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The confirmation of Betsy DeVos: Polarization, populism, and moral foundations in U.S. political rhetoric

Jacob William Wrasse

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The Confirmation of Betsy DeVos:
Polarization, Populism, and Moral Foundations
in U.S. Political Rhetoric
Jacob William Wrasse

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The political communication behaviors from both the U.S. voting public and elected representatives contribute to a political discourse that is typified by hyper partisanship and extreme polarization (Hibbing, Smith, & Alford, 2013). Existing research (e.g., Feinberg & Willer, 2015; Haidt, 2012; Westen, 2007) suggested that this is potentially because U.S. Americans tend to craft persuasive messages that they themselves would find logically and morally impactful, rather than critically analyzing the positionality and belief system of their intended audience. Research on Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) suggested that, for a contemporary rhetor, understanding the moral, ontological, and ethical precepts that support their opponent's ideology is crucial to designing persuasive appeals on moral issues (Haidt, 2012). This thesis sought to identify why the U.S. citizenry has such a difficult time communicating across political lines and whether the polarization in U.S. politics is driven from the top-down by political elites or from the bottom-up by average citizens. Utilizing the Rhetoric of Social Intervention RSI model of rhetorical analysis (Brown, 1978) as an ideal umbrella under which to unite the insights of research on political polarization, rural consciousness, populism, framing, social intuitionism, and MFT, the case study analysis examined the rhetoric of elected political elites as they debated the qualifications of Betsy DeVos, a contentious nominee for U.S. cabinet secretary. This study found it is possible for political elites to engage in audience-centered persuasive attempts, even if those attempts fall on deaf ears. This thesis also suggests that the centrality of a rhetorically Burkean view of identification as being central to persuasive success is underemphasized in many explanations of U.S. political communication. While this thesis is critical of Republican rhetoric during the DeVos

hearings, this study is more focused on the interplay between the majority and minority parties in the Senate. Until the fundamentally communicative nature of the polarization problem is explored, it is unlikely that advocates and politicians will be able to break the maladaptive, conflict-laden cycle currently typifying American political rhetoric.

I. Introduction

Many observers of politics were shocked by the election of Donald J. Trump to the presidency of the United States—even, as it turned out, the candidate himself (see McCaskill, 2016). The *New York Post* described Trump’s victory as a “historic upset” (Schultz, Halper & Fredericks, 2016), and *CBS News* reported that “much of the world reacted with shock” (“World reactions,” 2016, para. 1) that Trump, who had no government experience, had suddenly become the most powerful man in the world. While “millions of other voters [were] euphoric at the election of a true political outsider as president” (Healy & Peters, 2016, para. 4), “the fact that Mr. Trump had been endorsed by a Ku Klux Klan newspaper, even if he rejected it, symbolized the sense of shock that he would now lead a vibrantly diverse democracy” (para. 15).

The New York Times reported that the surprise victory was due, in part, to three key factors: “fear of social change; fear of terrorist attacks and other physical threats; and the crisis of identity that many whites are experiencing as they struggle to maintain their position” (Taub, 2016, para. 3). Taub (2016) termed the latter “a new kind of populism—a majoritarian backlash” (para. 3), the electoral power of which the Trump campaign was particularly effective at harnessing. Trump’s populist appeals resonated deeply with white Americans whom Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton had referred to as “a basket of deplorables” (Chozick, 2016, para. 1), and Taub (2016) described as “those who now are slightly less powerful [because of] the gradual erosion of their privilege” (para. 25). Benoit (2017) put it succinctly: “No presidential election campaign in recent memory has been as divisive as 2016” (p. 244).

But race was not the only issue that won Trump the election. *Time* speculated that the “failure of liberals to address the historical roots of white working-class frustration” (Time Staff, 2016, para. 4) made Trump’s promise to bring back jobs more important than his controversial statements. Rauch (2016) further explained that the Trump candidacy, which was light on policy details and heavy on unfounded claims, gained such broad-based appeal because roughly one-third of U.S. citizens are “politiphobes” (para. 46). These low-information voters believe that political corruption prevents “commonsense solutions to the country’s problems” (para. 46) from being enacted. These conditions, combined with the deep unlikeability of both candidates (see, e.g., Benoit, 2017), proved the perfect environment for a political outsider like Trump to mount a successful populist campaign for the presidency in a system of highly polarized political rhetoric.

One major outcome of Trump’s election as President of the United States was his ability to choose cabinet officials and, of all his controversial nominees, education secretary nominee Elisabeth “Betsy” DeVos was perhaps the most polarizing. DeVos, known to some as the “four star general of the voucher movement” (Kilgore, 2016, para. 3), drew immediate criticism when her nomination was announced in November 2016. NPR described DeVos, a billionaire with financial ties to the Republican Party, as a “lightning rod for Americans’ views about public education” (Sanchez, 2017, para. 1). DeVos drew the National Education Association’s ire just hours after her nomination was announced: “Betsy DeVos has consistently worked against [the NEA’s] values, and her efforts over the years have done more to undermine public education than support students” (“NEA president reacts,” 2016, para. 4). In a cabinet that *The Washington Post*

described as “nothing less than the worst cabinet in American history” (Waldman, 2017, para. 2), DeVos’ complete lack of experience with public education combined with her blatant lack of knowledge about basic education policy made her nomination remarkable. This remarkability was enhanced by the nominee’s disfluent, unconvincing answers to senators’ questions (see Chappell, 2017). For instance, in response to a question from Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) about eliminating potential conflicts of interest, DeVos said:

Well, Senator, first of all let me be very clear about any conflicts: where conflicts are identified they will be resolved. I will not be conflicted, period. I commit that to you all, and with respect to the specific ones that you cited, uh, one of them we were aware of as we entered the process, and that is in the process of being divested. Where, if there are any others that are identified, they will be appropriately divested as well. (*Nomination of Betsy DeVos to serve as Secretary of Education*, 2017, p. 15)

DeVos’ confirmation process, which began with a hearing before the Senate’s Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and culminated with a full debate on the Senate floor, highlighted the polarization of the United States’ two primary political parties as DeVos became the first education secretary to need a vice-presidential tie-breaking vote to be confirmed 51-50. This intense showdown between Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. Senate, often called the world’s greatest deliberative body, showcased the best and worst of U.S. political communication.

United States senators are far from alone when it comes to exhibiting extreme political polarization. In 2016, the Pew Research Center found that 45% of Republicans

and 41% of Democrats said “the other party threatens the nation’s well-being” (p. 5), suggesting that political divides are perceived not only as frustrating, but also potentially dangerous. The impact of this division is felt well beyond the halls of Congress, reaching all the way to state legislatures, community meetings, public protests, and even personal decisions. In 2016, nearly half of Republicans and a third of Democrats said they’d be “deeply upset” if one of their children married someone from a different political party, a major increase in negative partisanship from views a half century ago (McConnell, Margalit, Malhotra, & Levendusky, 2017, para. 1). Furthermore, rather than communicating effectively to overcome this polarization, many people in the United States seem, instead, to become communicatively apprehensive and thereby increase the pressure on this already strained discourse. For instance, a Marquette University Law School poll (2012) found that nearly one-in-three Wisconsinites stopped talking to someone they know about politics because of the 2012 effort to recall Governor Scott Walker over his union-busting “Budget Repair Bill” (Office of Governor Scott Walker, 2011, para. 1). Issues that previously transcended ideological division, such as the value of attaining a higher education, have become hot-button issues (Fingerhut, 2017) and have resisted attempts to reach dialogic or policy solutions. In 2017, the Pew Research Center found that the number of Republicans who viewed college as a negative influence on American society increased from 37% in 2015 to 58% (Fingerhut, 2017, para. 3). These trends, combined with a seeming inability to discuss polarizing political issues, could, at best, identify a shortcoming in our communication behaviors of the U.S. social system or, at worst, represent a threat to its survival as a democracy.

Even as ideological divides sharpen and impact the daily lives of U.S. Americans, scholars remain split on the source of increasing political animosity. Some scholars of political science indicate the increasingly polarized rhetoric of partisan elites as the cause of this national trend (e.g., Abramowitz, 2013; Neiheisel, 2016), while others point to “polarization and fragmentation” of media (e.g., Diehl, Weeks, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2016, p. 1890), regionality (e.g., Cramer, 2016; Peterson, 2007), or reliance on outmoded theories of political participation leading to government dysfunction (e.g., Rauch & Wittes, 2017). As it stands, political polarization has been linked to anti-establishment attitudes (Serazio, 2016) and the rise in populist politics (Maddalena, 2016). While all these elements undoubtedly factor into the complex web of variables governing American political behavior, more thorough explanations of this problem can be derived from viewing the expression of political beliefs as an act of communication because conflict is performed through communication. Thus, rather than viewing polarization as the result of conflicting ideas and strategic priorities, researchers should examine the way in which these differences of opinion are communicated. A renewed focus on *how* our polarized political debate became so discordant will provide a better understanding of *why* it remains so negative. In a paper examining the divide in liberal and conservative opinions on policy relating to Israel, Hays Gries (2015) noted that “differing cultural and socioracial ideologies, and the disparate moral values that underlie them, are the major drivers of American ideological polarization” (p. 53). This assertion, combined with a communication-centered lens, leads naturally to an alternative explanation for this political discord: that messages expressing personal ideologies, which are grounded in moral beliefs, have emphasized difference and led to highly polarized discourses. These

conditions allowed Trump, with no political experience, to craft a populist message that resonated with so many voters.

Ample evidence exists to support the notion that communication behaviors driven by moral belief systems influence political discourse (see Haidt, 2001, 2007, 2012; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Koleva, Graham, Iyer, Ditto, & Haidt, 2012) and that most communicators send messages that they would find convincing without considering what would appeal to someone with an opposing ideology (see Feinberg & Willer, 2015). For example, Feinberg and Willer (2015) found that barely one-in-ten people construct persuasive political arguments in a way that is likely to appeal to their intended audience. Instead, the authors found that people “spontaneously craft messages grounded in their own sense of morality” (p. 1665) rather than moral foundations that would appeal to their audience. The ways in which liberals and conservatives frame their political conversations to differently-minded individuals can determine whether their audience is persuaded to consider a new point of view or becomes more entrenched in its existing beliefs (e.g., Arbour, 2014; Feinberg & Willer, 2015; Lakoff, 1995, 2011; Levasseur, Sawyer, & Kopacz, 2011; Wagner & Gruszczynski, 2016). The dysfunction that typifies U.S. political rhetoric is perhaps better described as *perceived* dysfunction; for some actor in this social system, sowing dysfunction in political discourse is a means to an end. If other political actors or citizens, however, are unable to communicate across political lines because of the entrenched, highly-polarized tenor of national partisan politics, the ability of a democratic citizenry to debate issues of national importance is severely inhibited. Instead, an inability to persuade people with different ideologies will lead to increasingly polarized, unproductive discourses. Until the fundamentally communicative

nature of the polarization problem is explored, it is unlikely that advocates and politicians will be able to break the maladaptive, conflict-laden cycle currently typifying U.S. political rhetoric.

The divide between political ideologies is widening and the widespread inability to communicate across differences has effects ranging from the way neighbors interact to the bills that get passed on a federal level, making it a phenomenon desperately in need of explanation and remedy. The Rhetoric of Social Intervention model (Brown, 1978, 1982, 1986, 1987) provides a lens for analyzing naming conventions, ideologies, and changes in communication environments over time. This perspective identifies interventions as attempts to shift the way people perceive situations and, when augmented by Moral Foundations Theory (see Haidt, 2012) and knowledge of rural consciousness (see Cramer, 2016), is ideally-suited to an investigation of morally-driven political rhetoric in a politically polarized epoch. By adopting this methodology, this research aims to analyze and explain political communication phenomena in the most unified, comprehensive way possible. Following this (1) introduction, this thesis (2) reviews the current state of research on political communication and moral rhetoric, (3) outlines a methodology using the Rhetoric of Social Intervention (RSI) and Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) to conduct a case study analysis of interventions surrounding Betsy DeVos's nomination as Secretary of Education, conducts an RSI and MFT analysis of Republican and Democratic rhetoric in (4) Betsy DeVos' HELP Committee hearing, (5) senators' press releases about DeVos' nomination, and (6) speeches on the Senate floor leading up to the final vote. Following this analysis, this thesis (7) interprets the findings and draws

conclusions about why U.S. Americans have such difficulty communicating across political divides.

II. Literature Review

This literature review begins by summarizing the current state of political communication and the obstacles that political agents face in affecting persuasion. Then, it examines relevant scholarship on populism, social intuitionism, Moral Foundations Theory, and framing to provide information pertinent to this thesis's methodology. Reviewing this literature provides crucial insights into contemporary scholarly thought on communication and political science, a working knowledge of which is necessary to untangle the relationship between polarization, persuasion, and popular dissatisfaction with the state of political rhetoric in the United States.

Polarization

Scholars have indicated that structural and cultural changes in the electoral process have perpetuated the polarization of U.S. political discourse. Much of this change happened during the primary partisan election cycles, which Hays Gries (2015) argued have become races to the extremes of each party's flank as a result of politically safe, gerrymandered districts:

The only challenge most incumbents face comes from potential primary challengers within their own party. As a result, the "electoral connection" today does not mean that politicians heed the opinions of their average constituent. Instead, most politicians today seek the support of their primary voters—the ideological extremes of their parties. (p. 75)

Hibbing, Smith, and Alford (2014) similarly noted that this polarization has the effect of alienating moderate or centrist candidates who cannot find support from primary voters, who tend to have more partisan bias than general election voters. Abramowitz (2013)

observed that the overwhelming majority of the partisan divide has come “from the rightward shift in the location of the average Republican” (p. 712), driven by ideological differences with Democrats over “the size of the welfare state and role of the federal government in the economy” (p. 710). The fundamental disagreement over the role of government that drives the hyper-partisan primary election cycle is one explanation many scholars identified for the difficulty that comes when attempting to persuade citizens with opposing political views (see Feinberg & Willer, 2015). Additionally, U.S. governmental institutions lack the expectation of “loyal opposition,” a British parliamentary tradition in which the minority party is obligated to faithfully hold the majority in check just as the majority respects the minority’s indispensable as a check against tyranny by a slim majority (see Webber [2017] for more on loyal opposition). These ideological and structural impediments have contributed to public dissatisfaction with the tenor of debates in Congress.

While electoral forces have undoubtedly changed the nature of political discourse, taxonomic branding may have significantly influenced the ways both parties sell themselves to their audiences (Neiheisel, 2016). For instance, Democrats have failed to embrace the “liberal” label with which Republicans assail them (Neiheisel, 2016). Although presidents such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt and John Fitzgerald Kennedy embraced the “liberal” label as a positive description, the 1964 presidential election marked a distinct demarcation in the use of this descriptor. Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater ran a campaign based on the definition of “conservative” as a counter to liberalism (Neiheisel, 2016), while President Lyndon Baines Johnson eschewed Kennedy’s embrace of the liberal identifier (Ellis & Stimson, 2009). This lack

of unifying identity for Democrats, combined with the Republican propensity for using “liberal” as a pejorative moniker, has resulted in Democrats’ inability to “make sense of the political world” (Neiheisel, 2016, p. 418) and explain themselves to prospective voters. Consequently, many conservatives don’t consider “liberalism” an ideological position that indicates serious policy positions, but rather a “lifestyle brand” identified more by “views on issues like abortion and gay rights than their views on taxes” (Nunberg, 2007, p. 61). As conservatives renamed what it meant to be a “liberal” from a *policy-driven ideology* to a *stance on social issues*, rural areas—historically slower to adapt to social changes than more heavily-populated urban areas—became even less likely to embrace liberalism. Liberals’ inability to rename themselves appears to have affected state-level Democrats as well, as only three states had state legislatures in which Democrats and Republicans shared control after the 2012 elections (Abramowitz, 2013). Republicans, conversely, have adopted neo-liberal rhetoric emphasizing the market-based language of capitalism as a grand strategy for their political communication (see Foust & Lair, 2012; Giroux, 2005; Peck, 2015; Serazio, 2016; Shin & Park, 2016). The hegemonic influence of neo-liberal Republicanism has even seeped into Democratic rhetoric, and the lack of a clear, articulated response to this conservative ideological system is one potential theme scholars have identified as a contributing factor to Republican electoral supremacy.

Understanding and tapping into the political resentment of rural voters is another way that political elites may influence political discussions or promote political divide, regardless of whether or not they sincerely represent those interests. The rural-urban divide that is often translated into red and blue areas on electoral maps has received its

share of blame for the conflicting values that drive the polarized climate, but relatively little is known about the role of rural identity in politics. While some scholarship has equated rural identity with traditional conservative tropes like “firearm ownership, ... the importance of personal responsibility, and a limited role for government” (McGinty, Wolfson, Sell, & Webster, 2016, p. 6), the equivalency of rural and conservative, however, is not the full picture. As Cramer (2016) exhibited through a series of interviews with existing social groups throughout rural and urban areas of Wisconsin, a more apt description of this rural identity is rural consciousness. Cramer (2016) describes rural consciousness as having three tenets:

- (1) a belief that rural areas are ignored by decision makers, including policy makers,
- (2) a perception that rural areas do not get their fair share of resources,
- and (3) a sense that rural folks have fundamentally distinct values and lifestyles, which are misunderstood and disrespected by city folks. (p. 12)

While identity politics typically focuses on *class* and *race*, Cramer (2016) argued that *place* must also be discussed to explain the electoral differences between rural and urban areas. Possessing rural consciousness, Cramer asserted, is a result of active sense-making rather than an effect of conservative or Republican values such as “economic injustice, place identity, class identity, race, and values” (p. 89). Though Republican policies tend to benefit corporations and wealthy individuals more so than rural individuals, Cramer (2016) found that Republicans have been more effective at “tapping into existing resentments” (p. 222) than Democrats, and have helped rural individuals blame “not affluent people, but rather, the government, the people that work for it, and urban areas that are home to liberals and people of color” (p. 222) for the discontentment. Wisconsin

Governor Scott Walker is a prime example of a politician who “tapped into the economic anxiety and dread... [and] made use of the desire for people to make sense of their world” (p. 207). This skill, per Cramer’s (2016) definition, constituted playing into a politic of resentment for political gain (see also, Hochschild, 2016; Vance, 2016).

Yet another complicating factor in the ecology of modern political communication that has promoted polarization is the advent of social media, which has greatly impacted the ability of candidates and political parties to reach potential voters with messages. Hibbing, Smith, and Alford (2014) identified a key psychological tendency that makes the volume and variety of perspectives available to social media users so problematic: media consumers on all sides of the ideological spectrum “believe the facts that support their predispositions even when they are not real facts” (p. 242). These findings support decades of research on confirmation bias and selective exposure theory, or the idea that “exposure to counterattitudinal information that produces dissonance can lead to polarization in favor of preexisting ideas” (Vraga, 2015, p. 488). Though not a new phenomenon, the effects of selective exposure have the potential to become even more virulent in the age of social media (see Westerwick, Johnson, & Knobloch-Westerwick (2017) for more on selective exposure). Social media, which provide egalitarian platforms for all “news” sources regardless of their legitimacy and rigor, have led to the deprofessionalization of news sources, fragmentation of perspectives and information, and highly-individualized randomization of previously predictable patterns of political information processing (Donsbach & Brade, 2011). Fragmentation, which most directly affects “politically interested” (p. 519) media consumers, leads to partisan “echo chambers” (p. 512) that serve more to confirm

existing biases than provide opportunities for critical engagement with political complexities.

While social media use and news consumption are potential habits that may lead to political persuasion, Diehl, Weeks, and Gil de Zúñiga (2016) found that persuasion, or the shift of political opinions as a result of exposure to political discourse, can occur only when individuals' social media networks contain "exposure to discussion disagreement" (p. 1890) rather than homogenized networks of like-minded friends and news sources. This presents a confounding variable for communication practitioners seeking to influence undecided voters or political moderates, as platforms like Facebook allow users to "unfollow" or "unfriend" users whose political views may diverge from their own. Donsbach and Brade (2015) found the result is "randomization" (p. 512), or the decreasing likelihood that social media users encounter similar, accurate sets of information. For high-potential voting blocs like young people or the politically-disinterested, who typically participate at lower rates but could make a considerable difference if activated, network homogeneity and the randomization effect have made it increasingly difficult for political operatives to reach these demographics with a single, mass message. While social media randomization has decreased these voters' openness to political persuasion by exposing them mainly to people with similar opinions, it has also provided the technology necessary to target sought after demographics with paid advertisements. The paradox of this splintered media landscape poses major challenges to political candidates and parties, while also providing them with opportunities to take advantage of the political polarization of American voters.

Populism

As the U.S. social system has become increasingly polarized politically, scholars have suggested that populism has benefitted from this rise. Scholars have noticed themes of populist rhetoric becoming highly influential in recent major campaigns (see Jutel, 2016; Maddalena, 2016; Rauch & Wittes, 2017), often accompanied by anti-establishment rhetoric (Serazio, 2016) and appeals to a grassroots sensibility (Penney, 2012). Populism, traditionally seen as the “act of articulating ‘the people’” (Jutel, 2016, p. 1132) to constitute a candidacy representative of popular interests, has evolved as a concept and in practice from the time of the American Revolution. While theoretical populism focuses on sincere representation of voters’ beliefs, the real-world application of this concept appears to have been more opportunistically applied. Rauch and Wittes (2017) identified *modern anti-institutional populism* as populist campaign rhetoric that seizes upon a public’s “instinctive suspicion of anything or anyone deemed ‘elite’” (p. 8), whether or not a candidate is a member of that same elite class or would benefit from the perpetuation of the existing power system. While *populist* candidates may represent a coalescence of popular ideological concerns and ideals, *modern anti-institutional populists* leverage popular sentiment against the current government derived from their supporters’ anti-elitism. Therefore, *populism* as a representation of the electorate’s vision for the country is separate from *modern anti-institutional populism*, which takes advantage of popular support on one issue alone—an anti-elitist mistrust of government.

Though populist, anti-establishment rhetoric may actually represent an effort by common people to undo the influence of out-of-touch politicians and bureaucrats, Serazio (2016) argued that establishment politicians sometimes employ these sentiments to attract

voters who are disillusioned with government. This strategy has been a favorite among “establishment” politicians who rebrand themselves as “outsiders” and seek to use the discontentment of voters to maintain their control over the very institutions with which their constituents are dissatisfied. As such, Serazio (2016) defined contemporary populism not as a sincere attempt to represent voters, but as “an act of co-optation.” “It appropriates an outsider image on behalf of insiders and inveighs against power concentrated in the Capitol while eliding any response to power that might be concentrated in capital” (p. 181). This cynical understanding of populism as “rhetorical manipulations by hegemonic forces” (p. 181-182) recasts candidates ranging from former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich to former Texas governor Rick Perry—who have strategically critiqued the “powers that be”—as opportunistic by pointing out they neglect to acknowledge their own agency in the present power structure. This is what Rauch and Wittes (2017) would call *modern anti-institutional populism*.

Another set of factors impacting a polarized audience’s susceptibility to political persuasion are its levels of education and information consumption. Johansen and Joslyn (2008) noted that “more educated people... call upon many sources of information and possess a greater mass of stored information that can be utilized to question and counter new information” (p. 592), making them “less likely to be persuaded” (p. 592) by propaganda. Constituencies lacking a strong educational background are more vulnerable to manipulation, because they are less likely to research political claims they hear and routinely encounter fewer sources of information (Arthos, 2013). Such audiences have included ethno-centric Europeans fearful of increased immigration (Maddalena, 2016) and disaffected white Americans, typically without college degrees, who supported

Trump's candidacy for president (see Carnes & Lupu, 2017). Though these populations are more the subjects of changing circumstances than they are of systematic oppression, Freire (1968/2000) noted that, "conditioned by the experience of oppressing others, any situation other than their former seems to them like oppression" (p. 57).

Regardless of whether or not candidates for office self-identify as populists, scholars have found that most candidates often try to create the sense that theirs is a grassroots movement, which could be considered a form of support for their persuasive credibility. Penney (2012) explained that the proliferation of political campaign materials that can be worn or displayed on bodies is an attempt to signify a grassroots movement is at play. By turning their bodies into "body-texts" (p. 2324), campaign supporters put a face and physical presence to the ideas embodied in a campaign. When populist campaign symbols are featured prominently at campaign rallies and media coverage of events, outsiders are left with the perception that the ideas represented by the candidate or organization are ubiquitous throughout the culture (Penney, 2012).

Scholarly research has also indicated that populist politicians gain considerable persuasive power by striking a chord with the intended audience and creating the illusion of sameness between candidate and voter. Donsbach and Brade (2011) explained that "the four main factors leading to political judgments—party identification, issues, candidate images, and moods—has shifted toward the latter. More and more ad hoc judgments based, often unconsciously, on these subtle cues—are pivotal in this process" (p. 513). Westen (2007) concurred, noting that many modern campaigns—particularly by Democratic candidates—conceptualize the process of political persuasion as one taking place in a "dispassionate mind that makes decisions by weighing the evidence and

reasoning to the most valid conclusions” despite the fact that this “bears no relation to how the mind and brain actually work” (p. ix). Rather, Kim, Rao, and Lee (2009) found that message orientation, or the degree to which a candidate explained issues in a way similar to how audiences thought of the issues, played a greater role in whether or not the intended audiences successfully received messages than did the quality of argumentation or facts presented. Candidates and organizations whose messages best matched the orientation of the audience toward the issues created “fluency” in the audience’s minds, which “leads to a sense of ‘feeling right’” (p. 879), giving an advantage to candidates who carefully attend to communication best practices when designing persuasive messages. A politician with broad appeal, whose messages match the message orientation of their audiences and send signals that can be interpreted positively by multiple audiences, stands at a distinct advantage in the modern era. Westen (2007) acknowledged the highly subjective nature of reality, and indicated that rhetors sending political messages should recognize this simple fact as they approach their audiences:

You can slog it out for those few millimeters of cerebral turf that process facts, figures, and policy statements. Or you can take your campaign to the broader neural electorate, collecting delegates throughout the brain and targeting different emotional states with messages designed to maximize their appeal. (p. 88)

In other words, candidates that establish an emotional connection with their audience before attempting to convince them with evidence and data are more likely to have their messages received than those who jump straight to facts.

While implementing evidence-driven reforms may increase the likelihood of politically persuasive messages being received as intended, some scholars have argued

that invoking populism and increasing voter participation should not be the primary “ends” sought by contemporary politicians hoping to improve political systems. Rauch and Wittes (2017) argued that the folk theory of democracy, which states that “more public involvement will produce more representative and thus more effective and legitimate governance” (p. 3), is a widely held belief on both sides of the political spectrum. What many well-intentioned proponents of democratic participation miss, they argue, is that the folk theory “has a deep tendency to disappoint in practice” (p. 3). And, when elections do not go as party elites expect them to, the response is often to double-down on the idea that more participation would have yielded a different result. However, the “paradox of populism” (p. 12) is that “decades of reforms that emphasize individualism at the expense of institutions have had the paradoxical effect of heightening partisanship while weakening parties, a recipe for polarization and chaos” (p. 12). By deemphasizing the importance of political professionals, like policy experts, career bureaucrats, and party organizations, major policy decisions are left in the hands of politicians in the midst of a perpetual reelection cycle without the time or expertise to adequately comprehend the complexities of the work at hand (Rauch & Wittes, 2017; Serazio, 2016; Tonon, 2008). To compensate for this inability to learn the nuances of all policy proposals that cross their desks, Tonon (2008) argued that representatives should “hire policy analysts... request assistance from the permanent staff of their committees, or... call upon any number of bureaucratic agencies to provide information” (p. 278). This argument echoes Meltsner (1976), who reasoned that policy analysts were a necessity for representative democracy, which faces perpetual turnover as a result of staggered election cycles, but these ‘establishment bureaucrats’ are often demonized by

populist candidates as one reason Washington and state capitols are dysfunctional. As a result, Rauch and Wittes (2017) found that the administrative state has been weakened in favor of the policy opinions of “rationally ignorant” voters who have no reason to fully comprehend the complexities of legislative policies. The answer they proposed is to cease the demonization and neglect of “intermediation by professionals, experts, and institutions” (p. 13) and reinject the knowledge that politics requires a level of experience and institutional memory to adequately represent the voters in public discussion.

Though a host of factors have been found to affect the quality of political discourse in the United States, one constant has become clear: communication. To understand the nature of polarized political discourse in America, all the existing scholarship points to the communication-mediated nature of political ideologies as paramount. Whether it is the nature and quality of news that consumers rely on (Donsbach & Brade, 2011; Johansen & Joslyn, 2008), the names that ideologies ascribed to themselves (Neiheisel, 2016), or the ways in which professional bureaucrats and analysts were demonized (Rauch & Wittes, 2017), it is clear that political persuasion is affected by considerably more variables than which politicians present the best facts. To better understand the factors that impact political persuasion, the next section will examine the traditional methods of explaining how and why humans respond to some messages better than others.

Framing, Social Intuitionism, and Moral Foundations

Having established the current state of scholarly research on political persuasion and populism, the next step toward understanding why Americans have such difficulty communicating about contentious political issues comes from analyzing the cognitive and

linguistic factors that make some messages more appealing than others. To accomplish this goal, this section will examine three different perspectives on message effectiveness that will contribute to interpretation of the communication behaviors in the case study. Beginning with its modern roots in framing, this section is a chronological examination of the social intuitionist perspective on affective decision making, Moral Foundations Theory, and the explanations for political behavior they provide.

The concept of framing has had considerable utility in multiple disciplines, but the communication and social psychology perspectives have proven most useful for maximizing the effectiveness of political persuasion. Hallahan (1999) noted that framing is a “rich and useful concept,” but “[its] meaning...varies based on the research question” (p. 209) and discipline, and therefore requires better operationalization. Entman (1993) further remarked upon the “fractured paradigm” (p. 51) of framing, but provided a specific definition that is useful for this research: “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52). In short, Entman (1993) depicted framing as the process of defining the scope of a problem, selecting related information, and increasing that information’s salience in the mind of an audience. Lakoff (1995) applied such a practice of framing to the discursive practices of Democrats and Republicans and identified the predominant metaphors employed by each party. Republicans, whose foundation emphasized “moral strength” and a good-versus-evil view of the world, follow the “Strict Father Model” (p. 191), according to Lakoff. This perspective frames the world as a dangerous place and depicts a family wherein the “father has the primary responsibility

for setting overall family policy” because he “support[s] his family and protect[s] it from evils” (p. 191). Lakoff (1995) acknowledged that this is a paternalistic paradigm that emphasizes respect for authority, hierarchal communication with a high power distance, and an emphasis on shared moral values. Ideas that threaten this conceptualization of the world in this good-versus-evil framework are inherently evil, and “the metaphor entails that one cannot respect the views of one’s adversary: Evil does not deserve respect; it deserves to be attacked!” (p. 186). Conversely, the Democrats’ metaphor follows “The Nurturant Parent Model,” which emphasizes “being cared for and cared about, having one’s desires for loving interactions met, living as happily as possible, and deriving meaning from one’s community and from caring for and about others” (Lakoff, 1995, p. 197). This model, which focuses on emotional health and growth, stands in stark contrast to the strict conservative frame. The primary strength of Lakoff’s (1995) identification of liberal and conservative frames was in its illustrative capacity and focus on metaphor:

Liberals are less insightful than conservatives at recognizing that morality and the family lie at the center of their political universe. The cost to liberals has been enormous. Where conservatives have organized effectively in a unified way to promote all their values, liberals misunderstood their politics as being about coalitions of interest groups and so have remained divided and unable to compete effectively with conservatives. (p. 202)

Lakoff’s (1995) assertion that liberals are less adept at presenting their ideology in a unified, understandable way mirrors Neiheisel’s (2016) contention that Democrats have been unable to rebrand themselves after conservatives began using “liberal” as a

pejorative term, and it also suggests that this situation can be improved by consciously altering the party's linguistic and communicative behavior.

Framing has provided a key language for dissecting political rhetoric and helped reify some existing hypotheses on political rhetoric. Arbour (2014) used framing to identify key "issue frames" (p. 604) used by each party that were influenced by the "partisanship of the candidate and the partisanship of the voters" (p. 605). For instance, this research found that both parties emphasize jobs in their public discourse, but Democrats "tie their argument to tax policy, decrying tax breaks given to companies that send jobs overseas" while Republicans are "much more locally focused, as they talk about keeping jobs 'here'" (p. 614) and policies that could accomplish that goal. A similar division of focus between Democrats and Republicans was found on issues ranging from healthcare and terrorism to energy and immigration. These findings bolstered Simon and Jerit's (2007) assertion that each party's "elites use distinctive vocabularies when advancing their political agenda" (p. 265) (see also, Domke et al. (2000) on source cues). Similarly and like Westen's (2007) critique of Democrats' fondness for the "dispassionate mind" (p. ix) theory, Lakoff (2011) used framing analysis to assert that Democrats' metaphor for the world did not adequately match the moral strength of the Republicans' perspective:

Liberals tend to believe that if they just tell people the facts about their policies, the public will reach the right conclusion. It doesn't work like that. The result is that conservative morally-based communications are more effective in changing brains than are liberal policy-based communications. Conservatives have built a wondrous framing and communication system, but progressives have not. (p. 185)

The functional importance of this observation was portrayed in McGinty et al.'s (2016) analysis of rhetoric supporting universal background checks for firearms purchases, which found that “while proponents of universal background checks used fact-based messages in support of the policy, opponents often used rights-based messages designed to activate the core values of politically active gun owners and conservatives” (p. 33). Though useful to the extent that it helped identify divergent frames in action, Pinker argued—in a series of rejoinders and responses with Lakoff—that Lakoff’s reliance on metaphor as a foundational element of framing represented “dubious” brain science (Pinker & Lakoff, 2007, p. 60). “The implication that frames, by being ‘physically fixed’ in the brain, are especially insidious or hard to change is gratuitous” (p. 60), Pinker argued, indicating that Lakoff’s model may explain the “what” of framing with regard to political rhetoric, but failed to adequately explain the “why” and “how” in satisfactory terms.

The application of the social intuitionist perspective to the study of political rhetoric helped fill in the gaps left by framing while also adding psychological validity to the claims of communication theories on naming. The increased prevalence of this viewpoint has been driven in larger part by Jonathan Haidt in a series of publications and co-authored works over the past 20 years. Haidt (2001) addressed the history of theories on reasoning before making the case for the social intuitionist perspective. For much of psychological and communicative history, scholars have posited that humans reach decisions on moral matters through a process of conscious reasoning; that is, weighing the facts and information before making a decision. Haidt (2001) argued that research on heuristic processing and focus groups suggests otherwise, as he wrote that “moral

judgment is caused by quick moral intuitions and is followed (when needed) by slow, ex post facto moral reasoning” (p. 817). A moral intuition “can be defined as the sudden appearance in consciousness of a moral judgment, including an affective valence (good-bad, like-dislike), without any conscious awareness of having gone through steps of searching, weighing evidence, or inferring a conclusion” (p. 818). Moral reasoning, conversely, is a conscious process that only occurs when it is necessary to back up the conclusion of a moral intuition. Haidt (2001) illustrated this idea with the metaphor of “the emotional dog and its rational tail” (p. 814). The “emotional dog” represents human reactions to most situations: they are automatic, based on instantaneous reactions to stimuli. The tail, conversely, represents the minority of times when humans engage in conscious, rational reasoning processes. A rhetor pitching an argument to their audience based on the assumption that they will be convinced by rational arguments and statistics is tantamount to expecting the tail to “wag-the-dog” (p. 823). Rather, to be successful, the social intuitionist model proposed that the rhetor must first elicit a positive emotional response before the dog would wag its tail. In a later book on the subject, Haidt (2012) applied this same concept to the metaphor of an elephant and its rider; attempts to convince the rational rider with logic are no good if you have angered the emotional elephant.

In Haidt’s studies, humans seem to make post-hoc rationalizations for their moral intuitions when they are asked to explain why they made one decision over another. In his research, Haidt (2001) found that people “cite factors that could not have mattered” (p. 822) in explaining their decision making processes. These conclusions, rather, come from “a priori moral theories” or “a pool of culturally supplied norms for evaluating and

criticizing the behavior of others” (p. 822) through which we name experiences. Instead of recognizing their arguments as rationalizations for moral intuitions, based on little more than a feeling, Haidt (2001) argued that respondents act as attorneys and reverse-engineer a case that sounds convincing. Political communication has offered multiple explanations for the reasons voters support candidates whose policy positions do not best represent the voters’ interests. When viewed within the context of social intuitionist theories about moral decision making, Maddalena’s (2016) assertion that a leader seems reputable when “you feel that she is right insofar as she is sincere and makes you feel cared for” (p. 249) takes on an additional layer of meaning. If “feeling right” is as important as this research suggests, an application of the social intuitionist perspective indicates that such political maneuvers may be successful, at least in part, because they cater to the brain’s predisposition toward making snap judgements based on “momentary flashes of feeling” (Haidt, 2001, p. 825). This research aligns with Stephen Colbert’s concept of “truthiness,” which began as a joke on his satirical television show and later became Merriam-Webster’s 2006 word of the year (Lakoff, 2017). Truthiness is “the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true,” which Lakoff (2017) argued is “very much in competition with ‘truth’” (p. 604). Therefore, the rhetor who not only matches the communication “orientation” (Kim et al., 2009, p. 879) of their audience but also designs messages that appeal to the audience’s moral predilections are more likely to be received favorably, providing political communication practitioners and scholars with a new tool for evaluating message effectiveness (see also, Westen [2007] on heuristics).

The renaissance of social intuitionism provided the basis for Moral Foundations Theory (MFT), which formalized an understanding of the symbolically-constituted major moral precepts through which human beings filter their experience. Haidt and Joseph (2004) asserted that “human beings come equipped with an intuitive ethics, an innate preparedness to feel flashes of approval or disapproval toward certain patterns of events involving other human beings” (p. 56). These “flashes of affect” (Haidt & Joseph, 2004, p. 63) are the natural and automatic response to situations for which communication scripts and narratives are often invoked, and they are particularly influential when dealing with morally-charged situations. Intuitive ethics are formed mostly in childhood, and developed throughout humanity as an evolutionary response to living in a dangerous world. Haidt and Graham (2007) refined Haidt and Joseph’s (2004) findings and identified five major foundations upon which moral beliefs are constructed: *harm/care*, *fairness/reciprocity*, *ingroup/loyalty*, *authority/respect*, and *purity/sanctity*. Research has found that political liberals react instinctively to moral messages that utilize the *harm/care* and *fairness/reciprocity* foundations, whereas conservatives are affected by all five elements (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2007; Haidt & Graham, 2007). As a result, Haidt and Graham (2007) argued that conservatives have moral “motivations that liberals may not recognize as moral at all” (p. 103). This research inherently suggested that designing an effective appeal to an opponent—or anyone, for that matter—begins with identifying the moral foundation(s) upon which their belief rests.

Successful persuasion in the current era of political communication should consider the moral foundations held by the intended audience, as liberal non-recognition of conservative moral issues may serve only to further inflame differences. For instance,

Haidt and Graham (2007) illustrated how liberal defenses of diversity under the *fairness/equality* foundation may alienate conservatives who hold fast to the symbolically-constituted virtues of the *ingroup/loyalty* foundation:

Most cultures therefore have constructed virtues such as loyalty, patriotism, and heroism (usually a masculine virtue expressed in defense of the group). From this point of view, it is hard to see why diversity should be celebrated and increased, while rituals that strengthen group solidarity (such as a pledge of allegiance to the national flag) should be challenged in court. According to ingroup-based moralities, dissent is not patriotic (as some American bumper-stickers suggest); rather, criticizing one's ingroup while it is engaged in an armed conflict with another group is betrayal or even treason. (p. 105)

Similar analyses can be performed for each of the three moral foundations that conservatives hold and liberals are less likely to view as moral (*ingroup/loyalty*, *authority/respect*, and *purity/sanctity*). Haidt and Graham (2007) hypothesized that moral concerns over purity, which can manifest as racism, discrimination, or intolerance, "can be traced to a purity module evolved to deal with the adaptive challenges of life in a world full of dangerous microbes and parasites" (p. 60). The negative flash of affect associated with racism, therefore, could be understood not as merely a dislike or preference but a reaction based on purity that "trigger[s] flashes of disgust at the 'dirtiness' of certain groups" (p. 63). The idea that racism, bigotry, and homophobia may be an automatic response to an evolutionarily-developed desire to preserve the self and one's ingroup from out-group threats recontextualizes the assumptions of persuasive appeals that seek to change those beliefs. With this in mind, Hibbing et al. (2014)

encouraged their readers to recognize that “the main reason your political opponents hold the views they do is not laziness, a lack of information, or willfully bad judgment, but rather physiological and psychological contours that are fundamentally different from yours” (p. 255). Haidt and Graham’s (2007) assertion that liberals do not recognize all of the conservative foundations—*ingroup/loyalty*, *authority/respect*, and *purity/sanctity*—provided support for this claim.

Weber and Federico (2013) furthered this understanding of partisan moral tendencies when they noted that libertarians “more closely resemble the issue positions of liberals” (p. 121), causing a reexamination of how these foundations develop. Weber and Federico’s (2013) observation supported Haidt and Graham’s (2007) contention that liberal and libertarian foundations evolved from the “ethic of autonomy” (p. 102), which Haidt (2012) called the liberty model, a potential sixth foundation. Conservatives, on the other hand, possess a morality that came from the ethics of “community” (p. 102) and “divinity” (p. 103). The autonomy ethic assumes the moral world is “made up exclusively of individual human beings” (p. 102), and therefore identifies behaviors as “moral” if they enhance individual freedoms. Inversely, the ethics of community and divinity identify moral behaviors as those which protect the integrity of longstanding institutions, whether corporate, familial, or religious. The ethics of community and divinity undergird the final three moral foundations (*ingroup/loyalty*, *authority/respect*, and *purity/sanctity*) which therefore identify “duty, respect, loyalty, and interdependence” as virtues (p. 102). Research on MFT suggested that, for a contemporary rhetor, understanding the moral, ontological, and ethical precepts that support their opponent’s ideology is crucial to designing persuasive appeals on moral issues.

After a review of literature on the communicative and scientific behaviors that demonstrate the instantaneous, affective nature of human moral decision making, MFT provides a relevant approach for understanding how values and heuristic processing function in political persuasion. Smith, Alford, Hibbing, Martin, and Hatemi (2017) cautioned, however, that MFT is not an explanation of “the *causes* (emphasis in original) of ideology” (p. 435) but rather works best “for framing investigations on the *consequences* (emphasis in original) of ideology” (p. 435). This synthesis of framing and social intuitionism should be a fundamental part of analysis in a deconstruction of contemporary political rhetoric, which is the focus of the following section.

Rhetoric of Social Intervention

The Rhetoric of Social Intervention (Brown, 1978, 1982, 1986, 1987) is a communication model with broad utility in discursive analysis. In particular, it can guide research on the ways in which rhetors attempt to shift attention and compensate for gaps in ideologies. The model, developed by rhetorical theorist William R. Brown, considers communication and the human condition to be a process of constant sense-making. The model and Brown’s research builds upon Kenneth Burke’s theories on rhetoric, which contend that “man is the symbol-using animals” (Burke, 1966, p. 1). Brown (1978) argued that the uncertainty inherent to human existence inhibited the ability of the species to adequately predict and cope with challenges. The human experience, then, is a process of sense-making through the creation of shared symbols, or a “symbolic reality.”

Associated with a unique propensity of the human being to categorize experience so that it seems repeatable, ideology is grounded in the abstracting process common to *all* symbol-making... The world we conceive of is an arbitrated one—

(1) by our very senses, (2) by our reification of some ‘kinds’ and not others, and
(3) by the tacitly agreed-upon *rules* (emphasis in original) for constituting ‘kinds.’
(p. 125)

Brown refers to this process as *naming*, or “symbolically categorizing these [human] experiences” (Opt & Gring, 2009, p. 4) to make shareable the conceptual and physical features of the lived “reality” they experienced. For example, Brown identified the components of the “American Dream” ideology, including “*freedom, equality, individualism, and pursuit of happiness*” (Opt & Gring, 2009, p. 16), which all take on a common meaning based on the shared experiences of U.S. Americans. Importantly, however, Brown (1978) noted that the perception that these ideas, such as freedom or equality, have a set, common meaning—or even exist—is fallacious. Rather, Brown (1978) argued that these abstract concepts have been code-switched into reality, meaning that the individuals “‘forget’ that [they] created the connection between the internal symbolic category and external experience” (Opt & Gring, 2009, p. 41) and are only treating abstractions as concrete (see also, Leach [1976] for more on code-switching). The first step to persuading someone to see a different point of view, from this perspective, is to introduce doubt in how they have interpreted the world as they have named and made sense of it. Changing interpretation of social systems, needs, and issues, therefore, is a process of communicating across different reified kinds and names to explain experiences that are not adequately covered by existing naming systems.

In RSI, human proclivities toward naming and categorizing their experiences through symbols and signs to create an illusion of stability make them *ideological beings*. A collection of operationalized names and kinds form or constitute an “ideology,” or a

“symbolic construction of the world in whose superordinate ‘name’ human beings can comprehensively order their experience” (Brown, 1978, p. 124). Brown (1978) further asserted that ideologies are not only collections of names but organizing forces that have the property of *ultimacy*, in that the adherence to an ideology is also the adherence to a “superordinate symbolic construction of ‘reality’ with ‘order,’ ‘coherence,’ and ‘system’” (p. 126) that predicts or explains a multiplicity of positions on a variety of issues. For instance, people who name themselves *environmentalists* would likely also have coherent views about concepts like *recycling*—a necessity—or *greenhouse gases*—the cause of climate change—that correspond to their ideological system. On the other hand, persons subscribing to a *climate change denying* ideology might name *recycling* an “unviable liberal program” and view *greenhouse gases* as a “myth propagated by corrupt scientists.”

However, the unknowability of “reality” means that the work of naming is always incomplete. Names and ideologies are formed by backgrounding or foregrounding attention to experience rhetorically (Opt & Gring, 2009). When ideologies conflict with one another, as in the debate between “pro-life” and “pro-choice” views on abortion rights, conflict stems from the differences in what communicators foreground, or make relevant, and background, ignore in their talk. This contention is analogous to the complementary issue frames liberals and conservatives form to convey policy differences (see also, Arbour (2014) on framing). Code-switched ideologies are also operational when considering the operation of MFT’s flashes of affect. When confronted with a moral argument, people do not stop to consider whether their view of the world is accurate; they simply react unconsciously based on what they believe to be true. In this

way, names act as a trigger that prompts a taken-for-granted response learned through language. Brown (1978) contended that gaps in a naming system result in *deviance*, or “the difference between what our ideology leads us to expect will happen in experience and what actually seems to happen” (Opt & Gring, 2009, p. 83). As symbolic abstractions, ideologies are inherently incomplete and are subsequently vulnerable to reinterpretation by parties with competing ideological explanations for experience. In this way, an ideology with greater explanatory power may subsume the place of one that failed to prevent gaps in understanding, while an unsuccessful attempt at reinterpreting a vulnerable ideology may only emphasize deviance. This state of affairs leads to what Brown (1978) termed *deviance amplification*, in which deviance within an ideology goes unresolved and devolves into *vicious cycles* of unproductive discourse.

Interventions, then, are attempts at provoking or preventing an *attention shift*, or a “periodic refocusing of attention... compensatory to symbolic gaps and vicious cycles” (p. 135), to replace or update ideological names so as to resolve deviance. As a result, the RSI model provides a method for explaining the political partisanship that typifies U.S. politics. Populism can be understood not only as a strategy aimed at resonating with audiences on an emotional level, but as a political strategy that proposes the best *ideology* for making sense of the world. Political candidates who fail to persuade concerned audiences to see their point of view proposed unsuccessful *interventions*. Polarization is not only a matter of disagreement over policy priorities, but a process of *deviance amplification* that becomes a *vicious cycle* when each side insists that their interpretation of enacting an ideology is the only or “most perfect” one, despite inevitable anomalies. RSI model language adds a level of specificity that framing does not provide and may

therefore better inform advocates intent upon changing perceptions on charged issues.

Additionally, identifying the actors in a social system impacted by rhetorical interventions may increase researchers' ability to predict the direction of a social system, such as whether or not the system seems likely to descend into a vicious cycle or, conversely, escape deviance amplification.

Brown's RSI (1978, 1982, 1986, 1987) identified that interventions can attempt to provoke attention shifts in three subsystems which are assumed to constitute ideological systems: attention, need, and power. An attempted intervention in the subsystem of attention would strive to change what aspects of experience are backgrounded or foregrounded rhetorically by a communicator to explain anomalies. Anomaly-featuring communication would highlight the elements of ideas or objects that are not adequately defined by their name, while anomaly-masking communication would try to cover up the deficiencies of the naming system. Pro-choice advocates, for example, would engage in anomaly-featuring communication if they began calling *pro-life* activists *anti-woman* activists, thereby highlighting the hypocrisy of protecting unborn babies at the expense of their mothers' autonomy. Pro-life activists who refer to unborn children as *babies* rather than *fetuses* would be engaging in anomaly-masking communication, by glossing over the difference between an unborn mass of cells and a human person. An intervention in the need subsystem would attempt to shift attention rhetorically about "what we need and do not need" (p. 60). Humans have *biosocial needs*—that Brown (1987) indicated are essential for human survival and acceptance and are expressed through communication—as well as *symbolically created needs*, which are not physically necessary for survival but are constituted through code-switching. For example, the need for food, water, and

shelter and the names used to describe them communicate biosocial needs, while symbolically created needs like *comfortability* and *satisfaction* are abstract but have been code-switched into concrete needs. Finally, an intervention in the power subsystem would attempt to re- or de-emphasize the relational interdependence between individuals or groups. These relationships are either *reciprocal*, in which multiple parties share equal influence over each other, or *complementary*, in which one party dominates the other (Opt & Gring, 2009). An intervention urging members of a group to adhere to extant group responsibility norms would be a *reciprocal* intervention emphasizing *cooperation*, while the President of the United States issuing a directive to members of the executive branch would be a *complementary* intervention emphasizing *competition*. Most attempts at changing ongoing discourse can be better explained, analyzed, or planned through the application of these intervention subsystems. However, the RSI model recognizes that “each subsystem embodies and contains information about the other” (p. 76), leading Brown (1987) to term them *holographic*, or inextricably interconnected. While RSI analysis selects one subsystem to focus on, elements from others systems are assumed to play simultaneously in the background.

Previous research that has employed this model has found RSI to be an effective means of analyzing situations in which social life is impacted by rhetorical interventions. Opt (2013, 2015), for instance, employed RSI to explore media scandals and policy debates over mitigating sea level rise, Gring (1998) analyzed revolutionary discourse, and Endres (2008) utilized the model to explain performance text artifacts. The key definitional concepts of RSI, combined with its broad applicability, have provided scholars with a singular means for interpreting a wide array of situations by utilizing

different aspects of this model. To this end, RSI can serve as an apt mode of analysis for rhetorical interventions that appeal to moral foundations, seek to create political persuasion, or address polarization in American politics.

Given the complex interconnections of political communication and psychological factors that appear to impact American political thought, RSI provides an ideal umbrella under which to unite the insights of research on political polarization, rural consciousness, populism, framing, social intuitionism, and MFT. By using this combined research lens, rhetorical analysts of 21st century political interventions gain an ability to explain not just *what* rhetorical shifts occurred—framing—but *how* people processed those messages—social intuitionism and RSI—and why those appeals may have been so effective or ineffective—rural consciousness and MFT. This design will yield a more effective examination of the factors at play while also providing clearer instructions for practitioners wishing to understand previous rhetorical interventions. With this in mind, this thesis seeks to better understand why it is U.S. Americans have such a difficult time communicating across political lines when discussing moral issues. Additionally, this exploration hopes to uncover insights as to whether or not U.S. elected representatives model best practices for political persuasion, or if the level of polarization observed in national political discourses is driven from the bottom-up by the political communication habits of average citizens. In other words, what can U.S. Americans learn about political persuasion from the recommendations of communication literature and the persuasive behavior of their elected representatives? And, does the polarized state of national political discourses better reflect the communication behaviors of political elites or average citizens?

The following section describes in greater detail how the methodology was used to analyze political discourse through a case study of the rhetorical interventions present in the confirmation process for Betsy DeVos' nomination to the post of Secretary of Education.

III. Methods

Using the Rhetoric of Social Intervention (Brown, 1978, 1982, 1986, 1987) supplemented with additional rhetorical analyses from research on rural consciousness (Cramer, 2016), social intuitionism (Haidt, 2001), and Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt, 2012; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2004), this study aims to explain the nature of attempted political rhetorical interventions in the 21st century through an examination of Democratic and Republican attempts at political persuasion in Betsy DeVos' confirmation as U.S. Secretary of Education in 2017. The texts analyzed include an original transcript of the DeVos' HELP Committee hearing, press release about DeVos collected from Senators' websites, and portions of the Congressional Record. The RSI model will provide a key method and vocabulary for dissecting the attempted interventions, as it provides a process for analyzing naming conventions, attempts to shift attention, and conducting close analyses of rhetorical artifacts. The additional perspectives described above will lend increased explanatory power as to the communicative and psychological processes at play when moral persuasion is attempted. Through this structure this study provides insights into the ways politicians symbolically construct messages to justify proposed actions and how political cooperation is stymied by inefficacious efforts to persuade.

This thesis will analyze Senate Democrats' rhetorical interventions aimed at preventing the confirmation of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education in the early months of 2017 while Senate Republicans' simultaneously attempted to normalize DeVos' credentials. Political discourse surrounding public education policy has become increasingly polarized as Republicans have portrayed the Department of Education as an

exemplar of federal overreach. This fact, combined with DeVos' inexperience, set the stage for a contentious rhetorical battle typified by extreme polarization and lengthy attempts at cross-party persuasion. As DeVos was confirmed by a vote of 51-50, it is likely that Senate Democrats were truly trying to persuade one more Republican to vote against the nominee, making this case study a fitting series of texts to analyze and draw conclusions about political persuasion in the United States.

Using the Rhetoric of Social Intervention, this study will examine Democrats' primary and secondary rhetorical interventions in opposition to Betsy DeVos' nomination to be Secretary of Education. These interventions came in three distinct stages, each separated because of the social system it sought to influence: first, in DeVos' hearing before the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee; second, in Democratic and Republican press releases about DeVos sent between the time of her nomination and confirmation; and third, in senators' speeches on the floor of the U.S. Senate directly preceding the final confirmation vote. Following the pattern for RSI analysis (see Opt & Gring, 2009), each section will begin by defining the social system in which the interventions occurred, then describing the extant rhetoric in that space against which the intervention is directed, before explicating the primary and secondary interventions made by Democrats as they attempted to shift attention to name DeVos *undeserving of confirmation*. In general, the competing ideologies attempted to describe DeVos in polar opposite terms: while Republicans attempted to name DeVos *mainstream* and *qualified*, Democrats attempted to provoke attention shifts to the alternative names of *unqualified*, *incompetent*, and *undeserving of confirmation*. These "names," which appear

in italics throughout this text, were developed after reading all the primary texts and identifying themes that appeared in multiple senators' remarks.

In addition to performing an RSI analysis of each of the three stages of rhetoric in DeVos' confirmation process, each chapter will also compare the use of moral rhetoric by members of both parties using a modified Moral Foundations Dictionary (MFD). The original moral foundations dictionary was created by Graham, Haidt and Nosek (2009), by generating a list of synonyms for each of the five moral foundations and then excluding words "that seemed too distantly related to the five foundations and also words whose primary meanings were not moral" (p. 1039). Then, this MFD was used to code the frequency of moral rhetoric in rhetorical texts. Following the procedure used by Graham, Haidt and Nosek (2009), a "DeVos" MFD was developed that includes minor adaptations made systematically to measure moral rhetoric in a legislative setting. As the original MFD was written to analyze sermons, some words were not necessary for secular analyses; additionally, some words—like "member"—were excluded because "members" of the Senate were often identified as such with no moral intention. The full DeVos MFD can be viewed in Appendix A.

The coding and analysis of moral rhetoric was performed using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) program, which displays the rate of moral rhetoric in each of the five foundations as a percentage of total words spoken. LIWC can analyze the text of any Microsoft Word document using user-generated dictionaries, which assign words to categories, and report the frequency with which the words from each category were used in the analyzed text (see Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010 for more on the development and use of LIWC). Each chapter represents a different social system and

format, so texts were chosen for analysis based on meeting criteria specific to each site of rhetorical intervention. To qualify for LIWC analysis, speeches before the HELP Committee had to meet three criteria: (1) they needed to be extended monologues that proceeded questions directed to the nominee; (2) they must have addressed either DeVos' qualifications or the nature of the confirmation process; and (3) they needed to be more than 125 words long. Senators' press releases that qualified for analysis in LIWC had to meet three criteria: (1) the press release needed to be more than 125 words long; (2) the release must have made an affective statement about DeVos; and (3) the release must have referred only to DeVos, not DeVos and other cabinet nominees. Press releases that included reprinted remarks of what Senators had said in the HELP Committee or on the Senate floor were allowed to be counted, as reprinting these remarks in a press release was intended to affect a different social system than the original speeches. Finally, Senate floor speeches that were analyzed in LIWC needed only to mention DeVos by name; however, only words spoken aloud by Senators on the Senate floor were analyzed. This means that letters included for the record but not read in full were not analyzed, while letters from constituents read aloud by Senators were analyzed. Additionally, phrases indicative of parliamentary procedure (e.g., "I yield the floor," etc.) were eliminated prior to analysis. For a full list of senators whose remarks were analyzed in each section, see Appendix B. The rhetoric analyzed in this case study came either from the daily edition of the Congressional Record, an original transcript of the HELP Committee Hearing, or press releases posted on senators' official websites. In a few instances, news stories were cited to provide context for DeVos' remarks or to describe popular reactions to any stage of the confirmation process.

The next chapter describes DeVos' testimony before the Senate HELP Committee, beginning with a description of the social system, extant Republican names for DeVos, then moving into Democrats' primary and secondary interventions to rename the nominee. In the 115th Congress of the United States, the Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Senate Committee had 22 members: 12 Republicans and 10 Democrats. Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), who served as committee chair, and ranking member Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) were the first to speak at the committee's hearing on the confirmation of Elisabeth Prince "Betsy" DeVos to the US Secretary of Education (see *Nomination of Betsy DeVos to serve as Secretary of Education*, 2017). Following opening statements from Alexander and Murray, DeVos was introduced first by Senator Tim Scott (R-SC), a HELP Committee member and personal friend of the DeVos family, and former HELP Committee member ex-Senator Joseph Lieberman (I-CT), who returned to the Senate to speak in favor of DeVos' confirmation. DeVos' prepared testimony followed, lasting roughly eight minutes, and Alexander then began a round of questions with five minutes allotted for each Senator. In sum, the committee hearing lasted roughly three hours and 25 minutes. Following this RSI analysis, the chapter will conclude by comparing Democratic and Republican usage of moral rhetoric as measured by the DeVos MFD in LIWC.

IV. Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee Hearing

The Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions committee's broad mandate includes confirming nominees for Secretary of Education before the nominations head to the Senate floor for full confirmation. Past Secretaries of Education had extensive policy backgrounds in education, often with hands-on experience as a teacher, administrator, or school board member, implying criteria of experience and detailed policy knowledge (see *Nomination of Betsy DeVos*, 2017). Therefore, each senator's five-minute questioning period provides an opportunity for them to ask questions of the nominee and hear responses. However, many Senators also used their time to register their opinions on DeVos' qualifications and the manner in which the hearing was organized. This structure allowed for the creation and furtherance of multiple narratives, both for and against DeVos' nomination, and these narratives largely fell along party lines. While Republicans sought to name DeVos a *qualified* candidate in the *mainstream* of public opinion, Democrats' interventions attempted to name DeVos *unqualified*, *incompetent*, and *unwilling to defend marginalized students*. As such, this committee hearing functioned as an arena in which partisan rhetorical interventions could struggle to best name the relevant experiences being debated. This section explores the rhetorical interventions employed by both Republicans and Democrats in the HELP committee hearing using the RSI model, beginning with the primary intervention, followed by two secondary interventions and ending with an analysis of the moral rhetoric employed in selected statements from members of each party.

The primary intervention that occurred in the January 17, 2017 HELP Committee hearing was the Democrats' collective attempt to highlight gaps in DeVos' experience

and qualifications in the face of Republican support for the Michigan billionaire. This intervention, which evoked the concept of *loyal opposition*, was rooted in the Democrats' expectancy as the minority party to raise issues with candidates who may otherwise be pushed through by the tyranny of a slim majority. This rhetorical stance positions their attempts as an intervention in the power subsystem.

Table 1: A membership list of the Senate HELP Committee in January of 2017

U.S. Senator	Party	State
Lamar Alexander	Republican	TN
Johnny Isakson	Republican	GA
Bill Cassidy, M.D.	Republican	LA
Pat Roberts	Republican	KS
Michael B. Enzi	Republican	WY
Rand Paul	Republican	KY
Todd Young	Republican	IN
Lisa Murkowski	Republican	AK
Richard Burr	Republican	NC
Susan Collins	Republican	ME
Orrin Hatch	Republican	UT
Tim Scott	Republican	SC
Patty Murray	Democrat	WA
Al Franken	Democrat	MN
Tammy Baldwin	Democrat	WI
Tim Kaine	Democrat	VA
Bernie Sanders	Democrat	VT
Michael F. Bennet	Democrat	CO
Christopher S. Murphy	Democrat	CT
Maggie Hassan	Democrat	NH
Robert P. Casey	Democrat	PA
Sheldon Whitehouse	Democrat	RI
Elizabeth Warren	Democrat	MA

Social System

The HELP Committee hearing was the first step of DeVos' legislative approval process, and the persuasive arguments being made at this stage of the confirmation process were largely still focused on members of Congress and the incoming Trump administration. Senate Republicans functioned as the primary power-holders in this social system, as their majority meant they had little need to work with the minority party. However, with a 51-seat majority, the slim supremacy of Senate Republicans also elevated the importance of the minority Democrats; after all, if Democrats could persuade one or two Republicans to doubt DeVos' qualifications, DeVos' nomination could be derailed. The very real possibility that Democrats could prevent this nominee from being confirmed makes the rhetoric employed by both parties in this space worthy of analysis, as it seems likely that Democrats' persuasive efforts were truly aimed at changing Republicans' minds. HELP Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander's description of the committee shortly after gaveling the hearing to order indicated that this committee had, in fact, been open to working together across party lines, emphasizing a power-sharing system organized cooperatively:

Uh, this is the committee, as it'll probably become evident as we go along, that has some considerable differences of opinion on a variety of issues. But, we have found that we can sometimes resolve them in important ways. Last year, we passed what the Majority Leader, Senator McConnell, said was the most important bill of the Congress—21st Century Cures—and the year before a bill fixing No Child Left Behind which President Obama called a Christmas miracle plus 33 other bills signed by the president—33 total. I want to thank Senator

Murray and the Democrats as well as the Republicans on the committee for operating in that fashion. We've done that by showing courtesy to ourselves and to our witnesses which I hope will be evident today. (*Nomination of Betsy DeVos to serve as Secretary of Education, 2017, p. 1*)

Members of both the majority and minority described the committee as a non-partisan, cooperative body with a deep interest in the subjects under their purview, positioning the Senators present as not only elected representatives but *policy experts* whose standards should transcend partisanship. For instance, Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA) invoked her credentials as a “former pre-school teacher and school board member, as well as a mom who got her start in politics fighting for public investments in early learning” (p. 4), and Senators Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Maggie Hassan (D-NH) alluded to their families’ personal struggles with learning and physical disabilities. Because of the HELP committee’s reputation of being above the political fray and being focused instead on experience and responsible governance, it seems even more likely that persuasion could be a possible outcome of these Senators’ discussions. Given these senators’ credentials, it seems likely that the HELP Committee members were the best situated to send cues as political elites to the rest of the country about how they should feel about DeVos.

Though the Senators on the committee are certainly the primary power-sharers in this social system, outside influences still had some impact on the conversations taking place. DeVos is a member of this HELP Committee social system, as her record was up for debate and she had a chance to defend her past actions. One Republican defense for keeping the hearing brief, as Alexander suggested, was to “defer to the president... [as] it

was important to have a secretary in place” (*Nomination of Betsy DeVos to serve as Secretary of Education*, 2017, p. 56), meaning President Trump had a direct influence on the committee’s discussion, though he was not a respondent to claims made for or against DeVos during the hearing. Though the hearing was televised on C-SPAN and through internet streaming options, few, if any, acknowledgements were made to the audience watching at home, and the influence of outside groups and constituents was represented primarily through the letters of support or disapproval that Senators added to the hearing’s record. With this social system clearly identified, analysis of the Democrats’ attention intervention against Republicans’ attempts to characterize DeVos as *mainstream* and *qualified* focuses on the players in the room as they attempted to persuade each other.

Republican naming: *Mainstream and qualified*

Alexander’s opening statement served as Republicans’ first attempt to name DeVos as a *qualified, mainstream* nominee. This naming, which was likely a response to the outcry over DeVos’ nomination, was central to Alexander’s thesis: “I believe [DeVos is] in the mainstream of public opinion and her critics are not” (p. 2). His argument, which was clearly previewed and commenced in an orderly, coherent fashion, sought to refute the three main arguments he had heard against DeVos; each main point ended with the refrain “she’s in the mainstream, she’s on the side of our children” (p. 3). Alexander’s ability to frame the conversation was a key advantage for Republicans, as his opening remarks contained messages that foregrounded DeVos’ experience, philanthropy, and bipartisan support for charter schools, while backgrounding concerns about the

nominee's partisanship that Democrats would later raise. Alexander concluded his remarks:

The final criticism is that she's used her wealth to support these ideas; I think she deserves credit for that. Would the critics be happier if she had spent her time and her money trying to deny children more choices of schools that wealthy families already have? We're fortunate that Betsy DeVos is the nominee for U.S.

Education Secretary. She is and has been on our children's side. (p. 3)

By naming DeVos as *mainstream*, characterizing her lifetime of political activity as *qualifications* that demonstrate her *student-centered* agenda, and invoking his past service as Secretary of Education under President George H. W. Bush, Alexander set a precedent for Republican support of DeVos' confirmation that was based on a seemingly logical, comprehensive rationale endorsed by a policy expert.

Before the round of questions began, the Republican case for DeVos was further promoted by introductions of the nominee from Scott, Lieberman, and DeVos herself. Scott (R-SC), a friend of the DeVos family and sitting member of the HELP Committee, introduced DeVos by naming her a "champion of education for poor kids" (p. 7) before providing a biography for DeVos and her husband. As Scott told it, the billionaire DeVos "had a humble beginning" (p. 8) and started working at her parents' shop when she was seven years old. Additionally, "Betsy worked the third shift at her family's business" (p. 8) when she was off from college, which Scott said meant "she understands the sacrifices that families have to make in order to build a better life for themselves and for their children" (p. 8); in short, DeVos understands and believes in the American dream. Scott's foregrounding of select anecdotes from DeVos' formative years represented the most

direct attempt to argue the nominee was a “normal person,” rather than a rich heiress insulated from the problems an average U.S. American family faced. Lieberman’s introduction went beyond the personal and related his experience of working with DeVos’ American Federation for Children (AFC), which he stated had helped nearly half a million low-income students receive better educations. Lieberman, who was Vice President Al Gore’s running mate on the 2000 Democratic presidential ticket, lent his credibility to DeVos by describing her thusly: “She is disciplined, organized, knows how to set goals, and then develop practical plans to achieve them. She is really a purpose-driven team builder, and I’ve seen that in my membership on the board of the AFC” (p. 9). As a respected, bipartisan voice, Lieberman’s endorsement attempted to reassure Democrats who were concerned about DeVos’ lack of experience that she was temperamentally fit for the job.

Lieberman’s introduction also attempted to shift attention away from gaps in the Republican narrative of DeVos as *mainstream* and *qualified* in two key ways. First, Lieberman addressed what Senator Warren would later describe as DeVos’ “lack of experience” (p. 41), by explaining that the post of Education Secretary is so vast that no one could ever be completely prepared to lead it.

Now I understand that the Department of Education is bigger than anything she or, for that matter, any of us—except for Senator Alexander, of course—has ever led. But, everything I have seen tells me that Betsy is ready to take on this assignment and do it very well. I know that some people are questioning her qualifications to be Secretary of Education, and too many of those questions to me seem to be based on the fact that she doesn’t come from within the education

establishment. But, honest, I believe that today that's one of the most important qualifications you could have for this job. (p. 9)

Rather than shying away from characterizations of DeVos as *unqualified*, Lieberman used his introduction and bi-partisan appeal to turn the nominee's greatest weakness—her *lack of experience*—into a virtue—being an *anti-establishment, successful capitalist* who knows how to get the job done. Lieberman furthers this naming of experience by explaining away the outpouring of public disapproval for DeVos' nomination as being a result of her “fighting for reform and disrupting the status quo for so long” (p. 10) which made her confirmation process “naturally controversial” (p. 10). This assertion, though stated in a reasonable-sounding tone, is actually a loaded statement masking attention as it dismisses concerns about DeVos as *par-for-the-course* when dealing with a *qualified* candidate. He also added, “In all my work with her I have never heard Betsy speak against our public school system.” As a retired U.S. Senator who had previously served on the HELP committee and with his positionality as a former Democrat-turned-Independent now supporting the Education Secretary nominee of a Republican president, Lieberman's credible support contributed to the otherwise Republican narrative that DeVos is a *mainstream, qualified* nominee for such a position and, therefore, *deserving of confirmation*.

The last person to defend the nominee's record and qualifications before the question round began was DeVos herself. Her opening remarks, which barely deviated from her publicly-released prepared marks, made a case for her nomination and portrayed her views as centrist and sensible. After introducing her family members and supporters who were present in the gallery, DeVos asserted her commitment to “bring educational

opportunity to every family in this great nation” (p. 10) and affirmed that “learning as a lifelong pursuit is a fundamental American virtue” (p. 10), thereby appealing to a *mainstream* value. Building on Scott’s characterization of her early years as *working class*, DeVos shared a story about one of the key influences of her early life.

Growing up in Holland, Michigan, I attended local Christian schools and then Calvin College. My greatest educational influence in life was a public school teacher named Elsa Prince. While her students called her Mrs. Prince, to this day, I just call her “mom.” When Dick and I became parents, education took on a whole new meaning. We recognized that other parents were not able to make similar decisions about their children’s education, based on their income or the zip code in which they lived. (p. 11)

While this narrative did nothing to increase her perceived leadership experience with public schools, mentioning her Christian background and reverence for her mother’s vocation helped foreground her own story as a *relatable, caring citizen* who feels good will toward public educators and background her reputation as a *billionaire Republican donor*. After other remarks about her advocacy for charter schools in Michigan and nods toward traditional Republican talking points—such as “President-elect Trump and I know it won’t be Washington, D.C. that unlocks our nation’s potential... the answer is local control” (p. 12) and “craftsmanship is not a fallback, but a noble pursuit” (p. 12)—DeVos delivered a strong closing summary of her reason for seeking confirmation; namely, that she cares about children.

For nearly three decades, I’ve been involved in education, as a volunteer, an advocate for children, and a voice for parents. I’ve worked as an in-school mentor

for students in the Grand Rapids Public Schools, and have had the privilege of interacting with students and their families and teachers in ways that have changed my life and my perspective about education forever. I've worked with governors, legislators, and business and community leaders to expand educational opportunity through options that are making a lifetime of difference for hundreds of thousands of kids this year alone. And, I've worked with many dedicated teachers who strive every day to help students achieve, fulfill their potential, and prepare them for the global challenges that they will face. For me, it's simple: I trust parents, and I believe in our children. (p. 12)

This statement, which foregrounds DeVos' relevant experience and demonstrates ample rhetorical deference to the *harm/care* and *fairness/reciprocity* moral foundations, may have been a strong finish for the nominee's self-defense, but it did nothing to address the overwhelmingly negative reviews her nomination had been getting. Still, Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) later indicated her disagreement with how Democrats were characterizing DeVos, stating, "Given your lifelong work and commitment to education, any suggestion, such as was made earlier, that your nomination is linked to your political contributions is really unfair and unwarranted" (p. 43). This remark is particularly noteworthy as Collins later became one of two Republicans to vote against DeVos' confirmation in the full Senate. In these statements, and in their later questions to the nominee, Republicans gave DeVos the opportunity to foreground only her relevant experiences while backgrounding any anomalies—such as her lack of government experience—that may have weakened their narrative.

Primary Intervention: Democrats say DeVos is not “mainstream” or “qualified”

The primary intervention in this rhetorical discourse came from Democrats who, through their ranking member’s opening statement and individual question periods, railed against the Republicans’ attempt to background DeVos’ demonstrable lack of qualifications for the post to which she was nominated. This intervention was performed both because DeVos’ ideas clashed with Democrats’ ideologies but also because DeVos’ *inexperience*, in Democrats’ eyes, rendered her unfit for office; in essence, their resistance was both ideological and institutional. While differences in ideology often lead to attempts at shifting attention—as ideologies are superordinate systems of names that are, by their nature, incomplete (see Brown, 1978)—the role-based opposition Democrats levied as the minority party on the committee places their attempt to shift attention as an intervention within the power subsystem. The United States’ two party system is predicated, in part, on power sharing and interdependency as a means of democratically representing the needs of all constituencies. This is reflected in the U.S. Senate’s committee structure, which gives committee leadership and a slim majority to the party that holds control of the chamber. By positioning themselves as *competitive power holders* rather than *cooperative power subjects*, Democrats intervened in the Republicans’ ongoing attempt to name DeVos’ experiences and qualifications from a position of strength rather than subservience. As such, Democrats’ intervention seems aimed at enacting whatever sanctions they are able to as the minority party to encourage an additional Republican defector to oppose DeVos’ confirmation.

Following Alexander’s initial pre-emptive defense of DeVos’ nomination, Murray gave her opening remarks as ranking member of the minority and used her time to raise

concerns with DeVos' nomination without becoming overtly hostile. It is worth noting that, as DeVos' nomination moved forward in the weeks following the HELP committee hearing, Murray's tone became increasingly combative and explicit. The tone of her opening remarks, then, is the first indication that Democrats' HELP committee intervention was not mere political brinksmanship or opposition, but rather *loyal opposition* wherein each party's nominees are given a fair hearing even if ideological differences exist. As Murray articulated at the top of her opening remarks:

This is the first of many hearings that we will be holding on President-Elect Trump's nominees to fill critical positions in the federal government, so I want to start by reiterating the importance of the Senate's role in this process and this committee's role in this Senate work. President Trump has the right to [stutter] fill his cabinet with people he thinks will fill out the vision for [stutter] our country, but that doesn't mean that the Senate should be a rubber stamp. To the contrary, we owe it the people we represent to make sure that every nominee is not only qualified for the position and free of conflicts of interest, but that he or she will put families and workers first, and not millionaires, billionaires, or big corporations. (p. 4)

By foregrounding the responsibility of Democrats, as the minority party, to dutifully check the actions of the majority, Murray established the first of many allusions to a self-name of *loyal opposition* for Democrats. Murray furthered this sentiment with specific focus on the Secretary of Education position, saying "leading this agency is a big job. It is an important job, and I consider it to be my job to do everything I can to make sure whoever fills it is truly committed to putting students and families first" (p. 5). By

foregrounding the responsibility of the minority party to vet the candidates put forward by the majority party, Murray emphasizes the Democrats' power and responsibility on the committee rather than simply trying to shift attention to anomalies in the Republicans' naming system.

Murray did use the second half of her opening remarks to articulate concerns with DeVos' record or, more accurately, the lack of said record. Murray articulated four primary concerns with DeVos' nomination that she hoped would be addressed during the hearing: needing more information about DeVos' "extensive financial entanglements and potential conflicts of interest ... which are made in ways that are not transparent" (p. 5); second, having "major concerns about how you spent your career and fortune fighting to privatize public education and gut investments in public schools;" third, gaining insight to DeVos' policy positions, which remain "not clear on a number of issues;" and fourth, clarifying DeVos' beliefs on Title IX and the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights. Murray's opening remarks set a tone for the Democrats' questioning of DeVos in that many of these issues were rearticulated by other Democratic Senators.

The first major question that highlighted the anomalies in DeVos' record that defied expectations for an Education Secretary nominee (which Republicans were backgrounding) came from Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), who narrowly lost the Democratic presidential nomination to Hillary Clinton in 2016. After voicing his concerns that the United States was fast becoming an oligarchy, Sanders inquired about the amount of money the DeVos family had contributed to the Republican Party over the years. After establishing that the number could well be as high as \$200 million, Sanders and DeVos had the following interchange:

Sanders: My question is, and I don't mean to be rude, but do you think that if you were not a multi-billionaire, if your family has not made hundreds of millions of dollars of contributions to the Republican party, that you would be sitting here today?

DeVos: Um, Senator, as a matter of fact, I do think that there would be that possibility. I've worked very hard on behalf of parents and children for the last almost 30 years to be a voice for parents [stutter] a voice for students and to empower parents to make decisions on behalf of their children, primarily low-income children. (p. 18)

By foregrounding the political nature of DeVos' advocacy, Sanders drew attention to the interconnectedness between her enormous wealth and her life's work. While DeVos has been involved in education advocacy for almost 30 years, her efforts were made possible by her and her husband's large fortune. Though Sanders moved on from this line of questioning immediately after DeVos' response, his pointed question made headlines (see, e.g., Strauss, 2017) and, in not responding to her answer, rhetorically made DeVos' work, wealth, and Republican political support inseparable. Sanders implicitly renamed DeVos' *educational advocacy* as *partisan political activity* and DeVos herself, by her failure to recognize the privileges afforded her because of her enormous wealth, as an *out-of-touch billionaire*. Rather than explicitly attacking her inexperience, Sanders' decision to let the nominee's established lack of credentials go unmentioned served to solidify *unqualified* as a name that, without question, applied to DeVos. This *out-of-touch billionaire* name also functioned to split DeVos' lack of qualifications into two categories: professional and personal. Not only did Sanders implicitly invalidate her

professional work experiences, this question also implied DeVos lacked the personal character and temperament to hold office as she was unable to recognize the influence of her own wealthy background.

Later in the committee hearing, a few newsworthy gaffes reinforced this *out-of-touch billionaire* name. Most noteworthy, perhaps, was DeVos' suggestion that a school in Wapiti, Wyoming needed to keep a gun on premises "to protect from potential grizzlies" (*Nomination of Betsy DeVos to serve as Secretary of Education*, 2017, p. 39); the school quickly confirmed that no such weaponry was necessary (see Alsup, 2017). More telling, however, was DeVos' response to Senator Tammy Baldwin's (D-WI) question about how the nominee planned to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) students. This was tense in light of the DeVos family's past support for a gay conversion therapy program and the fact that Baldwin is the Senate's first openly-lesbian representative. After repeating a line she had used previously—"Let me restate again I embrace equality, and I firmly believe in the intrinsic value of each individual" (p. 36)—DeVos attempted to use her credibility as a mother to express her support for LGBTQ students: "I, if I had-- as a mom, I just can't imagine having a child that would feel discriminated against for any reason, and I would want my child in a safe environment" (p. 36). Though intended as support for her own qualifications, DeVos' admission that she "just can't imagine having a child that would feel discriminated against" (p. 36) highlighted the Democrats' concerns about her dearth of experience with public schools. Not only was DeVos *professionally unqualified*, her personal qualifications came from such a *privileged* position that she could not empathize with at-risk student populations, also implying she may not be aware of other issues pertaining to

the Department of Education. Sanders' establishment of the *out-of-touch billionaire* name allowed for subsequent DeVos gaffes to be perceived not only as gaffes, but as indications of personal incapacity to serve as Secretary of Education.

The next major support for the Democrats' intervention against DeVos' nomination came when Senator Franken asked the nominee to propound her beliefs on the relative virtues of measuring student progress by proficiency or growth standards. The exchange, which came at the top of Franken's five-minute question period, "caused a lot of brouhaha on social media and has been covered extensively by the news media" (Wong, 2017, para. 8) and led Franken to later remark that DeVos was the "least qualified nominee I'd ever seen" (*State of the Union*, 2017).

Franken: And this brings me to the issue of proficiency, which the senator cited, versus growth. I would like your views on the relative advantage of profi— measuring, doing assessments and using them to measure proficiency or growth.

DeVos: Thank you Senator, for that question. I think if I am understanding your question correctly around proficiency, I would also correlate it to competency and mastery, so that you each student is measured according to the advancement that they are making in each subject area.

Franken: That's growth. That's not proficiency. ... it surprises me that you don't know this issue... well, I'm not that surprised that you did not know this issue.

(*Nomination of Betsy DeVos to serve as Secretary of Education*, 2017, p. 24-25)

This interchange proved consequential in news coverage surrounding the HELP Committee hearing and became one of the single most prominent pieces of evidence to confirm DeVos was *unqualified* and an *out-of-touch billionaire*. Franken's method of

asking this question, however, is noteworthy in that it did not explicitly confront DeVos on her lack of qualifications; rather, Franken foregrounded the importance of identifying basic terminology and concepts within the field by asking a “wonky-sounding prompt that could’ve easily caused many viewers to tune out” (Wong, 2017, para. 5). It was not until DeVos failed to correctly identify the two standards for measuring student learning that Franken’s tone became incredulous and condescending. This tonal shift, however, did not change into a direct berating of the nominee—with the possible exception of “well, I’m not that surprised” (*Nomination of Betsy DeVos to serve as Secretary of Education*, 2017, p. 25)—as the Senator then shifted into a discussion of DeVos’ past support for gay conversion therapy. By staying focused on testing the nominee’s competency rather than continuing to bash her for her “proficiency vs. growth” blunder, Franken furthered the Democrats’ attempted intervention by upholding his party’s *loyal opposition* name. Near the end of his questioning period, Franken also gave DeVos a chance to clarify a statistic she had cited during Senator Hatch’s (R-UT) question about student loan debt. Specifically, DeVos had stated that student loan debt had gone “up almost 1000% in the last eight years” (p. 21).

Franken: In terms of throwing numbers around, you say student debt has increased by 1000%.

DeVos: 980% in eight years.

Franken: I’m sorry?

DeVos: 980%.

Franken: That's just not so. It has increased 118% in the past eight years. I'm just asking, if you are challenging my figures, I would ask that you get your figures

straight about education policy. That's why we want more questions, because we want to know if this person that we are entrusting, may entrust, to be the secretary of education, if she has the breadth and depth of knowledge that we would expect from someone who has that important uh that important job. (p. 26)

Franken was correct about the student loan debt statistic (see Berman, 2017), adding credibility to Democrats' portrayal of DeVos as *incompetent*. Twice in his five-minute question period, Franken gave DeVos just enough rope, so to speak, to demonstrate her incompetence through unforced errors rather than resorting to attacks that could be criticized as partisan or opportunistic. Franken's questions were key elements of the Democrats' attention intervention and also served to highlight the anomalies in DeVos' record that Republicans had backgrounded in their support of the nominee.

Next, Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)—a former lawyer and professor of law at Harvard University—interrogated DeVos on what Warren termed the nominee's "qualifications for leading the nation on higher education" (*Nomination of Betsy DeVos to serve as Secretary of Education*, 2017, p. 41) since her lack of experience with K-12 education had already been demonstrated. For the duration of this question period, Warren projected a persona that was part prosecutor interviewing a witness and part professor shutting down a disruptive student. This style, which contrasted with other senators' less confrontational demeanors, garnered significant news and social media attention; for instance, a five-and-a-half minute-long YouTube video uploaded by an organization screen-named Reflect (2017) titled "Elizabeth Warren Destroys Betsy DeVos At Confirmation Hearing" received more than 1.5 million views, and Google Trends reported the search term "elizabeth warren devos" went from zero usage to peak

popularity in the 48 hours following the hearing. Given Warren's paralingual and rhetorical choices, this five-minute question period seemed designed to demonstrate "logical" proof that DeVos had literally no relevant experience to qualify her to become Secretary of Education. Chairman Alexander later criticized Warren's rhetorical maneuvering by saying, "Lewis Carroll [the author of *Alice in Wonderland*] would be proud of that kind of reasoning" (*Nomination of Betsy DeVos to serve as Secretary of Education*, 2017, p. 56), implying Warren's logic was ludicrous. The exchange sought to direct attention to both DeVos' personal and professional lack of experience with public schools or school loan programs, as well as her noncommittal attitude toward ensuring transparency and accountability. Despite the increasing specificity of Warren's questions, DeVos failed to provide a satisfactorily-detailed answer. Though she promised to be "vigilant" (p. 42) DeVos was unable to demonstrate how she would oversee the responsible allocation of federal dollars. After repeated follow up questions that yielded more non-specific replies from the nominee, Warren summarized her dissatisfaction with DeVos' answers on accountability in a memorable fashion.

You know, swindlers and crooks are out there doing back flips when they hear an answer like this. If confirmed, you will be the cop on the beat. And if you can't commit to use the tools that are already available to you in the Department of Education, then I don't see how you could be the Secretary of Education. (p. 43)

Warren's anomaly-featuring communication highlighted not just DeVos' inexperience but her *evasiveness* when asked direct questions. Though DeVos' smile never wavered, this facial expression seemed more artificial than sincere as she failed to provide direct answers to questions. A similar series of responses from DeVos during

questioning from Senator Kaine (D-VA)—a former Democratic vice-presidential candidate, governor, mayor, and lawyer—helped concretize naming the nominee as *evasive* or *insincere*. As DeVos (once again) failed to provide a detailed answer, the tension in the room and Kaine’s frustration became increasingly apparent.

Kaine: And, if confirmed, will you insist on that equal accountability in any K-12 school or educational program that receives federal funding, whether public, public-charter, or private?

DeVos: I support accountability.

Kaine: Equal accountability for all schools that receive federal funding?

DeVos: I support accountability.

Kaine: K., is that a yes or a no?

DeVos: That’s uh—I support accountability.

Kaine: Do you not want to answer my question?

DeVos: I support accountability.

Kaine: Ok, let me ask you this: I think all schools that receive taxpayer funding should be equally accountable. Do you agree with me or not?

DeVos: Well, they don’t—they’re not, today.

Kaine: But I think they should. Do you agree with me or not?

DeVos: Well, no, because—

Kaine: You don’t agree with me. (p. 49)

Despite being given six separate opportunities in this interchange to give a convincing answer, DeVos’ repetitive responses instead contributed to a perception that she was hiding something; why else would she fail to convince the senator of her commitment?

The parallel effects of Warren and Kaine's rhetoric proved to be the HELP Committee hearing's most aggressively interrogative portions and, though these rhetorical tactics may have aimed to support the perception of the Democrats as *loyal opposition*, the senators' apparent "condescension" led Trump administration spokesperson Kellyanne Conway to accuse Democrats of "humiliating and trying to embarrass" DeVos (Conway, 2017, para. 1). Though these tactics energized Democratic loyalists against DeVos they created an easy target for Trump and DeVos supporters to criticize, suggesting Warren and Kaine were more interested in sending messages to their base than actually trying to persuade their Republican colleagues. This message orientation suggests that, as a result, these question periods may not have targeted a part of the defined social system of this hearing, though it may also indicate the two senators hoped that public outrage would have a greater impact on their Republican colleagues than face-to-face attempts at persuasion.

Beyond prompting DeVos' uncomfortable responses about supporting accountability, Kaine also used his portion of the hearing to drill DeVos about her support for students with physical and mental disabilities. By using his questions as a means of testing the nominee on her knowledge of and support for federal laws that protect students with disabilities, Kaine positioned himself as an advocate for students with disabilities while also giving DeVos an opportunity to express her knowledge on the matter. As was the case with previous questions, however, DeVos failed to adequately answer the question. The inquiry that prompted news media to report extensively on DeVos' confusion about the function of federal laws (see, e.g., Strauss, 2017) began with a simple question from Kaine:

Kaine: Should all K-12 schools receiving governmental funding be required to meet the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act?

DeVos: I think they already are.

Kaine: K., so, but I'm asking you a 'should' question; whether they are or not, we'll get into that later. Should all schools that receive taxpayer funding be required to meet the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education?

DeVos: I think that is a matter better left to the states.

Kaine: So, state's might—some states might be good to kids with disabilities, and other state might not be so good, and then what? People can move around the country if they don't like how their kids are being treated?

DeVos: I think that is an issue best left to the states.

Kaine: What about the federal requirement? It's a federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. (*Nomination of Betsy DeVos to serve as Secretary of Education*, 2017, p. 49-50)

Shockingly, DeVos had failed to recognize that IDEA—a landmark civil rights and education policy milestone—was a federal law. Noting DeVos' *evasive* answers on IDEA, Kaine concluded his question time by noting, "It's not a court, you're not under oath, not under subpoena, but you're trying to win my vote" (p. 50), leaving the social system at play to wonder why, exactly, DeVos was unwilling to commit to enforcing this federal law. In other words, DeVos failed to meet the expectancies Democrats had for an Education Secretary nominee during a confirmation hearing. The final blow to DeVos' credibility, which cemented her names of *evasive* and *unqualified*, came when Senator

Hassan (D-NH), a newly-elected senator and former governor whose son has cerebral palsy, followed up on the nominee's responses to Kaine's simple question.

Hassan: I want to go back to the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act.

That is a federal civil rights law. So, do you stand by your statement a few minutes ago that it should be up to the states whether to follow it?

DeVos: Federal law must be followed where federal dollars are in play.

Hassan: So, were you unaware what I just asked you about, the IDEA, that it is a federal law?

DeVos: I may have confused it.

Hassan: ... I just would urge you to become familiar, should you be nominated, with the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act and, I do have to say, I'm concerned that you seem so unfamiliar with it, and you seem to support vouchers schools that have not honored, you know, have made students sign away their rights to make sure the law is enforced. That is very troubling to me.

DeVos: Senator, I assure you that if confirmed, I will be very sensitive to the needs of special needs students and the policies surrounding that.

Hassan: And, with all due respect, it's not about sensitivity—although that helps. It is about being willing to enforce the law to make sure that my child and every child has the same access to public education—high-quality public education. (p. 58)

Hassan's follow up to Kaine's questioning yielded DeVos' self-admitted ignorance regarding a key federal law that impacts the nation's students and concretized the Democrats' *loyal opposition* competitive power intervention by emphasizing the

importance of *experience* and *knowledge* without directly berating the nominee or accusing her of *incompetence*. The Democrats' anomaly-featuring communication was made more effective because the anomalies it revealed in Republicans' anomaly-masking communication (*mainstream* and *qualified*) came not from the questioning senators but from the nominee's failure to correctly answer simple questions about education policy.

Though each individual senator attempted to provoke attention shifts with their anomaly-featuring communication, the sum of their efforts contributed to the Democrats' competitive power intervention and the power-share code between *minority* and *majority* party elected officials it evoked. The Democrats' questioning highlighted DeVos' *inexperience* as well as potential problematic conflicts of interest, all of which was backgrounded in the Republicans' anomaly-masking communication leveraged in support of Trump's nominee. Republican support for DeVos may have been implicitly defended under the superordinate ideological name *capitalist success story*; DeVos, as a billionaire in a *free-market* capitalist society that rewards *good ideas* with *profit*, is assumed to have some inherent value. If she was not inherently *competent*, it would be impossible for her to be a *capitalist success story* under this ideological system. By consistently affording DeVos the opportunity to demonstrate her own *incompetence* through unforced errors, Democrats suggest that her success is better explained by being a too-big-to-fail billionaire; rather than ascribing her great wealth to her success as a business woman, this explanation highlights the central nature of the nominee's inexhaustible funds to every part of her "experience." The total effect of Democrats' questioning may have been to name DeVos a *white mediocrity* though, as an op-ed in *Ebony* pointed out, "I can't even accuse DeVos of being mediocre, because mediocrity would at least imply there was

some effort involved. Her deluded responses were complemented with a smug smile that elicited to viewers that she [thought she] belonged” (Chappell, 2017).

Secondary Interventions: The Golden Rule and Charter School Accountability

Even as the primary intervention played out through attempted attention switches from both Democrats and Republicans, two secondary interventions were also happening. As Opt (2017) points out, naming is a fundamental human activity and, “in naming experience, human beings constitute a symbolic “reality,” which, as an abstraction, is necessarily incomplete” (p. 2). The RSI approach theorizes that for multiple interventions and attempts to provoke attention switches to take place simultaneously; there are always gaps in symbolic “reality” to be explained. The distinction between primary and secondary interventions, as well as which actors are performing the primary or secondary intervention depends on what the researcher chooses to background and foreground in the analysis. The first secondary intervention comes from Alexander’s implementation of the “Golden Rule,” and the second comes from the Democrats’ attempt to rename “charter schools” as *unaccountable*.

The first is a competitive power intervention enacted by Chairman Alexander through the implementation of *sanctions*, or the imposition of conditions by a powerholder for violating power code or the rules of the relationship (see Opt & Gring, 2009). In the case of the HELP Committee, a taken for granted rule is that the minority party is subservient to the majority party’s desires or authority. Alexander’s strict adherence to having only one five-minute round of questions during DeVos’ hearing can be considered a “rule” because it demonstrates—with clarity—that Alexander holds the most power in the room. This “rule”—and the threat of sanctions should it be violated—is meant to

support Alexander's "Golden Rule" explanation for limiting the questions to only one round, in which he names his decision *fair* and *demonstrating parity* with how President Obama's nominees were treated as opposed to *partisan* or *non-transparent*. Not only does the implementation of a sanction imply a clear *majority rules* power code, it may also confer a sense of authority and legitimacy to the power-holder; Alexander's stature and reputation would be maintained or heightened by his strict, seemingly-fair discharge of power. Though Democrats certainly attempted to change Alexander's mind, his stubbornness warrants being considered the main intervention because it was this symbolically-constituted reality that carried the day (at least on paper). This section will analyze Alexander's power intervention through sanctions as well as the Republican and Democratic attempts to rename the decision to hold only one round of questions for DeVos.

The second secondary intervention that permeated the HELP Committee hearing comes from Democrats' attempts to rename "charter schools" as *unaccountable* or *undeserving of federal funds*. According to a traditionally conservative or libertarian ideology, the way to create a "perfect" education system is through "charter schools." Ideologies, as superordinate rhetorical constructions, create powerful expectancies as to how the world should work; violations of these expectancies are not only problems that affect immediate perception but also the larger rhetorical implications for the relevant ideology. As such, the struggle between Democrats and Republicans to name the nature of "charter schools" is a struggle that transcends Betsy DeVos or even the Trump Administration, but is also intricately tied with perceptions of DeVos' qualifications for serving as Secretary of Education. This section will examine the unsuccessful attempt by

Democrats to persuade Republicans that charter schools are *unaccountable* and *underserving of federal funds* and, as a result, that DeVos' "experience" wasn't relevant.

Alexander's "Golden Rule." Alexander's stubborn refusal to consider a second-round of questions for DeVos' hearing, combined with the hearing taking place after business hours, represented a major power intervention that conflicted with the chairman's reputation as one of the "fairest" politicians in Washington, D.C. Throughout the hearing, numerous Democrats expressed their displeasure with Alexander's decision to limit DeVos' questioning and some even noted that this implementation of sanctions was out of character, thereby violating the expectancy set by his "fair" name. Senator Bennet (D-CO), the former superintendent of the Denver Public Schools, called Alexander "one of the fairest people in this town" (*Nomination of Betsy DeVos to serve as Secretary of Education*, 2017, p. 54) and said "it pained" him to voice his discontent over the chairman's decision "in view of how fair [Alexander had] been to me and other members" (p. 28), and Senator Whitehouse (D-RI) said he was "very fond of [Alexander], and... very fond of this committee" (p. 33) but he didn't believe the chairman's decision was accurately representative of Senate precedent. To dissect Alexander's power intervention, this section will begin by describing his initial "Golden Rule" justification for the hearing's agenda, continue by analyzing Democratic attempts to name that decision, and conclude by elucidating the rhetorical implications of Alexander's refusal to change course.

Alexander used a Christian biblical reference—an allusion to the "Golden Rule"—and a stated desire to be *fair* and *non-partisan* to justify his refusal to allow more than one round of questions. As a former secretary of education with a reputation for

fairness, Alexander seemed keen to build his ethos by foregrounding fairness and parity in his design of the hearing's process. Before he even began his opening remarks, Alexander said:

We're going to apply what I would call the Golden Rule, the one that comes from the book of Matthew, which applies the same procedures to you that we used in 2001 and 2005 for President George W. Bush's education secretary nominees and in 2009 and 2016 for President Obama's education secretary nominees, so we'll consider you and then vote just as we did then. (p. 1)

The previous hearings that Alexander enumerated were thereafter considered and named *precedent* in his argument, and he regarded *precedent* as the ultimate support material for a fair, logical rationale for limiting questions. In addition, his extreme foregrounding of a biblical allusion and a specific reference to a book of the new testament is clearly intended to activate a Judeo-Christian moral ethic while also painting him as a religious man. If Alexander believed, as appears to be the case, that *religion* is an ideological concept that implies *moral superiority, honesty, fairness, and being above the fray of politics*, then foregrounding his religious background was also an ethical appeal intended to improve the audience's estimation of his credibility.

When he was challenged about his decision by Democrats multiple times, Alexander usually returned to a variation on his initial refrain. For instance, when Senator Murray raised concerns about moving ahead with so few questions when DeVos had not completed her necessary ethics and financial disclosures, the chairman extended his "Golden Rule" metaphor to imply his reasoning was also *non-partisan* and *historically consistent*.

I'm gonna follow the Golden Rule. I'm not going to change the rules that apply to Senator [stutter] to uh Mrs. DeVos to rules that we haven't applied to President Obama's nominees or to President Bush's nominees, so we'll have a five minute round of questions and, uh, you and I can ask questions after that for another five minutes. That's exactly what we've done before... I would note that committee rules don't require tax returns to be reported by uh presidential nominees, the law does not, we did not require it of President Obama's two nominees for education secretary. If we want to change the rules, we can do that, but I'm not in favor of changing the rules in the middle of a... in the middle of the process. (p. 6)

He reiterated that idea, that the committee should not change course in the "middle" of a process, a moment later, saying:

Alexander: Well, I appreciate the request but I'm not going to change the rules in the middle of the game.

Murray: I was not aware those were rules.

Alexander: That-that is the precedent that we followed as far back as 1991 when I was the Education Secretary. We did it for both of President Obama's and we're going to the same thing for Mrs. DeVos. (p. 7)

Alexander went one step further in a response to comments from Senator Al Franken (D-MN), effectively naming his decision to limit questioning *preventing partisanship*. The chairman replied to Franken, "We are not going to treat a Republican nominee different than we treated Democratic nominee. We've had the same situation with both of President Obama's nominees" (p. 26), indicating that *fairness* and *preventing partisanship* were of paramount importance even if it meant making decisions that

ignored subjective circumstances. This entire narrative is anomaly-masking communication as Alexander is failing to counter-persuade against his opponents, who could easily name his decision to limit questioning as *rushing DeVos through* or *avoiding public scrutiny* as a decision *motivated by partisanship*.

Alexander's final tactic aimed at deflecting the Democrats' criticisms involved using repressive tolerance to normalize DeVos' nomination and also came as a response to Franken. After Franken corrected DeVos' incorrect student loan debt statistic, he ended his question period by addressing the chairman and raising concerns with the lack of a second round of questions.

Franken: That's why we want more questions, because we want to know if this person that we are entrusting, may entrust, to be the Secretary of Education, if she has the breadth and depth of knowledge that we would expect from someone who has that important uh that important job. Thank you.

Alexander: Thank you, Senator Franken. I had as many disagreements with Secretary King as you apparently do with Ms. DeVos. We are treating her the exact same way that we treated him. I think that's what I would call the Golden Rule. (p. 26)

By suggesting he had as many issues with John King as Franken had with DeVos, Alexander managed to not only deflect Franken's criticism but also imply that the "controversy" Democrats were "creating" about DeVos' qualifications was *normal*, and an example of an *enduring political difference*. Though relatively understated, this rhetorical maneuver indicates that Alexander is also endorsing DeVos' qualifications by equating her to previous Secretary of Education nominees. This move is an example of

repressive tolerance, a strategy used to stifle dissent by entreating the minority to “listen instead of protest” (Sculos & Walsh, 2016, p. 516), thereby resituating blame by naming the minority as *disruptive* and *part of the problem*. Alexander’s “Golden Rule” rationale managed to emphasize his own credibility, normalize DeVos’ nomination, and create an argument that accused Democrats of opposing DeVos for purely insincere political reasons.

Democrats attempted to persuade Alexander with anomaly-featuring communication that raised ethical, procedural, and partisan concerns with limiting questions to one round. Senator Murray’s opening remarks were the first instance in which Democratic concerns with the hearing’s agenda were raised, and she took issue with DeVos’ ethics disclosures being incomplete at the time of hearing. After enumerating several other issues she hoped to discuss with DeVos, Murray concluded her opening remarks by foregrounding the popular will of the minority to have a second round of questions.

I’m hopeful that this can be a smooth process, but, Mr. Chairman, I know my members are all here tonight. They are hoping for more than just five minutes of questions on this critical nominee and I hope that as we get through this you will consider doing that. (*Nomination of Betsy DeVos to serve as Secretary of Education*, 2017, p. 6)

When Alexander responded by pointing out that his procedure was identical to the procedure followed with secretary-nominees Duncan and King from the Obama administration, Murray sought to draw attention to gaps in Alexander’s explanation by differentiating the Obama nominees from DeVos. “Well, Mr. Chairman, I would just say

that nobody asked for additional time for at that point. So, I hope that as we get through this hearing we hear members' questions, we'll have an opportunity to revisit" (p. 7).

Senator Bennet continued differentiating the two scenarios, further drawing attention to Alexander's anomalous rationale.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In view of how fair you have been to me and other members, it pains me to say this, I really wish we had a second round of questions too. I really wish we had the tax returns for this nominee. I don't believe you are a precedent for this. When you became—when you were the nominee, you'd been a governor, you'd been the president of a university. John King had been a school principal, had been the commissioner of education in the State of New York. Arne Duncan had been the superintendent of Chicago public schools. Those were the experiences they brought to their committee hearing, and their records were well-known and well established. There is no way in the period of time that we have that we're going to be able to elicit that level of background. I would ask that some consideration be given to having additional questions, and that the tax returns be made available to the committee. (p. 28-29)

Bennet's clear delineation between the current situation and the scenarios Alexander referred to as *precedent* showed that, if Alexander was truly interested in *fairness* or *parity*, he would acknowledge the fundamentally different nature of DeVos as a nominee. By showing that Alexander's rationale was anything but fair or reasonable, Democrats like Murray and Bennet highlighted the ethical reasons that limiting questions was a mistake.

Other Democratic senators pointed out procedural flaws in Alexander's argument, namely that limiting questions would not yield adequate information and that the chairman's definition of precedent was overly-narrow. Senator Franken was a key proponent of this procedural argument, as he stated "we are selling our kids short by not being able to have a debate... I did not know of any rule about everyone getting one question" (p. 25) and that "virtually every member of the minority is asking to ask more questions and that's a very substantial difference" (p. 26). Here, Franken simultaneously advanced both prongs of the procedural argument by foregrounding the fact that constituents are harmed by not fully vetting nominees and by troubling Alexander's explanation of *precedent*. This attention shift encouraged audiences to see the chairman's symbolic construction of *precedent* may have, more accurately, been *precedent that advances a partisan agenda*. Similarly, Senator Whitehouse remarked that he could not remember ever have being told "I could never have a second round in a hearing as a matter of principle before" (p. 33), highlighting the apparent arbitrary and individual nature of Alexander's decision. Once again, Senator Bennet succinctly and articulately laid out the fundamental difference between DeVos nomination and the supposedly relevant precedent.

To me, the fact that Republican members of the Senate did not want to ask a second round of questions for the Obama nominee to the Senate, the idea that that should be a precedent for the Democrats, eight of whom are here tonight – to ask questions—even follow-up questions that we have heard tonight, I think is really unfair and uncharacteristic. (p. 54)

Senator Warren also cast doubt on the chairman's construction of *precedent* by saying, "Can I just ask about the precedent?... When we go back and examine the record, will we find instances where people asked for a second round of questions and were refused" (p. 56)? When Alexander declined to answer and repeated his *parity with Obama nominees* argument, Warren redeployed the type of rhetorical maneuvers she had used against DeVos on the chairman.

Warren: Mr. Chairman, I want to be clear, then this is the first time that someone has asked for a second round of questions and been refused?

Alexander: No- no no no, no one ever said that except you.

Warren: But, you haven't said otherwise—

Alexander: No, well, now that's an Alice in Wonder—I mean, Lewis Carroll would be proud of that – that's a little exceptional.

Warren: I'm sorry, did you say that you refused anyone a second round?

Alexander: No, I said that Lewis Carroll would be proud of that kind of reasoning. What I'm saying is I looked straightforwardly at the process that we had with President Obama's education secretaries and we determined we would do the same thing for President-elect Trump's nominee. (p. 56)

As with her questioning of DeVos, Warren's aggressive demeanor—which Alexander was quick to point out and dismiss with a literary allusion—may have negatively impacted her credibility, but it did foreground the flexible nature of the definition of "precedent." This anomaly-featuring communication was complemented by a call for transparency from Senator Baldwin, who stated "I wanted to weigh in also that I hope we will get additional opportunity to ask questions. I would like it to be not in writing but to

give the American people the chance to hear the exchange and responses” (p. 35), raised concerns with gaps in Alexander’s “word about process” (p. 1) and attempted to get the notoriously fair chairman to reconsider.

The final Democratic intervention to help Alexander recognize the “unfairness” of his rationale came in attempts to take what the chairman saw as *preventing partisanship* and rename it as *motivated by partisanship*. The primary support for this name came from Senator Murray, who began her second round of final questions as the ranking member by once again raising issues with Alexander’s decision. In language that was both accusatory and apologetic, Murray foregrounded the potentially partisan nature of limiting questions for an *unqualified* nominee like DeVos.

Let me just say, I am really disappointed that you have preemptively cut off our members from asking questions. It really is unprecedented. And you and I have worked together, and I appreciate that, but I hope you change your mind. I don't know what you are trying to protect Ms. DeVos from. She should get robust scrutiny. (p. 52)

It seems strategic that the most overt questioning of Alexander’s intentions came in the last half hour of the meeting; Democrats were slow to question the chairman’s motives. Rather than resorting to *ad hominem* attacks or thinly-veiled accusations, Democrats raised significant issues with limiting the number of questions DeVos could be asked with a multi-pronged, well-supported series of arguments while also recognizing Alexander’s reputation for fairness. In doing so, the Democrats’ anomaly-featuring communication left one anomaly conveniently unexplained: if Alexander is the fairest man in D.C., why is he behaving so unfairly? By raising the question without answering

it, Murray induces cognitive dissonance in the social system by implicitly naming Alexander's activity as *motivated by partisanship* and leaving the audience to draw their own conclusions about the most likely explanation for this gap in named experience.

Having examined both Alexander's power intervention and the Democrats' failed attempts to persuade him to withdraw his sanctions, a few key observations can be drawn about the effectiveness of this intervention. Given the numerous reasons Democrats found to raise issues with the chairman's symbolic construction of committee precedent, it seems likely Alexander's unwillingness to yield was motivated by something partisan. Alexander's failure to justify why his precedent excluded the numerous alternative precedents raised by Democrats caused his obstreperousness to be perceived as *motivated by partisanship* and *insincere*. Had the chairman provided a reasonable explanation as to why his precedent focused solely on 1991 and the two Obama education secretary nominees, thereby reconciling a major gap in his symbolic construction of *precedent*, he may have been better able to name his own motives *sincere* and *fair*.

Charter school accountability. The other secondary intervention that pervaded the HELP Committee hearing on Betsy DeVos' nomination regarded charter schools and whether or not they were *reputable* and *worthy of federal investment*. As this battle over the symbolic construction of charter schools is an ideograph for both traditionally conservative and liberal ideologies, perceptions of what the name "charter school" indicates were also influential over views of DeVos' qualifications, which are based heavily in charter school philanthropy and advocacy. The main intervention in this narrative comes from Democrats in the attention subsystem, as they used anomaly-featuring communication to foreground the importance of accountability as a safeguard to

ensure quality education and safe investment of federal taxpayer dollars. To see the impact of naming charter schools as either *accountable* and *innovative* or *unaccountable* and *unworthy of taxpayer dollars*, this section will examine the Republicans' attempts to name DeVos' experience and charter schools in general as well as Democrats' competing attention shift aimed at negatively impacting DeVos' credibility.

Prior to the Democrats' attempts to name charter schools as *unaccountable*, Republicans used their opening remarks and questioning periods to depict charter schools as having *bipartisan appeal*, sufficient accountability measures, and *servicing disadvantaged students*. Alexander used part of his opening remarks to list, in some detail, a cadre of politicians from both parties who have supported charter schools including Presidents H.W. Bush, Clinton, Bush, and Obama, Senator Hillary Clinton, Secretaries King and Duncan, and himself as Secretary of Education. Additionally, the chairman was sure to point out that the idea for charter schools originated from the Minnesota Democratic Farmer Labor Party (DFL), naming the very nature of "charter schools" as *bipartisan*. This anomaly-masking communication made no mention of concerns about accountability, instead choosing to foreground the sheer number of Democrats and Republicans that support "charter schools." Defense of these schools as *accountable* followed shortly thereafter during Senator Scott's introduction of DeVos where the Republican foregrounded charter schools as a means of *helping underprivileged children* to bolster DeVos' credentials.

Mrs. DeVos is clearly not opposed to accountability. What she's opposed to is holding some schools accountable but not all schools. What she's opposed to is leaving children trapped in schools that we know... we know are failing. Failing

the very students that will have no hope if they do not receive a high quality education. (p. 8)

By this logic, whether DeVos' record on accountability is credible is immaterial; rather, Scott would have the audience view the nominee as *compassionate* and a *champion of equal opportunity* rather than respond directly to concerns of unaccountability. The final element of the Republican attempt to background "charter school accountability" was added by Senator Enzi (R-WY), who foregrounded his dissatisfaction with accountability measures under the current Secretary of Education. "You'll inherit... the current Department of Education's data lacked transparency, omitted key information, made other flawed assumptions. As an accountant, I was appalled..." (p. 13). This offhand remark renames the current Department of Education as *opaque* and *unaccountable*; logically, then, this prompts the audience to wonder how much harm a nominee with a less-than-stellar record on accountability could do if the agency she has been appointed to is already struggling with accountability. By emphasizing bipartisanship, the possible positive impacts of charter schools, and characterizing the current Department of Education under Secretary King as *unaccountable*, Republicans' sought to rhetorically background any concerns about DeVos' record.

Republican efforts to sweep the issue of charter school accountability into the background of DeVos's hearing were ultimately unsuccessful, as Democrats used anomaly-featuring communication to foreground many gaps in the Republicans' naming. The Democrats' collective troubling of the symbolic construction of "charter schools" emphasized numerous points of contention, including DeVos' direct experience falling short, the funding implications of increasing support for charter schools, and President

Trump's unaccountable Trump University. Initially, Senator Murray's opening remarks established a clear and explicit name for "charter schools." Murray remarked that "we [must] focus our federal policies and investments on strengthening public schools for all students and certainly not toward diverting taxpayer dollars to fund vouchers that don't work for *unaccountable private schools* [emphasis added]" (p. 5), making clear her skepticism about "charter schools" as a *deus ex machina* for the nation's school children. Senator Bennet used his questioning period to point out that proving the value of charter schools is easier said than done.

According to one analysis, Detroit public schools -- and by the way, it is not easy to figure this out because there is so little accountability in Michigan -- the Detroit public schools averaged 9%, the kids—9% of the kids are proficient. Charter schools were a little better, 14% of the kids were proficient. I will stipulate that charter schools are doing better, but that is a horrible outcome for everybody involved. (p. 29)

By directly linking his concerns with *unaccountable* and *opaque* charter schools to Detroit public schools—an organization through which some of DeVos' *advocacy* had been focused—Bennet foregrounded the inconsistencies within DeVos' experience to name her a *part of the problem* as opposed to a *savior* or *experienced advocate*. Senator Whitehouse added his discontent with charter schools by noting that moving students from the public system and into private charter schools creates "legacy costs" (p. 32) for the public school system. Senator Murphy further noted that a lack of accountability could make it possible for "education industry" capitalists to become rich by duping taxpayers.

Murphy: Your family has been investors in a company called K12, it's for-profit online charter operator. It gets about 80% of its money comes from the federal or state taxpayers, and it paid its CEO over \$1 million in a year, it's made millions and millions of dollars in profit. I can go through a long litany of examples in which people have made their fortune off of public education dollars. A charter school principal in Orlando who got a \$519,000 payout when her school was closed for poor performance. I guess my question is simple, do you support companies and individuals profiting from public education dollars—that is essentially taking money away from students—to pay salaries for CEOs in return for investors?

DeVos: Senator, thank you for that question. Let me just say that when it comes to education, I think what's important is what the outcomes are, what the achievements are. And I don't think the delivery mechanism is the issue as much as it is, are students receiving the benefit of a great education?

...

Murphy: If we can't agree folks should not get rich off of schools, maybe we can agree they shouldn't get rich off of terrible schools. (p. 38)

This vague response, particularly in light of the insinuation that DeVos may have benefitted from lax accountability measures, is reminiscent of DeVos' repeated answers of "I support accountability" (p. 49) to Senator Kaine in that her answers failed to satisfactorily assuage her audience's concerns. These attacks on DeVos' personal integrity, which were grounded in her *inexperience* and charter schools' *unaccountability*,

were amplified when Senator Warren noted that DeVos' potential future boss—President-elect Trump—also lacked credibility on this subject.

Warren: Do you support protecting federal taxpayer dollars from waste, fraud and abuse?

DeVos: Absolutely.

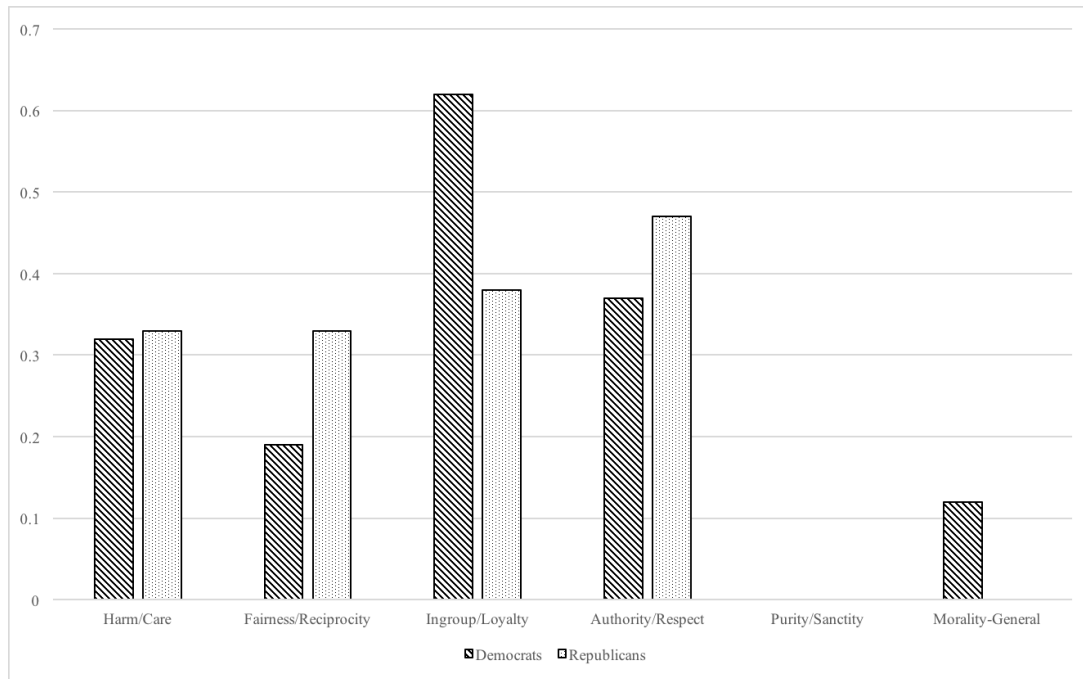
Warren: Oh good, so do I. Because now we all know that President-elect Trump's experience with higher education was to create a fake university which resulted in his paying \$125 million to students that he cheated. So I'm curious about how the Trump Administration would protect against waste, fraud, and abuse at similar for-profit colleges. (p. 42)

This argument implied guilt-by-association with the President, which is an uncommon occurrence in a Senate confirmation hearing. The Democrats' attention intervention against Republicans' failure to address accountability issues with private charter schools used anomaly-featuring communication to draw attention to unexplained gaps in their interpretation, namely that DeVos had been involved with charter schools that are inherently *unaccountable* and *undeserving of federal funds*. Though this issue was far from resolved during the HELP Committee hearing, the ideological nature of buying into or disregarding "charter schools" as a legitimate policy option surfaced during DeVos' hearing, making it likely that similar ideological differences would plague the remainder of her confirmation process.

Moral Rhetoric

Selected statements from Democratic and Republican senators were analyzed using the LIWC program and the DeVos Moral Foundations Dictionary (MFD) to

Table 2: Democrats' and Republicans' varied use of moral rhetoric during the HELP Committee's confirmation of Betsy DeVos to be US Secretary of Education, as measured by the DeVos Moral Foundations Dictionary [see Appendix A].



measure the rate of moral rhetoric employed during the HELP Committee hearing. The only Democratic speech to meet the criteria described in the Methods section came from Senator Murray while Republican Senators Alexander, Hatch, and Scott each met the requirements for measurement (see Appendix B).

Democratic rhetoric from Senator Murray was processed through LIWC to display the rate of moral rhetoric as a percentage of total words ($n=1,605$), and revealed that 1.62 percent of relevant Democratic speech was moral in nature. Though the expected liberal appeals to the *harm/care* and *fairness/reciprocity* foundations were present (see Table 2), Murray's main moral appeals were to the *ingroup/loyalty* and *authority/respect* foundations, which are more readily recognized by conservatives (see

Graham, Haidt & Nosek, 2009). Much of Murray's *ingroup/loyalty* appeal came from her use of the words "family" and "community," and her calls for a "reasonable" and "proper" process would appeal to the *authority/respect* foundation. The involvement of five of the six categories in the DeVos MFD suggests that Murray was successful in designing multifaceted moral arguments that should appeal to her conservative audience.

The combined speeches from Senators Alexander, Hatch, and Scott utilized moral rhetoric at a rate of 1.51 percent (n=2,123). Consistent with past research on conservative moral rhetoric, Republican moral speech registered relatively evenly across the first four foundations (though neither Democrats nor Republicans invoked the *purity/sanctity* foundation [see Table 2]). While the Democratic speech from Murray used five different MFD foundations, they varied widely in rates of utilization from .12 percent in *morality general* to .62 in *ingroup/loyalty*; Republican moral rhetoric, conversely, only ranged from .33 in *harm/care* and *fairness/reciprocity* to .47 in *authority/respect*. Though the Republicans did utilize the first two foundations, which are more-typically persuasive to liberals, it is worth noting that they were used at a lower rate than the third and fourth "conservative" moral foundations. Alexander only used two words with moral connotations—"devoted" and "families"—but Hatch and Scott each advanced themes of "fighting for equity in education" and "accountability" to form moral arguments. These word choices, combined with the range of moral language present, indicate that the messages from Republicans were primarily intended for fellow conservatives.

The usage of moral rhetoric in selected statements from the HELP Committee hearing revealed that both Democrats and Republicans were employing moral language that appeals to conservatives. This finding would support the supposition that Murray's

moral language was designed to appeal to Republicans who may have been on the fence about DeVos' nomination, while Republicans were attempting similar appeals to prevent their colleagues from deserting.

V. Senators' Press Releases

From the time of DeVos' nomination in November of 2016 through her full Senate confirmation in early February of 2017, the HELP committee's Senators took an active role in attempting to shape public perceptions of DeVos through their official press releases. As with later speeches on the Senate floor regarding DeVos' confirmation, Republicans issued considerably fewer total words ($n=2,717$) than Democrats ($n=7,005$) in their press releases that could be analyzed for moral rhetoric per the criteria listed in the Methods section, but this was reflective of the greater frequency of Democrats' attempts to name DeVos through this medium. As a result, the primary intervention analyzed in this chapter is the attention intervention Democrats' implemented through anomaly-featuring communication to counter Republicans' attempts to name DeVos *qualified* and charter schools *bipartisan* through press releases. This chapter will analyze the Democrats intervention against Republicans and the moral rhetoric employed by each party in their press releases.

Social System

Before proceeding with an analysis of the Democrats' intervention against the Republican naming of DeVos, this section must first identify the social system of this intervention and then the Republican's press release nomenclature for DeVos.

The most significant difference between Democrats' attempts to name DeVos *unqualified* and *motivated by partisanship* in press releases compared to the HELP Committee is that press releases attempt to influence a different social system. The main interveners in the social system of this attention intervention are still the HELP Committee members, as their established credibility makes them *policy experts* who have

a greater than average chance of influencing federal issues under their purview. While these *policy experts* were undoubtedly still trying to impact their colleagues' views of DeVos, these press releases were also key tools in engaging the senators' constituents and state-level news media. As a result, the social system for this intervention includes the U.S. public as engaged by their elected representatives as well as state and local news media (which were, in turn, using information provided by these same elected representatives in their reporting). Engaging their constituencies in this matter indicates that the Senators were hoping to incite strong feelings about DeVos among the electorate, which might then lead voters to contact other elected representatives and express support or opposition to the president's nominee. This section analyzes the Democrats' intervention through press releases and examine the differences in naming strategies both Republicans and Democrats employed compared to the rhetoric they employed in the HELP Committee hearing, which engaged a significantly smaller social system.

Republican naming: A “small government” nominee

In Republican press releases expressing an interpretation about DeVos, Senators emphasized DeVos' qualifications by bolstering them with their own qualifications, portrayed charter schools as bipartisan, and activated a traditional Republican frame by painting DeVos as a *small government* nominee who would keep the federal government out of state and local education policy. Two of the senators who sent press releases that favored DeVos' confirmation—Alexander and Isakson—were sure to point out their own credibility to strengthen the persuasive impact of their endorsement. Not only did Alexander's press release identify him as “Chairman Lamar Alexander” in its the first

sentence—thereby foregrounding his leadership role—his main support for advancing DeVos’ nomination was his own experience as Secretary of Education.

Alexander, who was Education Secretary for President George H. W. Bush, said his last act as secretary in 1993 was to ask every U.S. school district to emulate the dozen charter schools started by the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party. Since then, he said, broad, bipartisan support has increased that number to 6,800 charter schools, attended by 2.7 million children. (Office of U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander, 2017, para. 2)

This appeal to credibility had entered into the release’s narrative prior to his implication that the audience should be named “fortunate” (para. 5) that DeVos was the nominee, thereby imparting his blessing. Similarly, after “Isakson praised DeVos’ understanding that yesterday’s ‘non-traditional’ student today makes up a large portion of students” (Office of U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson, 2017, para. 7). Then the release noted that Isakson “also serves as chairman of the labor and workforce subcommittee” (para. 8), thereby enhancing his *policy expert* name. Alexander also directly quoted his *mainstream/bipartisan* argument from the HELP Committee, which asks, “Who is in the mainstream [regarding charter schools]? Both Presidents Bush, the President-elect, 25 states, the U.S. Congress in the D.C. Voucher program, 45 U.S. Senators, 73 percent of Americans, Betsy DeVos, or her critics?” (Office of U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander, 2017, para. 3).

Senator Cassidy (R-LA) furthered this *mainstream* narrative by noting his own support for charter schools and also introduced a new narrative: that DeVos embodied *small government* ideals.

I have made clear my commitment to taking power away from our nation’s capital and returning it to the kitchen table, believing that parents are better suited to decide what is best for their children than a Washington bureaucrat. Supporting school choice and making sure that all children have access to quality education have been top priorities... Secretary DeVos has made it clear that she will be an agent of change to improve our schools and children’s future. (Office of U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy, 2017, para. 2)

Isakson also contributed to DeVos’ name as *small government* nominee by foregrounding their conversation about “reducing burdensome regulations” (Office of U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson, 2017, para. 1), a key target of small government rhetoric. Senator Roberts (R-KS) released his desire to “work with Mrs. DeVos to ensure Kansans can make their own decisions about the best way to improve education, free from federal interference” (Office of U.S. Senator Pat Roberts, 2017, para. 2), and Senator Murkowski (R-AK) revealed that DeVos had committed “to defend state and local control of our schools, to implement federal education laws as they are written, and [to] not undermine or ignore our public schools or force vouchers in any state” in personal meetings (Office of U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski, 2017, para. 2). The emphasis on the senators’ qualifications to bolster their endorsements combined with their focus on *small government* ideals created a narrative that foregrounded DeVos’ adherence to traditional Republican beliefs and the senators’ personal satisfaction with her qualifications. The lack of reference to her actual qualifications and experiences also indicates that the Republicans were aware of her deficiencies, but wanted their voting base to support her despite that fact.

Primary Intervention: Democrats say DeVos is an “unqualified partisan appointee”

The Democrats, dissatisfied with the Republican effort to normalize DeVos, implemented an attention intervention prioritizing anomaly-featuring communication that sought to rename DeVos as *unqualified*, *incompetent*, *unwilling to defend marginalized students*, and a *partisan appointee*. A primary feature of the Democrats’ claims in press releases was their depiction of DeVos as fundamentally *unqualified*, and their allusions to her status as a *partisan appointee* increased substantially as many Democrats ceased giving DeVos the benefit of the doubt following her sub-par performance before the HELP Committee (see Table 3). In addition to advancing these semi-established names for DeVos, Democrats’ press releases bolstered their anti-DeVos arguments by referencing their own qualifications as *policy experts* as well as the strong opposition voiced by their constituents. For instance, one of Kaine’s releases referenced his status as “a former governor and strong supporter of public education whose three children attended Richmond public schools” (Office of U.S. Senator Tim Kaine, 2017a, para. 1), and another foreground the fact that “Anne and I and our kids have all been the beneficiaries of great public schools” (Office of U.S. Senator Tim Kaine, 2017b, para. 2). Similarly, Bennet noted his credentials as “a former superintendent of the Denver Public Schools” (Office of U.S. Senator Michael Bennet, 2017a, para. 3). Just as Republicans cited their own credentials to enhance the credibility of their endorsement, so too did Democrats foreground their expertise to further their naming of DeVos as *unqualified*.

Numerous Democratic senators also used their press releases to acknowledge the overwhelmingly negative response their constituents had to DeVos’ nomination, as well as Alexander’s handling of the committee hearing, and solidify their opposition to the

Table 3: Democrats reinforced four primary names for DeVos' experience in their press releases opposing her confirmation.	
Rhetorical name for DeVos	Democratic Senators' remarks
<i>Unqualified</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Betsy DeVos lacks the public education experience and qualifications for this job... (Office of U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin, 2017, para. 5) • ...she failed to adequately answer even the most basic questions about education policy-it's clear to me that she is not qualified for the demanding job of Education Secretary... (Office of U.S. Senator Al Franken, 2017a, para. 2) • There is no precedent for an Education Department Secretary nominee with your lack of experience in public education... While past nominees for Secretary of Education have served as teachers, school system leaders, and governors, and came to the Department of Education with deep executive experience in public education, you have held no such position. As such, your nomination provides the Senate and the public with few clues about your actual policy positions on a host of critical issues. (Office of U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren, 2017a, para. 2)
<i>Incompetent</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...she is the most incompetent cabinet-level nominee I have ever seen... (Office of U.S. Senator Al Franken, 2017b, para. 2) • [through] her lack of understanding... Mrs. DeVos has shown herself to be completely unqualified for this position - and her recent letter has only reinforced that she is unfit to serve as Secretary of Education. (Office of U.S. Senator Maggie Hassan, 2017a, para. 3)
<i>Unwilling to defend marginalized students</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not only did Mrs. DeVos fail to commit to enforcing the law to protect students with disabilities, but she also admitted that she was confused about whether [IDEA] is a federal law. (Office of U.S. Senator Maggie Hassan, 2017b, para. 3) • Ms. DeVos' answer to my question, in which she refused to commit to enforcing the current law on campus sexual assaults contained in Title IX is deeply troubling. We've come too far and have too far to go on campus sexual assaults to go back to the days of zero accountability. (Office of U.S. Senator Bob Casey, 2017, para. 2) • I will ask how Ms. DeVos if she can (sic) lead the effort to build positive school climates when she has spent so much time and money promoting discrimination against people based on their sexual orientation. (Office of U.S. Senator Chris Murphy, 2016, para. 3)
<i>Partisan appointee</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have no doubt that Betsy DeVos sincerely cares about children, and it is not her fault that President Trump nominated her. (Office of U.S. Senator Michael Bennet, 2017b, para. 3) • Betsy DeVos has demonstrated that she is fundamentally unqualified to lead the Education Department, and it's a shame that Republicans voted to confirm one of their major donors instead of looking out for our children. (Office of U.S. Senator Al Franken, 2017b, para. 2)

nominee. Whitehouse (D-RI) noted after the HELP Committee hearing that he “received thousands of letters, calls, and emails in opposition to her nomination, many of them citing the school voucher and privatization agenda of Mrs. DeVos” (Office of U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, 2017b, para. 4), which followed a previous release from late 2016 that reported on the senator’s efforts to convene roundtables with Rhode Islanders who had a stake in education (see Office of U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, 2016). Combined, the use of such evidence simultaneously justifies opposition to DeVos through constituent concerns and portrays Whitehouse as a conscientious representative. Warren (D-MA) raised concerns about DeVos’ “paper-thin record on higher education and student debt” (Office of U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren, 2017a, para. 4), and Murphy (D-CT) noted “I’ve never seen folks in Connecticut respond to a nominee like they did after that hearing. Since the hearing, 11,000 people from my tiny little state called and wrote into my office to oppose her nomination. Almost no one called in support. That’s extraordinary” (Office of U.S. Senator Chris Murphy, 2017b, para. 3). Hassan said she “urge[d] [her] colleagues to listen to the voices of their constituents and oppose Mrs. DeVos’ nomination” (Office of U.S. Senator Maggie Hassan, 2017b, para. 2), thereby foregrounding the public’s primarily negative perception of DeVos and implicitly accusing Republicans of ignoring voters in favor of advancing a partisan agenda. Senator Murphy furthered this *partisan appointee* name by suggesting Alexander’s motives for limiting questions were political in nature.

Unfortunately though, I didn’t have time to ask. I am deeply disappointed that Chairman Alexander, who has a well-deserved reputation for fairness, cut off the hearing when so many questions were left unanswered. We are doing our kids a

disservice by not thoroughly vetting Mrs. DeVos and her potentially radical ideas for our nation's schools. (Office of U.S. Senator Chris Murphy, 2017a, para. 2)

Murphy's accusation that Alexander was unfair was complemented by Baldwin's (D-WI) suggestion that DeVos' credentials hadn't been sufficiently inspected, as one of her releases indicated the HELP Committee hearing had not "ensure[d] that these and other important issues receive the scrutiny that they deserve" (Office of U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin, 2017, para. 4). The Democrats' anomaly-featuring communication in press releases largely sought to concretize names for DeVos that were established during the HELP Committee Hearing (see Table 4), which they supported by referencing their own qualifications as *policy experts* whose opinions on the topic should be trusted. Because their communication also featured indications that DeVos, a *partisan appointee*, was being shielded from scrutiny by *complicit* Republican senators, it appears Democrats wanted the publics affected in this social system to be aware of both DeVos' unfitness to serve and the non-transparent nature of her confirmation.

The other prominent anomaly featured in the Democrats' press releases was renaming DeVos as *unwilling to defend marginalized students*, which included comments about her confusion over IDEA, unwillingness to enforce Title IX protections, and poor record on LGBTQ issues. This name was not foregrounded as prominently in the HELP Committee hearing, but this is because the name was created to make sense of DeVos' answers on those issue. In other words, DeVos' sloppy, *evasive* answers across multiple disability-related issues were best explained by the nominee possessing an unwillingness to protect those populations. Senator Hassan (D-NH) made that point succinctly, while

also furthering the names of *unaccountable* and *undeserving of federal funds* for charter schools.

Mrs. DeVos' support for diverting taxpayer dollars to private, religious and for-profit schools without accountability requirements is unacceptable, as is her failure to understand the challenges facing students with disabilities... Not only did Mrs. DeVos fail to commit to enforcing the law to protect students with disabilities, but she also admitted that she was confused about whether the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is a federal law. (Office of U.S. Senator Maggie Hassan, 2017b, paras. 2-3)

Kaine, who had asked DeVos the initial question about IDEA in the HELP Committee hearing, also mentioned IDEA in his press releases, but the other Senator to mention the law by name was Republican Senator Susan Collins. Collins, who later voted against DeVos' confirmation in the Senate, was one of only two Republicans to oppose DeVos' confirmation. Her press release mirrored Democrats' by foregrounding the nominee's *unwilling to defend marginalized students*. The press release, which also foregrounded Collins' other concerns about DeVos to the media and the public, quoted a dramatic portion of Collins' announcement of her opposition to the nominee.

While it is unrealistic and unfair to expect a nominee to know the details of all the programs under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education, I am troubled and surprised by Mrs. DeVos' apparent lack of familiarity with the landmark 1975 law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, known as IDEA, that guarantees a free and appropriate education to children with special needs.

The mission of the Department of Education is broad, but supporting public education is at its core. I am concerned that Mrs. DeVos' lack of experience with public schools will make it difficult for her to fully understand, identify, and assist with those challenges, particularly for our rural schools in states like Maine... I will not, I cannot vote to confirm her as our nation's next Secretary of Education.

(Office of U.S. Senator Susan Collins, 2017, paras. 8-10)

Murkowski, the other Republican to vote against the confirmation, did not send a press release about DeVos until after she had been confirmed, making Collins' press release announcing her opposition the only instance that a Republican invoked any of the Democrats names for the nominee.

Democrats' press releases also identified DeVos' noncommittal responses to protecting sexual assault survivors and LGBTQ students as anomalies central to their party's intervention against Republicans' normalization of the nominee. Senator Casey alluded to his credentials on protecting students who experience sexual assault—he “introduced and passed into law the Campus SaVe Act, which put in place uniform reporting standards for campus sexual assaults on college campuses” (Office of U.S. Senator Bob Casey, 2017, para. 1)—before becoming the only Democratic senator to criticize this aspect of DeVos' inexperience in a press release.

Ms. DeVos' answer to my question, in which she refused to commit to enforcing the current law on campus sexual assaults contained in Title IX is deeply troubling. We've come too far and have too far to go on campus sexual assaults to go back to the days of zero accountability. A sexual assault is the ultimate betrayal and the students of our nation deserve a Secretary of Education who will

stand up for them, not one unwilling to commit to enforcing basic campus sexual assault protections. (para. 2)

Casey's statement foregrounding the centrality of protecting sexual assault survivors as a requirement for serving as Secretary of Education added another dimension to DeVos' *unqualified* name, while also highlighting one of DeVos' most evasive answers in the HELP Committee hearing. Additionally, Senator Murphy (D-CT) contributed to the name *unwilling to defend marginalized students* when he linked DeVos' inexperience to her past political activism on behalf of anti-LGBTQ causes.

I was very troubled to learn that President-elect Trump plans to nominate a person for Secretary of Education who has spent so much time funding partisan efforts to attack public education and push anti-gay political causes... I want to know how Congress would put someone who has spent her life trying to strip funding from public schools in charge of those very schools. I will ask how Ms. DeVos if she can (sic) lead the effort to build positive school climates when she has spent so much time and money promoting discrimination against people based on their sexual orientation. (Office of U.S. Senator Chris Murphy, 2016, paras. 2-3)

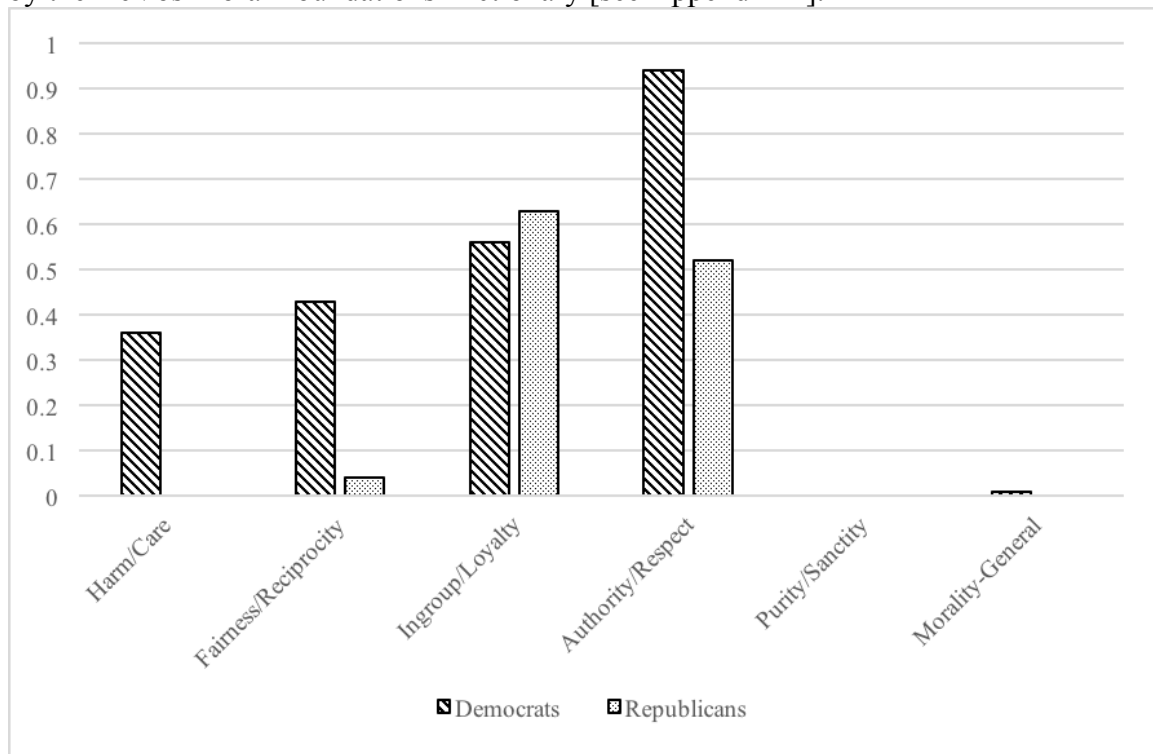
Murphy went on to portray DeVos' responses to these types of inquiries as "threshold questions" (para. 4), indicating he agreed with Casey's assessment of these issues as central qualifications for someone seeking to become U.S. Secretary of Education. In all, this portion of the Democrats' attention intervention featured anomalies the Republicans' naming of DeVos—namely, that DeVos is *unwilling to defend marginalized students* as evidenced by her *evasive* answers to simple questions. Describing these areas in which DeVos' answers were troubling and unsatisfactory as central parts of the education

secretary's job drew attention to the nominee's *unqualified* name while also sending a message about values to the social system affected by these press releases.

Moral Rhetoric

Press releases that met the criteria for analysis from both Democratic and Republican senators were analyzed using the LIWC program and the DeVos Moral Foundations Dictionary (MFD) to measure the rate of moral rhetoric in arguments made for media and voters. All 10 Democratic senators from the HELP Committee sent a total of 24 press releases that were fit for analysis (n=7,005 words) while only seven of the committee's 12 Republicans sent a total of eight press releases (n=2,717) (see Appendix B). This section will describe and analyze each party's rate of moral rhetoric.

Table 4: Democrats' and Republicans' varied use of moral rhetoric in their press releases regarding the nomination of Betsy DeVos to be US Secretary of Education, as measured by the DeVos Moral Foundations Dictionary [see Appendix A].



On average, Democrats employed more moral language in their press releases than in the HELP Committee hearing, indicating a shift in rhetorical strategy based on the social system impacted by press releases. First, moral language comprised 2.3 percent of all Democrats' words in press releases (n=7,005), with the average senator using moral language at a rate of 2.1 percent. Senator Kaine used moral rhetoric more than any of his Democratic colleagues at a rate of 3.42 (n=1,314), followed by Hassan at 3.22 (n=933) and Warren at 2.62 (n=800). Senator Whitehouse used moral rhetoric least frequently, at .96 (n=1,046).

As was the case during the HELP Committee hearing, Democrats' moral rhetoric occurred in five of the six moral foundations as measured by the DeVos MFD (see Table 4). Because the Democrats once again relied most heavily on the *authority/respect* and *ingroup/loyalty* foundations, it appears their arguments were targeted at moderate conservatives who are less likely to be persuaded by the "liberal" *harm/care* and *fairness/reciprocity* foundations. Some of the Democrats' strongest appeals to the *authority/respect* foundation came from Senator Baldwin, who expounded on the concept of "respect for tradition" in her press release when referring to "Wisconsin's... long and proud tradition of supporting quality public education for every student" (Office of U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin, 2017, para. 2). Kaine also advanced this *authority/respect* narrative by naming DeVos' illiteracy on IDEA a failure to "comply" with federal authority, and multiple Democrats mentioned the importance of education to "communities" and "families" thereby invoking *ingroup/loyalty*. Senator Warren advanced a more liberal *harm/care* argument by framing the job of education secretary as someone who "protects" children and families by ensuring a quality education, and Kaine

repeatedly invoked the importance of “accountability,” which represents the *fairness/reciprocity* foundation. The Democrats’ orientation toward “conservative” moral foundations indicates a targeted, competent persuasive effort to rename experience using moral arguments that would appeal to the desired audience.

Unlike Democrats, Republicans utilized less moral language in their press releases than they did in statements before the HELP Committee, suggesting their arguments targeting this social system were not meant to activate moral intuitions. Altogether, the Republican senators used moral language at a rate of 1.18 percent (n=2,717), down from 1.56 in remarks during the HELP Committee hearing (n=2,123), with the average senator using moral language at a rate of 1.09. Of the seven Republicans who sent press releases that qualified for analysis, only three had rates of moral language use greater than one percent: Collins at 1.63 (n=674), Roberts at 1.58 (n=631), and Murkowski at 1.32 (n=152). Senator Isakson had the lowest rate of usage at .53 (n=563)

Republican moral language only registered in three foundations—*fairness/reciprocity*, *ingroup/loyalty*, and *authority/respect*—down from four in the HELP Committee Hearing. Nearly half the Republicans’ moral language usage came from Senator Collins’ press release in which she announced her opposition to DeVos’ confirmation, wherein the senator appealed heavily to the *ingroup/loyalty* and *authority/respect* foundations through the use of words like “nation,” “respect,” and “deference.” This moral orientation seems strategic given Collins’ break with the Republican party line; though she was voting against the president-elect’s nominee, Collins’ argument still appealed to traditionally conservative moral frames. In essence,

though Collins was breaking ranks with her colleagues, she still “spoke Republican” when breaking the news.

Republicans and Democrats took fundamentally different approaches to the moral rhetoric they employed in their press releases. First, while Democrats increased the prevalence of their moral rhetoric and appealed to their audience using traditionally-conservative moral foundations, Republicans confined themselves to traditionally conservative foundations and decreased the moral nature of this appeal. This change in tact suggests not only that they were not keen to activate moral frames in the minds of their audience, but also that they tried less hard to engage Democratic moral systems when the opposition party was not in the room. Second, though Democrats’ moral rhetoric usage was similar to tactics employed by Senator Murray in the HELP Committee’s hearing, the rate of moral language increased from 1.62 to 2.3 percent. This increase in moral language could represent an evolution of the Democrats’ self-named role as *loyal opposition*. Though they started the confirmation process with a more open mind, as the *minority party of loyal opposition* it stands that Democrats’ displeasure with DeVos’ answers to questions would translate into increasingly argumentative rhetoric aimed at stopping the nominee’s progress by invoking moral foundations. The change in social system from being comprised of mostly senators during the HELP Committee hearing to media organizations and constituents in press releases had a considerable impact on the ways members of each party employed moral language to activate flashes of affect in their audience.

VI. Speeches on the Senate Floor

The debate over DeVos' nomination came to a head on the Senate floor, as Democrats tried to convince one more Republicans to join them in opposing the nominee. Senators had 30 hours of executive session in which to voice their support or opposition to DeVos' confirmation, all of which began on February 6, 2017, and continued through the night into February 7. Though the vote at noon on February 7 yielded a 50-50 tie, Vice President Pence cast the tiebreaking vote to confirm the DeVos as the 11th U.S. Secretary of Education. The close nature of this vote makes it increasingly likely that Democrats were still engaging Republicans with true attempts at persuasive conversion, while Republicans kept a comparatively low-profile on the Senate floor. This was reflected by the fact that Democrats uttered nearly 14 times as many words (n=158,718) as Republicans did on the Senate floor regarding this nominee (n=11574). To analyze the rhetorical changes that unfolded in this stage of the confirmation process, this section will explore the primary and secondary interventions made by Democrats against the Republican normalization of DeVos' nomination and then break down the use of moral language by both parties.

The primary name reinforced by Democrats for DeVos during the final hours of the Senate's executive session debate was that the nominee was *undeserving of confirmation*, which combined elements of the previous *unqualified* and *incompetent* names to make a declarative statement against DeVos. Before exploring this attention intervention by Democrats, this section must first identify the distinct social system in which this intervention took place as well as the Republicans' floor arguments against which Democrats rebelled.

Social System

While the HELP Committee hearing and senators' press releases targeted internal and external audiences, respectively, the Senate floor speeches targeted a hybrid social system that influenced both elected representatives as well as media and the voting public. Democrats' persuasive intent was aimed at provoking an attention shift that foregrounded DeVos' unpreparedness to serve as Secretary of Education, which the senators supported with references to historical precedent and ample evidence they received from constituents who opposed DeVos. These tactics served two purposes: first, as Democrats repeatedly stated, was to get "just need one more [Republican]... [to] stand with our constituents and say no to Betsy DeVos" (163[20] Cong. Rec. S688, 2017), and second, to prompt widespread media coverage and mobilize popular resentment for the nominee. The latter was accomplished through Democrats' decision to hold the Senate floor through the night of February 6 and a 12-hour period beginning at midnight on February 7, which symbolized the extraordinary nature of their opposition to DeVos and provided the news media with hours of footage and discourse to share with their audiences. As a result, this social system subsumes many elements of the prior two systems to simultaneously exert direct pressure on Republicans to oppose DeVos while inciting the American public to contact Republicans with the same message.

Republican naming: Democrats are obstructionists without a goal

In the 30 hours of executive session debate that preceded DeVos' confirmation vote, only five Republicans took the floor to defend DeVos as a *mainstream, qualified* nominee and portray Democrats as *obstructionists without a goal* (see Appendix B). Chairman Alexander was the first Republican senator to advocate on behalf of DeVos'

confirmation when he announced her nomination had passed the HELP Committee on the Senate floor January 24, 2017. In this floor speech, Alexander named Democrats as having no real reason to oppose DeVos other than the fact she was nominated by a Republican president.

Democratic Senators are searching for a valid reason to oppose the President's nomination of Betsy DeVos to be U.S. Education Secretary because they really don't want Americans to know what their real reason is. Here is the real reason: Betsy DeVos has spent the last 30 years—actually more than 30 years—being dedicated to helping low-income children in America have more of the same choices of schools that wealthy Americans already have. Specifically, the Democrats object to the fact that Betsy DeVos supports the idea of tax dollars following low-income children to the school that their parents may choose—public, private, or religious. (163[13] Cong. Rec. S409, 2017)

The chairman portrayed the Democrats' objections as purely partisan and lacking in substance, and his tone often drifted toward sarcasm and incredulity, as he asserted that no reasonable individual could dispute DeVos' credentials. As he put it, "I mean, how can you turn down a woman for U.S. Secretary when she spent 30 years of her life trying to help low-income children find a better school?" (S410). Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) helped concretize the Democrats' name of *obstructionists without a goal* by noting the Republican majority would inevitably approve DeVos and ascribing a motive to the minority party.

I regret that petty politics has gotten in the way of the ability of our colleagues across the aisle to get over the fact that the election didn't turn out quite the way

they hoped and to get back to work on behalf of the American people... Now, 18 days after President Trump's inauguration, he still doesn't have the help he needs in these critical posts. I believe this kind of mindless obstruction is actually irresponsible, if not downright dangerous. (163[20] Cong. Rec. S701, 2017)

These arguments did not engage with Democrats' previously-voiced concerns about DeVos' experience and were therefore unlikely to change any minority party members' minds about how to vote, indicating that these arguments were meant to provide tribal cues to Republican voters.

Additionally, DeVos was named *qualified* by all five Republicans to speak in support of her confirmation, and they foregrounded DeVos' status as a *champion of small government* to add ideological heft to their rationale for supporting her. Senator James Lankford (R-OK) furthered this narrative, which was designed to resonate with traditional "small government" conservatives, that supported DeVos' confirmation based on her ideological qualifications without re-litigating her actual professional experiences.

If a local district or if a State chose to provide other options, it is not her role in the Federal Government to try to stand in the way of that. Quite frankly, I find it refreshing that someone would say: We are not going to run your school from Washington, DC. What you choose to do in your schools, you are allowed to do. (163[19] Cong. Rec. S669, 2017)

Rather than describing DeVos' qualifications as an individual, Republican rhetoric decentered DeVos by portraying her as a symbolic figurehead who represented traditionally-conservative ideals and depicting Democrats as *bitter liberals*. In this

manner, Republicans' arguments for the nominee were less "pro-DeVos" as they were "anti-Democrat."

Finally, Republicans also attempted to show that DeVos had wide popular support by entering into the record the endorsements of numerous professional organizations as well as current and former elected officials. This tactic was no doubt meant to counter the considerable number of letters from constituents that Democratic senators read on the floor; however, it is notable that no Republican quoted words of support for DeVos from average voters. Though enumerating the professional organizations that supported DeVos may have functioned as a peripheral persuasive cue from political elites to Republican voters, Republicans' failure to counter Democrats' naming of constituent feedback as *overwhelmingly against DeVos* represented a considerable anomaly. As a result, Republican rhetoric may have inadvertently reinforced Democrats' later claims that Republicans were supporting DeVos for partisan reasons that actively ignored popular opinion in favor of showing deference to the new president.

Primary Intervention: Democrats say DeVos is "undeserving of confirmation"

Democrats railed against this Republican attempt to background DeVos' inexperience and incompetence by performing an attention intervention that foregrounded the nominee's ill-preparedness to assume office. This intervention, which named DeVos *undeserving of confirmation* and perpetuated previously-established names for the nominee (see Table 5), synthesized the Democrats' prior efforts to name DeVos *unqualified* and *incompetent*, and also used her inadequate answers to senators' HELP Committee questions to demonstrate their point. Additionally, this characterization of DeVos' experience was bolstered by the senators' own experiences with education as

<p>Table 5: Democratic senators' names for DeVos in speeches on the Senate floor.</p>	
<p>Name</p>	<p>Democratic Senators' remarks</p>
<p><i>Undeserving of confirmation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “She doesn’t understand basic education policy, yet she wants to lead the Federal agency overseeing education in our country. She doesn’t understand or know of current Federal laws that support and protect students with disabilities. She has shown her severe lack of knowledge about rural schools, which represent about one-third of the public schools nationwide. She never attended or taught in a public school or had any of her children in a public school.” Senator Heitkamp (163[19] Cong. Rec. S672, 2017) • “Why are we even debating the nomination of a person who clearly does not believe in our Nation’s public schools?” Senator Hirono (163[19] Cong. Rec. S674, 2017) • “In my mind she is the least qualified nominee in a historically unqualified Cabinet.” Senator Schumer (163[20] Cong. Rec. S685, 2017) • “[DeVos’ performance in the HELP Committee hearing] was one of the most embarrassing scenes I have witnessed during my time in the Senate. In fact, I believe it may have been one of the most embarrassing performances by a nominee in the history of the Senate.” Senator Franken (163[20] Cong. Rec. S730, 2017) • “It is difficult to imagine a worse choice to head the Department of Education.” Senator Warren (163[20] Cong. Rec. S695, 2017)
<p><i>Unwilling to defend marginalized students</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The most troubling part of that hearing, if you watched it or saw any parts of it, was [DeVos’] lack of understanding that every child deserves the opportunity for a quality education no matter what his or her disabilities may be. That is a responsibility we have as Americans.” Senator Manchin (163[20] Cong. Rec. S711, 2017) • “If my Republican colleagues rubberstamp this nominee, they will confirm a Secretary of Education who doesn’t believe in public schools, who will unravel rural education, and who has even worked to make it harder to protect women against sexual assault on college campuses. I believe that we have a moral imperative to ensure that all students have equal protections while attending school.” Senator Heinrich (163[20] Cong. Rec. S710, 2017) • “We need a Secretary of Education who believes that all children deserve access to a quality public education, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, neighborhood, or disability status. Betsy DeVos does not share this commitment to equal opportunity, and she is unqualified to serve as Secretary of Education.” Senator Markey (163[20] Cong. Rec. S713, 2017) • “IDEA is Federal—not State—law... And when this was pointed out to Mrs. DeVos, she said simply that she ‘may have been confused.’ Our children with disabilities deserve a real Federal partner... not a Secretary of Education who is confused about the Federal role in education.” Senator Menendez (163[20] Cong. Rec. S715, 2017) • “While I am pleased that Mrs. DeVos later clarified that she is no longer confused about whether IDEA is a Federal law, she has done nothing to reassure me that she would enforce it or that she understands how fragile the gains we have made under IDEA are.” Senator Hassan (163[20] Cong. Rec. S720, 2017) • “Even though she was willing to say that President Trump’s behavior toward women should be considered sexual assault, as I just talked about, she would not commit to actually enforcing Federal law protecting women and girls in our schools.” Senator Murray (163[20] Cong. Rec. S727, 2017)

Table 5: Democratic Senators' names for DeVos in speeches on the Senate floor. (continued)	
<p><i>Unwilling to defend marginalized students (cont.)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Asked about a family foundation that has donated millions of dollars to an organization promoting conversion therapy for LGBT youth, she claimed she had no involvement, which is ridiculous. Even if Mrs. DeVos’s own role as vice president of that foundation was a 13-year clerical error, as she now claims, she herself has donated approximately \$75,000 to support that anti-LGBT organization’s work.” Senator Franken (163[20] Cong. Rec. S730, 2017) • “The nominee for the Secretary of Education is one of the worst nominees who has ever been brought before this body for a Cabinet position. On the grounds of competence, on the grounds of ideology, and on the grounds of conflict of interest, she scores very, very low... Five minutes of questions and nothing else—[Republicans] were so afraid to hear what she might or might not know.” Senator Schumer (163[19] Cong. Rec. S663, 2017) • “She is first and foremost a Republican and conservative activist and megadonor. She was chair of the Michigan Republican Party, and she and her family have reportedly donated hundreds of millions of dollars to Republicans and conservative groups over the years.” Senator Murray (163[19] Cong. Rec. S667, 2017) • “At every step along the way, the Republicans have made it clear that no matter her inexperience, no matter her radical views, no matter her potential conflicts of interest, no matter her secrecy, no matter her blowing off basic anti-corruption practices, they will ram this nomination down the throats of the American people sideways.” Senator Warren (163[20] Cong. Rec. S696, 2017) • “She has contributed millions of dollars to Republican politicians over the years and probably thought that was the only qualification that she needed.” Senator Peters (163[20] Cong. Rec. S706, 2017) • “If Mrs. DeVos’s performance didn’t convince [Republicans] that she lacks the qualifications for this job, what would have had to have happened in that hearing in order to convince you? If you cannot bring yourself to vote against this nominee, is there anyone President Trump could nominate for any position that you could vote against? If we cannot set party loyalty aside long enough to perform the essential duty of vetting the President’s nominees, what are we even doing here?” Senator Franken (163[20] Cong. Rec. S731, 2017)
<p><i>Supporter of privatization</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “As a single-issue educational reformer, Mrs. DeVos does not have the breadth of knowledge necessary to oversee our national education policy from preschool through adult education and postsecondary education. Her policy solution for education is choice. As they say, when all you have is a hammer, everything is a nail.” Senator Reed (163[19] Cong. Rec. S677, 2017) • “We have some great charter schools in my home State of Hawaii. They are doing innovative things for their students, and that is something we should all support, but when Mrs. DeVos talks about charter schools, she is not talking about those schools. She is talking about privatization.” Senator Schatz (163[20 pt. II] Cong. Rec. S773, 2017)
<p><i>Out-of-touch billionaire</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “One of the major concerns I have continued to hear from my constituents about is her disconnect from the working class.” Senator Murray (163[20] Cong. Rec. S728, 2017) • “Instead, she has referred to public schools as a ‘dead end.’ Well, if you are a billionaire, you have a choice to go wherever you want to school. Maybe these people in a public school are not good enough for you? Well, then, go buy a school if you want. Most people don’t have that option. Most people are hard working.” Senator Leahy (163[20] Cong. Rec. S694, 2017)

well as numerous references to historical precedent that highlighted both the importance of public education in U.S. as well as the abnormal decision to limit questions in the HELP Committee hearing. Together, these arguments position DeVos as not merely a poor fit for Secretary of Education, but as the ideological antithesis to the expectancy of U.S. public education.

First, Democrats' previous names for DeVos as *unqualified* and *incompetent* were synthesized into the definitive name *undeserving of confirmation* as the senators made their final arguments against President Trump's nominee for Secretary of Education. This attention shift was promoted by numerous statements from the Democrats who spoke against DeVos' confirmation (see Table 5), and the context of the remarks reflected a new persuasive purpose. As these floor speeches were the last chance Democrats had to derail DeVos' confirmation, their arguments increasingly rested on the partisan nature of Republican support for the nominee. By this point in the process, DeVos' lack of qualifications were considered self-evident. For example, Senator Blumenthal restated his emphatic belief that DeVos was not fit to serve. However, rather than blaming the nominee for allowing herself to be considered for a position she lacked experience for, Blumenthal foregrounded her position as a *partisan appointee* to blame Republicans for letting the situation get this far.

She is unquestionably unqualified, unknowledgeable, unprepared for this job. She is unfit to run the Department of Education. As hard and as unkind as that verdict sounds, we have an obligation to speak truth here and speak that truth to power, even when it is the President of the United States, even when it is a job as

critically important as Secretary of Education—especially when it is as important as this job. (162[20 pt. II] Cong. Rec S797, 2017)

This argument advanced existing Democratic names for DeVos while simultaneously appealing to Republicans' sense of propriety as elected representatives, showing Blumenthal was still actively attempting to convert his Republican colleagues' beliefs about the nominee to align with his own. Similarly, Franken foregrounded the hypocrisy inherent in Republican support for an inexperienced nominee by comparing DeVos' poor response to his "proficiency versus growth" question to other high-ranking government offices.

I asked for her opinion on this very basic—this extremely basic—extremely important question [about the relative merits of measuring proficiency versus growth], and she had no idea what I was talking about. Let me be clear. She wasn't reluctant to declare her opinion. She wasn't trying to strike a middle ground. She did not know what I was talking about. We would not accept a Secretary of Defense who couldn't name the branches of the military. We would not accept a Secretary of State who couldn't identify Europe on a map. We would not accept a Treasury Secretary who doesn't understand multiplication. In fact, in nearly any circumstance, if a candidate for a job is asked a question that basic and that important and simply whiffs on it the way that Mrs. DeVos did, there is no second question. There is just a thank you for your time, and we will let you know, and will you please send in the next candidate. (163[20] Cong. Rec. S730, 2017)

This tactic, which concluded by comparing DeVos' HELP Committee hearing to a job interview, alluded to a traditional Republican free market value: that capitalism rewards competence and success. By foregrounding DeVos' subpar performance and its direct contradiction with Republican values, Franken's answers exemplified Democratic strategy of directing attention to anomalies in Senate floor speeches.

Another key element of Democrats' anomaly-featuring communication was the foregrounding of DeVos' many gaffes throughout her confirmation process; namely, her answers on IDEA, campus sexual assault prevention, and protecting LGBTQ students. Democrats mentioned the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act by its full name 53 times in their floor speeches and named DeVos' "confusion" about whether or not it was a federal law as a cover for her "unwillingness to protect all students." Senator Hassan personalized the issue by conveying her family's experience raising a special needs child, and many others portrayed IDEA as one of the most historically-significant federal education laws ever passed. This maneuver served not only to highlight the absurdity of a nominee for Secretary of Education being unaware of this law, but also to reinforce a key value any education secretary should hold: a commitment to providing all students with a free primary education. Senator Casey (D-PA) furthered this argument by naming failure to enforce Title IX sexual assault reporting policies as an *infringement of basic human rights*.

Hundreds of years ago, St. Augustine said: "Without justice, what are kingdoms but great bands of robbers?" If we don't get serious about this problem—the problem of sexual assault and what happens to young women on our college

campuses—we are robbing them of basic justice. We are robbing them of an opportunity to get a higher education. (163[20 pt. II] Cong. Rec. S763, 2017)

Renaming Title IX protections as a *safeguard against injustice* invokes a moral, as well as religious, frame, and resituates DeVos' noncommittal attitude toward enforcing civil rights law as an act of inhumanity. Such an argument, which was bolstered by similar refrains from other Senators (see Table 5), also applied to DeVos' personal and family history of supporting gay conversion therapy programs. By naming these beliefs a violation of the promise to provide all students with a high-quality education, Democrats renamed what Republicans may have called DeVos' "personal or religious beliefs" about civil and LGBTQ rights a *derelection of duty*, thereby proving her incapacity to serve. Senator Murphy synthesized the Democrat's *undeserving of confirmation* name by explaining DeVos' unsatisfactory experience as the result of an inability to empathize with children that require the most protection.

So at some point, you have to figure out that where there is smoke, there is fire. She has been given all of these opportunities to say: I am going to be a champion for disabled kids. I am going to stand up for minority kids. I am going to make sure that every child, no matter their race, no matter their religion, no matter their learning ability, gets an equal education. Every time she was given an opportunity to set the record straight, she obfuscated, she fudged, she clouded... If you are going to be Secretary of Education, you need to have a moral commitment to protect these kids, but at the very least you have to know what the Federal laws are that provide those protections. Over and over again, she was given the chance to show that moral commitment; she did not. And in that hearing, she showed a

troubling lack of knowledge about the statutes that protect those children. The Secretary of Education, more than anybody else in this country, is responsible for delivering results for our kids. The Federal Government is not in education, except for the cause of civil rights. (163[20 pt. II] Cong. Rec. S785, 2017)

By foregrounding the original reason the federal government became involved in public education—to ensure racial integration and equality of access—alongside DeVos’ repeated failures to defend IDEA, Title IX, and LGBTQ students, Murphy and fellow Democrats elevated DeVos inexperience to a level beyond a simple lack of qualifications. Rather, voting to confirm DeVos became tantamount to supporting a regression of federal civil rights laws and abandoning the country’s most vulnerable student populations, making Republican support for DeVos a matter that transcends partisanship and implies instead a failure of moral leadership.

Secondary Interventions

While the vast majority of Democratic arguments against DeVos focused on her being *undeserving of confirmation*, two secondary interventions were also advanced prominently before this social system. The first of these two attention interventions focused on the *historic* and *overwhelming* response from constituents to DeVos’ confirmation, while the second differentiated “charter schools” from DeVos’ support for “privatization of public education” as a means of generating profit.

Communication from constituencies. Even as Democrats advanced their anomaly-featuring communication about DeVos’ lack of experience and basic knowledge of education policy, many members also pointed out another anomaly that Republicans backgrounded: a failure to acknowledge the overwhelmingly negative public sentiment

Table 6: Democratic senators' names for constituent feedback regarding the DeVos nomination.	
Constituent feedback	Democratic Senators' remarks
<i>Historic</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Senate office phone lines have been shut down over the past week with so many callers weighing in against Betsy DeVos. Every office is receiving tens of thousands of letters asking the Senate to reject her. Almost 40,000 have come in to my office alone." Senator Murray (163[19] Cong. Rec. S668, 2017) • "I also have never seen the intensity of opposition to a nominee for this position as we have witnessed with Mrs. DeVos." Senator Reed (163[19] Cong. Rec. S676, 2017) • "I have been flooded with phone calls, emails, and social media messages from Virginians all across the Commonwealth, in many ways, in numbers that I haven't seen since the debate about the ACA." Senator Warner (163[20] Cong. Rec. S709, 2017)
<i>Overwhelmingly against DeVos</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Outcry over this nomination far surpasses anything else. As of a week ago, my office had received 3,000 calls about this nominee. A grand total of 12 were in favor of her confirmation. Additionally, we received more than 18,000 letters and emails, and again the overwhelming majority of them have urged me to oppose this nomination." Senator Franken (163[20] Cong. Rec. S731, 2017) • "I think it is not surprising that my office has been inundated with letters, emails, and phone calls strongly opposing the DeVos nomination. My office has received more than 4,000 letters and emails from Granite Staters. That may not seem like a lot to somebody from the State of California, but from the State of New Hampshire, to have 4,000 letters and emails on a nomination is unheard of. And almost all of them oppose this nomination. In addition, we have received 1,405 telephone calls in opposition and only 3 in support." Senator Shaheen (163[20] Cong. Rec. S704, 2017) • "They all say the same thing... overwhelmingly, they have told me that Betsy DeVos should not be our next Secretary of Education." Senator Stabenow (163[20] Cong. Rec. S708, 2017) • "By the way, I am not cherry-picking my correspondence to find the rare letters in opposition to this nominee. We have had an unprecedented avalanche of opposition to this nominee. It is running well more than 100 to 1 against her, and it is people from all walks of life." Senator Whitehouse (163[20] Cong. Rec. S732, 2017)
<i>Ignored by Republicans</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The more that comes out about her failed record, her tangled finances, conflicts of interest, and her lack of understanding or experience, the more the pressure increases on Republicans to put their allegiance to President Trump aside and stand with their constituents." Senator Murray (163[19] Cong. Rec. S667, 2017) • "I assumed that the rush to complete this nomination has something to do with the fact that Republicans' phones have been ringing off the hook from citizens who are outraged by the idea of this nomination. Before these Republicans decide whether to help Donald Trump reward a wealthy donor by putting someone in charge of the Department of Education who doesn't really believe in public education, I want them to hear from the people of Massachusetts, the people who on their own have contacted me about this nomination." Senator Warren (163[20] Cong. Rec. S697, 2017)

toward DeVos' confirmation. Democrats established three names for the nature of constituent feedback they received: that it was *historic, overwhelmingly against DeVos, and ignored by Republicans* (see Table 6).

Democratic senators described the public outcry over DeVos' nomination in great detail, often citing the number of unique calls and e-mails they received opposing the nomination. These figures, which ranged from 3,000 responses to 100,000, helped those viewing the floor speeches develop a quantitative sense of U.S. Americans' outrage. These data points, combined with repeated remarks about how the call volume from constituents dissatisfied with DeVos had overwhelmed the capitol's phone system, begged two obvious questions: *why* and *how* were Republicans seemingly oblivious to this constituent feedback? Senator Scott, the Republican who had introduced DeVos at the HELP Committee hearing, attempted to differentiate between calls from his South Carolinian constituents and calls from out-of-state activists by noting that he "certainly had a ton of calls from outside the state" (163[20 pt. II] Cong. Rec. S767, 2017), thereby implying that even if he did receive calls opposing DeVos they were not representative of the constituency he served. Senator Durbin (D-IL) countered by asserting DeVos' nomination was the result of pay-for-play politics because of her more-than \$200 million in contributions to the Republican party. Though Durbin acknowledged both Democrats and Republicans have been guilty of rewarding campaign donors with federal offices for hundreds of years, he suggested that DeVos' "thin resume" and "big wallet" (S795) would be more appropriately rewarded with the Ambassadorship to Aruba. Coons (D-DE) built upon this idea by suggesting Alexander's "Golden Rule" was a false justification to advance a purely *partisan appointee* with no regard for public outcry.

[We] were limited to one round of 5 minutes for questions, hardly sufficient for any nominee, let alone a controversial nominee with no public education experience other than undermining the underpinnings of the public school system, we can only conclude that there was something behind this effort to race Mrs. DeVos forward. (S807)

By foregrounding considerable anomalies in Republicans attempts to normalize DeVos in the face of *historic* public outrage, Democrats left little doubt as to why Republicans were supporting such an unqualified nominee. In doing so, Democrats' secondary attention intervention seems aimed at inflaming an already dissatisfied public by drawing attention to the blatantly partisan behavior of the majority party while concurrently advancing their self-name of *loyal opposition*.

“Charter schools” vs. “privatization.” The other prominent rhetorical development to come from Democrats' floor speeches was the renaming of DeVos' support for “charter schools” or “school choice” as support for *privatization* of public education in a manner *designed for profit* (see Table 7).

In Chairman Alexander's initial floor speech announcing DeVos' nomination had passed through the HELP Committee, he reiterated his characterization of “charter schools” as a *bipartisan* solution to problems with the public education system. Senator Scott attempted to reframe Democratic resistance to charter schools as being biased against “kids trapped in failing school districts and underperforming schools” (163[20 pt. II] Cong. Rec. S768, 2017), but this name failed to gain purchase with other senators as countless Democrats pointed out the differences between charter schools with bipartisan support and for-profit charters. Multiple Democrats framed the issue as a matter of

Table 7: Democratic senators' names for DeVos' support of charter schools in speeches on the Senate floor.	
Charter schools	Democratic Senators' remarks
<i>Designed for profit</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We need to champion access to public education and the accountability measures that give all of our students a chance to succeed. But in Michigan, Mrs. DeVos lobbied to block accountability standards for charter schools and lift the cap on charter schools. These actions pushed the number of unregulated, for-profit operators of charter schools from 255 to 805.” Senator Schatz (163[20 pt. II] Cong. Rec. S773, 2017) • “It is not uncommon for students [in New Mexico] to travel more than an hour to get to and from school in those parts of the State. School administrators often wear multiple hats, sometimes running the after-school program or driving the local schoolbus. In rural areas in my home State, the public school is often the only choice, and there simply aren't enough students to support the kinds of for-profit private schools that Mrs. DeVos wants to replace them with.” Senator Heinrich (163[20] Cong. Rec. S710, 2017) • “There are some towns in West Virginia with only one school—one school only—or where students have to travel for more than an hour on a bus to get to the school that has been consolidated. Voucher policies would be completely useless in these places.” Senator Manchin (163[20] Cong. Rec. S711, 2017)
<i>Impractical for rural areas</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Vouchers will siphon public funding away from our public schools, causing them to have to cut resources like teachers, advanced coursework, and preschool programs. They often do not pay the entire cost of attendance at a private school, making them unusable by low-income students and families.” Senator Manchin (163[20] Cong. Rec. S711, 2017) • “These are the kids Mrs. DeVos claims would be helped by school vouchers; instead, taxpayer dollars were taken away from public schools that remain the only choice for these low-income families and given to families who could already afford private school, who were already sending their kids to private school. That is the reality of school vouchers.” Senator Franken (163[20] Cong. Rec. S729, 2017) • “If you are simply pulling the money out of the public schools into charter schools and the costs are staying behind, what you are doing is crashing the revenues but leaving the expenses of public schools.” Senator Whitehouse (163[20] Cong. Rec. S733, 2017) • “If you hold the public schools accountable while you are taking some of their money away and you give that money to private schools and you don't hold them accountable, you are not promoting fair competition. You are not promoting student outcomes. You are basically taking money away from public schools and giving it to private schools.” Senator Kaine (163[20 pt. II] Cong. Rec. S773, 2017)
<i>Unhelpful for low-income families</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “In reality, most school vouchers don't cover the whole cost of private school tuition, nor do they cover additional expenses like transportation, school uniforms, and other supplies, which means the vouchers don't create more choices for low-income families; they simply subsidize existing choices for families who could already afford to pay for private school.” Senator Franken (163[20] Cong. Rec. S729, 2017)

accountability, which drew on DeVos' uninspiring response to Senator Kaine's question about accountability in the HELP Committee, though Markey (D-MA) outlined the Democratic response most comprehensively and succinctly.

The success of our public charter schools is largely due to very strong accountability measures brought about through State regulations and rigorous oversight. That is the key to our charter school system. It is accountability. It is oversight... When the Michigan State Legislature introduced a bipartisan bill that would have expanded oversight of charter schools, Betsy DeVos stepped in. She and her family donated \$1.45 million to State legislators in order to strip the helpful oversight accountability language out of the bill... Betsy DeVos and her unlimited funding ultimately succeeded in blocking the commonsense accountability legislation... In addition to the private schools that benefit from a voucher system, 80 percent of the charter schools in Michigan are run by for-profit companies, a much higher percentage than any other state. These companies are focused first and foremost on making money. (162[20] Cong. Rec. S713, 2017)

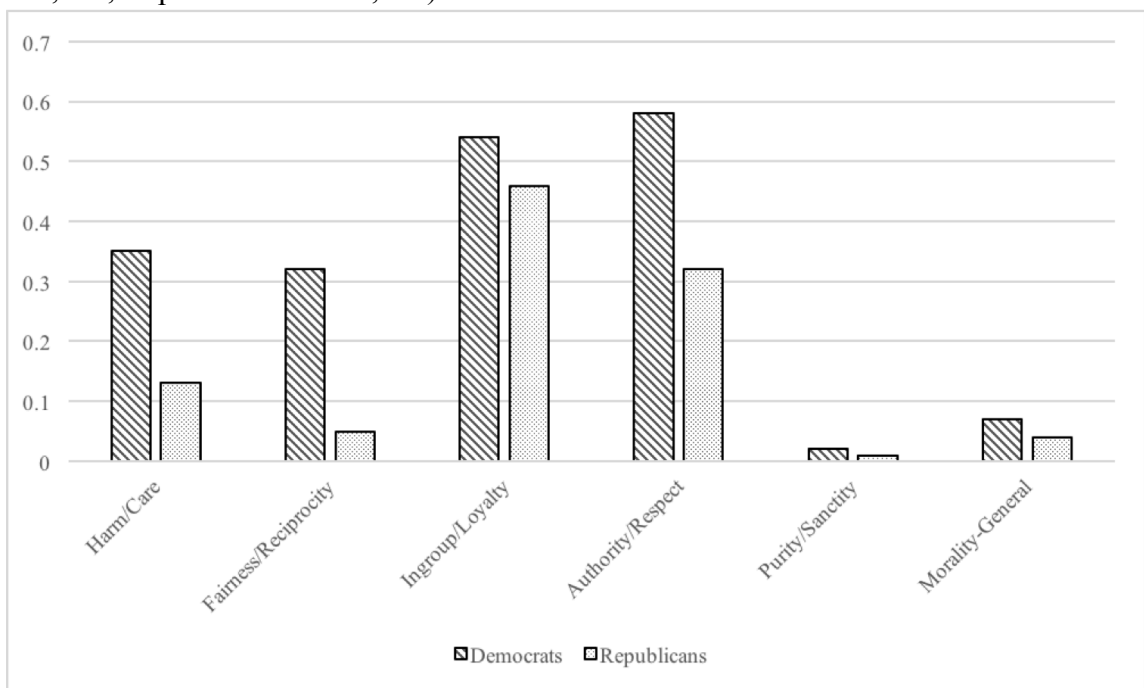
Markey's description of DeVos' direct monetary intervention to prevent oversight from occurring provided strong support for Democrats' depiction of the nominee as anti-accountability. Though numerous senators of both parties alluded to their support for charter schools and voucher programs, Democrats' sharp focus on accountability as a necessary part of any school choice program clearly delineated the two parties' thoughts on the issue. By citing DeVos' record on accountability and noting her preference for for-

profit charter schools, Democrats successfully shifted attention to major anomalies in the Republicans' support for the nominee.

Moral Rhetoric

Speeches from Democratic and Republican senators who spoke during the full Senate's debate preceding DeVos' confirmation vote were analyzed using the DeVos MFD in LIWC (see Appendix A). In all, 43 Democrats spoke against DeVos' confirmation and urged one more Republican to oppose the nominee ($n=158,718$) while only five Republicans defended DeVos ($n=11,574$). Though the sum of Democrats' total words was nearly 14 times greater than that of Republicans, these speeches still represent the greatest data set that was analyzed for moral rhetoric in this study for both parties.

Table 8: Democrats' and Republicans' varied use of moral rhetoric in their speeches on the Senate Floor regarding the confirmation of DeVos, as measured by the DeVos Moral Foundations Dictionary [see Appendix A]. Moral rhetoric is measured as a percentage of total words contained in qualifying portions of the senators' speeches (Democrats $n = 158,718$, Republicans $n = 11,574$).



The Democratic *loyal opposition* to DeVos' nomination came to a head during the floor debate, and attempts to recruit an additional Republican defector to oppose the nominee yielded significant moral appeals across all foundations. Democrats' moral language represented 1.88% of total words spoken in speeches, down from 2.3 in their press releases. Senator Cardin's (D-MD) speech (n=1,635) featured the highest rate of moral rhetoric at 3.18%, followed by Feinstein (n=599) at 3.01 and Markey (n=1,712) at 2.63. It is worth noting, however, that Murray spoke far more than any other Democrat (n=21,196) followed by Kaine (n=9,225); these high word counts, boosted in part by reading correspondence from constituents aloud in the Senate chamber, contributed to lower rates of moral language at 1.74 and 1.73 respectively. Because the length of individual senators' remarks varied so widely in this instance, the meta-analysis of all Democratic speeches provides a clearer picture of how the minority party used moral rhetoric to activate affective responses within this social system.

Democratic moral rhetoric followed the pattern established in both the HELP Committee hearing and senators' press releases, though the floor speeches registered language in all six moral foundations (see Table 8). The *authority/respect* foundation, a typically-conservative moral framework, was once again the primary type of moral rhetoric employed by Democrats, followed closely by *ingroup/loyalty*. Though liberal *harm/care* and *fairness/reciprocity* arguments were the two next most-prevalent foundations to undergird the minority's arguments, the focus on traditionally-conservative appeals indicates that Democrats were using language that targeted the moral system of the Republican colleagues. Though this does not necessarily indicate a competent persuasive effort, it at least demonstrates that the Democrats' final efforts to

derail Trump's education nominee did not fall prey to the U.S. American tendency to "spontaneously craft messages grounded in their own sense of morality" (Feinberg & Willer, 2015, p. 1665). Much of the *authority/respect* and *ingroup/loyalty* appeals came from persistent appeals to the importance of education for "communities" and "families," as well as citations of precedent from the "nation's" history and tradition of enforcing federal laws like IDEA. Though the Democrats' frequent use of the word "individual" (which occurred 107 times) artificially inflated the results of the *ingroup/loyalty* foundation—it was used as a proper noun 53 times in reference to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—removing all mentions of IDEA only reduced that foundation from representing .54 to .51% of total speech.

Additionally, this was the first time either party invoked the *purity/sanctity* foundation, and it was more prevalent in Democrats' speech (.02% of total speech compared to Republicans' .01). While some of these appeals were relatively banal, accusing DeVos of supporting "lax" accountability measures or "exploitation" of taxpayers, others resituated supporting DeVos as a moral violation. For instance, Senator Casey lambasted DeVos's noncommittal response to enforcing Title IX violations as a "stain on our country" (163[20 pt. II] Cong. Rec. S763, 2017), and Senator Heinrich (D-NM) reframed the DeVos vote as a referendum on supporting children. "As the members of the Zuni Pueblo wrote to me in their letter, 'our children are our most *sacred* (emphasis added) gifts.' This is what we are voting on with this confirmation" (163[20] Cong. Rec. S710, 2017). This *purity/sanctity* appeal, which developed evolutionarily to protect growing societies (see Haidt & Graham, 2007), was designed to personalize the

importance of opposing DeVos' nomination by triggering a deeply ingrained impulse to protect one's children and community from harm.

Republicans' rate of moral language use was roughly half that of Democrats and focused overwhelmingly on the *ingroup/loyalty* and *authority/respect* foundations. In all, 1.01% of Republican words spoken (n=11,754) were moral in nature, which is a lower rate than was present for Republicans in either the HELP Committee hearing or the senators' press releases. Senator McConnell (n=842) led the Republicans in the use of moral language with a rate of 1.9%, followed by Cornyn (n=1,761) at 1.42 and Scott (n=3,194) at .91. Republicans also used language that fell into each of the six MFD categories (see Table 8), though nearly half of their moral language fell into the *ingroup/loyalty* foundation. This is reflective of a deliberate attempt to name the confirmation vote as an *us* versus *them* issue by using both positive and negative appeals. For instance, supporting DeVos was aligned with support for "families," the "nation," and "communities," while opposition to the nominee was portrayed as an attempt to "obstruct" progress, thereby supporting "foreign" ideals and being on the "wrong" side of the "fight." The use of words like "foreign" and "wrong" triggers an affective response, automatically prompting the audience to take a side. This strategy, combined with the brevity of Republicans' remarks compared to those of Democrats and their relative lack of concrete support for DeVos' qualifications or support from voters, indicates that Republicans were not attempting to persuade Democrats to vote for DeVos. Rather, their messages appear to target wavering Republican senators as well as members of their base to concretize the "party line" that rationalized support for the nominee.

The fundamentally different use of moral language by the majority and minority parties reflects a divergence of purpose: Democrats sought to persuade an additional Republican senator to vote against DeVos, while Republicans sought to maintain their pro-DeVos position as the clock ran down. The patterns identified from MFD analysis of each party's word choices in Senate floor speeches supports the thesis that Democrats were continually engaged in purposeful attempts to persuade members of the opposite party, while Republican moral language choices indicate a focus on intra-party consilience rather than an inter-party dialogue.

VII. Discussion and Conclusions

On February 7, 2017, Republicans carried the day with Vice President Pence's tiebreaking vote and DeVos was confirmed as Secretary of Education, but the controversy ignited by her confirmation process continues to burn well into her tenure. A poll conducted in September 2017—seven months into DeVos' service as Education Secretary—found that only 28% of respondents had “very favorable” or “somewhat favorable” views of DeVos, while 40% viewed her unfavorably (Glum, 2017, para. 2). DeVos became one of many Trump administration officials to be portrayed satirically by Kate McKinnon on *Saturday Night Live*'s Weekend Update, and McKinnon's impression emphasized DeVos' cluelessness and elitism while maintaining the Secretary's never-wavering smile.

Jost: So, Betsy, what happened with that interview?

DeVos: Well, I think the problem is that the words that were coming out of my mouth were bad, and that is because they came from my brain.

...

Jost: You might now be the most protested member of Trump's cabinet. Why do you think that is?

DeVos: You know, I think it's because I do not do a good job... and I can't because I don't know how.

...

Jost: Can I just ask you something: do you like your job?

DeVos: No, I do not. I spend most of it getting screamed at while climbing into an Escalade, but I do like visiting good school (sic) and doing worksheets with cute little blacks and the occasional stinky poor white.

Jost: “Stinky poor white...” [laughs] Secretary DeVos, do you really want to say that on TV?

DeVos: Oh, I did a fudge. Oh... Look, I may not be very good on camera, but behind the scenes my ideas are much worse. (Saturday Night Live, 2018)

DeVos also suffered a setback when her appearance before the House Appropriations Committee led to many of her personal initiatives going unfunded in the next education budget (see Balingit & Douglas-Gabriel, 2018). Thus, although Trump’s nominee was confirmed and became Secretary of Education, her time in that position has been fraught with protests, criticisms, and few accomplishments. These actions suggest that the *historic* and *overwhelmingly* anti-DeVos sentiments Democrats referred to on the Senate floor were, in fact, present across the country and did not subside in intensity following the nominee’s confirmation. Though Democrats failed to derail DeVos confirmation vote, their naming of the nominee appears to have represented the sentiments of (at least) a plurality of U.S. Americans. Having completed RSI and MFT analyses of Senators’ official remarks throughout the varied stages of the confirmation process, this section will now detail implications and insights from those analyses that situate this research within the context of formative literature on the subject of political persuasion.

The confirmation process for Betsy DeVos was one of the most contentious debates over a Trump cabinet appointee and it was the first time in the history of the Department of Education that a vice presidential tie-breaking vote was needed, indicating

that the rhetoric employed by Democrats and Republicans in the Senate was more likely than ever to be aimed at persuading members of the opposite party. Given the polarized nature of U.S. American political rhetoric around the time of President Trump's election and the bipartisan efforts made to stop DeVos, this case study represents an ideal venue in which to analyze the persuasive practices of elected political elites. The following paragraphs will examine the DeVos confirmation debate and draw conclusions about political persuasion in the United States, the implications of this study on Moral Foundations Theory, the Rhetoric of Social Intervention model, and the importance of making messages "feel right" to audiences as a key criterion for persuasive success in contemporary political discourse.

First, DeVos' confirmation hearings provide insights for Rauch and Wittes' (2017) *modern anti-institutional populism* and Cramer's (2016) theory of rural consciousness. Initially, DeVos' confirmation and self-portrayal as an advocate for poor children and their families makes her candidacy the epitome of what Rauch and Wittes' (2017) termed *modern anti-institutional populism*, or populism that has an "instinctive suspicion of anything or anyone deemed 'elite'" (p. 8). However, the authors note that such a populist intent often under-emphasizes the fact that "like it or not, most of what government does simply must be decided by specialists and professionals" (p. 7). Therefore, DeVos, whom Senator Scott described as both a political newcomer and someone very experienced in education policy, was appealing to politiphobes (see Rauch [2016]) with little or no interest in learning about the complexities of running the Department of Education. As Senator Scott described DeVos:

I will tell you, she brings with her a fresh set of eyes; that, yes, she has no official experience, but she has invested the last 28 years of her life in improving public education. She has supported, without any question, the creation of public charter schools. (162[20 pt. II] Cong. Rec. S767, 2017)

Though inherently contradictory (how can someone with 28 years experience in education also be someone with a fresh set of eyes unless she was truly never adequately involved with education?), this argument is appealing to politiphobes who believe that “commonsense solutions to the country’s problems” (Rauch, 2016, para. 46) exist but are not enacted because political elites are corrupt. DeVos, on the contrary, was portrayed as an outsider and, therefore, not a part of the corrupt political class, while her experience in charter schools indicated she possessed knowledge of a *deus ex machina* solution to U.S. Americans’ dissatisfaction with the state of public education. Also consistent with *modern anti-institutional populism*, it seemed not to matter that DeVos, a former chair of the Michigan Republican Party and billionaire contributor to countless conservative causes, was very much a part of the corrupt system such politiphobes identify as the problem.

Furthermore, Democrats’ heavy foregrounding of letters from their constituents is also consistent with an adherence to the folk theory of democracy, which “assumes that, almost by definition, more public involvement will produce more representative and thus more effective and legitimate governance” (Rauch & Wittes, 2017, p. 3). However, the avalanche of constituent outcry against DeVos did not change the outcome of the confirmation vote. Republicans, it seems, don’t hesitate to use winning strategies like *modern anti-institutional populism* to appeal to politiphobes and achieve their policy

goals, while Democrats' more readily adhere to the folk theory of democracy that has "a deep tendency to disappoint in practice" (p. 3). Perhaps to defeat Republican tactics, Democrats need to cede the "higher ground" and choose rhetorical strategies based on their effectiveness in appealing to voters' values and emotions first before reverting to supporting their ideas' logical or ideological supremacy.

While Republicans' tactics indicated they targeted politophobic U.S. Americans—many of whom supported Trump—to leverage support for DeVos, Democrats were successful in targeting another key Trump voter demographic by invoking rural consciousness: rural Americans. During the HELP Committee hearing, Democrats rarely mentioned the challenges faced by rural school districts, like those in Wyoming and Alaska. However, during the Senate floor speeches, Democrats the inability of charter schools to help public school students in rural areas. This may indicate a shift in strategy by Democrats, who recognized after hearing from their constituents that many Trump supporters were also dissatisfied with DeVos. Thus, they subsequently decided to tactically foreground how the nominee's one-size-fits-all plan for helping underserved students would not help students in rural and, therefore, often primarily conservative, areas. In doing so, the Senate Democrats did what Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign could not: harness political resentment to activate rural consciousness. Rural consciousness, as developed by Cramer (2016), is a mindset held by citizens in rural areas that rests on three tenets:

- (1) a belief that rural areas are ignored by decision makers, including policy makers,
- (2) a perception that rural areas do not get their fair share of resources,

and (3) a sense that rural folks have fundamentally distinct values and lifestyles, which are misunderstood and disrespected by city folks. (p. 12)

Republicans, who heavily foregrounded DeVos' record as a savior for students—typically poor or underprivileged students living in urban centers—who had no other choices, may have been trying to portray Democrats as hypocrites for not protecting a traditional Democratic voting base but, in doing so, Republicans alienated a voting base of their own. For many rural districts, K-12 schools are a major center of public life, whether through community attendance at football games or parental involvement in parent-teacher associations. By trying to sell DeVos as a champion Democrats should get behind because of her support for inner-city youth, Republicans failed to adequately defend rural voters for whom DeVos' policies would not work, thereby meeting the first criterion of rural consciousness.

Democrats, however, actively foregrounded the quandary DeVos' nomination placed rural communities in (Democrats used the word rural 77 times in Senate floor speeches, compared to Republicans' five) by pointing out the difficulty of transporting students to school in geographically vast districts and the fact these districts also struggle to maintain quality educational programs at their current levels of funding. Creating charter schools would not, therefore, help any rural community, but rather create more problems and divert resources away from existing rural schools. This argumentation addresses every concern inherent in rural consciousness, thereby showing rural constituents that: (1) Democrats were intent on representing rural voices in policy discussion; (2) Democrats understood rural areas already have a difficult time receiving their fair share of resources; and (3) that Democrats' are aware of the difficult realities of

rural life that would make implementing charter schools challenging or impossible.

Though Cramer (2016) indicated Republicans have traditionally been more effective at “tapping into existing resentments” (p. 222) like rural consciousness, Democrats certainly outperformed Republicans in this area while arguing against the confirmation of Betsy DeVos. This indicates the rural voting bloc, though often associated with traditionally-Republican values, is not owned entirely by either party and can be engaged by politicians who recognize the particular set of concerns with government that come with living in a rural place.

While Democrats excelled in activating rural consciousness, their efforts to persuade Republicans tended toward central route appeals that may not have appealed to rationally ignorant members of the public. Democrats tend to conceptualize persuasion as something that takes place in a “dispassionate mind that makes decisions by weighing the evidence and reasoning to the most valid conclusions” (Westen, 2007, p. ix) despite considerable evidence to the contrary, and this was generally the case throughout the senators’ rhetoric on DeVos. While politically-active audiences, who likely already had a set opinion on whether or not they supported DeVos, may be persuaded by central route appeals to logic and evidence, rationally ignorant members of the U.S. public often glaze over when presented with such arguments about government policy; after all, “most voters are rationally underinformed, irrationally biased, and have no compelling reason to be otherwise” (Rauch & Wittes, 2017, p. 6) as their one vote is unlikely to be determinate in any election. Therefore, Democrats’ efforts to differentiate between “charter schools” and what they named DeVos’ support for *privatization* as a strategy *designed for profit* likely had limited effects on the voting public. While such technical arguments may have

been persuasive to Republican senators, it is worth noting that Republican rhetoric was considerably less specific and more in line with what Maddalena (2016) termed messages that “feel right” to an audience and “start the engine of imagination” (p. 248) rather than messages that encourage central processing and critical thinking. Democrats, on the other hand, argued in a way that would better appeal to highly attentive audiences prepared to process a message critically, as they created arguments that expected audiences to analyze both the literal meaning of their messages and the context in which they were delivered. Logically-driven arguments delivered in an overnight series of speeches on the Senate floor undoubtedly appealed to politically-active audiences, but they lacked the simplicity and vagueness typified by politicians like Trump that allowed voters to project what they wanted to hear or see onto a candidate. Though the Democrats’ arguments did seem to accurately represent the views of their constituents, they still failed to stop DeVos’ confirmation; then again, if their goal was to tarnish DeVos’ reputation and, by extension, the president’s reputation, their anomaly-featuring communication certainly achieved that goal. Going forward, Democrats must choose whether they will continue adhering to the rational mind theory when designing persuasive messages or if they will rely more heavily on intuitive, affective argumentative tactics to activate moral frames within their audiences’ minds.

Democrats use of moral language and focus on family and community, however, did defy Lakoff’s (1995) expectation that Republicans had a near monopoly on moral and family rhetoric. As he wrote, “Liberals are less insightful than conservatives at recognizing that morality and the family lie at the center of their political universe. The cost to liberals has been enormous” (p. 202). Lakoff (2011) later asserted that this failure

stemmed from the Democrats' lack of an effective communication system for naming and framing issues. However, as MFD analyses from each of the three stages of rhetoric concerning the DeVos confirmation showed, Democrats often invoked moral language from the *ingroup/loyalty* foundation, which places a heavy emphasis on words like "family," "community," and the good of the "nation" (see Appendix A). In fact, *ingroup/loyalty* was the primary moral foundation invoked by Senator Murray in the HELP Committee hearing, and the second most frequently invoked in Democratic senators' press releases and speeches on the Senate floor (see Tables 2, 4, and 8). Though considerable time has passed since Lakoff's (1995) assertion that Democrats failed to adequately centralize their political narratives around the "family," Lakoff (2011) indicated this problem has continued into the 21st century. Whether a development since 2011 or a circumstance specific to Democrats' beliefs on education, Democratic arguments against DeVos focused heavily on the impact of this nomination on families and communities, thereby flouting expectations of past research on Democratic framing systems.

Second, analysis of both parties' arguments using Moral Foundations Theory tended to support existing characterizations of both Democratic and Republican uses of moral rhetoric. Republicans tended to emphasize the *ingroup/loyalty* and *authority/respect* foundations consistently, but only invoked the *harm/care* and *fairness/reciprocity* foundations in a meaningful way when Democrats were present. The highest level of Republican use of the two "liberal foundations" peaked in the HELP Committee, indicating they hoped to frame their argument in a way that appealed to their Democratic colleagues. However, the relative non-presence of these two types of appeals

in Republican press releases and on the Senate floor indicated the rest of their messaging was intended to appeal to their voting base or that their moral persuasive efforts did not effectively target Democrats; given the Republican majority in the Senate, the former seems more likely.

Unlike Republicans, who stuck mostly to traditionally-conservative appeals and barely engaged the Democrats, the Democrats emphasized language from the conservative *ingroup/loyalty* and *authority/respect* foundations, indicating the construction of moral arguments likely to appeal to Republicans. The inflation of these two foundations may indicate a competent persuasive effort to engage elected officials with different ideologies than those espoused by Democrats, but this could also be a manifestation of the “ethic of autonomy” (Haidt & Graham, 2007, p. 102) that undergirds liberal and libertarian belief systems. As Haidt and Graham (2007) explain, liberal and libertarian ideologies rest on the assumption that “rights, justice, fairness, and freedom are moral goods because they help to maximize the autonomy of individuals, and to protect individuals from harms perpetrated by authorities and by other individuals” (p. 102). Democrats’ perception of Republican obstreperousness on DeVos as a threat to individual citizens’ rights to receive an education could have triggered such moral language usage, making it possible the Democrats’ use of traditionally-conservative moral foundations more accurately reflects their feelings about education and civil rights protections like IDEA than an intentional effort to “speak Republican.” In either event, the presence of multiple conservative and liberal moral foundations in Democratic speech demonstrates they did make arguments that could appeal to more people outside their own ideological system than Republicans did.

Third, the Rhetoric of Social Intervention model proved ideal for an analysis of political rhetoric that contained so many different attempts to name one nominee's experience. The names Democrats created for DeVos relied heavily on anomaly-featuring communication aimed at inducing deviance in Republicans. Pointing out gaps in names for experience can create deviance, or "the difference between what our ideology leads us to expect will happen in experience and what actually seems to happen" (Opt & Gring, 2009, p. 83), which, much like cognitive dissonance, may induce people to make changes to their ideological systems to better explain their experience. This strategy of creating deviance, which sought to remind Republicans of how supporting DeVos ran counter to traditional norms of government and beliefs about what constitutes *responsible representation*, was present across all naming shifts the Democrats' attempted, representing a concerted effort to use naming as a means of inducing persuasion. Additionally, the Democrats' self-name of *loyal opposition* was a key support for their behavior and persuasive strategies, and it also represents the perpetual presence of a holographic power intervention alongside each of the Democrats' attention interventions. Per the RSI model, interventions within a subsystem are often holographic in that "each subsystem... contains information about the whole ideological system" (p. 77); in other words, while this analysis foregrounded the attention intervention aspects of each Democratic attempt to rename Republicans' normalization of DeVos, the other subsystems were still at play in the background. Democrats' *loyal opposition* name was evidenced by their initial openness to hear from DeVos, which then led to their principled opposition after her answers failed to satisfy them and they were duty-bound to safeguard institutions against incompetent management (see Webber, 2017 for more on loyal

opposition). This name represents a complementary and competitive power intervention, as Democrats emphasized their obligation as a minority party to scrutinize the majority party's nominees—indicating a complementary power-share—and also offered a competing naming system for DeVos' qualifications. Given Senate Democrats' simultaneous emphasis on reinterpreting names for DeVos as well as reinforcing their responsibility as the minority party, the Rhetoric of Social Intervention model proved the ideal method for analyzing the holographic interventions and competing naming systems active in this case study.

Fourth, at the outset, this thesis sought to identify why U.S. Americans have such a difficult time communicating across political lines and whether the polarization in U.S. politics is driven from the top-down by political elites or from the bottom-up by average citizens. Existing research (e.g., Feinberg & Willer, 2015; Haidt, 2012; Westen, 2007) suggested that this is potentially because U.S. Americans tend to craft persuasive messages that they themselves would find logically and morally impactful, rather than critically analyzing the positionality and belief system of their intended audience. The case study analysis presented here examined the rhetoric of elected political elites as they debated the qualifications of a contentious nominee for U.S. cabinet secretary who faced bipartisan opposition and concluded that Democrats presented arguments that invoked traditionally-conservative moral and political values. Though this was an unusual situation—bipartisanship has become even more rare in Washington under the Trump Administration—this indicates that it is possible for political elites to engage in audience-centered persuasive attempts, even if those attempts fall on deaf ears. Additionally, it found that Republicans were more likely to invoke typically-liberal moral foundations

when Democrats were in the room and then revert to using primarily conservative appeals in press releases meant for public and media consumption. This would indicate that while average U.S. Americans may “spontaneously craft messages grounded in their own sense of morality” (Feinberg & Willer, 2015, p. 1665), professional politicians do adapt their messages to appeal to their audience’s moral and political beliefs.

Though it is unsurprising that politicians would use different tactics when engaging the opposition party versus members of their base, Republican support for DeVos never wavered despite the overwhelming amount of evidence and number of arguments presented both by their Democratic colleagues and their constituents. This suggests that, while Democrats may have adopted an effective persuasive stance, their audience was not open to being persuaded. Though Senators Collins and Murkowski defected from the Republican ranks to vote against DeVos, their defection was not necessarily the result of Democratic persuasion. After all, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell still got all the votes he needed to confirm the President’s nominee; Cillizza (2017) suggested that McConnell allowed Collins and Murkowski to defect because “both [Collins and Murkowski are] moderates sitting in rural states where a ‘no’ vote on DeVos was smart politics” (para. 8) and noted that the two senators announced their opposition within hours of each other. If Collins and Murkowski’s defection was, as Cillizza (2017) suggested, a calculated move sanctioned by Republican leaders, it is unlikely that Democratic resistance and attempts at persuasion could ever have swayed another Republican to defy McConnell. As Cillizza put it, “The drama over whether DeVos was going to be confirmed wasn’t drama at all. Not really. It was the carefully laid plan of a master vote-counter who knew exactly how much he could give and gave

it” (para. 13). Though this would explain why no Republicans were swayed by Democrats’ arguments, it fails to answer the question about the source of America’s polarization and, instead, raises a new question: if decisions aren’t made based on the quality of arguments or the demonstrated will of U.S. voters, what are they based on? The openly partisan nature of Republican support for DeVos suggests future attempts to achieve desired outcomes in legislative settings should not focus on crafting superior arguments, but rather on adopting effective tactics in the face of political opposition that is uninterested in anything but winning. In this way, congressional hearings and nomination fights are less like debates in courtrooms and more like reality TV shows that allow the audience to vote for their favorite contestants.

Finally, this case study supports previous communication research that indicates persuasion begins with matching a persuasive message to the audience’s orientation toward a subject; put another way, persuasion begins not with evidence or logic but with creating a sense of “feeling right.” If, as Westen (2007) and Haidt (2001) suggest, the rational mind approach to persuasion does not accurately reflect cognitive science, this finding has implications for the way the communication discipline approaches persuasion. The emphasis on “feeling right,” in some ways represents a departure from traditional communication education paradigms; Rothwell (2016) encourages speakers to focus on supporting claims with evidence.

Gaining and maintaining the attention of your audience increase (sic) the likelihood that your carefully prepared speech will resonate with listeners. An effective introduction gets your speech off to a good start, and an effective conclusion ends it with a bang. Backing your claims and bolstering your

arguments with supporting materials used effectively are critical elements of competent public speaking. Style—the way that you use language to express your ideas—should be clear, precise, and vivid. (p. 369)

While Rothwell's advice is not wrong, it seems this "evidence-based" paradigm is pervasive in introductory public speaking courses (see Morreale, Hugenberg, and Worley, 2006 for more on public speaking basic course textbooks). As this thesis has shown, "feeling right" to an audience is as—or more—important as the message being sent, because "feeling wrong" may prevent that message from being received in the first place. Though this seems like a refutation of the common speech education paradigm, "feeling right" could represent a return to focusing on audience analysis and Burkean identification as a means of affecting persuasion. In 1950, Burke defined identification by writing, "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his" (p. 55). Though most speech textbooks, including Rothwell (2016), mention these elements, this thesis suggests that the centrality of identification and audience analysis to persuasive success is underemphasized in the current approaches.

While this thesis provided an extensive review of literature on political persuasion and moral rhetoric, its findings are limited by its focus on members of the United States Senate in a single case study. Though this was intentional, this focus on elite discourse functioned to explain and describe how professional politicians communicate without examining the impact of these rhetorical maneuvers on average voters. Additionally, analysis of Democrats' moral language usage on an issue like education policy, which has clear links to families and communities, may have yielded an artificially high rate of

language in the *ingroup/loyalty* and *authority/respect* foundations and examining a different case (even a different confirmation hearing) may have revealed different findings. Additionally, the unique context in which confirmation hearings take place presents a unique set of constraints and may, therefore, be a unique form of rhetoric. Also, while this thesis has been critical of Republicans' rhetoric, this study is more focused on the interplay between the majority and minority parties in the Senate. Both parties, to be sure, have been guilty of playing politics instead of representing all constituencies when they hold power; it is possible that an identical analysis of a controversial nominee passing the Senate while Democrats held the chamber's majority would yield similar results. Future research on this subject should further analyze the responses of voters to the types of arguments made by politicians in similarly contentious debates to measure the real impact of elite discourse on a broader range of publics. Future research should also examine situations where Democrats hold a majority, to elucidate if these findings are indicative of a divide between Democratic and Republican rhetorical strategies or those of majority and minority powerholders. Additionally, more analyses of Senate debates using Moral Foundations Theory could provide insights into the use of moral language on issues other than education, which would add context to the findings of this study. Prospective research on confirmation hearings as a rhetorical genre would also do well to utilize the Rhetoric of Social Intervention model, which provides a capable method for dissecting the continual backgrounding and foregrounding of information that occurs when ideological systems collide.

Though Donald Trump's election was shocking to many observers of politics, his formation of one of the richest and least-qualified Cabinets in history also created a

unique series of confirmation hearings that highlighted the polarized nature of U.S. American political rhetoric. After a rhetorical analysis of the interventions employed by Democrats against Trump's nomination of Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary, it is clear that political elites in the United States are capable of designing effective persuasive appeals that account for the moral beliefs of their audience. If this capability exists, the question is no longer "why can't we communicate across political lines," but rather "what will it take for us use our skills and put country before party?"

VIII. Appendices

Appendix A: The DeVos Moral Foundations Dictionary

The following list of words comprises the DeVos Moral Foundations Dictionary, for use with the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) program as modified from the original Moral Foundations Dictionary (see Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009).

Superscripts indicate words or word stems that are listed under multiple foundations.

Harm/care (1): Safe*, peace*, compassion*, empath*, sympath*, care, caring, protect*, shield, shelter, amity, secur*, benefit*, defen*, guard*, preserve⁴⁵, harm*, suffer*, war, wars, warl*, warring, fight*, violen*, hurt*, kill, kills, killer, killed, killing, endanger*, cruel*, brutal*, abuse*, damag*, ruin*⁵, ravage, detriment*, crush*, attack*, annihilate*, destroy, stomp, abandon*³, spurn, impair, exploit*⁵, wound*

Fairness/reciprocity (2): Fair, fairly, fairness, fair-*, fairmind*, fairplay, equal*, justice, justness, justifi*, reciproc*, impartial*, egalitar*, rights, equity, evenness, equivalent, unbias*, tolerant, equable, balance*, homologous, unprejudice*, reasonable, constant, honest*⁶, accountab*, unfair*, uequal*, bias*, unjust*, injust*, bigot*, discriminat*, disproportion*, inequitable, prejud*, dishonest, unscrupulous, dissociate, preference, favoritism, segregat*³, exclusion, exclud*, unaccountab*

Ingroup/loyalty (3): Together, nation*, homeland*, family, families, familial, group, loyal*⁴, patriot*, communal, commune*, communit*, communis*, comrad*, cadre, collectiv*, joint, unison, fellow*, guild, solidarity, devot*, cliqu*, cohort, ally, insider, foreign*, enem*, betray*⁴, treason*⁴, traitor*⁴, treacher*⁴, disloyal*⁴, individual*, apostasy⁴⁵, apostate⁴⁵, deserted⁴, deserter*⁴, deserting⁴, deceiv*, jilt*, imposter, miscreant, spy, sequester, renegade, terroris*, immigra*

Authority/respect (4): Obey*, obedien*, duty, law, lawful*⁶, legal*⁶, duti*, honor*, respect, respectful*, respected, respects, order*, father*, mother, motherl*, mothering, mothers, tradition*, hierarch*, authorit*, permit, permission, status*, rank*, leader*, class, bourgeoisie, caste*, position, complian*, command, supremacy, control, submi*, allegian*, serve, abide, defere*, defer, revere*, venerat*, comply, experienc*⁶, expertise⁶, competen*⁶, precedent, precedence, defian*, rebel*, dissent*, subver*, disrespect*, disobe*, sediti*, agitat*, insubordinat*, illegal*, lawlweess*, insurgent, mutinous, defy*, dissident, unfaithful, alienate, defector, heretic*⁵, nonconformist, oppose, protest, refuse, denounce, remonstrat*, riot*, obstruct, inexperienc*⁶, amateur*⁶, incompeten*⁶, unqualified, unprecedented

Purity/sanctity (5): Piety⁶, pious⁶, purity, pure*, clean*, steril*, sacred*, chast*, holy, holiness, saint*, wholesome*, celiba*, abstention, austerity, integrity⁶, modesty, abstinenc*, abstemiousness, upright⁶, limpid, unadulterated, maiden, virtuous, refined, decen*⁶, immaculate, innocent, pristine, church*, disgust*, deprav*, disease*, unclean*, contagio*, indecen*⁶, sin, sinful*, sinner*, sins, sinned, sinning, slut*, whore, dirt*, impiety, impious, profan*, gross, repuls*, sick*, promiscu*, lewd*, adulter*, debauch*, defile*, tramp, prostitut*, unchaste, intemperate, wanton, profligate, filth*, trashy, obscene*, lax, taint*, stain*, tarnish*, debase*, desecrat*, wicked*⁶, blemish, exploitat*, pervert, wretched⁶

Morality general (6): Righteous*, moral*, ethic*, value*, upstanding, good, goodness, principle*, blameless, exemplary, lesson, canon, doctrine, noble, worth*, ideal*, praiseworthy, commendable, character, proper, laudable, correct, wrong*, evil, immoral*, bad, offend*, offensive*, transgress*

Appendix B: Senators' remarks analyzed in LIWC**H.E.L.P. Committee**

Senator	Affiliation	Word Count
Lamar Alexander	R-TN	961
Orrin Hatch	R-UT	521
Patty Murray	D-WA	1605
Tim Scott	R-SC	641

Press Releases

Senator	Affiliation	Word Count
Lamar Alexander	R-TN	359
Tammy Baldwin	D-WI	295
Michael Bennet	D-CO	494
Bob Casey	D-PA	332
Bill Cassidy	R-LA	127
Susan Collins	R-ME	674
Mike Enzi	R-WY	211
Al Franken	D-MN	444
Maggie Hassan	D-NH	933
Johnny Isakson	R-GA	563
Tim Kaine	D-VA	1314
Lisa Murkowski	R-AL	152
Chris Murphy	D-CT	1163
Patty Murray	D-WA	184
Pat Roberts	R-KS	631
Elizabeth Warren	D-MA	800
Sheldon Whitehouse	D-RI	1046

Floor Speeches

Senator	Affiliation	Word Count
Lamar Alexander	R-TN	4297
Tammy Baldwin	D-WI	1394
Michael Bennet	D-CO	3283
Richard Blumenthal	D-CT	4368
Cory Booker	D-NJ	5190
Sherrod Brown	D-OH	2304
Ben Cardin	D-MD	1635
Tom Carper	D-DE	1738
Bob Casey	D-PA	7320
Chris Coons	D-DE	2418
John Cornyn	R-TX	1761
Joe Donnelly	D-IN	1586
Tammy Duckworth	D-IL	216
Dick Durbin	D-IL	6093
Diane Feinstein	D-CA	599
Al Franken	D-MN	4522
Kirsten Gillibrand	D-NY	1064
Kamala Harris	D-CA	2226
Maggie Hassan	D-NH	3429
Martin Heinrich	D-NM	1125
Heidi Heitkamp	D-ND	2734
Mazie Hirono	D-HI	855
Tim Kaine	D-VA	9225
Amy Klobuchar	D-MN	2647
James Lankford	R-OK	1660
Patrick Leahy	D-VT	1404
Joe Manchin	D-WV	2517
Ed Markey	D-MA	1712

Claire McCaskill	D-MO	419
Mitch McConnell	R-KY	842
Robert Menendez	D-NJ	2210
Jeff Merkley	D-OR	7053
Chris Murphy	D-CT	6705
Patty Murray	D-WA	21196
Gary Peters	D-MI	1895
Jack Reed	D-RI	3810
Brian Schatz	D-HI	8918
Chuck Schumer	D-NY	2039
Tim Scott	R-SC	3194
Jeanne Shaheen	D-NH	2298
Debbie Stabenow	D-MI	1938
Jon Tester	D-MT	2720
Tom Udall	D-NM	2040
Chris Van Hollen	D-MD	6650
Mark Warner	D-VA	1622
Elizabeth Warren	D-MA	7548
Sheldon Whitehouse	D-RI	5892
Ron Wyden	D-OR	2161

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