nationally televised speech on the Vietnam War in which he explicitly appealed to "the great silent majority of my fellow Americans," to stand up against a "vocal minority" that sought to bring chaos to the streets of the country.[66] The effects of the speech could be seen almost immediately: telephone polling directly after the speech showed a 77 percent approval rate, and the number of people who approved of Nixon's presidency rose to a peak of over 68 percent soon after. More importantly

63 As quoted in King/Anderson 1971, 245.

64 King/Anderson 1971, 245.

65 For more on self-identification strategies and social group formation, cf. Schlenker/Goldman 1982.

66 Nixon 1969.

for the analysis here is that "within a few weeks, large subgroups of the American population actively identified themselves as members of the 'Silent Majority.'"[67]

Using a clear affirmative strategy, Nixon was able to create a sociopolitical identity that hadn't existed before made up of individuals from a wide array of economic, social, and political backgrounds. And the Silent Majority became an identity that would have a powerful impact in American politics for years to come. This event illustrates the power of strategic communication to shape the world; as King and Anderson put it, "by defining the 'Silent Majority' as a real entity, he prompted modes of behavior that made [...] his originally false depiction of the situation [...] come true, at least in its consequences."[68]

This specific situation also illustrates the way in which strategies of affirmation and marginalization work together to establish group identities, create solidarity within the chosen in-group, and provide the distinctions necessary for polarization of opinions to occur. At the same time that Nixon affirmed the identity of his positive in-group by "focus[ing] attention [...] on the shared features" that defined them ("non-shouters, non-demonstrators, tax payers, respecters of law and order"), he also sought to subvert and group his diverse opponents into one "vocal minority."[69] The dichotomous and exaggerated image created by such depictions of both sides worked hand in hand to drive polarization in audiences.

The strategy of marginalization utilized by the Nixon administration was not limited to a single speech or a single orator. Indeed, the administration consistently sought to find simple and memorable signifiers under which to group those who opposed his policies and his politics. To put it in Bowers and Ochs' terminology, the Nixon administration consistently used derogatory language to dehumanize and belittle opponents and sought to use flag individuals as scapegoats for the ills of the country. By depicting opponents as "external enemies," as "the merchants of crime and corruption in American society," and as "radical faculty [...] poisoning the student mind against the validity of the system," Nixon sought to undermine the *ethos* of his opponents. Those in Congress who opposed him were subject to similar defamation.[70] King and Anderson point explicitly to the midterm campaign of 1970 as the point at which the Nixon administration found the ultimate signifier: the "Radical-Liberal."

67 King/Anderson 1971, 247, citing polling data from Gallup and an article in Time magazine from the period.

68 King/Anderson 1971, 248.

69 King/Anderson 1971, 247–248.

70 Statements by Richard Nixon as quoted in King/Anderson 1971.

Interestingly, the orator who most bluntly deployed marginalizing strategies was not Nixon himself, but his Vice President, Spiro Agnew. As will be shown later, the use of surrogates to employ the marginalizing side of polarization is a tactic often used by orators to shield themselves from criticism that they are divisive or overly negative.[71] As Agnew traveled the country, his descriptions grew more flamboyant and the number of individuals belonging to the "Radical-Liberal" camp continually increased. Agnew decried the "social permissivists," the people "responsible for the erosion of decency," and "those charging from the far left of the political spectrum."[72] He continually sought to link members of the Democratic Party with the most extreme elements of social unrest of the time; while he initially only accused one senator of being a "full-fledged Radical-Liberal," the list soon expanded to at least ten others. Indeed, Agnew asserted that "this radicalism that infects our Congress and poisons our country is at best a bizarre mutation of Democratic liberalism," declared at one campaign stop that electing the Republican would "help rescue the Democratic Party from the radical liberals," and consistently claimed that the Democrats he opposed were "stimulating and encouraging these people."[73]

Over time, however, Agnew's excessive use of marginalization and provocative language tarnished his image and reduced his effectiveness as a surrogate for the administration. The damage done to Agnew's political image due to his use of marginalizing rhetoric illustrates an important lesson when it comes to polarizing strategies, namely, that they can be extremely dangerous to a speaker's *ethos* over time. Although King and Anderson did not dwell on this point, the dangers of polarizing rhetorical strategies for orators will be discussed in depth later in this chapter.

While King and Anderson claimed that Nixon's administration did everything necessary to create polarization in the electorate, they also noted that the strategy had limited effectiveness when it came to winning elections. The 1970 midterm election ended largely in a stalemate, and many of the Democratic politicians designated as "Radical-Liberals" won easily. According to their analysis, Nixon's strategy of affirmation was indeed a large success, with a significant portion of the American population self-identifying with the Silent Majority that he had called into existence.[74] But his strategy of marginalization was less successful. King and Anderson provided little indication as to why this might have been

71 Cf. Smith/Smith 1994.
72 As quoted in King/Anderson 1971, 250–251.
73 King/Anderson 1971, 251–252.
74 Cf. King/Anderson 1971, 254–255.

the case, stating merely that the "images of liberal Democrats it sought to foster lacked a high degree of correspondence with the images already held by the electorate."[75] They concluded with a final assessment that "few will deny that polarization does exist; its effective utilization is quite another matter."[76]

As mentioned previously, King and Anderson's analysis has been highly influential in research on the rhetorical strategy of polarization, and many theoretical and methodological lessons can be drawn. From a theoretical perspective, their insight that polarization involves both divisive as well as solidarity-forming strategies is of critical importance. It is not enough to merely define a common enemy; a common positive identity must be created as well, and the interplay of assertion and marginalization creates the polarizing effect. In this sense, King and Anderson's conception of polarization is as an effect of other, more basic rhetorical strategies. This distinction allows for a more detailed analysis of the strategy by breaking it into smaller units that can be clearly identified in communicative instances.

At the same time, King and Anderson are somewhat unclear as to the prerequisite audience conditions for successful polarization. On the one hand, they state that it intensifies "real differences that already divided Americans," and that the orator seeking to polarize requires "a core of potentially sympathetic individuals" to be successful.[77] This implies that the rhetorical act of polarization merely reinforces group memberships and self-identification of audience members, pushing people with existing attitudes, beliefs, and group identities into dichotomous camps. On the other hand, they also imply that Nixon created his positive in-group of the Silent Majority from thin air, and that "his use of the phrase generated the illusory consciousness of a common identity among many traditionally hostile groups."[78] This distinction touches on an important question for the concept of a rhetorical polarization: does the process *create* new identities, or does it merely *solidify* existing identities?

Another relevant aspect of King and Anderson's work is the idea that polarizing rhetoric is something that can be organized among different individuals over the course of a political campaign. Although other works (to be discussed later) deal more explicitly with the use of polarizing strategies in political movements, the analysis of both Nixon and Agnew illustrates how multiple speakers can use the same issues, individuals, and textual structures in tandem to create

75 King/Anderson 1971, 255.
76 King/Anderson 1971, 255.
77 King/Anderson 1971, 244.
78 King/Anderson 1971, 247.

the polarizing effect. As King and Anderson describe it, it seems that the overall strategy of the Nixon administration was to have the president himself engage in a strategy of affirmation and have the vice president engage in marginalization. Once Agnew's image had become so tarnished as to make him ineffective, however, Nixon himself had to take part in marginalizing strategies as well. As will be shown later, this division of labor is an important element in the sustained efficacy of polarization over the course of persuasive campaigns.

Other important aspects touched on by King and Anderson are the elements of speaker motivation and the effectiveness of polarizing rhetoric at meeting real-world goals. Although they do not devote much space to either, they state that the motivation behind Nixon's polarizing rhetoric was his lack of a solid constituency among American voters. Like Bowers and Ochs, they imply that the strategy is something of a last resort; that if Nixon had had other options, he would have avoided polarization altogether. The direct effects of Nixon's rhetoric were the creation of a "new" in-group sociopolitical identity and the definition of a negative out-group that Nixon was opposed to. The fact that Nixon sought to mobilize his "Silent Majority" against "Radical-Liberals" is clear, but the mixed effectiveness of this strategy to meet his real-world electoral goals is interesting. King and Anderson imply that Nixon was successful in polarizing his audience, but that the strategy did not create the real-world consequences he sought. Determining the necessary conditions for a polarizing strategy to be successful is an important area of concern; without it, orators choosing to polarize will have no indication of whether the strategy can help them meet their real-world goals.

From a methodological perspective, King and Anderson offer a model with which further research on polarization can occur, and their analytical approach has been mirrored in later works. The first step involves identifying polarizing frameworks and flag issues used by the orator(s) in question. Second, their method involves analyzing concrete texts in which specific orators utilized strategies of affirmation and marginalization involving their chosen framework and target groups. In the case of Nixon in particular, King and Anderson pointed specifically to the speech in which he first clearly formulated his chosen label of the Silent Majority. Other concrete instances of communication by Agnew and Nixon were identified as well. Finally, their methodology sought out specific textual markers that indicated polarizing strategies of affirmation and marginalization. They identified both positive and negative labels, keywords, and verbal constructions used by Nixon and Agnew to generate either affirmation or marginalization in their audiences. In the end, their multi-pronged analysis allowed King and Anderson to establish when the strategy of polarization was implemented, which frameworks and issues were the focus of the strategy, and the concrete textual

elements the speakers used to implement their strategy. Each of these elements will be relevant for the analysis of polarizing strategies in tea party rhetoric to come.

2.2.3 George C. Wallace's Polarizing Rhetoric

In the years following King and Anderson's analysis of the Nixon administration, the political rhetoric of the late 1960s and early 1970s remained a focus for communications scholars interested in the concept of polarization. Two works, from 1974 and 1976 respectively, dealt directly with the "rhetoric of polarization" found in the speeches of George C. Wallace, the bombastic Democratic Governor of Alabama.[79] Wallace was famous for his confrontational, combative, and energetic speaking style, and was a "national figure of long standing" who "employed a message that remained essentially unchanged from 1964-1972."[80] Underwood and Kneupper, focusing explicitly on his third-party 1968 presidential campaign, also emphasized that he used "one 'standard' speech," that was almost identical regardless of where he spoke.[81] Because of his consistent use of the same message, imagery, and frameworks, Wallace was a perfect subject of research into the strategy and tactics of polarizing rhetoric.

The analyses of Wallace's rhetorical strategies are particularly interesting for this work due to the clear parallels that can be drawn between the in-group he sought to create and that of the tea party, as well as the frames and issues that Wallace drew upon to polarize the American public. Indeed, in some respects, the rhetoric of the tea party movement can be seen as a direct descendent of the communicative strategies employed by Wallace and his campaign.[82] As Raum and Measell describe, elements of Wallace's campaign appearances were designed to emphasize frameworks of, "rabid patriotism, fundamental Protestant religion, and nostalgia," all of which were also common themes in tea party rhetoric.[83] For their part, Underwood and Kneupper discuss the "independent," white, and grassroots nature of the majority of Wallace's supporters and

79 Cf. Raum/Measell 1974; Underwood/Kneupper 1976.
80 Raum/Measell 1974, 29.
81 Underwood/Kneupper 1976, 3.
82 Some works dealing with the tea party movement explicitly make this connection; cf. Bunch 2010; DiMaggio 2011.
83 Raum/Measell 1974, 33.

audiences, which were elements that came to define the base of the tea party movement.[84]

Despite their shared object of investigation and their similar ultimate conclusions, each of these scholarly pairs took different approaches to analyzing Wallace's polarizing rhetoric. While Raum and Measell clearly focused on the strategic formulation of messages and non-message variables to heighten polarization within audiences, Underwood and Kneupper asserted that Wallace's audiences were already highly polarized to begin with, and instead described how he used this polarized state to his advantage. It is important to emphasize here that both research pairs insisted that a state of opinion polarization was already present within the population and audiences to which Wallace spoke. While Raum and Measell praise King and Anderson's prior conceptual framework on polarization, they explicitly criticize the "presumption that a speaker may create polarization where none existed." Instead, they claim that it "would be more realistic if they assumed that degrees of polarization are already existent in certain rhetorical situations."[85] Underwood and Kneupper, focusing even more on the psychological state of Wallace's audiences, wrote that Wallace "consistently attracted highly and diversely polarized auditors," and that his speeches consisted of "a series of messages directed toward auditors holding polarized views."[86]

If true, such assessments imply that polarizing rhetorical strategies cannot on their own *create* a polarization of attitudes in their audiences. Instead, they can at most, "effect modifications in those dispositions and presumptions which intensify polarization."[87] In practical terms, this would mean that an orator attempting to successfully employ a strategy of polarization should seek out preexisting polarized opinions and dispositions within their audience, and should seek to clarify and heighten the distinctions between the two groups. But this is a theoretical gap that can be bridged: while it may be the case that the attitudes present in an audience must have some preexisting diversity in order for polarization to be possible, Raum and Measell's analysis of Wallace's rhetoric makes it clear that they believe such opinions can be driven further apart by rhetorical techniques, and that in-group/out-group identification can be affected as well.[88]

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84 Underwood/Kneupper 1976, 2, 4. Cf. Skocpol/Williamson 2012.

85 Raum/Measell 1974, 29.

86 Underwood/Kneupper 1976, 1.

87 Raum/Measell 1974, 29.

88 In fact, an unfriendly reader could go so far as to say that Raum and Measell seem to misread and misrepresent King and Anderson's work in order to set their own apart. Indeed, the astute reader will note that their description of Wallace's message variables, while more detailed, clearly mirrors the former researchers' analysis.

Raum and Measell's analysis of the polarizing message variables found in Wallace's speeches provides significantly more detail regarding the specific textual markers found in polarizing communication. They break down the "style of the rhetoric of polarization" into distinct textual categories of "concrete description devices" and "copula tactics." The former category includes "the use of god- and devil-terms, *reductio ad absurdum*, and exaggeration," while the latter consists of "artificial dichotomies, we/they distinctions, monolithic opposition, motive disparagement, and self-assertion."[89] By illustrating each of these textual elements in Wallace's speaking, Raum and Measell provide a methodological roadmap to the analysis of polarizing texts. According to their analysis, all three of these concrete descriptive devices served the same purpose:

> Each of the three [...] is designed to portray people and events in such vivid, forceful language that the auditor is forced to respond. He cannot maintain neutrality, for the verbal images created by the speaker provide only for feelings of absolute attraction or absolute repulsion.[90]

Thus, these textual structures serve to provoke a psychological response in audience members, triggering in-group/out-group sorting and reinforcing social grouping.

Because Raum and Measell assert that polarized attitudes cannot be created through rhetorical means, the implication is that the issues and terminology selected by the orator must align with attitudes and opinions already present in their audience. In a sense, the function of these textual elements is to highlight the differences already present and trigger a reaction. The use of "God- and devil-terms," involves clearly labeling one opinion group in positive terms, while portraying those holding the opposite opinion in morally negative terms.[91] In the case of George Wallace, terms such as, "law-abiding citizen" and the issue of "law and order" were key god-terms, while "anarchists," "communists," and "liberals" became negatively connoted devil-terms. Each of these labels "served to vivify the characteristics of opposition and to increase solidarity with concepts favored by Wallace's audience."[92] The use of *reductio ad absurdum* and exaggeration served a similar purpose, consistently casting opponents in a ridiculous, cartoonish light and making their threat to Wallace's version of America seem greater than it actually was. "Both [...] serve to polarize the auditors'

89 Raum/Measell 1974, 30.
90 Raum/Measell 1974, 30.
91 See also: Burke 1974, 193–195.
92 Raum/Measell 1974, 31.

responses to the people and events depicted by encouraging an extreme avoidance response."[93] These *descriptive devices* parallel the use of flag individuals and flag issues as well as the invention of derogatory language that had been detailed by Bowers and Ochs a few years earlier.

The copula tactics described by Raum and Measell are intended to place the labels and issues designated by concrete descriptive devices into a contrasting and competitive relationship. The most important and fundamental of these tactics "is the drawing of artificial dichotomies, for it is upon these that other tactics [...] depend." In drawing an artificial dichotomy, "the speaker openly states that only two alternatives can be chosen by the auditor [...] it is the reduction of a many-faceted situation to two diametrically opposed alternatives that creates polarization."[94] The dichotomy is then directly associated with the two social groups implied by the god- and devil-terms, the positive of which becomes "we" and the negative of which "they." This "we/they distinction both underscores the in-group vs. out-group dichotomy and promotes in-group solidarity."[95]

In philosophical terms, the use of such tactics asserts the essential nature of a conflict between the morally just in-group and the morally corrupt out-group.[96] The reinforcing tactic of presenting the opposition as monolithic dehumanizes members of the out-group and further undermines their moral standing. Regardless of the actual range of opinions held by various individuals, the polarizing speaker asserts that they all, without exception, have "despicable motives" against the in-group and society as a whole. Wallace, for instance, asserted, "that his opponents have no interest in the well-being of the people, but are frivolous and self-serving instead."[97] The final copula tactic found in polarizing communication involves offering oneself as the sole savior of the in-group. In doing so, the speaker emphasizes the primacy of his views, the "reality" of his depicted dichotomy and conflict, and "becomes the embodiment of the god-terms and the leader of the 'we.'"[98]

Each of these elements combines to create a text that highlights differences already present in society or an audience, crystallizes these differences into two mutually exclusive and diametrically opposed groups, attaches positive and

93 Raum/Measell 1974, 31.
94 Raum/Measell 1974, 31.
95 Raum/Measell 1974, 32.
96 As discussed by Merton 1972, and as will be seen within the tea party oratorical network, this divide also has an epistemological dimension; the in-group gives its version of "knowledge" or "truth" primacy over the other.
97 Raum/Measell 1974, 32.
98 Raum/Measell 1974, 32.

negative labels to each group, and exhorts (and psychologically manipulates) listeners to choose the speaker's side over the "other." In other words, Raum and Measell's discussion of the textual structures associated with polarizing rhetoric illustrates the ways in which the strategies of assertion and marginalization described by King and Anderson (and the processes of isolation and confrontation described by Lanigan) can be translated into concrete texts.[99]

But simply creating a text with these polarizing elements is not enough to drive the process of polarization. The second part of Raum and Measell's analysis is devoted to the "extra-message and non-message variables" that polarizing rhetoric depends on to be successful. In particular, they emphasize the importance of external stimuli to generate an emotional response in the audience based on frameworks of the speaker's choosing. By combining both textual with para-textual elements, Wallace was able to create a "frenzied atmosphere" that "[bound] the hearers together," and increased their receptivity to the polarizing text of his speech.

These situational factors were also the focus of Underwood and Kneupper's work on Wallace's rhetoric. Mirroring Raum and Measell's assertion that rhetorical strategies (merely) serve to emphasize preexisting polarization, Underwood and Kneupper note that Wallace's audiences were already highly polarized before attending his campaign rallies: "The rhetorical situation [...] attracted diversely polarized auditors [...] Wallace's campaign speaking [was] a series of messages directed toward auditors holding polarized views."[100] In effect, Underwood and Kneupper claim that Wallace responded to the preexisting psychological makeup of his audiences, and did so in a way that emphasized the strength and righteousness of those who supported him. Describing his audiences as primarily made up of "closed-positive" and "closed-negative" individuals, they make it clear that the vast majority of those who showed up to a Wallace political rally were no longer open to persuasion.

This point is critical because it speaks to the non-persuasive nature of polarizing strategies. Instead, "Wallace's standard speech [...] was designed to achieve maximum acceptability through expression of the sentiments of a large segment of the population. This segment [...] may be characterized as 'closed-positive' auditors who tended to strongly accept Wallace's statements because of his source credibility."[101] In a sense, Wallace was preaching to the already converted, and geared his speeches to emphasize their preexisting beliefs and biases. Others in

99 Cf. Lanigan 1970.
100 Underwood/Kneupper 1976, 1.
101 Underwood/Kneupper 1976, 1.

his audiences were closed-negative, and "tended to reject statements because of the low credibility they associated to the source." A third group of listeners, "frequently the smallest in number, consisted of 'open' neutral or slightly biased (frequently negatively-biased) observers."[102]

Thus, Wallace's audiences based their assessment of his statements and speech largely according to their preexisting notions of his credibility and image as a speaker. By emphasizing the importance of speaker *ethos* prior to the rhetorical situation, Underwood and Kneupper minimize the importance of what the polarizing speaker actually says; audience members will accept or reject it based on their already held beliefs about the speaker. In fact, Underwood and Kneupper seem to deny Wallace the agency to change the opinions of his audience members at all: because the majority of his listeners were closed-minded, Wallace was reduced to rallying his own supporters as opposed to speaking persuasively. This conception aligns well with Bowers and Ochs' idea of polarization as a rhetorical last resort. [103] But is also implies that Wallace had no choice but to utilize polarizing strategies.

What Underwood and Kneupper do not offer, however, is any analysis of *why* Wallace's audiences were already so strongly polarized. By the 1968 presidential campaign, Wallace had already had a long political career, and his *ethos* as a political and as a public speaker had already been established. This explains why his audiences knew what to expect and likely explains why most were already so closed-minded. It is possible that prior to 1968, Wallace had already attempted other persuasive rhetorical methods and had failed to garner the public support using less destructive strategies. In light of Raum and Measell's assertion that he employed "a message that remained essentially unchanged from 1964-1972," however, it seems more likely that Wallace had long ago chosen to employ polarizing tactics in his speeches, and that through his consistent use of polarizing textual structures, his *ethos* had become associated with the rhetoric of polarization. To put it more bluntly, Wallace's audiences were likely already polarized because he had already polarized them at some prior time with his rhetorical actions.

For the purposes of this work and the analysis to come, individuals whose *ethos* has become directly associated with the process of polarization in the minds of the public (or their situative audiences) will be called *polarizing*

102 Underwood/Kneupper 1976, 2.
103 Cf. Bowers et al. 2010.

figures.[104] While a detailed discussion of this concept will be saved for later, the case of Wallace introduces this important aspect of polarizing strategies. Like Wallace by 1968, polarizing figures have become so associated with the strategy that any given audience is likely to already be divided into closed-positive and closed-negative individuals, their opinions formed by the mere force of the speaker's *ethos*. This speaks clearly to the dangers of utilizing polarizing rhetorical techniques; if an orator becomes associated with the process of polarization, it may become difficult to attract persuadable audiences or even to get a fair hearing of their ideas by listeners in the future. In Wallace's case, "through speaking in terms acceptable to the closed-positive and barely open auditor, he also limited his candidacy as acceptable only to those auditors."[105]

Still, despite the clearly polarized distribution of audience member opinions, Wallace could have chosen a different rhetorical route in his 1968 presidential campaign. He could have sought to persuade the few persuadable individuals in his audiences through thoughtful and even-keeled speeches. This change in tone would have undermined his established image as a firebrand and a "demagogue," a move that might have even jolted some closed-negative individuals into reassessing their prior evaluations of his *ethos*.[106] Instead, Wallace made a conscious choice to exacerbate the polarized views of his audiences.

In addition to clearly employing the range of textual and argumentative structures described by Raum and Measell, Wallace also utilized situational tactics to emphasize the in-group vs. out-group dynamic at his rallies. By directly confronting hecklers and protesters who spoke out at his speeches, he heightened their isolation from his chosen in-group. As Raum and Measell put it, "the presence of hecklers at Wallace rallies provided ample opportunity to dramatize the distinctions between the in-group and the out-group and Wallace frequently took advantage of such moments."[107] Indeed, as Underwood and Kneupper note:

104 For a detailed discussion of the concept of ethos in Aristotelian thought and its application in modern contexts, see: Knape 2009.

105 Underwood/Kneupper 1976, 8.

106 Cf. Underwood/Kneupper 1976, 4.

107 Raum/Measell 1974, 34.

> Not only did he handle these protests effectively, he thrived on them. Vocal heckling was used to raise the anger of his followers and demonstrate to all who would listen the problems of America [...] Utilizing hecklers for "demonstration by example" became an integral part of the campaign speech [...] adding immediacy to build an emotional intensity of his message.[108]

The Wallace campaign even purposefully allowed a few demonstrators into each rally at key moments, giving the candidate an opportunity to plan for protesters and integrate them into his polarizing strategy.

This confrontational tactic strongly reinforced in-group and out-group social polarization in Wallace's audiences. On the one hand, it directly reinforced the out-group's status in a negatively marginalizing way; disruptive hecklers and demonstrators became illustrative examples, and his often sarcastic and patronizing tone undermined their image with others in the audience.[109] Perhaps more importantly, this tactic allowed Wallace "to effectively use the group which remained closed-negative as a means of reinforcing closed-positive auditors."[110] In other words, Wallace was able to generate solidarity and group cohesion among his supporters by directly confronting the "enemy" among them. The manipulation of situational factors to emphasize group identification, heighten the emotional impact of words, and convey specific in-group frameworks served to make polarizing textual structures more effective.[111]

Taken as a whole, the research on George Wallace presented here is highly relevant to the theoretical work of this chapter. Raum and Measell's description of textual markers is extremely useful and (along with Underwood and Kneupper) their perspectives on situational control, audience psychology, and the need for preexisting social division indicate important contextual factors that must be accounted for in the development of a comprehensive theory of rhetorical polarization. Finally, the study of George C. Wallace is particularly interesting as a comparative object to the case study on the tea party network to come, as many of the polarizing frameworks, textual markers, and situational factors parallel the more modern movement.

108 Underwood/Kneupper 1976, 6.
109 Cf. Raum/Measell 1974, 34.
110 Underwood/Kneupper 1976, 8.
111 Cf. Raum/Measell 1974, 34–35.

2.2.4 George H.W. Bush and the Politics of Division

After the 1970s, theoretical and definitional research on polarizing rhetoric largely took a back seat to the practical application of existing models to real-world political communication. Presidential rhetoric, and the rhetorical strategies used by established political figures, remained a particular focus of analysis. Although they did not always use the explicit term of polarization, over the following 25 years, researchers analyzed rhetoric used by presidents Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Clinton, and George W. Bush, and determined that each polarized their audiences and the American public to varying degrees.[112] As a whole, scholars largely followed the methods and models set out by their predecessors: they analyzed specific speeches for polarizing textual structures, identified flag issues and individuals functionalized by each president, provided insight into orator psychology in using such divisive rhetoric, and described the effects of polarizing communication on the attitudes and actions of the American public and government.

Although much of the work done was practical analysis, some researchers sought to explicitly expand and refine the concept of polarization. In their 1994 book on presidential communication and leadership, for instance, Smith and Smith devote an entire chapter to "The Politics of Division" in which they focus on George H.W. Bush's presidency as a case study in both the successful and unsuccessful use of polarizing strategies to win elections and govern the country.

This chapter is particularly interesting for contemporary work for a variety of reasons: first, it details the use of polarization by a single president over three separate time periods (the 1988 presidential election, the governing period from 1988-1992, and the presidential election of 1992). Like the case of George C. Wallace, the analysis of a consistent orator allowed the researchers to control at least one variable in the rhetorical situation and to illustrate the success or failure of the strategy by the same orator under different circumstances. Second, Smith and Smith also provide a strong definition of polarizing rhetoric and clear theoretical descriptions of successful and unsuccessful polarizing strategies. Although their analysis of Bush's rhetoric does not focus on specific speeches or textual formulations, they clearly illustrate broader frameworks and flag issues around which the Bush administration sought to polarize. They also describe important contextual information for each period. Indeed, much like those who studied Wallace, they indicate that situational factors are critical in determining the success or failure of polarizing rhetoric. Third, Smith and Smith illustrate the effects of

112 Cf. Goodnight 1986; Smith/Smith 1994; Whittington 1997; Coe et al. 2004.

rhetorical polarization over time, showing how public attitudes shifted based on Bush's use of divisive imagery and frameworks over the course of his elections and presidencies. Finally, their research is interesting because it provides new insight into the dangers to speaker *ethos* when using polarizing tactics; indeed, they suggest that the more Bush used the strategy of polarization, the less effective it became.

Smith and Smith begin their chapter with a definition of polarizing rhetoric and a discussion of the factors that make such strategies effective or ineffective in a given communicative situation. They state that "polarization can be a deliberate strategy to build membership in an interpretive coalition. The politics of division is characterized by a rhetoric of polarization in which differences are stressed, similarities are downplayed, and derogatory language is developed to characterize the opposition." This definition parallels earlier conceptions of polarizing strategies, and the use of derogatory language for the opposition is taken directly from Bowers and Ochs' work. Importantly, they also follow King and Anderson's assertion that such divisive strategies are actually designed to create solidarity, or as they put it, "convergence through divergence."[113] The strengthening of group identities is the primary immediate real-world goal of polarizing rhetoric, while the ultimate goal may vary.[114]

According to the authors, the successful application of polarizing strategies depends on six factors:

1. "A speaker must invoke existing or latent prejudices among members of a community."

In agreement with earlier researchers, Smith and Smith indicate that polarization cannot arise out of thin air, but rather, that the strategy demands a precise situational assessment "to identify carefully the prejudices or divergences that already exist."[115] These differences of opinion are then functionalized by the orator to become the point of the wedge that drives audience members apart.

2. The orator must be "identified exclusively with one group rather than another," and "not as a fence-straddler."

113 Smith/Smith 1994, 79.

114 In the case of George H.W. Bush, this ultimate goal was to be elected president in 1988, to effectively implement his chosen policies from 1988 to 1992, and to be reelected in 1992.

115 Smith/Smith 1994, 79–80.

This clarity of position is necessary for the divisive tactics to have effect; if the orator does not take a clear position in the presented dichotomy, it will have little effect on their public.

3. It is important that the orator "identify with the dominant group."

This is because effective political leadership requires the activation of "communities that account for significant political resources." If the president (or an orator in general) chooses to polarize around an issue that is not supported by the majority, they will likely face a backlash from a political constituency even more powerful than their own.

4. Effective polarization requires the connection between the "bad group" and "one or more serious societal problems" to be "plausible."

More generally, the negative characteristics that the orator associates with the out-group must be plausible for audience members; otherwise, they will not accept the speaker's dichotomous depiction of the world.

5. The speaker's "image must not be undercut by the strategy of division."

This factor is critical to maintaining a credible *ethos*, and it again speaks to the dangers of utilizing polarizing strategies. Indeed, because of this danger, Smith and Smith assert that instead of directly using such language, an orator should "have surrogates [...] make the harsh polarizing charges." This also underscores the necessity for multiple orators in a sustained campaign of polarization: because the use of polarization can damage speaker credibility, it is better to spread the messaging out among different orators to minimize the negative effects on any given individual orator. As Smith and Smith put it, it is better for a given president to put a bit of "rhetorical distance" between themselves and polarizing language.

6. The in-group must be clearly associated with "higher societal values," and as "a part of the uplifting moral climate of the nation."

As a counterpoint to the fourth factor, it is important for the president's chosen in-group to be associated with positive values and moral rectitude. In this way, even if supporters feel that the polarizing strategy is inappropriate or

unwarranted, "members can feel confident and superior" that their side is correct and just.[116]

Smith and Smith describe these six factors as essential features of successful polarizing rhetoric. And although the focus of their work was explicitly on presidential rhetoric, the majority of these features can be expanded to more general communicative situations. The lone exception is the third factor: while it is true that winning elections requires the activation of majority blocks of voters, it is easily conceivable that other contexts would not require a speaker to identify with the "dominant group" or the majority opinion. Indeed, in Bowers and Ochs' original conception, polarizing rhetoric is a strategy utilized by those out of power (and out of the majority) to gain attention and to mobilize supporters to further action. A broader definition of polarizing rhetoric must take such situations into account as well.

Despite this limitation, Smith and Smith's guidelines provide a roadmap for orators who want to successfully implement polarizing strategies: find appropriate issues around which to polarize, clearly identify oneself with one side (preferably the dominant opinion group), plausibly link the out-group with negative moral values while asserting the righteousness of the in-group, and ensure that a proper "distance" remains between the (primary) orator and the marginalizing strategies in order to protect the their *ethos*.

In addition to providing a list of features of successful polarizing strategies, Smith and Smith also provide reasons that such strategies often fail. Loosely aligned with the factors described, polarization can fail to help a speaker reach their ultimate goal if: 1) existing overlapping group identities are stronger than the dichotomous groups depicted by the speaker, 2) the speaker is not clearly and exclusively associated with one side of the issue, 3) the flag issues chosen are not relevant or acceptable to the public, 4) the speaker becomes personally associated with the strategy of polarization, "irreparably" undermining their reputation, 5) the "logical link" between the out-group and social problems fails to convince audience members, 6) the divisive strategy "activates the 'bad' groups to join protective coalitions and to establish their own dominance."[117]

This final point speaks to the importance of prior calculation in the selection of flag issues and the identification of out-group members: if the out-group is so defined that a significant portion of the public feels attacked, it can lead to a backlash against the polarizing orator more powerful than their own chosen in-group. As will soon be illustrated, such a negative response can undermine or even

116 Smith/Smith 1994, 80.
117 Cf. Smith/Smith 1994, 81.

derail a politician's election campaign. On the other hand, if a speaker's ultimate goal is not to win popular elections, such a backlash might even serve to reinforce the in-group/out-group dynamic, particularly when the polarizing orator clearly identifies with a minority opinion.[118]

Through their case study of the Bush election campaigns and administration, Smith and Smith demonstrate both successful and unsuccessful uses of polarizing communicative strategies, and they identify his presidential campaign of 1988 against Michael Dukakis as his singular most successful use of polarization. During the campaign, Bush hired experienced political strategists Roger Ailes and Lee Atwater to identify "'hot button' social issues [that] could change [...] voters' preferences from Dukakis to Bush."[119] They identified two flag issues around which the Bush campaign proceeded to polarize voters: the issue of prison furloughs in Dukakis' home state of Massachusetts, and the Pledge of Allegiance. Each of these issues took advantage of preexisting divisions and prejudices in the American public, and the way that they were functionalized served to portray Dukakis as representing a minority position within the American electorate. The issue of allowing prisoners temporary furloughs—and the vivid imagery of the Willie Horton ad—exacerbated a divide along racial lines in the presidential race and injected the flag issue of crime prevention into the election. By consistently emphasizing frameworks of crime and punishment, and safety and security in his campaign speeches, Bush "successfully condensed race and crime into the symbol of Willie Horton, and voters began to perceive Dukakis as softer on crime than Bush and the majority of law-abiding Americans."[120]

During the campaign, a now infamous advertisement was released that portrayed convict William "Willie" Horton (who had assaulted a couple and raped a woman while on a furlough from prison), as a product of Dukakis' governorship in the state of Massachusetts. Although the Bush campaign did not directly produce the ad, and claimed to have no responsibility for its content, it was produced by a former colleague of Mr. Ailes. For his part, Mr. Atwater was quoted during the campaign as saying, "by the time we're finished, they're going to wonder

118 This point will be discussed in more depth later in the analysis of the tea party oratorical network, but it can be noted here that the majority of tea party orators are not primarily concerned with winning elections.

119 Smith/Smith 1994, 82. It is interesting to note here that Roger Ailes worked on President Nixon's presidential campaign in 1968 and would later become president of Fox News, the central television station in the conservative media environment and a critical force within the tea party oratorical network. For more on Ailes' role, see Chapter 3.

120 Smith/Smith 1994, 83.

whether Willie Horton is Dukakis' running mate."[121] Still, the Bush campaign was able to publicly distance itself from the most inflammatory elements of the advertisement because it had not produced the clip itself. Thus, Bush and his subordinates could hint at, intimate, and imply the same racial frameworks while maintaining plausible deniability for their responsibility in dividing the nation. As Smith and Smith put it: "These lines of division were not new with the Bush forces; they merely tapped into latent fears and prejudices and brought them to an emotional peak that polarized and activated voters."[122]

The second flag issue utilized by the Bush campaign in 1988 revolved around the Pledge of Allegiance. After Mr. Dukakis vetoed a bill as governor that would have required teachers to have their students say the pledge, Bush's campaign team used the issue to attack his patriotism. Although the decision to veto the bill had been based on solid legal reasoning and the protection of free speech rights, Mr. Bush was able to use the issue to depict Mr. Dukakis as un-American. He explicitly chose to give a speech at the nation's largest flag-making factory, and even invited delegates at the Republican convention to say the Pledge of Allegiance with him in unison. According to Smith and Smith, these "rhetorical choices invited Americans to associate the Bush campaign, and only the Bush campaign, with patriotism."[123] In summarizing the results of the election, they state that the

> Bush campaign exploited latent divisions in America. It indirectly encouraged racial division, [...] encouraged Americans to question Dukakis' patriotism, [...] pitted investors against spenders, [...] [and] pulled all three together with the master division of liberal versus mainstream. Liberals were depicted as wasteful, lazy, criminal coddling, unpatriotic persons.[124]

After winning the presidency, Bush and his administration needed to govern the country and try to come together with a Democratic Congress to implement his chosen policies. But the divisive tactics of the campaign made such conciliation difficult: "The polarization of the campaign had alienated parts of the electorate and Congress, and had left the country in a temper of division rather than compromise."[125] This speaks to both the success and long-term effects of Bush's use of polarizing rhetorical strategies. At the same time, it clearly illustrates a

121 Simon 1990.
122 Smith/Smith 1994, 83.
123 Smith/Smith 1994, 84.
124 Smith/Smith 1994, 85.
125 Smith/Smith 1994, 86.

downside to utilizing polarizing strategies for those who seek to effectively govern: by dividing the American electorate, Bush also polarized a Congress that had a Democratic majority, which made it more difficult for him to implement his desired legislative agenda.

Although Smith and Smith detail a few instances of conciliatory and consensus building behavior at the beginning of his term, they also identify a series of flag issues around which President Bush sought to polarize voters during his presidency, including the nomination of Clarence Thomas for the Supreme Court, the issue of access to abortion, his relationship with Congress, and the First Gulf War. In each of these cases, Smith and Smith detail specific instances in which Bush used divisive language or tactics to mixed success. Indeed, although they state that he was able to "further the very deep divisions" on many of these issues, he rarely succeeded in his ultimate goal of passing legislation.

Thus, in each case, Bush successfully polarized his audiences, but this polarizing strategy failed to help him meet his real-world goals for a variety of reasons. With regard to Thomas' nomination and confirmation as a Supreme Court judge, the divisive strategy "allowed President Bush to splinter his opponents' coalition," but it also drove feminist groups and newly elected female senators to form protective coalitions against the president.[126] When taking a strong pro-life stance on abortion, Bush successfully polarized the American public, but "Bush identified with the minority rather than the majority stance, and the politics of division did not enhance his administrative success."[127]

A similar problem confronted Bush in his relationship with Congress. Although he initially sounded conciliatory notes, his relationship with Democrats deteriorated rapidly. By 1990, Bush was criticizing Congress for inaction and seeking to divide public opinion away from congressional leaders. But here again, "Bush was using a partisan strategy from a minority position," and showed "an overreliance on a polarizing strategy when bipartisan cooperation was needed."[128] Divisive communicative tactics surrounding the Iraq War proved successful but short lived, with Bush becoming increasingly personally identified with polarizing tactics. "In sum, the politics of division provided mixed success."[129]

Smith and Smith end their case study with Bush's unsuccessful reelection campaign in 1992, in which polarizing strategies proved to be his downfall.

126 Smith/Smith 1994, 86.
127 Smith/Smith 1994, 87.
128 Smith/Smith 1994, 89.
129 Smith/Smith 1994, 90.

Although he sought to portray his opponent Bill Clinton as unpatriotic for not having served in Vietnam, and to divide "pro-war 'real Americans' from antiwar 'unAmericans,'" this framework "proved to be a division that had outlasted its time." Instead of moving Americans into the dichotomous camps Bush desired, the use of an outdated framework "was seen by many people as an inappropriate and desperate attempt by a failing president."[130] Other flag issues utilized by the Bush campaign also backfired, causing the president to take minority positions, activate opposing coalitions, and damage his *ethos* in the process. Just as the strategy of polarization had failed him during his administrative years, so too did it fail to win President Bush reelection.

Smith and Smith draw a few relevant conclusions from their analysis. They determine that the polarizing strategy of the 1988 election worked primarily because the Bush campaign was able to divide along "economic and racial, rather than primarily partisan or ideological lines." This led to a coalition of Republicans and conservative Democrats assembled "on the basis of their shared dislikes," rather than around a strong positive identity.[131] Critically, Bush was also able to keep his rhetorical distance from the more inflammatory and racially provocative elements of the campaign while still profiting from their effect. After the 1988 election, however, Bush found significantly less success with his use of polarizing tactics for two main reasons. First, the issues he chose to polarize around were either irrelevant, outdated, or "were salient only to a small number of Americans insufficient to form the majority coalition."[132] Second, Bush's *ethos* became too associated with polarization, which undermined his oratorical authority and credibility. By becoming associated with a negatively charged, divisive rhetorical strategy, Bush alienated many even within his own party. As indicated earlier, there "is always a danger in a divisive or polarization strategy: in the process of mobilizing and activating your group, you may be more effective in alienating and mobilizing communities on the opposite side of an issue."[133]

From a theoretical perspective, Smith and Smith also offer more general comments on polarization: it is a strategy designed to "realign communities, to build coalitions, and to produce desired behavioral changes," which "functions to change sympathizers into supporters, to build strength in one's own group, and to expand one's coalition on the basis of shared disbeliefs." Although they do not explicitly cite earlier works on polarization, this definition aligns well with those

130 Smith/Smith 1994, 91–92.
131 Smith/Smith 1994, 95–96.
132 Smith/Smith 1994, 97.
133 Smith/Smith 1994, 97.

that came before it; polarization creates solidarity within an (ascendant) in-group by generating an image of a shared negative out-group. Like their predecessors, Smith and Smith also agree that contextual factors are critical to the ability of such a strategy to help an orator meet their ultimate, real-world goals, "the skillful use of the politics of division requires an astute knowledge of the audiences to which it is being addressed, and an appreciation of the dangers inherent in dividing a population."[134]

2.2.5 George W. Bush: No Shades of Gray

In 2004, Coe et al. published an analysis of President George W. Bush's use of polarizing rhetorical tactics following the tragedy of September 11 and the build up to the Iraq War. Although Bush did not seek to polarize the country along partisan lines, he clearly sought to generate solidarity among the American public and to project a negative other as a danger to American values and society. In his own famous words: "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."[135] While the work of Coe et al. deals with the individual mechanisms of the strategy (detailing specific textual features, situational circumstances, and individual orator calculations), it also analyzed network-level elements of polarizing rhetoric, particularly the way that the interactions of multiple orator complexes can combine to drive broader social polarization. This work is also important because it directly addresses the process-oriented nature of polarization by breaking down the use of polarizing strategies into two phases, each of which has its own functions and time-sensitive elements.

Coe et al. focus their attention on elements of *binary discourse* in a series of fifteen nationally covered speeches by President George W. Bush between his inauguration and a speech given in March 2003, and show how these elements were paralleled in the editorial press coverage of the time. Although they reference work on polarization by King and Anderson and by Raum and Measell, they use the term "binary discourse" to describe texts that depict dichotomous situations, emphasize in-group and out-group dynamics, and pit one side against the other.[136] According to their model, binary discourse has three main attributes:

134 Smith/Smith 1994, 97–98.

135 George W. Bush, as cited in Coe et al. 2004.

136 Cf. Coe et al. 2004, 235.

1. "Binary discourse requires a *central organizing object* that provides a foundational meaning to the surrounding language."

In other words, binary discourse requires a flag issue, which can be a "behavior," an "idea," or an "event." Paralleling previous work, the authors also insist that the central organizing object "must resonate with the audience at whom communications are directed [...] The audience must have strong beliefs and an interpretation perceived as widely shared about the object."[137] In the case of George W. Bush, the September 11 attacks were the central organizing object of his polarizing rhetoric.

2. "Binary discourse occurs in two phases over time: the establishment phase and the extension phase."

During the establishment phase, "a speaker does two things": he "initiates or substantially increases the usage of binaries, and [...] employs the binaries in a rhetorically notable manner."[138] This phase establishes the two sides of the dichotomous framework within the public discourse and uses memorable textual formulations to increase "cultural circulation." The extension phase seeks to further the effect of the initial polarizing formulation over time and space, and consists of repeatedly emphasizing the binary framework, or highlighting the positive or negative aspects of one side or the other in order to "evoke the full binary," in the minds of the public. By clearly identifying both phases, the authors are able to show how the process of polarization was driven over time and reflected in both the president's own speeches and in media coverage of the speeches.

3. Finally, "a binary discourse utilizes *multiple binary constructions*."[139]

By selecting a series of different dichotomies with which to polarize their audience, orators gain the flexibility to select the most effective framework in a given speaking situation, or even to use multiple binaries together to increase the polarizing effect. In the case of George W. Bush, Coe et al. identify the binaries of "good/evil" and "security/peril" as central to his polarizing strategy. This third characteristic of "binary discourse" also parallels earlier research on polarizing

137 Coe et al. 2004, 235.
138 Coe et al. 2004, 236.
139 Coe et al. 2004, 236.

rhetoric; Smith and Smith in particular identify a series of polarizing frameworks used by the first Bush administration.

One of the primary effects of binary discourse is the amount of attention it draws to both the orator and the issue around which they have chosen to polarize. And polarizing language is particularly effective at gaining media attention because it fits with journalists' needs to write a compelling story. As Coe et. al describe it, such rhetoric is strategically useful precisely because it is designed to garner as much media attention as possible, leading to an amplification of the orator's original performance (and binary frameworks) to broader segments of society. Because "binary oppositions inherently suggest competition between two forces," they make it easy for journalists to construct a narrative. The use of provocative language and imagery to activate audience members also makes it more likely that journalists will directly quote such passages and integrate the same binary construction into their reports of the original performance. And because polarized descriptions always include a moral element (good/bad), they generate "resonance with the mass public and a sustaining news value."[140] Thus, the successful use of polarizing strategies will lead media outlets, and newspaper editorials in particular, to repeat the polarizing frameworks generated by the orator, leading to an amplification of the orator's own views and extending the divisive effect through time.

Appropriately, Coe et al. do not limit their analysis of binary formulations to President Bush's national addresses. They also directly compare editorial articles from twenty major newspapers in the days following each speech in order to gauge the repetition of the binary structures in the media. Importantly, they illustrate that the media coverage of Bush's speeches "followed the president's use of these binaries, often repeating his words."[141] The researchers were also able to clearly identify both an establishment phase and an extension phase of the president's polarizing rhetoric, showing that the three speeches following the September 11th attacks contained a particularly high percentage of binary formulations, while he continued to refer to the binaries long after the events of September 11th but at a significantly reduced rate.

Not only does the extension phase serve to deepen the divide and maintain established dichotomies, it can also be used to influence the polarized audience in ways controlled by the orator. As Coe et al. put it: "The results strongly suggest that the president strategically emphasized a particular side of the security/peril binary to fit a specific administration policy goal." The recognition that, once

140 Coe et al. 2004, 237.
141 Coe et al. 2004, 242.

established, polarized binaries can be functionalized over time to meet diverse needs of an orator is an important one. This indicates that the generation (or amplification) of a polarized state can serve to steer an audience long after the initial establishment of dichotomous frameworks. The fact that the selective use of binaries continued to be repeated in newspaper editorials only increased their efficacy and spread throughout American society.

For our purposes here, there are two relevant conclusions to be drawn from this case study. First, it clearly demonstrates different phases in the process of polarization. In the establishment phase, the consistent and repeated use of binary descriptions in provocative and memorable ways imprints the chosen dichotomy in the minds of direct listeners. The extension phase then sustains the binary framework by "periodically employing the binaries [...] and by consistently emphasizing the respective sides."[142] Although the repetition of polarizing texts leads to diminishing effectiveness, the emphasis of one side of an established binary can effectively evoke the polarized reaction in audience members. Second, Coe et al. show that "binary discourse seems ideally suited for a political culture dominated by mass media." The establishment phase of the process provides journalists with powerful, ready-made quotes and sound bites about the chosen flag issue, while the extension phase "prolongs the story," giving media outlets more material "until the next compelling narrative arrives." Thus, a politician or prominent public figure "can have a high confidence that the press will echo a binary discourse."[143] As stated previously, this media coverage amplifies an orator's message and spreads its polarizing effect to a much wider audience. And because an orator can (to a certain extent) strategically control this coverage by emphasizing certain aspects of a constructed dichotomy, they can (to a certain extent) steer public opinion in one direction or the other.

2.3 Polarization in Oratorical Networks

The research reviewed until now has largely focused on individual orators and orator complexes that have employed polarizing rhetorical strategies to help meet their real-world electoral goals. In the case of oratorical networks, however, the picture is more complex. In such situations, the strategy of polarization is used by a series of different orators and orator complexes, each with their own

142 Coe et al. 2004, 247.
143 Coe et al. 2004, 247–248.

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Index

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