POWER GRID POLITICS: WINTER STORM URI AND TEXAS GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT'S IMAGE REPAIR DISCOURSE

Matthew Gerber, Breann Bates, Chloe Caballero, Adán De La Garza, and Erica Kolson

Matthew Gerber (Baylor University)

Dr. Gerber is an Associate Professor who retired from his debate-related duties at Baylor in the Fall of 2022, after 20 years as the Director of Debate. His research interests include argumentation, debate, rhetorical criticism, and disability studies. He holds the Ph.D. from the University of Kansas.

Breann Bates   **Chloe Caballero**   **Adán De La Garza**   **Erica Kolson**

Dr. Gerber's co-authors were all M.A. candidates in the Department of Communication at Baylor University at the time of this article's construction. They consulted on the initial version of this manuscript as part of Dr. Gerber's graduate Seminar in Argumentation, Spring 2022.

Power Grid Politics: Winter Storm Uri and Texas Governor Greg Abbott's Image Repair Discourse

Matthew Gerber, Breann Bates, Chloe Caballero, Adán De La Garza, and Erica Kolson

Abstract

Winter storm Uri hit the state of Texas on February 14, 2021. Bringing record amounts of snow, ice, and prolonged sub-zero temperatures, the storm caused widespread power outages which led to hundreds of deaths, and created a complex rhetorical situation for Governor Greg Abbott. This article examines the image repair discourse engaged in by Abbott, and ultimately concludes that his use of blame-shifting, corrective action, and defeasibility strategies were ultimately effective, but to varying degrees based on each respective strategy. We argue herein that Abbott's strategy of shifting the blame for the debacle to ERCOT was his most effective tactic, while his reliance on corrective action approaches (while necessary and expected by the audience) were only marginally persuasive. Abbott's defeasibility strategy was undercut both by conflicting statements, and by the recent reality that Texas does, in fact, experience extreme weather events however rare. We also argue that severe weather events are likely to become more frequent in the future, and that Texas in particular will be uniquely impacted by these storms due to climate change. We conclude that the political fortunes of elected officials will increasingly depend on how they justify their response to these cataclysmic storms.

Key Terms: apologia, image repair, weather rhetoric, political communication

On the evening of February 14th, 2021, Valentine's Day, winter storm 'Uri' blanketed the entire state of Texas in heavy snow, ice, and sub-zero temperatures that lasted for nearly a week. The storm resulted in widespread power outages and electrical grid failures statewide, as "two out of three" Texans lost power, and another 49% of the public lost access to running water for more than two days (Stipes, 2021, para. 1). The death, damage, and destruction caused by this storm reached historic and unprecedented proportions. The toll in human lives that the storm exacted was high, as 246 people died outright as a result of hypothermia (freezing to death), carbon monoxide poisoning (from the use of coal-fired heaters or generators in a poorly ventilated space), fire caused by electric space heaters, or in automobile accidents caused by the treacherous road conditions (Svitek, 2022a). Revised accounts indicate that the storm was responsible for upwards of 700 deaths (Grinesky, Collins, & Chakraborty, 2022, para. 1). What made the impact of Uri so acute is that most Texans had never been exposed to the type of prolonged sub-freezing temperatures that accompanied the storm, and thus millions of people were caught largely unprepared (Machemer, 2021).

Unfortunately, in the contemporary era of warming global climates, Texas will likely see an increase in extreme winter storms like Uri; rather than being a 'once-in-a-lifetime' event, these storms will occur more often, and are likely to be more severe than in the past (Kollier, 2020). Indeed, the power outages in Texas caused by Uri were due to "climate change stressing systems that aren't built for extreme weather events" (House, Stone, & Ge, 2022, para. 2). Others argue that "emerging science suggests that global warming could play a role in arctic changes that cause southerly cold snaps like the one that devastated Texas in February 2021" (Mendez & Douglas, 2022, para. 12). Climate change not only brings with it stifling heat and arid conditions, but also increasingly unpredictable and intense ice and snow events to geographic locations and populations unaccustomed to such weather, such as those in Texas (Irfan, 2021). These dangerous new meteorological trends will naturally create the need for the political leadership in the state of Texas (and across the country) to address the public, and the authors argue that increasingly, that type of rhetoric will take on the dimensions of political apologia and/or image repair discourse (particularly in cases where a storm and its aftermath have been mishandled by politicians). It is also important to note here that apologia speeches often do not contain an actual apology or acceptance of culpability (mortification), and that rather, they often entail defending one's actions or policies rather than saying "sorry" in the traditional sense (Ryan, 1982, p.255).

The deadly winter storm that engulfed the state of Texas in February of 2021 had an immediate impact on Texas politics. The failures of the power grid and the handling of the crisis by Texas Governor Greg Abbott and by ERCOT (the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, an administrative body appointed by the Governor) were widely discussed by "many state lawmakers" (Ferman, 2021, para. 1), and indeed "there was national embarrassment-Texas was a laughingstock around the country" (Theophil, 2021, para. 5). One author argued that "despite the misery, death, economic disruption, and embarrassment that Texas suffered, little has changed" and that Texas "remains susceptible to the threat that another winter storm could inflict blackouts as bad as -or worse than- last year's catastrophe" (Gold, 2022, para. 8). Underscoring the political impact of the storm, another commentator suggested that the "weather crisis may act as the catalyst for voters to realize the old ways might no longer be the best" (Diaz, 2021, para. 1). Specifically, this essay argues that changes in the weather of Texas, brought on by or intensified by climate change, have taken center-stage as one of the hot-button issues that will likely dominate political discourse in the state in the coming years. The authors conclude that these new political weather rhetorics are 'seasonal' and that the types of political arguments being deployed and engaged in by Texas politicians, are increasingly likely to be dictated by the weather crisis of the moment, and how each political actor justifies their handling of that crisis.

The discursive milieu surrounding winter storm 'Uri' and the subsequent power grid failures of 2021, yields one particular example that helps to illuminate this trend. Abbott was roundly criticized by voters, the media, and other national political actors for his perceived mishandling of the storm and its aftermath, and the reliability of the Texas power-grid continued to be a critical issue for voters even as the memory of the storm faded. The authors argue herein that Governor Abbott's strategies of blame-shifting, defeasibility, and corrective action are best

illustrated, explained, and framed by the scholarly literature on political apologia and image repair, which is briefly reviewed below. Again, the authors argue that this example helps to demonstrate that the future cycles of political rhetoric in the state of Texas may literally hinge on the increasingly volatile weather, and how political actors respond to the aftermath of those events. While we isolate our arguments here to the rhetoric surrounding winter storm Uri, this is not the first time Abbott's handling of a weather crisis had become an issue on the gubernatorial campaign trail. In 2018, Lupe Valdez, the Democratic nominee for governor, "criticized Abbott for not calling a special session after Hurricane Harvey last year to tap the state's savings account, known as the Rainy Day Fund" (Svitek, 2018, para. 3). This fact helps to underscore and confirm the political trend examined in the present article. Before exploring Governor Abbott's discourse more thoroughly, it is necessary to briefly review the scholarly literature in the sub-fields of political apologia and weather rhetoric, to provide a frame of reference for this project, and to situate this essay in the current academic conversation.

Contextualizing Weather Apologia

The scholarly and critical vocabularies that inform and guide this study are found in two subfields of rhetoric: political apologia and/or image repair discourse, and weather rhetoric. This section of the article will briefly sketch out the parameters of those genres of scholarship, foregrounding the theoretical takeaways that help to undergird our arguments. Concurrently, the authors intend for this article to enrich and deepen our scholarly understandings of those two sub-fields as well, by extending their contours to new and previously unexplored contexts.

Political apologia and image repair discourse has been frequently and thoroughly theorized in the field of communication (Ware & Linkugel, 1973; Benoit, 1997; Benoit & Henson, 2009). Research in this area has provided a useful critical tool for scholars who seek to highlight and analyze the persuasive image repair messaging that emanates from political leaders, CEOs, celebrities, and other public figures who find themselves compelled to defend their character or policy (in)actions in the face of a crisis. While a full review of this area of scholarship is beyond the scope of this project, a brief snapshot of the relevant parts of this literature base is necessary to help provide a critical methodology that will inform this essay. The generic typology of apologia and image repair discourse rests on the assumption that public figures will continue to find themselves in situations which warrant explanation to various audiences, be they customers, stockholders, fans, or in this case, registered voters in the state of Texas. Toward that end, scholars have developed and shaped categories which elucidate the various strategies and discursive stances that are available to political actors who must engage in image repair discourse (Ryan, 1982).

Generically speaking, those categorically and operationally defined strategies and postures of verbal self-defense include: denial, blame-shifting, provocation, defeasibility, accident, good intentions, bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser, corrective action, compensation, and mortification (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p.275; Benoit, 1997, p.179). Speakers who employ the denial strategy seek to deny involvement,

participation, complicity, or responsibility in wrongdoing or malfeasance. Denial strategies also include blame-shifting, in which the speaker attempts to evade responsibility for perceived wrongdoing by blaming other actors or alternate causes for the offending act. This approach rests on the assumption that "if another person (or group or organization) actually committed the offensive act, the accused should not be held responsible for that act" (Benoit, 2017b, p.245). It is important to note here that blame-shifting, as an instrumental strategy, can only be deemed successful if the speaker who shifted the blame is, in fact, "exonerated" in the perception of the audience (Sellnow, Ulmer & Snider, 1998, p.69).

Closely related to the strategy of blame-shifting is Kenneth Burke's concept of scapegoating, and the authors will briefly sketch out its dimensions here in order to help untangle Abbott's rhetoric later in the article. For Burke (1973), the rhetorical construction of a scapegoat meant discursively casting an actor or agent as blameworthy due to inherent evilness or possessing undesirable, bad qualities. The scapegoat functions as a "representative" of those bad qualities, and thus can be "sacrificed" in order for the rhetor to purge guilt (Burke, 1973, p.39). Kent and Boatwright (2018) further explain that "scapegoating involves intentionally taking advantage of others, 'sacrificing' the careers and livelihoods of others for *the good of an individual, or organization" (p.515). This theoretical position helps to explain Abbott's rhetorical moves in the wake of Winter Storm Uri.*

Speakers who adopt the provocation approach tend to argue that the offending act was a righteous response to a legitimate provocation by another actor, such as when a corporation justifies a move to a different state to avoid new, restrictive regulations. The defeasibility strategy typically entails the speaker arguing that they lacked enough information or control to make an acceptable decision, or that their lack of information contributed to the offending act in question (Benoit, 2006, p.292). Another discursive posture is simply to argue that the situation was an accident, and that the offending act was truly unforeseeable and unexpected. A sub-variant of the accident strategy is the good intentions approach, in which the speaker argues that they "meant well", but intervening actors or events derailed the original intent of the act in question (Furgerson & Benoit, 2013, p.276). Bolstering strategies rely on the speaker's ability to "bolster his or her own image by highlighting positive qualities or actions in order to strengthen the audience's positive feelings" (Benoit, 2019, p.4), or to discursively link their called-into-question ethos with the actions or personae of other acts or actors who are viewed in a positive light by a particular audience. The minimization strategy is simply when the speaker attempts to downplay or downgrade the meaning or impact of the situation at hand. Any attempt by the rhetor to lessen or diminish the importance of the offending act would fall into this category. Speakers who deploy the differentiation strategy attempt to compare the extant crisis or offending act to other, less offensive acts as a way of minimizing the impact. Transcendence is a rhetorical device employed by the speaker that allows the audience to 'move past' the offending act, and often the rhetor claims to have 'learned from all of this' or promises to be a 'better person' following the offensive act. In some situations, speakers attempt to 'turn the tables' by attacking the accuser. This approach can take many forms, but "attacks can be primarily directed

toward character and/or policy" (Benoit, 2017a, p.2), or toward the motivations or intent of an actor/agent who has levied allegations against the speaker.

Those rhetors who engage in or pledge future corrective action for perceived wrongdoing, are implicitly admitting responsibility for the offending act, but are also attempting to regain public trust by promising to fix the problem. Corrective action can take many forms, and the use of this strategy is obviously constrained by the particular exigencies of the situation in question. One sub-strategy related to corrective action is the compensation approach, which simply entails the speaker paying for the damages caused by the offending act. Finally, speakers who accept full responsibility for the offending act, and who directly apologize for the wrongdoing, are said to be exercising the mortification strategy. Benoit and Brinson (1994) argued that a "textbook" definition of the mortification strategy is one in which "the apologist accepts responsibility, acknowledges the suffering of the victims without attempting to diminish the undesirable consequences they suffered, and directly apologizes for the offensive act" (p.82). The authors argue herein that the unique sub-genre of political weather apologia will likely continue to be characterized by, informed by, and measured against the current parameters and strategies that comprise apologia and image repair as a genre of rhetoric.

While the rhetorical dimensions of weather are just beginning to be studied and theorized in the discipline of communication, scholars recognized decades ago that weather, and the communication surrounding it, had lost its "innocence", and had become politicized as "human action enters more and more as a factor in the earth's atmosphere" (Rosen, 1989, p.32). Rees (2021) argued that "the weather is anything but neutral", implying that politics and ideology have seeped into common public understandings of weather-related events and how to make sense of them (p.25). These germinal research projects contemplate rhetorics associated with weather at a number of different intersections. As Majdik, Platt, and Meister (2011) argue, weather, at its symbolic base, is a rhetorical phenomenon: "as a contingent element of an uncertain future, we watch it, forecast it, judge it, prepare for it, pray for it, and dodge it" (p.74). Some studies have focused on meteorology, and the ways in which cultural performativity, deeply ingrained tropes, visual imagery and spectacle, and dogma creep into weather reports, making them less about the sharing of information, and more about "weathertainment" (Meister, 2001, p.425). Other approaches to weather discourse have more pragmatic implications, such as research which examines tornado warning efficacy (Perreault, Houston, and Wilkins, 2014; Liu, et al, 2020), or studies that analyze the persuasiveness of tsunami early-warning messaging (Oldring, Milekhina & Brand, 2020). Still other research projects have examined weather rhetoric from an image repair perspective. Compton (2018) lamented the recurring plight of the erroneous weather forecaster, who is situationally compelled to engage in rhetoric to control "the damage to credibility caused by a botched forecast of a storm" (p.779).

The essay which most closely resembles and informs the present study is the article by Benoit & Henson (2009), which examined President Bush's image repair discourse following his mishandling of Hurricane Katrina. Here, the authors argue that Bush's use of bolstering,

defeasibility, and corrective action strategies failed to rehabilitate Bush's credibility on this issue, and that defeasibility, in particular, was a poor strategic choice given that it implied an unprepared, overwhelmed, and ineffective government response to what should have been a predictable crisis (Benoit & Henson, 2009, p.43). That all said, surprisingly few studies have specifically analyzed how politicians respond when they are held publicly culpable for mishandling the effects of severe weather. Even fewer studies have focused on how state-level politicians are compelled to respond to their constituents, and to their political opponents, following catastrophic weather events. The authors hope to forward this essay as a corrective to that gap in the literature. The current project is situated in, and informed by, this emerging rhetorical sub-genre because it grapples with the unpredictable nature of weather, and the always-fallible human response to such crises by elected political leaders.

Equipped with this understanding of how both political apologia and weather rhetoric are operationalized, and with a typology of the strategies and postures available to rhetors in mind, we can critically analyze and evaluate the rhetoric of Governor Greg Abbott, who found himself in hot water with voters following the deep freeze of February 2021. In terms of our critical methodological approach, the authors engaged in a close-textual analysis of Abbott's public discourse in the immediate aftermath of the storm, a period which the authors define here as February 16th, 2021 (Abbott's first public statement about the storm) through February 24th, 2021, by which time the power outages had largely subsided and the immediate danger posed by the storm had passed (Lee, Maron & Mostafavi, 2022). While Abbott continued to make statements about the storm, and while this was an issue with persistent relevance for the public, the authors feel that this timeframe adequately captures the contours and parameters of Abbott's response to the storm. Specifically, we examined his rhetoric on Twitter, his public statements and speeches, and his press conferences which focused on the state response to the power outages. The authors coded these texts to see which image repair strategies emerged as the most prevalent and representative in his discourse. For the sake of organization, the next three sections will address each of Abbott's primary strategies separately, but it is worth noting that these three particular strategies were often used together, in conjunction with one another, and sometimes even in the same public statement.

Blame-shifting

As winter storm Uri unfolded in mid-February 2021, people in the state of Texas found themselves in a deadly and dangerous situation, facing widespread power outages as the electric grid sputtered and eventually collapsed, leaving millions of people in the dark and cold. Naturally, people wanted answers, and as the Governor of Texas, Greg Abbott found himself in a precarious political position. Julian Castro, the Democratic mayor of San Antonio (the seventh-largest city in the United States), attacked Abbott on Twitter, arguing that he "failed to prepare for this storm, was too slow to respond, and now blames everyone but himself for this mess" (Manchester & Miller, 2021, para. 3). Castro and other "Democrats say that Abbot ultimately holds responsibility for not acting earlier to prepare the state for a major weather emergency"

(Manchester & Miller, 2021, para.23). Even conservative leaders in Texas targeted Abbott for blame, as JoAnn Fleming, the Executive Director of Grassroots America, argued that "Texans are angry and they have every right to be…failed power, water and communications surely took some lives" (Caputo, 2021, para.3). Thus, Abbott found himself at the center of a blizzard of criticism from the public and from other politicians from both sides of the aisle.

In the hours and days following the storm, and as the magnitude of the crisis became as clear as the ice that coated Texas roads, Abbott's damage control apparatus shifted into high gear. Governor Abbott took to Twitter, delivered public speeches, held press conferences, and agreed to several on-air interviews in order to both disseminate vital information, and to begin to control the parameters of the narrative surrounding his response to the storm. Having thoroughly examined and coded this set of texts, the authors argue that three primary image repair strategies emerged from Abbott's discourse: blame-shifting, corrective action, and defeasibility. This section of the essay analyzes Abbott's use of blame-shifting and argues that his two-pronged, targeted attacks on the ERCOT board and on the viability (or lack thereof) of renewable energy, offer an illustrative example into the form and function of that strategy, and also demonstrates how effective that approach can be particularly early in a crisis situation.

The first target of Abbott's blame-shifting strategy was the collective ERCOT board, and also specific members of that appointed body. In a tweet on February 16th, 2021, Abbott deployed the blame-shifting strategy, by attacking the members of ERCOT (Electric Reliability Commission of Texas) directly, who were appointed to that board and charged with regulating and ensuring the dependable delivery of electric power to residents of Texas. In that tweet, Abbott argued:

The Electric Reliability Commission of Texas has been anything but reliable over the past 24 Hours. Far too many Texans are without power and heat for their homes as our state faces freezing temperatures and severe winter weather. This is unacceptable. Reviewing the preparations and decision by ERCOT is an emergency item so we can get a full picture of what caused this problem and find long-term solutions. I thank my partners in the House and Senate for acting quickly on this challenge, and I will work with them to enhance Texas' electric grid and ensure that our state never experiences power outages like this again (Abbott, 2021a).

This particular tweet, issued less than 48-hours after the onset of the severe weather, tipped Abbott's hand in terms of the overall strategic approach that he would employ. Herein, he began the process of shifting the blame to ERCOT, but also conflated and employed the other two main strategies that would exemplify his image repair. This tweet also clearly displayed his use of the defeasibility strategy, when he argued that investigation was necessary to get a "full picture" of the causes of the grid failure, implying that he lacked information or insight into how ERCOT had prepared for the possibility of a catastrophic winter storm. Also at play in this tweet is the corrective action strategy, in which Abbott promised an expeditious investigation into the root causes of the crisis, which again was laid at the feet of the ERCOT board.

While blaming the ERCOT board collectively for their failure to adequately prepare and manage the grid for extreme weather, Abbott also shifted the blame to specific members of the board, particularly those who did not actually live in Texas. On February 23rd, 2021, a little over a week after the storm hit, and with snow, ice, and power outages remaining in some parts of the state, four members of the ERCOT board resigned from their positions. All four of those board members were not native Texans, and lived out-of-state. In their letter of resignation, they made mention of "concerns about out-of-state board leadership at ERCOT" and that they were abandoning their positions "to allow state leaders a free hand with future direction and to eliminate distractions" (Kingery, 2021, para. 4-5). Governor Abbott publicly welcomed the resignations and continued to fault ERCOT for its actions and inactions in the face of the storm. His specific emphasis on the word "Texans" in his statement functioned to hammer home the "outsider status" of the board members:

"When Texans were in desperate need of electricity, ERCOT failed to do its job and Texans were left shivering in their homes without power. ERCOT leadership made assurances that Texas' power infrastructure was prepared for the winter storm, but those assurances proved to be devastatingly false. The lack of preparedness and transparency at ERCOT is unacceptable, and I welcome these resignations." (Abbott, 2021e, para. 2)

On February 16th, 2021, the same day that Governor Abbott released the initial tweet blaming ERCOT, he also sat down for an on-air interview with Sean Hannity, of the FOX News network. In this interview, Abbott doubled-down on the blame-shifting strategy, but with a different target altogether. When asked by Hannity if wind turbines and other renewable energy sources were reliable, Abbott retorted:

This shows how the Green New Deal would be a deadly deal for the United States of America. Texas is blessed with multiple sources of energy, such as natural gas and oil and nuclear, but you saw from what [inaudible] said, and that is our wind and our solar, they got shut down and they were collectively more than 10% of our power grid, and that thrust Texas into a situation where it was lacking power in a statewide basis, that was power that was spread out by that ERCOT organization that you were talking about. (2021b, para.3).

Here, Abbott attempted to shift the blame toward congressional Democrats in Washington who had been pushing the so-called "Green New Deal," which relies heavily on renewable sources of energy such as wind, solar, and geothermal power. He also blamed renewable energy sources like wind and solar power for being unreliable in extreme temperatures. In truth, Abbott's "focus on windmills ignores the evident fact that every kind of power generation fell short in this storm" (Domonoske, 2021, para. 6), and that "shutdowns at natural gas and thermal plants during a surge in demand were also a contributing factor (or a larger contributing factor?) to the outages" (Chute, 2021, para. 5).

In a televised statewide address on February 24th, 2021, Abbott continued to rhetorically batter the ERCOT board and its members. Abbott argued that in the days leading up to the storm,

which was accurately predicted by weather forecasters up to a week in advance (Spivey, 2021, para. 9), "ERCOT repeatedly assured the state and the public that ERCOT was prepared. Those assurances turned out to be false" (Abbott, 2021e, para. 5). Abbott also sought to shift the blame for the perceived slow state response to the crisis on ERCOT as well, when he proclaimed that "ERCOT operators should have acted quicker to stabilize the grid and to prevent power generators from being knocked offline" (2021e, para. 6). Governor Abbott further entrenched the blame-shifting strategy by again linking himself to outraged Texans who had been "victimized" by ERCOT, and simultaneously sounded a call to corrective action when he remarked that "our task now is to take the lessons of the past week and the anger that we all feel and channel them into immediate action" (2021e, para. 7).

Page | 43

Corrective Action

On February 17th, 2021, Abbott held a press conference to update Texas residents on efforts to restore power, and to outline the corrective actions that were already underway. In this press conference, after delivering a brief update on the storm itself (which by that time was subsiding and beginning to exit the state), Abbott led with the news that "6,000 megawatts have been added to the Texas grid", and that "1.2 million households" would have resumed electric power in the near term (Abbott, 2021c, para. 3). He also used this opportunity to continue shifting the blame toward over-reliance on renewables, by arguing that "17,200 megawatts of renewable generated power remain out either because of freezing of the wind or because of lack of sun for the solar" (Abbott, 2021c, para. 4). On February 19th, Abbott returned to Twitter, and posted a short, simple tweet that outlined the corrective actions being taken by his office to rectify the myriad problems that resulted from the storm: "The State is working around the clock to address four immediate winter weather priorities: 1.Restore Power 2.Support local officials to restore water 3.Ensure access to food & resources 4.Get refineries back online" (Abbott, 2021d, para. 1).

On February 24th, 2021, ten days after Winter Storm Uri struck, Governor Abbott held a "rare statewide televised address" designed to "reassure Texans that the state was moving aggressively" to deal with the aftermath of the crisis (Svitek, 2021, para. 1). The first words of the speech hinted at the use of a mortification strategy (which never fully materialized), when Abbott remarked: "Tragic does not even begin to describe the devastation and suffering that you have endured over the past week" (Abbott, 2021f, para. 1). However, while he acknowledged the audience's suffering, without trying to minimize it, he did not take the next requisite step of that strategic approach and accept responsibility or blame for the crisis. In fact, he even rhetorically positioned himself as a "victim" when he argued that he understood the righteous anger of Texans, and that "I'm angry too" (2021f, para. 4). This approach further underscored his heavy reliance on the blame-shifting strategy, as he continued to distance himself from the ERCOT board and project his anger toward them. Returning to the corrective action blueprint, Governor Abbott promised constituents that "the legislative session will not end until we fix these problems, and we will ensure that the tragic events of the past week will never be repeated"

(Cobler, 2021, para. 4). The remainder of Abbott's speech was dedicated to outlining the steps being taken to alleviate the disparate impacts of the storm, including moves to combat "skyrocketing power bills", "overhaul ERCOT", and to "fund the winterization of the Texas power infrastructure" (2021e, para. 8-10).

Over the course of the next several months, Abbott continued to take corrective actions aimed at updating the Texas electrical grid. These rhetorical gestures were both symbolic and tangible actions such as Abbott's championing of the passage of "sweeping legislation to overhaul the state's power grid", which included "requiring power plants to upgrade for more extreme weather" (Douglas & Ferman, 2021, para. 1). Abbott also made rhetorical moves aimed at placing further blame on ERCOT and deepening perceptions that the ERCOT members responsible for the mishandling of Uri were "outsiders". In August of 2022 as part of an ongoing effort to fulfill his promise to overhaul the ERCOT board, Governor Abbott vetoed the nomination of Steve Berberich, a widely supported candidate to lead the organization, "because he came from California" (Ferman, 2022, para. 6).

Defeasibility

While the defeasibility strategy played a minor role in Abbott's image repair rhetoric, it is worthy of analysis both in terms of a thorough and accurate review of what the Governor said in defense of himself, but also on its own merits. Having already claimed in his initial tweet on February 16th, 2021 that he lacked full insight into ERCOT's planning and preparedness for the winter storm, in his follow-up interview with Sean Hannity, Abbott explicitly tried to rhetorically create distance between himself and "that ERCOT organization that you were talking about". This statement makes it seem like ERCOT was something he didn't know much about; as if the first time he had heard of ERCOT was on the Hannity show, and that he didn't have oversight or control over this particular group. This discursive approach is best classified as defeasibility, but also entails an element of differentiation, in that Abbott is trying to create separation between his office and an obscure bureaucratic organization that was ostensibly previously unknown to him. Later in the same interview, Abbott again relied on the defeasibility approach, by arguing that winter storm Uri, and its accompanying prolonged sub-zero temperatures were truly "unprecedented" and thus not predictable (Abbott, 2021b, para. 11). Despite the fact that "Texas experienced a similar energy crisis ten years ago" and that warnings were issued that "energy producers needed to insulate and winterize their systems for extreme cold", Abbott and his administration were seemingly waylaid by Winter Storm Uri (Norton, 2021, para. 3). Having highlighted the primary image repair strategies used by Governor Abbott in response to winter storm Uri, the next section of the essay will discuss their efficacy.

Critical Analysis Of Abbott's Image Repair Strategies

Given his position as the Governor of Texas, and operating from the assumption that Abbott needed to engage in exactly the kind of "face-saving" discourse called forth by the situation, the authors argue that the effectiveness and appropriateness of his image repair strategies was ultimately effective, particularly in terms of shifting the blame to ERCOT. As

noted earlier, the use of blame-shifting as a rhetorical tactic can only be deemed effective if the intended audience actually perceives that the speaker was not at fault, and that the target of the blame shift is actually the culpable party. In this case, the authors argue that three lines of argument seem to support the conclusion that Abbott was "exonerated" in the minds of Texas voters. First, even though the fact of the matter is that "ERCOT is overseen by the Texas Public Utility Commission, whose three commissioners are appointed by the governor", and that Abbott is "the elected official most directly accountable for their performance" (Hooks, 2021, para. 18), the Governor was able to evince that he did not control the levers of power in that particular organization. In a survey of Texas residents a month after Winter Storm Uri, "58 percent of respondents blamed ERCOT for the situation that created rolling outages throughout the storm" (Murray, 2021, para. 2). Drollinger (2022) noted that following Uri "many blamed ERCOT's board of directors, but some pointed to state lawmakers" (para. 7). In either case, blame was not placed on Abbott, which was the goal and purpose of his blame-shifting rhetoric.

Second, the attempt to shift the blame to ERCOT occurred very early in the crisis, indeed as it was still ongoing. In other cases, this would create "bad optics" for the Governor, but in this situation the public's outrage was palpable, and Hooks (2021) noted that "the effort to direct the public fury began long before the snow melted" (para. 12). ERCOT proved to be a convenient (and archetypal) scapegoat for the debacle, and the authors argue that Abbott's ability to portray the board members as "outsiders" who didn't care about Texans was an effective move with constituents who are historically xenophobic and mistrustful of "others" (Ramsey, 2016). Here, Abbott was able to transfer blame for the devastation caused by Uri to the ERCOT board members, sacrificing their careers and livelihoods (at least for those four members who immediately resigned their positions in the wake of the crisis), and absolving himself of guilt and responsibility. In addition, because of the early nature of the blame-shift, indeed while the crisis was still in full swing, Abbott benefitted from a political misstep by one of his Republican colleagues, Senator Ted Cruz. Cruz took an ill-advised family trip to Cancun in the middle of winter storm Uri, "lied about it, and was shamed into returning" (Hooks, 2021, para. 25). "While that story sucked up oxygen, the lights came back on for most Texans" (Hooks, 2021, para. 25). Cruz's untimely jaunt to Cancun provided the public and media a convenient scapegoat other than Abbott, and further deflected criticism away from the governor. Indeed, Editor-at-large Chris Cillizza of CNN publicly questioned, "did Cruz's bad publicity make us miss the real story of the grid failure-Abbott's own failures amid crisis?" (2021, para. 3).

Third, while this article does not necessarily attempt to explain the intricacies of Texas gubernatorial politics, and the "why and how" of Abbott's electoral victory in November of 2022, it is nonetheless significant that he won in a landslide over an opponent who "made the grid's problems a big part of his campaign and has criticized Abbott over his handling of the grid during and after last year's tragedy" (Ferman, 2022, para. 17). The authors argue that political exoneration for past misdeeds is often best reflected by wins or losses in elections, and in this case, Abbott's handling (or mishandling) of Uri did not ultimately cost him the gubernatorial election of November 2022. Rather, Abbott triumphed handily over Beto O'Rourke, who made

the issue an early centerpiece of his campaign against the incumbent governor (O'Rourke would later make gun control the primary issue in his campaign, a move which was spurred by the school shootings in Uvalde, Texas on May 24th, 2022). Given that shifting the blame for Uri's aftermath to the ERCOT board was Abbott's primary rhetorical strategy, the reader can draw at least circumstantial conclusions that this approach was effective with Texas voters.

The second level of Abbott's blame-shifting strategy was to castigate unreliable renewable sources of energy as part of the problem, but his own statements in the media seemed to undercut the effectiveness of this approach. In comments to a local Dallas news station shortly before he appeared on the Hannity show on February 16th, 2021, Abbott "told the truth" when he pointed out problems with the reliability of the natural gas supply during the storm, saying "it's just frozen right now…frozen in the pipeline…it's frozen at the rig…it's frozen at the transmission line" (Hooks, 2021, para. 15). While there were also problems with power generation from renewable sources such as wind (frozen turbines) and solar (no sun during and after the storm), the reliance on renewables was not solely (or even mostly) responsible for the power outages. Public opinion polling confirms that Abbott's constituents were less persuaded by this line of argumentation. Studies conducted in the weeks following the storm concluded that only 6.7% of Texas residents placed blame on frozen wind turbines or other sources of renewable energy (Murray, 2021, para. 3). In an ironic twist, House Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), who was one of the main supporters of the so-called "Green New Deal" which Governor Abbott attacked in his appearance on the Hannity show, raised millions of dollars to help victims of the winter storm in Texas (Schwartz, 2021, para. 1). While Abbott's blame-shifting to the ERCOT board resonated with Texans, the second level of that strategy (blaming frozen wind turbines for the overall power grid failure) was only marginally effective given that it lacked truth, and because Abbott himself made conflicting statements which undermined the coherence of the Governor's narrative. In other words, the blame-shifting to renewable energy strategy might have been more cogent and persuasive had Abbott also not admitted that fossil fuel-based energy sources also failed during the storm. The authors do acknowledge, however, that shifting the blame to renewable energy sources may have played into the same audience perceptions about "outsiders" and "liberal" politics that helped to make Abbott's blame-shifting strategy toward ERCOT effective with Texans. Here, Abbott's ability to symbolically summon and link the broader ongoing "culture wars" in America to local Texas politics, may have provided him some cover.

Governor Abbott's use of corrective action strategies seems both appropriate and necessary, even if their efficacy has proven to be debate-able. In a weather crisis situation such as the one created by Uri, elected officials are expected, compelled, to outline the steps being taken to avoid similar impacts in the future, even if those measures are purely symbolic. Indeed, Governor Abbott's focus on corrective actions and "keeping a cool head" in previous crises that "pinballed from hurricanes to mass shootings to worldwide pandemic" had generally served him well (Moritz 2021, para. 3), and the authors argue that this situation was no different, as least as it relates to the use of this specific image repair strategy. As Benoit and Brinson (1994) argued,

some situations, particularly those resulting in widespread catastrophe or involving mass casualties (in this case hundreds of deaths), require public officials to do more than simply apologize. Indeed, the authors argue here that the sub-genre of "weather apologia" by political leaders, particularly those "in charge" such as state governors or the President, will likely compel and require corrective actions even if there is a simultaneous attempt by the rhetor to avoid culpability through the use of blame-shifting. Even if blame-shifting to another actor is successful, the governor or President will still be expected to rectify the situation and prevent its further occurrence. Under these circumstances "apologies are not enough", and leaders must outline the steps they will take to prevent future recurrence of the problem (p.84). In this case, Abbott's suggested corrective actions were translated into legislative action over the course of several months following the crisis.

The potential pitfall in the use of these strategies lies in the interplay between corrective action strategies, and Abbott's attempts to use blame-shifting and defeasibility approaches to skirt responsibility for the crisis. If Abbott truly could not have reasonably predicted and prepared for the eventuality of a catastrophic winter storm, and he truly did not have access to the levers of power because they rested with ERCOT, then why would his public constituents believe that he possessed the authority to direct corrective actions in the aftermath of the crisis? If he truly, legitimately, had no involvement in the factors which contributed to the disaster, why wouldn't he just wash his hands of the situation, continue to blame ERCOT, and continue the status quo? The answer probably lies in the assumption among his constituents that even if he was not directly responsible for the fiasco, his ability to muster resources as the Governor meant that he was on the hook for correcting the foul-ups that caused the crisis, and for taking steps to ensure that similar disasters do not occur in the future. That being said, there seems to be general consensus that Abbott's recommendations for winterization of the grid and increased oversight and regulation of both public and private utilities are both warranted and supported by Texans by at least slim (yet statistically significant) margins (Svitek, 2022b; Texas Politics Project, 2022).

In terms of Governor Abbott's use of the defeasibility strategy, the authors argue that this approach had mixed results, and perhaps could have been handled differently given the exigencies of the situation. As mentioned earlier in the article, President Bush's use of the defeasibility strategy following the mishandling of Hurricane Katrina's aftermath was ineffectual because New Orleans had frequently been hit by strong hurricanes in the past, and because large portions of that city lie below sea-level. Bush's claims that Katrina was impossible to foresee, "unprecedented" and "extraordinary", rang hollow with an audience that simply knew better (Benoit & Henson, 2009, p.43). It is true that to some degree, a winter storm of the duration, magnitude, and intensity of winter storm Uri was out of the ordinary (to say the least) in Texas. Weather events like these, particularly in Texas, are often viewed as an "unpredictable, unavoidable act of God", and thus beyond human control (Loftis, 2021, para. 3). Thus, the unique and uncommon nature of the winter storm that hit Texas did afford Abbott some political cover, and did function to make his use of the defeasibility strategy germane in this situation, if not wholly effective. That said, one mitigating factor that undercut the efficacy of this strategy

was that in 2011, Texas faced a similar (though not as long or severe) winter storm that resulted in widespread power outages. Many "policy observers blamed the power system failure on the legislators and state agencies who they say did not properly heed the warnings of previous storms or account for more extreme weather events warned of by climate scientists" (Douglas, McGee & McCullough, 2021, para. 5). Abbott's remarks in the Hannity interview also seem to conflict with his claims about the "unprecedented" nature of the storm, as he himself reminded Hannity that "Amarillo is closer to Colorado than it is to Austin, Texas, and so there are parts of Texas where it actually does snow that much" (2021b, para. 10). Ultimately, his use of the defeasibility strategy likely risked undercutting the shifting of blame to ERCOT; if an extreme snowstorm was not foreseeable for Governor Abbott, it seems to follow that it would have also been difficult to predict for ERCOT. If his comments on the Hannity show were accurate, and it was indeed not unheard of for at least parts of Texas to receive large amounts of snow and ice, then his shifting of blame to ERCOT rings hollow, and he himself should have taken action to prevent the devastating impacts of the storm.

Given these realities, it seems probable that the choice of these image repair strategies, though not necessarily in conjunction with one another, and while not always free of contradiction, were ultimately effective in terms of absolving Abbott of responsibility and saving face with voters in Texas. Public opinion polling data seems to confirm our conclusions here, that Governor Abbott's image repair discourse was at least marginally effective. Recent polling data was favorable toward Abbott's handling of the storm, with a Dallas Morning News/UT-Tyler poll taken shortly after Uri indicating that "53% of Texans believe Abbott did very well or well in responding to the power and water outages during February's winter storm" (Roy, 2021, para. 10). Still, public opinion data seems to reflect "widespread anxiety about the return of cold weather", and a "lack of confidence in the state leadership's measures to ensure the reliability of the grid" (Henson & Blank, 2022, para. 1). This data seems to point to an additional conclusion that voter anxieties about power outages are seasonal, like the weather itself, and like the political cycle. However, while one might argue that Abbott's comfortable victory in the November 2022 gubernatorial election was due to the public's short memory, and that the feelings of anger and desperation felt by voters in the immediate aftermath of Winter Storm Ur had largely melted away by that time, one very recent study indicated that as Governor Abbott and Democratic nominee Beto O'Rourke prepared to engage in their only public debate prior to the election, "power and electricity grid issues are among the most important issues that Texas voters think state lawmakers should address" (Deiseroth, 2022, para. 3). The fact that power grid reliability was still at top-of-mind for voters nearly a year and a half after the storm seems to indicate that they had largely been persuaded by Abbott's rhetorical approach, and placed blame for the debacle on actors other than the governor himself. This data also seems to confirm that in terms of the sub-genre of "weather apologia", while certain types of potentially dangerous weather events are typically seasonal (i.e. snow and ice in the winter months, strong thunderstorms in the Spring, drought and fire in the summer months, and increased hurricane

activity in the Fall), the need for management of the rhetoric surrounding these issues will likely become a year-round political contingency.

Conclusions

There has long been a disconnect between actions which are politically expedient and effective, and actions which are deemed to be ethical and morally justifiable. Though Governor Abbott was able to effectively avoid the political fallout from Winter Storm Uri, he did so at the expense of the people who made up the ERCOT board. Inherently, blame-shifting and scapegoating entail "guilt, or at least awareness of wrongdoing" (Kent & Boatwright, 2018, p.516). It is worth noting here that in the opinion of the authors, and from a human-centered standpoint, Governor Abbott could/should have engaged in mortification strategies, and accepted responsibility for his administration's role in the crisis. Following that, he could/should have directly apologized to his constituents, and especially to the families of the victims who perished during Uri. As mentioned earlier, Abbott acknowledged the suffering that Texas residents endured during and after the storm, but stopped well short of assuming any liability for the bungled response. At the most foundational level, winter storm Uri happened during Abbott's time as Governor, and as the chief executive of the state of Texas, he bears at least some culpability even if Texans perceived the majority of the fault to lay with ERCOT. As President Reagan famously remarked in his apologia address on the Iran-Contra affair, "this happened on my watch", and a similar statement from Abbott would have been appreciated in this situation, even if it was not politically expedient given his other discursive choices (Lee & Spano, 1996, p.122). That said, any acceptance of responsibility by the Governor would have been at odds with the blame-shifting strategy, which was the centerpiece (and most effective instrument) of his image repair discourse.

There is an old saying that goes as follows: "if you don't like the weather in Texas, just wait five minutes and it will change." Increasingly, these changes in Texas weather patterns have become both a source of ongoing, year-round voter trepidation about the reliability of the Texas power-grid, and also a seasonal political issue (based on the particular weather crisis of that particular season) that demands discursive attention from elected leaders, or from those seeking to hold office. Indeed, the dependable delivery of electric power to the state was one of the most important issues that dominated the Texas gubernatorial election race in 2022. In fact, "most Texans see shoring up the electric grid as a bigger priority than improving security at the border with Mexico" (Hagan, 2022, para. 7). While this essay focuses primarily on Governor Abbott's image repair discourse in the immediate aftermath of winter storm Uri, the follow-on effects of the storm continued to occupy much of the incumbent Governor's time and legislative focus after the storm. Indeed, political scientist Brandon Rottinghaus argued that "when the temperature drops, the most nervous man in Texas is Governor Greg Abbott" (Hagan, 2022, para. 3).

The Democratic challenger for the governorship, Beto O' Rourke, titled his summer 2021 campaign the "Keepin' the Lights On" tour, prompting Mark Miner, Abbott's director of campaign communication, to accuse O' Rourke of "hoping" for power failures, and running his

campaign based on "fear mongering" (Aguilar, 2022, para. 7). Incumbent Governor Abbott ultimately prevailed in the 2022 gubernatorial election, and that fact seems to support our conclusions here. It also seems to indicate that O'Rourke, who shifted his rhetorical strategy to focus on gun control following the school shootings in Uvalde in May of 2022, perhaps should have continued to hone-in on an issue that was statistically more important to Texas voters, even as the storm became a distant memory: reliable electric power delivery (Deiseroth, 2022, para. 4). While it is beyond the scope of this essay to try and explain the myriad complexities associated with Texas gubernatorial politics, it is not a stretch to argue that O'Rourke's pivot away from his focus on grid reliability to the gun control issue (even though the tragic shootings in Uvalde were more recent than Winter Storm Uri) was not likely to be a successful strategy in Texas. Indeed, O'Rourke's "gun-ban ambitions once again took him straight to the concession speech podium" (Chesnut, 2022, para. 2). It seems clear that the issue of power grid reliability is a salient one with voters in Texas, and is unlikely to go away simply because winter has given way to the typically hot Texas summer. Indeed, the potentiality of rolling summer blackouts due to the excessive heat certainly still exists, and should give pause to politicians who believe that Texas will continue to be able to weather the high summer temperatures as it has in the past (Friedman, 2021). While elected leaders have always been compelled to address and reassure the public in times of crisis, the authors argue that those instances are only likely to increase in the future, as weather in Texas (and the other states in the American south) becomes progressively more volatile due to climate change (Austin & Salazar, 2017). While it is certainly true that humans cannot control the weather, the ways in which elected officials justify their response to inevitable catastrophic weather events merits continued scholarly attention.

While highlighting a specific example of weather-related image repair discourse has been the main focus of this project, the authors also hope that this study enriches and deepens disciplinary knowledge about the form and function of political apologia and image repair more broadly. Based on the example elucidated here, the authors offer a few conclusions toward that end. First, the defeasibility strategy, when deployed as a device to deflect blame, is not likely to be effective if the crisis in question was in fact, predictable. It is no longer possible or acceptable for elected leaders to claim that violent and cataclysmic storms were a "bolt from the blue" and could not have possibly been predicted or prepared for. The new reality is that those types of storms will become more frequent and more ruinous, thus removing defeasibility as an efficacious image repair approach for politicians. Second, when engaged in image repair discourse, rhetors must be wary that "individual strategies used to restore an image may interact with other strategies" (Sellnow, Ulmer & Snider, 1998, p.69). Governor Abbott's image repair discourse was complicated by his simultaneous use of blame-shifting and corrective action strategies. Abbott's message was at times incoherent (though ultimately effective), or at least internally contradictory on this front. It is perceptually inconsistent to deny involvement with the mishandling of an event, but then to simultaneously advocate for corrective action to address the problem. Politicians typically don't "do the time" if they don't "do the crime", and in this case, Abbott's advocacy of corrective action belies his involvement or lack thereof, in the fumbled

crisis response to winter storm Uri. That said, given that this event happened on his "watch", Abbott's (and future political leaders in similar situations) strategic options were paradoxically constrained by the exigencies of the situation.

Finally, in terms of future scholarship that this study might conjure, the authors offer a few examples. While this particular project centered on Governor Greg Abbott's discursive grappling with the aftermath of the winter storm, another essay might focus more deeply on the image repair discourse of Senator Cruz, who also suffered politically for his decision to leave the state of Texas in the midst of the "costliest" and one of the most deadly weather crisis in Texas history (McClelland, 2021, para. 1). Other research in this area might include studies of former President Trump's crisis response to Hurricanes Maria and Irma, which devastated Puerto Rico (a U.S. territory) in 2017, or perhaps even a project which compared Trump's rhetoric on the Puerto Rico storms with how he discussed the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, which inundated the city of Houston later in 2017. Additionally, the authors suggest a follow-up to the current project, which would chart the trajectory of Governor Abbott's ongoing rhetorical attempts to justify his improvements (or lack thereof) to the Texas electrical power grid in the wake of his electoral victory in November of 2022. Indeed, at the time of the completion of this article in late December of 2022, Texas is once again at risk of widespread power outages due to plunging temperatures and higher-than-estimated demand for electricity. To this point, "luckily the state's grid held, but the resiliency test isn't over" (Foxhall, 2022, para. 2).

References

Abbott, G. [@GregAbbott_TX]. (2021a, February 16). *Governor Abbott on Power in Texas* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/kwtx/status/1361766831275597826

Abbott, G. (2021b, February 16). Greg Abbott Hannity interview transcript on Texas blackouts, power grid issues. Retrieved from https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/greg-abbott-hannity-interview-transcript-on-texas-blackouts-power-grid-issues

Abbott, G. (2021c, February 17). Texas Gov. Greg Abbott press conference transcript on winter storm, power outages. Retrieved from https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/texas-gov-greg-abbott-press-conference-on-winter-storm-power-outages-february-17

Abbott, G. [@GovAbbott]. (2021d, February 19). *Weather Disaster Priorities* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/govabbott/status/1362903509520306178

Abbott, G. (2021e, February 23). Governor Abbott statement on resignation of ERCOT leadership. Retrieved from https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-statement-on-resignation-of-ercot-leadership

Abbott, G. (2021f, February 24). Governor Abbott delivers televised, statewide address on power outages, winter weather response in Texas. Retrieved from https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-delivers-televised-statewide-address-on-power-outages-winter-weather-response-in-texas

Aguilar, J. (2022, February 4). Winter storm prompts campaign sparring between O'Rourke, Abbott over grid readiness. *KERA News,* retrieved from https://www.keranews.org/politics/2022-02-04/winter-storm-prompts-campaign-sparring-between-orourke-abbott-over-grid-readiness

Austin, A., & Salazar, A. (2017, September 1). Hurricane Harvey reminds us the South will bear the brunt of climate change in the U.S. *Demos,* retrieved from https://www.demos.org/blog/hurricane-harvey-reminds-us-south-will-bear-brunt-climate-change-us

Benoit, W., & Brinson, S.L. (1994, Winter). AT&T: Apologies are not enough. *Communication Quarterly, 42*(1), 75-88. DOI: 10.1080/01463379409369915.

Benoit, W. (1997). Image repair discourse and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review, 23*(2), 177-186. ISSN: 0363-8111

Benoit, W. (2006, August). President Bush's image repair effort on *Meet the Press*: The complexities of defeasibility. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 34*(3), 285-306. DOI: 10.1080/00909880600771635.

Benoit, W., & Henson, J. (2009). President Bush's Image Repair Discourse on Hurricane Katrina. *Public Relations Review, 35*, 40-46. DOI: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2008.09.022.

Benoit, W. (2017a). Criticism of actions and character: Strategies for persuasive attack extended. *Relevant Rhetoric,8*, 1-19.

Benoit, W. (2017b, July-August). Image repair on the Donald Trump 'Access Hollywood' video: "Grab them by the p*ssy". *Communication Studies, 68,*(3), 243-259. DOI: 10.1080/10510974.2017.1331250.

Benoit, W. (2019, Spring). John F. Kennedy's image repair on "The Catholic Issue" in the 1960 West Virginia primary." *American Communication Journal, 21*(1), 1-11.

Burke, K. (1973/1941). The philosophy of literary form: Studies in symbolic action (3rd Edition), University of California Press, Berkeley (1973/1941).

Caputo, M. (2021, February 19). Top Texas Republicans on the ropes after tone-deaf storm response. *Politico,* retrieved from https://www.politico.com/news/2021/02/19/texas-storm-response-cruz-abbott-perry-470109

Chesnut, M. (2022, November 11). Beto's gun-ban plan leads to loss in Texas. Retrieved from https://www.americas1stfreedom.org/content/beto-s-gun-ban-plans-lead-to-loss-in-texas/

Chute, N. (2021, February 19). What percentage of Texas energy is renewable? Breaking down the state's power sources from gas to wind. *Austin American-Statesman,* retrieved from https://www.statesman.com/story/news/2021/02/17/texas-energy-wind-power-outage-natural-gas-renewable-green-new-deal/6780546002/

Cillizza, C. (2021, February 25). Did Ted Cruz's Cancun trip distract from the biggest political failure in Texas? Retrieved from https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/25/politics/ted-cruz-greg-abbott-texas-power-grid/index.html

Cobler, N. (2021, February 24). 'The system broke': Abbott vows reform after storm in statewide address. *Austin American-Statesman,* retrieved from https://www.statesman.com/story/news/politics/state/2021/02/24/texas-power-outage-greg-abbott-winter-storm-recovery-ercot-grid/6802569002/

Compton, J. (2018). When weather forecasters are wrong: Image repair and public rhetoric after severe weather. *Science Communication,46*(6)*,* 778-78. DOI: 10.1177/1075547018799101.

Deiseroth, D. (2022, September 30). Texas voters, feeling the pinch of high energy prices, support investments to improve the grid. Retrieved from https://www.dataforprogress.org/blog/2022/9/30/texas-voters-feeling-the-pinch-of-high-home-energy-prices-support-investments-to-improve-the-grid

Diaz, K. (2021, March 6). What winter storm Uri means for Texas politicians. *North Texas Daily,* Retrieved from https://www.ntdaily.com/what-winter-storm-uri-means-for-texas-politicians/

Domonoske, C. (2021, February 18). No, the blackouts in Texas weren't caused by renewables. Here's what really happened. *NPR Radio: Live Updates: Winter Storms 2021,* retrieved from https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-winter-storms-2021/2021/02/18/968967137/no-the-blackouts-in-texas-werent-caused-by-renewables-heres-what-really-happened

Page | 53

Douglas, E., McGee, K., & McCullough, J. (2021, February 17). Texas leaders failed to heed warnings that left the state's power grid vulnerable to winter extremes, experts say. *The Texas Tribune,* retrieved from https://www.texastribune.org/2021/02/17/texas-power-grid-failures/

Douglas, E., & Ferman, M. (2021, May 26). Texas legislature approves bills to require power plants to weatherize, among other measures to overhaul electric grid. *Texas Tribune,* retrieved from https://www.texastribune.org/2021/05/26/texas-power-grid-reform-legislature/

Ferman, M. (2021, May 3). Overhaul of ERCOT board could replace experts with political appointees. *Texas Tribune,* retrieved from https://www.texastribune.org/2021/05/03/texas-power-grid-operator-legislature/

Ferman, M. (2022, August 10). 'He has total veto power': Greg Abbott takes control over who will lead Texas' troubled power grid, sources say. *Texas Tribune,* retrieved from https://www.texastribune.org/2022/08/10/texas-power-grid-ercot-ceo-greg-abbott/

Foxhall, E. (2022, December 23). Texas power grid holds amid record winter demand, but test isn't over. *Texas Tribune,* retrieved from https://www.texastribune.org/2022/12/23/ercot-power-winter-weather/

Friedman, S. (2021, May 26). Texas at 'elevated' risk of summer power shortages, potential outages, regulators warn. *NBC News DFW,* retrieved from https://www.nbcdfw.com/investigations/texas-at-elevated-risk-of-summer-power-shortages-potential-outages-regulators-warn/2642319/

Furgerson, J.L., & Benoit, W. (2013). Limbaugh's loose lips: Rush Limbaugh's image repair after the Sandra Fluke controversy. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media,* 20(2), 273-291. DOI: 10.1080/19376529.2013.823971

Gold, R. (2002, February). The Texas electric grid failure was a warm-up. *Texas Monthly,* retrieved from https://www.texasmonthly.com/news-politics/texas-electric-grid-failure-warm-up/

Grineski, S., Collins, T.W., & Chakraborty, J. (2022, December). Cascading disasters and mental health inequities: Winter storm Uri, Covid-19 and post-traumatic stress in Texas. *Social Science & Medicine,* 315. DOI: HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.1016/J.SOCSCIMED.2022.115523

Hagan, S. (2022, January 31). Texas Governor faces key test as winter weather threatens grid. *Bloomberg News,* retrieved from https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-31/texas-governor-faces-key-test-as-winter-weather-threatens-grid

Henson, J., & Blank, J. (2022, February 2). Polling shows shy looming winter weather triggers Texans' anxieties about the grid, and their doubts about political leaders' response. *The Texas Politics Project,* retrieved from https://texaspolitics.utexas.edu/blog/polling-shows-why-looming-winter-weather-triggers-texans-anxieties-about-grid-and-their-doubts

Hooks, C. (2021, April). Who's responsible for the Texas blackouts? *Texas Monthly,* retrieved from https://www.texasmonthly.com/news-politics/responsible-texas-blackouts/

House, H., Stone, L., & Ge, J. (2022, February 22). Are we ready for another Uri? How Texas local governments are building resilience in the face of worsening climate. Retrieved from https://rmi.org/are-we-ready-for-another-uri/

Irfan, U. (2021, February 18). Scientists are divided over whether climate change is fueling extreme cold events. *Vox,* retrieved from https://www.vox.com/22287295/texas-uri-climate-change-cold-polar-vortex-arctic

Kent, M.L., & Boatwright, B.C. (2018). Ritualistic sacrifice in crisis communication: A case for eliminating scapegoating from the crisis/apologia lexicon. *Public Relations Review,44*(4), 514-522. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2018.06.006

Kingery, J. (2021, February 23). ERCOT board members to resign after deadly winter storm that left millions without power. Retrieved from https://cbsaustin.com/news/local/report-ercot-board-members-resign-after-winter-storm-that-left-millions-without-power

Kollier, K. (2020, March 5). A&M study: The future of Texas depends on climate preparedness. *The Texas Tribune,* retrieved from https://www.texastribune.org/2020/03/05/study-future-texas-depends-climate-preparedness/

Lee, R., & Spano, S.J. (1996, January-March). Technical discourse in defense of public virtue: Ronald Reagan's explanation of the Iran-Contra Affair. *Political Communication,13*(1), 115-129. DOI: 10.1080/10584609.1996.9963098.

Lee, C.C., & Maron, M.; Mostafavi, A. (2022, September). Community-scale big data reveals disparate impact of the Texas winter storm of 2021 and its managed power outage. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 9*(335), 1-12. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01353-8

Liu, B.F, Seate, A.A, Iles, I., & Herovic, E. (2020, June). Tornado warning: Understanding the National Weather Service's communication strategies. *Public Relations Review,46,*(2). DOI: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.101879.

Loftis, R.L. (2021, February). How Texas froze: Neglect of power-grid and climate warnings set the icy stage. *Texas Climate News,* February 20th. Retrieved from https://texasclimatenews.org/2021/02/20/how-texas-froze-neglect-of-power-grid-and-climate-warnings-set-the-stage/

Machemer, T. (2021, Feb. 19). How winter storm Uri impacted the United States. *Smithsonian Magazine,* retrieved from https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/how-winter-storm-uri-has-impacted-us-180977055/

Majdik, Z., Platt, C.A., & Meister, M. (2011). Calculating the weather: Deductive reasoning and disciplinary telos in Cleveland Abbe's rhetorical transformation of meteorology. *Quarterly Journal of Speech,97*(1), 74-99. DOI: 10.1080/00335630.2010.539622.

Manchester, J., & Miller, M. (2021, February 16). Texas governor faces criticism over handling of winter storm fallout. *The Hill,* retrieved from https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/539130-texas-governor-faces-criticism-over-handling-of-winter-storm-fallout

Page | 55

McClelland, S. (2021, March 8). How to recover from the costliest weather event in Texas history. Retrieved from https://www.hmtrial.com/blogs/2021/march/how-to-recover-from-the-costliest-weather-event-/

Mendez, M., & Douglas, E. (2022, May 18). Seven ways climate change is already hitting Texans. *Texas Tribune,* retrieved from https://www.texastribune.org/2022/05/18/climate-change-texas/

Meister, M. (2001, November). Meteorology and the Rhetoric of Nature's Cultural Display. *Quarterly Journal of Speech,87*(4). 415-428. DOI: 10.1080/00335630109384349.

Moritz, J.C. (2021, February 19). Weathering crises: Texas electricity disaster could be biggest test yet for Governor Abbott. Retrieved from https://www.caller.com/story/news/columnists/john-moritz/2021/02/19/texas-gov-abbott-faces-biggest-test-latest-power-outage-crisis/4503245001/

Murray, A. (2021, March 10). Survey: Texans blame ERCOT for state's weather winter woes. Retrieved from https://www.chooseenergy.com/news/article/survey-texas-blame-ercot/

Norton, K. (2021, March 25). Why Texas was not prepared for Winter Storm Uri. Retrieved from https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/texas-winter-storm-uri/

Oldring, A., Milekhina, A., & Brand, A. (2020). Tweeting tsunami: Influence and early warning in British Columbia. *Canadian Journal of Communication,45*(3), 387-409. DOI: 10.22230/cjc.2020v45n3a3587.

Perreault, M., Houston, B., & Wilkins, L. (2014, November-December). Does scary matter? Testing the effectiveness of new national weather service tornado warning messages. *Communication Studies,65*(5), 484-499. DOI: 10.1080/10510974.2014.956942.

Ramsey, R. (2016, November 1). UT/TT Poll: Texas voters wary of those they perceive as outsiders. *Texas Tribune,* retrieved from https://www.texastribune.org/2016/11/01/uttt-poll-texas-voters-wary-those-they-perceive-ou/

Rees, J. (2021). The weather is never neutral. *Pacific Journalism Review,27*(1 & 2). 22-26. DOI: 10.24135/pjr.v27i1and2.1177.

Rosen, J. (1989). Coming next: The weather as political issue. *ETC: A Review of General Semantics.46*(1), 30-32.

Roy, R. (2021, March 9). POLL: 53% of Texans trust Gov. Abbott to keep public safe from pandemic, believe he handled winter storm outages well. *CBS19 News,* retrieved from https://www.cbs19.tv/article/news/local/53-of-texans-trust-gov-abbott-to-keep-public-safe-from-pandemic-believe-he-handled-winter-storm-well/501-7c81173d-e220-41cb-8b91-757136ee7415

Ryan, H.R. (1982). *Kategoria* and *apologia:* On their generic criticism as a speech set. *Quarterly Journal of Speech,68,* 254-261. DOI: 10.1080/00335638209383611.

Schwartz, M.S. (2021, February 20). Ocasio-Cortez fundraising drive for Texas relief raises $4 million. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-winter-storms-

Page | 56

2021/2021/02/20/969809679/ocasio-cortez-fundraising-drive-for-texas-relief-raises-4-million

Sellnow, T.L., Ulmer, R.R., & Snider, M. (1998, Winter). The compatibility of corrective action in organizational crisis communication. *Communication Quarterly,46*(1), 60-75. DOI: 10.1080/01463379809370084.

Spivey, S. (2021, August 31). Did the Farmer's Almanac really predict the February 2021 winter storm? Retrieved from https://www.ksat.com/weather/2021/08/31/did-the-farmers-almanac-really-predict-the-february-2021-winter-storm/#/questions

Stipes, C. (2021, March 29). New report details impact of winter storm Uri on Texans. *University of Houston News,* retrieved from https://www.texastribune.org/2022/01/02/texas-winter-storm-final-death-toll-246/

Svitek, P. (2018, September 28). Gov. Greg Abbott and challenger Lupe Valdez spar over arming teachers, Harvey recovery in debate. *Texas Tribune,* retrieved from https://www.texastribune.org/2018/09/28/greg-abbott-lupe-valdez-debate-watch/

Svitek, P. (2021, February 24). Gov. Greg Abbott, in statewide address, promises answers on winter weather disaster. *Texas Tribune*, retrieved from https://www.texastribune.org/2021/02/24/greg-abbott-winter-storm-speech/

Svitek, P. (2022a, January 3). Texas puts final estimate of winter storm death toll at 246. *Texas Tribune,* January 3, retrieved from https://www.texastribune.org/2022/01/02/texas-winter-storm-final-death-toll-246/

Svitek, P. (2022b, November 17). What Greg Abbott's decisive win over Beto O'Rourke portends for his third term in office. Retrieved from https://www.tpr.org/government-politics/2022-11-17/what-greg-abbotts-decisive-win-over-beto-orourke-portends-for-his-third-term-in-office

Texas Politics Project (2022, April). Greg Abbott job approval: The electric grid in Texas. Retrieved from https://texaspolitics.utexas.edu/set/greg-abbott-job-approval-electric-grid-texas-april-2022

Theophil, M. (2021, June 23). Rep. Ron Reynolds calls for special legislative session to include additional response to winter storm. Retrieved from https://communityimpact.com/houston/sugar-land-missouri-city/weather/2021/06/23/rep-ron-reynolds-calls-for-special-legislative-session-to-include-additional-response-to-winter-storm/

Ware, B.L., & Linkugel, W.A. (1973, October). They spoke in defense of themselves: On the generic criticism of apologia. *Quarterly Journal of Speech,59*(3), 273-284. DOI: 10.1080/00335637309383176.