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Explaining Presidential Approval: Persona Versus "Real World" Explanations

A dissertation submitted to the

Division of Research and Advanced Studies of the University of Cincinnati

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In the Department of Political Science
of the College of Arts and Sciences

2004

by

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ABSTRACT

Despite providing numerous plausible explanations of presidential approval, particularly how it changes over time, the research literature has significant deficiencies. These include the following: (1) over-reliance on aggregate-level research; (2) lack of a comprehensive model to determine which factors best explain presidential approval; (3) assumption of constancy in the meaning of the presidential approval question, such that the potential for change in approval being merely a reflection of change in the meaning of the presidential approval question has not been seriously considered; and (4) the assumption that measures of perceptions of the president as a person and his job performance are just two sides of the same coin, resulting in little consideration of perceptions of presidential persona as a key factor in explaining presidential approval. This dissertation addresses these deficiencies.

By using data from National Election Studies in 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000, we test, directly and indirectly, a comprehensive model of approval at the individual level, including perceptions of economic and foreign relations performance, party identification, socio-demographics, and perception of presidential persona. Our model essentially combines some of the key conventional explanations with one rival explanation. Tests of it show that the most important explanation of presidential approval is one's perception of presidential persona. This holds true on overall approval as well as approval of the president's handling of economics and foreign relations. We probed the matter further, and found change in presidential approval to vary rather consistently with change in perception of presidential persona, as measured by the favorability rating.

In addition to the tests of our model, we considered a second rival explanation of presidential approval, change in the meaning of the presidential approval question. By presenting indirect evidence, we demonstrate the likelihood of change in approval being merely a reflection of change in the meaning of the approval question, which alters the ingredients of evaluation of the president. This dissertation makes a key contribution to our understanding of presidential approval by determining more conclusively what is the best explanation of approval, and providing strong evidence, both direct and indirect, supporting our rival explanations of presidential approval.

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CHAPTER I

UNDERSTANDING PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL

<u>Introduction</u>

If Neustadt (1990) is correct in his claim that the president's power is primarily limited to his "power to persuade," then the increased focus on presidential approval since the 1970's is completely understandable. The president relies on persuasion to have Congress pass his legislative agenda, and his persuasive power largely depends on his popularity. Popular presidents are potentially more successful than unpopular ones in having Congress pass their agendas, as members of Congress are likely to view thwarting a popular president's plans as potentially more damaging to their electoral chances than thwarting the plans of an unpopular president.

There is clearly a correlation between approval ratings and the president's ability to persuade, so that understanding presidential approval is central to understanding American politics. Since the 1970's, an impressive body of literature examining explanations of presidential approval, particularly how it changes over time, has sprung up. In chapter two, we present an exhaustive review of this literature, while here we simply summarize its most prominent explanations of presidential approval in order to place this dissertation in context.

<u>CONVENTIONAL EXPLANATIONS OF PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL</u>

We refer to the explanations of presidential approval found in the literature as conventional explanations, as they represent the conventional wisdom on presidential approval. Such explanations are categorized as time, perception of real-world events, psychological, or media coverage. We begin our discussion with time.

Time-based Explanations

Time represents the focus of early research on presidential approval, beginning with Mueller's (1970) "coalition of minorities" theory, and Stimson's (1976) "disillusionments and expectations" model. Presidents typically witness a downward trend in their approval over the course of time, which is attributed to a number of factors, including the following: (1) increased alienation among supporters due to the president's decisions (Mueller, 1970); (2) the president's inability to live up to expectations (Stimson, 1976; Brace and Hinckley, 1991); (3) the president's steep learning curve at the beginning of his term (Neustadt, 1990; Light, 1991); (4) an increase in the president's effectiveness accompanied by a decrease in his influence (Light, 1991); and a product life cycle where the public's relationship with the president parallels the pattern of declines and upturns evidenced in the public's relationship with consumer products (Eisenstein and Witting, 2000). Time influences approval in other ways, as prior approval affects current approval (Brody and Page, 1975; Kernell, 1978). Despite the continued existence of time-based explanations of presidential approval, such explanations have fallen under rather intense criticism.

This was particularly true of Mueller's (1970) "coalition of minorities" theory and Stimson's (1976) "disillusionments and expectations" model. Their harshest critic was Kernell (1978), who argued that short-term fluctuations in popularity were largely determined by contemporary events and conditions, as the public's perception of them forms the basis for approval, which is withdrawn when things in society are not going the way the public senses they should. Kernell's (1978) work signaled a shift from time-based explanations of presidential approval to explanations based on perceptions of the

real world, with the economy, rally events, wars, scandals, and political drama receiving the most attention. Research on the relative influence of the real-world events explanations shows that foreign and economic influences are the most dominant, with attitudes on foreign matters more significant during foreign crises, and attitudes on economic matters more significant during economic crises.

Perceptions of Real-World Events Explanations

Economic explanations of presidential approval include economic indicators, personal versus sociotropic evaluations, prospective versus retrospective evaluations, and responsibility for economic conditions. Taken as a whole, the seeming consensus of the literature is that economic explanations provide the best explanation of approval.

The effect of **economic indicators** on presidential approval is open to debate. Some research found a negative effect of unemployment on approval,[1] while other research found unemployment to have little effect,[2] or at least a less effect than inflation.[3] Furthermore, some scholars found a strong relationship between inflation and approval,[4] while others found little relation between the two. Despite the uncertainty, a misery index combining inflation and unemployment was a significant determinant of approval.[5]

The debate over **prospective versus retrospective evaluations** revolves around whether the public bases its evaluation of the president on perceptions of future economic performance, prospective or sophisticated evaluations, or solely on past economic performance, retrospective or naïve evaluations. The answer to the debate is largely

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[1] See Mueller (1970) and Kenski (1977b)
[2] See Stimson (1976a), Kenski (1977a), and Kernell (1978)
[3] See Shienbaum and Shienbaum (1982), MacKuen (1983), and Lau and Sears (1981)
[4] See Kenski (1977a,c)
[5] See Hinckley (1991, 1993)

unsettled. While certain research found prospective evaluations to be more important,[6] other research found retrospective evaluations explained more about approval, and retrospective evaluations informed prospective evaluations.[7] Complicating matters, other research has shown that evaluations of the president are based on both retrospective and prospective evaluations of the economy.[8]

The debate over **personal versus sociotropic evaluations** revolves around whether the public evaluates the president on the basis of their own financial situation, or the performance of the nation's economy as a whole. As with the debate between retrospective and prospective evaluations, the answer is unclear. While certain research, particularly at the aggregate level, indicates that personal evaluations are more important, other research, particularly at the individual level, shows that sociotropic evaluations are more important.[9] Other research found matters other than either personal or sociotropic evaluations to be more important relative to economic evaluations. These include presidential management of the economy, group concerns about the economy, and media coverage of national problems.[10]

The final influence of the economy on approval is when the public assigns to the president **responsibility for economic conditions.** Typically, the president is held responsible for inflation more so than unemployment[11], and for personal economic conditions only when they have declined, and only by those who believe personal

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[6] See Chappell (1983), Chappell and Keech (1985), and MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson (1992 and 96)
[7] See Norpoth (1996) and Norpoth and Haller (1994)
[8] See Clarke, Rapkin, and Stewart (1994)
[9] See Kinder and Kiewiet (1979, 1981), Kinder (1981), Lau and Sears (1981), Monroe (1984), and Brody (1991)
[10] See Edwards (1983), Conover (1985), and Kernell (1986), respectively
[11] See Lau and Sears (1981)

economic problems are attributable to societal rather than individual causes.[12] Furthermore, responsibility for economic conditions is influenced by the extent to which economic problems are caused by the president versus external factors, the degree of control that presidents are felt to have over the economy, and impressions of the ability of past presidents to solve economic problems.[13]

Rally Events explain presidential approval in the following manner: specific, dramatic, and sharply focused international events (Mueller, 1970, 1973) tend to lead to increases in presidential approval, which at times can be rather dramatic. However, approval ratings return to pre-rally levels in a relatively short period of time, with those outside the president's party returning to pre-rally levels of approval more quickly than members of the president's party. Finally, while media coverage of rally-events affects presidential approval, its effect is debated. Certain research shows media coverage leading to decreases in support for the president, while other research shows media coverage having a positive influence on approval.

War is distinct from rally events, and, unlike them, generally tends to damage presidential approval, although Stimson (1976a) found essentially no effect of war on popularity. War's influence on presidential approval is seen in other ways as well, including its likelihood influencing foreign policy based evaluations of the president, the president's handling of it affecting his approval, and its effect on approval differing between both partisan and occupational groups.[14]

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[12] See Kinder (1981), Edwards (1983), Abramowitz, Lanoue, and Ramesh (1988), and Feldman (1982)
[13] See Peffley and Williams (1985)
[14] See Hurwitz and Peffley (1987), Edwards (1983), and Hibbs (1982), respectively.

Scandal, like war, generally damages presidential approval, and research has shown that how the president handles it affects approval more than economic performance does (Norpoth, 1984). However, members of the president's party were more supportive of their embroiled president than others (Hibbs, 1982), and support was more sensitive to scandal among Republicans than Democrats (Monroe, 1984). Finally, Clinton was not hurt by the Lewinsky scandal because the public judged his handling of his job on the usual suspects of the economy and foreign affairs, both of which Clinton was viewed as handling well, rather than on its perception of him as a person, which evidenced significant drops (Brody, 1998).

Political Drama explains presidential approval in the following manner: televised speeches and other broadcast statements, foreign travel, and presidentially relevant events may be used by the president, although perhaps in limited ways, to boost approval or in response to prior popularity that allows for more leeway in acting. Its influence relative to other explanations is debated, as MacKuen (1983) found it to be as important as economic conditions in predicting approval, while Ostrom and Simon (1989) and Marra, Ostrom and Simon (1990) found that the economy and war were better predictors of approval than political drama.

Psychological Explanations

These explanations of presidential approval include partisanship and views of the president as a person, i.e. persona explanations.[15]

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[15] Political socialization and its link with presidential approval is also a psychological explanation. However, it is a relatively minor matter and so we only discuss it in the literature review in chapter two.

Partisanship explanations assert that members of the president's party are more likely to approve than members of the out-party, as evidenced by higher initial levels of support by members of the president's party, and a quicker rate of decline in support by members of the out-party. Furthermore, partisan support for the president extends beyond overall approval to specific policy areas, and Republicans and Democrats hold different political and economic interests by which evaluations of the president are made.

Persona explanations have two sources: social psychology research and certain studies of presidential approval. Social psychology research found that we tend to approve of those who have similar attitudes, values, personalities, and interests; are pleasant, associated with pleasant experiences, or can reward us somehow; and are physically attractive. Essentially then, we evaluate others based on the type of people they are, and social psychology research indicates that we evaluate our political leaders, including the president, in much the same manner. While perceptions of presidential persona should influence evaluations of the president, only a relatively small number of studies within the approval literature actually explore this matter. Those that do, generate "persona" explanations centering on assessments of the president's character, one's personal affect toward the president, and favorability/likeability ratings of the president.

Character, particularly competence, leadership, integrity, and empathy, exerts a powerful influence on presidential approval, as the public tends to simplify the complex political world by evaluating the president on knowledge of his character rather than his policy-making. Personal affect toward the president may influence approval, but the evidence is rather inconclusive, with a fair amount of research finding no evidence of the influence of personal affect on presidential approval. Favorability and approval have

been shown to be separate measures, and although there are discrepancies, favorability has been shown to influence approval. Specifically, rises in favorability tend to accompany rises in approval, and approvers consistently tend to view the president favorably while disapprovers tend to view the president unfavorably. Although this link exists, Duggan (1985) showed that favorability was not enough for a president to enjoy high approval ratings, as the public evaluates the president based on his policy positions, regardless of any favorable impressions of the president it may have.

Media Coverage Explanations

The gist of media coverage-based explanations of approval is that the public evaluates the president on the basis of media reports, and that the nature of those evaluations, whether positive or negative, depends on the nature of the media coverage, whether good or bad. Furthermore, although the president's ability to manipulate the media into reporting only good news has been sharply curtailed, he is still able to control media access to some extent, and is able to use the media to his benefit. Of the various media-based explanations of approval, the most important is priming.

Priming occurs when mental constructs are activated in a way that influences the evaluation of other concepts or ideas. Numerous studies have demonstrated that exposure to certain news stories as opposed to others results in different bases of presidential evaluations, and change in the focus of media attention over time results in change in the ingredients of presidential evaluations.[16] Media coverage also allows respondents to make a sociotropic judgment of the president that they otherwise might not have made at the personal level (Mutz, 1992, 1994). Finally, priming affects

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[16] See, for example, Iyengar, et al. (1982, 1984), Pan and Kosicki (1997), and Krosnick and Brannon (1993)

knowledgeable citizens who trust the media as a reliable source of information, not just victims of media manipulation (Miller and Krosnick, 2000).

Edwards III et al. (1995) found that priming may alert the public to what is salient at a given time, and that salience of an issue is necessary for it to be used in presidential evaluations. When presidential evaluations are based on the object(s) of media attention, we have evidence of issue-salience being the underlying factor in those evaluations. Change, in which issues are salient at any given time, should trigger change in the basis of presidential evaluation. Finally, an interesting twist on priming is Zaller's (1992) RAS model, which asserts that the influence of media messages on individual level attitudes is direct rather than indirect, but is moderated by the nature of the information environment and the individual's exposure and resistance to persuasive messages.

RIVAL EXPLANATIONS OF PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL

The above discussion summarized the most prominent explanations of presidential approval put forth in the literature. However, two explanations of approval are notorious for their relative absence. The first of these is perceptions of the president as a person. The second is change in the meaning of the standard presidential approval question. Since these explanations are essentially not considered in the approval literature, we present them here as rival explanations of presidential approval. The potential for both of these explanations to be valid explanations of presidential approval stems from research done outside the field of political science generally, and presidential approval studies specifically, by social psychologists and scholars of social survey research. We elaborate on these rival explanations below.

Rival Explanation I: Presidential Persona

While a number of explanations of presidential approval exist in the literature, there appears to be an over-reliance on real-world events explanations, particularly the economy. However, the economy may not be as strong an explanation of presidential approval as the literature would suggest. In fact, Wert (1998) discovered that during his first administration, Clinton did not enjoy as high an approval rating as would have been expected based on the strength of the economy. The problem with economic explanations of approval, as well as other real-world explanations, is that they make unrealistic assumptions about the public's knowledge of what is going on in the policy-making world of the presidency. Considerable research in political science points to the fact that the public is not always that knowledgeable about such matters. As a result, people often substitute their perception of the president as a person, his persona, for policy behavior when evaluating the president's "handling of his job." This assertion is supported by Kinder's (1986) finding that, "a president is judged partly by the sort of person he seems to be (p.234)." This is so because "judgments of character offer citizens a familiar and convenient way to manage the avalanche of information made available to them each day about public affairs (p.235)." Essentially, it is easier for the public to assess the president on matters of character than on the specifics of policy-making.

Preceding Kinder's (1986) work, Lane (1978) discussed the matter of leadership selection, and asserted that people seek in leaders the same qualities they seek in friends, specifically similar values and empathy. If we seek in political leaders the same traits we seek in friends, then by extension we should evaluate our political leaders on the same bases by which we evaluate "potential" friends, namely on the type of person they are.

Clearly, then, there is strong indication that evaluations of the president are often made on the basis of the public's perception of his persona. As a result, the literature should be replete with explanations of presidential approval based on how the public views the president's persona. However, with the exception of a handful of findings suggesting the public evaluates the president on the basis of his character, this generally is not the case.

Thus, we present here our first rival explanation of presidential approval, perception of presidential persona. Perception of presidential persona is an attitude consisting of cognitive and affective components working together to drive a behavioral component, [17] depicted below in figure 1.1. A comprehensive view of the role perception of presidential persona plays in influencing presidential approval must consider both the

FIGURE 1.1: Conceptual Model of Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Components of Attitudes Toward the President

AFFECTIVE

Positive-Negative Feelings

e.g., Likes/Dislikes as Person
Warm – Cold Reactions

COGNITIVE

Beliefs about Character Traits,
Values of President

Beliefs about President's
Policies and Issue Positions

BEHAVIORAL

Predisposition to
Approve or
Disapprove of
President's Job
Performance

Vote For or Against
President

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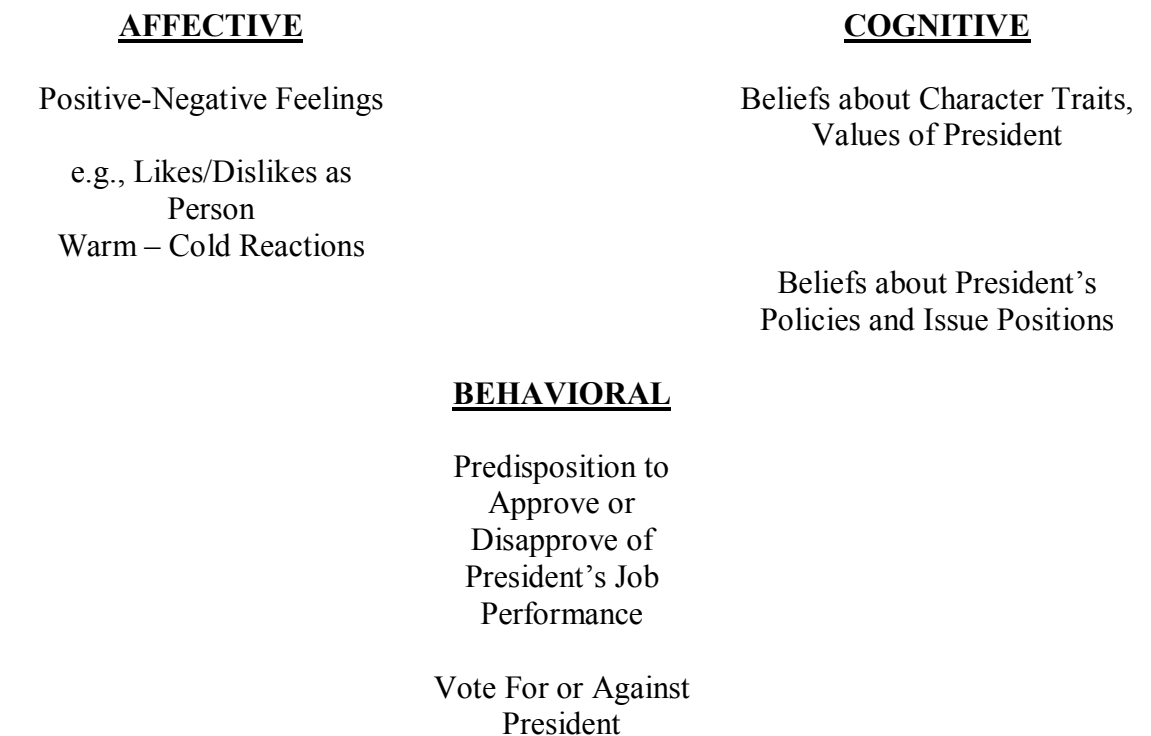
[17] See Erikson et al. (1991) and Glynn (1999)

affective and cognitive components. Our measure of presidential persona does this, as it includes character assessments (cognitive component), as well ratings of respondents' feelings toward the president, and the feelings elicited by the president (affective component). This first rival explanation of presidential approval asserts that perception of presidential persona is the most important explanation of approval.

Rival Explanation II: Meaning of the Standard Approval Question

While the literature does include a few studies relative to the connection between perception of the president as a person and presidential approval, it is completely devoid of any studies of change in the meaning of the presidential approval question as an explanation of change in approval. The likely cause of this omission is the assumption of scholars that the meaning of the presidential approval question is constant. In other words, respondents interpret the approval question in the same manner across time. However, this assumption is faulty, and we identify it as the second of three research problems discussed later in this chapter. Here, we discuss why this assumption is faulty in order to provide the rationale for our second rival explanation of presidential approval: change in the meaning of the presidential approval question over time.

Students of communications, psychology, and language have explored the issue of meaning generally. The findings from these fields demonstrate that not all people attribute the same meaning to a given word or phrase, and even single meanings may be expressed in multiple ways.[18] Haney (1979), in discussing the concept of bypassing, indicates that receivers' missing of the meaning of senders' messages is largely the result of the assumption that "words mean the same to the other person as they do to me (p.

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[18] See Fussell and Kreuz (1998) and Haney (1979)

289)." This assumption is based on two fallacies: (1) all words have only one meaning, and (2) words have meanings. According to Haney (1979), words do not have meanings in and of themselves, but are given meaning by the people that use them. However, not all people will assign the same meaning to the same word or phrase, as highlighted by the concept of the frame of reference, defined as "a system of attitudes and values which provide a standard against which actions, ideas, and results are judged and which to some extent controls or directs action and expression (Wolman, 1973)." Haney (1979) sees the frame of reference as being shaped by one's internal perceptions of reality. Because frames of reference are so individual in nature, they are often not the same for all people. If different people have different frames of reference for a given word or phrase, they will likely assign different meanings to that word or phrase.

The exploration of the problem of differences in meaning is not confined to students of communications, psychology, and language. Students of social survey research have also explored the issue relative to questionnaire design. Their findings further demonstrate that words and phrases do not have common meanings, thus posing problems for survey researchers in the design of questionnaires, and interpretations of the responses generated by those questionnaires. First, Hovde (1936) and Belson (1986) found evidence of respondents often failing to understand questions as intended, which is essentially what Haney (1986) referred to as bypassing. Second, a number of scholars[19] found variance in the meaning assigned to survey questions and their components, consistent with Haney's (1986) findings that terms do not have mono-usage, i.e. mean the same thing to all people, and that the meaning of words is assigned by the user. Not only

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[19] See Converse and Presser (1986), Belson (1981), Cantrill (1944), Campbell (1945), and Foddy (1993)

is there variance in the meaning of more general terms where it might be more expected, as discussed by Converse and Presser (1986), but also variance in meaning is evidenced with more common terms such as "usually," as found by Belson (1981). Furthermore, Foddy (1993) identifies the lack of clear empirical referents as leading to variance in meaning, which is often a problem with abstract terms, including "approve" and "disapprove." When a large number of meanings that could be attached to a given term exist, the lack of consensus on its meaning renders it essentially meaningless, leading Payne (1951) to conclude that one might as well substitute the word "blab" in its place.

Since the meaning of terms within survey questions, and thus the meaning of entire questions, is often open to interpretation, the next task is to discuss how respondents assign meaning to them. Foddy (1993) asserts that respondents seek contextual clues in order to assign meaning to questions. The media often provide key contextual clues through the effect of priming. Priming, as well as Zaller's (1992) related RAS model, tells us that respondents answer survey questions on the basis of what first comes to mind, in other words what is most accessible in memory. This is often influenced by the current focus of media attention, whereby respondents are "primed" to think about that particular issue. As a result, it provides the contextual clue respondents use to assign meaning to the presidential approval question, which in turn sets the parameters for the ingredients of evaluation of the president at that time. The focus of media attention shifts to other issues at other points in time, providing different contextual clues to respondents. This changes the meaning of the presidential approval question, and in turn the ingredients of presidential evaluation.

While priming asserts that respondents base their answers to survey questions on what first comes to mind, Hastie (1986) demonstrates that people access memory in different ways. Thus, what may be triggered in the memory of one individual at a given point in time may be different from what is triggered in the memory of another individual at that same point in time, even if media attention is focused on the same issue. Thus, we have further potential for respondents interpreting the presidential approval question differently, thereby compounding the problem, and evidencing the likelihood of respondents being exposed to different contextual clues used to assign meaning to a particular term or survey question. This leads to a serious measurement problem when considering responses to a given question, in this case the presidential approval question.

According to Foddy (1993), "if respondents typically search for contextual clues to help them interpret a question, different respondents may attend to different clues so that they end up with quite different interpretations of the question. When this happens, it makes little sense for the researcher to compare different respondents' answers with one another, since the different answers are, in essence, answers to different questions (p. 21)." This illustrates that there is both an explicit and implicit wording to survey questions. The explicit wording refers to the actual words that are included in the question. The implicit wording refers to the meaning the question takes on at various points in time. Scholars of survey research are quick to point out that question wording is a key issue, where change in the wording of questions typically yields change in the responses to that question. Essentially, we are no longer asking the same question. However, this assertion has apparently been applied only to the explicit wording of a question and not the implicit wording. As Foddy (1993) points out, if the meaning of a

question is not the same, then the question is really not the same. However, researchers continue to compare responses to questions that often have different meanings, and are thereby different questions, which opens up their work to serious measurement error.

In regard to the presidential approval question, if its implicit wording is "in light of the current downturn in the economy, do you approve or disapprove of the way (incumbent) is handling his job as president?" at one point in time, then at another point in time is "in light of how he has responded to recent security threats to our country, do you approve or disapprove of the way (incumbent) is handling his job as president?" the implicit wording of the question has changed, and so we really have two different questions. However, because the explicit wording of the presidential approval question never changed from "do you approve or disapprove of the way (incumbent) is handling his job as president?" scholars do not attribute change in response to the approval question to change in its wording. Clearly this is problematic.

Unfortunately, current survey research, with some notable exceptions, typically does not follow up the approval question with any questions probing why respondents approve or disapprove, or more importantly, how they interpreted the presidential approval question. If we had this information, we would know if there were indeed differences in the meaning of the approval question, and whether variance in presidential approval was explained by that variance. Clearly this is a need for future research, and we discuss that in chapter five.

The discussion above demonstrates that not all respondents assign the same meaning to survey research questions at the same point in time, and even the same respondent may assign different meanings to a question at different points in time. We

have applied the problem of differences in the meaning of survey research questions to the presidential approval question. Clearly its meaning is open to interpretation, and there are likely changes over time in its implicit wording, leading to likely changes in responses to it. This discussion, then, substantiates our claims that the meaning of the presidential approval question is subject to change, which plausibly explains change in presidential approval. Thus, we have successfully provided the rationale behind our second rival explanation.

Research Problems

The foregoing discussion involves one of three weaknesses in the presidential approval literature that we address in this dissertation as research problems. Those research problems are as follows:

1. Previous research has produced only minimal, partial explanations of presidential approval at the <u>individual</u> <u>level</u>, focusing instead largely on explaining <u>aggregate</u> changes in approval over time.

2. The literature implicitly assumes that the meaning of the standard presidential approval question remains essentially constant across respondents and over time, and that changes in approval are not explained by mere changes in the meaning of the approval question over time, but rather by substantive changes in the political environment over time, such as the performance of the economy.

3. The literature is largely devoid of comprehensive models that bring together the various single explanations into one overall explanation that best explains what drives presidential approval at both the individual and aggregate levels.

The first problem, an over-reliance on aggregate rather than individual-level analysis, is troublesome for primarily two reasons. First, aggregate level analysis assumes that factors such as "the economy" are homogeneous among individuals that comprise the approvers and disapprovers. Second, it allows for only indirect testing of relationships between certain factors considered as explanations of presidential approval.

Both problems are, in a sense, inter-related. Thus, we do not know if all approvers as well as all disapprovers are psychologically homogeneous. These problems are brought to light by the example of economic performance. In order to directly test the relationship between economic performance and presidential approval, we need to know at least one important characteristic of approvers and disapprovers, their perception of the economy. If there is a significant difference between both groups in their perception of the economy, where approvers are more likely to view economic performance positively while disapprovers are more likely to view economic performance negatively, then we have direct evidence, other things being equal, of a possible causal relationship between economic performance and presidential approval. We do not have this at the aggregate level. Instead, aggregate level analyses only show that change in approval over time mirrors change in economic performance over time. While, this has been taken by scholars as evidence that economic performance influences presidential approval, this evidence is certainly less than definitive, and so the conclusions based on it are, at best, tentative. In reality, what actually drives presidential approval at the individual level may be masked at the aggregate level.

The second problem, the assumption of the <u>constancy</u> of the meaning of the standard approval question over time, is troublesome because studies of social survey research demonstrate that more often than not, we do not have agreed upon meanings for specific terms within questions, let alone entire survey questions. In presenting our second rival explanation of presidential approval, namely change in the meaning of the presidential approval question, we discussed in detail why assuming that the meaning of the approval question is constant over time is problematic, and in turn, why we believe

that change in presidential approval over time is merely a reflection of change in the meaning of the standard approval question over time. Since we have already exhausted this issue, we will not discuss it further here.

The third problem, a lack of comprehensive models, is troublesome because it prevents us from conclusively determining what provides the best explanation of presidential approval, controlling for all possible explanations. Presently we have a number of competing explanations, without knowing with any certainty, which is best. If we were to bring together all possible explanations of presidential approval, including both the conventional explanations discussed in the literature and the rival explanations put forth in this dissertation, into a comprehensive model, then we could control for the effects of each and arrive at a conclusive decision as to which explanation of presidential approval is best. Such strenuous testing would allow us to determine, for one thing, if economic explanations are really as important as the literature seems to indicate they are.

In this dissertation, we make an important contribution to the field of presidential approval studies by designing a comprehensive model as discussed here. Although this is a step in the right direction, and will sort out some of the issues regarding what is the best explanation of presidential approval, it is not perfect. For one thing, we do not have measures of all the possible explanations of presidential approval, including both the conventional and rival explanations. The measures we do have may also be imperfect. Furthermore, the measures come from single points in time, and so do not shed light on what explains change in approval over time. These are matters to be considered by future research, which we discuss in the conclusion to chapter five. However, our efforts here

regarding the construction of a comprehensive model do help to further our understanding of presidential approval.

Research Questions

The research problems beg to be addressed by this dissertation, and so we seek to do so. We address the first problem by carrying out research at the individual level by using National Election Studies (NES) data from 1984 through 2000. We address the second problem by presenting change in the meaning of the standard approval question as a rival explanation of presidential approval, and seeking indirect evidence to support it. We address the third problem by constructing a comprehensive model of presidential approval as discussed above. In addressing these research problems, a set of research questions arises, presented below in table 1.1.

TABLE 1.1: Summary of Research Questions

(1a) What model best explains presidential approval at a given point in time?   　　(a) Overall Approval   　　(b) Economic Approval   　　(c) Foreign Affairs Approval
(1b)　How well do these models replicate across presidential election periods: 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000?   　　Are there notable exceptions?   　　If yes, what might explain the anomaly(ies)?
(2)　What are the implications of these findings for understanding what moves presidential approval over time at both the individual and aggregate levels?
(3)　How can differences and changes in the meaning of the standard approval question(s) be assessed, directly or indirectly?
(4)　What are the implications for measuring and monitoring presidential approval in the future?

We answer the first question via the findings of our tests of the comprehensive model of presidential approval, which are presented in chapter four. We answer the third question in chapter three, as we present the formal hypothesis associated with the second rival explanation of presidential approval: change in the meaning of the standard approval question. However, findings about the influence of differences and changes in the meaning of the standard approval question will be presented in both chapters four and five. Finally, we answer questions two and four in chapter five, as we discuss the conclusions and implications of our research.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation makes a significant contribution to the presidential approval literature as it addresses three major shortcomings: a relative lack of individual level analysis, a lack of comprehensive models, and an assumption that the meaning of the standard approval question remains constant over time. The first contribution is a comprehensive test of influences of presidential approval carried out at the individual level. The second contribution is the presentation of two rival explanations of presidential approval, which were rather neglected in the presidential approval literature.

The first rival explanation is presidential persona. Although there is some more recent research on considerations of presidential persona, particularly his character, as explanations of presidential approval, such considerations are few in number. Furthermore, most of the research focuses on only the cognitive component of attitudes toward the president as a person, i.e. character, but do not consider the affective component of feelings toward, and elicited by the president. Much of the research that addresses the affective component deals with favorability. Explanations of presidential

approval based on favorability are often dismissed as simply another means of measuring approval. We argue that this is an erroneous assumption, and that favorability and approval are two separate measures. Considering perceptions of the president's persona is a timely undertaking due to the anomalies of Bill Clinton's approval ratings, and the key character issues that arose during his administration.

The second rival explanation is change in the meaning of the standard approval question. As we stated, one of the major shortcomings of the presidential approval literature is the assumption that the meaning of the standard approval question remains constant over time. We argue that this is an erroneous assumption, as different people assign different meaning to survey questions, so that variance in presidential approval is likely caused by variance in the interpretation of the standard approval question. Considering the issue of change in meaning of the standard approval question is a timely pursuit as George W. Bush enjoyed unprecedented high levels of approval during a period of downturn in the economy. This would indicate that respondents did not necessarily interpret the approval question in economic terms, but, more likely, in terms of the president's handling of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Finally, in addition to these contributions to the field of presidential approval research, this dissertation makes a valuable contribution by examining the correlation between presidential approval and vote choice. In so doing, we explore the political relevance of presidential approval, and determine whether approval of the president affects one's choice for president, members of Congress, and Senators. Clearly, this is an important matter to consider. All told, this dissertation furthers our understanding of presidential approval and is thus an invaluable contribution to the field.

CHAPTER II

STATE OF THE LITERATURE

<u>Introduction</u>

  Due in large part to the prominent place the presidency holds in American politics, pollsters have increasingly inquired about the public's approval of the president. These inquiries have led scholars to seek to determine the causes of presidential approval, thereby creating a burgeoning field in American political science. The importance of presidential approval is illustrated by the following observations: (1) "Presidents hope to secure the public support they need for governing the nation by triggering favorable predispositions and building their own attractiveness as leaders (Thomas, Pika, and Watson, 1993);" (2) "Clearly, the way Washington politicians regard the president depends on how well they perceive he is doing in the country (Kernell, 1986);" (3) "A popular president is able to convince the public that he is delivering what the public expects (Lowi, 1985);" (4) Presidential approval is one of the "resources… that presidents in a given period have at their disposal to get things done (Skowronek 1993)" and (5) "Popularity or approval ratings in national surveys have become a standard by which the responsiveness of government is measured (Bennett and Bennett, 1990)." With the importance of approval, the ever-expanding research on the topic is understandable. The bulk of the presidential approval studies focuses on explanations of change in presidential approval over time.

  Beginning with Mueller's (1970) seminal work, an extensive literature of presidential approval studies has accumulated. In this chapter we provide a summary, but exhaustive review of this literature. This task has been facilitated by three recent comprehensive reviews of the presidential approval literature carried out by Horsley (1994), Wert (1998), and Gronke and Newman (2000). Consulting these reviews begins

the task of compiling the key studies of presidential approval. As we review these key studies, we deal with them by category. As we have already established, there are four categories of explanations of variance in approval: time, real-world events, psychological explanations, and media coverage explanations. In addition to the explanations from these four categories, we discuss the findings from two recent UC dissertations on presidential approval. We begin with time-based explanations.

Time-based Explanations

In all practicality, Mueller (1970) really got the ball rolling on presidential approval studies with his seminal work, the "coalition of minorities" theory. Its time-based nature indicates that initial studies of presidential approval relied on time as the key explanation of change in approval. Other prominent early studies of presidential approval, many of which were criticisms of Mueller (1970), also included time-based explanations. One of the key criticisms of Mueller's (1970) "coalition of minorities" model, which asserted that the inevitable and linear decline in approval was caused by the removal of support for the President by initial supporters who become increasingly alienated by the President's decisions, and could be interrupted by real-world events such as rally events, wars, and even economic slumps, was offered by Stimson (1976). In his disillusions and expectations model, Stimson (1976) argued that the decline in presidential approval is caused by disillusionment with the president due to his inability to live up to expectations, and approval follows a curved pattern over the course of a president's administration, not the linear decline noted by Mueller (1970).

Since these two models appeared, they have fallen under criticism and have fallen out of favor to varying degrees. The following findings represent key criticisms of the

"coalition-of-minorities" model: (1) the possibility of the President either regaining his original coalition or building a new one (Rose, 1991); (2) Americans have a positivity bias in which they have a predisposition to evaluate Presidents and other elected officials favorably, particularly at the outset of their terms before a performance record can be established (Sears, 1975 and Edwards, 1983); (3) policy-initiating presidents do not necessarily lose support more quickly than inactive presidents (Brody, 1991); (4) differences in approval between parties, not between demographic groups, are largest (Tatalovich and Gitelson, 1990); and (5) decline in approval may be a function of opposition party members who initially supported the president removing their support to achieve cognitive consistency (Ostrom and Simon, 1985, 1988). Two key findings critical of Stimson's (1976) expectations and disillusionment model are as follows: (1) the pattern he alleges does not always happen and even when it does, it is better explained by events than voter fickleness (Monroe, 1984); and (2) there was little difference in the withdrawal of support across all levels of sophistication when education was used as the measure, but significant differences across party lines (Presser and Converse, 1976-77). Furthermore, Sigelman and Knight (1983, 1985) and Brody (1991) found the expectations/disillusionment model to not apply only to the less sophisticated, however defined, and Kernell, Sperlich, and Wildavsky (1975) found people with little political knowledge and less connectedness with the political system to be more likely to support the president. Nonetheless, Ostrom and Simon (1985), Brody (1991), and Brace and Hinckley (1991) provide rather strong evidence that citizens do base their evaluations of the president on the gap between expectations and performance. Furthermore, findings

by Tedin (1986) and Sigelman (1981) provide evidence that opinion stability, particularly the stability of evaluations of the president, is weaker among the less sophisticated.

While time-based explanations have fallen under criticism, that has not eliminated time from consideration as an explanation of presidential approval. Other key time explanations of approval include the following findings: (1) the president has a steep learning curve at the beginning of his term, which may explain the early losses in support (Neustadt, 1990 and Light, 1991); (2) the president's effectiveness increases while his influence decreases over the course of his administration (Light, 1991); (3) time may be viewed as a measure of a cycle of deflating expectations (Brace and Hinckley, 1991); (4) time may be viewed as a product life cycle where the public's relationship with the president is similar to their relationship with consumer products, in which popularity follows a three-stage "s" curve of declines and upturns with the sequence of honeymoon, decline, and reelection (Eisenstein and Witting, 2000); (5) prior approval affects current approval (Brody and Page, 1975 and Kernell, 1978); and (5) prior approval affects presidential decisions to take negative or discretionary actions (Brace and Hinckley, 1991). Despite the existence of these time-based arguments, Kernell's (1978) criticism of time as an explanatory variable signaled a shift in presidential approval studies from considering time as an explanation of variance in approval, to perceptions of real-world events as an explanation. We now turn to a discussion of those explanations.

REAL WORLD EVENTS ARGUMENTS

Kernell's (1978) criticism of time-based explanations of presidential approval asserted that the previous conventional wisdom of approval being based on real-world events and conditions still held true. He hypothesized that short-term fluctuations in the

president's popularity are largely determined by contemporary events and conditions, with the president's current popularity reflecting the level of approval during the preceding month (Kernell 1978, 515). Kernell's (1978) evidence in support of his hypotheses demonstrates that time played little role at all in explaining approval. Instead, approval appears to be based more on the way things are in society as perceived by the public. The public has a sense of how things should be going in society and if things diverge greatly from this it is reflected in reduced support, or approval for the president. Kernell's (1978) model paved the way for other explanations of approval based on perceptions of real-world events and conditions. Such explanations focus on the economy, "rally"events, wars, scandals, and political drama.

The Economy

Of the real-world events explanations of presidential approval, perhaps the most important is the economy. Economic explanations of presidential approval fall into one of four categories: economic indicators (inflation and unemployment), personal versus sociotropic evaluations, retrospective versus prospective evaluations, and assigning responsibility for economic performance to the president. With the exception of this last category, economic explanations of approval involve the perceptions of economic performance held by the public. The media often influence these perceptions. As a result, perceptions of economic performance, which individuals use when making political decisions, may differ from reality. We need to address this phenomenon before moving to a discussion of the various economic explanations of approval.

Blood and Phillips (1995) and Hetherington (1996) found discrepancies between actual and perceived economic performance during 1992. While the economy was

actually growing, although not in a robust fashion, the public, by and large, believed the economy to still be suffering from recession. What explained the gap between real and perceived economic performance? Both authors found media coverage to be almost exclusively negative. The public relied on the media's depiction of the economy, rather than on unmediated reports of actual economic performance. As a result, the public had a negative view of the economy, and Hetherington (1996) found this to be a factor in the public's electoral decision in 1992 to oust Bush, and quite possibly the loss of congressional seats by Democrats in 1994, as the public's perception of the economy being in recession lingered until 1994. Thus, we see evidence of the perception rather than the reality of economic performance influencing political decisions. This must be kept in mind as we consider the economic explanations of presidential approval.

ECONOMIC INDICATORS

Although time-based explanations of approval are the earliest, the economy was considered in the early days as well. Mueller's (1970) work on the subject of presidential approval, typically considered a time-based explanation, included an economic component. His model included an economic slump variable, which measured the health of the nation's economy as determined by unemployment rates, specifically the difference between the current unemployment rate and the unemployment rate at the time the president took office. An increase in unemployment from its rate when the president took office was recorded as an economic slump. Mueller (1970) found the slump resulted in a decrease in the president's approval rating. In fact, for every one percent rise in unemployment, the president witnessed a three percent drop in approval. These findings indicate that unemployment hurts the president when it comes to approval, yet

Mueller's (1970) data also demonstrated that a decrease in unemployment did not necessarily boost the president's approval. While a weakening economy, as measured by an increase in unemployment, may hurt a president, a growing or strengthening economy as measured by a decrease in unemployment does not necessarily help a president.

Stimson (1976a), in another time-based explanation, included Mueller's (1970) economic slump variable, but unlike Mueller (1970), found that it explained little of the variance in presidential approval, thereby bringing to light the lack of consensus on the role economic indicator variables play in explaining approval. Indeed, a rather significant portion of the approval literature dealing with economic explanations considers the economic indicator variables of unemployment and inflation, but often with conflicting results. Continuing with unemployment as an explanation of presidential approval, Kenski (1977b) found it was associated with declines in approval for Republican presidents, but not for Democratic presidents. Contrariwise, Hibbs (1982a) found that Democrats were also hurt by unemployment. These contrary findings are not the only area of debate regarding unemployment as an explanation of presidential approval. Monroe's (1984) finding that unemployment was the most important economic indicator in explaining approval, as well as the other findings discussed above, indicate a strong relationship between unemployment and presidential approval. However, other scholars, notably Kernell (1978) and ironically Kenski (1977a) found that unemployment explained little of the variance in approval, rendering it rather unimportant.

Furthermore, scholars such as Shienbaum and Shienbaum (1982) and MacKuen (1983) found inflation more important than unemployment in explaining presidential approval. The former found inflation had a much stronger effect on approval than did

unemployment, while the latter found inflation had a longer-lasting or more enduring effect on approval than did unemployment. Furthermore, Brody (1991) found the American public twice as inflation averse as unemployment averse, and ironically Monroe (1978), in a work predating her 1984 finding, also found inflation to be an important predictor of presidential approval. Relatedly, Lau and Sears (1981) found the American public more likely to blame the president for inflation than for unemployment, further indicating the primacy of inflation over unemployment as an indicator of presidential approval.

Although these findings may have triggered a shift in focus from unemployment as an explanation of approval to inflation, the findings regarding inflation also demonstrate a lack of consensus. Kenski (1977a,c) found a strong relationship between inflation and popularity, but Shapiro and Conforto (1980a) as well as Norpoth and Yantek (1983) found little relation between the two. However, Norpoth (1984) later found lagged effects of inflation had a significant effect on popularity. Finally, Ostrom and Simon (1985) and Brace and Hinckley (1991, 1993) found a misery index combining inflation and unemployment to be a significant determinant of popularity. Nevertheless, Yantek (1988) in a comparison of President Reagan and Prime Minister Thatcher, found little connection between executive approval and either inflation or unemployment.

Frey and Schneider (1978) found the president's popularity declines when the rate of unemployment and/or inflation rises, but increases with the growth rate of private consumption rises. Furthermore, the government reacts to popularity levels by steering the economy in ways that will enhance popularity and re-election chances when popularity is lagging, but pursues ideologically oriented policies that may not be

politically popular when popularity is high. Similar to the findings of Frey and Schneider (1978), Metzger (1999) found that for each point of annual growth in GNP, presidents enjoyed a two to three point increase in approval. Hibbs (1982b) also found increases in per capita real disposable income resulting in increases in support for the president.

Another important matter regarding economic indicators and popularity is partisanship. Unemployment hurts Republicans (Monroe, 1984), and boosts disapproval for them (Brody, 1991), while it helps Democrats (Monroe, 1984), and reduces disapproval for them (Brody, 1991). The effect of inflation is more controversial. Brody (1991) found that it boosts disapproval for Democrats, while reducing it for Republicans. Lanoue (1988) also found inflation hurt Democrats, but found no effect on Republicans, while Monroe (1984) and Hibbs (1982) found inflation to be more harmful to Republicans than to Democrats. Finally, Lanoue (1989) found that inflation hurts Democrats, while unemployment hurts Republicans. The fact that inflation tends to last longer than recessions accompanied by unemployment demonstrates how economic performance tends to be more damaging to Democrats than Republicans.

PERSONAL VERSUS SOCIOTROPIC EVALUATIONS

In moving to the matter of personal versus sociotropic evaluations, Kinder and Kiewiet (1979, 1981) challenged the aggregate level findings that political decisions, congressional voting in particular, were made on the basis of personal economic grievances. While aggregate level data indicates that people vote against incumbents when their personal economic situation has declined, Kinder and Kiewiet (1979, 1981) found little evidence in support of this at the individual level. Instead they found that political decisions at the individual level, again primarily congressional elections

although presidential elections were also considered, were based on collective economic judgments, or what is better known as sociotropic voting. One's personal economic conditions, while important, are not "politically" important, in that they really do not affect political decisions even indirectly. Any influence at all is at best slight. People do not vote based on their own pocketbook, but rather on how the economic situation is in the country as a whole. Furthermore, there is little connection between one's personal economic conditions and the economic conditions of the country as a whole. In other words, citizens typically do not automatically view the economy of the country as a whole to be bad simply because their own economic condition is bad. Thus, pocketbook evaluations when it comes to political decisions may appear at the aggregate level, but are evidenced only slightly, if at all, at the individual level. Of course this brings up a whole new set of issues regarding the validity of aggregate level analysis, and demonstrates further why the individual level analysis of the present study is so important. Like Kinder and Kiewiet's (1979, 1981) work, it may call into question other conclusions bases on aggregate level analyses, which are prevalent in the literature.

While Kinder and Kiewiet's (1979, 1981) articles dealt primarily with voting in congressional elections, and to some extent in presidential elections, the underlying consideration is political decision-making. While different from voting, presidential approval is another form of evaluative political decision-making, and so the findings of Kinder and Kiewiet (1979, 1981) would logically extend to presidential approval. This is borne out by other research into personal versus sociotropic bases of presidential approval carried out by Kinder (1981), Lau and Sears (1981), Monroe (1984), Conover and Feldman (1986), and Brody (1991). Each of these works found essentially the same

thing about presidential approval that Kinder and Kiewiet (1979 and 81) found about voting, namely that citizens tend to use national economic conditions (sociotropic judgments) rather than personal economic conditions in evaluating the President, perhaps because they do not hold the government responsible for personal economic conditions.

Some final points on the matter merit consideration. Edwards (1983) argues that the public bases its evaluations of the president on how well he is handling or managing the economy, not on either sociotropic or personal economic judgments. Conover (1985) found group economic concerns about the economy compared favorably to both sociotropic and personal evaluations in explaining evaluations of Reagan and his handling of economic matters. Mutz (1992) found that approval is significantly affected when a personal economic experience, in this case unemployment, is viewed as a social problem due to extensive media coverage. Kernell (1986) found that media coverage of national problems might be a more important source for evaluating the president on the economy than is personal experience.

Finally, Conover and Feldman (1986) found a connection between emotional reactions to the economy and presidential evaluations. Specifically, they found that while people react cognitively to the state of the nation's economy and not their own personal financial situation, they react emotionally to both. Those emotions may be positive or negative, with the negative dimension being one of either fear/uneasiness or anger/disgust. Typically anger/disgust is the emotional reaction toward inflation, while fear/uneasiness is the reaction toward unemployment. The rationale is that the public is more likely to view inflation as controllable, while unemployment is uncontrollable. Because of this, anger/disgust has a stronger impact on presidential evaluations than does

fear/uneasiness. The president is seen as having control over inflation more so than he does over unemployment. As a result, anger/disgust is more a threat to presidential support than is fear/uneasiness. Of course positive emotions regarding both one's personal and the nation's economy are associated with favorable evaluations of the president. Finally, emotional, i.e. affective, reactions to the economy tend to be independent of cognitive reactions to the economy.

SOPHISTICATED VERSUS NAÏVE VOTER EVALUATIONS

In regard to the sophisticated versus naïve voter evaluations, a sophisticated voter evaluates the president on the basis not only of the past and the present, but also on future possibilities, and an understanding of short and long term consequences of economic policies. The naïve voter on the other hand simply takes a short-term view of the economy and evaluates the president accordingly, essentially punishing him for inflation and unemployment and rewarding him for growth of output. In many ways, the sophisticated voter is a prospective voter, making evaluations on prospects in the future, while the naïve voter is a retrospective voter, making evaluations solely on past performance. In terms of what is important for understanding approval, studies by Chappell (1983) and Chappell and Keech (1985) indicate that the sophisticated voter model explains evaluations of the president as well or better than the naïve model. However, the debate between retrospective versus prospective voters apparently is not close to being settled. First, Nickelsburg and Norpoth (2000) assert that retrospective evaluations are typically more important than prospective evaluations. Second, in a series of articles, MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson (1992, 1996), and Norpoth (1996) argue back and forth on the matter. MacKuen et al. (1992, 1996), find convincing

evidence that voters do evaluate the president on the basis of prospective expectations of the economy, not simply retrospective evaluations of the way the economy has been. Norpoth (1996), on the other hand, argues that MacKuen, et al. (1992, 1996), have it wrong, and that in his models retrospective evaluations of the president always dominate prospective evaluations. Basically, voters are concerned with what's been happening not what will happen in the future.

Adding to the mix is Haller and Norpoth's (1994) study that indicates voters can not be classified solely as retrospective or prospective, but demonstrate an asymmetry in their evaluations that considers the recent past in certain evaluations – presently good times lead to beliefs that good times will persist in the future – but does not necessarily consider the recent past in other situations – presently bad times don't lead to pessimistic views of the future. Thus expectations of the future do color evaluations of the president, but those expectations are often based on the recent past or on an understanding of economic cycles at work. Relatedly, Nadeau, et al. (1999) found that both retrospective and prospective evaluations were important. Although they found that elite retrospections were more important than prospections, a finding counter to that of MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson (1992, 1996), they did find that prospective evaluations of the economy were made by citizens, but perhaps in not as sophisticated a manner as other research would have us believe. When making economic judgments, and in turn evaluations of the president, prospective views did indeed have an impact, but citizens also evaluated on the basis of events that were more retrospective than prospective. Consistent with these findings, Clarke, and Stewart (1994) and Clarke, Rapkin, and

Stewart (1994) found both retrospective and prospective evaluations to be important factors in evaluations of George H.W. Bush.

RESPONSIBILITY OR BLAME FOR ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Finally, when it comes to responsibility or blame for economic conditions, Lau and Sears (1981) argue that citizens are more likely to blame the president for inflation than for unemployment. At the same time, Kinder (1981) and Edwards (1983) argue that the public does not hold the government responsible for personal economic conditions. Edwards et al. (1993) also found that those issues on which the public holds the president responsible for policy performance are those that have the most impact on approval. Feldman (1982) indicates, that blame or responsibility for economic conditions is based on a person's beliefs regarding the political culture. The dominant belief in the U.S. is individualism. The individual is largely responsible for his or her own economic conditions. This leads to reluctance on the part of the public to blame the government for personally bad economic times. However, those that do not subscribe to the dominant individualistic culture and see societal causes for personal economic problems will place responsibility for that on the government. Abramowitz, Lanoue, and Ramesh (1988) further found that responsibility for personal economic conditions was more likely to be placed on the government by those whose circumstances had declined and who had followed the campaign closely, while those whose economic situation had improved and that had not paid close attention to the campaign were less likely to attribute responsibility for their economic conditions to the government. Finally, Peffley and Williams (1985) claim the public assigns responsibility to the president for the following: (1) the extent to which economic problems are caused by the president versus external

factors; (2) the degree of control that presidents are felt to have over the economy, and (3) impressions of the ability of past presidents to solve economic problems (p. 413).

In a final note on economic explanations, Monroe (1984) put forth a comprehensive model on the relationship between the economy and popularity known as the "integrated rational approach." According to this model, presidential popularity is, in part, a product of estimations on the government's responsibility for the economy, the capacity of political parties and individual officials to influence the economy, and the incumbent's competency and the priority he places on different economic outcomes. Each of these estimations are influenced both by expectations of economic performance, which are in turn influenced by perceptions of past economic performance, and partisanship. Presidential popularity, as a product of economic estimations, is determined by rational, economic self-interest, hence the name "integrated rational approach."

RALLY EVENTS

The second real-world event is the "rally" event. Mueller's (1970, 1973) research defined a rally-event as being international in scope, specific, dramatic, and sharply focused. Greenstein (1965, 1974), Mueller (1970, 1973), Kernell (1978, 1985), Hibbs (1982b), Norpoth (1984), Lanoue (1988, 1989), Hugick and Gallup (1991), and Brace and Hinckley (1991) all found evidence that rally-events have a positive affect on presidential approval. However, Stimson (1976a) found only negligible affects, and Edwards (1983) found that rally-events do not boost approval differently than any other approval-boosting event. Furthermore, James and Rioux (1998) found only small rally effects when presidents vigorously responded to international conflicts, but the use of force in responding to international conflict causes rally effects to disappear.

Lee (1977), Hugick and Gallup (1991), and Ostrom and Simon (1988) all found that levels of approval decline and return to pre-rally levels in a fairly short period of time, with Hugick and Gallup (1991) noting seven months as the longest duration of a rally effect. Mueller, (1970, 1973) also found that popularity soon declines as much as five to six percentage points for each year between rally-events. The media have a great influence on the nature of the effect rally-events have on approval. Lee (1977), Bowen (1989), and Brody (1984) indicate that as media coverage increases, people gain greater information, leading to decreases in support. However, Edwards and Swenson (1997) and O'Neal and Bryan (1995) found greater media coverage actually having a positive influence on approval in certain instances. Lee (1977) and Ostrom and Simon (1985) found the nature of the event made a difference in the rally effect, but disagree as to which has more significant and lasting effects on approval, policy pronouncements or international crises.

In the first of two final matters regarding the "rally" effect, Parker (1995) found in her study of the Persian Gulf War that the "rally" effect extended beyond just presidential approval, with boosts in approval of Congress, trust in the federal government, assessment of personal finances, and expectations for the economy also occurring. Secondly, Sigelman and Conover (1981), Monroe (1984), and Callaghan and Virtanen (1993) speak to the matter of partisanship. The effect of a rally event is different across party lines. Members of the out-party are more quick to return to pre-rally levels of approval, and there is a potential lack of uniformity across parties in the way they respond to the rally event, evidenced by the fact that rally-events tend to be better predictors of approval for Republican rather than Democratic presidents.

WAR

The third real-world event is war, which is treated separately from the "rally" event. There is contradictory evidence on how war affects approval. While Stimson (1976a) found essentially no effect of war on popularity, Mueller (1970), Kernell (1978), Hibbs (1982b), Norpoth (1984), and Ostrom and Simon (1985) all found war to be damaging to presidential approval. The last two authors also found the new administration taking over in the middle of a war has been hurt less by it than the administrations preceding them. Hibbs (1982a) found differences between both partisan and occupational groups in their level of disapproval of the president during Vietnam, with partisan differences being much greater than occupational group differences. Blue-collar workers and Democrats were more disapproving than white-collar workers, retirees, and Republicans. Edwards (1983) found the way the president is handling the war has an effect on approval. Hurwitz and Peffley (1987) found approval based on foreign policy evaluations is in part based on one's foreign policy posture on the likelihood of getting into war. Finally, Stimson, Carmines, and Zeller (1978) found the curves of polynomial equations on approval are nearly equal during peacetime and wartime, but wartime presidents hit lower levels of approval and bottom out later than peacetime presidents.

SCANDAL

The fourth, but least considered real-world event is scandal. Mueller (1970) saw scandal as a possible predictor and so some scholars have examined it. Much of the literature on scandal centers on the effects of Watergate on Nixon's approval. Stimson (1976a), Kernell (1978), Hibbs (1982a,b), Norpoth (1984), and Lanoue (1988) all found

evidence that the Watergate scandal cost Nixon significant percentage points in approval. Studies on another specific scandal, Iran-Contra, by Ostrom and Simon (1989) and Krosnick and Kinder (1990) found that Reagan's approval was hurt by this scandal, particularly among those exposed to media coverage. Ostrom and Simon (1985) found scandal to cause a decline in approval for presidents generally. Furthermore, Norpoth (1984) found the manner in which the president handled the scandal to be more important than economic variables in explaining approval. Hibbs (1982) found that members of the president's party are more supportive of their embroiled president than others, and Monroe (1984) found support to be more sensitive to scandal among Republicans than Democrats. Relatedly, Baker (1996) found only minor and statistically insignificant losses in approval associated with congressional investigations of the White House. However, certain subcategories did demonstrate greater negative affects on approval, and greater media coverage also tended to be more damaging to approval.

Despite what appears to be overwhelming evidence that scandal is damaging to a president's approval, Clinton's approval ratings did not witness a downturn in light of the Lewinsky scandal. This is just one of the oddities of Clinton's approval record that has caused a considerable amount of attention to be paid to his approval record, and makes the study of presidential approval all the more timely. While researchers seek to determine why the Lewinsky scandal did not appear to harm Clinton's approval ratings, perhaps Brody's (1998) discussion explains it best. He demonstrates that despite the fact that the Lewinsky scandal saturated media coverage, and there were no rally-events to offset coverage of the scandal or its effects, Clinton's approval ratings did not drop. At the same time, the public's view of Clinton's honesty, trustworthiness, moral, and ethical

standards dropped rather significantly. However, the public's view of Clinton's leadership abilities actually increased, and there was if anything a slight increase in the percentage of people responding that Clinton was concerned or understands about the problems of people like me. Thus, as Brody (1998) further points out, the public apparently disconnected Clinton the person from Clinton the political leader. Clinton was judged as president on the same bases on which previous presidents have been judged, namely the economy and foreign policy. He was viewed as successful in both, and his abilities as president were judged accordingly. Apparently his personal shortcomings did not figure in the public's evaluation of Clinton as president.

POLITICAL DRAMA

The fifth real-world event is political drama, which consists of televised speeches and other broadcast statements, foreign travel, and presidentially relevant events (Simon and Ostrum, 1989). Although MacKuen (1983) found that political drama is as important as economic conditions in predicting approval, Ostrom and Simon (1989) found that the economy was a better predictor of approval for Reagan than was political drama, which was also true of his predecessors. Marra, Ostrom and Simon (1990) also found that environmental conditions (the economy and war) are better predictors of support than is political drama. These authors have found that the president may be able to use political drama to boost his support, but the opportunity to do so is rather limited. Ragsdale (1984) found that the likelihood of a presidential speech is dependent on his support and events, with change in support and occurrences of national and international events increasing the likelihood of a presidential speech, and escalation of military activities and worsening inflation or unemployment decreasing the likelihood of a presidential speech.

Nevertheless, Ragsdale (1987) did find that major addresses tended to boost approval if not across the board then at least in certain segments of the public. This indicates that while political drama may not be more important than economy and other environmental conditions, it does have a positive influence on approval.

Relatedly, Brace and Hinckley (1993a,b) found that positive-predicted dramatic events boosted Bush's approval, while negative-predicted dramatic events decreased his approval. They further found that presidents' use of political drama is either strategic, typically to try to boost support, or is in response to prior popularity that allows them more leeway in acting (Brace and Hinckley, 1991). Because politically dramatic events, including what could otherwise be considered rally-events, tend to enhance presidential approval, Brace and Hinckley (1992) assert that it would behoove presidents to stage such events in order to boost approval, and go on to claim that this indeed has occurred. Relatedly, Hinckley (1990) found that the president's use of campaign-type efforts throughout his administration to gain support from the public, and thereby show members of Congress that they may face electoral defeat if they do not support his legislative agenda, have tended to boost the president's approval ratings.

Despite these findings of political drama having a positive effect on approval, Darcy and Richman (1988) found little effect on approval from the political drama event of foreign travel. They found no significant differences in approval before and after the president traveled abroad. If any difference did exist, it was that Republicans benefited more from travel than did Democrats. Furthermore, Brace and Hinckley (1993a) found that the use of political drama, a.k.a. public relations, is relatively low, and that some forms do help, but others actually hurt. Therefore, presidents cannot necessarily rely on

performing some public relations act to boost support. While such use of political drama may work on occasion, it does not have universal effect in improving approval.

RELATIVE INFLUENCE OF REAL WORLD EVENTS

A final consideration regarding real-world events is the relative influence of foreign, economic, and domestic variables on approval. Research by Ostrom and Simon (1985), Edwards (1983), Rose (1991), MacKuen (1983) and Nickelsburg and Norpoth (2000) indicate that both foreign and economic influences exert significant influences on approval, and are both more important than other real-world events, particularly those of a domestic nature. At the same time, Wilcox and Allsop (1991) found context to matter. Attitudes on foreign matters are more significant during foreign crises, while attitudes on economic matters are more significant during economic crises.

In a couple final matters regarding real-world events explanations, Hurwitz and Peffley (1987) found support for Reagan to be dependent upon retrospective performance ratings and foreign policy postures, whereby those who favored a tough foreign policy stance, and believed we stood a good chance of staying out of war and our relations with other countries were healthy, were more likely to support Reagan. Meanwhile, Gilens (1988) found foreign policy related issues to be the most important contributors to the gender gap during the Reagan administration. Not only were women's foreign policy positions more liberal than men's, but also holding a liberal position produced a dramatically greater deficit in Reagan's approval among women than among men. Finally, Gilens (1988) further found that economic/welfare issues were the second largest contributor to the Reagan gender gap. The impact was different though from foreign

policy issues, as the impact of liberal stances was roughly the same for women as for men, but women were substantially more liberal on economic/welfare issues than men.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS

Turning to the category of psychological explanations, partisanship is perhaps the most important single factor in explaining presidential approval. Beginning again with Mueller (1973), he found clear links between party and approval as Republicans, Democrats, and Independents all responded to both rally-events and economic slumps in the predicted direction, but perhaps more telling was the fact that members of the out-party were more adverse in their response than were members of the President's party. Mueller also found evidence that there is a discrepancy between both party groups in their level of initial support for the president. Although Edwards (1983), and Tatalovich and Gitelson (1990) in their party-cleavage model, also found this initial discrepancy, they claim, in contradiction of Mueller's assertions, that there is a significant amount of difference in the rate of declining support for members of the two party groups, with Edwards asserting that shifts in approval between the two party groups may be of different magnitudes if not different directions. However, Lanoue (1989) demonstrated that Republican presidents tend to enjoy higher levels of support than do Democratic presidents. One reason may be related to Mueller's (1970) "coalition of minorities" theory. Lanoue (1989) demonstrates that the "coalition" of voters for Republican presidents is more homogeneous than is the "coalition" of voters for Democratic presidents. As a result, support for Democrats falls away more readily than it does for Republicans, as there is less unity.

Additional research further indicates the importance of partisanship in evaluating the president. Ostrom and Simon (1988) found this to be true in their analysis of the Carter administration where environmental changes were perceived and filtered through partisan identification, with out-party members feeling a need to withdraw support for the President more quickly in order to achieve cognitive consistency. While this may explain early-term decline in support by out-party members as well as quicker return rates to pre-rally levels following a rally event, Hibbs (1982) notes that partisanship acts as more than a mere filter or perceptual screen. It actually goes so far as to delineate and separate important political and economic interests, with members of the two-party groups evaluating the president accordingly. Furthermore, party is important as it affects popularity on both economic and foreign affairs matters. Hurwitz and Peffley (1987) found that in addition to foreign policy posture, party identification acts as an excellent predictor of retrospective foreign policy performance rating. Similarly, Mutz (1992) found party identification had a direct effect on the approval of incumbents regarding economics. Finally, Wilcox and Allsop (1991) found partisanship was a good predictor of attitudes on both foreign and economic matters during the Reagan administration on surveys in which Reagan was popular.

Kernell, et al. (1975) provided another notable psychological explanation for presidential approval. It consisted of an obligation to support index, a crisis support index, and a personal affect index as dependent variables, and sociodemographic and psychological factors as independent variables. Support was found to be higher among the elderly, religious conservatives, the less educated, blacks, females, and the psychologically disadvantaged, with personal inflexibility being the strongest of the

psychological variables. Race, education, and age affected support through the factor of personality. Support also appears to be based on happiness with the political system, as the President provides the link to it for the disconnected and ill informed, rather than short-term citizen evaluations or partisanship; and it is dynamic based on long-term psychological dispositions and environmental changes.

Political socialization is a psychological consideration dealt with by both Horsley (1994) and Wert (1998). While socialization is an important consideration, the literature they cite is of limited benefit to our understanding of socialization's relationship to presidential approval. The focus of the literature they cite is on children and their view of the president. Although there is a discussion of the differences between children and adults in how they view the president, the literature is not clear in how socialization and views of the president as a child affect views of the president as an adult. Furthermore, they provide few measurable variables that could be tested to determine if differences in the upbringing, or socialization process of the child leads to differences in how the individual as an adult evaluates or perceives the president. As a result, I have chosen not to consider the socialization literature as represented by Easton and Dennis (1969), Hess and Easton (1960), Hess and Torney (1967), Greenstein (1967), Jaros (1967), Jaros and Shoemaker (1976), Jaros, et al. (1968), Arterton (1974), and Dennis and Webster (1975) in the present study, and will not elaborate on it here.

Wert (1998) moved beyond the strict presidential approval literature to examine the social psychological literature's consideration of the factors that lead a person to approve of another person. While not pertaining to the president per se, such information proves useful as the findings can be applied to approval of the president. Byrne and

Nelson (1965) found we tend to approve more of people that hold similar attitudes to ours. Davis (1981) found we are more likely to approve of those with similar personalities. Blankenship, Hant, Hess, and Brown (1984) found we are more likely to approve of those with similar interests. We can extrapolate from these findings that those who believe the president is similar to them will be more likely to approve of him. Aronson and Linder (1965) and Berg (1984) found that we are more likely to approve of people who are pleasant, associated with pleasant experiences, or can reward us somehow. We can extrapolate that individuals who believe the president is pleasant, is associated with pleasant experiences, and/or can reward them somehow are more likely to approve of him. Berscheild and Walster (1974), found that physical attraction leads to approval, qualified by Peck (1968) as typically true only of younger children. However, while one could extrapolate that perception of the president as being attractive leads to approval of him, I do not consider that relationship in my study.

The social psychological literature indicates that a significant basis of evaluation of individuals is the type of person they are perceived to be. Thus, the type of person the president is should be part of the public's evaluation of him, thus figuring in their decision to approve or disapprove of his job performance. Evaluations of presidential persona should entail both affective and cognitive components. The feelings the public has toward the president, as well as the feelings he elicits from them comprise the affective component, while beliefs about the character traits that best describe the president comprise the cognitive component. The influence of personal affect on presidential approval is disputed. While Mueller (1970) asserted that the high popularity of Eisenhower was based in large part on his personal appeal and the mood of the

country, Ostrom and Simon (1985) argue that there was no Eisenhower phenomenon per se. His popularity, as well as Kennedy's, was based on a public concerned with foreign policy issues, presidential behavior that reinforced those priorities, and numerous approval-enhancing events. Rose (1991) also argues against a significant influence of personal affect indicating that only one personal event had any influence on public opinion from the Johnson administration through Carter's presidency.

In regard to favorability, Cohen (1999 and 2000) argues that there is a high level of consistency in which approvers also like the president or view him favorably, while disapprovers also tend to dislike the president or view him unfavorably. This is true despite the fact that likeability and approval are distinct measures and that the factors causing one to like the president or have a favorable view of him are not necessarily the same factors that make one approve of him. When there is inconsistency, it is not random, but is grounded in identifiable political and social characteristics. Additionally, the public sees the components of favorability as one dimension rather than several, as conventional wisdom might indicate. Cohen (1999 and 2000) also found rises in one measure accompanying rises in the other, thereby demonstrating a link between the two. Duggan (1985) found that while the public may have favorable impressions of the president, his approval is ultimately based on his policy positions. Clearly, "niceness" is not enough. Similarly Adams (1984) found that more people liked Reagan personally than liked his policies, indicating that personal popularity must be distinguished from the President's handling of his job. Sigelman and Conover (1981) found that more favorable views of Carter coincided with better evaluations of his handling of the Iran hostage situation, a finding similar to that of Cohen (1999 and 2000). On the other hand, Roper

(1983) found that Carter witnessed greater personal support than approval, but Reagan witnessed greater approval than personal support. This runs counter to the consistency Cohen (1999 and 2000) found, as well as other findings of Reagan's personal support being greater than his job approval. Thus, while there is evidence to support a connection between favorability and approval, exactly what it is, is unclear. Furthermore, the literature appears to consider favorability and approval as two sides of the same coin, presidential evaluations. Thus, there is virtually nothing in the literature that considers favorability to be an explanation of approval, which is ironic since Cohen (1999 and 2000) determined that favorability and approval are two distinct measures.

Despite the oft dismissal of favorability ratings as an independent influence on presidential approval, research continues to examine the influence of evaluations of presidential persona on presidential approval. The bulk of this research centers on the cognitive component of evaluations of presidential persona, namely character assessments. Although research on character assessments is expanding, works by Kinder (1986), Lane (1978), Rahn et al. (1990), Gronke (1999), Aldrich, Gronke, and Grynaviski (1999), and Greene (2001) are representative. While the particulars of each scholar's research are slightly different, there is a common theme, and common finding across all studies: assessment of the president's character is a key ingredient in the evaluation of the president. Lane (1978) found that individuals seek in leaders the same type of traits they seek in friends. By extension, good character is sought in presidents, and thus becomes a significant basis of evaluation of them. The other scholars all found that character assessments are as important, and in some cases more important, than other bases of evaluation, particularly policy performance. Finally, the character traits that

mattered most were competence, leadership, intelligence, and empathy. In addition to the scholars listed above, Newman (2003) focused on integrity as a factor in presidential approval, and found that assessments of the president's integrity were important in evaluating the president's job performance.

The public wants a president who conveys a strong sense of capability in doing his job, thus the need for competence, leadership, and integrity. The public also wants a president who conveys warmth toward and an understanding of the public and its needs, hence the need for empathy. Clearly character matters in presidential evaluations. Its importance may lie in its place as a substitute for evaluating the president on the basis of his policy-making decisions. As Kinder (1986) informs us, the public seeks to simplify the complex political world, and one means of doing so is through the utilization of character assessments. Character remains rather stable, and provides a consistent measure of the president by which the public can evaluate him.

MEDIA COVERAGE

The final category of explanations of presidential approval is media coverage. The role of the media in politics generally, and presidential approval specifically has been studied extensively. Early studies by Brody and Page (1975), and Haight and Brody (1977) found the balance between good and bad news significantly affected the popularity of Johnson and Nixon, and adding prior popularity and broadcast appearances as variables impacted Democrats' approval of Nixon. West (1991) found high television exposure for both Carter and Reagan led to lower approval ratings.

A significant media effect on popularity is priming. Priming, generally conceived, occurs when mental constructs are activated in a way that influences the

evaluation of other concepts or ideas. Domke, et al. (1998) indicate that there are two streams of thought in regard to priming. The first considers short-term memory affects in which cognitions are activated by stimuli that are readily accessible – available in short-term memory – and then applied to other objects. The other stream of thought considers long-term memory and examines how constructs are arranged and linked in long-term memory. Related to priming is Zaller's (1992) RAS model. Despite its differences with priming and the fact that the two are often considered separately rather than simultaneously, the RAS model for all intents and purposes is a type of priming model. Zaller (1992) argues that media messages may directly influence individual level attitudes, but the effects are moderated by the nature of the information environment and the individual's exposure and resistance to persuasive messages. Priming, on the other hand sees the role of media messages as powerful, but only indirect through agenda-setting and the alteration of standards of judgment or evaluation of political actors used by the public. Whether indirect as priming would argue, or direct as Zaller's (1992) RAS model argues, clearly media are able to shape the public's evaluation of political actors. Media do this by activating certain cognitions in the mind of the public, typically as a result of extensive coverage of certain issues as opposed to other issues, and those cognitions form the bases of evaluation for the public. Thus, by controlling what issues are covered, and the tone of the coverage of those issues, the media may control, in part, the standards of evaluation for political actors, including the president.

Pan and Kosicki (1997) found two "issue regimes" during the senior Bush administration. The first "issue regime" was the Gulf War in which media coverage was saturated with the Gulf War. The second "issue regime" followed the Gulf War and

turned to the economy as the dominant issue covered by the media. Evaluations of Bush made during the first "issue regime" were based primarily on the Gulf War and resulted in high approval ratings. However, after the war's end, the media turned their attention to the economy and this shift resulted in a shift in the ingredients of public evaluation of the president to his handling of the economy. As a result, his approval ratings plummeted. Pan and Kosicki's (1997) research clearly demonstrates that public evaluations of the president may indeed be based on whatever the media are covering as the dominant issue of the time. Krosnick and Brannon (1993) also found priming effects relative to the Gulf War, with evaluations of the president, particularly right after the war, being based on the public's assessment of how Bush handled it, leading to high approval ratings. Additionally, Krosnick and Brannon (1993) found that media influence was moderated by political knowledge, exposure to political news, and interest in the war. The most influence the media had was on those who had high levels of political knowledge, but had limited exposure to political news, and lower levels of interest in the war.

Iyengar et al. (1982, 1984) examined the Carter administration and compared different groups that were exposed to media coverage of certain issues as opposed to others. The findings showed that the bases of evaluation of Carter depended on the issues to which the various groups were exposed. The issues to which the groups were exposed were viewed as the most important issues, forming the basis of evaluations of Carter. The issues to which the public was directed by the media influenced how the president was evaluated. Despite some subtle differences in the two studies, their efforts, methodology, and outcomes were nearly identical. Thus, in both studies priming was found to have an effect on presidential evaluation. Furthermore, Iyengar (1987) again

demonstrated that news presentations influence presidential evaluations by altering the causal knowledge of individuals. How the public views certain issues will influence how they evaluate the president on those issues, and the nature of news stories about those issues likely influences how the public views them.

While Edwards III, et al. (1995) do not consider priming per se, although it is addressed, their work on issue salience makes an important contribution to an understanding of the role of priming. Their work found that in order for issues to be considered in the evaluation of the president, they must have salience with the public. The salience of certain issues varies over time, and as a result, so does the basis for presidential evaluation. Priming then is important, as media coverage may alert the public to what is salient at a given time, and thus evaluations of the president based on what has been the focus of media coverage may indeed be evidence of the salience of issues being the underlying factor in presidential evaluations. Miller and Krosnick (2000), however, put an interesting twist on the matter of issue importance and media priming. The typical priming literature views the public as "victims" of priming. Priming is viewed as manipulation of an unknowing audience without their consent. However, Miller and Krosnick (2000) did not find this to be true. Instead they found that those who are most susceptible to priming are knowledgeable citizens, otherwise conceived of as political experts, who trust the media as a reliable source of information. If issues are deemed important by the media, and subsequently significant coverage is given to those issues, then they must in fact be important issues. As a result, similar to Edwards III, et al.'s (1995) findings on the connection between issue salience and

presidential evaluation, these experts accept as important what the media view as important, and so their evaluation of the president will be based on these salient issues.

In other matters relative to media coverage explanations, Goidel et al. (1997) found the media can alter the foundation of political support via their focus on one issue over others and thus enhancing its importance. However, the ability of the media to change individual attitudes is dependent upon individual-level partisanship. The findings of Goidel et al. (1997) regarding the 1992 election and the role of the economy in Clinton's victory support Zaller's (1992) claims regarding the RAS model. The media may change individual attitudes, but only among partisans predisposed to accept the message. Strong partisans who are not accepting of the dominant message will not have their attitudes changed simply by media focus on one issue over others. Mutz (1992, 1994) found priming to interact with personal experience. If the media focus attention on a national economic problem that the individual has personally experienced, then he or she is able to judge a president sociotropically when he or she may not have evaluated the president negatively solely on their personal experience. Finally, despite a considerable amount of research pointing to media coverage as an important influence on presidential approval, research by Kinsey and Chaffee (1996) showed that interpersonal discussions of issues were more influential on approval ratings for George Bush during 1992 than was media coverage. However, their commentary on these findings indicates that interpersonal discussion is a means of evaluating the content of media coverage, so that the media still play an important role in evaluations of the president.

Brody (1991) is responsible for the most comprehensive consideration of media effects. Examining the Kennedy through Ford administrations as well as the Carter and

Reagan presidencies, he found that the public makes its evaluations of the president based on media reports and elite commentary regarding valence issues – general consensus issues like peace and prosperity – and position issues – divisive issues on which the President sets expectations. Positive media reports regarding progress being made on valence issues and actual results rather than mere stances on position issues yield favorable evaluations of the president.

A final consideration regarding the media is the fact that the president does have a fair amount of control over media access and can manipulate the media into reporting solely the good and not the bad about the president. Since Grossman and Rourke (1976) first reported this, the media have exerted more power over the agenda of reporting on the president and have included bad reports as well, so that the president cannot keep the bad completely out of media coverage. However, Mannheim and Lammers (1981) demonstrate that the president continues to use the media to his benefit as he often increases the number of press conferences when his approval begins to diminish, but interestingly there is little evidence to support any change in his verbal behavior in those conferences. If priming is as significant as the research indicates, the president's ability to exercise power over the media's agenda is important for his approval.

PREVIOUS UC DISSERTATIONS ON PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL

A final word needs to be said about the two dissertations on presidential approval done previously. First, Horsley (1994) sought to build a comprehensive model of presidential approval at the aggregate level. His theory posited that personality, socialization, partisanship, and expectations created a beginning orientation toward the president. This beginning orientation, which Horsley (1994) claimed was untestable,

influenced perceptions on environmental conditions such as the economy, domestic events, foreign events, and both extraordinary domestic and foreign events, all of which figured in the evaluation of the president in the testable portion of the theory. Horsley (1994) tested his theory, which sought a more causal explanation of presidential approval using LISREL techniques. The environmental theory that he tested indicates that the economy is the most important explanatory variable for approval. Wars, scandals, and foreign activity are also important, but considerably less so than the economy. Domestic events interestingly have the least effect, but generally the factors change in importance when narrowing the focus to particular party groups. Horsley (1994), however, tested his model in conjunction with the Bush presidency. It is important to determine if the same variables that explained approval for Bush do so for other Presidents as well.

Wert (1998) examined the matter of Clinton's approval, seeking an explanation as to why his approval was lower than it should have been considering the circumstances of the day. While examining whether there was truly a significant difference between Clinton's expected and actual approval ratings, something Wert (1998) tested by utilizing Horsley's (1994) LISREL model, the most important part of his research was examining the matter of disapproval. While Mueller (1970, 1973) indicated disapprovers were mirror images of approvers and so unnecessary to study, others found this not to be true. Wert (1998) decided to examine the Clinton administration to determine if there were differences between approvers and disapprovers that did not make them mirror images of each other. He found the following: (1) disapproval rates do matter, (2) disapprovers are not just mirror images of approvers, (3) even support for Clinton was weak, and (3) approvers were softer in their approval than disapprovers were in their disapproval.

CONCLUSION

Why does presidential approval inevitably decline over the course of a president's administration? Despite all the studies carried out to determine the answer, there is little consensus as to what the answer truly is. In fact, the review of the literature points to a number of competing explanations of approval. Which then is most important? According to Horsley (1994), real-world events explanations are. Other research would point to this being the case. However, we then have to determine which of the real-world events explanations is most important. Here, the evidence points to the economy, but which of the economic explanations is most important: economic indicators such as inflation and unemployment, one's personal financial situation in the past, one's personal financial situation in the future, the nation's economy in the past, or the nation's economy in the future? The matter is largely unsettled, nor is it completely clear that the economy is the most important real-world events explanation.

With all the emphasis that has been placed on real-world events explanations, we often lose sight of other plausible explanations of presidential approval. Scholars have begun to examine the issue of perceptions of presidential persona, but this is only an emerging area of study. Furthermore, affective measures of presidential persona, particularly favorability ratings, are often dismissed as nothing more than another measure of approval. As a result, we do not have a full consideration of the influence perceptions of presidential persona have on presidential approval. This is troublesome, as scholars have found that people base their evaluations of political leaders on the same things on which they base their evaluations of other people, which is generally the type of persons they are. Furthermore, Kinder (1986) asserts that the public simplifies the

complex political world by using character as a means of evaluating the president. If this is true, indeed perceptions of presidential persona may be equally important as real-world explanations, if not perhaps more important, and the literature needs to take this more into account than it presently does.

Finally, two further issues arise out of the presidential approval literature. First, there are few comprehensive models that would allow us to bring together all the rival explanations into one analysis allowing us to arrive at the single best explanation of approval, a serious problem alluded to above. Secondly, the literature does not take into account the effect that change in the meaning of the standard approval question might have on presidential approval. Despite numerous studies outside the field of political science that call into question the constancy of question meaning, students of presidential approval assume that the meaning of the standard approval question remains constant. As a result, the potential for change in presidential approval being merely a reflection of change in the approval question is not considered. This review shows that more has to be done in order to gain a complete picture of the explanations of presidential approval.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In chapter one, we introduced a comprehensive model of presidential approval. In this chapter, we elaborate on the model, discussing how we test it, the expectations of the outcome of those tests, and the model's components, particularly their relationship to each other and to presidential approval, how they are measured, and their sources. Furthermore, we present four key hypotheses. While one is supported only by indirect evidence, which we discuss, three are tested directly via the test of our model.

MODEL OF PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL

FIGURE 3.1: Comprehensive Model Of Presidential Approval
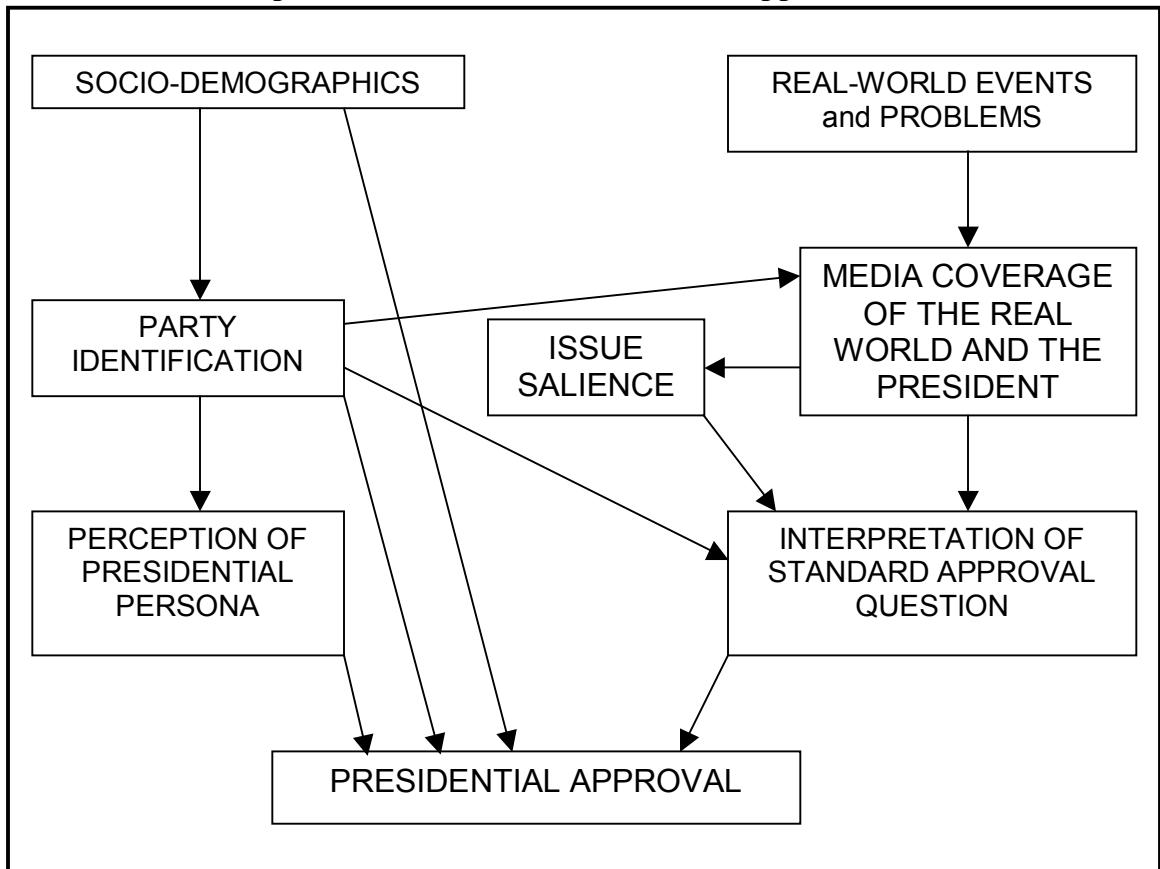
Figure 3.1, above is a graphic depiction of our model of presidential approval, showing the relationships between the components, and their relation to presidential approval. Real-world events and problems, media coverage of the real world and the

president, and issue salience have only an indirect influence on presidential approval, while interpretation of the standard approval question and perception of presidential persona have only a direct influence on presidential approval. Socio-demographics and party identification exert both a direct and indirect influence on presidential approval. The indirect influence of socio-demographics is exerted through party identification, as certain demographic groups are more likely to be Republican, while others are more likely to be Democratic, e.g., males tend to be more Republican, African-Americans tend to be more Democratic.

Party identification exerts its first indirect influence through perception of presidential persona. Party identification affects one's perception of presidential persona as members of the president's party are more likely to have warm feelings toward him, have positive feelings elicited by him, and think more highly of his character; while members of the opposition party are more likely to have cold feelings toward the president, have negative feelings elicited by him, and think less highly of his character. Party identification exerts its second indirect influence through interpretation of the standard approval question. Members of the president's party are more likely to interpret the meaning of the presidential approval question within the context of issues they believe the president is handling well, and they evaluate him accordingly. As a result, they approve of the president's handling of his job, although this may simply be a justification of support based solely on their partisanship. On the other hand, members of the opposition party are likely predisposed to disapprove, so they interpret the approval question within the context of issues they believe the president is handling poorly. Their evaluation of the president is based on those issues, leading to disapproval and

justification of their partisan-based disapproval. Finally, research shows the influence of party identification on media's effect on respondents, as strong partisans are less susceptible to negative media coverage of their party's president (Goidel, et al., 1997).

In dealing with the remaining variables that exert only an indirect influence on presidential approval, we first consider real-world events and problems. The bulk of the presidential approval literature emphasizes real-world events explanations, leading us to believe that they exert a direct influence on presidential approval since what occurs in the real world, most notably economic performance, drives presidential approval, particularly change in it over time. However, in reality only the perception one has of real-world events and problems influences presidential approval directly. Those perceptions are largely the result of media coverage of real-world events and problems, thereby making their influence on presidential approval only indirect.

Media coverage itself does not exert a direct influence on presidential approval either. It exerts its influence through other variables. First, media coverage of the president affects one's perception of presidential persona. The media affect perceptions of presidential persona in the sense that a negative tone toward the president may yield more negative evaluations of his persona, leading to greater likelihood of disapproval, while a positive tone may yield more positive evaluations, leading to a greater likelihood of approval. Second, media coverage affects the interpretation of the standard approval question, directly and indirectly through the variable of issue-salience.

Through priming, respondents evaluate the president based on what is at the forefront of their thinking, typically what has received the most attention from the media. What has received the bulk of the media's attention becomes the salient issue(s) of the

day, representing the influence media coverage of the real world and the president has on issue-salience. Thus, when respondents are asked whether they approve or disapprove of the president's handling of his job, they will interpret the meaning of "handling his job" in light of his handling of those issues believed most salient, thus representing how issue salience influences interpretation of the standard approval question. The importance of the influence of the interpretation of the standard approval question is that it shifts the bases of evaluation of the president, so that change in approval is really little more than change in the bases of evaluation. The issues on which respondents base their evaluation of the president are determined largely by which issues the media are covering at a given time. These are subject to change, thereby changing the interpretation of the standard approval question. Media exert a significant, indirect influence on presidential approval.

We have exhausted the discussion of each of the components of our comprehensive model and their relationship to each other and presidential approval, with the exception of the two components that exert a direct influence on presidential approval. These are perceptions of presidential persona, and interpretation of the standard approval question. Both of these direct influences represent the two rival explanations of presidential approval introduced in chapter one. Since we discussed them in length then, we only highlight the important aspects of them here. In regard to perception of the president's persona, Kinder (1986) asserts that the public wonders about the type of person the president is, and that assessments of his persona, represented by assessments of his character, act as a means of simplifying the complex political world. Essentially, the public substitutes a knowledge and understanding of the president's policy-making with character assessments as a means of evaluating the president and his

handling of the job. Based on Kinder's (1986) findings, we assert that one's perception of presidential persona provides the single-best explanation of presidential approval.

The importance of the influence of the interpretation of the standard approval question lies in the fact that the bases of evaluation of the president are determined in large part by how the respondent interprets the meaning of the question, and are subject to change as the interpretation of the question changes. Thus, the same respondent could approve of the president's handling of his job at one point in time and then disapprove at another point in time due solely to changes in the interpretation of the approval question. For example, at point A, the respondent may interpret the approval question within the framework of the war on terrorism, and believing President Bush is handling the war on terrorism well, will decide to approve. At point B, the respondent may interpret the approval question within the framework of economic performance, and believing President Bush is not handling the economy well, will decide to disapprove, yet may still believe that the president is handling the war on terrorism well. Furthermore, he or she may have believed the president was not handling the economy well when he or she decided to approve based on the president's perceived handling of terrorism. Thus, there was no change in the perceptions of the real world, simply a change in the interpretation of the standard approval question. We believe that variance in presidential approval is really a result of variance in the interpretation of the standard approval question, rather than variance in perceptions of the real world.

To this point we have presented the formal model, and explained the relationships between the components of it. The next step would be to operationalize the variables that measure these components, and explain how we test this model. This is not as simple as

it seems. As we discuss later in this chapter, our datasets come from National Elections Studies (NES) surveys administered in 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000. Thus, we are limited to that data in measuring the components of our model. However, not all of these components have valid measures in the NES datasets. Specifically, while the NES data do include measures of one's exposure to media coverage, they do not include measures of the effects of media coverage on perceptions of real-world events, issue salience, or the interpretation of the standard approval question. In order to even attempt such an assessment, a time-consuming content analysis of media coverage would have to be undertaken. This is clearly beyond the scope of this dissertation, and might not provide any direct evidence anyway. Even if it did, we still would have a problem because that data would not be part of the NES dataset used to test the model.

Due to these data limitations, we conclude that our comprehensive model has both a testable and non-testable portion. In this dissertation, our focus is on the testable portion of the model. Thus, whenever we refer to the comprehensive model, or simply model, in the remainder of this dissertation, it applies solely to the testable portion unless otherwise noted. The testable portion of the model includes the components of socio-demographics, party identification, and perception of presidential persona. In addition, we include five measures of perceptions of the real world, specifically four measures of the perceptions of economic performance and a single measure of the perception of the US position in the world. These measures allow us to include assessments of the real world, which are so prominent in the presidential approval literature, but do not allow us to examine those assessments in light of media coverage. The testable model is represented by the equation $A = P + I + E + F + D$, where A is approval, P is perception

of the president's persona, I is party identification, E is perceptions of economic performance, F is the perception of foreign relations performance, and D is the socio-demographic factors. The results from testing the model, which are presented in chapter four, help us answer our first research question.

The third research question has essentially already been answered. The use of data that come from surveys administered only at given points in time every so many years, such as the NES data we use in this dissertation, rather than from surveys that are regularly administered, disallows any direct assessment of the effects that differences and changes in the meaning of the presidential approval question have on approval, specifically whether change in question meaning over time explains change in approval over time. Thus, in this dissertation, we are able to assess those effects only indirectly. Even if we considered data outside of the NES dataset that comes from regularly administered surveys, we still presently do not have data that would allow us to directly assess the effects of change in the meaning of the presidential approval question on approval. Recognizing that we are unable to directly test the effects of the interpretation of the standard approval question on presidential approval, we removed it from the testable portion of our comprehensive model. However, it does not mean that we ignore the issue completely. Change in the meaning of the presidential approval question is a rival explanation of presidential approval put forth in this dissertation, and is one of the key contributions this dissertation makes to our understanding of presidential approval. In the section to follow, we present our formal question-meaning hypothesis. Since it cannot be tested directly, we will elaborate on some of the means of assessing the validity of the question-meaning hypothesis indirectly.

HYPOTHESES TO BE TESTED

In chapter one, we put forth two rival explanations of presidential approval, presidential persona and change in the meaning of the presidential approval question. Here, we put forth the hypotheses associated with both. The presidential persona hypothesis is the key to the entire dissertation, and is tested directly by the tests of our comprehensive model. If the evaluation of presidential persona provides the largest explanation of presidential approval on a regular basis, then we have strong support for our persona hypothesis. The hypothesis is stated as follows:

> H1: Persona Hypothesis: All else being equal, evaluation of presidential persona exerts the greatest influence on presidential approval.

The issue of question meaning has been explored rather extensively outside the realm of presidential approval studies, but has been relatively ignored by students of presidential approval. Thus, our rival explanation of change in presidential approval being plausibly explained by change in the meaning of the presidential approval question is vital. We presented the rationale behind the explanation in chapter one. Here we present it as a formal hypothesis, as follows:

> H2: Question Meaning Hypothesis: Change in presidential approval over time is a result of change in the bases of evaluation of the president over time. Those changes in the bases of evaluation are the result of changes in the interpretation of the presidential approval question. Thus, change in presidential approval merely reflects change in the interpretation of the presidential approval question over time.

As we have already established, unlike the presidential persona hypothesis, the question-meaning hypothesis is not directly testable via the NES data, or any other data for that matter. Instead, we rely on indirect evidence to support it. The source of the first

piece of indirect evidence is an analysis of differences in issue salience on explanations of presidential approval. The other two hypotheses put forth in this dissertation involve this matter of issue-salience. If issue-salience acts as a contextual clue used by respondents to assign meaning to the presidential approval question, then differences in what respondents identify as salient should result in differences in what explains presidential approval. Specifically, the variables related to the salient issue, measured by responses to the question asking respondents what they believe is the most important problem (MIP) facing the country should explain more variance in approval when the issue is salient than when it is not. The first of these hypotheses considers the salience of the economy, while the second considers the salience of foreign relations.

We test these hypotheses by controlling for issue-salience in the tests of our comprehensive model. We do so by first selecting those cases in which the issue is not salient, then selecting those cases in which the issue is salient. We then compare the results of both tests to determine if there are differences in the performance of our independent variables in explaining presidential approval. In order to support our hypotheses, we should find improvement in the explanation of presidential approval provided by perceptions of the economy when the economy is not the MIP to when it is; and we should find similar improvement in the perception of the US position in the world variable from when foreign relations is not the MIP to when it is. If we do not find such improvement, then our hypotheses on the effects of issue-salience are not supported. The two issue-salience hypotheses are presented below.

H3: ISSUE SALIENCE HYPOTHESES

H3a: Economic Salience: The variables measuring perception of the economy should explain more variance in presidential approval when the economy is the MIP, than when it is not.

H3b: Foreign Relations Salience: The variable measuring perception of the US position in the world should explain more variance in presidential approval when foreign relations is the MIP, than when it is not.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE VARIABLES

Below, we discuss each of the testable components of our model. We begin with the dependent variable, presidential approval. We next discuss the set of independent variables, namely, party identification, evaluation of presidential persona, and perceptions of economic performance and the position of the US in the world, both of which presumably reflect media coverage of real-world events. The third type of variable we discuss is the control variable of socio-demographic features. Finally, we discuss the moderator variable of issue salience.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE: PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL

The dependent variable in tests of our comprehensive model is obviously presidential approval. We not only consider overall approval, but also expand our analysis to consider approval of the president's handling of both the economy and foreign relations. By examining all three indicators of approval, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of presidential approval than what the literature typically provides with its near exclusive focus on overall approval. Furthermore, differences among the three types of approval in regard to what is important in explaining the variance in approval might provide indirect evidence that question meaning does matter as we believe it does.

The three approval variables are drawn from responses to three separate NES questions, presented in the appendix. Each of the approval questions is followed by a question asking respondents whether they approve or disapprove strongly or not strongly. While the NES approval scale moves from strongly approve to strongly disapprove, we recode it so that approval is a higher value, plus we throw out all Don't Know responses. The result is a four-point approval scale with the following values: (1) disapprove strongly, (2) disapprove not strongly, (3) approve not strongly, and (4) approve strongly.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

PRESIDENTIAL PERSONA

The presidential persona variable is a combination of three separate, but highly correlated measures[20] related to perception of the president as a person, including two affective components and one cognitive component. The first component, which is affective, is the score for each respondent on the standard NES feeling thermometer. In each NES study, respondents are asked to rate various political figures on a thermometer scale. Response options are essentially those of an actual thermometer, 0 to 100. Low scores indicate cold feelings for the individual, high scores indicate warm feelings for the person, and a score of 50 indicates neutral feelings.

The second component, also affective, is based on a scaled variable of feelings elicited by the president. Since 1984, the NES surveys have asked respondents if the incumbent president has ever made them feel angry, afraid, hopeful, or proud because of something he did or the type of person he is. We recoded the responses to each of these

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[20] A complete set of tables showing the correlations between the feeling thermometer, scale of feelings elicited by the president, and scale of perceptions of character traits descriptive of the president for each year is presented in the appendix.

questions so that a 1 was a negative response, while a 2 was a positive response. Therefore, a "yes" answer to angry and afraid was coded 1 while a "no" answer was coded 2. Conversely, a "yes" answer to hopeful and proud was coded 2 while a "no" answer was coded 1. Following the recoding, the four variables were summed into an index. The result was a variable with scores ranging from 4 to 8. The higher the score, the more positive the feelings elicited by the president.

The third component, which is cognitive, measures perceptions of the president's character. Respondents were asked to state how well a particular character trait described the president. The five character traits we include in our persona variable are intelligent, moral, knowledgeable, cares about people, and provides strong leadership. Each of these traits is positive in nature, and is coded as follows: Describes the president… (1) not well at all, (2) not too well, (3) quite well, and (4) extremely well. We sum the scores for each trait, resulting in a scale ranging from five to twenty, with higher scores indicating a more favorable perception of the president's character.

Because each of these three components is measured differently, they had to be standardized before they could be summed together to create a scaled persona variable. To do this, we created z-scores for each of the three components. We then proceeded to sum the resulting z-scores. The result of this summation of z-scores is a scaled, multi-faceted measure of individual perceptions of presidential persona, ranging from very negative to very positive, and is used to directly test our persona hypothesis.

PARTY IDENTIFICATION

On party identification, we simply used the standard NES measure, which asks respondents whether they are Republican, Democrat, or Independent. Their response is

further probed to determine the strength of their partisanship if Republican or Democrat, or their leaning toward one party or the other if Independent, resulting in the standard seven-point party ID scale, coded by NES as follows: (0) strong Democrat, (1) not strong Democrat, (2) Democrat leaning Independent, (3) Independent, (4) Republican leaning Independent, (5) not strong Republican, (6) strong Republican. With this coding, a positive change in party identification indicates being more Republican, while a negative change indicates being more Democratic.

PERCEPTIONS OF ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

Since the presidential approval literature strongly suggests economic performance plays a dominant role in explaining presidential approval, at least at the aggregate level, any comprehensive model of explanations of presidential approval at the individual level must include measures of perceptions of economic performance. The NES data include four consistently probed measures of perceptions of economic performance, and we use all four in our model. The first two assess respondents' retrospective perceptions of their own personal financial situation and the nation's economy as a whole (sociotropic evaluations), and are coded as (1) much worse, (2) somewhat worse, (3) stayed the same, (4) somewhat better, and (5) much better. The second two assess respondents' prospective perceptions of their own personal financial situation and the nation's economy, and are coded as (1) get worse, (2) stay the same, and (3) get better.

The *personal retrospective evaluation* measures respondents' perceptions of their own financial situation over the past year, while the *sociotropic retrospective evaluation* measures respondents perceptions of the nation's economy as a whole over the past year. The *sociotropic prospective evaluation* measures the performance of the nation's

economy as a whole over the next twelve months, while the *personal prospective evaluation* measures perceptions of one's own financial situation over the next twelve months. Finally, other economic performance measures, such as inflation and unemployment, appear in the NES data only sporadically, and so we do not include them in our model. However, the four measures we do use provide a broad picture of the effects of perceptions of economic performance on presidential approval, and allow us to directly test for these effects, and compare the influence of perceptions of economic performance with other explanations of presidential approval included in our model.

PERCEPTIONS OF FOREIGN RELATIONS PERFORMANCE

While we have four NES measures of perceptions of economic performance, we have only one NES measure of foreign relations performance, namely perceptions of the position of the US in the world. It is coded as follows: (1) gotten weaker, (2) stayed about the same, and (3) gotten stronger. While we would prefer to have more measures of foreign relations performance, other NES measures of foreign relations performance possess certain problems. Questions regarding the threat of war and beliefs about isolationism, do not really measure perceptions of foreign relations performance. The other questions that do measure perceptions of foreign relations performance appear only sporadically, and many address specific events that have occurred in the recent past. As a result, we do not have the same measure across all the years of our study. Due to these problems with the other measures, we include only this single measure of perceptions of foreign relations performance in our model. Perception of the US position in the world is itself a measure that is not free from potential problems.

Specifically, its meaning, like the standard approval question, is rather ambiguous. While ostensibly measuring foreign relations performance, the phrase "position of the US in the world" is open to interpretation. One may ask, "position in the world in what sense?" Is our military stronger or weaker than other countries? Is our labor force better or worse? Are we more or less educated? Is our economy stronger or weaker? The list goes on and on. Generally speaking, we would expect that if respondents perceive any of these as better, then they are more likely to approve of the president. However, whether the perception of the US in the world is purely a foreign relations assessment is not clear. If it is perceived as an economic question, then the US position in the world could conceivably explain variance in economic approval, even though it is not an economic question per se. Problems with the meaning of the US position in the world question unfortunately complicate the interpretation of its influence on the various types of approval, particularly when we consider issue salience.

CONTROL VARIABLE: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS

The presidential approval literature suggests that age,[21] race,[22] gender,[23] education,[24] income,[25] and employment status[26] influence presidential approval. Thus,

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[21] Age is coded in real years from 17 to 99, although 99 typically includes those who are 97, 98, or 99 and above depending on the year of the study.

[22] Blacks are coded 1 and whites are coded 0. Other races, which were small in number, were excluded from analysis.

[23] Males are coded 1 and females are coded 0.

[24] No years of education is coded 0, while seventeen years or more is coded 17. Codes 12 through 16 are the actual years of education.

[25] Income codes differ each year, but each code represents a range of actual dollar amounts. The precise codes for income for each year appear in the appendix.

[26] Employment status is a set of three dummy variables. Those who are currently working are coded 1 and all others are coded 0 in a WORK variable. Those who are temporarily laid off or are unemployed are coded as 1 and all others coded as 0 in a variable of those involuntarily not working, labeled NOTWORK1. Those who are

we include these socio-demographic features in our comprehensive model, with the relevant codes from the NES data provided below in the footnotes. In preliminary analyses, we also included marital status, region of the country in which the respondent lived, and union membership, but due to an infrequent appearance as a significant explanation of presidential approval, we removed them from further consideration. Although our model shows socio-demographics as having both an indirect and direct effect on approval, their inclusion in tests of the model is primarily as a control variable.

MODERATOR VARIABLE: ISSUE SALIENCE

The final variable to discuss is the moderator variable of issue-salience. Issue-salience acts as a moderator variable, as differences in the issues that are salient should result in differences in what explains presidential approval, thereby providing indirect evidence supporting our question-meaning hypothesis. Issue-salience is measured by the responses to the Most Important Problem (MIP) question posed each year in the NES data. Respondents are asked to identify a number of problems they believe are important problems facing the country, and then are asked which of those they believe is the most important problem facing the country. The responses are categorized by subject, with our focus being on only two categories: (1) a foreign affairs/national security category[27] created by combining the related categories of foreign relations and national defense, and

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retired, disabled, housewives, or students are coded as 1 and all others coded as 0 in a dummy variable of those voluntarily not working, labeled NOTWORK2.

[27] This is a dummy variable in which a foreign relations problem is coded 1 and any other category of problem is coded 0.

(2) an overall economics category[28], created by combining the unemployment codes from the social welfare category with the economic and business problems category.

DATA SOURCES

We test our comprehensive model using data drawn from the National Elections Studies of 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000. Although data exist for the midterm election years of 1986, 1990, 1994, and 1998, we limit our analysis to the five presidential election years for the following reasons: (1) 1984 is the first year in which NES measured approval of the president's handling of his job overall, plus his handling of the economy and foreign relations; (2) we essentially control for time by analyzing data collected at the same given point in time during each administration, namely near the time of the presidential election; (3) the data from all of these years include each of the measures of our variables, allowing for a consistent comparison of variables across the years of our study, whereas not all the midterm election years include all the measures of our variables, thereby limiting comparison over time; and (4) since the presidential election may exert an influence on presidential approval, which would not exist in the midterm election years, including data from both presidential and midterm elections could result in serious measurement error. Clearly, despite some disadvantages discussed later, selecting data from only the five presidential election years is the best choice for analyzing presidential approval at the individual level.

The data from 1984, 1992, and 1996 were drawn from the pre-election administration of the NES survey. The administration of the 1984 pre-election NES survey began on September 5, and ended on November 5. It included 2,257 respondents,

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[28] Also a dummy variable in which an economics problem is coded 1 and any other category of problem is coded 0.

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yielding 1,475 valid cases on overall approval; 1,495 valid cases on economic approval; and 1,482 valid cases on foreign relations approval. Administration of the 1992 NES pre-election survey began on September 1 and concluded on November 2. It included 2,485 respondents, yielding 1,917 valid cases on overall approval; 1,929 valid cases on economic approval; and 1,920 valid cases on foreign relations approval. Administration of the 1996 NES pre-election survey began on September 3 and concluded on November 4. It included 1,714 respondents, yielding 1,537 valid cases on overall approval; 1,516 valid cases on economic approval; and 1,513 valid cases on foreign relations approval.

The data from 1988 and 2000 were drawn from both the pre- and post-election surveys. Administration of the 1988 pre-election survey began September 6 and ended November 7, and included 2,040 respondents. Administration of the 1988 post-election survey began November 8 and ended January 30, and included 1,775 respondents. The number of valid cases on overall approval is 1,428. The number of valid cases on economic approval is 1,413. The number of valid cases on foreign relations approval is 1,422. Administration of the 2000 pre-election survey began on September 5 and concluded on November 6, and included 1,807 respondents. Administration of the 2000 post-election survey began on November 8 and concluded on December 18, and included 1,555 respondents. The number of valid cases for overall approval was 1,272, while the valid number of cases for economic approval was 1,271, and the valid number of cases for foreign relations approval was 1,270.

LIMITATIONS OF THE DATA

Two caveats about the NES data must be issued. First, since the NES surveys are not administered on a regular basis, we are unable to use NES data to explain change in

presidential approval over time. Instead, we are able to explain only the factors that influence approval at a given point in time, specifically around the time of the presidential election in 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000, which is still an important undertaking. However, other important factors that could influence presidential approval might arise at times other than around presidential elections, and would go unmeasured by NES surveys. As a result, the use of NES data prevents us from potentially creating as comprehensive a model as we would like, since any factors influencing presidential approval that are unmeasured by the NES surveys during presidential election years would not be included in our model. Thus, the use of NES data poses some problems relative to generalization of the findings.

Second, there may be some question wording and ordering issues. Certain questions have slight alterations in their wording across time, which may or may not have an effect consistent with research that indicates question wording can make a difference in the responses that are given so that you may not be measuring the same thing.[29] A potentially more serious problem is the inconsistency in the order and context in which certain questions appear on the questionnaires across time. Research shows the effect question ordering can have on responses to presidential approval questions.[30] Since we have no way of controlling for any question ordering differences across NES surveys, however, we must accept the NES data as is, despite the potential for measurement error.

DATA ANALYSIS

The primary undertaking in the data analysis of this dissertation is the testing of our comprehensive model. While we put forth three hypotheses that can be tested

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[29] See Orren (1978), Crespi (1980), and Roper (1983)
[30] See Bishop (1991), Alspach and Bishop (1991)

directly, those tests occur within the context of testing our comprehensive model. Testing the comprehensive model will tell us which variable explains the most variance in presidential approval on a regular basis, thereby testing our persona hypothesis.

The first issue-salience hypothesis is tested by the two tests of the comprehensive model in which we split the sample into two groups, one identifying an economic issue as the MIP, and the other identifying anything but an economic issue as the MIP. The second issue-salience hypothesis is tested by the two tests of the comprehensive model in which we split the sample into two groups, one identifying a foreign affairs/national security issue as the MIP, and the other identifying anything but a foreign affairs/national security issue as the MIP. If the perceptions of economic performance variables explain more variance in presidential approval among those who identified an economic issue as the MIP than among those who identified something other than an economic issue as the MIP, then we have support for our first issue-salience hypothesis. Similarly, support for the second issue-salience hypothesis occurs if the perception of the US position in the world variable explains more variance in presidential approval among those identifying a foreign affairs/national security issue as the MIP than among those identifying something other than a foreign affairs/national security issue as the MIP.

Since we test the three directly testable hypotheses by testing the comprehensive model, we dedicate the remainder of this section to a discussion of the means by which this is done. Those means are standard, ordinary-least-squares regression using the enter method of selection[31]. We selected the enter method for primarily two reasons. First, we

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[31] The enter method is the default equation building method of SPSS in which all variables selected as independent variables are included in the model. No variables are removed via a process of steps as in the case of forward, backward, or stepwise selection.

already had a theory as to which independent variables explain our dependent variable, making step-wise, forward, or backward selection unnecessary. Second, we wanted to put all the independent variables in the model at once in order to control for the effects of each, thereby gaining a more accurate account of which independent variables are significant and the relative explanation of the variance in approval each provides.

We selected ordinary, least-squares regression rather than log-linear or logistic regression for primarily two reasons. First, our dependent variable of presidential approval is an interval level variable with a reasonably normal distribution across four values. Thus, the requirements of ordinary, least-squares regression are met. Secondly, the output of the regression analysis is much more straightforward in its interpretation. As a result, it is less complicated to determine exactly how much variance in approval each variable explains, thereby determining whether our expectations have been met, and more importantly, whether our hypotheses were supported. We should note, however, that we also tested our model via logistic regression to ensure that there were no significant differences in the outcome between the logistic regression and ordinary, least squares regression. The findings from both tests were virtually the same.

The use of ordinary, least-squares regression requires a formal regression equation, which is as follows:

Presidential approval = β_0 + β_1(perception of presidential persona) + β_2(party identification) + β_3(perception of personal retrospective economic evaluation) + β_4(perception of personal prospective economic evaluation) + β_5(perception of sociotropic retrospective economic evaluation) + β_6(perception of sociotropic prospective economic evaluation) + β_7(perception of US position in the world) + β_8(age) + β_9(education) + β_{10}(gender) + β_{11}(income) + β_{12}(race) + β_{13}(currently working) + β_{14}(voluntarily not working) + β_{15}(involuntarily not working) + ε

The results of the tests of this equation are presented as statistics generated by SPSS. We are most interested in the following three statistics: (1) the R squares value of the entire model, which shows how much of the variance in presidential approval the regression model explains, thereby helping to answer part of our first research question; (2) the beta weight of each variable, which standardizes the values of each independent variable allowing for direct comparison between them, thereby allowing us to determine the relative importance of each independent variable in explaining approval; and (3) the significance level of each variable, which sheds light on which variables consistently influence presidential approval and which do not, providing further answers to our research questions. Finally, we should note that certain variables in the regression equation raise the potential for multicollinearity, which would skew the results of the tests of our comprehensive model. However, collinearity diagnostics indicated that it was a minimal threat. The tolerance and VIF values are presented in the appendix.

We test the regression equation a total of fifteen times over all five years we consider, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000. Tests one through three test overall approval, economic approval, and foreign relations approval, respectively, and include all respondents. The primary purpose of these tests is to determine which is the best explanation of presidential approval, thereby testing our persona hypothesis.

Tests four through fifteen take issue salience into account. Tests four through nine consider economic salience, while tests ten through fifteen consider foreign relations salience. Overall approval, economic approval, and foreign relations approval are all tested twice on each type of issue salience. The first set of tests considering economic salience, tests four through six, includes only those respondents who identified something

other than an economic issue as the MIP. The second set of tests, tests seven through nine, includes only those respondents who identified an economic issue as the MIP. The first set of tests considering foreign relations salience, tests ten through twelve, includes only respondents who identified something other than a foreign affairs/national security issue as the MIP, while the second set of tests, tests thirteen through fifteen, includes only respondents who identified a foreign affairs/national security issue as the MIP.

SUMMARY OF EXPECTATIONS

As we conclude chapter three, we briefly discuss our expectations regarding the outcome of the data analysis. While the literature would lead us to believe that perceptions of economic performance should explain the most variance in presidential approval, followed by party identification, and that perception of presidential persona matters little, our set of expectations does not follow these beliefs generated by the literature. Instead, we believe that perception of presidential persona provides the best explanation of variance in presidential approval, followed by party identification, perceptions of economic performance, perception of the US position in the world, and socio-demographics. The latter is ranked in terms of amount of variance in presidential approval explained as follows: employment status, race, gender, income, and age. In regard to the economic perceptions variables, we expect that the *sociotropic retrospective evaluation* will explain the most variance in presidential approval among the four perceptions of economic performance variables, an expectation, that although lacking consensus, has the greatest support in the presidential approval literature.

These expectations apply to overall approval. On both economic approval and foreign relations approval, we still expect perception of presidential persona to explain

the most variance in approval. However, we expect the amount of variance it explains in absolute terms to be diminished as the amount of variance in economic approval explained by the sociotropic retrospective evaluation of the economy increases in absolute terms, and the amount of variance in foreign relations approval explained by the perception of the US position in the world increases in absolute terms.

Furthermore, on economic approval, we expect the other perceptions of economic performance to explain more variance in economic approval than overall approval, relative to the other variables; and on foreign relations approval, we expect the US position in the world to explain more variance in foreign relations approval than any of the perceptions of economic performance variables. Finally, although party identification may still explain the second largest amount of variance in both economic and foreign relations approval on some occasions, it may at times be replaced by the sociotropic retrospective evaluation of the economy on economic approval, and the perception of the US position in the world on foreign relations approval.

Regarding issue-salience, we expect the following: (1) the four perceptions of economic performance variables will explain more variance in all three types of approval among respondents who identified an economic issue as the MIP than among respondents who identified something other than an economic issue as the MIP, and (2) the perception of the US position in the world will explain more variance in all three types of approval among respondents who identified a foreign affairs/national security issue as the MIP than among respondents who identified something other than a foreign affairs/national security issue as the MIP. We thus conclude chapter three. On the following page is a table defining the variable labels appearing in the tables in the next chapter.

Table 3.1: Variable Label Definitions

PRESIDENTSPERSONA:	Presidential persona measure. Includes the feeling thermometer for the incumbent; scaled measure of whether the president has made respondent feel angry, afraid, hopeful, or proud; and scaled measure of the extent to which the respondent believes the president is moral, intelligent, knowledgeable, cares about people, and provides strong leadership
PARTYID:	Seven point party identification scale
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE:	Sociotropic retrospective evaluation of the nation's economy
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE:	Sociotropic prospective evaluation of the nation's economy
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE:	Personal retrospective evaluation of the nation's economy
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE:	Personal retrospective evaluation of the nation's economy
USPOSITION:	Whether respondent believes the position of the US in the world has grown stronger, weaker, or stayed about the same over the past year
AGE:	Respondents age in real years
EDUCATION:	Number of years of education respondent has had
GENDER:	Respondent's gender
INCOME:	Respondent's family income in actual dollar amounts
RACE:	Respondent's race, coded as white/black
NOTWORK1:	Voluntarily not working: retired, permanently disabled, housewives, and students
NOTWORK2:	Involuntarily not working: temporarily laid off and unemployed
WORK:	Currently working

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In this chapter, we are focused on two things. First, we present the findings from the tests of our comprehensive model. We begin with the findings on overall approval, move to economic approval, and conclude with foreign relations approval. We present in tabular form the key statistics for each year of our analysis, namely the beta weights, t-tests, and significance levels for each of the variables, and the r-square values for the model itself. We follow each table with an explication of the statistical findings.

Second, we present the findings from our tests of issue salience. Again, we present the statistics in tabular form beginning with overall approval, moving to economic approval, and ending with foreign relations approval. For each type of approval, we present two tables. The first presents data when the economy is NOT the most important problem, while the second presents the data when the economy is the most important problem. Data considering foreign relations as the salient issue is presented in the appendix, as are the tolerance measures for each run of the regression model, testing the potential for multi-collinearity among the independent variables.

OVERALL APPROVAL

In explicating the findings on overall presidential approval, shown below in table 4.1, we consider how well our model explains variance in overall presidential approval, how well it replicates across election years, and the performance of the following variables: (1) socio-demographics, (2) measures of the perceptions of economic performance, (3) measures of the perception of the US position in the world, (4) party identification, and (5) perception of presidential persona.

TABLE 4.1: Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Overall Approval of the President by Year

Independent Variables	1984			1988			1992			1996			2000		
	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
AGE	-.034	-2.054	.040	-.075	-3.949	.000	-.038	-2.182	.029	-.021	-1.161	.246	.034	1.437	.151
EDUCATION	-.006	-.379	.705	-.052	-3.004	.003	-.058	-3.380	.001	.010	.651	.515	.007	.352	.725
GENDER	-.002	-.115	.908	.017	1.042	.298	-.038	-2.430	.015	-.007	-.473	.636	-.028	-1.453	.147
INCOME	-.013	-.808	.419	.019	1.048	.295	.002	.097	.923	-.036	-2.069	.039	.022	1.034	.301
NOTWORK1	-.031	-1.863	.063	-.041	-2.118	.034	.018	1.002	.316	-.033	-1.798	.072	-.072	-3.039	.002
NOTWORK2	-.007	-.487	.627	.005	.337	.736	-.033	-2.142	.032	-.021	-1.432	.152	.003	.138	.890
PARTY ID	.103	5.804	.000	.113	5.824	.000	.170	9.237	.000	-.097	-4.891	.000	-.131	-5.016	.000
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	.004	.260	.795	.006	.330	.742	.035	2.196	.028	-.025	-1.561	.119	-.068	-3.270	.001
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	.016	1.046	.296	.003	.205	.838	.031	1.937	.053	.004	.237	.813	.029	1.439	.150
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.721	36.223	.000	.693	33.977	.000	.624	31.304	.000	.728	32.320	.000	.671	24.820	.000
RACE	-.065	-4.521	.000	-.073	-4.362	.000	.009	.575	.566	-.006	-.398	.691	-.013	-.651	.515
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.007	.473	.636	-.005	-.302	.762	-.008	-.510	.610	.000	-.005	.996	-.018	-.896	.370
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.077	4.430	.000	.045	2.650	.008	.086	5.160	.000	.079	4.653	.000	.023	1.102	.271
USPOSITION	.002	.143	.886	.046	2.750	.006	.010	.612	.540	.043	2.716	.007	.051	2.449	.014
R SQUARE	.740			.688			.615			.724			.621		

Table 4.1 shows that the model explains a considerable amount of variance in overall presidential approval, with R-square values range from nearly .62 to .74. However, the rather wide range in R square values is somewhat disconcerting. Apparently, the model does a better job of explaining overall approval in certain instances than in others. The findings lead us to believe that factors not measured in our model influence presidential approval more so in some instances than in others. For instance, the model does a better job of explaining approval in the first terms of both the Reagan and Clinton administrations than the second terms of these two presidents, and its performance during the senior Bush's one term is similar to that of the second terms of Reagan and Clinton. Perhaps, the factors explaining approval for one-term presidents are more similar to the factors explaining approval in the second term of two-term presidents rather than the first term of such presidents. Clearly there are dynamics beyond the factors measured in our model that explain approval in such instances, leading to the smaller R square value. However, we can only speculate on what those factors may be as they simply are not picked up by the measures we use in our model. Furthermore, the results could simply be attributed to chance fluctuations.

Moving to a consideration of the performance of the independent variables, the socio-demographic variables, including age, education, gender, income, employment status, and race, perform inconsistently. Age is the most consistent of the socio-demographic variables, but is significant in only three of the five years. However, those three years are for Republican presidents Reagan and Bush. Thus, age matters, at least in our tests for Republican presidents, but not for Democratic presidents, as age was not significant in explaining overall approval of Clinton in both 1996 and 2000. At the same time, we are considering only two Republican

presidents, and only one Democratic president, so generalizing about the importance of age in explaining overall presidential approval is rather limited. In considering the other socio-demographic variables, education and race were significant only twice, as was the dummy variable of those voluntarily not working; while gender, income, and the dummy variable of those involuntarily not working were significant only once. With the possible exception of age, for the reasons discussed above, we generally conclude that socio-demographics do not exert a consistent, direct influence on overall presidential approval.

Moving to the performance of the variables measuring perceptions of the real world, we first consider the four measures of perceptions of economic performance. Due to the prominence of economic explanations of presidential approval in the literature, we expect these four measures to provide a significant explanation of overall approval on a consistent basis. However, this largely does not occur. Of the four measures, two, the retrospective evaluation of one's personal financial situation and the sociotropic prospective evaluation of the nation's economy, never provide a significant explanation of overall approval, while a third, the prospective evaluation of one's personal financial situation, provides a significant explanation only twice. Thus, only one measure, the sociotropic retrospective evaluation of the economy, provided a consistent, significant explanation of overall approval, doing so in four out of five years.

Clearly these findings run counter to what the literature tells us about economic performance and presidential approval. With the lack of consensus as to the relative importance of retrospective versus prospective evaluations, as well as personal versus sociotropic evaluations, we would expect to find evidence of all four measures providing a significant

explanation of variance in overall approval on a consistent basis. Yet, only two provide a significant explanation of overall approval, and only one of those does so consistently. Furthermore, there is little clarification on the debate between the relative importance of retrospective and prospective evaluations, as well as personal and sociotropic evaluations, as one sociotropic measure, one personal evaluation, one retrospective evaluation, and one prospective evaluation provide a significant explanation of variance in overall approval. Apparently the one conclusion we can make is that retrospective evaluations are important when considering the nation's economy as a whole, i.e. sociotropic evaluations; while prospective evaluations are important when considering one's personal financial situation.

Clearly, the four measures of perceptions of economic performance do not provide the explanation of overall approval that we would expect based on the literature, as only one provides a consistent, significant explanation. The failure to perform as expected extends to the amount of variance in approval the single, consistently significant measure explains. If economic performance is as important as the literature indicates, then the sociotropic retrospective evaluations of the economy should explain the most variance in overall approval. Clearly this is not the case, as both perception of presidential persona and party identification explains more variance in overall approval, and by a rather wide margin. However, the amount of variance in overall approval explained by the sociotropic retrospective evaluation relative to perception of presidential persona and party identification is consistent with our own set of expectations. We will return to a discussion of expectations in chapter five.

Turning to the other perception of the real world variable, perception of the position of the US in the world, the literature would have us believe this variable would provide a significant

explanation of overall presidential approval, as foreign relations is the other real-world explanation that has a strong influence on presidential approval. However, much like perceptions of economic performance, perception of the position of the US in the world largely fails to meet these expectations. Specifically, it provides a significant explanation of variance in overall approval in only three of the five years. While we might not necessarily expect this foreign relations measure to explain variance in overall presidential approval in years in which no significant foreign relations event has occurred, we would expect it to explain variance in overall approval in years in which a significant foreign relations event did occur. This is why the findings on perception of the position of the US in the world are so surprising. It does not provide a significant explanation of overall approval in 1992, the one year in which we can point to a clear, major foreign relations event having taken place, namely the Persian Gulf War.

Although perception of the US position in the world does not always provide a significant explanation of variance in overall approval, when it does, the amount of variance it explains relative to perceptions of economic performance is consistent with expectations. There is some indication in the literature that foreign relations is as important as economics in explaining variance in presidential approval. Since both appear to be equally important, we would expect the position of the US in the world to explain more variance in overall approval than perceptions of economic performance on some occasions, less on other occasions, and roughly the same on yet other occasions. This is essentially what happened. In 1988, perception of the US position in the world explained roughly the same amount of variance in overall approval as the sociotropic retrospective evaluation of the economy. In 1996, the sociotropic retrospective evaluation explained more variance. In 2000, the sociotropic retrospective evaluation did not provide a

significant explanation of overall approval, while perception of the US position in the world did. However, 2000 marked one of the two years in which the personal prospective evaluation provided a significant explanation of overall approval, and it explained more variance than perception of the US position in the world. Generally speaking then, this measure of perceptions of foreign relations performance meets expectations in only a limited manner.

We next consider the performance of party identification and the perception of presidential persona. Consistent with our persona hypothesis, the latter provides the single best explanation of overall presidential approval across all five years of our study. In so doing, it explains an overwhelmingly greater amount of variance in overall approval than any other variable. Furthermore, an improvement in one's perception of presidential persona is associated with a greater likelihood of approval.

Also consistent with our expectations, party identification provides the second best explanation of overall approval across all five years of our study. As expected, "being more Republican" increases the likelihood of approval for Republican presidents, and decreases the likelihood of disapproval for Democratic presidents, as indicated by the negative sign associated with the beta weight for party ID in 1996 and 2000. Finally, while party identification adds less explanation to the variance in overall approval than perception of presidential persona, by far, it adds more explanation to the variance in overall approval than the remaining significant variables, by far. This fact indicates that perception of presidential persona and party identification are more important than real-world explanations in explaining overall presidential approval.

We should note, however, that it is entirely possible for much of the effect of party identification to be wrapped up in the perception of presidential persona. Clearly, Republicans are more likely to have a positive perception of the persona of Republican presidents, while Democrats are more likely to have positive perceptions of the persona of Democratic presidents. While members of the president's party are more likely to have a positive perception of his persona, members of the out-party are more likely to have a negative perception of his persona, as they are more likely to "just not like the guy." This likelihood may explain the small beta weights for party ID in comparison to presidential persona, as there is relatively little independent effect of party identification on overall approval beyond its effect through perceptions of presidential persona.

Finally, after having considered the performance of the independent variables, we turn to the matter of replicability. In answering our second research question, we need to determine if the model that best explains presidential approval is the same in each year of our analysis. In a strict sense, the answer is no. The set of significant variables each year is different, so that the model is not the same in each year. As a result, we have essentially five models explaining presidential approval, which poses two problems: (1) we are hard-pressed to arrive at a conclusive best explanation of presidential approval, and (2) we have a problem with replicability. However, such a conclusion is based on focusing on details that lead us to "miss the forest for the trees." When we focus instead on the big picture, a different scenario appears.

If we remove all the independent variables that provide a significant explanation of overall approval only sporadically, and focus on the independent variables that provide a significant explanation of overall approval in at least four of the five years, we have a fairly

consistent model of explanations of approval. That model consists of perceptions of presidential persona, party identification, and the sociotropic retrospective evaluation of the economy. Even if we were to include the variables that provided a significant explanation of overall approval only three of the five years, we would add only age and perception of the US position in the world.

Re-running the regression model with just these five variables yields r-square amounts roughly identical to the r-square amounts of the model with all variables included. Thus, these five variables account for the bulk of the variance in overall approval, while the other variables do little but add noise. Furthermore, the amount of variance in overall approval each variable explains is roughly the same as it was when all variables were included in the model. We conclude that the set of explanations that constitutes the best model, and one that replicates the best over all five years, includes perceptions of presidential persona, party identification, the sociotropic retrospective evaluation of the economy, perception of the US position in the world, and age.

However, this is not a perfectly replicated model. As mentioned, age and perception of the US position in the world provide significant explanations of approval only three times. Furthermore, the model does not do as well in explaining variance in approval in 2000, as the sociotropic retrospective evaluation of the economy did not provide a significant explanation of overall approval that year. With these exceptions, though, this model of five variables does provide the best explanation of variance in overall approval on a rather regular basis.

In summary, our findings lead to the following set of conclusions. First, our model explains a considerable amount of variance in overall presidential approval. Second, socio-

demographic variables exert no consistent, direct influence on overall presidential approval. Third, the economy is not as important an explanation of overall presidential approval at the individual level that the aggregate level research in the literature suggests, as only one measure of perceptions of economic performance provided a consistently significant explanation of variance in overall presidential approval, the sociotropic retrospective evaluation. Fifth, perception of presidential persona provides the single best explanation of overall presidential approval. Sixth, party identification explains the second largest amount of variance in overall presidential approval. Finally, the best model of explanations of overall presidential approval, based on the variables that demonstrated the highest degree of replicability, consists of perception of presidential persona, party identification, the sociotropic retrospective evaluation of the economy, perception of the US position in the world, and age.

ECONOMIC APPROVAL

In shifting attention from overall approval to approval of the president's handling of the economy, we are concerned with how well the model explains economic approval vis-à-vis overall approval, and with changes in the performance of party identification, the perception of presidential persona, the four perceptions of economic performance measures, and the measure of the perception of the position of the US in the world. Our findings on economic approval are presented below in table 4.2.

Table 4.2 shows that our model applied to economic approval does not explain as much variance as it did when applied to overall approval. This is somewhat surprising as we are inquiring about economic approval specifically, and we have four strong measures of perceptions of economic performance. Apparently there are more variables outside our model that explain

TABLE 4.2:   Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Approval of President's Handling

of the Economy by Year

Independent Variables	1984			1988			1992			1996			2000		
	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
AGE	.012	.622	.534	-.007	-.302	.762	.083	3.917	.000	.064	2.749	.006	-.040	-1.362	.173
EDUCATION	.013	.734	.463	-.024	-1.235	.217	-.022	-1.074	.283	.033	1.600	.110	.059	2.272	.023
GENDER	.003	.184	.854	-.014	-.753	.452	-.035	-1.883	.060	.032	1.675	.094	.024	.994	.321
INCOME	.003	.136	.892	.052	2.477	.013	-.049	-2.258	.024	.020	.882	.378	.077	2.879	.004
NOTWORK1	-.023	-1.149	.251	-.031	-1.418	.157	-.016	-.722	.470	.000	.011	.991	.006	.213	.831
NOTWORK2	.000	.009	.993	-.025	-1.354	.176	-.009	-.452	.652	-.035	-1.851	.064	.043	1.748	.081
PARTY ID	.138	6.570	.000	.162	7.244	.000	.248	11.123	.000	-.087	-3.360	.001	-.072	-2.252	.025
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	-.004	-.217	.829	.011	.583	.560	.019	.981	.327	-.031	-1.516	.130	-.083	-3.237	.001
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	.059	3.265	.001	.060	3.116	.002	.043	2.199	.028	.048	2.381	.017	.032	1.260	.208
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.480	20.362	.000	.530	22.657	.000	.340	14.082	.000	.528	17.959	.000	.497	14.962	.000
RACE	-.033	-1.941	.052	-.042	-2.188	.029	.033	1.832	.067	.020	1.006	.315	-.050	-1.971	.049
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.064	3.572	.000	.028	1.491	.136	.036	1.895	.058	.020	.977	.329	.010	.420	.674
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.224	10.831	.000	.144	7.326	.000	.212	10.510	.000	.214	9.695	.000	.168	6.584	.000
USPOSITION	.016	.868	.386	.043	2.217	.027	.027	1.373	.170	.028	1.352	.176	.111	4.282	.000
R SQUARE		.626			.593			.430			.537			.435	

economic approval than was the case with overall approval. Nevertheless, with the exceptions of 1992 and 2000 where our model does not do a very good job in explaining economic approval, our model explains roughly 54 to 63 percent of variance in economic approval, which is fairly decent.

In regard to the performance of the independent variables, perception of presidential persona continues to explain the most variance in approval. Even when we consider economic approval specifically, one's view of the president as a person is more important than policy performance, indicating further that the public often substitutes policy knowledge with perception of presidential persona. The difference, however, is that the amount of variance in economic approval explained by perception of presidential persona is less relative to the other significant variables than it was with overall approval.

Party identification witness a change in the amount of variance in economic approval explained vis-à-vis the other significant variables. On overall approval, party identification provided the second largest explanation of variance behind perception of presidential persona. On economic approval, party identification provides the second largest explanation of variance only twice, in 1988 and 1992. In 1984 and 1996, party identification explains the third largest amount of variance in economic approval, but in 2000, explains only the sixth largest amount of variance. In the instances of 1984, 1996, and 2000, perceptions of economic performance measures explain more variance in economic approval than party identification. As such, we begin seeing some of the expected improvement in the performance of the economic perception variables.

Since we are probing respondents' beliefs about the president's handling of the economy, we would expect the perceptions of economic performance measures to explain

more variance in approval than they did on overall approval. This should be particularly true of the retrospective evaluations, as we would expect respondents to evaluate the president's handling of the economy on the basis of how the economy has been performing more than on how they anticipate it will perform in the future. Although the prospective evaluations should show some improvement, we would not be completely surprised if they did not explain much more variance in economic approval than overall approval. Generally speaking, the perceptions of economic performance measures performed close to expectations.

First, the retrospective evaluation of one's personal financial situation never provided a significant explanation of overall approval. On economic approval, however, it provides a significant explanation of approval four of five times, being insignificant only in 2000. This is marked improvement. Apparently, when evaluating the president's handling of the economy, specifically, respondents apparently take into account both their own and the nation's economic situation over the past year, while they only take into account the nation's economic situation over the past year when evaluating the president's handling of his job generally. The sociotropic retrospective evaluation was significant in all years except 2000 when considering overall approval. When considering economic approval, it is now significant in 2000.

The sociotropic retrospective evaluation shows marked improvement in another way, and that is the amount of variance in approval it explains. There is a clear difference between the amount of variance in economic approval that the sociotropic retrospective evaluation explains when compared with the amount of variance in overall approval it explained. The beta weights are significantly larger, demonstrating that the

sociotropic retrospective evaluation adds much more to the explanation of economic approval than it did to the explanation of overall approval. Furthermore, the sociotropic retrospective evaluation explains more variance in economic approval relative to the other variables. While it explained the third largest amount of variance in overall approval on a regular basis, it explains the second largest amount of variance in economic approval on three occasions, and explains nearly as much variance in economic approval as does party identification in 1988. With the exception of 1992, the sociotropic retrospective evaluation improves in the amount of variance in approval that it explains, and therefore conforms to expectations.

Finally, regarding the prospective evaluations, the sociotropic dimension was significant one on economic approval, while it was never significant on overall approval. The personal dimension was significant only once on economic approval, while it was significant twice on overall approval. Thus, the record of the prospective economic evaluations is mixed, but, as we stated earlier, not necessarily surprising. We would not expect prospective evaluations of economic performance to figure in one's evaluation of how the president is handling the economy, since the question tends to trigger retrospective rather than prospective evaluations. Thus, it relative lack of providing a significant explanation of economic approval is consistent with expectations.

The final variable to consider is the perception of the US position in the world variable. As a measure of foreign relations, ostensibly, we expect its performance to decline on economic approval. Since we are probing respondents' beliefs about the president's handling of the economy, beliefs about foreign relations should not figure in their evaluation. Thus, we expect to not see the perception of the US position in the

world providing a significant explanation of variance in economic approval. However, this was not the case, as it did provide a significant explanation of variance in 1988 and 2000, explaining the third largest amount of variance in 2000. A plausible explanation is the vague nature of the perception of the US position in the world variable.

It is possible that respondents interpreted the question as, "do you think the position of the US in the world in terms of its economic strength has increased, decreased, or remained about the same?" Such an interpretation could lead to this variable being considered in the evaluation of the president's handling of economy, and thus its provision of a significant explanation of variance in economic approval. Ironically though, in 2000, the perception of the US in the world explained the third largest amount of variance in economic approval, and the personal retrospective evaluation, which had explained a significant explanation of variance in economic approval every other year, did not do so in 2000. Even if the perception of the US position in the world was interpreted in economic terms, the measures of perceptions of economic performance should still explain more variance in economic approval. However, yet this was not entirely the case.

In regard to replicability, the situation is much as it was with overall approval. There are technically multiple models of explanations of economic approval, but if we consider only those that provide a significant explanation of variance in economic approval four of the five years, we are left with one best model. It consists of the following variables: perception of presidential persona, party identification, and both the sociotropic and personal retrospective economic evaluations.

In summary, in addition to the conclusions about the best model of explanations of economic approval discussed above, we conclude that our model does not explain economic approval as well as overall approval, and that the perception of the president's persona is again the single best predictor of approval. We also find evidence of marked improvement on the retrospective economic evaluations, as expected; some decline in the performance of party identification; and, finally, rather surprising performance of the perception of the US position in the world, particularly in 2000.

FOREIGN RELATIONS APPROVAL

As we turn to foreign relations approval, as was the case with economic approval, we are concerned with how well our model explains foreign relations approval vis-à-vis overall approval, and with changes in the independent variables. We are particularly concerned with changes in the perception of the US position in the world, both in terms of its explanation of foreign relations approval vis-à-vis overall approval, and its explanation of foreign relations approval relative to the economic variables. We expect it to explain more variance in approval both in regard to foreign relations approval vis-à-vis overall approval, and relative to the perceptions of economic performance variables. Our findings on foreign relations approval are presented below in table 4.3.

TABLE 4.3:   Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Approval of President's Handling

  of Foreign Relations by Year

Independent Variables	1984			1988			1992			1996			2000		
	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
AGE	-.025	-1.108	.268	-.026	-1.065	.287	.075	3.300	.001	.047	1.790	.074	-.018	-.642	.521
EDUCATION	-.035	-1.645	.100	-.004	-.192	.847	.119	5.314	.000	.002	.088	.930	.032	1.249	.212
GENDER	-.005	-.272	.785	.049	2.333	.020	.028	1.393	.164	.016	.732	.465	-.063	-2.659	.008
INCOME	.001	.037	.970	.059	2.502	.012	.056	2.442	.015	-.003	-.122	.903	.029	1.099	.272
NOTWORK1	-.036	-1.554	.120	.000	-.006	.996	-.006	-.241	.809	-.014	-.514	.607	.007	.235	.815
NOTWORK2	.000	-.004	.997	.025	1.203	.229	-.010	-.476	.634	-.005	-.221	.825	.025	1.057	.291
PARTY ID	.073	3.002	.003	.060	2.444	.015	.097	4.062	.000	-.053	-1.825	.068	-.070	-2.190	.029
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	.016	.777	.437	.014	.662	.508	-.004	-.170	.865	-.002	-.094	.925	-.029	-1.153	.249
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	-.023	-1.079	.281	-.017	-.807	.420	.046	2.186	.029	.011	.488	.625	.029	1.194	.233
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.521	18.969	.000	.574	22.124	.000	.446	17.309	.000	.469	14.245	.000	.525	15.923	.000
RACE	-.024	-1.235	.217	-.074	-3.518	.000	-.012	-.624	.533	-.030	-1.346	.179	-.073	-2.908	.004
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.030	1.446	.148	-.019	-.934	.351	.019	.866	.386	-.015	-.638	.524	.021	.861	.389
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.021	.893	.372	.026	1.220	.223	.001	.064	.949	.030	1.223	.222	.090	3.616	.000
USPOSITION	.192	8.965	.000	.119	5.569	.000	.047	2.231	.026	.236	10.220	.000	.144	5.669	.000
R SQUARE			.498			.501			.349			.418			.445

Table 4.3 shows that the ability of our model to explain foreign relations approval is considerably less than its ability to explain overall approval and even economic approval. In fact, the model only explains roughly 50 percent of variance in foreign relations approval twice, in 1984 and 1988, while it does a particularly poor job of explaining variance in foreign relations approval in 1992. Interestingly, the model as applied to both overall and economic approval explained less variance in approval in the second terms of Reagan and Clinton, while the model applied to foreign relations approval actually explains slightly more variance in approval in the second terms of Reagan and Clinton than the first terms.

The lack of the model to explain a considerable amount of variance in foreign relations approval is rather understandable, as we only are able to include one foreign relations measure, and even it is a vague reflection of beliefs about foreign relations. Thus, it is clear that other variables than what we are able to include in our model explain variance in foreign relations approval. If NES included more consistent measures of beliefs about US foreign relations, we may have a model that would better explain variance in foreign relations approval. Unfortunately that was not the case, and so our model explains a relatively small amount of such variance.

In considering the independent variables, perception of presidential persona continues to be the most important variable in explaining approval. However, as was the case with economic approval, while perception of presidential persona explains more variance in foreign relations approval relative to the other variables, it explains less in absolute terms as demonstrated by the drop in beta weights. The drop in the amount of the explanation of foreign relations approval that perception of presidential persona adds

is accompanied by an increase in the amount of the explanation of variance perception of the US position in the world adds. This pattern parallels the performance of presidential persona vis-à-vis the perceptions of economic performance measures when considering economic approval. This indicates that the substantive variables do figure in one's evaluation of the president's handling of specific matters more so than his handling of his job generally, which is as expected. However, the fact that perception of presidential persona remains as the variable that explains the most variance in foreign relations approval relative to the other variables further indicates that individuals often substitute knowledge of policy performance with their view of the president as a person.

Party identification witnessed the most change in performance. When party identification explained the second largest amount of variance in overall approval, its beta weights in 1984 through 1992 were .103, .112, and .170. On economic approval, party identification declined in relative terms, explaining the second largest amount of variance in approval only twice. However, with the exception of 1996 and 2000, it actually improved in absolute terms, as its beta weights in 1984 through 1992 were .138, .162, and .248. On foreign relations approval, party identification never explains the second largest amount of variance in approval, and in fact does not even provide a significant explanation of variance in economic approval in 1996. Thus, as with economic approval, the amount of variance in approval explained by party identification drops relative to the other variables. It also drops in absolute terms. While its beta weight improved from overall to economic approval in 1984 through 1992, its beta weight on foreign relations approval drops in all five years, and never moves above .100.

Thus, party identification was not as meaningful in explaining foreign relations approval as it had been in explaining overall and economic approval.

In regard to the perception of the real world variables, we expect the perception of the US position in the world to provide a statistically significant explanation of foreign relations approval all five years, while we would expect none of the four perceptions of economic performance measures to provide a significant explanation of foreign relations approval. This generally was the case. Of the perceptions of economic performance measures, only the personal retrospective evaluation in 1992, and the sociotropic retrospective evaluation in 2000, provided significant explanations of foreign relations approval. The perception of the US position in the world provided a significant explanation of foreign relations approval all five years, and provided the second largest explanation of variance, just behind perception of presidential persona. Clearly its performance is much improved from both overall and economic approval, and the nature of its performance is consistent with our expectations.

As with overall and economic approval, our final consideration is the replicability of our model when applied to foreign relations approval. Again using the principle of selecting only those variables that provide a significant explanation of approval four of the five years, we conclude that the best model of explanations of variance in foreign relations approval includes perception of presidential persona, party identification, and perception of the US position in the world. In addition to this conclusion, we also conclude the following about foreign relations approval: (1) our model does a relatively poor job of explaining variance in foreign relations approval; (2) perception of presidential persona remains the most important explanation of variance in approval; (3)

party identification does not provide as meaningful an explanation of variance in foreign relations approval as it had in regard to overall and economic approval; and (4) perception of the US position in the world greatly improved in the amount of variance in approval explained, providing the second largest explanation of variance in foreign relations approval in all five years of analysis.

INITIAL CONCLUSIONS

Before moving to the consideration of issue salience, we draw some conclusions regarding key findings on the explanations of approval presented in the first part of this chapter. The most important conclusion is that regardless of the type of approval, perception of presidential persona, rather than any of the substantive variables measuring perceptions of real-world events and conditions, explains the most variance in presidential approval, thereby confirming our persona hypothesis. The next conclusion is that the best model of explanations of presidential approval, again regardless of type of approval, includes perception of presidential persona, party identification, and at least one substantive variable measuring perception of real-world events and conditions. On overall approval, the substantive variables were perception of economic performance measure and the measure of perception of the US position in the world. On economic approval, the substantive variables were the sociotropic retrospective and prospective evaluations of the economy. On foreign relations approval, the substantive variable was perception of the US position in the world. Thus, when we move to the specific types of approval, the substantive variables measuring perceptions of "policy performance" in the specific area figure more prominently in explaining variance in presidential approval. Nevertheless, perception of presidential persona continues to explain the most variance in

presidential approval, regardless of type of approval, indicating that respondents tend to substitute knowledge of "policy performance" with their view of the president as a person, thereby simplifying the political world as Kinder (1986) pointed out.

However, we see an interesting pattern develop relative to the amount of variance in approval explained by perception of presidential persona vis-à-vis the substantive variables measuring perceptions of real-world events and conditions. This pattern is demonstrated below in table 4.4, which presents the beta weights of the key variables.

TABLE 4.4: BETA WEIGHTS COMPARISON

	1984			1988		
	Overall	Economic	Foreign Relations	Overall	Economic	Foreign Relations
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.721	.480	.521	.693	.530	.574
PARTY ID	.103	.138	.073	.113	.162	.060
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.077	.224		.045	.144	
USPOSITION			.192	.046	.043	.119

	1992		
	Overall	Economic	Foreign Relations
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.624	.340	.446
PARTY ID	.170	.248	.097
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.086	.036	
USPOSITION			.047

	1996			2000		
	Overall	Economic	Foreign Relations	Overall	Economic	Foreign Relations
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.728	.528	.469	.671	.497	.525
PARTY ID	-.097	-.087		-.131	-.072	-.070
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.079	.214			.168	.090
USPOSITION	.043		.236	.051	.111	.144

* Blank fields denote the variable was insignificant.

Table 4.4 shows that the beta weight of perception of presidential persona declines rather dramatically as we move from overall approval to economic approval. At the same time, the beta weight of the sociotropic retrospective evaluation of the economy increased dramatically as we move from overall approval to economic approval. In similar fashion, the beta weight of perception of presidential persona declines, and the beta weight of perception of the US position in the world increases as we move from overall approval to foreign relations approval. This would indicate that context affects the meaning of the question, and thereby the ingredients of evaluation of the president. As such, it provides indirect evidence in support of our question-meaning hypothesis.

When respondents were asked whether they approved or disapproved of the president's handling of his job generally, the meaning of the question was more vague and abstract, thus open to various interpretations. When the meaning of the question can have multiple interpretations, it is easier for respondents to substitute knowledge of "policy performance" with their views of the president as a person, and this could explain the large beta weights for perception of presidential persona on overall approval, accompanied by rather small beta weights on the substantive variables. When respondents are asked to evaluate the president's handling of the economy, the question is less abstract. Its context is more defined since it asks specifically about the handling of the economy. Thus, perceptions of economic performance are more likely to be included in the ingredients of presidential evaluation than they were on overall approval. This clearly was the case as the beta weight for the sociotropic retrospective evaluation of the economy was much higher on economic approval.

However, the question still remains partially vague. Exactly what about the president's handling of the economy are we talking about? Is it inflation or unemployment, how one's individual economic situation is going, or how the nation's economy as a whole is going? Since there is still some vagueness to the question, a number of respondents still choose to substitute knowledge of "policy performance" with their views of the president as a person, thereby explaining why perception of presidential persona still explains the most variance in economic approval relative to the other variables, but less in absolute terms.

Without going into as much detail, what is at work with foreign relations approval is similar. The meaning of the question is more defined as it is given context. We are now specifically discussing the president's handling of foreign affairs, and so perceptions of foreign affairs performance should explain more variance in foreign relations approval. This is indeed what we see as the beta weight of perception of the US position in the world increases. Of course, we still have the same issues regarding respondents' substitution of "policy performance" with views of the president as a person as noted by the perception of presidential persona explaining the most variance in foreign relations approval relative to the other variables, but less in absolute terms.

Clearly then, the evidence shows that context matters. When we more specifically define the approval question to a specific policy area, respondents are more likely to evaluate the president's performance based on measures that apply to the policy area about which we are inquiring. The meaning of the question is less vague, so it is less open to interpretation, and the ingredients of evaluation of the president are more

circumscribed. This definitely has implications for our understanding of the role of question meaning in presidential approval, to which we return in chapter five.

A final conclusion regarding the findings on tests of our comprehensive model as applied to overall, economic, and foreign relations approval is that the literature-generated expectations were largely unmet. This was particularly true of economic performance, as only one measure of perceptions of economic performance provided a statistically significant explanation of variance in overall approval on a consistent basis. While the literature-generated expectations went largely unmet, our own set of expectations was largely met. We will say more about the expectations in chapter five.

ISSUE SALIENCE

In chapter three, we hypothesized that the measures of perceptions of economic performance will explain more variance in presidential approval when the economy is identified as the most important problem (MIP) than when anything else was identified as the MIP. Similarly, we hypothesized that perception of the US position in the world will explain more variance in presidential approval when foreign relations is identified as the MIP than when anything else is identified as the MIP. In other words, the salience of an issue should boost its explanation of presidential approval. Differences in the issues that are salient may lead to differences in the interpretation of the approval question. As a result, evidence supporting our issue-salience hypotheses provides indirect evidence in support of our question-meaning hypothesis. Also in chapter three, we discussed how we test the issue-salience hypotheses. Here we present the findings of those tests.

We first consider overall approval and present in tabular form the data from both economic salience and foreign relations salience. The first table in each instance shows

the findings from when the issue is not the MIP, while the second table shows the findings from when the issue is the MIP. In addition to overall approval, we continue to consider economic approval and foreign relations approval. However, due to the attention placed on economic performance as an explanation of presidential approval, we will only consider economic salience and its influence on economic and foreign relations approval. While we make some summary comments about foreign relations salience and its influence on economic and foreign relations approval, this is done mostly in comparison to our findings on economic salience, and we do not present the findings on foreign relations salience in tabular form in this chapter. Instead, the findings on foreign relations salience are presented in tabular form in the appendix.

When we did not consider issue salience, socio-demographics did not exert a consistent direct effect on presidential approval. We expect the same to be true when we account for issue salience, with the possible exception of employment status having a consistent direct effect on approval when the economy is the MIP. Furthermore, perception of presidential persona was the most important explanation of approval when we did not consider issue salience, and we expect the same to be true when we do account for issue salience. We also expect party identification to perform in similar fashion when we account for issue salience as when we did not.

While we will comment as to whether these expectations were met, our primary focus is on the changes, if any, in the amount of variance in approval the substantive, perceptions of the real world variables explain. Thus, when dealing with economic salience we will focus on the changes on the four measures of perceptions of economic

performance, and when dealing with foreign relations salience, we focus on the changes in the perception of the US position in the world.

OVERALL APPROVAL: SALIENCE OF THE ECONOMY

Table 4.5 shows measures of the perceptions of economic performance generally mattering little or not at all in explaining overall approval when the economy was <u>not</u> considered the MIP. Counter to our first issue-salience hypothesis, table 4.6 shows little change in the explanation of overall approval provided by the four measures of perceptions of economic performance when the economy was the MIP. The personal retrospective and sociotropic prospective evaluations continue to be insignificant. The personal prospective evaluation did become significant in 1988 when the economy was the MIP, but lost significance in 2000, thereby canceling out the slight improvement in performance in 1988. Similarly, the sociotropic retrospective evaluation gained significance in 1988, but lost significance in 2000. In 1984 and 1992, the sociotropic retrospective evaluation was significant both when the economy was not the MIP and when it was. The amount of variance in approval it explained changed little in both relative and absolute terms. All told, the four measures of perceptions of economic performance did not conform to expectations.

On the other hand, socio-demographics generally performed as expected, although employment status did not exert a consistent direct effect on approval when the economy was considered the MIP. Also, perception of presidential persona and party identification both conformed to expectations as perception of presidential persona remained the most important explanation of approval, and party identification was not affected greatly by issue salience.

TABLE 4.5   Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Overall Approval of President by Year
The Economy is NOT the Most Important Problem

Independent Variables	1984			1988			1992			1996			2000		
	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
AGE	-.012	-.561	.575	-.109	-4.210	.000	-.047	-1.530	.127	-.027	-.913	.362	.055	1.445	.149
EDUCATION	.010	.476	.634	-.072	-2.922	.004	-.100	-3.059	.002	.029	1.095	.274	.003	.087	.931
GENDER	.020	1.022	.307	.028	1.205	.229	-.021	-.720	.472	.022	.896	.371	-.010	-.307	.759
INCOME	-.007	-.347	.728	.052	1.977	.048	.018	.526	.599	-.023	-.820	.413	.018	.494	.622
NOTWORK1				-.035	-1.247	.213	.042	1.210	.227	.013	.456	.648	-.092	-2.417	.016
NOTWORK2	.011	.518	.605	.020	.873	.383	.003	.117	.907	-.019	-.811	.418	.009	.288	.774
PARTY ID	.055	2.076	.038	.132	4.736	.000	.160	4.624	.000	-.127	-3.702	.000	-.022	-.485	.628
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	.029	1.400	.162	-.031	-1.288	.198	.042	1.415	.158	-.031	-1.220	.223	-.094	-2.729	.007
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	.039	1.841	.066	-.004	-.150	.881	-.016	-.529	.597	.008	.308	.758	.051	1.513	.131
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.769	25.913	.000	.685	23.339	.000	.640	16.467	.000	.710	18.373	.000	.726	15.599	.000
RACE	-.054	-2.787	.005	-.092	-3.773	.000	.028	.987	.324	-.044	-1.781	.076	.008	.226	.821
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.007	.331	.741	-.018	-.768	.443	.049	1.643	.101	.040	1.561	.119	-.040	-1.183	.237
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.066	2.713	.007	.018	.726	.468	.111	3.472	.001	.059	2.150	.032	-.004	-.106	.915
USPOSITION	.017	.782	.434	.039	1.643	.101	-.039	-1.287	.199	.065	2.443	.015	.080	2.347	.019
WORK	-.001	-.053	.958												

TABLE 4.6   Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Overall Approval of President by Year
The Economy is the Most Important Problem

Independent Variables	1984 Beta	t	Sig.	1988 Beta	t	Sig.	1992 Beta	t	Sig.	1996 Beta	t	Sig.	2000 Beta	t	Sig.
AGE	-.059	-1.830	.068	-.030	-.940	.347	-.044	-1.791	.074	.007	.118	.906	.163	1.595	.115
EDUCATION	.001	.043	.965	-.037	-1.387	.166	-.030	-1.281	.201	-.003	-.061	.951	-.098	-1.054	.295
GENDER	-.002	-.085	.933	.019	.772	.441	-.019	-.924	.356	.010	.200	.842	.186	2.025	.047
INCOME	-.014	-.491	.623	-.011	-.412	.680	-.011	-.467	.641	.058	1.085	.280	-.140	-1.498	.138
NOTWORK1				-.046	-1.503	.134	-.004	-.150	.881				-.300	-2.982	.004
NOTWORK2	.020	.715	.475	.006	.232	.816	-.051	-2.431	.015				-.142	-1.603	.113
PARTY ID	.101	3.068	.002	.096	3.185	.002	.164	6.515	.000	-.091	-1.282	.202	-.282	-2.441	.017
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	-.027	-.924	.356	.074	2.767	.006	.025	1.134	.257	.032	.623	.534	-.021	-.231	.818
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	-.031	-1.058	.291	-.009	-.335	.737	.035	1.622	.105	.033	.594	.554	.137	1.425	.158
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.775	21.008	.000	.698	22.054	.000	.632	23.700	.000	.790	9.763	.000	.431	3.732	.000
RACE	-.045	-1.702	.090	-.037	-1.508	.132	-.005	-.239	.811	.033	.678	.499	-.020	-.219	.827
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.006	.209	.834	-.002	-.063	.950	-.026	-1.261	.208	-.056	-1.110	.269	.044	.523	.602
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.068	2.058	.040	.105	4.007	.000	.065	2.901	.004	.088	1.394	.166	-.139	-1.522	.132
USPOSITION	-.029	-.970	.333	.036	1.416	.157	.042	1.920	.055	-.056	-1.008	.316	.030	.311	.757
WORK	.021	.643	.520							.055	.971	.334			

OVERALL APPROVAL: SALIENCE OF FOREIGN RELATIONS

Table 4.7 shows perception of the US position in the world providing a significant explanation of overall approval twice when foreign relations was not the MIP. However, table 4.8 shows that it never provided a significant explanation of overall approval when foreign relations was the MIP.   Clearly this runs counter to our second issue-salience hypothesis.   In fact, perception of the US position in the world fares worse when considering foreign relations salience than the perceptions of economic performance did when considering economic salience.   Of course these unexpected results could be caused, in part, by the vague nature of the question probing one's perception of the US position in the world. As we have discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, the position of the US in the world may tap matters other than strictly foreign relations issues. Thus, it may not be considered when foreign relations is regarded as the MIP. The fact that it explained variance in overall approval when foreign relations was not the MIP, but did not do so when foreign relations was the MIP would suggest that it took on a non-foreign relations meaning.   Clearly there is potential for measurement error by using the perception of the US position in the world as a foreign relations measure, and we will discuss this matter in the conclusion to this chapter.

While perception of the US position in the world failed to conform to expectations, the four measures of perceptions of economic performance generally did. The sociotropic prospective evaluation was insignificant both when foreign relations was not the MIP and when it was. The personal prospective evaluation was significant once when foreign relations was not the MIP, and never when it was. Furthermore, while the sociotropic retrospective evaluation was significant only once when foreign relations was

TABLE 4.7   Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Overall Approval of President by Year
Foreign Relations is NOT the Most Important Problem

	1984			1988			1992			1996			2000		
Independent Variables	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
AGE	-.016	-.636	.525	-.082	-3.865	.000	-.056	-2.880	.004	-.014	-.539	.590	.054	1.432	.153
EDUCATION	.003	.123	.902	-.069	-3.623	.000	-.050	-2.604	.009	.016	.660	.510	-.026	-.748	.455
GENDER	.000	-.018	.986	.019	1.076	.282	-.025	-1.456	.146	.018	.819	.413	.007	.206	.837
INCOME	-.016	-.695	.488	.030	1.507	.132	-.011	-.553	.580	-.012	-.475	.635	-.005	-.135	.892
NOTWORK1	-.036	-1.450	.148	-.038	-1.751	.080	.021	1.004	.316	-.001	-.024	.981	-.131	-3.514	.000
NOTWORK2	-.005	-.225	.822	.008	.423	.673	-.032	-1.873	.061	-.021	-.988	.324	-.019	-.580	.562
PARTY ID	.097	3.660	.000	.119	5.532	.000	.166	8.084	.000	-.116	-3.706	.000	-.049	-1.102	.271
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	-.010	-.459	.646	.017	.919	.358	.030	1.670	.095	-.021	-.919	.358	-.072	-2.139	.033
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	-.021	-.932	.352	-.015	-.787	.431	.018	1.004	.316	.014	.574	.566	.058	1.754	.080
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.785	26.640	.000	.691	30.375	.000	.635	28.674	.000	.724	20.367	.000	.699	15.571	.000
RACE	-.044	-2.129	.034	-.064	-3.483	.001	.008	.478	.632	-.026	-1.158	.247	-.026	-.780	.436
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.022	1.002	.317	-.005	-.269	.788	-.001	-.035	.972	.017	.726	.468	-.034	-1.046	.296
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.042	1.663	.097	.059	3.125	.002	.088	4.781	.000	.069	2.665	.008	-.006	-.166	.868
USPOSITION	-.020	-.892	.373	.039	2.133	.033	.008	.459	.647	.043	1.774	.077	.076	2.257	.024

TABLE 4.8 Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Overall Approval of President by Year
Foreign Relations is the Most Important Problem

Independent Variables	1984 Beta	t	Sig.	1988 Beta	t	Sig.	1992 Beta	t	Sig.	1996 Beta	t	Sig.	2000 Beta	t	Sig.
AGE	-.051	-1.864	.063	-.059	-.757	.451	.112	.761	.453	-.177	-1.092	.301	.287	1.468	.151
EDUCATION	.007	.267	.790	-.025	-.346	.730	-.281	-1.756	.090	.008	.056	.957	.223	1.781	.083
GENDER	.018	.729	.466	.067	.915	.362	-.110	-.770	.448	.003	.019	.985	.044	.375	.710
INCOME	.006	.231	.817	.027	.339	.735	.209	1.442	.161	.256	1.361	.203	.026	.206	.838
NOTWORK1	.023	.825	.410	-.022	-.272	.786	-.155	-.935	.358				-.164	-1.105	.276
NOTWORK2	.033	1.308	.192	.044	.632	.529	.134	1.039	.308	-.002	-.021	.984	.040	.352	.727
PARTY ID	.036	1.109	.268	.054	.603	.548	.096	.553	.585	-.089	-.471	.648	-.017	-.099	.922
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	.031	1.186	.236	.103	1.378	.171	.100	.740	.465	.063	.459	.656	-.140	-1.188	.242
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	.055	2.116	.035	-.030	-.429	.669	.054	.355	.725	-.160	-1.329	.213	.097	.669	.507
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.760	20.815	.000	.698	8.237	.000	.577	3.309	.003	1.123	5.759	.000	.583	3.318	.002
RACE	-.067	-2.749	.006	-.180	-2.455	.016	-.159	-1.048	.304	-.284	-2.324	.042	.163	1.404	.169
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	-.025	-.973	.331	-.104	-1.413	.161	.073	.496	.624	.123	1.091	.301	.067	.613	.544
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.105	3.512	.000	-.025	-.318	.751	-.011	-.071	.944	-.007	-.053	.959	-.205	-1.724	.093
USPOSITION	.027	.963	.336	-.076	-.974	.332	.072	.503	.619	-.111	-.753	.469	.096	.778	.441
WORK										.015	.098	.924			

the MIP, it was significant three times when foreign relations was not the MIP. This is plausible due to the potential for the economy to be considered salient among a large number of respondents identifying something other than foreign relations as the MIP. The only oddity was the significance of both the personal and sociotropic retrospective evaluations in 1984 when foreign relations was the MIP.

Generally speaking, when foreign relations was regarded as the MIP, none of the substantive perceptions of the real world variables mattered. In fact, neither did party identification. When foreign relations was not regarded as the MIP, party identification was significant each year except 2000. When foreign relations was regarded as the MIP, party identification was never significant. Thus, when foreign relations was regarded as the MIP, the only variable to provide a consistent, significant explanation of overall approval was the perception of presidential persona.

ECONOMIC APPROVAL: SALIENCE OF THE ECONOMY

Based on our earlier findings on economic approval, we expect both the personal and sociotropic retrospective evaluations of the economy to provide a significant explanation of economic approval regardless of the significance of economic issues. We would expect those variables to provide a stronger explanation of variance in economic approval when the economy is the MIP, and we would expect the personal and sociotropic prospective evaluations of the economy to provide a significant explanation of variance in economic approval more often when the economy is the MIP than when it is not. Once again, however, our expectations are largely unmet.

Table 4.9 shows the four measures of perceptions of economic performance when the economy was not the MIP displaying a pattern similar to the one shown on economic

TABLE 4.9   Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Approval of President's
Handling of the Economy by Year
The Economy is NOT the Most Important Problem

Independent Variables	1984			1988			1992			1996			2000		
	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
AGE	.038	1.301	.194	.010	.334	.738	.030	.826	.409	.073	1.910	.057	-.037	-.812	.417
EDUCATION	.023	.808	.420	-.060	-2.065	.039	-.006	-.147	.883	.028	.816	.415	.015	.362	.718
GENDER	.024	.963	.336	-.015	-.541	.588	-.059	-1.677	.094	.036	1.119	.264	.032	.828	.408
INCOME	-.028	-.995	.320	.078	2.533	.012	-.066	-1.604	.109	.003	.078	.938	.096	2.259	.024
NOTWORK1	-.022	-.718	.473	-.061	-1.855	.064	-.010	-.249	.804	.041	1.066	.287	.003	.058	.954
NOTWORK2	.029	1.133	.258	-.011	-.387	.699	.011	.313	.754	-.093	-2.997	.003	.022	.570	.569
PARTY ID	.143	4.164	.000	.171	5.175	.000	.269	6.504	.000	-.085	-1.911	.057	-.041	-.771	.441
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	.013	.462	.644	-.041	-1.436	.151	.010	.294	.769	-.036	-1.077	.282	-.074	-1.792	.074
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	.081	2.932	.003	.061	2.138	.033	.042	1.153	.249	.115	3.421	.001	.075	1.863	.063
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.425	11.048	.000	.523	15.047	.000	.346	7.478	.000	.483	9.656	.000	.544	9.929	.000
RACE	-.055	-2.145	.032	-.038	-1.291	.197	.042	1.236	.217	.031	.971	.332	-.091	-2.217	.027
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.105	3.867	.000	.029	1.046	.296	.030	.836	.403	.051	1.502	.134	-.006	-.146	.884
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.251	7.955	.000	.121	4.143	.000	.221	5.788	.000	.224	6.198	.000	.178	4.453	.000
USPOSITION															

TABLE 4.10 Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Approval of President's Handling of the Economy by Year
The Economy is the Most Important Problem

Independent Variables	1984			1988			1992			1996			2000		
	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
AGE	.010	.269	.788	-.015	-.431	.667	.085	2.776	.006	.107	1.474	.143	-.032	-.285	.776
EDUCATION	.049	1.487	.138	-.012	-.392	.695	-.009	-.321	.748	.128	1.912	.058	.152	1.512	.135
GENDER	-.022	-.673	.501	-.012	-.441	.659	-.002	-.081	.935	-.033	-.545	.587	.164	1.617	.110
INCOME	.019	.548	.584	.038	1.227	.220	-.036	-1.239	.216	.039	.588	.558	-.004	-.035	.972
NOTWORK1	-.014	-.377	.706	-.005	-.152	.879	-.002	-.071	.944				-.005	-.047	.963
NOTWORK2	.004	.113	.910	-.047	-1.675	.095	.012	.449	.654				-.014	-.148	.882
PARTY ID	.139	3.630	.000	.169	4.920	.000	.235	7.558	.000	-.115	-1.326	.188	.091	.732	.467
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	.010	.293	.770	.075	2.493	.013	.012	.451	.652	.051	.808	.421	-.208	-2.101	.039
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	.042	1.231	.219	.066	2.255	.025	.050	1.859	.063	.010	.149	.882	-.020	-.188	.851
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.532	12.271	.000	.497	13.842	.000	.349	10.620	.000	.566	5.708	.000	.623	4.988	.000
RACE	.002	.072	.943	-.037	-1.341	.181	.028	1.131	.258	.023	.380	.704	-.125	-1.249	.216
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.056	1.622	.106	.046	1.621	.106	.027	1.059	.290	.020	.321	.749	.045	.496	.621
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.156	4.025	.000	.183	6.173	.000	.219	7.916	.000	.206	2.644	.009	.140	1.384	.171
USPOSITION	.041	1.182	.238	.049	1.695	.091	.017	.637	.524	.003	.045	.964	.097	.945	.348
WORK										-.053	-.747	.457			

approval when issue salience was not taken into account. The personal prospective evaluation was never significant, while the personal retrospective evaluation was significant three years, being insignificant in 1992 and 2000. The sociotropic prospective evaluation was significant in 1984, while the sociotropic retrospective evaluation was significant in all five years. The only difference between these findings and the findings on economic approval when we did not account for issue salience is that the personal retrospective evaluation was significant in 1992 when we did not account for issue salience, but is not significant in 1992 when we did. These findings are consistent with expectations, so we should see improvement in the economic measures when the economy is the MIP. Table 4.10 shows a different story.

When the economy is the MIP, the personal retrospective evaluation was significant only once, a clear departure from its performance when the economy was not the MIP. The sociotropic retrospective evaluation, the perception of economic performance measure we would expect to provide the best explanation of variance in economic approval, also declines in performance. It was insignificant in 2000 when the economy was the MIP, but was never insignificant when the economy was not the MIP. The decline in sociotropic retrospective is seen not only in the lesser frequency of significance, but also in the generally smaller beta weights when the economy was considered the MIP. Only in 1988 was the beta weight on the sociotropic retrospective evaluation larger when the economy was considered the MIP than when it was not.

A third measure of perceptions of economic performance, the sociotropic prospective evaluation, also declined but only marginally. It was never significant when the economy was not the MIP, but was significant in 1984 when the economy was the

MIP. All told, three measures of perceptions of economic performance declined in their performance when economic issues were the MIP. The only perception of economic performance measure to demonstrate the expected improvement was the personal prospective evaluation. When the economy was not the MIP, it was never significant. When the economy was the MIP, it was significant in 1988 and 2000.

While the perceptions of economic performance variables do not perform as expected, the other variables more or less do. The perception of the US position in the world was significant once when the economy was <u>not</u> considered the MIP, but was never significant when the economy was considered the MIP. When the economy is considered the MIP, the foreign relations variable should not provide a significant explanation of approval, particularly when it is economic approval, and this was the case.

Finally, socio-demographics continue to not exert a consistent direct effect on approval, not even employment status. Party identification is not greatly affected by issue salience, performing similarly when the economy was the MIP as to when it was not. Perception of presidential persona continued to be the most important explanation of approval, regardless of whether the economy was the MIP or not.

All told, the variables measuring the perceptions of economic performance do not perform as expected, while the perception of the US position in the world, party identification, and perception of presidential persona generally do. Additionally, the model that best explains economic approval is different when the economy is considered the MIP than when the economy is <u>not</u> considered the MIP. The variables that provide a consistent, significant explanation of economic approval when the economy is <u>not</u> considered the MIP are perception of presidential persona and both the personal and

sociotropic retrospective economic evaluations. The variables that provide a consistent, significant explanation of economic approval when the economy is considered the MIP are perception of presidential persona and the sociotropic retrospective economic evaluation. Interestingly, party identification was significant only three of five times, both when the economy was not the MIP and when it was. This is a departure from its performance when we did not account for issue salience and when we accounted for issue salience on overall approval.

FOREIGN RELATIONS APPROVAL: SALIENCE OF THE ECONOMY

The four measures of perceptions of economic performance should not provide a significant explanation of foreign relations approval when the economy is <u>not</u> considered the MIP, although it would not be completely unexpected for them to explain foreign relations approval when the economy is the MIP. Since we are dealing with foreign relations approval, the perception of the US position in the world should provide a consistent, significant explanation of foreign relations approval, both when the economy is <u>not</u> the MIP and when it is, although its predictive power may be diminished when the economy is the MIP. We also expect the perception of presidential persona, party identification, and the socio-demographics to perform as they have been when considering issue salience. Unlike with economic approval, our expectations are generally met as shown in tables 4.11 and 4.12.

First, when the economy was <u>not</u> considered the MIP, shown in table 4.11, the perception of the US position in the world was significant in all five years, and generally explained the second largest amount of variance in foreign relations approval behind perception of the president's persona. When the economy was considered the MIP,

TABLE 4.11 Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Approval of President's Handling of Foreign Relations by Year: The Economy is the NOT the Most Important Problem

	1984			1988			1992			1996			2000		
Independent Variables	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**
AGE	-.026	-.769	.442	-.012	-.372	.710	.048	1.300	.194	.056	1.216	.225	-.043	-.954	.340
EDUCATION	-.001	-.020	.984	-.018	-.573	.567	.083	2.115	.035	.011	.270	.787	.045	1.096	.274
GENDER	.000	-.014	.989	.039	1.303	.193	.002	.059	.953	.007	.182	.856	-.076	-2.029	.043
INCOME	.024	.734	.463	.038	1.138	.256	.179	4.317	.000	.022	.505	.614	.003	.062	.951
NOTWORK1	-.014	-.397	.692	-.024	-.688	.492	.041	.986	.325	.001	.026	.979			
NOTWORK2	.025	.812	.417	.013	.446	.656	-.015	-.416	.678	-.035	-.940	.348	-.028	-.683	.495
PARTY ID	.081	2.028	.043	.079	2.261	.024	.130	3.130	.002	-.059	-1.090	.276	-.032	-.609	.543
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	.004	.125	.900	.023	.756	.450	.013	.354	.723	-.036	-.892	.373	-.057	-1.412	.159
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	-.025	-.763	.446	-.023	-.752	.452	-.015	-.396	.692	-.016	-.399	.690	.042	1.076	.282
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.490	10.856	.000	.557	14.840	.000	.450	9.730	.000	.452	7.440	.000	.563	10.283	.000
RACE	-.019	-.627	.531	-.108	-3.488	.001	-.005	-.141	.888	-.071	-1.829	.068	-.103	-2.534	.012
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.039	1.207	.228	-.026	-.870	.385	-.035	-.973	.331	.078	1.786	.075	.021	.521	.603
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	-.001	-.025	.980	.006	.189	.851	.093	2.429	.015	-.080	-1.951	.052	.085	2.161	.031
USPOSITION				.125	4.100	.000							.000	.007	.994

**TABLE 4.12   Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Approval of President's
Handling of Foreign Relations by Year: The Economy is the Most Important Problem**

Independent Variables	1984			1988			1992			1996			2000		
	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
AGE	.011	.255	.799	-.036	-.898	.369	.067	1.996	.046	-.004	-.059	.953	-.021	-.172	.864
EDUCATION	-.023	-.643	.520	.004	.109	.913	.148	4.729	.000	.129	1.872	.064	.027	.246	.806
GENDER	-.025	-.706	.480	.066	2.100	.036	.052	1.867	.062	.024	.380	.705	.107	.986	.328
INCOME	-.016	-.433	.665	.065	1.847	.065	-.011	-.360	.719	.049	.720	.473	.021	.196	.845
NOTWORK1	.017	.416	.678	.034	.884	.377	-.028	-.837	.403				-.085	-.718	.475
NOTWORK2	.000	.008	.994	.054	1.719	.086	-.006	-.205	.838				-.185	-1.785	.079
PARTY ID	.091	2.108	.036	.035	.898	.369	.072	2.107	.035	-.054	-.603	.548	-.012	-.087	.931
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	.051	1.338	.182	.003	.074	.941	-.004	-.137	.891	-.026	-.400	.690	-.112	-1.073	.287
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	-.031	-.815	.416	-.003	-.083	.934	.055	1.880	.060	.006	.087	.931	.060	.540	.591
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.512	10.523	.000	.605	14.968	.000	.447	12.435	.000	.514	4.997	.000	.511	3.824	.000
RACE	.010	.284	.777	-.029	-.918	.359	.007	.252	.801	.085	1.372	.173	-.058	-.544	.588
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.051	1.328	.185	-.036	-1.134	.257	.029	1.031	.303	-.053	-.824	.412	.074	.761	.449
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.005	.120	.905	.090	2.703	.007	.015	.487	.627	.084	1.040	.300	-.023	-.218	.828
USPOSITION	.227	5.825	.000	.095	2.890	.004	.018	.593	.553	.296	4.237	.000	.220	2.003	.049
WORK										-.060	-.841	.402			

shown in table 4.12, perception of the US position in the world was significant four times, and in those instances explained the second largest amount of variance in approval. Thus, even when the economy was considered the MIP, the perception of the US position in the world remained a key explanation of foreign relations approval.

Second, three of the four measures of perceptions of economic performance, the prospective sociotropic evaluation, and both the prospective and retrospective personal evaluations, were never significant both when the economy was not considered the MIP and when it was. The sociotropic retrospective evaluation is significant twice when the economy is not considered the MIP, and significant only once when the economy is considered the MIP. This is the only surprising finding on foreign relations approval. However, perceptions of economic performance generally would not be expected to explain much variance in foreign relations approval, which essentially was the case.

Finally, socio-demographics continued to fail to exert a consistent direct effect on approval, regardless of issue salience, and perception of presidential persona continued to provide the best explanation of approval, regardless of issue salience. Both of these findings are consistent with expectations. Party identification, however, does not completely meet with expectations. Previously it had not been effected by issue salience, being significant the same number of times regardless of issue salience. However, when considering foreign relations approval, party identification was significant three times when the economy was not the MIP, but was significant only twice when the economy was the MIP. This is a somewhat surprising finding, but we will not speculate on its reasons at this time. In one last note, perception of presidential persona and perception of the US position in the world were the only two variables to provide a consistent,

significant explanation of foreign relations approval, both when the economy was <u>not</u> considered the MIP and when it was.

<u>SALIENCE OF FOREIGN RELATIONS</u>

As we mentioned previously, we include the findings on the effects of foreign relations salience in tabular form in the appendix rather than within the text of this chapter. However, we do make some general comments about the findings, most in comparison with the findings on economic salience. We first consider the non-substantive variables, i.e. those that do not measure perceptions of the real world. We essentially ignore socio-demographics since they have not exerted a consistent direct effect on approval. Thus, our focus is on perception of presidential persona, and party identification. In all prior tests of our model, both when we accounted for issue salience and when we did not, perception of presidential persona provided the best explanation of approval. We would expect this trend to continue when we account for the salience of foreign relations on both economic and foreign relations approval, but this was surprisingly not the case. In 1996, when foreign relations was considered the MIP, perception of presidential persona was insignificant. In fact, in 1996, no variables provided a significant explanation of either economic approval or foreign relations approval when foreign relations was the MIP.

Party identification had not been affected by economic salience, but it was affected by foreign relations salience on overall approval. Its performance on economic approval and foreign relations approval was consistent with its behavior on overall approval when accounting for foreign relations salience, rather than its behavior when considering economic salience. When foreign relations was <u>not</u> considered the MIP,

party identification provided a significant explanation of economic approval four times, and foreign relations three times. However, when foreign relations was considered the MIP, party identification provided a significant explanation of economic approval only once, and never provided a significant explanation of foreign relations approval.

We next consider the substantive, perceptions of the real-world variables, beginning with the four measures of perceptions of economic performance. They have much more predictive power on economic approval when foreign relations was not considered the MIP than when it was. When it was not, the sociotropic retrospective evaluation was significant all five years, as expected. When foreign relations was considered the MIP, the sociotropic retrospective evaluation was significant only once. A similar drop in performance is evident with the personal retrospective evaluation. When foreign relations was considered the MIP, this variable was not significant in any of the four years in which it was significant when foreign relations was not considered the MIP. Ironically, it was significant in the one year in which it was not significant when foreign relations was not considered the MIP. There was not much difference evidenced on either the personal prospective evaluation or the sociotropic prospective evaluation. The former was significant once when foreign relations was not considered the MIP, but never when foreign relations was considered the MIP. The latter was significant once when foreign relations was not considered the MIP, and twice when it was.

On foreign relations approval, perceptions of economic performance have much less predictive power than they had on economic approval, which is expected. Of the four, only two, the sociotropic retrospective and prospective evaluations, were significant when foreign relations was not the MIP. The sociotropic retrospective evaluation was

significant twice and the sociotropic prospective evaluation was significant once. None of the four measures were significant when foreign relations was considered the MIP.

Finally, the perception of the US position in the world provided a significant explanation of economic approval twice when foreign relations was not considered the MIP, and once when it was. This is somewhat surprising, as we would expect the foreign relations variable to have greater predictive power when foreign relations is considered the MIP. The most serious departure from expectations was with the perception of the US position in the world as an explanation of foreign relations approval. When foreign relations was not considered the MIP, the perception of the US position in the world was significant each year but one, 1992, but was significant only once, 1984, when foreign relations was considered the MIP. This is completely opposite of what we would expect. The one, ostensibly foreign relations variable should provide a consistent, significant explanation of foreign relations approval when foreign relations is the MIP, yet it does not. This is all the more strange since it did provide a consistent, significant explanation of foreign relations approval when foreign relations was not the MIP. In many ways, the performance of the perception of the US position in the world when considering foreign relations salience mirrors the performance of the perceptions of economic performance when considering economic salience. Generally speaking, the findings when considering issue salience did not meet expectations. In concluding this chapter, we discuss potential reasons for this occurrence.

ISSUE-SALIENCE CONCLUSIONS

Generally speaking, the findings of our tests accounting for issue-salience largely failed to conform to expectations. As a result, our issue-salience hypotheses are not

supported. The question, then, is what explains this failure of the data to conform to expectations? One possibility is measurement error. Our four measures of perceptions of economic performance ostensibly measure a fairly specified aspect of the economy, specifically how one perceives the performance of their own economic situation and the nation's economic situation both in the recent past and in the near future. Although respondents could base their perception on a wide range of matters, that range likely does not include all the measures identified in the economic/business category of the MIP. Thus, we have a problem with specification. The measure we use to test for the salience of the economy is not specified well. There are too many answers to the most important problem question that are coded as a business/economic issue. Thus, there are likely a number of those categories that would not apply to one's perception of recent past and near future economic performance. As a result, we need to re-specify this variable in the future and run the tests again. It should only include answers that clearly apply to an assessment of past and future economic performance.

The problem of specification is worse with perception of the US position in the world and the foreign relations/national defense category of responses to the most important problem question. As we have already mentioned, the perception of the US position in the world is a rather vague measure. While it is ostensibly a foreign relations measure, we are not certain how it is interpreted by respondents across time. As a result, we do not know if it really applies to many of the responses given to the most important problem question that were coded as foreign relations/national defense issues. Therefore, specifying the foreign relations/national defense category is troublesome. However, we should make an attempt to specify the category to include only those responses that

reasonably apply to one's perception of the US position in the world, however that may be defined. Clearly then, measurement error is a plausible explanation for the data to not conform to expectations when accounting for issue salience. We may simply not be measuring what we think we are measuring.

This is evidenced in another way. We have responses that ostensibly indicate what respondents believe to be the most important problems facing the country. However, we do not know for certain if that is really what we are measuring. Instead we may simply have an artifact of a media agenda-setting effect. Do respondents really believe that their answer to the most important problem question truly is the most important problem facing the country, or was it simply what they heard or seen in the media recently, and so it was the first thing to come to mind? We have no way of knowing the answer, which further complicates our understanding of whether we are really measuring what we think we are.

The final matter, and one that we review in the next chapter, is just because respondents identified a particular issue as the most important problem facing the country does not mean they evaluate the president on the basis of his perceived handling of the issue. One might think that whatever a respondent identifies as the MIP will pervade his or her thinking and become the basis of evaluation of the president. The logic here is that if a problem is serious enough to be identified as the MIP, then it is one the respondent is thinking a lot about, even if only because the media has been giving it a lot of attention, and thus would also come to mind as an issue on which the president should be evaluated when the respondent is asked the approval question. However, we have no way of knowing if this actually occurs. In other words, there may be little or no connection

between what the respondent identifies as the MIP and what becomes the basis of his or her presidential evaluation. Thus, the real issue here is the nature of salience. To put a bit of a twist on Edwards, et al. (1995) research, an issue must be salient in the evaluation of the president for it to influence presidential approval. Just because an issue is salient generally, i.e. it is identified as the MIP, does not necessarily mean it is salient in the evaluation of the president. Thus, for the economy, for example, to influence presidential approval it is not enough for it to simply be identified as the MIP, it must also be considered an important component in the ingredients of presidential evaluation. Thus, a respondent must believe the economy is the most important problem facing the country, and because of its importance, the president should be evaluated on the basis of his perceived handling of it.

The NES data provide no means of determining whether or not this type of process occurs. Respondents may think one thing when asked the most important problem question, and quite another when asked the approval question. Thus, the likelihood exists that there is no connection between the two. Respondents simply may not evaluate the president on the same issue that they identified as the MIP, which would result in issue-salience, as measured by responses to the MIP, not affecting the explanation of presidential approval. Due to this, we do not reject our question-meaning hypothesis simply because our issue-salience hypotheses were not supported. As we state in the next chapter, the results of our tests of issue-salience may be nothing more than an indication that respondents did not base their evaluation of the president on the issue they identified as the MIP. In fact, this potential brings up further issues relative to question-meaning, which we address in the chapter to follow.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, and EXTENSIONS

The goal of this dissertation, and therefore part of its importance, is to determine what best explains presidential approval at the individual level. To do so, we formulated a comprehensive model, the testable portion of which included some of the key conventional explanations from the aggregate level research discussed in chapter two, as well as a rival explanation, namely perception of presidential persona. We tested the model with data from NES surveys administered in 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000, and presented those findings in chapter four. We begin this chapter by highlighting the findings that largely failed to conform to expectations generated by the presidential approval literature. Following this discussion, we turn to the two rival explanations of presidential approval put forth in this dissertation: presidential persona and question meaning. We then discuss the importance of studying presidential approval, particularly within the context of approval's influence on electoral choice, and conclude the chapter by pulling everything together and discussing directions for future research.

<u>The Issue of Unmet Expectations</u>

At the conclusion of chapter three, we discussed the differences between the literature-generated expectations regarding the outcome of the tests of our comprehensive model of presidential approval and our own set of expectations. The key difference between the two was the place of economic performance and perception of presidential persona in explaining presidential approval. The literature would have us believe that economic performance is the most important explanation of presidential approval, while we believe perception of presidential persona is the most important. The findings in chapter four demonstrate that our set of expectations was largely met, while the set of literature-generated expectations was largely unmet. Contrary to what the literature

would have us believe, but consistent with our own beliefs, economic performance was not the most important explanation of variance in presidential approval, perception of presidential persona was. Consistent with both sets of expectations, party identification explained the second largest amount of variance in presidential approval.

Clearly, economic performance failed to meet expectations, both those generated by the literature, and our own. It failed to meet the literature-generated expectations, most notably, by not providing the best explanation of variance in presidential approval. The literature also led us to believe that all four measures of perceptions of economic performance would provide a significant explanation of presidential approval, and we concurred with this expectation. However, this expectation was largely unmet, representing one of only two failures of our own set of expectations being met.

Two measures, the personal retrospective and sociotropic prospective evaluations, never provided a significant explanation of variance in approval. Of the two that did provide a significant explanation of variance in overall approval, the personal prospective evaluation provided a significant explanation of variance in overall approval only twice, in 1992 and 2000. Thus, the sociotropic retrospective evaluation was the only measure of perceptions of economic performance to provide a significant explanation on a consistent basis, with 2000 being the only year it did not provide a significant explanation of variance in overall presidential approval.

However, even its performance represents the second of two failures of our own set of expectations being met. We expected the sociotropic retrospective evaluation to explain the third largest amount of variance in presidential approval in all five years of analysis. However, this was the case in only three years, as it did not provide the third

best explanation of presidential approval in 1988, and in 2000 it failed to provide a significant explanation of variance in approval.

In a final note regarding economic performance, scholars disagree as to which is the more important economic evaluation: sociotropic or personal, retrospective or prospective. Our findings demonstrate why debate lingers over this issue. Personal evaluations mattered only when we considered the prospective dimension. Sociotropic evaluations mattered only when considering the retrospective dimension. Thus, there is no conclusive evidence supporting the superiority of sociotropic or personal evaluations, or the superiority of retrospective or prospective evaluations. Despite the debate, we believe the strongest evidence points to the sociotropic retrospective evaluation being the most important of the four economic performance measures. Had it explained the greatest amount of variance in presidential approval, then the expectations generated by the literature would have come closer to being met, but this did not happen.

The importance of our findings is twofold. First, they show the lack of conformity to expectations generated by the aggregate level research found in the presidential approval literature. Apparently, the aggregate level data mask what actually goes on at the individual level. Although trends in economic performance may have tracked with approval at the aggregate level, our findings indicate that economic performance did not figure into individuals' evaluations of the president to the extent the literature would have us believe. Second, they show that our rival explanation of presidential persona performed as expected.

Finding that perceptions of presidential persona explained the most variance in presidential approval allows us to make a significant contribution to the presidential

approval level. We can further that contribution if we are able to link this micro-level finding with the macro-level by finding evidence of change in approval tracking with change in the public's perception of presidential persona. If we do, we provide support to a corollary hypothesis to our initial persona hypothesis: change in presidential approval is plausibly explained by change in the public's perception of presidential persona.

Persona Explanations: Linking the Micro-level with the Macro-level

Since we found that perception of presidential persona explains the most variance in presidential approval, it is reasonable to assume that change in the public's perception of presidential persona would explain change in presidential approval. In order to determine if such a relationship exists, we must move beyond the NES data used to test our comprehensive model. The approval question utilized by NES is used by other polling organizations, and we use that as our measure of presidential approval. Our measure of the public's perception of presidential persona is the favorability rating utilized by numerous polling organizations. The favorability rating asks respondents whether they have a favorable or unfavorable impression of certain people in the news, including the president. When comparing results of the approval rating and the favorability rating, we use data generated from the same polling organization at the same point in time, e.g. results of Gallup Poll approval ratings from February of 1999 would be compared with results of the Gallup Poll favorability ratings from February of 1999. Typically, the approval rating is measured more frequently than the favorability rating. As a result, we have selected data from the polling organization that provides the most regular measure of both the approval rating and the favorability rating. In the case of Reagan and George H.W. Bush, there are regular measures of both ratings for only one

year of their administrations. Contrariwise, we have regular measures of both ratings for the entire Clinton administration, and the George W. Bush administration to date.

While we rely on the favorability rating to measure the public's perception of presidential persona, it is not without its flaws. Recall that the measure of one's perception of presidential persona used to test our persona hypothesis was multi-dimensional in nature, including a feeling thermometer rating how warmly or coldly one felt about the president, a measure of character traits descriptive of the president, and whether or not the president had elicited certain positive or negative feelings. It is virtually impossible to replicate such a measure across time. There are simply not enough surveys administered on a regular basis that measure each of these three matters.

As a result, we must rely on a substitute measure of perceptions of presidential persona. That is why we turn to the favorability rating. It is understood as a measure of the public's views of presidential persona, as it asks whether the respondent has a favorable or unfavorable impression of the president, and not, at least ostensibly, a measure of the president's job performance. However, the question asking respondents about their impression of the president is potentially as vague as the approval question. As a result, we do not know how respondents interpret the favorability question, and, in turn, if it is taking into account the same type of things as the multi-dimensional scale we used in the test of our persona hypothesis. However, since we do not have any alternatives that would clearly probe respondents' perceptions of presidential persona, we must assume that the favorability rating is a reasonable measure of it. Thus, if fluctuations in approval mirror fluctuations in favorability, we have evidence supporting

our assertion that change in approval is plausibly explained by change in the public's perception of presidential persona.

We examine this matter by considering data from the Reagan, G.H.W. Bush, Clinton, and G.W. Bush administrations, which are presented below in figures 5.1 through 5.4 respectively. In each figure, we present the trend lines for the positive dimensions of both the approval and favorability ratings, approve and favorable, respectively. The negative dimensions of both ratings, disapprove and unfavorable, are more or less mirror images of the positive dimensions, and thus only add noise to the charts, making them difficult to read. Thus, throughout the discussion of our findings, when we refer to approval and favorability, we mean the positive dimensions of the approval rating, approve, and the favorability rating, favorable, as shown in the figures.

FIGURE 5.1: Trends in Approval Rating and Favorability Rating: Reagan
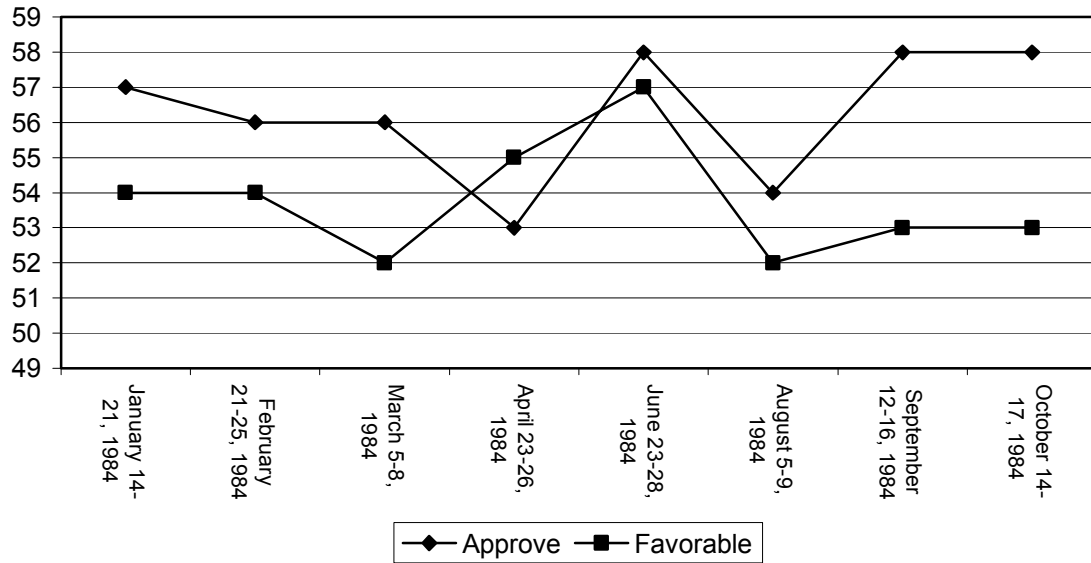
SOURCE: CBS News, New York Times Poll[32]

Figure 5.1 shows a relationship between approval and favorability that begins as a lagged effect from January to June, and moves to a more direct effect from June through

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[32] The potential exists for question-wording effects as the introduction to the favorability question was not the same in all administrations of the question. The text appears in the appendix.

October. During the lagged effect period, the decline in favorability from February to March was followed by a similar decline in approval from March to April. The gradual increase in favorability begun in March and ending in June was followed by a more immediate increase in approval between April and June. During the more direct effect period, approval and favorability both declined from June to August, increased from August to September, and leveled off from September to October, with the only real difference being a greater increase in approval than favorability. Interestingly, though, approval typically ran higher than favorability, which is not consistent with our expectations. We assumed that certain members of the population, e.g. Democrats, might like Reagan the man, but disagree with his policy choices, resulting in a favorable impression, but disapproval of his handling his job as president. This, however, was not the case, as more respondents apparently approved of Reagan's job performance than viewed him favorably as a person. This is a curious finding, but we will not speculate on the reasons for it in this dissertation.

Figure 5.2, below, shows us that with a few exceptions, most notably the period between February 28 and March 29, when approval remained constant while favorability increased, leveled off, and then decreased; the trend lines of approval and favorability track in near parallel fashion. Increases in approval mirror increases in favorability, and decreases in approval mirror decreases in favorability. The only real difference is in intensity, where some of the increases and decreases are more pronounced with favorability than with approval. Thus, the relationship between approval and favorability hinted at during the Reagan administration becomes much clearer during the presidency of George H.W. Bush.

FIGURE 5.2: Trends in Approval Rating and Favorability Rating: G.H.W. Bush
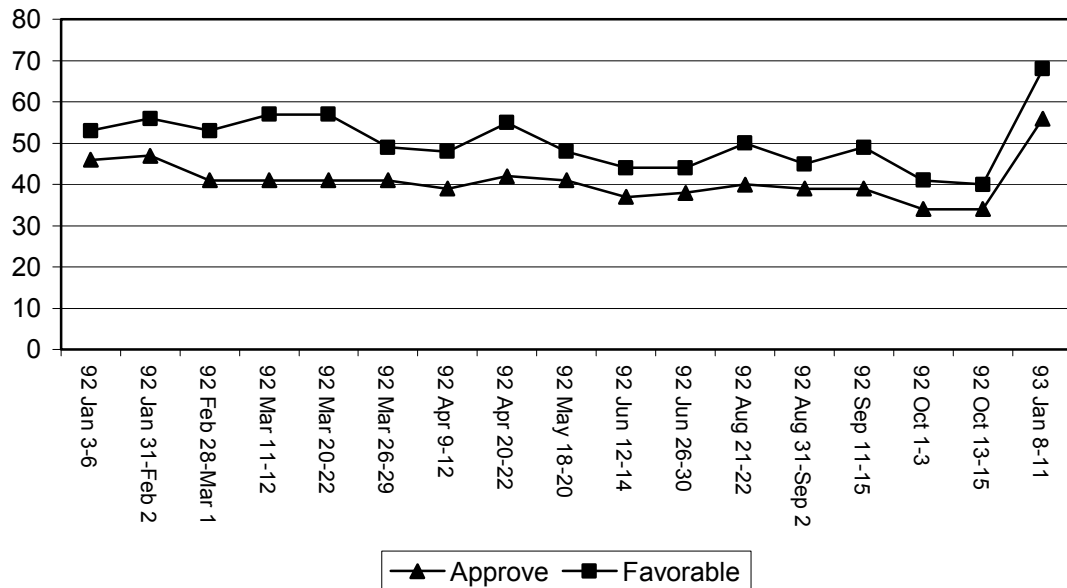
SOURCE: Gallup Poll

Furthermore, unlike the Reagan administration data, favorability ran higher than approval; consistent with our assumption that one may have a favorable impression of the president as a person, but not approve of his job performance. Finally, we should note that both favorability and approval skyrocketed between the middle of October and the first part of January, before Clinton took office, a period running less than a month before the election through the lame-duck period of Bush's administration. Such an increase in approval during this time frame is surprising. If the increase were noticeable before the election, it clearly was not enough to overcome Bush's sluggish approval ratings for him to win re-election. If the full effect of the increase were not felt until January, it is surprising that the public would have such a healthy retrospective view of the Bush presidency after electing Clinton, and sending Bush out of office.

FIGURE 5.3: Trends in Approval Rating and Favorability Rating: Clinton
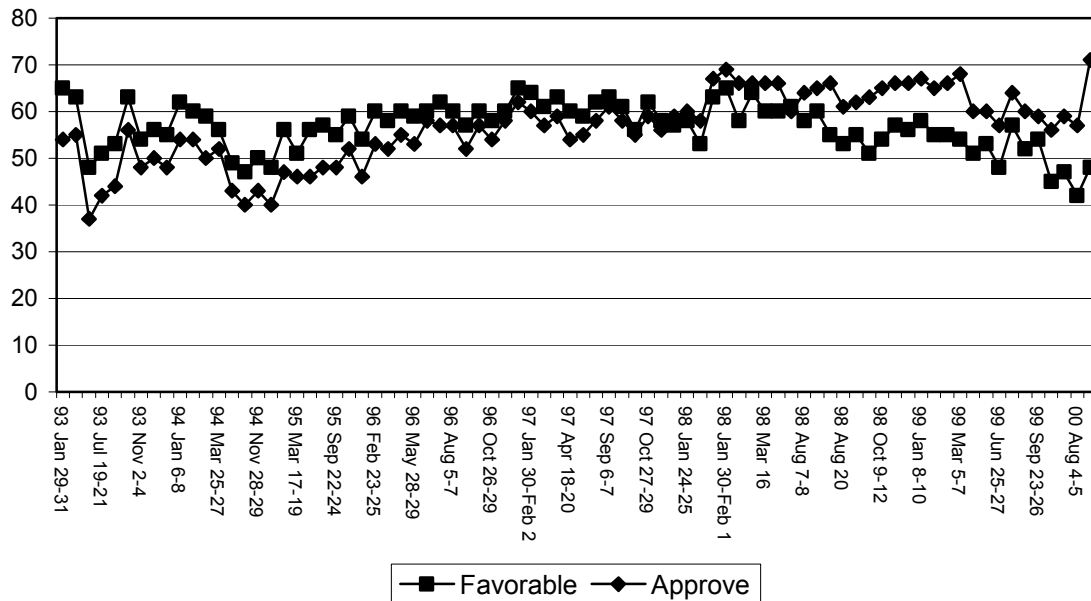
SOURCE: Gallup Poll

Figure 5.3 shows a relationship between approval and favorability similar to that evidenced in the administration of George H.W. Bush. For much of Clinton's administration, particularly prior to 1998, favorability and approval tracked in near parallel fashion, with increases and decreases in approval typically accompanying increases and decreases in favorability, with the key difference being the intensity of the changes. However, during 1998 we saw some important changes begin to occur that remained through the end of Clinton's administration. First, there were more exceptions to the two ratings tracking together, with a greater number of instances in which increases or decreases in one rating did not correspond to increases or decreases in the other rating. Secondly, the two ratings were farther apart from each other. Finally, and most importantly, Clinton's approval rating moved higher than his favorability rating.

Although we have provided solid evidence in support of a general relationship between change in favorability and change in approval, there are implications for our hypothesis in the fact that Clinton's approval ran higher than his favorability for much of

his second term. What accounts for this phenomenon if change in approval is explained by change in perception of presidential persona, as we hypothesize? We have established that variance in presidential approval is best explained by perceptions of presidential persona, but we do not know which of those perceptions are actually used in evaluating the president's job performance. Thus, perhaps we should restate our hypothesis as change in approval is plausibly explained by change in the specific perception of presidential persona that is most important in explaining approval at a given point in time. Change in the favorability rating may not signal change in the specific perception of presidential persona that is used in evaluating the president's job performance.

The fact that we do not know with any certainty which perceptions of presidential persona the favorability rating is tapping at any given time, due to its abstract nature, is illustrated by the way the Lewinsky scandal affected Clinton. Scandal will cause most respondents to interpret the favorability question within the context of the scandal, leading them to have an unfavorable impression of the president due to his moral shortcomings. As a result, the favorability rating at this point in time taps the negative aspects of the perception of presidential persona. However, the positive aspects that had been tapped previously may have remained unchanged. If, in evaluating presidential job performance, respondents use the positive aspects of the perception of presidential persona tapped by the favorability rating prior to the revelation of scandal rather than the negative aspects tapped by the favorability rating after the revelation of scandal, the approval rating will remain high, while the favorability rating will drop. Data from a 1998 Heartland Poll cited by Miller (1999) indicate this is what happened with Clinton.

Polls taken throughout 1998 showed that the Lewinsky scandal did damage the public's view of Clinton from a moral perspective, but apparently did not damage the public's view of his leadership capabilities. The 1998 Heartland Poll showed that the best explanation of Clinton's approval was his strong leadership capabilities. Thus, the aspect of the perception of Clinton's persona that was most important in evaluations of his job performance did not change. Views of his moral standing, which clearly did change, were not prominent in explanations of his approval as reported in the 1998 Heartland Poll. Thus the change in perceptions of Clinton's moral standing lowered the favorability rating, but not the approval rating, providing valid evidence in support of our foregoing assertions. Due to the inexact nature of the favorability rating as an instrument with which to measure the public's perception of presidential persona, we must devise a better instrument in order to better understand perception of presidential persona, change in it, and its relation to presidential approval. That task, though, must wait for the future.

FIGURE 5.4: Trends in Approval Rating and Favorability Rating: G.W. Bush
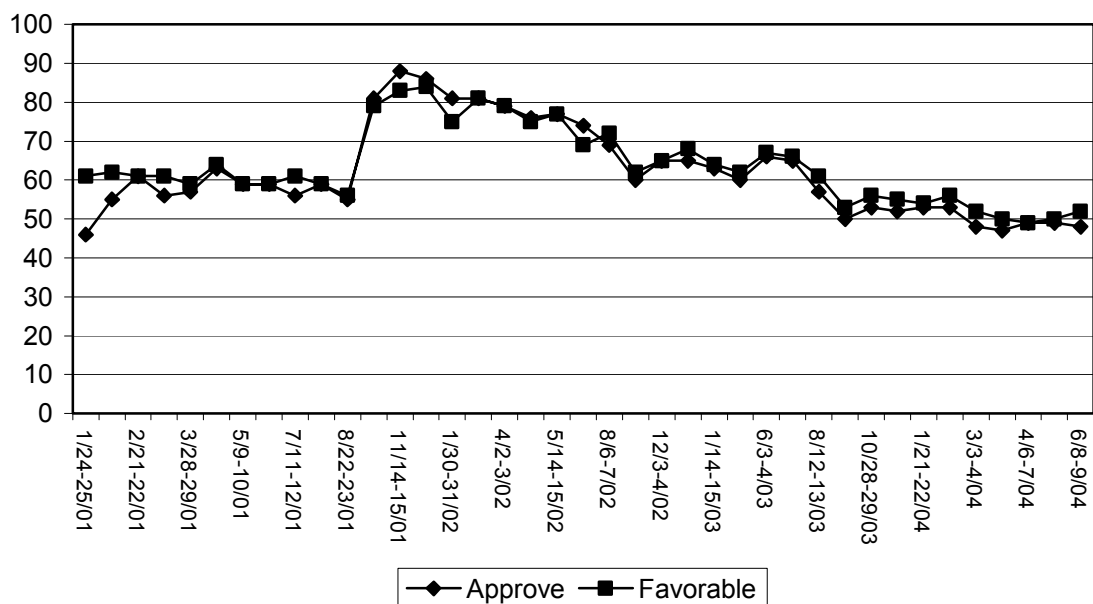
SOURCE: FOX News/Opinion Dynamics Poll

Figure 5.4 shows a rather unique pattern in the tracking of favorability and approval over the course of current president George W. Bush's administration to date. First, approval and favorability track together more closely than they did for the other three presidents under consideration, as they are practically on top of each other throughout the entire course of Bush's presidency to date. While the two ratings followed near parallel tracks for the other three presidents under consideration, there was a reasonable amount of separation between them. This is not the case with George W. Bush, thereby signifying what may be a hallmark of his administration, namely that both support and criticism of Bush appear to be at a personal level. The nation appears divided between those that like Bush personally, and thus approve of his job performance, and those that dislike him personally, and thus disapprove of his job performance. When we have a situation in which those that like a president personally approve, while those that dislike him personally disapprove, we would expect to see an overlap of the approval and favorability ratings, which is what we have with Bush.

The second unique feature of the Bush data is the significant spike in both approval and favorability following September 11, 2001. None of the other presidents under consideration experienced such a spike in either approval or favorability. The fluctuation in both ratings fell within a relatively circumscribed range, and this would be the case for George W. Bush were it not for the post 9/11 spike. In fact, if we remove the period between August 2001 and December 2002, both favorability and approval fluctuate in a roughly twenty percent range between slightly less than fifty percent and slightly less than seventy percent. This range is more consistent with the patterns of the other three presidents under consideration. The fact that both favorability and approval

spiked together following September 11, 2001 raises a concern regarding favorability, or the public's perception of presidential persona, as an explanation of presidential approval. We turn to a discussion of that concern as we conclude this section of chapter five.

Although we have provided rather solid evidence that change in presidential approval accompanies change in the public's perception of presidential persona, as measured by the favorability rating, we still have a lingering question. What explains favorability? In other words, what influences the public's perception of presidential persona? The fact that favorability and approval both spiked following September 11, 2001, hints at the possibility that favorability, i.e. the public's perception of presidential persona, may be influenced by the same types of things that influence approval. In the case of George W. Bush, the public may have approved of his handling of the terrorist attacks, and thus approved of his job performance generally, leading to an independent rise in approval. However, the manner in which he handled the terrorist attacks may have improved the public's perception of his persona, thus raising his favorability rating. Since we have shown that change in favorability explains change in approval, the rise in favorability itself may have contributed to the rise in approval. Determining what explains favorability, particularly the possibility that the same types of things that influence approval may influence favorability, is clearly an important undertaking. However, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, and thus becomes a future research consideration discussed in the conclusion of this chapter.

Question-Meaning Explanations

Now that we have exhausted our discussion of the first rival explanation, presidential persona, we turn to a discussion of the second rival explanation, meaning of

the presidential approval question. In chapter one, we established that respondents do not assign the same meaning to survey questions, leading Foddy (1993) to conclude that "when this happens, it makes little sense for the researcher to compare different respondents' answers with one another, since the different answers are, in essence, answers to different questions (p. 21)." This served as the rationale for our second rival explanation of presidential approval: change in approval is merely a reflection of change in the meaning of the presidential approval question. We presented this as a formal hypothesis in chapter three, where we also established that testing the hypothesis directly was not possible. Therefore, we discussed the initial means by which we would seek indirect support of the question-meaning hypothesis, namely issue-salience.

Unfortunately, what we expected to find when examining the effects of issue salience simply did not materialize, as shown in the findings presented in chapter four. Simply put, the salience of an issue did not lead to an improvement in the amount of variance in approval explained by the measure(s) of the salient issue. Although these findings were disappointing, they do not necessarily damage our question-meaning hypothesis. It simply removes one piece of potential evidence.

Clearly there are a number of measurement issues that may explain the results, rather than a lack of variance in interpretation of the question. We discussed those measurement issues in detail in chapter four and will not reiterate them here. It is important to note here, however, that the results may simply show that respondents did not connect their response to the most important problem question with their evaluation of the president when answering the approval question. As Edwards (1995) points out, "for an issue to have a significant influence on evaluations of the president," it is not

enough for it to be salient. Respondents "must also evaluate the president in terms of his performance regarding it." The NES data tell us which issues respondents identified as salient, but we have no way of knowing whether they evaluated the president on the basis of his performance on those issues. The results of our tests of the effects of salience could be taken to show that respondents by and large did not evaluate the president in terms of his performance on the most important problem. Simply because respondents apparently did not interpret the presidential approval question within the context of their responses to the most important problem does not mean that there isn't variance in respondents interpretations of the approval question. It just means we have to turn to other types of indirect evidence to support our question-meaning hypothesis.

The indirect evidence we consider comes from research examining the effects of priming on presidential approval. The theory of priming states that respondents seek shortcuts when making judgments, thereby basing those judgments on a subset of considerations, typically those matters most accessible in memory, rather than on an exhaustive set of considerations. This allows the respondent to make an informed decision, while at the same time, conserving effort. Although not expressly stated in the theory, priming influences, if not completely defines, the bases of evaluation that a respondent uses to make a judgment, and priming research indicates that the bases, or ingredients, of evaluation of the president are not constant.

The fleeting nature of the ingredients of presidential evaluations is illuminated by the title of a key article examining the effects of priming on presidential approval, "Altering the Foundations of Support for the President Through Priming (Krosnick and Kinder, 1990)." This article, among others, demonstrates that priming can change the

ingredients respondents use in presidential evaluations, and hence their decision to approve or disapprove. But what is the priming induced change in the ingredients of presidential evaluations really telling us? We argue that priming alters the clues respondents use to interpret the meaning of the presidential approval question, as the media change their focus of attention over time. Thus, change in the ingredients of presidential evaluations is a result of priming-induced change in the interpretation of the approval question, which is the rationale behind our persona hypothesis. The nature of the relationship between priming and presidential approval is seen below, in figure 5.5. To determine whether priming offers solid indirect evidence in support of our question-meaning hypothesis, we discuss the findings from key articles examining the effects of priming on approval for presidents Carter, Reagan, and both Bushes.

Figure 5.5: Relationship Between Priming and Presidential Approval

Focus of Media Attention	→	Interpretation of Presidential Approval	→	Ingredients of Presidential Evaluations	→	Presidential Approval
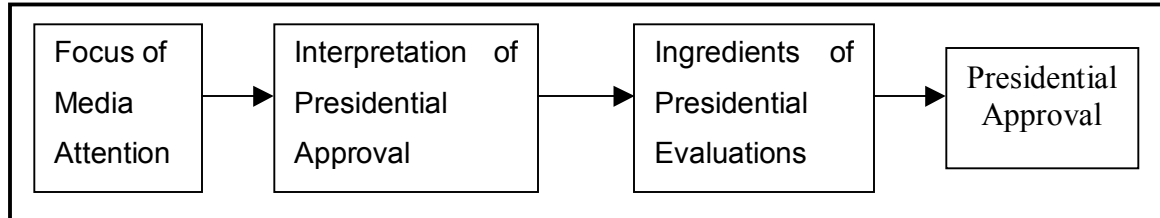
The Carter era research was experimental in nature, with Iyengar, et al. (1984) examining the effect of exposure to news stories on the ingredients of presidential evaluations. One experiment exposed subjects to varying amounts of news stories about energy related topics; while another assigned subjects to one of three groups exposed solely to news stories about defense, energy, or inflation. In reporting their findings on the first experiment, Iyengar and his colleagues stated, "energy performance ratings were more influential in evaluations of Carter's general performance among students exposed to stories about energy than among those exposed to no stories about energy (Iyengar, et

al. 1984)." The effects were similar in the second experiment as subjects in the group exposed to stories about defense were more likely to evaluate Carter on the basis of defense; while subjects exposed to energy related news stories were more likely to evaluate him on the basis of energy policy, and subjects exposed to stories about inflation were more likely to evaluate him on the basis of his handling the problem of inflation. The results of these two experiments show that the ingredients of evaluation of Carter were influenced by both the amount and type of news stories to which subjects were exposed. This indicates that indeed, media coverage provides the contextual clues respondents use to assign meaning to the presidential approval question. Differences in media coverage lead to differences in the contextual clues, and in turn, differences in the ingredients of presidential evaluations.

The Reagan era research turned from experimental to real-world studies of the effects of priming on presidential evaluations. On November 25, 1986, Attorney-General Meese revealed the secret funneling to the Contras of funds obtained from secret sales of arms to Iran. Media attention quickly shifted to this developing situation. Fortuitously, the revelation of the Iran-Contra affair came in the middle of the administration of the 1986 NES surveys, allowing Krosnick and Kinder (1990) to study whether or not priming changed the ingredients of evaluation of President Reagan. A comparison of the responses of those interviewed before and after November 25 showed a decline in public support for Reagan after November 25. Was this a result of Iran-Contra, and thus differences in the ingredients of evaluation of Reagan before and after November 25?

Evidence reported by Krosnick and Kinder (1990) shows a sizeable increase in the amount of influence attitudes relative to Central American policy had on evaluations

of Reagan's performance after November 25. Furthermore, evidence also shows an increase in the impact the more general foreign affairs issue of isolationism had on Reagan's performance among post-revelation respondents. Not only does the evidence show an increase in the impact of the specific Central American policy and general foreign policy issues on evaluations of Reagan's performance, but also it shows the complete removal of a key domestic issue, aid to blacks, in evaluations of Reagan's performance. This would indicate that foreign affairs rather than domestic affairs had become the bases of evaluation of Reagan's performance, and so Krosnick and Kinder's (1990) evidence shows that the revelation of the Iran-Contra affair changed the bases of evaluation of Reagan. Arguably this is a result of differing contextual clues being received by respondents. They were not exposed to matters relative to the Iran-Contra affair prior to November 25, but were bombarded by such matters afterward. Thus, the drop in Reagan's approval was likely caused by the approval question being interpreted after November 25 as a reflection of one's approval of Reagan in light of the recent revelation of the Iran-Contra affair.

The research from the George H.W. Bush era considered another real-world event, the Persian Gulf War. During the time of the Gulf War, media coverage of it was nearly incessant for a period of months, creating the distinct possibility that respondents were primed to evaluate Bush's performance on the basis of his handling of the Gulf War specifically, and the Iraq situation generally. Krosnick and Brannon (1993) examined the possibility of just such a priming effect, and found a roughly fifty percent increase in the impact that assessments of the Gulf crisis had on evaluations of Bush's overall job performance following the Gulf War. This finding indicates that the high approval

ratings Bush enjoyed at the end of the Gulf War were a result of the increase in respondents evaluating him on the basis of the Persian Gulf crisis, and those evaluations being positive. Furthermore, it once again demonstrates the plausibility of presidential approval being affected by change in the meaning of the approval question. In this instance, the Gulf War became the contextual clue respondents used in assigning meaning to the approval question. The approval question now likely became, implicitly, "in light of the current Persian Gulf crisis, do you approve or disapprove of the way George Bush is handling his job as president?" Interpretation of the approval question in this manner led to the increase in evaluations of Bush being based on his handling of the Gulf War, and, in turn, higher approval ratings.

Our final piece of indirect evidence supporting our question-meaning hypothesis comes not from research on priming per se, but rather from a recently published work by Bishop (2004) on illusions of public opinion, in which he also considers the issue of question meaning and presidential approval. Comparing data from the July and September 2001 Ohio Polls, Bishop (2004) demonstrates a significant shift in the responses given to the open-ended question asking respondents why they approved or disapproved of the way George W. Bush was handling his job as president. In July, a wide range of reasons was given for approving of the way he was handling his job, and terrorism was not among them. In September, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, there were fewer reasons given for approving Bush's handling of his job, and most involved issues such as terrorism/security, foreign affairs, and leadership. Clearly, the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 received extensive media coverage, and so respondents were provided with the contextual clue of the terrorist attacks, and specifically how Bush

was responding to them, in assigning meaning to the presidential approval question when it was asked after September 11, 2001. The increase in the impact that terrorism/foreign affairs related issues had in the evaluation of George W. Bush's job performance as shown by Bishop (2004) is consistent with the findings of the effects of priming on evaluations of Reagan and George H.W. Bush, as discussed previously.

A shift in the focus of the media tends to result in a shift in the ingredients of evaluation of the president. Bishop (2004) explains such an occurrence within the context of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the following manner. "In more normal periods, when there's not a lot of news about the president, this rather vague question becomes subject to multiple interpretations. By contrast, when a crisis emerges…and the president becomes the focus of attention, the meaning of the question becomes much less ambiguous for most respondents. It comes to mean, largely, how is the president handling his duties in the present situation? The meaning of this normally ambiguous question, in other words, becomes homogenized (Bishop, 2004)." Bishop's evidence and conclusion points to the existence of changes in the meaning of the presidential approval question over time, and thus to the potential for change in approval being explained by change in the meaning of the approval question.

In conclusion, while we have no real means of directly testing whether the meaning of the approval question changes over time, and, in turn, that those changes explain change in presidential approval over time, we have provided four pieces of solid indirect evidence in support of this assertion. The evidence shows that change in presidential evaluations was a result of change in the ingredients of those evaluations, which was brought about by priming. Arguably priming provided contextual clues for

respondents with which to assign meaning to the approval question. Thus, we extrapolate that change in approval was a result of the change in the meaning of the approval question brought about by changes in the contextual clues received by respondents as a result of media priming. Clearly, by changing the stories they choose to cover at a given time, the media offer various contextual clues regarding the meaning of the approval question over time, thus exposing respondents to different contextual clues. As Foddy (1993) states, "when this happens, it makes little sense for the researcher to compare different respondents' answers with one another, since the different answers are, in essence, answers to different questions." By extension, comparing responses to the presidential approval question over time may be in error as the differences in responses may simply be differences in the interpretation of the approval question; a conclusion supported by the evidence provided above.

Political Relevance of Presidential Approval

This dissertation represents yet another study of the "causes" of presidential approval, but why do we bother studying presidential approval at all? Does an understanding of it have any political relevance? Yes. While the literature points to a number of politically relevant aspects of presidential approval, we focus on two of the more prominent ones. The first is congressional-presidential relations. Despite research by Bond and Fleisher (1990) and Zeidenstein (1985) indicating presidential popularity's limited influence on the president's legislative effectiveness, Edwards (1989) states otherwise. Although the president's ability to effect change in Congress is limited, it is best when the president is able to take advantage of high levels of public approval. Thus, approval does affect the president's legislative influence.

In the introduction to this dissertation, we asserted as much, based on Neustadt's (1990) assertion that the president's power is primarily limited to his power to persuade. We believe his power to persuade Congress to accept his legislative agenda is dependent on his approval. Indeed, Ostrom and Simon (1988) asserted that the president's influence in policy-making, as well as his support in Congress is diminished by declines in public approval. The likely reason for this is the fact that members of Congress pay close attention to electoral politics, calculating their behavior to improve their chances at being re-elected. As we stated in chapter one, members of Congress are likely to view thwarting the initiatives of a popular president as potentially damaging their electoral prospects. Not wanting to risk losing their re-election bid, members of Congress are inclined to support the legislative agenda of a popular president. As such, the president's persuasive power, and thus his legislative influence are at their height.

Unpopular presidents, those with relatively low approval ratings, encounter greater congressional opposition to their legislative agenda, as thwarting the initiatives of an unpopular president does not carry with it electoral risks. In fact, it could enhance the electoral opportunities of, at least some, members of Congress. Clearly this weakens the president's persuasive power, and his legislative influence, potentially leading to further declines in approval, as the public perceives him as doing little, if anything, to help the country. A downward spiral of support, accompanied by continued Congressional thwarting of his legislative agenda, will more than likely lead to electoral defeat for a first-term president, and will damage the legacy of a second-term president.

Thus, presidential approval is important relative to congressional-presidential relations largely because of Mayhew's electoral connection. The influence that the level

of approval has on the president's power to persuade Congress to pass his legislative agenda, i.e. his legislative influence, is due to members of Congress acting in a manner most conducive to their chances at re-election. Ironically, members of Congress' own desires to be re-elected may influence a first-term president's chances at re-election. Thus, we turn to the second matter of political relevance for presidential approval, namely presidential elections.

Sigelman (1979b) found a high correlation between approval, as measured by the Gallup Poll, and popular vote for incumbent presidents. Brody and Sigelman (1983) extended this research and found that presidential approval influences vote choice for the incumbent party's candidate in elections in which the incumbent president was ineligible to run. These findings countered those of Mueller (1973), and in so doing point to the electoral importance of presidential approval. As we examine the matter, we consider approval as a potential indicator of the likelihood of re-election for first-term incumbents and for the incumbent party's candidate in elections in which the incumbent is ineligible to run. In addition to presidential elections, we are interested to see if presidential approval has an effect on Congressional elections. In order to consider the relationship between presidential approval and both presidential and congressional elections, we return to the NES data and examine the correlation between one's response to the approval question, and one's electoral choice as recorded in the post-election NES surveys of 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000. Tables 5.1 through 5.3, below, show the results of the correlations between presidential approval and presidential elections, House elections, and Senate elections.

TABLE 5.1: Correlation Between Approval and Presidential Vote Choice

	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000
OVERALL APPROVAL	.771	.653	.704	-.762	-.592
ECONOMIC APPROVAL	.695	.631	.558	-.613	-.458
FOREIGN AFFAIRS APPROVAL	.610	.552	.437	-.573	-.472

TABLE 5.2: Correlation Between Approval and House Vote Choice

	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000
OVERALL APPROVAL	.474	.376	.387	-.503	-.429
ECONOMIC APPROVAL	.416	.381	.336	-.411	-.323
FOREIGN AFFAIRS APPROVAL	.380	.341	.299	-.404	-.388

TABLE 5.3: Correlation Between Approval and Senate Vote Choice

	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000
OVERALL APPROVAL	.429	.379	.480	-.577	-.486
ECONOMIC APPROVAL	.445	.375	.352	-.504	-.384
FOREIGN AFFAIRS APPROVAL	.387	.387	.323	-.450	-.407

Table 5.1 shows a rather strong relationship between overall presidential approval and presidential vote choice. The relationship is strongest in the years in which the incumbent was a candidate, but even in the two years in which the incumbent was ineligible to run, 1988 and 2000, the relationship is still fairly strong. This indicates that approval of the incumbent president will help his party's candidate win election in the year in which the incumbent is ineligible to run. Relatively consistent with expectations, the relationship between presidential vote choice and economic approval is less than it was with overall approval, and, with the exception of 2000, less yet in its relationship with foreign affairs approval. Because of this, we focus the rest of our discussion on the relationship between overall approval and vote choice.

Our primary concern is with the ability of approval to predict presidential vote choice, and in turn presidential elections. Clearly the correlation between approval and vote choice is not perfect. We would inaccurately predict vote choice based on approval

anywhere from roughly 20 to roughly 40 percent of the time. Since not all approvers vote for the incumbent or his party's candidate, and not all disapprovers vote for the challenger, certain approvers will be wrongly predicted as voters for the incumbent or his party's candidate, while certain disapprovers will be wrongly predicted as voters for the challenger. This is best evidenced by the fact that in all five presidential election years we examined, the percentage of respondents who voted for the incumbent was less than the percentage of respondents who approved of the president, while the percentage of respondents who voted for the challenger was greater than the percentage of respondents who disapproved of the president. Clearly, there is a greater number of "defectors" among approvers than among disapprovers, where it is more likely for an approver to vote for the challenger than it is for a disapprover to vote for the incumbent.

While we encounter some degree of error in using approval to predict vote choice, approval does act as a better predictor of the outcome of the popular vote. Charting approval with vote choice[33], we see that, on average, disapprovers are 9 percent more likely to vote for the challenger than approvers are to vote for the incumbent or his party's candidate. Similarly, approvers are, on average, 10 percent more likely to vote for the challenger than disapprovers are to vote for the incumbent. As a result, the incumbent suffers a net loss of votes to the challenger, which was calculated using the data cited above to be, on average, 9 percent. We would thus expect to find the percentage of votes for the incumbent or his party's candidate to be roughly 9 percent less than his approval percentage, and the percentage of votes for the challenger to be roughly 9 percent greater than the percentage of those disapproving of the president.

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[33] The charting of approval with vote choice is presented in the appendix as crosstabs for all five election years we consider.

Although there are some slight discrepancies, due in part to the existence of third-party candidates in 1992 through 2000, this largely bore itself out.

The discussion above illustrates how we are able to use approval as a predictor of the outcome of the popular vote. In 1984 and 1988, Reagan enjoyed an approval rating above 60 percent. The same was true of Clinton in 1996 and 2000. In these years the incumbent or the incumbent party's candidate won the popular vote. Although they lost votes to the challenger, they had an insurmountable approval rating. With a 60 percent approval rating, 40 percent disapprove. Thus, if we add 9 percent to the 40 percent who disapprove, and subtract 9 percent from the 60 percent who approve, the incumbent still has a winning edge of 51 to 49 percent.

Bush's approval rating, on the other hand, was only 42 percent, with 58 percent disapproving. When the president's approval rating is lower than 50 percent, he is almost guaranteed to lose the popular vote, as he will actually receive a smaller percentage of votes than his approval percentage, and the challenger will receive more votes than the percentage of those that disapprove of the president. Even though the vote against Bush was split between two challengers, Clinton and Perot, Clinton was still able to emerge victorious because Bush's approval was so low. Thus, we would predict that the incumbent or his party's candidate would win the popular vote if the president's approval were at least 60 percent, or 18 percent higher than his disapproval. A difference of less than 18 percent between approval and disapproval has a high likelihood of leading to electoral defeat. However, there are numerous dynamics at work, and so an incumbent could still win the popular vote with less than an 18 point difference between approval and disapproval as the potential exists that fewer approvers will defect than usual, leading

to a lower net gain of votes for the challenger. Thus, while not perfect, the approval rating allows us to predict electoral outcomes reasonably well, and therein lays the importance of the approval rating as a factor in electoral politics.

As we conclude this section, we briefly turn to the relationship between presidential approval and congressional elections. Tables 5.2 and 5.3 show that there is not a strong relationship between the two. Only in a few instances in 1996 was the correlation between the two above fifty percent. The data allow us to conclude that approving of the president does not necessarily translate into voting for congressional candidates of the president's party's, nor does disapproving of the president necessarily translate into voting against congressional candidates of the president's party's.

Tidmarch and Carpenter's (1978) findings shed light on this matter. They found congressional incumbents to be generally insulated from the effects of presidential elections. A negative tide of popularity leading to electoral defeat for the incumbent does not necessarily affect congressional incumbents who are of the president's party. Thus, many of these congressional incumbents achieve re-election. At the same time, congressional incumbents of the opposition party are not necessarily hurt by a positive tide of popularity for incumbent presidents. Just because a president is popular and achieves re-election does not mean that congressional incumbents of the opposition party will lose their re-election bids. Despite this apparent insulation of congressional incumbents from the effects of presidential popularity and elections, other research on mid-term elections would indicate that a popular president may help members of his party running for election to Congress win seats, while an unpopular president may hurt the electoral chances of members of his party running for Congress. However, Tidmarch

and Carpenter (1978) found that the ability of the president to help or hurt congressional members of his party's electoral chances is limited. Nonetheless, the findings regarding mid-term elections indicate that they are important. We did not consider mid-term elections in this dissertation, but future considerations, to which we now turn, will have to include an examination of the correlation between them and presidential approval.

Conclusions and Future Research

Throughout the course of this dissertation, we have demonstrated a number of important things. First, we pointed out the plethora of explanations of presidential approval that are extant in the literature. Relatedly, we showed how tests to determine which was the most important explanation by bringing all the competing explanations together in a comprehensive model were relatively few in number. Secondly, we demonstrated how certain aggregate level findings did not translate to individual level analysis, as findings that may have been true at the aggregate level were largely false at the individual level. The most important of these was the finding that economic performance was not as important an explanation of presidential approval at the individual level as it had been at the aggregate level.

Thirdly, we provided solid evidence supporting the hypotheses associated with our first rival explanation of presidential approval, namely that perception of presidential persona provides the most important explanation of presidential approval, and that change in the public's perception of presidential persona plausibly explains change in presidential approval. First, in tests of our comprehensive model of presidential approval, the measure of perceptions of presidential approval explained the most variance in approval at five specific points in time, namely the presidential election years from

1984 through 2000. Secondly, change in approval generally varied with change in the public's perception of presidential persona, as measured by the favorability rating.

Fourthly, we provided solid indirect evidence in support of our second rival explanation, namely that change in approval merely reflects change in the meaning of the presidential approval question over time. The evidence we presented showed a change in approval coming about as the result of change in the ingredients of evaluation of the president's job performance. The change in ingredients was the result of media priming. Thus, we concluded that priming provides the contextual clues whereby respondents assign meaning to the approval question. As the media shift focus, the clues change over time. Thus, respondents are exposed to different clues, which results in different interpretations of the approval question.

Finally, we demonstrated the importance of approval as a predictor of vote choice and popular vote outcomes. While approval isn't a perfect predictor of vote choice, it is accurate 70 to nearly 80 percent of the time when the incumbent is running, and a still respectable 60 to 65 percent when he is not. Furthermore, we are able to reasonably predict the outcome of the popular vote by considering the gap between the president's approval and disapproval. The incumbent is likely to win re-election if the gap is at least 18 percent gap, but is less likely to win re-election if the gap falls below 18. Although other factors come into play, the gap between approval and disapproval provides the basis for a reasonable expectation of who will win the popular vote in presidential elections.

All told, the findings of this dissertation are significant, and provide an important contribution to the presidential approval literature. However, no single dissertation could address all the issues relative to explanations of presidential approval, nor could it resolve

all the issues that the research carried out in this dissertation brings to light. As a result, there are future considerations to be discussed. In the remainder of this chapter, we discuss four specific matters to be considered in future studies.

The first is the need to develop a survey instrument that measures each of the variables the literature has offered as explanations of presidential approval, in order to determine what actually explains presidential approval at the individual level. Currently, we are limited to the NES data in order to examine explanations of presidential approval at the individual level, which enables us to get snap-shots of presidential approval only at given points in time every two years. Furthermore, there are limitations with the NES data that pose problems. We considered neither presidential election year studies prior to 1984, nor any midterm election year studies largely because they did not include all the variables we wanted to consider. Thus, we would have an inconsistent measure of certain variables if we expanded upon the number of years we considered. We opted against this. An exhaustive survey instrument would allow us to have precise measures of the potential explanations of presidential approval, and would allow us to probe the explanations of presidential approval at the individual level on a consistent basis over time. Furthermore, it would allow us to gain a clearer understanding of change in presidential approval over time at the individual level than what is currently possible.

The second future consideration is the need for a precise, non-abstract measure of the perception of presidential persona. As we have discussed, since the favorability rating is an abstract measure, we do not know the specifics about presidential persona it is tapping at any given time. This is problematic, as we need to know which aspects of presidential persona are instrumental in explaining presidential approval at any given

time. Only a more precise measure than the favorability rating would allow us to gain such information. That is one reason why the multi-faceted measure of presidential persona used to test our persona hypothesis is of greater value. It taps multiple dimensions of one's perception of the president as a person, and it allows us to know exactly what is going into the equation of those perceptions. The use of a similar, multi-faceted measure of perceptions of presidential persona in a survey instrument that is administered over time would allow us to explore the influence of perceptions of presidential persona on presidential approval in more depth, and with greater accuracy.

The third future consideration is further exploration of the question-meaning issues raised above. Specifically, we need to devise a means to directly test the effects of change in the meaning of the presidential approval question on change in approval. Although a number of experiments regarding question meaning have been carried out, in which respondents were asked an open-ended question probing how they interpreted certain questions, this has not been done in regard to the presidential approval question.

Any means of tracking change in the meaning of the presidential approval question requires two things. One, it has to group together common interpretations of the approval question, and track the approval rating within each group. Only when there are fluctuations in approval within a particular group is there evidence of real change in presidential approval based on change in the perception of the president's handling of a particular issue. However, determining this involves the second requirement for tracking change in the meaning of the presidential approval question, namely, panel research.

Panel research is more complicated, as members of the panel tend to drop out over time. However, the use of panel research is necessary for tracking both presidential

approval and interpretation of the approval question among the same respondents over time. If the interpretation of the question remains the same, and approval remains relatively constant, then there is no real change in approval. On the other hand, if the interpretation of the question remains the same, and approval changes, then there likely is real change in approval. Thirdly, if both the interpretation of the approval question and presidential approval change, then the change in approval is more than likely the result of the change in the interpretation of the approval question. Although it has certain pitfalls, panel research is clearly the best means for testing the potential effects of change in the meaning of the approval question on presidential approval. If developed successfully, it could prove invaluable in helping us understand the dynamics of presidential approval.

The final future consideration involves the relationship between approval and vote choice. Two matters are pertinent here. First, we have shown that incumbents and their party's candidates when they are ineligible to run typically receive nine percent fewer votes than approval, while challengers typically receive nine percent more votes than disapproval for the president. As a result, we may be able to predict the outcome of the popular vote based on the margin between approval and disapproval. To explore this further, we should go back as far as the presidential approval polls go, and track the differences between approval rating and percentage of the vote incumbents received. This would allow us to see whether the pattern of differences between approval rating and percentage of the popular vote the incumbent or his party's candidate received that emerged in the NES data extends further in history past 1984. It would also allow us to determine if the predicted outcome of the popular vote based on the difference between approval and vote percentage was realized on a regular basis.

The second matter involves the relationship between congressional vote choice and presidential approval. While we found a limited correlation between the two during presidential election years, we brought up the fact that the correlation may be greater during mid-term election years, where the president's party tends to suffer if he is unpopular. We should explore this potential relationship by examining the correlation between congressional vote choice and presidential approval during the mid-term elections. This can be done by using NES data from the mid-term election years, which contains both the approval rating, and vote choice for the congressional elections. Examining these matters will help further our understanding of the importance of presidential approval in electoral politics.

In conclusion, this dissertation has brought to light some key findings that further our understanding of presidential approval. Clearly, however, our understanding of this important topic is far from exhausted, despite the numerous studies of it that have been undertaken. Our research demonstrates that not all the possibilities have been fully explored. The future considerations we have discussed further illustrate the need for even further understanding of the issues surrounding presidential approval. With changes in society and culture, as well as new advances in technology, the dynamics behind presidential approval may be constantly changing, and our ability to explore and understand those dynamics, and hence presidential approval in general has greatly improved. The study of presidential approval is clearly relevant to both the academic world and the practical political world, as presidents certainly need to know what explains approval, and in turn what they may be able to do to improve their approval ratings while in office. To put it simply, approval matters.

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APPENDIX A

WORDING OF NES QUESTIONS USED AS MEASURES IN COMPREHENSIVE MODEL OF PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL

Overall Approval

DO YOU APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE OF THE WAY _____ IS HANDLING HIS JOB AS PRESIDENT?

DO YOU APPROVE STRONGLY OR NOT STRONGLY?

DO YOU DISAPPROVE STRONGLY OR NOT STRONGLY?

Economic Approval

DO YOU APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE OF THE WAY _____ IS HANDLING THE ECONOMY?

DO YOU APPROVE STRONGLY OR NOT STRONGLY?

DO YOU DISAPPROVE STRONGLY OR NOT STRONGLY?

Foreign Relations Approval

DO YOU APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE OF THE WAY _____ IS HANDLING OUR RELATIONS WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES?

DO YOU APPROVE STRONGLY OR NOT STRONGLY?

DO YOU DISAPPROVE STRONGLY OR NOT STRONGLY?

Party Identification

GENERALLY SPEAKING, DO YOU USUALLY THINK OF YOURSELF AS A REPUBLICAN, A DEMOCRAT, AN INDEPENDENT, OR WHAT?

WOULD YOU CALL YOURSELF A STRONG REPUBLICAN OR A NOT VERY STRONG REPUBLICAN?

WOULD YOU CALL YOURSELF A STRONG DEMOCRAT OR A NOT VERY STRONG DEMOCRAT?

DO YOU THINK OF YOURSELF AS CLOSER TO THE REPUBLICAN PARTY OR TO THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY?

Perception of Presidential Persona

Feeling Thermometer

I'D LIKE TO GET YOUR FEELINGS TOWARD SOME OF OUR POLITICAL LEADERS AND OTHER PEOPLE WHO ARE IN THE NEWS THESE DAYS. I WILL USE SOMETHING WE CALL THE FEELING THERMOMETER AND HERE IS HOW IT WORKS: I'LL READ THE NAME OF A PERSON AND I'D LIKE YOU TO RATE THAT PERSON USING THE FEELING THERMOMETER. RATINGS BETWEEN 50 DEGREES AND 100 DEGREES MEAN THAT YOU FEEL FAVORABLE AND WARM TOWARD THE PERSON. RATINGS BETWEEN 0 DEGREES AND 50 DEGREES MEAN THAT YOU DON'T FEEL FAVORABLE TOWARD THE PERSON AND THAT YOU DON'T CARE TOO MUCH FOR THAT PERSON. IF WE COME TO A PERSON WHOSE NAME YOU DON'T RECOGNIZE, YOU DON'T NEED TO RATE THAT PERSON. JUST TELL ME AND WE'LL MOVE ON TO THE NEXT ONE. IF YOU DO RECOGNIZE THE NAME, BUT YOU DON'T FEEL PARTICULARLY WARM OR COLD TOWARD THE PERSON, YOU WOULD RATE THE PERSON AT THE 50 DEGREE MARK.

(INCUMBENT PRESIDENT'S NAME)

Personal Affect Toward President (Feelings Elicited by the President)

NOW WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT THE FEELINGS YOU HAVE TOWARD THE CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENT. I AM GOING TO NAME A CANDIDATE, AND I WANT YOU TO TELL ME WHETHER SOMETHING ABOUT THAT PERSON, OR SOMETHING HE HAS DONE HAS MADE YOU HAVE CERTAIN FEELINGS LIKE ANGER OR PRIDE. THINK ABOUT _____. NOW, HAS _____--BECAUSE OF THE KIND OF PERSON HE IS, OR BECAUSE OF SOMETHING HE HAS DONE--EVER MADE YOU FEEL:

ANGRY

HOPEFUL

AFRAID OF HIM

PROUD

*NOTE: IN 1988 REAGAN WAS NOT ELIGIBLE TO RUN AGAIN FOR PRESIDENT SO WAS NOT A CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT. THE SAME WAS TRUE OF CLINTON IN 2000. WORDING OF QUESTION FOR REAGAN AND CLINTON APPEARS BELOW.

NOW WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT THE FEELINGS YOU HAVE TOWARD RONALD REAGAN. HAS REAGAN – BECAUSE OF THE KIND OF PERSON HE IS, OR BECAUSE OF SOMETHING HE HAS DONE – EVER MADE YOU FEEL:

NOW WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT THE FEELINGS YOU HAVE TOWARD BILL CLINTON. HAS CLINTON – BECAUSE OF THE KIND OF PERSON HE IS, OR BECAUSE OF SOMETHING HE HAS DONE – EVER MADE YOU FEEL:

Beliefs About Character Traits of the President

I AM GOING TO READ A LIST OF WORDS AND PHRASES PEOPLE MAY USE TO DESCRIBE POLITICAL FIGURES. FOR EACH, PLEASE TELL ME WHETHER THE WORD OR PHRASE DESCRIBES THE CANDIDATE I NAME.

THINK ABOUT (_____). THE FIRST PHRASE IS "HARD-WORKING". IN YOUR OPINION DOES THE PHRASE "_____" DESCRIBE (_____) EXTREMELY WELL, QUITE WELL, NOT TOO WELL, OR NOT WELL AT ALL? YOU CAN JUST TELL ME THE NUMBER OF YOUR CHOICE.

Intelligent

Moral

Knowledgeable

Really cares about people like you

Provides strong leadership

*NOTE: AS ABOVE, REAGAN AND CLINTON WERE NOT ELIGIBLE AS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES IN 1988 AND 2000 RESPECTIVELY. WORDING OF THE QUESTION FOR REAGAN AND CLINTON APPEARS BELOW.

IN YOUR OPINION DOES THE PHRASE _____ DESCRIBE RONALD REAGAN EXTREMELY WELL, QUITE WELL, NOT TOO WELL, OR NOT WELL AT ALL?

IN YOUR OPINION DOES THE PHRASE _____ DESCRIBE BILL CLINTON EXTREMELY WELL, QUITE WELL, NOT TOO WELL, OR NOT WELL AT ALL?

Perceptions of Economic Performance

Personal Retrospective Evaluation

WE ARE INTERESTED IN HOW PEOPLE ARE GETTING ALONG FINANCIALLY THESE DAYS. WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU (AND YOUR FAMILY LIVING HERE) ARE BETTER OFF OR WORSE OFF FINANCIALLY THAN YOU WERE A YEAR AGO?

IS THAT MUCH BETTER OFF OR SOMEWHAT BETTER OFF?

IS THAT MUCH WORSE OFF OR SOMEWHAT WORSE OFF?

Personal Prospective Evaluation

NOW LOOKING AHEAD--DO YOU THINK THAT A YEAR FROM NOW YOU (AND YOUR FAMILY LIVING HERE) WILL BE BETTER OFF FINANCIALLY, OR WORSE OFF, OR JUST ABOUT THE SAME AS NOW?

Sociotropic Retrospective Economics

HOW ABOUT THE ECONOMY. WOULD YOU SAY THAT OVER THE PAST YEAR THE NATION'S ECONOMY HAS GOTTEN BETTER, STAYED THE SAME OR GOTTEN WORSE?

* NOTE: IN 1996 AND 2000 QUESTION WAS WORDED AS:

NOW THINKING ABOUT THE ECONOMY IN THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE, WOULD YOU SAY THAT OVER THE PAST YEAR THE NATION'S ECONOMY HAS GOTTEN BETTER, STAYED ABOUT THE SAME, OR GOTTEN WORSE?

WOULD YOU SAY MUCH BETTER OFF OR SOMEWHAT BETTER OFF?

WOULD YOU SAY MUCH WORSE OFF OR SOMEWHAT WORSE OFF?

* NOTE: IN 2000, WORDED AS:

MUCH BETTER OR SOMEWHAT BETTER?

MUCH WORSE OR SOMEWHAT WORSE?

Sociotropic Prospective Economics

WHAT ABOUT THE NEXT 12 MONTHS? DO YOU EXPECT THE ECONOMY TO GET BETTER, GET WORSE, OR STAY ABOUT THE SAME?

Perceptions of Foreign Relations Performance

DURING THE PAST YEAR, WOULD YOU SAY THAT THE UNITED STATES' POSITION IN THE WORLD HAS GROWN WEAKER, STAYED ABOUT THE SAME, OR HAS IT GROWN STRONGER?

Socio-Demographics

Age

WHAT IS THE MONTH, DAY AND YEAR OF YOUR BIRTH?

Education

WHAT IS THE HIGHEST GRADE OF SCHOOL OR YEAR OF COLLEGE YOU HAVE COMPLETED?

Employment Status

WE'D LIKE TO KNOW IF YOU ARE WORKING NOW, TEMPORARILY LAID OFF, OR ARE YOU UNEMPLOYED, RETIRED, PERMANENTLY DISABLED,(A HOUSEWIFE),(A STUDENT), OR WHAT?

Income

PLEASE LOOK AT THIS PAGE AND TELL ME THE LETTER OF THE INCOME GROUP THAT INCLUDES THE INCOME OF ALL MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY LIVING HERE IN _____ BEFORE TAXES. THIS FIGURE SHOULD INCLUDE SALARIES, WAGES, PENSIONS, DIVIDENDS, INTEREST, AND ALL OTHER INCOME. (IF UNCERTAIN: WHAT WOULD BE YOUR BEST GUESS?)

Issue Salience

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEMS FACING THIS COUNTRY? (ANYTHING ELSE?)

       <FIRST MENTION>

       <SECOND MENTION>

       <THIRD MENTION>

OF THOSE YOU'VE MENTIONED, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM THE COUNTRY FACES?

APPENDIX B

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THE FEELING THERMOMETER, THE SCALE MEASURING RESPONDENTS BELIEFS ABOUT CHARACTERISTICS DESCRIPTIVE OF THE PRESIDENT, AND THE SCALE MEASURING FEELINGS ELICITED BY THE PRESIDENT

TABLE B-1: Correlation Between Measures in the Presidential Persona Scale, 1984

	FEELING THERMOMETER REAGAN	CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESIDENT	FEELINGS ELICITED BY PRESIDENT
FEELING THERMOMETER REAGAN	1.000	.673	.761
CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESIDENT	.673	1.000	.574
FEELINGS ELICITED BY PRESIDENT	.761	.574	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

TABLE B-2: Correlation Between Measures in the Presidential Persona Scale, 1988

	FEELING THERMOMETER REAGAN	CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESIDENT	FEELINGS ELICITED BY PRESIDENT
FEELING THERMOMETER REAGAN	1.000	.706	.907
CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESIDENT	.706	1.000	.764
FEELINGS ELICITED BY PRESIDENT	.907	.764	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

TABLE B-3: Correlation Between Measures in the Presidential Persona Scale, 1992

	FEELING THERMOMETER BUSH	CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESIDENT	FEELINGS ELICITED BY PRESIDENT
FEELING THERMOMETER BUSH	1.000	.621	.907
CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESIDENT	.621	1.000	.669
FEELINGS ELICITED BY PRESIDENT	.907	.669	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

TABLE B-4: Correlation Between Measures in the Presidential Persona Scale, 1996

	FEELING THERMOMETER CLINTON	CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESIDENT	FEELINGS ELICITED BY PRESIDENT
FEELING THERMOMETER CLINTON	1.000	.760	.935
CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESIDENT	.760	1.000	.769
FEELINGS ELICITED BY PRESIDENT	.935	.769	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

TABLE B-5: Correlation Between Measures in the Presidential Persona Scale, 2000

	FEELING THERMOMETER CLINTON	CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESIDENT	FEELINGS ELICITED BY PRESIDENT
FEELING THERMOMETER CLINTON	1.000	.648	.671
CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESIDENT	.648	1.000	.694
FEELINGS ELICITED BY PRESIDENT	.671	.694	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

APPENDIX C

COLLINEARITY DIAGNOSTICS

Table C-1: Collinearity Diagnostics: Overall Approval

	1984		1988		1992		1996		2000	
Independent Variables	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF
AGE	.655	1.527	.645	1.550	.699	1.430	.622	1.608	.659	1.518
EDUCATION	.758	1.320	.782	1.279	.725	1.380	.767	1.303	.817	1.224
GENDER	.909	1.100	.874	1.144	.901	1.110	.922	1.084	.958	1.044
INCOME	.733	1.364	.691	1.447	.677	1.477	.671	1.489	.766	1.306
NOTWORK1	.654	1.530	.623	1.606	.639	1.565	.602	1.660	.650	1.539
NOTWORK2	.853	1.172	.895	1.118	.887	1.128	.939	1.065	.932	1.072
PARTY ID	.567	1.765	.623	1.604	.634	1.578	.500	1.999	.527	1.897
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	.770	1.299	.829	1.207	.836	1.196	.789	1.268	.846	1.182
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	.449	2.230	.564	1.774	.836	1.197	.823	1.215	.872	1.147
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.788	1.269	.827	1.210	.542	1.844	.391	2.561	.495	2.019
RACE	.869	1.151	.846	1.183	.954	1.048	.856	1.169	.847	1.180
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.793	1.261	.884	1.131	.879	1.137	.809	1.237	.905	1.105
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.594	1.684	.807	1.239	.779	1.284	.693	1.444	.853	1.172
USPOSITION	.740	1.351	.835	1.197	.806	1.241	.785	1.274	.827	1.209

TABLE C-2: Collinearity Diagnostics Economic Approval

	1984		1988		1992		1996		2000	
	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF
AGE	.649	1.542	.650	1.539	.706	1.417	.623	1.606	.658	1.520
EDUCATION	.758	1.319	.787	1.270	.725	1.380	.771	1.297	.819	1.222
GENDER	.904	1.106	.884	1.131	.902	1.109	.924	1.082	.959	1.043
INCOME	.726	1.377	.696	1.436	.677	1.476	.676	1.479	.769	1.301
NOTWORK1	.650	1.539	.629	1.589	.647	1.547	.607	1.648	.647	1.547
NOTWORK2	.857	1.166	.897	1.115	.883	1.133	.937	1.067	.931	1.075
PARTY ID	.574	1.741	.621	1.609	.637	1.570	.503	1.989	.534	1.873
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	.789	1.268	.820	1.220	.839	1.191	.790	1.266	.843	1.186
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	.770	1.298	.831	1.203	.835	1.197	.824	1.214	.870	1.149
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.454	2.205	.564	1.772	.545	1.835	.390	2.564	.501	1.996
RACE	.868	1.152	.846	1.182	.956	1.046	.857	1.167	.852	1.174
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.796	1.257	.881	1.135	.779	1.283	.808	1.237	.900	1.111
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.593	1.686	.804	1.245	.879	1.138	.690	1.449	.854	1.171
USPOSITION	.742	1.348	.832	1.201	.807	1.240	.783	1.278	.828	1.207

TABLE C-3: Collinearity Diagnostics Foreign Relations Approval

	1984		1988		1992		1996		2000	
	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF
AGE	.650	1.538	.654	1.530	.702	1.425	.625	1.599	.659	1.518
EDUCATION	.754	1.326	.784	1.275	.728	1.374	.772	1.296	.813	1.230
GENDER	.909	1.100	.873	1.146	.903	1.108	.919	1.088	.960	1.042
INCOME	.735	1.361	.684	1.462	.680	1.470	.673	1.487	.765	1.308
NOTWORK1	.653	1.531	.629	1.589	.647	1.546	.607	1.649	.645	1.550
NOTWORK2	.864	1.158	.893	1.120	.882	1.134	.936	1.068	.930	1.075
PARTY ID	.575	1.738	.626	1.598	.641	1.559	.502	1.993	.530	1.889
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	.789	1.268	.826	1.211	.835	1.198	.790	1.266	.840	1.191
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	.769	1.300	.836	1.196	.831	1.203	.816	1.226	.879	1.137
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.453	2.209	.561	1.782	.549	1.823	.391	2.558	.493	2.030
RACE	.870	1.150	.844	1.185	.954	1.048	.858	1.166	.850	1.177
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.798	1.254	.885	1.131	.780	1.283	.806	1.241	.899	1.112
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.593	1.685	.803	1.245	.878	1.138	.688	1.455	.858	1.165
USPOSITION	.742	1.347	.833	1.201	.806	1.240	.791	1.264	.829	1.206

- NOTE: Collinearity diagnostics on the model runs testing for the effects of issue salience were comparable to those presented here, and thus will not be included in tabular form in this appendix.

APPENDIX D

MULTIPLE REGRESSION OF THE BEST MODEL OF EXPLANATIONS OF OVERALL PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL

TABLE D-1: Multiple Regression Of The Best Model Of Explanations Of Overall
            Presidential Approval: 1984

	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.740	42.937	.000	.479	2.088
PARTYID	.106	6.737	.000	.570	1.753
SOCIOTROSPECTIVE	.083	5.754	.000	.687	1.456
USPOSITION	.009	.678	.498	.734	1.363
AGE	-.045	-3.733	.000	.967	1.035
R Square: .743					

TABLE D-2: Multiple Regression Of The Best Model Of Explanations Of Overall
            Presidential Approval: 1988

	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.709	38.626	.000	.595	1.681
PARTYID	.122	6.924	.000	.646	1.548
SOCIOTROSPECTIVE	.041	2.679	.007	.858	1.165
USPOSITION	.056	3.630	.000	.853	1.172
AGE	-.075	-5.289	.000	.988	1.012
R Square: .684					

TABLE D-3: Multiple Regression Of The Best Model Of Explanations Of Overall Presidential Approval: 1992

	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.635	36.340	.000	.564	1.773
PARTYID	.159	9.775	.000	.656	1.525
SOCIOTROSPECTIVE	.097	6.645	.000	.813	1.230
USPOSITION	.014	.950	.342	.829	1.206
AGE	-.027	-2.025	.043	.977	1.024

R Square: .621

TABLE D-4: Multiple Regression Of The Best Model Of Explanations Of Overall Presidential Approval: 1996

	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.735	36.789	.000	.432	2.315
PARTYID	-.090	-4.944	.000	.523	1.913
SOCIOTROSPECTIVE	.075	5.242	.000	.848	1.179
USPOSITION	.044	2.954	.003	.783	1.277
AGE	-.022	-1.657	.098	.979	1.022

R Square: .723

TABLE D-5: Multiple Regression Of The Best Model Of Explanations Of Overall Presidential Approval: 2000

	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.662	29.196	.000	.524	1.909
PARTYID	-.140	-6.414	.000	.569	1.758
SOCIOTROSPECTIVE	.010	.582	.561	.896	1.117
USPOSITION	.033	1.830	.067	.815	1.228
AGE	.005	.279	.780	.983	1.017
R Square: .605					

APPENDIX E

MULTIPLE REGRESSION TABLES ACCOUNTING FOR FOREIGN RELATIONS SALIENCE

TABLE E-1   Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Approval of President's Handling of the Economy by Year
Foreign Relations is NOT the Most Important Problem

Independent Variables	1984			1988			1992			1996			2000		
	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
AGE	.041	1.344	.180	-.004	-.151	.880	.065	2.736	.006	.086	2.503	.013	-.027	-.623	.533
EDUCATION	.075	2.724	.007	-.040	-1.827	.068	.001	.025	.980	.062	2.012	.045	.035	.862	.389
GENDER	-.016	-.619	.536	-.021	-1.000	.317	-.029	-1.382	.167	.019	.671	.503	.058	1.567	.118
INCOME	-.006	-.195	.846	.054	2.361	.018	-.058	-2.411	.016	.015	.476	.634	.090	2.155	.032
NOTWORK1	-.036	-1.177	.239	-.040	-1.641	.101	-.003	-.102	.919	.047	1.370	.171	-.006	-.142	.887
NOTWORK2	.002	.081	.935	-.038	-1.879	.060	.012	.589	.556	-.093	-3.346	.001	.016	.433	.665
PARTY ID	.160	4.872	.000	.175	7.066	.000	.248	9.949	.000	-.094	-2.361	.019	-.002	-.047	.963
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	.023	.812	.417	.014	.651	.516	.010	.444	.657	-.016	-.530	.596	-.080	-2.004	.046
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	.052	1.880	.061	.058	2.700	.007	.051	2.329	.020	.092	3.055	.002	.086	2.215	.027
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.503	13.649	.000	.510	19.486	.000	.345	12.825	.000	.509	11.293	.000	.576	11.094	.000
RACE	.000	-.009	.993	-.020	-.972	.331	.037	1.819	.069	.028	.966	.335	-.120	-3.028	.003
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.073	2.617	.009	.032	1.533	.126	.028	1.313	.189	.045	1.492	.136	-.020	-.524	.601
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.145	4.505	.000	.162	7.486	.000	.224	9.959	.000	.208	6.261	.000	.177	4.522	.000
USPOSITION	.028	.984	.325	.051	2.416	.016	.026	1.163	.245	.026	.845	.398	.100	2.537	.012

TABLE E-2   Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Approval of President's Handling of the Economy by Year
Foreign Relations is the Most Important Problem

Independent Variables	1984			1988			1992			1996			2000		
	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
AGE	.004	.112	.910	-.016	-.203	.839	.004	.025	.980	.260	.841	.420	-.102	-.549	.586
EDUCATION	-.029	-.875	.382	-.011	-.155	.877	-.283	-1.565	.128	-.216	-.743	.475	.131	.930	.359
GENDER	.031	1.015	.311	.022	.301	.764	-.040	-.264	.794	.017	.065	.949	-.034	-.286	.776
INCOME	-.009	-.277	.782	.094	1.187	.238	.239	1.475	.151	-.161	-.446	.665	.022	.173	.864
NOTWORK1	-.007	-.200	.841	-.010	-.121	.904	-.142	-.790	.436				.138	1.013	.319
NOTWORK2	.040	1.276	.203	.134	1.958	.053	-.095	-.670	.508	.179	.782	.452	-.007	-.059	.953
PARTY ID	.107	2.672	.008	.154	1.715	.089	.272	1.404	.171	-.011	-.031	.976	-.203	-1.230	.227
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	-.010	-.295	.768	-.010	-.141	.889	.054	.360	.721	.198	.753	.469	-.084	-.663	.512
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	.075	2.309	.021	.080	1.160	.249	.073	.427	.672	.142	.617	.551	-.124	-.865	.393
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.421	9.294	.000	.580	6.987	.000	.432	2.246	.032	.077	.207	.840	.379	2.151	.039
RACE	-.084	-2.751	.006	-.215	-2.977	.004	-.058	-.344	.733	.257	1.100	.297	.065	.545	.589
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.099	3.027	.003	.107	1.465	.146	.063	.386	.702	-.149	-.690	.506	.268	2.307	.027
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.306	8.181	.000	.000	-.005	.996	.073	.444	.660	.315	1.323	.215	.201	1.614	.116
USPOSITION	.002	.056	.955	-.125	-1.648	.102	-.064	-.397	.694	.441	1.565	.149	.264	2.145	.039
WORK										.221	.769	.460			

TABLE E-3   Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Approval of President's Handling of Foreign Relations by Year: Foreign Relations is the NOT the Most Important Problem

	1984			1988			1992			1996			2000		
Independent Variables	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
AGE	-.021	-.589	.556	-.021	-.776	.438	.073	2.852	.004	.039	.957	.339	-.045	-1.002	.317
EDUCATION	-.032	-1.015	.310	-.008	-.315	.753	.122	4.873	.000	.028	.758	.449	.075	1.840	.067
GENDER	-.009	-.295	.768	.048	2.122	.034	.042	1.882	.060	.016	.465	.642	-.041	-1.102	.271
INCOME	.014	.427	.670	.055	2.147	.032	.053	2.062	.039	.030	.797	.426	-.004	-.091	.928
NOTWORK1	.013	.363	.717	.004	.161	.872	-.013	-.486	.627	.017	.428	.668	-.010	-.233	.816
NOTWORK2	.014	.481	.631	.027	1.212	.226	-.011	-.492	.623	-.037	-1.134	.257	-.047	-1.231	.219
PARTY ID	.078	2.045	.041	.066	2.426	.015	.080	2.972	.003	-.058	-1.234	.218	-.009	-.176	.860
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	.014	.425	.671	.007	.289	.773	.002	.099	.921	-.040	-1.143	.253	-.067	-1.680	.094
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	-.036	-1.120	.263	-.010	-.418	.676	.035	1.495	.135	-.011	-.301	.763	.035	.917	.360
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.513	12.072	.000	.570	19.737	.000	.458	15.833	.000	.471	8.799	.000	.556	10.485	.000
RACE	.001	.028	.978	-.065	-2.830	.005	-.005	-.247	.805	-.045	-1.325	.186	-.096	-2.409	.016
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.055	1.723	.085	-.017	-.770	.441	.002	.109	.913	-.087	-2.410	.016	.008	.197	.844
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	.025	.675	.500	.045	1.864	.063	.034	1.400	.162	.086	2.187	.029	.099	2.524	.012
USPOSITION	.210	6.457	.000	.128	5.505	.000	.030	1.249	.212	.230	6.257	.000	.163	4.081	.000

TABLE E-4   Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Affecting Approval of President's Handling of Foreign Relations by Year: Foreign Relations is the Most Important Problem

Independent Variables	1984			1988			1992			1996			2000		
	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
AGE	-.005	-.116	.908	-.059	-.757	.451	-.263	-1.416	.168	-.007	-.017	.987	.072	.461	.647
EDUCATION	.023	.576	.565	-.025	-.346	.730	.203	1.205	.238	.063	.161	.875	-.065	-.546	.588
GENDER	-.003	-.078	.938	.067	.915	.362	.100	.695	.493	-.033	-.097	.925	-.258	-2.372	.023
INCOME	.004	.101	.919	.027	.339	.735	.158	1.059	.299	-.113	-.235	.819	.047	.414	.682
NOTWORK1	-.014	-.333	.740	-.022	-.272	.786	.130	.818	.420				-.092	-.704	.486
NOTWORK2	.021	.581	.562	.044	.632	.529	-.014	-.111	.912	-.033	-.107	.917	.008	.073	.943
PARTY ID	.090	1.906	.057	.054	.603	.548	.125	.684	.500	.072	.148	.885	.024	.162	.872
PERSONALPROSPECTIVE	.026	.687	.493	.103	1.378	.171	.147	1.013	.320	.170	.483	.640	.015	.137	.892
PERSONALRETROSPECTIVE	-.011	-.279	.780	-.030	-.429	.669	-.053	-.338	.738	-.132	-.427	.679	.156	1.203	.236
PRESIDENTSPERSONA	.483	9.055	.000	.698	8.237	.000	.553	2.913	.007	.313	.626	.546	.729	4.465	.000
RACE	-.013	-.363	.717	-.180	-2.455	.016	.266	1.585	.124	.070	.223	.828	-.186	-1.656	.106
SOCIOPROSPECTIVE	.035	.922	.357	-.104	-1.413	.161	-.063	-.410	.685	.090	.312	.761	.207	1.959	.057
SOCIORETROSPECTIVE	-.026	-.598	.550	-.025	-.318	.751	.006	.037	.971	.129	.404	.695	-.002	-.017	.987
USPOSITION	.249	6.113	.000	-.076	-.974	.332	.132	.898	.377	.410	1.086	.303	-.025	-.214	.832
WORK										.040	.104	.919			

APPENDIX F

WORDING TO APPROVAL RATING AND FAVORABILITY RATING QUESTIONS

CBS News/New York Times Poll: Ronald Reagan

I'm going to name some possible presidential candidates and ask what you think of them. If you haven't heard much about someone I name, just tell me. Is your opinion of...Ronald **Reagan...favorable,** not favorable, undecided, or haven't you heard enough about...Ronald Reagan...yet to have an opinion?

I'm going to name some public figures and ask what you think of them. If you haven't heard much about someone I name, just tell me. Is your opinion of Ronald **Reagan favorable,** not favorable, undecided, or haven't you heard enough about Ronald Reagan yet to have an opinion?

Is your opinion of Ronald **Reagan favorable,** not favorable, undecided, or haven't you heard enough about Ronald Reagan yet to have an opinion?

I'm going to name some candidates and ask what you think of them. If you haven't heard much about someone I name, just tell me. Is your opinion of...Ronald **Reagan...favorable,** not favorable, undecided, or haven't you heard enough about...Ronald Reagan... yet to have an opinion? (If 'don't know', ask:) Are you undecided or have you not heard enough about him?

Gallup Poll: George Bush

"Do you approve or disapprove of the way George Bush is handling his job as president?"

"Next, I'd like to get your overall opinion of some people in the news. As I read each name, please say if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of this person -- or if you have never heard of him or her. What is your overall opinion of George Bush?"

Gallup Poll: Bill Clinton

"Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling his job as president?"

"Next, I'd like to get your overall opinion of some people in the news. As I read each name, please say if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of this person -- or if you have never heard of him or her. What is your overall opinion of Bill Clinton?"

FOX News/Opinion Dynamics Poll: **George W. Bush**

"Do you approve or disapprove of the job George W. Bush is doing as president?"

"I'm going to read the names of some people. Please tell me whether you have a generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of each. If you've never heard of one, please just say so. George W. Bush."

APPENDIX G

CROSSTABS OF APPROVAL AND VOTE CHOICE

TABLE G-1: Crosstabs of Approval and Vote Choice, 1984

	REAGAN (INCUMBENT)	MONDALE (CHALLENGER)
APPROVE-REAGAN	84.4%	14.6%
DISAPPROVE-REAGAN	5.9%	92.1%

TABLE G-2: Crosstabs of Approval and Vote Choice, 1988

	BUSH (INCUMBENT PARTY CANDIDATE)	DUKAKIS (CHALLENGER)
APPROVE-REAGAN	78.4%	21.1%
DISAPPROVE-REAGAN	11.3%	86.5%

TABLE G-3: Crosstabs of Approval and Vote Choice, 1992

	BUSH (INCUMBENT)	CLINTON (CHALLENGER)	PEROT (CHALLENGER)
APPROVE- BUSH	68.8%	15.8%	15.3%
DISAPPROVE- BUSH	8.9%	70.3%	20.2%

TABLE G-4: Crosstabs of Approval and Vote Choice, 1996

	CLINTON (INCUMBENT)	DOLE (CHALLENGER)	PEROT (CHALLENGER)
APPROVE -CLINTON	76.9%	14.3%	7.2%
DISAPPROVE -CLINTON	4.3%	86.7%	7.5%

TABLE G-5: Crosstabs of Approval and Vote Choice, 2000

	GORE (INCUMBENT PARTY CANDIDATE)	BUSH (CHALLENGER)
APPROVE-CLINTON	72.4%	24.4%
DISAPPROVE-CLINTON	12.3%	83.5%