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Presidential Rhetoric about Immigration from Ronald Reagan to Donald Trump

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Presidential Rhetoric about Immigration from Ronald Reagan to Donald Trump

By

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Abstract

The United States is known as the “land of opportunity” where many seek safety, economic prosperity, and freedom. The U.S is a nation built by immigrants. While achieving the American Dream has never been easy, the U.S has a population of over 45 million migrants. Immigration policy is a federal responsibility and, as such, requires presidential leadership. Presidents have had to address the issue and have done so differently. For example, during one of the 1980 Republican primary debates, George H.W Bush and Ronald Reagan both agreed that building a relationship with its Mexican neighbor was important for the United States to do. Yet, in 2016, Donald Trump entered into the presidential election using anti-immigration rhetoric, calling Mexican migrants criminals and rapists and blaming Mexico for sending them to the United States. Research has shown the use and power of presidential rhetoric. Understanding how presidents have talked about the issue of immigration is important and this thesis asks: How have presidents both as candidates and once in office talked about immigration policy? Using content analysis, I examine inaugural addresses, policy speeches, presidential debates and statements from 1981 to 2020 to understand how Democratic and Republican presidents have talked about immigration policy as candidates and once in office.

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents, who migrated to the United States from El Salvador in pursuit of a better life. Their sacrifices led me to this moment and my future path.

I. Introduction

The U.S is a nation built by immigrants. Over the years people have sought refuge in the United States for different reasons. Being known as the “land of opportunity” many have come to the United States seeking safety, economic prosperity, and freedom, but achieving the American Dream has never been easy. In 2021, there are over 45 million migrants in the United States. Immigration policy is a federal responsibility and, as such, requires presidential leadership. Presidents have had to address the issue and have done so differently. Actions have been done by presidents in two different ways, legislation and executive action. In both cases, their rhetoric was supported by the action. Under the Ronald Reagan administration, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) was passed by Congress and signed into law, which allowed immigrants who had entered the U.S. before Jan. 1, 1982, to apply for legal status but required them to pay fines, fees, and back taxes.¹ Using executive action in 2012, President Barack Obama announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) which allowed people under age 31 who were brought to the U.S. as children to apply for two-year deportation deferrals and work permits.² Presidents have also talked about immigration in different ways, for example, during one of the 1980 Republican primary debates, George H.W Bush and Ronald Reagan both agreed that building a relationship with its Mexican neighbor was important for the United States. Yet, in 2016, Donald Trump entered into the presidential election using anti-immigration rhetoric, calling Mexican migrants criminals and rapists and blaming Mexico for sending them to the U.S. It is important to note that both Reagan and Trump are from the same party. Research has shown how the use and power of presidential rhetoric provides

¹ “Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA),” *Boston University Human Resources*, accessed January 10, 2021, <https://www.bu.edu/hr/policies/federal-and-state-laws/immigration-reform-and-control-act-irca/>.

² Suzanne Gamboa, “What is DACA? What you need to know,” *NBC News*, March 8, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/smart-facts/what-daca-n854906>.

leverage over the political system and creates a lasting influence for the public.

Throughout the United States' history, the nation has witnessed the passing of various immigration policies. Understanding how presidents have talked about the issue of immigration is important and this thesis asks: How have presidents both as candidates and once in office talked about immigration policy? Using content analysis, I examine State of the Union addresses, policy speeches, presidential debates, and presidential statements from 1981 to 2020 to understand how Democratic and Republican presidents have talked about immigration policy as candidates and once in office. Presidential rhetoric is an important tool that can be used by the president and their administration to set the agenda and influence the public. Behind every speech is the greater intent for the president to gain the public's support and move their policy agenda forward. Rhetorical communication is a way to win over an audience. In the past, rhetoric was used by the elite to persuade. In a democratic society, rhetoric is more complex than simply a tactic to persuade an audience.³

A president's response to, or statement about, certain topics can pave the way for getting policy enacted. There is a need to understand the underlying circumstances behind a president's policy position, whether it's influenced by their background or political party. Past immigration speeches have been viewed through multiple lenses such as positive or negative or through religious and values lenses. As Mary Stuckey says, due to their position as both head of state and head of government, presidents, are the clearest voices in national politics.⁴ They help the public understand the state of the nation and set individual policy decisions.

³ Mary E. Stuckey, "Rethinking the Rhetorical Presidency and Presidential Rhetoric," *Review of Communication* 10, no. 1 (January 2010): 38–52, doi:10.1080/15358590903248744, xiv, <https://dominican.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=52236876&site=eds-live>.

⁴ Mary E. Stuckey, *Political Rhetoric: A Presidential Briefing Book*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Routledge, 2015, xv, <https://search-ebscohost-com.dominican.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1019278&site=eds-live>.

Strategizing a clear message about public policy to the nation can bring difficulties, as the U.S can be prone to division on values and ideologies. Now, more than ever, the executive branch is constantly under pressure and monitored by the media and the world. It has become a cycle of campaign and governing promises. Focusing on the national agenda is one of the very important steps for a new administration. Through their rhetoric presidents call attention to issues and offer solutions to problems, they work with Congress, and they inform the public. There is ample literature about candidate rhetoric and presidential rhetoric. However, there is a gap in the research about presidential rhetoric and immigration policy. Using content analysis this thesis explores the presidential and candidate rhetoric of five presidents to analyze which values were emphasized when they talked about immigration policy. The American values described by Smith and Smith are important to explore because values vary in their application, they are broad and not absolute.⁵ People come to the United States because of the values that are expressed by the notion of the American Dream. Presidents have talked about immigration reform either as an economic, national security or moral argument; based on our values and what America stands for as a nation of immigrants. Presidents are a primary figure in government and are a representative of the fundamental principles and values that the United States stands for.

The thesis includes a review of the literature, theoretical framework, a discussion of the data collected, the findings and analysis, and a conclusion. I explored various literature relevant to the study of rhetoric including; presidential and candidate rhetoric, agenda setting, and positive and negative rhetoric in connection to immigration policy.

⁵ Craig Allen Smith and Kathy B. Smith, "Presidential Values and Public Priorities: Recurrent Patterns in Addresses to the Nation, 1963-1984," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1985): 743-53, 749, <http://www.jstor.org.dominican.idm.oclc.org/stable/27550274>.

II. Literature Review

Presidents and presidential candidates hold a responsibility of setting their political agendas and sending their message about their policy positions to the American people. As candidates they make campaign promises and build their agenda, in case they are elected to office. It's important to note that rhetoric is constantly changing and may be able to withstand short term changes in approval and public opinion. This literature review examines scholarship from the areas of presidential rhetoric and presidential campaign rhetoric, agenda setting, the differences between positive and negative rhetoric, and lastly literature with a primary focus on policy rhetoric.

A. Presidential Rhetoric

The rhetorical presidency, as Jeffrey K. Tulis describes it, is not a fact of institutional change but a profound development in American politics.⁶ Presidents are a primary figure in government and are a representative of the ideologies we value. In "Rethinking the Rhetorical Presidency and Presidential Rhetoric," Mary Stuckey, focuses on the history of the rhetorical presidency and looks at factors including class, race, gender, and the mediated and interactive nature of presidential rhetoric.⁷ Stuckey defines the rhetorical presidency as an argument about the institution of the American presidency, the best work on both the rhetorical presidency and on presidential rhetoric has been profoundly institutional in its orientation. She gives the warning that as presidential rhetoric becomes more common, it can become more conversational, debased, and less valuable.

According to Stuckey, a rhetorical presidency is not necessarily a responsive presidency.⁸

⁶ Jeffrey Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987, 4 <https://dominican.on.worldcat.org/oclc/15791355>.

⁷ Mary E. Stuckey, "Rethinking the Rhetorical Presidency and Presidential Rhetoric," 38.

⁸ Mary E. Stuckey, "Rethinking the Rhetorical Presidency and Presidential Rhetoric," 48.

Because presidents have the power to frame issues for national debate, the way presidents talk about policy issues can affect policy outcomes. Her research concludes with explaining that the areas of the rhetorical presidency and the study of presidential rhetoric are vibrant, growing, and rich areas of research. Fully examining how the issues of class, race, gender, and sexuality and how these circulate in presidential messages through the mass culture affect and are affected by presidential leadership and rhetoric can be beneficial.⁹ In many points of history, the nation has seen examples of the effects from rhetorical choices such as Abraham Lincoln choosing not to give speeches about slavery during the Civil War and Theodore Roosevelt using the presidency as a bully pulpit to promote his policies and pressure members of Congress to pass legislation.

There is no simple or straightforward way in for an administration passing policy, so a president must find their own voice—in stump speeches, State of the Union addresses or policy speeches. Several studies have focused on the various methods in which presidents have used rhetoric throughout their terms. James N. Druckman and Justin W. Holmes examined the impact of presidential rhetoric in State of the Union addresses. Presidents use rhetoric to shape their own approval in the form of priming and persuasion.¹⁰ Priming simply alters the issues on which individuals base their overall evaluations and also happens when media attention to an issue causes people to give the issue more weight (or importance). Druckman and Holmes focus on priming but do not study the impact of presidential rhetoric compared to variables (e.g. the economy). It is possible for presidents to alter their rhetoric in order to influence their own approval.¹¹ The ability to influence citizens via priming shows promise in future research.

Mary Stuckey in “Rethinking the Rhetorical Presidency and Presidential Rhetoric”

⁹ Mary E. Stuckey, “Rethinking the Rhetorical Presidency and Presidential Rhetoric,” 49.

¹⁰ James N. Druckman and Justin W. Holmes, “Does Presidential Rhetoric Matter? Priming and Presidential Approval,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2004): 755-78, 756, <http://www.jstor.org/dominican.idm.oclc.org/stable/27552635>.

¹¹ James N. Druckman and Justin W. Holmes, “Does Presidential Rhetoric Matter? Priming and Presidential Approval,” 756.

continues the work of Tulis and others in examining how presidential communication has changed the presidency and the political system.¹² There are the issues of framing rhetoric and the rise of the mass media. As she describes, the next step includes a new way of thinking, challenging current expectations of rhetoric and she argues that rhetoric has become less important as a tool for presidents to use to influence policy or further their agenda.

In “The Power of the Presidency to Hurt,” Stuckey states that presidents are both individual agents who make rhetorical and political choices and discursive nodes through which political discourse circulates.¹³ Presidential rhetoric can be understood using three frameworks: educative rhetoric, vituperative rhetoric, and performative rhetoric. Educative rhetoric is grounded in reason and used to inform the entire nation. Vituperative rhetoric uses less formal language, through humor and stories, reducing distance between citizens and their chief executive. Lastly, performative rhetoric is where values and norms can be applied by presidents. All three kinds of rhetoric allow presidents to identify priorities for action and to define the terms of debates. In “Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition,” David Zarefsky said that understanding presidential rhetoric can be done in three approaches, studying message-audience relationships, examining speaker-message relationships, and unpacking the text.¹⁴ Rhetoric is a reflection of a president's values and worldview, calls for interpretation, and should not be limited to just one perspective.

B. Campaign Rhetoric

Every four years, the nation votes for their next president. Campaign rhetoric is important

¹² Mary E. Stuckey, “Rethinking the Rhetorical Presidency and Presidential Rhetoric,” 38.

¹³ Mary E. Stuckey, “The Power of the Presidency to Hurt: The Indecorous Rhetoric of Donald J. Trump and the Rhetorical Norms of Democracy,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 2020, 50: 366-391, 366, <https://doi.org/10.1111/psq.12641>.

¹⁴ David Zarefsky, “Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3. September 2004: 607–19, 609, <https://dominican.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=poh&AN=19473249&site=eds-live>.

to examine because it can be a signal about what the president would do if elected. There is a great amount of attention shed on the candidates for them to perfect their stump speeches and persuade people to vote for them. During a campaign, presidential candidates make promises about what they will do if they are elected. They talk about their policy agenda and propose solutions to problems.

Scholars have studied individual campaigns and the rhetoric used by candidates. For example, Noor Aswad Ghazal analyzed campaign speeches from the 2016 presidential election between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Noor found gender expectations between the candidates and affirmed presidential rhetoric as being anchored in political times. Candidates aim to evoke an emotional reaction with their rhetoric. Ghazal questioned the role of charismatic rhetoric in influencing the appeal, and potential electability, of the candidates during the 2016 presidential election.¹⁵ Charisma sets a person apart from the rest and can be viewed as a value-based, symbolic, and emotionally laden characteristic. The charismatic element might have had on the electability of each candidate and provides insights that should be valuable for future elections.

Samuel Gunawan also investigated campaign rhetoric during Hillary Clinton's run for president in 2016. One of Clinton's strategies was following predecessor Barack Obama's strategy of keeping four components of campaign rhetoric: agenda setting, framing, character construction and emotional resonance.¹⁶ On occasion, Clinton would fire back at Donald Trump's

¹⁵ Noor Ghazal Aswad, "Exploring Charismatic Leadership: A Comparative Analysis of the Rhetoric of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (March 2019): 56–74, doi:10.1111/psq.12490, 56
<https://eds-b-ebshost-com.dominican.idm.oclc.org/eds/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=210e1d3b-f40a-44c8-8771-1114d49406ec%40pdc-v-sessmgr03&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZlWxpdmU%3d#AN=134910506&db=poh>.

¹⁶ Samuel Gunawan, "Hillary Clinton's Presidential Campaign Rhetoric: Making America Whole Again," *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences* 38, no. 1 (January 1, 2017): 50–55, doi:10.1016/j.kjss.2016.11.002, 50,
<https://dominican.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edselp&AN=S2452315116301382&site=eds-live>.

slogan in order to highlight nation unity. Her agenda covered education, business, and bonds of family and community, promoting the values of community and respect that would resonate with the voters. Jennifer Jerit in “Survival of the Fittest: Rhetoric During the Course of an Election Campaign” argued that candidates evoke emotional appeals in order to emphasize sensual values. Throughout the campaign, Clinton continued to act as a strong leader and demonstrated rhetorical power, which opened the gates for future females to run for office. While Clinton did not win the race, there is much to learn from her rhetorical choices. Priming particular issues was evident when candidates sought to control the agenda, however, the relationship between candidate focused issues and types of rhetoric is still difficult to decipher.¹⁷ An emotional appeal in campaign rhetoric can potentially attract support from the public and the base. Overall, Jerit stated that the next step for studying campaign rhetoric is to determine any patterns with a bigger sample of campaign speeches in order to generalize the types of appeals, or themes, that dominate a campaign and make an impact on people.

Sourav Bhattacharya describes how candidates choose their rhetoric strategically in order to influence voter perception as the choice between positive and negative advertising.¹⁸ Armed with information about their own quality and possibly the rival’s quality, candidates commit to a campaign theme: Positive or negative. The effect of negative campaigns depends on whether it is faced with another negative campaign (cross talk) or a positive campaign (fruitful debate).¹⁹ A clear strategic choice can influence voter perception and the possibility of a split electorate. A

¹⁷ Jennifer Jerit, “Survival of the Fittest: Rhetoric during the Course of an Election Campaign,” *Political Psychology* 25, no. 4 (2004): 563-75, 563, <https://search-ebscohost-com.dominican.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.3792409&site=eds-live>.

¹⁸ Sourav Bhattacharya, “Campaign Rhetoric and the Hide-and-Seek Game,” *Social Choice and Welfare* 47, no. 3 (2016): 697–727, 698, <https://search-ebscohost-com.dominican.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.26153480&site=eds-live>.

¹⁹ Sourav Bhattacharya, “Campaign Rhetoric and the Hide-and-Seek Game,” 697.

positive campaign cannot do any worse than a negative campaign irrespective of what the other candidate does. Bhattacharya said that in order to further this research, investigating the role of attack messages can possibly determine whether negative messages are beneficial or harmful during campaigns.

Overall, scholars have found connections between campaigning and governing rhetoric in speeches. Jeremiah Olson, Yu Ouyang, John Poe, Austin Trantham, and Richard W. Waterman compared Barack Obama's campaign speeches with his governing speeches to determine whether or not there was a relationship between his rhetoric on the campaign trail and when he became president. There has been little research dedicated to the connection between campaign and governing rhetoric. During campaigns, candidates make promises in order to secure votes, but once in office priorities may shift. Research found that newly elected presidents struggle as they make the transition from campaigning to governing. The president's use of language also impacts the effectiveness of a direct public appeal. Presidents who engage in more image-based rhetoric are considered more charismatic and have higher ratings.²⁰ The language used in Obama's speeches did not change from the campaign to governing, but his campaign rhetoric did set up his rhetoric for later governance. Olson, Ouyang, Poe, Trantham, and Waterman urge that there needs to be a new way to reevaluate the conventional wisdom about how presidents approach their rhetorical choices after being elected.

C. Agenda Setting

In "Presidential Rhetoric and the Public Agenda" Jeffrey E. Cohen argues the theory of presidential influence over agenda setting is used to predict the impact of presidential rhetoric

²⁰ Jeremiah Olson, Yu Ouyang, John Poe, Austin Trantham, and Richard W. Waterman, "The Teleprompter Presidency: Comparing Obama's Campaign and Governing Rhetoric," *Social Science Quarterly* 93, no. 5 (2012): 1402-23, doi:10.1111/j.1540-6237.2012.00925.x, 1407, <https://dominican.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjst&AN=edsjst.42864133&site=eds-live>.

over the public's agenda.²¹ Presidents may resort to substantive arguments to influence public opinion since rhetorical symbolism might not be enough. While Cohen's research examined State of the Union Addresses and the president's influence on policy issues and agenda setting, my research uses a variety of speeches and debates. Mary Stuckey argues,

“Like the media, they cannot tell the public what to think, but they can help the public decide what to think about, a process by which presidential agendas influence those of the media and the mass public, and are, in turn, influenced by the media and public agendas. Agenda setting is stratified and presidential frames can dominate, but cannot control that process. They can draw attention to issues by speaking, by hosting events at the White House, through proclamations, and through other ceremonial and policy initiatives. The very act of directing public attention is important. Whether it results in immediate policy or opinion change is much more debatable.”²²

In conclusion, scholars have found that presidents can influence the public policy agenda through their rhetoric. The public will listen to what the president says is important. Cohen demonstrates that when presidents give a high-profile speech dedicated to one policy problem, the policy problem will rise on the public agenda.²³ While presidential impact on the public's agenda is fleeting, presidents can grab public attention, but they may not be able to hold that attention for long.

D. Positive and Negative Rhetoric

As Bhattacharya says, armed with information about their own quality and possibly the rival's quality, candidates commit to a campaign theme: positive or negative.²⁴ Damien Arthur

²¹ Jeffrey E. Cohen, "Presidential Rhetoric and the Public Agenda," *American Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 1 (1995): 87-107, doi:10.2307/2111759, 87, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2111759>.

²² Mary E. Stuckey, *Political Rhetoric: A Presidential Briefing Book*, 8.

²³ Jeffrey Cohen, "Presidential Rhetoric and the Public Agenda," 102.

²⁴ Sourav Bhattacharya, "Campaign Rhetoric and the Hide-and-Seek Game," 1.

and Joshua Woods tackled the rising shift of negative rhetoric specifically in presidential immigration rhetoric. They researched five frames of reference: illegality, criminality, terrorism, economic threat.²⁵ They examined presidential rhetoric to determine any relationship between presidents' discussion of immigration and the social context in which they find themselves speaking; which has not been fully developed by other scholars. They concluded that presidents maintain a “rhetorical congruence” with public opinion, essentially presidents pay attention to their rhetoric in order to connect to the public. Other literature agrees that rhetoric is an important independent variable, but has not fully developed whether or not presidential rhetoric about immigration issues is responsive to a particular context. In some cases, immigration is discussed negatively when unemployment is high, placing the blame on immigration for the rise in unemployment.²⁶ Overall, their research suggests that presidents change the negativity of their rhetoric on immigration policy issues depending on when the speeches are given and where they are when they give the speech. In order to make further assumptions on the influence of the president's discussion on immigration, there needs to be further context of the speeches that are used to set political agenda or policy.

E. Public Policy Rhetoric

In their research, Scott B. Astrada and Marvin L. Astrada focus on the impact of public policy rhetoric on the public, and examine the impact of Trump's administration ideology, known as “Trumpism.”²⁷ Trump’s rhetoric was premised on the mechanism of fear, loathing, and

²⁵ Arthur Damien, and Joshua Woods, “The Contextual Presidency: The Negative Shift in Presidential Immigration Rhetoric,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (September 2013): 468–89, 468, <https://search-ebscohost-com.dominican.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=89306145&site=eds-live>.

²⁶ Arthur Damien and Joshua Woods, “The Contextual Presidency: The Negative Shift in Presidential Immigration Rhetoric,” 472.

²⁷ Scott B. Astrada and Marvin L. Astrada, “Truth in Crisis: Critically Re-Examining Immigration Rhetoric & Policy under the Trump Administration,” *Harvard Latino Law Review* 22 (August 2019): 7-36, 7, <https://search-ebscohost-com.dominican.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=140201912&site=eds-live>.

spectacle and this affected public policy issues such as immigration, criminal justice, and civil rights. Their research explored how, in the era of spectacle, facts are replaced by “alternative facts” and loathing the immigrant as the “other” became threatening to American identity. This behavior came under scrutiny throughout the Trump administration in the media, especially when it was compared to the prior administration of Barack Obama. “President Trump has been able to utilize specular-based rhetoric to not only supplant “truth,” but also contradictory evidence, or opinions that are recognized using accepted empirical methodology, which are casually dismissed as a hoax or fake with no necessity for corroboration utilizing traditional notions of soundness and credibility.”²⁸ Moving forward, Astrada and Astrada suggested that American politics needs to stray away from theatrical politics in order to evade the negative effects on policy and the social order.

Johanna E. Hartelius' research examines the terms used to describe immigrants in the media, public, and political actors. There is a debate to drop the “i-word” (illegal) from illegal immigrants. Activists seek to influence public discourses because the values and variables attached to such ideas have a direct impact on the immigration debate. The entire campaign is not only reshaping the word “illegal” but it’s also to change the stigma and intolerance affecting undocumented migrants and people of color. This is still an active debate as policies such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) have been a target under the Trump administration.²⁹ In connection to Sourav Bhattacharya’s research about positive and negative rhetoric and campaigning, the language used to describe DACA recipients, “Dreamers” is a less hostile alternative to “illegal.” Overall, Hartelius argued that rhetorical choices can reframe the

²⁸ Scott B. Astrada and Marvin L. Astrada, “Truth in Crisis: Critically Re-Examining Immigration Rhetoric & Policy under the Trump Administration,” 35.

²⁹ E. Johanna Hartelius, *The Rhetorics of US Immigration : Identity, Community, Otherness*, University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2015, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=1096011&site=eds-live>.

debate about citizenship status and media organizations like the *Associated Press* changed their journalism practices by dropping the term “illegal immigrants” to “reflect the evolution of society.” Jesse H. Rhodes and Amber B. Vayo examined trends in negativity, fearful content, and anger content in these statements. Scholars have found evidence of “affective polarization” and high numbers of partisan polarization in the mass public since the 1980s.³⁰ Using civil religion as the basis for the immigration rhetoric, Ryan T O’Leary offers the suggestion that immigration reform tends to fail because of the rapidly changing nation. Defined by Robert Bellah, civil religion is the “transcendent goal” of American political life entailed a vision of American destiny, which often was (and continues to be) expressed in a sort of Puritan apocalypticism.³¹ Through the lens of civil religion, rhetoric such as “invasion” and “conquest” is used to tie together religion and Anglo-Saxon ethnicity that stirs up the immigration debate in the U.S.³² Other politicians alongside Trump have deployed similar rhetoric of invasion to describe migrants not only from Latin America but also Muslim immigrants and refugees from other parts of the world. Civil religion rhetoric is a symptom of the corruption and tug of war of the prophetic core of American civil religion. With a growing fear of immigrant “invasions” inflaming the far-right base, rhetoric that is grounded in a particular, civil-religious mythology of chosenness, national identity, and manifest destiny may be used to inflame fellow partisans for political ends.

³⁰ Jesse H. Rhodes and Amber B. Vayo, “The Historical Presidency: Fear and Loathing in Presidential Candidate Rhetoric, 1952–2016,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (December 2019): 909–31, doi:10.1111/psq.12512, 911, <https://eds-b-ebshost-com.dominican.idm.oclc.org/eds/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=65d69b26-c42c-482b-be30-7687d26f22dc%40pdc-v-sessmgr01&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmU%3d#AN=139521587&db=poh>.

³¹ Ryan T. O’Leary, “From Anglo-Saxon Nativism to Executive Order: Civil Religion and Anti-Immigration Rhetoric,” *Politics & Religion* 9, no. 4 (December 2016): 771-93, 772, <https://search-ebshost-com.dominican.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=119564876&site=eds-li> [ve](#).

³² Ryan T. O’Leary, “From Anglo-Saxon Nativism to Executive Order: Civil Religion and Anti-Immigration Rhetoric,” 771.

F. Conclusion

There has been significant research done by scholars about presidential rhetoric. Campaign rhetoric and governing rhetoric has been studied. However, there are gaps in the scholarship. Many scholars focus on the relationship between the president and the public through their rhetoric. Jeffrey Cohen's research covered agenda setting and its relation to presidential rhetoric. The public will listen to what the president says is important. One thing in common with most literature is that there is evidence that rhetoric can enlighten or inform the public, shape their opinions, or set the agenda. Mary Stuckey repeats several times that values can help identify patterns, but further research is needed in this area as well as the connection between rhetoric and public policy. This project examines the rhetoric of presidents as candidates and once in office about immigration policy using the work Smith and Smith did about rhetoric and American values.

III. Theoretical Framework

The rhetorical presidency is a development in American politics and presidential leadership that has affected the presidency in profound ways. Tulis describes the modern rhetorical presidency as not a fact of institutional change, like the growth of the White House staff, or changing career patterns of congressmen, but as a profound development in American politics.³³ Ronald Reagan was described as a "great communicator" at the end of his first term. Through radio and television addresses, Reagan kept the relationship between the presidency and the public strong. It's important to note that the rhetorical presidency began before President Reagan. At times, the president is seen using the presidency as a "bully pulpit" to promote his policies and pressure members of Congress to pass legislation. Presidents are the occupants of

³³ Jeffrey Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, 4.

the highest office of the land and are there to uphold the Constitution. They are the clearest voices in our national politics. Presidents are a primary figure in government and are a representative of the fundamental principles and values that the United States stands for.

Jeffrey Tulis argues that “rhetorical power is thus not only a form of “communication,” it is also a way of constituting the people to whom it is addressed by furnishing them with the very equipment they need to assess its use---the metaphors, categories, and concepts of political discourse.”³⁴ The rhetorical roles of the presidency, as well as the policy implications of presidential language, are evident in such processes. In the words of Murray Edelman, “political language is political reality.”³⁵

Rhetoric has not always offered the same kinds of opportunities overtime, nor has it been subject to the same kinds of constraints. Rhetoric is understood as persuasion, a mechanism through which the powerful gain consent and legitimize their rule. Political actors talk and share their ideas and goals. Maybe they are successful at persuading people to support their plans or maybe they're not. Each president has different approaches to finding their own voice while in office. Rather than predominantly focusing on the president, Stuckey focused on three elements: The White House Office of Communication, the speechwriting staff, and presidential surrogates.³⁶ The presidential voice must be carefully crafted and also consistent with the administration. Stuckey describes it as a group effort, all three elements must be in sync and organized. Rhetoric is aimed at facilitating specific policy proposals, in which linguistic choices

³⁴ Jeffrey Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, 203.

³⁵ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Presidents Creating the Presidency: Deeds Done in Words*, 2nd ed. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008; 8, https://books.google.com/books?id=jfuWeY8EmiMC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ViewAPI#v=onepage&q&f=false.

³⁶ Mary E. Stuckey, *Political Rhetoric: A Presidential Briefing Book*, 2.

have to be defined by the speaker. Through their rhetoric, presidents articulate ideologies and policies.³⁷ They reaffirm and challenge the values and beliefs that unites us as a nation.³⁸

Rhetoric involves a complex interaction of content, specific choices made by the speaker, and situated audience interpretations of those choices.³⁹ Rhetoric is socially interactive and presidents articulate the frames in order to find some kind of public resonance. An example that Stuckey provided to illustrate this point was President Franklin Roosevelt's choice of language during war time. President Franklin Roosevelt crafted language to help convince the public that the U.S. should be involved in Europe's troubles. Individuals have the greatest power in society by either accepting or rejecting rhetoric based on their personal beliefs and values. Because there is no guarantee in how the audience will respond to messages, presidents and their communication staff spend time crafting their speeches and language because they don't know what will resonate with an audience. If individuals connect policies to their own values, then it could be possible that presidents and candidates frame their policies, or speeches, to commonly held American values. For example, both Johnson and Reagan, presidents have expressed the same value patterns in national addresses. They used the same value, to mean very different things. "Morality" was used to begin Affirmative Action and to attack it, "Peace" and "Patriotism" were used to begin the War in Vietnam, to criticize it, to sustain it, and to end it.⁴⁰

Following the ideas and theory of the rhetorical presidency, this thesis, examines speeches about immigration policy given by presidents when they were candidates and then once they were in office to determine what values were expressed. The study of presidential values by Craig Allen Smith and Kathy B. Smith became prominent in this research as the study of values

³⁷ Mary E. Stuckey, *Political Rhetoric: A Presidential Briefing Book*, xxvi.

³⁸ Mary E. Stuckey, *Political Rhetoric: A Presidential Briefing Book*, xxvi.

³⁹ Mary E. Stuckey, *Political Rhetoric: A Presidential Briefing Book*, xv.

⁴⁰ Craig Allen Smith and Kathy B. Smith, "Presidential Values and Public Priorities: Recurrent Patterns in Addresses to the Nation, 1963-1984," 749.

can help us understand which presidents or candidates advocate immigration on the basis of American values. People come to the United States for the values that are part of the American Dream. Analyzing the rhetorical choices presidents and candidates make in their speeches and in presidential debates can provide insight into what type of language and values are used.

Presidential speeches can signal the administration's commitment to a policy or program to other government actors and the public. This can help us understand whether candidates and presidents express the same values and if there are any connections across the Democratic and Republican parties regarding immigration policy. This thesis argues that presidents will use the values America stands for to explain their immigration policies and to persuade the public and the Congress to follow their policy proposals.

IV. Methodology and Data Collection

This thesis uses content analysis to analyze 20 speeches. In *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, Klaus Krippendorff states that “content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use. As a tool, its purpose is to provide knowledge, new insights, a representation of “facts,” and a practical guide to action.”⁴¹ Because I am looking at rhetoric (speeches, debates, statements, addresses) content analysis is an appropriate methodology.

The primary data set consists of 18 speeches and 2 debates from presidential administrations between 1981 to 2020. The presidents include Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump (and Joe Biden). For each president, a total of four speeches were analyzed: two as a presidential candidate and the other two as president. This was to find any differences, or similarities, in speeches given as a candidate and then once

⁴¹ Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1980, 21.

in office. George H.W Bush was omitted from the presidents I studied because I had difficulty finding two immigration related candidate speeches for him. The speeches were collected from The American Presidency Project at UCSB and the American Rhetoric-Online Speech Bank. All 18 speeches and 2 debates contained references to immigration reform, immigration policy, or immigration in general. The following search terms were used to find the speeches: immigration, migration, immigration policy, Central America, Latin America, and Mexico. Speeches that focused on the geographical location along the U.S and Mexico border were prioritized—which included Central and Latin America.

I was the sole coder for the project and therefore there was no intercoder reliability. The Code Sheet (see Appendix A) was designed to capture any connection between the president's rhetoric and the eight American values. The code sheet starts with the name of the Candidate/President, followed by the date, title and type of speech. The total number of sentences and number of sentences devoted to immigration was also included. The next section focused on the framing of immigration rhetoric which included eight values from Craig Allen Smith and Kathy B. Smith based on the work of Edward Steele and W. Charles Redding.⁴² Steele and Redding created a list of seventeen American values that Smith and Smith used for their research. This project uses eight of the seventeen values because of how these values connect to the issue of immigration. The eight values coded for include: Puritan and Pioneer Morality, Value of the Individual, Achievement and Success, Change and Progress, Ethical Equality, Equality of Opportunity, Effort and Optimism and lastly Patriotism.⁴³ See Table 1 for list of values and corresponding definitions. In addition to values, I coded for positive and negative rhetoric, mentions of U.S history, mentions of specific policies, policy goals, and policy aims. All

⁴² Craig Allen Smith and Kathy B. Smith, "Presidential Values and Public Priorities: Recurrent Patterns in Addresses to the Nation, 1963-1984," 744.

⁴³ Ibid.

sentences that discussed immigration were coded. An online sentence counter was used to count the total number of sentences in each speech or debate.⁴⁴

V. Findings and Analysis

Using Steele and Redding's typology of recurrent American values, eighteen speeches and two presidential debates were coded. Steele and Redding found that their results suggested a typology of recurrent American values. They found that (1) it is possible to locate a body of relatively unchanging values shared by most contemporary Americans; (2) it is possible to formulate these values—at least approximately—in 'clusters' of assertions; and (3) it is possible to observe the explicit or implicit functioning of such values as underpinnings for persuasive, appealing, argument in speech addressed to a mass audience.⁴⁵ After dividing their results into groups, it indicated that Democratic and Republican presidents did not differ in their orderings of the values and revealed similarities among the five presidents orderings of the eighteen values.

Steele and Redding found that presidents sell and defend their programs and behavior through their conception of the American public and its values. Presidents rhetorically adjust their national audiences by explaining their policies in terms of their conceptions of the "American Value System." I coded for eight American Values: Puritan and Pioneer Morality, Value of the Individual, Achievement and Success, Change and Progress, Ethical Equality, Equality of Opportunity, Effort and Optimism, and Patriotism. This thesis found that many presidents used the same, shared common values in their speeches and debates regardless of party.

⁴⁴ "Online Sentence Counter," *Text Fixer*, Accessed November 20, 2020, <https://www.textfixer.com/tools/online-sentence-counter.php>.

⁴⁵ Craig Allen Smith and Kathy B. Smith, "Presidential Values and Public Priorities: Recurrent Patterns in Addresses to the Nation, 1963-1984," 744.

Based on the findings from the American values chart, all five presidents used the same---shared common values in their speeches and debates. For example, of all the candidate speeches and debates coded, there were twenty-four sentences dedicated to the value of Equality of Opportunity, sixteen of Change and Progress, fourteen of Patriotism, seven of Effort and Optimism, and only one sentence that expressed the Value of the Individual. There were zero sentences that included Puritan and Pioneer Morality and Achievement and Success (See Table 2). Of all of the presidential speeches, there were forty-six sentences that were coded as the value Patriotism, twenty four for Equality of Opportunity, eighteen for Effort and Optimism, fifteen for Change and Progress, and four for Ethical Equality. Lastly, there were zero sentences devoted to Puritan and Pioneer Morality, Value of the Individual, and Achievement and Success (See Table 3).

Smith and Smith's results suggest that any president addressing the nation will exhibit three levels of American Values: Core, Intermediate, and Peripheral. The five core values are (a) Puritan and Pioneer Morality, (b) Peace, (c) Patriotism, (d) Effort and Optimism, and (e) Progress and Change.⁴⁶ The four values that were shared in Smith and Smith's research and my own findings were Puritan and Pioneer Morality, Patriotism, Effort and Optimism, and Progress and Change. Since I did not include Peace in my research, this was the only value not shared.

However, Smith and Smith found that seven values failed to qualify as either core or peripheral values. None of the seven ranked among the highest or lowest values (by average rank) for presidents or for the entire body of speeches. These are the seven values most likely to vary from president to president.⁴⁷ These seven intermediate values were: (a) The Value of the Individual, (b) Ethical Equality, (c) Equal Opportunity, (d) Efficiency, Practicality, and

⁴⁶ Craig Allen Smith and Kathy B. Smith, "Presidential Values and Public Priorities: Recurrent Patterns in Addresses to the Nation, 1963-1984," 749.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Pragmatism, (e) Rejection of Authority, (f) Rationalism, and (g) Kindness and Generosity. In the speeches and debates, three of the seven values were present: Value of the Individual, Ethical Equality, and Equality of Opportunity. Smith and Smith identified this group as the lowest ranking, which contradicts my findings. Equality of Opportunity was found forty-eight times, one of the most found values from the group of speeches and debates coded. Immigration policy can be complex and can hinder people's hope of achieving the American Dream, but the dream is still possible. Regardless of political time and circumstance of birth., the American Dream is the same, the freedom of writing one's future and having the opportunity to choose their desired path.

My results showed various differences between the values found in speeches and debates from presidents and presidential candidates from both the Democratic and Republican party. I have to note that I studied three presidents/candidates from the Republican party and two from the Democratic party, so it is not an even mix. However, the total number of sentences containing the eight American Values are more common with the Republican presidential candidates and presidents than Democratic presidential candidates and presidents (See Table 5). Shifting to a qualitative analysis of the speeches and debates that were coded, this thesis found that some of the presidents and presidential candidates may have used the same values, but their rhetorical choices in how they expressed these values differed.

Puritan and Pioneer Morality

Puritan and Pioneer Morality is defined by Steele and Redding as "The world is seen in terms of good and evil. Virtues such as honesty, simplicity, courage, orderliness, humility, responsibility, and cooperation are stressed. Actions need to be justified with a moral purpose" (See Table 1). There were no direct quotes from the candidates and presidential speeches and

debates that show the value of Puritan and Pioneer Morality. I believe that the reason for Puritan and Pioneer Morality absence is rooted in the definition of the value. The world is seen in terms of good and evil stands out, and there were no sentences in the individuals four speeches, or debates, that talked about immigration as either a good or evil virtue in the world.

Value of the Individual

Ronald Reagan was the only president of the five to have addressed Value of the Individual. Value of the Individual is defined as “Every person is a unique, autonomous person worthy of concern and possessing intrinsic dignity which should not be violated” (See Table 1). At the 1980 Republican National Convention Acceptance Address Reagan said, “I ask you to trust that American spirit which knows no ethnic, religious, social, political, regional, or economic boundaries; the spirit that burned with zeal in the hearts of millions of immigrants from every corner of the earth who came here in search of freedom. Some say that spirit no longer exists. But I've seen it. I've felt it -- all across this land; in the big cities, the small towns and in rural America. It's still there ready to blaze into life if you and I are willing to do what has to be done.”⁴⁸ This was the only quote I found to be related to the Value of the Individual since it addresses that the millions of migrants arriving to the U.S should be taken in by the nation regardless of their background and legal status. In this primetime address, Reagan used the words “American spirit” and “freedom” in order to unify the nation under the cause that every individual regardless of their background should have a chance to experience the true spirit of the U.S. This emotional appeal to unify the nation is foreshadowed by Sourav Bhattacharya. The positive appeal described by Bhattacharya, says that candidates will promote themselves on an

⁴⁸ Ronald Reagan, “1980 Republican National Convention Acceptance Address,” *American Rhetoric Online Speech Bank*, July 17, 1980, <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreagan1980rnc.htm>.

issue, or trait, adjusted to the campaign theme. In Reagan's case, he won the party nomination by staying on the theme that the American spirit will not be degraded.

Achievement and Success

Achievement and Success is defined as "The accumulation of wealth is a measure of personal merit. Business success is especially valued. Success is equated with morality. Means can be justified by goals or results" (See Table 1). There were no quotes found in any of the speeches and debates from the five candidates and presidents that related to Achievement and Success. The definition of the value is limited to the idea that personal success has a relation to one's own treatment in life. The reason why this value may not be relevant in the immigration speeches and debates, could be that the five presidents did not talk about a hierarchy among migrants arriving to the U.S. However, Donald Trump may be the exception as he categorized all migrants from Mexico as criminals. Meanwhile, the other four presidents did discuss changing the system to reduce crime, but shared the common theme that migrants were arriving for economic opportunity.

Change and Progress

Change and Progress is defined as "Human nature can be improved. The present is better than the past, and the future will be better than the present. Change is necessary and beneficial" (See Table 1). The value of Change and Progress was used by Reagan, Bush, and Obama. In total, thirty-one sentences were devoted to this value, fourteen for Reagan, seven for W. Bush, and ten for Obama (See Table 4).

When President Reagan signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), he stated "In the past 35 years our nation has been increasingly affected by illegal immigration. This legislation takes a major step toward meeting this challenge to our

sovereignty. At the same time, it preserves and enhances the Nation's heritage of legal immigration. I am pleased to sign the bill into law.”⁴⁹ IRCA marked a major change as the primary goal of the act was increasing border security and establishing penalties for employers who hired unauthorized immigrants. The new law was the future protection of the most important value, American citizenship.

In his remarks at an Immigration and Naturalization Service Ceremony on Ellis Island, George W. Bush said “Immigration is not a problem to be solved. It is a sign of a confident and successful nation. And people who seek to make America their home should be met in that spirit by representatives of our Government. New arrivals should be greeted not with suspicion and resentment but with openness and courtesy.”⁵⁰ Despite belonging to the same party, both Reagan and W. Bush talked about change and progress in a different scenario. Reagan's statement came after a bipartisan effort with Congress passing and Reagan signing into law. Meanwhile, George W. Bush’s speech was for a naturalization service ceremony, a public event intended to bring communities together for one main goal, to formally naturalize the next wave of American citizens, held at the Statue of Liberty, a symbol of freedom. Arthur and Woods found that presidents will go to the regions, states, and localities that face questions and issues dealing with immigration as well as those areas that they believe will be the most receptive to their messages about immigration, particularly during election.⁵¹ The Statue of Liberty is a symbol of hope and the American Dream, so George W. Bush’s decision to hold the speech there signified the positive immigration frames used in presidential rhetoric.

⁴⁹ Ronald Reagan, “Statement on Signing the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986,” *The American Presidency Project*, November 6, 1986, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/254479>.

⁵⁰ George W. Bush, “Remarks at an Immigration and Naturalization Service Ceremony on Ellis Island, New York,” *The American Presidency Project*, July 10, 2001, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/212849>.

⁵¹ Damien Arthur and Joshua Woods, “The Contextual Presidency: The Negative Shift in Presidential Immigration Rhetoric,” 6.

Lastly, in a room full of reporters Barack Obama said, “Two years later, politicians remain polarized, and the challenge is unresolved. On the anniversary of those marches, I again express my commitment to comprehensive immigration reform and will do everything I can to bring order and compassion to a system that is broken today. It is in our interest and true to our tradition to come together and solve this problem. And as President, I intend to lead us in that effort.”⁵² The Dream Act would permit those eligible to apply for temporary legal status and eventually obtain permanent legal status. Unlike the passing of IRCA with Reagan, the Dream Act was met with serious opposition from the Republican Party. Obama pushed for the temporary measure in order to fix the broken immigration system and protect the young people who have been raised as Americans. Eventually he used his executive authority to sign the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). This speech was given in 2008, 6 years before DACA was enacted and throughout this speech, Obama was optimistic about changing to the broken immigration system on the anniversary of the May 1st marches. However, by 2014 Obama was not able to pass immigration reform and executive action was his only option for making his campaign promises a reality.

Ethical Equality

Ethical Equality is defined as “All individuals are spiritually and ethically equal in the sight of God and the law, regardless of material differences” (See Table 1). Only Barack Obama and George W. Bush expressed this value in their discussion of immigration reform, in a total of four sentences in two different speeches (See Table 4).

In his “Address to the Nation on Immigration Reform,” George W. Bush spoke about the broken immigration system. He described the current status of the nation, migrants living in the

⁵² Barack Obama, “Obama Statement on the May 1 Immigration Marches,” *The American Presidency Project*, May 01, 2008, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/291266>.

shadows forging documents so they can work putting a strain on resources for hospitals and schools, but an underlying message that migrants are part of the American life. He also addressed the issue of the numbers of migrants crossing through the southern border but not generalizing the entire migrant community into a cluster by saying, “Yet we must remember that the vast majority of illegal immigrants are decent people who work hard, support their families, practice their faith, and lead responsible lives. They are a part of American life, but they are beyond the reach and protection of American law.”⁵³ Regardless of their background, migrants are still human beings and while they don’t hold the same protection under the law, they are part of the American life. He gave a primetime address and also released a Spanish language transcript of this address. This choice of broadcast lets the American people know who is really in charge when it comes time to making executive decisions regarding the U.S. Obama spoke highly of migrants in his remarks with reporters about immigration reform. “Now, these are young people (“Dreamers”) who study in our schools, they play in our neighborhoods, they're friends with our kids, they pledge allegiance to our flag. They are Americans in their heart, in their minds, in every single way but one: on paper.”⁵⁴ This was coded as Ethical Equality because he talked about Dreamers as individuals who have been living in the United States and have had the same experiences and express the same values as Americans.

Equality of Opportunity

Equality of Opportunity has been a long-held American value. Steele and Redding defined the value as “Each individual, regardless of circumstance of birth, has the opportunity to rise in the economic and social system” (See Table 1). All five presidents expressed/used this

⁵³ George W. Bush, “Address to the Nation on Immigration Reform,” *The American Presidency Project*, May 15, 2006, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/215456>.

⁵⁴ Barack Obama, “Remarks on Immigration Reform and an Exchange With Reporters,” *The American Presidency Project*, June 15, 2012, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/301439>.

value in their speeches. Ronald Reagan as a presidential candidate expressed this value in his debate with former Vice President Walter Mondale when he stated, “And we have been the safety valve, whether we wanted to or not, with the illegal entry here, in Mexico, where their population is increasing and they don't have an economy that can absorb them and provide the jobs. And this is what we're trying to work out, not only to protect our own borders but to have some kind of fairness and recognition of that problem.”⁵⁵ According to Stuckey in “The Power of the Presidency to Hurt,” national debates are heavily influenced by educative rhetoric, influencing the political culture; setting, as the framers hoped, a model for what it means to be a citizen in a republic.⁵⁶ Reagan acknowledged that everyone in the room is an immigrant, working and living for the American Dream. Maintaining a good relationship with neighboring nations is a step towards resolving the issue of illegal crossings, by understanding the economic system and disparities that prompted the flow of migration.

Similarly, as president, Obama said in his “Address to the Nation on Immigration Reform,” “My fellow Americans, we are and always will be a nation of immigrants. We were strangers once too. And whether our forebears were strangers who crossed the Atlantic or the Pacific or the Rio Grande, we are here only because this country welcomed them in and taught them that to be an American is about something more than what we look like or what our last names are or how we worship. What makes us Americans is our shared commitment to an ideal: that all of us are created equal and all of us have the chance to make of our lives what we will.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ronald Reagan, “Debate Between the President and Former Vice President Walter F. Mondale in Kansas City, Missouri,” *The American Presidency Project*, October 21, 1984, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/217277>.

⁵⁶ Mary E. Stuckey, “The Power of the Presidency to Hurt,” 371.

⁵⁷ Barack Obama, “Address to the Nation on Immigration Reform,” *The American Presidency Project*, November 20, 2014, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308498>.

In his “1994 Address to the Nation on the Middle-Class Bill of Rights” President Clinton had a similar message. He said, “But the truth is that most people in this country, without regard to their race, their religion, their income, their position on divisive issues, most Americans get up every day, go to work, obey the law, pay their taxes, and raise their kids the best they can. And most of us share the same real challenges in this new economy. We’ll do a lot better job of meeting those challenges if we work together and find unity and strength in our diversity.”⁵⁸ This quote is a good representation of Equality of Opportunity because it places a priority on the individuals in the economic system rather than on their background.

During his 2004 Address to a Joint Session of Congress, George W. Bush commented, “Tonight I also ask you to reform our immigration laws so they reflect our values and benefit our economy. I propose a new temporary-worker program to match willing foreign workers with willing employers when no Americans can be found to fill the job. This reform will be good for our economy because employers will find needed workers in an honest and orderly system. A temporary-worker program will help protect our homeland, allowing Border Patrol and law enforcement to focus on true threats to our national security.”⁵⁹ The program would help migrant workers find a job and would give them an opportunity to rise in the system. On the other end of the spectrum, as a presidential candidate, Donald Trump made this remark after winning primaries in multiple states, “On immigration policy, “America First” means protecting the jobs, wages, and security of American workers. Whether first or tenth generation, no matter who you are, we’re going to protect your job because, let me tell you, our jobs are being stripped from our

⁵⁸ William J. Clinton, “Address to the Nation on the Middle Class Bill of Rights,” *The American Presidency Project*, December 15, 1994, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/218082>.

⁵⁹ George W. Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” *The American Presidency Project*, January 20, 2004, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/211969>.

country like we're babies.”⁶⁰ I categorized this sentence under Equality of Opportunity because the candidate gave his attention to American workers that deserve the opportunity to work, while also removing migrants from the same opportunity, which was very different from how previous presidents either as candidates or as president spoke about immigrants.

Effort and Optimism

Effort and Optimism was defined by Steele and Redding as “Optimistic action can overcome any problem. Hard work is inherently good, apart from its consequences. “Doing something” is good, idleness is bad. Since hard work will overcome problems, optimism is advisable” (See Table 1). George W. Bush commented that under a nation of laws and rules, the U.S is also a nation of immigrants and this cannot be ignored. He stated that “We will fix the problems created by illegal immigration, and we will deliver a system that is secure, orderly, and fair.”⁶¹ Comprehensive immigration reform was touted as the solution. This was coded as Effort and Optimism since W. Bush was adamant about “doing something” that would solve the problems the country was experiencing.

In his “Address to the Nation on Immigration Reform” Obama said, “Now, I continue to believe that the best way to solve this problem is by working together to pass that kind of commonsense law. But until that happens, there are actions I have the legal authority to take as President—the same kinds of actions taken by Democratic and Republican Presidents before me—that will help make our immigration system more fair and more just.”⁶² Obama put his faith into believing that a comprehensive immigration reform would also resolve the broken system.

⁶⁰ Donald J. Trump, “Remarks of Presidential Candidate Donald Trump after Winning Primaries in Montana, South Dakota, New Mexico, New Jersey and California,” *The American Presidency Project*, June 07, 2016, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/332346>.

⁶¹ George W. Bush, “Address to the Nation on Immigration Reform,” *The American Presidency Project*, May 15, 2006, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/215456>.

⁶² Barack Obama, “Address to the Nation on Immigration Reform.”

Donald Trump differed in how he spoke about what he would do to address the issue of immigration. Trump focused on using rhetoric that had a positive reaction among his supporters. Typically, this meant focusing his immigration rhetoric on law and order and not about the role immigration had played throughout the history of the United States. For example, at one of his rallies Trump said “Every day I'm president, we will track down the gang members, drug deals, child predators and criminal aliens that we find. We will get them. We will throw the hell out of our country or put them in jail.”⁶³ In “Truth in Crisis,” Scott B. Astrada and Marvin L. Astrada said that the Trump administration has disrupted public policy by framing the immigrant “other” as an enemy.⁶⁴ Rather than unifying the nation after a scandalous election, the administration changed the cultural landscape. Trump’s version of “doing something” was placing the blame on migrants for all of the bad things happening in the U.S.

Patriotism

Patriotism was another value shared among all five presidents. Patriotism was defined by Steele and Redding as “Loyalty to the tradition and values of America rather than undifferentiated, egocentric nationalism. A willingness to defend the United States” (See Table 1).

In 1980, during his Republican National Convention Acceptance Address, Ronald Reagan said “Tonight -- Tonight, let us dedicate ourselves to renewing the American compact. I ask you not simply to "trust me," but to trust your values -- our values -- and to hold me responsible for living up to them. I ask you to trust that American spirit which knows no ethnic, religious, social, political, regional, or economic boundaries; the spirit that burned with zeal in

⁶³ Donald J. Trump, “Remarks at a “Make America Great Again” Rally in Great Falls, Montana,” *The American Presidency Project*, July 05, 2018, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/332423>.

⁶⁴ Scott B. Astrada and Marvin L. Astrada, “Truth in Crisis: Critically Re-Examining Immigration Rhetoric & Policy under the Trump Administration,” 8.

the hearts of millions of immigrants from every corner of the earth who came here in search of freedom.”⁶⁵ In his 1996 Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union President Clinton said, “Let me be very clear about this: We are still a nation of immigrants; we should be proud of it. We should honor every legal immigrant here, working hard to be a good citizen, working hard to become a new citizen. But we are also a nation of laws.”⁶⁶ President Trump said, “Loyal citizens like you helped build this country, and together we are taking back our country. Returning the power where it belongs, to the people.”⁶⁷ All three showcased the presidential priority of restoring “our” values back to the nation and restoring the power of the American Dream. However, Trump is an outlier as he completely disregards the migrant community, using negative stereotypes, and blaming them for the current state of the nation. Meanwhile, Clinton and Reagan proudly talk about the country’s history as a nation of immigrants.

Another common theme expressed by the presidents and presidential candidates in this study was belonging. At an Immigration and Naturalization Service Ceremony President George W. Bush said, “For all of you, the oath of citizenship is more than a formality. And today America is more than your home; it's your country. This is one of the things that makes our country so unique. With a single oath, all at once, you become as fully American as the most direct descendant of a Founding Father.”⁶⁸ In an exchange with reporters about the Dream Act President Obama said, “We have always drawn strength from being a nation of immigrants, as well as a nation of laws, and that's going to continue. And my hope is that Congress recognizes

⁶⁵ Ronald Reagan, “1980 Republican National Convention Acceptance Address.”

⁶⁶ William J. Clinton, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” *The American Presidency Project*, January 23, 1996, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/223046>.

⁶⁷ Donald J. Trump, “Remarks at a “Make America Great Again” Rally in Great Falls, Montana.”

⁶⁸ George W. Bush, “Remarks at an Immigration and Naturalization Service Ceremony on Ellis Island, New York.”

that and gets behind this effort.”⁶⁹ The U.S would become a better nation if it protected and ensured a good life to the children raised here, since this nation was their home and belongs to them. Overall, among all five presidents, patriotism was shown as admiring the nation of immigrants or returning the U.S to its former glory of traditional values, richness, and prosperity.

My findings show that the speeches and debates by Republican candidates and presidents had more sentences dedicated to the eight American values, compared to the Democratic party (See Table 5). The total (119 sentences) for the Republican party can be attributed to George W. Bush, since eighteen sentences were dedicated to Patriotism and twelve to Equality of Opportunity throughout his four speeches. Overall, all five presidents shared in common two values: Equality of Opportunity and Patriotism.

I am most surprised with Bill Clinton’s result. He had the fewest number of sentences dedicated to the American Values with a total of fourteen sentences throughout his four speeches. And, Clinton spoke negatively about immigration and campaigned as a law and order candidate. He claimed that some migrants were taking advantage of the rest of us (American citizens), breaking the law, abusing the welfare system, and flaunting the U.S.’s immigration laws, and he was working to stop it. He acknowledged that the U.S is a nation of immigrants, but also a nation of laws. As for the last administration, I wasn’t surprised about Donald Trump’s references to Patriotism in his speeches. He spoke very negatively about migrants, putting an emphasis on “Making America Great Again” and blaming the nation’s problems on the number of migrants from Mexico and Central and Latin America.

VI. Conclusion

Presidential candidates and presidents speak differently about policy issues, regardless of

⁶⁹ Barack Obama, “Remarks on Immigration Reform and an Exchange With Reporters.”

party. Presidents have control over their rhetorical choices. They can choose whether or not to talk about an issue and they can choose how to talk about that issue. Factors such as location, the type of speech, and audience influence the rhetorical choices candidates and president make.

It is crucial to show the public that the country's leader knows just what is affecting them at any given time. For a candidate, the ultimate goal is to gain as many votes as possible, so incorporating American values could potentially make a difference, however this was not researched in this study. I can infer that the eight American values focused on in this research are the core values that most Americans across the ideological spectrum believe in. A president's personal values can influence public priorities through the president's conception of public value. During a campaign, candidates try to connect with voters and demonstrate that they share their values. Framing immigration policy in terms of particular American values may resonate with some voters. Candidates choose their language carefully. As the results show (see Table 4), candidates incorporated the values Change and Progress, Effort and Optimism, and Equality of Opportunity the most. This could tell us more about their campaign promises and whether immigration policy would be prioritized in their administration. From the speeches and debates, candidates and presidents knowingly, or unknowingly, apply American values when discussing immigration policy. Value analyses such as the one done in this thesis helps further the understanding of how presidents and candidates use American values to discuss the issue of immigration.

My research only covers a small number of candidates and presidents. In the age of social media, taking a look at presidents' messages on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram can provide some valuable insight about how presidents and candidates communicate with the public and which values are prominent. Future research about values and

immigration policy rhetoric should look beyond the traditional form of communication and study social media. Presidents are positioned to influence the form and content of the national discourse. They also have control over their rhetorical choices. They can choose whether or not to talk about an issue and they can choose how to talk about that issue.

The field of rhetorical studies makes different ontological assumptions and relies on a more complex view of the rhetorical transaction. It emphasizes contingency and choice rather than predictability and control. Overall, immigration laws and policies have changed throughout history. Every presidential administration will be responsible for overseeing immigration policy. The system we have today is the result of several major legislative reforms from Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Our presidents, as our leaders, have the enormous task of making the nation care about the issue and tapping into commonly held values and beliefs could be one way to reach the public and further policy goals.

Table 1: Steele and Redding's "American Values"⁷⁰

Puritan and Pioneer Morality	The world is seen in terms of good and evil. Virtues such as honesty, simplicity, courage, orderliness, humility, responsibility, and cooperation are stressed. Actions need to be justified with a moral purpose.
Value of the Individual	Every person is a unique, autonomous person worthy of concern and possessing intrinsic dignity which should not be violated.
Achievement and Success	The accumulation of wealth is a measure of personal merit. Business success is especially valued. Success is equated with morality. Means can be justified by goals or results.
Change and Progress	Human nature can be improved. The present is better than the past, and the future will be better than the present. Change is necessary and beneficial.
Ethical Equality	All individuals are spiritually and ethically equal in the sight of God and the law, regardless of material differences.
Equality of Opportunity	Each individual, regardless of circumstance of birth, has the opportunity to rise in the economic and social system.
Effort and Optimism	Optimistic action can overcome any problem. Hard work is inherently good, apart from its consequences. "Doing something" is good, idleness is bad. Since hard work will overcome problems, optimism is advisable.
Patriotism	Loyalty to the tradition and values of America rather than undifferentiated, egocentric nationalism. A willingness to defend the United States.

⁷⁰ Craig Allen Smith and Kathy B. Smith, "Presidential Values and Public Priorities: Recurrent Patterns in Addresses to the Nation, 1963-1984," 744.

Table 2: Number of Sentences of Values Expressed by Presidential Candidates

	Puritan and Pioneer Morality	Value of the Individual	Achievement and Success	Change and Progress	Ethical Equality	Equality of Opportunity	Effort and Optimism	Patriotism
Ronald Reagan (R)		1		3		2		2
Bill Clinton (D)						3		3
George W. Bush (R)				3		12		7
Barack Obama (D)				10		2	1	1
Donald Trump (T)						5	6	1
Total:	0	1	0	16	0	24	7	14

Table 3: Number of Sentences of Values Expressed by Presidents

	Puritan and Pioneer Morality	Value of the Individual	Achievement and Success	Change and Progress	Ethical Equality	Equality of Opportunity	Effort and Optimism	Patriotism
Ronald Reagan (R)				11		10		4
Bill Clinton (D)								8
George W. Bush (R)				4	2	4	7	18
Barack Obama (D)					2	10	5	2
Donald Trump (T)							6	12
Total:	0	0	0	15	4	24	18	46

Table 4: Total # of sentences of American Values corresponding to Candidate and President

Name	Candidate OR President	Puritan and Pioneer Morality	Value of the Individual	Achievement and Success	Change and Progress	Ethical Equality	Equality of Opportunity	Effort and Optimism	Patriotism
Ronald Reagan	Candidate		1		3		2		2
	President				11		10		4
Bill Clinton	Candidate						3		3
	President								8
George W. Bush	Candidate				3		12		7
	President				4	2	4	7	18
Barack Obama	Candidate				10		2	1	1
	President					2	10	5	2
Donald Trump	Candidate						5	6	1
	President							6	12
Total		0	1	0	31	4	48	25	58

Table 5: Total # of sentences containing the American Values by Party

	Candidates	Presidents	Total
Democratic Party	20	27	47
Republican Party	41	78	119

Appendix A**Code Sheet**

Name of President (# of speech)

Candidate/President:

Date of Speech:

Title of Speech:

Type of Speech:

Total Number of sentences:

Number of Sentences devoted to immigration:

Framing of immigration rhetoric

Values from Smith and Smith article (list each)

- Puritan and Pioneer Morality
- Value of the Individual
- Achievement and Success
- Change and Progress
- Ethical Equality
- Equality of Opportunity
- Effort and Optimism
- Patriotism

Negative/Positive

Mentions of U.S. history

Sentences devoted to statements of Future Policies:

Mentions of specific policies/policy goals/aims

Notes:

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