Presidential Economic Frameworks:
How Expectations and Context Shape Rhetorical Leadership
Abstract
Presidents devote a substantial portion of their rhetoric to discussing the economy (Arthur, 2014; Wood, 2007; Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2005). It is commonly assumed that they entrepreneurially advance an economic agenda on standard party ideology. There is merit, however, in perceiving the president’s economic agenda as defined by the context in which they lead. Assessing presidential economic rhetoric from that perspective provides insight into presidential power and leadership. Presidents use their context to assess what is expected of them. To meet those expectations, presidents determine what economic policy or direction is expected and then seek to convey to the expector that they have fulfilled that expectation – adjusting their rhetoric accordingly (Arthur & Woods, 2013; Hoffman & Howard, 2010). Using a different way of classifying presidential economic rhetoric, in the form of six ubiquitous economic frameworks from 1946 - 2012, this research suggests that presidents construct these frameworks to produce an image of economic leadership that fits within what they think is appropriate given the political environment; thus presidents pay a great deal of attention to the context in which they discuss the economy (Arthur & Woods, 2013; Windt, Jr., 1996).
“Permanent wage and price controls in America would stifle the American economy, its dynamism, its productivity, and would be, I think, a mortal blow to the United States as a first-class economic power.”

--- Richard Nixon

Introduction

Presidents devote a substantial portion of their rhetoric to discussing the economy, grasping within their defined structures of power to play a role in economic policy (Arthur, 2014; Wood, 2007; Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2005). It is commonly assumed, however, that they entrepreneurially advance an economic agenda on standard party ideology. Nevertheless, there is merit in perceiving the president’s economic agenda as defined by the context in which they lead. Context shapes the president’s economic agenda and his economic message; using context to assess what is expected of them and then tailoring their economic rhetoric to the expectors to convey that they have met those expectations, presidents convey an image of strong economic leadership (Arthur & Woods, 2013; Hoffman & Howard, 2010).

This study argues that contextual conditions motivate presidents to use specific economic frameworks in their rhetoric (Coe, 2007; Neumann & Coe, 2011). Using speeches to convey policy preferences alleviates economic anxiety and frames the economic message (Wood, 2004; Eshbaugh-Soha, 2006). By using frames that presidents find appropriate, the context in which they give the speech shapes the economic rhetoric (Rojecki, 2008). Presidents hope this will situate their economic rhetoric within the appropriate political expectations for economic leadership and connect their rhetoric to the expectations of their constituencies (Arthur, 2014). Assessing presidential economic rhetoric from this perspective provides insight into the notion of presidential power and leadership.

Using a different way of classifying presidential economic rhetoric, in the form of six ubiquitous economic frameworks from 1946 - 2012, I consider how presidents construct these frameworks to ensure their economic rhetoric lines up with the political expectations for economic leadership (Arthur & Woods, 2013; Baum, 2004). I then argue that predicting the frequency and the type of frame presidents use to discuss the economy is possible when controlling for the context that pressures the speeches
Assessing the rhetoric in this manner advances the study of how presidents think about their rhetoric in relation to the economy, the socio-political/historical context, and the expectations of economic leadership. Using multiple models, this study offers findings that suggest presidents pay a great deal of attention to the context in which they discuss the economy (Windt, Jr., 1996). Determining how presidents frame their economic rhetoric is noteworthy given how much attention presidents pay to the economy and how few results they obtain by ‘persuading’ with their ‘mechanism of power’ rhetoric (Arthur, 2014; Wood, 2007; Edwards, 2003). The results from this analysis indicate that the presence of specific variables predict what type of economic framework presidents will employ in their rhetoric and how that changes with the context pressuring the speech.

I begin the article by explaining the importance of political rhetoric for presidential leadership and how it factors into the notion of ‘framing’ salient political issues. I move the discussion to the various economic frames presidents employ in their rhetoric. Next, I consider the empirical model and the data, wherein I used the American Presidency Project to gather the economic rhetoric from Presidents H.S. Truman through B.H. Obama (1946 – 2012). I then offer a discussion of the findings and their significance for the study of rhetorical leadership. Finally, I discuss the limitations of this study and how future research should address those concerns.

**Presidential Rhetoric**

Presidents utilize the power their office affords to meet the expectations set out for them, whether institutionally or from other political actors (Howell, 2003). Incessantly trying to meet the expectations of their office and utilizing their opportunities for speeches is one way that presidents try to assure constituencies that they are meeting the expectations the Office demands of them (Waterman, et. al., 2014).

Presidents, however, have ascertained in years past, that simply asserting what they want does not produce results, particularly on the national stage (Arthur, 2014;
Kernell, 2007; Edwards, 2003; Canes-Wrone, 2005; Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2008). Their inability to ‘persuade’ has compelled them to change their strategy. In fact, presidents often construct their messages to meet the expectations of specific local groups and interests, thus appearing as though they are leading (Cohen, 2010). To ensure that their policy perspectives resonate with the audiences, presidents often allow the context in which they give the speech to determine its contents (Arthur & Woods, 2013).

Presidents frame the issues in their political rhetoric and engender an alignment of the external expectations and their policy perspectives (Cobb & Ross, 1997). The use of language in defining and redefining an issue is central to connecting the expectation and the perception that they are addressing that expectation. Presidents also frame the issues with the hope of redirecting attention to a larger thematic concept rather than the reality of whether or not they are meeting those expectations; they are capable of utilizing rhetorical frames to go unnoticed or redirect the attention of those with specific expectations of economic leadership (van Hulst & Yanow, 2014). Presidents ascertain the frames to use by purposefully assessing the contextual conditions in which the speech occurs (van Hulst & Yanow, 2014; Schon & Rein, 1994; Chong, 1996). They understand the political expectations and which frames will enable them to remain within the political equilibrium (van Hulst, 2008). Frames are considered to be the “interpretive packages that activists [and entrepreneurs] develop to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, appeal to authorities, and demobilize antagonists” (Polletta & Ho 2006, p.190). In other words, frames provide an interpretive lens through which to see a problem, how to fix that problem, and assess the outcome.

**Economic Frameworks**

Classifying presidential economic rhetoric with frameworks identifies the outcome that the president thinks will best meet the expectation. As illustrated by Table 1, the presidential statements regarding the economy produced six ubiquitous political frameworks (Boydstun, Glazier, & Phillips, 2013; Glazier & Boydstun, 2012; Jacobs & Shapiro, 2000). Presidents employ their rhetoric to associate the issue that they are advocating with “a frame of reference [that] activates beliefs that trigger one’s [specific]
response to an issue” (Chong, 1996, p. 203). The president must think that appealing to these core beliefs will engender specific policy outcomes or a perception that the president is within the defined expectations (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999). The economic framework uses the core belief to shape the perception of the president’s economic leadership, to make it more conducive to the president’s strengths (Boydston, Glazier, & Phillips, 2013; Glazier & Boydston, 2012).

The first framework deals with furthering democracy and freedom; it is a fundamental component of American thought, a core belief of many (Coe, 2007; Schochet, 2003; Bennett & Stam, 1998). This frame will not only conjure up ideas about the plight of economic democracy, it will contrast our economic system with other ‘economic’ systems such as Socialism and Communism (Boydston, Glazier, & Pietryka, 2013; Lipset & Marks, 2001; Kingdon, 1999). Presidents will claim that their economic plans ‘further democracy’ and/or the opposition’s plans and ideas are anti-democratic. This frame discusses the obligation the United States has towards fledging democracies, our obligation to continue our dominance and assistance in using our economy to promote democracy around the world, connecting the president’s economic leadership to democracy.

The second framework is that of American Exceptionalism (Brooks, 2013; Dunn, Caesar, Heclo, et. al, 2013; Brooks, 2012; Edwards & Weiss, 2011; Kingdon, 1999; Friedman, 2012). This political framework refers to the American economy and its actions as the greatest in the world, an economy that has certain rights and responsibilities. America can exercise these rights whenever necessary and, just as important, it has a responsibility to those economies and peoples around the world that are considered allies. The U.S. economy is unique, which makes our responsibilities unique. The perception is one wherein neglecting to see what the president has done economically is the same as failing to understand how unique American values are, which projects a negative image of America to our allies and our enemies.

The third framework is a discussion that fits under the supply-side economic ideology (St, John, 2011; Dolan, Frendreis, & Tatalovich, 2008). This framework creates a perception of the economy in terms of how economic actors should best operate to
make the economy better or stronger, a free-market economy of sorts (St, John, 2011; Edwards & Wayne, 1985). This is an ideology that strongly resonates with the core beliefs of those who assent to notions of *Trickle-down* economics and to *Reaganomics* (Stein, 1994). The policy perception is that the economy will become or remain strong because the president has exemplified that he has lowered taxes on the wealthy and removed regulations so that the economy can flourish (Edwards & Wayne, 1985).

The fourth framework is the rhetoric that fits within the Keynesian Economic ideology (Wall, 2008; St, John, 2011). Presidents frame their economic rhetoric in a way that justifies government intervention in the economy when the economy is not doing well, a stimulus of sorts (Stein, 1994). The core beliefs of government intervention in private affairs are redolent of such actions that transpired during the New Deal, which inspires a particular constituency and invokes outrage by another (Wall, 2008; St, John, 2011; Dolan, Frendreis, & Tatalovich, 2008). Essentially, the president frames his rhetoric to this expected policy outcome (government action in the market economy in the hopes that the intervention can stabilize certain economic indicators) as a way to remain within the expected realm of expectations from this specific constituency (Gordon, 1990).

The fifth framework is the rhetoric that is associated with economic catastrophes. Presidents construct their comments on the economy in a way that calls attention to economic disasters and the economic conditions that could result (Trager & Vavreck, 2011; Maggio, 2007; Ramsay, 2004; Lewis & Schultz, 2003). Such rhetoric has to do with the direction of the economy and the president’s response to that direction. Discussing the economy as a looming catastrophe is rare and enables the president to signal to the expectors that his economic leadership is sufficient in such an event (Maggio, 2007).

The last political framework used to discuss the economy has to do with the notion of *sine qua non* or an essential condition, something that is absolutely necessary for the economy. Presidents assess the political context and the expectations for
economic policy directions and then discuss their policy recommendations for the economy as absolutely necessary, given that they line up with the expectations. Presidents can sense the mood for economic policy change and adjust their rhetoric, within the proper context, to signal to the expectors that they are meeting those demands.

The political frameworks used to discuss the economy have to do with the expectations looming during the contextual environment wherein the president is attempting to meet the economic policy expectations he has ascertained. I am arguing that the presidents think the framework is important, particularly for maintaining an image of the strong economic leader that is necessary for their reelection, historical legacy, and the political capital that affords them success in other domestic policies (Arthur & Woods, 2013; Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2005; Druckman & Holmes, 2004). They construct their speeches with specific frames, which leads to the following research questions:

**R1:** How do presidents throughout the post WWII period use the economic frames to discuss the economy?

**R2:** How are the total economic frames broken down by Republican presidents and Democratic presidents?

**Contextual Realities that Shape Presidential Rhetoric**

Presidents assess the context of their speeches as a way to ascertain the expectations imposed upon them – a mechanism of leadership if you will (Arthur & Woods, 2013; Zarefsky, 2004; Rojecki, 2008). Paying attention to the context of the speech enables the president to use specifically chosen words and phrases that resonate with the audience and cues to them that their fears or hesitations regarding his leadership are unfounded. This ‘frames’ the speech in a reality with which the audiences understand, thus quelling their concerns about the president’s economic leadership. Presidents hope that the audiences, in turn, will be reassured by the president’s display of economic leadership in response to the contextual reality, which
gives the president more political and social capital. Zarefsky (2004) maintains that “presidential rhetoric ... defines political reality” in the way that best supports the goals of the president (p. 612). The president’s attempt to define the economic situation with a framework that will reassure the expectors of his economic leadership offers insight into the economic expectations imposed upon the Office of the Presidency and the president’s attempt to convey to the expector that he has met those expectations.

**Negative Presidential Rhetoric**

Using ‘tone’ with an economic framework enables presidents to communicate their alignment with a specific expectation about the state of the economy and reassure the expectors that the president’s economic leadership can be trusted (Arthur, 2014; Arthur & Woods, 2013; Wood, 2007; Boydstun, Glazier, & Phillips, 2013; Boydstun, Glazier, & Pietryka, 2013). It just so happens that presidents tend to be mostly positive about the economy (See Figure 1). Their economic rhetoric is either positive, a form of credit-claiming, or it is neutral, a form of placation that communicates to specific constituencies and audiences that the president is conscious of the economy (Arthur, 2014; Wood, 2007; Wood, 2004; Hänggli & Kriesi, 2010).

[Figure 1 about here]

As illustrated by Figure 1, presidents have a tendency to not use negative rhetoric regarding the economy, unless the context warrants it; they want the public to focus upon something that will draw their attention away from the real conditions of the economy or to their (in)ability to handle the situation (Howard & Hoffman, 2010; Ragsdale, 1984). Thus, it is incredibly important to pay attention to when presidents discuss the economy negatively, given that their negative rhetoric encompasses slightly less than 20% of their total economic rhetoric (Arthur, 2014).

**H1:**
The presence of an economic framework in presidential rhetoric is significantly increased when the president discusses the economy negatively.
**H1a:**
The presence of negative economic rhetoric will increase the likelihood that the president will use one of the economic philosophy frames such as the *Supply-Side* or the *Keynesian* frame.

**H1b:**
The presence of negative economic rhetoric will increase the likelihood that the president will use the *Sine Qua Non* frame.

**Honeymoon Period**

Scholars often discuss the first 100 days of the president’s administration as the ‘honeymoon period’ (Arthur, 2014; Eshbaugh-Soha, 2005; Light, 1999). During this time, with few exceptions, the president’s approval ratings are the highest and Congress is more likely to work with them. In other words, the honeymoon period, typically, provides the president with a measure of political capital that is unrivaled for the rest of their presidency. Given how the political environment responds to the president during this time and how the economic expectations are imposed upon an incoming president, he has some flexibility in how he discusses the economy.

During this timeframe, the president is more successful legislatively (Light, 1999). As time passes and the President gets entrenched in the realities of governing, their influence deteriorates and the political capital is quickly expended (Arthur, 2014; Light, 1999; Barrett & Eshbaugh-Soha, 2007). Nevertheless, the economic expectations for the incoming president are typically high and continue to increase when the economy begins to deteriorate. Presidents understand that they are going to need cooperation from Congress, public opinion, and the business interests to accomplish anything substantial as it pertains to economic policy. Therefore, during this time presidents ask for more government intervention in the economy and are more likely to get it (Light, 1999; Eshbaugh-Soha, 2006).

**H2:**
Presidents are more likely to use the economic philosophy frame, *Keynesian Economics*, during the first 100 days of their administration.
Moreover, presidents have the flexibility to discuss the economy negatively during the first 100 days of their administration. In fact, nearly 42% of their ‘honeymoon’ economic rhetoric is negative, which is staggering given that only 23% of their economic rhetoric that occurs after the first 100 days is negative – a major difference in timeframe and opportunity. Interestingly, they are far more negative about the economy during their ‘honeymoon’ (Arthur, 2014). The context of the political environment allows them to do this because of their ability to shift blame for the negative economy onto their predecessor. The negative economy is not quite ‘their’ negative economy. The economic situation can be negatively framed as a catalyst for justifying more government intervention in the economy, which, if successful, adds credence to the president’s historical legacy and economic leadership efficacy.

H2a:
Presidents are more likely to use the Economic Catastrophe frame during the first 100 days of their administration.

**Approval Rating**

When presidents possess high approval ratings, particularly above 50%, they are seen as effective leaders and are able to command attention from Congress on salient policies (Canes-Wrone & de Marchi, 2002; Page, Shapiro, & Dempsey, 1987; Page & Shapiro, 1993). Therefore, presidents are granted leeway while they are seen as strong leaders. There is a perception that the president is meeting the expectations imposed upon him. Some research, however, suggests that when that approval rating is below the 50% threshold, Congress ignores the president and pays more attention to what their constituents want, engendering a perception that the president is deficient regarding expectations (Rivers & Rose, 1985). Presidential approval ratings do not typically stay above 50%; this is an historical and statistical fact (Brace & Hinckley, 1992). There are fluctuations and external events that raise the president’s approval ratings, maintaining the perception of strong leadership longer than the average. In other words, strong presidential popularity is variable and the success they obtain from that popularity is not consistent across time, party, and president (Edwards, 1980). When,
inevitably, their approval ratings decline below the threshold for success, presidents will do what they think is necessary to convey to the expector that they are within the acceptable realm of the effective leadership for the expectors.

**H3:**
The presence of an economic framework in presidential rhetoric is significantly increased when the president’s approval rating goes down.

The expectations for economic performance are high, a majority thinks of the economy as the most important issue (Arthur, 2014; Dolan, Frendreis, & Tatalovich, 2008). How the president describes the economy during periods of economic downturns is incredibly important for how his image of leadership is perceived (Arthur, 2014). The expectors require a measure of accuracy. If the economy is stale and the president discusses it as robust, he will be seen as out of touch. Often presidential approval rating is tied to how well the economy is doing, substantively connecting the president and the economy (Wood, 2007). Although not always, the data show that often enough a decrease in the president’s approval rating is correlated with a negative economy (Wood, 2004). Therefore, presidents will try to redirect attention from the negative economy and their approval ratings by exemplifying that despite how bad things are, America is still the greatest economy in the world—in comparison to other world economies—and he is the leader of that economy. Moreover, he must convey the appropriate balance of understanding about the robustness of the economy and his hope for how the economy is going to get better. The expectation is that he will be a good manager of the economy and convey to the expector that he is meeting his responsibilities.

**H3a:**
As the president’s approval ratings decrease, they are more likely to use the Economic Catastrophe frame.

**H3b:**
As the president’s approval ratings decrease, they are more likely to use the American Exceptionalism frame.
Recession

A recession is a potentially disastrous context for presidents to navigate. The perception of their economic leadership is challenged forcefully. The expectors want assurances that the presidents are, in fact, doing what they legally and informally can accomplish with the powers their office possesses. Constructing the appropriate economic narrative, however, is no easy task. Therefore, presidents often neglect economic discussions during a recession. In fact, Howard & Hoffman (2010) argue that presidents talk more about non-economic issues when confronted with a recession. In many of the last recessions, presidents have simply ignored the true state of the economy in their speeches by redirecting the attention of the expectors, offering platitudes instead of substantive economic policy discussions and solutions (Howard & Hoffman, 2010).

H4:
The presence of an economic framework in presidential rhetoric is significantly decreased when the U.S. economy is in a verified recession.

The presence of a verified recession will not, however, create an increase in the use of the American Exceptionalism frame. The president will not want to draw the attention of international allies to the negative U.S. economy, as it will potentially stifle the image and mission that the U.S. is a ‘City on a Hill’ and should be emulated.

H4a:
The presence of a verified recession will decrease the likelihood that the president will use the American Exceptionalism frame.

Military Conflicts

When the U.S. is engaged in a major military conflict, that issue is the foremost concern of the American people (Arthur, 2014; Wood, 2009; Coe, 2007; Wood, 2007; Dolan, Frendreis, & Tatalovich, 2008). These events command a great deal of attention and resources (Stine, 2009; Morris, 2014; Kwarteng, 2014). There are serious concerns
about the level of spending on the conflict, what that does to the items in the budget that are not military mission specific, and the impact of the aforementioned on the deficit. This reality engenders, for presidents, the necessity of portraying an image of strong leadership.

**H5:**
The presence of an economic framework in presidential rhetoric is significantly increased when the U.S. is engaged in a ‘major’ foreign conflict.

Moreover, presidential ‘saber rattling’ can have a deleterious effect upon the most salient economic indicators and the expector’s perceptions of those indicators (Wood, 2012; Wood, 2009). The constant discussion of war, American soldiers in harm’s way while on foreign soil, and bloody conflict with other countries produces negative outcomes for economic performance (Wood, 2012; Wood, 2009). The expector’s concern creates a complex context, in which economic leadership can be questioned. Presidents must often redirect attention from the concerns about the U.S. economy, with the appropriate frameworks, indicating that their leadership can be trusted.

**H5a:**
When the U.S. is engaged in a ‘major’ foreign conflict, the president is more likely to use the *American Exceptionalism* frame.

**‘Lame Duck’ Status**

In one of the oddest ironies of presidential power, presidents are the most powerful when they first assume the office and are the least experienced and the least powerful when they have been there the longest and possess the most experience (Crockett, 2008; Light, 1999). Towards the end of a president’s second term, their political capital is mostly expended, making them a ‘lame duck’ to the expectors (Light, 1999; Sabato, 2008; Shogan, 2006; Brace & Hinckley, 1992; Fortier & Ornstein, 2007). Light (1999) calls this inevitable reality the “the cycle of decreasing influence” (p. 39). As presidents settle into their last two years office, they lose a significant measure of their power, allowing the opposition to resist many of the measures of leadership from the
Presidents rightly understand this change in their power, their ability to successfully bargain, and their expectations for political effectiveness. Moreover, beginning in their sixth year, presidents routinely face political problems that entrench the administration and a political environment that is increasingly obsessed with the election of a new president – thus, truly stifling the president’s ability to accomplish anything new (Crockett, 2008). As presidents are politically considered ‘lame ducks’ by the expectors, they begin to focus their rhetoric on what they have accomplished in the past, their historical legacy, and how they have actually fulfilled their economic responsibilities. They begin a PR campaign wherein they address what they want to be remembered for historically, advocating the strength of their economic leadership and historical legacy.

H6:
The presence of an economic framework in presidential rhetoric is significantly increased when the president is considered a ‘lame duck’ politically.

H6a:
When the president is considered a ‘lame duck’ politically, he is more likely to use the Furthering Democracy frame.

Major Speech

Presidents perpetually edit and rewrite their speeches, paying particular attention to what they say to whom they say it (Arthur & Woods, 2013; Ritter & Medhurst, 2004; Schlesinger, 2008; Waldman, 2000; Frances & Gottheimer 2010; Nelson & Riley, 2010). Leading us to think that not all presidential speeches are the same; particularly, there is a difference between the presidents’ intentions for news conferences, town hall meetings, interviews, off-the-cuff remarks, and major speeches (Smith, 1983). This is evidenced by the differences in the amount of each speech from each president (Arthur, 2014; Wood, 2007). Moreover, presidents control their speechmaking events; they choose where and what type of speech they give and to whom they give it. In fact, they are only required to give one account of what they are doing every year – the State of
the Union. They are required to give an account to Congress about the state of the union, which is required by the Constitution. However, the ‘account’ does not necessarily have to be an orally delivered speech, even though it is mostly done in this manner. In other words, the legal context of their office necessitates that presidents give at least one major speech each year. Therefore, focusing upon the State of the Union Addresses offers insight into how presidents will try to use economic frameworks to quell any doubts about their economic leadership and reassure some expectors that they are meeting expectations (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2005; Ragsdale, 1987).

H7:
The presence of an economic framework in presidential rhetoric is significantly increased when the president discusses the economy in a compulsory major address to Congress.

H7a:
When the president discusses the economy in a compulsory major address to Congress, he is more likely to use the Furthering Democracy and the American Exceptionalism frames.

Divided Government

The president’s relationship with the Congress is complicated when either chamber is a different party than the president, intensifying expectations from both parties as each has a measure of power they want to exercise (DiClerico, 2000). However, the more same-party members the president has in Congress does typically increase his ability to succeed legislatively, which reinforces his perceived image as an effective economic leader (Arthur, 2014; Bond & Fleisher, 2000). Given that economic leadership is so important to both chambers, their attention to what the president is doing in this area is greater (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2005). In fact, the president struggles to build coalitions within his own party and the opposition party; his own party is less likely to work with him because of the difficulties they will face in Congress during discussions of economic policy during divided government (Krehbiel,
1998; Brady & Volden, 2006; Barrett & Eshbaugh-Soha, 2007; Canes-Wrone, 2006; Bond & Fleisher, 2000; Light, 1999).

H8: The presence of an economic framework in presidential rhetoric is significantly increased when the president, the Senate and/or the House are of a different political party.

Empirical Model

I ascertained that two separate models (\(M1 = \) the presence of any economic framework, and \(M2 = \) the type of economic framework) were important to finding out how presidents pay attention to their surrounding context when constructing their economic speeches. This offers a different approach in the literature on rhetorical frameworks in presidential rhetoric. For both models (\(M1 = \) Ordered Logistic Regression and \(M2 = \) Multinomial Logistic Regression) the analyses provided predicted probabilities and odds ratios for 1644 units of analysis. The log likelihood and the \(\chi^2\) values were highly significant for each model. Tables 3 and 4 present the coefficients, standard errors, and the measures of significance for the following regressions:

\[
M1 - PR(PEF_{i,t} = 1 \text{ or } 0) = \\
M2 - PR(TEF_{i,t} = 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, \text{ or } 6) = \\
\begin{align*}
\alpha + \gamma \text{Presidential Influence}_{i,t} + \beta_1^* \text{ Negativity}_{i,t} + \beta_2^* \text{ Major Speeches to Congress}_{i,t} \\
+ \beta_3^* \text{ Recession}_{i,t} + \beta_4^* \text{ Major Foreign Conflict}_{i,t} + \beta_5^* \text{ Divided Government}_{i,t} + \hat{e}_{i,t}
\end{align*}
\]

The specification controls for the presence of any economic framework - \(PEF_{i,t}\), wherein the \(i\) represents a dichotomous response (1 = the presence of any economic framework & 0 = no economic framework) probability for each individual speech \(t\) (1946 - 2012) in the first model and the type of economic framework - \(TEF_{i,t}\), wherein the \(i\) represents a multinomial response (1 = Furthering Democracy, 2 = American Exceptionalism, 3 = Supply Side Economics, 4 = Keynesian Economics, 5 = Economic Catastrophes, 6 = sine qua non) probability for each individual speech \(t\) (1946 - 2012) in the second model. I regressed the \(PEF_{it}\) and the \(TEF_{it}\) on a vector of different measures of presidential influence (\(\beta_1^* \text{ Average Presidential Approval} + \beta_2^* \text{ Lame Duck Status} + \beta_3^* \text{ \)
Honeymoon Period), presidential statements differentiated by tone (β_i Negative Statements), compulsory presidential speeches (β_i Major Speeches to Congress), the importance of partisanship (β_i Divided Government), and two dichotomous variables measuring an important contextual political environment — (1) whether there was a recession happening (2) if the U.S. was in a major foreign conflict

Independent Variable

I used the American Presidency Project to track the presidential speeches by keyword. As other research employs, I used a detailed codebook and intercoder reliability to categorize the language (Arthur, 2014; Woods & Arthur, 2014; Boydstun, Glazier, & Phillips, 2013; Boydstun, Glazier, & Pietryka, 2013; Arthur & Woods, 2013; Cameron, 2000; Barrett, 2005; Barrett, 2004). For simplicity, I chose to use presidential speeches that included the word “economy” at least once – using a stratified random sample, as many other scholars have done, to determine a database of presidential economic rhetoric (Arthur, 2014; Arthur & Woods, 2013; Glazier & Boydstun, 2012; Lohr, 2010; Hopkins & King, 2010; Barrett & Eshbaugh-Soha, 2007; Jacobs & Shapiro, 2000; Spriggs, 1996; Barrett, 2004; Peterson, 1990).iii From January 1, 1946 through January 19, 2012, this provided me with 1644 presidential speeches (units of analysis).iv As illustrated by Table 2, the population is measured over 65 years (1946 -- 2012); presidents talked about the economy differently over time. Taking snippets of the population over time will keep the “population drift” from biasing the sample (Hopkins & King, 2010).

[Table 2 about here]

Findings/Discussion

As it pertains to the descriptive analysis for the research questions (R1 & R2), illustrated by Figure 2, the presidents throughout the post WWII period used the economic frames (Furthering Democracy, American Exceptionalism, Supply Side
Economics, Keynesian Economics, Economic Catastrophes, and Sine Qua Non) regularly to discuss the economy. In fact, they used a total of 621 economic frames from 1946 through 2012, which translates to presidents using economic frames in 37.5 percent of their total economic speeches. The total economic frames were broken down by 321 Republican president frames and 300 Democratic president frames.

[Figure 2 about here]

The *Furthering Democracy* economic frame appears to be one of the most prevalently used frame. As illustrated by Figure 3, the economic frames were broken down by 50 Republican president frames and 91 Democratic president frames. There were 141 total frames used in the 1644 units of analysis, which is about nine percent of the president’s total economic rhetoric being used to conjure up ideas about the plight of economic democracy. The *American Exceptionalism* economic frame also appears one of the most prevalently used frames. The Democrats used 69 of the frames and Republicans used 69. There were 138 total frames, which is about nine percent of the president’s economic rhetoric being used to convey that the American economy and its actions are the greatest in the world.

[Figure 3 about here]

The *Supply Side Economics* economic frame is the most prevalently used frame. The Republicans used this frame 151 times and the Democrats used it 26 times. There were 177 frames used in the 1644 units of analysis, which is about 11 percent of the president’s total economic rhetoric being used to create a perception of how the government should approach its role in the economy. As seen in Figure 4, the vastly different usage in this frame between the Republicans and the Democrats is noteworthy; however, given ideological predilections of the two major parties, it is interesting that Democrats used it all.

[Figure 4 about here]
The *Keynesian Economics* frame was used 90 times, which is about six percent of the economic rhetoric being used in a way that calls for the government to intervene in the economy and invest in particular programs (Zakaria, 2008). This frame was used 82 times by Democrats and 8 times by Republicans; again, it was to be expected given ideological predilections of the two major parties. Interestingly, however, is that Republican presidents decided to use the frame at all, giving into the pressure of their contextual environment.

The *Economic Catastrophes* frame was the least used frame in the rhetoric. It was only used 13 times total. The Republicans used the frame most often with 11 mentions. President Obama is the only Democrat to use the frame with two mentions. This is less than one percent (0.08) of the total economic rhetoric being used to call attention to economic disasters and the economy that would result (Trager & Vavreck, 2011). This confirms what other scholars have noted, presidents are rarely overly negative with regard to the economy (Howard & Hoffman, 2010; Eshbaugh-Soha, 2010).

[Figure 5 about here]

The *Sine Qua Non* economic frame was used 30 times by the Democrats and 32 times by the Republican presidents. As presented in Figure 5, there were 62 frames used in the 1644 units of analysis, which is just about four percent of the president’s total economic rhetoric being used to create a perception of the president’s actions on the economy as something that is absolutely necessary (Neustadt, 1991). This is to be expected, as presidents typically decrease their economic policy speeches when the economy is doing poorly; they do not want to publicly commit to any specific policy direction. They think that if they are positive and/or neutral about the economy, they cannot be blamed or held accountable when things go wrong, thus, maintaining a perception of strong economic leadership.

As it pertains to the quantitative analysis, the results suggest that the theory supports hypotheses H1, H1a, H1b. Presidents are rarely negative when it comes to their discussions of the economy. However, when they are negative, the presence of an
economic framework is significantly increased (See Table 3). In fact, the presence of an economic frame in negative presidential rhetoric is increased by a factor of 2.322, suggesting that presidents are cautious and pay particular attention to framing their negative economic rhetoric to ensure their expectors of their strong economic leadership. More interestingly, however, is the fact that while using negative economic rhetoric, presidents utilize either the Supply Side or Keynesian economic frame, offering reassurance to their various expectors that their economic philosophies are congruent with those of the expectors.

[Table 3 about here]

Further, the results suggest that hypotheses H3, H3a, and H3b are in line with the theory. Presidents pay particular attention to their economic rhetoric depending upon their approval ratings. The findings suggest that as the president becomes less popular with the public, they include an economic framework in their rhetoric as a way to convey their economic effectiveness. As Figure 6 illustrates, presidents are less likely to use an economic frame when their approval rating is high. In their estimation, the public already trusts their economic leadership, which eliminates the necessity of framing the issue, as the public seems to already perceive the president as he perceives himself.

[Figure 6 about here]

More interestingly, however, is the fact that while considering their approval ratings in their use of economic frames, presidents either use the Economic Catastrophe or American Exceptionalism economic frame, offering reassurance to their various expectors that they understand the severity of the economic situation while simultaneously conveying that the American economy is exceptional, alleviating the long-term concerns about the economy. One could speculate that as the president’s approval ratings go up, he would use the Furthering Democracy frame more often. Higher approval ratings provide the president with the security of feeling as though their economic leadership
justifies their promotion of that specific frame. The direction of the results of the analysis does show this; however, it is statistically inconclusive that this is exactly why they use fewer of the Furthering Democracy frames when their approval ratings go up.

Further, the results suggest that hypotheses H4 and H4a are in line with the theory. Actually, presidents avoid the notion of recession as forcefully as the context will allow them. The findings suggest that as the economy falls into recession, they simply avoid talking about it with the public. Moreover, according to Figure 7, presidents stop using one of the most frequent frames, American Exceptionalism, so as not to draw attention to the U.S.’s economic plight or question the president’s leadership.

[Figure 7 about here]

To anecdotally illustrate this political predilection, there were two recessions during the George W. Bush Administration. The recession began in March 2001 and the president did not even utter the word ‘recession’ until December 2001 (Arthur, 2014). During the second recession (December 2007 – June 2009), he would deflect the expector’s concern by referring to the previous recession, which he claims he inherited from the previous administration, and how the U.S. economy is resilient.

[Table 4 about here]

At the very end of February 2008, he did mention the word ‘recession’ in reference to the economic situation that began in December 2007. However, he was responding to a query wherein he argued that the U.S. is not heading towards a recession, even though it was already in one. In early April 2008, he responds to another question by stating that the U.S. is not in a recession, but rather an economic slowdown. By the end of April, the expectors are pressuring the president for an answer. During a press conference, he is asked, “…Americans believe we are in a recession. What will it take for you to say those words, that we are in a recession?” President Bush’s response is telling. Finally, in September 2008, President Bush does acknowledge the seriousness of the economic situation. He says,
I will tell you that these are very difficult economic times—very difficult. And we'll let the economists define it for what it is. I would hope that those who worry about recession, slowdown, whatever you want to call it...

Further, the results suggest that hypotheses H7 and H7a support the theory. Presidents pay particular attention to their rhetoric while giving a major, nationally televised address. The president knows that their audience is limited, in both numbers and duration of attention. This research suggests that presidents try to mitigate the effects of this decreasing access to their constituents by utilizing the few times they do have to give an economic speech. Holding all other variables constant, the presence of an economic frame in a major presidential speech is increased by a factor of 4.665, suggesting a utility maximization of their ability to convey to their expectors their perceptions of their own economic leadership (See Table 3). As Figure 7 illustrates, the presence of an economic frame dramatically increases when the president is giving a major speech. Moreover, while delivering a major address, presidents are more likely to use the *Furthering Democracy* or the *American Exceptionalism* economic frame, quelling any doubts about their economic leadership and reassuring the expectors that they are meeting expectations. In fact, the presence of these economic frames in a major speech is increased by a factor of 1.985 and 2.112, respectively (See Table 4).

Conclusions

It is clear that presidents frame their rhetoric pertaining to the economy in specific ways and that rhetorical leadership is a crucial part of the political process; it is a venue through which political power and legitimacy are exemplified to the public (Fontana, Nederman, & Remer 2004). This research suggests that the common assumption that presidents entrepreneurially advance an economic agenda on standard party ideology is not a clear assessment of the attempts at rhetorical leadership, but rather we should consider that the president’s economic agenda is defined by the context in which they lead. Presidents use context to assess what is expected of them and then tailor their
rhetoric to the expectors, constructing a rhetorical reality wherein they are seen as a strong economic leader despite the contextual elements that have determined their perception of the president’s leadership. During this political process, the president can use language that creates a framework and worldview from which all political perceptions follow, allowing the president to convey that they have met the expectations of the expector and conveying a perception of strong economic leadership.

This study argued and empirically demonstrated that contextual conditions motivate presidents to use specific economic frameworks in their rhetoric. By ascertaining and analyzing these specific frames, I determined that the context in which the speech was given shapes the economic rhetoric. Assessing presidential economic rhetoric from this perspective provides insight into the notion of presidential power and leadership. Moreover, I demonstrated how presidents construct these frameworks to ensure their economic rhetoric lines up with the political expectations for economic leadership. Using multiple models, this study offered findings that suggest presidents pay a great deal of attention to the context in which they discuss the economy. The results from this analysis indicate that the presence of specific variables predict what type of economic framework presidents will employ in their rhetoric and how that changes with the context pressuring the speech, advancing the study of how presidents think about their rhetoric in relation to the economy, the socio-political/historical context, and the expectations of economic leadership.
Works Cited


Figure 1.
The Tone of Presidential Economic Rhetoric
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Economic Frame</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W.J. Clinton</td>
<td>5/31/1997</td>
<td>Furthering Democracy</td>
<td>I also had the opportunity to discuss with leaders of Europe the present success of our economy and what we can do together to promote prosperity in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe in ways that will ensure their prosperity and ours for the next 50 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.B. Johnson</td>
<td>10/25/1964</td>
<td>American Exceptionalism</td>
<td>But the strength that underlies our world leadership is anchored in the prosperity and stability of the American economy. Our 4-year record of strong and balanced economic advance knows no parallel in this or any other country. Maintaining this great prosperity is a vital task that challenges our free society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.W. Bush</td>
<td>3/28/2001</td>
<td>Supply-Side Economics</td>
<td>And for those who say we can't afford meaningful, real tax relief that will stimulate the economy, they're the ones who want to increase the size and scope of the Federal Government. They trust the Government to spend people's money. And that's not the philosophy of this administration. Once we've set priorities, we trust the people to spend their money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.H. Obama</td>
<td>2/3/2009</td>
<td>Keynesian Economics</td>
<td>We've got provisions to help states who are seeing record numbers of people unemployed, providing them unemployment insurance, food stamps, making sure that they don't lose their health care. That's the right thing to do. Not only does it stimulate the economy, but it gives families immediate relief. We focus on making sure that in addition to creating jobs, we're laying the foundation for long-term economic growth. So we invest in infrastructure, around new green jobs and energy, making sure that we are weatherizing homes to save on our energy bills long term; making sure that we are investing in our health care IT system so that we can reduce costs and improve quality and reduce medical errors. So those are all sound investments that need to be made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.W. Reagan</td>
<td>2/18/1981</td>
<td>Economic Catastrophes</td>
<td>We can no longer procrastinate and hope that things will get better. They will not. Unless we act forcefully – and now – the economy will get worse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.M. Nixon</td>
<td>11/14/1969</td>
<td>Sine Qua Non</td>
<td>At the same time, I feel strongly that the soundness and stability of our economy demand stringent fiscal measures on all fronts, and that such stringency will better serve the long-run interests of all the American people...Therefore, I direct you to make no commitments at this time which will lead to spending in excess of the 1970 outlay ceiling which the Director of the Bureau of the Budget communicated to you at my direction. I expect your full cooperation in demonstrating our fiscal responsibility. It is imperative that this Administration do everything in its power to fight the inflationary pressures which are eroding the purchasing power of the American people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.
Sentences Exemplifying Tone in Presidential Economic Rhetoric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J.F. Kennedy</td>
<td>1/14/1963</td>
<td>America has enjoyed 22 months of uninterrupted economic recovery. But recovery is not enough. If we are to prevail in the long run, we must expand the long-run strength of our economy. We must move along the path to a higher rate of growth and full employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.M. Nixon</td>
<td>2/25/1974</td>
<td>With regard to my statement that there will be no recession, I have met with my economic advisers just last week. I went over this question in great detail. We are going through what I would say is a downturn in the economy at this point, but not a recession. And for the balance of the year, the prospects are good. They are good, because we are going to be dealing with the energy crisis—what was a crisis—as a problem. That will be helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.E. Carter</td>
<td>9/28/1979</td>
<td>Inflation is the most persistent challenge to our economy, primarily fed by escalating energy costs, which are predominantly controlled by others in foreign countries. Inflation tends to pit our people and our institutions against each other and contributes to a sense of frustration and doubt and concern, which is so worrisome to our people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.W. Reagan</td>
<td>5/28/1985</td>
<td>In 1981 our critics charged that letting you keep more of your earnings would trigger an inflationary explosion, send interest rates soaring, and destroy our economy. Well, we cut your tax rates anyway by nearly 25 percent. And what that helped trigger was falling inflation, falling interest rates, and the strongest economic expansion in 30 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.H.W. Bush</td>
<td>1/29/1991</td>
<td>I understand, and I'm not unrealistic about the future. But there are reasons to be optimistic about our economy. First, we don't have to fight double-digit inflation. Second, most industries won't have to make big cuts in production because they don't have big inventories piled up. And third, our exports are running solid and strong. In fact, American businesses are exporting at a record rate. So, let's put these times in perspective. Together, since 1981, we've created almost 20 million jobs, cut inflation in half, and cut interest rates in half. And yes, the largest peacetime economic expansion in history has been temporarily interrupted. But our economy is still over twice as large as our closest competitor. We will get this recession behind us and return to growth soon. We will get on our way to a new record of expansion and achieve the competitive strength that will carry us into the next American century. We should focus our efforts today on encouraging economic growth, investing in the future, and giving power and opportunity to the individual.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2.
Total Presidential Economic Frameworks
Figure 3.
Furthering Democracy and American Exceptionalism Economic Frameworks
Figure 4. Supply Side and Keynesian Economic Frameworks
Figure 5. Economic Catastrophe and Sine Qua Non Economic Frameworks
Table 3. Predicting the Presence of Economic Frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficients</th>
<th>Odds Ratios</th>
<th>p value</th>
<th>standard errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Rhetoric</td>
<td>.8423</td>
<td>2.322</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.3139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honeymoon Period</td>
<td>.4287</td>
<td>1.535</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>.4126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval Ratings</td>
<td>-.0118</td>
<td>.9882</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.0043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recession</td>
<td>-.3211</td>
<td>.7254</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.1187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Foreign Conflict</td>
<td>.4481</td>
<td>1.565</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.1833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lame Duck President</td>
<td>.2691</td>
<td>1.309</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Speeches</td>
<td>1.540</td>
<td>4.665</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divided Government</td>
<td>.2779</td>
<td>1.321</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.1630</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variable: Pr (Success = 1)
N = 1644

Log Likelihood - 1028.639
\( \chi^2 = 117.43 \) (p < .0000)
Figure 6.
Average Presidential Approval Rating from 1946 - 2012

*Data from American Presidency Project from 1946 - 2012*
Figure 7.
The American Exceptionalism Framework during a Verified Recession 1946 - 2012

American Exceptionalism Framework
(as predicted by a multinomial logit)

Figure 8.
Major Presidential Economic Speeches from 1946 - 2012

Major Economic Speeches
(as predicted by logit model)

*Data from American Presidency Project from 1946 - 2012
Table 4.  
Predicting the Presence of Economic Frameworks  
(Multinomial Regression Analysis)  
N = 1644  
Log Likelihood  -1962.3489  \( \chi^2 = 241.49 \) (p < .0000)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Furthering Democracy</th>
<th>American Exceptionalism</th>
<th>Supply Side</th>
<th>Keynesian Economic Catastrophes</th>
<th>Sine Qua Non</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Rhetoric Honeymoon Period Approval Ratings Recession</td>
<td>( .5557^{**} ) (.2364) ( 1.091^{<strong><strong>} ) (.1918) ( 1.415^{</strong></strong>} ) (.2552) ( 1.232^{****} ) (.3030)</td>
<td>( 1.430^{<strong><strong>} ) (.4039) ( 4.038^{</strong></strong>} ) (1.037)</td>
<td>( -0.0217^{<em><strong>} ) (.0080) ( -0.0141^{</strong>} ) (.0069) ( -0.0829^{</em>**} ) (.0317)</td>
<td>( -0.8014^{***} ) (.3145)</td>
<td>( 0.5282^{<em><strong>} ) (.2034) ( 0.5429^{</strong></em>} ) (.1819) ( 0.5985^{<strong>} ) (.2515) ( 1.403^{*} ) (.7492) ( 0.6670^{</strong>} ) (.2950)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Major Foreign Conflict Lame Duck President Major Speeches Divided Government | \( .6814^{***} \) (.2499) | \( 0.6984^{**} \) (.3206) | \( 1.985^{****} \) (.3469) \( 2.112^{****} \) (.3319) \( 0.8772^{**} \) (.4043) | \( 0.7066^{****} \) (.2202) \( 0.4514^{**} \) (.1931) |

\( ^*p < .1 \)  \( ^{**}p < .05 \)  \( ^{***}p < .01 \)  \( ^{****}p < .001 \)  \( ^{*****}p < .0000 \)
See for specifics. However, the ‘context’ of their speeches can be defined as: geographical location, unemployment rates, inflation rates, audience of the speech, whether the U.S. is at war, etc.

To accommodate the two separate models, I constructed two dependent variables from data that were gathered from the economic rhetoric of Presidents H.S. Truman through B.H. Obama (1946 – 2012). The first dependent variable is dichotomous, wherein “1” represents the presence of any economic framework in the speech and “0” indicates no economic frame in the first model (M1). The second dependent variable is multinomial, wherein “1” is Furthering Democracy, “2” is American Exceptionalism, “3” is Supply Side Economics, “4” is Keynesian Economics, “5” is Economic Catastrophes, and “6” is *Sine Qua Non* statements in the second model (M2) (Boydston, Glazier, & Phillips, 2013; Glazier & Boydston, 2012).

Ensuring reliability in ascertaining the economic frameworks and the tone of the presidential speeches is crucial for my argument. To account for this, I employed standard inter-coder agreement tests on all the variables using roughly 10 percent (160 speeches) of the total economic speeches (1946 – 2012). Only minimal training on how to code the content of presidential speeches according to the codebook and protocol was given; the intercoder reliability occurred on 160 presidential speeches, from a random sample, and identified the same variables for the discussion of the economy. The percentages of agreement on the seven variables ranged from 96.3 percent to 99.4 percent. I also added Scott’s Pi, which corrects for chance agreement, to the analysis to further ensure the reliability was correct (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2005). The results ranged from .81 to .91 on nearly every variable — using alpha levels of .80 or higher as the measure of significant reliability (Krippendorff, 1970). Only one of the 7 variables (the Economic Catastrophe framework) was significantly below the required .80 alpha standard; it measured .66. Given that coders had 98.8 percent agreement on the presence of the Economic Catastrophe framework variable, I think that it is still pertinent to discuss it and include it in the model as though it is an economic framework that presidents use. The problem, however, is that this framework only showed up two different times in the random sample of inter-coder reliability. There were two disagreements. We simply randomly chose which instances to include in the overall sample that was used for the analysis.

For a complete description of the coding of the data, see . For simplicity, I randomly chose 101 economic speeches from President H.S. Truman through President B.H. Obama. Earlier presidents spoke less often about the economy. In order to account for this, if there were 100 or fewer speeches, I coded every mention of the economy from that president. Later presidents, however, discussed the economy much more often than earlier presidents. To account for this, I took 10 percent, plus one, of their total speeches (Lohr, 2010).