

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

**“A Divisive Union: How Rhetoric in United States State of the Union Speeches from
2001-2021 contribute to hyperpolarization and division of the country.”**

verfasst von / submitted by

Travis James Bederka

Angestrebter akademisch Grad / in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2024 / Vienna 2024

Studeinkennzahl It. Studienblatt / degree programme code as it appears on the student
record sheet: UA 066 812

Studienrichtung It. Studienblatt / degree programme as it appears on the student record
sheet: Meisterstudium English Language and Linguistics

Betreut von / Supervisor: Ass.—Prof. Igor Yanovich, PhD

Table of Contents

List of figures.....	i
Abstract.....	1
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Background.....	2
2.1. Literature Review.....	2
2.2. The State of the Union Address and other speeches.....	6
2.3. Political Discourse Analysis.....	11
2.4. Divisiveness in the United States.....	14
3. Methodology.....	18
3.1. Selection of the Speeches.....	19
3.2. Explanation of the Codes.....	21
3.3. How these codes were selected.....	35
4. Analysis.....	36
4.1 Pilot Study.....	38
4.2 Trends and Patterns.....	42
4.2.1 Speeches by Bush.....	42
4.2.2 Speeches by Obama.....	46
4.2.3 Speeches by Trump.....	51
4.3 Commonalities shared between the Three Presidents.....	56
5. Conclusion.....	59
6. References.....	61

List of Figures

1. Figure 1.....39

2. Figure 2.....43

3. Figure 3.....47

4. Figure 4.....52

Abstrakt

Inmitten der zunehmenden politischen Polarisierung in den Vereinigten Staaten wird die Sprache viele dieser Spaltungen widerspiegeln. Der Präsident der Vereinigten Staaten, der einst eine einigende Figur für alle Amerikaner sein sollte, verewigt diese Spaltungen nun in der Sprache, die er verwendet. Dies geschieht vor allem in der Rede zur Lage der Nation, der wichtigsten Rede, die ein Präsident halten kann. Anhand der Reden des Präsidenten zur Lage der Nation aus den Jahren 2001 bis 2021 werde ich zeigen, wie spaltend die Rhetorik des Präsidenten mit zunehmender Polarisierung wird.

1. Introduction

The United States of America is a country that is wrought with division and polarization in nearly every aspect of its society, which has had cataclysmic effects on its economy and political system. As such, the president of the United States assumes the monumental task of attempting to unite Americans on certain policies and beliefs for the betterment of the country. However, in a society as polarized as the United States, for every person who respects and agrees with the president, there is at least one other person who despises and disagrees with the president, showcasing how divided the country is. This is a problem that many presidents and politicians have found themselves confronting.

One way to attempt to unify the people in any political system, as well as draw support for certain policies and actions, would be through speeches. In the United States, there are speeches for all occasions including press conferences, crisis speeches, commemorations of heroes, as well as a variety of other speeches for numerous reasons. Yet, the biggest speech that a president can make is the State of the Union address (SOTU), which is given every year (except for inauguration years) and helps prepare Americans for what policies are to be taken for the upcoming year while bringing Americans together under one common goal. However, this has not worked due to a plethora of divisive language which exploits the numerous divides that exist in American society.

For as hopeful as presidents may be in unifying the United States with the SOTU address, there is still language used which is not inclusive of all Americans and can be seen as divisive. This divisive rhetoric has the potential to make certain sections of the population feel unwanted, uncared for, and even speak down in regard to race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, political affiliation, as well as numerous other factors. As a result, Americans will find themselves at increasing odds with one another as existing social gaps continue to widen.

In addition to proposing policies and actions onto the people, the president additionally attempts to instill a certain ideology and belief as well based on their personal and partisan tenets, which is what fosters the divisive rhetoric heard in the speeches. By identifying which divisive methods the president uses in their SOTU speeches, it is hoped that people will recognize how the president attempts to propose more than just policy and how to avoid succumbing to the divisive language that plagues American society, and other societies as well.

2. Background

The SOTU speeches are speeches which contribute to the further polarization in the United States by having the presidents utilizing divisive rhetoric to sell their ideologies to the American people as well as political actions, which frequently reflect their ideologies. Within this section, the literature that was found to provide more background information regarding this topic will be covered. Following this, the function and history of the State of the Union speeches, the nature of political discourse analysis (PDA), as well as the polarized nature of politics within the United States will be examined. All of this information will serve to provide the reader with a greater understanding as to how the SOTU speeches contribute to the hyperpolarization of the United States between 2001-2021 and how the language within the speeches contributes to this division.

2.1 Literature Review

The topic of PDA as well as divisive rhetoric in the SOTU by the presidents of the United States involve a look into both the politics of the United States as well as how language is utilized in these speeches. To provide a proper idea of this, literature was gathered from a plethora of sources referring to how certain presidents use language, what drives countries towards polarization, the nature of PDA, as well as particular examples of divisive rhetoric used by presidents. All of these sources contribute to the wider context of how the president of the United States engages in divisive rhetoric during the SOTU speech and increases polarization.

In order to properly look into a topic such as this, research was first conducted into the field of political rhetoric in general. One of the most commonly used tactics in politics is to make oneself into a “populist” party, which involves appealing to the people directly while not fully specifying who “the people” are (Canovan, 1984). Due to the ambivalent nature of who belongs to “the people”, populism is a concept that can be used by almost every type of

political movement to properly gain support and momentum in accomplishing political goals. The “people” can be directed towards any section of the population, all of it, or only a small minority since it is something that cannot be properly defined. This lack of a concrete definition allows politicians to manipulate the meaning as much as they want while allowing the public to believe that what they suggest is good for everyone. McCoy and Somer (2019) observe the phenomenon of how polarization takes place and how divisions within society can be exploited through ambitious political actors by many means, including language. Much like what Canovan (1984) suggested, political actors make use of appealing to the “people” in order to enact their policies and prey on their grievances with society. However, McCoy and Somer (2019) also include how populist leaders employ language that is polarizing and plays against other groups that have the potential to stand in the way of their ambitions. This language may be directed towards the established elites of a country, a demographic minority, or other political organizations that supposedly hinder their progress and provide competition.

In terms of how political discourse analysis (PDA) is utilized, Dummire (2012) investigates the language that is used in politics and how it can be utilized under a variety of topics through PDA. The nature of PDA aims to understand how language is truly used in order to further a politician’s agenda, or what is said with regards to a particular situation from a person with power to people with little to no power. PDA has originated as a form of critical discourse analysis (CDA) since it is assumed that political discourse is observed via critical lens and that CDA serves as a political endeavor at its core (Dummire 2012). Given how CDA looks at analyzing language through a certain lens, PDA focuses primarily through a political lens in order to find out what is truly being said by politicians and what “political language” truly entails. Horvath (2009) looked to implement PDA into Obama’s discourse, and focused on the grammar he used, his interpretation of words like “freedom” and “justice” as well as how the beliefs of the Democratic Party influenced the language he used in his speeches. The turbulent events that happened during Obama’s early presidency revealed a deeply divided America; Obama hoped to reconcile these differences by using language that was more inclusive with the possessive “our” as opposed to the more established and elitist beliefs of his predecessor, George W. Bush (Horvath, 2009).

In contrast to Horvath (2009), Sarfo and Krampa (2013) found that during the war on terror, both Bush and Obama used language and tactics that coerced the public into accepting their anti-terrorist policies through discourse which alluded to objective acts of terrorism that would cause harm to the United States and its citizens, similar to the attacks on September

11th, 2001. In a sentiment similar to what Sarfo and Krampa (2013) expressed, Cap (2007) explains a method in political discourse which has been utilized following the 9/11 attacks known as proximization. This is a method which splits the population into “us vs. them” camps and seeks to legitimize their claims and actions by presenting a near and present danger to the people with drastic and often gruesome language. This kind of language presents a clear danger in the minds of the people and can serve to divide people as well as garner support for a certain action or policy. A more detailed analysis of Obama’s speeches was done by Wang (2010) and shows, much like Horvath (2009), that Obama did use first-person plural pronouns and possessives a lot, but also plenty of references to the Judeo-Christian God as well. This shows that for as inclusive as Obama attempted to be, there were still instances of divisive language within his speeches that divided the people, whether he intended to or not.

Another method of division was noticed by Louie and Viladrich (2021) in the rhetoric of Donald Trump, where he attempted to pin the blame of the COVID-19 pandemic on both Chinese and Hispanic immigrants. This type of rhetoric, they claim, was used to shore up support for a more right-leaning demographic and bolster the white supremacy that they secretly support. It was particularly effective in supporting ideologies pertaining to white supremacy and the narrative that immigrants to America, particularly from Asia and Latin America, are not the same as native-born Americans. In a similar vein to proximization proposed by Cap (2007), Louie and Viladrich (2021) proposed that there was a danger proposed by Trump which sought to create a sense of uneasiness within Americans. However, Cap (2007) spoke in terms of conflict and the War on Terror, while Louie and Viladrich (2021) referred to two particular demographics; regardless, the threat of an imminent danger is an effective one used by any politician and may garner support among certain people while vilifying entire populations.

In addition to using divisive language, there are also subtler ways for political actors to extend their points to the public. One of these tactics is through the use of dogwhistles. A dogwhistle can be defined as “the use of messages embedded in speeches that seem innocent to the audience but resonate with a specific public attuned to receive them” (Safire, 2008). Whitely (2014) states that dogwhistles are frequently used by politicians in order to make the audience who hold the same beliefs think that the politician is on the same side as them while the rest of the audience does not pick up on the message. This can be used in a variety of manners from race to religion to class as well as with other sections of a country which are highly divided between one another in order to promote a group’s ideology.

When it comes to political actions, it is important to know that in many cases, they are ideologically driven. Van Dijk (2006) said that ideologies are a form of belief that depend on language in order to be spread to as many people as possible and that such discourse depends on the subjective interpretations of its listeners. If an ideology is to spread, it must meet a number of social criteria, but one in particular is that it must provide a feeling of belonging to someone who listens to it (Van Dijk, 2006). As a result, the pronoun “we” is frequently expressed to show unity with the members of an ideology; this allows people of all different backgrounds to take part in this ideology and engage in discourse pertaining to it. The more that people find themselves being included into a particular ideology linguistically, the more likely it is that they will ascribe to it as they feel included and wanted by the preachers of 4 ideology. This is a sentiment that is demonstrated by Horvath (2009) and Wang (2010) where they demonstrated how Obama tended to use the possessive “our” and “we” more frequently than Bush.

In addition to ideology, Ash, Morelli, and Van Weelden (2015) propose a phenomenon known as *posturing* where more effort is spent on divisive issues as opposed to more common-value ones. This phenomenon was observed in the U.S. Senate where senators up for re-election tend to magnify certain divisive issues, however, this magnification does not equal the creation of polarization. Instead, the elections bring forth a greater view of these issues to the public eye and merely highlight polarization (Ash et al., 2015). Winans (2019) defined political polarization as groups moving further away from each other in terms of opinions and ideology and identifies three factors for divisive language: negative campaigning, incivility, and political polarization. Additionally, the two major tools of a candidate’s campaign are language and communication because they don’t just list off their policy proposals but are also the messengers for greater ideas and attempt to codify their ideology to as many people as possible, as Van Dijk (2006) proposed. These concepts, such as the spread of ideology and divisiveness, help to show that polarization is widespread in the United States and show what polarization consists of so that it may be more easily identified. Yet, at the same time, Van Dijk’s (2006) concept of ideology shows just how this polarization is spread in the United States where candidates attempt to sell an ideology as well as political actions. Although the president is meant to represent the United States as a whole, they are also tasked with representing their party as well, providing a paradoxical task of representing the interests of the country as a whole and the ideology of their party. As such, this use of ideology is prevalent in a number of different events from election

campaigns, to press conferences, and even to one of the most important speeches a president can give: The State of the Union (SOTU) speech.

The SOTU speech is one of the most prominent speeches given to the public by the president. The reason that the SOTU speech is so effective is because it allows people to get a simplified view of the president's policy agenda that he would like to impose (Cohen 1995). Even though there may be details missing from certain policies within the speeches, the president takes an explicit stance on the policies that would divide the left from the right. One of the biggest issues that a president needs to overcome is to keep the public's attention on a particular policy that they would like to implement within the year lest the public lose attention and focus on another issue the president does not wish to focus on.

2.2 The State of the Union address and other speeches 5

The State of the Union address (SOTU) is an annual speech given by the president (with the exception of inaugural years where a new president assumes the office) in order to provide a summary of actions that have taken place over the course of the previous year while recommending new policies and actions for the coming year. This speech is mandated by the United States Constitution under Article II, section 3 and cannot be excused. However, from the original text of the Constitution, a thorough description of what should properly constitute this speech is missing and, like many other sections of the Constitution, has continued to be debated to the present day.

The first SOTU speech was given by George Washington in 1790 from the former capital of the United States, New York City. Both George Washington and his successor, John Adams, delivered the speech in person, until Thomas Jefferson discontinued this practice. Fearing that such a speech was reminiscent of the British monarchy, the president wrote the speech, which was then read aloud to Congress by a clerk. The public was able to read the SOTU speech through public newspapers in order to stay informed about what the president had to say. This practice continued until 1913 when Woodrow Wilson read aloud the speech in Congress once more in addition to having it written down. The final president to provide a solely written SOTU speech with no spoken component was Jimmy Carter back in 1981, shortly before he stepped down to his successor, Ronald Reagan.

For much of American history, the speech has been delivered orally or through writing, yet due to the limitations of technology in early America, not many people were able to listen to the speeches (before the practice switched to purely writing for more than a century). Unless people got the chance to observe the speech in Congress, the speech was

contained primarily in writing for much of the nation, until 1922 when Warren Harding's speech was the first speech to be broadcast on radio, albeit to a limited audience; Calvin Coolidge's speech the following year was broadcast to the country as a whole the following year. In 1947, Harry Truman became the first president to read aloud the SOTU on television, adding a new dimension to the influence of the media upon American society.

The SOTU has, since then, become an event where the president is also able to bring Americans together in expectation of policies for the upcoming year. In addition to this, the speech also takes a PR dimension as well since "any presidential mention of a policy will increase public concern and awareness of it" (Cohen 1995; 102). The presidency of the United States comes with a lot of power and prestige to it as it is one of, if not the highest positions in the entire country. At the mention of an issue from the president, the public's 6 attention will be drawn to it, whether they agree with the president's stance on it or not.

Since this is an annual speech, with the exception of inauguration years, the president is able to rally support for policies and actions that they believe should be enacted. Much 6 a president's personality, their political stances on certain issues differ from one president to the other. As a result, each president may have their own different style of speaking and the type of language that they use. This may result in certain presidents using types of language that some people may not be too pleased with or may even consider offensive. Others may use more subtle tactics in order to gain support for their policies and may resort to linguistic manipulation in order to reach their goals. Sarfo and Krampa (2013) state that "Text and talk controls people's minds, and therefore, discourse may also indirectly influence people's actions through persuasion and manipulation" (380). From this, it shows that the SOTU speech, in addition to other speeches as well, have the ability to convey language and meanings in a manner that most people would not be able to recognize at first. One of the most used methods of manipulation is the dogwhistle and is used by politicians to reach out to the parts of the public who share the same beliefs that they do while not singling out the rest of the population with the parts of their belief that might make them uncomfortable (Whitley, 2014). Dogwhistles come in a variety of shapes and forms, but the main characteristic of them is that they are conveyed via phrases that many people would not understand. One example of such comes from the 2012 presidential debates where Republican vice-presidential candidate, Paul Ryan, described America as a nation of "makers and takers", under the belief that the makers are the ones who work hard to improve the country while the takers are the ones who are lazy and want everything handed to them (Whitley 2014). In this example, "makers and takers" is a phrase known among conservative

and Republican supporters while the true meaning evades the more liberal-minded people, allowing this candidate to use this phrase to show potential supporters that he truly is one of them. By having “makers” refer to entrepreneurial business owners and workers who contribute to the economy and “takers” refer to people who do not work and do not contribute much to the economy while reaping the benefits of the “makers”, the candidate is setting up a dialogue which will place the conservative and liberal supporters at odds with each other with the conservatives being touted as the productive ones. All the while, those who are not conservative will not know the true depth of the phrase and that they are being referred to as the “takers”.

What makes the SOTU different from other speeches is that it is a speech which serves as an assessment for what happened in the previous year and what is planned to happen for the coming year. Yet, this is also a time for the president to rally the country under their leadership and erase arbitrary differences with the introduction of sensible legislation. The SOTU is one of the most anticipated speeches that a president can make and is vital when it comes to discussing his plans of what should be done for the coming year, yet each president takes liberties in making the SOTU address fit their particular style and what they wish to accomplish during their terms.

Different presidents use different styles when speaking in addition to inflections, body language, and the type of vocabulary they use to describe the positions that they take. For example, Louie and Viladrich (2021) note that Trump focused primarily on his political base as opposed to the wider American public during his four years in office both in the SOTU address as well as in other public events. The vast majority of his political base consisted of white voters (BBC, 2016), which he roused in the hopes of overcoming his political rivals; this was accomplished by playing on their fears of immigration and COVID (Louie & Viladrich 2021). This rallying of his political base was a controversial tactic of Trump as it seemed to focus on predominantly white conservatives while leaving other groups and demographics out of his political reference. Within Trump’s speeches and discourse, he engaged frequently in the method of dividing and conquering, where he would stigmatize against one group, often an ethnic or racial minority, which would often then translate into symbolic or political violence against said group, such as against the Asian demographic during the COVID pandemic (Louie and Viladrich 2021). Donald Trump’s tactics to garner political support isolated his political base from the rest of the voter base and further widened the gap between the Democratic and Republican parties due to Trump’s singling of different groups and his hostile language towards those who disagreed with him.

The presidency of George W. Bush contained a different style of behavior from what was observed under Trump. The Bush '43 administration was one that was originally beset by crisis following the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and whose focus had been the War on Terror in the invasions in both Iraq and Afghanistan until the end of his presidency in 2009. In order to gain support for the policies regarding the War on Terror, George Bush utilized a tactic identified by Piotr Cap (2007) known as proximization. Proximization is a tactic that has been found to be used primarily for situations where the speaker could justify their actions by displaying a threat from outside that could bring harm to the public and required immediate action (Cap 2007). This works by having the president tell the public that their safety and even their lives are at stake from an outside danger and that if they don't follow the policy that the president laid out, they will be a victim of the aforementioned danger. For example, in Bush's 2007 SOTU speech, he said "And this dependence leaves us more vulnerable to hostile regimes and terrorists who could cause huge disruptions of oil shipments and raise the price of oil and do great harm to our economy". This shows how Bush is placing the American people in the face of hypothetical danger as a demonstration of what would happen if proper support for his policy is not put into place. The use of proximization is a tactic used by many presidents before Bush in order to demonstrate the potential outcome of a crisis, such as during the Civil War, the Great Depression, the World Wars, the Cold War, and other conflicts, but what sets Bush apart is that the 9/11 attacks showed people what truly could happen to them and how many rallied behind Bush to prevent it from happening again.

Additionally, many of Bush's SOTU speeches are directed towards foreign policy with frequent mentioning of war and militarism following the 9/11 attacks (Dummire, 2012). This makes sense as much of Bush's presidency was characterized by the War on Terror, but this is not the only political issue he focused on. Cohen (1995) states that a president's three most common policy concerns pertain to: the economy, foreign policy, and civil rights. Given that the nature of the SOTU speech is supposed to focus on all different types of policies, no president can focus on one topic alone and instead must include other fields as well. Yet not too many topics since that would overburden the people with information and take up too much time. SOTU speeches, by nature, were designed to be recaps and recommendations for what happened and what was to come in a way which would not take up too much of people's time and mental capacity.

For the final president examined in this paper, Barack Obama has a speaking style which differs from the two previous presidents mentioned above. Obama is a different case

because as the first black president of the United States, he was seen by many of those around him as ill-equipped to run the presidency due to racist and white supremacist views. In an attempt to combat these views and disprove the narrative that he was incompetent, Obama spoke as clearly and precisely as he could. When Obama accepted the nomination for president at the Democratic National Convention (DNC), he wanted there to be both civility and respect during the election (Winans 2019). Obama's speeches can be seen as being more inclusive of all different peoples and ethnicities, which demonstrated an attitude which was more centered around the American public at large (Horvath 2009). Horvath (2009) added that Obama frequently made use of the first-person plural pronouns and possessives, such as "our" in order to show a sense of unity among the American people. It could be said that Barack Obama was one of the most unifying figures in 20th century America; however, while this may be true when compared to the Bush and Trump, there were still instances when Obama engaged in some language which was not universally accepted.

While Obama's speeches did make use of we/our pronouns to garner support from Americans for the president, the government, and the policies they wanted to advance (Horvath 2009), Obama was not immune to language which, knowingly or unknowingly, isolated particular demographics in American society. For instance, much like his predecessor, Bush, Obama used certain phrases and clauses in the hopes of painting a bad image of the concept of terrorism by drawing the audience into accepting any anti-terrorist policies he wanted to pass (Sarfo & Krampa 2013). From this instance, it can be observed that Obama has perpetuated the use of proximization like Bush, albeit not to the same degree as Bush, but still to a noticeable amount based on the way he speaks. Yet, this is a common feature among presidents, and other politicians for that matter. In a country as large and diverse as the United States of America, there is bound to be some division where some demographics will be more opposed to the language that a president uses regardless of whether the president had any intention of offending or not. Especially in a speech as important and widely listened to as the SOTU, there are points where there are instances of divisive language clearly at use, and other instances that may not be as clear upon the first hearing it.

Upon researching the literature for this topic, the nature of the SOTU speeches, as well as how they specifically foster division under the lens of a PDA approach, was explored. By looking into how exactly a society can be divided as well as what constitutes divisive rhetoric, a background of knowledge was established as to how societies are given to division and how it can be heightened with divisive rhetoric. When a society has divisions that exist, a

politician has the ability to utilize rhetoric that will exploit those divisions to their advantage with language that will appeal to one side while upsetting the other. This will provide a decent idea when looking through the president's SOTU speech and all the different forms this may happen. Additionally, by looking at some of the speech patterns and divisive tactics that the presidents already employed, this will aid in the creation of codes based on divisive tactics a president may use. Ultimately, the literature that was analyzed supported the conclusion that although the SOTU address is supposed to be a time of unity and reflection for the whole country, it can also be used by a president to support their agenda and ideology, further dividing an already polarized America through divisive rhetoric.

2.3 Political Discourse Analysis

Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) is a field which is made up of both inter- and multidisciplinary research which focuses on both the linguistic and discursive dimensions in both text and talk as well as the nature that is adopted by discourse once it develops a political characteristic (Dunmmire 2012). PDA is a way of interpreting the language that is used in politics and how it can be interpreted by the average people as well as those who are more knowledgeable in the field of politics. As Dunmmire (2012) remarks "PDA is concerned with understanding the nature and function of political discourse and with critiquing the role discourse plays in producing, maintaining, abusing, and resisting power in contemporary society" (736). When observing the language that is used in politics and by politicians, one must be aware of the potentiality of how subtle and nuanced the language and discourse can be. Horvath (2009) observes discourse as a term which is able to reach from different fields such as linguistics, sociology, philosophy, and other such disciplines. Discourse's meaning is managed by the language users' subjective perspectives of a certain event or situation concerning the discourse, based upon the mental models they use (Van Dijk 2006). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the study of said discourse as well as how it can be interpreted in different contexts and perspectives and serves as an umbrella term to different forms of discourse analysis; including PDA.

The singular element which distances CDA from other interpretations of discourse comes from the addition of the word 'critical' (Horvath 2009). Although PDA is similar to CDA, both methods of interpretation are different in the fact that PDA is a subset which takes place under the context of a political text and analyzes it based on the person speaking, the particular policy it is describing, and the situation in which it is found; such as George H.W. Bush's campaign slogan "Read my lips: No new taxes" simultaneously advocating for a

policy of lower taxes and for people to elect him during the presidential election of 1988 as a response to people being upset over how high taxes were at the time. Political language helps communicate ideas, ideologies, and actions to the public and citizenry, yet is also crafted in a way that makes it the most appealing to the people, depending on the system of government. The crucial difference between CDA and PDA is that while CDA is used to find out what exactly is contained within a sentence, PDA aims to examine what is in a sentence that can have an effect on wider populations and have people follow or believe what a person is saying; such as the example above where Bush is attempting to win over voters by promising lower taxes.

In the United States of America, where the people choose a majority of their civic leaders, the language that a politician uses must be thought about very carefully as it could damage their hopes for reelection or an opportunity to pass a bill that they would love to see enacted. Although the United States of America is a multi-party country, the two most powerful parties, Democrats and Republicans, attempt to gain control over one another in the attempt of winning more power and spreading the ideologies of their parties, which are frequently at odds with each other. PDA provides the framework which allows a researcher to look into the language that politicians use in order to find out the real meanings behind what a politician is saying and if there is anything hidden within the language that could bypass the average listener. The field of discourse analysis looks to uncover any hidden meanings that is not expressed within the language itself, and PDA is no different as the hidden language may be used to deceive, fool, lie, or exaggerate under the guise of policies or political campaigns.

PDA is a method which can help the reader come closer to understanding the true nature of a particular phrase or sentence by making sense of the circumstances surrounding it and analyzing potential meanings. For example, Trump's use of the phrase "stand back, stand by" when asked about the far-right group, the Proud Boys, sparked a lot of debate over its intended meaning during the 2020 presidential election debates. There are some who believe that the phrase was in direct reference to the Proud Boys, and other right-wing groups, instructing them to wait until after the election to attack the Capitol should the election not go in Trump's favor. Others believe that this is directed towards those same groups to cease their violent and hateful activities. Although these words may sound simple and innocent enough, "stand back" comes off as a command for these groups to not interfere, yet "stand by" implies that they are to wait until a certain signal or command is given where they would engage in some potentially violent activity. This simple phrase sparked immediate debate and controversy as to what it could possibly have meant, despite it being four simple words which

anyone could have used in any context. Many speculate that this phrase did serve as a dogwhistle for far-right groups and served as a connection to the storming of the Capitol on January 6, 2021, where Trump supporters and far-right groups rejected Trump's loss and sought to overturn the election results. PDA looks to understand the context surrounding the use of language and how it has the ability to change a seemingly normal phrase into something that can divide, deceive, or divert the public's attention away from something else.

When candidates are running for presidency or any other political office, they have both the public and the world listening to them, which allows them to increase their unconventional tones and language (Winans 2019). In order to garner support for their candidacy, they may resort to using language or terms which may be considered "uncivil" in order to show the public (or more accurately, their supporters) that they are on their side. One example of this came during the 2016 presidential race where Hillary Clinton referred to Donald Trump and his supporters as "a basket of deplorables", a term which doubtlessly offended those who supported Donald Trump and further isolated a significant portion of the population away from her cause. Incidents such as these also allow PDA to provide certain contexts as to how such situations came about since there would logically be no reason for a politician to use such a phrase if it wasn't warranted in some way. Another example comes from 2012, when Obama ran for his second term, although his speeches were mostly positive, he made use of negative language against his opponent, Mitt Romney, when he said "Now, our friends down in Tampa at the Republican Convention were more than happy to talk about everything they think is wrong with America. But they didn't have much to say about how they'd make it right. They want your vote, but they don't want you to know their plan" (Winans 2019). While it is more subtle than insulting an entire demographic, as Hillary Clinton did in the previous example, this still shows how during high-stakes events as primaries and debates, the language used from one opponent to another can become hostile and uncivil. As the previous examples show, political texts are not always straight-forward and can take on a number of dimensions, which may lead to confusion as to who the "deplorables" are as described by Clinton, or who the people are who don't want you to know their plan, as described by Romney. PDA allows the researcher to look at certain phrases and sentences and analyze them with the political context that is given. PDA is heavily based on the political context surrounding the statement and when it is utilized, it must be analyzed according to a number of factors ranging from the policy/instance it is referring to, the person speaking, as well as the person's speech habits prior to the instance.

Instances, like the ones described in the previous paragraph, allow PDA to be used in order to help provide context as to why such statements were used and what the underlying meaning of these sentences were. This also allows analysts to form patterns and consistencies regarding to how language is used against certain demographics within a population. Such discourse can vary between ethnicities, races, classes, ideological beliefs, gender, and a variety of other paradigms that a society may be divided into. Political discourse must take into account how each of these strata will be affected by the language that is used and how people in general will react to this language. PDA can be analyzed from a number of different perspectives and is often studied as to how it can be used to change people's ways of thinking and formulate what may happen when the discourse is used in a particular topic or subject, such as how presidents talk about a certain policy or issue and how they communicate this to the people. The groups who are in charge of discourse often turn out to be the most influential groups in society, which gives them a stronger opportunity to control both the minds and actions of their supporters (Sarfo & Krampa 2013). This could be especially dangerous in a country as diverse, yet divisive, as the United States of America.

2.4 Divisiveness in the United States

With a country as diverse as the United States, it is inevitable that there will be differences in opinion due to the diversity of races, ethnicities, religions, and beliefs within the country. In a country as large as America, the opportunities to divisiveness are rife, especially with past grievances that still carry on to the present. This section aims to delve into the more specific divisions within the United States so as to understand what sort of divisions were exploited within the SOTU addresses. Each of the three presidents observed have their own sets of policies they would like to see passed based on the combined beliefs of themselves and their parties, as a result of this, these policies will not be agreeable to many people within the United States. A brief recap of divisiveness within the United States will help the reader understand how certain groups were (and still remain) disenfranchised as well as provide some insight into how these groups remain divided even during a speech as unifying as the SOTU.

The United States of America is a country that has often been described as a “melting pot”, as a way to describe its vast diversity of culture, people, beliefs, ideologies, and attitudes with people from all over the world contributing to its diversity. However, while the diversity of the United States is unquestionable, its history has demonstrated vast amounts of inequality, exploitation, and outright violence towards various groups of people. From the

African-Americans who were enslaved and denied rights upon emancipation, to the Native Americans who were forced off their land and into reservations, to the Asian Americans who were exploited into performing dangerous jobs and placed into internment camps during WWII (Japanese only), as well as women who do not have equal representation or rights as men, the United States' history is full of discrimination and inequality of all different kinds of groups. Although the political system designed for the United States was one of the most inclusive in the world by the late 18th century, it still came with a lot of restrictions and unclear ideas about how the government was to truly work.

Even before the War for Independence was won, the United States was already experiencing divisiveness over whether power should be placed within the individual states or the federal government, a theme that can be observed time and again in American history. This divisiveness between the federal and state governments would eventually culminate in the American Civil War where the southern states would fight against the northern states for four bloody years in an attempt to preserve their states' rights, and even expansion, of slavery. After the Civil War reached its conclusion, the two main parties of the United States, the Democrats and the Republicans, took control and attempted to outdo one another at each election with the country being firmly split into both sides.

While this political schism was happening, minority groups continued to face discrimination with little to no political representation from neither the federal nor the state governments. After decades of little to no representation and even violence against minority groups, the Civil Rights Movement took place in the 1960s as a means of restoring rights to disenfranchised groups all across the United States. This movement also coincided with the growing opposition to the conflict in Vietnam, where the causes were intermingled with one another and shared many of the same outlooks and goals. Even though the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-20th century brought some much-needed solutions to discrimination, many forms of discrimination and division still survive to this day, which can still be exploited and referred to for political agendas.

For much of the 21st century, the political divide in the United States continues to grow between Republicans and Democrats, and with such a wide division, there are people who either look to bridge the divisions or exploit them. Polarizing figures look to take advantage of the grievances that pertain to political, economic, or cultural issues; they wish to activate such tensions on already existing cleavages and divisions within society; or they will wish to combine formative rifts together with other divisions which affect society as a whole (McCoy & Somer 2019). Pernicious polarization is a society that is divided into us vs. them

groups which stems from a single dimension of difference that overtakes the other divisions in a diverse setting; this can prove to be harmful to a democracy (Winans 2019). Whether a politician wishes to unite a country into a more stable and unified state, or whether they wish to benefit off of its divisions, they are not able to succeed without the use of language. One of the biggest methods of driving divisions further in a society is the creation of political identities (McCoy and Somer 2019). This allows a certain mindset to develop among adherents of a political ideology in the hopes of both preserving and spreading its message while ensuring that opponents are kept in check, if not eliminated entirely. As McCoy and Somer (2019) report, “In extreme situations, political identity can become all-encompassing as people view those in the “other” camp with distrust, suspicion, or fear and cease to interact with them” (235). Although political identities allow people to place a label on what their beliefs are and build communities with like-minded people, there always is the risk that these political identities define too much about a person and can lead to discrimination or even violence against other groups.

In the United States of America, use of political identities has spurred the acceleration of hyperpolarization since the start of the 21st century, with both sides viewing the other with contempt and distrust. A Pew Research Center report from 2014 found that in 1994, 16% of Democrats asked viewed the Republican Party with a negative outlook while 17% of Republicans asked viewed the Democratic Party in the same manner. Ten years later in 2004, this information rose with 29% of Democrats viewing the Republican Party as unfavorable, while 21% of Republicans viewed the Democratic Party as unfavorable.

The poll concluded in 2014 with 38% of Democrats viewing the Republican party as unfavorable while an astounding 43% of Republicans viewed the Democratic Party with disdain, more than double its rate from 2004. In addition to the increasingly hostile views from one party to another, it was also found that in 2014, 27% of the Democrats questioned saw the Republicans as a threat to the nation’s well-being, while 36% of Republicans viewed Democrats as a threat to the nation’s well-being.

This data indicates that the two main parties view the other with greater hostility as time has progressed and the opportunities for bipartisan cooperation seem to be shrinking. Undoubtedly, the rise of community-specific media and news channels with a particular political leaning have contributed to this division with stations as Fox News catering to a more right-leaning portion of the population while stations as CNN are more viewed by left-leaning audiences. Many of these media stations may intentionally leave out details or peddle lies in an attempt to serve their purposes and galvanize their viewers into ascribing to the

same beliefs that they do. One notorious example resulted from the infamous Newtown Massacre in 2012, where an armed gunman entered the Sandy Hook Elementary School and killed 20 children along with six faculty and staff. After this, the debate on gun ownership in the United States was reignited as to whether people should be allowed to own powerful assault weapons with little to no background checks in regard to mental health or responsibility. The host of the far-right news channel InfoWars, Alex Jones, claimed that the children and adults who were murdered were all mere actors and that they were still alive. Jones claimed that the supposed shooting was staged as an attempt to limit gun ownership in the United States, which Jones, along with many members of the far-right, greatly opposed.

The InfoWars controversy with Alex Jones demonstrated that the divisiveness in the United States has grown so wide that not even a tragedy as the massacre at Newtown could be agreed upon and that the victims were seen as 'crisis actors'. There have also been instances of similar accounts from mass shootings occurring after the Newtown massacre as the question of gun ownership is one that is one of the most contested topics in America at present. Yet, this is only one of many instances that Americans remain divided on, there are also a plethora of issues pertaining to social issues, economics, politics, the environment, race relations, foreign relations, and many other topics.

The formation of interest groups such as Black Lives Matter as well as countless splinter and reactionary groups serve as evidence for how America has split apart at a social and cultural level as well as at the political and economic levels. Frequently, these groups will find themselves at odds with other groups and look to carry their message to the highest levels of government and garner the attention of the president. Thus, the president is put in the awkward position of having to represent all Americans from all different beliefs and ideologies and using language which would not cause too much offense to any group which could serve as a potential support base for the president.

The president has some of the highest authority in the entire country and is supposed to act as a unifying figure, however, despite being the leader of the free world, they can be just as, if not more, divisive than anybody else in the country. The president is supposed to be a public and unifying figure that the entire country can look to and transcend divisiveness, yet with so much power, the president is bound to make decisions or sign a bill that will inevitably make some people more upset than others. This is in contrast to Supreme Court Justices, Representatives, or Senators who do not hold the same prestige as a president and work for particular sections of the country as Congressmen or are not selected by the people at all, such as Supreme Court Justices. In a country ruled by two powerful parties, it is an

inevitability that when the president is selected from one of these parties, then the members of the other party will not be able to identify with the president and may even be opposed to some of the legislation they propose. The president may say or propose some things which both sides of the aisle may find common ground on, but no matter how hard a president may try, there will be nothing they can do to fully unite the country under one banner.

The biggest reason for divisiveness within the modern-day United States of America is that it is too large of a country with too many differences in opinion that either don't know how or don't want to work with one another. The history has shown to be divisive as well with certain groups in the United States being disenfranchised and having social and economic issues which persist to this very day. In addition to social and economic discrepancies within the American population, the political history has also shown to be divisive as well with the formation of political parties that have only grown stronger, more powerful, and more competitive against one another. This has culminated into the Democratic and Republican parties which currently dominate the American political landscape and have left little to no room for any other contender. Although the president is supposed to be the unifying figure which all Americans can look up to, he is a divisive character in his own right as he represents policies and actions in which not all Americans support. This divisiveness is often reflected in the language that they use and how they describe other groups and demographics. A president may resort to using uncivil language, dogwhistles, or any other form of linguistic technique which demonstrates that there is at least one part of the population that he has a disdain for. The result of this has been a growing divide between the parties and its adherents. By the 21st century, the degree of political polarization in the United States of America has reached a degree to which it has not achieved before with people from opposing political beliefs refusing to cooperate or concede to the views of the other side. This division in the United States has shown its head in a number of ways from controversial figures such as Alex Jones, Donald Trump, and Hillary Clinton to name a few, as well as actions such as the storming of the Capitol on January 6, 2021. The language that has been used by these figures contribute to the country being plagued by division and hyperpolarization.

3. Methodology

In this section of the thesis, I will be discussing how the research was carried out and how the data was collected and interpreted. This research made use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to interpret the data that was found within the SOTU speeches

given from 2001-2021 to show how many instances of a divisive rhetoric took place as well as what exactly they said in order to provide the reader with an idea of how divisive in nature they truly were. The following sections will outline how the speeches themselves were selected, the types of codes that were created, how said codes were applied to the speeches as well as what data was collected. This section will describe what each code means as well as provide examples so that future scholars may take inspiration in order to spot divisive language in future political speeches or speeches of another nature. In addition to the nature of the codes themselves, the sources they came from will also be noted if they were found in the literature.

3.1 Selection of the Speeches

In order to properly look at how the president engages in divisive language it was decided to look into a series of speeches from three chronological presidents in order to see what aspects made up the divisive language as well as which aspects some presidents used more or less than others. It was decided to use the SOTU speeches from the post-WWII era as this was the time where a vast majority of SOTU speeches were being broadcast to people all over the country. Following this, the SOTU speeches would take place between the years 2001-2021 between the three presidents who assumed the office during this time: George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump. Joe Biden was excluded from this list as his presidency is still ongoing as of the writing of this paper.

In addition to selecting speeches in a time where mass media is widely available to a vast majority of Americans, the time period was focused on the 21st century to show what the new SOTU (and by extension other speeches) would be like in this new era. Almost immediately, the United States was beset with crises that shook the political world to its core on a level not seen since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. With the Cold War over and only a decade until the new millennium, people were wondering which direction the United States would head towards, yet only one year into the 21st century, the World Trade Center was attacked and America found itself in a new conflict that would last 20 years. With new presidents to take command, new crises unravelling, and new decisions to be made on issues which weren't relevant in the 20th century, this new century would reveal new attitudes to these challenges, and the speeches given in this time period would reflect said attitudes.

With the time period set between 2001-2021, this means that there were approximately seventeen SOTU speeches (the SOTU speech is replaced with the inauguration speech when a new president assumed the office). Even though there was plenty

of material to work with, it was believed that priority should be given to the speeches which were held most notably during a period of crisis and trepidation in order to see just how a president uses language during such trying times. Yet, while speeches were collected from years in which a crisis took place such as 9/11, the 2008 financial crash, or the COVID outbreak, not every year had a major crisis take place within it, and speeches which took place in years which were relatively calmer were observed as well. As a result, the SOTU speeches were selected both in years where a crisis took place during a presidency as well as years which were relatively stable in the world of politics.

Between the three presidents of this time period, Bush and Obama served two terms while Trump only served one term, which meant that Bush and Obama had seven SOTU speeches each while Trump only had three. In order to properly divide the speeches between the three presidents, it was decided that four speeches from both Bush and Obama would be selected while only two speeches from Trump would be selected. This was done to give a sense of proportionality among the presidents since this would offer an accurate way to observe a president's speech patterns and observe how it changed over the course of their presidency.

The SOTU speeches that will be observed are from the following years: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2018, and 2020.

In addition to the speeches reviewed in the 21st century, a pilot study was also conducted in order to allow an opportunity to demonstrate the codes and adjust them as necessary. This pilot study was conducted on the 1957 SOTU speech given by president Dwight Eisenhower. This speech was decided as Eisenhower was one of the most beloved presidents in the United States and assumed the office as the beloved Allied Supreme Commander from WWII and a competent leader, and therefore unified the United States in the midst of the early days of the Cold War. This time period posed a significant difference to the 21st century where hyperpolarization made the United States the most divisive it has been since the Civil War in the mid-19th century. Yet, for as unifying a figure as Eisenhower may have been during his presidency, the goal of this pilot study is to prove that divisive language in the SOTU can occur in even the most beloved of presidents; albeit, not to the same degree as with many other presidents, but that divisive rhetoric will still be present.

The SOTU speeches that were selected for this topic were all based on the goal of exposing divisive language within the United Speeches within the modern era. It was believed that the three presidents who served between 2001-2021 would provide plenty of information as to how language used in these speeches would be used to either divide or

unify the country. With the emphasis on particular policies that presidents emphasize in a multi-policy speech such as the SOTU, the public will respond to what the president gives attention to (Cohen 1995). The American idea of security from any and all outside threats were extinguished during this time as many ideas and beliefs regarding the American political and economic system were called into question, and the SOTU speeches would reflect how the presidents would communicate this to the American people. These speeches not only recap what policies and actions were taken throughout the previous year and recommend what policies and actions should be taken for the coming year, but they also hold plenty of sentiment in an attempt to remind the people what it means to be an American and remind them of the ideals that they, as Americans, should represent in all cases.

3.2 Explanation of the Codes

For the task of identifying divisive language within SOTU speeches, it was decided to review the speeches that were selected and spot instances of divisive language with the help of codes in order to identify particular instances and patterns of divisive rhetoric. Ten codes were developed based on particular trends that were noted in each of the speeches reviewed and catalogued along with definitions and examples of how each code operates. This would allow future research to be conducted for speeches covering a variety of topics. Inspiration from these codes was also taken from much of the literature studied prior to the writing of this topic. Since much of the literature also pointed out particular rhetoric and linguistic methods used by the presidents, it was also decided to incorporate some of these techniques into the research. Even though many of these rhetoric styles were specific to one president as the literature suggests, it was decided to apply these codes to all presidents to see whether this was a tactic shared by all three of the presidents mentioned.

In addition to the codes that were created, there have also been instances of note where the SOTU speech contains a line or phrase which do not fall into any of the codes created yet are nonetheless divisive. These instances were noted as well and recorded in a category which does not specify them in any other category as being divisive under other means. An example to demonstrate this comes from Bush's SOTU speech in 2002 where Bush used the phrase "They were wrong, as they are evil" in describing countries and governments who supported Al Qaeda. While this is not in reference to an organization or group within America, it is still divisive in that it is worded so brashly and harshly in a way that would let other Americans know that he would revert to such strong language and not the rhetoric that a president should use. There may not be too many moments of outlier codes

such as this, however it was important to take note of them as they still indicate the divisiveness within SOTU speeches as they do not fit within any of the categories which have been created for these codes.

Upon defining and organizing the codes used for this topic, the ten codes are as follows:

The first code is known as *singling*, which occurs when one particular demographic from the American population is separated from the rest of the population as a whole with the express purpose of making said group look better or worse from the rest of the population.²¹ This code is able to take place along religious, ethnic, racial, political, class, or other conditions which would allow the mentioned group to be isolated from the rest of the population and have a quality attributed to the group as a whole with no consideration towards the individuals who comprise it.

Even though this code may look at groups of people primarily, there are certainly instances that happen where an individual is singled out; however, in order for *singling* to be used properly, it must be clear that the individual is used as a stand-in for the group which they belong to. Depending on who is mentioned, this can be accomplished through presidents, judges, congressmen, celebrities, or any other public or private figures whose presence is meant to represent a group as a whole. The way this code's protocol is applied is that a group or individual (as part of a larger group) is mentioned in a way that separates them from the rest of the population and are either disparaged or praised in a manner which places them above or below other groups/demographics. This goal's code is to identify how certain groups are spoken about and which portions of the population are the most susceptible to being spoken about either favorably or unfavorably.

An example to demonstrate how *singling* works can be found in Bush's 2006 SOTU address, where he spoke about the LGBT+ community by saying "They're concerned about unethical conduct by public officials and discouraged by activist courts that try to redefine marriage" (Bush 2006). This instance demonstrates how *singling* works by having Bush isolate a community of the United States—the LGBT+ community in this case—and attribute qualities to them which places them at a lower standing than what is considered acceptable in the United States. Within this quote, Bush singles out the LGBT+ community and its supporters by saying that they are attempting to redefine marriage and convince public officials to act in a way which actively hurts Americans. This instance demonstrates how a president is able to identify a demographic from the larger population and attribute qualities to them with little to no disregard to the individuals of the group. Such broad generalizations

of entire groups of minorities allows for discrimination against them to take place and, with enough encouragement, violence as well.

The second code that was developed for this topic is known as *comparison*. Much like *singling*, it involves taking a group (or individual representing a group) from the wider population of the United States and attributing them with some sort of quality that can be described as either good or bad. However, where this code differs from *singling* is that it is done with more than one demographic and the demographics are compared between each 22 other with the goal of making one seem better or worse than the other. This may also be along religious, political, ethnic, racial, class, or other distinctions, but will be fulfilled so long as the speech makes it clear that one group is being made superior or inferior to the 22 group that is mentioned.

During Donald Trump's 2020 SOTU address, he was quoted as saying "Under the last administration, more than 10 million people were added to the food stamp rolls. Under my administration, 7 million Americans have come off food stamps, and 10 million more people have been lifted off of welfare" (Trump 2020). This example demonstrates how *comparison* works by showing that Trump identified two groups in his speech (with the last administration representing the Democratic Party and the present administration representing the Republican Party) and attributing qualities to both which makes one seem better than the other. By saying that the previous administration added more people to food stamps, Trump is saying that the Obama administration was weak and inefficient, but by saying that more people have gotten off food stamps and welfare he is saying that the Republican administration has been doing far better than the Democratic one. One is clearly being made to seem more appealing than the other, and this fosters division because people may not agree that the Obama administration was weak and may view the Trump administration as worse for a variety of reasons other than helping people get off of welfare. The implication within this quote is that Democrats do not truly help people outside of spending government money on sustaining them while the Republicans enact policies that truly help the people and offer them opportunities that the Democrats cannot.

The third code that will be used is known as *forever foreign*. This is a code that is enacted whenever a claim or a statement is levied against a group of people that concerns their citizenship or legality within the United States. As was expected, this code was the most applicable to immigrants and groups of foreign people. Such characteristics of this code can be found in questions or concerns regarding a foreigner's or minority's legality to be in the United States, complete disregard for their status as citizens regardless of how many

generations their family has lived in the United States, and concerns about them not being “American enough” in regards to their cultural practices, pronunciation of English, or their support of certain beliefs and ideologies.

While there are instances where one’s loyalty and allegiance to the nation is called into question among political lines, this code will focus on instances regarding race and ethnicity. For this reason, the political dimension will not be observed, despite loaded rhetoric that may result from one side referring to their political opponent as not American enough 23 rhetoric along such lines. This will seek a greater understanding of presidential views in regard to immigrant communities and potentially reveal a deeper view of how the three presidents observed view the immigrant communities found within the United States. 23

An example of how *forever foreign* operates comes from the 2018 SOTU address where Trump said, “Struggling communities, especially immigrant communities, will also be helped by immigration policies that focus on the best interests of American workers and American families” (Trump 2018). From this quote it is obvious that Trump does not view immigrant communities in the same way that he views American communities. By saying that he has a policy in place to deal with immigrant communities in the interests of American workers and families demonstrates that he does not view these immigrant communities as equal and, if anything, a strain for Americans. Additionally, Trump alienates a large section of the population by saying that among the struggling communities in America, he views that immigrant communities are key among them and are not able to live up to American standards. Given Trump’s prior rhetoric to immigrants (especially immigrants from Latin America), this contributes to the ongoing discourse that Hispanic immigrants are, ultimately, a problem for the United States and that they are viewed as something other than American, regardless of their legality or how many generations their families have lived in the United States.

The fourth code used is called *proximization*. This was a code inspired by Piotr Cap (2007) who defined *proximization* as “to account for situations in which the speaker seeks legitimization of their actions by alerting the addressee to the proximity or imminence of phenomena which can be a ‘threat’ to the addressee and require immediate action” (4). This code applies to where there are hypothesized threats or dangers from either outside or within the country and places the citizenry in close proximity to the danger mentioned. This danger may include, but is not limited to, wars, acts of terrorism, acts of sabotage, economic hardships such as sanctions, among other threats. However, if an act of *proximization* were to take place, then it must follow two factors.

The first factor is that it must have ordinary and average citizens be affected by whatever threat a president posits. This may come in the form of being involved in a way, suffering directly from economic sanctions, or any other outside threat, but the citizens would have to bear the brunt of whatever conflict may happen. The second factor is that the threat must come from someone or an entity who supposedly wishes harm and is directly targeting the United States and its people. Therefore, *proximization* cannot be invoked through a chain of events which will eventually find its way to the people of the United States; instead, the threat must come directly from a source with the United States as a target.

This code is normally invoked when the president makes reference to a terrible event or possibility that could happen, often with the context of a certain policy or action taking place or not depending on the president's wishes. This is a method that can be used to terrify the people into believing that something awful will happen should they fail to support or denounce a particular policy. Throughout much of the period that will be discussed (2001-2021), this *proximization* can be manifested as another 9/11 or similar terrorist attack as it helped destroy the sense of security among American citizens in the early 21st century. The threats themselves may be either real or hypothetical, but they must represent a danger to the American public and show that it is possible for the United States to find itself in danger.

To demonstrate an example of how *proximization* works, a quote was found in Obama's 2010 SOTU address which was quoted as saying "Now, even as we prosecute two wars, we're also confronting perhaps the greatest danger to the American people, the threat of nuclear weapons" (Obama 2010). Although Obama says that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will soon come to an end, he does not dissuade the threat of nuclear weapons which can be used against the United States. Obama does not say where exactly this nuclear threat is coming from, yet the vague threat of nuclear weapons used on American soil can produce a psychologically distressing effect on Americans to think that a nuclear war is likely which they may find themselves in the midst of. Even going so far as to label it the "greatest danger" instills a fear in people in the hopes of having them rally behind the president for protection and supporting the policies he makes for the sake of their safety. However, there will be Americans who refer to this as "fear-mongering" or planting false fears within the minds of Americans to garner support for a threat that does not actually exist. These Americans will refer to Obama as someone who plays on the worries of Americans in order to secure more power for himself and who doesn't understand the weight of his words. Therefore, the use of such language will contribute to divisiveness even more within the

United States between people who perceive the threats as genuine and credible and those who view them as empty and another form of fearmongering

The fifth code used to judge the SOTU speeches is known as the *Strict Father*. This is a code that occurs when the president assumes a more authoritative stance and demands for something to be done, no matter the cost. This may involve ignoring certain statutes, opinions, or making demands that seem outlandish, and circumvent the lawmaking channels while paying no mind to its opponents or opposing viewpoints. As a result, this may result in language that frequently uses the imperative and calls for a certain action to be done at or 25

There is also another dimension that this code assumes in addition to calling for action, and that is how the president assumes to know what is best for the people. During the SOTU speech, the president may say something concerning what the people should be at 25 of or how they should feel in a particular situation; a situation no different from a strict father telling his children that they should feel a certain way about something. This instills the feeling that the president knows something that the people don't and will act in their best interests, even if the people do not wish for it to happen.

As a result, this could potentially alienate a large portion of the population by saying that their fears about other, perhaps more pressing issues are unjustified and that they should be worried about what the president tells them to worry about. The *strict father* has a high chance of gaslighting parts of the population, especially political opponents and other figures, into believing that their feelings are unjustified unless the president tells them they are. This, in turn, may be used to gain support for a policy that needs public backing and may result in divisive opinions regarding the president's conduct and whether the president believes that he has more power than he truly does.

An example of how the *strict father* operates was during Trump's 2019 SOTU speech where he was quoted as saying "This is not an option. This is a necessity" (Trump 2019) when talking about a bill promoting infrastructure development. Trump's language in this instance makes it sound as though there is not a choice in the matter and that this infrastructure bill must be passed under any and all circumstances. There was no discussion as to what the bill itself would contain, nor was there any mention as to how it would improve the United States specifically, but an assurance that this is something that must be passed with his authority as the president serving as the only justification. This quote alone summarizes the nature of the *strict father* code and how it is often used by presidents, and other politicians for that matter, to promote an agenda which they believe will be good for the American people regardless of whether the people want it or not. While the job of a politician

often consists of having to pass bills or perform actions which the people often disagree with for long-term betterment, instances such as these show that the president takes it upon themselves to pass these acts due to believing that they have more power than they actually do. With such strong language, it will inevitably cause a divide within the country with some people believing that the president does not truly care about what is important. Meanwhile, other people who support the president might chastise those who don't support him under the belief that they are focused on the wrong issues and that they are not looking out for the whole of the nation. The *strict father* is a code which has the strong potential to gaslight parts of the population and repel large groups of the population while attracting a large group of the population to the president's cause.

The sixth code that was created is known as the *Dark Past*. This is a code where terrible events from the past are brought up in order to persuade or dissuade people from either supporting or opposing a certain policy or action. The president may make reference to events in history (although mostly American history) such as slavery, the Civil War, the World Wars, the Great Depression, Vietnam, 9/11, the 2008 financial crash, or other events which are not viewed as pleasant. This code can be found simply by spotting the times where the president refers to a tragedy under the assumption that such an event can and will happen again if their policies are not enacted. This has the effect of telling the people that the past can come back to haunt them and the same devastating consequences will follow if the president's words are not taken seriously.

By contrast, there are instances where the president will use the more inspiring and triumphant aspects of history to motivate and inspire the people. However, the *dark past* was specifically chosen because this is a tactic that can be used to stoke fears in the American people and cause them to adhere to the president's policies out of fear of history repeating itself. By having the past brought up, this may also call to mind loved ones who may have been involved in such events; this is especially effective with the more recent events in American history such as 9/11, the War on Terror, the 2008 crash, or the COVID epidemic where there were people who experienced these events firsthand or know people who have. The past also serves as a divisive issue and can mean different things to different people; such as the Civil War, for instance, being described as a bloody tragedy in history even though for African-Americans, it was instrumental in the abolition of slavery. The interpretation of the past depends on what events are being referred to, whose perspective is doing the interpretation, and in what context it is being used. In such a diverse country as the United

States, there is rarely any accord as to how the past is viewed, and different events can be seen as either good or bad depending on whose perspective it is.

An example of how the *dark past* works comes from the 2007 SOTU speech where Bush says, “To allow this to happen would be to ignore the lessons of September 11 and invite tragedy” (Bush 2007). In this example, Bush is making reference to the not-to-distant memory of 9/11 and attempting to sway the hearts and minds of Americans in supporting his policies by referring to a national tragedy which claimed many lives and changed American history drastically. By using the threat of another 9/11, Bush is trying to garner support for the continued wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which had become unpopular at this point, y 27 does not want to give up lest it result in another terrorist attack which could claim many more American lives. By leveraging the memory of 9/11, Bush is playing upon the emotions o 27 Americans and hoping that the mention of this memory will result in more support for the continued War on Terror. Even though Bush does not say exactly how another attack would be possible nor who would be responsible for it, the picture is already painted in the minds of Americans of what could potentially happen for the future. This act, while registering heavy with many Americans, especially to those who were involved or knew someone who was involved in the attacks, also has the effect of drawing criticism from the opposing side as well. People who disagree with the continuing War on Terror may have seen this as a 27 senseless and inappropriate means to rally support for the cause and call to mind the memories of the victims all for a selfish purpose which the president himself uses only for the purpose of gathering support. The *dark past* shows that even something like the past can be misinterpreted, misconstrued, and used for whatever purpose the president needs while also serving as a reminder of how the past is not always too far behind and has the possibility 27 being repeated.

The seventh code that was created is known as *conspiring opposition*. Put simply, this code makes use of the “us vs. them” mentality but does so in a way to suggest that if someone is not actively supporting a particular agenda, then they are directly supporting the weakening of the nation as a whole. This code promotes a black-and-white vision of one’s opposition in order to paint the one side as good and willing to do anything for the people, while portraying the other side as selfish, conspiring, and not at all supportive of neither the people nor the country. When the president brings up a certain policy or action, it is obvious that there may be some opposition to it, yet this code takes opposition to the most extreme conclusion, often accusing the other side of sabotage and making accusations which are rarely founded to be true.

Similar to the first code, *singling*, this code points to a specific group of people and aims to temporarily remove them from the rest of the population for the sake of attributing a quality onto them. But what sets this code apart is that this is primarily in reference to those who have an opposing political view instead of being identified among racial, gender, or other lines that do not pertain to political beliefs. Political opponents may run the risk of being demonized and labeled as traitors who are working against the will of the people whenever this code is invoked, increasing hostility across political lines.

Conspiring opposition can be located when a certain action is brought up, often one which draws a lot of controversy and opposition from political opponents. The president 28 goes on to single out the opponents of the policy and may proceed to label these same opponents as “un-American” or using similar rhetoric, so long as it is implied that they are hindering progress for the good of the nation. As a result, the president creates an us vs. them conflict with the president presenting himself as the one who wishes to do what is good for the whole country while the opponents are portrayed as unpatriotic not only to the president, but to all Americans. Meanwhile, those who are on the opposing side are gaslit into believing that they are supporting the wrong narrative, thus prompting further division among the people. This code makes use of populist support and a president can direct it towards a perceived enemy who is believed to have no other goals aside from making the lives of Americans worse and bringing about the downfall of the country and its institutions.

An example which demonstrates how *conspiring opposition* works comes from the 2013 SOTU address where Obama was quoted as saying “We can choose to believe that Superstorm Sandy, and the most severe drought in decades, and the worst wildfires some states have ever seen were all just a freak coincidence. Or we can choose to believe in the overwhelming judgment of science -- and act before it’s too late” (Obama 2013). This quote demonstrates how *conspiring opposition* is put into use since Obama starts off by dividing the issue into two sides: those who believe in climate change, and those who don’t. He then goes on to imply that those who don’t believe in it say that the recent extreme weather is all a coincidence and that there is no climate change. Meanwhile, he says that those who do believe in climate change have all of the evidence on their side and that they are in the right. By going on to say that those who do believe in climate change will go on to act before it is too late, Obama is implying that those who do not support policies to hinder climate change (or more accurately, his policies to address it) will be contributing to a belief that will damage the country in the long term. This results in painting the people who do not agree with the president’s policies as active conspirators who not only wish to do damage to the United

States of America, but to the world as a whole by not enacting solutions to address climate change. Using such language with regards to certain beliefs and policies will have the effect of dividing the American public even further apart and further polarize the nation to the point where the two sides will always be divided on a particular issue. This is particularly dangerous in a pluralistic system as the United States where two political parties have the most power, since it reduces any bipartisan cooperation and increases hostility across party lines.

The eighth code that was devised is known as *the good and the bad*. This is a code that is similar to *singling*, but it focuses on one group in particular and aims to divide the one demographic into two or more portions. How this works is that one group is singled out from the rest of the population, but instead of being spoken about as a whole, it is subdivided into two sections (although there may sometimes be more subdivisions, but this is rare). One section of the group will be praised and be noted as having more favorable qualities that appeal to a president more. The other part of the group will not be given such compliments and instead may be found displeasing by the president or at least not to the standards that the more favorable part of the group is able to perform. In many cases, individuals of said group may be singled out from the rest of the demographic and labeled as “good” or spoken about favorably while the rest of the group (often times the majority) is deemed as less than favorable.

Using a tactic such as this not only promotes division with the rest of the population at large but has the unique effect of turning members of the same group against each other as well. This may cause friction within the group and serve as a “divide from within” tactic so that the group may be weakened even further. As a result of this, the group is left fighting from the inside due to a certain amount of its members being granted favorable treatment while the rest of the group is neglected or told that they are not as good as the favorable group. This will cause tension and strife within the community and split the group into even further subdivisions, namely those who the president views as favorable and those who feel that they have been rejected. *The good and the bad* is a code that attempts to undercut demographics in America by prompting division within the demographics themselves and making sure that they will not be unified and continue infighting as opposed to doing something about the larger problems they face.

An example of how *the good and the bad* works comes from the 2007 SOTU address where Bush said, “We should establish a legal and orderly path for foreign workers to enter our country to work on a temporary basis. As a result, they won’t have to try to sneak in, and

that will leave border agents free to chase down drug smugglers and criminals and terrorists” (Bush 2007). This example clearly shows how Bush is dividing immigrants from Latin America into two groups: the first is those who enter legally so that they can work to enhance the country and then go back once their job is done, while the second group comprises terrorists who enter illegally and wish to only cause harm. This black-and-white view will cause outside groups to view immigrants as part of the “bad” group if they do not prove themselves to be the “good” group and that if they aren’t here for work then they are there for some other nefarious purpose. Suspicion and doubt will be further raised in these groups if they are not viewed with the same favorable views that the “good” are bestowed with and discrimination can be increased upon the belief that a group is perceived to be in the “bad” category.

Members of the group who are perceived to be “bad” will begin to resent those who are perceived to be “good”, and those who are in the latter may come to increasingly resent the former. Divisions and subdivisions within groups are common as not everyone in a demographic or group can be expected to believe the same thing or hold the same values, but this code opens the possibility for such divisions to be exploited for the purposes of receiving more favorable treatment from the system as a whole. Infighting, factions, and violence may arise out of this internal division and the group will splinter even further due to the application of qualities which are seen as either good or bad, depending on the demographic. In the example that was used, Hispanic immigrants frequently are a victim of this tactic as a means of controlling immigration into the United States and ensuring that they do not unify and become too powerful. The example demonstrates how these xenophobic attitudes can be applied in wide generalizations which oversimplify one of the largest demographics in the United States and perpetuates the stereotype that if a Hispanic immigrant is not there to work, then they are here either as a criminal or thug with the only goal of causing trouble and destruction in the United States.

The ninth code that was developed is known as *ideological difference*. This is a code that was, at first, difficult to define and specify because in a country as large as the United States, there would, naturally, be vast differences in ideology. However, the core idea of this code is that a certain idea, belief, or tenet will be brought up which claims to represent the beliefs about the nation or its people as a whole. These beliefs will then be extended to the people and the president will speak about them as though they were universally shared. As a result, many people may not agree with this line of thinking and claims such as “America is a

nation of freedom” or “America offers opportunity to everyone” may be viewed as untrue by skeptics who do not believe that these statements are true.

A president will often use claims such as these in order to present America as the greatest country in the world and themselves as contributors and servants to that greatness. Yet, as already mentioned, in a country as diverse and divided as the United States, there will always be a section of the population who are not in accord with the president and may even take offense to some of these statements should they be received as such. Such instances 31 be found when the president makes some sweeping generalization regarding patriotism or what it truly means to be an American. The end result is that a claim is made about what 31 expected of the United States ideologically as the moral, virtuous, and hard-working exception to the world and that people do not agree with such statements for one reason or another; nonetheless, they are perpetuated as though they are core beliefs which all Americans share. The values that are presented may run contrary to the opinions of others and risk isolating those who do not ascribe to the beliefs and may even be labelled as unpatriotic due to their disagreement.

An example which demonstrates how *ideological difference* works comes from the end of the SOTU speeches where the president frequently says, “God bless the United St 31 of America”. Even though America has a large amount of religious diversity, the president still calls upon the Judeo-Christian God for protection even though they realize that people of other faiths live in the United States and may feel excluded by this statement. Although this may create a stronger base with the Evangelical and Christian populations, this also risks isolation of other religious groups, who may feel as though the president does not care much for them. Additionally, this phrase runs contrary to the doctrine of the United States prompting a separation between church and state. By saying things such as “God bless you” from such a high position of power, some people may feel as though religion has a strong hold on the government and that the president is making their religion public and violating the separation between church and state. There are many ways to interpret such statements and even though it may be a well-meaning saying, it does not change the fact that there are people who feel left out by saying such things and that there are some people who do not wish to have God used by such a high-ranking member of the government. Ideologies have the potential to be one of the most divisive aspects in the United States and as Van Dijk (2006) said, “Language use in general, and discourse production and comprehension in particular depend on, and influence, the relevant properties of the communicative situation as interpreted by language users” (121).

The tenth and final code which was designed for this subject is known as *the people as an entity*. This code is where the president addresses the population as though they all share the same opinions and formed a monolith where one person is indistinguishable from the other in terms of opinion. In doing so, the president presumes that everyone is in accord with what they have to say and that there is nothing that he can say that they will oppose. As a result, some people will feel as though they aren't being heard and that their individual concerns aren't being heard. 32

This type of code can be found when the president makes a claim under the belief 32 it is what all Americans are either for or against. However, while this may sound similar to the *strict father*, this differs in that the *strict father* assumes a more authoritative tone; meanwhile, this code takes place when the president says something as a matter of fact and that it is a common sentiment shared by all. It is not enforced upon like the *strict father*, nor does it concern America's moral and existential merit as *ideological difference* but is more of an observance as to what Americans need at that particular moment. In saying it as such, this can give the impression that anyone who has a differing opinion is not normal or may not be a true American if they are going against the majority of people. This prompts further division where it ironically presupposes that people are of one common mind and heart. This code can be effective by placing Americans under one umbrella and having dissenters risk being labelled as suspicious or seditious. The main point of this code is to show how, despite a plethora of thoughts, beliefs, and opinions, the president may see the people as being monolithic. Yet, when it is assumed that everybody shares the same beliefs, the president only creates further divisions and disturbances.

An example of how this code works can be seen in the 2019 SOTU address where Trump says, "It is the agenda of the American people" (Trump 2019). Such a broad categorization of what the American people would like to see done will doubtlessly cause some people to be upset because there will be those who do not view such an agenda as worthy of being discussed. By lumping the American people into such a broad and general category, many people will feel as though they are being ignored and that their real wishes and desires are not being heeded. People will instead distance themselves further from the president, or the party as a whole, and find a new candidate who is more open to hearing about their issues and working to fix the problems that they see fit to solve. When a president envisions the people, of any country, as one entity, they wipe out all of the differences in ideas, beliefs, and opinions in an attempt to make it easier for themselves to talk and pass

policy. This will result in people feeling ignored and further dividing the country more than it was and offering a form of resistance, either civilly or violently.

In addition to divisive language which falls outside of the codes created, there have also been times where more than one code is at work within a phrase. When the code cannot be deciphered, or whether two codes fit applicably into an instance of divisive language, this was noted as well in order to show just how divisive language may not always be as clear-cut as anticipated. In order to properly log codes such as these, an extra category was set up¹ 33 record the times where two or more codes were in use. Within this extra category, the quote was taken from the SOTU speech and determined between which codes it shares a category with and whether it was a combination due to the presence of qualities from more than one code. In order to prevent confusion, these combinations were placed into a category of their own so that it would not belong to one code or the other and broken down into what elements of the sentence or phrase would qualify for two different codes.

This instance of a combination can be seen in the 2015 SOTU address where Obama says, “Send me a bill that gives every worker in America the opportunity to earn seven days of paid sick leave. It’s the right thing to do” (Obama 2015). This sentence demonstrates a 33 combination of both the *strict father* and *conspiring opposition*. Due to the supposition of this being “the right thing to do” qualifies it for the *strict father* because Obama is asserting this in a tone which suggests that he knows what is best for Americans and that this is a lesson that must be taught to the people. In addition, he also uses the imperative “send” in order to allow a direct order which may be taken in an authoritative context as this is something that he is specifically demanding without the consent of the appropriate bodies of government.

Meanwhile, this sentence also belongs to the code of *conspiring opposition* since Obama is saying that if it is the right thing to do, then anybody who is against it would be against the good of the people and the nation as a whole. Anybody who disagrees with such a statement after saying “it’s the right thing to do” will automatically be thought of as a traitor. Regardless of whether the plan doesn’t make sense or will end up doing more harm than good, anybody who disagrees with the statement in terms of ideology will be seen as an enemy and as someone who only wishes to bring harm to the country.

This code in particular takes a dangerous angle with the combination of the *strict father* and *conspiring opposition* as it can be used to rally support against those who oppose such policies. The language of the *strict father* can be used in a stern and aggressive manner against opposition, leading to even harsher language against opposition and making them sound even more dangerous than originally intended. To the supporters of the president, this

would cement their belief that the opposition is against the good of the people and that they should be ignored or silenced at any and all costs.

There are other combinations as well which convey different meanings and linguistic interpretations based on what the president is talking about. Although it has been attempted to delineate these codes as clearly as possible based on what has been observed in the speeches, there is still the inevitability of codes being mixed together and not so easily interpretable. Yet, this is an expected development when it comes to interpreting these speeches; each 34 president –and this applies to every single president in American history— has their own linguistic style and manner of speaking and they will mix these codes with each other and produce a number of different outcomes which can be interpreted in many different ways. Code combinations are inevitable as well as the ambiguity of whether a sentence or phrase fits one code more than another.

These ten specific codes (plus the combinations and those pertaining to the “other” category) help provide a good idea of what is to be expected within these speeches as we 34 how much each president will use these codes. These codes will help catalogue how each president from 2001-2021 utilized the language in the SOTU speech as well as demonstrate their attitudes to specific groups ranging from ethnic, to racial, to political groups as well as along other lines. Yet, there were also exceptions to the ten codes that were created in the form of codes which did not fit specifically into the code list as well as combinations of any of the ten codes. This was all expected as the use of language by presidents, as well as any political figure, will not always be consistent and will change due to the constantly shifting world of politics as well as attempting to keep people’s support for whatever policies they wish to enact. This proved to be true from 2001-2021 where the first two decades of the 21st century were steeped in a near-constant state of crisis which demanded rapid change and quick response and which, undoubtedly, influenced the type of language which was used for both the SOTU as well as other speeches.

3.3 How these codes were selected

The codes that were selected and created for this topic were inspired from multiple areas which ranged from research done prior to the writing of this topic to general trends and patterns noted within the observed speeches. The research that was conducted and the authors who looked at some of the language used by the presidents proved to be significantly helpful when it came to the creation of these codes and helped to lay the groundwork of how these codes operate as well as how they could be applied in other scenarios. Although some

adaptations were made to their original ideas in order to better suit the needs of this research topic, the research that was conducted proved to be instrumental in identifying how different presidents use language for their means as well as the perceived needs of the country. Yet, these authors were not the only source of inspiration for how these codes came into creation.

Another source which assisted in the creation of these codes is research which was personally conducted into the behaviors and linguistic mannerisms of each of the three presidents. Even though the SOTU speech is the primary focus of this research, there was also research conducted into other speeches done by Bush, Obama, and Trump which helped provide a better idea of their language use. To accomplish this, speeches outside of the SOTU, such as press conferences, debates, crisis speeches, special events, and other types of events where the president is engaged in speaking were observed. A better idea was provided as to which of the codes were the ones which the presidents engaged in and how it affected their speaking patterns. An example of this can be demonstrated by George W. Bush, who made frequent use of sentences which pertained to the code of *proximization*, whereby the nation would face imminent attacks and conflict at any given moment. Given that much of Bush's career was centered around foreign conflict relating to the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror in both Iraq and Afghanistan, it makes sense that much of his language would be directed towards another potential attack on American soil. As a result of this, many of his speeches concerned foreign entanglement in the Middle East with many speeches being given about the necessity of protecting the nation and ensuring the safety of Americans. Although there were other issues that Bush was focused on such as immigration and education (No Child Left Behind), this is not brought up as much as foreign relations and the War on Terror.

However, while a president's language used in other speaking events may seem to be reflected in the SOTU speeches, this is not always the case. For example, although Donald Trump used language which falls under the guise of the *forever foreign* code, it is important to note that the use of this code in his SOTU speeches was not as prevalent as expected. Despite his numerous comments regarding Asians, African Americans, Hispanics, Jews, and other groups, this code is not used as extensively in his SOTU speeches, showing it to be an exception. Yet, with the SOTU speech, this makes sense as it is meant to be a speech that brings together the nation as one and casting out a group by saying that they are not "American" enough or fail to live up to certain cultural standards and practices would not be a good impression upon the people. SOTU speeches are some of the biggest speeches that a president can give throughout their entire career and it is logical that they make it as inclusive and inviting as possible in order to have the people support their approval ratings.

4. Analysis

This section will provide the results of the studies and demonstrate how often each instance of divisive rhetoric was used in each speech as well as the interpretation of their results. Each of the ten codes that were described in the previous section (along with the combinations and codes which fell outside of the codes described) were applied to the best of what could be found within the speeches and help provide a better idea of what each president attempted to say in their SOTU speech. Results were interpreted based on how often each code was used, who it was directed towards, in what situation it was used in, as well as which president said it. The proceeding results aim to demonstrate how divisive the language used in the SOTU speech has become from 2001-2021 as hyperpolarization increased in the United States.

To begin with, the analysis starts with the pilot study conducted on Dwight Eisenhower's 1957 SOTU speech in order to demonstrate how much divisive language was used prior to the current period of hyperpolarization. By focusing on a president who was universally beloved as Eisenhower, this will help to show that even the most beloved of presidents cannot help but provoke division in SOTU speeches. By having this pilot study be set during the 1950s, it will also help provide a reference as to how much divisive language has potentially grown since then and how the current period of hyperpolarization reflects this.

Following this, the SOTU speeches for George Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump will be looked at individually to determine what sort of divisive language each president utilized during their time in office. Each president will be given their own section to individually observe them and their particular speech patterns while a graph will show all the instances of divisive rhetoric in their speeches. The presidents will be observed in chronological order starting with Bush, progressing to Obama, before finally ending with Trump to gauge whether divisive rhetoric in presidential speeches has increased or decreased from 2001 to 2021.

Sections 4.2 to 4.4 will observe the speeches collectively for divisive language and find out which codes were the most prominent among the three presidents. Observations were also made as to which groups ended up being the most targeted and whether they were more politically or ethnically discriminated against. Looking at the speeches will shed some context as to how divisive language in SOTU speeches increased from 2001-2021 and how frequently each code of divisive rhetoric was used. This is where the codes will be counted up in total to show how many times each code was used and whether they were focused on a particular set of issues shared across all three presidents or whether each president was

focused on policies and actions which reflected their own concerns. Each president will be observed individually to help show which codes were the most used among them.

Section 4.5 will then conclude by comparing all three of the presidents together to show whether there were any commonalities between Bush, Obama, and Trump. This will be done by looking at all of the divisive rhetoric used and comparing it to see whether there were similarities in rhetoric or whether one code was used more than all the others among 37 three presidents. By doing so, it is hoped that more information will be garnered as to which tactics of rhetoric are used by the presidents as well as if there were any specific demographics that they directed this rhetoric towards. Additionally, these observations will demonstrate if whether the use of divisive rhetoric has increased or decreased between 2001-2021.

4.1 Pilot Study

Before the codes were applied to the selected speeches, a pilot study was carried out in o 37 to test the validity of the codes generated as well as to provide a reasonable reference point as to judge whether divisive language in American politics increased or decreased. The speech that was selected for this pilot study was Dwight Eisenhower's 1957 SOTU speech.

This speech was selected for the pilot study as it demonstrated what a speech under a more unified America looked like under a president that was favored by both the Democratic and Republican parties. As the supreme commander of the Allied forces in WWII, Eisenhower was seen as a pivotal and competent leader who brought the world out of the turmoil of war and into an age of peace and prosperity despite the threats of the spread of communism and nuclear war towards America. Therefore, it was decided that a speech from someone like him would help to prove whether such divisive language as the codes demonstrate existed in a time where America was more unified. The 1957 SOTU speech was reviewed multiple times in order to make sure that the codes that were found within this speech met the criteria of the codes that were created, and the identifications were kept recorded for the instances where Eisenhower used divisive language in his speech.

Figure 1 shows the amounts of divisive rhetoric which occurred in Eisenhower's 1957 SOTU speech.

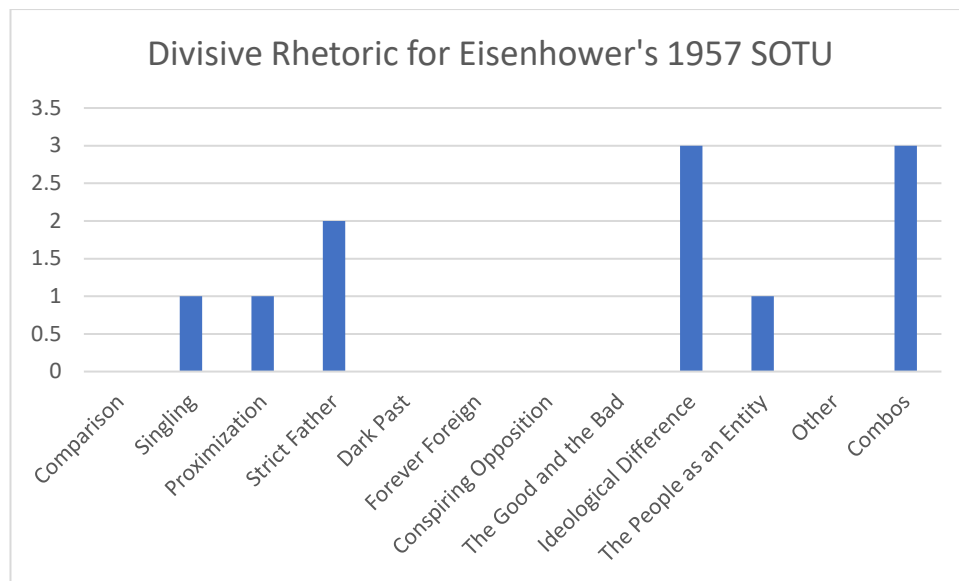


Figure 1 shows how many instances of divisive language took place in Eisenhower's 1957 SOTU address. Half of the codes created were not used and those that were used were used maximally three times for ideological difference and combinations. Yet, this also shows that Eisenhower still engaged in divisive rhetoric long before the current age of hyperpolarization.

What was found was that there were eleven instances of divisive language used within this speech. Of those eleven instances, there were three instances of *Ideological difference*, two instances of the *strict father*, one instance of *proximization*, one instance of *singling*, one instance of *the people as an entity*, and three instances of codes that fall within the 'other' category and are not considered to be a part of the list of codes that was created. These eleven instances found in Eisenhower's SOTU speech demonstrate that even the most unifying of figures is prone to say something controversial and may unknowingly alienate people against them. From what can be observed here, the *ideological difference* was the code that was used the most frequently with frequent references made to America's past, the ideals the country was founded upon, and how the United States stands as a beacon of inspiration to the rest of the world for freedom and wisdom.

One example of this *ideological difference* comes from when Eisenhower says, "In the main, today's expressions of nationalism are, in spirit, echoes of our forefathers' struggle for independence" (Eisenhower 1957). With the American government firmly focused on the expanding reach of the USSR and the spread of communism in different countries all over the world, many countries (especially in the Warsaw Pact) were viewed as being oppressed or living in tyranny. The purpose of the *ideological difference* is to highlight an instance where the president says something that reinforces what should be believed about a certain topic,

and, in this case, Eisenhower is saying that the beliefs and ideologies that America was founded on extend to other countries; by extension, America must be ready to defend liberty and freedom at whatever cost. Eisenhower tries to gain support for his policies which will provide aid to these countries by relating these struggles to when America fought for its independence from Great Britain. Such a tactic would no doubt lead people to draw some connections between the struggles of other countries and the American Revolutionary War, and by playing into that nostalgia, Eisenhower hoped to secure some support for his policies. On the other hand, some Americans may have found it distasteful or even inappropriate to make such a connection. Yet, this is not the only time where he has made reference to the Founding Fathers or the ideals which America was built upon.

Towards the end of the speech, Eisenhower made reference to the Declaration of Independence by saying that “they asserted that every individual is endowed by his Creator with certain inalienable rights” (Eisenhower 1957). By closing his speech with a reference to the Declaration of Independence, Eisenhower is attempting to win the public over by showing that he will continue to expand upon these inalienable rights and that he is a figure who can provide the services that the United States needs. Eisenhower uses this *ideological difference* in a manner which paints the United States as the greatest country in the world and how he, as its president, will expand upon the greatness that America has the potential to have.

Yet, at the same time, the use of the *strict father* code provides an insight into how divisive Eisenhower’s language has the potential to be. The first instance of *strict father* appears when Eisenhower says, “No subject on the domestic scene should more attract the concern of the friends of American working men and women and of free business enterprise than the forces that threaten a steady depreciation of the value of our money” (Eisenhower 1957). In this quote, Eisenhower is saying that the most pressing issue that Americans face at home is the devaluation of money (inflation). This shows that Eisenhower is taking a direct approach with the *strict father* code and telling Americans what they should be afraid of instead of what they might be afraid of. As a result, some Americans may feel as though this is not at all what they fear and may feel as though their true fears are being brushed aside by the president, thus, division may occur as a result of people’s fears and concerns not being taken seriously, and even being told that what they truly fear is not what should be feared according to Eisenhower.

The second instance of the *strict father* occurs when Eisenhower said, “I shall shortly recommend to the Congress by special message the changes in our immigration laws that I deem necessary in the light of our world responsibilities” (Eisenhower 1957). From this

quote, Eisenhower wishes to make some changes to America's immigration policy with the outside context being in reference to the failed Hungarian uprising in 1956. Yet, in addition to recommending immigration measures to Congress, Eisenhower also states that he will change the immigration system in a way which he feels fit to implement. Once again, this is an instance of the *strict father* since Eisenhower is taking action in a manner which he feels would be fitting to the country as a whole and which disregards the appropriate channels for doing so. Such an action would cause division among Americans if they were to find out that the president was making changes to laws and institutions based on what he personally feels is the most appropriate and not what is based on the greater good or more solid advice from experts and other members of the government.

Additionally, there are three instances that demonstrate divisiveness in this SOTU speech, yet do not fall into the codes that were created. The first instance occurs when Eisenhower says, "It is rewarding to all our citizens in opportunity to earn and to advance in self-realization and in self-expression" (Eisenhower 1957). While on the surface this may not sound so divisive, this quote does not take into account minorities who are unable to advance and express themselves freely due to widespread discrimination against races and women during this time period. Minorities may not feel themselves included in this quote since they are at a clear disadvantage of this self-expression and have notably less opportunity than their more privileged counterparts.

The second instance is a dogwhistle which reads as "To which all who seek justice and who hunger for peace can rally" (Eisenhower 1957). This dogwhistle appeals to the Christian population of the United States as it is based on the Bible quote of Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled". Even though this may come off as appealing to Christians, other groups may feel left out by such a statement and may not fully understand what Eisenhower aims to get across with this quote. By inserting a dogwhistle into this quote, Eisenhower is showing that he is aligning himself more with a particular group rather than with Americans as a whole and yearns for their support more than any other demographic. Even though other populations may not understand the dogwhistle, it still demonstrates that the president has their interests aligned with a particular group, instead of all the other groups and populations of America.

The final instance comes towards the end of the SOTU address when Eisenhower says, "America's vital interests are world-wide, embracing both hemispheres and every continent" (Eisenhower 1957). By assuming that America's interests are shared in every country all over the world, Eisenhower divides the country into two camps which believe that

America's interests are worldwide, and those who don't believe it is. Using such language to say that America's policies are global shares traces of the *strict father* yet it does not say so in a manner which is not imposing, but rather, it is said in a way which is stated as a matter of fact and that any place that does not share America's interests is out of line and needs to be dealt accordingly.

These three instances show us that the divisive language that Eisenhower employs contains instances of dogwhistling, ignorance of the problems at home, and an assumption that the entire world shares that same perspective as America and will act in a manner which helps America achieve its goals while neglecting issues that other countries face. None of these instances have been specifically codified in the codes which were provided, yet they all show an instance of divisive language which some people will be opposed to.

This pilot study shows that even with a unifying figure as Dwight D. Eisenhower as president, there are still instances of divisive language that can occur which will turn some part of the population away from him. Even in an era when the United States was at its most unified, the population was not of a single mind and that the language used will not always unify the people, in fact, it may do the opposite and drive people apart. With an authoritative tone from the *strict father*, to differences in ideology, to the threat of war by *proximization* and all of the other instances of divisive language, this SOTU speech contained divisive language which made some people not feel included and even threatened. The SOTU speech given by Eisenhower proved to be a good method to see what can be expected in future speeches and show that the codes that were created helped to define a lot of divisive language that was expected. While not all instances of divisive rhetoric were used, this helped provide an idea of how divisive language in the realm of politics is conducted and going forward with the other speeches that were reviewed, this helped to solidify the meanings of the codes and know what exactly to look for with some of the codes created. This pilot study also helped provide a reference as to the rate of division in SOTU speeches and conclude that if this amount of divisiveness was found in a speech from a more unified era, then the speeches that come from a more polarized time will contain much more divisive language.

4.2 Trends and Patterns

In this section, the general trends and patterns will be observed as to which presidents used which codes and to which people they were directed. This part will first begin with an observation of the speeches from individual presidents and observed quantitatively before all three presidents are compared in the final section. Doing so will help provide an insight into

the divisive language of individual presidents and show what their true intentions may have been. By analyzing the speeches altogether at the end, it will present the reader with an idea as to what the main concerns of the U.S. presidency as a whole may have been and what these three presidents may have in common with each other, despite being quite different from each other personally and politically.

4.2.1 SOTU speeches by Bush

From George W. Bush's time in office, he gave seven SOTU speeches from 2001-2008, much of them concerned the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the following War on Terror. From his two terms in office, four out of the seven speeches were selected to analyze and the speeches that were selected are the SOTU speeches from 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2007. Two speeches were selected based on major events (2002 after the 9/11 attacks, and 2004 after the declaration of the War on Terror) and two speeches were selected from relatively calmer years where comparatively less significant events took place. Upon looking through the speeches selected for Bush, the number of instances where divisive language was used added to 68 instances with 13 instances being used in 2002, 21 instances in 2004, 18 instances in 2006, and 16 instances in 2007. With the paranoia of the War on Terror and 9/11 fresh in America's consciousness, Bush utilized divisive rhetoric in a manner which he believed would unify the country under an ideological banner while isolating those whom he felt did not belong and single them out from those who wish to see the country grow.

Figure 2 displays a table showing all of the types of divisive language that was used by Bush in his SOTU speeches.

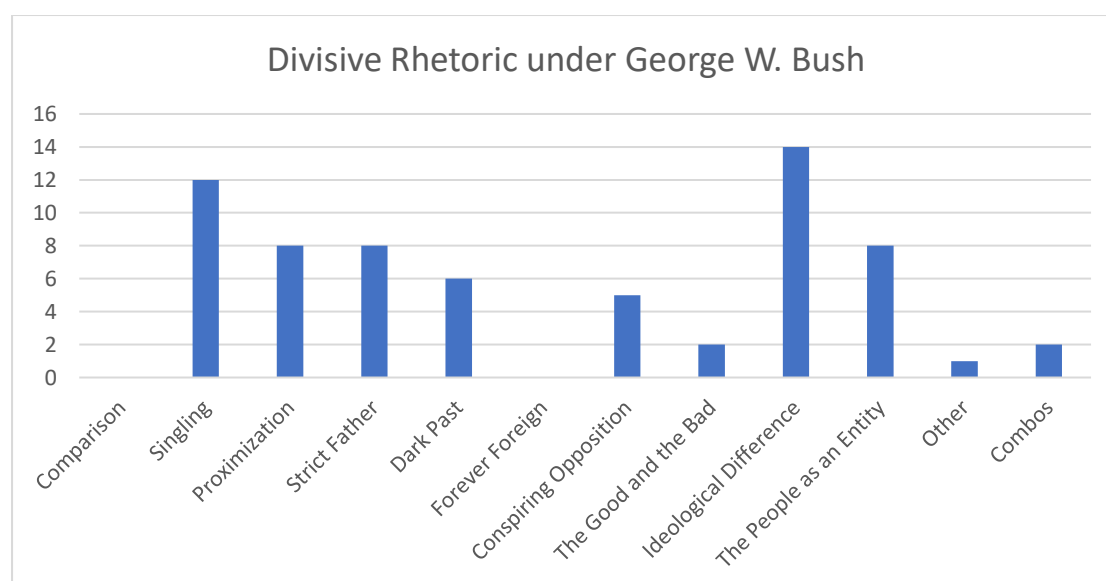


Figure 2: All the recorded instances of divisive rhetoric which have occurred in Bush's SOTU speeches. Ideological difference has proven to be the most used divisive speech with 14 recorded instances while comparison and forever foreign have absolutely no instances.

As can be seen from the table, it was found that the *ideological difference* was the code that was used most. This is due in large part to Bush making reference to the Judeo-Christian God in his speeches, which undoubtedly, would isolate chunks of the population who do not share the same beliefs as Bush. For instance, during his 2004 SOTU address Bush uses the phrase "The same moral tradition that defines marriage also teaches that each individual has dignity and value in God's sight" (Bush 2004). By invoking God in his speech, Bush not only isolates those who do not believe in the same figure as he does, but he also uses it as a way to keep marriage between one man and one woman, additionally isolating the LGBT+ community. This is seen as favorable by the Christian fundamentalist population in the United States and similar groups, but not by very many other people.

Yet, this hostility is not only based in religion, but a variety of other topics as well ranging from American ideals to what the country should be supporting and representing. In Bush's 2006 SOTU address he said, "America is a great force for freedom and prosperity" (Bush 2006) which can be interpreted in many different ways yet will not be universally agreed upon. While there are some people who believe in this idea that America brings the freedom and prosperity promised, there are also people who believe that it does no such thing; especially in the context of the growing War on Terror, some people would even view America as the aggressor, bringing destruction and retribution to countries like Iraq and Afghanistan instead of freedom and prosperity. *Ideological difference* is a code that can be applied to a number of situations where the president makes a bold claim regarding what America should be like yet may run aground to other opinions shared by other people.

Following *ideological difference*, the second-most used code is *singling*. Given that Bush's presidency began with the 9/11 attacks, much of his presidency was spent making sure that enemies did not cause America any more damage than they already had. This fueled the country into believing that minorities such as Muslims, Hispanic immigrants, and other groups were actively working to undermine the well-being of the country. One example of this comes from Bush's 2007 SOTU address where he says, "In recent times, it has also become clear that we face an escalating danger from Shia extremists who are just as hostile to America and are also determined to dominate the Middle East" (Bush 2007). This statement not only singles out Muslims, but, more specifically, the Shia branch of Islam due to its supposed threat in Iran and assistance with Al-Qaeda. This type of language looks to not only

divide Muslims from the rest of the population, but also stir up tensions within the Muslim community as well, similar to *good and the bad*, but without the mention of the good. In addition to minority groups, Bush also directed his *singling* to political opponents as well or people who don't tend to fall into the rigid category of what a real American is.

However, it is important to note that not every single code created was used during Bush's SOTU speeches. For example, the code *forever foreign* was not brought up, indicating that, despite the terrorism crisis, Bush did not resort to isolating American citizens based on heritage or ethnicity and claim them to not be "real Americans". Yet, this was not proven to be used in his SOTU speeches, this code may have been used in some of his other speeches as well. The SOTU speech is a speech which is supposed to bring together the nation as a whole in support of policies suggested by the president, to use such a code like *forever foreign* in such a delicate time as this would have led to a further division between already-existing social gaps.

There is one instance of a code pertaining to the "other" category and this comes from the SOTU speech in 2002. In relation to the countries and organizations which provide support to Al Qaeda, Bush remarked "They were as wrong as they are evil" (Bush 2002). Although this is not in reference to any population within the United States, this is an instance of brash and crude language that is unexpected from such a prestigious office as the president of the United States. To use language with the word "evil" in such a manner will no doubt drive people (namely political opponents such as the democrats) away from Bush's policy while his conservative base would agree with him and potentially shun those who do not agree with what Bush said.

All of these instances mentioned contribute to the divisive language which separates Americans from one another and creates more problems for the country as a whole. One of the groups that were the most discriminated within these speeches were Muslims as well as people of Middle Eastern heritage. Out of the 12 instances of *singling*, six of them were in the scope of politics as Bush's speeches singled against opponents to the War on Terror, government employees who (supposedly) oppose religion, supporters of the LGBT community, isolationists, and even Republicans (of which Bush spoke about favorably by stating that he is a proud member of the party). Meanwhile, the following instances single out African-Americans with HIV, Hispanic immigrants, three instances against Muslims (both Sunni and Shia), and even an unmentioned enemy when Bush says, "That to win the war on terror, we must take the fight to the enemy" (Bush 2007). The group who is victimized the most by this *singling* are political opponents due to Bush's frequent mentioning of people

who are opposed to many of Bush's beliefs. In terms of ethnicity, Bush appears to have singled out the Muslims more than any other group in these speeches; however, this is in reference to the extremist branches of Islam which the United States launched the War on Terror against. In his 2002 SOTU speech, Bush was quoted as saying "America will take the side of brave men and women who advocate these values around the world, including the Islamic world, because we have a greater objective than eliminating threats and containing resentment" (Bush 2002). This quote paints a picture to the American people that the "Islamic world" and its people (many of whom have come to America) are backwards and that it is up to the American soldiers to provide freedom and liberty to these countries since Bush believes that America is the bastion of democracy and liberty.

Much of the rhetoric that George Bush uses during the selected speeches concerns the United States being the moral arbiter and spreader of freedom, democracy, and hope to all people. Yet, as Figure 2 shows, Bush frequently makes use of language which utilized both the *strict father* and the *people as an entity* codes, showcasing his supposed authority and his belief that such policies are something that all Americans agree with. For instance, when using the *strict father*, Bush tends to use his language in imperatives, showing that he wants his policies to be taken care of with as little resistance and opposition as possible, as can be shown in his 2004 SOTU address when he said "You need to renew the PATRIOT Act" (Bush 2004). Already a controversial piece of legislation that many Americans did not agree with, Bush's additional use of commanding language makes this seem like a command that must not be questioned and leading many in the opposite parties to believe that Bush does not care about outside opinions or other views, and isolating a good portion of the American population. Yet, the *people as an entity* code is used the same amount of times as the *strict father*, potentially demonstrating that the people are of generally one opinion in Bush's view and making sweeping generalizations about what (Bush thinks) the majority of Americans want is what all Americans want. In doing so, by not addressing the various needs of differing groups and demographics, Bush is pushing all of these different groups further away from each other and widening the social gaps which have plagued the United States since its founding.

All of these instances of divisive rhetoric used by the Bush presidency show that even during a time where the country was beset by chaos following the 9/11 attacks, there was still division to be found in the midst of tragedy and that it was being exploited with divisive rhetoric. The instances of *ideological difference* show that by invoking the Christian religion into a speech aimed to unify all Americans as the SOTU aims to do, it risks isolating people

of other religions from the political landscape. Additionally, people who do not agree with Bush's perceptions of what America's ideals and values face being seen as "un-American" in a time where national security was at its highest and paranoia about terrorism were at levels unseen since the Cold War. The language used from these four SOTU speeches shows that the Bush administration continued to divide the American population along ethnic and political lines while singling out primarily political opponents and Muslims and using a more authoritative method of speaking, invoking the principles of the *strict father*. The rhetoric used in Bush's SOTU speeches is divisive and while he attempts to unify Americans with these speeches, the language used within isolates many groups and contributes to the polarization which will come to characterize America in the coming years.

4.2.2. Speeches by Obama

Assuming the office of the presidency in 2009, Obama had proven himself to be a candidate who was different than his predecessor, George W. Bush. Much like Bush, Obama inherited a nation in a time of crisis; although it was not primarily a crisis of national security and terrorism, but America was in the midst of an economic crash upon the collapse of the housing market in 2008. By the time of Obama's inauguration, the American economy was the worst it had been since the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and people's faith in the government was plummeting. However, Obama's election campaign promised great change to the country in terms of the economy, as well as in social issues (with him being the first black president of the United States) and a change to how the presidency was viewed. One instance of how he conducted himself was in 2008, upon accepting the presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention (DNC), where he called for both civility and respect to happen throughout the election (Winans 2019). In fact, Horvath (2009) claims that, "Obama's forms of addresses can be seen as more inclusive of nationalities and ethnicities, applying a more citizen-centered attitude" (50). After a campaign which sought to bring the country together, Obama made use of language which, on the surface, did not seem to divide and aimed to bring the country together as one, despite harsh reprisals from Republican colleagues. However, upon analyzing Obama's SOTU speeches from 2010, 2012, 2015, and 2016, it was found that Obama's speeches proved to contain more divisive rhetoric than Bush, namely along political rather than ethnic or racial lines.

Figure 3 displays a table showcasing all the instances of divisive rhetoric that have occurred in Barack Obama's observed SOTU addresses.

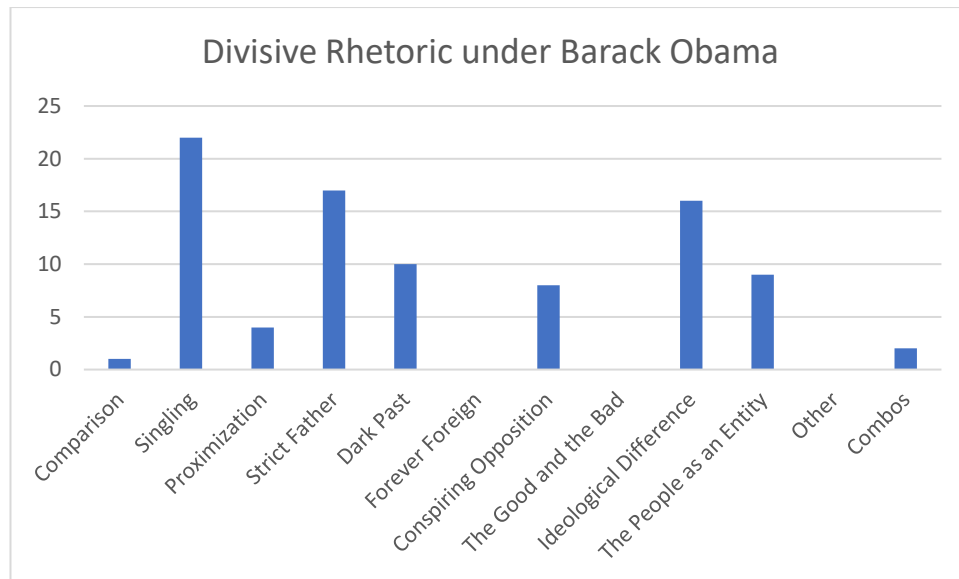


Figure 3: The recorded instances of divisive rhetoric under Barack Obama. As Figure 2 displays, the most used code is singling while both forever foreign and other were not used once.

Upon reviewing the SOTU speeches based on the codes and criteria previously established for divisive rhetoric, there were 90 total instances of divisive rhetoric which Obama employed in these speeches. Out of all of these 90 instances, *singling* was found to be the most prevalent with 22 instances recorded from these speeches. Following this, the second most used code is the *strict father* at 17 occurrences and third is *ideological difference* with 16 occurrences. In addition, there are also two instances of combination codes, between *singling* and *strict father* as well as *strict father* and *ideological difference*. Despite Obama using possessives like “our” frequently to unify people in the face of a crisis (Winans 2019), he still incorporates this divisive rhetoric showing that although he planned to be a unifying figure, there are still some divisive elements that he has incorporated.

However, while Obama may have used more instances of divisive rhetoric overall than Bush, what is notable is that there has been less usage of *proximization* and *the good and the bad* compared to his predecessor. This suggests that in these speeches, Obama did not aim to stir up fears about an attack on American soil nor did he resolve to splitting groups into further subdivisions as Bush had done. Nevertheless, the increased use of other codes (with the exception of the ‘other’ category and *forever foreign*) shows that the language that Obama used may have indicated that a heightened sense of division was occurring within the United States and that even the highest office of the presidency was partaking in it.

During this time period, the effects of hyperpolarization were beginning to take hold within the United States where Republicans increasingly refused to cooperate with

Democrats and vice versa. The election of Obama helped exacerbate this hyperpolarization due to many of his policies which were considered unacceptable by Republicans and even though Obama tried to be a unifying force for the country, the divisive rhetoric continued within his SOTU speeches, and targeted political opponents primarily. Additionally, the use of the *strict father* in the form of imperatives and circulating the appropriate political channels in order to accomplish his desired policies also provided some divisiveness towards those who feel as though they are being ordered to do something against their will.

One example which demonstrates Obama's use of the *strict father* comes from the SOTU address in 2010 where he says, "And if I have to enforce this discipline by veto, I will" (Obama 2010). Although some Americans may find it endearing that Obama is taking a voiced position on an issue that many Americans feel strongly about, Obama also risks isolating those who believe in the rigid power of government to operate in a controlled manner. By using his threat of a veto (although perfectly constitutional), Obama is sending out the message that he will not be afraid to use such a power to his content, regardless of who is preventing his policy or action from taking place.

Instances such as this help show how Americans are divided in terms of politics and how the government is affected by this division as well. As a part of the left vs. right debate, the question of big government vs. small government is a question that has existed in the national conscience since the very founding of the country, constituting in a formative rift. A formative rift happens when a division that is long-standing arises during the formation of a nation or country or during the transition of one form of government to another (McCoy & Somer 2019). By utilizing these formative rifts, a president is making use of one of the largest forms of division that a country has had since its conception and splitting its people into different sides of the debate.

Although Obama came to represent a more inclusive side of the Democratic Party and America as a whole, this inclusiveness was not received well by the opposing republican Party who became increasingly hostile towards Democrats. The Democratic Party as a whole became the advocate to rectify the inequalities in the United States, aiming to utilize capitalism as a means of generating wealth, yet regulating it so that it would continue to not cause too much harm to others (Horvath 2009). This form of regulation, especially in the financial sector, is a strong stance that the more fiscally conservative Republicans take a stand against.

For example, although Obama's SOTU address in 2010 singled out plenty of the big banks which led to the financial crisis of 2008, by saying "Our most urgent task upon taking

office was to shore up the same banks that helped cause this crisis” (Obama 2010). Not only was Obama referring to financial institutions, but also to the politicians who supported them. Even though *singling* in this instance may have been directed towards the banks, it also serves as a subtle attack against the former Republican administration who let the banks have free reign and develop this crisis at the end of the Bush presidency. However, it is not only *singling* towards the big banks that Obama has engaged in.

In all of the instances that Obama has utilized *singling*, there is only one instance which is not politically related. Obama singled out the big banks, lobbyists against financial reform, the government itself, big companies, unnamed “entrenched interests” who would like to keep the status quo, the previous administration, and even against his own party members. There have been no instances of *singling* based on race or ethnicity, gender, or religion (with the one exception of Islamist extremism). The bulk of Obama’s divisive rhetoric is, uniquely, not only aimed at the opposing Republican party and larger companies, but also against his own party, the Democrats. This divisive rhetoric against his own party demonstrates that even within the largest organizations and parties that run the country, there is a decent amount of fragmentation within them that is not safe from the divisive rhetoric that a president may use against political opponents. In 2010, when Obama says in his SOTU address “To Democrats, I would remind you that we still have the largest majority in decades and the people expect us to solve problems, not run for the hills” in a rare moment when the president calls out his party. Instances like these demonstrate that the presidency can serve as a divisive figure within their own party and run the risk of having their parties divided into separate camps which will either support or reject them. The SOTU speech helps to bolster this kind of division by having it be broadcast all over the country and making the people feel more loyal to the president as opposed to the party itself, which, in turn, will create more division among people; potentially, it will spawn camps of traditional Republicans or Democrats against different, potentially more radical, groups or camps. This is a concept not uncommon in American history as political parties have been formed, split, and formed into new types of political parties. Yet, if the SOTU speech has a potential to divide within the president’s own party with language, then the effect of creating an even further divide against the opposing political parties has far greater potential.

The SOTU speeches observed from Obama focused heavily on economic and class issues, which are topics that have divided the Democrats and Republicans for decades and form the basis of their party ideologies. When Obama makes reference to Wall Street bankers responsible for the crash of 2008, or the big businesses who do not pay their fair share of

taxes, he uses these as subtle references to attack the fiscal policies of the Republican party without having to directly say that it is against the Republicans. Additionally, he risks alienation and isolation of Republican citizens, by associating Republicans with the greed and carelessness of banks and Wall Street. Although Obama's observed SOTU speeches make no reference to ordinary people who are Republicans, the example of him referring to Bush by saying "I've approved fewer regulations in the first three years of my presidency than my Republican predecessor did in his" (Obama 2010) casts a negative light on George W. Bush by selectively referring to him as his "Republican" predecessor. This has a telling effect on Republicans about how Obama does not like Republicans since Obama inserted "Republican predecessor" into his speech instead of simply saying, predecessor. Another example comes from the 2012 SOTU address where Obama singles out Warren Buffett for paying less taxes than his secretary as a result of loopholes in the tax codes. By focusing on an individual to direct all of these accusations to and using them as an example allows the president to form an image to everyone of what they should not be. However, depending on who the figure is, they may be beloved by a certain demographic and may feel that by demonizing this figure, the president is demonizing them by extension. The president's use of divisive rhetoric to go after one individual representing a cause they wish to take action against will then be seen by other Republicans and fiscally conservative people as an attack on themselves and not wish to associate with Obama and the Democrats so long as he continues these attacks against them.

This form of political opposition is found in many of the different topics that Obama refers to in his speeches. From financial regulation, to climate change, to the War on Terror, to a number of different topics, Obama is primarily going against, not only the Republicans, but also those who view the topic differently than he does. When Obama mentions a topic that someone opposes or thinks differently from, he frequently adopts the *strict father* mentality, which risks dividing the nation further as other people (namely those who are being opposed) feel like they are not being taken seriously in their concerns. A common aspect of the *strict father* code, as was mentioned in Section 3.2, is the use of imperatives and demands in its usage, issuing many things as demands in a way which seems to circumvent the necessary channels of government. It does not always have to be delivered in the form of an imperative, but it can serve as the most imposing way to have a point come across to the people. This is demonstrated in Obama's 2012 SOTU address when he says, "So let me put colleges and universities on notice: If you can't stop tuition from going up, the funding you get from taxpayers will go down" (Obama 2012) in regards to the rising costs of tuition. Even though this quote does not use an imperative, it still puts forth a direct order that is disguised

as a vague threat and shows that the president believes that they have more power than they actually do.

Although the SOTU address's primary purpose is to talk about what happened in the previous year and what needs to be done for the coming year, it also runs the risk of becoming increasingly partisan. As Obama's SOTU speeches have shown, there is the risk of using such a speech to further divide the country along political and class lines for populist support. Even though Barack Obama believed that the language he was using was more "civilized", as he put it in his presidential nomination speech, it still contained more elements of divisive language than his predecessor, George W. Bush along lines which focused more on politics and class as opposed to ethnic, gender, racial, or other dimensions. Thus, the divisive rhetoric that was utilized in Obama's SOTU speeches was subtler than Bush's, but it also played into divisiveness along partisan lines, making the division between Democrats and Republicans wider and fostering less opportunities for bipartisan cooperation on future issues.

4.2.3 SOTU Speeches by Trump

With the election of Donald Trump in 2016 as the popular Republican candidate, Trump had already built a reputation for being a controversial figure who utilized populist sentiments and fiery rhetoric against the established political system while opposing Democrats and minorities of all kinds. From the start of Donald Trump's campaign for presidency in 2016, he established himself as a candidate which catered to a specific demographic, namely that of white, Christian conservatives while seeming to disregard other demographics and populations. As opposed to engaging with a broader scope of Americans during his time in office from 2017-2021, Trump focused primarily on his political base (Louie & Viladrich, 2021). Some of the rhetoric that was used prior to his presidency and during his campaign was already filled with divisive rhetoric towards many different groups and demographics; one of the most notable instances of divisive rhetoric occurred in 2015 during his bid for presidency speech where he said that Mexico is sending people who are "bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists," (Trump 2015). This quote established how divisive Trump would be as president and the SOTU speeches he engaged in proved to be just as divisive as the speeches he gave before his election.

Figure 4 demonstrates the instances of divisive rhetoric used by Trump during his only term.

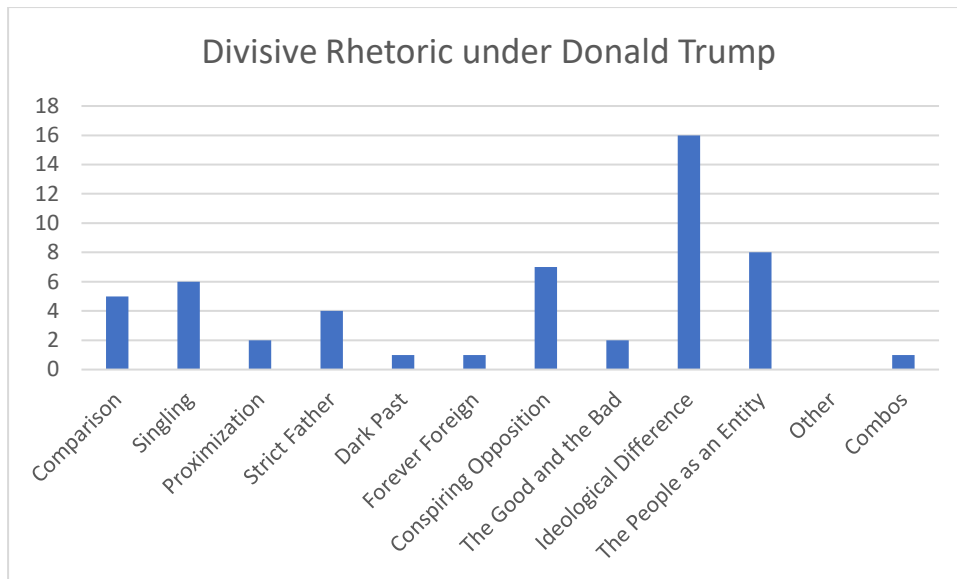


Figure 4: This table shows the instances of divisive rhetoric Trump utilized in the SOTU speeches in 2018 and 2020. Much like Bush, the ideological difference is utilized the most while the other category is the only code which is not used.

For the two SOTU speeches that were selected from his presidency, from 2018 and 2020, there were a total of 52 instances of divisive rhetoric which took place. Although this sounds to be less divisive than Bush and Obama, this information came from two speeches alone, indicating that the trend of divisive language has only increased from 2001-2021. Out of all of the codes which Trump utilized, the *ideological difference* was the most used code with 16 recorded instances between these two speeches. Following this, the second most used code that was utilized by Trump is *the people as an entity*, a code which addresses the various peoples of the United States as one body with little differentiation in terms of beliefs or opinions. However, what is most interesting to note is that Trump is the only one of the three presidents to make use of the *forever foreign* code, a code which aims to divide predominantly ethnic and racial minorities by questioning their loyalty to America or calling their citizenship and legality into question. With this use of *forever foreign*, Trump is the only one of the three presidents observed who had made use of every single code that was created for this study in addition to one instance of combination (between *singling* and *conspiring opposition* back in 2020) yet with no instances belonging to the “other” category. The use of all ten codes that were created for this study shows that Trump’s rhetoric in the SOTU speeches is more divisive than either Bush or Obama.

Within the two speeches that were observed, the 2018 SOTU address had 20 instances of divisive rhetoric occurring while the 2020 SOTU speech had 33 instances of divisive rhetoric taking place. The 2020 SOTU address has the highest number of instances of

divisive rhetoric occurring in any of the SOTU speeches observed between 2001-2021. The speeches that Trump delivered for the SOTU fit the criteria for divisive language as was set forth by Winans (2019). According to Winans (2019) “The three parts of divisive language are negative campaigning, incivility, and political polarization” (3). Based on the speeches that Trump delivered, all of these three criteria were met, culminating in language that was divisive for a speech which is intended to unite Americans behind recommended actions and policies for the coming year.

In addition to creating division among different groups in the United States, Trump also succeeded in creating divisions within certain groups as well. One manner in understanding the strategy used by Trump to create divisions within groups via dividing, diverting, and conquering is how the discourse used against certain ethnic/racial groups were stigmatized into violence, both symbolic and political (Louie & Viladrich 2021). Most notably, this division took place among the Hispanic population where Trump focused much of his vitriolic discourse towards and praised certain members of the community while demonizing it as a whole. Quotes such as “The United States of America should be a sanctuary for law-abiding Americans, not criminal aliens” (Trump 2020) shows that Trump paints a picture of how immigrants are damaging the country by referring to them as “criminal aliens” while referring to Americans as “law-abiding”. Rhetoric such as this has been used to fuel anti-immigrant sentiments as well as dividing the community from within as per the code *the good and the bad*.

One instance of *the good and the bad* comes from the 2018 SOTU address where Trump mentioned “Homeland Security Investigations Special Agent Celestino Martinez... served 15 years in the Air Force before becoming an ICE agent fighting gang violence and getting dangerous criminals off our streets” (Trump 2018). By focusing on a member of the Hispanic community who has abided by the proper manner of being an American in Trump’s view, Trump is using Martinez as an exception to the rest of the community, which is believed to be engaging in dangerous and unlawful activities. *The good and the bad* in this instance divides the community from within as it lets the other people of the Hispanic demographic know that unless they are behaving in a similar way to Martinez, then they will face demonization and a negative perception from other Americans.

However, it is not only the Hispanic demographic that Trump has launched rhetorical attacks against, but he has also launched divisive rhetoric against political opponents as well in his SOTU addresses. Having been a Republican candidate who frequently disagreed with the policies that the Democratic party implemented, Trump’s rhetoric against his political

opponents was levied in a way which not only made the Republican party look good, but also made the Democratic party look incapable and corrupt by comparison.

Trump's frequent use of *conspiring opposition* as well as *singling* against political opponents plays a significant factor in the SOTU speeches. By directing his rhetoric against the Democratic party and other left-leaning organizations, Trump paints the Democratic party and its supporters as incompetent and actively working to undermine the strength of the nation. For example, in the 2020 SOTU address, Trump was quoted as saying "If we hadn't reversed the failed economic policies of the previous administration, the world would not now be witnessing this great economic success" (Trump 2020). By claiming that the Obama administration implemented failed economic policies, which Trump and his administration reversed, he is stating that his presidency will fix all the ills that the previous presidency created as well as the other ills created by Democrats. Even by using such harsh language as "failed economic policies", this rhetoric is stating that the opposing political faction is not capable to the degree of the Republicans if all they can do is implement policies that are "failed". This has a profound impact on people of opposing political views as well.

One of the most notable characteristics in the SOTU addresses by Trump is the frequent use of the *people as an entity code*, which suggests how he does not take into account the difference in opinions and beliefs. This is of particular importance because this code allows the president to make sweeping generalizations regarding policies and actions and speak in a way as though this is something that all Americans desire and is truly needed. In the ironic nature of the code, by saying that certain policies or actions are what all Americans desire, it erases the diverse needs of different groups and assumes a "one size fits all" approach to policymaking. It assumes a unifying nature since it talks about all Americans sharing the same belief, yet at the same time it is divisive since there are plenty of Americans who do not share the same sentiments and wish for the president to focus on different subjects. For example, in the 2018 SOTU address, Trump made the brief yet bold claim that "Americans love their country" (Trump 2018) under the assumption that every single American loves the United States in every way even though this is certainly not the truth. Making such claims and assuming that every single American follows this belief will lead people to believe that the president is speaking on their behalf and projecting what he wants them to say as opposed to listening to them and truly understanding what they want. Due to this, further divisions will occur in the nation along lines of race, ethnicity, class, gender, political affiliation as well as along other dimensions.

However, the code that was the most used, *ideological difference*, is the most significant as it is used in a way that uses strong and emotionally charged language. When *ideological difference* is invoked, it is used in a manner that attempts to push forth an agenda or the justification of a policy onto the people. Trump's use of *ideological difference* differs from other presidents' uses in that he uses language which affects his followers and potential followers in a manner which either has them supporting his cause or creating contempt with the policies of political opponents. For example, in the 2020 SOTU address, Trump says "Ladies and gentlemen, our ancestors built the most exceptional republic ever to exist in all of human history, and we are making it better than ever before" (Trump 2020). By referring to the United States as "the most exceptional republic ever to exist in all of human history", Trump is painting a picture of the United States as the greatest country of all time and how his administration is making it better than it ever was. Using such language has the additional effect of creating a false dichotomy where the language is used to praise Trump and his Republican colleagues while also suggesting that the Democrats would only cause damage and chaos to the republic.

Another example by Trump comes from a comment in regard to birth control where Trump says, "Whether we are Republican, Democrat, or independent, surely we must all agree that every human life is a sacred gift from God" (Trump 2020). In this instance, Trump is invoking *ideological difference* not only against those who don't believe in (Judeo-Christian) God, but also against women as well. Many people who are supporters of birth control and planned parenthood may be opposed to this comment as this comment is talking about human lives being highly valued and saying that those who do not value such lives – especially when it may come at the cost of a woman's life or wellbeing – are going against the wishes of God and do not wish to protect such lives. Trump's use of emotionally charged language in his *ideological differences* prove that in addition to making sweeping claims about what is right or just within the United States is true and that those who disagree or are opposed to it are not in the right and devalue the country and its people. By making such claims in the SOTU address, Trump is further dividing different populations and demographics from the platform of the Republicans while increasing the tensions between both Democrats (who are generally more pro-choice) and Republicans among other social groups.

As stated before, Trump engaged in a campaign which revitalized the voters within his base while not paying much mind to any opposition or anybody who does not fall into his support base (Louie & Viladrich, 2021). In the SOTU speeches that Trump has read during

his presidency, there are noticeably fewer instances where unity is called for and more divisive rhetoric has been used stemming from the xenophobia and hyperpolarization which continues to divide the United States. The frequent use of *ideological difference*, *people as an entity*, and even the singular use of *forever foreign* showed that Trump's rhetoric fit all three criteria of Winans' (2019) uncivil rhetoric. As a result of this, Trump's divisive rhetoric is used to further divide communities both from outside and within while utilizing uncivil language in order to draw support from his base towards actions and policies that do not serve to the benefit of many Americans.

4.3 Commonalities shared between the three presidents

Even though it has been proven that each of the presidents mentioned has engaged in divisive rhetoric during their SOTU addresses in a different manner, there are also instances where each president shares some common traits in the divisive language they use. The divisive rhetoric used by the presidents may be directed towards different demographics and groups based on race and partisanship, yet through different uses of the codes which were created, it has been demonstrated that there are some similarities used between the three presidents, namely through the popularity of *ideological difference*, the invoking of the Christian religion into speeches, and how the code combinations utilized made use of the *singling* code.

One of the most frequently occurring codes which was used by all three presidents during this time period was the *ideological difference* in that the president attempted to push an agenda onto the public to garner support for the policy they wanted to enact. This ideology may come in the form of politics, beliefs about the country, morality, and other factors, however, the biggest use of *ideological difference* is in a religious sense. At the end of each SOTU address observed here, the president invokes the phrase "God bless the United States of America" in some capacity. Even though this is a feature which has happened at the end of the SOTU address long before 2001, the invoking of God in a highly-politicized speech not only isolates those who do not follow the Christian God (as many presidents are Christian), but it also causes an ideological strain against those who believe that church and state should be separate entities. Peoples of different faiths and religions end up feeling isolated from the national discourse with the frequent mentioning of the Judeo-Christian God. One example of how this occurs comes from the 2006 SOTU address, where Bush stated, "Human life is a gift from our Creator, and that gift should never be discarded, devalued, or put up for sale" (Bush 2006) in reference to the discussion surrounding birth control. Instances such as these allow the president to implement their own personal ideologies, as well as the ideology of the

group that they belong to, onto the policy they will pass. Yet, it is not only religious ideologies that are mentioned by the presidents mentioned.

Another common ideology shared by all three presidents is that of nationhood and the nature of America. As the unifying figure who is supposed to lead Americans into a better and brighter future, the president attempts to utilize the core beliefs of America –such as freedom, liberty, etc.—and assure them that the American dream is still available for all who want to partake. However, the utilization of such language in regard to America can be challenging as there are certain groups in the United States who were not historically entitled to the freedoms and liberties that were supposedly promised and still do not receive those promises in the present. For example, towards the end of the 2020 SOTU address, Trump stated that “we settled the New World, we built the modern world, and we changed history forever by embracing the eternal truth that everyone is made equal by the hand of Almighty God” to foster some patriotism at the end of the speech (Trump 2020). This sentence is particularly divisive as it completely disregards the native Americans who already lived on the American continent, claims to have built the modern world as though America was the only country to do so, and talk about equality when the history of the United States contains racism and discrimination. By painting history in a more favorable light, Trump is stoking patriotic fervor among his support base, but isolating other groups and demographics who do not feel that it is as ideal a picture as he makes it out to be.

The use of the *ideological difference* code is one that all three presidents make frequent use of, however, another similarity between them is the frequent accusations against opposing political factions. This finger-pointing in the SOTU address contributes to the division and hyperpolarization in the United States as well by accusing the other side of sabotaging policies or garnering support for one’s party by denigrating the other side. Whatever the cause may be, the divisive rhetoric found in the SOTU speeches contributes to the hyperpolarization within the United States by demonstrating how hostile the two main parties are towards one another. This frequently takes the form of presidents accusing other politicians or members of the government for not showing their support on a particular policy or issue, such as the 2004 SOTU address where Bush accused many members of the government of not supporting the war in Iraq and thereby bolstering Saddam Hussein’s power by saying “Some in this chamber and in our country did not support the liberation of Iraq. Objections to war often come from principled motives, but let us be candid about the consequences of leaving Saddam Hussein in power” (Bush 2004). A second instance comes from the 2012 SOTU address where Obama claimed to have approved fewer regulations as

opposed to his “Republican predecessor” Bush. By making accusations and emphasizing one’s partisanship, a distinct us vs. them mentality is formed, and the other side will find it increasingly difficult to engage in bipartisan cooperation so long as one side continues to talk about the other in such a manner. Partisan politics are embedded into the SOTU address and despite the calls for unity and going into the next year as a united nation, there are still moments where the rifts between the Democrats, Republicans, and other independent parties are formed. As a result of this, the supporters of both sides would be further unwilling to support a candidate of the other side and even grow to distrust supporters from the other side under the belief that they harbor the same beliefs as the president does.

Additionally, the three presidents that were looked at all utilized combinations of different codes at least once and utilized singling within these combinations. These instances make use of *singling* at least once in a president’s term, demonstrating that these combinations were directed towards a certain group of people. The combinations also made use of the *strict father*, and *conspiring opposition* codes which reveals the attitudes that the presidents feel about the groups they mention. These types of codes show that the president in question wants to make it known that there is a certain group or demographic they are targeting and that they want to make it known so that they will seem more favorable in the public’s eyes. Even though all three presidents use these combination codes against different groups, they all share the similarity in that they are singling out these particular groups with the goal of isolating one group from the rest of the country and assigning some negative quality against them. This was found in Bush’s 2004 SOTU address where he was defending the No Child Left Behind Act by saying that there are those who wish to “weaken standards and accountability” (Bush 2004). In this particular instance, Bush was singling the opponents to the bill and implying that they want to erode the education system in America. The use of these combination codes allows the president’s divisive rhetoric to not only single out a group but attach some negative connotation with a certain group of people in order to rally support against them and for the president. As a result, the group in question, along with its supporters and allies, will feel left out of the discussion and as though the president wants nothing to do with them, thus perpetuating more division and polarization within the United States.

Even though Bush, Obama, and Trump may be different from one another in terms of personality, politics, and rhetoric, they still share some commonalities among each other in terms of employing certain divisive rhetoric within their speeches. Through the use of *ideological difference* to impose a certain belief onto people from patriotism to faith, as well

as the use of combination codes which make use of *singling* along with other codes, the SOTU speeches observed share a few commonalities with each other that contribute to the division of the nation. While the groups these three presidents target may be different from one another, as well as their preferred tactics, the divisive rhetoric they use within the SOTU speeches still show that there are some methods that the presidents use to divide the public that are quite similar to one another. The divisive methods that one of these presidents use in the SOTU speech may be different among Bush, Obama, and Trump, but the speeches show that while a president is supposed to be a unifying figure all Americans can identify with, the frequent *singling*, use of *ideological difference*, as well as combinations of codes show that a president can also serve as a potential divisive figure.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the amount of divisive rhetoric found in the SOTU speeches by American presidents visibly increased between 2001-2021. Although the SOTU speech is meant to be a unifying moment for Americans in order to bring the nation closer together, it can be observed that throughout the twenty-year period, the rate of divisive language increased. The notions of divisive rhetoric which were identified proved to be directed towards certain populations in the United States, yet the rhetoric used was always directed towards someone based on the president. The codes that helped identify divisive rhetoric also showed that divisiveness in SOTU speeches were as prevalent in decades prior as they are now, specifically with Dwight Eisenhower's 1957 SOTU address. Yet, the hyperpolarization of the 21st century increased divisive rhetoric from 2001-2021 along numerous different lines such as race, gender, class, partisanship, etc.

The ten codes for divisive rhetoric that were created helped to organize different types of divisive rhetoric that were found in the SOTU speeches. George Bush's rhetoric was focused primarily on the War on Terror and made use of *ideological difference* and *proximization* in order to garner the public's support for his counter-terror measures. Bush primarily ended up singling out Muslims and people of Middle Eastern descent while utilizing language that ended up being more divisive than inclusive in such a critical time. Obama's presidency initially encouraged a more tolerant and inclusive attitude as he proclaimed himself at the start of his campaign, however, Obama ended up using more divisive rhetoric than in the speeches selected from Bush. While Obama did not go after racial and ethnic minorities as much as Bush, Obama still made use of divisive rhetoric against political opponents, which resulted in language that came across as hostile to

Republicans and other political groups. Finally, Trump's observed SOTU speeches included some of the most divisive language observed in this time period despite being contained to only two speeches. Trump is the only president observed that made use of every single code (with the exception of the other category) which resulted in a population which was incredibly divided and political parties which continued to drift further apart from each other. By focusing on Trump's voter base, namely white, evangelical men, Trump ignored the other demographics of the country and the rhetoric used rarely spoke of someone outside of his voter base in a positive manner. From the speeches that were observed, the rate of divisive rhetoric in SOTU speeches starting from 2001 increased to 2021.

In addition to looking at Bush, Obama, and Trump individually, these three presidents were also compared with one another to see if there were any shared characteristics between them. Although Bush, Obama, and Trump had major differences in their use of divisive rhetoric, they still demonstrated some commonalities between each other by being particularly divisive to the other party as well as utilizing the *ideological difference* as one of the most used divisive tactics in their speeches. Particularly, the invoking of the Judeo-Christian God into the SOTU speeches was something that not only these three presidents shared, but it was something that nearly all presidents engaged in when giving a SOTU address. Even though Bush, Obama, and Trump may have been different in a number of ways from each other, they still make use of some of the same divisive rhetoric among each other, and perhaps with even more politicians in the American government.

While the SOTU speech provided a good insight into how divisive rhetoric continues to plague American politics, one must also recognize that it is a microcosm on the American political spectrum. To receive a better idea of how entrenched divisive rhetoric is, other types of speeches such as press conferences, hearings, and speeches for special occasions must be listened to as well as observing speeches in different branches of government ranging from Congress to the Supreme Court and even to the state governments. The SOTU address, while serving as one of the most important speeches a president has to give, only shows a microcosm of how the divisive rhetoric works in the United States and further research must be conducted into the various speeches and hearings which continue to divide the United States on a daily basis.

Phaidra: use for full quotations.

References

- Ash, Elliott; Morelli, Massimo; Van Weelden, Richard. 2015. "Elections and Divisiveness: Theories and Evidence." *The Journal of Politics* 79(4), 1268-1285.
- BBC News. 2016. "Reality Check: Who really voted for Donald Trump".
<https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-37922587> (November 9, 2016).
- Canovan, Margaret. 1982. "'People', Politicians, and Populism." *Government & Opposition* 19(3), 312-327.
- Cap, Piotr. 2007. "Proximization: A methodological account of legitimization strategies in the post 9/11 US political discourse." *Topics in Linguistics* 1, 13-17.
- Cohen, Jeffery. 1995. "Presidential Rhetoric and the Public Agenda." *American Journal of Political Science* 39(1), 87-107.
- Dunmire, Patricia. 2012. "Political Discourse Analysis: Exploring the language of politics and the politics of language." *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 735-751
- Horvath, Juraj. 2009. "Critical discourse analysis of Obama's discourse." In *Language, literature and culture in a changing transatlantic world, International conference proceedings*, Presov: University of Presov, 45-56 April 2009.
- McCoy, Jennifer; Somer, Murat. 2019. "Toward a theory of pernicious polarization and how it harms democracies: Comparative evidence and possible remedies." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681(1), 234-271.
- Pew Research Center. 2014. "Political Polarization in the American Public".
<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/> (June 12, 2014)
- Rudyk, Irina. 2007 "Power Relations in President Bush's state of the union speech." *The International Journal of Language Society* 23, 68-76.

Sarfo, Emmanuel; Agyeiwaa Krampa, Ewuresi. 2013. "Language at war: A critical discourse analysis of speeches of Bush and Obama on terrorism." *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education* 3(2), 378-390.

Safire, William. 2008. *Safire's Political Dictionary*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Van Dijk, Teun. 2006. "Ideology and discourse analysis." *Journal of political ideologies* 11(2), 115-140.

Vivian, Louie; Viladrich, Anahi. 2021. "'Divide, divert, & conquer' Deconstructing the presidential framing of white supremacy in the COVID-19 era." *Social Sciences* 10(8), 280.

Whitley, Stephen. 2014. "'Dog-Whistle' Rhetoric: Pedagogy and the Coded Language of Modern American Politics". MA Thesis, Texas A&M University.

Winans, Trevor. 2019. "Divisive Rhetoric and Adverse Language in American Political Discourse". MA Thesis, Boston University.