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Presidential Rhetoric: From The War On Drugs To The Battle Over Legalization

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PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC: FROM THE WAR ON DRUGS TO THE BATTLE OVER LEGALIZATION

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family. They are the motivation that kept me going when I thought I could not do it. *Gracias mamá, abuelos, tías y tíos* for walking this journey by my side, for the unconditional love and support, and for believing in me. *Todo es gracias a ustedes.*

Also, this thesis goes out to all of the innocent victims of the war on drugs.
PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC: FROM THE WAR ON DRUGS TO THE BATTLE OVER LEGALIZATION

by

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THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the rhetoric executed by different presidents in order to sustain the battle against drugs. The war on drugs is one of the longest battles the United States has fought. From its inception under President Richard Nixon to Barack Obama, the war on drugs has become an institutionalized presidential program responsive to public demands for action against the spread of illegal drugs. Over the airwaves, presidential rhetorical overtures on the matter go hand in hand with the drug war on the streets. However, although presidential rhetoric remained largely consistent on combating and criminalizing drugs over much of the previous four decades, it has evolved more recently during the Obama administration as a growing number of observers have questioned the validity of the war and numerous states have legalized the use of medicinal marijuana. This study examines in historical context the extent to which presidential rhetoric and the institutionalization of the war on drugs have begun to shift toward legalization, as well as the potential policy implications moving forward. Furthermore, this study also incorporates a social experiment that analyzes respondent’s behavior to a president’s speech. To conduct this research, I utilized data from The American Presidency Project and data collected through a survey.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Outline

The United States has historically been at war with different enemies. The war on poverty, the war on terrorism, and the war on drugs are some of the most famous foes. Prohibition is not a new issue in the United States. In the 1930s the country faced a severe issue with the production, sale, and consumption of alcohol. Nowadays, the problem is global and related to marijuana and other drugs. Several countries have decriminalized or legalized the consumption of marijuana. On the other hand, several other countries continue to enforce a prohibitionist regime. In the United States, the main sponsor of this war on drugs, several states have legalized the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes and four states plus the nation’s capital for recreational purposes. Furthermore, since Richard Nixon first began the war on drugs in 1969, pressure on different countries such as México and Colombia remained fairly strong. However, despite these long-standing developments, the rhetoric surrounding the war on drugs has begun to soften in recent years under the Obama administration.

In order to restore peace and safety to the American citizens, the government must guarantee that security will prevail and the problem of insecurity will be solved in an efficient way. In order to guarantee security the government must take a different approach. Drugs do not magically appear in Chicago, New York, or any other American city. Some people feel unsafe in their own communities when drugs are illegally available for their children to purchase. Efficiency is defined as “getting the most for the least, or achieving an objective for the lowest cost” (Stone 2012, 63). Under this premise, one can imagine that in order to obtain the best outcome possible for the least the economic investment, government must reduce violence and the harm in society. To do this, the robust prison system must change, and the government should stop funding with taxpayers’ money a war that has no end. Furthermore, an efficient way to end this war would be with the legalization of marijuana and the investment of tax money in prevention and rehabilitation of patients.
The United States’ war on drugs has remained constant through several decades. Different presidents in office, minor changes in rhetoric, and one thing remains constant: Prohibition. U.S. presidents have also maintained a consistent prohibitionist rhetorical message in regards to the war on drugs. The rhetoric of war is heavily present in presidential speeches. Therefore, speeches have conveyed powerful messages that have long allowed the government to maintain the prohibitionist angle alive. In institutionalizing the war on drugs, the U.S. government has taken the lead in pushing for international support to fight the cartels and their “dangerous” drugs.

The United States has been at war with different countries and different social issues. Some of the longest ongoing battles are against poverty, inequality, terrorism, and drugs. This research examines the rhetoric, metaphors, and frames utilized by presidents to build support from Congress and the people, the readability and complexity of presidential speeches, a social experiment on speeches has been conducted to evaluate how people perceive speeches.

1.2 Rhetoric, Metaphors, and Frames

The utilization of certain words allows presidents to convey dominant and powerful messages. This section examines the historical context and the extent to which presidential rhetoric and the institutionalization of the war on drugs have begun to shift toward legalization, as well as the potential policy implications moving forward. I begin by briefly reviewing the literature on the general emergence and globalization of the war on drugs (with particular reference to U.S. and Latin American relations), followed by a review of key works, metaphors, and phrases on the U.S. institutionalization of the war on drugs and the developments concerning U.S. presidential rhetoric on drugs. To examine this shift, I assess key presidential speeches from the Nixon to Obama administration that exemplify U.S. drug policy trends, as well as key developments and changes in the institutionalization process over the forty-year period.
1.3 **Readability and Rhetoric: The Careful Selection of Words and the Never Ending Battle against Drugs**

Presidents attempt to deliver their message with a specific purpose. A number of variables included in presidential speeches are readability, which allows the president to deliver a powerful and understandable speech. Typically, readability involves measuring sentence length, word length, and complexity. Other aspects to control for in this research include presidential speeches, education levels, and literacy rates, partisanship of the president, among other variables. The importance of such speeches revolves around the idea that citizens may support presidential policy proposals if some rhetorical steps are taken and specific requirements are met. If the intended audience is a specialized group, then the readability scores will demonstrate a higher degree of complexity than if the speech is intended to the American people or Congress. Also, if the approval ratings are higher, the president will have more freedom to convey the message that he wants and the readability scores will demonstrate a higher degree of complexity. Lastly, if the president attended a private school and completed an advanced degree the speech will have a higher degree of complexity. Moreover, a speech conveyed by a president with public education or only an undergraduate degree would have a lower degree of complexity. Therefore, if the president delivers a speech with a lower degree of complexity, more people will be able to understand it.

1.4 **Social Experiment: Presidential Persuasive Power**

Powerful speeches have allowed U.S. presidents to shift people’s opinion and mobilize masses. Following that thought, this section examines a social experiment that analyzes respondents’ behavior to a president’s speech. One can expect the results to corroborate the theory that the group exposed to the non-criminalization speech will present a more favorable opinion in regards to drug legalization. To test my hypothesis, I have designed a survey experiment. The survey respondents were randomly assigned to three experimental conditions, pro-criminalization, non-criminalization, and the control group to a non-related speech.
Specifically, participants read a short presidential speech addressing the drug legalization issue. After their exposure to the presidential speech, participants were asked about their attitudes towards legalization. The research includes a survey with several questions, in which the majority is composed of multiple-choice questions. The purpose of this experiment is to assess participant attitudes prior to the exposure to a presidential speech and then measure any potential shift in opinion after reading a presidential message.

1.5 Summary

This chapter offered an introduction to the main issues that this thesis will try to answer and how I intend to study the rhetorical presidency, the social experiment, and the subject of readability. In the following chapters I will go over some of the previous research on these subjects and what can be added to the existing literature. I also present the theoretical framework and the hypotheses that are examined.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the past, Latin American countries lined up and followed the same prohibitionist path as the United States. However, recently Uruguay decided to legalize the production, sale, and consumption of marijuana, while other counties like México decriminalized marijuana. U.S. presidents' have also maintained a consistent prohibitionist rhetorical message in regards to the war on drugs. U.S. Presidents’ Speeches have conveyed powerful messages that have long allowed the government to maintain the prohibitionist regime alive. In institutionalizing the war on drugs, the U.S. government has taken the lead in pushing for international support to fight the cartels and their “dangerous” drugs. In fact, since Richard Nixon first began the war on drugs, pressure on different countries such as México and Colombia to fight the Cartels and production of illegal drugs remained fairly strong. However, despite these long-standing developments, the rhetoric surrounding the war on drugs has begun to soften in recent years under the Obama administration. This has occurred at the same time that a growing number of observers have questioned the validity of the war and numerous states have begun legalizing the use of medicinal marijuana.

The eighteenth amendment to the Constitution of the United States, ratified in 1919, states that the manufacture, sale, transportation, importation of alcohol were prohibited. Nearly a century later, the United States has taken a different view on the notion of prohibition. Okrent (2010) described the rise of Al Capone and some of the most prominent alcohol barons. Prohibition had created a black market that some young men took as a prominent business opportunity. By violating the 18th amendment, “annual sales of bootleg liquor had reached $3.6 billion nationally by 1929” (Okrent 2010, 274). That amount was the equivalent of the entire federal budget for that year. This story is not very different from the marijuana prohibition. Perhaps the fact that drug prohibition is a global and not a domestic issue makes this matter extremely important.
According to the Drug Policy Alliance (2014a) “the first anti-opium laws in the 1870s were directed at Chinese immigrants. The first anti-cocaine laws, in the South in the early 1900s, were directed at black men. The first anti-marijuana laws, in the Midwest and the Southwest in the 1910s and 1920s, were directed at Mexican migrants and Mexican Americans. Moreover, the implementation of these laws and regulations “aggravated racial disparities in the prison population given the fact that drug offenders sentenced under the crack cocaine provisions were predominantly poor people, many of whom were African American” (Sirin 2011, 90). Since the origin of the war on drugs, from President Richard Nixon to present days under President Barack Obama, the war has become an institutionalized presidential program responsive to public demands for action against the spread of illegal drugs.

Resistance to outdated prohibitionist policies is coming from various sectors of U.S. society. From the legal community, James P. Gray, a veteran judge from California criticizes the current prohibitionist measures. He argues for a change in the status quo and in the legal system. Furthermore, Gray (2001) also defines legalization and defines people who believe in legalization as “free marketers”. Often times people believe that by legalization it will become a free-for-all situation with all kinds of drugs and many politicians see this as throwing the white flag in this war. However, by legalization the judge means that there will be “programs involving rehabilitation and treatment, medicalization, decriminalization, regulated distribution or a combination of one or more of these various options” (Gray 2001, 213). Judge Gray not only explains the failures and issues with the system but also provides and explains the alternatives for future generations.

When it comes to the U.S. war on drugs, most attention often lies on drug policy changes but it is also important to note the broad scope of the war, not just as it affects Americans but also the manner in which it has affected other countries—particularly those in Latin America where many of the drugs originate from. For instance, Andreas and Nadelmann (2006) recognize that there have been different ways in which the United States has tried to implement its internal policy on drugs to Latin American, as well as on a more global level. Early on, the United States
decided to ban the consumption of different drugs and pressured other countries to follow the same path, partly as an effort to stem the inflow of narcotics from Latin American countries while also attempting to stop the harvesting of drugs on U.S. soil. The authors also mention that the rhetoric of the war on drugs has been globalized and the nature of the prohibition reflects the dominance of the United States. Efforts in different countries to implement a different approach such as legalization are often minimized by the United States. However, after many decades of this unsuccessful battle, other governments and even some states have started moving on to a market-approach solution.

The current state of the war on drugs does not fit into the reality of U.S. society. Focusing more intently on the war on drug vis-à-vis the U.S.-Mexico border, Payan (2013) provides an interesting approach to the war on drugs and the reasons to consider it a war that cannot be won. Namely, Payan (2013) analyzes the war on the US -México border and how the prohibitionist regime around illegal drugs has become fairly strong. Another strong argument against the war on drugs revolves around the fact that “an estimated 32 million Americans smoke marijuana” (Payan 2013, 9) and the “federal government spends $26 billion dollars on its anti-drug strategy” (Payan 2013, 9). The rhetoric implemented by presidents on both sides of the border suggests that they must keep on fighting a never-ending war. In order to solve this problem, there must be a consensus among different countries and not only the United States. Along with a change in rhetoric there must be a change in policy implementation.

The dissonance between the U.S. war on drug policies and the reality faced by the American society reflects a policy failure. Furthermore, Bagley (1988) explains the perplexity of a policy failure. The author mentions that such failure lays in the deficiencies and distortions in the premises upon which the entire anti-drug campaign/policy was based. The author also mentions that the implementation of certain policies was not as tough as the rhetoric. Furthermore, some policies evolved and focused on the “demand” aspect rather than the “supply/supplier” aspect. The author also explains that claims that the Reagan administration, despite its tough anti-drug rhetoric, never actually went to war. Bagley (1988) and Payan (2013)
attack the policy failures and explain the reasons why the government should not fight a war that
cannon be won.

Forty years after adopting a strong rhetoric that came hand in hand with a prohibitionist
drug policy, the results have not been favorable. U.S. marijuana and other drugs consumption
remain as high as ever, and the violence in México escalated and it is worse than ever. Both
countries are interested in finding a solution but they seem to be stuck with the same approach.
Although recently there has been some effort to decriminalize the small possession of illegal
drugs in México and the United States has allowed its states to decide, the problem goes beyond
temporary policies and it requires a different approach.

The U.S.-México border has suffered the consequences of this war. The rhetoric
remained pro-war during many years and the border has taken a toll on it. It appears that in order
to change the momentum, a shift in approaches is required on both sides of the border. Payan
(2006) explains that “when President Richard Nixon declared a war on drugs in 1969, the U.S.-
México border became, for all practical purposes, the frontline of a never-ending war between
the U.S. government and the drug-smuggling cartels” (Payan 2006, 23). He believes that
economics is what drives people to engage in this illegal activity on both sides of the border. The
author also explains the diversification of the Mexican cartels with the incarceration of Miguel
Ángel Félix Gallardo and how this became a headache for the U.S. government as they would
not only have to fight one criminal organization but now four cartels. Such developments have
made the war against drugs more complicated and expensive.

Presidents from both, the Republican and the Democrat parties have been in command
through different periods of this war. However, the rhetoric remained strong and harsh against
drugs regardless of party affiliation. Villalobos (2013) mentions the different changes in
domestic policy and how the government allowed or denied the evolution of certain drug related
laws. For instance, during President Clinton’s two terms (1993-2001), eight states legalized
medicinal marijuana. However, President Bush used federal law to push back some state level
efforts to legalize marijuana. Furthermore, President Obama allowed the states to decide whether
to legalize or not medicinal marijuana. I will utilize this chapter to further explore the extent to which rhetoric and policy changes go hand in hand.

The war against drugs and cartels has a price that taxpayers on both sides of the border absorb on a daily basis. Payan and Staudt make some closing remarks for the book *A War That Can’t Be Won* (2013), addressing some of the future challenges for both the Mexican and the United States governments. The chapter proposes that, along with the change in rhetoric there must be a change in the budget priorities. Instead of spending more money on law enforcement, there should be more money available for research, treatment, and prevention. Though, some Presidents mention recovery and treatment in their speeches, the common use of words intent to portray it in a negative way. Legalization and change in rhetoric should allow the policy-making actors to allocate more money where needed.

After many years of being a labeled a taboo topic, consumption of marijuana is no longer predominantly connected to immoral behavior. Lauter (2013) wrote that according to a recent poll, a majority of United States citizens support and approve the legalization of marijuana. According to the Los Angeles Times, with information from the Pew Research Center, 52% to 45% of adult Americans support the legalization of cannabis. Furthermore, the shift in opinion is largely attributed to the fact that “most Americans no longer see marijuana as a ‘gateway’ to more dangerous drugs, and most no longer see its use as immoral” (2013). With this change in society one can argue that it is also time for politicians to change policies.

2.1 **The Rhetorical Presidency**

The concept of the rhetorical presidency has been around for several decades, “according to Tulis, the rhetorical presidency is a twentieth-century phenomenon that began to emerge under Theodore Roosevelt” (Lucas 2008, 35). On the other hand other experts like Mel Laracey argue that the practice of going public on certain issues is “hardly unique to twentieth-century presidents” (Lucas 2008, 36). These two specialists agree that presidents were by far more active
in the nineteenth century but they were not as open about their activism. Furthermore, the one variable to consider in the presidential activism is the presence of new means of communication. Access to information in this century has allowed presidents to convey their messages not only via radio as other presidents, but they can also utilize television, newspapers, and more recently online social media.

Whitford and Yates (2009) classify presidents according to their rhetoric and policies. He places Nixon in the first group as the one who initiated the utilization of the word “war” in the “war on drugs” rhetorical framework. Presidents Ford and Carter were included in the second tier where they struggled to solidify control over this area of the bureaucratic apparatus. In the next block, Jimmy Carter was considered a turning point due to the reduction of criminalization and a pro-regulatory stance. After Carter, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush engaged in military-style tactics for drug control and also place especial emphasis on the “just say no” strategy. The next era included President Clinton and George W. Bush were drugs received some importance but the main concern was centered on narcoterrorism and then other issues as the war on terror. Over this period of time, presidents have emphasized different aspects of the war at their best convenience Thus, over a span of over 40 years we have experienced that “presidents have used the war on drugs for political gain – electorally, at the polls and as part of a broader issue strategy” (Whitford and Yates 2009, 31). Furthermore, the authors explain how presidents aimed to move the drug policy by allocating their time, attention, and resources and they examine presidents across time.

Roderick Hart (2008) questions some of the literature on presidential rhetoric. He argues that, perhaps, Edwards’ “on deaf ears” is in reality “on slow ears” as presidential remarks do not become mainstream or relevant quickly. The author also believes that presidential rhetoric “crystalizes vague concepts, alters the national imagination, changes definitional habits, shifts people’s presuppositions, relocates sources of authority, changes the arc of time and space, shortens the political agenda, shifts the locus of controversy, alters our political metrics, models specific attitudes and instantiates new possibilities” (Hart 2008, 246). Therefore, with this piece
of literature one can see some of the criticism against rhetoric. Nevertheless, despite the ‘slow ears’ there are some ears out there eager to listen. As presidents emit their messages for any kind of ‘ear’ to listen to it, one of the main goals is “stirring the nation to action was supposed to be the president’s first priority” (Tulis 2004, 6). Tulis (2004) at the same time established some attributed of the leadership styles implemented by presidents like Bill Clinton. One of the leadership styles establishes that the “president personally sets direction and established priorities through major speeches which emphasize the principles upon which the president wants policy constructed rather than concrete rules, regulations, or appropriations that would be the means to realize those principles” (Tulis 2004, 7).

Furthermore, another interesting debate emerges from rhetoric: The rhetorical presidency versus presidential rhetoric. Medhurst (2004) tries to disclose the strength and weaknesses of the rhetorical presidency and the presidential rhetoric. He then argues that “rhetorical discourse is addressed to one or more audiences, and it is the audience, not the speaker or the speech that is the final arbiter of persuasion or influence” (Medhurst 2004, XV) he identifies this as the human decision or action. Another contribution to the literature features the intellectual power. Medhurst believed that “what to say, how to say it, to whom, under what conditions, and with what apparent outcome” (2004, XVI) was part of the art of rhetoric and, thus, important for the president.

2.2 Language and Symbols

The language selected and utilized by presidents is one of matters covered in this thesis. Nixon baptized this issue as the war on drugs over 40 years ago. Today, the White House tries to part away from this phrase. Gil Kerlikowske, White House Office of National Drug Control Policy Czar, mentioned that the federal government is trying to approach this issue as a health problem rather than a crime. A war required an enemy, a goal, and a purpose. In this case, Kerlikowske said that "regardless of how you try to explain to people it's a 'war on drugs' or a
'war on a product,' people see a war as a war on them," he said. "We're not at war with people in this country” (Fields, 2009). Five years later, the country has four states and the nation’s capital with recreational marijuana and another state that will no longer charge people with felonies for simple drug possession. Moreover, the simple utilization of words like “war” contains a negative connotation was not only common but also embraced by presidents and now is a word that is trying to be replaced. Also, “a speaker referring to scientific war has something very different in mind than one who talks of political war” (Beer 2001, 32).

As Francis A. Beer (2001) explains through his different chapters that words of war and peace have different meanings during different time periods, the notion of reason and rhetoric fundamentally indicates that politicians use different words not only to create speeches but to build and illusion, they give reasons to back up their argument and to stimulate an outcome that satisfies their goal, and they also utilize different language, as the narratives of “good” and “evil”.

Some words and the meaning behind them are not the same nowadays as they were several years ago. Rhetoric and words shifted and “as they shift, the meanings of specific terms and concepts shift with them” (Beer 2001, 40). Furthermore, the author also employed the anterior meaning shifter notion, in which shifters are like adjectives. However, they are symbolically “broader and richer” (Beer 2001, 32). In our drug war context, “drug” is considered the anterior meaning shifter.

Furthermore, there is also a notion of reason explained by the author. Beer believes that “we construct ourselves politically as reasoning and reasonable men and women” (Beer 2001, 41). Based on that assumption, politicians deliver reasons to shape and carve an image to promote their agenda. Hence, “political actors move each other in various ways, including the symbolic politics of oral and written conversations, arguments, debates, publicity, publication, and propaganda” (Beer 2001, 51).

As far as the good and evil, these are some of the two components that politicians use to manipulate or persuade people to justify a war. In this case, the war on drugs has the same
components. This war is not only against the substances but also against organized crime that facilitates the production and distribution. The evildoers are not only the persons, but also the substance itself is portrayed as evil, dangerous, and deadly. Therefore, whether the characters are “good” or “evil” one can say that “war, as Lewis Richardson suggested, is like weather: always present but infinitely changeable in different configurations. ‘Bad’ or ‘good’ weather comes and leaves” (Beer 2001, 170). The author suggests that “language will continue to be important in reflecting and constructing the meaning of war and peace” (Beer 2001, 165) with additional component of survival and adaptation. Politicians understand that our environment changes, so does their language. Their language must adapt to the current issue, whether is war or peace, in order to survive.

Furthermore, Bourdieu (1994) enhances the literature by providing the concept of symbolic power. He stated that symbolic power is “that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it” (Bourdieu 1994, 164). This symbolic power generally makes people believe or see a transformation of the world and for this thesis; presidents utilize this power in order to create an illusion and transformation of the United States by fighting the evildoers and the dangerous substances.

2.3 THE RHETORIC OF MORALITY AND PANIC

Presidents have also appealed to morality and panic. Shogan (2007) explains that some presidents include religion to enhance their speech and achieve their goal. Moreover, “presidents can use moral and religious rhetoric to enhance their political leadership and strengthen existing authority” (Shogan 2007, 4). It is not surprising that presidents convey messages that target specific audiences or groups of people. By including religion and appealing for morality and values they can deliver their message across the political spectrum with efficiency. Presidents also use moral or religious language to condemn certain actions in domestic or international
affairs. The author believes that presidents think of this approach as helpful because it connects the pragmatism of policy to the passion of emotions and this leads to a discussion of principles. Also, besides morality, moral panic another aspect to consider. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) think that moral crusaders and certain officials initiated the movement against drugs. This was the case mainly because of the sense of immoral wrongdoing and aberrant behavior. Some of the indicators and characteristics of moral panics are concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility. All these were found at some point in this war on drugs. One can argue that at this specific moment the drug war does not meet the criteria but it is mainly due to the evolution of the social issue.

2.4 FRAMING THE DISCOURSE AND METAPHORS

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provided a list of words utilized on a daily basis that are war words. Indefensible, attacked, right on target, demolished, won, shoot, and strategy are some of the words that we use regularly to describe many things but deep down they have a war connotation. In the war on drugs, several of these words are included to persuade people to support the cause; moreover, the essence of metaphor is “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 5). Hence, the relationship and duality of these words with the construction of what we know as the drug war. A common claim remarks that human beings are natural war fighters, researcher Brian Ferguson mentions that “no work has demonstrated that non-pathological humans have an inborn propensity to violence” (Hodges 2013, 4). Moreover, human beings tend to be endowed with compassion and empathy rather than a desire to kill. Furthermore, the author also believes that politicians are not always in favor of war. However, the engagement in this type of conflict will also improve a leader’s position as it consolidates public support for the leader and the policies implemented. Moreover, discourse must be constructed in a manner that justifies and builds support. Hodges believes that
war has been effectively institutionalized in American society. Therefore, the war on drugs is not considered to be unusual.

Frames are also important. The way politicians frame different issues, like the war on drugs, could lead to social change. Lakoff (2004) thinks that by reframing is a way of social change. These frames are embedded in our minds and by a constant repetition, as he explains, ““remember, “don’t think of an elephant.” If you keep their language and their framing and just argue against it, you lose because you are reinforcing their frame” (Lakoff 2004, 33). Thus, every word is like an elephant and it evokes a frame and knowledge.

Jeanne Fahnestock (2001) described the different styles in theatrical tradition, schools of language, and different aspects of speeches. The author believes that the “continual reappearance and reassertion of the same term or phrase has undoubted rhetorical force” (Fahnestock 2001, 135). That reappearance refers to the frequency with which concepts are used to reinforce an idea and it is merely part of an effort to engender a rhetorical presence for such concepts. An examination of the number of repetitions, also known as content analysis method, is relevant to the presidential speeches because a clear repetition of certain words might indicate the way the President is trying to convey a message.

Stephanie Falcon (2013) borrowed the work of Norman Fairclough and the critical discourse analysis in the depiction of language to inform the public about the war. Falcon created an experiment and collected original data. The experiment required the manipulation of some mock articles, for this particular case the manipulation will be on presidential speeches, for the media framing. These articles use positive or negative pronouns intentionally. Moreover, Norman Fairclough (1995) explains that in the critical discourse analysis the facts remain the same. However, a differed emphasis given on each speech, from the non-criminalization to the pro-criminalization speech, allows the President to appeal for values, beliefs, and knowledge. Furthermore, in an earlier publication, Fairclough (1992) reviews the analysis of text as a part of discourse analysis. Also, “framing studies typically are concerned with how people's opinions are affected by opposing ways of presenting, or framing, an issue or even” (Gross and
D’Ambrosio 2004, 1). Also, “framing effects on policy opinion operate through both affective and cognitive channels” (Gross 2008, 169). And to finish, Druckman (2002) explains how scholars have employed the concepts of framing and framing effects.

2.5 Readability and Complexity

The drugs and cartels issue is not exclusive of the United States of America. However, it is rather a global problem. In the past, it has been compared to the alcohol prohibition of the 1930s. Therefore, presidents have delivered their message with a specific purpose.

Aside from the external factors, one must analyze the levels of readability that some of these speeches contain. This is important because readability shows complexity. Once we obtain a complexity degree we can assess if the president spoke with higher degree of complexity to the specialized group and a lower degree to the American people. Typically, readability involves measuring sentence length, word length, and complexity. Or as defined by Flesh, readability is “comprehension difficulty of writing” (1948, 344) which contains a statistical formula for its measurement. Flesh then describes the statistical formula and the benefits of utilizing it to decipher the levels of readability. Furthermore, the author explains that the formula has been used to test the readability of material in “advertisements, children’s books, newspapers, textbooks, industrial publications, and many other types of materials” (Flesh 1948, 346). Thus, the employment of the Flesh formula is not new, yet it is still relevant and employed in different fields and studies.

Edward Fry (2002) delivers an interesting distinction between readability and leveling. He mentions that “readability formulas usually give a numerical score to rank books or other reading matter in an order that of difficulty. Sometimes this numerical score corresponds to a suggested approximate grade level” (Fry 2002, 286). Fry (1975) also proposes that readability and motivation go hand in hand. The author argues that “high motivation overcomes high readability level, but low motivation requires low readability level” (Fry 1975, 847). This idea
can be applied to a classroom of 5th graders enjoying material ranked for 7th graders. However, in politics this concept might not be transferable. If the president wants to address the nation on drug issues, he might choose to utilize words that are understandable for the vast majority of the population. If the average citizen has low motivation and requires a low readable material he or she might have to settle for the highlights and remarks of experts on the field. If the president is going to convey a message to congress or to a group of people (like the DEA, FBI, or CIA) and chooses to use complex words and sentences then the motivation of these individuals will not be taken into consideration. If a president does not consider that the majority of the population has no motivation or desire to read or hear an important speech, then this message will have no impact. Hence, some of the speeches will communicate policy and other notions under a low readability score.

McConnell (1983) tries to refute the claims on flesh formula and readability by saying that “short statements can be incomprehensible while long statements can be easy to understand by virtue of their length” (McConnell 1983, 66). Nevertheless, he agrees that readability is and it should be a key consideration for such studies.

2.5.1 Communication between the President and the People

Ragsdale (1980) also argues that positive and negative events will regulate exposure and speeches. Therefore, if a president addresses an issue, like the war on drugs, he will take different factors into consideration. In the readability and complexity study I will incorporate, approval ratings, type of audience, type of election year, and other factors.

Besides readability and complexity, one reason to distinguish between messages to the general population as opposed to Congress or another specialized group is the fact that “for the great majority of American citizens, knowledge about candidates and issues is driven more by interest than by information availability” (Neuman 1996, 15). Therefore, the average citizen might not pay as much attention as a member of Congress. Also, one can argue that the fact that
the average American is not interested in this issue should drive the president and his staff to simplify the message to the nation. This essay includes written and oral messages. However, Welch (2003) believes that the TV is a powerful tool that presidents utilize to deliver their messages. Through a televised address, presidents exercise the opportunity to enter millions of homes and speak to people directly. The author refuted the common idea that a televised address will influence public opinion. Furthermore, if it had some kind of influence it had the opposite effect the president would have hoped. A president will not go “public” for every single matter. Though, the war on drugs seems to be an item in the agenda that presidents like to address. Furthermore, “in the political system "going public" is defined appropriately as the process by which presidents attempt to influence the policy-making process by communicating with the public” (Laracey 2009, 912).

Teten (2007) described the State of the Union Address as a pivotal rhetorical tool that presidents utilize to set the tone of their government, propose programs, and communicate with people. Also, “presidents across time have addressed Congress in their speech and are still doing so to dictate policy” (Teten 2007, 672). Therefore, speeches are important tools that presidents use for policy advancement. Moreover, the way the president frames and delivers the speech matters. Not only the State of the Union Address is important, but also the relationship between the Executive and its constituents. This could be measure by public opinion polls. Furthermore, Sparrow (2008) defines the interaction between the president and public opinion as instrumental for reaching particular political ends. This relationship exists for tactical purposes and allows the president and his advisors to use public opinion as a “channel or guide for policy makers” (2008, 585). In this case, public opinion also serves as a “permissive limit” for policy makers (Almond 1950; Key 1961; Sobel 2001 in Sparrow 2008, 585). Furthermore, the increase use of online resources allows the “presidential administrations seeking to generate positive publicity for their programs and policies see the potential in new media to get their message out on their own terms” (Owen and Davis 2008, 660).
2.6 SOCIAL EXPERIMENT ON PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC

The power to persuade has been studied by Stone (2012) and the current scenario points at the Polis Model. This model dictates that “in addition to reason, people use emotion, prior beliefs, stereotypes, and other “irrational” factors in making decisions” (Stone 2012, 323). Moreover, people receive the information from the presidential speech and consider several other factors. In addition, “political actors attempt to manipulate others’ beliefs and policy preferences” (Stone 2012, 323). All this supports the claim that speeches attempt to manipulate and shift people’s responses.

Lyn Ragsdale (1980, 971) mentions “speeches may enable Presidents to create or modify public opinion at key points during their terms”. The author analyzes Presidents and speeches from 1949 to 1980. However, the basis of this study is that citizens may support presidential policy proposals if some requirements are met. Ragsdale ponders on what factors influence a President’s decision to address an issue, and to what kind of effect does the public speeches have on the voters and the people. Ragsdale also argues that factors like unemployment, military activity, and positive and negative events will regulate exposure and speeches. The experiment will be conducted in a border city that has been affected by the ongoing war on drugs. Even though this may not fall under military activity, maybe this kind of conflict affects people’s support.

The creation and modification of opinion and behavior is an interesting consequence that can be attained with powerful messages. Furthermore, James E. Hawdon (2001) analyzes the role of presidential rhetoric in the creation of a moral panic. Broadly, the author explains how the rhetoric is used as a tool to persuade an audience to support a particular political course of action. The author argues that some of these Presidents are image-makers. Moreover, they construct an image of the reality that they want to portray to the public in order to obtain acceptance. People worry about their wellbeing and if they believe that drugs are a national threat then they will support a war. Likewise, presidents try to obtain support for their policies by addressing the nation. Also by trying to persuade them to believe that the war is a positive for the country and
that it only improves their living conditions. Presidential rhetoric is important and influential as former President Lyndon Johnson once bragged: “I can arouse a great mass of people with a very simple kind of appeal. I can wrap the flag around this policy, and use patriotism as a club to silence the critics” (Morales 1989, 149). Waltraud Morales analyzed the use of the “war on drugs” to legitimize US intervention in Latin America. It was studied as a potential replacement for anti-communism propaganda. This reinforces the idea of the creation of moral panic.

2.6.1 Pro-legalization and Pro-criminalization

The issue of drug legalization or criminalization has become an international issue with some political drama. Jeffrey Cohen (1995) argues that Presidents have the ability to manipulate popularity ratings through such drama. Additionally, “when Presidents deliver major speeches dedicated to a single policy problem, the public responds” (Cohen 1995, 88) and consequently there must be some shift in public opinion. Also, when preparing a speech, whether pro-legalization or pro-criminalization, it must have a good connection with the people; otherwise, “the public may not be highly receptive to presidential influence attempts” (Cohen 1995, 88).

Mark Kleiman and Aaron Saiger (1990) review some of the different social positions from the libertarian, the conservative, to the liberal. Utilizing some of Ethan Nadelmann expertise in the field they define the “the social costs of prohibiting some drugs, and enforcing that prohibition, exceeds the value of the goals which that prohibition achieves” (Kleiman and Saiger 1990, 530). In addition, the authors go over the definition of legalization and the impact of the current state of prohibition. All these issues are relevant to the issue of the presidential rhetoric and the battle against criminalization.

Since Richard Nixon first utilized the concept of war against drugs, many countries followed the prohibitionist regime and have fought a long lasting battle. During the next chapters, several aspects of the rhetoric implemented will be analyzed.
Chapter 3: The Public and Persuasive President

The theoretical framework is based on key works of the public presidency, mainly the work of Neustadt (1990) and Edwards (2003). Neustadt (1990) argues that presidents cannot simply dictate orders and expect them to happen. Sometimes, a president will say ‘‘Do this! Do that!’ and nothing will happen” (Neustadt 1990, 31). Hence, the political power vested on the president does not necessarily mean that it will have an immediate effect. This is relevant to the theoretical framework because even though there are some good intentions to eliminate drugs and a potential harm, the fact that a president speaks to the public or to Congress is no guarantee of success. Despite being the leader of the most powerful country in the world, some presidents do not obtain results by “giving orders-or not, at any rate, merely by giving orders” (1990, 10). Moreover, the president must use their “persuasive power” in their speeches. Also, the incorporation of key words utilized by the presidents throughout the five decades of the war on drugs is pivotal to the understanding of such theories. Neustadt mentioned that presidential power is not a guaranteed power. The president can speak about certain topic and try to obtain a positive outcome. However, he may not obtain a desire outcome.

Edwards (2003) provides a theoretical framework that outlines how and why presidents find it so difficult to move public opinion, with the president’s words essentially falling on deaf ears. The incorporation of “the public presidency” and the attempts to lead and influence public opinion are some of the characteristics that most “modern” presidents have possessed. Thus, the way drug policies were framed throughout the war on drugs had a relation to the rhetoric and the president’s ability to influence the public. The “director of change” vs. “facilitator of change” leadership styles is also important in Edwards’ remarks. Applied to the drug policy one can argue that some presidents fought the war against drugs using the facilitator approach, while some others took the director route. Also, Edwards (2003) believes that when presidents deliver a speech more often than not they are speaking to deaf ears. Being the most powerful man on earth
will not guarantee the president success when conveying a message. Frequently, people will ignore the message and it will not have a tangible effect.

Furthermore, Neustadt (1990) concludes that having powers bestowed to the office is no guarantee the president can actually exhibit power but rather must rely on persuading others to follow their lead. In other words, no president can simply dictate change by delivering a message, as the process is much more difficult and requires sharing power across institutions and key actors. The relationship with the war on drugs comes across due to the ineffectiveness of accomplishing a successful battle against the drug cartels and the final proclamation of a victory on this war. Moreover, the willingness of a president to win the war on drugs is not tied together to a successful speech. Edwards mentions two views on presidential leadership: director of change and facilitator of change. The first one establishes “goals and leading others where they otherwise wouldn’t go” and the latter view establishes that the president is primarily a facilitator of change “reflecting and perhaps intensifying widely held views and exploiting opportunities to help others go where they want to go anyways” (2003, 24). These two theories on the presidency provide an argument of rhetoric versus policy implementation.

3.1 **Rhetoric, Metaphors, and Frames**

The war on drugs is one of the longest battles the United States has fought. From its inception under President Richard Nixon to Barack Obama, the war on drugs has become an institutionalized presidential program responsive to public demands for action against the spread of illegal drugs. Over the airwaves, presidential rhetorical overtures on the matter go hand in hand with the drug war on the streets. However, although presidential rhetoric remained largely consistent on combating and criminalizing drugs over much of the previous four decades, it has evolved more recently during the Obama administration as a growing number of observers have questioned the validity of the war and numerous states have legalized the use of medicinal marijuana. In this chapter, I examine the extent to which presidential rhetoric and the
institutionalization of the war on drugs have begun to shift toward legalization, rhetorical changes, metaphors, as well as the potential policy implications moving forward. Even though people often think of this battle as a war, “Colin Powell had always argued that no troops should be committed without specific objectives, a clear and achievable definition of victory, and clear exit strategy, and open-ended commitments should not be used” (Lakoff 2004, 56). Some of these premises are not met. For instance, an achievable victory has not been met, after five decades fighting this war the goal is neither clear nor achievable. A clear exit strategy that has been overlooked by the federal government is legalization or decriminalization of cannabis.

As stated in the literature review, there has been a general emergence and globalization of the war on drugs, particularly in the U.S. and Latin American. This chapter includes a review of key works on the U.S. institutionalization of the war on drugs and the developments concerning U.S. presidential rhetoric on drugs. I also developed a theoretical framework grounded in recent historical developments under the Obama administration, which posits that a shift is gradually occurring moving the country away from the prohibitionist mentality and more towards legalization. To examine this shift, I assess key presidential speeches from the Nixon to Obama administration that exemplify U.S. drug policy trends, as well as key developments and changes in the institutionalization process over the forty-year period.¹ I conclude with a more general

¹ In order to understand what has been said throughout the years, an extensive use of The American Presidency Project is included in this paper. Different speeches by President Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush, and Obama are content analyzed and discussed. The search of those speeches was narrowed down by the words “Drugs” and “War.” All of these speeches, whether addressed to Congress, the nation, or simply a message for Drug Awareness Month, are used for discourse and content analysis purposes. The careful use of some words reflects the policy implementation and it also defends the state of the war (see more details further below in the analysis section).
assessment of the current political atmosphere, the likely developments and policy implications for the foreseeable future, and a discussion of potential avenues for future studies to continue the scholarly discussion over the topic.

3.2 **THEORETICAL EXPECTATIONS**

My theoretical expectations are that the discourse and the rhetoric changed and evolved progressively. President Richard Nixon used stronger words to convey a rigorous message, while President Obama chose different words that modified the speech and its meaning. Along with the recent changes on the rhetoric one can also analyze the policy implications. Society changed and their needs and demands shifted as well. Shifts in the public perceptions and behaviors related to drugs have had an impact on how presidents have responded to the war on drugs in the US. Under this premise of social evolution, the presidential rhetoric has also evolved. From an aggressive rhetoric that calls for prohibition and to allocate millions of dollars towards the protection of the American people against these evil criminals and their drugs to the tolerance and acknowledgement that this has become a health issue and rehabilitation should be included in the picture.

3.3 **ANALYTICAL SECTION**

The ways in which language is used and implemented in speeches allows the president to shape the country and obtain support. Some key speeches will be utilized out of several speeches from 1969 to 2013, with two key words: “war” and “drugs”. These speeches were read and verified that were related to the battle against illegal drugs. Some speeches that contained the words “war’ and “drugs” but referred to other topics were not included. Furthermore, the speeches were ran through an online program that counted the number of times a word was repeated and provided the top five words for each speech. Additionally, the audience was also taken into consideration for this study and the repetitions of certain words are examined in terms of policy implementation.
3.4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Thousands of lives and millions of dollars have been lost in this ongoing battle against drugs and the cartels. This issue is not exclusive of the United States of America. It is rather a global problem. In the past, it has been compared to the alcohol prohibition of the 1930s. However, the battle over drug legalization has been fought for longer and with a smaller number of victories. This social issue has become an institutionalized element. Payan mentions that “forty years ago, President Richard M. Nixon declared the so-called “War on Drugs.” Ever since, the ideological, bureaucratic, budgetary, and administrative apparatus to sustain the prohibitionist regime around illegal drugs has become fairly robust and has built around itself a strong political and social consensus that translates into unmitigated support for the total repression by sheer force of an illicit market that has nonetheless proven to be a match” (2013, 6). Moreover, Whitford and Yates (2009) characterize the tone of the presidential rhetoric as “eclectic” as they believe presidential statements have a mixture of thematic approaches, ranging from hope, courage and patriotism, to grave concern, approbation, and even fear. Also, when politicians speak they generally try to “include words that “celebrate, explain, glorify, mythologize, grieve, caution against, and prepare for” (Hodges 2013, 3).

Presidential rhetoric includes some metaphors related to war. The word ‘war’ on the war on drugs is one of the many metaphors included in speeches and messages to the American people. Furthermore, the war metaphor “excludes alternative ideas and polarizes groups who question the crusade” (Elwood 1994 in Whitford and Yates 2009, 92). Also as pointed out by Hodges “the realities of war are magnified or minimized, remembered or forgotten through the discursive processes humans use to give them meaning” (2013, 3).

The drug prohibition is not a recent and it did not happen overnight. Moreover, “the nature of the global drug prohibition regime reflected the dominance of the United States and Europe in establishing global norms concerning the selection and appropriate uses of psychoactive substances” (Andreas and Nadelmann 2006, 45). Throughout the years, the war on drugs has become an institutionalized element. Presidents from both parties, Republicans and
Democrats, have been in command and they maintained a similar approach in regards to drugs and their legalization. President Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, William Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama have dealt with this ongoing issue and they have had a similar approach. However, the rhetoric and the implementation of certain policies have shifted in the last few years and some states are leaving behind prohibition policies and moving to a market approach. Moreover, the fact that as of 2014, four states and the nation’s capital decided to legalize recreational marijuana could be an example of such change in policy.

At a glance, one can see a change in the rhetoric with two quotes. Policy rhetoric is therefore the argument used to persuade an audience to support a particular political course of action (Hawdon 2001, 421). President Nixon mentioned that “the possible danger to the health or well-being of even a casual user of drugs is too serious to allow ignorance to prevail or for this information gap to remain open. The American people need to know what dangers and what risks are inherent in the use of the various kinds of drugs readily available in illegal markets today” (1969). On the other hand, President Obama moved toward a legal path for medical marijuana by arguing that “my attitude is if the science and the doctors suggest that the best palliative care and the way to relieve pain and suffering is medical marijuana then that’s something I’m open to because there’s no difference between that and morphine when it comes to just giving people relief from pain. But I want to do it under strict guidelines. I want it prescribed in the same way that other painkillers or palliative drugs are prescribed” (Villalobos 2013, 182).

In 1969, President Richard Nixon decided to categorize the fight against illegal drug trafficking as the “war on drugs”. In “Policing the Globe: Criminalization and Crime Control in International Relations”, Peter Andreas and Ethan Nadelmann mention that “both the nationalization of the crime issue and the federalization of crime control had received their first substantial impetus during the 1930s, when the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt included crime control among the array of issues on his New Deal agenda” (2006, 126). After
President Nixon, “the Ford and Carter administration brought both a diminution in the rhetoric, as well as revelations of legal and illegal excesses by federal police agencies. But the Reagan and Bush administrations revived the crime issue in the 1980s and sponsored dramatic increases in both the reach of federal criminal laws and the resources of federal criminal justice agencies” (Andreas and Nadelmann 2006, 126). One thing remained the same during all these administrations: the drug prohibition. During these years, some of the most important decisions made by the U.S. government involve policy enactment. According to Mann (2013), the following are some of the most crucial policies that came to pass and results of such policies:

- 1970. September-October. Major Federal Drug War Legislation Passes. Three of the nation’s ten African American lawmakers vote in favor of Nixon’s Comprehensive Drug Abuse and Prevention Act, the first major piece of Federal legislation laying the groundwork for the national war on drugs

- 1972. March 22. Nixon’s “Shafer” commission, made up largely of conservative white elected officials, recommends legalization of marijuana. “Neither the marihuana user nor the drug itself can be said to constitute a danger to public safety,” writes co-author Gov. Raymond Shafer, a Republican from Pennsylvania. Measure receives no support from black lawmakers in Congress.

- 1973. July 28. President Nixon creates the Drug Enforcement Agency (the DEA) within the Justice Department.

- 1976. California’s Democratic legislature passes and liberal Democratic Governor Jerry Brown signs SB 42, establishing tough new mandatory minimum sentencing laws comparable to those approved by New York state three years earlier. According to a Rand study, the law produces prison commitment rates in California that have “increased substantially,” contributing to “major problem of prison crowding.”

- 1977. August 2nd. President Jimmy Carter proposes easing Federal marijuana laws. Measure fails to find support in Democratically controlled Congress. At
the time, Carter expressed the following sentiments: “I support legislation amending Federal law to eliminate all Federal criminal penalties for the possession of up to one ounce of marijuana. This decriminalization is not legalization. It means only that the Federal penalty for possession would be reduced and a person would receive a fine rather than a criminal penalty. Federal penalties for trafficking would remain in force and the states would remain free to adopt whatever laws they wish concerning the marijuana smoker.”

- 1978. California’s Democratic Party approves a second measure toughening incarceration and parole rules, called the Public Protection Bill. Governor Brown signs the measure into law. In a press statement, Governor Brown boasts that “for most crimes the bill triples the maximum period a person released from state prison can be placed on parole and subjected to conditions of parole and supervision by a parole officer.”

- 1982. Just Say No. Nancy Reagan launches a national campaign designed to “inoculate” young people against the temptations of narcotics. Total inmate population at start of decade: 474,000


marijuana. Establishes a 100-to-1 disparity in punishments for crack cocaine compared with powdered form of drug.

- 1994. September. Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act signed by President Bill Clinton during a ceremony in the Rose Garden. “The law abiding citizens of our country have made their voices heard,” President Clinton says. “If the American people do not feel safe…then it is difficult to say that the American people are free.”
- 2000. November. Libertarian Cato Institute publishes “After Prohibition,” a collection of essays urging an end to the war on drugs. Nobel Prize-winning conservative economist Milton Friedman writes the foreword, urging an end to drug war era policies.
- 2011. In a major reversal, Rep. Charles Rangel co-sponsors the Ending Federal Marijuana Prohibition Act of 2011, a bill that would remove marijuana from the list of illegal drugs under the Controlled Substances Act. The measure also draws
support from Rep. John Conyers, head of the Congressional Black Caucus, also co-sponsors. Measure fails.

- 2012. Conservative Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul (R-Tx) calls for an end to the drug war.
- 2012. Colorado and Washington pass similar bills that legalizes recreational marijuana
- 2013. August 12. Attorney General Eric Holder calls for major reforms to drug war era sentencing laws. In an interview with NPR, Holder concludes that the war on drugs has meant “a decimation of certain communities, in particular communities of color.”
- 2014. Oregon, Alaska and D.C. pass similar bills that legalizes recreational marijuana

Presidents in the United States have spoken publicly against the production, sale, and consumption of these illegal substances. In this study, I have compiled speeches from 1969 to 2013. During this period of time, these eight presidents delivered 228 speeches. Out of those 228 speeches, 40 were intended to the United States Congress and the remaining 188 were delivered to the American people. The presidents communicated their speeches through different methods like the radio, TV, and even the State of the Union.
Richard Nixon delivered 29 messages in regards to the war on drugs. Out of these 29 messages 12 were intended to Congress and 17 to the American people. Furthermore, two of
those speeches were delivered via the radio. These messages covered certain issues that seemed pivotal for the Nixon administration. The use of drugs and the side effects were covered in an urgent manner to raise awareness of the gravity of this situation. President Nixon also revealed some statistics in regards to the number of arrests for the illegal use of narcotics. Another important announcement was the theory on how “narcotics have been cited as a primary cause of the enormous increase in street crimes over the last decade” (Nixon 1969).

President Nixon speeches displayed a strong discourse. The constant use of certain words in a negative context allowed the President to promote specific steps to counteract the drugs and the cartels. The words that the president repeated the most in his 29 speeches include: program (436), drug (432), federal (370), Congress (266), problem (165), and crime (146). Some words like crime used in this context, allowed the President to convey his message and obtain support to continue fighting this battle against drugs. Therefore, the use of these words functions in a negative way to obtain support from Congress and from people in general. These words and rhetoric allowed President Nixon to “focus substantial attention and resources on the foreign sources of the heroin, cocaine, and most of the marijuana consumed in the United States” (Andreas and Nadelmann 2006, 127) as he attained support from Congress and public opinion.

Aside from the strong political discourse, a bi-national cooperation with Mexico begun “with Operation Intercept, President Richard Nixon declared a War on Drugs in 1969” and forty years after adopting this drug policy, U.S consumption remains as high as ever and violence in Mexico is worse than ever (Grayson, quoted in Staudt and O’Rourke 2013, 217). On August 9, 1974, President Nixon resigned after the Watergate scandal and now “the war on drugs had to compete with other issues for resources, including resurrecting the image of the presidency as an institution” (Whitford and Yates 2009, 48).
When Ford faced Carter as an electoral opponent, Carter “advocated marijuana decriminalization at an early stage of the campaign” (Whitford and Yates 2009, 50). Ford, on the
other hand, did not directly endorse decriminalization. During his term, President Gerald Ford spoke to Congress four times and to the public seven times on drug abuse. Things did not change so much and the war on drugs remained high in the order of priorities. President Ford mentioned that more than 5,000 Americans die each year from consumption of these illegal substances. He also raised the issue of “street crime”, which was a method used by drug addicts to obtain money for drug purchases. The cost of this war was at $17 billion a year and it remained classified as a serious threat to health and to the entire nation. President Ford claimed an important victory but he also stated that “we had not won the war on drugs”. With the selection of certain words, he created an atmosphere of suspense and danger. The enemy was in the United States territory and was consumed by a good number of Americans. Thus, presidential policy rhetoric can indirectly induce moral panics by influencing public opinion (Hawdon 2001, 422).

President Ford’s harsh rhetoric was usually geared toward drug traffickers. He stated “these merchants of death, who profit from the misery and suffering of others, deserve the full measure of national revulsion” (1976). Furthermore, Ford’s objective was to protect society from those traffickers and the illegal substances that threatened to harm the American people. Overall, in his eleven messages, the president repeated words like crime (218), drug (151), federal (126), law (117), and criminal (102). Even though President Ford’s rhetoric was not as crude as his predecessor, he still maintained certain words that imply that the government will not look for a different alternative. Furthermore, words like “crime” and “criminal” allow him to articulate an intense discourse that enables him to expand the anti-drug policy. Other words like “law” and “federal”, are used to call for international cooperation and to illustrate that these drugs, which constantly break federal and state law, come from different countries and that there is a flow of cash from the United States to the country or countries that provided the drugs. Also, President Ford in some of his remarks mentioned that “Americans have always stood united and strong against all enemies. Drug abuse is an enemy we can control but there must be a personal and a national dedication and commitment to the goal” (Ford 1976). Moreover, the words “drug”, “abuse”, and “program” were repeated several times on these messages. However, President
Ford hardly ever mentioned words like “health” or “recovery” on his messages giving consistency to Nixon’s rhetorical messages.

Figure 5. Gerald Ford – Congress and Other Messages
President Jimmy Carter addressed this social issue nine times during his tenure in office. Out of those nine times he intended the message to Congress four times and the American people five times. During his administration drugs and crime were linked to death as the fourth most common cause. Also, the President believed that “many communities remain unsafe because of drug-related street crime, and the immense profits made in the illicit drug traffic help support the power and influence of organized crime” (Carter 1977). One thing that remained common with these three administrations was the call for international assistance and cooperation. México was one of the countries willing to cooperate with the United States. President Carter mentioned that he wanted to reduce the harm caused by drugs by discouraging the use of such products, and also alcohol and tobacco. To do so, he listed seven points with specific instructions on how to stop the illegal flow of narcotics. In March 1977, Carter took a step to decriminalize marijuana. In a nutshell, he wanted to “advocate replacing the criminal penalties for possession of less than an ounce with a civil fine” (Whitford and Yates 2009, 51). His plan was unsuccessful but the Carter administration is considered a change point in the progression of the war on drugs.
A truly important section of Carter’s speech involves the use of marijuana. The president mentioned that “the National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse concluded five years ago that marijuana use should be decriminalized, and I believe it is time to implement those basic recommendations” (Carter 1977). His support for decriminalization of one ounce of marijuana did not mean legalization. However, a slight change was on the horizon. President Carter also spoke about drug treatment, which aimed to cure drug addicts and “make people aware of the health problems associated with such substances” (Carter 1977). Although he publicly announced his support for decriminalization of marijuana and his intention for international cooperation, the reality was different. The rhetoric remained fairly consistent and the words that were utilized the most were: drug (123), president (46), think (42), abuse (35), federal (23), heroin (20), project (19), and country (19). It is also important to mention that for the first time, the word health appears in the top words.

Some federal agencies were instructed to direct and enforce programs against drug abuse and the simple consumption of marijuana. President Carter mentioned that “no government can completely protect its citizens from all harm not by legislation, or by regulation, or by medicine, or by advice. Drugs cannot be forced out of existence; they will be with us for as long as people find in them the relief or satisfaction they desire. But the harm caused by drug abuse can be reduced” (1977). All together it seemed that the rhetoric was going to shift in the late 70s. However, with the next administration the rhetoric maintained certain degree of stability.
Ronald Reagan spoke to the nation against drug abuse in 60 different occasions. Out of those 60 times, 6 were intended for Congress and the remaining 54 to the public. Not only
President Reagan addressed this social issue but also the First Lady, Reagan, shared some words on the drug abuse problem. President Reagan tend to offer a strong speech with information and statistics on the usage of drugs like marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and crack, his wife tried to appeal to a different section of the population. Some presidents utilize religion to appeal to certain masses. As Shogan explains, “moral and religious argumentation can be viewed as a strategic political tool used by presidents to augment their formal, constitutional powers” (2007, 4). In this case, President Reagan with help of the First Lady appealed to the families. Mrs. Reagan, as a mother and grandmother, spoke about how drugs are a national concern and affects everybody and not only a small portion of Americans. She shared some stories from all across the country and also mentioned that people should simply “say yes to your life and when it comes to drugs and alcohol just say no” (Reagan 1986). President Reagan had an agenda that “embraced both enforcement and demand reduction” (Whitford and Yates 2009, 57), hence the “just say no campaign” lead by the First Lady.

Moreover, President Reagan re-aligned himself with the discourse implemented by other presidents by saying that “your government will continue to act aggressively, but nothing would be more effective than for Americans simply to quit using illegal drugs” (Reagan 1986). Reagan’s message to the nation repeated words like: drug (1053), America (179), illegal (151), people (143), abuse (126), and crime (85). According to Bagley, “President Reagan talked tough, but never really got tough” (1988, 192). The careful implementation of these words matches the Mrs. Reagan speech. However, in the mid-1980s Congressman Charles Rangel repeatedly criticized the Reagan administration for “its unwillingness to allocate sufficient resources for drug prevention programs (e.g., education, treatment, and rehabilitation), its lack of a coherent strategy for prosecuting the war at home and overseas, and its failure to provide consistent leadership at the level of policy implementation” (Bagley 1988, 191).
Once again, “George H. W. Bush intensified the drug war in part because of its political value” (Whitford and Yates 2009, 63). President George Bush addressed the nation on what he called an important and threatening issue. One particular aspect of Bush’s speech was the fact
that the President believed that cocaine was the most serious problem, especially crack. Hence, foreign policy improvements would place especial attention on Colombia. President Bush also labeled this fight against drugs, especially cocaine, as “very difficult”. It did not seem to matter because the President launched a campaign that required the engagement and cooperation of all the Americans. To understand the nature of this social crusade against drugs, President Bush mentioned that “to win the war against addictive drugs like crack will take more than just a federal strategy: It will take a national strategy, one that reaches into every school, every workplace, involving every family” (1989). Bush spoke to the Congress of the United States four times while he focused his attention to the American people 39 times. He referred to the war on drugs a total of 43 in one presidential term.

In order to understand the intensity of Bush’s speech one can analyze the words that he repeated the most. Drug (1694), school (93), country (91), program (90), and America (88) were the top words for drug control strategy. President Bush mentioned a strategy that required federal intervention to help millions of people with their addiction to drugs, especially crack cocaine. President Bush wants to keep drugs away from Americans, but he does not address the issue with health and addiction in an extensive manner. The 41st President of the United States announced an increase in federal spending on drug treatment. Also, he believed that “addiction is such a cruel inheritance; we will intensify our search for ways to help expectant mothers who use drugs” (Bush 1989).

President Bush continued a foreign approach to the drug issue. Instead of addressing the demand aspect by fighting addiction on U.S. territory, he decided to fight drug cartels and criminal organizations abroad. The United States, in cooperation with Colombia, had a frontal fight against powerful drug cartel organizations that included the Medellín Cartel and the Cali Cartel. President Bush believed that the United States has the responsibility to fight these criminal groups and support “our brave friends in Colombia” (1989). Moreover, such assistance required the federal government to spend money abroad fighting the drug suppliers of the American people. The President also believed that the United States should fight as one,
regardless of political views or social ideology. Also, the implementation of such policies, domestic and foreign, will not be successful if the nation is divided.

Figure 11. George H.W. Bush – Congress and Other Messages
In President Clinton’s first two years in office, “the anti-drug budget shifted so that about forty percent was spent on programs to reduce demand, an increase in thirty percent” (Whitford and Yates 2009, 68) from previous administrations. President William Clinton spoke against the use of illegal drugs on 38 times. Only eight times he focused on Congress while the other 30 were intended to the American people. The 42nd President of the United States was not intimidated by the word “war” and begun his speech by mentioning that even though the country is at peace, some communities are at war. The word terror was used as well, giving the speech a powerful and emotional tone. However, President Clinton mentioned that he requested a larger budget and obtained a 30% raise in 1999. With that increase in budget he implemented unprecedented new campaigns to convince and persuade young people to stay away from drugs and give this people a chance for a better future. Another important remark from the president was that they were going to help the prisoners break clean from drugs and their addictions, which seemed to be a different approach to fixing the main issue. President Clinton wanted to fight this
battle for America and for its citizens, which is why he mentioned that if Congress approves the budget it will “give a lot of people their lives back and make our streets safer” (1999).

President Clinton mentioned that “we have to break this cycle; we have to give all these people a chance to be drug-free and to be productive citizens again” (1999). Furthermore, President Clinton’s top five words were: drug (399), people (387), American (213), work (193), and America (146). Clinton also mentioned crime 72 times in place number seven, help 48 times, and health 41 times. While recognizing that drugs were terrible for society, he believed that with the expansion on the federal budget and the implementation of drug rehabilitation and anti-testing programs some of these individuals that made a mistake could go back and obtain a second chance. President Clinton understood that besides a frontal war against drugs there must be a “change in the budget priorities from law enforcement to research, treatment and prevention through education” (Payan and Staudt 2013, 321). Additionally, under President Clinton, several states adopted medicinal marijuana.

Figure 13. Bill Clinton – Congress and Other Messages
For George W. Bush, the drug issue had a role in an election. For Bush, the “administration’s record on drugs was ‘one of the worst public policy failures of the 1990s,’ which he proposed to reverse by offering $2.7 billion in increase spending” (Whitford and Yates 2009, 69). Moreover, an increase in budget would go directed towards criminalization rather than prevention. President George W. Bush words had an interesting approach because in this case he is not only standing against the use of illegal drugs but also against the abuse of legal substances like alcohol. During his presidency, he spoke directly to Congress once and 25 times to the people. Once again, President Bush asked for a raise on the budget to fight addictions. President Bush repeated these words the most: drug (361), country (91), people (64), drive (59), and use (49). With the selection and repetition of these words one can see that negative words like “abuse” are kept to a minimum. Once these top words are cross-referenced with the proclamation, one can infer that President Bush was trying to convey a message with compassion and empathy to all those persons that suffer an addiction to drugs or alcohol as he mentioned
words like help 29 times and DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education program) 28 times during his tenure.

However, President Bush’s state oriented approach was not the same in the drug issue. In the cases of states that had approved the legal use of medicinal marijuana, President Bush decided that the federal law should be respected and implemented. Thus, the root of the problem remained the same. Instead of allowing this new approach, President Bush fought it back and decided to keep this social issue, as we know it, a war on drugs.

Figure 15. George W. Bush – Congress and Other Messages
After President Bush’s proclamation, President Barack Obama followed his step and delivered some speeches where, President Obama mentioned that “each day brings new opportunities for personal growth, renewal, and transformation to millions of Americans who have chosen to forge a path toward recovery from addiction to drugs or alcohol” (2010).

Whitford and Yates (2009) believe that drug policy was not an important deal for Obama in the debates during the presidential campaign or during the first years in office. The main concerns for the American people would be to tackle the economic issues and Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Obama had a clear message, he wanted to save lives from the hazards of addictions and he used some interesting words. The top words used by President Obama in this proclamation are: drug (88), country (68), people (57), México (53), and Latin America (30). These words do not sound as harsh as the ones used and implemented by some of the previous presidents.

Furthermore, the recovery appeared 15 times and DARE 9 times. President Obama conveyed this message with the purpose of sharing that America had a problem but it could be solved. These
Americans, addicted to drugs and alcohol, could save their lives if they take care of this abuse problem. They could gain their health back and they can also become productive members of society. President Obama also wanted to share that issue had a solution and “we must spread the word that substance abuse is preventable, that addiction is treatable, and that recovery is possible” (2010).

Furthermore, under Obama’s administration four states and the nation’s capital decided to break the traditional model. Colorado, Washington, Oregon, Alaska, and D.C. decided to legalize recreational marijuana. Hence, the overall ideology of the war on drugs had shifted. Public opinion demonstrates that legalization is a valid option. According to the Los Angeles Times, with information from the Pew Research Center, 52% to 45% of adult Americans support the legalization of cannabis (Lauter 2013). Also, as far as the race issue, “more than 20 years later, President Obama finally overturned the Anti-Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988 by signing the Fair Sentencing Act on August 3, 2010. This historic piece of legislation significantly reformed crack cocaine sentencing by reducing the 100 to 1 sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine to 18 to 1” (Sirin 2011, 91).
The presidential rhetoric remained fairly consistent. However, with that rhetoric some policies evolved. Some states are leaving behind prohibition policies and moving to a market
approach. The results were that, indeed, the rhetoric did not have a significant change. Even though rhetoric did not drastically change it did vary from speech to speech. Certain words with a positive connotation might create a different image on people’s mind as opposed to the harsh words that were imposed by the first couple of presidents that fought a frontal battle against drugs. Thus, the rhetoric implemented by President Obama is not similar to what President Nixon decided to use. It seems to be that in the future the rhetoric will progressively keep on evolving. Perhaps, the best example to illustrate such shift in rhetoric/policy is the four states and the District of Columbia, which legalized recreational marijuana. Thus, leaving behind some of the old approaches and moving to a progressive approach. “The acceptance of a policy, at least those that indicate the general direction of political action, depends on public opinion” (Hawdon 2001, 422). In this case, the acceptance of marijuana legalization seems to be approved by the population and just waiting for political approval.
Chapter 4: Readability and Rhetoric: The Careful Selection of Words and the Never-Ending Battle against Drugs

The war on drugs has impacted millions of people around the world and the United States is not an exception. In over forty years, the United States and other countries have suffered the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives. Also, millions of dollars have been spent to fight this war. Powerful speeches have allowed presidents to shift people’s opinion and mobilize masses. Following that thought, presidents should attempt to deliver their message with a specific purpose. Through the selection of certain words, the readability formula will determine complexity and allow the president to deliver a powerful and understandable speech. Typically, readability involves measuring sentence length, word length, and complexity. The importance of such speeches revolves around the idea that citizens may support presidential policy proposals if some requirements are met. If the intended audience is a specialized group, then the readability scores will demonstrate a higher degree of complexity than if the speech is intended to the Congress or to the American people. Also, if the approval ratings are higher the president will have more freedom to convey the message that he wants and the readability scores will demonstrate a higher degree of complexity. Lastly, if the president attended private school and completed an advanced degree, the speech will have a higher degree of complexity as opposed to a speech conveyed by a president with public education and/or only an undergraduate degree. Therefore, if the president delivers a speech with a lower degree of complexity, more people will be able to understand it.

The president of the United States of America addresses the nation on a wide variety of issues. A speech can build confidence or create distrust among the constituents. Therefore, speeches are a pivotal part on a president’s routine. The president and their staff must pay close attention to several aspects in order to deliver an important and influential speech. If the president delivers a message but nobody understands the content, that message was a waste of time and resources. In this war against drugs, rhetoric goes hand in hand with the battle on the streets. Presidents go public in order to obtain and maintain support for this cause. If more and
more people question the validity of this war, then these speeches must persuade and convince people to trust the decisions executed by the government. In this essay, speeches given since 1969 will be reviewed in order to determine the readability scores. This will determine if presidents prepare speeches and considerer the type of audience, approval ratings, and other variables.

In general, people should care about readability because it measures the size of the spoon that feeds the people with information. If a president decides to deliver a message with low readability scores to the American people is because he wants the majority to comprehend and to support such speech. One must pay close attention and care about the interaction between speeches and readability for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons include: the potential implementation of laws and rules, shift in budget priorities if Congress decides to support the president’s request conveyed in a speech, or even a shift in approval ratings. The simplification of certain speeches means that the president thinks that their constituents are not knowledgeable enough or that he just wants to try and simplify the message to help them understand the issue. If the president is trying to convey a stronger message to reach more Americans, then by simplifying the speech he might achieve this.

4.1 THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

Readability involves measuring sentence length, word length, and complexity. For this research the variables utilized include presidential speeches, education level, common space scores, approval ratings, intended audience, and whether there is an election that year. The reason behind the selection of those variables is to determine the complexity of the speeches and what might produce an impact to the speech during the preparation. Therefore, there are three main hypotheses that will test if the intended audience, approval ratings, and level of education are related to the complexity level of the speech.
**H1:** If the intended audience is a specialized group, then the complexity scores will demonstrate a higher degree of complexity than if the speech is intended to the American people or Congress.

**H2:** If the approval ratings are higher the president will have more freedom to convey the message that he wants and the complexity scores will demonstrate a higher degree of complexity.

**H3:** If the president attended private school and completed an advanced degree the speech will have a higher degree of complexity as opposed to a speech conveyed by a president with public education and/or only an undergraduate degree.\(^2\)

Although presidential rhetoric remained largely consistent on combating and criminalizing drugs over much of the previous four decades, it has evolved more recently during the Obama administration as a growing number of observers have questioned the validity of the war and numerous states have legalized the use of medicinal marijuana. In my opinion, the readability scores were more complex in the Nixon Era because he had to convey a powerful message to obtain and maintain support to fight this war. On the other hand, president Obama has delivered messages that include the utilization of simple and basic words. This change in

\(^2\) There are a number of limitations to this hypothesis that can be further addressed in future studies. First, presidents do not solely write their speeches so while it is possible that a president’s background can affect the content and tone of a speech, one must also consider the various speech writers and policy wonks who influence the process by providing input and content across multiple iterations of speech drafts before the president approves the final speech for public delivery (e.g., see Vaughn and Villalobos 2006). Also, future studies may consider an alternative hypothesis centered on religiosity and how that might affect the manner with which presidents approach the drug issue in their speeches directed at the general public (e.g., with considerations for concepts such as morality, the jeremiad form of rhetoric, etc.).
rhetoric is connected to the type of message that president Obama is currently trying to convey. Therefore Obama’s speeches should be easier to understand in terms of sentence length, word length, and complexity. The war on drugs has an impact on people’s lives on a daily basis. One should care about the ongoing battle and the rhetoric implemented to maintain the prohibition and the war alive. At a glance, speeches are not very important and transcendental. However, the consequences of not paying attention to what the president has to say are harmful to our society. Furthermore, with that shift in rhetoric some policies evolved as well. Some states are leaving behind prohibition policies and moving to a market approach.

4.2 Methodology

In reference to politics, Jones and Wheat (1984) argue that newspaper readability is typically written above 5th grade level. However, “sports articles are easier to read than those dealing with world news, or politics” (Jones and Wheat 1984, 432). This indicates that even at the newspaper level, politics has a greater difficulty. Moreover, the difficulty seems to be inherent and it justifies the readability level. Presidents try to deliver a clear and understandable message. Whether the message is intended to the American people, to Congress, or to a specialized group, the main purpose is to convey a powerful message. Thus, if the message is more complicated and people do not understand the core meaning, it will not be of value to the administration. Hence, readability and rhetoric go hand in hand.

The estimation test that I will employ is a multivariate regression with the readability scores on the war on drugs serving as the dependent variable. Some of the independent variables to be considered are political ideology, public opinion, years in office, election year, level and type of education, and intended audience. The post estimation tests employed are the Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity, Cameron & Trivedi's decomposition of IM-test, Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity, and the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) test for multicollinearity.
The dependent variable will consist on the readability scores assigned to different presidential speeches in regards to the war on drugs. In order to understand what has been said throughout the years, an extensive use of The American Presidency Project is included in this paper. Different speeches by President Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush, and Obama are measured with the Flesch Kincaid Grade Level, Gunning Readability Index, and the SMOG Index. The search for those speeches was narrowed down by selection of the words “drugs” and “war”. These speeches consist of State of the Union Addresses, messages to Congress, to the nation, and to specialized groups, among other types of messages. Moreover, recent speeches also include online media. Hence, “presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, as the first new media era chief executives, have been pioneers in the development of strategies for governing with digital communication” (Owen and Davis 2008, 659).

Each speech is run through readability software, which examines and provides scored of the most common readability indicators. For this study, I will focus only on the Flesch Kincaid Grade Level, SMOG Index, and Gunning Index. If we obtain a score of 7.0, this will indicate a grade-school level, which means that a seventh grader would be able to read the presidential speech. With the second one, however, one must take into consideration that a sentence is defined as a string of words punctuated with a period. The formula will also consider long sentences with a semi-colon as two sentences and words with hyphen are considered as a single word. The third formula counts the number of sentences. According to Smith (2014), it divides the number of sentences into 100 to determine the average sentence length, counts the number of long words in the passage, it does not count words in which ed forms the third and final syllable, hyphenated words, or compound. These three formulas provide an approximate grade level of the passage.

The dependent variable is related to my hypothesis because one can suggest that a president will try to deliver a message that suits the intended receiver. If any given president tries to obtain support to enforce the current prohibitionist regime, then it will deliver a message with certain difficulty according to the audience. It is expected to see that the complexity of the
speech increases or decreases according to the audience. If the president delivers the message to the people, then the complexity level should be lower than if the speech is intended to Congress. Another scenario implicates a specialized group, such as the CIA, FBI, or an anti-drug group, in which the speech will have a higher degree of complexity.

Political ideology is one of the independent variables used in this research. This will be measured with the common space score. The scores represent the standard liberal-conservative spectrum in with increasingly positive scores indicating greater alignment to the right; increasingly negative scores greater alignment to the left, and the 0 position denoting the dead ideological center. Therefore, one can expect presidents like Reagan, Bush, and Nixon with positive scores that indicate their conservative believes. On the other hand, a president like Obama or Carter will have a negative number. Political ideology is important because according to their alignment they might deliver a simple or complex message. Also, if they stick to their ideology they might also try to persuade for a potential marijuana legalization scenario or to increase their support for the current prohibitionist regime.

Public opinion is another independent variable. Public opinion will be measured on a scale from 0 to 100 and it will be collected from *The American Presidency Project*, which displays data adapted from the Gallup Poll and compiled by Gerhard Peters. I will use the most recent public opinion poll prior to the speech. Public support might give certain freedom to the president to deliver a stronger message. On the other hand, if the approval ratings are low then the message might be less aggressive and easier to read. Furthermore, with this variable is important to highlight that one can encounter a different question. Is public opinion influenced by the speech or is the speech influenced by public opinion. It is hard to confirm with one hundred percent certainty that one caused the other.

Number of years in office is also taken into consideration. This will be measured on a scale from 1 to 8. A number will be assigned depending on the year they gave the speech. For example, if the message is given on the first year in office then a number one will be assigned. I am controlling for this because one can assume that depending on the year the president delivers
the speech he will have more freedom to convey a different type of message. On one hand, during the first term and if the president is seeking re-election the speech might not be as complex and controversial. On the other hand, if the president delivers the message at the end of his second term then he will have the freedom and opportunity to deliver a different message. I will use a lame duck variable to condense the terms and identify the speech in two scenarios: if it was given one the first term or the second presidential term.

In addition to the number of years in office, if it was an election year it also plays a pivotal part in the speech making. If the speech is delivered in a non-election year it might be slightly different than if delivered during a year where Congress or presidential elections are held. I will give a value of 1 if the speech was delivered during a year with no elections, a 2 if conveyed during presidential election year, and lastly a number 3 if given during a Congress election year. I am controlling for this variable because the president will try to earn votes either for himself or for his party and a message or speech could potentially move the public opinion polls. Therefore, speeches and the election year go hand in hand. In this variable, the baseline will be non-election year and Congress election and presidential election will be analyzed.

The level and type of education a president received will also be considered. This will be considered as two separate variables. The first one will be the level of education the president has. If the president has a Bachelor’s degree then he will receive a 0, if the president has an advance degree (MA, MBA, PhD, JD, etc.) then he will receive a 1. For the second variable, we will control for the type of education the president received. If the president attended a public university it will receive a 0 and if he attended a private school then he will receive a 1. These two variables are interesting because the complexity of the speeches might be tied to the level of education and the university where the president obtained that degree. One can hypothesize that if the president has an advance degree and comes from a private university he will deliver a speech with a higher degree of complexity.

Along with all the previous variables, I will also control for the audience that the speech was directed to. The president will prepare a different speech if it is directed to the nation than if
it is directed to Congress. In this case, I will code audience in three different ways. If directed to the nation then it will be coded with a 1, and my assumption is that the speech will be simpler to understand with less complex words and analogies. If directed to Congress then it will be coded with a 2 and the assumption is that it the complexity will be higher. Lastly, if the speech is intended for special group like the CIA, FBI, ATF, or a group of experts, then the complexity will be at its highest and it will be coded with a number 3. The speech to the American people will serve as the baseline for this variable.

The complexity scores along with the political ideology, public opinion, years in office, election year, level and type of education, and intended audience will try to show that some presidents will deliver a message with several things in mind. A president should not get in front of an audience and convey a speech without considering the complexity of the message and the previously mentioned variables. Hence, if the president delivers a message to the nation on his third year in office, just prior to the president election and with just an average score on the public opinion polls he might deliver a non-controversial message with low complexity.

4.3 FINDINGS

These different models demonstrate that the audience and approval rating hypotheses were statistically significant while the education hypothesis was not. The following table and graphs will describe the results and why it should be considered important for presidents and the rhetoric implemented in their speeches.
Speeches that are intended to Congress as a primary audience will have higher complexity levels than the ones intended to the American people. This provides a positive relationship between the dependent and the independent variable. Also, this is statistically significant at the p < .01 level. One can also say with a 95% confidence that for every unit increase there will be between .417 and 1.651 increase in overall speech complexity measured by the Flesh Kincaid Index. Moreover, the approval ratings score is also significant at the p<.01 level. This variable indicates that approval ratings play an important role in the president’s speeches. However, this is not a deterministic result. One might assess that speeches are the ones that influence public opinion. However, it could also be said that public opinion is the one that dictates how the president will handle the speech and address the situation. Graph 1 below demonstrates how as the approval ratings increases the speeches complexity measured with the Flesh Kincaid Index decreases.
On the other hand, the speeches that are intended to Congress as a primary audience will have higher complexity levels than the ones intended to the American people when measured with the SMOG index. This is statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level. One can also say with a 95% confidence that for every unit increase there will be between .379 and 1.448 increase in overall speech complexity measured by the SMOG Index. Moreover, the approval ratings score is also significant at the $p<.01$ level. The approval rating plays an important role in the president’s speeches. Once again this is not a deterministic result. One might assess that speeches are the ones that influence public opinion but it could also mean that public opinion is the one that dictates how the president will present his speech. Moreover, Graph 2 below shows how as the approval rating increases the speeches complexity measured with the SMOG Index tends to decrease.

Figure 19. Effect of Approval Rating on Readability, Flesh Kincaid
The results with the Gunning Readability Index as a dependent variable provided only one significant result. In this case, speeches that are intended to Congress as a primary audience will have higher complexity levels than the ones intended to the American people. Moreover, one can say with a 95% confidence that for every unit increase there will be between .414 and 3.029 increase in overall speech complexity measured by the Gunning Readability Index. In this case, however, the approval rating score is not significant.

With this information, one can infer that hypothesis number one is relevant because the readability scores will demonstrate a higher degree of complexity if the speech is intended to Congress than if it is directed to the American People. Intuitively, one could assume that if the president wants to influence Congress into passing a law, the speeches must be powerful and meaningful. In this case, readability plays an important factor in this equation because it shows that the president delivers a more complex speech. Also, hypothesis number two is significant because if the approval ratings are higher the president will have more freedom to convey the
message that he wants as opposed to the limited freedom with low approval ratings. In the third model, the approval rating variable was not statistically significant. However, the first two models demonstrate that readability and complexity have an impact on the speech making process.

However, I also found that one hypothesis is not significant. Hypothesis number three, which states that if the president attended private school and completed an advanced degree the speech will have a higher degree of complexity as opposed to a speech conveyed by a president with public education and/or only undergraduate degree came out insignificant. Therefore, the higher the level of education and the type of the education does not have a role in the complexity of the speech.

4.4 Conclusion

The war on drugs has impacted millions of people around the world and the United States and several Latin American countries are not the exception. Millions of dollars have been spent to fight this unsuccessful war. Presidents and their staff have elaborated important and transcendental speeches to increase public support for the war on drugs. In this study, I found that the complexity of such speeches is influenced by the audience and by the presidential approval rating. These two variables show that presidents do not simply go out and deliver messages without considering the audience and approval ratings. When presidents talk about the war on drugs and the message is intended for members of Congress, the complexity scores will be impacted by the fact that the message is not for the average citizen or voter. Furthermore, the approval rating variable plays an interesting role because one can argue that speeches are elaborated based on the current public opinion polls. However, one can also make the case for the opposite and argue that public opinion is influenced by the speech itself. These speeches are important because a powerful speech will always allow presidents to shift people’s opinion and mobilize masses. Readability allows the president to deliver a powerful and understandable
speech. This involves measuring sentence length, word length, and complexity. The careful selection of words allowed each president to convey a message. The results gathered in this study show that the intended audience and the approval ratings are significant when examining a speech with a readability formula. On the other hand, the level of education and the type of school where the president obtained that degree appear to be statistically insignificant. In conclusion, rhetoric and readability scores can go hand in hand when trying to persuade the audience to follow the lead of the president.
Chapter 5: Social Experiment: Presidential Persuasive Power

Presidential rhetoric in speeches can cause a shift in opinion, for or against drug criminalization or legalization. U.S. presidents have maintained a consistent prohibitionist rhetorical message in regards to the war on drugs. Powerful speeches allowed presidents to shift people’s opinion and mobilize masses. Following that thought, this work examines a social experiment that analyzes respondents’ behavior to a president’s speech. One can expect the results to corroborate the theory that the group exposed to a non-criminalization speech will present a more favorable opinion in regards to drug legalization. Moreover, the validity of the current prohibitionist regime, which endorses the war on drugs, was also analyzed in terms of support. This social experiment is based on a survey in which respondents were randomly assigned to three experimental conditions, pro-criminalization, non-criminalization (focused on treatment/recovery), and a non-related speech. These three will appear in the form of presidential speeches.

5.1 Theory and Hypotheses

United States’ presidents have maintained a fairly consistent prohibitionist message in regards to the war on drugs and the people that consumes such substances. Speeches have conveyed powerful messages that have long allowed the government to maintain the prohibitionist position alive. The issue of drug legalization is not new. However, there seems to be a shift in policy and ideologies—stemming from a broader focus on treatment, recovery, and debates over the health issues related to marijuana—that appear to be moving the public away from the criminalization mindset.

My experiment consisted of a first wave where respondents are given a questionnaire without a sample presidential speech to examine and a second wave that includes the same questionnaire preceded by one of three presidential speeches. One speech contains a pro-legalization message that will encourage the voters to approve the legalization of marijuana. The
second speech contains a non-criminalization message that focuses on addiction treatment and recovery. The third speech is a global warming speech that will be applied for the control group. My dependent variable consists of people’s opinions on drug criminalization/legalization issues across several different survey questions.

I generally expect that a speech and the rhetoric framework used to persuade listeners will have an impact on people’s decisions. I expect to see different outcomes depending on the speech that the group was exposed to. A group of approximately 200 college students were subject to this two-wave (pre- and post-test) experiment (each wave applied approximately two weeks apart). The groups (taking the full classroom and splitting it into three subgroups) are exposed to the same questionnaire in both waves with the different speeches applied during the second wave (post-test).

The research question investigates if the rhetoric implemented in presidential speeches influence people’s second wave opinion on drug legalization. The hypotheses for this section of the thesis consists of the following:

**H1**: The group of people exposed to the non-criminalization speech will be more likely to have higher levels of support and present a more favorable opinion in regards to marijuana legalization, whether medicinal, recreational or decriminalization.

**H2**: The group of people exposed to the non-criminalization speech will be more likely to have higher levels of disapproval and present a negative opinion in regards to marijuana legalization.

### 5.2 Research Design

To test these hypotheses, I have designed a two-wave survey experiment. The survey respondents were randomly assigned to three experimental conditions: pro-criminalization, anti-criminalization, and a control speech, which appear in the form of presidential speeches applied during the second wave. Specifically, participants read a short presidential speech addressing the
drug legalization issue. These speeches were taken from the two different sides of the spectrum. One is from Richard Nixon, who had a pro-criminalization approach, harsh rhetoric, and hardly ever mentioned health as a priority. The second speech was selected from the Obama administration. This speech took a more liberal tone moving away from criminalization. The third speech simply mentioned global warming, a non-related issue, for a control group. All these speeches had names and years removed in order to avoid bias. After their exposure to the presidential speech, participants were asked about their attitudes towards legalization. The research includes a survey with several questions, in which the majority is composed of multiple-choice questions.

I administered the surveys to the participants, all of whom were adults who participated voluntarily. The sample size target included undergraduate students of the University of Texas at El Paso. The rationale is that this study examines public opinion and students are considered as an effective and convenient sample of the general population, especially given the limited resources that the researchers have for this project. The causal explanation for this research question is that a speech and the rhetoric utilized in it will have an impact on people’s decisions. The University of Texas at El Paso Internal Review Board allowed research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior.3

The experiment included several questions. In all three different test groups I asked whether the respondents believe the war on drugs, which was declared in the 1960s, has been

3 University of Texas at El Paso IRB determined this project was EXEMPT according to federal regulation 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2), IRB Reference Number: 529772-1, and full approval was granted to conduct the two-wave survey experiment.
successful or unsuccessful. The second question asked if possession of small amounts of marijuana should be treated as a criminal offense. This was included to measure if people a speech pro-criminalization speech could move people to believe that possession of marijuana should be punished with prison even with the current overpopulated prison system The next set of questions ask whether the respondent agrees with the change of the current prohibitionist regime or would rather see a change. This is actually divided into three different questions as they ask for the different tiers of legalization. The three tiers are decriminalization, medicinal, and recreational marijuana. In terms of violence, a question was asked to see if the respondents believe the violence would increase or stay the same in the United States. Another important question was if people believed the U.S. government anti-drug budget should focus mainly on criminalization, prevention, treatment of addictions, or if they do not know. Lastly, “recreational” raises the question of whether people believe the enrolment in voluntary treatment programs would increase, decrease, or stay the same after the legalization of marijuana. All the potential answers to the questions in the survey were done on a 1-to-5 scale. One can expect that the individuals exposed to pro-criminalization speech will be more lenient to agree with the current prohibitionist regime and provide some answers in a more conservative manner. On the other hand, the respondents who were part of the non-criminalization speeches might agree with a change in regime and provide opposite answers to the ones in the pro-criminalization group. Some additional variables included were age, race/ethnicity, and party identification, ideology, and gender.

5.3 Findings and Discussion

The experiment produced some interesting figures and findings. The experiment was divided into six total groups. Pre-test groups A and B (first wave), Post-Test groups A and B
(second wave), and Control groups Pre-test C (first wave) and Post-Test C (second wave). During the pre-test, 204 students were surveyed with no speech included. This was done in order to obtain some of their thoughts and beliefs prior to the speeches. These 204 students were randomly divided into three different groups of 68 members each. During the second round of the experiment, the post-test, 68 were exposed to the pro-criminalization message, 68 to the non-criminalization one, and the control group had 68 respondents for a total of 204 individuals.

Group A was exposed to a speech by Richard Nixon, which contained a clear pro-criminalization message. In this message, Nixon explained that the number of Americans consuming drugs has increased and he recommended severe new penalties for both heroin traffickers and those engaged in illegal distribution of other illicit drugs. His message was delivered in order to create a rally ‘round-the-flag’ effect for the war on drugs.

Group A had some interesting results. When people were asked whether they believed the war on drugs had been successful or unsuccessful in the pre-test, 19 respondents believed it had been neither successful nor unsuccessful and 23 sided with unsuccessful. However, after being exposed to Nixon’s speech the results shifted and the president obtained the desired approval. People who were neutral or thought of it as an unsuccessful battle answered that it had been successful. Thus, the post-test shows that 27 individuals answered ‘successful’, decreasing the ‘unsuccessful’ option from 23 to 12. The concept of the rally ‘round-the-flag’ effect is best described as “certain intense international events generate a ‘rally round the flag’ effect which tends to give a boost to the President’s popularity rating” (Mueller 1970, 21). Furthermore, this concept illustrates the idea of the rally ‘round-the-flag’, as the speech allowed changing the overall perception of the war and it also created support by symbolic patriotism.
Figure 21. Pre-Test A – Do you think the war on drugs has been successful or unsuccessful?

Figure 22. Post-Test A – Do you think the war on drugs has been successful or unsuccessful?
The second question is in regards to drug possession and if it should be treated as a criminal offense. In this regards, the pre-test suggested that people were more inclined to agree with the possession as a criminal offense. Once they were exposed to the speech, people were more inclined to disagree with this policy. Moreover, people who chose ‘agree’ or ‘neither agree nor disagree’ decided to elect ‘disagree’ in the post-test.

![Figure 23. Pre-Test A – Should possession be treated as a criminal offense?](image-url)
People were also asked if they agree or disagree with the decriminalization of marijuana. Decriminalization of marijuana would maintain that distribution is illegal, but it will end the arrest of consumers for non-violent crimes and thus reduce mass incarceration. In this regards, people did not agree with Nixon and the majority agreed with the decriminalization of marijuana. The major shift from the pre to the post-test occurred when people moved from the ‘agree’ option to ‘strongly agree’. This shows that even though people agreed with the war and they support their nation, they do not agree with the current laws and prohibitions.
Figure 25. Pre-Test A - Do you agree or disagree with the decriminalization of marijuana?

Figure 26. Post-Test A – Do you agree or disagree with the decriminalization of marijuana?
Then I questioned if people agreed with the legalization of medicinal marijuana. This tested if people agreed with the overall perception of the war but disagreed with the prohibitionist measures. In this regard, some people in the middle, which did not agree nor disagree, moved slightly to the disagree option. However, the vast majority of the respondents agree that the government should legalize medicinal marijuana in the United States.

Figure 27. Pre-Test A – Do you agree with the legalization of medicinal marijuana?
The third question in regards to legalization asks how strongly people agree with the legalization of recreational marijuana. Recreational marijuana allows for the full production, distribution, and consumption of marijuana for adults. In this matter, people sided in a very similar way to the medicinal marijuana question. After being exposed to the Nixon speech people moved from disagree to strongly agree and agree. Once again this showed that the speech increased support for the war but not for the policies.
Figure 29. Pre-Test A – Do you agree with the legalization of recreational marijuana?

Figure 30. Post-Test A – Do you agree with the legalization of recreational marijuana?
I also asked if the government legalized marijuana, if violence would increase in the United States to test if people were actually afraid and in need of a war. In this question some people that believed that violence would decrease move slightly to increase. However, the majority of the people believe that violence would stay about the same.

![Bar Chart]

**Figure 31.** Pre-Test A – Do you think the violence in the USA would increase?
Lastly, people were asked where they think the anti-drug budget should focus on. People were given four options: criminalization, prevention, treatment of addictions, or a simple I do not know. Even though Nixon and his government focused on criminalization, people think more money should go for prevention and treatment of addiction. After the exposure to the speech, people shifted from criminalization to prevention.
Figure 33. Pre-Test A – U.S. Government anti-drug budget should focus mainly on:

Figure 34. Post-Test A – U.S. Government anti-drug budget should focus mainly on:
In this group, the pro-criminalization speech helped the president to change the overall perception of the war on drugs. When the group was asked about the war on drugs and they read how better and improved drug law enforcement has caused a critical heroin shortage throughout the nation they feel that the war has been successfully working. Therefore, people will stand behind their president and the core values of the nation, thereby creating a rally ‘round-the-flag’ effect.

However, in regards to policy it had a reverse effect. People did not agree with the current prohibitionist regime and they agreed that the government should decriminalize or legalize medicinal and recreational marijuana. This could be attributed to the demographics of the respondents. In this group out of the 68 individuals, 33 identified as democrats, 40 identified themselves as independents, 56 were from Hispanic origin, and the vast majority was in the 18 to 21 years old group. The fact that people react in a different way to the policy questions could be credited to a party alignment. The 33 Democrats and some of the independents could have moved the balance against the president as a defensive reaction. This reaction could have been triggered by the core values of the party and certain words and phrases included in the speech.

Group B was exposed to a different speech, one that basically stands at the other side of the spectrum. This group read a speech by President Barack Obama in which he addresses the drug on wars as a health issue. President Obama mentions that people in the United States overcome their struggles with addiction on a daily basis. They do not do it by themselves. They do it with personal determination and the support of family, friends, and even health professionals. Moreover, this speech is not as harsh or pro-criminalization centered as Nixon’s. Therefore, one could expect a different reaction in this scenario.

In this group, people were asked the same questions. In regards to their opinion on the war on drugs, people who believed that it had been very unsuccessful or successful moved slightly towards somewhat successful and to neither successful nor unsuccessful. Obama did not advocate an ending to the war on drugs or criticized this policy. This was a speech during the National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month, where he paid special tribute to the
people who guide people in recovery through treatment. Hence, it was more of a health related discourse. It is, nevertheless, important to discuss that people might choose to believe that the war is successful for the same reason as in the previous group, symbolic patriotism.

Figure 35. Pre-Test B – Do you think that the war on drugs has been successful or unsuccessful?
Figure 36. Post-Test B – Do you think that the war on drugs has been successful or unsuccessful?

For the second question, when people were asked if they believed if possession should be treated as a criminal offense, the responses showed that people who disagreed or were in the neither agree nor disagree section moved to the strongly agree and agree portion. One could imagine that the speech could make people to believe that possession should not be treated as a criminal offense, but in this case the shift was in favor of criminalization.
Figure 37. Pre-Test B – Should possession be treated as a criminal offense?

Figure 38. Post-Test B - Should possession be treated as a criminal offense?
The third question in which people are asked about decriminalization of marijuana did not show a major change in opinions after being exposed to the speech. Essentially, people who agreed with decriminalization shifted and they now strongly agree with this potential policy implementation. In this case, Obama’s speech does give his speech an emotional touch and mentions that Americans should extend a helping hand to those in need in order to help the nation move towards a brighter future. Hence, that patriotic duty incorporated in the speech might have given an extra push to these respondents to strongly agree in decriminalization of drugs.

Figure 39. Pre-Test B – Do you agree or disagree with the decriminalization of marijuana?
Figure 40. Post-Test B – Do you agree or disagree with the decriminalization of marijuana?

The fourth question deals with legalization, in this case for medicinal purposes. The majority of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this kind of legalization. After being exposed to the speech, there was a slight change as the people who strongly disagreed with this type of legalization moved to neither agree nor disagree and to disagree. Once again, the shift was not major but the results could have been part of the patriotic emotion that the speech conveyed.
Figure 41. Pre-Test B – Do you agree with the legalization of medicinal marijuana?

Figure 42. Post-Test B – Do you agree with the legalization of medicinal marijuana?
The next questioned addressed the most radical type of legalization, the one that allows for recreational consumption of marijuana. In this question people who did not agree nor disagree with legalization shifted toward the agree option. It is important to mention that even though the name of the president was not included and the speech speaks about health and recovery, the fact that the majority of the respondents identify with the Democratic Party could have had an impact.

Figure 43. Pre-Test B – Do you agree with the legalization of recreational marijuana?
Figure 44. Post-Test B – Do you agree with the legalization of recreational marijuana?

The question in regards to US violence showed some movement. People who thought that violence would decrease moved to the middle, where people believe violence in the US would stay about the same.
Figure 45. Pre-Test B – Do you think the violence in the USA would increase?

Figure 46. Post-Test B – Do you think the violence in the USA would increase?
The question in regards to the US anti-drug budget produced an interesting finding. During the pre-test people highly believed in prevention as the number one optioned followed by treatment of addiction as the areas where the budget should focus on. After the group was exposed to a speech that speaks about addiction, treatment, and how Americans must work together for effective services that diminish substance abuse and encourage healthy living one could expect the group to give an emotional response. However, the criminalization optioned remained the same, only a handful of people shifted from treatment of addiction to prevention. Prevention remained as the number one option and treatment came in as the second one.

Figure 47. Pre-Test B – U.S. Government anti-drug budget should focus mainly on:
Even though Obama has allowed the states to decide whether they want to legalize or not he has never delivered a speech where he pushes for a legalization of marijuana. Therefore, it is hard to measure if a speech of that nature would actually have an impact that can cause a radical shift in opinions. Another important thing to mention is the demographics of this group as the overwhelming majority of the people where democrats, moderate in ideology, female, of Hispanic origin, and mainly young people.

The third group was exposed to a global warming speech, an unrelated topic to test the respondents. There was plenty of consistency between both tests with a few anomalies perhaps related to some external factors (including the occurrence of the midterm elections between the first and second wave) that could have interfered with the respondents’ mindset if exposed to candidate rhetoric related to the drug war. Outside of Texas, the states of Oregon, Alaska, and the District of Columbia voted to legalize recreational marijuana and that might have affected the views of some respondents. Such possible limitations notwithstanding, the differences found
between our two main test groups (and in comparison to the control overall) indicate that presidential rhetoric on drug issues can indeed be persuasive in specific ways, some more potent—i.e., the rally effect for criminalization rhetoric—while others more subdued and incremental—particularly pertaining to rhetoric focused on treatment/recovery rather than criminalization.

5.4 Conclusion

Presidents must pay attention to their rhetoric in order to shift opinions and attitudes. Moreover, some presidents and their administration “responded to the increasing intensity of the drug problem with heightened rhetoric and proposals for additional funding” (Kleiman and Saiger 1990, 528). Moreover, when it comes to rhetoric, it is easier to get people to approve a war than to oppose it. It seems that symbolic patriotism and the rally ‘round-the-flag’ effect also play an important role in maintaining support for the war on drugs and it is hard to get people to disapprove of it. Even though people agree with the war they disagree with policies and that could be attributed to partisanship and politics. The party affiliation or sympathy could provoke a defensive reaction to certain policies especially one like the war on drugs.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

The United States, the main sponsor of the war on drugs, has engaged in different battles. In the 1930s the topic that criminalized in the U.S. was alcohol, now marijuana and other drugs. Presidents have utilized different tools at in order to maintain support from Congress and the American people. In this thesis, I questioned if the rhetorical messages delivered by the different presidents had an effect on people’s opinion and policy implementation. This thesis on presidential rhetoric and the effects on the drug war provided some interesting results. Overall, I find that presidents are able to rally the public behind a call to support the war on drugs, but that rhetorical overtures beyond that do not seem to shift public opinion on policy as much as one might think. Instead, I find over time trends where presidents shifted their rhetoric more towards sweeping symbolic speeches aimed at the general public while shifting away from policy-oriented speeches for Congress. This shift occurred primarily during the Reagan administration and the “Just Say No” campaign, with Reagan’s successors following suit. Such shift in rhetoric helps explain why, in more recent years, presidential rhetoric towards drugs has moved away from criminalization (in line with public opinion shifts and state-level changes in policy) while national-level policy has become more institutionalized (and militarized) on the whole. Thus, this thesis helps to explain how and why presidents are able to generate political capital with their rhetoric even as a gap between language and actual policy continues, which future studies can further explicate.

The chapter on rhetoric, metaphors and frames, reviewed presidential speeches from 1969 to 2013. This section gathered the most repeated words, metaphors, phrases on the war on drugs and some of the drug policy trends. The results were that the presidential rhetoric remained fairly steady. The outcome was that, indeed, rhetoric did not shift significantly. Collectively, all eight presidents delivered their messages to Congress and the people and placed special emphasis on words like drug, program, crime, law, abuse, problem, etc. Some messages were intended to increase support for the war and the policy. However, even with that steadiness in
rhetoric some policies changed. After many years of prohibition, President Obama allowed states to decide and a handful are leaving behind prohibition policies and allowing a market approach. Under Obama’s administration four states and the nation’s capital decided to break the traditional model. Colorado, Washington, Oregon, Alaska, and D.C. decided to legalize recreational marijuana.

The chapter on readability and rhetoric provided a different perspective. This chapter tried to capture some of the different components of the speech. From the intended audience, the terms in office, type of election year, type and level of education, common space scores, and approval rating were included to test the readability and complexity of the presidential speeches. In this chapter three hypotheses were tested and two were statistically significant. The first one tested if the intended audience is a specialized group, then the complexity scores will demonstrate a higher degree of complexity than if the speech is intended to the American people or Congress. The second one checked to see if the approval ratings are higher the president will have more freedom to convey the message that he wants and the complexity scores will demonstrate a higher degree of complexity. The third one was on level and type of education and tested if the president attended private school and completed an advanced degree the speech will have a higher degree of complexity as opposed to a speech conveyed by a president with public education and/or only an undergraduate degree. The first hypothesis showed that if the president speaks to Congress the readability level will be higher. Therefore, the words utilized will be more complex. Only the third hypothesis was statistically insignificant; the first two proved that the complexity of speeches is influenced by the audience and by the presidential approval rating. These results are an attempt to demonstrate that presidents and their staff will consider the audience and the approval ratings before drafting an important speech. When a president speaks to Congress the complexity scores will be higher because of the fact that the message is not intended for the average American citizen. Moreover, the approval rating variable is rather interesting because one can argue that it is similar to the chicken and the egg. Some can say that speeches are elaborated based on the current approval ratings and based on that they have more
freedom to elaborate the message. However, one can also make the case for the opposite and argue that the approval rate and public opinion are influenced by the speech itself. The results gathered in this section show that the intended audience and the approval ratings are significant when examining a speech with a readability formula.

Chapter 5, on the presidential persuasive power, which had a social experiment, provided interesting results. Typically, when a president decides to deliver a speech one of the goals is to obtain support for their ideas and policies. In this case, I tested if there was a change in people’s opinions and perceptions in regards to the war on drugs and the policies. As people were asked to answer a pre-test survey and a post-test survey with a presidential speech one could have expected to see that the group of people exposed to the non-criminalization speech will be more likely to have higher levels of support and present a more favorable opinion in regards to marijuana legalization, whether medicinal, recreational or decriminalization. The second group of people exposed to the anti-legalization speech will be more likely to have higher levels of disapproval and present a negative opinion in regards to marijuana legalization. Lastly, the control group would demonstrate how fickle the respondents are. The conclusion to this experiment and the three groups demonstrated that rhetoric is as complex as the person delivering the speech and the public receiving it. Three main conclusions outshine the rest: First of all, in rhetoric it is easier to get people to approve a war such as the war on drugs mainly through symbolic patriotism and the rally ‘round-the-flag’ effect. Second, even though people agree with the war they could also disagree with policies and that could be attributed to their political party of choice and party values. The party affiliation or sympathy could provoke a defensive reaction to certain policies especially one like the war on drugs. The third conclusion, obtained through the control group, points out some anomalies that could be related to some outside factors that could have interfered with the responses given by the students surveyed.

Overall, this thesis tied three different chapters together to provide a different perspective. The war on drugs has been analyzed and examined in many different ways. Republicans and Democrats have enforced the prohibition of drugs for decades and only now is
there a visible change with a partial legalization that a handful of states decided to implement. This thesis decided to look at this issue from a different angle: rhetoric. The words, the sentences, the paragraphs, the speeches that presidents and their staff put together to deliver to the nation and maintain this robust system. This thesis shows that there is some evidence that Edwards (2003) was right, presidents do speak on deaf ears from time to time. It also shows that speeches could have an impact if they are prepared for the right crowd with the right words, especially for a rally cry against the dangers of drug proliferation. Also, as Neustadt (1990) mentioned that presidents cannot simply dictate orders and expect change to happen, they have to persuade and do much more in order to see a tangible change. And as Neustadt concludes, “powers are no guarantee of power” (1990) but rhetoric has proven to be one of the most powerful weapons those presidents utilize in order to win this war.

As per the gap between rhetoric and policy, while presidential language has allowed for the notion of a “war on drugs” to remain a potent rhetorical tool over forty years, policy changes over the last several decades have institutionalized and militarized the war in a manner inconsistent with changes in public opinion—particularly in the last couple of decades as support for criminalization has given way to public (and presidential) overtures for a softer, more non-criminal approach. In light of these trends, can it be that rhetoric on the war on drugs has served as a smoke screen? Has the country experienced historical amnesia in light of the macro policy changes that have been embedded even as the public mood has shifted at the state and local level in key areas around the country? What else can we better understand about how the public feels about drug policy, particularly since it has been historicized and, to a large extent, normalized to the point that the public has in fact become over sensitized to the importance and implications tied to national drug policy changes? And what about other key contextual changes that have occurred over time alongside the rhetorical shifts? Namely, as I briefly addressed in chapter two, it is also important for more works to consider the impact and implications of how shifts in murder rates, trends in racism, etc. have affected national policy related to drugs and, more specifically, how minority groups and those in poverty have been impacted by the most hardline
policies leading to racial injustices and disparities. Another consideration would be to examine key executive branch actors beyond the president, in particular by examining the numerous drug czars that presidents have appointed and they used such surrogates to develop and enforce their more hardline drug policies even as presidential rhetoric began to soften over time. Future studies would do well to further bridge these rhetoric-policy gaps, as well as other key contextual driving influences that have shaped the drug war over time.

As far as other avenues for future research, scholars can also take a more comparative approach to consider the rhetoric-policy gap for U.S. war on drugs alongside that of México and other Latin American countries. Indeed, while I have focused on the drug issue mostly from the domestic domain, a broader, more foreign-policy driven outlook could yield many additional interesting insights, including, for example, how U.S. presidential rhetoric compares to Mexican presidential language on the war on drugs over time.
References


Vita

Born in El Paso, TX and raised in Ciudad Juárez, México, Manuel Antonio Gutierrez began his education at the University of Texas at El Paso in 2008. He completed his B.A. in Political Science with a minor in Chicano Studies four years later and then enrolled in the Master’s program. While attending school, Manuel worked as a sales associate at a retail store and served as a teaching assistant in the Political Science department. He also worked for a summer as a campaign consultant for a mayoral race and a House of Representative race in Quintana Roo, México. Furthermore, Manuel presented his research project “Presidential Rhetoric: From the War on Drugs to the Battle over Legalization” at the First International Congress of the Mexican Association of Political Science (AMECIP) in Guanajuato, México, at the 4th annual Iowa Association of Political Scientists Conference (IAPS), in Pella, Iowa and at the Western Social Science Association (WSSA) Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He also presented the research paper “Voting, Clientelism, and Rain: A Quantitative Analysis of Voter Turnout in México” at the Western Social Science Association (WSSA) Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico with his colleague Yahve Gallegos.

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