Diversionary Cheap Talk: Unemployment and US Foreign Policy Rhetoric, 1945-2010

Erin Baggott Carter*

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Abstract

This study explains how domestic economic conditions affect the foreign policy rhetoric used by leaders. When domestic economic conditions deteriorate, leaders criticize other nations in order to highlight intergroup differences and boost their popularity at home. Leaders use diversionary cheap talk in response to unemployment, which poses a unique threat to their popularity. They target historical adversaries, which make intergroup distinctions most salient. Diversionary cheap talk wins most approval points from citizens who do not share the leader's partisan affiliation, since reframing politics as an international rather than national competition affects their group identity more than core partisans. I test the observable implications of the theory with the American Diplomacy Dataset, an original record of 50,000 American foreign policy events between 1851 and 2010 drawn from a corpus of 1.3 million *New York Times* articles.

Word Count: 11,000

Key Words: diversionary conflict, international relations, domestic politics, political psychology, political communication, social identity theory, text analysis, computational social science

*Assistant Professor, School of International Relations, University of Southern California. For helpful comments and suggestions, I am grateful to Adam Breuer, Ruth Carlitz, Brett Carter, Adam Glynn, Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, Stephanie Hofmann, Konstantin Kashin, Will Lowe, Steve Rosen, Robert Schub, Beth Simmons, Arthur Spirling, Brandon Stewart, Anton Strezhnev, Dustin Tingley, Ariel White, Yuri Zhukov, and seminar participants at Harvard, UCLA, and the International Studies Association Presidential Text Panel. Email: baggott@usc.edu.

1 Introduction

In his first year as president, Bill Clinton won broad acclaim for his tough statements on China. He blamed China for American job losses and criticized the "butchers of Beijing" for the murders in Tiananmen Square. Yet a year later, news outlets deemed his China policy "almost identical to his Republican predecessor's." After "days of anguished deliberation," Clinton renewed China's most favored nation trading status and "ended the annual linkage between China's trade benefits and human rights performance" (Fletcher, 1994). Congress accused Clinton of "turning his back" on China's freedom fighters, but his poll ratings remained strong.

This paper argues that Clinton's China policy is an example of a larger phenomenon: *diversionary cheap talk*, defined as noncommittal belligerent statements directed at other nations. Leaders use diversionary cheap talk to offset declines in their domestic popularity and are most likely to do so during times of economic hardship. This rhetoric is diversionary because it is a strategic response to domestic unpopularity, and cheap because it lacks the explicit commitments that incur audience costs.

There is a large literature on diversionary conflict in international relations, but it focuses on material conflicts like militarized interstate disputes rather than foreign policy rhetoric. It is based in social identity theory, which suggests that leaders can increase ingroup affinity by making intergroup distinctions more salient (Coser, 1956; Simmel, 1955; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). A recent review concludes that though the internal logic of diversionary conflict is "compelling and theoretically well supported," the empirical evidence is "decidedly mixed" (Baum and Potter, 2008, 48). Several studies find evidence of diversionary aggression in US foreign policy (Clark, 2003; DeRouen, 2000; DeRouen and Peake, 2002; Fordham, 1998*a*,*b*; Hess and Orphanides, 1995; Howell and Pevehouse, 2005; James and Hristoulas, 1994; James and Oneal, 1991; Levy, 1989*a*,*b*; Morgan and Bickers, 1992; Ostrom and Job, 1986) and

elsewhere (Bennett, 2000; Dassel and Reinhardt, 1999; Davies, 2002; Enterline and Gleditsch, 2000; Gelpi, 1997; Heldt, 1999; Lebow, 1981; Mansfield and Snyder, 1995; Oneal and Tir, 2006; Russett, 1990; Sobek, 2007; Tir, 2010). Yet skeptics have amassed opposing evidence (Chiozza and Goemans, 2003, 2004; Foster and Palmer, 2006; Gowa, 1998; Johnston, 1998; Leeds and Davis, 1997; Lian and Oneal, 1993; Meernik, 2000, 2004; Meernik and Waterman, 1996; Moore and Lanoue, 2003; Potter, 2007). Some cases are hard to reconcile with the theory: in Britain, there were rallies in the Falklands War and the Gulf War but not in other cases in which rallies would be expected, such as the Korean, Suez, and Kosovo wars (Lai and Reiter, 2005). Some go so far as to call diversionary aggression a "myth" (Meernik and Waterman, 1996).

Others have developed scope conditions for diversionary aggression. It is more likely between states with pre-standing rivalries (McLaughlin and Prins, 2004), when leaders are accountable (Carter, 2018; Kisangani and Pickering, 2011), and in mature democracies, consolidating autocracies, and transitional polities (Pickering and Kisangani, 2005). It is less likely when states avoid provoking troubled adversaries (Clark, 2003; Fordham, 2005; Leeds and Davis, 1997; Miller, 1999). Diversion appears more likely to produce a rally when supported by Security Council authorization (Chapman, 2011; Chapman and Reiter, 2004), when the White House draws attention to a dispute (Baker and Oneal, 2001), and in conditions of media attention, popular leadership, divided government, non election years, and first terms (Colaresi, 2007). Most recently, scholars have asked whether diversion occurs outside democracies. They find some autocracies, especially single party regimes, divert as well (Carter, 2018; Pickering and Kisangani, 2011).

This study extends the logic of diversionary conflict to foreign policy rhetoric. There is surprisingly little research on rhetoric in international relations. The international relations literature deems talk "cheap" (Fearon, 1995; Kydd, 2005). The audience cost literature considers rhetoric meaningful, but only if it invokes audience costs through explicit, public

threats (Fearon, 1994; Schultz, 2001; Smith, 1998; Tomz, 2007). However, if foreign policy rhetoric can activate ingroup identity, then it may be appealing for leaders who wish to improve their ratings without incurring the substantial risks of militarized interstate disputes. While it might be "outlandish" for presidents to engage in the impeachable exercise of diversionary war (Meernik and Waterman, 1996), hostile foreign policy rhetoric is far less outlandish a risk.

To develop a theory of diversionary cheap talk, this paper draws upon research in political psychology and political communication. These literatures find persuasive evidence that elite statements influence citizen beliefs (Behr and Iyengar, 1985; Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston, 2006; Brody, 1991; Cohen, 1995; Jentleson, 1992; Zaller and Chiu, 2000). I draw on social identity theory to argue that diversionary cheap talk highlights intergroup differences between nations and leads citizens to evaluate their leader favorably. When a leader criticizes foreigners, she cues ingroup identity, which increases citizens' social attachment to the nation and to herself as its leader. This is a "solidarity mechanism," through which "[c]ollective group goals and common group identity are highlighted, norms of group-based altruism are strengthened, punishment and rejection of defectors are increased, and perceptions of the in-group and out-group are manipulated" (Halevy, Bornstein and Sagiv, 2008, 405).

The theory generates observable implications about when leaders use diversionary cheap talk and who they target. I follow the consensus in the diversionary conflict literature in focusing on poor economic conditions as the most important source of public disapproval for leaders. Low approval ratings limit leaders' ability to advance their domestic agenda. Therefore, when the economy deteriorates, leaders will criticize foreign nations to improve their approval ratings and restore the political capital necessary for them to govern. Second, a key observation from social identity theory is that the depth of intergroup differences is important for group attachment. Therefore, consonant with recent empirical findings in the

diversionary conflict literature (McLaughlin and Prins, 2004), I expect diversionary rhetoric to be most effective when it targets threatening outgroups. In the context of foreign policy, these are best represented by historical adversaries. And finally, because diversionary cheap talk shifts the focus of political competition from the partisan to the international level, it has differential partisan effects. Because national identity cues widen the tent of the political ingroup, diversionary cheap talk is most effective at boosting support among the leader's nonpartisans: liberal citizens for conservative leaders, and conservative citizens for liberal leaders.

I test these hypotheses with the American Diplomatic Dataset, an original record of over 50,000 US diplomatic events between 1945 and 2010 drawn from *New York Times* articles on foreign affairs. I used tools from computational social science to classify bilateral interstate interactions into hundreds of specific types and four aggregate categories: verbal cooperation, verbal conflict, material cooperation, and material conflict. This is by far the most historically extensive event dataset. As such, it allows an exploration of US foreign policy behavior across a variety of administrations and economic crises. Crucially, the granularity of the dataset allows me to restrict attention to events which the sitting US president initiated and directed at foreign state actors.

I find robust evidence of diversionary cheap talk in US foreign policy. First, I establish that US presidents face incentives to divert verbally rather than materially: while militarized interstate dispute initiation does not affect presidential approval ratings, critical rhetoric about other nations is associated with increased ratings, especially among nonpartisans. Responding to this incentive, presidents between 1945 and 2010 typically diverted in the form of words, not deeds. Simulations indicate that as unemployment varied from its minimum to its maximum observed value, hostile foreign policy rhetoric nearly doubled, depending on the administration. Throughout this study, estimates are conservative: I operationalize conflict as events the United States initiated, although findings are robust to a redefinition of

conflict as events the United States participated in. The verbal statements in the dataset are high profile and likely to be noticed by the American public: all appeared in the headlines of the *New York Times*.

This study contributes to existing scholarship in several ways. First, it demonstrates that US foreign policy rhetoric responds significantly to domestic economic conditions. International relations scholars should therefore continue to focus more seriously on the communicative aspects of foreign policy, and in particular its relationship to domestic politics (Johnston, 2001, 2008; Kurizaki, 2007; Ramsay, 2011; Sartori, 2002, 2005; Trager, 2010, 2011, 2016). The American Diplomacy Dataset will enable researchers to further explore the communicative aspects of foreign policy, and their relationships to material and economic factors, in more detail than existing datasets permit.

Second, this study contributes to the diversionary conflict literature by showing that in many cases where diversionary theory predicts conflict initiation, leaders instead choose rhetorical hostility. In this sense, leaders may have their cake and eat it too: They benefit from an ingroup rally without inviting an international crisis. The mixed empirical findings in the diversionary conflict literature may be partly due to the fact that existing scholarship considers only the most serious forms of diversion like militarized interstate disputes. It is possible that a wide range of diversionary behavior takes place at less extreme levels, such as the rhetorical hostility documented in this paper.[1]

Finally, the political communication literature has maintained a curious focus on the influence of elites rather than leaders. There are few studies of whether leaders can use rhetoric to influence approval ratings. One study comments, "Surprisingly, virtually no research has addressed this question—despite widespread recognition that presidents invest substantial resources to perfect their rhetoric... and clear evidence that approval fundamentally affects

[1]In the language of the foreign policy substitutability literature (Bennett and Nordstrom, 2000; Clark, Nordstrom and Reed, 2008; Most and Starr, 1984, 1989; Oakes, 2012), rhetorical hostility, like the development of new economic policies, may be seen as a substitute for diversionary conflict.

the president's power and policy-making success" (Druckman and Holmes, 2004, 755). This study contributes to the political communication literature by showing that leaders, much like party elites, can shape popular opinion. While elites shape opinion with appeals to partisan subgroup identities, leaders shape opinion with appeals to superordinate national identity. In both cases, the ingroup rally mechanism suggested by social identity theory applies.

In the remainder of this paper, Section 2 develops the theory of diversionary cheap talk, Section 3 introduces the American Diplomacy Dataset, Section 4 presents the results, and Section 5 concludes.

2 Theory

There is compelling evidence that ingroup members cooperate more with each other than with outsiders, particularly when intergroup distinctions are strong. Social identity theory suggests that individuals categorize others into groups, identify with a group themselves, and compare between groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Individuals derive self-esteem from their group and evaluate it more highly than others. For example, when individuals are matched with an induced ingroup member in the lab,[2] they are more altruistic: they show a 47 percent increase in charity concerns and a 93 percent decrease in envy. Moreover, they are 19 percent more likely to reward an ingroup member for good behavior and 13 percent less likely to punish him for bad behavior (Chen and Li, 2009). Though induced identities are not sufficient to make participants ignore dominant strategies in prisoner's dilemma games, real world group identities are (Goette, Huffman and Meier, 2006). Even for induced groups, negative outgroup opinion strengthens ingroup identity and cooperation (McLeish and Oxoby, 2011).

[2]Group identity is artificially induced with artwork preferences; these are known as minimal groups.

Ingroup bias is well documented at the subnational partisan level. The political psychology literature understands partisan identities as social identities (Green, Palmquist and Shickler, 2002; Greene, 1999, 2002, 2004; Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012; Malka and Lelkes, 2010). Characterizing partisans as "sports fans," Mason (2015, 129) writes, "Partisans feel emotionally connected to the welfare of the party... and when the party is threatened, they become angry and work to help conquer the threat... The connection between partisan and party is an emotional and social one, as well as a logical one." For example, conservative self-identification is stronger when it is a reaction against liberalism, and vice-versa (Zschirnt, 2011). Partisan motivated reasoning leads individuals to support policies they otherwise might not (Bolsen, Druckam and Cook, 2014; Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus, 2013). For example, party labels induce bias in assessments of candidates with identical platforms (Munro et al., 2013). Ingroup bias is subject to the manipulation of party elites, who cue these social identities for instrumental ends. Citizens form views based on elite statements rather than policy information, especially when their policy knowledge is low (Bullock, 2011; Cohen, 2003; Iyengar and Valentino, 2000; Rahn, 1993; Zaller, 1992). Without elite cues, the relationship between ideological self identification and policy preferences is weak (Malka and Lelkes, 2010; Popp and Rudolph, 2011).

I argue that much like party elites, heads of state can use political communication to cue ingroup identity. The diversionary literature argues that a "dramatic" international crisis which directly involves the president is necessary for a rally.[3] Yet social identity theory and the empirical findings above suggest that elite statements that highlight intergroup distinctions are sufficient to cue ingroup identification. Just as party elites issue partisan cues to increase their popularity, I expect the president to issue national cues to consolidate hers. When the leader criticizes an outgroup, she makes group identity more salient, and group members evaluate her more highly. One of the chief demagogues of the twentieth

[3]See e.g. Baker and Oneal (2001); Mueller (1973, 209).

century understood this intuitively: "The art of leadership... consists in consolidating the attention of the people against a single adversary and making sure than nothing will split up that attention" (Hitler, 1925 [1998]).

American presidents frequently employ language critical of outgroups. While battling inflation and recession in 1978, President Carter told a crowd of 5,000 Texans that he was in complete control of American foreign policy and that "We're not going to let the Soviet Union push us around. We're not going to be second" (Walsh, 1978). In the mid-1990s, facing growing protectionism, President Clinton blamed the trade deficit on foreigners. President Obama criticized Chinese trade practices, leading one newspaper to comment, "Last week's sabre-rattling over tyres and chicken may soon become altogether too commonplace. Against the backdrop of the highest inequality and unemployment since the early 1980s... the pressure on US President Barack Obama to get tough with China is intense" (Garrett, 2009).

I expect ingroup appeals to win popularity for the president, just as they do for party elites. This yields the first observable implication of the theory: by cueing national social identification through tough talk on foreigners, the leader increases individual social attachment to the nation, and to the leader herself. This provides a rally effect that increases the leader's popularity. Thus,

H1: Hostile rhetoric about foreign countries increases presidential approval ratings.

Rhetoric is particularly effective when it targets traditional adversaries, because these render intergroup differences most salient. Threats to a group make group members angry and increase group identification (Huddy, 2015; Mackie, Davos and Smith, 2000; Smith, Seger and Mackie, 2007). Between 1946 and 2010, several nations were seen as American adversaries: China, North Korea, Japan, Russia, Germany, Vietnam, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Cuba. Because Americans perceive these outgroups as especially threatening, rhetoric

targeting them should produce larger rallies than rhetoric targeting neutral countries or allies. This yields the second hypothesis,

H2: Hostile rhetoric about foreign countries is particularly effective in increasing presidential approval ratings when it targets historical adversaries.

An important difference between this paper and existing research on the influence of party elites is that party elites preside over relatively well-defined partisan identities, while the president presides over a superordinate national identity composed of partisan subgroups. Partisan identity should mediate national identity depending on whether citizens share party identification with the president. Specifically, national identity cues will most increase presidential approval among citizens who do *not* share the leader's partisanship. Absent national cues, citizens tend to think of politics as competing partisan teams, and they oppose the outgroup president. However, when politics are recast as a competition between the national group and foreign outgroups, the president is cognitively reassigned to their own team, and their support for the president as group leader increases. For leaders, there is a large potential gain to be had, because baseline presidential approval among noncore voters is lower than among core voters.

This hypothesis parallels theories about traditional diversionary conflict. Baum (2002, 263) explores the constituent foundations of rallies and finds that "individuals who are closest to the point of ambivalence between approval and disapproval are most likely to change their opinion in response to external circumstances." As such, he finds that diversion typically targets swing voters and opposition party members. This is related to Fordham (1998*a*)'s point that core constituents should never be satisfied by a diversionary use of force, because they want their major economic concern addressed directly. I expect hostile foreign policy rhetoric to be most effective among noncore voters for similar reasons. Thus,

H3: Hostile foreign policy rhetoric is most effective in increasing presidential approval among members of the subnational outgroup (swing voters and opposition party members).

While leaders might be tempted to bluster constantly to sustain high approval ratings, it is likely they do so selectively. Elites (particularly those who do not share the leader's partisan affiliation) gain points by exposing false messaging by leaders. Citizens are more skeptical about leader statements when there is elite or media disagreement (Berinsky, 2007; Brody, 1991; Graber, 2002; Groeling and Baum, 2008; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Krosnick and Kinder, 1990; Kuypers, 1997; Larson, 2000; Lee, 1977; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998; Mueller, 1973; Paletz, 2002; Rahn, 1993). Leader statements reach the national audience faster than elite statements due to the leader's prominence, but the leader's information dominance does not last forever. Therefore, the leader is forced to use hostile foreign policy rhetoric as a short-term tactic. She blusters in front of the national audience, wins approval points, and moves on before partisan elites sow doubt.

The diversion literature generally assumes that unemployment is the most serious challenge to leader popularity.[4] While conservative leaders are typically associated with business interests and liberal leaders with labor interests, all leaders must be concerned with the unemployment rate because it has such a broad impact on the economy.[5] However, it is difficult for leaders to address unemployment in the short run. During this time, it threatens their popularity and political capital. Because they must maintain political capital to advance their policy agenda, leaders turn to hostile foreign policy rhetoric to increase their approval ratings. Thus,

[4]Some scholars focus on unemployment as a source of diversion (Ostrom and Job, 1986), others use a "misery index" which combines unemployment and inflation (DeRouen, 1995; James and Hristoulas, 1994; James and Oneal, 1991; Meernik, 1994; Meernik and Waterman, 1996; Ostrom and Job, 1986).

[5]As a result, I part with work that examines the coalitional basis for diversion (Baum, 2002; Bearce, 2003; Brulé and Hwang, 2010; Fordham, 1998*a*; Morgan and Bickers, 1992).

H4: When unemployment rises, leaders are more likely to adopt hostile foreign policy rhetoric.

Finally, leaders should prefer hostile foreign policy rhetoric to dispute initiation. In the language of foreign policy substitutability, verbal diversion is preferable to material diversion because it is less costly and risky. Moreover, Congress has less oversight over presidential statements than international interventions. Though Baum (2002) argues that skeptical voters require tangible measures like international crises to change their evaluation of the president, the political communication literature shows that politicians routinely influence public opinion through statements. This generates a final observable implication,

H5: Leaders prefer hostile foreign policy rhetoric to dispute initiation, since rhetoric allows them to increase their approval ratings without risking war.

3 The American Diplomacy Dataset

To test these hypotheses, I created the American Diplomacy Dataset. It is drawn from the *New York Times*, which has the broadest historical coverage of any digitized paper of record. I used computational methods to download all 1.3 million articles published between 1851 and 2010 with nation states in the title. The dataset records all day-level events in which the United States was the source or target or an interstate interaction. The United States participated in 54,305 events between 1945 and 2010; this study focuses on the 24,274 events it initiated in that period.[6]

Transforming news articles into data about interstate interactions took three steps: elim-

[6]All documents were downloaded in accordance with terms of service policies. The document texts cannot be released due to copyright reasons, but the event data generated from texts will be made available on my scholar webpage. Each document is a 2-4 sentence summary of the news article. For technical reasons related to event extraction, short summaries are preferable to long articles.

inating duplicate articles, eliminating irrelevant articles, and extracting events from the remaining articles. While existing studies have implemented the third step, the first two represent methodological advancements and greatly reduce the amount of noise in the dataset.

The elimination of duplicate and near duplicate articles has been a challenge for event data scientists. Duplicate articles can be a serious source of bias if events are reported multiple times per day or on consecutive days, particularly if they are described somewhat differently and cannot be eliminated with the "one per day" filter.[7] I eliminated exact duplicates with list matching: I created a list of all 1.3 million articles in Python and compared each to the remaining articles in the list. I eliminated near duplicates with fuzzy matching, a method that counts the number of changes it would take to make two strings identical. I deleted temporally proximate articles that were more than 90% similar.[8] All in all, 31,255 duplicate and near duplicate articles were deleted.

I then used supervised learning methods to identify and delete irrelevant articles. Because I searched for articles with nation-states in the title, I collected many reports on international sports matches, the arts, obituaries, and so on. In order to discard these articles, I randomly drew 1,000 documents from the corpus, read them, and coded them as political/military, economic, or irrelevant in topic.[9] I then used a linear support vector classifier to use the relationships between the words and labels in my 1,000 document training set to generate topic labels for the rest of the documents in the corpus.[10] The classifier was 75.3% accurate in ten-fold cross validation, which is considered very accurate in machine learning.[11] All in

[7] In a recent review, Schrodt calls this a "very difficult problem" (Schrodt, 2012*b*, 554).

[8] Technically, "similarity" here reflects string matching, not n-gram similarity. For fuzzing string matching, the Levenshtein ratio is used, the number of changes it would take to make two strings identical, divided by the length of the string. Fuzzy string matching is implemented with the `fuzzywuzzy` module.

[9] All articles were processed per standard procedure: words were lowercased and stemmed; symbols, numbers and stop words were removed.

[10] Linear support vector classifiers are generally considered the best classification algorithm in machine learning. These relationships were captured in a term frequency–inverse document frequency matrix.

[11] Accuracy fell rapidly with the inclusion of additional topic labels; separating political affairs from military affairs, for example, decreased the classification accuracy to 64.7%.

all, nearly 300,000 articles were identified as irrelevant by the classifier; I discarded them all. The final corpus consists of 969,398 documents, all unique articles about economic, political, or military affairs in the world. Table 4 in the appendix shows the distribution of topics in the training and test sets.

Having pruned the corpus, I then extracted interstate events with software that has been widely used in the event data field. Textual Analysis By Augmented Replacement Instructions (TABARI) is computational linguistic software that recognizes country-verb-country patterns in sentences: for example, `US praises Canada` or `China condemns Japan` (Gerner, Schrodt and Yilmaz, 2009; Schrodt, 2012*c*). I extracted data on over 300 types of interstate interactions: everything from rhetorical exchanges to routine diplomacy to war.[12]

Like previous event data research, I make a distinction between verbal and material events: those that are speech acts versus actions. *Material cooperation* is cooperation in deed rather than speech, and includes things like providing aid or yielding to another state's demands. *Verbal cooperation* includes things like consultation and appeals. *Verbal conflict* is conflict in speech and includes things like protestations, demands, criticism, blame, and rejections. *Material conflict* includes MID-type violent interactions, but also sub-MID actions such as coercion, halting aid, canceling negotiations, expelling observers, or imposing trade sanctions. Sample news stories and the events generated from them are shown in Table 6 in the appendix.

Processing in this manner yields 54,305 events involving the United States between 1945 and 2010. Of these, 24,274 were initiated by the US executive branch toward foreign states: these events are the subject of this study. The unit of observation is the month. For each month, I record the number of material conflicts, verbal conflicts, material cooperation events, and verbal cooperation events initiated by the United States.

[12]Event types are taken from the CAMEO ontology, which focuses on interstate behavior (Schrodt, 2012*a*). A list of all 300 event types is available at http://web.ku.edu/~keds/cameo.dir/ CAMEO.SCALE.txt.

3.1 Considerations

It is appropriate to discuss the strengths and limitations of any new dataset. Its strengths include the following. First, it is by far the most historically comprehensive event dataset to date. Other day-level IR event datasets exist, such as Gary King and Will Lowe's Ten Million Events (King and Lowe, 2003), but they lack historical range, with most extending back only into the 1990s.[13] IR datasets with great historical range do exist, such as the Militarized Interstate Dispute project (Ghosn, Palmer and Bremer, 2004), but they are censored in the sense that they only contain violent conflicts. This is the first dataset that permits comprehensive study of cooperation and conflict in American foreign policy over 1945-2010. In particular, the verbal and cooperative aspects of international relations remain seriously understudied.

Second, introducing topic classification to event data has a number of advantages—first among them, eliminating non-random biases. Existing event datasets have done an insufficient amount to eliminate duplicate and especially irrelevant articles. I find that when sports articles are included, annual material conflict counts are slightly higher, but annual CAMEO conflict scale averages are way off, as shown in Figures 8 and 9. Other event data scientists have pointed to the problem of sports articles before, but this analysis highlights the tremendous bias they introduce to conflict scale averages. Keyword searches to eliminate sports articles—occasionally but not always used in the event data field—do not perform nearly as well as classification. Other topic labels—such as cultural activities—can also eliminate several common problems in event data. For example, World War II commemorations often appear in event datasets as annual military conflict between the United States and Japan. Picking up on words like "parade," "honor," and "veterans,"

[13] DARPA's Integrated Conflict Early Warning System (ICEWS) covers 1998-2010 and focuses on Asia; the Kansas Event Data System (KEDS) covers 1979-2011 but uses a dated ontology and focuses on the Middle East. There are several event datasets of political violence, but these too date generally from the 1990s, except for the Global Terrorism Database which covers 1970-2010 and Uppsal Conflict Data Program and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (UCDP/PRIO) dataset on political instability covering 1946-2011.

classification notes these articles as cultural and deletes them from the corpus.[14] Failing to exclude these events inflates conflict records, as shown in Figures 8 and 9 in the appendix. And obviously, a wide range of scholars have pointed out that states face different incentives for cooperation and conflict in high and low politics.

The American Diplomacy Dataset faces several limitations. First, it is single source. The *New York Times* is an American newspaper; if reporters have a pro-US bias, they may report US cooperation more and foreign cooperation less. Second, because of how the *New York Times* has digitized articles, the American Diplomacy Dataset is most useful for the post-World War II era. Many pre-1945 articles were digitized as abstracts rather than full articles. Because of the abbreviated language used in the abstracts, the TABARI software has difficulty identifying grammatical structures. As such, fewer events are extracted from pre-1945 text. For the purposes of this study, this is irrelevant because my explanatory and control variables start in 1945; however, future analyses of the American Diplomacy Dataset should bear this in mind. Third, journalists may focus on attention-grabbing high politics more than mundane economic dealmaking. Below, I find that American diplomats engage more frequently in political-military affairs than economic affairs, but this may reflect journalists' preference for covering the former rather than the latter.

Finally, the American Diplomacy Dataset does not record secret diplomacy or covert operations that are later disclosed as historically important. For example, in the US-Iran case study below, it appears that nothing hostile occurred in the relationship prior to the hostage crisis, while in fact, the CIA overturned the Mossadegh regime in the 1950s. Because the press was not aware of this, this hostility is not in the dataset. Scholars should bear in mind that the American Diplomacy Dataset records only what the press knows in the present, not retrospectively. Finally, several studies have addressed the general limitations of text as data; analyses of the Global Diplomacy Dataset should be aware of these as well

[14] On both these problems, see Schrodt (2012*b*, 554).

(Grimmer and Stewart, 2013; Schrodt, 2012*b*; Schrodt and Brackle, 2013).

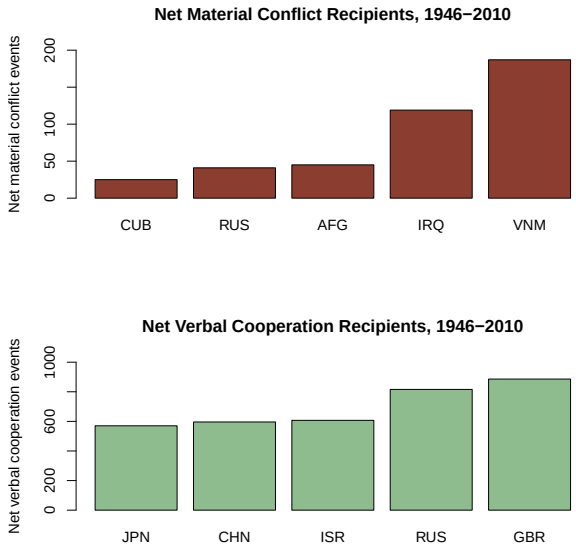
3.2 A Descriptive Exploration

In this section I descriptively introduce the American Diplomacy Dataset in order to demonstrate its face validity with the historical record of US foreign policy. The data show that American aggression is directed at traditional adversaries, while American cooperation is directed at friends and rivals alike. Verbal diplomacy is far more prevalent than material diplomacy. And finally, the *New York Times* reports that American diplomats engage more frequently with high politics than low.

Figure 1 shows the top five targets of American aggression and cooperation over 1946-2010. The top panel shows the countries toward which the United States launched the most net material conflict, measured as the number of conflictual events less the number of cooperative events. Here we find traditional American adversaries: Vietnam, followed by Iraq, Afghanistan, Russia, and Cuba. The bottom panel shows the top recipients of net American verbal cooperation, measured as the number of cooperative events less the number of conflictual events. Here three of America's primary allies appear: Great Britain, Israel, and Japan. So too do competitors, China and Russia. While material conflict targets traditional foes, verbal initiatives target both friends and rivals.

Figure 2 shows four event history case studies: US diplomacy toward Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and China since 1945. The Afghanistan case is simplest. The United States barely interacted with Afghanistan until the Soviet invasion in 1979, when verbal diplomacy rose. Verbal diplomacy rose again in 1989 when the Soviet Union withdrew, drawing US praise. Engagement spiked with the US invasion in 2001—both material conflict and verbal cooperation. This is consonant with the widely observed burstiness of event data: during Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, for example, both conflict and cooperation soar, because the frequency of interactions of all types skyrockets (Schrodt and Gerner, 2004; Clark, Nordstrom

Figure 1: Net US Diplomatic Interactions with Main Parters, 1946-2010



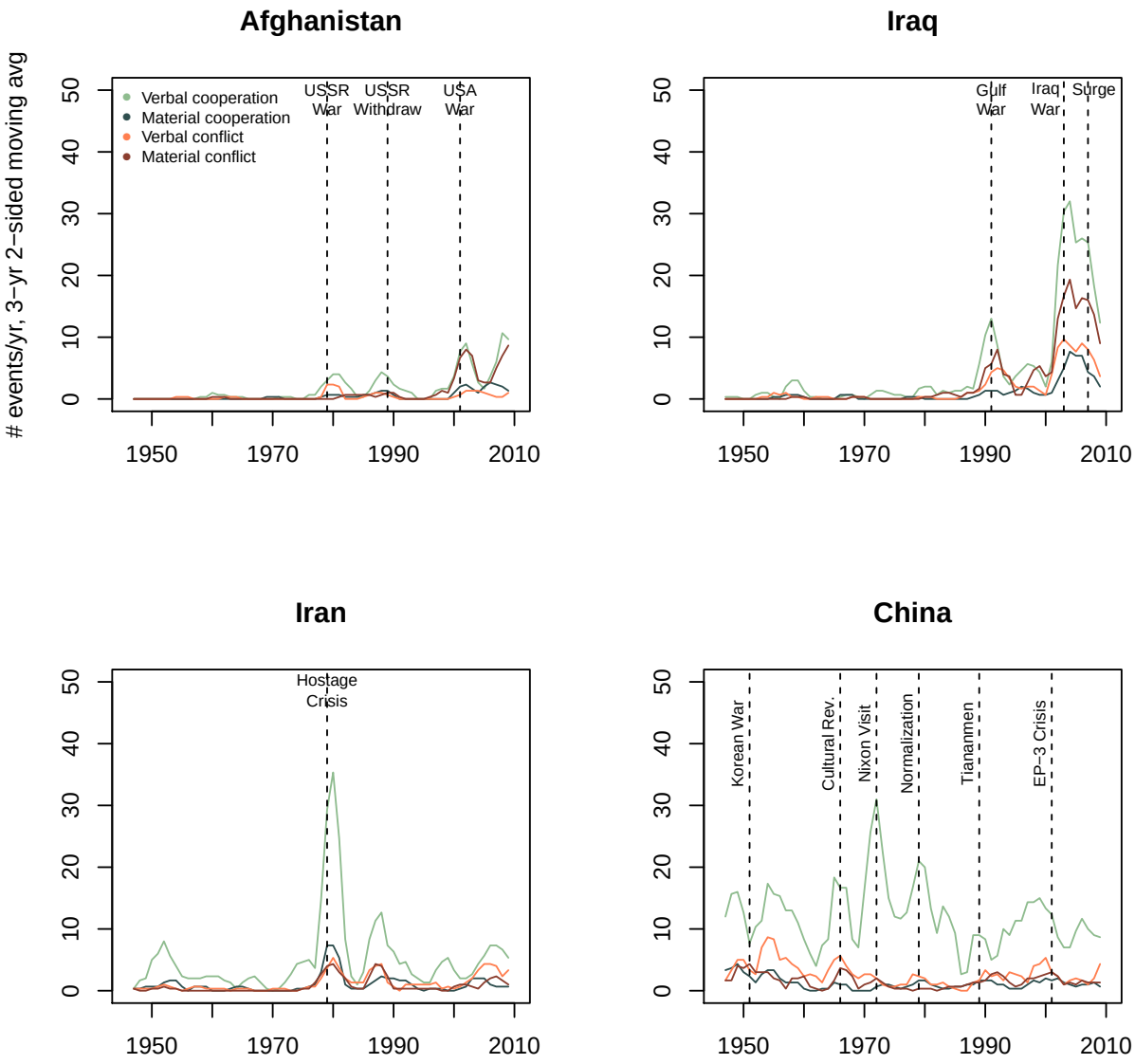
and Reed, 2008, 772; Goldstein and Freeman, 1990).

US actions toward Iraq also comport with the historical narrative. The United States interacted very little with Iraq on any metric until the first Gulf War, when material conflict spiked. Conflict peaked with the 2003 invasion, again with the surge, and fell in the late 2000s as the United States withdrew.

The US-Iran event history also lends credence to the project. The relationship spiked in intensity during the 1980-1981 hostage crisis. During the crisis, material and verbal conflict rose to all time highs. However, there was also much verbal cooperation, reflecting President Carter's attempts to solve the crisis diplomatically.

A final test is presented for a more complicated relationship: US-China relations. Here, too, the data tell a familiar story. US conflict initiation toward China was highest during the Korean War. Conflict initiation rose again during the Cultural Revolution, presumably as a response to anti-imperialist propaganda. Verbal cooperation skyrocketed during the move toward normalization in the 1970s, reaching a global maximum during Nixon's 1972

Figure 2: US Diplomacy Toward Four Countries



visit and rising again with normalization in 1979. After the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, verbal cooperation fell nearly to zero. It rose in the next decade as Presidents Bush and Clinton sought to repair the relationship. Cooperation fell in the early 2000s, reflective of the cooling in relations due to the EP-3 spy plane collision crisis and China's criticism of the Iraq war. Overall, these four event histories suggest that the American Diplomacy Dataset accurately captures dyadic conflicts, crises, and charm offensives.

The dataset also captures monadic trends well. As shown in Figure 3, post-World War II American diplomacy is characterized by heightened engagement of all forms during the Vietnam War, a gradual decline thereafter, and increased engagement—particularly conflictual engagement—after 9/11. Verbal cooperation is by far the most prevalent mode of international action—at least twice as common as the next most common event type, verbal conflict. Material and verbal conflict track each other closely, though verbal conflict is more common than material conflict. In the trend lines shown with 5 year moving averages, material conflict was only more common than verbal conflict twice: during the height of the Vietnam War, and after 9/11. Material cooperation is least common of all.

And finally, there are differences in the topic of diplomacy. As shown in Figure 4, American diplomats more frequently engage in high politics than low. The proportion of activity devoted to each has remained fairly constant since 1945. However, readers should note the tendency of journalists to cover high politics more frequently than low politics; this is a source of potential bias.

4 Empirics

This section tests the hypotheses outlined above about the relationships between US unemployment, hostile foreign policy rhetoric, and presidential job approval. Section 4.1 introduces the explanatory and control variables. Section 4.2 models the relationships between

Figure 3: US Diplomacy Toward World

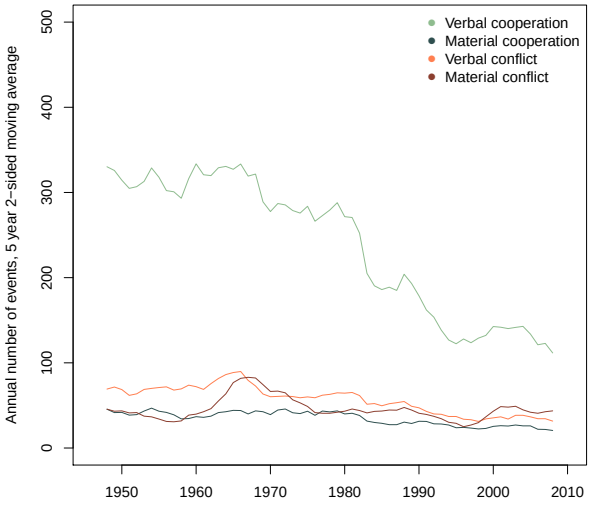
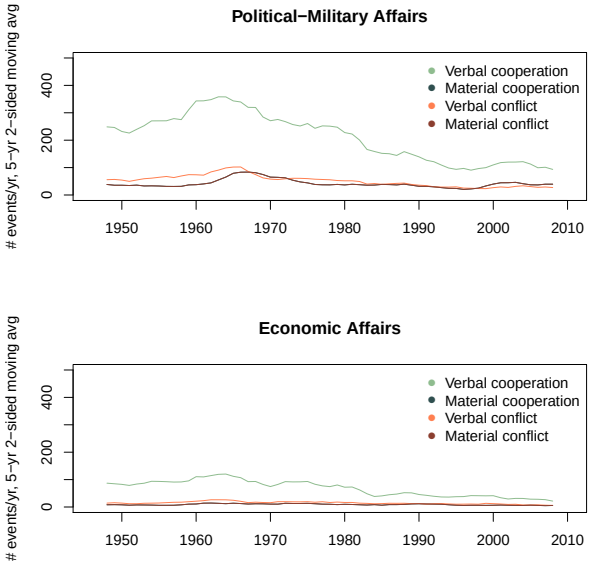


Figure 4: US Diplomacy Toward World (By Topic)



unemployment, hostile foreign policy rhetoric, and presidential job approval in a monthly setting with administration fixed effects. Consistent with the theory, the rally effect is strongest among the leader's nonpartisans and hostile foreign policy rhetoric is most common when unemployment is high. Section 4.3 reviews several robustness checks, including simultaneous equation models and the inclusion of additional covariates.

4.1 Explanatory and Control Variables

The explanatory variable is the monthly seasonally adjusted domestic unemployment rate (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). I adopt the standard controls in the literature, including dummy variables for second terms, election years, and unified government (Berlemann and Enkelmann, 2012; Pickering and Kisangani, 2005, 31). To account for temporal dependence, I include lagged values of the outcome variables. I include administration fixed effects to account for unmeasured factors distinct to individual administrations that could influence their conflict behavior, such as presidential priorities or staff. Descriptive statistics appear in Table 7 in the appendix.

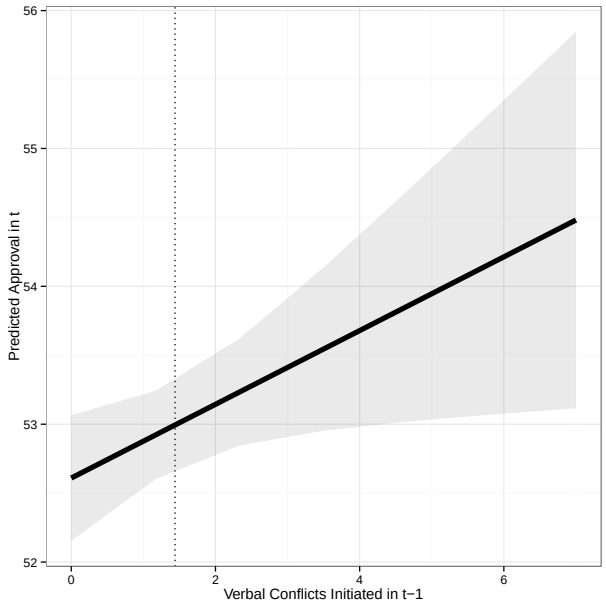
4.2 Analysis

First, I establish that US presidents face an incentive to engage in hostile foreign policy rhetoric. I estimate the relationship between the number of verbal conflicts in month $t-1$ and presidential approval ratings in t with ordinary least squares regression.[15] Results appear in Table 1. Model (1) shows that hostile foreign policy rhetoric in $t-1$ is associated with higher approval ratings in t. Model (2) shows that the effect is almost twice as large when rhetoric targets traditional American adversaries. Model (3) reports results without administration effects; the effect of hostile foreign policy rhetoric remains constant. This model is used

[15]The approval rating indicates the fraction of respondents answering "approve" to the question, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way [first & last name] is handling his job as President?" (Gallup, 2013).

to simulate the effect of moving from the minimum number of verbal conflicts directed at adversaries in the sample to the maximum, holding other variables at their means. Predicted approval at different levels of hostile foreign policy rhetoric is shown in Figure 5. The dotted line indicates the average amount of hostile rhetoric targeting adversaries each month. Moving from 0 to 7 episodes of rhetoric toward adversaries in a month increases public approval by two percentage points.

Figure 5: Hostile Foreign Policy Rhetoric and Presidential Approval



Across all models, material dispute initiation has little effect on approval ratings. This corresponds with mixed empirical findings in the diversionary war literature.

Table 2 explores who rallies. Diversionary cheap talk is most effective in increasing approval ratings among the president's nonpartisans. For Democrats, hostile foreign policy rhetoric increases approval ratings among Independents. For Republicans, it increases approval ratings among Independents and Democrats. In short, cueing national identity is most effective in increasing support among voters who do not share partisan identification with the leader.

Table 1: Hostile Foreign Policy Rhetoric and Presidential Approval

	Dependent variable:		
	Presidential Approval		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Approval_{t-1}	0.883^{***}	0.901^{***}	0.939^{***}
	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.013)
$\text{Verbal conflict}_{t-1}$	0.148^{**}		
	(0.074)		
$\text{Verbal conflict}{\rightarrow}\text{adversaries}_{t-1}$		0.250^{**}	0.267^{**}
		(0.123)	(0.121)
$\text{Material conflict}_{t-1}$	0.018	0.038	-0.009
	(0.073)	(0.069)	(0.063)
$\text{Unemployment}_{t-1}$	-0.612^{***}	-0.469^{**}	-0.046
	(0.196)	(0.190)	(0.103)
Second term_{t-1}	-1.635^{***}	-1.133^{**}	-0.615^{*}
	(0.478)	(0.464)	(0.359)
$\text{Unified government}_{t-1}$	-1.685^{***}	-1.134^{**}	-0.961^{***}
	(0.587)	(0.572)	(0.343)
Constant	9.904^{***}	7.685^{***}	3.626^{***}
	(1.697)	(1.654)	(1.128)
Administration fixed effects	Yes	Yes	No
Observations	628	621	621
R^2	0.899	0.908	0.905
Adjusted R^2	0.896	0.905	0.904
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 2: Hostile Foreign Policy Rhetoric and Partisan Approval

	Dependent variable:					
	Democrat sample			*Republican sample*		
	D app$_t$	I app$_t$	R app$_t$	R app$_t$	I app$_t$	D app$_t$
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
D approval$_{t-1}$	0.875***					0.828***
	(0.026)					(0.026)
I approval$_{t-1}$		0.881***			0.871***	
		(0.029)			(0.024)	
R approval$_{t-1}$			0.832***	0.746***		
			(0.032)	(0.027)		
Verbal conflict→adversaries$_{t-1}$	0.113	0.466*	0.394	0.230	0.476*	0.606**
	(0.233)	(0.270)	(0.313)	(0.202)	(0.247)	(0.278)
Material conflict$_{t-1}$	−0.073	0.012	−0.008	−0.106	−0.142	−0.086
	(0.115)	(0.132)	(0.153)	(0.116)	(0.141)	(0.159)
Unemployment$_{t-1}$	0.496**	0.077	−0.228	−0.413**	−0.351	−0.606**
	(0.226)	(0.241)	(0.274)	(0.183)	(0.229)	(0.274)
Second term$_{t-1}$	−0.438	−0.351	−1.852*	−2.288***	−2.097***	−2.579***
	(0.752)	(0.876)	(1.047)	(0.576)	(0.749)	(0.887)
Unified government$_{t-1}$	−2.946***	−2.001*	−1.233	1.055	−1.815**	−3.616***
	(1.031)	(1.077)	(1.173)	(0.717)	(0.890)	(1.047)
Constant	8.759***	6.087***	6.784***	24.396***	10.052***	10.516***
	(2.167)	(2.086)	(2.077)	(2.778)	(2.465)	(2.617)
Observations	261	261	261	379	379	379
R^2	0.885	0.822	0.771	0.724	0.833	0.826
Adjusted R^2	0.882	0.817	0.766	0.720	0.830	0.824
Note:						*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3 explores when presidents bluster. Here, I employ negative binomial models because hostile foreign policy rhetoric is a count variable.[16] Unemployment is measured at month $t-2$ to avoid simultaneous cause and effect, because unemployment statistics are released the first week of the month. Model (1) shows the relationship between unemployment and hostile foreign policy rhetoric in general (that is, toward all countries) is insignificant. Model (2) shows there is a significant positive relationship between unemployment and hostile foreign policy rhetoric toward adversaries. Model (3) shows the relationship between unemployment and material dispute initiation is insignificant.

Figures 6 and 7 visualize the results based on Model (2) for Democratic and Republican administrations, respectively. These figures simulate the predicted number of hostile statements directed toward adversaries in month t based on the unemployment rate in month $t-2$, holding all other variables at their mean. Shaded bands represent 95% confidence intervals. While presidents vary considerably in their baseline propensity to employ hostile foreign policy rhetoric, all do so more in the presence of unemployment. As unemployment rises from its minimum observed value to its maximum observed value, presidents direct nearly twice as much hostile foreign policy rhetoric toward traditional adversaries.

4.3 Robustness Checks

Pickering and Kisangani (2011, 484) call for using simultaneous equations to "estimate the reciprocal relationships that exist among diversionary force and its domestic consequences." I oblige by reestimating a diversion model (in which diversion is caused by unemployment) alongside an approval model (in which approval is caused by unemployment and diversion).[17] The results are robust, as shown in Table 8 in the appendix.

[16] Outcome variables are over-dispersed but not zero inflated: only 5% of months have zero material conflicts and only 3% have zero verbal conflicts.

[17] I do not use a GMM dynamic panel estimator as Pickering and Kisangani do; this would be inappropriate as the method is designed for small T, large N panels.

Table 3: Unemployment and Hostile Foreign Policy Rhetoric

	Dependent variable:		
	Bluster$_t$	Bluster $\rightarrow$ adversaries$_t$	Dispute initiation$_t$
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Verbal conflict$_{t-1}$	0.107***		
	(0.037)		
Verbal conflict$\rightarrow$adversaries$_{t-1}$		0.084**	
		(0.037)	
Material conflict$_{t-1}$	0.034	0.017	0.108***
	(0.038)	(0.021)	(0.037)
Unemployment$_{t-2}$	0.124	0.107**	−0.117
	(0.093)	(0.051)	(0.091)
Second term$_{t-1}$	−0.361	0.055	−0.381*
	(0.229)	(0.126)	(0.226)
Election year$_{t-1}$	−0.276	−0.008	−0.459**
	(0.217)	(0.119)	(0.214)
Unified government$_{t-1}$	0.028	0.175	−0.251
	(0.302)	(0.167)	(0.298)
Constant	2.211***	0.595*	4.531***
	(0.643)	(0.353)	(0.631)
Administration fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	733	733	733
R^2	0.281	0.109	0.225
Adjusted R^2	0.264	0.088	0.208
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Figure 6: Unemployment and Hostile Foreign Policy Rhetoric (Democrats)

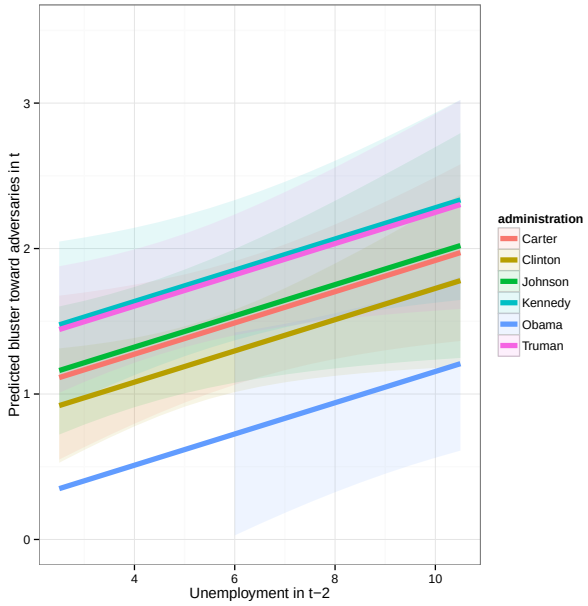
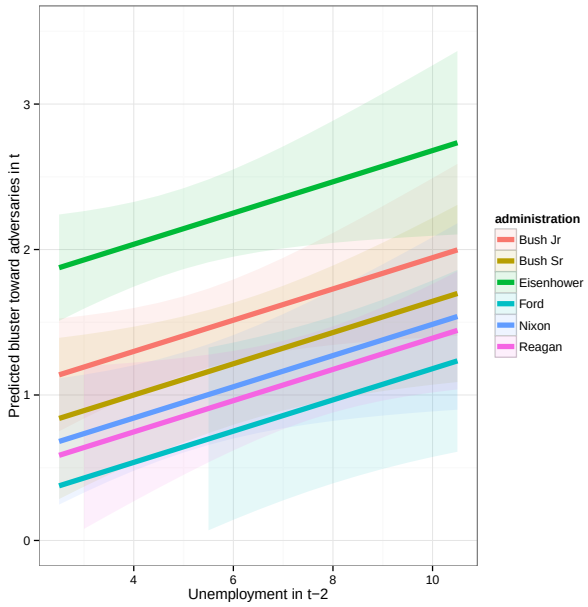


Figure 7: Unemployment and Hostile Foreign Policy Rhetoric (Republicans)



Results are also robust to including dummy variables for the *Cold War* and *Crisis Involvement*, which are standard in the literature but which are proxied here with administration fixed effects and material conflict initiation. Results are also robust to employing the "misery

index" of unemployment plus inflation as the explanatory variable.

5 Conclusion

This study shows that when economic conditions deteriorate, American presidents consolidate domestic support by criticizing other countries. By cueing national identity and highlighting differences between nations, they elicit an ingroup rally that boosts their popularity. Poll data show that citizens evaluate leaders more highly after they engage in hostile foreign policy rhetoric and economic data show that leaders are more likely to engage in that rhetoric when unemployment (or the misery index) is higher. Further strengthening the notion that this behavior is strategic, leaders target traditional adversaries for hostile foreign policy rhetoric, since threatening outgroups render intergroup distinctions most stark. I find no evidence for diversion in the form of material dispute initiation. For leaders choosing between hostile rhetoric, economic reform, and international conflict to increase domestic popularity, hostile rhetoric is the least costly and risky option, even though it is a short term solution because sustained bluster invites the criticism of party elites. For American presidents, cheap talk pays.

Future research should focus on three areas. First, citizens have multiple political allegiances. The political communication literature suggests that the media is an important intermediary between elites and citizens. For example, rallies are smaller when there is elite debate surrounding a presidential action. While this study finds that presidents are able to generate rallies with rhetoric and that rallies are mediated by citizen partisanship, further research might focus on how sub- and superordinate group membership affects the acceptance of political cues from leaders in a more complex—perhaps experimental—framework. Second, there is little research on political rhetoric in less representative countries. Diversionary cheap talk is not particular to America: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hugo Chávez

won massive popularity through their anti-Americanism, for instance. Chinese policymakers bluster about the South China Sea to increase their domestic legitimacy. Scholars have devoted relatively little attention to rhetoric in international politics due, in part, to scarce data. The American Diplomacy Dataset helps address that paucity. While verbal and material behavior are theoretically and empirically distinct, they are sometimes substitutes, and the rhetorical aspects of international politics remain under-theorized and under-explored.

6 Appendix

Table 4: Classification Report

Label	Training Set Documents	Test Set Documents
Political-military	505	668,067
Economic	300	301,326
NA (sports, culture, obituaries)	195	189,818
Total	1,000	1,159,211

Figure 8: Number of Global Material Conflicts According to Different Corpora (Counts)

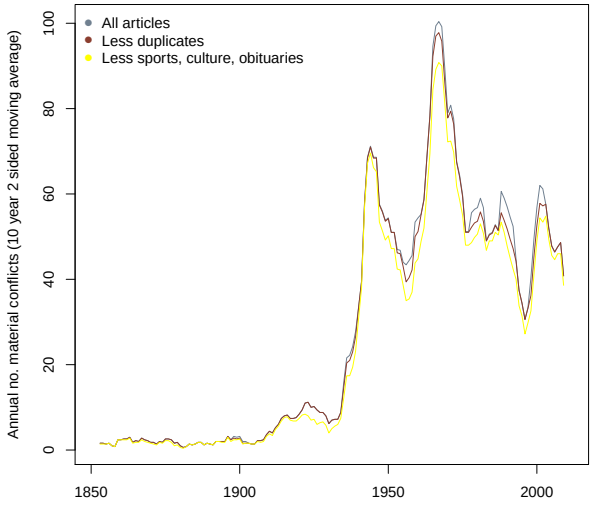


Table 5: CAMEO General Event Codes

Scale Value	Event Description	
7.0	Provide aid	Material cooperation
6.0	Engage in material cooperation	
5.0	Yield	
4.0	Express intent to cooperate	Verbal cooperation
3.5	Engage in diplomatic cooperation	
3.0	Appeal	
1.0	Consult	
0.0	Make public statement	
-2.0	Investigate	Verbal conflict
-2.0	Disapprove	
-4.0	Reject	
-5.0	Demand	
-6.0	Threaten*	
-6.5	Protest (demonstrate)	Material conflict
-7.0	Coerce	
-7.2	Exhibit force posture	
-9.0	Assault	
-10.0	Fight	
-10.0	Engage in unconventional mass violence	

* Threats are considered verbal conflict in CAMEO; I remove them from verbal conflict for theoretical reasons.

Table 6: Illustrative Events

News Story	Source	Event(s)	Target
United States trade with China this year is surging tenfold from the 1972 level. Exports to China will reach $840 million by year end while imports from China will total $60 million.	US	cooperates economically	China
Chile's military Government has named a former finance minister to negotiate with United States copper companies over compensation for property nationalized by the previous Marxist Government.	US Chile	cooperates diplomatically cooperates diplomatically	Chile US
Canada Upset Over US Investments: The Canadian Government is increasingly concerned about American corporations.	Canada	makes pessimistic comment	US
Cuba Indicates Interest in Talks If US Ends Economic Blockade.	Cuba	expresses intent to meet or negotiate	US
Iran Due to Buy 30 Jet Fighters: Total Cost of the Grumman Planes Is 900 Million... Iran has reportedly accepted a United States offer.	Iran	agrees to cooperate materially	US
Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko arrives in Washington tomorrow for the first broad Soviet American talks in nearly eight months.	US Russia	cooperates diplomatically cooperates diplomatically	Russia US
Saudi Arabia and Kuwait Give Syria Pledge on Oil Embargo... Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have given President Hafez al-Assad of Syria firm pledges to continue the oil embargo against the United States.	SA Kuwait	imposes embargo, boycott, or sanctions imposes embargo, boycott, or sanctions	US US

Figure 9: Level of Global Material Conflict According to Different Corpora (Means)

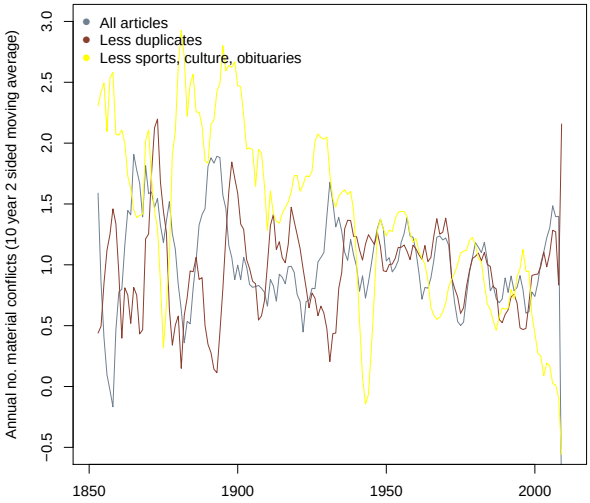


Table 7: Descriptive Statistics

	Val	Null	NA	Min	Max	Median	Mean	SD
Mean CAMEO score	772	0	35	-4.12	5.65	0.89	0.81	1.16
Verbal conflict	781	24	26	0.00	15.00	4.00	4.69	2.78
Material conflict	781	42	26	0.00	24.00	3.00	3.81	2.59
Verbal cooperation	781	10	26	0.00	67.00	19.00	19.69	9.43
Material cooperation	781	72	26	0.00	11.00	3.00	2.90	2.02
Unemployment rate	780	0	27	2.50	10.80	5.60	5.80	1.67
Consumer price inflation	791	0	16	21.48	231.75	76.90	95.88	67.79
Presidential approval rating	723	0	84	22.00	88.00	53.00	53.14	12.89
GDP growth	786	0	21	-2.18	6.12	1.56	1.62	1.15
S&P 500	672	0	135	40.33	1539.66	169.63	465.90	483.14
Democratic administration	807	432	0	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.46	0.50
Election year	807	603	0	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.25	0.43
Cold War	807	255	0	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.68	0.47
Swing vote	336	0	471	0.56	0.76	0.69	0.67	0.05
Crisis involvement	791	707	16	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.11	0.31
Unified government	807	478	0	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.41	0.49

Note: All statistics are at the monthly level. Event variables indicate the number of events in a given category per month.

Table 8: Simultaneous Equation Model of Diversion, Unemployment, and Approval for Democrats

(1) Diversion Model (DV: Verbal Conflict Initiation)	
Unemployment$_{t-1}$	0.44*
	(0.22)
Election year$_{t-1}$	-0.64.
	(0.38)
Crisis involvement$_{t-1}$	1.38**
	(0.43)
Unified government$_{t-1}$	0.14
	(-.69)
Constant	0.88
	(1.31)
No verbal conflict years t, t^2, t^3	Yes
Administration dummies	Yes
N	259
Adjusted R2	0.42
(2) Approval Model (DV: Approval Rating)	
Approval$_{t-1}$	0.84***
	(0.03)
Verbal conflict$_{t-1}$	0.20.
	(0.11)
Material conflict$_{t-1}$	0.02
	(0.10)
Δ Unemployment$_{t-1}$	-0.56
	(1.47)
Second term$_{t-1}$	-0.28
	(1.03)
Crisis involvement$_{t-1}$	1.03
	(0.79)
Unified government$_{t-1}$	-4.27***
	(1.13)
Constant	9.73***
	(1.94)
Administration dummies	Yes
N	259
Adjusted R2	0.90

Standard errors in parentheses.
The sample is limited to months in Democratic administrations.
*** p<0.01,** p<0.05,* p<0.1.

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