

# The Egocentric Presidency:

## How Modern Presidents Use Language to Communicate with the American Public

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*Modern presidential scholars have indicated that over the last eighty years, presidential speeches have become longer in length and less formal in language. This thesis aims to expand upon the findings of modern presidential scholarship by analyzing all State of the Union addresses from President Franklin D. Roosevelt's address in 1934 to President Barack Obama's most recent address in 2016. More specifically, by studying modern American presidents' verbally delivered State of the Union addresses, this thesis aims to identify whether modern presidents have over time increased their use of "egocentric" language – or frequency of singular first person pronouns – in their addresses. In doing so, my thesis hopes to contribute to the notable scholarship of the "rhetorical presidency" and "anti-intellectual presidency." Furthermore, this paper hopes to identify the general development of "egocentric" language in modern State of the Union addresses as well as observe and inspect how and why modern presidents use this language at all.*

The President of the United States is seen as the leader of the free world and the centermost figure in American politics. Due to the American presidency's prestige and mystery, scholars have always been interested in the institution since its formation in 1789. Much of presidential scholarship focuses on the President of the United States as an icon, or on the specific policies presidents enact during their presidencies. Less focus is on the language and rhetoric presidents use during their speeches to the American public. This thesis aims to do just that by contributing to a scholarly discussion about how presidents use language in order to increase their own favorability, gain more government influence, and advance their policy goals.

While presidential scholars have examined the rhetoric used by presidents, most evidently in a line of scholarship known as "the rhetorical presidency," (Tulis, 1987) these scholars have not done so specifi-

cally looking at the use of "egocentric" language. For the purpose of this paper, "egocentric" language is language that a speaker uses to refer to himself or herself. More specifically, a speaker does this by using singular first person pronouns. When a president is giving a speech, he is referring to himself by using singular first person pronouns and is therefore using "egocentric" language. The singular first person pronouns that a president may use in a speech are: "I," "my," "me," "mine," and "myself." In his 2016 State of the Union address, President Barack Obama, when speaking to the United States Congress and the American people, refers to himself several times in order to make a profound statement about the future of the United States. "That's what makes me so hopeful about our future. I believe in change because I believe in you, the American people. And that's why I stand here as confident as I have ever been that the state of our Union is strong" (Obama, 2016). This

thesis aims to evaluate modern American presidents use of the singular first person pronouns. In order to be efficient in this paper and to avoid redundancy, this thesis utilizes the term “I+” to refer to the use of the all singular first person pronouns (“I,” “my,” “me,” “mine,” and “myself”). Additionally, throughout the remainder of this paper, if a specific singular first person pronoun is being addressed – for example, “me” – this paper will make it explicitly clear that only that pronoun is being observed.

The question that this paper aims to answer is: have modern American presidents referred to themselves in State of the Union addresses more over time? By evaluating modern presidents use of “I+” pronouns in State of the Union addresses, this paper seeks to answer this question. This paper is based on the belief that over time, modern American presidents have gradually become more comfortable with the language and rhetoric they use, and therefore are more copious with the use of “egocentric” language and with referring to themselves. The foundation of this argument will be further explained in this paper’s literature review.

In order to successfully examine this study’s research question and argument, this thesis is divided into five parts following the introduction and an in-depth explanation of what the “egocentric presidency” is. First, this paper will examine the scholarly literature on the “rhetorical presidency” and the “anti-intellectual presidency” in a literature review. This literature review will better explain the foundation for this paper. Additionally, within the literature review, presidential case studies will be utilized in order to best illustrate the “rhetorical presidency” and “anti-intellectual presidency.” Second, following the literature review, the paper’s hypothesis will be laid out. Third, the methodology used within this study in order to properly test this paper’s research question and argument will be explained. Utilizing SPSS to run a scatter plot and correlation test, this study largely uses a quantitative approach to test the research question and argument. Fourth, this paper reveals and examines the results of the study. Simply, this study will divulge the outcome of the scatter plot and correlation test, but will then take a qualitative look at several modern State of the Union addresses in order to give the reader a descriptive and in-depth explanation of the “egocentric” language used by modern American presidents. Lastly, the paper will close with a conclusion section, which will recognize several implications of this new line of scholarship and will identify what future research is needed in order to properly advance this scholarship.

### *The Egocentric Presidency*

In this paper, what does the term, “egocentric presidency,” actually mean and what argument is this paper attempting to make with the term, “egocentric?” Certainly, this paper is not attempting to call or claim that some modern American presidents are self-centered or narcissistic. Rather, this paper is an attempt to study how presidents invoke more “egocentric” language in their speeches. Moreover, egocentrism in this thesis simply refers to modern presidents’ use of “I+” words in their speeches. For this study, a president’s level of egocentrism is evaluated based on how often he referred to himself in his speeches in relation to how often other modern American presidents refer to themselves. The “egocentric presidency” is a study of the American presidency by solely examining how presidents use language to refer to themselves in their speeches. This paper does not examine a president’s personality or behavior while in office to determine his level of egocentrism, only his language during speeches.

Within presidential studies, it is essential to study American presidents’ use of language and rhetoric – the “rhetorical presidency” – in order to properly understand the presidency. Additionally, studying presidential language and rhetoric provides necessary insight into the presidency as a whole as well as helps to detect changes in the office. For instance, without taking a close look at presidential language, scholars would not have recognized the change in relationship between the President of the United States and the American public, as presidents at the beginning of the 20th century began to appeal to the public much more in order to increase their favorability with the public and to gain governmental influence. This study, by establishing a new facet to the “egocentric presidency,” will advance this line of scholarship further and contribute to presidential scholars understanding of modern presidential language and rhetoric.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review intends to underscore the academic discourse between scholars over the history of presidential language and rhetoric in two sections. The first section will highlight the “rhetorical presidency” and “anti-intellectual presidency” through studies that examine how and why presidents use the rhetoric they do when speaking to the American public. The second section of this literature review will recapitulate studies that examine the “rhetorical presidency” and “anti-intellectual presidency” through

specific examples from recent presidential administrations.

### *The Rhetorical Presidency*

The main scholarship on the “rhetorical presidency” began with Jeffrey Tulis’ book, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (1987), which looks at the rhetoric presidents use and the possible meanings or reasons behind it. Tulis (1987) finds that a significant shift in presidential rhetoric and behavior occurred during Woodrow Wilson’s presidency from 1913 to 1921. During this time, Wilson deviated from the behavior of past presidents by communicating directly to the American public. Before Wilson, previous U.S. presidents refrained from making speeches to the public as it was frowned upon as such acts were seen as demagoguery or ruthlessly appealing to the public’s emotions in order to gain power. Wilson’s behavior resulted in a massive presidential shift, in which all presidents since his presidency have felt comfortable addressing the public directly. In essence, Wilson split the American presidency into two rhetorical periods based on an evolving constitutional understanding of the presidency and what relationship the president is supposed to have with the American public. The first period is called the founding period, where presidents refrained from appealing to the public fully and instead, focused on fostering a strong relationship with Congress. The second period is called the modern period, where presidents speak directly to the public in order to obtain more authority and support.

Contrary to the beliefs of Tulis, Laracey (2009) makes a direct argument against Tulis’ book, *The Rhetorical Presidency*. In Laracey’s study, he highlights seven presidencies during Tulis’ founding period, such as that of Zachary Taylor, where the president communicated directly with the American public – such as through speeches or newspapers – regarding policy. Laracey argues that Tulis’ study inaccurately makes a general observation in regard to how “premodern” presidents acted, expressing that according to Tulis’ study, all “premodern” presidents had absolutely “no communication to the public about policy matters” (Laracey, 2009). Crockett (2009), in reviewing the disagreement between Tulis and Laracey, contends that Laracey’s study is wanting severely in three ways. Firstly, Crockett finds that the evidence presented by Laracey is “unconvincing and open to question” (Crockett, 2009). Secondly, Laracey’s disagreement with Tulis’ book is mainly over defining terms rather than the actual conclusions Tulis makes. Lastly, Crockett expresses that the model Laracey created to dispute Tulis’ study comes up

short, leaving Tulis’ model to remain valid. “In sum, although Laracey and Tulis operate in the same arena and make use of similar tools, they are really playing different games, and it creates analytical confusion to conflate the two scholarly projects” (Crockett, 2009). Crockett argues that Laracey is comparing apples to oranges in order to dispute Tulis’ book.

In order to accurately understand the American presidency and its evolution, it is important to understand the office based on the behaviors of modern presidents as well as the power created based on their behaviors. Teten (2003) finds that the State of the Union addresses from George Washington to Bill Clinton have significant “structural and rhetorical changes” throughout American history (Teten, 2003). Using content analysis, this study suggests that there are three specific eras of the State of the Union address based on its rhetorical evolution. These three eras are: founding, traditional, and modern. Predictably, Teten states the founding era began with President Washington as the State of the Union address “was little more than an update on the military situation of the day and was very brief” (Teten, 2003). Not long after Washington’s presidency, the State of the Union moved from the founding era to the traditional era with President Jefferson. “[W]ith the swearing in of Thomas Jefferson, the state of the union would change for almost 113 years” as Jefferson felt delivering a speech to Congress was like “a king’s pronouncement” or the act of a tyrant (Teten, 2003). Due to this, Jefferson “ended the live delivery of the address and sent it instead in letter form for the legislative branch to read. He felt this move would end a ‘speech from the throne’ and simplify the way the federal government operated (Teten, 2003). Like Tulis (1987), Teten finds that the modern period of presidential rhetoric began with President Wilson. This period is distinguished by having shorter State of the Union addresses and by presidents’ uses of more “group words” (Murphy, 2008). Perhaps, the most important finding of this study is that “[t]he modern president speaks as one of the audience” (Teten, 2003). This study indicates that a president “goes public” as Kernell (1997), suggests by speaking as if he is simply any other American in the audience in order to successfully appeal to those he is ultimately speaking to. Kernell (1997) finds that the president uses “going public” as a way of pandering to the public in order to achieve a desired result, which was not attempted before Wilson, according to Tulis (1987) and Teten (2003). Kernell (1997) argues that “going public” has drastically transformed the relationship between the presidency and the legislative branch, as the president no longer relies completely on Congress

for validation of power and legitimacy.

Contrarily to Teten's assertion that the modern change in presidential rhetoric of State of the Union addresses began with Wilson, Murphy (2008) suggests that the "enduring change in rhetorical styles occurred during Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration" (Murphy, 2008). In a more recent study by Teten (2008), perhaps in response to Murphy, Teten argues that many scholars of the rhetorical presidency frequently examine only the modern period of presidential rhetoric because they believe rhetoric of the founding and traditional period is too dissimilar to modern rhetoric, therefore making it useless to better understanding the presidency today. Teten suggests that this practice is unscholarly and marked with impropriety as scholars opt for "easier handles" to make their arguments within the study of presidential rhetoric (Teten, 2008). Additionally, failing to evaluate the rhetoric of presidents during the founding and traditional periods falls short in detecting how similar the language is between these two periods and the modern period. Teten's study earnestly suggests that scholars must look to all periods of presidential rhetoric in order to properly evaluate the office's history as a whole.

Ever since presidents have decided to "go public," their reliance on the public opinion of the American people has become more and more meaningful. Due to this, presidents have crafted creative and sophisticated means to determine their popularity amongst the public. According to Jacobs (2005), presidents rely on the "collection of data – accurate, detailed, and extensive profiles of voters and, especially, critical slices of the electorate" (Jacobs, 2005). Rhetorically, Jacobs expresses that the president has the role of conveying his devotion to the national interest of Americans. Jacobs argues that the president, in order to appeal to the public as effectively as possible, uses comprehensive polling data which helps his administration generate the best strategies to communicate with the American people.

In addition to polling, the President of the United States uses keywords in his speeches in order to hone in on a specific audience. In doing so, the president panders to that audience in order to achieve a desired result, such as to gain support for a specific policy agenda. Keywords and phrases used in presidential speeches differ not only based on the audience, the forum or mostly importantly, the president, but also based on the political party of the president. Hart and Lim (2011) find that there is a very distinct difference between the language Republicans use compared to that of Democrats. This study suggests that Democratic presidents, which are seen as the leader of the

party of "progress and change" make reference to the future much more often than Republican presidents do, while Republican presidents, profess reference to the past much more often than their Democratic counterparts (Hart & Lim, 2011). Coleman and Manna (2007) find that presidents consistently use party references in their speeches in order to appeal to their party's constituents rather than to "portray a statesman-like image above the political fray" (Coleman & Manna, 2007). Even when presidents "go public" in order to gain the support of the American people, they put more rhetorical emphasis on political parties than on being an unbiased politician, who is above the partisan game.

As public opinion has become increasingly more important to presidents, Shapiro and Jacobs (2001) find that this reality does not mean presidents are more likely to be responsive to the beliefs and attitudes of the American public. Instead, presidents aim to "manipulate public opinion" in order to achieve a desired result rather than to listen to the true opinions of American voters. Through polling, presidents collect data regarding the attitudes of the American public, but use this data to formulate a plan on how to best and most effectively influence the public. Due to this, Shapiro and Jacobs make a strong case that presidents do not pander to the American public, but rather tailor desired policy to popular opinion. Likewise, Simon and Ostrom Jr. (1988) find that the president's increased interest in public opinion has caused a "politics of prestige," in which the support of the public determines, in no small way, the actions and behavior of the president. Similar to Shapiro and Jacobs, Simon and Ostrom Jr. find that a president cares about public opinion not because of a genuine interest in the beliefs of the American public, but rather because he cares to gain support for a desired outcome. Instead of sincerely listening to the American public, "presidents have an incentive to manage, manipulate, or otherwise control" public opinion of Americans (Simon & Ostrom Jr., 1988). Although the President of the United States looks at public opinion for political gain, the public merely influences the rhetoric presidents use to influence the opinions of the American people.

In eight short case studies, Zarefsky (2004) illustrates the power of presidential rhetoric and its ability "to alter public conceptions of political reality, thereby shifting the ground" (Zarefsky, 2004). Zarefsky uses case studies to best explain the effect presidential rhetoric has on public opinion. For example, in order to reduce the federal spending on welfare programs, Ronald Reagan "described isolated but egregious cases of welfare fraud, distinguishing the



perpetrators from the ‘truly needy’” which proved successful as Reagan stayed popular among the majority of Americans (Zarefsky, 2004). Through the calculated use of rhetoric, the president can sway the public by shaping an issue or policy in such a manner that is beneficial for his administration.

Through appeals to the public, the President of the United States aims to gain support for not only himself as a politician, but for his entire party and their respective policy agenda. As specified by Shapiro and Jacobs (2001) as well as Simon and Ostrom Jr. (1988), the president has additional incentives to use strategies in order to manipulate the American public’s political thought. Lim (2002) finds that there have been “five significant changes in twentieth-century presidential rhetoric,” specifically, “presidential rhetoric has become more anti-intellectual, more abstract, more assertive, more democratic, and more conversational” (Lim, 2002). In an effort to be received clearly and positively by the American public, presidents pander by using rhetoric that is deemed more easily understandable, informal, and colloquial. In doing so, presidents aim to communicate to the American public that they are not elitist and are instead “just regular people with whom the average American might want to have a beer with.”

One significant line of scholarship mentioned by Lim (2002) is the anti-intellectualism of presidential rhetoric, which Shogan (2007) explains is rhetoric that “disparages the rational complexity associated with intellectual pursuits” (Shogan, 2007). In its purest form, President George W. Bush – when speaking at a graduation ceremony at Yale – used anti-intellectual rhetoric in order to cater to “the hisses and boos” that welcomed him to the stage. Bush, instinctively assessing the crowd, used the power of rhetoric and self-deprecating humor in order to control the speech and the attitudes of the graduates, successfully leaving the stage with a sincere applause. Shogan (2007) finds that not only is there anti-intellectualism in the American presidency, but there is anti-intellectualism in everyday American life that contributes to its presence in presidential rhetoric. According to Shogan, there is poor relationship between American intellectuals and the political elites, in which elites use whatever means necessary to hold influence, power, and legitimacy. Sadly, anti-intellectualism is prevalent in modern presidential rhetoric because it is effective and remains beneficial for presidents to use.

### *Specific Evaluations Of Presidencies*

Since Woodrow Wilson to present day, the President of the United States looks to the American pub-

lic for both power and legitimacy. The president uses a variety of tactics in order to manipulate public opinion in his favor. One of the earliest presidents to use modern media to pander to the public was President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In what historians explain to be “intimate exchanges between the president and the people,” President Roosevelt used the radio to facilitate his “Fireside Chats,” which enabled him to communicate with millions of Americans at once. Through the use of content analysis, Lim (2003) finds that “the Fireside Chats were a harsher, more castigatory rhetorical genre” (Lim, 2003). Lim suggests that being a master of rhetoric, Roosevelt was able to convey an intimacy to the American people while still speaking about important issues and policy that is normally interpreted as political and crude (Lim, 2003). There is no question that the advancements of technology in the 20th and 21st century have created greater means of communication for presidents, which enables them to appeal to the public more frequently, effectively, and to a wider audience.

Just as Lim argued that President Roosevelt’s Fireside Chats were less intimate than previously believed, Osbourne (1980) argues that President John F. Kennedy used rhetorical strategies, such as anti-intellectualism, in his speeches in order to make them more understandable for his audiences. This study breaks Kennedy’s 68 major speeches into four equally numbered and distinct categories based on audience. Through content analysis, Osbourne (1980) finds that Kennedy tailored his speeches to the audience and forum he was speaking in. Not surprisingly, Kennedy’s speeches exhibited rhetoric patterns, such as preferences to “end his national talks with appeals for God’s help” while preferring to open his speeches to college and business audiences with humor (Osbourne, 1980). Along with President Franklin Roosevelt’s rhetorical patterns, President Kennedy’s patterns help scholars better understand how presidents pander to the public.

Like the studies before evaluating Roosevelt’s and Kennedy’s rhetorical strategies, Jacobs, Page, Burns, McAvoy, and Ostermeier (2003) found that President Nixon also tailored his speeches specifically to his audiences. This study argues that Nixon changed the subject matter of his speeches based on the news and current events. For instance, the rate of unemployment dictated the amount Nixon would speak about the subject. When unemployment was high, Nixon spoke about it more often. Quite surprisingly, the study suggests that Nixon focused a high percentage of his speeches on actual policy (Jacobs et al., 2003). In addition, according to Rottinghaus (2008), Nixon used public opinion polls to gauge his

overall public opinion. Alternatively, Nixon would also use “public opinion mail periodically to demonstrate to the public that the White House’s position was congruent with the position of the concerned public and, correspondingly, to persuade the public that their position was popular” (Rottinghaus, 2008). Nixon is a perfect example of a president using several mediums to assess popularity as well as manage public opinion.

Although every modern president has used “going public” to his advantage, it is interesting to assess which presidents were better at it than others. Understandably, there are a variety of factors that determine whether or not a president effectively uses rhetoric. Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton are two of the most of recent and most effective orators to occupy the White House in modern history. Sigelman, Lee, and Whissell (2002) used content analysis of Reagan’s and Clinton’s Saturday morning radio addresses and determined that Reagan’s language was closer to regular everyday American speech. Additionally, Reagan was “the less long-winded and more plain-spoken of the two,” contributing to the idea that he was “someone they [Americans] felt they knew well and someone with whom they would feel capable of, and comfortable in, sitting a while for a conversation” (Sigelman, Lee, & Whissell, 2002). Although, Clinton was less successful according to Sigelman, Lee, and Whissell, both his and Reagan’s rhetoric indicates that they aimed to speak in a familiar and understandable manner in order to be perceived positively by the American public.

The scholars mentioned within this literature review have contributed greatly to the study of the “rhetorical presidency” and “anti-intellectual presidency.” Without their insight and expertise, this thesis would not have been possible. This paper aims to expand upon these two lines of scholarship and delve into a new, undiscovered field by evaluating the American presidency through modern American presidents’ use of singular first person pronouns in State of the Union addresses.

## Hypothesis

According to scholars, who study the “rhetorical presidency,” modern American presidents use language and rhetoric in a manner unlike that of their predecessors when addressing the public. Modern presidents have shifted their use of language in widely publicized speeches in order to appeal or – pander – to the public. By doing this, a president is attempting to increase his favorability among the American populous, in turn leading to more governmental in-

fluence, and improved opportunity at achieving his administration’s goals. Additionally, as recognized in the “anti-intellectual” presidency, modern presidents are pandering to the public by using language in speeches that is less formal and more colloquial. This “anti-intellectual” language is easier for the American public to understand and is much more conversational, which increases a president’s favorability as the American public feels they know the president on a more personal level. The argument in this study is that modern American presidents have begun to use “I+” pronouns more often over time because presidential language as a whole has evolved into a less formal and more “anti-intellectual” institution. From this, the following hypothesis can be made:

H1: Over time, modern American presidents have gradually increased their use of “I+” pronouns in State of the Union addresses in relation to the total word count of their addresses.

Conversely, the null hypothesis for this paper is that modern American presidents have not gradually increased their use of “I+” pronouns in State of the Union addresses in relation to the total word count of their addresses.

## Methodology

The methodology used for this thesis is fairly straightforward and simple. In order to test this paper’s research question and hypothesis, it was essential to analyze whether there is a significant correlation between the frequency of a modern American president’s use of “I+” pronouns in a State of the Union address and the year that State of the Union address was given. To test this relationship, I collected the number of times a president used “I+” pronouns in every verbally delivered State of the Union address since President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s first in 1934 to President Barack Obama’s final and most recent in 2016. Additionally, I collected the total word count of each of these addresses in order to create a ratio with the amount of times an “I+” pronoun was said divided by the total amount of words said in the address. Just as this paper utilizes the term “I+” to refer to the use of all singular first person pronouns, for the remainder of this study, the term “I+”/WC will be utilized to refer to the use of “I+” pronouns over the total word count of an address. The term “I+”/WC calculates the frequency in which a president uses “I+” pronouns, not simply the total number of times an “I+” pronoun is used. This can be more thoroughly

explained with an example.

In 1987, President Ronald Reagan used “I+” pronouns a total of 61 times in his State of the Union address, but used a total of 3,774 words in the entire address. The “I+”/WC ratio for Reagan’s 1987 address is 0.01616, which means “I+” pronouns make up 1.616 percent of all words Reagan said in this address. In comparison, in 2012, President Barack Obama used “I+” pronouns a total of 103 times – which is much larger than Reagan’s 61 – in his State of the Union address, but used a total of 7,028 words – which is nearly double Reagan’s 3,774 words – in the entire address. The “I+”/WC ratio for Obama’s 2012 address is 0.01466, which means “I+” pronouns make up 1.466 percent of all words Obama said. When simply comparing the raw numbers of these two addresses without observing the “I+”/WC ratio, it is obvious that Obama used more “I+” pronouns as well as more words in total, but when comparing the “I+”/WC ratio of both addresses, it is obvious that President Reagan used a higher frequency of “I+” pronouns. Reagan’s “I+”/WC ratio was 0.01616 compared to Obama’s 0.01466.

By creating the “I+”/WC ratio, this study can compare these speeches together and determine who is more “egocentric.” If I were to determine “egocentrism” simply based on the amount of “I+” pronouns used, President Obama is far more “egocentric” in his 2012 address compared to President Reagan in his 1987 address. Regrettably, this would not account of the word length of each speech and in turn would not calculate the frequency at which a president uses “I+” pronouns. It is important to use frequency of “I+” rather than total amount of “I+” used because it accounts for how often a president uses “I+” pronouns, not simply the number of times they were used. Using the “I+”/WC ratio, we are able to receive a better evaluation of which presidents are the most “egocentric” when comparing them to one another.

More precisely, I was able to collect the number of times “I+” pronouns were used in State of the Union addresses as well as the total word count of these same addresses by using the University of California, Santa Barbara’s “The American Presidency Project” website, (<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/index.php>). This website gave me access to all State of the Union addresses delivered since George Washington’s first in 1790. With access to all of the State of the Union addresses, I was able to ‘copy’ and ‘paste’ each address into an online word count tool (<http://wordcounttools.com>). This tool automatically collected the number of times “I+” pronouns were said as well as the total word count of these State of the Union addresses. From here, I manual-

ly transferred the information collected by this word count tool into a spreadsheet. The spreadsheet was organized into four columns, 1 the president who delivered the State of the Union address, 2 the year the address was given, 3 the number of “I+” pronouns used in the address, and 4 the total number of words said in the address. Then, this spreadsheet was imported in SPSS, which was then able to analyze the relationship between two variables; each address’ “I+”/WC ratio and the year each address was given. More specifically, these two variables were presented in a scatter plot, which plots these variables on an X, Y axis in order to compare their relationship. Additionally, in a study that involves “time” – or years – a scatter plot is able to show the general trend of the second variable over time, which in this study is presidents’ use of “I+”/WC or “egocentric” language. In addition to using a scatter plot to analyze the two variables’ relationship, this study ran these variables through a correlation test. By doing this, this study aims to discover whether the relationship between I+/WC and year is correlated.

Before delving into the results portion of this study, there are several important notes that must be made in order provide clarity and precision within this paper. Firstly, as specified earlier in the methodology, this paper only utilized the verbally delivered State of the Union addresses since President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s first on January 3, 1934 to President Barack H. Obama’s last on January 12, 2016. It is important to note why President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the appropriate president to begin this study with. This thesis aims to evaluate only the “egocentric presidency” with regard to modern American presidents, so I used presidential literature to determine who was the first modern president in a study such as this. As established in the literature review, presidential scholars openly argue that the modern rhetorical presidency began with President Woodrow Wilson or President Franklin D. Roosevelt. For the purpose of this study, President Franklin D. Roosevelt is determined to be the first modern president, as Murphy argued, because this study aims to evaluate widely publicized speeches through a variety of mediums (radio, television, etc.). When President Woodrow Wilson was the President of the United States from 1913 to 1921, presidential speeches had not yet been broadcast on the radio or on the television. Because of this, President Wilson was not speaking to as large of an audience as later presidents would, which may have dramatically changed the language and rhetoric he used. Instead, I chose to begin my study with the State of the Union addresses of President Franklin D. Roosevelt because as Murphy suggests, the modern

“rhetorical presidency” coincides “with the increased use of technology by the president and Congress and the expansion of the audience for the State of the Union speech,” which had completely occurred by President Roosevelt’s time in office (Murphy, 2008).

The second important point to note is to provide why this paper utilizes State of the Union addresses and not other presidential speeches. Firstly, State of the Union addresses have occurred nearly every year in verbal form thus allowing for this study to have consistency as to the audience the president speaks to. Additionally, it is important to express that the State of the Union address is “mandated by Article II, Section 2 of the United States Constitution” (Peters, 2016). More specifically, the United States Constitution stipulates, “He [the President] shall from time to time give to the Congress information of the state of the union, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient” (United States Constitution, 1787). Because the State of the Union address is addressing Congress and then broadcast out to the American public, this event provides a unique opportunity to evaluate the use of presidential language and rhetoric. Due to the intended purpose of the State of the Union address, presidents tend to speak about issues of more substance and importance than in speech given in other forums and to other audiences. For this paper, State of the Union addresses were chosen to be the speeches to be analyzed because they provide a standard of consistency and due to their unique audience. Additionally, it must be noted that this study does not utilize State of the Union addresses that were delivered as written messages, such as President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s address in 1945 or President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s address in 1956. The chief reason for excluding these written messages is because the audiences of these written addresses are much different from the audiences of verbally delivered addresses. In this study and in all studies regarding “the rhetorical presidency,” the audience to which the president is addressing is crucial to the language and rhetoric the president chooses to use. For instance, the audience during a verbally delivered State of the Union address would be all individuals in attendance, anyone watching the address on the television, and anyone listening to the address over the radio. Contrariwise, the audiences of written State of the Union addresses only include individuals who have access, time, and interest in reading them. In order to provide consistency and relevance, this thesis only evaluates verbally delivered State of the Union addresses.

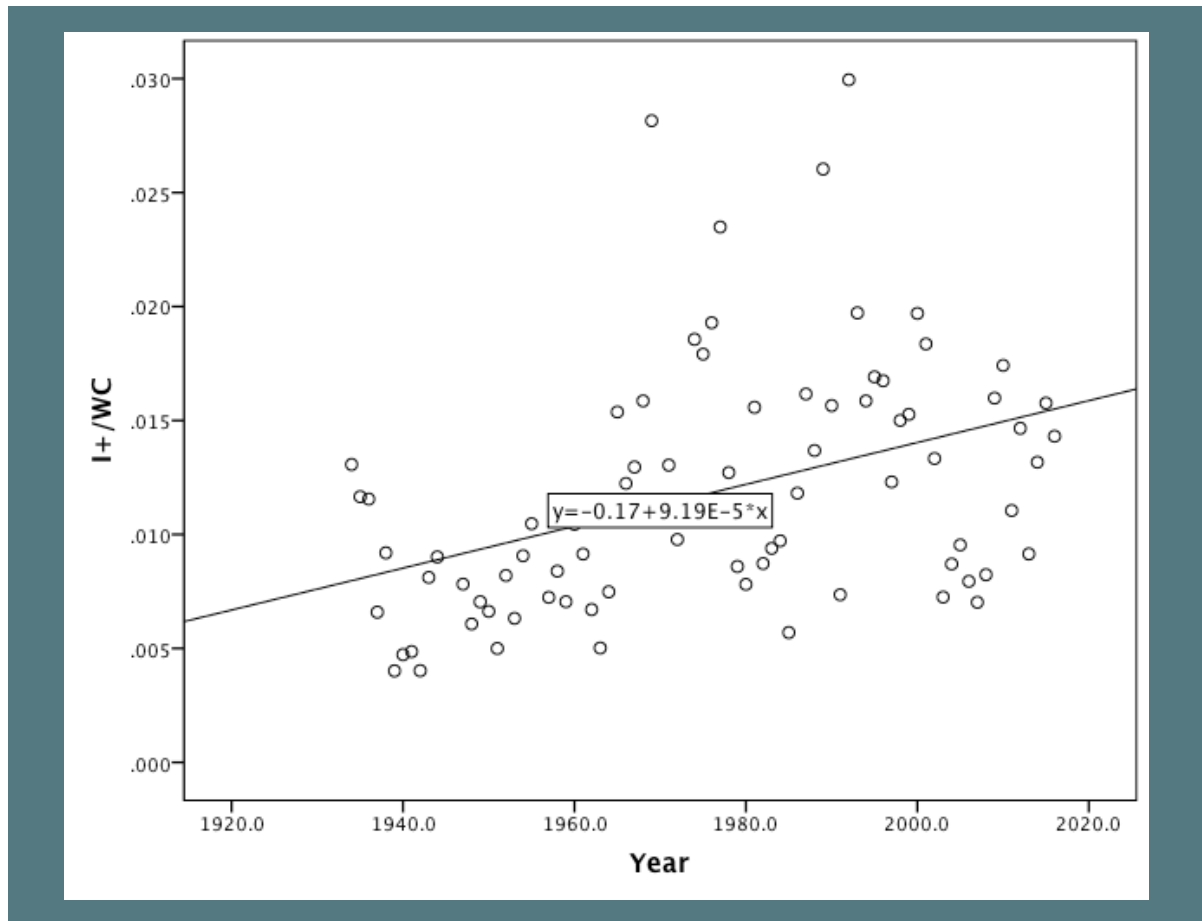
The last note that must be made before exploring into the results portion of this study is that five of

the seventy-nine addresses included in this paper “are technically not considered to be “State of the Union” addresses” (Peters). Moreover, “the five most recent presidents (Reagan, Bush, Clinton, G.W. Bush, and Obama) addressed a joint session of Congress shortly after their inaugurations but these messages” are not truly State of the Union addresses (Peters). Peters (2016) argues that although the addresses are not truly State of the Union addresses, it is safe to consider them as such for research purposes. What is most important is that the audiences of these five speeches are the same as traditional State of Union addresses. Additionally, Peters explains “the impact of such a speech on public, media, and congressional perceptions of presidential leadership and power should be the same as if the address was an official State of the Union” (Peters). The five speeches that are included in this study that are not technically State of the Union addresses, but for research purpose might as well be, are President Reagan’s 1981 “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Program for Economic Recovery,” President George H. W. Bush’s 1989 “Address on Administration Goals Before a Joint Session of Congress,” President Clinton’s 1993 “Address on Administration Goals Before a Joint Session of Congress,” President George W. Bush’s 2001 “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on Administration Goals,” and President Obama’s 2009 “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress.” In the next section, this thesis will reveal and examine the results regarding this study’s research question; have modern American presidents referred to themselves in State of the Union addresses more over time?

## Results

Within this section, I will divulge the findings of the research question and hypothesis. As hypothesized earlier in this paper, I expected to find that modern American presidents have gradually increased their use of “I+” pronouns in State of the Union addresses compared to the total word count of those addresses. By running my data in a scatter plot using SPSS in addition to testing this data in a correlation test, I was able to determine that modern American presidents have increased their use of “I+”/WC in State of the Union addresses. More simplistically, using these two measures – the scatter plot and correlation test – I was able to determine that modern presidents have referred to themselves at a greater frequency in State of the Union addresses over time. Specifically addressing this paper’s hypothesis, I can say with certainty that its assertion was correct. In



**Table 1: Scatterplot (x-axis: “Year,” y-axis: “I+/WC)**

the next several pages I will use a number of tables and diagrams in order to effectively explain how this study was able to determine that my hypothesis is true and was proven.

Table 1, on the next page, is a scatter plot that plots the points of two variables, the “I+”/WC ratio of all 79 State of the Union addresses that this thesis has studied and that addresses corresponding year. By using this scatter plot, I was able to show the general pattern of State of the Union addresses in relation to the use of “I+”/WC over time. In Table 1, it is important to note that my “I+”/WC variable is represented on the y-axis and the “State of the Union year” variable is represented on the x-axis. When viewing Table 1, it is apparent that there is a gradual incline in the use of “I+”/WC in relation to the State of the Union years. Additionally, because the general trend is increasing from left to right on the scatter plot, the relationship and correlation between these two variables is positive or direct. Table 1 supports this paper’s hypothesis that over time modern American presidents have referred to themselves more often. More precisely, Table 1 shows that in the 1930s – at

the beginning of the modern State of the Union address – the average “I+”/WC ratio was approximately 0.0075. By the 1970s, Table 1 shows that there was a gradual incline in the average “I+”/WC ratio, which at this time was approximately 0.010. In the 2010s, this scatter plot shows that the average “I+”/WC ratio has continued to gradually increase and hovers around 0.014. By simply looking at the average “I+”/WC ratios of State of the Union addresses over the last eighty years, it is clear that modern presidents have gradually increased the use of “I+”/WC. This scatter plot is just one measure used to show the rela-

**Table 2: Correlation Test Between “Year” and “I+”/WC**

Pearson Correlation	.406
Significance (1-tailed)	.000

tionship between modern presidents' "I+"/>WC ratios and the year presidents gave their addresses. Next, I will support my findings with a correlation test run in SPSS.

Running a scatter plot shows the general trend between two variables, but does not show or indicate the level of correlation and significance between the variables. In order to do this, SPSS was utilized in this study to run a correlation test, which tests both the correlation between "I+"/>WC ratios and State of the Union years. Table 2 shows the output of the correlation test run for this study. When looking at Table 2, the two most important statistics to note are the "Pearson Correlation" output between "Year" and "I+"/>WC and "Sig. (1-tailed)" between these same variables. The output for this test's "Pearson Correlation" was calculated to be 0.406, which indicates that there is a "moderate" relationship between "Year" and "I+"/>WC. Perhaps more importantly, the level of significance between "Year" and "I+"/>WC was calculated to be 0.00. The relationship between

two variables is significant when the output is less than 0.05. Clearly, 0.00 is less than 0.05, conclusively showing that the relationship between "Year" and "I+"/>WC is significant. 0.00 indicates that the relationship between these two variables is significant and therefore is not random. In addition to Table 1, Table 2 supports this paper's hypothesis as there is a correlation and significance between the year a State of the Union address was given and the increased use of "I+"/>WC. Next, I will discuss two tables, which show the actual "I+"/>WC ratios of modern American presidents. The first table (Table 3) ranks all modern presidents based on the average "I+"/>WC ratio of all their speeches. In other words, Table 3 ranks modern presidents from most "egocentric" to less "egocentric." The second table (Table 4) displays the top ten State of the Union addresses from modern presidents based on highest "I+"/>WC ratios. In other words, Table 4 shows the ten most "egocentric" modern State of the Union addresses.

**Table 3: Ranking the Modern Presidents Based on Average "I+"/>WC**

	<b>NO.</b>	<b>PRESIDENT</b>	<b># OF SPEECHES</b>	<b>AVG. "I+"/&gt;WC X 1000</b>	<b>YEARS IN OFFICE</b>
1	38	<b>FORD</b>	3	20.23	1974-1977
2	41	<b>H.W. BUSH</b>	4	19.85	1989-1993
3	42	<b>CLINTON</b>	8	16.44	1993-2001
4	36	<b>L. B. JOHNSON</b>	6	15.34	1963-1969
5	44	<b>OBAMA</b>	8	13.96	2009-PRESENT
6	37	<b>NIXON</b>	4	13.14	1969-1974
7	40	<b>REAGAN</b>	8	11.37	1981-1989
8	43	<b>W. BUSH</b>	8	10.05	2001-2009
9	39	<b>CARTER</b>	3	9.71	1977-1981
10	34	<b>EISENHOWER</b>	7	8.48	1953-1961
11	32	<b>F. D. ROOSEVELT</b>	11	7.98	1933-1945
12	35	<b>KENNEDY</b>	3	7.07	1961-1963
13	33	<b>TRUMAN</b>	6	6.79	1945-1953

The first two tables support this paper's hypothesis by demonstrating that there is both a direct correlation and significance between the increase in State of the Union address' "I+"/>WC ratio and the year the State of the Union address was delivered. Table 3 does not aim to support this hypothesis further, but rather aims to display the results of which modern American presidents are actually most "egocentric" by this paper's standards. Quite simply, Table 3 is a ranking of the 13 modern American presidents included in this study based on their average "I+"/>WC ratio for all their State of the Union addresses. In order to calculate the average "I+"/>WC ratio of each president, I added all the "I+"/>WC ratios of all their addresses and divided that sum by the number of addresses they gave. For instance, President Gerald Ford gave 3 State of the Union addresses from 1975 to 1977. To calculate President Ford's average "I+"/>WC ratio, I added his 1975 "I+"/>WC ratio (0.0179), 1976 "I+"/>WC ratio (0.0193), and 1977 "I+"/>WC

ratio (0.0235) together and then divide this sum by the number of addresses President Ford verbally delivered in total (3). President Ford's average "I+"/>WC ratio of all his addresses is 0.02023. In addition, in order to make Table 3 easier to interpret, I multiplied the average "I+"/>WC of all 13 presidents by the number 1,000. By doing this, Table 3 is more visually digestible and succinct, allowing the reader to effortlessly recognize the variances in averages and understand the intent to which some presidents were more or less "egocentric." Specifically regarding the presidents' rankings in Table 3, President Ford is judged to be the most "egocentric" in language as his average "I+"/>WC is largest. Following Ford, the next four most "egocentric" presidents are President George H.W. Bush, President Bill Clinton, President Lyndon B. Johnson, and President Barack Obama. The middle four modern presidents with regard to "egocentrism" are President Richard Nixon, President Ronald Reagan, President George W. Bush, and President

**Table 4: Top 10 "I+"/>WC State of the Union Addresses Since 1934**

	<b>YEAR</b>	<b>PRESIDENT</b>	<b>"I+"/&gt;WC x 1000</b>
1	1992	<b>H. W. BUSH</b>	30.34
2	1969	<b>L. B. JOHNSON</b>	28.16
3	1989	<b>H. W. BUSH</b>	26.03
4	1977	<b>FORD</b>	23.49
5	1993	<b>CLINTON</b>	19.72
6	2000	<b>CLINTON</b>	19.70
7	1976	<b>FORD</b>	19.29
8	1974	<b>NIXON</b>	18.56
9	2001	<b>W. BUSH</b>	18.36
10	1975	<b>FORD</b>	17.91

Jimmy Carter. The bottom four modern presidents – who are deemed by this study as being the least “egocentric” – are President Dwight Eisenhower, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, President John F. Kennedy, and President Harry Truman, in descending order. Although the bottom four presidents in this table are not in perfect chronological order, they are, at the very least, the least recent presidents to be in office. The bottom four presidents provide a revealing point as they support this paper’s thesis that modern presidents have over time increased their use of “I+” pronouns in relation to their address’ total word count. Eisenhower, Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Truman referred to themselves in their State of the Union addresses at the lowest frequency of all modern presidents. It must be noted that in the remainder of the rankings, the results are varied in order as Ford is at the top, although he was the President of the United States in the mid to late 1970s. Nevertheless, this thesis argues that there has been a gradual increase in the president’s use of “I+” pronouns in State of the Union addresses. Therefore, this thesis did not expect to find that every president was more “egocentric” than his predecessors and less “egocentric” than his successors. If that were the case, this thesis would have hypothesized that President Barack Obama was the most “egocentric” president while President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the least “egocentric.”

Table 4 utilizes the same approach as Table 3 did to determine the average “I+”/WC ratio of modern presidents’ State of the Union addresses. But this table displays the top 10 State of the Union addresses based on each addresses’ “I+”/WC ratio. Table 4 does not include an address from every modern president as not all presidents had an address with a high “I+”/WC ratio. Additionally, there are several presidents that had more than one address that landed in the top ten, which is generally cogent when considering where they ranked based on average “I+”/WC of all their addresses in Table 3. As indicated in Table 4, President George H.W. Bush’s 1992 is deemed to be the most “egocentric” State of the Union address in the modern presidential era. Following this, President Lyndon B. Johnson’s 1969 address is the second most “egocentric.” The next four addresses based on level of “egocentrism” are President H.W. Bush’s 1989 address, President Ford’s 1977 address, and President Clinton’s 1993 address and 2000 address, in descending order. The seventh to tenth most “egocentric” addresses are as follows; President Ford’s 1976 address, President Nixon’s 1974 address, President W. Bush’s 2001 address, and President Ford’s 1975. In the top ten, three modern presidents are listed more than once, which are Ford, H.W. Bush, and Clinton.

Predictably, in Table 3, these three presidents are the three most “egocentric.” Next, this paper will briefly look at several of the most “egocentric” State of the Union addresses listed in Table 4 in order to show how and why these modern presidents might have “egocentric” language in their State of the Union addresses.<sup>1</sup>

In order to provide a more in-depth and extensive explanation to this study, it is essential to delve into several modern State of the Union addresses, where the “egocentric” presidency is in full display. For the remainder of this results section, this paper will look at the rhetoric and language used by modern American presidents in their addresses. Specifically, I will be analyzing five of the most “egocentric” modern State of the Union addresses. All five of these addresses were listed in Table 4, indicating that they are in the top ten most “egocentric” addresses. More precisely, I will be examining the following five State of the Union addresses: Lyndon B. Johnson’s 1969 address, Nixon’s 1974 address, Ford’s 1977 address, H.W. Bush’s 1992 address, and Clinton’s 1993 address, in that order.

The first State of the Union address this thesis aims to analyze in order to demonstrate how modern American presidents use “egocentric” language is President Lyndon B. Johnson’s January 14, 1969 address. This 1969 address was the very last of President Johnson’s five State of the Union addresses while in office. Additionally, this address came just six days before President Johnson would leave office and President-elect Richard Nixon would assume the presidency. In this speech, President Johnson’s “I+”/WC ratio is 0.0281, which means “I+” pronouns constitute 2.81% of all words used in the speech, making it the second highest out of all modern State of the Union addresses. In this address, Johnson uses language such as “I believe” and “I think” countless times in order to recommend policy initiatives without using more forceful, and therefore negative, language. For instance, Johnson stated, “I believe that we should resume the talks with the Soviet Union about limiting offensive and defensive missile systems” (Johnson, 1969). It is clear that President Johnson is advocating for the United States to resume communication with the Soviet Union in relation to missile systems in order to promote global peace, but he does so in a passive manner as to avoid being perceived as authoritarian. Perhaps, the main use of “I+” by President Johnson in this address is seen when he

<sup>1</sup> Table 5 tests other external factors that may affect the “I+”/WC ratio of State of the Union addresses.



reminisces on his time as a public servant and as he humbly thanks his fellow statesmen for their friendship. Although indicating that he had several reservations about giving a final State of the Union address just days before leaving office, President Lyndon B. Johnson states,

“Now, my friends in Congress, I want to conclude with a few very personal words to you. I rejected and rejected and then finally accepted the congressional leadership’s invitation to come here to speak this farewell to you in person tonight. I did that for two reasons. One was philosophical. I wanted to give you my judgment, as I saw it, on some of the issues before our Nation, as I view them, before I leave. The other was just pure sentimental. Most all of my life as a public official has been spent here in this building. For 38 years – since I worked on that gallery as a doorkeeper in the House of

Representatives – I have known most of the men pretty well who walked them. I know the questions that you face. I know the conflicts that you endure. I know the ideals that you seek to serve.”

In this quote, although, President Johnson seems to be using his rhetoric in a modest manner, his use of “I+” pronouns may be more appropriately attributed to an attempt by Johnson to improve his lasting legacy as President of the United States. Moreover, as this is Johnson’s final widely publicized speech as president, he may be using “egocentric” language in order to passively recommend policy and display more modest behavior to the American people. More specifically, as Johnson leaves office and Nixon assumes office, the transfer of presidential power is not simply from one man to another, but this transfer is additionally from one political party to another. As President Johnson leaves office he understands that this is his final opportunity, as President of the United States, to strengthen his legacy. Lastly, Johnson knows that under President Nixon’s and the Republican Party’s leadership, the direction of the United States may drastically change from the direction he supports. Therefore, Johnson uses “egocentric” language in his last attempt to argue that his beliefs and the Democratic Party’s beliefs are best for the country.

The second State of the Union address this thesis will use to examine the “egocentric presidency” is President Richard Nixon’s 1974 address. In this address, which was delivered on January 30, 1974, President Nixon was under heightened scrutiny as the Watergate Scandal had persisted for over a year. More specifically, this speech is the seventh most “egocentric” modern State of the Union address as Nixon’s “I+”/WC ratio was 0.0186. The main use of “I+” pronouns in this ad-

**Table 5: Regression (Evaluating External Factors for the Increase in “I+”/WC)**

Variable	Beta Coefficient (Standard Error)
Year	.001* (.000)
Approval Rating	.000 (.000)
Senate Majority	-.004* (.002)
House Majority	.003 (.002)
GDP	.000* (.000)
Term	.001 (.001)
Constant	-1.307* (.000)
R-square	.340
N	79

dress revolve around making a direct appeal to the public when addressing Watergate. Moreover, Nixon – with the use of “I+” pronouns – attempts to ease the concerns of the American people with regard to the national scandal. For instance, during the later portion of this address, Nixon states, “I would like to add a personal word with regard to an issue that has been of great concern to all Americans over the past year. I refer, of course, to the investigations of the so-called Watergate affair” (Nixon, 1974). By speaking about the scandal head on, Nixon hopes the American people will consider his behavior to be aboveboard and forthcoming. Just moments after speaking directly about Watergate to the American public, he once again appeals to the public as well as to Congress by stating,

“Another point I should like to make very briefly: Like every Member of the House and Senate assembled here tonight, I was elected to the office that I hold. And like every Member of the House and Senate, when I was elected to that office [the Presidency], I knew that I was elected for the purpose of doing a job and doing it as well as I possibly can. And I want you to know that I have no intention whatever of ever walking away from the job that the people elected me to do for the people of the United States.”

With the use of “egocentric” language, President Nixon attempts to demonstrate his authenticity, integrity, and intention to fulfill his duties as the President of the United States. Ironically, only seven months after Nixon delivered this address to Congress and the American public, he resigned from office. His resignation helped him avoid impeachment stemming from the events of the Watergate Scandal.

President Gerald Ford’s 1977 address is the third State of the Union address to be examined within this thesis. Ford spoke to Congress and the American people for the last time as President of the United States on January 12, 1977 and this address ranks as the fourth most “egocentric” modern State of the Union address, as his “I+”/WC ratio was 0.0235. As with President Johnson’s 1969 State of the Union address, this 1977 address is very much about the lasting legacy of the president as a new president has been elected and will take office in only a matter of days. In this case, Republican President Ford is leaving the White House, as Democratic President-elect Jimmy Carter will take office. In this address, Ford is very cognizant of the transfer of executive power

from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party, as he uses his “egocentric” rhetoric to focus on the successes of his presidency. It must also be mentioned that President Ford assumed the presidency after then President Richard Nixon resigned due to Watergate. Following Nixon’s resignation, the American people deeply distrusted the government, more specifically the presidency. During President Ford’s time in office, he attempts to restore the American people’s trust in the American government and in his administration, which he makes perfectly evident in this State of the Union address. In fact, Ford cleverly makes reference to his 1975 and 1976 addresses in order to show how – under his leadership – the country and presidency has improved. Specifically, President Ford states,

“In January 1975 I reported to the Congress that the state of the Union was not good...A year ago I reported that the state of the Union was better – in many ways a lot better – but still not good enough... Now, after 30 months as your President, I can say that while we still have a way to go, I am proud of the long way we have come together.”

Using “egocentric” language, President Ford aims to stress the good he has provided the country and argues that the presidency is in better shape than it was when he took office. Following this, Ford – lacking modesty – states, “I am proud of the part I have had in rebuilding confidence in the Presidency, confidence in our free system, and confidence in our future” (Ford, 1977). Contrary to President Johnson’s use of “egocentric” language, President Ford does not care to be seen as humble, but rather, vigorously aims to improve his legacy by stressing the successes of his presidency.

President George H.W. Bush’s 1992 State of the Union address is the fourth address this thesis will use to assess modern president’s use of “egocentric” language. This address delivered on January 28, 1992 has an “I+”/WC ratio of 0.0303, making it the most “egocentric” modern State of the Union address as 3.03% of the speech’s words were “I+” pronouns. More so than the three addresses analyzed earlier, this address uses “I+” pronouns to make general appeals to the American public by stressing his administration’s genuineness and truthfulness. For instance, President Bush states, “Let me tell you right from the start and right from the heart, I know we’re in hard times. But I know something else: This will not stand” in an attempt to pander to the public (Bush,

1992). Essentially, President Bush is informing the American public that he is fully aware that many Americans have fallen on hard times, but eventually, he is confident that those times will end, and prosperous times will follow. Additionally, in order to stress to Congress and the American public that his intentions are impartial and unbiased, he states,

“Let me level with you. I know and you know that my plan is unveiled in a political season. I know and you know that everything I propose will be viewed by some in merely partisan terms. But I ask you to know what is in my heart. And my aim is to increase our Nation’s good. I’m doing what I think is right, and I am proposing what I know will help.”

Just in this short quote, President Bush uses “egocentric” language masterfully, using a total of twelve “I+” pronouns. President Bush’s use of “egocentric” language in this address is very much like President Lyndon B. Johnson’s 1969 address as both presidents aim to convey to the American public and to Congress that they are modest, but genuine in achieving their administrative goals. Moreover, in this address, Bush is clearly making an appeal to the American public for their support.

The last State of the Union address this thesis will utilize in order to examine “egocentric” language is President Bill J. Clinton’s 1993 State of the Union address. On February 17, 1993, President Clinton – having been in office less than a month – addressed Congress and the American public in his first State of the Union address. This address has an “I+”/WC ratio of 0.0197, making it the fifth most “egocentric” modern State of the Union address. This address is different from the first four addresses analyzed in this paper because this is a speech given just after taking office. The first four were the last State of the Union addresses for the respective presidents; Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and H.W. Bush. Nevertheless, President Clinton uses “egocentric” language in this address to explain the current state of the presidency, as his two Republican predecessors had left it, and to speak about what he hopes to achieve in the next four years. Moreover, early in this address, President Clinton warns the American public that the country is not prospering as well as it should be, after the Reagan and H.W. Bush presidencies, but under his leadership the country is pushing forward. Clinton goes on to state, “I did not seek this office to place blame. I come here tonight to accept responsibility, and I want you to accept responsibility with me. And if we do

right by this country, I do not care who gets the credit for it” (Clinton, 1993). As shown in this quote, Clinton is using “egocentric” language to express that it is the responsibility of all of the American public to get the country back on track and he will help lead this change. Additionally, Clinton uses “egocentric” language in this address to convey to the American middle class that he will be their champion and their lives will improve under his presidency. “To middle class Americans who have paid a great deal for the last 12 years and from whom I ask a contribution tonight, I will say again as I did on Monday night: You’re not going alone any more, you’re certainly not going first, and you’re not going to pay more for less as you have too often in the past” (Clinton, 1993). In this address, Clinton is masterful at pandering to the American public that he will be the president to lead the country into the future and into the right direction.

## Conclusion

This thesis aimed to study the “rhetorical presidency” and “anti-intellectual presidency” by creating a new facet in these two lines of scholarship. More specifically, it was this thesis’ mission to study modern American presidents – from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Barack Obama – and their use of “egocentric” language in State of the Union addresses. Precisely, this paper set out to answer whether these presidents have over time referred to themselves more in their addresses. Based on the conclusions made by past presidential scholars, this thesis hypothesized that over time, modern presidents would refer to themselves more because these presidents have become more and more comfortable with the language they use in order to communicate the American public. By analyzing all 79 modern verbally delivered State of the Union addresses, this study was able to create a ratio of “I+” pronouns over the total number of words in a speech. This approach allowed for me to compare these addresses against one another and then rank them from most “egocentric” to least “egocentric.” Additionally, using a scatter plot and correlation test, I was able to run the “I+”/WC of all modern addresses against the year of the address in order to properly and effectively test my research question and hypothesis. In the end, I am able to conclude that over time, modern American presidents have referred to themselves more in State of the Union addresses. Furthermore, using several modern State of the Union addresses as examples, this thesis was able to examine actual presidential applications of “egocentric” language. This paper found that there has been a gradual, but steady increase in the use of “I+”/WC by

modern American presidents.

It is essential to state that although the year a State of the Union address was delivered can undoubtedly help presidential scholars approximate the use of “I+”/WC for that speech, there may be additional factors that contribute to this gradual rise in “egocentric” language over the last eighty years. Some external factors that could perhaps be valuable to test in depth in future studies with regard to the “egocentric” language of modern American presidents are the political party of the president, the state of the U.S. economy, the president’s approval rating, and the majorities in the House and Senate. Apart from institutional factors that may affect a modern president’s use of “egocentric” language might be based on his personality or rhetorical style. In both cases, this thesis could benefit from an interdisciplinary approach to study the “egocentric presidency.” Lastly, there are two implications I have drawn from this study regarding possible explanation as to why modern American presidents have increased their

use of “I+” pronouns over time in State of the Union addresses. The first implication I draw is that modern presidents are using “egocentric” language as a clear and direct way to communicate their goals to Congress. By using this language, the president aims to strengthen their relationship with the legislature in order to advance their administrative goals. The second implication for this study is that modern American presidents are using “egocentric” language as a way of pandering to the public in order to increase their approval ratings and in turn increase their government influence. By using “I+” pronouns to refer to themselves in addresses, American presidents are appealing to the public by shaping their rhetoric to resemble a conversation with the American public rather than a more formal policy speech. This study does not conclude that modern American presidents are becoming progressively more “egocentric,” but rather that their language is.

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*All about me? Not really. Modern presidents who communicated most frequently using the pronoun "I" were George H.W. Bush, Lyndon Johnson, Gerald Ford, Bill Clinton, Richard Nixon and George W. Bush.*

## Travis Barrett



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