Auditioning for the Rhetorical Presidency: Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speeches as "Presidential" Documents

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Scholars have identified various genres of presidential speech and developed interesting and varying arguments about the nature and effectiveness of presidential rhetoric. One area of scholarship that deserves attention is a thorough examination of the content of pre-presidential speeches, specifically presidential nomination acceptance speeches. A candidate's acceptance speech launches the general election campaign and provides each party's nominee with a significant rhetorical opportunity. We examine the nature of the rhetoric used in nomination acceptance speeches given by Democratic and Republican presidential candidates since 1948. During this time period there have been many significant changes in the electoral and institutional landscapes. Nomination acceptance speeches offer a glimpse as to how candidates have chosen to rhetorically respond, or not, to electoral and institutional changes. Did candidates adjust their rhetoric in response to these changes? Specifically, how do candidates present themselves personally, particularly how do they portray their personal biography and partisanship? Did the use of religious rhetoric in acceptance speeches change over time as the Religious Right became more of an electoral force? Finally, as the institution of the presidency changed and the public's expectations of presidents' legislative responsibilities increased it is important to examine the policy substance nominees have chosen to incorporate in these speeches, especially how they claim credit for past policy accomplishments and how they take positions on policy. With this data, we can examine changes that have occurred over time in this form of speech that is unique to the era of the modern presidency. Our results indicate that in some instances, candidates were very adaptive with their rhetorical approach. In response to electoral and institutional changes, candidates begin incorporating more biographical sentences while de-emphasizing partisan references. Republican nominees respond beginning in 1980 by incorporating significantly more religious rhetoric than in the previous time period, however, Democrats did not. Candidates also begin progressively including more policy substance in their speeches by claiming credit for collective accomplishments and ratcheting up the amount of position taking in which they engage. Overall, we find that this genre of speech is a surprisingly adaptable one that has evolved into a speech that is much more "presidential" than it was initially, thus providing each nominee with a chance to audition for the rhetorical presidency.

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Because of the proliferation of primary elections after 1968, today's political party

conventions have come to merely ratify a presidential nominee that has, de facto, often been

known for many months. The conventions, however, still provide a forum to highlight and

promote the parties' respective nominees. Above all, the convention offers a chance to convince

(or, at least begin convincing) the general electorate that it should cast a ballot for the party's

nominee. It sets the thone and theme for the coming general election campaign. A candidate's

nomination acceptance speech signals the launch of the general election campaign and provides

each party's nominee with a significant rhetorical opportunity. Up to this point in the

presidential contest, primarily partisans have been engaged; the general electorate has been

largely absent. From these speeches, the public has an opportunity to assess what kind of

president they think each candidate might be in a way that offers comparability. The form of the

speech is essentially the same, that is, it functions as a genre of speech. The speeches occur

within weeks of each other, in similar settings where the immediate audience is partisans but a

much wider audience is addressed on television and reached through media coverage of the

speech.

We examine the nature of the rhetoric used in nomination acceptance speeches given by

Democratic and Republican presidential nominees since 1948. This is the corpus of comparable

acceptance speeches.[1] During the time period under study, much changed in the electoral

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[1]Franklin Roosevelt was the first nominee to appear in person before his party's convention in 1932 to formally accept the nomination. Before this time period, acceptances were either by formal letter, or a speech given after the convention had concluded. FDR continued this practice in 1936, but not 1940 or 1944, addressing the convention from a remote location for his latter two nominations. The first Republican to appear before his convention to accept the

landscape. For example, the general electorate became less partisan, religious voters began to exert their influence in presidential politics, and presidential campaigns became much more candidate centered. In addition, there was some institutional evolution within the modern presidency; the president was becoming more powerful, and this included the development of the role of chief legislator. Nomination acceptance speeches offer a glimpse as to how candidates have chosen to rhetorically respond, or not, to electoral and institutional changes. As presidential campaigns became more candidate centered, did nominees begin including more biographical narrative? As the general electorate became less partisan, did candidates seek to rally the partisan troops, or appeal to bipartisanship? With the rise of the Religious Right as an electoral force, did candidates begin including more religious rhetoric in an attempt to appeal to this bloc? Did candidates change the way in which they talked about substantive policy issues given the enhanced role the president now played in the legislative process? These questions are explored using content analysis of nomination acceptance speeches that codes for biographical rhetoric, partisan language, religious rhetoric and symbolism, credit claiming, and position taking. As changes manifest themselves in both the electorate and the institution of the presidency, how responsive did candidates prove to be to evolving circumstances? Did candidates adjust their rhetoric? Our results indicate that in some instances, candidates were very adaptive with their rhetorical approach in these speeches. Candidates begin incorporating more biographical sentences while de-emphasizing partisan references. Republican nominees respond beginning in 1980 by incorporating significantly more religious rhetoric than in the previous time period.

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nomination was Thomas Dewey in 1944. Nineteen-forty eight was the first election where, 1) both parties' nominees appeared in person to accept the nomination, and 2) the speeches were televised providing wide dissemination (See Congressional Quarterly 1997; Hamby 2008).

Candidates also begin progressively including more policy substance in their speeches by claiming credit for collective accomplishments and ratcheting up the amount of position taking in which they engage.

The Use of Nomination Acceptance Speeches as Data

This research is developed through the lens of what Jeffrey Tulis (1987) has labeled the rhetorical presidency. Tulis identifies the rhetorical presidency as crystalizing with Woodrow Wilson and continuing to the present day. It is different from earlier presidencies; a rhetorical president appeals directly to the public, thus becoming a popular leader. In the nineteenth century, this mode of address was unseemly for presidents. The Founders did not envision the president as popular leader, and indeed, would have feared such a leader becoming a demagogue. Today, popular appeals are regularly used by presidents to gain support for presidential initiatives in attempts to "go over the heads" of Congress (Kernell 1997). Acceptance speeches as a form of rhetoric are unique to the modern presidency. When Franklin Roosevelt appeared before the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1932 to accept the nomination, he stated,

> The appearance before a National Convention of its nominee for President, to be formally notified of his selection, is unprecedented and unusual, but these are unprecedented and unusual times. I have started out on the tasks that lie ahead by breaking the absurd traditions that the candidate should remain in professed ignorance of what has happened for weeks until he is formally notified of that event many weeks later. My friends, may this be the symbol of my intention to be honest and to avoid all hypocrisy or sham, to avoid all silly shutting of the eyes to the truth in this campaign. You have nominated me and I know it, and I am here to thank you for the honor. Let it also be symbolic that in so doing I broke traditions. Let it be from now on the task of our Party to break foolish traditions. We will break foolish traditions and leave it to the Republican leadership, far more skilled in that art, to break promises (Roosevelt 1932).

Thus, Roosevelt chose a specific change in tradition precisely because it could help him appeal to voters as symbolic of the changes he would bring as president.

Nomination acceptance speeches, which occur only within the era of the rhetorical presidency, can be treated as "presidential" documents in that the presidential candidates are directly appealing to the public to vote for them (much as presidents do when they "go public"). As the rhetorical presidency developed within the institution of the presidency, presidential aspirants also became more active and involved in their own campaigns. In a sense, with these speeches, nominees are auditioning with the public to be the next rhetorical president. Furthermore, our research treats nomination acceptance speeches as a genre of presidential rhetoric (Campbell and Jamieson 1990), that is, as a unique type of rhetoric that standing alone can aid in illuminating aspects of, in this case, presidential aspirants' positioning themselves vis-à-vis the electorate. Political scientists tend to study the rhetorical presidency, while communication scholars tend to study presidential rhetoric. Political scientists are inclined to approach the subject from an institutional angle, while communication scholars mainly approach the subject by way of rhetorical criticism (Medhurst 1996). This research attempts to bridge the divide that often exists between these two scholarly disciplines. Thus, we proceed mainly from the institutional perspective of the rhetorical presidency, but utilize the concept of genres of speech from communication studies to help us shed light on how candidates have rhetorically navigated the electoral environment.

Previous research on nomination acceptance speeches encompasses several scholarly disciplines besides the aforementioned political science and communications. Psychologists have used nomination acceptance speeches to analyze what is called "pessimistic rumination," a

combination of having a pessimistic explanatory style and dwelling on bad news, two psychological variables that are used to predict depression and one's susceptibility to helplessness (Zullow and Seligman 1990). It was found that during the twelve elections Zullow and Seligman analyzed, the candidate who was the most pessimistic in his acceptance speech lost the election in nine instances. Miller and Stiles (1986) used acceptance speeches to examine the degree of familiarity found in acceptance and inaugural speeches. Sociologists have used nomination speeches to examine particular concepts across time, such as the concept of liberty (Easter 2008).

Communication scholars have been active in examining acceptance speeches. Several analyze one particular acceptance speech for narratives and themes (Norvold 1970; Smith 1971; Scheele 1984; Renz 1992; Dearin 1997). Others have approached the genre from a functional perspective by assessing the acclamations, attacks, and defenses candidates employ (Benoit 1999). Still other communication scholars have compared the two candidates' speeches within the same election cycle to assess the way each candidate approached the other (Gustainis and Benoit 1988). The communication scholar whose research is most useful for this examination is Jarvis (2001), who analyzed both the partisan and personal language used by candidates over time and found that partisan language decreased and personal appeals increased. Valley (1988) conducted a largely historical analysis of the Democratic Party's nominees. A serious limitation of this analysis is that it only covered one of the two major parties. In addition, while it documented the various mechanisms that candidates have used historically to accept their party's nomination, the subsequent comparisons over time failed to take into account the extent to which comparing the issues addressed, or the nature of the rhetoric, would differ depending on the form

(letter, later address, or address at the convention). In addition, the dissemination of the speech to the public (through newspaper accounts, radio, or television) can also change the function and nature of the communication.

Political scientists have been less active in examining nomination acceptance speeches than communication scholars. Political scientists will often use other forms of communication with nomination speeches (such as television ads, or with other types of campaign speeches) to address particular questions; political scientists are less likely to utilize acceptance speeches as a genre, the perspective that communication scholars are more likely to use. Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen (2003) utilize acceptance speeches (with television ads) to analyze how candidates approach issues from the perspective of issue ownership; certain issues are "Democratic" ones and others are "Republican" in nature and candidates will use the voters' conception of issue ownership to try and make salient with the public issues on which they hold an advantage. Burden and Sandburg (2003) utilize acceptance speeches (with other campaign rhetoric) to assess how candidates have addressed budgetary issues in their campaigns.

What is missing from much of the literature on nomination acceptance speeches is a consistent treatment of the form of the speech used by candidates from both parties. A second thing missing from much of the literature on nomination acceptance speeches, is the lack of a multi-dimensional analysis of acceptance speeches. Our research begins with 1948 because 1) both parties candidates are accepting the nomination in person at the convention, 2) the acceptance speeches were televised, and 3) 1948 allows us to capture the critical points at which scholars have documented several aspects of electoral change, as well institutional change occurring within the modern presidency. In this way, therefore, we can assess how nominees

have appealed to the fluid electorate in their quest for the dynamic institution of the presidency.

Electoral and Institutional Change

In particular, we are interested in two large scale changes, one electoral and the other institutional, that occur during the period under study and how these changes may have effected nominees' rhetoric. First, we examine whether or not candidates' rhetoric began to reflect the rise of candidate-centered campaigns (Wattenberg 1991), specifically by the inclusion of more personal aspects about the candidate. This includes their use of biography, how they present their partisan identity, as well as their use of religious references and symbolism. Secondly, as presidents came to be seen as "chief legislators" in the twentieth century (Binkley 1956), we examine how nominees present themselves substantively to the electorate by claiming credit for past accomplishments and by taking policy positions on both foreign and domestic policy.

Electoral Change: The Rise of Candidate-Centered Elections and Dealignment

Martin Wattenburg (1991) documented that as parties were declining in the latter half of the twentieth century, there was a rise in candidate-centered presidential campaigns. "[T]he elections of the 1980s mark a critical threshold in the emergence of the candidate-centered era in American electoral politics. This change in focus from parties to candidates is an important historical trend, which has been *gradually taking place* over the last several decades" (1, emphasis added). Thus, because this change has been gradual, we would expect that over the time period under study, we would see secular change occurring in several particular aspects of a nominee's acceptance speech.

First, we expect to see that candidates begin incorporating more references and devoting

more space to their personal biography in their speeches, sentences focusing on themselves as both a candidate, but also as an individual. Secondly, as campaigns were becoming more candidate-centered, they were becoming less partisan-centered. Furthermore, as several researchers have noted, the electorate in the United States began a period of dealignment in the mid-1960s (Norpoth and Rusk 1982; Carmines, McIver, Stimson 1987; Dalton, McAllister, and Wattenberg 2002). During a period of dealignment, voters' ties to political parties weaken. They are more likely to split their tickets, and more voters self-identify as independents rather than partisans. Therefore, as campaigns were becoming more candidate-centered and as dealignment was developing in the American electorate, we expect that candidates over time will de-emphasize their own partisanship in acceptance speeches in order to potentially appeal to nonpartisans and others watching on television with weak party attachments, who become critical in securing general election victories.[2]

Electoral Change: The Rise of the Religious Right

In the 1970s, the block of voters that came to be know as the Religious Right or Christian Right emerged (Fowler and Hertzke 1995; Wilcox 2000). As Wilcox (2000) notes, the newly formed Moral Majority mobilized for Ronald Reagan in 1980 (8). Reagan's Democratic opponent Jimmy Carter was himself a Christian evangelical, and had activated the evangelical vote in 1976 (Brooks and Manza 2005). This block of voters continues to be influential, and while they are most often associated today with the Republican Party, many southern

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[2]Jarvis (2001) has examined both partisan and personal language used in nomination acceptance speeches. However, her measures differ in some important ways from ours which will be detailed in our discussion of methodology.

evangelicals in the 1980s and 1990s, maintained their Democratic Party identification (Wilcox 2000, 7). As the Religious Right developed as an electoral force, we would expect to see candidates of both parties incorporate more religious references in their acceptance speech rhetoric over time. In addition, we also expect that 1980 would be a critical juncture that would potentially affect both parties as the Christian Right became a recognizable, cohesive, and significant voting bloc. We do, however, recognize that Republican nominees after 1980 might be more active than Democratic nominees in including religious rhetoric to attract this growing electoral force, so we also test this hypothesis on the party nominees separately.

Institutional Change: The Development of the Chief Legislator Role

In the twentieth century, presidents came to be known as "chief legislator" in addition to the host of other roles presidents had traditionally played (Wayne 1978; Hoffman and Howard 2006). Previous research on presidential State of the Union Addresses (SUAs) found that "as the chief legislator role developed in the twentieth century, presidents' legislative recommendations in SUAs became more specific" (Hoffman and Howard 2006, 95). It was during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations that Congress began to expect presidentially produced legislative programs (Neustadt 1955). Presidential SUAs became the most prominent and public way for the president to request legislation from Congress and in the process also let the public know the key items of their agenda for the coming year.

We expect that there will be some evolutionary growth, therefore, in the incorporation of policy discussions in acceptance speeches as candidates adapt to institutional changes in the office to which they aspire, as well as to a less partisan electorate. As the audience for

acceptance speeches changed from mostly being partisans in the hall who largely knew the platform and for what the party and candidate stood, to a situation where the speeches were being televised to broader audiences, more and more households owned televisions, and there being less appeal for partisan "red-meat" speeches in an era of dealignment, we expect that nominees will respond by devoting more attention to policy substance in their acceptance speeches. This manifests itself in two ways. First, we would expect nominees to devote more space to claiming credit for past policy accomplishments, which could include both collective (as in the party, state, administration, etc.), as well as individual accomplishments, that aid them in their quest to "sell" themselves as presidential material by showing past effectiveness. In addition, as campaigns became increasingly candidate-centered, we would expect to see a secular growth in individual credit claiming, where the candidate is personally taking credit for accomplishments ("I did x", as opposed to "we did x"). Second, we expect nominees to devote more attention to their statements of future policy, or position-taking, given that they begin to have cause to appeal to voters outside the party. Rather than emphasizing partisan rallying, they will progressively begin to expand their substantive policy rhetoric.

Methodology

We utilize quantitative content analysis for this project, as well as some qualitative analysis of acceptance speeches from 1948-2008. Speeches were quantitatively analyzed along five dimensions: biography, partisanship, religious symbolism, credit claiming, and position taking. Both authors coded each individual speech along these dimensions. Coding was

compared and any discrepancies resolved on a case by case basis.[3] In addition, a qualitative

assessment of partisanship was also conducted.

Both the candidates' use of biography, as well as their use of partisan references are

examined to assess the effects of candidate-centered campaigns on rhetoric. The unit of analysis

for assessing the use of biography was the sentence; sentences in which the nominee talked of his

childhood, upbringing, life story, and background were identified. The percent of the speech

devoted to biographical sentences was then calculated. We expect that over time, as campaigns

become increasingly candidate-centered, there will be a secular increase in candidates' use of

biography.[4] Time is captured by a temporal counter that increases by one every electoral cycle

and OLS regression is used.

To quantitatively gauge the use of partisanship, explicit references to the candidates'

party name (or version of the name e.g., Democrat, Democrats, Democratic) were coded. Other

references to the party (such as "our party," and pronouns such as "we," "us," or "they" where the

referent was clearly the party) were also coded.[5] The unit of analysis is the reference. As party

becomes less important to the general electorate over time, we expect that a candidate will often

seek to de-emphasize his partisan identity by referring less to the party, both explicitly, and more

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[3]Coding criteria are available from the authors.

[4]Jarvis (2001) also researches the effects of candidate-centered elections on acceptance
speech rhetoric, but looked at what was termed "personal appeals" which were first person self-
references, finding that these had somewhat increased over time. We believe that examining the
candidates' use of biography adds another dimension when looking at the effects that campaign-
centered elections may have on acceptance speech rhetoric.

[5]Jarvis (2001) also examined the use of partisan language, but limited her examination to
partisan labels only and did not account for variations of party reference and use of pronouns.

implicitly with his use of pronouns. Again, we expect to see a secular change due to the creeping nature of dealignment and its presence in the electorate. Because partisan tone is very difficult to gauge in a quantitative way, we also utilized qualitative analysis in our attempt to assess the way candidates addressed partisanship over time.

Religious symbolism is captured by coding mentions of a religious deity (God, Lord, Creator, etc.), as well as any religious references utilized, such as Bible verses, and references to things such as saints, prayer, crusades, or religions, etc.[6] The unit of analysis is the reference. We hypothesize that both parties will seek to incorporate more religious references over time as the religious right becomes a cohesive and active voting bloc. In addition, given that 1980 is a significant year in the development of the Christian Right as a recognizable and influential electoral group, we also gauge the effects of 1980 as a critical event, coded as a dummy variable (0 for years 1960-1976, and 1 for years 1980-2008). This is also tested on the two parties' nominees separately.

As the role of chief legislator developed within the institution of the presidency and candidate-centered elections arose, we hypothesize that we will see more inclusion of policy substance over time, both through nominees claiming credit for policy actions, as well as taking positions of future policy actions they advocate. Credit-claiming involves a political actor highlighting accomplishments to claim credit for them (Mayhew 1974). In acceptance speeches, it can serve as a way for candidates to assist voters in making performance evaluations. Sentences in which the candidate claims credit for accomplishments (mutually exclusive of

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[6]Coding dictionary is available from the authors.

biography) were identified and a distinction was made as to whether the candidate was claiming

credit for individual accomplishments or broad, collective accomplishments (such as for the

party, administration, state, or Congress). Political actors may claim credit for broad

accomplishments, such as "we have balanced the federal budget;" credit is claimed for some

collective entity, which in this hypothetical example, could be an administration, a party, or even

Congress. Additionally, this type of rhetoric may also involve one advertising an individual

accomplishment, such as "I have consistently balanced my state's budget." We coded both types

of credit-claiming (individual and collective). The unit of analysis is the sentence and credit

claiming is calculated as a percentage of the total speech. A candidate could choose to claim

extensive credit for accomplishments, but either couch them as "our" accomplishments or "my"

accomplishments. It is, to some degree, a matter of personal rhetorical style how candidates

choose to cast their credit claiming and in an age of candidate-centered elections, one may begin

opting more for the individual level credit claiming. But, it is also a fact that in our system of

government, most of what a political actor does (whether member of Congress, governor, or

president) is usually going to be a collective action, often necessitating the use of a plural

pronoun. For this reason, we look at both collective and individual credit claiming for evidence

of secular growth. However, we do expect that over time, as campaigns become increasingly

candidate-centered, there will be an increase in individual credit-claiming as candidates seek to

demonstrate and highlight their individual effectiveness. We also factor the effect of presidential

incumbency into this model by using a dummy variable (0=nonincumbent, 1=incumbent), as

incumbent presidents will have presidential accomplishments to tout that challengers will not

have, thus giving them an incentive to draw contrasts with their opponent.

The other way in which we examine substantive policy rhetoric is through candidates use of position taking, which candidates engage in to help voters make prospective judgements. Mayhew (1974) defines a legislator's position taking "as the public enunciation of a judgmental statement on anything likely to be of interest to political actors" (61). This activity can also apply to the parties' presidential nominees, who are seeking to become chief legislator. Anytime a candidate takes a position on a policy in his speech, either in support or in opposition, we code it as an incidence of position taking. The unit of analysis is the reference to a policy position.[7] Position taking can be either specific or general and on both foreign and domestic policy. For example, Truman stated, "In the field of labor we needed moderate legislation to promote labor-management harmony, but Congress passed instead that so-called Taft-Hartley Act, which has disrupted labor-management relations and will cause strife and bitterness for years to come if it is not repealed, as the Democratic platform says it ought to be repealed" (1948). This is a rather specific example of position taking; he supports the repeal of Taft-Hartley. A more oblique example of position taking would be McGovern stating in his acceptance speech, "This is also the time to turn away from excessive preoccupation overseas to the rebuilding of our own nation. America must be restored to a proper role in the world" (1972).

Findings

Biography

Figure 1 shows the results of our analysis regarding the percentage of the sentences a candidate devotes to discussing biography in his nomination acceptance speech. A simple visual

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[7]If the nominee took a particular policy position, and then later in the speech repeated the same position, it is coded as one incidence of position taking.

assessment of Figure 1 indicates a progressive movement of nominees' use of biography since 1948. In the six elections before 1972, seven of the twelve nominees included no discussion of their background and/or life story. From 1972 forward, no nominee totally eschews a discussion of his personal biography. It is important to recall that the nomination process candidates went through significantly changed at this juncture. 1972 marks the first time in the modern presidency era that each party had a majority of their delegates selected to their conventions through primaries (Nelson 1996, 201). The reforms of this era are important in the development of candidate-centered presidential elections. From 1972 forward, the path to garnering the nomination was more through party voters, less through party elites. Given that aspirants for the nomination now had to appeal to party voters and introduce themselves to party voters, biography likely made its way into stump speeches during the pre-nomination season after 1968, and carried over into acceptance speeches. As the first column of Table 1 indicates, our regression analysis shows that over time there has been a statistically significant increase in the candidates' use of biography.

(Table 1 and Figure 1 about here)

Partisanship

In an era where both candidate-centered elections and dealignment materialized, we expected to see that candidates would respond by referring to their party less over time in their nomination acceptance speeches. Figure 2 indicates the number of total references each nominee made to their own party in their speeches, through use the party's actual name, as well as other formulations of party reference including pronouns where the referent was the party. We

hypothesized that over time, as partisan ties in the electorate declined, candidates would de-emphasize their party by referring to it less in their acceptance speeches. As the second column of Table 1 indicates, there has been a statistically significant decline in nominees' reference to their own party; for every election cycle, there will be about 2 fewer references in a nominee's speech. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in the 16 election cycles we studied, only three of the eventual winners of the popular vote actually included more references to their party than their opponent.

(Figure 2 about here)

Qualitative Assessment of the Use of Partisanship. As our quantitative results indicate, presidential nominees over time have made significantly fewer references to their own political party in their acceptance speeches. However, there are many aspects about the tone of partisanship in these speeches that are not adequately captured by simple quantitative analysis. Do the parties specifically appeal to independents (directly and indirectly)? Is there evidence of bipartisan language?

References to "independents" first appeared in the 1972 campaign, with both McGovern and Nixon using the term once. It is not, perhaps, surprising that this term first appears in acceptance speeches in 1972, the year which for the first time since being asked in 1952, fully 1/3 of National Election Studies (NES) respondents indicated to the initial question, "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" that they were "independent" (American National Election Studies 2004). However, after 1972, there is only sporadic mention of independents by nominees until 2008. Ford mentions

them twice in 1976, and Reagan (1980) and Mondale (1984) each mention once. They are the last two candidates to specifically mention independents until 2008 when each of the nominees makes two references to this group. Even though independents (including leaners) make up approximately one-third of the electorate during this time period (and in 2000 40%), there is no mention of them by the nominees between 1984 and 2008.

At the beginning of our time series, Truman's 1948 speech stands out. In this speech, Truman never once mentions his opponent's name or refers to him in any way; the speech, however, does repeatedly take to task the Republican 80th Congress. Truman even ends the speech by saying "This country can't afford another Republican Congress" (Truman 1948). Truman pledges to call them back into special session on "turnip day" (July 26th), so that they may enact planks from the Republican platform. It is this tactical masterstroke that enables Truman to subsequently campaign against the "do-nothing Congress." Truman's is most assuredly a partisan speech. Dewey's 1948 speech, while less strident in tone, is also notable as a partisan speech in that he talks of the party and its ideals and certainly doesn't seek to distance himself from the party. Stevenson's 1952 address is very erudite and self-deprecating, but it is in Eisenhower's 1952 speech that we get the first glimpse of candidate-centered things to come; his speech is written to reflect his background and themes of a battle run throughout it. It is, however, surprisingly partisan coming from someone who had previously been viewed apartisanly. In the 1956 election, we see both candidates do virtually all of the standard things candidates now routinely do in this type of speech; this is the first time that both candidates give a speech that includes significant position taking.

In the elections of 1960, 1964, and 1968, only Nixon in 1968 offers a speech that is

unique for its lack of partisan "red meat." While Nixon takes to task the "current

administration," he does so in a way that does not refer specifically to Democrats. Both of

Carter's speeches in 1976 and 1980 stress his connection to the Democratic Party, even as he was

not a traditional party elite and did not campaign as one. It is with Reagan's 1980 speech that

there is a lasting shift away from both parties' partisan tone. Even though Reagan ran a

particularly partisan campaign, he opened his 1980 acceptance speech by reaching out "to every

American, regardless of party affiliation, who is a member of this community of shared values"

(Reagan 1980). Reagan continues his speech using a values-oriented rhetoric to explain his

vision of government emphasizing the fact that he "places trust not in one person or one party,

but in those values that transcend person and parties" (Reagan 1980). Through historical

examples, Reagan reminds his listeners of the current state of America, what it has been, and

what it can be with new leadership and a different policy program. For example, near the end of

his speech, Reagan extols

> Everywhere we have met thousands of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans
> from all economic conditions and walks of life bound together in that community
> of shared values of family, work, neighborhood, peace and freedom. They are
> concerned, yes, but they are not frightened. They are disturbed, but not dismayed.
> They are the kind of men and women Tom Paine had in mind when he
> wrote–during the darkest days of the American Revolution– "We have it in our
> power to begin the world over again" (Reagan 1980).

Even though Reagan's rhetoric emphasizes the "shared values" of all Americans and makes

overtures to those who may not be Republicans, he does, in fact, sprinkle in partisan statements

to remind the public that the Republican Party can better solve the problems of the country.

While Reagan draws a clear distinction between the two major parties, specifically the failures of

Democratic leadership over the past four years, what is most apparent is the fact that he focuses most of his criticism and attacks directly at President Carter, rather than at the larger Democratic Party. Fully 27% of Reagan's sentences are devoted to attacks on his opponent; in our time series this is matched only by Truman's 1948 address in which he attacked, but the attacks were on the Republican Congress (See Figure 3).

(Figure 3 about here)

Bill Clinton is also significant in the way he approached his acceptance speech in 1992. With the introduction of his "New Covenant," Clinton appeared to be almost non-partisan.

> We will build an American community again. The choice we offer is not conservative or liberal. In many ways, it is not even Republican or Democratic. It is different. It is new. And it will work. It will work because it is rooted in the vision and the values of the American people (Clinton 1992).

Much like Reagan, Clinton rooted his appeal in language about American values. We also see Clinton highlight the differences between his opponent and himself. This can be contrasted with 1960, when Kennedy drew distinctions and referenced the *opposition party* specifically when he stated "His party is the party of the past. . . Their platform, made up of left-over Democratic planks, has the courage of our old convictions. Their pledge is a pledge to the status-quo– and today there can be no status quo" (Kennedy 1960). The distinction that Clinton made with his opponent was not partisan, rather it was personal.

> He promised to balance the budget, but he hasn't even tried. In fact, the budgets he has submitted to Congress nearly doubled the debt. Even worse, he wasted billions and reduced our investments in education and jobs. We can do better.

So if you are sick and tired of a government that doesn't work to create jobs, if you're sick and tired of a tax system that's stacked against you, if you're sick and tired of exploding debt and reduced investments in our future, or if, like the great civil rights pioneer Fannie Lou Hamer, you're just plain old sick and tired of being sick and tired , then join us, work with us, win with us, and we can make our country the country it was meant to be. Now, George Bush talks a good game, but he has no game plan to rebuild America, from the cities to the suburbs to the countryside, so that we can compete and win again in the global economy. I do (Clinton 1992).

Gore's 2000 acceptance speech epitomizes our quantitative finding that nominees are de-emphasizing references to their own party over time. Gore does not use his own party's name at all, making only two fairly obscure references to the party. His speech concentrates on presenting himself as a candidate for president and distancing himself from Clinton, despite the fact that the economy was strong, the country was at peace, and he was part of the first Democratic administration to be re-elected since Roosevelt.[8]

In 2008, both Obama and McCain make clear bipartisan references in their speeches. McCain's speech not only separates him from the past 8 years of Republican leadership under George W. Bush, but also highlights his experience and record of working in a bipartisan manner as a Senator.

Instead of rejecting good ideas because we didn't think of them first, let's use the best ideas from both sides. Instead of fighting over who gets the credit, let's try sharing it. This amazing country can do anything we put our minds to. I will ask Democrats and Independents to serve with me (McCain 2008).

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[8]This was a conscious strategy on the part of the Gore campaign, and Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2003) find that the major cause of Gore's underperformance in election models that predicted he would win handily was "his failure to receive a historically normal amount of credit for the performance of the Clinton Administration" (163). His acceptance speech rhetoric encouraged listeners to put the Clinton Administration behind them. This strategy ended up being very detrimental to Gore.

Bipartisanship is presented as part of McCain's governing philosophy and he reminds his

audience of this.

> The constant partisan rancor that stops us from solving these problems isn't a
> cause, it's a symptom. It's what happens when people go to Washington to work
> for themselves and not you. Again and again, I've worked with members of both
> parties to fix problems that need to be fixed. That's how I will govern as President.
> I will reach out my hand to anyone to help me get this country moving again
> (McCain 2008).

Having regained their majority in Congress in the 2006 midterm elections and public

approval for the Bush Administration being at an all time low, it seems as though the timing

would be ripe for a resurgence in partisanship from the Democratic Party's nominee. While

Obama does provide many distinctions between the two parties on policy and past performance,

he calls for a "new way" – a bipartisan effort.

> The challenges we face require tough choices, and Democrats as well as
> Republicans will need to cast off the worn-out ideas and politics of the past. We
> may not agree on abortion, but surely we can agree on reducing the number of
> unwanted pregnancies in this country (Obama 2008).

In addition, he reaches out to all Americans, almost in a manner similar to Reagan in 1980 with

reference to the "shared values" of Americans regardless of party when he states

> The men and women who serve in our battlefields may be Democrats and
> Republicans and Independents, but they have fought together and bled together
> and some died together under the same proud flag. They have not served a Red
> America or a Blue America – they have served the United States of America
> (Obama 2008).

Breaking down the barriers between Democrats and Republicans to focus on policies, ideas, and

not partisanship resonates throughout Obama's speech. He even reminds his audience that during

the primary there were "Republicans who never thought they'd pick up a Democratic ballot, but

did" (Obama 2008).

As party nominees appear before a live partisan audience, it is not surprising that there are

some consistently partisan aspects to all of these speeches, even as they made less reference to

their own party. However, qualitatively, one can see two things. First, beginning with Reagan,

there was more reliance on personal attacks than in earlier speeches. While the speeches have

typically (though not always) included some level of attack on the opponent and his party,

Reagan specifically made attacks personal, and others after him followed. Secondly, appeals to

bipartisanship go in fits and starts. It is not in any way consistent, but largely bound to the

specific circumstances of that election.

Religious Rhetoric

Figure 4 shows the use of religious references by each nominee. We hypothesized that as

the Religious Right began emerging, we would see candidates over time begin incorporating

more religious references in their speeches, and that 1980 would mark a critical juncture which

would serve to distinguish the 1948-76 elections from the 1980-2008 elections in this regard. As

the first column of Table 2 indicates, these expectations are not substantiated by our regression

analysis. Neither the mere progression of time, nor the critical election of 1980 obtain any

significance on the use of religious references by nominees. The fact that there has always been

some minimal level of religious references used in these speeches should be noted, and is likely

why the model did not attain any statistical significance. In further analysis of our data, we also

tested this hypothesis on the two partisan groups separately. As columns two and three of Table 2 indicate, while there is no significance in the Democratic model, the model that tests this hypothesis on just Republican nominees' use of religious rhetoric does show statistical significance for the 1980 intervention variable. There is evidence, therefore, that in 1980 and subsequent elections, Republican nominees did begin including significantly more religious references than they had in the earlier time period from 1948-1976.

(Figure 4 and Table 2 about here)

Policy Substance

Credit Claiming. We expected that nominees over time would, as candidate-centered elections arose and institutional expectations of presidents in the legislative arena increased, begin claiming more credit for past policy accomplishments, both collective ones, as well as individual ones. Figure 5 indicates the percentage of sentences in each nominee's speech devoted to claiming credit for both collective and individual accomplishments. As shown in Table 3, collective credit claiming has significantly increased over time, even when controlling for the effect of incumbent presidents. Individual credit claiming, however, has not increased significantly over time, contrary to our expectations.

(*Figure 5 and Table 3 about here*)

Position Taking. We also examined substantive policy rhetoric through candidates' use of policy mentions in their speeches, expecting this to be increasing over time, as well. Figure 6 depicts the relatively steady growth in the number of policy mentions by nominees and the third column of Table 3 indicated that this is, in fact, a statistically significant growth over time. For every

election cycle, the model indicates that candidates will include almost three more policy references than candidates in the previous cycle.

(Figure 6 about here)

Conclusions

We see evidence over the last 60 years that as the electorate has changed, nominees have begun asking for the general electorate to vote for them in their acceptance speeches based on who they were as individuals and by stressing more substantive policy to indicate what the nominee would do and support if elected. Our quantitative results indicate that as the electorate went through some well-documented changes in the last six decades, presidential nominees adjusted some of their rhetoric in ways that we expected, but not all of our expectations were met.

As elections were becoming more candidate focused and less focused on parties as a whole, nominees have incorporated more and more biographical information in their speeches. At the same time, they also began referring less to their party. They have always addressed a very partisan live audience, but nominees have chosen to begin progressively de-emphasizing references to their party during the era we study. Qualitatively, we see beginning with the 1980 election and Ronald Reagan, attacks which had previously largely been confined to partisan attacks, often became couched in personal tones. As candidates began to stress their own partisanship less, we also see evidence that opponents were attacked more individually, than in a partisan fashion. Appeals to bipartisanship in acceptance speech rhetoric, however, are quite irregular and depend on the specific circumstances of individual election cycles.

Contrary to our expectations, it is not the case that all nominees have significantly increased over time their use of religious references, or even in the 1980 election and subsequently. When, however, Democratic nominees and Republican nominees are separated, there was found to be a statistically significant difference in Republican nominees' use of religious references from the 1948-76 time period to the 1980-2008 time period, indicating that Republican nominees responded to the rise of the Religious Right with their rhetoric once the Moral Majority mobilized for Reagan in 1980.

As the public's expectations of what presidents should do once in office has increased, nominees' rhetoric began to reflect these rising expectations, both by engaging in more credit claiming and more position taking. There has been progressively more collective credit claiming by nominees during our time period. And, while we uncover evidence that nominees reacted to the rise of candidate centered campaigns by stressing their individual story, they did not, however, ramp up their individual credit claiming in a significant way. As for position taking, as the public has come to expect more of presidents and institutionally presidents gained enhanced legislative powers, potential presidents have come to promise more and more by engaging in consecutively more position taking.

What does this tell us about the nomination acceptance speech? While it is of relatively recent vintage, it has proven to be quite adaptable. While there can be no more partisan forum than a party's quadrennial national convention, the speech that the party's nominee now gives is marked by less and less partisanship as we move through election cycles. The speech has also come to be remarkably "presidential." Its adaptability has allowed aspirants to begin exhibiting substantial policy substance, both through credit claiming, and position taking, activities in

which presidents regularly engage (Hoffman and Howard 2006). Thus, with this speech,

nominees are very much aware that they are auditioning for a role that the public can grant them.

As a result, they have come to pattern much of this particular campaign speech on patterns in

presidential speech.

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Table 1

Secular Effects on Nomination Acceptance Speeches, 1948-2008 (OLS Regression Results)

	Biography	*Reference to Own Party*
Intercept	-2.93	33.26
Time	1.18 (.20)***	-1.52 (.54)**
R^2	.54	.21
Durbin-Watson	1.97	1.79

**p ≤ .01 (one-tailed)

***p ≤ .001 (one-tailed)

N = 32, standard errors in parentheses, all VIFs < 5.

Table 2

Secular and Punctuated Effects on Religious References in Nomination Acceptance Speeches, 1948-2008 (OLS Regression Results)

	All Religious References	*Religious References: Democrats*	*Religious References: Republicans*
Intercept	7.41	5.36	9.45
Time	.05 (.32)	.25 (.43)	-.16 (.35)
Post 1976	2.49 (2.98)	-1.00 (3.95)	5.99 (3.25)*
R^2	.12	.04	.41
Durbin-Watson	2.52	2.45	2.20
N	32	16	16

*$p \leq .05$ (one-tailed)

**$p \leq .01$ (one-tailed)

***$p \leq .001$ (one-tailed)

Standard errors in parentheses, all VIFs < 5.

Table 3

Secular Effects on Policy Substance in Nomination Acceptance Speeches, 1948-2008 (OLS Regression Results)

	Collective Credit Claiming	*Individual Credit Claiming*	*Position Taking*
Intercept	.28	-.12	-.74
Time	.17 (.10)*	.15(.11)	2.86(.38)***
Incumbency	9.70 (.98)***	3.14 (1.12)**	
R^2	.77	.25	.67
Durbin-Watson	2.30	1.49	2.25

*$p \leq .05$ (one-tailed)

**$p \leq .01$ (one-tailed)

***$p \leq .001$ (one-tailed)

N = 32, standard errors in parentheses, all VIFs < 5.

Figure 1: Use of Biography in Acceptance Speeches, 1948-2008
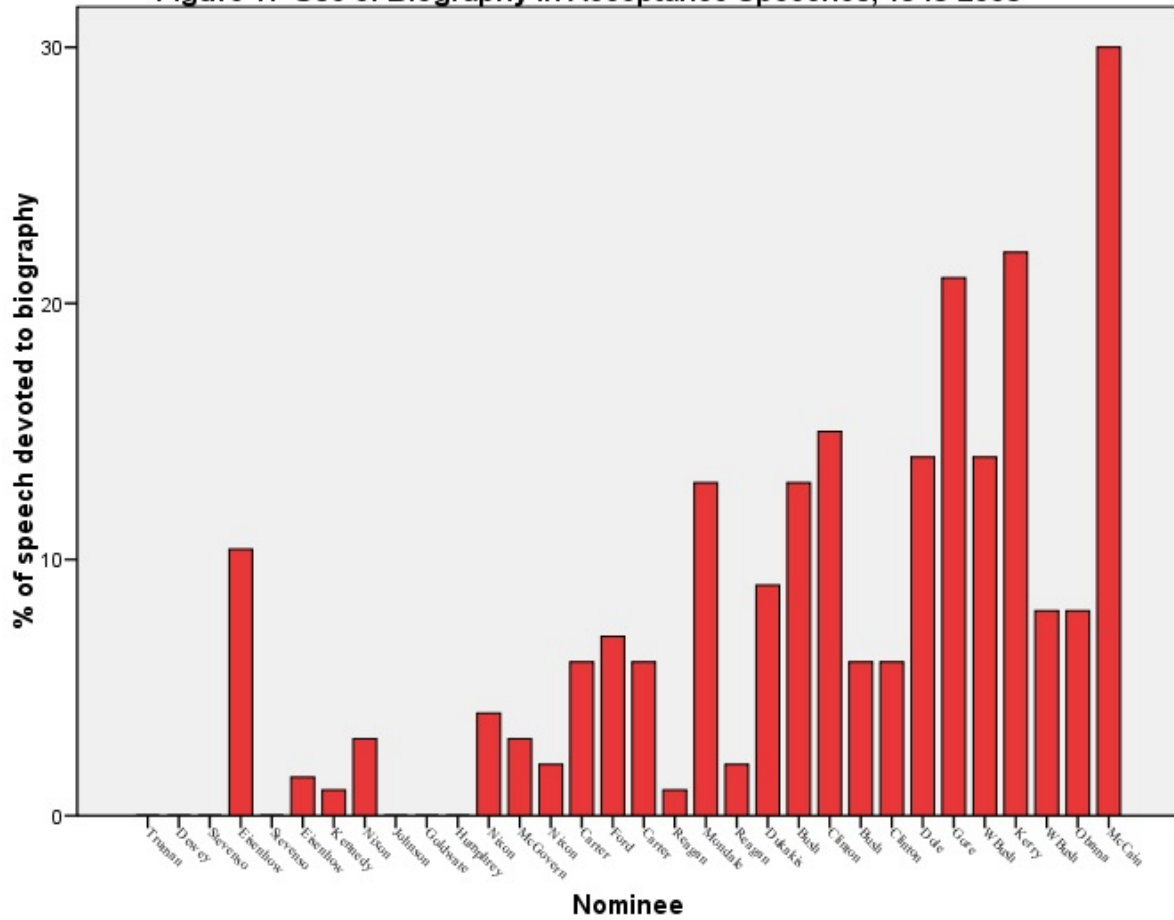
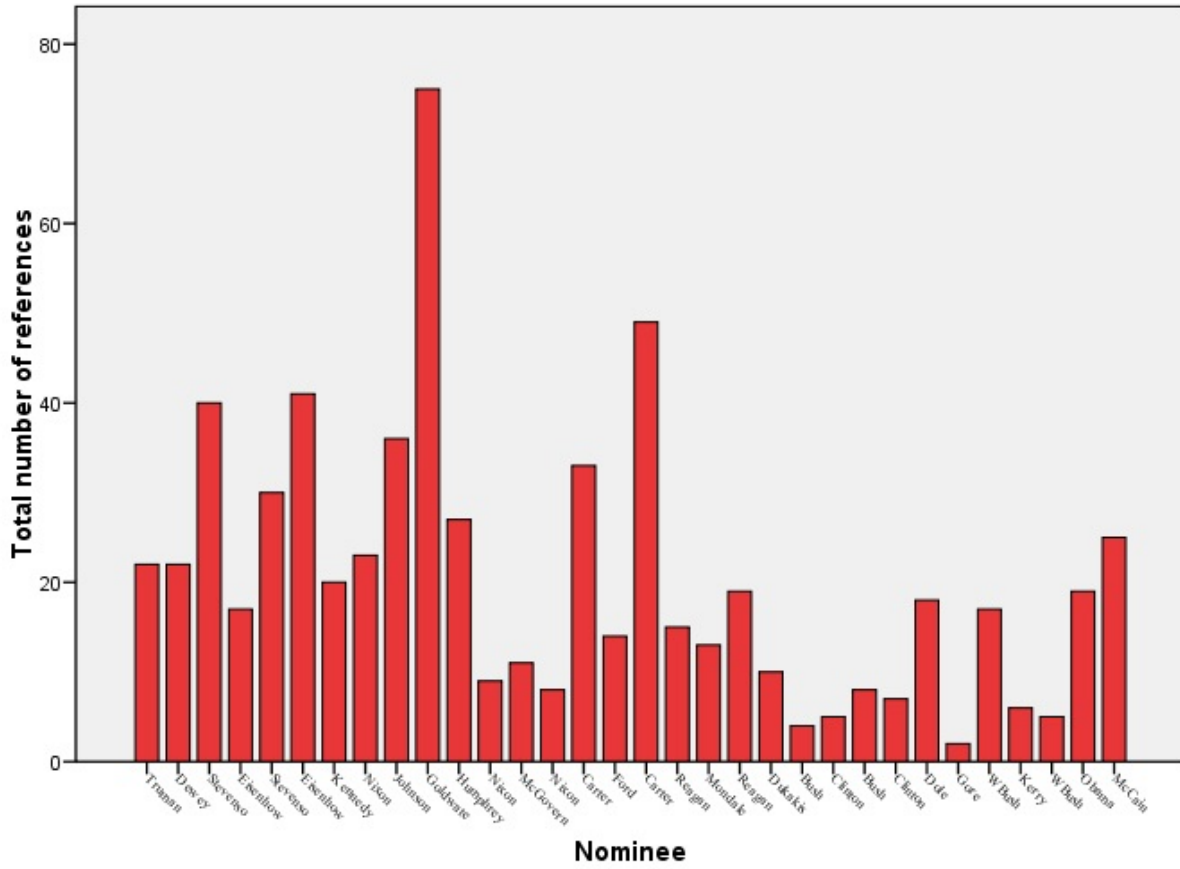Figure 2: References to Own Party in Acceptance Speeches, 1948-2008

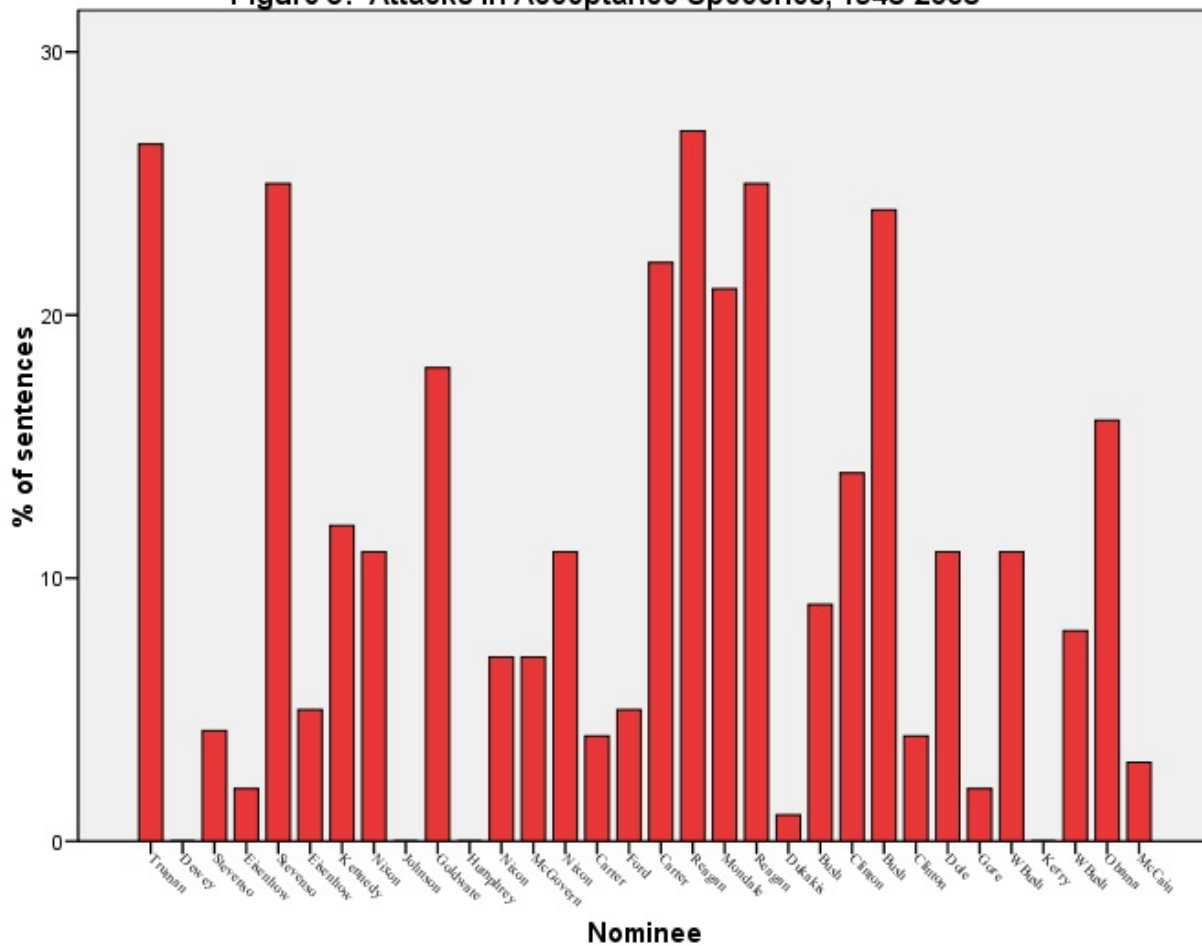Figure 3: Attacks in Acceptance Speeches, 1948-2008

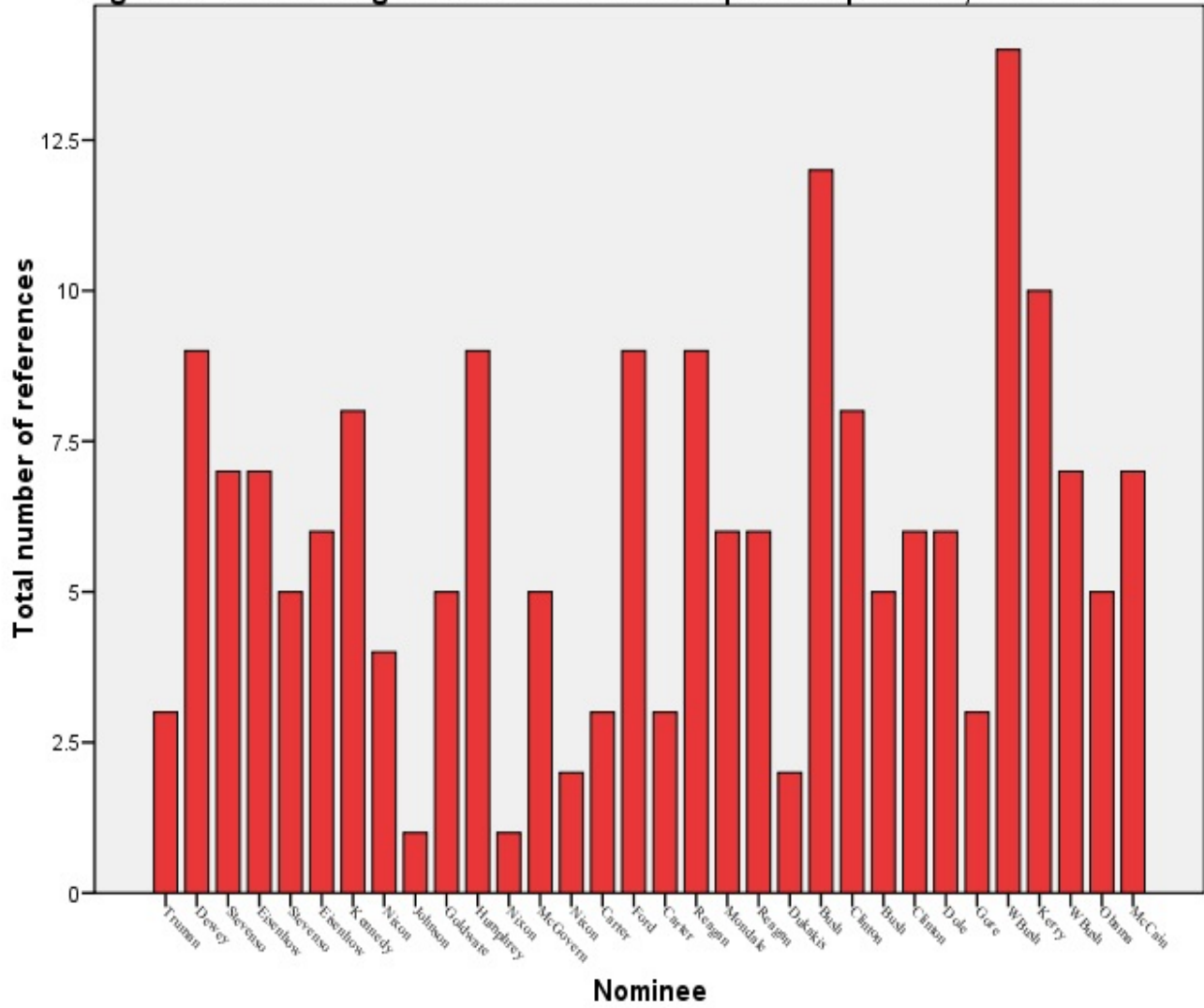Figure 4: Use of Religious References in Acceptance Speeches, 1948-2008

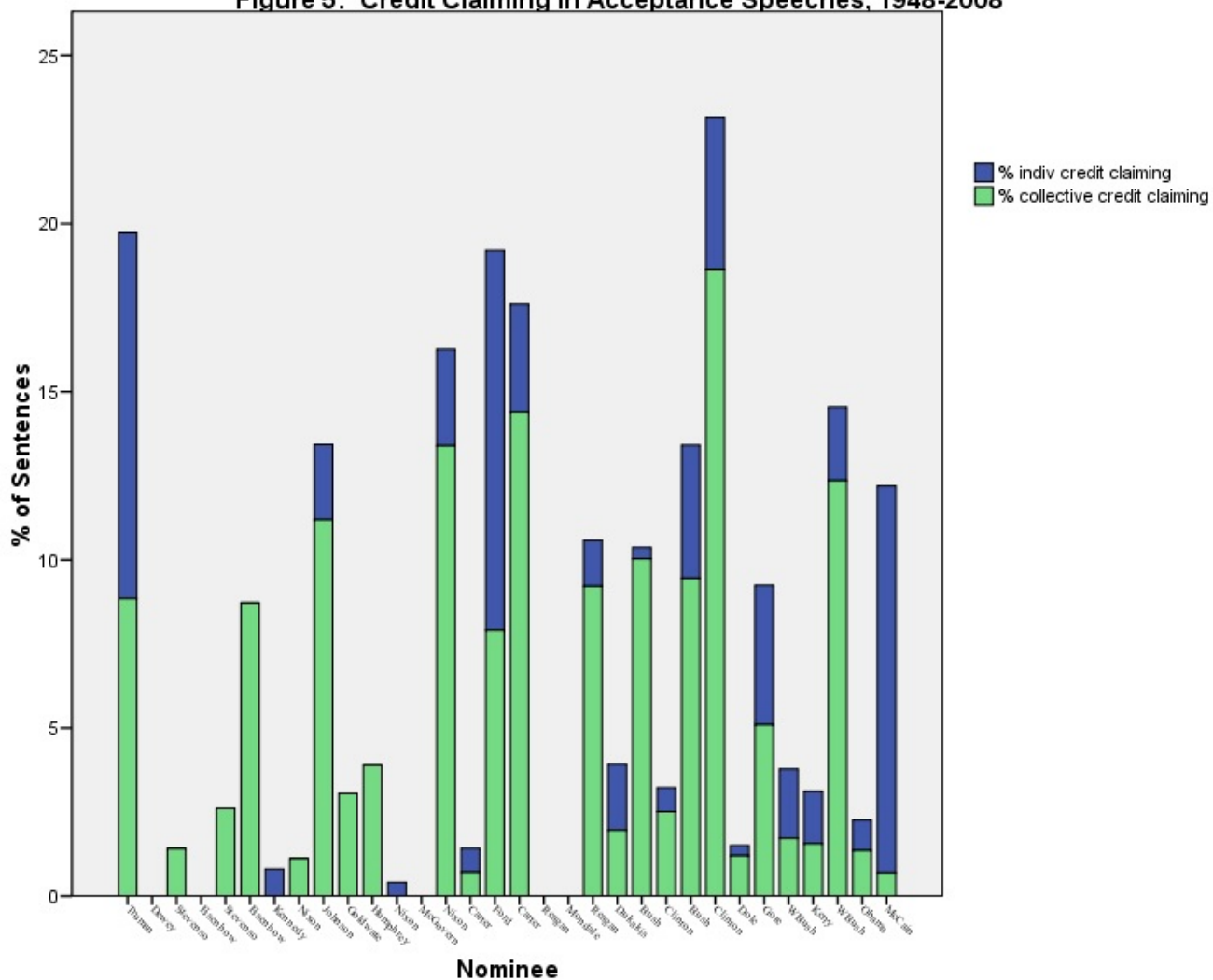Figure 5: Credit Claiming in Acceptance Speeches, 1948-2008

Figure 6: References to Policy in Acceptance Speeches, 1948-2008