

**SHAPING THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH: THE EFFECT OF PARTY AND PARTY SYSTEM INSTITUTIONALIZATION ON PRESIDENT'S ISSUE CHOICES**

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**Abstract**

Presidents have more and more relied on a host of communication mechanisms in order to “communicate directly” with the voters. Despite the value of the “bully pulpit” for setting the public agenda, the messages in these communications has received little attention. This manuscript not only looks at the issues that Presidents raise and why the choices made, but goes beyond by looking at the effect of party institutionalization in these speeches. Here I argue that different party institutionalization settings provide different strategies for presidents to engage in. By looking at the first comparative analysis of presidential communications I argue that mix between the level of institutionalization of the party system and of the president's party create incentives for the President to lead or pander.

**Keywords:** Presidents, Party Institutionalization, Party system institutionalization, Political Communication.

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## 1. Introduction

The process of writing a presidential speech extends far beyond the mere flourishes that help make the text attractive and coherent. There is a critical component related to the issue(s) that will be mentioned. This process has a strategic component, as every communicative action must have a purpose (Habermas 1984). The strategy of choosing which issue(s) to speak about will have to weight several factors. First, what does the president want to talk about? Second, how believable will the president be? And third, what are the concerns of the citizens? The degree to which these different questions are weighted will affect the issue profile of the speech. Furthermore, via the power of the ‘bully pulpit’, these speeches will set the public agenda (Kernell 1997).

The power to rally public opinion in order to achieve legislative successes has been widely studied in the presidential communications literature. There is significant evidence that points to the ability of presidents to influence public opinion (e.g. Rottinghaus 2010, Brader 2006, Geer 2006, Buchanan 2005, Newman 2003), even in light of criticisms to its effectiveness (e.g. Edwards III 1996a, 1996b, 2003). The main argument in this literature is that, a president’s ability to get Congress to pass the president’s preferred legislation is tied to how the public perceives the specific policy issue. By relying on a consistent and well-crafted political communication strategy, presidents can promote their agenda in the public sphere and mobilize the necessary societal support to implement it (e.g. Kernell 1997, Rottinghaus 2010). For instance, by studying the impact of President Bush’s speeches on Iraq, Tedin, Rottinghaus and Rodgers (2011) showed that by “going public” the president was able to influence political opinions across certain issue types and groups. Similarly, by comparing different instruments of political communication, Rottinghaus (2009) concludes that presidential addresses on national television are most effective in shaping public opinion.

Most studies of presidential communications so far have focused on the US presidency, however, with new advances in archiving and access researchers have started to gain access to data previously unavailable in other countries different to the US. In one such analysis Hawkins (2009) studied 200 speeches of over 40 presidents. In his study, Hawkins focused on four types of speeches to study the presence of populism in presidential discourses. Specifically, for each president, he obtained “a campaign speech, a ribbon-cutting speech, an international speech, and a famous speech, typically an inaugural address or an annual report to the nation” (Hawkins 2009, 1051). By doing this he was able to compare presidents and find the presence of populism in modern and historic presidential speeches.

Despite the importance that presidential communications have acquired in the studies of the American Presidency, and of the comparative literature recently, little is known, however, about exactly what issues are being raised by the President on an ongoing basis. Currently most studies focus either on whether the president can mobilize the public on a specific issue, such as the Iraq war (Tedin, Rottinghaus and Rodgers 2011), on the effects of different types of ‘strategic’ speeches (Rottinghaus 2009), or on the presence of populism (Hawkins 2009). This literature, however, has failed to acknowledge more broadly how presidential issue preferences translate into the public agenda. And most importantly how those presidential issue profiles are constrained by the party of the president, the electorate’s preferences, and the type of party system the country has.

Research on issue attention shows that politicians selectively choose the issues on which they talk based on how citizens evaluate the party’s performance on these issues and on the level of importance or salience of the issue among the public (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994, Kaplan, Park and Ridout 2006, Sigelman and Buell 2004, Simon 2002, Xenos and Foot 2005). These findings are based on the existence of informative party labels that develop in the context of strongly institutionalized party systems, where party organizations

are solidified (Panebianco 1988) and parties become “well established and widely known” (Mainwaring and Torcal 2006, 206). These associated reputations, that inform citizens about the likely stance of politicians on issues, make parties “reliable” and “responsible” (Downs 1957, 105). Based on issue ownership theory (Petrocik 1996) for instance, we would expect that presidents will highlight more, on average, the issues that benefit their party over issues that benefit the opposition party. However, as Sagarzazu (2011) has shown the dynamics of issue attention are different in settings where parties are not institutionalized (i.e. party labels have no meaning).

In light of the relative importance of presidential communications for the crafting of the presidential agenda and the mobilization of popular support for it, together with the attempt at influencing other branches, institutions, or even sending messages to foreign institutions and public’s. This manuscript will analyze, via quantitative text analysis, the attention devoted to different issues in presidential speeches. This analysis, however, will be the first attempt at looking at presidential speeches in a comparative perspective. As such it will not restrict itself to the United States only but will include other countries with presidential systems where the institutionalization of the party system varies. Specifically, this essay will analyze, together with the United States, Venezuela and Brazil. In doing this comparison I will be able to analyze whether the dynamics of issue attention vary according to the level of party institutionalization.

This manuscript proceeds as follows: In the next two sections, I develop the theoretical argument. The succeeding section then turns to the empirical part of the study by illustrating the research design. Afterwards, it will present the results of the analysis and conclude with a summary of the results and a discussion of the implications of the findings.

## **2. Party and Party System Institutionalization as Agenda Setters**

In this section I present the theoretical constructions and assumptions that I make in this study. Specifically it starts by looking at the current discussion on the definition of parties issue profiles. It highlights the main discussion in the field only to point out that these dynamics only hold when the parties are institutionalized. After an overview of the causes and consequences of party and party system institutionalization, it presents the theoretical conclusion that can be drawn from taking into consideration these factors for the issue preferences of presidential communications.

### **2.1 The forces behind issue preferences**

Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts (2001) present a dichotomy of choices presidents have to make. Should they *lead* by going against prevailing public opinion? or should they *pander* to the public’s preferences? While Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts (2001) theory is in the context of enacting legislation it also applies to the public issue preferences presidents make. Presidents can ‘lead’ by speaking on owned issues or they can ‘pander’ to the most salient issues. While there are not many studies looking at whether, and why, presidents decide to raise some issues rather than others, there is plenty of evidence in the campaign literature suggesting politicians do both. For the purposes of this study, we rely on the theories of issue ownership and issue salience that emanate from the campaign literature but have been shown to apply to actual day to day politics (see for instance Green-Pedersen et al. 2011, Green-Pedersen and Wilkerson 2006, Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010, Sagarzazu 2011, Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu 2012, Sagarzazu 2012).

As defined by Petrocik (1996), issue ownership by parties is related to the party’s constituency (long-term ownership) and the citizens’ view on which party is better at handling the issue (short-term

ownership). As such, Issue Ownership theory is based on the assumption that parties can effectively “own” issues. Based on party constituencies, for instance, it has been widely accepted that center of left parties own social issues such as welfare, health, and unemployment; while right of center parties own issue of national security, immigration, and taxation (Petrocik 1996, Petrocik, Benoit and Hansen 2003, Budge, Robertson and Hearl 1987).

According to the Issue Ownership framework when a party effectively owns an issue it should spend time and resources positioning this issue in the public agenda. Owning an issue and highlighting it can have positive electoral consequences since having ownership of a salient issue the party should benefit electorally. As (Petrocik 1996) comments “voters’ decisions are shaped by directional choices, and once the agenda of the election is settled ... voters tilt the outcome in favor of the candidate advantaged by the agenda” (830). A second assumption of the theory is that parties can increase the salience of an issue by talking about the issue. As such, a non-important issue can become significant if the salience of the issue is raised (Vavreck 2009). In conclusion if a president decides to speak on an owned issue even if that issue is not the most salient problem then he would in fact leading.

On the other hand the Issue Salience theory is more like pandering. Politicians, in order to appear responsive to to the public, highlight the issues that are more important to the electorate (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994). Talking on the same issues is believed to be better for the democratic process as it allows citizens to compare and contrast politicians of different parties (Sides 2006, Kaplan, Park and Ridout 2006). However, as Hamilton (1788) in *Federalist 71* following a prevailing current goes against the principles under which “government was instituted”. In summary, when politicians and parties put aside those issues they own in order to follow salient issues they pander.

Based on the discussion above, it can be noticed that the concepts of leading and pandering used in this manuscript differ slightly from the meaning provided them in Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts (2001). For the purposes of understanding strategic political communications *Leading* will be the act of speaking on party owned issues, and *Pandering* the act of speaking on salient issues. When an issue is both owned and salient it will be also considered leading.

## **2.2 When the party doesn't matter...**

Work by Sagarzazu (2011), however, argues that the level of Party Institutionalization affects the degree to which parties can own issues and as such affects the dynamics of issue attention.

Institutionalized parties serve many purposes including helping their members win elections by sharing organizational resources. In exchange for these resources obtained from the party, politicians invest resources of their own, including their reputations, to maintain the brand value of their parties (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005, Scarrow 2010). The meaningful labels that ultimately result from this trade establish party issue positions that help voters reduce their information costs and make informed choices (Conover and Feldman 1982, Converse 1975, Cox and McCubbins 2005, Downs 1957, Feldman and Conover 1983, Shively 1979).

Weakly institutionalized parties, on the other hand, have fragile roots in society, do not have a strong role in recruitment of new members, and lack the structures for internal organization and the resources for supporting party members in their elections (Jones 2007, Mainwaring 1999, Mainwaring and Torcal 2006, Panebianco 1988). When parties are not institutionalized, personalistic politics prevails over programmatic appeals and as a consequence voters have difficulty identifying between party labels (Jones 2007, Mainwaring 1999, Mainwaring and Scully 1995, Mainwaring and Torcal 2006, Mainwaring and Zoco 2007). When party

labels have no meaning citizens have a hard time differentiating between competing options. The absence of meaningful party labels, and therefore the lack of cues also affects how politicians choose the issues on which they talk (Sagarzazu 2011).

The existence of weak party institutionalization is usually attributed to the lack of party system institutionalization. However, Party System Institutionalization (PSI) and Party Institutionalization (PI) are complementary but not the same concept (Randall and Svassand 2002, Balán 2012). As such besides looking at the level of institutionalization of parties it is also necessary to look at the institutionalization of the system as a whole.

Institutionalized party systems, just as the institutionalized parties, serve many purposes. Specifically, they help increase stability, accountability, improve representation, and overall promote a better functioning democracy (Mainwaring and Torcal 2006). In weakly institutionalized systems, however, there are high levels of electoral volatility and weak party organizations (Jones 2007, Mainwaring 1999, Mainwaring and Torcal 2006).

### **3. Issue strategies and Institutionalization**

While the work of Sagarzazu (2011) has helped in understanding the logic of issue politics outside of settings with institutionalized parties, it fails to account for the possible existence of institutionalized parties in weakly institutionalized systems, and of weakly institutionalized parties in institutionalized systems. The consideration of these combination of High and Low PI and High and Low PSI brings about four possible scenarios with four different strategies for politicians. The incentives to Lead or Pander in each of these scenarios are quite clear. Table 1 shows the strategies that should prevail in each.

The first scenario, where both the system and the president's party are strongly institutionalized, follows from the prediction of issue ownership and issue salience theories. President's actually have the opportunity to lead and to pander and they will choose strategically.

The fourth scenario, that which sees both the president's parties and the system institutionalization to be rather weak, has no specific strategy (as discussed by Sagarzazu (2011)). In this setting there are no issue attachments that allow the president to lead on and no pressures to pander in order to build credibility as responsive. As short term politics take over the only pressure is for the president to be on top of the issue of the day.

The second scenario is one where the party of the president has managed to institutionalize in a weakly institutionalized system. As a member of an institutionalized party the president has a bag of owned issues from which the president can exercise leadership. As such, in this setting presidents will lead.

Finally the third scenario, that where the party of the president is weakly institutionalized and the system is highly institutionalized is rather interesting. This scenario is one where the president's party is a new actor in the political system. Usually in the context of an insurgent candidate who manages to upset the traditional parties in the system. In such scenario the new president has risen to power by championing a long lasting concern, highly salient, of the electorate. As such, during his tenure, the president will be encouraged to highlight this salient issue that brought him to power, thus keeping it salient. It is important to highlight in this case that the candidate turned president was not the 'owner' of the issue, and as such it cannot be considered that he is leading. Instead the president of this scenario will pander *ceteris paribus*.

**Table 1: Effect of Institutionalization of President's Party and of Party System on Presidential Communication's strategy**

		Party System Institutionalization	
		<i>Strong</i>	<i>Weak</i>
President's Party Institutionalization	<i>Strong</i>	Lead and pander	Lead
	<i>Weak</i>	Pander	-

#### 4. Research Design

In order to test the theory put forward in the previous section it is necessary to find cases where the different dynamics take place. As such it is imperative to find four countries where the institutionalization of the party system and of the president's party varies (Molina and Alvarez 2004, Payne et al. 2002, Mainwaring 1999). Three such cases have been identified, the only case pending -which might be due to its non-existence- is the third scenario where the party of the president is not institutionalized and the party system is.

The cases chosen for the other three scenarios can be seen in Table 2. For the strongly institutionalized party and party system (scenario 1) I have chosen the United States. With regards to the scenario 4 where both the president's party and the party system are weakly institutionalized I have chosen Venezuela (Payne et al. 2002).<sup>1</sup> The second scenario, where the party of the president is strongly institutionalized while the system is not I have chosen Brazil. This case refers specifically to the period under the PT's rule (Samuels 1999, Zucco Forthcoming).

**Table 2: Effect of Institutionalization of President's Party and of Party System on Presidential Communication's strategy**

		Party System Institutionalization	
		<i>Strong</i>	<i>Weak</i>
President's Party Institutionalization	<i>Strong</i>	United States	Brasil
	<i>Weak</i>	?	Venezuela

In the remaining of this section I will present the strategy for collecting and analysing the data in order to test the theory lay out in the previous section.

#### 4.1 Preliminary data

One of the advantages of the chosen cases is that in these countries the presidents have used a communication strategy in which they make weekly broadcasts to the nation (whether by radio or TV).<sup>2</sup> For each country I collected the available transcripts for the period between 1990 and 2010. Based on these 20 years the dataset contains: all weekly radio addresses by US presidents Clinton and Bush II, all *Café de Manhã* by Brazilian president Luiz Inacio (Lula) Da Silva, and all *Aló Presidente* by Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez. Table 3 shows the total number of programs by country/year. These addresses will provide a key component to

<sup>1</sup> In a comparative analysis of legislative parties Alemán, Ponce and Sagarzazu (2011) show how the US system behaves in a very institutionalized fashion despite arguments to the contrary.

<sup>2</sup> While the nature and style of these programs varies by country it is still a very similar communication strategy. As such we are confident that by analysing these programs we'll be able to look at the presidents' issue strategies appropriately.

understanding the issue preferences, and their evolution through time, of the presidents. Other speeches which will be part of the dataset include Inauguration and State of the Union addresses, or their equivalents.

**Table 3: Number of programs per year**

Year	US		Brazil	Venezuela
	Clinton (1993-2001)	Bush II (2001-2009)	Lula (2003-2010)	Chavez (1999-present)
1993	46	-	-	-
1994	51	-	-	-
1995	51	-	-	-
1996	52	-	-	-
1997	50	-	-	-
1998	52	-	-	-
1999	52	-	-	24
2000	-	-	-	32
2001	-	50	-	34
2002	-	52	-	42
2003	-	52	4	42
2004	-	52	29	33
2005	-	53	33	33
2006	-	52	26	20
2007	-	52	49	36
2008	-	52	51	25
2009	-	16	51	16
2010	-	-	39	22
Total	354	379	282	359

A second component to the dataset will be comprised of a tracking of the most important problems in each of these countries. This measure should allow us to compare the issue preferences of the president and of the public and will be necessary to prove the arguments laid out above.

In the next section I will be discussing the analysis and preliminary results from the transcripts collected. I will first discuss the method used to obtain issue attention measures from these transcripts to latter discuss the findings.

### **5. What the President's say**

In order to measure issue attention of presidential discourse, I rely on the weekly addresses of the President to the nation. These programs have been used as a communication mechanism to transmit an unfiltered message from the president to the people. As such these programs provide the ideal opportunity for the president to highlight the issues that the president's strategy demands. While there have been studies of presidential communications (for instance Tedin, Rottinghaus and Rodgers 2011, Rottinghaus 2009, Edwards III 1996*a*, 1996*b*, 2003, Geer 2006, Buchanan 2005, Newman 2003, Hawkins 2009) little attention has been paid to these weekly broadcasts. Most attention, instead, has been paid to larger -more high profile-

speeches such as inaugurations, State of the Union addresses, and important trips. However, while State of the Union addresses or presidential visits are big events with a large media following, weekly presidential addresses are also represented in the news and are an opportunity for a president to set the record on an issue, or call attention to an issue, in line with his communication strategy. Furthermore, compared to other presidential speeches weekly addresses provide a more continuous measure of issue attention and could potentially lead to discovering changes in issue preferences by presidents.

### **5.1 Obtaining issue attention measures**

The process to obtain issues from texts used in this paper is similar to that of Sagarzazu (2011) where a quantitative text analysis approach, which applies cluster analysis to textual data, is used to obtain issue attention measures. From the “Bag of Words” family of text analysis mechanisms this clustering approach considers words as independent observations (see Proksch and Slapin 2008, Laver, Benoit and Garry 2003, Grimmer 2010, Quinn et al. 2010). By using clustering techniques word-groups (clusters) will form based on the similarity and dissimilarity patterns with which words are mentioned. As such words that are mentioned together, more often than not, are presumed to belong to the same issue cluster Sagarzazu (2011). Specifically, we estimate the distances of the correlations between the different words and cluster the words based on these distances.

The process of text analysis used in this paper follows standard routines in quantitative text analysis (see Quinn et al. 2010, Proksch and Slapin 2008, Laver, Benoit and Garry 2003, Grimmer 2010, Sagarzazu 2011). First, texts are obtained and converted into plain text. Second, texts are cleared from punctuations, numbers, currencies, symbols, and stop words. Third, words were stemmed to their root stem to standardize multiple versions of the same thought (economy, economic, economies) and to reduce the size of the dataset.<sup>3</sup> Fourth, words that were too frequent -in more than 95% of articles- or too infrequent -in less than 5%- were removed (see Klüver 2009, Proksch and Slapin 2009). Finally, a stem count matrix was generated where each file was a row, each stem a column, and each cell was the frequency of the stem in the article. For matters of simplicity from this point forward we will refer to stems and words interchangeably.

Once the matrices are generated we multiply the word matrix by its transposed. In so doing we will keep a word-to-word matrix where the cells indicate the number of times that both words are mentioned together. This new matrix is normalized to correct for the over-dispersion caused by too frequent and too infrequent joint mentions (specifically we obtain the squared root of the resulting matrix). The next step in the process is the estimation of the distances of the correlations between the words. This measure estimates the closeness between the different words in our sample and allows the clustering algorithm to establish the groups based on the proximity of the elements (Jain, Murty and Flynn 1999).

After the distances between words are estimated, we proceeded to construct a measure for the classification of words into issues. To this purpose we use a clustering algorithm, which infers relationships from the data itself (Kaufman and Rousseeuw 1990). Clustering techniques are mathematical tools that allow the classification of data according to latent characteristics (Everitt 1980, Gordon 1981). Once the clustering algorithm is applied to the matrix the result is an organization of the data based on the data’s own associative properties. Similar to factor analysis, cluster analysis compares the different units and classifies them based on their closeness. We have chosen to use a hierarchical clustering algorithm, as opposed to other alternatives,

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<sup>3</sup> In the US dataset, for instance, there were 9,000 words that were reduced to 5,000 stems.

due to its simplicity to use and analyze. The way this algorithm work is that it divides the data into classes until the classes cannot be subdivided (Everitt 1980, Gordon 1981). The input of the clustering algorithm is the distance matrix and the output is a tree that divides words into branches.<sup>4</sup> Based on this division we assessed the organization of the words and through an iterative process of removing non-political words, we obtained a clear structure of words and clusters.<sup>5</sup> For the US data it took 26 iterations in total to obtain five politically relevant clusters: Economic, Education, Health, National Security and Environment. Table 4 provides five key words for each of the five issues found in the speeches of Clinton and W. Bush. In the case of Brazil the issue clusters were very clear from the very first iterations, taking only 5 to obtain a sizable number of politically meaningful clusters (see Table 5). Table 6 provides five key words of three clusters (from the 17 identified) for the Venezuelan data, these issues and estimates were obtained from (Sagarzazu 2011).

**Table 4: Key terms per issue area, United States**

<b>Education</b>	college	education	school	student	system
<b>Health</b>	benefit	coverage	healthier	hospital	insurance
<b>Nat. Security</b>	afghanistan	arm	biological	chemical	defense
<b>Environment</b>	air	food	land	nature	water
<b>Economy</b>	balance	budget	land	economy	interest

**Table 5: Key terms per issue area, Brazil**

<b>Transportation</b>	freight	rail	road	port	kilometer
<b>Development</b>	automotive	credibility	factory	incentive	Petrobras
<b>Agriculture</b>					
<b>Social Inclusion</b>	citizenship	welfare	dignity	inclusion	hope
<b>Government</b>	obligation	seriousness	comprehension	presidency	fair
<b>Energy</b>	energy	electricity	hydroelectric	alcohol	biofuel
<b>Environment</b>	forest	Amazon	environmental	conservation	land

Table 6: Key terms per issue area, Venezuela

<b>Political Situation</b>	armed	democracy	protests	revolution	march
<b>Elections</b>	fraud	mandate	referendum	party	vote
<b>Economy</b>	unemployment	growth	credit	economy	debt

## 5.2 Preliminary results

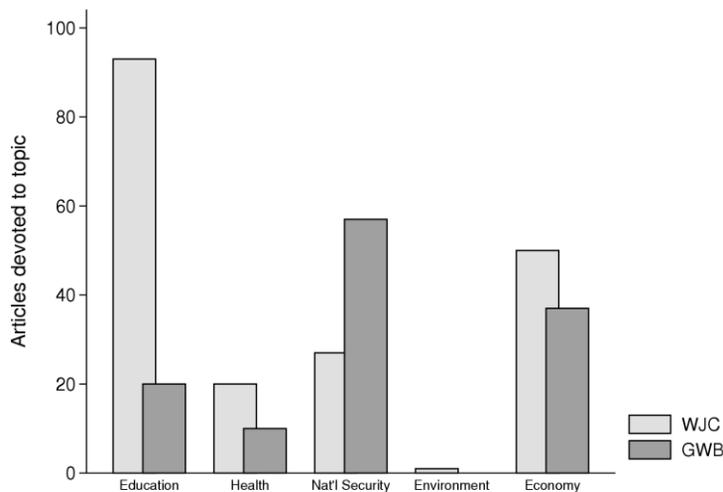
After obtaining the issue areas from the text corpus the next step is to estimate a measure of attention to each issue. To do so we will count, for each article, all the words classified in each issue area and, for comparability purposes, we will divide this by the total number of words in each article. This will give us the percentage of attention to an issue. This measure allows us to compare the attention devoted by the three presidents (Clinton, Bush, Lula, and Chavez) to different issues. Based on this measure two analyses have been made.

<sup>4</sup> We used the R function `hclust` from the package `cluster` for the hierarchical clustering.

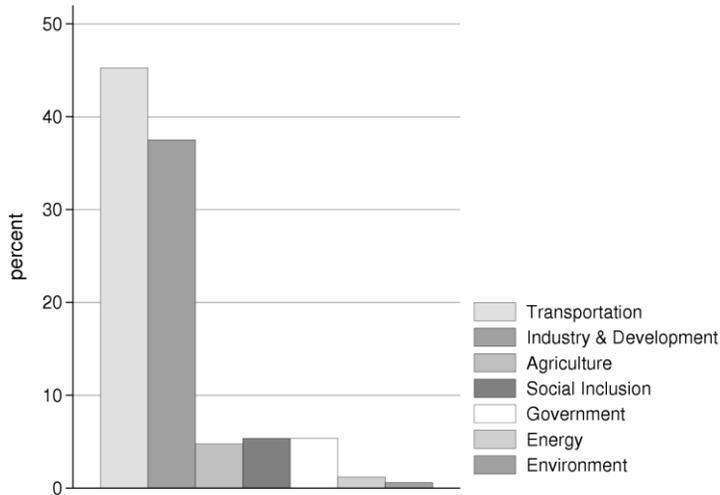
<sup>5</sup> We removed e.g. politically not meaningful verb stems or pronouns.

First, we estimated the dominant issue for each article. We do so by choosing the issue that is most frequent. We add these measures together for each president (for Chavez we do it on a yearly basis) and see the different frequencies with which presidents decide to highlight an issue. Figure 1 shows the attention aggregates for Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, attention by Lula can be seen in figure 2 and figure 3 shows the attention aggregates for Chavez. Different findings are worth pointing out. With regards to US Presidents we can see a clear differentiation between Clinton and Bush. While Clinton is more prone to mentioning social issues such as Education and Health, Bush is more willing to talk about National Security issues. This finding confirms our expectations, which based on the issue ownership stand point (Petrocik 1996), would predict that presidents -in strongly institutionalized systems- would highlight the areas that his party is most competent in, i.e. owns. With regards to Venezuela, however, a different dynamic seems to be in place. Out of the 17 issues, identified by Sagarzazu (2011) and from which this essay is taking the Alo Presidente classifications, only three receive attention by Chavez as the leading issue in a broadcast, these are: Elections, Economy ,and Political Situation. These issues are mentioned over other possibilities -more attuned to the Issue Ownership theory- such as social programs, welfare, or other center of left issues. Finally, with regards to Brazil, we see an interesting patten where the two main issues could be considered performance issues, transportation and development, however two of the second tear issues - Agriculture and Social inclusion- are issues were the PT has a long reputation. These findings reinforce the claims of Sagarzazu (2011) and, together with the finding in the US and Brazilian data, confirms the hypothesis that in weakly institutionalized party systems issue ownership can't be established and as such it can't inform the strategic communications of political actors.

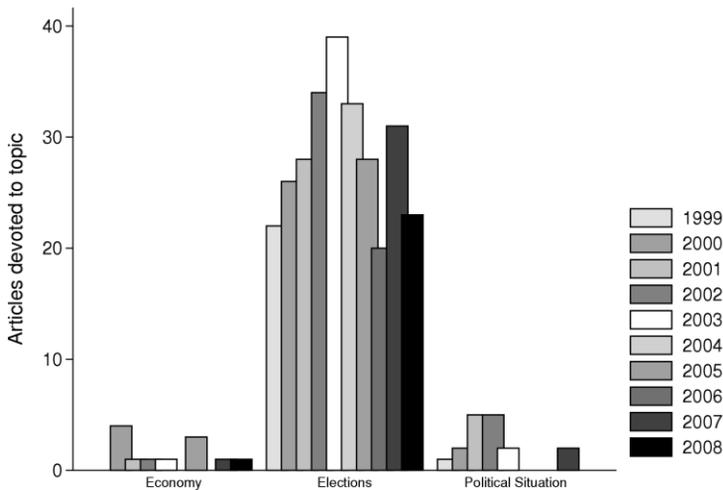
**Figure 1: Number of articles per issue area - US, by President**



**Figure 2: Number of articles per issue area - Brasil, by Year**

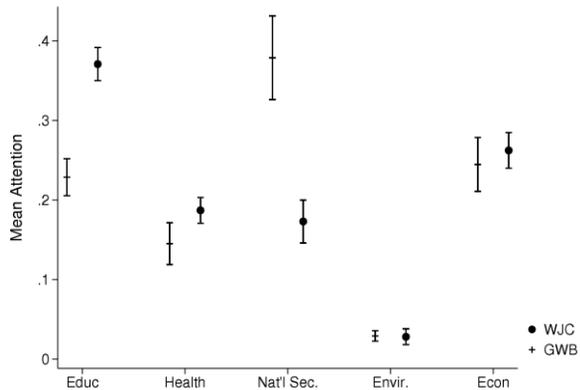


**Figure 3: Number of articles per issue area - Venezuela, by Year**



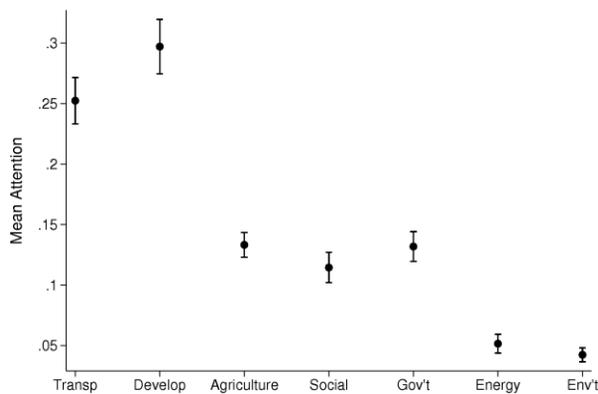
It could be said, however, that this issue classification measure undermines inter-related issues or more subtle dynamics of issue attention to several issues. After all a President could very well be talking of the increased burden of social programs on the nation's budget. Based on this premise a second analysis was performed where we estimated another measure of attention. For each US President, and for each year of the Chavez presidency, we estimated the mean percentage attention to each issue together with a 95% confidence interval. The results in figures 4, 5 and 6 confirm the previous findings but allow us to make further clarifications on these issue measures. Let's take, for instance, the issue of the economy for Clinton and Bush. While figure 1 showed that Clinton had more speeches on the economy than Bush, 4 shows that on average, however, both presidents devoted similar attention to this issue. Confirming the argument that the economy is a performance issue that favors good perceptions of the economic situation, as such it makes sense that both presidents attempt to highlight good aspects of the economy similarly. Specially considering the extensive literature on voting and the economic situation (see for instance Duch and Stevenson 2005).

**Figure 4: Mean attention to issue area - US, by President**



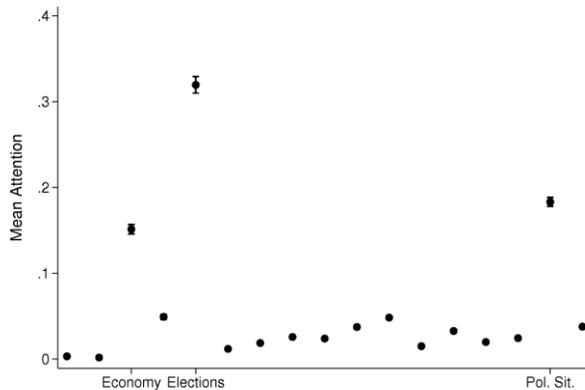
In the case of Brazil we can clearly see the same behavior present in figure 2, three groups of issues based on the attention they receive. Performance issues are at the top of the attention spectrum while owned issues are lower, but still present.

**Figure 5: Mean attention to issue area = Brazil, all years**



Finally, when we look at the Venezuelan data in figure 6 we see that there is no significant difference with the findings of figure 3. Three issues received most of the attention of President Chavez during the period under study, and the 14 other issues received less than 5% of the space.

**Figure 6: Mean attention to issue area - Venezuela, all years**



## 6. Conclusion

In this manuscript I put forward a general theory of how Presidents speak. I set out to analyze how presidents in political systems with different levels of party institutionalization use weekly communication mechanisms to highlight the government's agenda, and how this is invariably related to the issues that the president favors and his party owns and the issues that are salient.

I argued that the level of institutionalization of the President's party and of the Party System affect the degree to which the president will lead -by speaking on party owned issues- or pander -by speaking on salient issues-. I argued that each combination of strong and weak institutionalization provides different incentives for presidents to engage in none, one, or both of these strategies.

In light of issue ownership theory (Petrocik 1996) and issue salience theory (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994) I argued that in systems where the president's party and the party system are strongly institutionalized a president's agenda will be focused on those issues in which his party has more competence and as such we should see that prioritization in these weekly addresses, however public demands will also force the president to appear responsive and leading will alter with pandering in a strategic combination. In the opposite extreme, in settings where political parties and the party system are weakly institutionalized we should not see these any issue dynamics taking place. The two medium cases provide a breeding ground for each of the two strategies individually. Where there is a strong system institutionalization and the president's party is weakly institutionalized the president will see as his best strategy to pander to the popular issue that brought him to office. In contrast, where the system is weakly institutionalized and the party of the president is strongly institutionalized the president will see major benefit from leading on those issues his party owns.

To address these concerns this preliminary study obtained transcripts of weekly addresses by presidents in three of the four scenarios described. The United States was chosen as the case with strong party and party system institutionalization, and Venezuela the case with weak party and party and party system institutionalization. Brazil -under the PT- was chosen as the case where the president's party is strongly institutionalized and the system weakly so. For scenario three, weak president's party and strong system, no suitable case has been found, it might just be the case this scenario doesn't exist.

By using quantitative text analysis techniques similar to those in Sagarzazu (2011) I obtained the different issues under discussion in the different texts and generated an issue attention measure that detailed the frequency with which an issue was mentioned in a given article. The analysis of these issue attention



measures corroborated some of the expectations set forth previously. It was found that while President Clinton highlighted more the issue of Education, President Bush did the same with National Security. On the issue of the Economy it was shown that, while Clinton devoted more articles to this topic, on average both presidents mentioned this topic equally (in concordance with the 'performance' nature of the issue). With regards to President Chavez's addresses it was shown that three issues were dominant in these programs: Economy, Elections, and Political Situation, with elections being the most frequent of the three throughout the years. Finally, the speeches of Lula highlight the conflicting dynamics that emerge in a system with weak and strongly institutionalized parties. These dynamics create tensions between performance issues and owned issues, as more of the parties institutionalize more prevalence should owned issues have.

This study has provided some early evidence that presidents of different countries and from different parties have different issue priorities which are highlighted in the president's communication strategy. In particular we looked at weekly radio and TV addresses. These addresses are a weekly way in which the president can send an unmediated message to the nation. As such they provide the perfect opportunity for a president to establish his agenda on the national stage. The findings in this essay are just a small, yet important, part of the puzzle of presidential communications. Further studies should look at weekly dynamics of attention to the president's chosen issues by the media and the citizens. By untangling this web we'll be able to better understand the strategic use of the presidential 'bully pulpit'.

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**Appendix**

**Table 7: Issue Areas identified in Sagarzazu (2011)**

<b>Issues</b>
Border Security
Corruption
Economy
Education
Elections
Foreign Affairs
Health Care
Institutions
Justice
Participation
Political Situation
Poverty
Press
Principles
Safety
War