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LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE: A STUDY OF PUBLIC OPINION LINKAGE FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

by

MICHAEL JOHN TOWLE, B.A., M.A.

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

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LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE:

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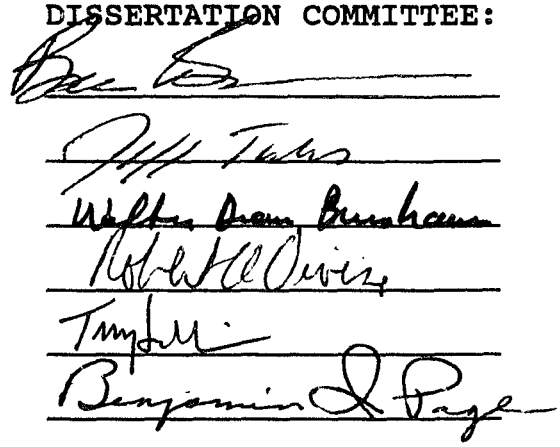

To Mom and Dad

Acknowledgements

In June of 1988 I had the good fortune of seeing the view of Rome from the top of St. Peter's Basilica. While there, I met an American Roman Catholic priest, who had been A.B.D. for fifteen years. Upon hearing that I was about to begin my dissertation, he gave me some seemingly divinely inspired advice on how to avoid his predicament: "Make up your mind right now that you are going to write the worst dissertation you can possibly get away with."

Although I set out to meet the priest's standards, I soon found that the counsel and suggestions of my committee pushed the quality of this work beyond what I would have expected from myself. Indeed I owe a tremendous amount of thanks to the members of my committee for any insights or revelations that the reader may find in this work. Walter Dean Burnham, Robert Divine, Benjamin I. Page, Terry Sullivan and Jeffrey Tulis were all instrumental in guiding this project to completion.

But I owe a special debt to the chair of this committee, Bruce Buchanan. Professor Buchanan seemed to understand the extent to which the battle I fought to write this dissertation was as much psychological as it was scholarly. On both counts, I am deeply indebted. I would like to think that this dissertation even passed the rigorous "so what?" test by which he taught me that all work must be judged.

Another group of people was also indispensable to this project. The archivists at the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library were--without exception--highly professional, knowledgeable, and helpful. They were also amiable, and made my seemingly endless hours in the reading room seem less tedious. Claudia Anderson, Linda Hanson, and Shellynne Wucher deserve particular mention in this regard.

The scholars of the Government Department who made helpful suggestions for my project are too numerous to mention here, but their input is appreciated.

My time in Austin is noteworthy for the special friends I've made; all deserve mention, yet space precludes it. But particularly supportive were the fellow graduate students with whom I developed close friendships; indispensable to my survival were those who not only began with me but who also shared the experiences of the past six years: Bill Case, Ed Hamilton, Bill Nichols, Leo Villalon, and Gregg Vunderink.

Martha FitzSimon is thanked for adding color and charm to the sometimes dreary days of finishing this dissertation.

Finally, many thanks to my family, whose support was unyielding. This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and father.

And to that priest I met in Rome, wherever you are: thank you.

Austin, Texas
October 1990

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Political scientists, pundits, pollsters, and journalists alike have analyzed the relationship between the American president and the American people. This is not surprising. Clearly, American presidents are more exposed to their constituencies than are any other political leaders anywhere in the world. The character of the American polity in conjunction with twentieth century communications technology has made this possible. In addition, the modern ability to gather and process information has allowed the continuous reading of various measures of the citizenry's opinions and attitudes about incumbent presidents and their policies.

Indeed, the opportunity for studying the relationship between the American people and their chief executive has not been lost. Frequently, such scholarship examines public attitudes about the president or presidency.[1] Other analyses focus on the

[1] See, for example, Fred I. Greenstein, "The Benevolent Leader: Children's Images of Political Authority," American Political Science Review, December 1960, p. 934-943; Jong R. Lee, "Rallying Around the Flag: Foreign Policy Events and Presidential Popularity,"

higher rate of success that presidents enjoy in their dealings with political actors when their public support is strong. Richard Neustadt, of course, first argued about the importance of "public prestige," and his theory has been successfully tested with correlations between presidential success and the "public approval rating," the pollster's device for measuring popularity.[2]

But this research is one-sided. While we know a considerable amount about the impact of the public's

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Presidential Studies Quarterly, Fall 1977, p. 252-256; Thomas E. Cronin, "Americans Expect too Much of the Presidency," Intellect, March 1978, p. 346-347; and Douglas I. Hibbs, Jr., R. Douglas Rivers, and Nicholas Vasilatos, "Dynamics of Public Support for American Presidents among Occupational and Partisan Groups," American Journal of Political Science, May 1982, p. 312-332.

[2] Neustadt's thesis about public prestige is presented in Richard Neustadt, Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership from FDR to Carter (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1980), chapter 5 For statistical tests of Neustadt's thesis, see James E. Pierson, "Presidential Popularity and Midterm Voting at Different Electoral Levels," American Journal of Political Science, November 1979, p. 683-694; George Edwards, Presidential Influence in Congress, (San Francisco: Freeman Press, 1980); Douglas Rivers and Nancy Rose, "Passing the President's Program," American Journal of Political Science, 1985, p. 183-196; David Rohde and Dennis Simon, "Presidential Vetoes and the Congressional Response," American Journal of Political Science, 1985, p. 397-427; Dennis M. Simon and Charles W. Ostrom, Jr., "The Politics of Prestige: Popular Support and the Modern Presidency," Presidential Studies Quarterly, Fall 1988, p. 741-759.

attitude about the president, we remain woefully uninformed about the impact of the president's attitude about the American public. As one scholar of the American presidency notes:

> What do...presidents know about their publics? We know their sources of information about their constituents but little else...presidents listen to the many voices that claim to speak for the public: pressure groups, the media, and scholars. They watch public opinion polls and commission studies to analyze the nature of their support and opposition, particularly at election time. They count the yeas and nays in their mail. But what they reject and what they accept from these sources and how they use it remains largely unknown.[3]

Yet, this is an important question in a democracy. For a president to act according to the public's will, or to be constrained by public pressure, or even to manipulate the public's passions, he/she must operate according to an understanding of the public. Furthermore, from the standpoint of presidential scholarship, the relevance of our abundant knowledge of public opinion remains unclear without knowing its

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[3] Doris A. Graber, "Conclusions: Linkage Successes and Failures," in Graber (ed.), The President and the Public (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1982), p. 269. Graber notes one exception, namely her own study of early presidencies, discussed below.

impact on the occupant of the Oval Office. And that impact is far from obvious.

The goal of this dissertation is to begin to examine this largely uncharted territory. Using the case study of the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson and the highly accessible archival record of his administration, three questions will be asked: 1) what motivated the administration's interest in public opinion; 2) how was information about the public interpreted; and 3) what was the impact of that interpretation on the linkage of public opinion to the White House?

It is certainly true that the linkage of public opinion to any given president will vary and will rely in part on such things as ideology, personality, and perception. Nonetheless, this study will maintain that there are institutionally-based biases in the way that public opinion is used and understood in the modern White House, and that these biases have serious consequences for the democratic responsiveness of the modern presidency. The Johnson case study will be used here to illustrate how the conditions under which contemporary presidents operate can force an administration to ask certain questions about the

public and seek out certain types of information, to the exclusion of others.

Ultimately, this work explores a great irony. Despite the fact that there is now a plethora of sources of public opinion information available to the White House, most presidents of the post-World War II era have left the White House unpopular and seemingly out of touch with public opinion. No doubt, there are many causes of this. Perhaps, much of the problem could be attributed to the fickle nature of public opinion. Similarly, politicians can be blamed for leading the public to expectations that cannot be fulfilled.[4] And it could plausibly be argued that some presidents have lost because they chose to do the right things over the popular things.[5] But this dissertation examines how the conditions under which the contemporary presidency operates may contribute to the

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[4] Perhaps one of the most forceful arguments of this idea is made by Theodore J. Lowi, The Personal President: Power Invested, Promises Unfulfilled (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).

[5] Indeed, the presidents themselves make this argument. Truman and Johnson maintained that they made difficult decisions in favor of foreign interventions; Ford asserts that the pardoning of Richard Nixon was necessary for the nation; and Carter defends his temperate response to the Iranian taking of American hostages as the more level-headed reaction.

strained nature of the relationship between the president and the people.

The argument here is that the importance of public support for the successful operations of the contemporary presidency has affected the attitudes about public opinion in the modern White House such that it has become extremely easy for presidents to lose touch with public opinion. In fact, the importance of public approval for a president's success may force more attention to superficial issues of popularity and less attention to a richer analysis of the underlying public opinion.

To be sure, this is exploratory research, designed to generate hypotheses and suggest directions for future study. This research is based on an observation made while examining papers in the Johnson Presidential Library; namely, that the Johnson administration gradually lost touch with the American public. The argument in this dissertation is that the process by which the administration lost touch with the public was easy, understandable, and, in many ways, the result of rational actions on the administration's part. Consequently, this process may have serious implications for the democratic responsiveness of the

modern presidency. It is hoped that this dissertation will lay the foundation for further critical examinations of presidential attitudes about American public opinion.

Previous Scholarship of Interest

Although few scholars have systematically researched the presidential perspective on public opinion, there is a wide variety of related scholarship to which this research will contribute. While by no means exhaustive, the following discussion will review some prominent studies in order to describe the place of this dissertation in the political science discipline.

The following discussion will examine works in two subfields of political science. The first section will focus on the scholarship pertaining to the role of the public in the operations of the presidency; it is hoped that this will illustrate the need for the approach taken in this dissertation. The second section will review various scholarly attempts to come to grips with the place of public opinion in the governance of American society; this review will take care to

describe some of the difficulties inherent in this research. The following discussion should give the chapters that follow an appropriate theoretical foundation.

i. The Role of Public Opinion in the U.S. Presidency

The importance of the public in the success or failure of a presidency is widely acknowledged among presidency scholars. Richard Neustadt's classic work Presidential Power deals at length with the importance of the president's prestige in the public at large. According to Neustadt, a president must protect his/her public standing because it is an important persuasive tool to be used against those who would otherwise oppose him/her.[6] Neustadt's discussion of how presidents relate to the public primarily focuses on how they should project their image, not how to read the public. In fact, Neustadt emphasizes the role of the president as a "teacher" to "students...who are habitually inattentive."[7] Nonetheless, Neustadt's

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[6] Richard Neustadt, Presidential Power, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1980), chapter 5.

[7] Ibid. p 74.

theory clearly explains why it is wise for presidents to be attentive to the public.

No doubt it is partly due to Neustadt that many scholars have focused on the presidential-public relationship. One widely read accounting of that relationship is George Edwards' The Public Presidency. Edwards' book lists "six fundamental relationships" which form the central themes of each chapter. First among these is "the president's understanding of public opinion."[8] Yet, despite his claim, Edwards does not address this topic. Instead, the real theme of Edwards' first chapter is the difficulty involved in attempting to understand public opinion. This is an important point, but it is not the same as trying to come to grips with how a president and his/her advisors actually do settle on an interpretation.

Some scholars have asked insiders about the impact of public opinion. Paul Light, for example, in his The President's Agenda, notes that White House staffers claim that public opinion is important in the creation of the policy agenda, particularly on issues which appear to have gained prominence in the public mind.

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[8] George Edwards, The Public Presidency (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), p. 2.

Yet these staffers acknowledge that the role of public opinion is discounted if it is perceived that the public does not comprehend or is disinterested in a given issue deemed important by the administration.[9] Although Light does not continue, this observation invites further discussion, because the process by which the president and his/her staff distinguish between publicly prominent and publicly unimportant issues is an interpretive one. How are these interpretations made?

It is obvious that presidents are concerned with what the public thinks. For proof, one need only look to the size of the White House public relations apparatus. According to the leading scholars of this topic, of the 500-600 persons employed as White House staff in 1977, between 60% and 85% were used to publicize the president, and of the forty-nine presidential aides with annual salaries over $40,000, slightly over 30% had positions directly involving media relations. This figure was ascertained before Carter's establishment of the Office of Assistant to the President for Communication, and therefore should

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[9] Paul Light, The President's Agenda (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 92, 99.

be considered low.[10] Although the names and structures of personnel offices in the White House change from administration to administration and even from year to year, in the last month of the Reagan administration the White House Office contained: the Office of the Press Secretary, with a subdivision dedicated to News Summary and Audio Services; the Office of Communications with subdivisions including the office of the Assistant to the President for Communication, the Director of Speechwriting, and the Director of Media and Broadcasting; the Office of the Public Liaison; the Office of the First Lady, including her press operation; and the Office of the Vice President, including his press operation.[11]

Yet with the exception of the Office of Public Liaison, these offices are primarily charged with aiding the president in his/her role as the leader of public opinion. In fact, it is this aspect of the

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[10] Michael Baruch Grossman and Martha Joynt Kumar, Portraying the President: The White House and the News Media (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 83-84.

[11] For a discussion of the role and influence of the White House staff, see Bradley H. Patterson, The Ring of Power: The White House Staff and its Expanded Role in Government (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

president's relationship with the American people which is most often studied. But leadership of public opinion, or even manipulation of public opinion, first requires an understanding of public opinion. To lead the public successfully, a president must read the public correctly.

In addition to their general attention to public opinion, presidents are also concerned with maintaining their public approval rating, the pollster's device for ascertaining the number of people supportive of the president's overall performance. This concern is more than just vanity, it is also strategically necessary. Soon after taking office, Lyndon Johnson told Harry McPherson why he was pushing legislation through Congress so hard immediately after taking office rather than waiting until the summer of 1964.

> Because they'll [members of Congress] all be thinking about their reelections. I'll have made mistakes, my polls will be down, and they'll be trying to put some distance between themselves and me...[12]

It is important to distinguish between public approval and public opinion. Public approval is a pollster's term which--despite its apparent importance-

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[12] Harry McPherson, A Political Education, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972), p. 268.

-is little more than a statistical measure of presidential popularity; public approval is one aspect of public opinion. Public opinion, on the other hand, refers to the abstract political concerns of the mass public, including such things as public attitudes about the role of government, the legitimacy of the current government, beliefs about the role of the citizen in the political order, and attitudes about policies and governance.

Public approval, many have observed, tends to fall over the course of a President's term, and this fall has its repercussions.[13] Several scholars have noted the changes in the political dynamic between times of presidential popularity and presidential disfavor. Dennis Simon and Charles Ostrom have observed the numerous studies which have examined this phenomenon, and have concluded that the "politics of prestige" is a "major feature of the modern presidency." According to Simon and Ostrom, the disparate literature in this area has clearly demonstrated that effectiveness rests upon high levels of public support. The public approval

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[13] Paul Light asserts that loss of public approval contributes to a "cycle of decreasing influence" which makes it increasingly difficult for presidents to acquire the passage of legislation. See Light, p. 36.

level has been shown to correlate with such things as the probability of successfully preventing veto overrides, minimizing losses during midterm elections, maintaining a high "boxscore," and successfully running for reelection.[14] But the public approval rating tells a president fairly little about why he/she is popular and, consequently offers little guidance for the specifics of policy formulation. It does, however, affect a president's freedom to act, but there may be a decline in approval for exercising this freedom. Since high levels of public approval are so important, it is likely that presidents speculate on which actions can boost or sustain their approval rating.

The contemporary American polity ensures a continuous presidential concern with public opinion and public approval, and the president's sources of such information are numerous. In addition to his/her own election, the president needs to be attentive to the number of fellow partisans who are elected to Congress on his/her coattails. Furthermore, presidents are keenly aware that their party will probably lose some

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[14] Dennis M. Simon and Charles W. Ostrom, "The Politics of Prestige: Popular Support and the Modern Presidency," Presidential Studies Quarterly, Fall 1988, p. 741-759.

seats in Congress at the midterm election, and they are equally aware of the damage this loss can cause them. Of course, first term presidents also have to worry about their own reelections. Furthermore, the White House can also draw on non-electoral sources of public opinion information. The most obvious is the public opinion poll. White House attention to polls has grown steadily during the modern presidency to the point where presidents now have an official pollster who measures public opinion.[15] In addition, there are interest groups, members of congress, and other prominent citizens who occasionally gain access to the president; each of these can claim to have the support of the public, a vocal "issue public," or even a "silent majority." And since 1977, there has even been an executive Office of Public Liaison.

The nature of the presidency in the American polity has changed considerably in the twentieth century. The importance of the public in the

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[15] For a discussion of the growth of this role, see Michael Barone, "The Power of the President's Pollsters," Public Opinion, September/October 1988, p 2-4, 57. Since the institutionalization of the White House pollster during the Carter years, the pollster's salaries were paid by the national committee of the President's party.

successful operation of the presidency is one of the most striking changes. Even the method of nominating candidates has incrementally shifted the decision to the party's rank and file.[16] Some scholars have observed that the people are increasingly involved in the policymaking process as presidents attempt to woo them to support administration policies. Samuel Kernell, for example, has noted the rise (and consequences) of the presidential strategy of "going public," the technique of asking the people to badger members of Congress on behalf of a particular item on the president's agenda.[17] Jeffrey Tulis, similarly, observes a twentieth century change in the American understanding of the constitutional order which has resulted in the belief that presidents should speak directly to the public about policy matters, rather than discuss policies with congress and principles of governance with the people.[18] Theodore Lowi has

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[16] A critical discussion of these changes can be found in Nelson Polsby, The Consequences of Party Reform (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

[17] Samuel Kernell, Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1986).

[18] Jeffrey K. Tulis, The Rhetorical Presidency (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987).

scornfully noted the growth of what he calls the "plebiscitary" or "personal" presidency, "an office of tremendous personal power drawn from the people," which has resulted in the unfulfillable expectation that presidents should take the prime responsibility for governing American society. The impossibility of this means that presidents must now search for "the most effective presentation of appearances."[19] Indeed, Lowi and others have observed that the modern presidency operates under conditions analogous to perpetual campaigning.[20]

Yet, the importance of public support to contemporary presidents invites questions. Since presidents must concern themselves with popularity, their conception of "the public" or "public opinion" must affect their actions. Clearly, then, the information an administration chooses to be attentive to about public opinion and the way it interprets that information is a vital determinant of presidential action.

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[19] Lowi, The Personal President, p 20.

[20] See, for example, Sydney Blumenthal's The Permanent Campaign (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).

Nonetheless, relatively few scholars have focused on the implications of presidential attitudes about the public and public opinion. One exception is Doris A. Graber's Public Opinion, The President, and Foreign Policy. Graber's study examines the major foreign policy decisions of Presidents John Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe, but does not examine any modern presidents. Nonetheless, it is a fascinating analysis of the ways in which the early presidents ascertained information about the public and the tensions which resulted when they attempted to square the practical considerations of policymaking with their beliefs about the role of the public in governmental actions. Graber concludes that throughout American history it has been the common political culture which has prevented presidents from moving too far astray from the public in foreign policy.[21] Of course, Graber bases her conclusions about the contemporary presidency on administrations which ended in 1825. Not only has the presidency changed substantially since that time, but so too has the understanding of democracy within the

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[21] Doris A. Graber, Public Opinion, The President and Foreign Policy: Four Case Studies from the Formative Years (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968), p. 309-313.

American political culture. Furthermore, since the place of the U.S. in world affairs has made foreign policy a highly salient issue in American politics, a more contemporary analysis is needed.

Graber wrote her study in the late 1960's, and for many years she remained one of the few scholars who had focused on the presidential understanding of public opinion. Since the mid-1980's, however, there has been an increase in attention to this important topic.

Melvin Small is one of the scholars who has recently completed works examining presidential attitudes about public opinion. Specifically, Small has observed the ways in which the Johnson and Nixon administrations reacted to the anti-war movement during the Vietnam conflict.[22] Although Small only focuses on these administrations' reactions to one segment of the population, his examination of the presidential view of the public is noteworthy in that he recognizes the importance of presidential perception of public opinion. Small notes:

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[22] Melvin Small, "The Impact of the Antiwar movement on Lyndon Johnson, 1965-1968: A preliminary Report," Peace and Change, Spring 1984, p. 1-22. See also, Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

> Public opinion is what government officials thought it was [sic.], whether or not their notion conformed to the neat flow charts created by the scholars. That is, even though presidents seemingly do not "understand" how public opinion works in American society, if they label some expression of opinion as an important reflection of public opinion, then in terms of the impact on American policy, it is.[23]

Indeed, whatever the president reacts to as if it were the expression of the public is crucial, for that reaction indicates the aspects of public opinion which successfully linked to the government.

Four other scholars deserve mention for their recent works examining presidential perspective on the public. Three of these, it should be noted, have relied in part on the Johnson archives (which is also true of Small's work, a fact which should be seen as a testimonial to the quality of the Johnson archives). The first of these is Bruce Altschuler, who focused his work on Lyndon Johnson's relationship with pollsters, and argues that "there has been an important relationship between presidents and public pollsters and...this relationship poses a significant danger to the objectivity of the latter." In addition to

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[23] Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, p. 7. Emphasis in original.

discussing Johnson's use of polls, Altschuler also notes that Gallup's and Harris's claims that they don't conduct polls for candidates is a line "fuzzier than they imply;" each did some work for the Johnson White House. Furthermore, Altschuler notes that the White House frequently tried to influence the pollsters, and that the pollsters sometimes ingratiatingly tried to gain access to the President. Altschuler also exposes the pollsters' practice, now apparently stopped--of supplying the White House with advanced releases of polls slated for publication.[24]

Kathleen Turner and Lawrence Jacob have also completed works based on the Johnson administration's relationship with the public. While Kathleen Turner's Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press focuses primarily on Johnson's frustration in attempting to convince the press of the value of his Vietnam policies, it is included in this review because of the degree to which Turner observes and discusses Johnson's attempt to communicate and convince the

[24] Bruce Altschuler, "LBJ and the Polls," Public Opinion Quarterly, Fall 1986, p. 285-299.

public through the press.[25] Jacob's work, which is a historical comparative study of the British ministry of Health and the American Department of Health and Welfare, extracts much of its information from the Kennedy and Johnson archives. Jacob's thesis is quite interesting: in the United States and Great Britain,

> the development...of a government public opinion apparatus had a "recoil effect": in striving to have an outward effect on public opinion, the creation of the apparatus had the inward effect of heightening sensitivity to public opinion.

Jacob argues that although attempts to manipulate public opinion ultimately evolved into highly responsive government, "the government's capacity to manipulate the public remains a standing danger."[26]

Another scholar who is examining the presidential perspective on the relationship between the president and the public is Thomas Langston. Langston disagrees with many contemporary scholars--such as Theodore Lowi

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[25] Kathleen J. Turner, Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[26] Lawrence R. Jacob, "The Recoil Effect: Government Manipulation and the Tracking of Public Opinion in the U.S. and Britain." Paper prepared for delivery at the 1990 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, The Palmer House, Chicago, Illinois, April 5-7, 1990.

and Jeffrey Tulis--who assert that there has been a change in the American Constitutional order such that twentieth century presidents operate on a mandate model of the office in which presidential leadership is expected to be used to fulfill explicit promises made to the people. According to Langston, "there has not been any clear change from one era to another in the way that presidents are perceived--by themselves or by their followers--in relation to the polity." Instead, Langston argues, there have been "contending visions of presidential representation of the public." Langston distinguishes presidents according to Edmund Burke's notion of representatives, either as trustees or delegates, and concludes that "republican" and "plebiscitary" conceptions of the presidency "have been in almost constant tension in American history."[27] Langston's argument will no doubt spark further debate, but it is noteworthy here because of its efforts to conceptualize the presidential perspective of public opinion.

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[27] Thomas S. Langston, "Alternative Perceptions of the Presidency: Delegates, Trustees and Non-Linear Models of American Political Development." Paper prepared for delivery at the 1990 Annual Meeting of the Southwest Political Science Association, the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Fort Worth, Texas, March 28-31, 1990.

A new generation of scholars has begun to examine how presidents come to an understanding of public opinion. The role of the public in the routine operations of the presidency makes the questions being asked in these works more perplexing and more crucial. Clearly, more scholarship should focus on how the White House interprets and uses such information. This dissertation hopes to contribute to this newly expanding field.

ii Public Opinion and Linkage

Scholars of public opinion have produced a wide body of literature which helps to ground this study. Although the term "public opinion" seems to have emerged in the late eighteenth century, an understanding of the importance of this complex concept extends back to ancient times.[28] Yet since the

[28] For an examination of the history and definition of public opinion, see Wilhelm Bauer, "Public Opinion," in the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Edwin R. A. Seligman, ed. (New York: MacMillian Company, 1934), Volume 12, p. 669-674. See Also Hans Speier, "Historical Development of Public Opinion," American Journal of Sociology, January 1950, p. 376-388; Paul Palmer, "The Concept of Public Opinion in Political Theory," in Essays in History and Political Theory, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936), p. 230-257; Bernard Berelson, "The Study of Public Opinion," in The State of the Social Sciences (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 299-318. See

emergence of survey research, many scholars have narrowly used the term to denote the proportions of people on competing sides of contemporary issues. In 1934, on the other hand, one scholar defined public opinion as

> a deeply pervasive organic force...it articulates and formulates not only the deliberate judgment of the rational elements within the collectivity but the evanescent common will, which somehow integrates and momentarily crystallizes the sporadic sentiments and loyalties of masses of the population.[29]

Although this definition is sketchy and unclear, it illustrates that public opinion can be conceived of quite broadly. It is important to note that there are many manifestations of public opinion which may affect a government official, from popular culture, to riots, to polls and election outcomes. In a democratic society, political fortunes can depend on one's notion and understanding of public opinion.

Despite the complexity of the concept, several scholars have questioned the impact of public opinion on the policy outputs of the American government.

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also Robert Weissberg, Public Opinion and Popular Government (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1976), p. 1-5.

[29] Bauer, p. 670.

Perhaps the classic writing in this field is V.O. Key's Public Opinion and American Democracy.[30] Key's seminal work is an exhaustive analysis of the numerous facets of public opinion. For our purposes, however, Key's most relevant discussions are those that deal with "linkage" between citizen and government.[31] Key observes and analyzes four formal institutions of linkage--political parties, elections, representative processes, and pressure groups--but concedes that "the interaction between government and public opinion in the day-to-day work of government presents...a phenomenon about which our systematic data are limited."[32] Yet Key does observe that

> at any particular time with respect to a given issue, immediate opinion consists of the alert, attentive, interested, and informed public...more remote from government is the opinion of persons with lower levels of participation in public affairs, with less attention, less information, and a less immediate concern.[33]

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[30] V.O. Key, Public Opinion and American Democracy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961).

[31] Ibid, p. 409-431.

[32] Ibid, p. 431.

[33] Ibid, p. 428.

The distinction between the "attentive" and "inattentive" public (that is, those with "immediate" and "remote" opinions) creates difficulties for analysis of government as a simple "two-way flow of communication" between citizens and government.[34] This difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that "the techniques employed by government for the appraisal of the response in public opinion to governmental action...are relatively crude." Such techniques include hunch, intuition and impression.[35] Key notes:

> We can cite examples of opinion feedback [into government], but the data permit no estimate of the total role of the process in the political system. What kinds of proposals and actions induce response?...Which sources of response are most influential...? On all such matters there is simply no comprehensive information.[36]

Others have attempted to conceptualize the linkage between the government and the governed. Robert S. Erikson and Norman Luttbeg have identified five models which are commonly used to explain this linkage.[37]

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[34] Ibid, p. 413.

[35] Ibid, p. 420-422.

[36] Ibid, p. 420.

Three of these models are "coercive,"[38] based on the assumption that representatives make decisions according to external controls. Such controls stem either from a citizenry well-informed about public matters and the stances of candidates, or from political parties which clearly state their platforms and which voters use to select candidates, or from a cluster of many pressure groups which serve as conduits of political communication, applying pressure to candidates or parties. Luttbeg and Erikson also postulate two "noncoercive" models in which public preferences are satisfied by means other than voters, parties, or interest groups. Noncoercive control of the government may occur because many attitudes are broadly held by all Americans, resulting in a wide range of political decisions which will be acceptable to most citizens without any constituent pressure, or

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[37] Robert S. Erikson and Norman Luttbeg, American Public Opinion: Its Origins, Content and Impact (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973), p. 15-20.

[38] Norman Luttbeg, "Political Linkage in a Large Society," in Norman Luttbeg, ed., Public Opinion and Public Policy: Models of Political Linkage (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1974), p. 1-10.

because government officials have been socialized into the belief that they should be responsive to public opinion.[39]

These models help postulate possible methods of linkage. Yet it remains necessary to develop methods to empirically examine the impact of citizens on the government. Before one can build theory about public opinion linkage, data must be collected which illustrate the ways in which public opinion is interjected into the governmental process.

Some scholars of public opinion have attempted to collect data on the nature of linkage in the American polity; such works measure the impact of public opinion on the general outputs of the American government. For the most part, these works could be labelled correlational studies: they show the tendency of government to act upon or ignore the issues of concern to the American people. Because of the numerous possible points of public input into the government, these studies often choose to ignore the complexities

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[39] Ibid. Edmund Burke, of course, originally distinguished between the representative roles of "trustee" and "delegate," arguing that representatives should act as trustees. In fact, most elected officials have argued that they do both, depending on the circumstances.

involved in determining causality, focusing instead on the degree to which citizens may be satisfied with the output of the government.

Most correlational studies show at least a moderate relationship between opinion and policy. Robert Weissberg's analysis of domestic political conflicts concluded that congruence between opinion and policy varies considerably according to the specific policy area. Yet congruence was "limited" in the best cases and quite disparate in others.[40] More positive correlations have been found in works by Alan D. Monroe and Robert S. Erikson. Erikson tested opinion-policy linkage on state policies in the 1930's and concluded that "the states most likely to enact a given policy are the states where public demand for policy is strongest."[41] Other work by Erikson, in conjunction with Gerald Wright and John McIver, has also found state governments to be highly responsive to public opinion, and that state political parties respond in

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[40] Robert Weissberg, Public Opinion and Popular Government, chapter 4.

[41] Robert S. Erikson, "The Relationship between Public Opinion and State Policy: A New Look at Some Forgotten Data," American Journal of Political Science, February 1976, p. 25-36.

ways predicted by the Downsian Model of the electoral process.[42] Monroe's analysis of "salient" national policy decisions showed a significant level of congruence between public opinion and public policy, and also observed that the American political system reacts better to public decisions to maintain the status quo than to change.[43]

Several scholars have suggested that correlation between public opinion and public policy is highest on issues of high salience and/or of interest to an attentive public.[44] Donald J. Devine, by isolating the quarter of the population which has a high level of exposure to and interest in politics, has asserted that

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[42] Robert S. Erikson, Gerald C. Wright, Jr. John P. McIver, "Political Parties, Public Opinion, and State Policy in the United States," American Political Science Review, September 1989, p. 729-750. For related work, see Erikson and Wright, "Public Opinion and Policy Liberalism in the American States," American Journal of Political Science, volume 31, p. 980-1001.

[43] Alan D. Monroe, "Consistency Between Public Preferences and National Policy Decisions," American Politics Quarterly, January 1979, p. 3-19.

[44] The inspiration for this work no doubt stems from Robert Dahl's concern about the "intensity problem" of American Democracy: the idea that "government should be designed to inhibit a relatively apathetic majority from cramming its policy down the throats of a relatively intense minority." See Robert Dahl, A Preface to Democratic Theory (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 90.

public policy is more congruent with the attitudes of the attentive public than the general public.[45] Monroe has emphasized the importance of saliency by observing Key's distinction between permissive, supportive, and decisive publics. Monroe observes that there exist some issues about which a "permissive" public may have a general opinion without particular intensity, thereby allowing the government to act as it will. Supportive publics, on the other hand, form an understood consensus that the government should continue a general range of policies; transgression from the range may invite undesirable public scrutiny. Finally, on rare occasions, decisive publics may demand actions with the threat of incumbent removal. Essentially, Monroe observes that mere numerical majorities are not sufficient to induce government action without an indication that the public understands government action and policy options.[46]

Some correlational studies have attempted to question the direction of causality. Do government

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[45] Donald J. Devine, The Attentive Public: Polyarchical Democracy (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1970).

[46] Alan D. Monroe, Public Opinion in America (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1975), p. 242-244. See also Key, p. 32-37.

actions affect opinion or do opinions change the direction of policy? Or, indeed, is there any genuine link? The correlation may be spurious, since even if policies and opinions co-vary it is possible that external forces are affecting both the public and the government in the same way. In an attempt to address this topic, Benjamin I. Page and Robert Shapiro examined 357 cases in which American political preferences changed more than six percentage points in national opinion polls at any point between 1935 and 1979 and correlated these changes with coded measures of government policy changes. In addition to finding a substantial 87% congruence between policy changes and long-lasting public opinions on salient issues, Page and Shapiro conclude that opinion is more frequently a proximate cause of policy change than vice-versa.[47]

Aggregate correlational studies are appealing because they avoid the tedious difficulties involved in identifying the specific points of linkage between the public and the government. Because the American system of government has numerous points of potential public

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[47] Benjamin I. Page and Robert S. Shapiro, "The Effects of Public Opinion on Policy," American Political Science Review, 1983, p. 175-190.

input, many have found it wiser to simply focus on the question of whether the government as a whole produces policies desired by the people. Yet there is a cost for doing this; namely, the abandonment of attempting to specify the perceptions and motivations of specific actors in the system. As a result, it is difficult to ascertain from these studies whether congruence is accidental or even conscious (since policy makers often may be unaware that they are affected by public opinion), and it is impossible to tell why and how linkage occurs.

Conclusion: An Approach for Examining the Presidency

Although correlational analyses have provided some insight into linkage, it is necessary to return to the questions they sought to avert. Knowledge of congruence does not tell us where, how, or if linkage has occurred, and knowledge of the lack of congruence does not tell us whether public officials attempted to ascertain the will of the people. The discovery that elected officials are ignoring or disregarding public opinion, for example, has different implications than the discovery that they are misinterpreting public

opinion. Furthermore, since public opinion is seldom a monolith, knowledge of how elected officials react to the multifarious vagaries of their constituencies' attitudes reveals more about the nature of the American polity than mere correlation between opinion and output.

Of course, basing a study on an individual politician--as will be the case here--also has shortcomings. Although correlational studies can not address questions pertaining to the way that government officials use information about the American public, a trade off occurs when observing the reaction of individuals. Such studies are limited by the idiosyncrasies of the individuals observed, making generalizations more problematic. Yet the advantages of such a study in this case outweigh the disadvantages, for the examination of internal attitudes of individual administrations constitutes a logical next step for understanding public opinion linkage to the American executive.

Most scholars who have attempted to analyze public linkage with individual political officials have focused on legislators, and some of their observations may be applicable to executives as well. Lewis Anthony

Dexter, for example, conducted over 100 interviews with members of congress to ascertain how representatives acquire beliefs about their constituents.[48] Two of Dexter's observations are equally plausible for White House officials: "some men automatically interpret what they hear to support their own viewpoints," and "what congressmen hear and how they interpret what they hear depends on who they are."[49] The former observation certainly held true in the Johnson White House on many issues, including most notably the Vietnam War. Dexter's latter observation complicates research into the Johnson administration because information about public opinion was frequently interpreted for the President; of course, Johnson would also interpret this information himself. Like Graham Allison's observation "where you stand depends upon where you sit,"[50] the individual interpretation presented to a president (or

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[48] Anthony Lewis Dexter, "The Representative and His District," Human Organization, Spring 1957, p 2-13.

[49] Ibid, p. 5-6.

[50] Note that Allison's observation in Essence of Decision (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), was about the role of the individual, whereas Dexter's is about the personality. Nonetheless, the observation stands, because personality affects attitudes about role.

other officials) may be tainted--consciously or unconsciously--with self-interested or otherwise prejudiced analysis.

One scholar has made observations about congressional scholarship similar to those made about presidential scholarship at the beginning of this chapter. Richard Fenno, in the introduction to his Home Style: House Members in Their Districts, observes

> [O]ne question central to the representative-constituency relationship remains underdeveloped. It is: What does an elected representative see when he or she sees a constituency? And, as a natural follow-up, What consequences do these perceptions have for his-her behavior? The key problem is perception. And the key assumption is that the constituency a representative reacts to is the constituency he or she sees.[51]

In an attempt to close this gap in knowledge, Fenno travelled extensively with eighteen members of congress and congressional candidates. By a research method he calls "soaking and poking,"[52] Fenno developed a

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[51] Richard F. Fenno, Home Style: House Members in Their Districts (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), p. xiii. Emphasis in original.

[52] Ibid, p. xiv. The author, in the appendix, expresses a preference for the term "participant observation."

typology of self-presentation of members of congress based on their perceptions of their constituents' attitudes.

Fenno's research should be inspirational to scholars interested in examining linkage. Although time-consuming and painstaking, Fenno's method allows for a direct examination of certain aspects of linkage between citizens and the United States Congress.

An analysis like Fenno's needs to be conducted on the presidential level. The plebiscitary nature of the contemporary presidency, the crucial role of the presidential-public relationship in the formation of the national agenda, and the twentieth century growth in the policymaking responsibilities of the presidency make such research essential. An understanding of the presidential perspective upon the American public is a necessary component of the attempt to understand twentieth century American politics.

Chapter 2

Framework of the Study

A cursory examination of information about public opinion would lead one to believe that it is a misnomer to speak of the American public supporting a policy or a politician. Indeed, with 250,000,000 Americans of diverse backgrounds and beliefs, one wonders how it can be asserted that the public stands for any particular thing at all.

Americans, like the citizens of all countries, have a cultural identity which establishes the boundaries for generally acceptable political action.[1] For example, cultural norms seem to be partially responsible for a less developed American welfare state (compared to other industrialized Western liberal democracies), and a low level of regulation of American industry.[2] But Americans do not have a tradition of

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[1] For a general discussion of the role of political culture in the United States, see Donald J. Devine, The Political Culture of the United States (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972). For a comparative analysis of the role of political culture in democracies, see Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965).

[2] For a discussion of this see Aaron B. Wildavsky, "Doing More and Using Less: Utilisation of Research as

separate camps with ideological consistency; there are, for example, no significant monarchist, fascist, Marxist, or religious factions which attract citizens to a clear and consistent political philosophy. And the major political parties do little to clarify matters, since each party has adherents who claim to be "liberal" or "conservative" without any explanation of the terminology. The major American political parties could best be described as an amalgam of state and local political parties with only the most tenuous claims of commonalty.

The nature of American politics, therefore, presents an interesting question. For a president to act according to the public's will, or to be constrained by public pressure, or even to manipulate the public's passions, he/she must operate according to an understanding of the public. But how does a president settle on an understanding? The answer is elusive.

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a Result of Regime" in Meinoff Dierkes, Hans N. Weiler, and Ariane Berthoin Antal, eds., Comparative Policy Research (Hants, England: Gower Publishing Company, 1980), p. 56-93.

Of course, this is not to suggest that cultural restraints do not change or cannot be violated. Twentieth century American thought, for example, has shifted from an isolationist to a internationalist preference.

The president's sources of information about the public are often unreliable as indicators of mass opinion. Citizens' opinions are often poorly articulated, and even when they are expressed they may not be instructive for the policymaker. For example, if campus protesters against the Vietnam war really wanted Lyndon Johnson to immediately stop all American involvement in Vietnam, how useful was that opinion given the complexities of the situation? Clearly, protestors expressed dissatisfaction, but they provided few positive indications for policy direction. But since the protesters' views were not the same as the American majority's,[3] Johnson was left in the unenviable position of attempting to choose between the articulating issue public and other less vocal but more supportive elements of society. For Johnson, the Vietnam situation may not have had any potential path which would have decisively satisfied a large segment

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[3] Public opinion can be said to have begrudgingly followed Johnson's leadership on Vietnam until early 1968, and for much of Johnson's term the protestors could have been dismissed as atypical. See Leslie H. Gelb with Richard K. Betts, The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1979), p. 293.

of the public. In the words of V.O. Key, "The voice of the people may be loud, but the enunciation is indistinct."[4]

Some claim that public opinion polls have come to the rescue of the bewildered statesman. For example, George Gallup writes,

> Polls can report what all the people think about an issue--not just those who take the trouble to vote. And polls can identify the groups who favor and those who oppose a given issue with far greater accuracy than is possible by examining election returns. In addition, polls can report the reasons why voters hold the views they do.[5]

According to Gallup, elections are not adequate gauges of public opinion because the citizenry often does not stand for all the issues expounded by the successful candidates, who will interpret their elections as mandates.[6]

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[4] V.O. Key, "Public Opinion and the Decay of Democracy," Virginia Quarterly Review, Autumn 1961, p. 487.

[5] George Gallup, "Preserving Majority Rule," in Albert H. Cantril, ed. Polling on the Issues (Washington, D.C.: Seven Locks Press, 1980), p. 174.

[6] George Gallup and Saul Forbes Rae, The Pulse of Democracy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), p. 19. See also Gallup, The Sophisticated Poll Watcher's Guide (Princeton, N.J.: Public Opinion Press, 1972), p. 18-20.

But opinion polls have shortcomings as a government official's tools. First, while polls do measure existing opinion, there is no reason to believe that the respondents' opinions are carefully considered. In fact, poll results themselves call into question the depth of public attention to affairs of state. Despite being a major controversy of the Reagan presidency, for example, a 1986 New York Times/CBS News poll revealed that only 38% of the American people knew which side the U.S. government supported in the war in Nicaragua.[7] In 1979, only 23% of the public knew that the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. were the two countries negotiating SALT II.[8] In 1964, 62% of the American people were unaware that the Soviet Union was not a member of NATO.[9] In 1945, as the United States was in

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[7] David Shipler, "Poll Shows Confusion on Aid to Contras," New York Times, 4/15/86, p. 6.
Some have suggested that this poll unfairly denigrated the public, since the word "rebels" was used instead of "contras," and the American people are slow to believe that the U.S. would support rebels. Nonetheless, the fact that by 1986 the American people could not identify the "rebels" as the "contras" demonstrates a low level of attention to a burning issue of the mid-1980's.

[8] George Edwards, The Public Presidency, p. 11.

[9] Charles W. Roll and Albert H. Cantril, Polls: Their Use and Misuse in Politics (New York: Basic Books, 1972), p. 129.

the final months of its war with Japan, one poll indicated that only half of the American public could identify Emperor Hirohito.[10] A public official attempting to use polls to ascertain public opinion will be forced to speculate on the quality of both the survey technique and the responses. In short, the official will not be released from the task of attempting to interpret public opinion.

Another shortcoming of public opinion polls is their inconclusive meaning. In 1988, when asked, "Are we spending too much, too little or about the right amount on welfare?" only 22% said "too little." But when the same organization substituted the words "assistance to the poor" with "welfare," 61% also responded "too little."[11] One 1981 poll found that while 95% of the respondents believed that the Clean Air Act may need amending, 70% of the same respondents confessed knowing little or nothing at all about the Act.[12]

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[10] Thomas A. Bailey, The Man in the Street (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1948), p. 132.

[11] Stephen Budiansk, et al. "The Numbers Racket: How Polls and Statistics Lie," U.S. News and World Report, 7/11/88, p. 44-47.

[12] Edwards, p. 9.

The public official cannot escape the task of interpreting public opinion. Any attempts to understand public opinion, even with the help of sophisticated polling techniques, will necessarily involve the public official's own views and biases. The public official will have to weigh his/her own understanding of public opinion against various measures which support or repudiate his/her views. The official may have to decide what a fully informed public would want, or attempt to separate opinions according to the intensity with which groups hold them or articulate them. He/she may even need to determine which group of the population has the "best" opinions. Attentive public officials will surely feel uncertainty about their understanding of public opinion.

Polls are a passive means of extending a citizen's opinion to his/her government. Instead of taking pen in hand, organizing a committee, or attending a demonstration, a respondent merely has to reply to the question posed to him/her, regardless of intensity of feeling, interest, or comprehension of the issues. As a result, poll results are often of dubious value to the politician attentive to the public.

The Foundations of this Study

It is precisely this uncertainty which makes this study so important and so interesting. The Johnson administration had to create a understanding of public opinion from the imperfect information they received within the parameters of their world view. The task remains to reconstruct the understanding which they created.

Yet it is a difficult thing to ascertain the perceptions held by an administration. This difficulty is exacerbated when attempting to make generalizable observations from a case study which might plausibly apply to other administrations. Nonetheless, it is hoped that this exploratory research will generate hypotheses which will be testable in other modern presidencies.

There are two fundamental difficulties which plague a study of this kind. The first difficulty stems from the uncertainty involved in reconstructing the perceptions of other individuals. Fortunately, the availability of archival sources makes this task simpler when studying the presidency. Indeed, archival research can be a superior method to interviewing or

using memoirs since it allows an analysis not only of day to day operations, but also of the development of attitudes, ideas, and concerns over the course of an administration. Furthermore, presidents and their advisors are seldom accessible for scholarly discussion while they are in the White House, and comments after the completed term may be tainted with selective memory or an attempt to sway the judgment of history. A study of this nature, therefore, requires archival sources for a basis from which to reconstruct an administration's thoughts.

A second major problem of a study of this kind stems from the fact that the presidency is an idiosyncratic office. It is certainly true that ideology, personality, and intelligence will affect the beliefs and perceptions of any administration. But is it possible that there are features of the modern presidency as an institution which may tend to bias the beliefs and perceptions of any presidency similarly situated? If so, then generalizable statements can be made which would partially negate the undeniably individualistic nature of the office. The fundamental contention of the argument that follows, as noted in the first chapter, is that the conditions under which

the modern presidency functions forces presidents to ask certain questions about the public, and biases them towards particular interpretations of public opinion. These institutional features of the modern presidency are arguably responsible for the many presidents in the post-WWII period who seemingly became estranged from public opinion over the course of their terms.

But can single-case studies successfully generate generalizable hypotheses and serve as sources for theory building? Several scholars have contended that they can, if properly selected and cautiously analyzed. Perhaps the strongest argument on behalf of the case study approach was made by Harry Eckstein, who argued that case studies are equal to comparative (multi-case) studies for theory-building, and sometimes superior.[13]

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[13] Harry Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds. The Handbook of Political Science, vol. 7, Strategies of Inquiry (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975), p. 79-137.

The issue of the validity of case studies for theory building has been closely examined by scholars of comparative politics, since their studies frequently examine one society or culture. Presidency scholars would do well to examine Eckstein's discussion of this issue. Theory building in the presidential studies subfield is typically bemoaned as inadequate--both by presidency scholars and other political scientists--and is frequently reliant on case studies. Indeed, there can only be one president at any given time, which often forces case study analysis. The lesson from comparative politics, however, is that such

Eckstein's defense of case studies--which is too elaborate to restate here--is qualified by the caveat that the case must be strategically chosen and the theoretical constructs must be carefully defined and methodically tested.

Norman Thomas is one of the few scholars who have critically examined the role that case studies can play in studying the presidency.[14] Thomas examines Eckstein's defense of case studies and agrees that "case studies have been underutilized for the purposes of finding clues to general theories in the study of macropolitics;"[15] furthermore, case studies should not and "need not be purely descriptive and atheoretical."[16] Thomas argues

> at the very least, scholars contemplating the use of case studies...should consciously use an analytic framework...and they should design their studies so that their findings can be related to the efforts of other

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restrictions should neither be cause for discouragement nor an excuse for the paucity of innovative theoretical approaches.

[14] Norman C. Thomas, "Case Studies," in George C. Edwards and Stephen J. Wayne, Studying the Presidency (Knoxville, Tenn: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), p. 50-78.

[15] Ibid, p. 57.

[16] Ibid, p. 74.

> scholars. Some degree of comparability across presidential adminstrations...will make their conclusions better able to be generalized and will facilitate replication and further study in other situations.[17]

With Thomas' caveat in mind, the analysis in this dissertation will take care to analyze both cause and effect of the phenomena observed, and will conclude with a discussion of hypotheses testable in future research.

There are several reasons why the Johnson administration has been chosen for this case study. The first is the role of the public in the politics of the Johnson administration. Lyndon Johnson was a president who saw an active role for the federal government; the nature and quantity of legislation passed during his administration is a testimony to this. His "Great Society," including its "War on Poverty," was an attempt to expand the role of government as a source of social insurance and economic assistance for American citizens. Furthermore, the Johnson administration actively pursued an expanded role for the federal government in civil rights enforcement, consumer advocacy, health care, and education. The role of the citizenry in the

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[17] Ibid.

instigation and support of this expanded function of the federal government into American life is particularly important in a study of this nature. Furthermore, the Johnson programs were not without their detractors. The method by which the Johnson administration fought against, compromised with, and attempted to woo the leaders of elements of the public which disagreed with him is enlightening.

Lyndon Johnson's great struggle was the Vietnam war. The military role of the United States in the Vietnamese civil war was the most divisive issue in American politics in the post-WWII period. Johnson had to deal with a vociferous range of opinions ranging from those who wanted full scale involvement of the United States in Vietnam to those who sought an immediate withdrawal of American forces. The nature of this divisiveness forced Johnson to be attentive to public opinion. It also cost him support for his domestic policies and ultimately forced him from the White House. The response of Lyndon Johnson to such divisions of public opinion is revealing.

A second reason the Johnson administration has been chosen for this study is the quality and location of the Johnson archives. As noted above, this project

requires archival investigation in order to ascertain longitudinally the discussions about public opinion within an administration. The Reagan administration's documents have not been housed or processed as of this writing. Much of the material in the Carter library is still unavailable or unprocessed. Although the records of the Ford administration are thoroughly processed, Gerald Ford only served for two and a half years and never successfully faced the electorate. Richard Nixon's archives remain largely unprocessed, and the peculiar circumstances surrounding the estrangement of Richard Nixon from the American public make the Nixon administration less ideal as a hypothesis-generating case study. Therefore, the Johnson administration is the most recent administration appropriate for this study for which thorough resources are available. Furthermore, Johnson's archives were also chosen for reasons of access: this study is conducted at the University of Texas at Austin, where the Johnson archives are located.

Johnson's alleged attention to public opinion polls is a third reason for the selection of his administration. Johnson paid little attention to polls as a U.S. Senator, but his election as Kennedy's vice-

president in 1960 changed his mind. Kennedy valued poll-taking and used it extensively in his campaign. The campaign's successful use of polls convinced Johnson of their value.[18] After his ascension to the presidency, Johnson used polls as a bargaining technique; he was known to carry opinion poll results in his pocket (or in his head) and present them to influential individuals when they visited the White House.[19] Johnson's legendary attention to polls could skew the results of this research, but it suggests that his administration was sensitive to one form of public opinion input. In light of the growth of the presidential use of opinion polling in the past two decades, including the use of an official White House pollster, the popular belief that LBJ was highly attentive to polls should probably be dismissed as an outgrowth of the fact that LBJ was the first modern

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[18] Eric Goldman, The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), p. 232.

[19] Louis Harris, The Anguish of Change (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1973), p. 23. See also, for example, Frank Cormier, LBJ: The Way He Was (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1977), p. 98; and Michael Wheeler, Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics: The Manipulation of Public Opinion in America (New York: Liveright, 1976), p. 133.

president to extensively use them. If anything has changed, it is the sophistication of the use of polls by subsequent presidents.

The most important justification for selecting the Johnson administration, however, is LBJ's dramatic drop in popularity over the course of his administration. As noted earlier, one method of measuring popularity is the public approval rating, a technique begun in 1939 by the Gallup Poll. Consistently since then, the Gallup Poll has been asking, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way _____ is handling his job as president?" The question is followed up by "Is that approve/disapprove strongly, or approve/disapprove somewhat?" Other pollsters have since adopted similar measures of public approval, though often with different wording.[20] Johnson's first published Gallup approval ratings were very high, 79% and 80%. They

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[20] Irving Crespi, "The Case of Presidential Popularity," in Albert Cantril, ed. Polling on the Issues (Washington, D.C.: Seven Locks Press, 1980), p 29-34. Crespi also notes that Gallup's first four polls contained a slightly different wording: "Do you approve or disapprove of Franklin Roosevelt as president?" This was changed because many who "approved" of him since he was the elected president were not supporters. The question also had a tendency to measure the personal like or dislike of Roosevelt himself. See Crespi, p 41, 45n.

averaged 68% over his first 21 months in office, a time which included his election with over 61% of the popular vote.[21] But Johnson's popularity dropped precipitously after 1966. During the final seventeen months of his administration, Johnson's average approval rating was a fairly low 42%.

As noted in the previous chapter, presidents are attentive to their popularity because it affects the political success of their term. It is logical to assume that attention to and interpretation of public opinion is related to levels of popularity, because highly popular presidents can afford to "spend" some of their popularity as political capital, but unpopular presidents need to attempt to raise their popularity and be careful not to further erode their levels of support. This study will proceed from this assumption by analyzing the changes in the Johnson administration's reactions to public opinion as its popularity dropped.

Table 1 divides the Johnson administration into three phases of popularity, according to Gallup's

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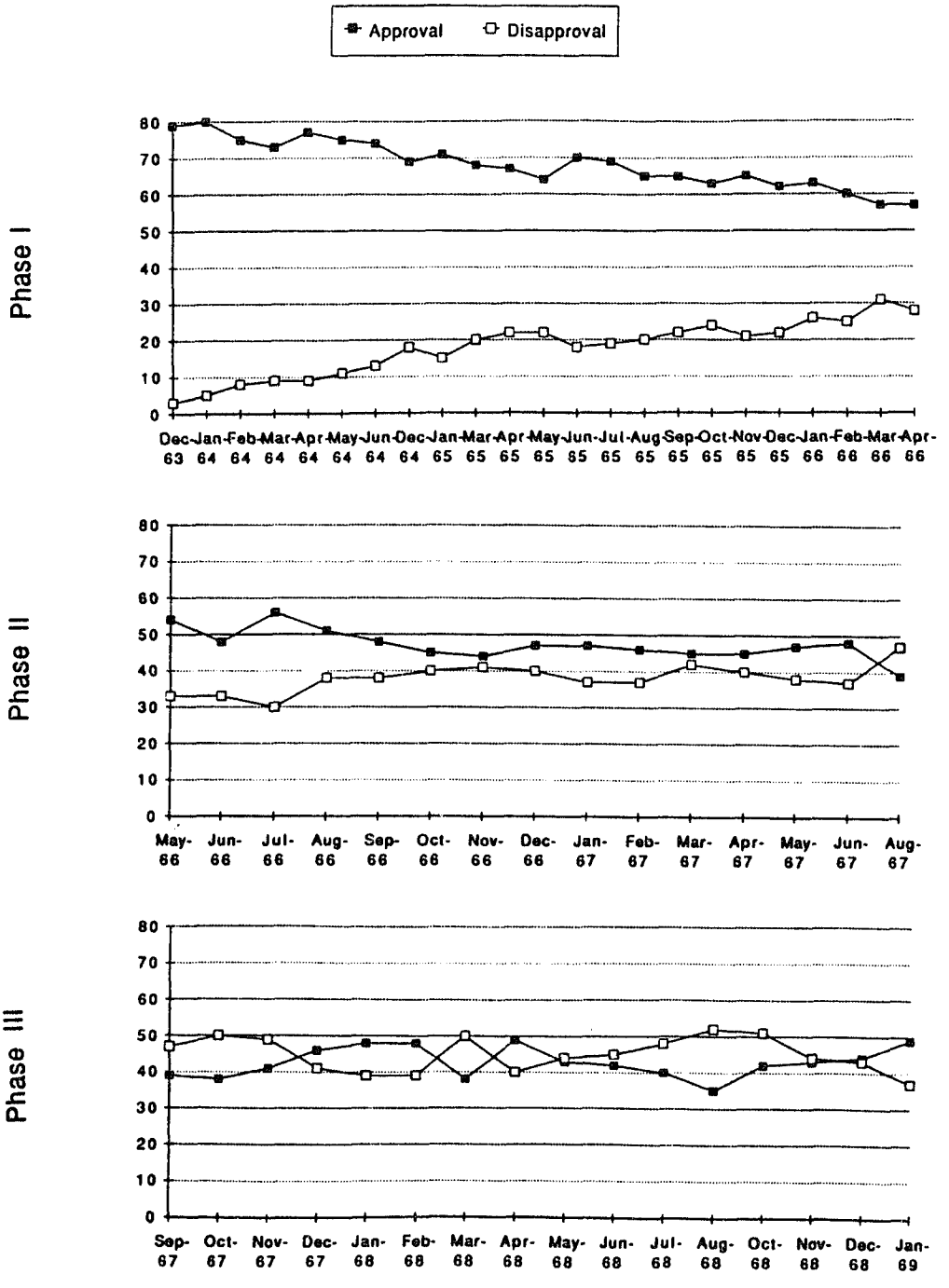
[21] This was partly due to the fact that his opponent Barry Goldwater, was unpopular to mainstream Americans; but Johnson's popularity cannot be denied.

Table 1

Average Gallup Monthly Approval and Disapproval Ratings for Lyndon Johnson, in percents



measurements of public approval. Phase I extends from Johnson's sudden entry into the presidency until April of 1966. As noted earlier, Johnson's approval rating during this period averaged a high 68%. Phase II corresponds with the time period that the Johnson administration's public approval rating was steadily declining. This occurred approximately between May 1966 and July 1967. The office files of Bill Moyers indicate that the White House was aware of the slide. (See Appendix A for a list of the names and responsibilities of Johnson administration officials mentioned in this research). In early June, Moyers informed the President, "Conversations with Gallup, Harris, and other professionals in the poll business confirm only one thing: that our standing is down and likely to drop further."[22] Phase III is the time

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[22] Memo, Bill Moyers to the President, 6/9/66, "BDM Memos, June-July 11, 1966", Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 12, LBJ Library. All future citations of archival material will be from the LBJ Library.

Citations from the Johnson archives will follow the following format. The cite will first list the author of the correspondence, if known, and then the recipient, if known. If the document is not a correspondence, then an appropriate explanation will be given. A date, if known, is indicated next. This is followed by a file name, then the name of the collection in which the document may be found, and finally, the box number in that collection. When citing materials from the vast White House Central

period during which Johnson's approval rating remained fairly low. This phase, too, began with an awareness that approval had sunk to new depths. On August 10, 1967, Johnson was informed by an aide, "The overall LBJ job rating has dropped 8 percentage points since mid-July. In early August it is: Approve 39%, Disapprove 47%, no opinion 14%."[23] Two weeks later, the same aide informed Johnson, "For the first time, says [Pollster Louis] Harris, the war 'appears' to be hurting your chances for reelection."[24]

Phases II and III each began with an awareness within the administration that large portions of the

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Files (WHCF), a code is also given to indicate how the document was filed by White House Archivists. These standard codes are used in Johnson archives; the archivists there will be able to locate the appropriate collection by this code. All documents are cited here to allow ease of relocation by the Johnson library archivists.

Verbatim quotations have occasionally been altered to correct or standardize spelling and grammar. Such rare changes are always minor. For example, I standardized the use of the spelling "Vietnam," although the original documents sometimes use "Viet Nam." Punctuation frequently needed to be added (or corrected), particularly to handwritten documents. Of course, the meaning of the documents cited was never changed. If corrections could not be made without changing the meaning, the standard "sic" was used.

[23] Memo, Fred Panzer to the President, 8/10/67, "August", Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 398.

[24] Memo, Fred Panzer to the President, 8/25/67, "August", Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 398.

public had reevaluated the Johnson administration. As Table 1 indicates, neither phase enjoyed a sustained surge in popularity. The dramatic drop in Johnson's popularity over the course of his administration makes it an ideal case for study, because it can help to evaluate the degree to which public approval can affect an administration's attitudes about public opinion.

It is important to point out, however, that the divisions between the phases are not ironclad. The phases represent time periods during which common tendencies in public opinion interpretation were observed. The administration is separated into phases primarily for ease in analyzing changing trends, although these trends may be observed to some extent in earlier or later phases. The goal here is to examine the patterns which dominate each phase.

Structure of the Analysis and the Use of Evidence

In order to come to grips with the Johnson administration's understanding of public opinion, each of the phases will be analyzed in turn. Chapter 3 will focus on Phase I, Chapter 4 on Phase II, and Chapter 5 on Phase III. Each of these chapters will follow the

format of first analyzing the factors which motivated the administration's attention to public opinion, and then discussing the preponderant trends observed in the administration's interpretation of public opinion.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in analyzing the Johnson administration's motivations and interpretations is deciding what constitutes evidence. The Johnson presidential library is the repository for approximately 40,000,000 pages of documents, according to estimates made by the Johnson archivists.[25] As such, no pretense is made here concerning the completeness of this project. Indeed, more research can and should be focused on this important topic.

Yet assertions are made in the forthcoming analysis concerning the preponderant trends observed in each phase. Obviously, it is entirely possible that either the unseen documents or the unrecorded thoughts and conversations of the Johnson administration are the sources of evidence which dispute the assertions here. As such, the value accorded these assessments must rest

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[25] When the archives opened, they contained approximately 31 million pages of documents. Of these, over 13 million pages were the materials that were in the Johnson White House at the end of Johnson's term. Other important collections have since been donated.

in part on the judiciousness with which certain materials were selected for analysis. (See Appendix B for a discussion of this selection process). Even so, disputes will arise as to what constitutes a significant or preponderant trend. This is a problem endemic to all qualitative research, particularly research which is based on observation. Yet unlike much qualitative research, such as that based on participant observation, this research has the added strength of being fully repeatable. The written remnants of the Johnson administration remain available for future research, unaffected by the passage of time.

Public Approval and Strategic Concerns

Presidential attention to public opinion is motivated, in part, by strategic necessity. Scholars and presidents alike have observed the hazards that can befall an administration which fails to correctly interpret public opinion or loses public support. Strategic considerations demand presidential attention to public opinion.

Yet there are tremendous variations in the strategic concerns which animate an administration's

attention to the American public. For example, a president may attempt to ascertain the public's opinion on a policy for majoritarian reasons; that is, policies may be pursued to satisfy the majority will. On the other hand, a president's concern with public opinion may stem from the desire to determine whether there exists sufficient public support to allow for an unpopular action without unacceptable levels of political damage. Or a president may wish to use public opinion as a political club to beat potential opponents in Congress; this is generally noticeable in the early stages of an administration when a president declares that he has a mandate to pursue particular policies. In short, the strategic concern which forces attention to public opinion may vary according to the strategic uses meant for the information obtained.

As noted, the discussion of each of the phases in the following chapters will begin with an analysis of the Johnson administration's strategic concerns with public opinion. The argument to be presented is that as the level of public approval dropped, the degree of latitude afforded Johnson decreased, thus changing what the administration needed from the public. The administration's changed concern not only affected the

kinds of information about the public that it sought, but also had a direct affect on the interpretation of that information and, subsequently, its impact on administration actions.

Of course, it is certainly plausible that strategic considerations were not the only impetus behind LBJ's attention to public opinion. For example, many have asserted that Johnson's life was marked by a need for acceptance and love.[26] Others have observed that Johnson seemed particularly attentive to polls when they showed high levels of approval.[27] Was Johnson's attention to polls motivated by a deep burning desire to be loved? While it is impossible to dismiss such psychological arguments about LBJ, these arguments do seem to deliberately eschew some obvious political explanations; for example, that Johnson found in polls a shrewd bargaining resource. No doubt, personality and the psychological profiles of the

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[26] See for example, Kearns, p. 48; also, Wilson C. McWilliams, "Lyndon B. Johnson: The Last of the Great Presidents," in Marc Landy, ed., Modern Presidents and the Presidency (Lexington, Mass: D.C. Heath and Company, 1985), p. 165.

[27] See, for example, James David Barber, The Presidential Experience, third edition (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1985), p. 72. See also Louis Harris, The Anguish of Change, p. 23-24.

members of the administration had an impact on their motivation to observe public opinion. Nonetheless, the analysis here will focus on the political nature of their concern, as reconstructed from the materials in the Johnson archives. Specifically, the argument presented in the chapters that follow is that the administration concerned itself with maintaining and expanding its base of public support while Johnson's approval rating was high (Phase I), defining and stabilizing it while approval was declining (Phase II), and protecting what remained of it at the nadir of approval (Phase III). Not only did this pattern create the parameters within which public approval was interpreted, but also it narrowed the scope of public opinion deemed sufficiently serious for analysis.

Finally, it is important to note the two institutional forces that serve as the impetus behind attention to public opinion. The first is public approval, which has become an unignorable constraint of the modern plebiscitary presidency. Attention to public approval, it will be argued, frequently overshadows attention to other manifestations of public opinion. Second, real plebiscites also play a role in forcing attention to the public. Each of the phases

here had a major election of concern to the White House: Phase I included Johnson's election campaign against Barry Goldwater; Phase II included the congressional midterm election, always a concern for presidents as they contemplate their future legislative successes; and Phase III overlapped Johnson's truncated hopes for the 1968 Democratic nomination and reelection. The impact of these elections will be examined.

Public Approval and Interpretation

The second part of the analysis of each of the phases will focus on the dominant characteristics of the interpretation of public opinion. The following chapters will argue that the unique patterns of interpreting public opinion resulted in a situation in which the administration was highly cognizant of various manifestations of public opinion during Phase I, less attentive to public opinion during Phase II, and closed off to many possible interpretations of public opinion during Phase III.

As previously mentioned, the research here is exploratory in nature, and the goal of this

dissertation is to establish a foundation for future scholarship. Therefore, the concern here is more with generating hypotheses and ideas than with testing them. As such, it is necessary to propose explanations for the phenomenon observed. Several theoretical frameworks can be used to explain the observation that the pattern of interpreting public opinion in the Johnson White House resulted in an increasingly narrow understanding of public opinion and public opposition to the Johnson administration

The following discussion highlights the various theories that will be used to explain the Johnson administration's patterns of interpreting public opinion. All of these explanations, while from a wide array of fields of study, fit neatly into the context of the modern presidency. As such, these theories should be understood as guides to understanding the observations discussed in the following chapters.

i The Congratulation-Rationalization Effect

The most striking feature of the five and one-half year process of interpreting public opinion in the Johnson White House is that the administration's attitude about the American people seemed to depend

upon what the American people thought about the administration. Clear and distinct patterns of thought occurred within each of the three phases.

It is not surprising that interpretation of public opinion changed with the phases. With the level of public approval dropping, one likely reaction would be frustration and a sense that negative external forces are increasingly beyond control.

Such an observation is not without precedent. John Kingdon has observed patterns in candidates' beliefs about voters which depend upon the success or failure of the individual candidate's bid. Kingdon interviewed winning and losing politicians of various state and federal offices in Wisconsin after the 1964 election. According to Kingdon,

> Winners tend to believe more than the losers that the voters in their district decided how to cast their ballots not by blind party voting, but according to the issues of the election and the man who was seeking the office.

Furthermore,

> losers are inclined very strongly to believe that voters are not informed about the issues of the election, while winners tend to believe that voters are much better informed. A full quarter of winners even think that voters are very well informed about the issues, most of these being safe winners.

Kingdon calls his observation the "congratulation-rationalization effect."[28]

Interestingly, Kingdon observes the congratulation-rationalization effect within the same individual. When seasoned politicians were asked to name the factors which led to their previous victories and defeats, 91% contributed their defeats to such uncontrollable things as party makeup of their district, lack of money, family name of the opponent, etc. On the other hand, 75% of their victories were credited with such controllable factors as hard work, reputation, constituency service and campaign strategy.[29]

Modern presidents may face two elections and it is plausible that the congratulation-rationalization effect would apply equally to presidents as to lower offices. Furthermore, the nature of the modern presidency could exacerbate the influence of this effect. As many observers have maintained, the modern presidency operates under conditions analogous to

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[28] John W. Kingdon, "Politician's Beliefs About Voters," American Political Science Review, 1967, p. 140.

[29] Ibid, p. 141.

perpetual reelection. As noted in the first chapter, Theodore Lowi describes this condition as the plebiscitary presidency; the American citizenry has formed a personal relationship with the occupant of the Oval Office, and that relationship is based on a continuous judgment of the ability of the president to fulfill political expectations.[30] As also discussed earlier, one continuous measure of the public's satisfaction with its personal president is the public approval rating, which has been demonstrated to have an influence on presidential success or failure in political endeavors.

Does Kingdon's congratulation-rationalization effect apply to the continuous state of reelection of the modern presidency? It shall be argued here that it does. The Johnson administration's three phases will be analyzed to demonstrate this point. Phase I clearly was marked by a self-congratulatory tendency in the White House. Of course, Lyndon Johnson won with the greatest margin in U.S. history during this phase, but this tendency existed even in late 1963 and early 1964, before the official start of the campaign. It also continued into early 1966. During Phase III, on the

[30] See Lowi, The Personal Presidency.

other hand, the administration was clearly rationalizing; low approval and public discontent were seen to have several causes outside of the White House's control. As the following chapters will contend these changes in attitude about the public affected the interpretation of and the judgment about the value of public opinion.

ii Cognitive Psychological Variables

Some early works in the field of cognitive psychology also offer partial explanations for the observed changes in the administration's patterns of interpreting public opinion. Indeed, a simple analysis using Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance will prove powerful.

Festinger's theory is quite simple. When individuals have two or more belief sets in conflict, they experience a psychological discomfort in their thought processes which Festinger labels as "dissonance" or "cognitive dissonance." The existence of dissonance, according to Festinger, if sufficiently uncomfortable, will motivate the individual to resolve the inconsistencies.[31] These attempts at resolution

[31] Leon Festinger, A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 2-3.

The field of cognitive psychology is vast, and the reader may wonder why I have chosen cognitive dissonance theory as an operative explanatory theory. One important reason is the parsimony of the theory; the use of dissonance theory requires simply the discovery of contradictory belief sets and subsequent attempts to resolve the contradictions. Yet other theories of social cognition have also achieved prominence, such as attribution theory--which attempts to ascertain how an individual ascribes motivations to others [For a general discussion, see H. H. Kelley and J. Michela, "Attribution Theory and Research," Annual Review of Psychology, 1980, p. 457-501], and schema theory--the prominent theory that individual minds simplify the understanding of information by creating organizational interconnections of knowledge. [For a general discussion, see S. T. Fiske and S. E. Taylor, Social Cognition (New York: Random House, 1984), especially chapter 6]. While the psychologist might find such theories to be more powerful explanations of human behavior, they are particularly difficult to use to ascribe behaviors to an individual. Schemata, the basic blocks of knowledge according to schema theory, are built upon a lifetime of experiences. It is a monumental task to ascribe a schemata to another individual. Furthermore, it should be noted that consistency theory retains a following among psychologists. Indeed, schema theorists also apply the consistency concept to their work; the ideas are not mutually exclusive. [For a discussion of the processing of schema-consistent and schema-inconsistent theory, see Richard Lau and David O. Sears, "Social Cognition and Political Cognition: The Past, The Present and the Future," in Richard Lau and David O. Sears, eds. Political Cognition, (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986), p. 347-366]. Fiske and Taylor also note that consistency theory's prediction of the selective interpretation of information "makes a complementary point to some of the work on social schemata." See Fiske and Taylor, p. 361-362.

Finally, it is important to remember that the use of consistency theory here is to explain administration

can take numerous forms, including "behavior changes, changes in cognition, and circumspect exposure to new information and new opinions."[32]

Festinger has also observed the phenomenon of post-decision dissonance. Doubts about the wisdom of a decision will result in dissonance and attempts to reduce it. Festinger postulates that dissonance reduction can result from "attempts to increase the relative attractiveness of the chosen alternative, to establish cognitive overlap, or possibly to revoke the decision psychologically."[33] The Johnson administration, it shall be argued, fell victim to some of the classic symptoms of cognitive dissonance as public approval dropped. As a result, the administration had difficulty accepting the various

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behavior and to generate hypotheses for future research. As such it is only one of any number of explanatory theories which might be suggested. Indeed, I am arguing that these psychological factors, to the extent that they are crucial, are a direct result of the institutional demands of the modern presidency. [For a discussion of why the institutional surroundings of elite actors should not be considered secondary to cognitive factors, see Paul A. Anderson, "The Relevance of Social Cognition for the Study of Elites in Political Institutions, or Why It Isn't Enough to Understand What Goes on in their Heads," in Lau and Sears, eds. Political Cognition].

[32] Festinger, p. 31.

[33] Ibid, p. 47.

indications that its actions were not in accord with public opinion, especially after the early years of strong public approbation. Johnson's declining approval rating, it shall be argued, also resulted in dissonance about his domestic and foreign policy decisions. The administration dealt with this by creating the belief that the public still supported its actions. Furthermore, as the support declined, the pressures to reduce the dissonance increased, manifesting themselves in the selective perception of information about public opinion.

Selective perception, in fact, is an essential concept of cognitive dissonance theory. According to S.T. Fiske and S.E. Taylor, psychological research into selective perception has focused on three areas:

> Selective exposure (seeking consistent information not already present), selective attention (looking at consistent information once it is present), and selective interpretation (translating ambiguous information to be consistent).

Considerable evidence exists to support the theory's expectation of selective attention and selective interpretation, but experiments designed to test the expectation of selective exposure have met with mixed

results.[34] Nonetheless, the administration may have also selectively exposed itself to public opinion, although not necessarily for reasons stemming from cognitive dissonance. The institutional features of the modern presidency may have led to selective exposure due to a narrowed range of intake of public opinion information.

iii Interpretation as an Institutional Phenomenon

The relevance of Kingdon's and Festinger's theories to the behavior of an American president suggests that the modern president's need for high levels of public support has created an institutionally-based guidance to the interpretation of public opinion. The institutional demands of the presidency will tend to favor certain patterns in an administration's cognition, including the congratulation-rationalization effect and cognitive dissonance, when public approval slides due to unpopular policy choices.

The deterioration of the popularity of most post-war presidents illustrates that it has become fairly

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[34] Fiske and Taylor, p. 359-362.

easy for the White House to "lose touch" with the people. The Johnson administration is a classic example of this. The primary reason why the LBJ administration slowly cut itself off from a careful analysis of public opinion, it shall be argued, stems from the demand for high levels of public approval to operate successfully the modern presidency. As noted above, the levels of public approval had a direct impact on the Johnson administration's strategic concerns with public opinion and the questions it asked about the public. As public approval descended, the Johnson administration's use of public opinion had to be adjusted to satisfy the new constraints. No longer could it simply demand support from other political elites on the basis of a mandate, for example. It had to ask new questions about the public and use its knowledge of public opinion in different ways. For example, the administration's Phase I concern with maintaining and expanding the wide base of popular support was due to the desire to continue Johnson's tremendous success in dealings with members of Congress and other political elites. By Phase II, the administration's primary strategic concern with defining the base of public support resulted in its

seeking information which would help it to stabilize against further decline. Finally, the administration's protective strategic concerns during Phase III led the Johnson White House to keep up the appearances of public approval and manipulate or create indicators of public support. What is noteworthy about these changes across the phases is that the strategic concerns with public opinion were induced by the institutional framework of the modern presidency which demands high levels of public prestige for success. These same institutional demands, however, also slowly closed the administration off from the American public, as the forthcoming chapters will contend.

The institutional arrangement of the modern White House may also contribute to this effect. Karl Deutsch, in his discussion of cybernetic processes in The Nerves of Government, notes that autonomous organizations often develop ruts in their manner of acquiring and processing information, and making decisions. According to Deutsch, organizations frequently fail due to "self-closure," a diminished ability to use information due to patterns in acquiring it.

Self-closure, Deutsch asserts, occurs because autonomous organizations' decision systems tend to form biases favoring certain types of information over others; these biases result in failure. Deutsch suggests six modes of such failure, two of which are informative here. The first of these is

> the failure or the gradual narrowing of intake of information from the outside world. This failure involves the overcalculation of memories over current ranges of intake, or internal over external messages, and of current ranges of intake over new data and new information.[35]

Such tendencies will be seen in the Johnson administration's delayed understanding that real change had occurred in the political climate, and its reliance on earlier understandings of public opinion. Second Deutsch discusses the "loss of depth of memory" which "involves the overvaluation of established routines for recalling and recombining data."[36] As the discussion of the strategic concerns of the administration in each stage will indicate, the Johnson administration slowly reduced the variety of sources of public opinion.

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[35] Karl W. Deutsch, The Nerves of Government (London: The Free Press of Glascoe, 1963), p. 225.

[36] Ibid, p. 226.

The process of interpreting public opinion discovered in the Johnson administration is counter-intuitive. While one might expect a sharpened awareness of public attitudes at a time of low public approval and a pending reelection campaign, the Johnson administration in fact closed itself off to a more thorough analysis of public opinion as its popularity declined. As the following chapters will argue, this phenomenon was a byproduct of the presidential need for public support.

Chapter 3

Phase I: Acute Awareness of Public Opinion

Phase I began with Johnson's sudden ascendency to the presidency and extended approximately through April of 1966. Johnson's ability to ameliorate the fears of the nation at the time of the Kennedy assassination no doubt contributed to support ratings which averaged over 76% for his first six months in office, according to published Gallup results. Throughout Phase I, Johnson was able to sustain high support ratings, generally well over 60%. By early 1966, however, the public began reassessing Johnson; perhaps because of the inflationary pressures that were starting to be felt in the domestic economy and the increased American involvement in the little understood war in Vietnam. For the purposes of this analysis, Phase I ended in April of 1966, when Gallup published his third consecutive approval rating for Johnson below 60%, and the White House began to sense a change in the political climate.

If any single word were to be used to describe these early years of the Johnson administration, it would be "action." Right from the start it was obvious

that Johnson would be a driven, active president. The activity and urgency of the early years permeates the archival records and published accounts of the administration. One striking example of this is Johnson's handwritten scrawl below a December 1963 memo to CEA Chairman Walter Heller: "Work, think, work, think, hard on the State of the Union. I depend on you. Hurry your thoughts..."[1] Johnson's reputation as a hard-working activist president would later backfire on him as the press would report that he over-worked his staff.

But the early efforts paid off and established his reputation in the public mind as a president who understood power and the workings of Congress. With the dramatic slaying of President John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson inherited a legislative program whose future was in doubt; Johnson's youthful predecessor was becoming increasingly less popular at the time of his death and his dealings with Congress reflected his position. Approximately three months after Johnson took the oath of office, however, he successfully pushed through Congress the first of Kennedy's

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[1] Memo, LBJ to Heller, 12/23/63, WHCF, Ex, Sp 2-4, "State of the Union Message," Speeches, Box 133.

remaining major programs, an $11.5 billion tax cut. Within another five months came the historic passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.[2] The passage of these two bills firmly established Johnson as a leader to be respected. Within a year, Johnson had launched his Great Society programs, designed with the intent of reducing the conditions of poverty.

The tremendously high levels of public support with which Johnson began his term certainly contributed to his early accomplishments. But, as this chapter will argue, the high levels of support also led the Johnson administration to a high state of awareness of public opinion; this occurred for several reasons. First, the realization of the importance of public support resulted in the administration's concern with maintaining and exploiting it. As a result, the administration actively sought ways to do so. Second, it also resulted in a fear of support loss, which kept the administration attentive to public opinion. Finally, the administration's indulgence in self-congratulation created an atmosphere in which the

[2] For an insider's view of these bills, see Eric F. Goldman, The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1969), p. 76-85.

correctness of its actions was reaffirmed by the "wisdom of the people." That is, the administration's political beliefs and its understanding of public opinion were cognitively consonant.[3]

This chapter will analyze Phase I in two parts; this procedure will be followed for each phase in subsequent chapters. The first section of this chapter will attempt to answer the question: what animated the administration's interest in public opinion during Phase I? The second part of this chapter will focus on the predominant trends observed in the interpretation of public opinion during Phase I. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the implications of these findings.

Not only does Phase I serve as a useful referent point for Phases II and III, but the concern about public opinion and the interpretation of it during

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[3] John Kingdon makes a similar observation. The self-congratulatory tendency of winning politicians and the corresponding belief in a well-informed electorate, he asserts, will make the politician responsive to public opinion: "He [the politician] might pay greater attention to his constituency than otherwise, because he believes that his constituents are paying greater attention to him..." Kingdon, "Politicians Beliefs About Voters," p. 144.

Phase I has numerous implications about the importance of the role of public support in the linkage of public opinion to a popular president.

Strategic Concerns

Johnson's early success is commonly partially attributed to the outpouring of sympathy and support from the American public after the Kennedy assassination. Indeed, Johnson's handling of the situation was generally highly acclaimed as dignified and able.[4] And Johnson knew that quick actions in the wake of high public support were essential to successful accomplishments.[5] Therein lies one of Johnson's earliest strategic concerns about public opinion: the maintenance and expansion of a wide base of public support. Such support was essential not only for Johnson's 1964 election effort, but also served as

[4] Some later accounting of the transfer of power would question Johnson's sensitivities to the Kennedy family, particularly Robert Kennedy. But most accounts dispute such claims, although it is generally acknowledged that the confusing moments after the assassination helped establish Robert Kennedy's ill feelings toward Johnson. See William Manchester, The Death of a President (New York: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 268-276.

[5] McPherson, p. 268.

a political tool to help achieve administration policy objectives. The administration's concern with maintaining and expanding its base of popular support can be seen in two particularly noticeable ways: first, the administration had a high degree of concern about the public's stance on issues; and second, there was a constant attempt to find information about public support which could be used when dealing with other political elites.

i. defining the public's policy agenda

One distinctive feature of Phase I was the administration's active attempt to ascertain and act on the public's policy agenda. In the earliest days of the administration, for example, Johnson asked Princeton professor Eric Goldman to contact scholars and other intellectuals to acquire new ideas for the administration.[6] But attention was given to more than just university elite. In October 1964, Douglas Cater prepared an analysis of surveys in ten states, commissioned by the White House from pollster Oliver Quayle. The memo ranked public issue concerns in the

[6] Memo, Goldman to LBJ et al., 12/21/63, WHCF SP2-4, "State of the Union," Box 133.

various states, and noted a high degree of public concern about waste in government spending. Johnson requested that his speechwriters take this survey information into account while preparing speeches.[7] In August of 1965, Cater advised Johnson "to set ambitious but realistic goals" in various areas of concern to the public, based on a Gallup poll. Johnson approved of the formation of a task force to pursue the idea.[8] Memoranda about the 1966 State of the Union message also reflect the administration's concern with public opinion when establishing legislative objectives; Joseph Califano, for example, asked Hayes Redmon for information from polls on a wide variety of topics.[9] Johnson was interested in acquiring information about public opinion about his domestic program; a memo from Hayes Redmon to the President in November 1965 reads "Mr. President: Louis Harris has agreed to do the poll you asked for on the Great Society."[10] The concern

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[7] Memos (2) Cater to LBJ, 10/8/64 and Cater to Busby, 10/12/64, "Political Polls," Busby Box 41.

[8] Cater to LBJ, 8/3/65, Ex Sp 2-4, "State of the Union Messages," Box 133.

[9] Redmon to Califano, 12/28/65, "1967 State of the Union Categories: Youth Labor Manpower." Statements 224.

with maintaining a wide coalition was also evident at the beginning of the 1966 congressional session. For example, Bill Moyers received a memo from Hayes Redmon discussing issues of importance to the public which Congress dealt with in the previous session. Redmon concluded that, politically, there was "a lot of mileage left" in the administration's programs.[11] In June of 1965, the White House had a poll taken by the Gallup polling corporation. The poll was designed to ascertain public attitudes about immigration policies.[12] During Phase I, the public's attitude about specific issues was continuously monitored.

The administration also sought to expand its strong base of public support during Phase I by deliberately seeking issues which appealed to various groups. This was particularly evident during the 1964 campaign. For example, Bill Moyers informed the

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[10] Redmon to Moyers, 11/9/65, filed in the Louis Harris Name File. There is no indication, however, that the poll was ever done. This observation is also made by Altschuler, p. 296.

[11] Redmon to Moyers, 1/27/66, "Polls," Personal Papers of Henry Wilson, Box 14.

[12] Letter, Irving Crespi to Hayes Redmon, 6/10/65, filed in the George Gallup name file. See also, Memo, Redmon to Moyers, 7/21/65, "Immigration," Office Files of Mike Manatos, Box 8.

President that he and a Democratic National Committee researcher believed that the administration should emphasize the "peace issue," in part because it "has a powerful appeal to women and younger voters."[13] On other occasions issues were chosen to counteract a group's opposition to a separate issue. This was especially true when trying to avoid the issue of civil rights in the South. For example, an April memo to the President from Horace Busby suggested that administration officials should make more public statements in the South in order to counter the negative effects of Johnson's civil rights stance.[14] Similarly, one memo in October 1964 noted that the President, on his campaign stop in Georgia,

> will not be in a position to make the statement that would get him the most support of all down there--that is, something to satisfy the South on Civil Rights enforcement. Accordingly, he must look for something else that will have wide appeal.

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[13] Moyers to LBJ, 9/23/64, "Memos to the President 1964," Moyers, Box 10.

[14] Memo, Busby to LBJ, 4/22/64, "Political Polls," Office files of Horace Busby, Box 41.

Textiles, important to the region, were the suggested topic of the Georgian stop.[15]

The administration's attention to the public's issue agenda can be seen to have stemmed in part from the desire to maintain its public support base.

ii Gaining the Upper Hand

The concern with maintaining and expanding the wide public coalition was motivated in part by the desire to wield the mandate of public support in such a way as to ensure continuous success. Indeed, the legendary stories of Johnson carrying poll results in his pocket during the early years of his administration illustrate the nature of his concern, as the President would use these polls to prod refractory elite political actors. The archival evidence also shows this concern with the administration's bargaining position. Soon after the 1964 election, for example, the White House was aware that Johnson's landslide could be used effectively when dealing with Congress.

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[15] Memo, Jackson to Feldman, 10/20/64, "All Campaign Speeches (Beginning 9/10/64)," Confidential File, Box 89.

For example, Henry Wilson informed Larry O'Brien of the status of North Carolina election results.

> The President carried the state by 174,000 votes or 56%.
> [Democratic Gubernatorial Candidate Dan K.] Moore carried by 172,000.
> The negro boxes voted for both of them. So the Moore people can make no pitch that the President rode Moore's coattails.[16]

Similarly, Eric Goldman writes about Johnson's edginess in 1964 on the night of his election. Despite the certainty of the outcome, Johnson was concerned with the margin of victory. The fears were unwarranted: Johnson's 61.1% of the popular vote was (and still is) a record. Yet, one particular concern of Johnson's that night is telling:

> All election evening Lyndon Johnson closely watched one particular instance of ticket splitting. A Kennedy was running in 1964, Robert Kennedy, candidate for United States Senator from New York. LBJ carried the state by a plurality of approximately 2,600,000 votes, RFK by 720,000. The President was particularly interested in the Senator-elect's victory statement on television. Robert Kennedy said that his win represented an "overwhelming mandate for the policies of John F. Kennedy and of course Lyndon Johnson."[17]

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[16] Wilson to O'Brien, 11/9/64, "Larry O'Brien, Wilson, Box 4.
Actually, the memo was incorrect. Although Johnson did receive more total votes than Moore, Johnson led Goldwater by 175,295 votes, whereas Moore defeated his opponent by 184,178 votes.

Johnson was aware that his landslide victory carried with it political clout.

The Phase I concern with public opinion as a tool to be wielded remained after the election of 1964. For example, on April 1, 1966, Marvin Watson informed the President that White House staffer Ralph Harding showed Idaho Senator Frank Church a poll indicating that 88% of the people of Idaho supported Johnson's Vietnam policy.

> Ralph stated that he had discussed this with and explained it to Senator Church, and that this information had a very sobering affect on Senator Church.[18]

Again, the strategic use of information about public opinion was to curb another political actor's recalcitrance in supporting Johnson's policies.

Furthermore, the administration was always attentive to information which indicated the President's potential strength over other politicians. In April 1966, a New York poll was commissioned from Oliver Quayle--who Johnson regularly used as a pollster. The poll measured the impact on public opinion of critical public hearings held by Arkansas

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[17] Goldman, p. 301-304.

[18] Memo, Watson to LBJ, 4/1/66, "3-1-66--4-7-66," WHCF, PR 16, Box 347.

Senator William Fulbright on Johnson's Vietnam policies. The poll showed that Johnson's approval rating in New York was 67% versus 53% for New York Senator Robert Kennedy, who opposed the Johnson Vietnam policies; Kennedy's approval rating dropped after the hearings. A Bill Moyers memo to Johnson about the poll indicates that Johnson may have actually gained support from the hearings, and notes the "increased vote of confidence" for Johnson.[19] Similarly, legislative aide Michael Manatos alerted the President that "without exception" all of the senators seeking reelection in 1966 "expressed unanimous support of their constituents and themselves for your policies in Vietnam."[20] Members of the administration knew that support for Johnson could translate to presidential leverage, especially when Johnson had the support of another politician's constituents.

During Phase I, the administration was aware of the political benefits derived from wide support. This awareness kept the administration attentive to public

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[19] Memo, Moyers to LBJ, 4/12/66, "Public Opinion Polls (1 of 5)," Confidential File, Box 81.

[20] Memo, Manatos to LBJ, 1/25/66, "Manatos: Leg. General - 1966. Jan. Feb. March," Office Files of Michael Manatos, Box 3.

opinion and concerned about maintaining and expanding the base of support. Furthermore, as the following discussion will illustrate, the interpretation of public opinion during Phase I further heightened this attention to public opinion.

Interpreting Public Opinion

It is important to realize that it would have been impossible for the President and his associates not to realize Johnson's tremendous popularity. As noted earlier, published Gallup approval ratings hovered between 60% and 80% until the last two months of Phase I, and Johnson won his 1964 election with the greatest margin of victory in U.S. presidential election history. LBJ's popularity was evident even in the early days of his presidency. On January 14, 1964, Horace Busby evaluated the analysis of Johnson in the Public Opinion Index for Industry, a publication which "all major U.S. corporations subscribe to--and religiously believe in," and concluded "the Johnson administration begins with a strong plus in the personal image of the President."[21] Richard Nelson

reported to Johnson a March 25 telephone conversation with Gallup. Gallup informed Nelson

> The President is doing a fantastic job. We all thought that the honeymoon would last 30-45 days and then the polls would drop off sharply. But this has not been the case. The President still has a fantastically high national rating, and it looks like that rating is going to continue. He is doing a great job, and the people know it and are willing to express it. We just polled Republican county chairman, and they nearly all secretly feel that the G.O.P. doesn't have much of a chance in November.[22]

The good news also came from his life-long constituents. Busby reported on a survey completed in Texas:

> The most marked change is the waning--and virtual disappearance--of the highly negative ratings long characteristic of opinion polls in Texas as Senator and Vice President. Only 6 percent give the "worst possible rating"...Only 13 percent are "unfavorable" in any degree.[23]

Even fifteen months after the election, the administration could continue to gloat. Hayes Redmon reported to Bill Moyers about an "interesting and

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[21] Memo, Busby to LBJ, 1/14/64, "Memos to Mr. Johnson--April," Office Files of Horace Busby, Box 53.

[22] Memo, Nelson to LBJ, 3/26/64, filed in the George Gallup Name File.

[23] Memo, Busby to LBJ, 4/16/64, "Political Polls," Office Files of Horace Busby, Box 41. (emphasis in original).

factual" report of the Republican National Committee. The report noted the severe defeat of 1964, and acknowledged that most traditional Republican groups had voted for Johnson, and non-voters (often said at that time to be a silent source of Republican support) overwhelmingly supported Johnson over Goldwater.[24] Johnson's popularity could not be doubted except by the most skeptical of political advisers.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the administration's reaction to the President's high public standing. Specifically, the following discussion will assess the interpretation of public opinion within the White House. Three dominant trends will be discussed. First, the administration attributed its public approval to the President's ability to align with public opinion and convince the public of the worthiness of his actions. In essence, the administration's assessment of public opinion was congratulatory, and with good cause. Second, the administration tended to believe that there were dangerous signs that Johnson's support would soon

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[24] Memo, Redmon to Moyers, 1/22/66, "Manatos: Leg General - 1966 Jan. Feb. March," Office Files of Manatos, Box 3.

decline. Third, the pervasive belief existed that the public desired major legislative programs. All of these reactions were predictable and most probably correct assessments of the political climate at the time. The implications of these assessments will be discussed in the conclusion.

i. Self-Congratulation

To understand the administration's interpretation of public opinion, it is not enough merely to know that the administration was aware of its popularity, it is also necessary to understand what the White House attributed its popularity to. Kingdon's "congratulation" effect, for example, suggests that the politicians will explain their elections in terms of personal actions. Similarly, for Johnson, self-congratulation became particularly prevalent late in the 1964 campaign, and continued throughout the remainder of Phase I. The Johnson administration tended to see the continual public approval as a sustaining reason for self-congratulation.

One early indulgence in self-congratulation occurred in the waning days of the 1964 campaign, when it was increasingly clear that Johnson would be the

decisive victor. On October 12, Busby informed Johnson of his popularity with the campaign press corps. "You have not, at any point, enjoyed the respect and admiration of any segment of the press to compare with the sentiment running among this travelling contingent now." Busby explained that Johnson's popularity was the result of various acts of political courage; primary among these was an October 9 New Orleans campaign speech which passionately expressed Johnson's belief in the civil rights movement to a Southern audience. (Johnson concluded his speech with an ad lib which momentarily shocked, then won over, his audience. It was about a Democratic U.S. Senator who left Mississippi as a young man. When an old man, the Senator expressed a deep desire to then representative Johnson and Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn.

> I would like to go back down there and make them one more Democratic speech. I just feel like I've got one in me. Poor old state, they haven't heard a real Democratic speech in thirty years. All they ever hear at election time is nigra, nigra, nigra).[25]

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[25] Eric Goldman, p. 294.
Johnson attracted wide attention and gained many followers because of this speech. But he lost Louisiana in the election.

Busby explained the reason for Johnson's support

> The New Orleans speech was courageous--and, most especially, courageous politics. People dislike or distrust politicians as synonymous for non-courageous, devious acts [sic]. Thus, overnight, they are speaking of you--as once of FDR--as the "master," "the champ."...
>
> Several men discoursed on this theme: "I can see now why they say Johnson is [a] leader--I'd follow him now myself." The press...is seeing you through new eyes. Virtually all of it comes from this one factor: a show of deliberate courage.[26]

Self-congratulation for the high popularity was a phenomenon which remained throughout Phase I. Even the Vietnam War was seen as a source of Johnson support; an accurate observation at the time.[27] Another memo from Busby to the President reveals this.

> The temper of the people is difficult to assess from the White House. My premise for this memo may be far wrong. However, my own intuitive conclusions are these:
>
> The indicated high level approval for your handling of Vietnam stems from your willingness to give "prompt, adequate, and fitting reply."...
>
> The public confidence in you rests heavily on the man-in-the street's instinct that while you want peace as he does, you also will not allow the Communists to push the U.S. around, as the man in the street believes he would not.

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[26] Memo, Busby to LBJ, (the memo is undated, but the contents indicate that it was written October 12, 1964), "Memos to the President, 1964," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 10 (emphasis in original).

[27] Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, p. 28.

It is important to note the self-congratulatory nature of the perceived reason for public support: the people and the President are believed to be thinking as one. This memo eventually makes that connection explicit. "The people, as you said so often during the Korean War, are probably ahead of the Congress--and certainly equal in their understanding to the Executive."[28] Two June memos from Hayes Redmon reinforce the idea that the bold actions in Vietnam were bringing support. Pollster Louis Harris privately informed Redmon that his polls revealed "a clear mandate for the President's course of action." A later memo explains, "[There is] support for air raids and [a] clear, overwhelming mandate to send as many U.S. troops there as necessary to withstand the Viet Cong attacks during monsoon season."[29]

There was also a strong belief that the domestic policies of the Johnson administration were widely hailed by the people. A December 1965 memo, for

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[28] Memo, Busby to LBJ, 2/27/65, "Memos to the President - February 1965," Office Files of Horace Busby, Box 52.

[29] Memos(2), from Hayes Redmon, 6/17/65 (The latter memo is undated, but appears to follow the first. It has a handwritten notation, however, that it was filed 8/9/65), "PR 16 Public Opinion Polls (April '66 - June '65)," Confidential File, Box 80.

example, listed the five most popular issues which elicited public support. Of these five, four were domestic: Medicare, civil rights, anti-poverty, Vietnam, and increased Social Security benefits. The same memo noticed the similar thinking of the administration and the people:

> A Harris poll showed that people blame crime on social problems rather than a breakdown in law enforcement. Asked to list the causes of crime, people named such things as slum life, restless youth, poverty, racial discrimination. This is a good tie with the Great Society programs in anti-poverty, education, civil rights, etc.[30]

Similarly, Bill Moyers was informed in late January 1966 that support for the 89th Congress, which passed large segments of the Johnson program, was "widespread and bipartisan," with support for Medicare, education, and the tax cut being most favorable.[31] Johnson was particularly proud of his domestic legislative achievements, and during Phase I his administration credited these achievements for his popularity.

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[30] Memo, Redmon to Califano, 12/28/65, "1967 State of the Union Categories: Youth, Labor, Manpower," Statements Box 224.

[31] Memo, Redmon to Moyers, 1/27/66, "Polls," Office Files of Henry Wilson, Box 14.

The administration was popular during Phase I, and the legislative successes of the early Johnson years no doubt flowed from that popularity. The members of the administration had cause for self-congratulation, for they believed that their actions were in line with the public will. Their beliefs about public opinion were cognitively consonant with and reinforced by their beliefs about the value of their actions.

The administration's assessments about public opinion during Phase I were probably correct. According to published Gallup polls, the President had good cause for self-congratulation during Phase I. In February 1964, 61% approved and only 14% disapproved of Johnson's foreign policy record. Although it dropped to 50% approval and 28% disapproval in February 1965, it rose to 60% approval and 25% disapproval by July 1965. Johnson's forte, of course, was domestic policy, and polls showed an impressive standing. In February of 1964, 70% approved of Johnson's domestic policy record, with only 12% disapproving. One year later, the figures were still impressive: 60% approval versus 20% disapproval. By July 1965, Johnson still was

acclaimed for his domestic policy achievements by 63%, with only 27% disapproving.[32] The administration's self-congratulation was not without cause.

ii. Fear of support loss

It is interesting to note that despite the tendency towards self-congratulation, the administration often showed signs of fear that the support was illusory or transient. Much of this concern stemmed from presidential campaign jitters. Secretary of Commerce Luther Hodges and Tennessee Governor Buford Ellington warned Johnson of White "backlash," a movement to Goldwater in "distressingly great numbers," because of Johnson's support for civil rights legislation.[33] Johnson ignored them. Horace Busby had less precise fears, and urged against an "'easy win' theory."

> My own feeling is that many within the Democratic Party apparatus have a naive, immature, unreal view of what the Party is up against...Confidence is rested too casually on polls, press, and pros who have already

[32] Gallup Political Index, Report No. 2, 1965. The figures do not add up to 100% because of the undecided respondents.

[33] Memos(2), Hodges to LBJ, 8/10/64 and Ellington to LBJ, 8/10/64 in "Elections-Campaigns (1964 - 1966)," Confidential File, Box 77.

> badly misjudged the country's temper in their estimates about Goldwater's delegate bid. If they missed these, their bias--or naivete--is no service to the Democratic cause.[34]

Although most of this low-level doubt occurred during the campaign, it is evident throughout Phase I. An early 1966 memo which discussed the crushing defeat of the Republicans in 1964 cautioned against "over-optimism about 1966."[35] The nature of the fear was that there might exist public opposition of which they were unaware.

The topic which seemed to instill the most fear of support loss, however, was Vietnam; despite the support, the administration was able to foresee the problems their policy would cause. In early 1965, for example, Horace Busby informed Johnson that increased controversy over the Vietnam policy made him "genuinely fearful" of several possibilities, including "a rising acceptance of the pro-isolation, pro-negotiation, pro-withdrawal position."[36] In early years of the Vietnam

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[34] Memo, Busby to LBJ, 7/13/64, "Memos to the President-July," Busby 52.

[35] Memo, Redmon to Moyers, 1/22/66, "Manatos: Leg General - 1966 Jan Feb March," Manatos 3.

[36] Memo. Busby to LBJ, 2/27/68, "Memos to the President, February 1965," Office Files of Horace Busby, Box 52.

conflict, Johnson was also fearful of hawk sentiment. In a meeting with his Vietnam policy advisors on May 16, 1965, Johnson revealed his nervousness about a recent bombing pause. "My judgement is [that] the public has never wanted us to stop the bombing...we don't want to do it too long else we lose our base of support."[37] On August 4, 1965, Douglas Cater held a meeting to discuss the "information problem" stemming from press reports of American activities in Vietnam. The notes record Cater as saying at the start of the meeting, "Our public posture is fragile."[38] In a December meeting with his Vietnam advisors, Johnson noted, "The weakest chink in our armor is public opinion."[39] Jack Valenti, in a memo to Johnson discussing public perceptions of decisions on Vietnam, commented, "You have said yourself that our support is

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[37] Notes of meeting in the President's Office, 5/16/65, Meeting Notes, Box 1.

[38] Memorandum for the record, 8/4/65, "Publicity (1963-1965)," Confidential File, Box 83.

[39] Notes of meeting in the Cabinet Room, 12/17/65, Meeting Notes, Box 1.

wide but thin."[40] The administration was able to foresee that the Vietnam policies could cost the President his public support.

This concern for a potential downturn in public approval is significant. The administration was motivated to continue to pay attention to the attitudes of the people. In short, the administration did not want to lose its cause for self-congratulation, nor the perceived source of its success. The administration, therefore, was open to the possibility of public discontent and nervously watched for the potential erosion of support. There are indications that this fear affected policy advice to the President and public presentations of administration positions. Notes of a National Security Council meeting in February 1965, for example, indicated that Bill Moyers supported a retaliatory bombing strike "to meet the demands of domestic opinion requirements."[41] Similarly, Hayes Redmon, in a memo to Bill Moyers in February 1966,

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[40] Memo, Valenti to LBJ, 12/18/65, "SP 2-4, Exec, State of the Union Messages," Speeches 133.

[41] Notes of National Security Council Meeting No. 548, 2/10/65, Meeting Notes, Box 1.

indicated his concern about the loss of support from those who wanted to escalate the Vietnam conflict.

> In order to bring the moderate hawks back with us, we should, in Louis Harris' phrase, "bloody it up a little." We must show the public we are getting somewhere. Recent publication of Vietcong killed and wounded rates was helpful in this regard.[42]

The administration's fear of support loss contributed to its decisions about policies and public presentations of information.

iii. Belief in Public Desire for Major Programs

The Johnson administration's concern with the public issue agenda led to the firm belief that the country wanted and was ready for major legislative programs. This belief existed from the earliest days of the administration, and most likely was true. But it is important to note that the questions the administration was asking about the public's issue concerns also led to this belief. That is, since the administration was actively seeking issues of concern to the public, it should not be surprising that it

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[42] Redmon to Moyers, 2/27/66, "Public Opinion Polls (1 of 5)," Confidential File, Box 81.

"discovered" some desire for legislative programs to address these concerns, whether unusually high support existed for the programs or not.

Johnson's hiring of Princeton professor Eric Goldman as a link to the "best minds"[43] of the country was an early source for the belief in the public's demand for legislative programs. Goldman circulated to the President and his staff a memo in December 1963 which discussed ideas for the forthcoming State of the Union address.

> It seems to me that the single most dramatic and appealing specific new proposal that could be made would be one directed at doing something about the outsiders of American society--the poor and the disadvantaged...[This proposal] would provide an outlet for the talents and energies of the many Americans, who are, I believe, eager to do something personally about repairing American society.

Goldman's discussions with "intellectuals," which took place at Johnson's request, backed up this theme.

> The group was unanimous in urging that the Message should have a theme of vigorous, confident action. Clinton Rossiter put it: "This is no time for the Nation to be resting; there is so damn much to be done..."

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[43] For the story of Goldman's sudden association with the LBJ administration, see Goldman, chapters 1 and 2.

Bruce Catton, editor of American Heritage, was reported as saying,

> It seems to me that right now there is in the air a touch of the feeling that was abroad during the first few months of the New Deal administration when concrete programs were being presented and put into effect. I think the country is in the mood to applaud a Message along this line.[44]

A brief memo to Johnson outlined the major conclusions of Goldman's discussions. It noted, "General agreement: Theme should be action."[45]

Johnson, of course, had the most ambitious legislative agenda since the New Deal, and the White House perceived these programs as popular. Indeed, large proportions of the public favored Johnson's programs. For example, according to Gallup Polls, 61% of the public and 71% of White Americans outside of the South favored equal access to public accommodations in early 1964;[46] 57% approved of Johnson's civil rights

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[44] Memos(2), Goldman to "The President and Appropriate Members of the White House Staff," "State of the Union Messages," Ex, Sp 2-4, WHCF, Box 133.

[45] Memo, Goldman to LBJ, "Eric Goldman Report to the President - Dated December 21," "State of the Union Messages," Ex, Sp 2-4, WHCF, Box 133.

[46] George Gallup, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971, Volume Three, 1959-1971, (New York: Random House, 1972). All future Gallup poll data will come

policies in a poll published in May 1964; 63% approved of the proposed Medicare legislation in a poll published in January 1965, even though the question specifically indicated that the programs "would be financed ought of increased social security taxes." In April of 1965, Gallup supplied respondents with a list of domestic problems, and asked them to select the three they thought the government should focus the most attention on; 45% selected "improving public education," 35% chose "reducing unemployment," and 32% selected "helping people in poor areas." All these goals were consistent with the objectives of the Great Society. The Johnson White House recognized the high public approval of its domestic agenda.

It is difficult to discern whether the perception of public opinion initiated the ambitious agenda, or if the perception of public opinion justified the administration's plans. Nonetheless, the two were consistent. This consistency established for the Johnson administration an important basis for future thought about its relationship with the American public.

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from this source or the Gallup Political Index, unless otherwise indicated.

Conclusion

As the analysis in the subsequent chapters will make evident, the administration's highest degree of awareness of public opinion occurred during Phase I. The Johnson administration recognized the importance of public support, asked questions about its cause, and sought ways to maintain and expand it. Indeed, the fear of losing public support kept the administration attentive to public opinion.

The administration identified itself with the public during Phase I by partaking in self-congratulation about its level of public support. The policy pursuits of the administration were cognitively consonant with the general belief about the desires of the public. This too added to the administration's awareness of public opinion, as it operated on the tacit assumption that the public was attentive to and supportive of its actions.

Johnson began his presidency intent on achieving major legislative successes.[47] And, as noted, public

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[47] Kearns, p. 195. See also Lyndon Baines Johnson, The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 71. Johnson, upon becoming president, immediately

opinion in the early Johnson years was supportive or at least permissive of Johnson's legislative agenda. While this research has not suggested a causal link, it has found a high degree of sensitivity to many manifestations of public opinion during Phase I, including public attitudes about Johnson's policy agenda. Johnson's attention to public opinion was motivated, in part, by the recognition that public support for him and his agenda was an important factor in his success.

It would probably be a mistake to call the Phase I Johnson a "delegate" in the Burkean sense of the word. Johnson began pushing legislation through Congress immediately upon his elevation to the presidency, and there is little indication that he waited for public opinion. Nonetheless, he was aware of the supportive public opinion for his agenda during Phase I and concerned about how his support could erode.

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prioritized some preliminary anti-poverty plans being developed in the Kennedy administration. Furthermore, many have asserted that Johnson wanted to surpass the achievements of his hero, Franklin D. Roosevelt. See, for example, William E. Leuchtenburg, In the Shadow of FDR: From Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 142-147.

The high degree of attention to public opinion during Phase I is noteworthy because without such attention public opinion cannot act as a constraint on the proposed agenda. Furthermore, presidential attention to public opinion is necessary if the public is going to have a positive or initiating impact on the agenda. During Phase I, then, the potential for public input into presidential decision-making was high.

It is interesting to note that it was during Phase I that Johnson misled the public and the press about his foreign policy intent in Vietnam. In July of 1965, the United States began the escalation of the American involvement in Vietnam. Although many of Johnson's advisors recommended immediate discussion of the decision with Congress and the public, Johnson chose "to tell Congress and the public no more than was absolutely necessary;" this included a request for appropriations far below what was necessary to fight the war, in order to avoid rousing suspicions.[48] Johnson's lying--or his concealing the truth--can be understood in terms of his attention to public opinion.

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[48] Kearns, p. 294. Bruce Buchanan makes a similar point in The Presidential Experience: What the Office Does to the Man (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1978), p. 89.

Johnson's concern for maintaining public support for him and his policies may have influenced his decision to practice deception. Doris Kearns writes that Johnson privately admitted that he concealed his intent in part to save his Great Society programs while keeping the American political right at bay.[49] This reasoning is also indicated in an unsigned memorandum prepared in 1968 by someone present at one of the July 1965 National Security Council meetings during which Johnson decided to escalate the size of the American forces in Vietnam. The memorandum is about the author's notes of that meeting, at which Johnson choose the fifth of five options; namely, to escalate quietly. The author writes,

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Indeed the deception may have been worse than it seems. As the Pentagon Papers were later to reveal, the planning for the American involvement in Vietnam began long before the escalation of July 1965. Three months prior to the Gulf of Tonkin incident of August 1964, a draft of what was later to become the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was written. The Resolution was Johnson's means to acquire authority for dealing with the conflict without full-scale public and congressional involvement. A copy of the early draft can be found in "Meetings on Southeast Asia, Volume 1," National Security Files, Files of McGeorge Bundy, Box 18.

[49] Kearns, p. 295.

> The notes also record my own feeling that while the President was placing his preference for alternative five...on international grounds, his unspoken object was to protect his legislative program--or at least this had appeared to be his object in his informal talk...of the preceding week.[50]

Considering the high degree of attention to public opinion during Phase I, deception was a rational--albeit inexcusable--way of bypassing the public. Johnson, in effect, wanted to avoid public debate on his Vietnam policy in order to maintain the advantages of strong public support. Lying no doubt seemed advantageous to Johnson because of his high levels of concern about public opinion. Future research into the effects of Johnson's perception of public opinion on the American involvement in Vietnam should explore this possibility.

Finally, Phase I is noteworthy because of its contrasts with Phase II and III. As the next two chapters will indicate the administration never again comprehended public opinion as broadly as it did during Phase I.

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[50] Memo, 11/2/68, concerning the National Security Council meeting of July 27, 1965, Meeting Notes, Box 1.

Chapter 4

Phase II: The Awareness Declines

Phase II is defined here as the period beginning in May 1966, the time when Johnson's public approval rating was falling near 50% and the White House became concerned about the declining level of support. The decline was steady and undeniably significant. In May 1966, the published Gallup approval rating for Johnson was 54%, by late December it had fallen to 46%, and by August 1967 it had dropped to 39%. Johnson's Phase I years of support had become the halcyon days of his presidency, with levels of support that he would not again equal. For the purpose of this analysis, Phase II ends and Phase III begins in August 1967, when Gallup published his first approval rating for Johnson below 40%.

The change in Johnson's political climate in late spring of 1966 was at first a subtle change. The decline in Johnson's support could not be clearly attributed to any single factor. There was some growing discontent about U.S. policy in Vietnam from both those who wanted to escalate and deescalate American involvement in the conflict, although the

strongest opposition was still fairly isolated. There was a growth in inflation, from 1.7% in 1965 to 2.9% in 1966, significant by the standards of 1966. Nonetheless, the economy was still strong for the average American, with an unemployment rate of only 3.8%. There were some serious strains in Johnson's dealings with the press, but Johnson was hardly the first president to go through that. Perhaps the public was simply becoming disinterested in the colorful Texan with his seemingly endless supply of energy. The source of the decline was not obvious, but the decline was. And the decline would definitely have its repercussions.

By the end of Phase II, however, the mild distrust of early 1966 grew into widespread disapproval. Campus groups were protesting the Vietnam war, Republicans were decrying the high inflation rate, and Johnson's policies, which once seemingly sailed through Congress, were now caught in quagmires of compromise or a complete lack of support. Published Gallup polls revealed many problems for Johnson's attempts to convince the public of the worthiness of his Vietnam policies: the number of Americans that thought American involvement in the war was a mistake grew from 32% in

February, to 37% in May, to 41% in July; in June, only 48% had "a clear idea of what the Vietnam war is all about; and in July, 52% of the public disapproved of Johnson's handling of the Vietnam situation.

The reaction of the Johnson administration to the declining public prestige is very curious. As this chapter will argue, the administration reacted to the decline in ways which subtly narrowed its understanding of public opinion. Both the administration's strategic concern about public opinion and its interpretation of it led to this effect. The decline in public approval led the administration to focus its concern primarily on Johnson's success among Democrats. This contrasts with Phase I, of course, when the administration's focus had been wider, as it tried to maintain the tremendously high levels of approval by appealing to broad segments of society. Furthermore, the administration's Phase II attempts to discover the source of the decline in support led to some significant interpretations of public opinion. As will be shown, these interpretations included the belief that popularity would soon return; a belief which would justify a lesser degree of concern about public opinion. Furthermore, the administration tended to

believe that their chief problem was image and the way in which the President publicly discussed major policy initiatives. As will be argued, the administration failed to more carefully analyze public opinion to see if the problems were more deeply rooted. As a result, the administration no longer maintained the same close attention to public opinion endemic to Phase I.

The Johnson administration's reaction to the American public changed with the level of public approval. Since Phase II is the most dynamic of the three phases, consisting of a clear and decisive descent in levels of public approval, it should not be surprising that the administration's reaction was also dynamic during this phase. Phase II, then, is transitional. The early days of Phase II often resemble Phase I, but the resemblance fades with increasingly ominous reports of public disapproval. Similarly, the latter half of Phase II begins to show signs of behavior common to Phase III.

Since early Phase II often resembles Phase I, and late Phase II often resembles Phase III, the natural question is whether the administration would more appropriately be divided into only two phases for analysis. The answer is no. It must be remembered

that the phases are based on observations of tendencies, and clearly overlap. And, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, there are certain aspects of Phase II which are unique to this phase. Nonetheless, since some behavior patterns in the second half of Phase II are more typical of Phase III, they will be discussed in the next chapter with Phase III.

As with Phase I, Phase II will be analyzed in two parts. The first part will focus on the strategic concerns which motivated the administration's attention to public opinion, and the second part will examine the predominant trends observed in the interpretation of public opinion during Phase II. The conclusion will discuss the implications of the findings.

Strategic Concerns

As public approval began its perceptible drop, the strategic concerns of the Johnson administration changed. As could be expected, one new concern was finding the source of the problem: what caused the decline in support? Correspondingly, the administration wished to stabilize against further decline. Another major concern was defining the base

of public support; who was with and who was against the administration? These concerns, of course, were heightened before November 1966 by the fear of losing Democratic seats in the congressional midterm election, a fear which proved justified. And after the 1966 election, the administration began to take a serious look at whether sufficient public support existed to win a second full Johnson term in 1968.

i. what's going wrong?

There is a noticeable change in the tone of White House memoranda as the strategic focus became "what's going wrong?" Hayes Redmon's memos to Bill Moyers, for example, illustrate the new concern with identifying the President's supporters and detractors. On May 27, 1966, Redmon informed Moyers of the results of an Oliver Quayle poll,

> The President's loss is among Republicans. Some moderates are returning to their party and very few Goldwaterites are coming over to the President. At the same time the President holds the Democratic vote very well.[1]

[1] Redmon to Moyers, 5/27/66, "BDM Memos, June-July 1966," Moyers Box 12.

In June, Redmon's conversations with Gallup, Harris and Quayle provided this explanation of declining support:

> All agree that the primary cause is the Vietnam situation. Also a major secondary factor is the rising cost of living. There is general agreement with Lou Harris' comment that people are in a "foul mood" regarding Vietnam.[2]

Similarly, a Sherman Markman memo to Marvin Watson which was subsequently passed to the President explicitly states the concern. Markman asked Iowa Governor Harold Hughes three questions about a negative Iowa poll: "1. Do you think the poll accurately reflects the facts...? 2. If so, what are the causes of the disaffection? 3. What can be done about it?"[3] A White House staff meeting on June 24, 1966, discussed three sources of the decline: Vietnam, inflation, and relations with farmers.[4] One strong indication of the Phase II White House concern was a memo from Hayes Redmon to Bill Moyers containing a lengthy quote from George Gallup about the causes of sharp drops in

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[2] Redmon to Moyers, 6/9/66, "BDM Memos June-July 11, 1966," Moyers, Box 12.

[3] Markman to Watson, 6/9/66, "Public Opinion Polls (1966) 4 of 5," Confidential File, Box 82.

[4] Jones to Watson, 6/24/66, "Public Opinion Polls (1966) 4 of 5," Confidential File, Box 82.

presidential popularity. The memo, which expressed Gallup's assertion that inaction is the frequent culprit in such situations, circulated through various offices and was ultimately passed to Jake Jacobsen, Marvin Watson, Joseph Califano, Douglas Cater, Henry McPherson, Robert Kintner, Walt Rostow, and the President.[5] Clearly, the administration was cognizant of its problem. Yet the seeds for future problems were already planted. Slowly, the issue of popularity would become more important to the administration than the root causes of public support. That is, public support slowly drowned out some wider questions about public opinion. But in early Phase II, this is only mildly noticeable.

In fact, this early concern for the source of support loss is fairly similar to the concern for the public's issue agenda seen during Phase I. As public approval began to drop, the administration was forced to examine the public's attitude on the administration's record to date. And the administration no longer had cause for rejoicing. While Johnson's Gallup approval rating generally stayed above 50% through the summer of 1966 and usually

[5] Redmon to Moyers, 7/19/66, George Gallup Name File.

remained above 45% for the remainder of Phase II, the public evaluation of Johnson's record on certain issues was bleak. In August, 1966, for example, Louis Harris informed the White House that 90% of the public gave Johnson an unfavorable rating on controlling inflation.[6] Bill Moyers was informed in late September of poll results indicating that only 18% of the country wanted to continue fighting in Vietnam at the current levels; 18% wanted to withdraw entirely and 55% wanted to escalate further (9% were undecided).[7] Johnson's attempt to keep the middle ground would continue to erode his support. Yet Johnson continued to gather support in other areas. A poll taken in Georgia in the fall of 1966, for example, showed Johnson attracting support for his programs of aid for education and the elderly, as well as for "maintaining a strong military defense."[8] So, for a while, the administration maintained its interest in the public's attitudes about

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[6] Memo, Redmon to Moyers, 8/31/66, "BDM Memos, July 12 - August 1966," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 12.

[7] Memo, Redmon to Moyers, 9/27/66, "BDM Memos September 1966 - February 1967." Office Files of Bill Moyers. Box 12.

[8] Moyers to LBJ, 9/9/66, "Public Opinion Polls (3 of 5)." Confidential File, Box 81.

specific issues even as popularity declined. Acquiring a return to public support was a crucial factor in motivating that interest.

ii. consolidating support for the 1966 elections

As it became evident that the drop in public opinion was continuing, the administration became increasingly concerned with electoral success. Beginning in early summer 1966, White House attention to public opinion heightened due to the pending midterm election. Would they be able to maintain the wide Democratic majority in congress?

In June, for example, Bill Moyers informed Johnson that polls and editorials were reflecting a renewed approval of the War on Poverty.

> This leads me to the conviction that the War on Poverty can be a positive factor in November. You made hay with it in 1964 during your poverty tours, and I think you should consider some similar trips this year.[9]

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[9] Moyers to LBJ, 6/9/66, "BDM Memos, June-July 11, 1966," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 12.
In July and August, the administration considered making a 1966 anti-poverty tour, but it never materialized. See TR 93, "Tour of Anti-poverty Programs in U.S.," Exec. and Gen., WHCF, Box 25.

An earlier memo the same day also illustrates the concern.

> I discussed with Oliver Quayle the question of doing a nationwide opinion poll for you...We agreed that the poll should have great depth, ie., an open end personal profile on you, the whole range of policy questions, etc.
>
> ...I think it will provide us with an important benchmark on which to make important decisions for the 1966 campaign and against which to judge other polls taken from now through the fall.[10]

Concern for the 1966 election may also explain why Moyers asked Fred Panzer to prepare a report on the issues which Democratic members of Congress believed were of the greatest concern in their districts; the report was forwarded to Johnson.[11]

By the summer of 1966 the administration's concern with the public issue agenda seemed to stem primarily

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[10] Moyers to LBJ, 6/9/66, "BDM Memos, June-July 11, 1966," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 12.

[11] Moyers to LBJ, 6/10/66, "Public Opinion Polls (1966) 4 of 5," Confidential File, Box 82.
The survey indicates that the members of the House believed that the primary issues of concern to their constituents were Vietnam (88% mentioned it), inflation (61%), the war on poverty (34%), civil rights (29%), and education (19%). In the Senate, the response was Vietnam (76%), inflation (56%), agriculture (40%), civil rights (28%), and education (20%). Note that the survey only indicates the issues of concern, not the beliefs about the constituents' opinions on the issues.

from the need to galvanize support for Democratic policies before the 1966 election. Unlike Phase I, the concern was now consolidation, not expansion. Not surprisingly, the condition of the Democratic party began to figure more prominently in the administration's discussions. In mid-July, for example, Moyers made several suggestions to Johnson to help the Democratic cause in the 1966 election.

> 1. Before the Freshman democrats go home...you should have all the first-termers down for a meeting, pictures with you, etc.
>
> 2. I would like to see you ease into an occasional television press conference now rather than wait until the fall and have it charged that we are doing it only because of the campaign. If you have one in July and another in August, you can go on to have one in September and October, as well. There is no question that you are good at this game, and I think it is important--as November approaches--for us to have silenced the charges of "lack of information," "what is the Administration hiding?," "inaccessibility," etc. Furthermore, the Republicans have a hard time demanding equal time for your televised press conferences.
>
> 3. Your schedule in September seems to be getting filled...but I hope you could save a two-week period just in case you decide to (a) return to Honolulu, or (b) tour the Far East to visit our allies supporting us in Vietnam. A successful trip of this kind

> could have considerable impact in November...and the American people like nothing better than seeing their president well-received abroad.[12]

Johnson accepted the advice. The Democratic candidates for Congress visited Johnson eleven days after the Moyers memo. One hundred Democratic freshmen met with the president on September 6, and photographs were taken of Johnson shaking hands. And on October 7, Johnson again met with congressional candidates.[13] Furthermore, Johnson held televised news conferences on July 20 (three days after the memo), August 27, October 6 and 13, and November 4; Johnson had only had one televised news conference in 1966 before the Moyers memo.[14] And Johnson visited the Far East in late October and early November, returning six days before the November 8 election. As could be expected, Democratic successes in the midterm elections were becoming an increasingly salient strategic concern with public opinion as the elections approached.

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[12] Moyers to LBJ, 7/17/66, "BDM Memos, July 12 - August 1966," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 12.

[13] President's Diary cards. Also, audio visual archivist's records.

[14] WHCF, Press Office Files.

iii More Electoral Concerns: A public coalition for 1968

The 1966 midterm election brought Johnson a loss of 47 Democratic members of the House and two Democratic senators. Not surprisingly, the administration became concerned about the implications of the loss for its own future. Furthermore, the electoral concerns which had catalyzed attention to public opinion through the first half of Phase II were quickly replaced with electoral concerns about Johnson's 1968 bid for reelection.

Of course, concerns about 1968 electoral success preoccupied Johnson until his March 1968 decision to withdraw from the campaign. But during Phase II, Johnson was continuously attempting to define his base of public support. For example, Johnson began 1967 by attempting to appease and win back those who were opposing him. According to a letter from Bill Moyers to Johnson, which Moyers wrote in late 1967 after leaving the White House, the 1967 State of the Union Address had been designed to reestablish a base of support for LBJ.

> Last year's state of the Union message was deliberately designed, as you suggested, to appeal to our opponents. The polls had

> turned downward. We had just lost 47 seats in Congress and found a more obstinate House...[T]he speech, in response, struck the role of underdog. It was an appeal for understanding and sympathy for patience and moderation.[15]

Johnson's concern for his coalition was clearly justified. Not only would it become more difficult to pursue his programs and policies, but his 1968 reelection chances were in doubt.

The administration's concern with the 1968 election began almost immediately after the 1966 election. In January of 1967, James Rowe forwarded to Johnson an analysis of the 1966 election. The analysis called itself "an attempt to be as objective as possible about what happened on November 8 and to learn what happened, looking forward to a national Democratic victory in 1968."[16]

Indeed, one feature characteristic of the remainder of Johnson's term is the ever-present attention to polls showing whom the public would prefer as the Democratic party's candidate or who would win an election if it were held that day. The administration

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[15] Moyers to LBJ, 12/7/67, Bill Moyers Name File.

[16] Watson to LBJ (plus attachments), 1/12/67, "Elections, Campaigns (1967-)," Confidential File, Box 77.

frequently referred to such polls as "presidential pairings," and they played an important role during Phases II and III as indicators of public support.

Obviously, winning the 1968 election was the administration's primary reason for examining presidential pairings. And during Phase II, the prime focus was on Johnson's support from within the Democratic party. The concern with stabilizing against future decline was paramount.

Polls about presidential pairings were noticed with a modicum of interest at least as early as May 1966, but attention to such sources of public opinion increased drastically in 1967, as declining approval ratings and the 1966 midterm election made it clear that Johnson could face a serious challenge from within the Democratic party. And the challenger most feared was Robert F. Kennedy.

It is well established that Lyndon Johnson and Robert Kennedy did not trust or like each other. White House attention to public attitudes about Kennedy and his slowly evolving public opposition to U.S. policy in Vietnam reflect that distrust. Furthermore, Johnson and his staff were nervously aware of the popularity of the late President's brother. Yet 1967 began with

White House awareness that Kennedy's appeal had begun to fade. Part of the reason for the drop in Kennedy's popularity was a controversy between the Kennedy family and biographer William Manchester. Although Manchester claimed to have been given complete rights to the Kennedy family's story of their reaction to the assassination of President Kennedy, the Kennedy family sued Manchester over parts of his book The Death of a President, claiming that he had breached an agreement and had violated the Kennedy family's privacy.[17] According to Harris polls which Robert Kintner and Fred Panzer examined and passed on to the President, the negative publicity for the Kennedy family resulting from the suit was costly to Robert Kennedy. According to an advance release of a Harris poll given to the White House,

> Senator Robert Kennedy's standing with the American people has taken a tumble downward. By 56-44 percent, the public now prefers President Johnson to Kennedy as the Democratic candidate for President in 1968. Only two months ago, Kennedy was the choice over Mr. Johnson by 54-46 percent.

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[17] See William R. Manchester, The Death of a President, November 20-November 25, 1963 (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

The survey also indicated that support for a Kennedy vice-presidency was also slipping, with Vice President Hubert Humphrey only narrowly behind the New York Senator as the public's preference.[18]

Despite Senator Kennedy's drop in public appeal, the White House remained uneasy about this potential challenge from within the Democratic party. Even as Harris uncovered damage to Kennedy's reputation, White House staffer Fred Panzer received word that a Gallup poll also scheduled for release in late January contained "bad news and will dispel any optimism from the Harris poll bounce back." Panzer reported to Cabinet Secretary Kintner that Gallup found a nine percent Kennedy lead as the preferred candidate among adults and thirteen percent lead among Democrats.[19] This information discrepancy led to a renewed interest in the source of Kennedy's popularity. Although this was resolved when White House staffer Jim Jones reported to the President his discovery that the Gallup

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[18] Kintner to LBJ, plus attachments, 1/27/67, "Elections Campaigns (1967-)," Confidential File, Box 77. Attachments include two advance releases by Louis Harris. The block quote is from the Harris release for January 30, 1967.

[19] Panzer to Kintner, 1/26/67, "Elections Campaigns (1967-)" Confidential file, Box 77.

poll was out of date, and therefore inaccurate,[20] the attention to the Democratic potential challenger continued. In early March, Robert Kintner reported to the President with poll results showing RFK losing an election to George Romney and tieing Richard Nixon, and that these findings could be attributed to Kennedy's increasingly intense stance against U.S. policies in Vietnam.[21] Yet the White House concern continued. On March 23, Panzer informed the President that a Gallup poll completed March 15 showed a preference for LBJ over RFK.[22] The President again received assurance in May:

> On Wednesday, May 10, 1967, Gallup will release a poll showing your pairing with RFK. It will show
> --LBJ now has a decisive edge over RFK.
> --RFK has lost much of his support.[23]

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[20] Jones to LBJ, 1/28/67, filed in George Gallup Name File.

The original poll, as it turned out was taken before Johnson's 1967 State of the Union Address, which the administration believed to be a source of a boost in support.

21 Kintner to LBJ, 3/3/67, "2-1-67--3-15-67," PR 16, Box 348.

[22] Panzer to LBJ, 3/23/67, "3-1-67--4-20-67," PR 16, Box 348.

[23] Panzer to LBJ, 5/5/67, "May," Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 398.

The President was particularly interested in this, and requested more information. Panzer informed Johnson that the public had undergone "a complete turnaround in preference between LBJ and RFK since January 1967." At the beginning of 1967, Kennedy was preferred over Johnson 48% to 39%, but by late April Johnson was preferred 49% to 37%. According to Gallup, Kennedy's losses came largely from Democrats, with Johnson leading 52% to 39% among Democrats. Gallup cited the Manchester book controversy, a rise in LBJ's popularity, and Kennedy's dissent on Vietnam policy as the reasons for the changed preference.[24] For a while, fears of a Kennedy challenge were quieted.

Concern about Democratic support can be seen in other ways, however. In February 1967, White House officials anticipated the early endorsement of LBJ from Iowa Governor Harold E. Hughes, and became anxious when it seemed slow in coming.[25] On April 19, Johnson discovered that the Gallup Poll had surveyed Republican county chairman nationwide, and wished to know if a

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[24] Panzer to LBJ, 5/8/67, filed in the George Gallup Name file.

[25] Markman to Watson, 2/20/67, "2-1-67--3-15-67," PR 16, Box 348.

similar poll had been conducted within the Democratic party; White House aide Jim Jones considered this an "urgent matter."[26] When Marvin Watson responded to the President with a memo from Fred Panzer explaining that the last poll of Democratic county chairmen was in June 1964, the President wrote on the bottom, "M-- Can't some editor we know get Dem. chairmen views? L."[27]

Strategic concern for stabilizing the base of popular support dictated the administration's increased attention to their status in the Democratic party. But this attention was different than the Phase I attention to the entire population. In Phase II, the administration focused its concern on narrower segment of the population.

There were also some other subtle changes. The concern with political survival forced the administration to ask different questions about the public. While the administration was still concerned about the popularity of its programs, this concern was motivated by the desire to stabilize its level of

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[26] See Jones to Watson (plus attachments), 4/19/67, filed in the George Gallup Name File.

[27] Panzer to Watson, 4/20/67, filed in the George Gallup Name File.

support. No longer was the administration seeking out new issues on the public's issue agenda, but rather it was more concerned about ascertaining public attitudes about the policies already in place. Of course, Johnson had already proposed most of the legislation of his ambitious agenda by Phase II. Still, the change in the strategic concerns about public opinion resulted in some subtle changes in the questions asked of the public.

More significantly, however, were the changes in the interpretation of information about public opinion. As the following discussion will argue, the answers to the question "What's going wrong?" added to the administration's narrowed scope of understanding public opinion.

Interpreting Public Opinion

The way in which the Johnson administration distanced itself from public opinion can be seen in the administration's interpretation of public opinion. Throughout Phase II, it will argued, the administration had great difficulty accepting the decline in public

approval as a serious problem. The manifestation of the denial varied from the belief that the decline was a temporary phenomenon to the conviction that it was Johnson's communication technique which caused it. The forthcoming analysis will illustrate that the administration operated on the assumption that widespread public support still existed, even if it wasn't obvious.

An explanation for these Phase II beliefs can be found in cognitive dissonance theory. The Phase I belief that public desires and presidential actions were in accord had become strained.[28] As a result, members of the administration embarked on dissonance reduction, which manifested itself in the belief in a poor communication technique, and an imminent rise in popularity. Both of these beliefs were more palatable than believing that the public support loss represented real disenchantment with the administration. And as the following analysis will illustrate, these selective perceptions led the administration to an estrangement from the possibility of a richer understanding of the American public.

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[28] Festinger observes that dissonance can result from incongruity with past experiences. See Festinger, p. 4.

i. A failure to communicate? A problem of image?

The most striking feature of internal discussions about the American public during early Phase II was the omnipresent belief that the drop in approval was due to problems in White House communications. A very common phrase used during this period was "the message isn't getting out." The general belief was that the people really would support the President if they more clearly understood what he was doing. The situation wasn't really serious; after all, support would come as the people could be made to understand.

This attitude is so pervasive as to be startling. On May 17, Robert E. Kintner distributed a memo to Johnson and his chief assistants indicating his displeasure with the President's speeches. "The material that is being developed for his [the President's] consideration is not adequate, fresh enough or sufficiently significant," wrote Kintner. The memo arranged plans for future speechwriting and concluded,

> It is the desire of the President to...concentrate more on major addresses in an important setting, in order that he will have the opportunity to explain more fully and more carefully his domestic and foreign policies and his future plans and their execution.

Johnson wrote on his copy, "Bob--good. L."[29] On May 20th a staff meeting was held to discuss the problem. Kintner and Moyers observed that the President was "not being adequately serviced" in his speeches and those involved in the speechwriting process had become "embarrassed by the methods of procedure and the results."[30]

Curiously, several memos written in various offices on June 9, 1966 also reiterated this theme. Hayes Redmon, assistant to Bill Moyers, wrote two memos to his superior that day discussing Johnson's falling public approval. One memo reports that Redmon's discussions that morning with pollsters Gallup, Harris, and Quayle, led him to conclude that the President must "offer 'some ray of hope' that the situation will improve." A later memo that day indicates Redmon's reflections:

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[29] Memo, Kintner to LBJ, Moyers, Watson, et al., 5/17/66, Confidential File, "Speeches (1966)" WHCF, Box 86.

[30] Memo, to LBJ, 5/20/66, "Speeches (1966)," Confidential File, Box 86. Although the portion of the memo in this file does not indicate the author, other documents in the box suggest that Robert Kintner was probably the author.

> The memorandum I sent you earlier today pointed out that the pollsters feel Vietnam and inflation are the primary causes for the President's slump in the polls. While I agree that these are certainly no good, I have the strong impression that our problems go beyond a mere statistical read-out on some worrisome issues. I feel that the President is simply not getting through to the people. I fear that his regionalism, accent and his press reputation for cantankerousness and willfulness are creating an atmosphere of unpopularity for him. I believe there is a serious need to freshen his image.

Redmon further noted that many discussions with Democratic Party operative Fred Dutton confirmed his own beliefs:

> [H]e said that the Great Society is simply not being sold. He feels the fact that the President achieved the greatest legislative program in our country's history has not gotten across to the public.[31]

Moyers relayed the information of the first memo to President Johnson, including the need "to offer some ray of hope."[32]

Similarly, a June 9 memo to Marvin Watson from assistant Sherman Markman expressed a similar theme. Markman's concern about a negative Iowa Poll resulted

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[31] Memos(2), 6/9/66, Redmon to Moyers, "BDM Memos, June-July 11, 1966," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 12. Emphasis mine.

[32] Memo, Moyers to LBJ, 6/9/66, "Public Opinion Polls (1966) 4 of 5," Confidential File, Box 82.

in conversations with Iowa Governor Harold E. Hughes and his chief political advisor. The Iowans discussed the problem that Johnson was having in their agricultural state. "Both agreed that the problem is image rather than substance, but the bad image has struck home." They recommended that Johnson take advantage of a scheduled June 30 speech in Iowa by giving a "strong presentation" explaining the importance of the Midwest. "It should be extremely down to earth." Markman continued, "The Governor is strong in his suggestion that the President throw away the script and talk straight to the people as he can do so magnificently."[33] Note the pervasive belief that speeches, communication, and correction of "image" problems are at the core of the administration's difficulties.

The final June 9 memo dealing with the image problem was from Kintner to LBJ and dealt with the subject of inflation.

> I have been trying to figure out how to get over nationally the story that while prices are higher, people earn more, their living standards are higher, and theoretically at least, they should be able to save more.

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[33] Memo, Markman to Watson, 6/9/66, "Public Opinion Polls (1966) 4 of 5," Confidential File, Box 82.

Kintner asked Johnson for permission to talk to Treasury Secretary Henry Fowler and CEA Chairman Gardiner Ackley about "the assembling of some real information, in a simple form that people can understand." Johnson approved.[34] The premise of the memo is that inflation would not be a political problem if the White House could only communicate more effectively.

Various memos that summer before the midterm election indicate the continued White House obsession with speechmaking. A memo from Moyers to Johnson was attached to a survey of members of Congress about the issues of concern in their districts. The members were also asked about "the most important subjects for speeches" in their area, and that information was carefully tabulated according to region of the country.[35] A June 27 memo from Redmon to Moyers relayed information with various individuals about Johnson's deteriorating support among farmers; "all are agreed that what's needed is a 'tub thumping' farm

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[34] Memo, Kintner to LBJ, 6/9/66, "Public Opinion Polls (1 of 5)," Confidential File, Box 81.

[35] Memo, Moyers to LBJ, 6/10/66, "Public Opinion Polls (1966) 4 of 5," Confidential File, Box 82.

speech...what we really need is some good quotable material on the farm situation from the President."[36] In early August, assistant Harry McPherson returned from a trip and discussed with Moyers the opinions of people he met in Rhode Island, and made some suggestions. Moyers passed the list of suggestions along to the President, including this one:

> As much outright candor, even to the point of risk, about what the President is doing or not doing in every major crisis situation. Honest mistakes of judgment sometimes sit better with the public than success won by sleight-of-hand. If he could be seen to stumble, occasionally, while trying to do the best he could for the public, it would help.[37]

Similarly, Will Sparks wrote to Robert Kintner on August 26 about Johnson's "speech-writing problems."

> The President is not getting enough credit for being the kind of man he is, and for the ideas he supports.
>
> One reason is that neither his personality nor his true concerns are being projected adequately in his formal appearances...

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[36] Memo, Redmon to Moyers, 6/27/66, "BDM Memos, "July 12-August 1966," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 12.

[37] Memo, Moyers to LBJ, 8/4/66, "BDM Memos, July 12-August 1966," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 12.

> It might help, I believe, if more attention were paid to what I call...the purely rhetorical aspects of the President's appearances.[38]

Numerous other examples could be given of the administration's faith that they could talk their way out of their problems if they could only be more clear, more open, more forceful. But one document brings home this idea more than any other. Staff Assistant Charles Maguire typed 27 pages of notes from a November 3, 1966, meeting between the President and his speechwriters. To an archival researcher, these notes are a diamond in a haystack, and remarkable for several reasons. The notes are very detailed, and include long quotes of comments from those in attendance. Furthermore, the notes reveal the earthy, home-spun side of Johnson that is often missing in the bland memoirs and histories of his administration. The memo includes colorful language, analogies to his "uncle Ezra," comparison of his desire for peace with sexual urges, and chides to his aides about their wives' physical statures.

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[38] Memo, Sparks to Kintner, 8/26/66, "Speeches (1966)," Confidential File, Box 86.

Most striking for the purposes here, however, is the firmly expressed belief that speechwriting was the culprit in dealing with the public. Several notes of comments by the President can be quoted at length to demonstrate this point.

> He saw two deficiencies in present speeches: (1) "Sex 'em up more." (2) "Make them Presidential."...
>
> The President discussed the speeches he had delivered on his Asian-Pacific trip. He felt they did not communicate his goals. They were not simple enough, sharp enough to get the message across...
>
> The President referred to the Manila communique as a case in point of bad communications. It was much too long. It was not at all quotable....
>
> The President's general impression of the Manila communique: "It constipated me. I vomited twice."...
>
> He elaborated on the one-sided Liberal arguments, referring to...criticism about U.S. bombing "of steel plants and oil refineries."...
>
> "We've got to get this point over...it isn't fair and we're not doing the job...we can use the White House and all the Government to put these points over...but we are not doing it...we are too damn soft and puddin-headed."...
>
> As an example of an area where we have failed repeatedly to communicate a true and meaningful story, the President instanced "higher prices and inflation." "Folks just don't know that they can pay those high prices and still have more left over."

> The same is true of the Vietnam story. The same is true of so many signing statements; "no one listens, no one remembers."[39]

What makes all these references to communication technique and image so crucial is the underlying premise that the people really would support the administration if they knew what it was doing. This can be explained by Fiske and Taylor's notion of selective interpretation. Note that the administration did not entertain the notion that the public had good reasons not to like what the administration was doing. Perhaps this was correct, but there was no real reason to sustain this tacit assumption.

Of course, many have noted that Johnson communicated poorly in large staged settings.[40] But

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[39] Memo, Maguire, to Kintner, 11/7/66, "Speeches (1966)," Confidential File, Box 86.

Johnson perhaps clung to his belief that "the message isn't getting out" longer than his speechwriters. One revealing point about these notes is that in Johnson's absence, which occurred in the middle of the meeting, the speechwriters agreed that a major problem was Johnson's insistence on headline grabbing features (called "grabbers" by the President) in all his speeches. When Johnson returned, he said he wanted in every speech "one good lead...even if you have to say 'my wife is ten months pregnant.'" While others were shying away from sensational presentation, Johnson was still holding on to the belief that communication technique could solve his problems.

[40] See, for example, Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power (New York: The

the administration's problems were clearly more than simply image. After all, this was the same Lyndon Johnson who had won 61.1% of the popular vote in 1964, and the same Lyndon Johnson who had at least two years of strong support. Johnson's public speaking technique left much to be desired, but it was clearly not the cause of all of the administration's troubles.

In fact, it is important to point out that the administration faced serious problems with its programs which were not simply problems with image. As noted earlier, inflation rose dramatically in 1966, stemming primarily from the added spending in Vietnam and on the Great Society. Many of the problems associated with the War on Poverty were leading to urban and racial unrest, and the administration had few answers for the resulting problems;[41] it was not necessarily image alone that caused only 32% of the population to have a favorable opinion of the Great Society (according to Gallup Polls). By the end of 1966, it was becoming increasingly clear that the war in Vietnam would be

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American Library, 1986), p. 117-118; and Kearns, p. 317-318.

[41] See Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding, (New York: The Free Press, 1969), especially chapters 7 and 8.

protracted; there were nearly 400,000 American troops in Vietnam, 6377 Americans had been killed, and there was no obvious solution to the conflict in sight. There was no good reason for the administration to believe that image was primarily responsible for causing nearly a third of the public to declare in November 1966 that American involvement in the Vietnam conflict was a mistake and for 40% to disapprove of Johnson's handling of the situation in Vietnam (according to published Gallup polls).[42] Many people may have had serious questions about administration policies, but the administration chose not to seriously address that possibility.

This Phase II behavior can be explained by continuing the analogy made earlier of the president as a perpetual candidate on Kingdon's congratulation-rationalization continuum. According to Kingdon, winners tend to believe that their actions were the important determinants in election outcomes. Johnson's average monthly Gallup approval rating was within 3% of

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[42] See Small, Johnson, Nixon and the Doves, tables 1 and 2. For a discussion of the high costs of the rather minimal war progress by 1967, See George C. Herring, America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975, second edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), p. 149-156.

the 50% mark for seven of the fifteen months of Phase II; thus, Johnson was still sufficiently high for him to be considered a winner here, but the analogy would be to a "marginal winner." Indeed, the administration was still subtly flattering itself by the belief that speeches and images were the cause of public decline. After all, they could reason, the substantive actions of their administration were still supported.

As noted, cognitive dissonance theory again contributes to a satisfactory explanation for the administration's behavior. The declining congruence between administration actions and public support motivated the administration to seek the consonance of Phase I. An efficient dissonance reducing technique involved selectively interpreting information to create a new cognition; namely, that style and not substance was to blame. Style, after all, is more easily changed and less serious.

ii Popularity is just around the corner

One feature of public opinion interpretation which continued throughout the entirety of Phase II was the belief that the declining support was temporary or not as bad as it seemed. Often this belief manifested

itself in statements indicating that opposition was from a vocal minority, and therefore did not constitute a real threat. Or sometimes it expressed itself in unsubstantiated statements showing that while people disagreed with some of Johnson's policies, they could still be considered supporters. Phase II is also riddled with comments that public support would be increasing soon, though these statements were seldom true in the short run and ultimately wrong over the range of Phase II. This represents a curious switch from Phase I, when the fear of support loss motivated the administration to be more attentive to public opinion. As the following discussion will illustrate, during Phase II the administration could subtly close itself off to public opinion through its confidence that a return to popularity was imminent.

This tendency to give a rosy view of the political climate can be seen from the early days of Phase II.[43]

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[43] A similar observation has been made by Bruce E. Altschuler in "Lyndon Johnson and the Public Polls," Public Opinion Quarterly, Fall 1986, p. 288-289. Altschuler gives several examples of the administration's attempt to "emphasize the positive." Although Altschuler does not make note of it, all seven of his examples occur in the transitional period of public approval, which I have labelled Phase II.

For example, after informing Bill Moyers that pollster Oliver Quayle found in North Carolina a 53% disapproval of Johnson's handling of the Vietnam War, Hayes Redmon relayed the pollster's view that

> the negative rating does not mean that there is anything approximating public support for the noisy minority voices of [Vietnam policy detractors Arkansas Senator J. William] Fulbright, [Oregon Senator Wayne] Morse, [General James M.] Gavin and the New York Times.[44]

The following example demonstrates how the administration could drown out the bad news with the good. On July 26, Hayes Redmon sent Charles Roche a memo which listed the "political moods" that congressional candidates would face in the 1966 election:

> (1) A trend of opinion favorable to the President as regards his job in general and his handling of Vietnam in particular.
> (2) Public frustration over the duration of an unpopular war in Vietnam.[45]

On February 17, 1967, Fred Panzer informed the President of his latest Gallup approval rating, which was 46%. Gallup published the numbers in such a way as

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[44] Memo, Redmon to Moyers, 5/26/66, "BDM memos, April-May 1966," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 12.

[45] Memo, Redmon to Roche, 7/26/66, filed in the George Gallup Name File, WHCF.

to demonstrate that fewer people "strongly approved" (down to 16% from 23% in September 1966) or "strongly disapproved" (down to 17% from 26%) of the President. Despite the fact that there was no significant improvement in the approval rating and there was a decrease in strong supporters, Panzer explained it optimistically:

> What does this mean? Apparently, the public is marking time. Most significantly, the violent opposition is beginning to soften, perhaps because
> --people have more understanding of the President's problems.
> --people are impressed with your post-State of the Union posture.[46]

(Note that this quote also reveals another Phase II phenomenon--the belief that the people need only "understand" the administration to accept it). Another Panzer memo was blatant in its attempt to accentuate the positive; it began: "Here's a better way of interpreting the Gallup release for yesterday, March 12, 1967."[47]

Finally, the entirety of Phase II is marked by a faith in an eventual upsurge in the polls; few of these

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[46] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 2/17/67, "Presidential Memo Backup Material, Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 399.

[47] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 3/13/67 filed in George Gallup name File, WHCF.

predictions had even short-term validity. On May 26, 1966, for example, the White House staff took note of one of Oliver Quayle's observations in Wyoming. "Olly says he feels confident, despite these unhappy figures, that the president will 'come back' by September."[48] In January 1967, Jim Jones informed Johnson that a negative Gallup poll which seemed to repudiate a positive Harris poll was inaccurate, because the Gallup data were a month old and predated some significant changes including "the favorable response to your State of the Union Message."[49] The implication, of course, was that improvement would be evident in the next poll. It was not. Similarly, Panzer's analysis of a February poll inspired him to inform the President that "a breakthrough on the upward side is highly likely if things keep on the way they are."[50] There was no breakthrough. On April 5, Robert Kintner informed the President that he was feeling positive about the future. "I sense a greater upsurge over the next few

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[48] Memo, Redmon to Moyers, 5/26/66, "BDM Memos, April-May 1966," Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 12.

[49] Memo, Jones to LBJ, 1/28/67, filed in George Gallup Name File, WHCF.

[50] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 2/17/67, "February," Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 398.

months. I don't know, obviously, the reasons for this, and I think they are probably rather complex factors..." Despite the fact that Kintner did little more than relay positive "vibes," the President reacted warmly. "Tell him, 'The President liked that very much,'" Johnson told his secretary.[51] On May 12, 1967, Panzer informed LBJ that some positive Harris poll results slated for publication the following week might "seriously jolt the hopes of the two G.O.P. front runners" and "take the Vietnam war out of the campaign."[52] Of course, neither occurred. Optimism like this became more difficult to muster with passing time.

Fiske and Taylor's concept of selective attention to information is useful here. The cognitive attempt to return to consonance between public support and administration actions is one explanation for the Phase II optimism. The drive to reduce the dissonance may have resulted in the administration's selective attention to the declining amount of positive

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[51] Memo attachment, LBJ to Mary S., 4/5/67, filed in the George Gallup Name File, WHCF.

[52] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 5/12/67, "May," Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 398.

information about public opinion and the resulting new belief that popularity would soon return. This belief is significant, since the administration could allay its concerns about additional support loss. As a result it could comfortably be less attentive to public opinion.

And the administration was susceptible to anyone who could play off the desire to return to consonance. George Reedy, in his The Twilight of the Presidency, notes the importance of emphasizing the positive. Reedy notes that a strong president "has a propensity to create an environment to his liking and to weed out ruthlessly those assistants who might persist in presenting him with irritating thoughts."[53] In comparing the contemporary White House to Versailles, Reedy, who served as Johnson's press secretary, observes

> The sensitive mind boggles at the revelation that the...assistant who shows up at the bed chamber at 7:15 am in the morning with a

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[53] George E. Reedy, The Twilight of the Presidency: From Johnson to Reagan (New York: New American Library, 1987), p. 87.

> Gallup poll demonstrating a five point rise in popularity is displaying the total sum of the court wisdom of a Richelieu (who, of course, had other forms of wisdom as well).[54]

One wonders if Reedy had Fred Panzer in mind. Panzer, whose sycophantic manner became clear in even a cursory examination of his files, was often instrumental in presenting information in a more palatable way. This trait, which could soften the blow of bad news, will be even more common and have more serious consequences as Phase III approaches, and as Panzer became more central to the integration and interpretation of poll data for the President.

iii Fear of overselling major programs

As noted in the first part of this chapter, when the administration first became aware of the slide in public support, it sought to ascertain the cause. Just as in Phase I when the questions about the source of the popularity led to the belief in the desire for major action, the Phase II questions about the source of the decline of popularity again focused attention on the administration's programs. As a result, throughout Phase II there was concern that the rhetoric of

[54] Ibid, p. 81.

sweeping and dramatic government programs, such as "the Great Society" and the "War on Poverty," was becoming unacceptable to the public. The public was believed to be suspicious of broad action, and administration officials began to prefer to address legislative goals individually rather than as part of a large front. This observation particularly underscores the administration's Phase II tendency to change its style, not its substance.

The first instance of this tendency actually occurred during the later part of Phase I. On January 9, 1966, Bill Moyers presented Johnson a draft of the State of the Union message. Moyers explained his choice of emphasis by saying, "I believe the mood of the country and the Congress call for simplicity and understatement not rhetorical flourishes."[55] Nonetheless, Johnson's 1966 agenda remained legislatively ambitious.

But during Phase II the phenomenon was particularly noticeable. For example, the Governor of Iowa relayed to Sherman Markman his belief that

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[55] Memo, Moyers to LBJ, 1/9/66, "1/10/67 State of the Union Message Memorandums - for and from the President," Statements File, Box 226.

Johnson's anti-poverty programs gave Iowans the impression that the "administration has abandoned the Midwest in favor of the large urban areas."[56] The previously mentioned notes of a speechwriter's meeting also reveals similar concerns. Harry McPherson cited a problem to be avoided: "We are saddled with 'a long history of Presidents reaching for high notes...' and the result is a self-defeating pattern of Presidents over-reaching themselves."[57] Memos dealing with the preparation of the 1967 State of the Union Message also reflected discomfort with grand scale legislative programs. After advising Bill Moyers to be careful in using a "consolidation" theme, Panzer concluded that the speech should "propose what remains to be done in general terms: consolidation and efficiency in government could be stressed here."[58] A December 2 memo recorded the concern of those meeting on the topic. Moyers indicated the need to address the major criticisms of Johnson: "1. That he is a promoter. 2.

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[56] Memo, Markman to Watson, 6/9/66, "Public Opinion Polls (1966) 4 of 5," Confidential File, Box 82.

[57] Memo, Maguire to Kintner, 11/7/66, "Speeches (1966)," Confidential File, Box 86.

[58] Memo, Panzer to Moyers, 11/23/66, "State of the Union," Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 418.

That he oversells his programs... 3. That he is too program oriented...". Doug Cater concurred, "We should make the State of the Union non-programatic. We need to define what has happened to the Great Society."[59] Indeed the 1967 State of the Union was rife with Johnson's acknowledgement that his administration needed to tighten the growth in government.

> Three years ago we set out to create...instruments of social progress. This required trial and error--and it has produced both. But as we learn, through success and failure, we are changing our strategy...

Later the President stated,

> This is our goal throughout the entire federal government. Every program will be evaluated. Grant-in-aid programs will be improved and simplified as desired by many of our local administrators and Governors.
>
> Where there have been mistakes, we will try very hard to fix them.[60]

Indeed, the subdued nature of the address caused some problems for the administration. Unlike previous years when civil rights proposals received major backing, in 1967 it received only two sentences. As a result,

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[59] Redmon to Moyers, 12/2/66, "Memorandums," Statements Box 225, WHCF.

[60] "State of the Union Message Asks Reaffirmation of Commitment to Viet Nam War, Domestic Reforms," 1967 CQ Almanac, p. 3 - a.

telephone calls had to be made to Martin Luther King and numerous reporters to assuage fears that the President had backed off his commitment to civil rights.[61]

Nonetheless, the general belief was that it was the rhetoric of big programs, not government action, which got the administration in trouble; this should not be surprising given the belief in Phase II that image was the administration's primary problem. On December 6, 1966, Tad Cantril, assistant to Fred Panzer (and son of pollster Hadley Cantril), expressed his concern to Panzer.

> A Sunday Gallup Poll showed 44% having an unfavorable opinion of the Great Society...
>
> This suggests that the phrase "Great Society" is a bit ideological in nature. Recalling Lloyd Free's differentiation between the operational and the ideological: well over half of the American people are "liberal" when it comes to specific programs...while well over half are "conservative" when it comes to approving various statements about political values.
>
> Louis Harris also showed public disapproval of the "war on poverty."...

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[61] See Memos (3), Alexander to LBJ (1) and Kintner to LBJ (2), 1/11/67, "Comments on LBJ's State of the Union Message," Statements, Box 227.

> ...I would suspect that many people would approve of specific programs embodied in the phrase "the Great Society," but I would also suspect that many would have negative feelings about the phrase itself.
>
> Thus, looking ahead to 1968, would it be possible to dwell on the specific programs and to underplay the phraseology of "Great Society" and "War on Poverty?"[62]

Assistant Secretary of H.E.W., Ralph Huitt, informed Secretary John Gardner in December of 1966 that members of Congress didn't like the rhetoric of federal programs.

> Two members of our House education committee argue that this Administration talks too much about poverty and civil rights. These men are strong and effective supporters of all Administration legislation for civil rights and help for the disadvantaged, and they will continue to be. Nonetheless they believe we should not talk about it so much...
>
> The ideas of the two members of Congress have been expressed, in various less coherent ways, by others to whom we have talked.[63]

A February 17, 1967 memo from Panzer to LBJ had a subsection entitled, "The Changing Presidential Image." Panzer, exuding ever-present Phase II optimism, asserted, "The great watershed in your image seems to

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[62] Memo, Cantril to Panzer, 12/6/66, "Cantril, Tad," Panzer 326. Cantril was referring to Lloyd Free's thesis in The Political Beliefs of Americans (New Brunswick: N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1967).

[63] Memo, Huitt to Gardner, 12/28/66, "Health, Education and Welfare 1966," Office Files of Mike Manatos, Box 19.

date from the State of the Union Message." Panzer proceeded to show the positive comments from various columnists who were often critical of the President: the New Republic's TRB liked the "quiet," "moderate," and "restrained," Johnson; Joseph Kraft said that LBJ "has shown a growing disposition to come off the bombast and hyperbole;" Evans and Novak approved of Johnson's "stark realism" and "ended years of erratic propaganda from Washington designed to build up false hopes;" and Walter Lippmann ("no sycophant") found Johnson's budget "refreshingly straightforward" and devoid of "the phoniness of last year's message."[64] The administration's belief that appearances were the crucial problem, however, led to a cosmetic response to public opinion. The non-programatic rhetoric was seen as improving the image and paving the way for greater public approval without a substantial revision in the administration's policies. Rhetorical changes received priority in Phase II.

Of course, no turnaround in the downward trend occurred.

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[64] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 2/17/67, "February," Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 398.

Conclusion

The Johnson administration narrowed its scope of attention to public opinion during Phase II. The administration's strategic concern with public opinion and the subsequent questions it asked about the American public resulted, to a large extent, in the administration's distancing itself from a richer understanding of public opinion. First, the administration sought to discover the source of the decline. This led it to focus its attention on image, self-portrayal, and the rhetoric of the administration's major domestic programs. The administration seldom entertained the notion that there may have been real widespread discontent which, if not checked, could worsen. Second, the administration sought to define and consolidate its base of public support, not only to prevent further decline in the always necessary public approval, but also to prepare for the elections in 1966 and 1968. But these concerns amidst declining approval led the administration to prioritize its attention to the Democratic Party rather than the whole public. This is particularly true as the administration began to consider Johnson's 1968

presidential election. In a practice that was to become more problematic and more common in Phase III, the administration became concerned with Johnson's public appeal relative to the other possible candidate, Robert Kennedy. Instead of focusing their concern on public opinion about Johnson, the administration's fears could be allayed if Johnson could prove more popular than Kennedy. By Phase II, the administration had changed its mode of concern for public opinion, with some subtle consequences, including a diminished level of attention to the public's issue agenda.

Cognitive dissonance theory and the importance of public approval to the contemporary presidency offer some explanation of the administration's Phase II interpretation of public opinion. Unlike Phase I, when the administration could use public approval for an indication of self-worth and a cause for self-congratulation, Phase II was marked by a discrepancy between the administration's belief about its actions and its information about public opinion. As a result, it created the belief in a deficient communication technique, which allowed it to act as if the public really would support Johnson if it understood his presidency more. This also led to the belief that

public support would return as soon as the people caught on to what the administration was trying to do.

The process of interpreting public opinion during Phase II led the administration to a diminished understanding of public opinion. The widespread belief within the White House that image was the primary problem for LBJ was largely unsubstantiated and led to a situation in which the administration could more readily dismiss the notion that real public disenchantment may have existed. Furthermore, the administration's conviction that public support would imminently return made matters worse. Unlike Phase I, when the fear of support loss kept the administration attentive to public opinion, Phase II's optimism gave the administration sufficient excuse to not examine its sources of public opinion information more carefully.

A series of events in late 1967 suggest that the Phase II mode of interpreting public opinion may have had serious consequences for the fate of the Johnson administration. Just as the Phase I attention to public opinion may have led to Johnson's deception about his intent in Vietnam, the Phase II belief in the need for better communication and image may have led the administration to lead a public relations effort to

garner support for Johnson's Vietnam policy. Throughout mid-1967 the administration began a rather successful major public relations effort to build support for the war. This effort included the establishment of an ostensibly private organization called The Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, which claimed as members such notables as Presidents Eisenhower and Truman, who served as honorary co-chairs. As part of the public relations effort, General William Westmoreland and Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker were called back to the U.S. to gather public support for the war.[65] Although some key events of the public relations effort, such as the U.S. tour of General Westmoreland, took place during Phase III, the planning for the public relations offensive took place in Phase II.[66] This is significant because some have credited the optimism resulting from the late 1967 public relations campaign with the mass disillusionment which occurred after the Vietcong's surprise strength

[65] Herring, p. 182-183.

[66] For interesting documents concerning the public relations effort, including the White House complicity in the formation of the Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, see the folders pertaining to Vietnam in the Confidential Files, Boxes 72 and 73.

shown in the Tet offensive of late January of 1968.[67] It is interesting to note that the planning for this consequential public relations event occurred during Phase II, when communication was commonly cited as a prime suspect of the administration's problems.

The strategic concern for public opinion and the interpretation of it during Phase II resulted in a change from the mode of understanding public opinion seen during Phase I. This change represents a subtle closing off of public opinion linkage to the President.

But the bad news continued for the administration. By Phase III, the evidence that public disenchantment was widespread and real became too overwhelming for the administration to continue to dismiss its problem by relying on optimism or deciding to work on communication technique. Nonetheless, as the following chapter will indicate, the administration's realization of its problem did not enhance public opinion linkage to the White House. Instead, the administration further distanced itself from the public.

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[67] Herring, p. 203. See also Small, Johnson, Nixon and the Doves, p. 124.

Chapter 5

Phase III: The Distant Public

Johnson's popularity had dropped significantly by the fall of 1967. Although Phase II was a period of steady decline, the administration's levels of public approval were frequently good enough to maintain the hope that public approval would rise. But the second half of 1967 was marked by a series of events which permanently scarred the Johnson administration: race riots in Detroit in late July; a massive anti-war march on the Pentagon in October; and a decision by Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy to challenge Johnson for the Democratic nomination in November. Gallups's published approval rating for Johnson at the start of Phase III reflected the administration's difficulties, remaining below 40% from August through October.

By November 1967, however, the administration began a brief respite from bad news. Johnson's approval rating crept up slowly to 41% in November, 46% in December, and even to 48% by January 1968. The rise in approval may have resulted from some optimistic reports of the Vietnam war's progress made during the U.S. visits of General Westmoreland and Ambassador

Bunker. But Johnson's political fortunes were lost with the optimism when, in late January 1968, the Vietcong coordinated a surprisingly strong attack during the Vietnamese Tet holidays. Public opinion almost immediately turned against the war. In February, CBS news anchorman Walter Cronkite told the American people,

> It seems now more certain than ever that the bloody experience in Vietnam is to end in a stalemate. This summer's almost certain standoff will either end in real give-and-take negotiations or terrible escalation...
>
> To say that we are closer to victory is to believe, in the face of evidence, the optimists who have been wrong in the past...to say that we are mired in stalemate seems the only realistic, yet unsatisfactory, conclusion.[1]

Furthermore, by late March, only 26% of the public approved Johnson's handling of the war, according to Gallup polls. Then in early March, Johnson narrowly defeated Senator Eugene McCarthy in the New Hampshire primary by less than 7%. By late March, the Gallup public approval rating for Johnson was a mere 36%. On March 31, Johnson withdrew his candidacy from the 1968 presidential election.

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[1] Herbert Y. Schandler, The Unmaking of a President: Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 197.

The administration's reaction to the low levels of public support is interesting. Instead of being more meticulous in its attention to and interpretation of public opinion in order to shore up support and prepare for the 1968 election, the White House closed itself off to many possible understandings of public opinion. As will be shown, by Phase III, Johnson's slow process of "losing touch" with the people had worsened.

Phase III is defined here as the period beginning in August 1967 when Johnson's popularity first fell below 40% in published Gallup approval reports. Nonetheless, as noted earlier, much of the behavior observed during Phase III began in the later months of Phase II. What is crucial to observe in the following analysis, however, is how the administration's mode of understanding public opinion shifted with the continuously poor levels of public support for Johnson.

The pattern of analysis in this chapter will deviate slightly from that of previous chapters. As always, the strategic concerns which motivated attention to public opinion will be analyzed first. But before analyzing the interpretation of public opinion, this chapter will include a brief section

discussing the events surrounding Johnson's March 31, 1968, decision to withdraw his candidacy from the 1968 election.

The argument to be presented in the forthcoming analysis is that the Phase III features of the strategic concern for and interpretation of public opinion further narrowed the administration's understanding of public opinion and, subsequently, the degree of public linkage to the President.

Strategic Concerns

With the levels of public support reaching an all-time low and never achieving a sustained recovery, the administration had no choice but to focus its attention on protecting what remained of the power base. Fearful of further erosion of public support, Johnson and his staff focused their energies on preventing public disapproval from making the administration completely impotent. Indeed, the strategic importance of public support can clearly be seen in the administration's Phase III concern about public opinion; rather than attempting to acquire accurate information about public attitudes in order to act in a popular fashion, Johnson

frequently focused his concern on creating the appearance of public approval. Of course, Johnson continued to seek real approval when possible, but the appearance of popularity became equally sufficient. If indices of public support weren't available when dealing with other crucial political actors, the semblance of support was created to fill the need.

Phase III concern with the appearance of popularity manifested itself in two ways. Since public support is so crucial to the operations of the modern presidency, and since mass public support was not forthcoming during Phase III, the administration attempted to 1) publicize any indications it could find of pockets of support, and 2) manipulate the indicators of public support. This illustrates the degree to which the administration had closed itself off to the careful analysis and interpretation of public opinion. By Phase III, the administration tacitly had deemed the appearance of popularity as a sufficient substitute for any real understanding of public opinion.

i speaking of popularity

A curious use of public opinion became increasingly common in the second half of the Johnson

Administration: the White House began to attempt to curry public favor by informing the public how popular Johnson and his policies were. That is to say, Johnson resorted to telling the public how popular he was with them. Clearly, Johnson needed the appearance of popular legitimacy in order to operate effectively.

Of course, Johnson seldom actually spoke to the public about their opinions. Usually, he would ask his subordinates to coax others to reveal positive indicators of public opinion. For example, on May 7, 1967, while retreating to his central Texas ranch, Johnson was informed that his popularity and the support for his Vietnam policies were increasing. Johnson had the following message relayed to Press Secretary George Christian, "George: call a backgrounder on this. Just visit with them and show them this--AP, UPI, and two of the networks."[2] On October 17, 1967, Fred Panzer informed Johnson,

> I spoke to William J. Eaton of the Chicago Daily News as you requested. I gave him the data on recent Harris polls which showed you beating four GOP rivals nationally. I also gave him more on the New York poll.

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[2] Memo with photocopied top cover "The President's reactions relayed to Christian from the LBJ Ranch," 5/17/67, filed in the George Gallup Name File.

> He was very happy to get the information because he said he was puzzled by hearing so much about your low popularity. I think I helped clear this up for him.[3]

Later that month, Johnson took note of a favorable Roscoe Drummond article placed in the Congressional Record by New York Congressman Leonard Farbstein. The article demonstrated Johnson's lead in presidential pairings in New York state against Republicans Richard Nixon, Charles Percy, Ronald Reagan, and George Romney. Attached to a copy of the page from the Congressional Record was a note from Johnson, "George Christian: have Bill White and Drew Pearson write columns like this."[4] On November 16, 1967, Panzer forwarded some favorable poll results to George Christian with the message, "The President asked me to get to you some of the favorable polls and election results for backgrounding

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[3] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, "10-1-67--10-31-77," WHCF, PR 16, Box 349.

[4] Memo, LBJ to Christian, 10/27/67, filed in the Drew Pearson Name file. This memo is interesting for another reason. Many have claimed that Lyndon Johnson never understood the press or how to deal with it. Note Johnson's cavalier expectation that the press easily can be convinced to write a positive story. Indeed, George Reedy, one of Johnson's Press Secretaries, claimed that one of Johnson's major weaknesses was his "inability to understand the press;" he expected the press to act like political actors. See George Reedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, A Memoir (N.Y.: Andrews and McMeel, 1982), p. 59.

columnists. Roscoe Drummond for one."[5] Sometimes the requests were to members of the Congress rather than the press. On February 4, 1968, Johnson sent a memo to an unidentified recipient,

> ask them to be sure to get the Gallup poll of last Saturday and this Sunday and have a good speech written for somebody to put in the record--[Fred] Harris or [Gale] McGee. [Ed] Edmondson put [it] in [the] House side, but I want it in on the Senate.[6]

Occasionally Johnson's attempts to spread the good news bordered on the silly, as he would try to make national news out of minor local indicators of support. This occurred primarily during the second half of his administration, when the low approval level was cause for concern. On March 29, 1967, for example, Johnson suggested that George Christian give to columnists Roscoe Drummond or Richard Wilson poll results from Valley Times, a weekly paper in southern Worcester County, Massachusetts. The poll showed that of the 68 people who cast ballots, 58 preferred Johnson over

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[5] Memo, Panzer to Christian, 11/16/67, "11-1-67--11-21-67," WHCF, PR 16, Box 349.

[6] Memo, from LBJ, 2/4/68, filed the George Gallup Name File.

Massachusetts native Robert F. Kennedy.[7] On another occasion, Johnson was informed in a memo from Marvin Watson that eight high schools in Illinois chose Johnson as their "person most admired in the world."

> Some of the reasons why President Johnson was most admired were stated to be "because he faces a lot of responsibility and seems to handle it well." And, "because he is a very brilliant man." Another boy said that Johnson was admired because he "can evade all criticism and quiet all opposition."

Handwriting on the memo indicates that Johnson told aide Jim Jones, "Find [a] way to get this out--Drew Pearson or somehow." Another notation indicates that George Christian sent Drew Pearson a note, "Can you make something of this? Regards."[8]

ii. playing the numbers

One phenomenon particularly noticeable in the latter years of the administration is the degree to which the administration concerned itself with the numbers in the polls rather than the opinions reflected in the numbers. Again, this illustrates the

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[7] Memo, LBJ to Christian, "3-1-67--4-20--67," WHCF, PR 16, Box 348.

[8] Memo, Watson to LBJ, 10/24/67, filed in Drew Pearson Name File.

administration's strategic concern with protecting its power base, and contrasts with Phase I and II, when polls were used to identify pockets of potential support or to identify the President's public coalition. By Phase III, the polls themselves frequently became the issue, as the administration focused its energies on changing the poll numbers without necessarily attempting to change the opinions reflected in the numbers.

Administration concern with poll numbers during Phase III can be seen in its newly intensified attention to poll questions and survey techniques. In October 1967, Panzer forwarded to Johnson a letter from a Gallup interviewer who was disturbed by the fact that the approval question, "Do you approve or disapprove of the job President Johnson is doing as president?" did not allow respondents to qualify their answers. Panzer discussed the matter with statistician Richard Scammon, who suggested taking a poll with a substitute question, "Do you approve, disapprove, or partly approve and partly disapprove of the job President Johnson is doing?." Panzer explained,

> Then we show [Gallup] the results of [our] question...which presumably would reveal a high proportion having mixed feelings and try to get Gallup to change his question.

Johnson approved of the idea, scrawling on the memo a note to Marvin Watson, "M-, OK. What do we do about this?" Watson forwarded the memo back to Panzer with a note, "Fred, can we get this done?"[9] A later memo in the Gallup Name File indicates that Panzer unsuccessfully attempted to convince Gallup to change the question.[10]

Another example of the concern with the numbers can be seen in the administration's attempts to manipulate short-term public attitudes to create positive poll results. On July 28, 1967, for example, in the wake of race riots in Detroit and following a presidential address to the nation about the situation, Fred Panzer informed Johnson that the Gallup Poll would be conducting a survey on August 3 on Johnson's approval rating and the reaction to his efforts to ease racial tension. Panzer advised quick action to appeal

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[9] Memo, Watson to Panzer, 10/18/67, "Watson, Marvin, (Incoming), "Panzer Box 433, plus attachments. See also Panzer to LBJ (plus attachments), 10/17/67, "October," Panzer Box 398.

[10] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 11/9/67, filed in the George Gallup Name File.

to the public, "since at critical times the public responds favorably to Presidential action."[11] Note that Panzer was not concerned about understanding public opinion, but rather about affecting the poll. Similarly, on December 13, 1967, President Johnson responded to a Gallup poll of the country's G.O.P. county chairman by suggesting a similar poll for the Democratic party. Johnson told Jim Jones, "Get something each week to all county chairman and committeemen boosting us. Then take a quiet poll."[12] Again, the fact that Johnson wished to blitz the Democrats before surveying them is an indication that his concern was not so much with their opinions as with the poll numbers he could manipulate out of them.

iii Electoral Concerns: The 1968 Election

Of course, the administration's concern for its reelection prospects also forced attention to public opinion. While the nature of this attention was

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[11] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 7/28/67, "Presidential Address to Nation on Civil Disobediency," Confidential File, Box 89.

[12] LBJ to Jim Jones, 12/13/67, filed in the George Gallup Name File. The note is an attachment to a Gallup "Advance Promotion."

concern for victory, it did not necessarily mean a return to the wide attention to public opinion that characterized Phase I. That is to say, by Phase III Johnson was satisfied to be more preferred than other potential candidates. Although issues which may have hurt the administration's popularity were examined, and although the administration was interested in the demographics of support on various issues, there was relatively little attention to public input into the issue agenda, such as was observed in the previous phases. The primary focus of the administration was on Johnson's vote potential relative to his challengers. In short, the administration reacted to the political environment in order to protect itself and survive.

Although Phases II and III are both animated in part by a concern for the impending reelection, these phases can be distinguished by the nature of the concern. By the end of Phase II, Robert Kennedy's status among Democrats had temporarily subsided and Johnson's leadership within the Democratic party was intact, but the number of people supporting the party was declining. Phase III, on the other hand, begins with Johnson being concerned about protecting himself from challenges from Republicans, rather than

establishing himself within his coalition. And for a short while, the White House seemed safe from powerful Republican challenges. But as the political horizon became increasingly negative, the challenges came both from the Republican and Democratic parties. The Johnson administration, by that point, was no longer building or defining a public support base. It was playing defense, and losing.

The administration began to refocus its attention on potential Republican challengers during the latter part of Phase II, when Robert Kennedy was going through a lapse of support from within the Democratic party. While aboard Air Force One on April 23, 1967, for example, Johnson asked Panzer for his pairing figures against Romney and Nixon.[13] Panzer provided Johnson with the figures the following evening and the results were of mixed fortune; Johnson led against Nixon, but trailed against Romney.[14] But the news soon got better. On May 12, Panzer reported to Johnson "a dramatic turning point;" Johnson was even with Romney

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[13] LBJ to ?, 4/23/67, "4-21-67--5-20-67," PR 16. Box 348.

[14] Panzer to LBJ, 4/24/67, filed in the Louis Harris Name File.

and had a ten percent lead over Nixon.[15] By the end of July, Johnson would read a memo of Gallup results which showed him leading Romney, Nixon and Reagan.[16]

Johnson's success in presidential pairings continued to be mixed in the early fall of 1967, then steadily declined. After the Detroit riots, for example, Johnson lost to Michigan Governor George Romney by 8% in a Gallup poll, but still led Nixon.[17] Panzer reported to Johnson in mid-September that Gallup and Harris had differing results about the pairing against George Romney, with Harris showing him trailing and Gallup showing him leading.[18] Romney then made a major gaffe in his campaign, which temporarily cost him in the polls,[19] and which refocused the administration's concern on the possibility of a bid by

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[15] Panzer to LBJ, 5/12/67, "May," Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 398.

[16] Panzer to LBJ, 7/31/67, filed in the George Romney Name File.

[17] Panzer to LBJ, 8/17/67, filed in the George Gallup Name File.

[18] Panzer to LBJ, 9/11/67, "9-2-67--9-30-67," PR 16, Box 349.

[19] Romney, when asked about his previous support for American involvement in Vietnam, responded that he had been "brainwashed" by the government into taking that position. The comment cost Romney considerable support.

New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller. A Gallup poll released in mid-September showed Johnson trailing Rockefeller by 2%, causing Panzer to caution Johnson that the sampling error made the results "too close to call"--a caveat he seldom repeated on memos indicating a narrow Johnson lead.[20] A Harris survey also slated for mid-September, however, showed Johnson beating Rockefeller, Nixon, Reagan, and Romney (with his lead over Romney expanding to 16 percent).[21] And a September 22 report to the President discussed a Louis Harris analysis indicating that a Johnson-Humphrey ticket would defeat a Romney-Reagan ticket and tie a Rockefeller-Reagan ticket. And a Johnson-Kennedy ticket would even defeat the latter.[22]

But any feelings of security against Republican challengers were short-lived. The late fall and early winter of 1967 increasingly showed Johnson in trouble. One chart filed in the White House Central Files on

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[20] Panzer to LBJ, 9/.15/67, "9-2-67--9-30-67," PR 16, Box 349.

[21] Panzer to LBJ, 9/18/67, filed in the Louis Harris Name File.

[22] Panzer to LBJ, 9/22/67, filed in the Louis Harris Name File.

November 22, 1967, listed Gallup and Harris "trial heats" for the first eleven months of 1967, with Johnson losing all the mock elections listed in October and November.

Curiously, Gallup polls indicated a slight rise in Johnson's approval rating during the same time period. This may have stemmed from the pro-Vietnam blitz orchestrated by the administration including speeches by General Westmoreland and Ambassador Bunker. By December some positive feedback in presidential pairings was seen. On December 1, 1967, Panzer reported that Gallup now had Johnson leading Nixon by four percent.[23] By late January, Panzer would report that Johnson led all Republicans except Nelson Rockefeller, who he was slightly behind.[24]

January 1968 was a short-lived time of comfortable self-assurance for the administration about Johnson's renomination by the Democratic party. On January 10, 1968, for example, an Oliver Quayle poll of likely voters in the New Hampshire Democratic primary revealed

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[23] Panzer to LBJ, 12/1/67, "Memos to the President, December 1967," Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 397.

[24] Panzer to LBJ, 1/27/68, filed in the Oliver Quayle Name File.

that Johnson was rated favorably by 73% and unfavorably by 27%, versus a 56% to 44% ratio for Eugene McCarthy. Quayle's analysis also showed LBJ leading, with 82%, while McCarthy and RFK held 9% and 8% of the decided voters, respectively.[25] Again, on January 18, a Napolitan poll of New Hampshire registered voters showed Johnson leading McCarthy, 76% to 6%, and Kennedy, 67% to 22%. Similarly, when Johnson asked Panzer for information about his support among 1964

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[25] Panzer to LBJ, 1/10/68, "12-28-67--1-23-68," PR 16, Box 350.

This memo also is also noteworthy for its foresightful analysis. Eugene McCarthy, of course, would ultimately do surprisingly well in the New Hampshire primary; although Johnson would win, McCarthy's surprise showing would ultimately help Johnson decide to withdraw from the election. Curiously, Quayle foresaw the outcome. Panzer wrote that Quayle was "nervous" about how the undecided voters would vote. "He believes they would mostly go for McCarthy or someone else--not LBJ. Thus, he counsels LBJ supporters to be very cautious in making claims about how well they will do, lest it give McCarthy or Kennedy an opportunity to claim any kind of victory even though Johnson gets more write-ins then others combined. Poor mouthing the vote is always good advice." Quayle's advice, if heeded, may have downplayed McCarthy's strong showing and kept Johnson in the race.

Democratic national delegates, Panzer reported that 87.1% of respondents would support Johnson's re-election.[26]

But in late January, the already topsy-turvy political environment changed drastically for Johnson, for the worse. Despite the administration's successes in convincing Americans during late 1967 that the U.S. was making progress in Vietnam, the Vietcong launched a major offensive--the Tet offensive--on January 30, 1968. Although the American and South Vietnamese forces were considered victorious over the Vietcong on the battlefield, the Vietcong's surprise show of force was a turning point in American public opinion about the war, particularly since it followed on the heels of the optimism created by Westmoreland and Bunker. And the impact on Johnson's 1968 reelection aspirations were profound.

The administration was soon forced to divide the focus of its electoral concerns between some rather strong Republican opposition and the newly emerging Democratic opposition. By early February, Eugene McCarthy was attracting supporters in his bid for the

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[26] Panzer to Watson (with LBJ handwritten message), 1/22/68, and Panzer to LBJ, 1/23/68, "12-28-67--1-23-68," PR 16, Box 350.

Democratic nomination, and rumblings continued about a possible challenge from Robert Kennedy, particularly after the Tet offensive. Furthermore, Johnson's public approval rating declined markedly in the first six weeks after the Tet offensive, from 48% to 36%.[27] Clearly, LBJ again had to concern himself with Democratic party politics. But February public opinion polls were also showing Johnson facing serious challenges from potential Republican opposition. The administration's future was in doubt.

In March, it was clear that reelection would be a struggle. But the New Hampshire primary surprised all political observers, including the President.[28] Although Johnson's name was not on the ballot, it was expected that he would far out distance Senator Eugene McCarthy, even as a write-in candidate. But Johnson only narrowly defeated McCarthy, 49.5% to 42.7%, and McCarthy claimed a "victory" because of his surprise showing. Four days later, no doubt inspired by Johnson's politically crippled status, Robert Kennedy

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[27] Stanley Karnow, Vietnam: A History (New York: The Viking Press, 1983), p. 546.

[28] For Johnson's reaction, see Lyndon Baines Johnson The Vantage Point: Perspectives on the Presidency (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971) p. 537-538.

announced his decision to seek the nomination. Johnson's ability to gain the nomination of his party was in serious doubt.

While Johnson's political fortunes were crumbling, he and his staff had come to a crucial decision to stop most of the bombing of North Vietnamese territory as an overture to encourage peace talks. This was a turning point in the administration's policies in Vietnam, and the President was scheduled to announce his decision in a nationwide broadcast on March 31, 1968. Yet the conclusion of the speech stunned even the most astute political observers.

> With America's sons in the fields far away, with America's future under challenge right here at home, with our hopes and the world's hopes for peace in the balance every day, I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any partisan causes or to any duties other than the awesome duties of this office--the presidency of your country.
>
> Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your president.

With that, the Johnson administration began to come to a close.

Curiously, the attention that the administration paid to its reelection efforts did not help and may

have even hindered its understanding of public opinion. As previously argued, the administration's Phase II attention to popularity may have diverted its attention from other aspects of public opinion. By Phase III the problem may have worsened: as the administration became more concerned with its standing relative to other candidates than with its public approval rating. After all, public approval was less relevant if potential opponents could be defeated.

But was Johnson Running in 1968?

Yet the assertion here that LBJ's attention to public opinion was motivated by his concern for reelection assumes that he considered himself a candidate in the 1968 election. Although Johnson asserted that he never intended to run for reelection, documentary evidence in the Johnson archives suggests that Johnson's withdrawal decision was not made until perhaps the day of or the day before his announcement.

Johnson claims to have decided as early as 1964 not to seek re-election in 1968. According to Johnson, after agonizing in May of 1964 about whether to seek

election to the office he inherited from Kennedy, his wife counselled him,

> If you lose in November--its all settled anyway.
> If you win let's do the best we can for 3 years or 3 years and 4 months--and then, the Lord letting us live that long, announce in February or March 1968 that you are not a candidate for re-election.[29]

And when 1968 arrived, Johnson asserts, the real question was not if he would run but when he would announce that he was not running.

Indeed, Johnson contemplated announcing at the end of his January 17, 1968, State of the Union Address that he would not run. Johnson writes in his memoirs, The Vantage Point, that he was seriously considering a surprise announcement on that occasion, but was prevented from making it because, "When I arrived at the Capitol that night, I thought I had the statement with me but discovered that I had failed to bring it." He adds that he was also uncomfortable with the timing.[30] In fact, John Connally called Press

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[29] Ibid, p. 94.

[30] Ibid, p. 430.
George Christian writes about Johnson's claim that he lost the statement, "I've always believed he was joshing." See George Christian, "The Night Lyndon Quit," Texas Monthly, April 1988, p. 109, 168-169.

Secretary George Christian that day and left him with a list to pass to the President of five reasons why he should conclude that night's State of the Union address with a withdrawal statement.[31]

But George Christian tells a slightly different story. Although he confirms that Johnson had talked with him about quitting as early as August 1967, Christian says that it was never a certain thing. On March 30, the day before the announcement, Johnson called his friend Horace Busby and asked, "What do you think we ought to do?"[32] On the morning of March 31, Busby asked the President what the odds were that he would withdraw. "Seven to three against," came the reply.[33] In short, the withdrawal was never a sure thing.

It quickly becomes apparent while rummaging through Johnson's papers that he certainly acted like a candidate for the first three months of 1968. Johnson sought poll results, communicated with his campaign

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[31] Christian to LBJ, 1/17/68, "Elections-Campaigns (1967-)," Confidential File, Box 77.

[32] Christian, "The Night Lyndon Quit," p. 168.

[33] Ibid.

committee, and worried about improved public relations. On February 16, 1968, six weeks before his surprise March 31 withdrawal announcement, for example, Johnson responded to a memo from Marvin Watson indicating overwhelming support for Johnson over other potential Democratic candidates among Iowa Democratic County Chairmen. Johnson wrote on the memo, "Send to [columnists] Drew Pearson, [Walter] Winchell, and [Robert] Spivack."[34] Again, it seems unlikely that he was certain about how he would act. On March 22, merely nine days before withdrawing, National Security Adviser Walt Rostow advised Johnson that his longtime friend Justice Abe Fortas and others were discussing the administration's problem "holding and attracting the youth in the coming election." They were concerned that the younger generation's disaffection, "draws them towards McCarthy and Bobby Kennedy." The memo passed along the suggestion that the White House should systematically contact campus youth groups. Johnson responded with a note to Harry McPherson, "Harry, you and Joe Califano explore. L."[35] Johnson's willingness

[34] Watson to LBJ, 2/16/68, "1-24-68--3-5-68," PR 16, Box 350.

[35] Rostow to LBJ, 3/22/68, "March 1968," filed in the Abe Fortas Name File.

to use his staff's time on campaign matters indicate that--at very least--he was trying to keep his options open. Furthermore, on March 27, 1968, LBJ was still concerned about the potential outcome of the Wisconsin primary, and wanted to answer Wisconsin detractors of his Vietnam policy with a forthcoming article in The Reader's Digest by Dwight Eisenhower.[36] That evening he spoke at length on the telephone with pollster Ed Pauley, who was in Los Angeles, about public poll results showing him losing to Robert Kennedy in California. At the conclusion of the discussion, Johnson told him to work with former White House staff member Irving Sprague.[37] Would Johnson discuss poll results and campaign personnel if he had conclusively decided to withdraw from the race in four days?

Even Johnson's intimate and trusted friends seemed to be in the dark about Johnson's plans to withdraw, and Johnson did nothing to ease the work they were doing for him. James Rowe, for example, wrote to

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[36] Roche to LBJ, 3/27/68, "Vietnam, 1 of 2," Office Files of Marvin Watson, Box 32.

[37] Notes of Johnson's telephone conversation with Ed Pauley of Los Angeles about polls, 3/26/68, "MMW Conversations," Office Files of Marvin Watson, Box 32.

Johnson on March 28, complaining about the fact that supporters were questioning him about why Johnson had not yet officially announced his candidacy. Rowe reported that he was assuring them that Johnson was running, and there is no indication that Johnson informed his longtime friend otherwise. Similarly, Johnson met or spoke with his friend Justice Abe Fortas twenty-six times in March, the last time on March 28.[38] Nonetheless, Fortas was surprised by the announcement; a phone message that night reads "Well you do have some surprises, don't you?"[39] Since up until the end of March Johnson was still seeking information about his standing in the primaries and not telling his closest associates about his plans to withdraw, it seems likely that it was near the very end of March before he really decided to quit.

But even if Johnson really did know all along that he would not seeks reelection, the argument here still holds that the election was a driving force behind the administration's attention to public opinion.

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[38] Johnson's Diary cards.

[39] Message, Fortas to Johnson, (message taken by Jim Jones), "March 1968," filed in the Abe Fortas Name File.

Certainly Johnson acted like a candidate, he and his associates analyzed public opinion information as if he were a candidate, and they focused their attention on presidential pairings as a measure of public support.

Interpretation of Public Opinion

The Phase III interpretation of public opinion further contributed to the narrowed scope of public opinion linkage to the administration. By Phase III, Lyndon Johnson's behavior was analogous to a losing candidate on Kingdon's congratulation-rationalization continuum; indeed, Johnson was losing in the perpetual campaign for public approval which characterizes the modern plebiscitary presidency. And as with the rationalization of Kingdon's losing candidates, the Johnson administration tended to blame its low level of approval on external causes. No longer was the administration convinced that stylistic changes would enhance public standing. Instead, the White House dismissed indications of public disapproval either as outright fabrications and misrepresentations or as indications of how the political opposition had manipulated public opinion against it.

By Phase III the administration was also exhibiting classic signs of cognitive dissonance. As previously noted, S.T. Fiske and S.E. Taylor have divided selective perception into three parts: 1) selective exposure which occurs when an individual seeks information to support his/her beliefs, 2) selective attention which occurs when an individual focuses his/her attention only at consistent information, and 3) selective interpretation which occurs when an individual translates ambiguous information in such a manner as to make it consistent.[40] Selective attention was noticeable beginning in Phase II, as the administration frequently sought out positive information in order to paint otherwise negative information in optimistic hues. By Phase III, the administration was particularly susceptible to selectively interpreting negative information such that it could continue to believe that it had public support. This selective interpretation manifested itself in many ways: 1) the administration developed a deep distrust of polls and pollsters; 2) it frequently blamed its problems on the unfair

[40] Fiske and Taylor, p. 360-361.

manipulation of political opponents; and 3) it developed beliefs which allowed them to dismiss the dissenting portion of the population as an atypical minority, even when evidence suggested otherwise. Occasionally. the administration would even exhibit the tendency to patronize the public, perhaps as a way of dismissing public opinion. Johnson and his associates by Phase III had cognitively created enemies against the administration and the nation, and saw opposition as unrepresentative of the American people.

The administration may have also selectively exposed itself to public opinion by Phase III. Fiske and Taylor note that while psychologists have not been able to conclusively link cognitive dissonance with selective exposure, "there is strong support for de facto selective exposure; that is, most of us inhabit an environment that is biased in favor of position with which we already agree."[41] George Reedy has also noted the tendency for a strong president to mold his environment to his own liking,[42] a tendency also observed during Phase II. Similarly, by Phase III, the

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[41] Fiske and Taylor, p. 361.

[42] Reedy, The Twilight of the Presidency, chapter 6.

administration's behavior in the analysis of public opinion became consistent with Deutsch's prediction of self-closure in political systems. Deutsch's self-closure, or Fiske and Taylor's "de facto selective exposure" to consonant information, can be seen in the previously noted routinization of the interpretation of public opinion information through the sycophantic Fred Panzer. This reliance on Panzer for the interpretation of polls[43] at the nadir of approval may have exacerbated the administration's tendency to soften the blow of bad news. Irving Janis, in his Groupthink, has also noted the tendencies of groups to develop a "mindguard" who protects the group from information which might damage their confidence.[44] It seems plausible that Panzer ultimately played that role. Furthermore, it is problematic that an administration which began by holding polls in high esteem would allow an otherwise unimportant actor to become central in the coordination and internal dissemination of them. Panzer's pandering to the President cannot be

[43] Altschuler, p. 287.

[44] Irving Janis, Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p. 40-41.

considered harmless. The atmosphere that the administration created for itself by Phase III allowed it to more easily maintain its cognitive consistency, even in the light of contrary evidence.

As already noted, the slow reliance on "presidential pairings" as a primary source of public opinion information lulled Johnson into interpreting his sometimes likely renomination as an indication of public support; this too corresponds with Deutsch's discussion of the tendency to failure in organizations which narrow and routinize their sources of information.[45] Deutsch also notes that failure can occur when certain information is overvalued over others, and when current information ranges are preferred over others.[46] This occurred as the administration shunned aside negative indicators of public opinion as incorrect, or chose the optimistic interpretation of otherwise negative information. Attempts at avoiding and reducing dissonance, it should be noted, narrowed the range of data that the administration accepted as believable. Ultimately, it

[45] Deutsch, p. 226.

[46] Ibid.

will be argued, the administration selectively interpreted sources of public opinion information in ways which confirmed its world view.

The following discussion will analyze some noteworthy features of Phase III interpretation.

i. Distrust of Polls and Pollsters

Perhaps the most interesting phenomenon to occur during Phase III was the tendency to distrust polls and pollsters. The same administration which so carefully read and analyzed polls suddenly changed its opinion of them. Instead of attempting to analyze polls, they tended to find fault with them, particularly when the polls disrupted their carefully constructed view of the public. Louis Harris, the brunt of some of Johnson's criticism, has noted that Johnson only believed in polls "when they tended to support what he was doing."[47]

The usual complaint was not about polls per se, but the "inept" or "biased" way in which they were conducted.[48] Such distrust would be predicted by Fiske

[47] Louis Harris, The Anguish of Change, p. 23.

[48] Altschuler makes a similar observation. See Altschuler p. 293.

and Taylor's notion of selective interpretation; the administration could thus disbelieve and dismiss the bad news that the polls were revealing.[49] Often this tendency manifested itself in examinations of contradictions between Gallup and Harris. On February 17, 1967, Panzer completed a report requested by Johnson on this topic. The report began:

> For two weeks running, the two giants of the polling industry have collided head on. The result: they have sprung a Gallup-Harris "credibility gap."
>
> But while they have been hurt in the collision, you, an innocent bystander, have also been injured.
>
> Looking at the two polling "accidents" in detail...we can place the blame on "driver error." There was either an error of omission or commission.
>
> But beyond this, there is reason to believe that their vehicles--the polls--are unsafe.

Panzer proceeds to explain how the contradiction occurred, pointing out that Gallup and Harris failed to report the conditions under which their polls were taken, asked bad questions, or faultily reported their

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[49] Altschuler also notes five cases where the administration believed that pollsters "underemphasized the positive." All of his examples occur in the period of low approval which I have labelled Phase III. See Altschuler, p. 283.

results. Despite the problems, Panzer notes that Johnson was gaining more favorable press coverage. He then asks, "Will the polls show the change?"

> Possibly, but there are several hurdles.
> 1) The pollsters have a built in bias which they may or may not be able to keep out of their interpretations.
> --Gallup is a Republican and very conservative.
> --Harris was very close to the Kennedy camp in 1960.
> 2) The newspapers can slant the polls...
> 3) Polling is still a crude tool that is not as foolproof as it is reported by the pollsters.
> 4) The news releases put out by Gallup and Harris do not give all the data and background that every trained person needs to make sense of them.[50]

One month into Phase III, on September 8, 1967, Panzer informed the President that the forthcoming Gallup release would show him losing in a trial run against George Romney by 50% to 44%. Harris polled at the same time but claimed a Johnson "victory" of 52% to 48%. Panzer's advice:

> The best thing to do is to let the pollsters explain it. If it casts doubt on their credibility this will also cast doubt on the accuracy of their presidential popularity ratings too.[51]

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[50] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 2/17/67, "February," Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 398.

[51] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 9/8/67, "President: telecopies sent to ranch," Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 399.

Note that Panzer's concern was to protect the administration through the discrediting of the public approval rating. But also note that Panzer seemed to be doubting the quality of the polls. Indeed, the following month Panzer gave Johnson a letter from a Gallup surveyor who perceived problems with the survey technique: "Mr. President: I thought you would like to read this letter from a Gallup poll interviewer who disapproves of the way Gallup is handling his job as a pollster."[52]

Frequently there was a belief that the poll write-ups expressed the political leanings of the pollsters themselves. As just shown, Panzer was concerned about Gallup's Republican affiliation and Harris's attachment to the Kennedys. Sometimes these concerns became suspicions. On October 3, 1967, Panzer reported to LBJ that a recent Gallup poll showed that a Nelson Rockefeller/Ronald Reagan ticket would have a substantial lead over a Johnson/Humphrey ticket. Panzer correctly noted that Gallup transgressed from his usual practice by also giving the percentages

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[52] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 10/10/67, "October," Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 398.

without the undecideds, which seemingly raised Rockefeller's popularity.

> Note: It is unusual for Gallup to distribute the undecided vote as he has in this release. It looks like he wants to show the Rockefeller-Reagan ticket in the best possible light. In fact, his story is almost a plea for Rockefeller to run.[53]

Panzer's distrust of the pollsters continued through the Johnson administration. Many examples can be cited. In a memo to LBJ on October 24, 1967, Panzer wrote that Gallup's claim that he was conducting "interviews in depth" was "highly questionable" because of "loaded" questions designed to bias the answer.[54] On November 3, Panzer reported that he was investigating why Gallup's published figures had not changed in two weeks. It appeared that Gallup merely reused the same data. Panzer concluded, "If this holds up--and I think it will--the story of what looks like a shady practice should be broken."[55] On December 1, Panzer was displeased that Gallup had "buried" the fact

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[53] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 10/3/67, filed in George Gallup Name File, WHCF.

[54] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 10/24/67, "October," Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 398.

[55] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 11/3/67, "November," Panzer 398.

that a trial heat showed LBJ defeating Nixon.[56] Panzer's explanation: "To me it is an example of Gallup's shenanigans."[57] Panzer even took to ridiculing Gallup polls which didn't cover topics of interest to the administration. On December 21, Panzer sent the following telegram to Marvin Watson who was with the President's party in Canberra, Australia:

> Gallup's Sunday Release shows that a ten year drop in church attendance has been halted. Pass it along to the Pope.
> Coming Wednesday in the Gallup Poll: "Is God Dead? The Public's Answer."
> If this keeps up, Gallup may next ask: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way God is handling his job?"[58]

This telegram must have been warmly received in Canberra, since it was passed along for the President to read.

Johnson shared Panzer's suspicion of polls and pollsters during Phase III, despite his continuous obsession with them. In late 1966, for example, Johnson informed his aides,

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[56] Altschuler also notes Panzer's annoyance at "buried" information. See Altschuler, p. 289.

[57] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 12/1/67, "Memos to the President December 1967," Panzer 397.

[58] Memo, Panzer to Watson, 12/21/67, filed in George Gallup Name File, WHCF.

> We're up eight percent on women and you can't find it--it's buried. The Kennedys have always owned Harris...they can always get a Bobby poll among the liberal Democrats in California.[59]

In February 1967 he assigned Jim Jones to examine "'Why polls are downgrading us.' Survey of what Harris and Gallup are up to..."[60] On October 6, 1967, Johnson asked Panzer to prepare a set of critical letters to George Gallup, which were apparently designed to appear as if they came from ordinary citizens. These letters, five in all, were a response to Gallup's "plead" to Rockefeller to run for president. One of these read as follows:

> Dear Mr. Gallup,
>
> A Rockefeller-Reagan ticket is ridiculous.
>
> I can appreciate how much you would like the New York Governor to win the Republican nomination. And I don't even have to read between the lines of your story.
>
> But teaming him up with Reagan is too much.

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[59] Memo, Maguire to Kintner, 11/7/66, "Speeches (1966)," Confidential File, Box 86.

[60] Assignment progress record, LBJ to Jones, 2/13/67, "Polls--Backup to Memos to President," Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 395.

> How about a George Wallace-Martin Luther King ticket? It would get all the Negro votes plus the backlash votes. Or maybe a George Wallace-Bobby Kennedy ticket to combine the conservative and liberal votes.
> Sincerely,[61]

It is not clear from the record what Johnson did with these letters. Later in the year, Johnson attached a note requesting speeches to a 1951 Gallup poll which showed 66% of the people polled wanting to pull U.S. troops out of Korea. His note said in part, "People can't follow Dr. Gallup, Harris. If we had followed him [sic] we would have been in a big mess."[62] Note that Johnson blamed Gallup, not the people he polled, as the source of the supposedly bad advice about Korea.

The President and his administration may have had serious gripes with the actions of pollsters and the way their polls were conducted. In fact, many of the administration's complaints about pollsters were true: Gallup was Republican, Harris was closer to the Kennedys, newspapers and pollsters can and do slant polls. The relevance of this information, however, is not clear. It is also particularly interesting to note

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[61] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 10/7/67, "October," Panzer 398.

[62] Memo, LBJ to Levinson, 11/18/67 (filing date), filed in George Gallup Name File, WHCF.

that the attention to these concerns occurred mainly at the nadir of presidential popularity. Again, the selective interpretation of information allowed the administration to more readily dismiss the unpleasant news relayed in the polls. Furthermore, previous scholarship has demonstrated that the pollsters were often exceedingly ingratiating to President Johnson,[63] a fact which is easily verified by reading documents pertaining to public opinion in the Johnson archives. This makes the President's paranoia about pollsters seem even more extreme. Attempts at dissonance reduction through the distrust of polls allowed the administration to close off an avenue of information from the American public.

ii Manipulation by political opponents

One indication of the rationalization and cognitive dissonance of the administration during Phase III was the belief that others were manipulating public

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[63] Altschuler, "Lyndon Johnson and the Public Polls." The ingratiation even occurred during Phase III. The George Gallup name file contains the December 1, 1967, message from George Christian to Marvin Watson: "Bill Crook advises that Dr. Gallup has been hinting that he would like to have a private meeting with the President. Crook claims Gallup feels bad about polls reflecting badly on the President."

opinion against the administration. Occasionally, this manifested itself in the form of hostility to members of the press. Panzer, for example, countered a series of articles by Walter Lippmann which criticized Johnson's lack of credibility by noting,

> Lippmann has to be taken in context and that would include these forgotten facts:
> --He supported Alf Landon in 1936.
> --He supported Tom Dewey in 1948.
> --He supported Eisenhower in 1952.[64]

Of course, he also supported Johnson in 1964 and Kennedy in 1960.[65] Johnson and Panzer were annoyed in late October, 1967, about press reactions to a "misleading" Gallup poll. Time, Newsweek, and The New Republic were all considered guilty of overstating Gallup's published report of American objection to involvement in the war in Vietnam. Among their agreed remedies was a backgrounder to columnist Robert Spivack who occasionally wrote about the "unfairness of the press."[66] Or a more biting example is this comment:

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[64] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 3/31/67, filed in the George Gallup Name File, WHCF.

[65] Ronald Steel, Walter Lippmann and the American Century (New York: Random House, 1981), p. 521-522, 554-555. In fact, Steel writes that in 1964 Lippmann almost considered LBJ to be "a savior."

[66] See Memos, Panzer to LBJ, 10/31/67, filed in the George Gallup Name File, WHCF, and 10/30/67 and

> To find out what the public is thinking on Vietnam...turn to columnist Joseph Kraft. He will contemplate his navel and tell you the U.S. mood...Kraft's interpretation of the national mood is palpable bunk based on the fuzziest wishful thinking.[67]

Often it wasn't the press, but other political actors, who were believed to be deliberately distorting the truth. Robert Kintner believed that the people were being led astray by political manipulation by the opposition;

> I believe that many people think there is not the "will for peace" within the administration. This is nonsense, of course, but it is getting wide currency through Kennedy, McCarthy, and etc.[68]

Needless to say, Democratic opposition was considered particularly contemptible and, correspondingly, dishonest.

Again, cognitive dissonance theory lends an explanation for this behavior. Johnson was able to dismiss the extent of his problems by blaming them on

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10/31/67, "November 1967 (Watson)," Office File of Fred Panzer, Box 433.

[67] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 2/15/68, filed in George Gallup Name File, WHCF.

[68] Letter, Kintner to LBJ, 1/15/68, "State of the Union 1968, Memorandum 12/2/66 - 1/12/68," Statements, Box 260, WHCF.

political opponents, and by not directly dealing with the negative information. Buchanan has noted similar behavior in Johnson resulting from cognitive dissonance. According to Buchanan, Johnson's public deception on the progress of the Vietnam war led to dissonance, and the dissonance resulted in Johnson's self-deception; he began to believe his optimistic utterances about the war. But as the opposition grew, Buchanan asserts, Johnson began "to suspect and privately impugn the motives of those who disagreed with him."[69] Blaming the opposition constituted a selective interpretation of information, allowing for dissonance reduction.

iii Opposition is socially undesirable

The most common form of rationalizing the opposition to the administration was to dismiss it as the manipulation or manifestation of socially undesirable elements. A particularly poignant example is an unsigned "memorandum for the record" in the files of Marvin Watson:

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[69] Buchanan, p. 90-91.

The assortment of clippings which follow traces in capsule-like form the results of a political guerrilla force outside the major political parties that has crystallized during the past two years. Its influence is far-reaching. It has become a potential threat to our democratic institutions as well as to the Democratic election success in the Presidential and Congressional elections in 1968. It goes by many names and its seemingly loose organizational ties include a broad range of groups and individuals--from known and avowed communists such as Herbert Aptheker, to the Stokely Carmichaels of the militant black power movement, to the peace demonstrators, the draft-card burners, LSD disciples, to the campus agitators such as Paul Booth, to the alienated intellectuals, community organizers, well-meaning clergy, and others who are unhappy, bewildered, and confused by the complexity of the national and international problems with which we must cope.

...this proliferation of groups is exerting influence and political power out of all proportion to its actual strength because its appeal is to a narrow segment of our total electorate. However, it is well-organized and financed, vocal, aggressive, and uses effective infiltration and propaganda techniques as well as violence when necessary to carry out its purpose. Its activities are reminiscent of those of similar groups during the 1930's and 1940's. Its targets are similar: students and faculty, social welfare and other politically naive individuals, the clergy, labor unions, minority groups, the poor, the ignorant, and many Federally-financed programs dealing with these people. Many of the leaders of these groups are the same individuals who received their basic training in the depression years.

The fruits of this activity are seen every day and are illustrated in the attached clippings: riots, demonstrations, civil disobedience, anti-Vietnam agitation, campus

> uprisings, bloodshed and property destruction--all of which weaken our national unity at a time when we must be united before the world.[70]

Note that this memorandum completed the rationalization not only by putting down the leaders of the opposition, but also by dismissing those members of it who don't fall into such categories as "LSD disciples" as "unhappy, bewildered, and confused" or "well-meaning" or "politically naive individuals." Note too the tremendously large size of the "narrow segment" of the society "targeted" by the allegedly atypical opposition, including: students, labor unions, minorities, and the poor.

Similarly, a March 8 memo to Johnson explained Eugene McCarthy's policy assets as "the organizational talents of the Communists and the hemi-demi-semi-

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[70] Memorandum for the Record, "Vietnam [folder 1 of 2]," Office Files of Marvin Watson, Box 32.

The memo is undated, but it was probably written in late 1967 or early 1968. The memo speaks of problems "as we approach the 1968 campaign." Although the attached report has been largely dismantled, the latest date on a clipping which is obviously part of the report is dated June 22, 1967. This is, therefore, the earliest possible date for the report.

Communists, who have been out of circulation (and making money) since Henry Wallace."[71] Not only were they communists, they weren't even good communists!

The administration clearly showed signs of frustration with dissenters. Records indicate that the opposition was considered to be unfair, unpatriotic, overly vocal, and even subversive. Campus protestors, for example, were considered by Vice President Humphrey to be part of a "well-planned" organizational effort. Indeed, Humphrey's belief that he recognized the same people at various demonstrations resulted in a request to the Justice Department to examine the possibility.[72] On another occasion, a memo to Johnson relayed excerpts from remarks by White House reporter Merriman Smith who thought Johnson the "object of some of the worst vilification" that he had seen covering the White House. The excerpt noted Smith's suggestion:

> It is time for the "squares who raise kids, mow their lawns, and pay their taxes (to) decide to involve themselves by getting off their patios and telling the dirty mouths to shut the hell up."

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[71] Memo, to LBJ, 3/8/68, "Political Affairs (St 15-St 32)," Confidential File, Box 77.

[72] Memo, Kintner to LBJ, 5/18/67, and Kintner to Attorney General Clark, 5/19/67, "Publicity (1967--," Confidential File, Box 83.

Smith reportedly had to print "several thousand" copies of the speech to satisfy requests for copies. (The memo notes that Smith was ill-received by the press because of the speech: "He was snubbed by some of his colleagues and accused of apple-polishing").[73] The White House staff developed a siege mentality, evident in the battle analogy used in this excerpt from an unused speech intended for floor use by a member of Congress:

> Mr. Speaker,
>
> The fire directed at the White House in the past few weeks rivals in sheer volume the incoming shells that landed on Con Thiem a short time ago.
>
> The volleys come from batteries on the left and on the right. There are big Republican B-52 raids on the President's policy in Vietnam. There are waspish attacks by ADA raiders. There are salvos of scorn and a drumfire of distrust.
>
> The Gallups and the Harrises are booming too with their pseudo-scientific O-bombs. ("O" for opinion, that is).
>
> Mr. Speaker, the air is thick with the sulphur and brimstone of these American fulminations. Even the Wall Street Journal has made a low-level strafing run at the President. Its reporters shot up the White House with a burst of interviews with 12 people who were unhappy with the President....
>
> Mr. Speaker, I think something should be done about it.

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[73] Memo, ? to LBJ, 5/25/67, "Speeches (SP/FG-11-15)," Confidential File, Box 86.

> I propose a thirty-day halt in the bombing--of LBJ, that is.
> I propose a de-escalation of the dissent being directed at our President.
> I propose a halt to the flock from the fringes which is now being aimed at the White House.[74]

Note the degree to which the administration had selectively interpreted dissent as unpatriotic or unfair; this allowed dissent to be more readily dismissed. The process of self-closure had reached its fullest depths. The opposition was no longer expected to be won over with better speeches or changed style. Indeed, criticism and disagreement were now dismissed as coming from society's "fringes," and therefore, the administration no longer needed to concern themselves with it.

iv. Patronizing the Public

One reaction to public discontentment which seems unique to Phase III was an occasional patronizing attitude toward the American people. This self-styled superiority was a subtle attempt at dissonance reduction. For example, Fred Panzer prepared for Marvin Watson a "brief summary of the fevers which have

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[74] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 10/9/67, "October," Panzer 398, and undated draft to "Mr. Speaker" in the same file.

coursed through the American body politic." The 12 page document recounted various occurrences of vocal opposition back to the time of the Articles of Confederation. The implication of this research was that the Vietnam protesters were part of a long tradition of opposition starting with Shay's Rebellion and the Whiskey Rebellion. By making this comparison, Panzer was able to downplay the importance of the opposition by comparing it to 180 years of American history. Panzer said that the report "may bear out Thomas Jefferson's cool observation that 'a little rebellion now and then...is a medicine necessary for the sound health of the government."[75] Another patronizing comment was Special Assistant Ernest Goldstein's description to President Johnson of his speech the night before to students at Amherst College: "I was pleasantly surprised to find that dialogue is still possible. There was only one rude incident."[76]

Some memoranda during Phase III indicate an air of intellectual superiority within the White House. By so

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[75] Memo, Panzer to Watson, 9/16/67, "September 1967 (Watson)," Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 432.

[76] Memo, Goldstein to LBJ, 11/14/67, "Vietnam [folder 2 of 2]," Office Files of Marvin Watson, Box 32.

acting, the White House could discount public discontent as unreasonable. On one occasion Panzer notified the President that the public was not accepting his call for an income tax surtax to control inflationary pressures, by observing,

> Apparently the public has learned only half the lesson of the "new economics"--the part about cutting taxes and increasing federal spending to stimulate the economy. They don't buy lesson number two--the steps necessary to control inflation.[77]

Three weeks later Panzer informed the President that, according to Gallup, while 58% disapproved of Johnson's handling of the war, 63% backed the continued bombing of North Vietnam.

> In other words, a majority disapproves of the very same policy it approves.
> This is nonsense.
> The contradiction means, as I see it, that while people favor bombing versus stopping the bombing they just don't like the war.[78]

In fairness to the Johnson administration, however, it should be noted that the mass public was seldom disparaged even during Phase III. Usually a portion of the public, or public opinion leaders, were

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[77] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 10/13/67, "October," Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 398.

[78] Memo, Panzer to LBJ, 11/9/67, filed in the George Gallup Name File, WHCF.

targeted for disdain, or the public was redefined in the administration's mind to include only those with approving attitudes.

Conclusion

By Phase III, the administration had tremendously narrowed its scope of attention to public opinion and its interpretation of what constituted a legitimate expression of public opinion.

Part of the problem for the Johnson administration stemmed from the constant need for public approval endemic to the contemporary presidency. Since public support was strategically necessary but unavailable, the administration was forced to protect itself by holding up the appearance of popularity. But concern with appearance diverted attention from any careful analysis of public opinion; appearances were quicker and easier to come by, and that was considered sufficient. The desire to change poll questions or otherwise manipulate polls to reveal better results illustrates the degree to which the administration had lost interest in understanding public opinion since the halcyon days of Phase I.

Karl Deutsch's discussion of the self-closure of political systems is particularly appropriate for understanding the Johnson administration during Phase III. According to Deutsch, narrowing the range of information intake and routinizing the source of information are prime causes of failure. The value placed on presidential pairings as a source of public opinion information in Phase III contrasts sharply with the widespread attention to public opinion of Phase I or even the narrower attention to public approval of Phase II. The scope of what was considered legitimate public opinion had also narrowed. Furthermore, not only had the sources and interpretation of information narrowed, but the evolving process of coordinating poll data through the sycophantic Fred Panzer routinized the interpretation of public opinion. This, no doubt, exacerbated the tendency towards rationalization and cognitive dissonance.

Indeed, it is difficult to know how public opinion could have made itself heard without severe distortion during Phase III. The cognitive dissonance between the administration's beliefs about its actions and the negative indicators of public prestige led the administration to become suspicious with its preferred

source of public opinion--polls--and dismiss dissent as the coordinated machinations of various detractors on an atypical sub-population. This, of course, can be explained by Fiske and Taylor's three part division of selective perception resulting from dissonance. The selective attention to optimistic information during Phase II had given way by Phase III to selective interpretation of otherwise negative information. Johnson, in effect, was dealing with a fictitious public believed to be unable to communicate amidst all the vocal detraction. The only voices heard and believed during much of Phase III were those of increasingly scarce supporters, though their scarcity was doubted.

The behavior of Johnson and his associates is a classic example of the rationalization of Kingdon's losing candidates. The administration saw all of its problems as stemming from external factors: polls were wrong, pollsters were biased, the opposition was manipulative, unfair, and ill-equipped to understand the administration's problems. Collective introspection in the White House was avoided until the political situation had become undeniably deteriorated.

And Johnson was forced to forego possible reelection. As a result, public linkage to Johnson could not occur until Johnson was a lame duck.

The role of public opinion in the Johnson administration during Phase III is noteworthy because it is counter-intuitive. One might have expected that attention to public opinion would sharpen as public approval dropped, so that the administration could adjust its actions or its public presentation accordingly. Instead, attention to public opinion was diminished as unacceptable information was disregarded or avoided. So too, the depth of that information was lost as the administration settled for sources such as straw polls for the 1968 election as indicators of public approval. Indeed, the narrow concern with public approval slowly but surely overshadowed the wider concern with public opinion.

Of course, the administration was not and could not be completely oblivious to public opinion during Phase III; discontent and dissent were too widespread in late 1967 and 1968. But the mode of attention to public opinion had narrowed. While the concern for the 1968 election was partly responsible for this change, it is also important to note that the 1968 election did

at least serve as one conduit of public opinion linkage to the President during Phase III. But it is difficult to guess what type of linkage would have occurred if there had not been the concern for the 1968 election.

There are, however, two areas where public opinion might be said to have linked to the Johnson administration during Phase III, and these deserve discussion. First, Johnson did attempt to deescalate the Vietnam conflict during Phase III; the mass American disillusionment after the Tet offensive may have contributed to this decision. And second, the beleaguered President did finally decide to withdraw his candidacy from the 1968 election.

While these two events may be seen as linkage successes, they also constitute a degree of linkage failure. One striking feature of the change in the Vietnam policies is the degree to which they were forced on the President despite the long festering public dissatisfaction. In fact, the decision to attempt deescalation can be more readily attributed to Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford. Clifford's predecessor, Robert McNamara, resigned November 1, 1967, effective February 28, 1968. Upon starting his

post, Clifford, whose views were known to be hawkish,[79] accepted the President's request to chair a task force to examine the advisability of a 206,000 troop increase in Vietnam, as requested by General Westmoreland and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Earle Wheeler.[80] Clifford, whose newcomer status perhaps allowed him the freshest view of the facts of the conflict, decided within a week of chairing the task force to oppose the troop increase,[81] and immediately began working on what he would later call a "conspiracy" to convince the Senior Advisory Group on Vietnam--commonly called the Wise Men--and other Johnson associates to advise deescalation of the conflict. When the advisors finally met with the President on March 26, 1968, Johnson was shocked that the majority of his advisors now favored deescalation. Clifford would later report a scenario confirmed by others:

> The President could hardly believe his ears...By the time he had finished [listening to his advisors], he said that "somebody has poisoned the well."...He was so shocked by the change in the attitudes of the Wise Men

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[79] Small, Johnson, Nixon and the Doves, p. 141.

[80] Schandler, chapter 6.

[81] Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves, p. 144.

> that he wanted to hear the briefings they had received. The meeting with the Wise Men had served the purpose that I hoped it would. It really shook the President.[82]

Nonetheless, the President remained equivocal as to his immediate plans for the war; but by March 28 he had conclusively decided to attempt a deescalation and peace overture through a cessation of the bombing in most areas of North Vietnam.[83] The announcement would be made in the March 31 speech which ended in Johnson's surprise candidacy withdrawal.

Clifford's role in the attempted deescalation cannot be understated. Indeed, George Reedy, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze, and George Christian all emphasize the importance of Clifford in Johnson's decision.[84] As Clifford would later assert:

> I didn't think the public was willing to support the policy we had been following...I needed some stiff medicine to bring home to the President what was happening in the country.[85]

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[82] Schandler, p. 264.

[83] Schandler, p. 266-276.

[84] Small, Johnson, Nixon and the Doves, p. 142 and 142n.

[85] Schandler, p. 254-255.

Clifford, then, served as the conduit of public opinion linkage to the President. Yet it is significant to note that despite the fact that public support for Johnson's handling of the war had fallen to 26% by the end of March 1968, Clifford still needed "strong medicine" to impress the President with the status of public opinion. Given Johnson's equivocation even after the March 26 meeting with the Wise Men, one wonders about the extent to which public opinion would have been heard without Clifford's influence. The lateness of the decision to change the strategy of pursuing the Vietnam conflict--and the need for a newcomer to impress Johnson with the public's attitude about the war--is indicative of the low levels of public linkage to the White House during Phase III.

So too, to the extent that public disapproval played a role in Johnson's decision to voluntarily leave the White House, his decision can also be seen as an example of public opinion failure, not success. According to George Christian, Johnson's withdrawal was necessary in March of 1968 for his peace overture to be taken seriously. Christian writes, "In order to maintain his validity and credibility as president, he

had to sacrifice his political career."[86] If Christian is correct, public disapproval with Johnson and his policies had to grow to the extent that the withdrawal of his candidacy was one of the few options open to the President. If public opinion had successfully linked to the President earlier, one might surmise, this extreme step may not have been necessary. Johnson's withdrawal, in effect, was too much, too late.

[86] Christian, "The Night Lyndon Quit," p. 169.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Implications of the Study

It is important to note that the Johnson administration reacted rationally to the decline in public approval. Public approval is so vital to the successful operations of the modern presidency that the administration was forced to change the focus of its inquiries about public opinion as the levels of public support dropped. Thus, during Phase I, Johnson sought to maintain the high levels of public support which were bringing him so much success. As the support base declined into Phase II the administration rationally sought to discover the source of the decline and to stabilize its political base, particularly within the Democratic party as the elections of 1966 and 1968 approached. Even the protective and manipulative nature of Phase III also is a reflection of rational concern. With public approval inadequate to maintain the earlier successes of his term, and with an approaching reelection, Johnson and his associates scrambled to buy time by keeping up the appearances. None of this should be considered surprising.

The changes in the interpretation of public opinion in each phase, however, are surprising and perhaps even counter-intuitive. While one might have expected the administration to become increasingly sensitive to the concerns and attitudes of the American public as support declined and Johnson's reelection campaign approached, the opposite occurred. As the administration adjusted its strategic concerns with public opinion, it also changed the kinds of information it sought and, subsequently, its interpretation of public opinion. As the previous chapters have illustrated, the Johnson administration became increasingly closed to the understanding of the breadth and depth of public opinion. (See Table 2 for a summary of this argument).

The need for public support contributed to this change. During Phase I, the strategic concern for maintaining the base of public support led to an interest in the public's issue agenda, as the administration actively sought issues which elicited public approbation. Furthermore, the fear of losing the support kept the administration highly attentive to possible causes of its decline. The self-congratulatory bent to the interpretation of public

Table 2

	LBJ Administration's motivation to examine public opinion	Characteristics of interpretation of public opinion	Result
Phase I	-maintaining and expanding the base of popular support -election in 1964	-concern for ascertaining the public's issue agenda -self-congratulation (acting like a "winning" candidate) -fear of support loss	-high degree of awareness of public opinion
Phase II	-defining the base of public support: what's going wrong? -stabilizing against future decline -midterm election	-belief that problems are primarily due to style, image and communication -belief in an imminent upsurge in popularity	-subtle closing off of some alternative possible interpretations of public opinion
Phase III	-protecting the power base (as demonstrated by concern with the appearance of public support, and attempts to manipulate indicators of public support) -re-election	-rationalization (acting like a "losing" candidate) -belief in pollster bias -belief in manipulation by opponents -belief that the opposition is a socially undesirable, illegitimate, unrepresentative minority	-siege mentality -extremely low levels of attention to or interest in the many possible interpretations of public opinon

opinion led to the belief that the public was highly attentive to the administration, an attitude also observed in the winners of elections. As a result, Phase I is marked by a wide scope of attention to the intricacies of public opinion.

Public linkage to the Johnson administration during Phase II, however, was more difficult. A new strategic concern brought on by the decline in public approval was to stabilize the contracting base of public support against further decline before the elections of 1966 and 1968. An early result of this was an increased attention to the Democratic party, a narrower segment of the population. Another interesting result was the increased use of straw polls as a source of information about the public; the result was a satisfaction with Johnson's being the preferred candidate against potential rivals. Furthermore, during Phase II, the administration focused its attention on the reasons for the decline in public approval, and the commonly cited culprit was the administration's image, an interpretation which allowed the administration to more readily dismiss the idea that the decline was serious. Unlike Phase I, when a fear of support loss kept the administration attentive

to the public, the interpretation of public opinion in Phase II was noticeable for its optimism, another feature of Phase II which allowed the administration to downplay the importance of the decline in public opinion.

But it is difficult to know how public opinion could have made itself heard without severe distortion during Phase III. In order to maintain any semblance of efficacy and hold out for a second elected term, the administration was forced to adopt a protective strategic concern. Yet the administration's preoccupation with creating the appearance of public support overshadowed attempts to understand the public. The Phase III interpretation of public opinion is particularly noteworthy and contributed to the narrowed understanding of public opinion. The administration's rationalization of negative information, dismissal of public opinion polls, and distrust of pollsters allowed it to downplay the significance of public dissent. Johnson continuously narrowed the size of the population which he considered to be legitimately expressing the public will. Consequently, the growing levels of dissent during Phase III could not have a

significant effect on the administration until the 1968 New Hampshire primary revealed the impotence of Johnson's power base.

The Johnson administration, to be sure, reacted to public opinion in each phase studied. There was never a time when the administration was unaware of the consequences of the decline in the indicators of public support for the successes of its policies. Attempts to remedy the situation with such things as attention to style or the publicization of even the most innocuous evidence of support illustrates this.

Yet a distinction must be made between <u>reaction</u> and <u>response</u>. The patterns of public opinion interpretation discussed in the previous chapters left the administration increasingly less able to respond to the public in any meaningful way. Ultimately, of course, the real question here is about the democratic nature of the presidency. Has the plebiscitary nature of the modern presidency made it any more responsive to the people? The Johnson case suggests not necessarily. It is disturbing that an impending reelection and low public support did little to force the administration to carefully assess public opinion. In fact, the Johnson case study suggests that a lack of public

support may even perpetuate itself, as the strategic need for the appearance of public support becomes an acceptable and more readily available substitute for real support. The people's voice was most easily heard when it was already supporting the administration. There was little evidence of democratic responsiveness in the Johnson administration, however, after the support base had deteriorated.

There is a tremendous irony in this. The contemporary American polity includes a continuous feeding of public opinion information into the White House. This is due not only to the growth of the mass media, but also to the corresponding growth in the public opinion polling industry, an industry which has carved its niche in American politics. Even by Johnson's administration, as we have seen, polls were being regularly commissioned and routinely analyzed in the White House, although the institutionalization of an official pollster in the White House had not yet occurred. But despite all this information, the patterns of interpreting public opinion information were such that there was no indication of any additional public guidance of presidential actions. Again, the Johnson administration clearly reacted to

public opinion. But their understanding of public opinion as the term progressed effectively negated the possibility of democratic control.

Another irony stems from the need for and attention to public approval. The priority placed on public support may have drowned out other aspects of public opinion, resulting in the narrowed understanding of public opinion observed in Phases II and III. As public approval fell, the administration changed the questions it asked about public opinion and the type of information it sought. As a result, the operative conception of public opinion included a decreasing portion of the array of opinions commonly expressed in the late 1960's. Public approval may have served to block the linkage of other forms of public opinion.

Public approval is the dominant concern of those in the White House because it is strategically necessary for the president's success. But for the Johnson administration, public approval was not a very meaningful source of public opinion. Thus, for example, declining public approval ratings during Phase II clearly indicated that there was a problem, but did not reveal its causes. Phase III, similarly, illustrates the administration's inability to determine

a way out of public disfavor. Indeed, by Phase III, the Johnson administration was no longer as motivated to ascertain a better understanding of public opinion, since appearances were more important for the fulfillment of short-term goals.

While those who decry the central role of the public in the routine operations of the modern presidency can point to the Johnson White House as an example of their concern, it is very important to understand the nature of public opinion input. Is the modern presidency a plebiscitary presidency? Most definitely. Does this mean that presidents must necessarily be swayed by the fleeting nature of public attitudes? No, not if presidents--like Johnson--are unable to understand the public.

The Johnson case study illustrates that the problems stemming from the plebiscitary nature of the modern presidency are worse than previously expected. Reasonable people could disagree about whether the ideal president should stand by his or her convictions despite public opinion, or should actively pursue an understanding of public opinion so that the people can guide or determine the executive's actions. The debate sparked by Edmund Burke's distinction between delegates

and trustees may never be definitively settled. But everyone should agree that the worst of all possible worlds is a president who operates in a political order which demands behavior as a delegate, but who cannot accurately ascertain an understanding of public opinion. Such presidents will react to the public, but not in a way satisfactory to even the most ardent supporters of majoritarian democracy. Indeed, the degree to which the Johnson administration's interpretation of public opinion dismissed or discounted mounting public criticism of its policies indicates that even if it had chosen deliberately to adapt to public pressures, it would not have been able.

One could argue that Johnson's withdrawal from the 1968 campaign is an indication that the system worked, that public opinion did prevail. Yet such an argument necessarily is predicated on the premise that the selection of candidates constitutes an adequate linkage of public opinion to the Oval Office. But what of the role of the public during the course of a term? For Johnson, his administration became so out of touch with public opinion that withdrawal from the 1968 campaign

became the only option. Dissent had to mount to the point where it caused the collapse of the Johnson administration before it could have any influence.

Some may argue that it is a good thing that presidents are not constantly responding to public opinion. Yet one must be careful to distinguish between pandering to public opinion and not losing touch with the public. In democratic systems, there is supposed to be some level of public control of politicians. Indeed, the constitutional provision for presidential reelection not only gives the people a choice, but also serves as a check against an unacceptable straying from the public will.

The Johnson case study illustrates how easy it is for a presidential administration to lose touch with the people. Indeed, certain institutional aspects of the presidency are prime causes of this problem. The modern presidency operates on a public support base, and public support bases tend to decline. All administrations will have similar strategic concerns, ask similar questions, and face similar problems. Their responses, too, may be similar, such as worrying first about image rather than substance, or attempting to manipulate indicators of public support.

Future Directions for Research

Of course, it is entirely possible that the presidential-public relationship during the Johnson years was an anomaly. Future research into other presidencies will provide the comparative perspective necessary to make more conclusive statements about public opinion linkage to the White House.

The next step in researching this topic should be to test the findings here in other presidencies similarly situated. That is, other presidencies which suffered sustained support loss should be examined for progressively narrowed understandings of public opinion stemming from changes in their strategic concerns for and interpretations of public opinion. Thus, the Truman, Nixon, and Carter presidencies would make ideal case studies. Did these presidents also begin their administrations with heightened sensitivities to the public's issue agenda? Did their declines in public support also result in rationalization and cognitive dissonance leading to poorer understandings of public opinion? Did they narrow the scope of intake of public opinion information such that popularity itself or success in straw polls became sufficient substitutes

for more extensive analysis of public opinion? Affirmative answers to these questions would call into question the democratic responsiveness of the modern presidency. Perhaps even the Hoover administration should be analyzed to determine whether such problems in unpopular administrations are outgrowths of the post-war presidency and the modern polling industry, or have deeper roots in the American constitutional order.

Of course, the presidencies that didn't suffer sustained support loss may also provide insights. Were the Eisenhower and Reagan administrations just lucky, or were they able to avert problems through democratic responsiveness? What sorts of problems did they experience in understanding public opinion?

Ultimately, the American polity needs to decide what constitutes the ideal relationship between the president and the people. How much and what types of public opinion linkage should occur? While unable to answer this question, this dissertation has attempted to shed some light on the nature of the problem. The lesson from the Johnson administration is that the added importance of public opinion to the modern presidency does not necessarily translate into

heightened presidential understanding of the public. The role of the presidency as an institution of popular leadership, controlled by public opinion, deserves further study and careful reconsideration.

Appendix A

Individuals Associated with the Johnson Administration Mentioned in this Study

Gardner Ackley: Council of Economic Advisors Chairman, 1964-1969.

Clifford Alexander: Foreign Affairs Officer, National Security Council, until June 1964; Special Assistant to the President, June 1964 to August 1967.

Ellsworth Bunker: Ambassador to South Vietnam, May 1967 to June 1973.

Horace Busby: Special Assistant to the President, until October 1965. Served as Cabinet Secretary. Personal Friend of the President.

Joseph Califano: Special Assistant to the President, July 1965 to January 1969.

Tad Cantril: Served briefly as Fred Panzer's assistant in late 1966 and early 1967.

Douglas Cater: Special Assistant to the President, May 1964 to October 1968.

George Christian: Administrative Assistant, May 1966 to December 1966. Special Assistant to the President, December 1966 to January 1969. Press Secretary, February 1967 to January 1969.

Clark Clifford: Secretary of Defense, March 1968 to January 1969. Clifford was a longtime friend and adviser to the President, dating back to the FDR administration.

John Connally: Governor of Texas, January 1963 to January 1969. Personal friend of the President.

Myer Feldman: Special Consultant to the President, until November 1965.

Abe Fortas: Justice of the Supreme Court, 1965-1969. Fortas was a longtime friend and adviser to the President, dating back to the FDR adminstration.

Henry Fowler: Treasury Secretary, April 1965 to December 1968.

John Gardner: Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, August 1965 to March 1968.

Eric F. Goldman: Special Consultant to the President, December 1963 to September 1966.

Ernest Goldstein: Special Assistant to the President, September 1967 to January 1969.

Richard N. Goodwin: Special Assistant to the President, April 1964 to September 1965.

Walter Heller: Council of Economic Advisers Chairman, until 1964.

Luther Hodges: Secretary of Commerce until June 1965.

Ralph Huitt: Assistant Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, 1965 - 1968.

Hubert H. Humphrey: Vice President of the United States, January 1965 to January 1969.

Jake Jacobsen: Legislative Counsel, April 1965 to January 1969. Acted as principal assistant when the President travelled.

Lyndon B. Johnson: thirty-sixth president of the United States, November 1963 to January 1969.

Lady Bird (Claudia Taylor) Johnson: wife of the President.

Jim (James R.) Jones: Assistant to the President, February 1965 to January 1968; Deputy Special Assistant to the President, January 1968 to May 1968; Special Assistant to the President, May 1968 to January 1969. Served as Appointments secretary from January 1968 to January 1969.

Robert Kintner: Special Assistant to the President, April 1966 to June 1967. Served as Cabinet Secretary. Acted as Chair of White House Staff meetings. Before working for the White House, Kintner was President of N.B.C., from 1958 to 1966.

Lawrence Levinson: Deputy Special Counsel, December 1966 to January 1969.

Robert McNamara: Secretary of Defense until February 1968.

Harry McPherson: Special Counsel to the President: February 1966 to January 1969.

Charles Maguire: originally joined the administration as a White House Fellow, October 1965, and remained on the White House staff. Served varyingly as assistant to Jack Valenti, Bill Moyers and Robert Kintner. Completed his term with the title "Assistant to the President." Acted as Cabinet Secretary from June 1967 to January 1969.

Sherwin Markman: Assistant to the President, January 1966 to September 1968.

Mike Manatos: Administrative Assistant until January 1969.

Bill Moyers: Special Assistant to the President until January 1967. Served as Press Secretary from July 1965 to January 1967.

Richard Nelson: Assistant to the President until December 1964.

Paul Nitze: Secretary of the Navy to 1967; Deputy Secretary of Defense to 1969.

Lawrence O'Brien: Special Assistant to the President until November 1965. Postmaster General, November 1965 to April 1968.

Fred Panzer: Staff Assistant Responsible for Research, under Moyers, Kintner and Watson, from May 1965 to January 1969. Reported directly to the President after Watson's departure to become Postmaster General.

Hayes Redmon: Assistant to Bill Moyers, from February 1965 until Moyers' departure, serving with the title "Staff Assistant to the President." Remained briefly at White House after Moyers' departure.

George Reedy: Special Assistant to the President, serving as Press Secretary, March 1964 to July 1965. Special Consultant to the President, September 1965 to April 1966. Special Assistant to the President, March 1968 to January 1969.

Charles Roche: Assistant to the President, January 1966 to January 1969.

John Roche: Special Consultant to the President, September 1966 to September 1968.

Walt Rostow: Chair, State Department Policy Planning Council, until April 1966. Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, April 1966 to January 1969.

James H. Rowe: Longtime friend and adviser to the President, dating back to the FDR adminstration.

Will Sparks: Assistant to the President, October 1965 to January 1969.

Irving Sprague: Aide for Legislative Affairs, February 1967 to September 1968.

Marvin Watson: Special Assistant to the President, February 1965 to April 1968. Acted as Appointment Secretary after Valenti's departure. Postmaster General, April 1968 to January 1969.

William Westmoreland: General. Appointed by Johnson as head of military advising operation in Vietnam. Served as commander of U.S. combat forces in Vietnam until mid-summer 1968.

Earle Wheeler: General. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1964 - 1970.

Henry Wilson: Administrative Assistant until February 1967.

Jack Valenti: Special Assistant to the President until April 1966. Served as Appointments Secretary. Personal Friend of the President.

Appendix B

A Word About the Archival Method

The analysis in this dissertation is based on research conducted regularly over a period of a year at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, Texas. My research required months of reading internal White House memoranda until I recognized patterns in the Johnson administration's relationship with the American people.

This research was conducted to maximize the chances of locating strong evidence. First, I selected the office files of the top Johnson aides, and examined folders which contained memoranda for Johnson. Thus, whenever possible, I read memoranda for the President from such people as Bill Moyers, Horace Busby, Marvin Watson, George Christian, Joseph Califano, George Reedy, and Jack Valenti. (See Appendix A for a synopsis of the role of these and other individuals in the Johnson administration). I was particularly attentive to folders from these files which had labels indicating topics relating to the public such as "elections-campaigns," "public opinion polls," "response to State of the Union," etc. Often I simply

randomly examined folders relating to various topics; surprisingly, such "fishing expeditions" were frequently quite fruitful.

Second, I selected the files of those who were specifically assigned the responsibility of interpreting public opinion and opinion polls for the president. Although this was done at different times by a wide variety of people, Richard Nelson, Hayes Redmon, and Fred Panzer were integral to this process.1 The files of Fred Panzer were extremely valuable for this research. They were also quite sizeable, some 660 boxes, not all of which have yet been processed. Panzer's role in the interpretation of public opinion was itself interesting. Although Panzer was not a central actor in the Johnson administration, his office became the clearing house for polls and other public opinion related data. Thus, Panzer sent frequent memos to Johnson, often several in a single day, and markings on these correspondence indicate that Johnson read much of this material. (See below).

I also found that the files of speechwriters and press office personnel were very valuable. Since these

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1 Bruce Altschuler, "LBJ and the Polls," Public Opinion Quarterly, Fall 1986, p. 287.

people were responsible for public relations, they devoted enormous energy to understanding the public to which they were relating. Thus the files of aides such as Harry McPherson, Richard Goodwin, and Douglas Cater often were of great research value.

Not all White House aides preserved their files intact upon leaving the White House. Frequently, they dismantled their files and sent them to be categorized in the White House Central Files (WHCF). Others removed their files, (which was legal then); often these people later donated their material to the Johnson White House as "Personal Papers of _____."

If an aide's office files were not available, the White House employee name file was checked (called the FG-11-8-1 files by the Johnson archivists). All employees had such a file, although the uses of such files were inconsistent. For some, it merely contained information about terms of employment; for others, it contained substantive records or an indication of how the individuals papers were filed in the White House Central files.

The White House Central Files was where the vast majority of paper went. I gave priority to examining

files from the WHCF which contained information about political affairs, public relations, and speeches. I also used these files to acquire information about specific topics and programs. The WHCF contain an important subcategory called the "Confidential Files" which were particularly useful, since these were used for materials considered sensitive by the White House.

The WHCF also contained the "Name Files." These are files containing memos, letters, or papers from, to, or about individuals not on the Johnson White House staff. These files are enormous. It is the Name Files, for example, that contain all White House letters from, to, or about private citizens. More importantly for my purposes, these files contained memos about close Johnson associates such as Abe Fortas, Congressman Jake Pickle, Robert Kintner (while not employed by the White House), Bill Moyers (while not employed by the White House), and James Rowe. These files were often extremely valuable to my work. For example, I gathered substantial information from the name files of pollsters George Gallup and Louis Harris which had never been opened until I requested

them; this was quite surprising since previous scholars have used the archives to examine Johnson's relationship with pollsters.

President Johnson himself seldom wrote memos, preferring informal meetings or the telephone. Frequently, however, he would write messages onto memos delivered to him and return them to the author. Another common practice was to tell a secretary what he wanted communicated. The secretary would type Johnson's comment verbatim on a yellow slip of paper and attach it to the relevant memo or send it alone to the appropriate person. When I refer to Johnson's statements or memos from Johnson in my citations, I am often referring to these yellow slips. Furthermore, memos to Johnson frequently contained check-boxes of options which could be selected by the President. These boxes also reveal presidential decisions.

It is not always clear how much Johnson read of the material addressed to him. But, fortunately, the Johnson White House carried out a practice which made it easier for future researchers. Whenever Johnson was seen reading a memo, an assistant would put a letter "L" on the top of the paper. Occasionally, Johnson would make this notation himself. If Johnson went

through material in which the memo was located but no one saw him read it, it was marked with a "ps" (president saw).

Communication within the Johnson White House was extensive, which partially explains the circulation of similar attitudes which I observed. Memos and files were xeroxed and carbon-copied, and often appeared in the files of numerous aides (whether they were part of the original correspondence or not). This became so confusing that I needed to bring to the archives a computer generated chronological list of materials that I had photocopied for my personal collection in order to prevent costly repetitions of the same work. The growth of common attitudes which resulted from the White House communication network was one of my earlier observations which led to this research.

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