

The Ubiquitous Presidency: Toward a New Paradigm for Studying Presidential Communication

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The rhetorical presidency—a deeply influential paradigm for understanding presidential communicative governance—has been disrupted by dramatic changes in the U.S. electorate, the media environment, the goals of public appeals, and the nature of political content. To address the rhetorical presidency’s limitations with regard to current presidential communication practices, we conceptualize and offer a preliminary test of a new paradigm: the ubiquitous presidency. This paradigm argues that modern presidents cultivate a highly visible and nearly constant presence in political and nonpolitical arenas of American life by being accessible, personal, and pluralistic.

Keywords: ubiquitous presidency, rhetorical presidency, presidential communication, emergent media, pluralism

For the better part of three decades, the “rhetorical presidency” has been a central means of studying and understanding presidential communication. First proposed by Ceaser, Thurow, Tulis, and Bessette (1981) and then elaborated in Tulis’s (1987) book, the rhetorical presidency argues that during the early 20th century, presidents’ public communication changed markedly, with heightened emphasis on the rhetorical aspects of the presidency altering the nature of the institution itself (for reviews and discussion, see Aune & Medhurst, 2008; Friedman & Friedman, 2012; Stuckey & Antczak, 1998). Reception of the work was not universally positive; several critics challenged the idea that the rhetorical presidency was a modern phenomenon (Ellis, 1998; Nichols, 1994). Nevertheless, the rhetorical presidency has been deeply influential to research on presidential communication.²

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This important truth about the rhetorical presidency should not discourage scholars from acknowledging another, equally important truth: The paradigm is no longer tenable for current application. The rhetorical presidency—even when used as little more than a convenient label for a complex institution—encourages a scholarly orientation that rests on certain foundational assumptions. Yet these assumptions—about the U.S. citizenry, the media environment, the efficacy of public appeals, and the content of political messages—are increasingly at odds with current realities. The result is a paradigm that struggles to adequately contextualize the notable changes the presidency is undergoing. Put simply, research on presidential communication—which has for many years benefited from the rhetorical presidency paradigm—is now hamstrung by it.

Implicitly acknowledging the ill fit of the rhetorical presidency to contemporary practices, several scholars have added nuance to the old paradigm by studying specific presidents. Crockett (2003), for example, characterized George W. Bush's time in office as an "unrhetorical rhetorical presidency," in that Bush was not widely regarded as an effective speaker but nevertheless had to operate within the rules of the rhetorical presidency. DiIulio (2007), meanwhile, suggested that the Bush presidency epitomized a "hyper-rhetorical presidency" in which being "on message" was praised above all else. Others have gone further in their critiques. Hartnett and Mercieca (2007), again focusing on Bush, argued that the president had engaged in a "post-rhetorical presidency" by favoring discourse that sought "to confuse public opinion, prevent citizen action, and frustrate citizen deliberation" (p. 600).

Such accounts complicate the rhetorical presidency paradigm but offer little guidance about what could replace it if scholars were willing to look beyond single presidential cases. Stuckey (2010), in a forward-thinking critique, suggests more is needed:

Those of us who work in the areas of presidential rhetoric and the rhetorical presidency are fast approaching the point where we need less codification and more new thinking; we need fewer case studies that illustrate principles we already acknowledge and more work that challenges our understanding. (pp. 38–39)

The present study responds to this call by offering a new paradigm for studying presidential communication: the ubiquitous presidency. This paradigm holds that modern presidents cultivate a highly visible and nearly constant presence in both political and nonpolitical arenas of American life via engagement in a fragmented media environment. In this article, we discuss the ubiquitous presidency in relation to the rhetorical presidency. Where present, we highlight continuities between the two paradigms. But we also illustrate that the ubiquitous presidency rests on assumptions that are more consistent with current developments. We then discuss and offer a preliminary examination of three key characteristics of the ubiquitous presidency—that it is accessible, personal, and pluralistic. Importantly, we view what we offer not as the final word but as a first attempt to stimulate new thinking on contemporary presidential communication.

² For example, the journal *Critical Review* devoted a two-part special issue to the 20th anniversary of Tulis's book in 2007. That issue served as the basis for an edited book, *Rethinking the Rhetorical Presidency* (Friedman & Friedman, 2012).

The Rhetorical Presidency in Changing Times

The sociopolitical landscape in which the rhetorical presidency paradigm took shape bears less and less resemblance to the current environment. Foundational scholarship about the presidency and presidential communication (e.g., Campbell & Jamieson, 2008; Ceaser et al., 1981; Hart, 1987; Neustadt, 1990; Tulis, 1987) was theorized in a Cold War environment that reflected the president as “leader of the free world.” Presidents used major national addresses as their primary means of public communication (Coe & Neumann, 2011). Chief executives could expect that their addresses would be broadcast by the major networks (and would preempt even popular entertainment programs), would garner comparatively large audiences, and would dominate the news cycle for the next several days (Baum & Kernell, 2009; Smoller, 1990). That news would be encountered primarily via broadcast television and printed newspapers. Meanwhile, the audiences that viewed these addresses had few vehicles to provide immediate feedback to the administration, the media, or even their own social circles. Partisan processing of the speech’s content would not have been buttressed by media outlets devoted to delivering ideologically driven news and commentary. This was a pre Internet, pre globalization, pre 9/11 political environment.

Understandably, the rhetorical presidency paradigm rests on several assumptions that are consistent with that seemingly distant landscape. For example, the rhetorical presidency is grounded in the idea that presidents primarily communicate to a mass public, “the people” (Tulis, 1987, p. 6), united by a “common purpose” (Ceaser et al., 1981, p. 163). Similarly, media outlets were typically understood as those that allowed the president “to communicate directly and instantaneously with a large national audience” (Ceaser et al., 1981, p. 164). Presidents did just that, using radio and television broadcasts to adopt a more intimate style (Hart, 1999; Jamieson, 1988). Such mass-mediated communication also was viewed as effective in moving public opinion, with presidents in that era “going public” to seek support for their policy goals (Kernell, 2007). Finally, the rhetorical presidency assumes that the content of presidential messages is fully controlled by the president (and the president’s speechwriters/strategists). In this paradigm, the president creates a message and delivers it, and the audience receives it in largely the fashion originally crafted.

Each of these four assumptions—about the nature of the public, the media landscape, the efficacy of public appeals, and the content of political messages—still has some merit. But each assumption also has become increasingly problematic over the past few decades. Consider the descriptions accompanying “the public.” A mass conception of the American public may have always been somewhat knotty, but it is now an especially untenable proposition on which to base a theoretical paradigm. Presidential prime-time appeals have sometimes served as part of a unifying, national experience for the body politic (Katz, 1996), and they might occasionally still. Yet, as political theorists argue, U.S. politics is at its core pluralistic (Dahl, 1961; Schattschneider, 1975)—and is increasingly so. Politically, institutions that may have unified the citizenry—the presidency, news media, political parties, organized religion—now lack public confidence, trust, or affiliation (Bennett, 1998; Smith, 2015). “The public” is increasingly polarized and engages in selective exposure to politically consonant media information (Levendusky, 2013). Demographically, Stuckey (2010) observes that the rhetorical presidency paradigm fails to account for a rapidly diversifying American population. Notably, such population shifts are made manifest in patterns of

political engagement. Younger Americans see citizenship as part of individual identity as opposed to the group-based view of older cohorts (Bennett, 1998). The modern presidency thus faces an increasingly stratified, individualized, and diverse audience.

Assumptions about mass media also have become difficult to sustain. For Ceaser et al. (1981), the rhetorical presidency rested on a mass media system that could project homogeneous, unifying presidential messages. These mass-mediated messages were limited to the media available (i.e., radio, television, print) and the few times per year the president addressed citizens in large numbers (Kernell, 2007). Although mass-mediated channels remain in the present media environment, programming is increasingly segmented, and media choice has increased dramatically (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013). When media practices change, entities in non-media fields, such as politics and government, change as well (Chadwick, 2013). For instance, modern news has taken on an increasingly partisan, entertainment-based hue (Baum, 2003; Levendusky, 2013).

The digital-infused media system is now better equipped to support presidential "narrowcasting" as opposed to traditional "broadcasting" (Domke & Coe, 2010). Kernell (2007), for example, documents fewer "major" prime-time addresses since the integration of cable television. Chief executives now use fragmented media to target local constituencies and news outlets (Cohen, 2010; Heith, 2013), give tailored Saturday YouTube addresses (Scacco, 2011), and appear in softer news venues. All of this is occurring as disinterested audiences are increasingly tuning out major presidential broadcasts (Baum & Kernell, 2009). Taken together, these changes make the traditional image of a president speaking to "the people" by way of mass media appreciably different from current realities.

Then there is the question of the efficacy of presidential communication—a topic of considerable debate (see Aune & Medhurst, 2008; Zarefsky, 2004). The rhetorical presidency paradigm suggests that to move opinion in favor of the administration the president exhorts citizens through public communication. There are two limitations to this assumption. First, while focusing on public communication, the rhetorical presidency lens overlooks other means of presidential communication that seek to influence intergovernmental agents. For example, the president's contemporary use of signing statements and executive orders to unilaterally advance an agenda challenges the "publicness" standard of rhetorical appeals (see Beasley, 2010). Second, for public presidential communication, the question becomes how effective rhetorical strategies are at swaying citizens. Research completed before the full integration of cable television supports the president's role in shaping public opinion via public communication (Ragsdale, 1984). Yet recent work argues that presidential communication in general rarely moves mass public opinion (Edwards, 2003), or does so only under specific circumstances (Cohen, 2010; Rottinghaus, 2010). Young and Perkins (2005), for instance, conclude that presidential communication had a stronger agenda-setting influence before cable television was introduced to the public than after. Our concern is less with the exact effects that presidential communication is likely to generate (or fail to generate) and more with the assumptions about effects that a given paradigm is likely to support. Conceiving of presidential communication as largely a mass-public focused, mass-mediated endeavor encourages scholars to conceive of effects as large-scale changes in public opinion—precisely the kind of effects that presidents appear increasingly unlikely to generate (Edwards, 2003; Rottinghaus, 2010).

Finally, the rhetorical presidency paradigm assumes that the content of political messages is controlled by political elites, whether the president or journalists. The president is the lone voice vis-à-vis Congress. Journalists, in turn, report on presidential actions with little challenge, especially on matters of foreign policy (Farnsworth & Lichter, 2006). Such elite control over messaging is critical to understanding the rhetorical presidency, which diverged markedly from the “bargaining model” whereby the president derived persuasive power from negotiations with Congress (cf. Kernell, 2007; Neustadt, 1990). The rhetorical presidency attempts to assume full communicative control.

Modern presidents still seek message control, but they often have less ability to harness it because contemporary media technologies are transactional. Not only does the president now use softer news venues that allow for citizen feedback (cf. Davis & Owen, 1998), presidents also communicate through digital channels, allowing individuals the ability to interact with, manipulate, and share the president’s words (Scacco, 2012). Put simply, presidents’ public communications are no longer “texts” in the sense that they once were. Every public message from the president is now “intertextual,” being promoted, challenged, and redefined by individuals (see, e.g., Booth, 2010; Dunmire, 2009). Much as when the president negotiates with Congress through the bargaining process, presidents now must also digitally negotiate with citizens over the communicative process.

A New Paradigm: The Ubiquitous Presidency

To adequately situate the presidency in these changing times, a new paradigm is necessary. This new paradigm must integrate the president’s need to fulfill public expectations of communicative governance. The interaction of political officials with particular media formats and practices engenders subsequent expectations about public communication (Chadwick, 2013)—expectations that can become deeply ritualized within the presidency (Ryfe, 2005). The ubiquitous presidency paradigm integrates such expectations by arguing that the president creates a nearly constant and highly visible communicative presence in political and nonpolitical arenas of American life through the use of mass as well as targeted media. This shift is born of a necessity to compensate for changes to the public, the media, rhetorical goals, and political content. The paradigm assumes that a fragmented media environment privileges targeted presidential communications over mass ones, meaning institutional resources are increasingly devoted to targeted appeals. Second, as a strategic communication actor, the president will seek ways to identify with an increasingly diverse, segmented, and disinterested set of audiences. Third, with multiple audiences for every presidential message, adaptation and identification should take place both within each communication and through the media platforms selected. Finally, the ability of audiences to influence content leads to the co-construction of political messages between the president and individuals.

Based on these assumptions, we argue that the ubiquitous presidency is accessible, personal, and pluralistic. We discuss each characteristic separately, but should note that in the actual practice and public experience of politics, these characteristics buttress and overlap with one another.

Accessible

At the most fundamental level, the ubiquitous presidency is accessible; that is, it actively seeks to engage segments of the public via multiple platforms and provide people opportunities to interact with the president. If the presidency of times past was one that often hoped, even expected, that people would meet it where it existed—such as in formal speeches on network television or the front page of the nation’s major newspapers (see Bradshaw, Coe, & Neumann, 2014; Smoller, 1990)—the ubiquitous presidency is one that tries to meet people where they are.

Contemporary strategic communication is largely built upon delivering precisely tailored content. Much as political campaigns now offer targeted messages with considerable precision (Nielsen, 2012), presidents, too, have incentives in a fragmented media environment to narrowly target individuals and groups. Facing dwindling and aging audiences for their traditional fare, presidents have sought to target audiences in a host of nontraditional venues. As a result, audiences increasingly encounter the president when they are seeking entertainment. A person tuning in to the January 2010 college basketball matchup between Duke and Georgetown may have been surprised to see President Obama, who guest-announced a portion of the game and bantered about working with congressional Republicans. Two years later, viewers of NBC’s *Late Night* were likely not expecting to see President Obama make a surprise appearance, during which he “slow-jammed” the news with host Jimmy Fallon. Nor were people expecting the president, in 2015, to make a video appearance at the Grammy Awards to promote the administration’s campaign to prevent sexual assault on college campuses. But this is the ubiquitous presidency in action, targeting audiences anywhere they can be found.

The ubiquitous presidency is also accessible in the sense that it engages citizens in interactions that are more direct and transactional. Government-based digital interfacing has long been viewed as a central component of what sets the Internet apart from older forms of media (Mayer & Cornfield, 2008) and is now becoming a more prominent part of the presidency. Although actual person-to-person interactivity remains valuable, the White House avails itself of technological affordances that facilitate medium-to-person interactivity (Owen & Davis, 2008; Stromer-Galley, 2004). Importantly, this interactivity is usually still “controlled” in a way that allows public engagement, but on terms that forward elite aims (Stromer-Galley, 2014). Nevertheless, in an age when people can access content of all kinds on their own terms, it follows that they also want to access the president on their own terms.

Personal

Greater accessibility via diverse venues and interactivity encourages the president to adopt a “backstage” persona—to be willing not only to make a joke but in some cases to be the joke. That persona leads to a second characteristic: The ubiquitous presidency is personal, meaning that modern chief executives emphasize informality and personal disclosure.

If we are to reach—or simply encounter—the president in a variety of traditional and nontraditional venues, it follows that those interactions would be more informal and less constrained by rigid expectations of presidential behavior. After all, someone who stumbles upon presidential

communication during a period of leisure and entertainment will probably at least want to get a laugh out of it. When contemporary fictional portrayals of presidents present them in a heroically charismatic and personal light (Genovese, 2005), there might be a greater public expectation to see this side of the president as well. Seen through this lens, it is understandable that the president would seek to merge traditional advocacy functions with informal styling and uncommon venues. President Obama's use of a selfie stick to encourage health care signs-ups in a widely viewed *BuzzFeed* video relied on just such a strategy. This kind of personalization is not confined to nontraditional venues, however. Presidents, in an era of ubiquity, also are inclined to make their familiar forms of communication more personal. For instance, scholars have documented the increased use of self-references in some traditional forms of presidential communication (Hart, 1987; Lim, 2008). Lim (2008) illustrated how presidents and their speechwriters have for decades been intentionally finding ways to make the president sound simpler, more ordinary. Such a shift is understandable in the context of the ubiquitous presidency, where the president's omnipresence encourages a more common, relational sound—one suited to regular interactions with a wide range of audiences.

The personal component of the ubiquitous presidency has a second dimension as well. Thus far we have discussed personalization of the president as an individual—as someone willing to be casual, lighthearted, common. But personalization is also about disclosure, or allowing aspects of one's private life—including relationships with family and friends—to become more public. In most cases, this occurs at a president's discretion. Presidential candidates since Jimmy Carter have been, for example, increasingly open about private religious matters (Kaylor, 2012)—a practice that typically continues once in office (Domke & Coe, 2010). More broadly, presidents might choose to involve their families in a public event or to permit pictures to be taken during a vacation. Then-first daughter Jenna Bush's call to President Bush during *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, complete with background images of the president and his family, typifies this idea. Notably, in an era of 24-hour news—when everyone is looking for a scoop and partisan motivations are also in play—such disclosure is sometimes forced. For example, early in George W. Bush's presidency, his daughters made news by being cited for underage drinking. Whereas in the past such a moment may have been handled quietly, in the era of the ubiquitous presidency disclosure was guaranteed by an equally ubiquitous media.

Pluralistic

The transition from a mass, attentive presidential audience to a fragmented, inattentive one changes not only the means by which the president speaks about himself but how he speaks of and to "the people." The ubiquitous presidency, relative to the rhetorical presidency, has to wrestle more directly with the reality that a broad range of groups are seeking a seat at the political table—or, at a minimum, are hoping to garner presidential recognition. Situating this idea more broadly, we can say that the ubiquitous presidency is one that is increasingly cognizant of pluralism (cf. Beasley, 2001). This is true from both a domestic and international perspective.

Domestically, greater pluralism means that presidents seek opportunities to engage with a wider range of groups and ideas than they have in the past. Operating within a rhetorical presidency paradigm, Lim (2002) observed that presidential communication has become more democratic over time, employing

more references to the mass public (e.g., “my fellow Americans”). No less democratic, the ubiquitous presidency deconstructs “the American people” into its component parts—ethnic, racial, religious, and more. Presidential communication, as a result, becomes an increasingly coalitional act. It is in this context, for example, that President Obama, in his 2009 inaugural address, became the first president to include nonbelievers and Hindus in his description of America’s religious tapestry.

Internationally, pluralism means that presidents are asked to rhetorically engage more thoroughly with other nations of the world. In a post Cold War, post globalization, post 9/11 world, presidential ubiquity does not stop at the U.S. borders. Other nations pay considerable attention to the U.S. president (Farnsworth, Lichter, & Schatz, 2013), heightening the stakes for how presidents talk with, and about, the international community. And presidents increasingly speak of the world abroad, building an “international identity” (Coe & Neumann, 2011). Both at home and abroad, then, the ubiquitous presidency is one more aware of, and potentially more invested in, diverse groups of people.

Studying the Ubiquitous Presidency

Thus far we have argued for a new paradigm through which to understand the modern presidency. If this paradigm is to have value to scholars, it should highlight new questions and new forms of data that might be necessary to answer those questions. This section of the article lays the groundwork for such productive idea generation, providing several analyses that begin to highlight the three characteristics of the ubiquitous presidency. Our analysis is meant to be only a first glance at several trends and forms of data that begin to bring into focus the paradigm we have proposed.

A useful starting point is to consider where, and how much, the president is mentioned in news media discourse. Ubiquity suggests that the president is in many places, including in places he has not as regularly been in the past. With this in mind, we undertook a series of searches to locate mentions of recent presidents in a wide range of political and nonpolitical media. We began with two agenda-leading newspapers that have long been used to study the presidency vis-à-vis news media: *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* (e.g., Bradshaw et al., 2014; Cohen, 2008). To this we added the other form of legacy media that is most closely associated with presidential communication: broadcast television evening news (e.g., Smoller, 1990). Of the three major networks, we focused on NBC because it provided the fullest access in the available data archives and is likely to be very similar in content to the other two networks.³ In these three news outlets, we ran searches for mentions of each of the past five presidents during their respective terms (see Figure 1).⁴ All returns were averaged per year and then converted to z-scores to assess differences on a common scale.

³ The Tyndall Report (<http://tyndallreport.com>), which tracks the topics of broadcast evening news, regularly finds considerable consistency across the three networks.

⁴ Specifically, we searched for the word *president* within five words of each president’s last name. *The New York Times* print articles were examined from January 20, 1981 to January 20, 2015; *The Washington Post* from January 1, 1984 to January 20, 2015; and *NBC Nightly News* from November 1, 1989 to January 20, 2015.

With the exception of Reagan, who proved to be an outlier in newspaper coverage and for whom there were no broadcast news transcripts available, there was a steady decline in presidential mentions over time. The trend accelerates with Obama, who in each of the three sources was mentioned at least a full standard deviation less than the presidential average. This trend is consistent with research that has demonstrated the decreasing amount of news coverage devoted to presidential politics in traditional national media sources (e.g., Cohen, 2008).

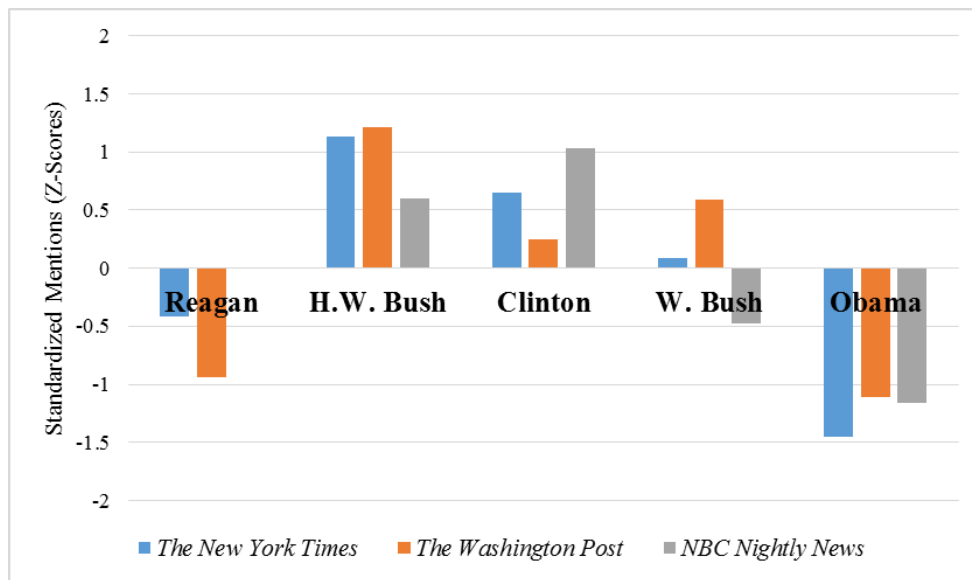


Figure 1. Traditional media mentions of five presidents.

These initial trends begin to clarify that ubiquity has not meant a simple increase in presidential prominence across every possible venue. Rather, it might mean that as traditional media have decreased their focus on the president, newer and nontraditional media have become more common venues for coverage of the president. With this in mind, we combed available academic and Internet archives looking for a wide array of new/popular media sources in which we could search for presidential mentions across at least two presidencies. Our goal in selecting sources was practicality (i.e., the data available to produce consistently valid search returns across at least two presidencies) and cultural salience (i.e., media with some prominence in American society). These considerations led to two publications that spanned at least three presidencies: *Consumer Reports* (product testing) and *The Hollywood Reporter* (entertainment industry). Both magazines date to the 1930s and hold top positions in their respective domains. In addition, we found four sources that allowed searches across the past two presidencies. Two are prominent culture magazines (*The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair*), and the third is America's preeminent sports media organization (ESPN.com). Finally, we included CNN.com, a cable news organization whose

online site has consistently drawn among the largest audiences of any online news source.⁵ Although these six sources are a small sample of the nontraditional media outlets in which the president might be mentioned, they represent a varied selection of popular media that are attended to by millions of Americans.⁶

Figure 2 displays the results (again via z-scores). As before, there are striking differences between Obama and his predecessors. In three of the four sources (all except *Vanity Fair*) for which we could compare Obama only to his immediate predecessor, Obama led the way in mentions. *The Hollywood Reporter* allowed for a comparison of three presidents, and there the trend steadily increases across presidencies. The clean movement from past presidents to more recent ones on four of the six sources is particularly remarkable given that Clinton, Bush, and Obama have all governed during or since many of the changes that brought about the ubiquitous presidency. That is, these are ubiquitous presidents competing with other ubiquitous presidents for mentions—and still the trends are predominantly toward greater ubiquity. *Consumer Reports* turned out to function differently, giving the vast majority of its presidential attention to Clinton. A qualitative review of the stories revealed no clear reason for this difference. Notably, from the president's perspective, a mention in *Consumer Reports* would probably not be as desirable as would a mention in the other sources considered here.

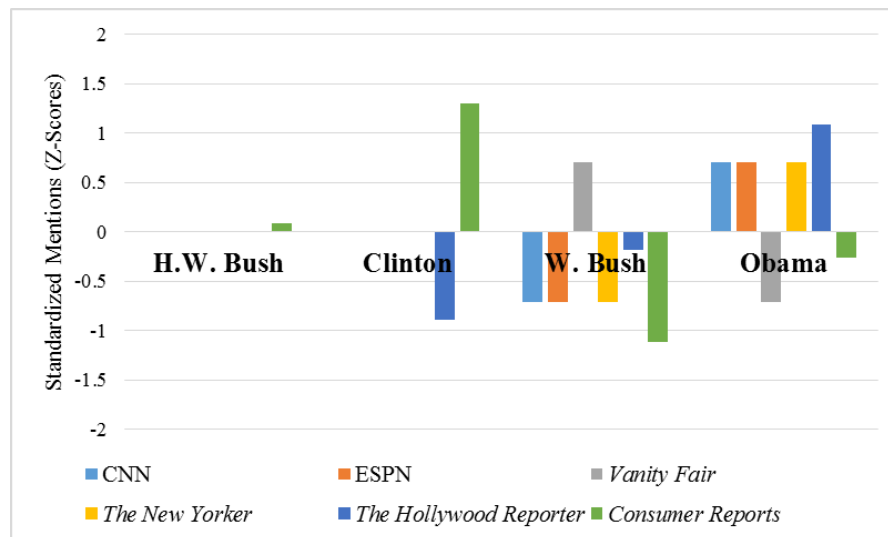


Figure 2. Nontraditional media mentions of four presidents.

⁵ Typically, CNN.com trails only Yahoo News for online news audience (Pew Research Center, 2015).

⁶ Similar to traditional media mentions, we searched for the word *president* within five words of each president's last name. *Consumer Reports* articles were examined from January 20, 1989, to January 20, 2015; *The Hollywood Reporter* from January 20, 1993, to January 20, 2013; *The New Yorker* from January 20, 2001, to January 20, 2015; *Vanity Fair* from January 20, 2001, to January 20, 2015; ESPN.com from January 20, 2001, to January 20, 2015; and CNN.com from January 1, 2002, to January 20, 2015.

Accessible

The ubiquitous presidency rests on a near-constant presidential presence across media platforms. Although nascent digital affordances limited the ability of the Clinton administration to disseminate messages across multiple venues, the second Bush administration set up podcasts and an iTunes page for weekly radio addresses. The creation and popularity of social media platforms allowed the Obama administration to expand its presence across 12 digital platforms (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Scribd, Google+, Flickr, SlideShare, Github, LinkedIn, Foursquare, Instagram, and Tumblr). Further, President Obama has interacted through digital-based sources by participating in Reddit’s “Ask Me Anything,” Twitter town hall meetings, and an increasing number of interviews with digital-only outlets (Eilperin, 2015).

If the president is truly more accessible with his public communication, from both a platform and interactivity perspective, we should expect news media sources to be reflecting this change as they report on the president’s activities over time. Figure 3 reports a search of traditionally oriented news media (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *NBC Nightly News*, and CNN.com, using the same date ranges as before) for associations of the president within five words of the words *speech* and *interview*. We should expect that, as the venues available for presidential communication increase, the news media will cover the president’s communication in these venues with more frequent references to speeches and interviews.

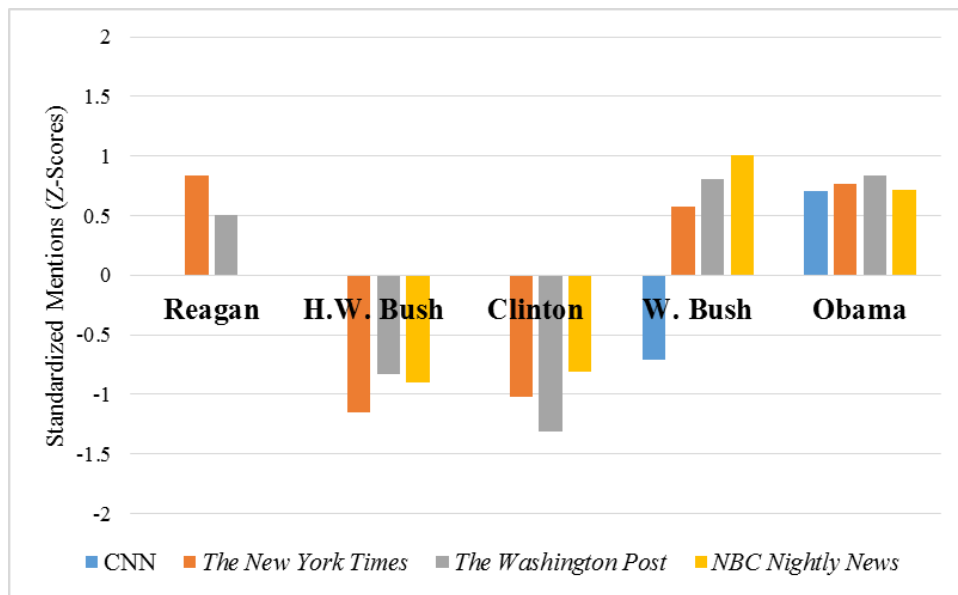


Figure 3. Presidential associations with the words speech and interview.

Indeed, news media are mentioning components of the president's public communication with greater frequency over time. Of the four news media source comparisons, Barack Obama had the highest average associations in two media (CNN and *The Washington Post*), and George W. Bush led the *NBC Nightly News*.

These trends in news media mentions do not seem to be driven by communicative prowess, as evidenced by Ronald Reagan's and Bill Clinton's scores. Reagan received the most associations only in *The New York Times*, a paltry reflection of his reputation as the Great Communicator. Clinton, who routinized the weekly radio address and was typically more loquacious than his peers (Scacco, 2012), had some of the lowest mentions. The increases may be driven by the greater frequency with which presidents are giving minor speeches and interviews across media platforms.

For the president to be accessible, he also must invite interaction in his public communications. We consider two initial ways of examining presidential invitations for White House public engagement: the inclusion of interactive features on the White House website and conversational signaling on social media platforms. The development of the White House website across three administrations illustrates the increased emphasis presidents are placing on interactivity (see Owen & Davis, 2008, for a review of the Clinton and Bush websites). We compared screen captures of the Clinton, Bush, and Obama White House home pages six years into each presidency to look for elements of accessibility, particularly medium/technological interactivity (Stromer-Galley, 2004). Each administration approached website interactivity differently, particularly related to the placement and number of interactive features on the home page.

The Clinton administration's White House website emphasized preemptive interactivity. This approach anticipates public questions and concerns with the "Interactive Citizens' Handbook" and a "White House Help Desk" to give the appearance of interactivity. These affordances are not emphasized, however. The "Help Desk" hyperlink is second from the bottom of the page, whereas the "Handbook" hyperlink is sixth from the top of the page.

Six years into George W. Bush's administration, the White House home page emphasized invitational interactivity. A "Contact" link was located at both the top right and bottom of the page. The left center hyperlinks bar contained an "Interact" section that included "Ask the White House" and "White House Interactive." As opposed to the Clinton White House supplying answers to "frequently asked questions," the Bush site framed interactivity with "ask" and "contact." The messaging of these options illustrates an increased focus on accessibility compared to the Clinton website.

The White House website six years into the Obama administration shifted the messaging to participatory interactivity. Features highlighted not only invitational messaging but had democratic overtones. In addition to "Contact Us" and "Get Email Updates" in the upper right corner of the home page, the administration included additional interactive features that touched on overtly democratic activities. The home page examined from January 20, 2015, featured the State of the Union in the scrolling article feed with a button visitors could click to indicate "I'm In" to watch the address. A "Participate" button was featured in the top center of the page, and an "Engage" button was located at the

left center. The hyperlinks at the bottom of the page included social media buttons to engage with the White House, "Participate" with mobile apps and developer tools, and a "Speak Out" set of links to the "We the People Petitions" and "Contact the White House." These messages shift the goals of interactivity closer to participatory activities in a democracy. Yet the threshold of elite reciprocity to citizen engagement still appeared to be high. For example, "We the People Petitions" that reach a threshold of 100,000 signatures receive an official White House response within 60 days (Karpf, 2015). Although the presidency continues to place a premium on elite-citizen interaction, the number of options to interact with the White House has greatly expanded with the Obama administration website.

An examination of the Obama White House Twitter feed also provides a window into how his administration engages in interactive signaling. We studied a random selection of @whitehouse tweets collected from 2009 to 2015 ($n = 9,967$) for how interactions were encouraged through hashtags. Of the top 60 hashtags used most often by the White House, three encouraged direct interaction: #whchat (1), #whtweetup (26), and #askthewh (60). Although not in itself a definitive indicator of greater interactivity, hashtag signaling is an indicator that the White House has attempted to remake itself as more interactive. The president's use of Twitter, in this manner, reflects the continued evolution of the ubiquitous presidency—one that will continue to hone the technological tools and messages associated with accessibility.

Personal

As the presidency has become increasingly accessible, each president also has been painted in a more informal and intimate manner. Informality arises first in how the president appears more in entertainment and personality-based outlets. Whereas the last two presidents (Bush and Obama) are mentioned less than their predecessors were in traditional news outlets, there are marked increases in mentions in ESPN, *The New Yorker*, and *Hollywood Reporter* (recall Figures 1 and 2). These venues capture aspects of presidents' less formal side—sports, dress, mannerisms, and demeanor. For instance, as an avid basketball fan, President Obama is featured each March providing his "Barack-etology" for NCAA basketball's March Madness. Of the more than 1,200 ESPN.com mentions Obama received in the first six years of his administration, 15.1% occurred in March. With modern presidential candidates focusing on visuals that feature "displays of physical activity or athletic ability" (Grabe & Bucy, 2009, p. 107), entertainment-based outlets may increasingly highlight aspects of a president's hobbies.

We considered as well the White House's communicative actions alongside press mentions in understanding the disclosure component of the personal president. Before organizations' websites highlighted employees' personal side in biographical sketches (e.g., family, hobbies), little was known about workers' private lives. Just as many organizations now include personal information on employees, so, too, does the executive branch. For example, President Obama's Twitter bio sketch (@POTUS) begins with "Dad, husband, and 44th President of the United States." Similar mentions of family-related roles are found in the Twitter bio sketches of one-quarter of Obama's cabinet, including Secretary of State John Kerry ("Husband, father, grandfather, brother, former Senator, 68th U.S. Secretary of @StateDept"), Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julian Castro ("Father of two, husband, twin brother, boxing fan, former Mayor of San Antonio, and 16th U.S. Secretary of @HUDgov. #GoSpursGo"), and United

Nations Ambassador Samantha Power (“United States Ambassador to the United Nations, mother, human rights defender, teacher, writer, and member of #RedSoxNation”). Illustrating how informality and disclosure represent components of the personal ubiquitous presidency, several of the sketches include sports-related references.

Turning to press associations, a clear pattern emerges across news media outlets of presidents mentioned alongside “family” (see Figure 4). George W. Bush and Barack Obama led their predecessors in the mean number of associations per year of their presidency. Although some of this trend may be accounted for by President Bush’s focus on “family values” issues (especially opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage), the framing itself as well as the general trend lines support the notion that news outlets are increasingly tying the president to more personal, family-related subjects.

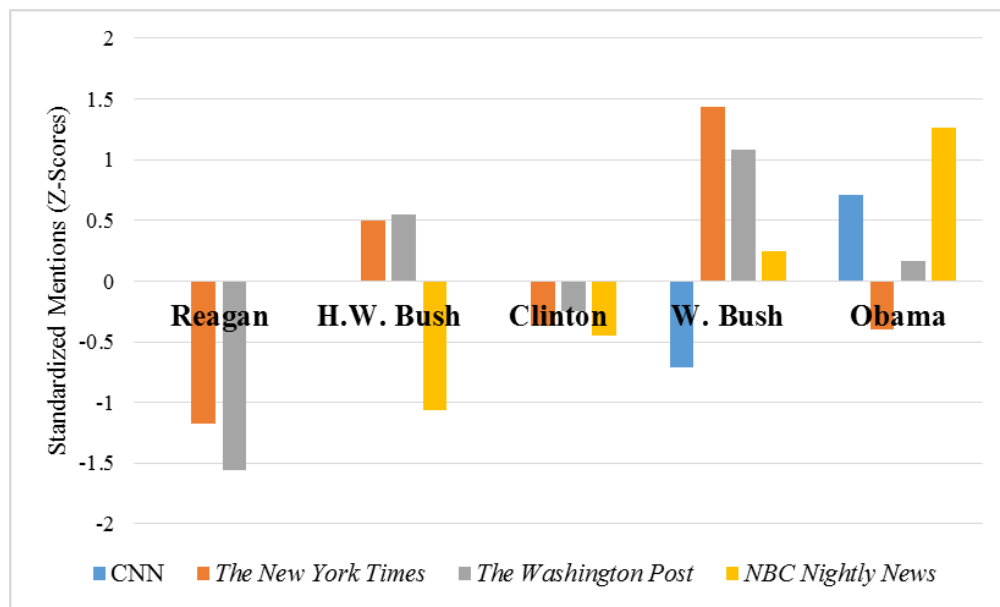


Figure 4. Presidential associations with the word family.

Pluralistic

The ubiquitous presidency operates within a pluralistic nation and world, where an increasingly diverse collection of groups and nations regularly interact and influence collective outcomes. As one means of illustrating the myriad ways that pluralism is signaled within the ubiquitous presidency, we briefly consider the State of the Union address. A speech event traditionally associated with the rhetorical presidency (Tulis, 1987), the stagecraft of the event is an interesting object of analysis for understanding the ubiquitous presidency. Jamieson (1988) noted how Reagan first used invited gallery guests to visualize the “heroes” of American life. This display shines an interesting light on pluralism, because the people

typically represent a remarkable cross-section of the American public. Gallery guests have ranged from teenagers who help the homeless, to young couples benefiting from a president's preferred policy, to astronauts and soldiers, to young immigrants about to enter college, to small business owners and famous athletes. Given the vast panorama of citizens displayed on such occasions, it is notable that the number of gallery guests mentioned in the average State of the Union address grew dramatically as the ubiquitous presidency took hold. Indeed, Reagan averaged 1.29 such mentions and the first President Bush averaged just 0.67. Clinton, however, made 4.57 such mentions per speech. George W. Bush made 2.29, and Obama made 4.0.⁷ In all cases, this parade of guests offered a visual depiction of American pluralism in one of the presidency's most symbolically powerful rituals.

As with the other characteristics of the ubiquitous presidency, an indicator of pluralism in the presidency can be found in discursive associations made in major news media. To track such associations in the domestic context, we focused on three minority cultural groups that have seen particularly dramatic shifts in their sociocultural position over the past few decades: Hispanics, gays, and adherents of non-Judeo-Christian faiths. Hispanics are the fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States, a fact at the center of immigration reform efforts. Gays have been the subject of major policy transitions during each of the last three presidencies (e.g., Don't Ask Don't Tell, the Defense of Marriage Act, state-level prohibitions on same-sex marriage, the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell, and the Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* legalizing same-sex marriage). Meanwhile, non-Judeo-Christian faiths (in this case, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists) are the only religious communities in the United States to have increased their numbers (as a proportion of the populace) over the past several decades (Coe & Chenoweth, 2013).

Figures 5, 6, and 7 illustrate the associations between each of these groups and recent presidents, and the trends are quite consistent. Hispanics garnered growing attention vis-à-vis the presidency beginning with Clinton. These associations continued to increase during George W. Bush's and Barack Obama's administrations. Gays gained a substantial presence in news discourse during the Clinton administration, then saw a relative dip during the second Bush presidency, before returning to Clinton-esque levels during Obama's presidency. The most striking shift, however, is in associations between the presidency and non-Judeo-Christian faiths. Here, George W. Bush makes the first move, and then associations increase dramatically during Obama's time in office. Clearly, as the demographic makeup of the United States has changed, presidents have increasingly been discussed in terms of the changing sociocultural landscape.

⁷ The list of gallery guests is available at the American Presidency Project (<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>). Counts were conducted by the authors and include all listed guests except U.S. politicians.

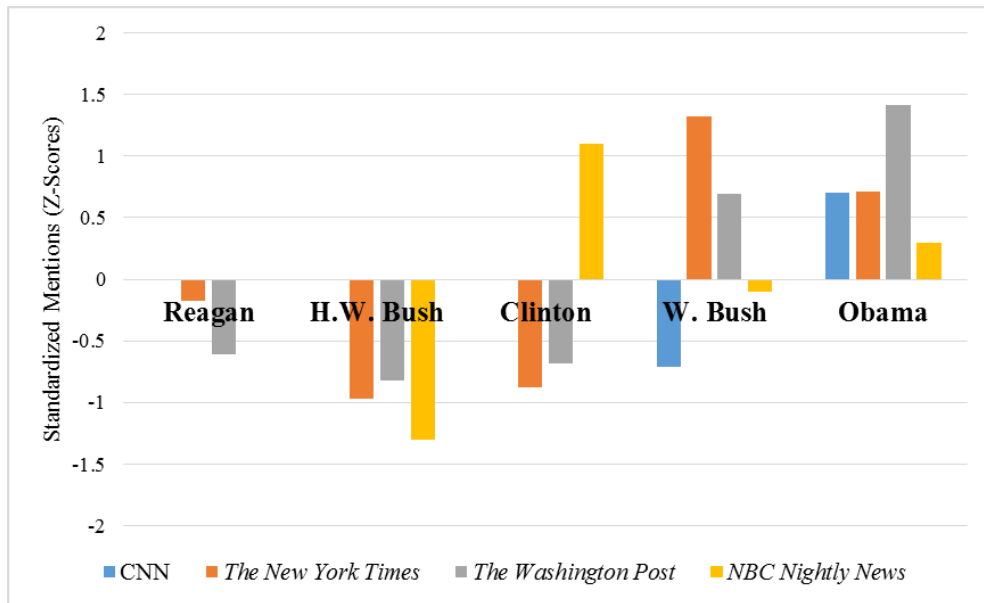


Figure 5. Presidential associations with the word Hispanic.

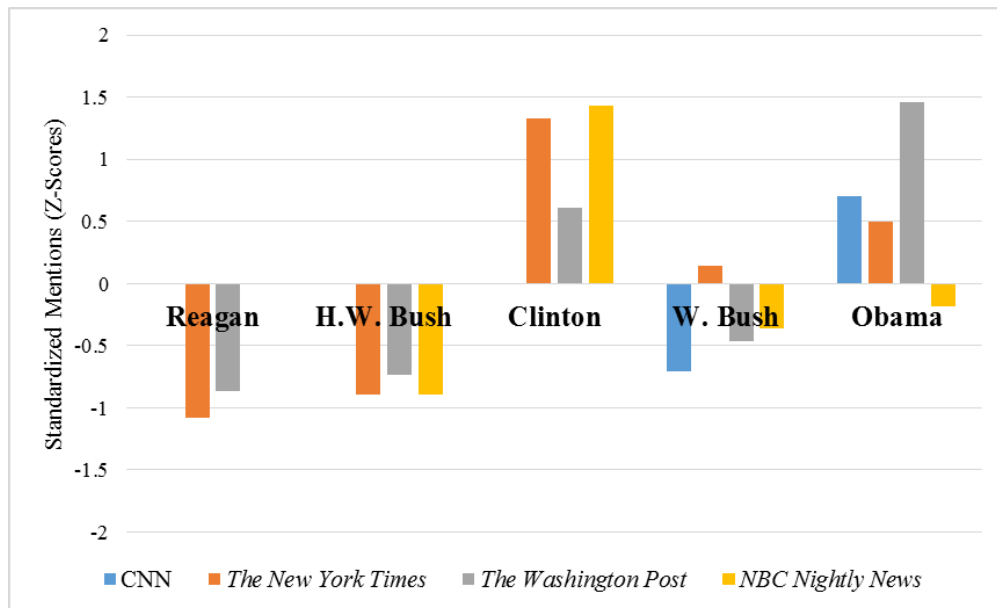


Figure 6. Presidential associations with the words gay and gays.

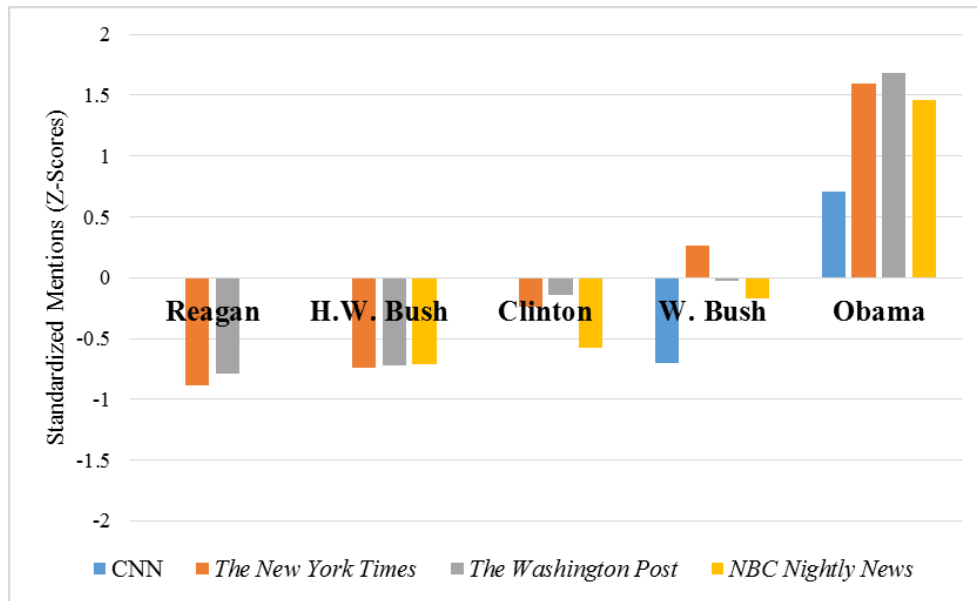


Figure 7. Presidential associations with non-Judeo-Christian religions.

Isolating such associations on the international stage is more challenging given the range of groups that exist. We therefore opted to look at a single word—*international*—that points to the world beyond U.S. borders more generally. Figure 8 reports the results of this analysis, providing a useful point of contrast to the trends discussed with minority groups.

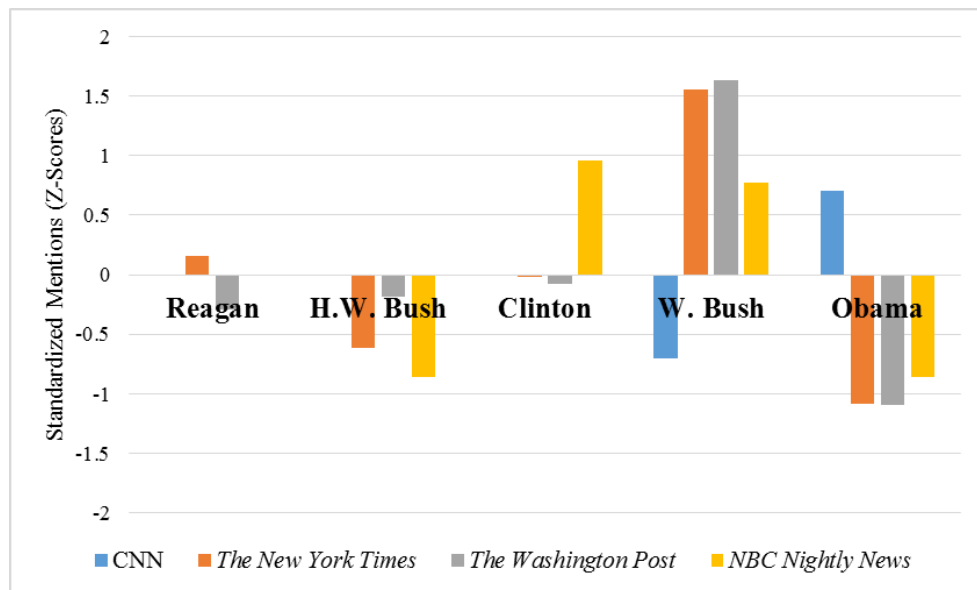


Figure 8. Presidential associations with the word international.

Here, it is George W. Bush whose presidency was most associated with international affairs. Clinton led in television associations, and Obama exceeded Bush online. The strong associations of Bush with the international environment in print outlets owes to the post-9/11 military engagements that saw Bush seeking international support for U.S. efforts. Such post-9/11 circumstances—that is, world contexts where international engagement and communication are more necessary than ever—have played a central role in moving the presidency toward greater ubiquity. But we also see in these trends that Bush's wars created an uncommon moment: Obama's international endeavors did not garner nearly the attention of his predecessors. This is likely due in part to the lesser human cost of Obama's military engagements, but it also reflects Obama's greater focus on domestic policy during his time in the White House.

Conclusion

The president's communicative relationship with the public is in transition. Practices that characterized the rhetorical presidency, including the occasional prime-time address or more unifying communicative acts (e.g., inaugural addresses, State of the Union addresses, farewell addresses) remain. Yet the shifting dynamics associated with the public, media landscape, efficacy of public appeals, and the content of political messages subsume even more traditional communications in a manner that meets ubiquitous executive aims. As a result, presidential communicative practices become more accessible, personal, and pluralistic. These developments raise theoretical and practical questions about the continued adherence to the rhetorical presidency paradigm as well as the efficacy of applying a ubiquitous presidency approach to future scholarship on presidential communication. We suggest four domains, among many, where adopting a ubiquitous presidency paradigm could move scholars and practitioners toward a better understanding of the presidency.

First, the ubiquitous presidency has its antecedents in microtargeted, personalized political campaign practices (Nielsen, 2012). Just as scholars observed how the rhetorical presidency was inspired by the rise of the permanent campaign (Ceaser et al., 1981), researchers also must be cognizant of election campaign practices that are then brought into the executive branch. For instance, Stromer-Galley's (2014) observation that recent presidential campaigns avoid direct contact between individuals and political elites through controlled interactivity mirrors how the Obama administration frames participatory interactivity via digital technology platforms while placing a premium on elite-citizen engagement. Researchers should continue to look to political campaigns to understand the evolution of ubiquitous presidential communication.

Second, the ubiquitous presidency reassesses what we mean by presidential rhetorical content. A rhetorical presidency approach assumed formal and ceremonial nationally broadcast messages. The ubiquitous presidency paradigm accounts for more formal occasions and major addresses, as well as more informal content such as images on Instagram or YouTube videos. As Gronbeck (1996) noted two decades ago, "In the age of secondary orality, what we are to understand as political rhetoric must be monumentally expanded. The 'Public Papers' will never again contain the rhetorical discourse of a president" (p. 45). By viewing content in this manner, the ubiquitous presidency can normalize communicative occurrences that currently seem strange (e.g., Barack Obama with a selfie stick). Researchers should look beyond established venues to fully account for ubiquitous presidential practices.

Third, scholars must reexamine fundamental questions of citizen socialization to, and effects of, the ubiquitous presidency. Whereas individuals were once (and might still be) socialized at an early age to view the president as authoritative (Lane & Sears, 1964), the extent to which greater accessibility, personality, and pluralism invite different perceptions of the president is yet to be well understood. Related to the effects of ubiquitous communication on individuals, researchers should fundamentally rethink the goals and outcomes of presidential communication. A ubiquitous presidency approach partially accounts for the limited mass effects of public appeals (see Edwards, 2003) by arguing that communication is often not targeted at a mass level and might not seek to move mass opinion. Presidents may communicate to maintain a level of support, ensure relevance amid other distractions, or persuade individuals to accomplish a specific task (e.g., sign up for health care). Such approaches can be better understood within a ubiquitous presidency paradigm.

Fourth, scholars should be cognizant of what these developments mean for the institution of the presidency and democratic governance. The rhetorical presidency concerned many scholars because frequent presidential communications subsumed a rich variety of political discourse (Stuckey & Antczak, 1998), publicly elevated the stature of the chief executive relative to other coequal political agents (Tulis, 1987), often supplanted intergovernmental negotiation efforts (Edwards, 2003), and diminished the weight afforded to pronouncements (Ceaser et al., 1981; Kernell, 2007). The need for direct public appeals was viewed as an outgrowth of institutional executive weakness vis-à-vis Congress. Ubiquitous presidential communication efforts will most likely exacerbate concerns about the breakdown of executive-congressional relationships and the frequency of executive appeals, areas that warrant continued attention. Moreover, it is reasonable to view the ubiquitous presidency as, at least in part, a reactionary response to dramatic shifts in the sociopolitical and media environment.

Still, this new approach may simultaneously broaden the scope of political discourse. Whereas the rhetorical presidency relied on executive control over national messaging, the ubiquitous presidency assumes that the president trades partial messaging control for more interactive, transactional messaging. It could be that the invitational nature associated with accessible, personal, and pluralistic communication engages more individuals with the governance process. "We the People" White House petitions, the ability to intertextually repurpose presidential content, the choice of when to listen to a weekly address, and pluralistic messages directed at historically marginalized citizens all shift control toward individuals. Presidential communicative power is reoriented as a result. It is too early to fully deduce what these developments might mean for democratic engagement and political power, but they will certainly test executive power and the relationship between the president and the citizenry.

These thoughts are but a first step forward; we hope others will take many more to stimulate new thinking and research on presidential communication as it occurs in the 21st century. Our sense is that these are steps the field needs—and is ready—to take.

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