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Preface:

When presidents attempt to influence a nation, their most direct mode of persuasion is rhetoric. Often, the positions they choose to champion are those in which the public has, and will continue to possess, limited knowledge. As will be shown, behavioral psychologists believe that this inadequate understanding leads to a greater dependence on what are called “peripheral cues”, i.e., speakers’ influences not directly related to the substance of their argument or the strength of its logic. If presidents seek and attain public support, understanding and monitoring their use of means outside the realm of Aristotle’s *logos* becomes exceedingly important. This study focuses on President George W. Bush’s recent attempt to persuade the nation on a topic where he was forced to lead alone – Social Security Reform (Feldman, “Bush”). With a basic understanding of the President’s proposal, this study will introduce how Plato’s thoughts on rhetoric, and some of the most recent political psychology research can help to analyze the President’s use of peripheral persuasion. Having provided such a background, Chapter 1 will introduce original research on two of President Bush’s peripheral techniques, both efforts to successfully package his Social Security Reform proposal. Chapter 2 will track the progress of rhetorical trends in the President’s reform campaign stump speech during 2005, concluding that he shifted his rhetoric toward manipulation and away from education. Chapter 3 will analyze the truth of the President’s words, delving into some of the manipulative assertions referenced in Chapter 2, and concluding that the President distorted certain facts to persuade his audience.

These three chapters provide a holistic analysis of the President’s rhetorical campaign to promote his Social Security proposal to the public. They reveal a politician who not only believes linguistic packaging, misleading rhetoric, and distortions of reality will buttress his efforts to enact his chosen reform, but also one willing to take such steps. Hopefully, the methods utilized throughout this analysis will pave the way for similar studies of other
campaigns and politicians in the future. Such an analysis attempts to answer the question “to what extent do our leaders attempt to persuade us with reason or rhetoric?” In other words, how much of their effort is directed toward education, and how much is aimed at manipulation? In a democracy, one would hope that reason and education would prevail over rhetoric and manipulation. However, this study finds that, at the very least, our current president maneuvered his Social Security Reform language in favor of manipulation, at the expense of logic.

Chapter 1: Packaged Rhetoric – Convincing Us Without Logic

I. An Analytical Framework:

II. The Rhetoric of Accounts:
   a) Methodology – Statistical Analysis of Proposal Titles
   b) The “Private” vs. “Personal” Debate
   c) Results for “Private” vs. “Personal”
   d) Results for the Many Rhetorical Options of “Personal”
   e) Methodology – The Impact of Account Rhetoric
   f) Results of the Rhetoric Experiment

III. Bipartisan Rhetoric:
   a) Methodology
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   c) Why Bipartisan Rhetoric
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IV. Conclusion: Polling and Intentions

I. An Analytical Framework:

President George W. Bush began and perhaps ended his strongest effort to reform Social Security during 2005. His proposal, which evolved over time, would provide the ability for working citizens to voluntarily invest a portion of their Social Security contributions into a limited set of stocks and bonds. In addition, Social Security benefits, which currently grow at the rate of prices, would grow disproportionately less for those of higher means.
After strongly promoting his proposal at the February 3rd State of the Union Address (Bush, “State”), the President engaged in a nationwide “60 Stops in 60 Days” campaign tour from March 3rd to May 1st (Strengthening Social Security). This included more than 30 presidential speeches at town halls and lecture halls, in addition to the 100 or more nationwide visits by his administrative staff (“March 3 – May 1”). Moreover, his efforts included movement on Capitol Hill, likely resulting in the introduction of several bills each including at least part of his proposal (Naylor). In fact, his presidential advocacy for the proposal began in full with his creation of the President’s Commission to Strengthen Social Security in 2001. While he continues to support his proposal, the media reports that the policy discussion has largely ended. The Washington Post concisely calls it a proposal “tried and failed” (“A Weakened President”).

This chapter will analyze two peripheral techniques used during the 2005 campaign. First, we show how the President evolved his use of “personal” to describe the accounts proposal. Second, the chapter explores the President’s partisan use of bipartisan language. We find that both linguistic appeals were designed for positive public influence.

1. **Account Rhetoric - Pathos**
   - Conservative politicians’ evasion of “privatization” language is shown to have occurred only recently, after decades of pro-privatization oratory.
   - Though the President attempted to steer his audience away from privatization rhetoric, the media did not follow.
   - The terminology the President uses for his Social Security proposal proceeds from “personal accounts”, to “personal savings accounts”, to “voluntary personal savings accounts” in a use-it-and-leave-it approach.
   - The trend appears to follow a unidirectional procession toward rhetorical trustworthiness.
   - An original survey experiment shows the rhetoric to be progressively effective.

2. **Bipartisan Rhetoric - Ethos**
   - The President employs bipartisan rhetoric, clearly avoiding the use of “Republican(s)” in isolation during his speeches.
   - He presents particular Democrats in name and in person while not doing so for Republicans.
   - This rhetorical strategy appears to be solely that; the establishment of the President’s 2001 Commission to Strengthen Social Security portrays a less bipartisan president in action.
   - Psychological studies suggest that this rhetorical method could prove effective.
I. An Analytical Framework:

Although many findings in this chapter are shown in tandem with specific psychological theories in order to estimate their significance, there are two overarching linguistic psychology theories that can guide the analysis. The first comes from the original student of rhetoric: Aristotle.

In *The Art of Rhetoric* Aristotle stipulates three types of rhetoric: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. *Ethos* exemplifies “the character the speaker [wishes] to present” (Billig, 222). It describes the audience’s perception of the speaker. *Ethos* will become especially important when discussing the President Bush’s use of bipartisan rhetoric, which this chapter hypothesizes to be an attempt to strengthen his *ethos*. In other words, the President used bipartisan rhetoric to legitimate himself as an objective proponent of what need to be done to reform Social Security. *Pathos* represents “the mood or tone of [one’s] speech” (222). It denotes the emotions or beliefs invoked or inspired within the audience by a speaker’s language or style. *Pathos* will become relevant as the chapter explores the importance of the President’s specific terminology when referring to his proposed accounts. The last of the three, *logos*, is actually not important for this chapter. *Logos* is “the argument [of] the speaker” (222). Whether the President’s argument is logical is of the most importance to this analysis, but is not discussed until Chapter 3, which examines the President’s honesty. Whether the President’s argument was logical is not critical for understanding how he used rhetoric to motivate support for his proposal.

The importance of *ethos* and *pathos* over *logos* for understanding the influence of President Bush’s rhetoric on Social Security reform becomes clearer when we consider a second source for an analytical framework. This second source comes from modern academics in the field of political, behavioral, and linguistic psychology. Two dual-processing theories are
relevant: the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), and the Multiple Motive Heuristic Systematic Model (HSM) by Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagly (1989). Both argue that humans use one of two “routes” when processing information (Garst and Bodenhausen, 1119). The “central route” (ELM) or “systematic processing” (HSM) path is employed when a person is specifically devoting attention to incoming data. Such information is processed, or considered, with greater care. The second “peripheral route” (ELM) or “heuristic processing” (HSM) course handles everything else. This pathway services information when a recipient lacks “motivation, ability, or both,” (1121) relying on ethos cues like admiration or pathos cues like melodic language.

It is the research on this second route that this chapter utilizes in its analysis. This decision was made with due consideration. As mentioned earlier, presidents often campaign on subjects that the public does not understand. Moreover, citizens are frequently too apathetic, or simply unable to investigate public policy issues in detail. While there are certainly political matters that are so important that they rise to the center of attention and are relatively uncomplicated (Kingdon), Social Security in 2005 was not one of them. The public, according to studies, sees Social Security with “ignorance, misinformation, fearfulness, and distrust” (Heclo).¹

Because of the public’s lack of Social Security comprehension, it seems appropriate to conclude a great percentage of the topic’s information will proceed through the peripheral route. It is likely for this reason that the media and both sides of the debate have paid so much attention to rhetorical differences, as this chapter will demonstrate. If the President does send peripheral cues, they will likely have greater impact on public opinion than facts and logic, which in turn could circuitously affect a national policy that supports more than 90% of Americans aged 65

¹ For more polls that show the public’s lack of knowledge see http://www.pollingreport.com.
and over. It is essential to be aware of the persuasive impact of such influence, especially when it could be used by a president to convince a democratic society without reason or logic. This chapter will use discursive psychology, which analyzes a speaker’s thinking by examining their rhetoric (Billig, 228), to evaluate what it posits to be Bush’s use of two peripheral cues during the President’s 2005 Social Security proposal campaign.

II. The Rhetoric of Accounts:

This section focuses on the President’s chosen rhetorical terminology for the accounts in his Social Security proposal. The President made a concerted effort to call his accounts “personal accounts,” while his opposition attributed great significance to calling them “private accounts.”

The importance of single words or phrases in politics is often overlooked by analysts and the media. However, research has shown them to carry great influence. Political debate is a frequent kind of discussion. Political arguments “tend to be well scripted” (Mutz, Sniderman, and Brody, 4) because people have heard them before. As a result, specific words or phrases that recurrently surface may connote more meaning than they would otherwise. Like the Pavlovian dog, people can be “conditioned to associate verbal cues with past direct and vicarious experiences” (Graber, 185). These “condensation symbols” (185) allow politicians to convey a disproportionately large amount of meaning in a single word or phrase, an especially useful tool in today’s sound bite age. Of course, the opposition can do the same, perhaps neutralizing (Kinder, 368) any influence. Pathos persuasion often comes via “condensation symbols” in the form of key terms. This is a peripheral technique used by both sides, and is considered widely as something that should be monitored like any other political argument, advertisement, or attempt to sway the public (Schram). As will be shown, it is because of condensation symbols’ potency that both sides spend so much money polling, conducting focus groups, and communicating
findings to allies.

This section will first delineate its strategy to isolate and analyze the terminology the President presented during 2005, as well as the media context he did so in. Following the methodological explanation, a history of the “personal” versus “private” debate will precede the analysis of data collected.

II. a) Methodology – Statistical Analysis of Proposal Titles

In order to conduct a quantitative analysis of President Bush’s rhetoric concerning Social Security over a period of time, a ‘consistent’ set of data was necessary. Here, consistent means that the data was generated from similar circumstances even though at different times. To establish such a steady series, this chapter made use of the President’s “Conversations” across the country during 2005. The year of 2005 was chosen because it was the year that the President launched his major Social Security campaign, beginning at the State of the Union address in early February and continuing through July.

President Bush’s many speeches are available on the U.S. Government Printing Office’s website. On this site, the 2005 Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents was searched for “Social Security.” Searching through approximately 150 results, it becomes clear that a consistent form of speech delivered by the President was titled either “Remarks on Strengthening Social Security in…” or “Remarks in a Discussion on Strengthening Social Security in…” Discussions such as these were titled based on location or specific business-type constituencies, though it may well be that only supporters in those locations and constituencies were invited (Trejos). In an attempt to establish a more generic audience, this chapter eliminates those discussions given to the latter, such as to the National Association of Realtors, the Independent

2 <http://www.gpoaccess.gov>.
Insurance Agents and Brokers of America, and other similar groups. In order to mitigate for variance, this chapter analyzes only those speeches given in such “Remarks in a Discussion” and not those from press conferences or other venues. Lastly, it was noted that 28 of the 32 speeches remaining included audience interaction. The four that did not included more than twice the number of words from most of the 28 speeches, and certainly were much larger than all of the 28. Though this chapter expects that the patterns to be discussed here would likely be found in many or most of the President’s speeches, the discrete set of 28 supplies a fairly consistent database to test. Thus, it is these 28 that will be used for the remainder of the chapter.

The 28 speeches raise the issue of the diversity of community dialogue. Because the President involved visitors and audience members in his discussions, each event included unique contextual responses. However, the President’s repetitive and habitual framework with diverse audiences lends itself well to this study. In each of the 28 speeches, the President thanks his invited guests, discusses current events (Iraq, Afghanistan, Tax Cuts, etc…), presents his Social Security “stump speech”, introduces an invitee to speak, and then proceeds into a dialogue with the audience. This chapter will analyze only the “stump speeches”. By isolating only the Social Security monologue that the President presents, trends in his language emerge with greater clarity. The standardization of his speeches allows for a quantitative analysis of his Social Security rhetorical campaign. Reading these speeches, one finds that the President speaks from

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3 Location can also be thought of as a type of constituency.
4 Texts taken from those Bush speeches found in the references section between February 3rd and July 22nd, 2005.
5 The American Cultural Center Resource Service defines a stump speech as “The ‘standard’ speech of a candidate for office – the one he or she is most likely to use, perhaps with slight variation, on normal occasions.”
6 There are several stumps that necessitated the elimination of a single instance of audience participation from the text data. These include “Awww”, “You’re on a roll”, and “Thank you, Mr. President” among them, each from a different event.
a similar outline each time.

The software program TextStat, available at multiple Internet sites like [www.freeware-guide.com](http://www.freeware-guide.com), allows searching for the total number of words in each stump, the number of specific chosen words, and the search for two words within a linguistic distance from one another. These tools aided in most of this chapter’s findings.

The first study investigated the various terms the President employed in discussing his proposed “accounts.” To accomplish a comprehensive analysis, the entire data set was searched for the words “account” and “accounts.” The words preceding “account(s)” were then categorized. Because this chapter sought to analyze what terms the President used for these accounts, pronouns such as “your”, “his”, and “her”, and irrelevant terms like “health care” or “Thrift Savings” were eliminated from this set of data. Figure 1 and 2 show the results, with the first pie chart breaking the President’s account rhetoric down by category. The second pie chart explores the 83% of total terms from Figure 1, all of which included “personal.”

To see how the President’s “personal” account rhetoric changed over time, Figures 3, 4, and 5 are given. In Figures 3 and 4 certain “personal” account terms were used as a percentage of all account terms in the 28 given speeches. To observe the cumulative and quantitative changes, Figure 5 provides the combination of the two preceding figures. From the blue “personal account(s),” orange “personal savings account(s),” and red “voluntary personal savings accounts(s)” variables in the three figure, it becomes evident that the President modified the name of his account proposal twice; he did so first in late March, and again at the end of May.

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7 While there are many programs available that can quantitatively analyze linguistic documents, TextStat was found to be the most economical and easiest to use.
8 These are similar retirement accounts available to Congressmen.
9 Referenced graphs and figures not in the text are to be found in the graphs appendix.
10 Excluding the pronouns and irrelevant terms discussed earlier.
Figure 6 provides the results of a separate study conducted to provide context to the account rhetoric discussion. This graph illustrates the account terminology that the media was using over the 2005 fiscal year. Searching headlines and lead paragraphs in the newspaper database LexisNexis for “Social Security”, “Accounts”, and “President Bush” in “Major Paper” from the “General News” category, we looked for the use of terms “private” or “personal” when they preceded “account(s).” Both the author’s narrative and quotations, some from President Bush, were counted. For example, an article with “private Social Security accounts” would count as one for “private”. This procedure results in articles being counted multiple times since they could include both “private” and “personal” as qualifiers to accounts. Figure 6 shows the number of articles using “private”, “personal”, and the total number of articles resulting from the LexisNexis search.

The last graph used in this chapter, Figure 7, accounts for the ‘no risk’ rhetoric in Bush’s 28 stump speeches. Each stump speech was searched for four ‘no risk’ terms: “conservative[ly],” “gamble[ing],” “lottery,” and “dice.” These four terms that were found in President Bush’s discussions best characterize the assurances against financial hazard made by the President in his speeches. In order to count, each term was required to be found in use of such a ‘no risk’ message. For example, the President said in Indiana, “I think everybody should be allowed to be able to take his or her own money and watch it grow over time. Now, you can’t put it in the lottery…There will be guidelines” (Bush, Notre Dame, 3/4/05). The number for each speech was divided by the total number of words, and then multiplied by 1,000. Thus, Figure 7 shows the use of ‘no risk’ rhetoric terms per 1,000 words for each of the 28 stump speeches in the data set.

When analyzing rhetoric quantitatively in this fashion, one must be careful not to attribute too much importance to utterances. With technological progress has come increased
presidential communication. The massive amount of rhetorical data available “virtually guarantees that the presidential foot will, sooner or later, find its way into the presidential mouth” (Smith and Smith, 191). Therefore, in analyzing President Bush’s nearly three dozen speeches, it will be those consistent comments that receive attention. Still, those gaffs that only rarely occur also offer insight. President Bush’s use of the term “private” when discussing accounts, which transpires only once, is such an example.

**II. b) The “Private” vs. “Personal” Debate**

The debate over what to call the President’s proposed Social Security accounts has become one of the more prominent aspects of the modern Social Security reform discussion. In fact, the energy of the rhetorical debate makes it seem like it has been fought over as long as the use of Social Security accounts. However, this rhetorical dispute surfaced quite recently.

Promoting accounts for Social Security has been part of the conservative movement for decades. For much of this time, the conservative Cato Institute has led the way. In 1980, Cato Institute scholar Peter Ferrara published *Social Security: The Inherent Contradiction*, arguing for “privatization” and the “privatizing of the insurance function of the [Social Security] program” (Ferrarra, *Social Security*, 336). He proposed the plan as the central reform in his fifth chapter, “The Ideal System.” In fact, until 2002, the Cato Institute’s Social Security center was called the “Project on Social Security Privatization” (“Private vs. Personal”). However, times have changed. Ferrara now calls his accounts “personal,” (Ferrara, *Social Security*) and the Cato Institute center is named “Project on Social Security Choice” (“Social Security Choice”). The political decision to use “personal” rather than “private”, because of negative polling responses of the latter, will be discussed in the next section.

Like the Cato Institute’s recent rhetorical transformation, President Bush has renovated
his language. Reminiscent of Ferrara’s “The Ideal System,” as a candidate for a House seat in 1978, George W. Bush said at a Texas country club, “The ideal solution would be for Social Security to be made sound and people given the chance to invest the money the way they feel” (Stevenson, “For Bush”). Two decades later in 1999, presidential candidate George W. Bush stated that the third of his central aims was to allow Americans “the option of investing part of their Social Security contributions in private accounts.” (Italics added) Five years after that, in September 2004, President Bush would say, “That’s why I believe younger workers ought to be able to take some of their own money, set aside a personal savings account that will help Social Security fulfill its promise, a private account that they can call their own, a private account they can pass on to the next generation and a private account that the Government can’t take away” (Bush, “Remarks at a Victory Committee Reception”, Italics Added).

By the second month of Bush’s “60 Stops in 60 Days” tour of 2005 however, the battle of “private” versus “personal” accounts had become a focal point in the reform dialogue. In March, \textit{The New York Times} reported that the rhetorical debate was “one of the most ferocious struggles” (Toner) in what should have been a more policy-oriented discussion. Several examples of this battle’s occurrences appeared on the front lines of public exposure. \textit{The New York Times} reported Bush complaining that, ‘‘privatization’ is a trick word…to scare people”. The same article quoted Democrat Senator Harry Reid correcting a reporter who used “personal” to describe the accounts; “It’s ‘privatization,’” the Senator said, ‘personal’ is “the Republican term” (Toner). \textit{The Washington Post} published, “Republican officials have begun calling journalists to complain about references to ‘private accounts’…[and] warning their congressional candidates against using any form of the word ‘private’” (Allen). Others have reported that journalists are being corrected during Social Security briefings (Feldman, “The War of Words”).
The debate has called attention to the importance of semantics and rhetoric in the President’s marketing of his proposal. Clearly, both sides believe that the terminology used for accounts could impact the proposal’s political viability, and also agree that “the language struggle is fueled by polls and pollsters” (Toner). Pollsters and consultants alike agree that the different rhetoric carries different meanings. “What [‘private’] conveys,” said one Democratic pollster, “is putting your retirement up to the mercy of private-sector forces that you may or may not have any control over…It conveys a fundamental change in a program that works” (Toner). It is “exclusive” and “limiting” said a Republican consultant. Use of the term “personal,” he continued, “is encompassing…It’s ownership” (Toner). While different polls give different results, it certainly appears that when asking about the President’s proposal, a question that uses “personal” rather than “private” leads to a more positive response. The New York Times related a study finding that a “personal” account question results in 49% opposition while a “private” account question results in 58% opposition (Toner).

Around the same time, MediaMatters.Org published an article revealing a memo from Luntz Research Companies to Republican Congressmen. In it, the recipients are advised to “PLEASE, remember that you are NEVER talking about privatizing Social Security…

Personalizing Social Security has a 17% higher favorability rating than privatizing…If necessary, do what I do, and institute a strict policy among your staff that anytime someone uses [privatize] in the context of Social Security, they must pay you $50. It works” (‘Luntz’).  

Though the survey experiment this paper provides does not discount the effect of the “private” vs. “personal” linguistic difference for the proposal’s evaluation, we find that rhetorical decisions varying the use of “personal” made by the President actually prove more powerful.
II. c) Results for “Private” vs. “Personal”

While many in the media observed that President Bush and his administration were attempting to employ “personal” and avoid “private”, no author or reporter actually verified it. The data was therefore used to present Figures 1 and 2, equipped to perform this function.

As seen in Figure 1, the President made use of several different rhetorical terms when discussing his proposed accounts. He used “personal” to describe his accounts 83% of the time. “Retirement account(s)” occurred 7% of the time, and “savings account(s)” arose 5% of the time. “Private” was only used once in all of the 28 speeches surveyed, and awkwardly so. The quote, stated in Louisiana on March, 11, 2005, is reproduced here:

> But it is a way to say to younger workers that you're going to be able to come closer to the benefits that have been promised to you, because by putting money aside, you will be able--in a private account, private markets, investing in the private markets, you'll be able to get a better rate of return on your own money than the Government could get on your own money (Bush, Shreveport, 3/11/05).

One can observe the President’s discomfort when he first says “private account,” and then attempts to alter his speech. This chapter argues that this term, used once within the entire data set, is a remnant of President Bush’s former rhetoric as well as that of the conservatives. As discussed earlier, “private” was removed from the conservative vocabulary only recently.

A separate study discussed in the earlier methodology section of this chapter becomes relevant at this point. As several media outlets have said (Allen), the victory of the rhetorical battle could mean the conquest of the policy war. Thus, it is important to examine if and how the media picked up on the President’s rhetorical framework. Figure 6 illustrates the number of articles in major U.S. papers utilizing “personal” or “private” rhetoric when discussing accounts. “Total Articles” represents all articles found through the LexisNexis search.

In January, before the President’s February 2nd State of the Union address and his
preparation for “60 Stops in 60 Days”, the number of articles discussing his accounts in just breached 100. Though President Bush’s actions clearly doubled the level of attention his accounts received, “private” rhetoric surpassed “personal” rhetoric by 2 to 1 for most of the 2005 year. The only month where “private” appeared to be used less relative to “personal” was in May, though it was still higher. Moreover, the media progressively reduced attention to the proposal even as the President was beginning his national tour. The disproportionately “private” number of articles reveals a contemporary political context in which the President’s rhetoric did not make headway. Still, the President maintained his rhetorical strategy (within his Stump Speeches), only using “private” once. Political discourse analysts have said, “Language strategies are geared to an anticipation of the course that political events will take and to an anticipation of how the mass media will respond to the strategies” (Graber, 185). This chapter posits that the sharp contrast between the media and the President represents a rhetorical failure of the President to successfully, or perhaps even partially reposition the public conversation.

II. d) Results for the Many Rhetorical Options of “Personal”

Clearly, the media and both sides of the proposal debate have assigned a great deal of importance to the difference between “personal” and “private” accounts when advocating President Bush’s reform. However, the media and political analysts have disregarded the range of rhetoric within the President’s use of “personal” accounts. As seen in Figures 1 and 2, the “personal” terms President Bush used to describe his accounts breaks down into four major names, together making up 83%: “personal account(s)” used 42% of the time, “personal savings account(s)” used 33% of the time, “personal retirement account(s)” used 13% of the time, and “voluntary personal savings account(s)” used 10% of the time. Just as the media has analyzed the President and his administration’s continued decision to use “personal,” this chapter seeks to
explore any particular trend in the President’s use of these four “personal” phrases.

To explore any rhetorical decisions the President made within this “personal” account rhetoric the chapter presents the use of these terms chronologically. Figures 3 and 4 show the number of times a certain term (e.g. “personal account(s)” or “personal retirement account(s)”) occurs in each speech as a percentage of the total number of account terms. As before, this total simply represents all the relevant times accounts were mentioned (“health care account” and “hold you to account” are excluded), eliminating for instances of pronouns (e.g. “an account” and “your accounts”). Figure 5 shows a cumulative graph of the four “personal” terms as they occurred in Bush’s stump speeches. Table 1, given below, documents the progression.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetorical Terms</th>
<th>Months Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Personal Account(s)”</td>
<td>February, March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Personal Savings Account(s)”</td>
<td>March, April, May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Voluntary Personal Savings Account(s)”</td>
<td>May, June, July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Personal Retirement Account(s)”</td>
<td>Appears Sporadically Throughout</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the noted figures, it appears that the President used the three first “personal” terms in a fairly chronological procession. “Personal retirement account(s)” was the most unsystematically distributed of the four terms employed. The other three designations seem to replace each other throughout 2005 in a ‘try-it-then-dump-it’ fashion.

The President proceeded in a consistent direction of terminology. From using the simple term “personal” early on, he expanded the name to fit additional ideas. By March, the President used “savings”, which he included in his next formation “voluntary personal savings account(s).” In this last shift the language was modified to emphasize the freedom to not use the accounts.

Having observed the direction of the President’s rhetoric, toward dependability and freedom, the question of intentionality becomes important. Of course, it is possible that neither the President nor his Social Security campaign staff purposefully executed these adjustments.
However, strong and consistent patterns such as these are very suggestive. Results like these of rhetorical creations, and of different presidents, have often proven to be intentional (Wynton Hall, 320).

Thus, the question of “Why?” should be explored. Why would the President find it necessary, or even advantageous to modify his terminology? Perhaps one significant purpose of such rhetoric is to counter one of the strongest arguments against his proposal; many opponents of the President’s reform argue that accounts “come with higher risk” (Furman, “Would Private Accounts”). Because the stock market’s growth has been accompanied by infamous crashes, President Bush’s political advisors would likely take this argument very seriously. Though a title does not logically rebut the point, it responds through pathos, evoking a ‘safe’ sentiment among the public audience.

Interestingly, the President never responds to such arguments, only repeatedly stating that the restrictions on the proposed Social Security accounts make them “conservative” (Bush, Shreveport, 3/11/05) investments, and that accounts would not be like a “gamble,” (Bush, Memphis, 3/11/05) “the lottery,” (Bush, Westfield, 3/4/05) or going to “shoot dice” (Bush, Canton, 5/2/05). Such ‘no risk’ rhetoric was part of the President’s attempt to promote the perception of account dependability. As seen in Figure 7, however, this language sharply decreases to a lower level during and after March 2005. Taken in context with the findings from Figure 5 however, the increased rhetoric of dependability seems to offset the decrease of ‘no risk’ language found here. Perhaps the President’s strategy was to use the account terminology to imply financial safety, rather than discussing risk through statements like “You can’t gamble” (Bush, Little Rock, 2/4/05). The strategy seems more likely to prove effective for the simple

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11 Like the use of “personal” rather than “private.”
reason that the media might pick up on it. In fact, the President may have found that inserting ‘no risk’ and ‘optional’ language into the account term was the only way of getting the media to include such information in the short video clips used on television (Adatto). In addition, they might use the President’s terminology as they had earlier in sometimes calling accounts “personal,” or one of his other terms.

One cannot positively ascertain the motives behind the President’s rhetorical changes without interviewing his Social Security campaign staff. Other studies, like Wynton Hall’s “The Invention of ‘Quantifiably Safe Rhetoric’” find results of a similar nature and spend much of their work justifying their conclusions through interviews with presidential polling consultants. This opportunity may prove possible in the future; however, one can presently observe the consistent and largely unidirectional progression of the President’s account rhetoric and hypothesize intentions based on the given data.

II. e) Methodology – The Impact of Account Rhetoric

One other method available to researchers is to evaluate the impact certain rhetoric has on citizens. The observance of a progressively successful rhetorical evolution may suggest that the President acted like many other modern presidents, relying heavily on polling and focus groups (Wynton Hall, 320). The following segment will explain the survey technique utilized to explore this option. We find that linking the President’s rhetoric to audience approval is possible, even if we cannot determinately prove it to be purposeful.

To evaluate the suppositions made about the efficacy of President Bush’s terminology changes, a sample of college students was asked to participate in a survey. Each student at Swarthmore College received an invitation to participate in a survey on Social Security reform
proposals, with the opportunity to enter a lottery for a financial reward.12 The site directed those willing to one of four surveys via www.surveymonkey.com.13 Each of the surveys began with several background questions. The second page supplied a general explanation of the President’s (without reference to him) accounts proposal. The four surveys only differed in the name of the accounts given (private, personal, personal savings, or voluntary personal savings):

In the discussion on Social Security reform, one key proposal includes the creation of [_______] accounts. Each worker would have the option of sending a portion of his or her Social Security payroll tax contributions into this [_______] account, choosing to invest from a set of government-approved funds, each including many stocks and/or bonds.

Participants were then asked questions evaluating the proposal in general, concern for beneficiaries, and perceived partisanship. Finally, eight multiple-choice questions were asked to assess participants’ overall knowledge of Social Security and the President’s proposal.14 It is from this set of questions that we can create an index to observe how knowledge impacted participants’ evaluations of the accounts proposal. Though only including Swarthmore College students eliminates variation in age and education level, the study provides us with a good prediction of the direction and level of influence of the President’s rhetorical choices.

12 We also performed a pre-test using Haverford and Bryn Mawr students. The pre-test tested the effects of “personal accounts”, “private accounts”, “accounts”, and “voluntary personal accounts.” Since the pre-test did not test the precise rhetorical changes used by President Bush, we do not analyze its results in this discussion. However, it is discussed in Chapter 3.
13 This website allows for the creation of multiple surveys.
14 1. Who pays the payroll tax?  2. How much of payroll tax revenue is used to pay for current Social Security benefits?  3. [Does] the Social Security Trust Fund, to some degree, invest in the stock market?  4. At approximately what age does a non-disabled American currently become eligible for Social Security benefits?  5. From what you knew prior to this survey, would [the accounts] proposal increase Social Security’s ability to pay all benefits promised to current workers?  6. From what you knew prior to this study, would [the accounts] proposal increase or decrease benefits for the middle-income earner?  7. From what you knew prior to this study, would progressive indexing increase Social Security’s ability to pay all benefits promised to current workers?  8. Would progressive indexing increase or decrease benefits for the middle-income earner?
II. f) Results of the Rhetoric Experiment

382 students completed the survey. The results illustrate the power of rhetorical alteration. The three terms that President Bush employed chronologically, “personal accounts”, “personal savings accounts”, and “voluntary personal savings accounts”, perform increasingly well among the experiment participants. Participants rated the proposal between 1 and 10, 10 being the most supportive. Table 2, given in the graphs appendix, indicates that the percentage ranking the proposal 6-10 were 35 % for “personal accounts”, 41 % for “personal savings accounts”, and 52% for “voluntary personal savings accounts”. Figure 8 shows this graphically. The support for the accounts proposal increased by 6% with the second term, and another 11% with the third term. Participants averaged evaluations of 4.5, 4.7, and 5.1 respectively. Likewise, the perception of the proposal as “highly” or “mostly” partisan decreased to 48% for “voluntary personal savings” among those who evaluated partisanship.15 It does appear though that “personal savings” (66%) was perceived more often as partisan than was “personal” (61%).

Table 3 shows the results of two multivariate analyses of the experiment. The first examines the effect of key variables on participants’ evaluations of the account proposal. The second tests for effects on whether they consider the proposal to be partisan on a scale of “Highly Partisan” (1) to “Totally Bipartisan” (5). We include binary variables indicating whether participants saw “private,” “personal savings,” or “voluntary personal savings” rhetoric in the description of accounts. The three rhetoric variable coefficients represent the change relative to “personal”, the omitted category. We also include measures of the participants’ knowledge of Social Security, political orientation, and level of political activism.

15 Participants were given the option of selecting “Don’t Know” for the partisanship question. 25% to 35% of people selected this choice for the four surveys. Though this may introduce some unexplained variation, it is difficult to hypothesize why participants chose this option.
The regression findings for rhetoric mirror Table 2. The shift from “personal” to “personal savings” is positive, though with a 25% (.25) level of probability that if the test were done again we would not get the same results. This means the effect of “personal savings” is beneficial to the President, but not at a statistically significant level. The shift from “personal” to the third rhetoric of “voluntary personal savings” is also positive and approaches significance with a .13 level of probability (if one uses a significance level of .10).16 In this case, the .42 coefficient means that on average, a person reading the proposal named “voluntary personal savings accounts” will evaluate it .42 higher on the 1-10 scale than a persona reading the proposal named “personal accounts.” Knowledge of Social Security, political orientation and level of political activism, however, all have highly significant effects on whether a participant evaluates the accounts proposal favorably. The informed, liberals, and activists are more likely to evaluate the proposal negatively regardless of what rhetoric is used to characterize it. The rhetorical switch from “personal” to “voluntary personal savings” accounts in comparison has a more modest effect. Altogether, the R² values inform us that the variables we use can explain 23% of the variance for the “Evaluation” regression, and 10% of the variance for “Partisanship”. Not surprisingly, there is a significant amount of variation among our 382 participants not covered by their knowledge, political orientation, activism, and rhetorical prompts. Still, our model clearly does have explanatory power.

These findings hold also for predicting whether the participant thinks the proposal is too partisan. Here though, the rhetorical shift from “personal” to “voluntary personal savings” accounts has a statistically significant effect at the .05 level. Changing the rhetoric from “personal” to “voluntary personal savings” accounts seems to help participants decide that the

16 A .10 significance level is often used. But, a .05 level is more rigorous and more conventionally accepted. (Schram)
proposal is less partisan. Again, however, the knowledge of Social Security, political orientation, and level of activism are more important in predicting whether a participant will think the proposal is too partisan. The informed, liberals, and activists are more likely to think the accounts plan is too partisan.

In the foregoing analysis, it is interesting to note the relatively minor difference between “private” and “personal”. Considering the attention paid by the media to the “private vs. personal” debate, it appears they missed the truck. None of the studies or hypotheses discussed in the earlier “private vs. personal” section present nominal differences more significant than the ones found here between “personal” and “voluntary personal savings”. It is only the Republican pollster, Mr. Luntz, who believes that the more famous rhetorical debate mattered as much as 17% (“Luntz”). Quite possibly, the media reported on this debate because it represented the two political parties involved. And yet, at least in this survey, the two names perform almost identically. While it is certainly possible that “private” affects the population more negatively than “personal”, the progression to “voluntary personal savings” in this survey influenced more minds. Reporters and analysts missed an influential part of the rhetoric story.

This information gives us additional reason to postulate that the President purposefully altered his rhetoric. The three terms he employed progressively help his proposal, in increased favorability, and in decreased perceptions of partisanship. The ‘no risk’ rhetoric portion of the last section is also further emphasized. It was argued that the inclusion of “savings” and “voluntary” could assuage citizens’ worries about risk. From these results, one may conclude this hypothesis was confirmed. It becomes more and more apparent, as one delves deeper into these rhetorical findings, that President Bush was either very lucky in his rhetorical decisions, or, more likely, relied on polls and focus groups to design his proposal’s visage.
III. Bipartisan Rhetoric:

This next section of the chapter will describe a study performed to explore the level of rhetorical bipartisanship the President employed. Reading the many speeches the President gave on Social Security during 2005, one finds that the President often makes statements such as, “In order to solve this problem, it’s not going to be a Republican idea or a Democrat idea, it’s going to be an American idea” (Bush, Albuquerque, 3/25/05). To observe this rhetorical attempt at bipartisanship, the location of the words “Republican(s)” and “Democrat(s)” were found in relation to each other. Finding that they frequently appeared together may suggest that the President made a concerted effort to (or naturally did) appear bipartisan. Psychological studies will be presented that show the influence such action can have on public perception. Aristotle would categorize this rhetorical tool as *ethos*, persuasion through the perceived credibility of the speaker. This analysis will show how the President used this *ethos* influence, likely received through the peripheral route, in his 2005 Social Security speeches. Once shown, President Bush’s rhetoric will be compared with his actual bipartisanship within the reform debate. This section concludes that the President used bipartisan rhetoric to foster a somewhat inaccurate perception of his political willingness to be flexible and to cultivate positive public sentiment.

III. a) Methodology

We again made use of the computer software TextStat. Using the same text corpus as before (28 stump speeches), the data was searched for “Republican(s)” and “Democrat(s)” within specified word distances from each other in both directions. We then took the number of occurrences that two words were in proximity and divided by the total number of one of those terms. For example, if “Democrat(s)” and “Republican(s)” occurred within 5 words of each other 10 times, and the term “Democrat(s)” occurred 15 times, then we know that 66% of
“Democrat(s)” are within 5 words of “Republican(s).”

Of course, one could imagine the two terms occurring within a sentence quite opposed to bipartisanship. (Borowiak) For example, “The Republicans are great, while Democrats are stupid” It should be noted that none of the pairings found were observed as partisan (pro-Republican, or anti-Democrat).

III. b) Results

First, the total number of “Democrat(s)” and “Republican(s)” were noted. Surprisingly, the former occurred 56 times while the latter only 39 times. In exploring this variance, it immediately became clear that the difference in frequency was the result of the President referring to specific Democrats in his speeches, some of whom were invited to speak. This non-linguistic decision will be elaborated upon in the discussion following this particular study.

Having eliminated specific references to Democrats (15 of them) and Republicans (none; to be discussed later), “Democrat(s)” and “Republican(s)” were mentioned 41 and 39 times respectively. Next, the searches were performed at different distances to observe frequency when near one another. Because the total number of each differ by two, the searched percentage findings given below will be correspondingly different.

The word gaps found to be most informative were three, six, and eight in both directions.

Thus, the findings were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>87% of “Republican(s)” are within 3 words of “Democrat(s)”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>83% of “Democrat(s)” are within 3 words of “Republican(s)”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example: “It’s going to take Republicans and Democrats...” (Bush, Montgomery, 3/25/05)

| 2. | 92% of “Republican(s)” are within 6 words of “Democrat(s)” |
|    | 88% of “Democrat(s)” are within 6 words of “Republican(s)” |

Example: “A lot of Republicans liked it. A lot of Democrats thought it was an interesting idea” in the past; and it ought to be on the table.” (Bush, Tucson, 3/21/05)

| 3. | 97% of “Republican(s)” are within 8 words of “Democrat(s)” |
|    | 93% of “Republican(s)” are within 8 words of “Republican(s)” |

Example: “It’s not a problem for just Republican youngsters. It’s not a problem just for Democrat youngsters. It’s a problem for every youngster.” (Bush, Tampa, 3/4/05)
Though one cannot positively establish the motives of such rhetorical action without inside knowledge, the President’s consistent rhetorical bipartisanship can be clearly observed through this data. Of all the times Bush mentioned “Republican(s),” he failed to mention “Democrat(s)” within eight words only 3% of the time. The same applies for the reverse 7% of the time.

Again, the question of intent is raised by these linguistic observations. This chapter posits that there are two possible reasons why the President would act in such a way. First, he could be attempting to signal his true willingness to work with Democrats; thus, his language would parallel his policy-related actions. Or second, he could be using bipartisan rhetoric for its psychological effect; thus, his rhetoric would be part of his political campaign, and not pursued in practice. This chapter finds the second alternative to be more likely and will argue in the later section entitled “Bipartisan Action?” that this is so. First, however, we will discuss the rhetorical significance of the President’s bipartisan language.

**III. c) Why Bipartisan Rhetoric**

Many political analysts have monitored the increasing rhetorical hostility among politicians in recent decades (Funk, 6). With increased negative advertisements and more frequent *ad hominem* attacks, political psychologists have begun exploring the effect such methods and attitudes have on the American public. They have found that the growth in political rancor has led to a precipitous increase of “dissatisfaction with politics” (6).

The investigation into the public’s negative reactions to political “animosity” has also been accompanied by studies into the positive public responses from “fairness” and “[resolving] of differences” (198). Such chapters have found the belief in a “fair process…influences satisfaction” with decisions. Oddly enough, that satisfaction is maintained, “regardless of whether [the] outcome was preferred” (198). Thus, perceived fairness might pacify opposition.
Another kind of psychological impact relevant to this discussion is called the “halo effect.” Psychologists have found that when an audience perceives another person to have positive traits, like beauty or good voice tone, it ascribes other complementary characteristics to that person as well (Boltz, 10/31/06), such as increased credibility or *ethos*. Unfortunately, studies have not been performed on the halo effect of bipartisan rhetoric.\(^{17}\) However, as the earlier studies suggest that such an attitude would be perceived as a positive characteristic, it seems likely that the prolific use of such language could benefit the speaker.

These studies are relevant to the President’s use of bipartisan rhetoric in that they explain how such language could help the President in his political campaign. Positive sentiments about his proposal encouraged by such “fair process” rhetoric could propel President Bush’s reform forward just enough to become legislation. Another way to see the President’s method is through the use of the ELM’s peripheral route, or the HSM’s “heuristic processing.” Although the frequency with which the President repeatedly mentions both parties has no impact on the *logos* of Bush’s proposal, it may persuade his audience by influencing its perception of “source credibility…to reach a satisfactory decision without extensive issue-relevant thinking” (Nelson, Thomas, and Garst, 493). Essentially, this means that the President may convince the public through means other than or beyond the logic of his argument (Elsbach, Kimberly, and Elofson). As discussed earlier, because the public knows so little about Social Security, and because there is some degree of public apathy toward the perceived long-term rather than short-term problem, the use of the “peripheral route” by Bush’s American audience will increase. Thus, the employment of rhetorical devices that utilize the psychological responses discussed here can become exceedingly influential. This chapter posits that the attribution of such a maneuver to the

\(^{17}\) That we could find.
President’s rhetorical strategy, while presently not confirmable, is well founded.

**III. d) Referencing Democrats**

Bush’s invitation to Democrats for his discussions may have been a truly bipartisan attempt; however, political science discussions like this must consider the alternative, and perhaps more likely objective. Group names like *Democrats for Nixon*, *Democrats for Bush*, *Republicans for Gore*, and *Republicans for Kerry* give increased legitimacy to their candidate. Psychologists call the influential effect from such a decision a “positive violation”.

| Table 4 |
|------------------|--|------------------|
| **Action Type**   | **Positive or Negative** | **Violation or Confirmation** |
| Republicans for Accounts | + | Confirmation |
| Republicans Against Accounts | - | Violation |
| Democrats against Accounts | + | Confirmation |
| Democrats for Accounts*** | - | Violation |

A Republican supporting President Bush is a “positive confirmation”; it is assumed to occur. A Republican against President Bush is a “negative violation”; it violates one’s general expectancy. A Democrat against President Bush is a “negative confirmation”; again, it is expected (Boltz, 11/13/06). However, the “positive violation” of Democrats supporting President Bush is the most politically helpful of all four possibilities. It is important to notice that in all of President Bush’s speeches analyzed here, he never invites a visiting speaker identified as being Republican. In fact, he never even discusses particular Republican politicians when presenting his proposal. However, he does so with Democrats, from Former U.S. Representative Tim Penny and Former U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, to Former President Bill Clinton (Bush, Louisville, 3/10/05) and Financial Manager Robert Pozen (Bush, Atlanta, 7/22/05). He likely mentions each to imply that those who would otherwise be expected to oppose his proposal do not. By “resorting to one’s opponent’s authority…[and] backing up one’s own ethical appeal with somebody else’s – [one can exemplify] a clever persuasive strategy, which is likely to
disarm the opposition” (Halmari, 118). Thus, because opposing party members support the proposal, the inference is made that it proposal must not be highly problematic or partisan.

Of course, this sidesteps the disagreements Bush has with any of these people. For example, Robert Pozen, the supposed generator of Progressive Price Indexing, stated clearly in his testimony before Congress two days before the President adopted PPI that accounts should come much later in any discussion of reform (Pozen). President Clinton specifically advocated against personal accounts, even as he proposed partially investing the Social Security Trust Fund’s holdings in stocks (Clinton, Albuquerque, 7/27/98), a strategy President Bush formally denied when creating the President’s Commission to Strengthen Social Security (Bush, “President’s Commission”). By only referencing Democratic agreements with his proposal, President Bush implies a greater level of support than might truly exist. It is in fact this the surprising lack of opposition that may substantively influence the public.

III. e) Bipartisan Action?

It is now clear that, although the President uses a rhetorical strategy to exude bipartisanship and references Democrats to positively violate expectancies, he does not always present the whole truth. This section will show how the President’s actions further diverge from his bipartisan rhetoric.

One of the President’s most public acts in attempting to reform Social Security was the creation of the President’s Commission to Strengthen Social Security. While President Reagan, for example, brought strong arbiters from both parties and positions in his early 1980s commission (Light), President Bush did not.

President Bush established the Commission with an executive order on May 2, 2001. Its instructions were to “preserve Social Security for senior Americans while building wealth for
younger Americans,” under six orders:

(a) Modernization must not change Social Security benefits for retirees or near-retirees; (b) The entire Social Security surplus must be dedicated to Social Security only; (c) Social Security payroll taxes must not be increased; (d) Government must not invest Social Security funds in the stock market; (e) Modernization must preserve Social Security’s disability and survivors components; and (f) Modernization must include individually controlled, voluntary personal retirement accounts, which will augment the Social Security safety net. (Bush, “President’s Commission)

These orders instituted strict limits on the ultimate findings of the commission. Stated best by Dr. Olivia Mitchell of the Wharton School and member of the President’s Commission during her testimony before the Senate Finance Committee, “Our Commission was charged with improving the sustainability of Social Security – without changing benefits for those now or near retirement, without raising payroll taxes, and while establishing new savings opportunities through personal accounts” (Mitchell). These goals were all central to the President’s proposal.

The members of the Commission, it turned out, corresponded to the politics of the entities’ constraints. The day of the Commission’s creation, several media outlets reported on an apparently bipartisan group. However, an equal number of Democrats and Republicans does not mean that both sides of a debate are represented. After investigating, The New York Times reported it as “heavily stocked with members of both parties who favor [the President’s] proposal to create private investment accounts for all workers” (Stevenson, “President to Name Panel”). The USA Today published an article the same day entitled “Commission Members All Back Privatization” (Mimi Hall). The St. Louis Post-Dispatch quoted complaints from Senate Democrat Tom Daschle, “This is a stacked, completely orchestrated effort to come to a desired result” (Associated Press, “Social Security”). Michael Tanner, director of the conservative Cato
Institute, said, “This is a remarkably pro-privatization group” (“Issues and Trends”). Lastly, in what can either be seen as an admission of a biased commission or a confident belief that early agreement encourages productive discussion, White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer said, “The commission that the President will announce will, of course, be comprised of people who share the President’s view” (“The Bush Social Security Commission”). Four years later however, the President would continue to say, “I’m willing to work with anybody, Republican or Democrat or independent, who wants to come in and discuss ways to solve the problem. Everything is on the table except raising payroll taxes” (Bush, Omaha, 2/4/05).

Perhaps the Commission should be seen as an attempt to discuss the implementation logistics of the President’s proposal. However, the emphasis President Bush placed during the 2005 tour on having “put together a bipartisan Commission” (Bush, Albuquerque, 2/4/05) reveals a politician attempting to represent legitimacy and open-mindedness while acting to the contrary. Although presidents have acted without their opposition party in the past, this president does so while pursuing a rhetorically bipartisan strategy. This decision to pursue less than full disclosure, and in fact to partially or wholly mislead, will be evaluated as part of the entire President’s strategy once it has been delineated.

**IV. Conclusion: Polling and Intentions**

While examining the impact that the President’s two peripheral cues could have on the public, this chapter has argued that the mere existence of such probability suggests intent. However, it is possible, though unlikely, that the President and his speech-writing team mistakenly stumbled upon two techniques of *ethos* and *pathos* persuasion.\(^\text{18}\)

Political scientists and discursive psychologists have shown us the dependency of

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\(^{18}\) The author has found others as well. They will be discussed in later chapters.
American politicians, especially presidents, on pollsters and public opinion measurements. Fortunately, some academics like Wynton Hall, who performed a rhetorical analysis of President Reagan similar to this one, have confirmed findings with polling staff. Of course, this often does not occur until decades after the President’s campaign. Still, when other found consistent and persuasive patterns are confirmed as purposeful, it lends additional legitimacy to the method.

Throughout the years, many in the political linguistics and psychology fields have concluded that presidents are in control of their language. These leaders employ “speech-craft,” or “crafted talk,” using polling information to package their content (Wynton Hall, 320). Since President Kennedy in the 1960s, presidents have included polling in their strategy: President Johnson “attacked and leaked polls”; President Ford used them “privately rather than publicly”; President Carter “often misused data in decision-making”; many believe President Reagan’s administration “was little more than a public relations show”; and while some believe the first President Bush did not use them much, most “assumed that Bill Clinton lived by them” (320).

As the use of presidential rhetorical strategy progressed, pollsters have joined the makeup of White House strategy teams (Breglio and Vincient, 31). Defining the terms of a debate has become an increasingly important goal as the ability to package arguments has increased. For this reason, this chapter argues that President Bush and his administration, as well as Democrat counterparts, have placed significance on the debate between “private” versus “personal” accounts. The media seems to have given some help to the opposition. However, it appears that the Bush team has also experimented and explored with the most successful method of delivering “personal” to the public. We can observe their success in constructing a progressively persuasive rhetoric through which to propose the accounts reform. Perhaps a discussion with a present-day Bush pollster may one day confirm that such findings were purposeful.
Secondly, this chapter documented that the President repeated an *ethos* appeal throughout his Social Security campaign. Moreover, in observing his 2001 creation of the “bipartisan” Social Security Commission, it appears that his rhetoric does not match his actions. The President introduced such language, this chapter argues, in order to better persuade his audience, perhaps without any intention to act on such promises.

Having analyzed the use and impact of rhetorical peripheral cues in President Bush’s Social Security campaign, the rationale for such analysis is quite evident. As shown, a president can, and sometimes does attempt to persuade\(^{19}\) a nation to support some of the most important national policies in ways that do not involve logic or evidence. While these methods certainly supplement more conventional techniques, the power that peripheral cues can have on the public could make their use somewhat hazardous in a democracy where the public holds substantial decision-making power. Because the President can exploit persuasive techniques, these rhetorical maneuvers must be monitored. Perhaps the kind of confirmation that Wynton found will become less necessary as we discover the truth that, in fact, a president’s “polling and strategy go together hand in hand” (31).

\(^{19}\) It is interesting to note that “to persuade” derives from the Latin *per-saudeo*. *Saudeo* “to urge, advise, encourage, recommend,” comes from the Proto-Indo-European *swad*, “to make sweet or pleasant” (Mulligan). For this reason, Yale professor Bryan Garsten argues that persuasion is the art of “catering to [an] audience’s sweet tooth” (3).
Chapter 2:
Manipulative Rhetoric – Tracking the Stump Speech

1. Introducing the Progression Analysis:

2. Stump Speech by Part and Time:
   a) His Introduction – No Change, FDR, On the Table, and 3rd Rail
   b) Problems vs. Solutions
   c) Four Problems with Social Security – Living Longer, 2041, IOU, and Bankruptcy
   d) Two Proposals – Accounts and Progressive Price Indexing (PPI)
   e) Six Arguments for Accounts – Rate of Return, No Risk, Inheritance …etc
   f) The Rhetoric for PPI – Avoiding Poverty

3. Taking Stock:
   a) Categorizing the Rhetoric
   b) The Use of Pathos Over Logos

1. Introducing the Progression Analysis

   In Chapter 1 we followed the President’s references to his proposal of accounts. We observed two shifts between three titles, and found in an experiment that the chronology performed progressively better among participants. In this chapter, we will employ the TextStat word search program that helped to establish those chronological results. In this chapter we will recount the evolution and transformation of the President’s stump speech as a whole.

   As discussed earlier, the 28 speeches were found to be quite similar in many respects. However, now we follow the changing frequency of the general assertions made throughout the speech. In observing the rise and fall of different arguments that the President presents, it is tempting to assign purpose to every movement. This must be avoided, lest we over assign intent. However, because the data chosen has such a consistent nature, trends and permanent changes in President Bush’s words likely portray a conscious effort to better pursue his interests. One assumes that his prime interest in this case is the persuasion of the public. Having seen the major trends in the President’s rhetorical movements, we will then be able to analyze his linguistic
efforts as a whole.

The following analyses will each reference graphs in the appendix that represent the chronological progression of certain words or phrases that President Bush used during his stump speeches. Each of these words represents a specific argument or point that the President made during these speeches. In observing the word and phrase movement, we arguably observe the rise or fall of the arguments that make use of them. Like in Chapter 1, these graphs will track word use as a percentage of the total words used in the President’s stump speech. The y-axis will in all but two instances have a maximum of 4 or 4.5 “# per 1,000 words”, meaning the number of times the term was used per 1,000 words. Because all the stumps range between 1,300 and 3,200 words, most close to 2,200, the nominal maximum for these graphs is typically 9 term uses.

2. Stump Speech by Part and Time:

   a) His Introduction – No Change, FDR, On the Table, and 3rd Rail

   There are four central pieces to the President’s stump speech introduction that are consistently found in a high number of his “discussions”. Three of them changed fairly dramatically over his seven month push for Social Security reform.

   The one consistent piece was his insistence that those elders nearing or in retirement would experience no difference in benefits. Quite aware of his repetition, he said, “Nothing is going to change for [those 55 and older]. You don’t have to worry about it. You’ll notice it’s the third time I’ve said it. Sometimes in this business of ours, you’ve got to keep repeating yourself in order for it to sink in.” As seen in Graph Intro 1, the President maintained the frequency of such public reassurances at a fairly constant level. Quite likely, this has much to do with his concern that the majority of those 55 and older already, in fact, opposed his reform (Nethaway). As CBS’s Dan Rather reported a month after the President ended his Social Security push, “the
group most responsible for opposing the president’s Social Security reform plan is the AARP” (Rather), the American Association for Retired Persons. This 35 million-member faction, a $750 million annual business, “one of the most powerful lobbying groups in Washington”, was an opposition that the President recognized from the beginning. It is likely for this reason that the assertion maintained its frequency.

Differently, it appears that President Bush believed he discovered a ‘new line’ part way through his campaign in his use of “Franklin D. Roosevelt”. As seen in Graph Intro 1, though only saying it once before March 11, 2005, afterward the President began frequently making comments like, “Franklin Roosevelt did a good thing when it came to Social Security” (Bush, Atlanta, 7/22/05). Playing up his approval of the Social Security program as a whole, and FDR’s creation of it in particular can also be seen in combination with his dramatic increase of “a better deal”, to be discussed later. To be discussed later, this would of course play off FDR’s rhetoric of “The New Deal”.

In the opposite direction, the President progressively decreased his rhetoric promoting other ideas for reform. Throughout the President’s earlier, and especially March 2005 speeches, he repeatedly suggested that others “Bring [ideas] forth: let’s sit down at the table and discuss ways to permanently fix the system” (Bush, Portsmouth, 2/16/05). In fact, only 7 out of the 74 times that he promoted ‘coming to the table’ did he mention that this excluded increasing the payroll tax (Bush, Raleigh, 2/10/05). As seen in Graph Intro 2, however, come April this “table” rhetoric largely fell out of his speech. There are several possible reasons for this. For one, it was in April that the President proposed his own more complete solution to Social Security. Though, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, his account proposal would not alleviate the majority of Social Security’s financial problems. But, his proposal for progressive price indexing (PPI) would have worked toward that goal. In suggesting his own solution, the President may have
thought it imprudent to continue asking for others. Secondly, perhaps he believed that any good will resulting from the perception of an open-minded president had already been gained. Still, it is interesting to note that at the end of a seven-month push for reform, when his proposal was clearly not going to move forward, he chose not to pick up on any of the other proposals that had been ‘put on the table’ by others. Unfortunately, it is true that much of the opposition chose to employ stonewalling tactics rather than constructing a counter-proposal (Thomma). Pushing for everyone to put ideas on the table was also likely an attempt to focus the public on the fact that, as he said at a GOP fundraiser, Democrats “stand for doing nothing” (Allen and Fletcher).

The last of the President’s four introduction points, one that he dropped entirely after mid-March, was his self-portrayal as a leader addressing a politically self-destructive topic. For the first two months the President often mused, “I want to talk about Social Security, which for years has been called the third rail of American politics. If you touch it, you expire politically” (Bush, Blue Bell, 2/10/05). The advantage of an argument such as this, of course, is that a politician might receive credit for tackling a difficult subject. The public would see it as ‘true leadership’. Though at best we can hypothesize that the President’s strategists did not find the assertion politically useful, the fact that Graph Intro 2 portrays such a stark elimination of an argument from the President’s highly repetitious stump speech strongly suggests that it was a purposeful maneuver.

b) Problems vs. Solutions

Having introduced the topic of Social Security to his audience, the President then spends a considerable amount of time explaining the problems of the system. Of course, it makes practical sense to do so. By convincing his audience of a problem, they would then recognize the need for a solution. He would often state, “I see a problem, and I want to discuss with you why I
see a problem” (Bush, Raleigh, 2/10/05). Or, citing his “60 Stop in 60 Days Tour”, he might boast of his effect on the Congress; “Guess what. They now know we got a problem” (Bush, Milwaukee, 5/19/05). In fact, in such assertions President Bush implied that educating the public and Congress of Social Security’s upcoming problem was his central goal. **Graph “Problem” vs. “Solv*”** clearly portrays a president who frequently cites problems during his stump speech. The * allows the search to count any words that begin with the given root. Though by looking at the red points on the graph one observes that the President varied his use of the word quite frequently, an average decline in use is evident with the help of Excel’s linear trendline. That the President decreased his warnings of problems is not really surprising. As mentioned before, the public must think a problem exists in order to care enough to consider possible solutions.

On the opposite side of the discussion, we can observe the President’s discussion of “solving” the problem, reaching “solvency”, or any mention of finding a “solution”. As seen in the same graph, this rhetoric more than doubles between the campaign’s beginning and end. Early on, the President implied, or sometimes claimed that the accounts proposal would at least partially solve the listed problems;21 “I fully recognize a personal retirement account is not the only thing needed to make – to solve Social security permanently. But it's a part of a solution” (Bush, Omaha, 2/4/05). However, as time progressed, as seen in **Graph “Problem” vs. “Solv*”**, the President became increasingly interested in discussing solutions. Much of this increase likely corresponds to the decrease in problem rhetoric. Just as President Bush needed to assert a problem in the beginning, he wished to propose his own solution toward the end. As will be discussed later however, the PPI solution was a fairly end-of-the-line proposal that the President

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20 Take care to note the much higher y-axis maximum of 18.
21 This will be heavily expanded upon in the third chapter.
was quite less interested in than the accounts proposal. As shown in Chapter 1, President Bush had supported a version of the accounts proposal for more than two decades. Unfortunately for him, the accounts proposal does not solve the financial problems that he so often discussed. It is for this reason that even as he spoke about accounts, it was only after introducing PPI that the “solv*” rhetoric increased. In doing so he said, ““And by the way, that progressive indexing] right there will solve, by far, the vast majority of the solvency issue of Social Security” (Bush, Atlanta, 7/22/05). This is in itself inaccurate, and will be discussed in the third chapter.

That he spent most of his time traveling the country proposing a “solution” that did not in fact solve Social Security’s financial problems is somewhat disturbing. If the public only learns about the problems of a system, and then hears of the President’s proposal, it may be the case that they assume that the proposal solves the problem. For example, in a Haverford College and Bryn Mawr College survey experiment identical to the one performed at Swarthmore, only 19% of 1,023 student participants responded “no” to whether accounts would ease “Social Security’s ability to pay all benefits promised”. Another 21% responded “some, but not much”. Less than half the participants at two elite colleges could answer correctly whether or not the President’s proposal would help solve Social Security’s financial problems. From the graph, it appears that the President was more interested in convincing the public of the problems than in proposing changes to reach a solution. However, toward the end of his campaign, the President’s rhetoric did shift toward solvency. Perhaps this is because of criticism, or perhaps because he set up his campaign in that order. Either way, the trend is almost uniformly upward.

c) Four Problems with Social Security – Living Longer, 2041, IOU, and Bankruptcy

In describing Social Security’s problems, the President consistently begins with a list of three related elements. First, the population is growing. Second, each citizen is living longer.
And third, benefits are growing for each successive generation. In conclusion, he repeatedly states, we have “more people, living longer, being promised greater benefits” (Bush, Portsmouth, 2/16/05), or “Fewer people paying greater benefits to a greater number of people who are living longer” (Bush, Milwaukee, 5/19/05). To track this argument, we followed the progression of two successive words: “liv* long*”. Thus, “live long”, “live longer”, and “living longer” would all be counted. As seen in Graph Problems 1, this argument substantially decreased over time. In fact, if one goes by the linear “trendline” excel creates, the President decreases his discussion of this by two thirds between the beginning and end of his 2005 reform push. It would seem likely that he declines in this discussion as a correlation of the general fall in “problem” rhetoric mentioned in the previous paragraph. The same would follow for the other variable on Graph Problems 1, 2041/42. This is the date President Bush refers to as the time Social Security is exhausted.

However, even as he decreases his “problem” rhetoric for these two variables, he increases them for the other two investigated. Both of these, his use of “IOUs” and “bankruptcy”, should be seen as more political rhetoric than educational information. While economists may disagree about the 2041 date, as will be discussed in the following chapter, each of these two later terms are incredibly vague, perhaps lending different meanings to different people. The President refers to the Social Security trust fund, which holds contributions in the form of U.S. Treasury bonds as “Kind of a bank of IOUs” (Bush, Portsmouth, 2/16/05). Moreover, in referring to the Social Security trust fund’s exhaustion, the President states, “I want you to know I cannot in good conscience, as your President, know that the system is going broke and knowing a lot of people are working hard to put payroll taxes into a broke system” (Bush, Atlanta, 7/22/05). As Chapter 3 will show, both these statements are somewhat misleading. While one might hear them and worry that benefits will not be paid after the trust fund is exhausted, even at that time Social Security would be capable of paying three quarters or more of its promised
benefits. The President’s repeated statements of, “In 2041, it’s bust…You’re paying into a bankrupt system” (Bush, Milwaukee, 5/19/05), are not technically false, but rhetorically deceptive. Interestingly, as seen in **Graph Problems 2**, while the President’s informative discussion of increasing life expectancy and upcoming exhaustion decrease, his use of “IOUs” and bankruptcy rhetoric increase. In fact, the trendlines show an average increase of about 100%. One can hypothesize how such terms might instill the fear of losing promised benefits in the public, pushing citizens to search for, and perhaps more readily accept a proposal that claims to protect their future retirements. It may be for this reason, the language’s political and persuasive ‘punch’, that the President increased their usage.

**d) Two Proposals – Accounts and Progressive Price Indexing (PPI)**

Clearly, as Chapter 1 implied, the accounts proposal was the centerpiece of the President’s Social Security reform campaign. The frequency with which the President uses the word “account(s)” could not fit on our common y-axis of four times per 1,000 words. Still, as seen in **Graph Proposals**, there was a distinct fall in the average number of times the President referred to his accounts. At first, one would assume this is because of his increased discussion, as shown, of PPI. However, it is important to note that President Bush only introduced PPI at the very end of April 2005. This last-minute solution as an addition to the President’s proposal will be discussed in Chapter 3. And yet, even before then, one can observe the decreasing usage of accounts, especially with respect to the very beginning of his campaign. In reading these 28 speeches, one notices that the President spends a great deal of time introducing the concept of his accounts proposal in the beginning, and focusing more on the positive elements to his proposal later on. This is not to say that he does not discuss accounts early on, but in proportion, he spends more time exploring their advantages after the first few weeks rather than introducing them.
e) Six Arguments for Accounts – Rate of Return, No Risk, Inheritance …etc

This next segment will explore six different rhetorical routes that President Bush pursued in convincing his audience to support his accounts proposal. The first two speak to the President’s central argument in favor of accounts: increased benefits. The accounts proposal revolves around the ability to take advantage of the faster growth of some stocks and bonds than is found from Social Security contributions. The accuracy of this claim will be evaluated in Chapter 3. Here, we note the President’s decreased progression of claims like, “It’s easy to come – develop a mix of stocks and bonds that can beat the rate of return that the money now earns” (Bush, Portsmouth, 2/16/05) or “The government does a lousy job on getting a good rate of return…You see, if you have a personal savings accounts, you could do a lot better than 1.8 percent. A conservative mix of bonds and stocks, you can get up to 7 or 8 percent” (Bush, Milwaukee, 5/19/05). Though it always appears his central argument, Graph Accounts 1 portrays a substantive decrease in his use of the phrase “rate of return”. The President’s assurances that this higher rate would be protected against risk decreases as well. To counter one of the key arguments against accounts, that the stock market is not a consistent earner, the President guarantees that accounts would not be like the lottery, or gambling. The President often repeats statements like, “You can't take it and play dice with it; you can't take it to the track; you can't gamble on, you know, fly-by-night stocks” (Bush, Little Rock, 2/4/05). It is somewhat surprising that the President decreases these two rhetorical assertions. Arguing that stocks would achieve a higher rate of return, and that the accounts would be subject to guidelines seem like fairly convincing arguments. One might think that the decrease is a simple correlation with the decrease in overall problem rhetoric. However, as will be shown, other pieces of the President’s problem rhetoric increased, or were maintained. Perhaps then, the President believed that he had found other, more persuasive arguments.
The first of the two increased pieces of rhetoric that the President used with respect to the problems of Social Security was a rhetorical maneuver harking back to his use of FDR. While it was at first surprising to see the “rate of return” and ‘no risk’ rhetoric decrease, we can see from Graph Accounts 2 why that might have been. The President’s use of a “better deal” dramatically increases during the campaign. Using it just like the “rate of return” assertion, the President says, “And so one way to allow young workers to get a better deal from a permanent fix in the Social security system is to let them take some of their own money and watch their own money grow, to be a part of a retirement system” (Bush, Denver, 3/21/05). Thus, the “better deal” rhetoric replaces much of the rate-of-return rhetoric. This switch likely followed a hypothesis that “a better deal” would, like the use of FDR rhetoric, evoke a more positive response to the President’s proposal. This is the second instance pathos overtaking logos. We will see it again.

The second of these increased rhetorical trends was the President’s argument concerning inheritance. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, some analysts and citizens dislike the current Social Security policy concerning inheritable benefits. Currently, a widow must choose between the use of their benefits or that of their departed spouse. The proposal would allow one to pass on an entire account, though certain restrictions make it less attractive for some.22 Interestingly though, the President did not even mention the change until his fifth speech. From thereon, his discussion of the subject increased.23 His statements were versions of, “That doesn’t seem fair to me that fellow Americans working all his or her life, contributing in the system, and then dies early, and the surviving spouse gets a burial benefits and, at 62, gets the greater of the benefit structures but not both” (Bush, Milwaukee, 5/19/05). It appears from the rise of this rhetoric that

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22 To be discussed in Chapter 3.
23 As seen in the graph, it increased ‘on average’. A linear trendline finds the least squares fit.
the President believed this argument to be persuasive, though his proposal had not changed. Like many of the arguments that the President increases his use of, it is fairly easy to understand why this rhetoric might prove persuasive to the public. The message is fairly simple to understand, and moreover, it appears to be an unfair policy that the President is attempting to change. We will see another such argument in the use of “Thrift” very soon.

The third and last account argument to grow during the President’s campaign is his “investor class” rhetoric. This rhetoric is designed to approach the accounts proposal from a social viewpoint. The President argued, “You’ve got ‘the investor class’…I believe the so-called investor class ought to be every American” (Bush, Portsmouth, 2/16/05). Reminiscent of John Edward’s “two Americas” (“Edwards”), President Bush suggests that a certain societal inequity must be changed, and to so the government should “promote ownership in America” (Bush, Portsmouth, 2/16/05) through the proposed accounts. Though this argument increases on average, it is more an example of a consistently spoken assertion. As seen in Graph Accounts 3, President Bush uses it throughout 2005 at about the same frequency. One would assume he did so because he thought it to was a persuasive argument, though it may simply be that he included it in his stump speech in the beginning and never cared enough to remove it.

The last accounts assertion the President often makes, and the most consistently maintained, is the referencing of a government-employee offered accounts policy already in place. Thrift Savings accounts are available to federal employees, including congressmen. After explaining the similarities between the accounts proposal and this federal policy, the President consistently states, “If setting aside money so it can grow better in a conservative mix of bonds and stocks is okay for United States Senators, it ought to be okay for workers all across America” (Bush, Milwaukee, 5/19/05). Similarly, he asserts, “If the Thrift Savings Plan that includes a voluntary personal savings accounts is good enough for Members of the United States
Congress, it is a good enough option of workers all across America” (Bush, Atlanta, 7/22/05).

We would argue that the statement, ‘If it’s good enough for them!’ is of the sort that many in the public would find persuasive. Like before, the message is simple, and the contrast between private versus federal public employees is stark. Of course, there are distinct differences between the Thrift Savings accounts and the President’s proposed accounts. Most of all, as Chapter 3 will discuss, Social Security contributions must also satisfy the obligation of the “legacy debt”. Still, as Graph Accounts 3 illustrates, the President chooses to repeat his “Thrift” rhetoric fairly consistently. We argue the central reason for doing so was the ability to make the ‘If it’s good enough for them!’ argument. Though we could not test our hypothesis with another experiment, we argue that the public would find it highly persuasive. Most importantly, we think that the President would have made the same hypothesis.

f) The Rhetoric for PPI – Avoiding Poverty

Adding PPI to the proposal means having to talk about it. Thus, President Bush needed to find or refine persuasive arguments to support it. His typical PPI stump usually progressed through three stages. First, he reminds the audience of the growing benefits problem. Benefits currently grow by the rate of wages, averaging more than the rate of prices or inflation.24 This means that benefits are growing in real terms, not just maintaining their value. But, the President repeatedly states, the government will make sure “that future generations receive benefits equal to or greater than benefits enjoyed by today’s seniors” (Bush, Milwaukee, 5/19/05). Third, and last before explaining the fine points of the PPI, he would assure the audience, “You’re not going to retire into poverty” (Bush, Atlanta, 7/22/05). As shown on Graph PPI, only after the announcement of PPI does the President mention poverty, never failing to do so afterward. We

24 This will be discussed in full in Chapter 3.
cannot graph the other pieces because the rhetoric, like “greater benefits”, is widely used.

That the President discusses “poverty” only when promoting PPI is somewhat disconcerting. Chapter 3 will reveal how accounts may leave some with significantly less than expected in their retirement savings if stocks or bonds perform as many economists expect them to. As seen in Figure 9, for 65% of beneficiaries in 2005, benefits made up more than half of their income. Moreover, for a third of beneficiaries, it made up 90% or more of their income. And, in fact, 90% of Americans 65 and older receive Social Security benefits (“Social Security Basic Facts”). It seems clear that Americans have become dependent on the program. Much of this is likely related to the fact that 52% of America’s workforce has no private pension coverage. Further, only 31% has put aside any savings “specifically for retirement” (“Social Security Basic Facts”). With such a dependence on Social Security, we argue that many citizens are not capable of comfortably withstanding less than expected retirement income.

Unfortunately, as Chapter 3 will discuss, the President has implied that accounts would secure more income. And yet, it is only with respect to PPI that the President even mentions poverty.

Because of the nature of PPI, it is very possible that the President felt it necessary to assure people against worries of retiring into poverty. The essence of PPI is a reduction in the rate at which the majority of retirees’ benefits grow. This means, as Figure 10 shows, that all those above the bottom third of earners would receive less than promised benefits once the proposal is enacted. A practical worry from such a policy would be whether or not the benefits given will be ‘enough’. It seems likely for this it is because of such fear that the President repeatedly and consistently makes the ‘no poverty’ point. While one might wonder why he did not do so in the case of the accounts proposal, it is important to remember that critics were decrying the risk of fewer benefits. It was and is impossible for them to tell the public, “you will receive 30% less benefits”. Benefit income would entirely depend on the stock and bond market.
However, with PPI, critics can promise workers that they will receive a certain percentage less than currently promised. This simple assertion, we argue, could instill fear in the public more easily than the possibility of achieving less, or possibly more benefits, with an account.

3. Taking Stock:

Having dissected the President’s stump speech, we will first recap his general stump and then analyze which types of rhetoric were increased and decreased over the campaign. First, the President introduces the topic of Social Security by referring to FDR, the man who created it. Then, he asserts that the topic is politically dangerous by calling it the “third rail”. He suggests that all politicians should come together and put “ideas on the table”, but assures audiences that those 55 and older will undergo “no changes”. Second, the President outlines Social Security’s problems as he sees them. People are living longer and receiving greater benefits, and because of the trust fund’s “IOUs” rather than “real” assets, the system will go “bankrupt” in 2041. For the majority of his campaign, the remainder of the speech revolves around his proposal for accounts. These, he maintains, provide a better “rate of return”, though not at substantial risk. One obtains a “better deal”, also with the ability to pass on assets to spouses, children, or others. He asserts the importance of overcoming our society’s construction of an “investor class”. Lastly, with respect to accounts, he refers to the Thrift Savings Plan available to Congress, and contends that if it “is good enough for Members of the United States Congress, it is a good enough option of workers all across America” (Bush, Altanta, 7/22/05). To support his new proposal for progressive price indexing President Bush usually pledges that everyone’s benefits will be maintained or grow, and promises that no one will “retire into poverty”.

a) Categorizing the Rhetoric

In analyzing the President’s stump speech, it becomes apparent that there is both
informative and emotive rhetoric involved. Recalling Aristotle’s categorizations from Chapter 1, we recognize informative rhetoric as *logos*, the argument, and emotive rhetoric as *pathos*, words that evoke passion or belief beyond logic. With the graphs and these labels we have the tools to assess what kinds of rhetoric the President increased and decreased during his campaign.

Table 5 to the left lists all the arguments and statements from the stump speech that have been discussed in this chapter.\(^2\) Those comments that maintained or increased their frequency during the campaign, recognized by their positive trendlines,\(^2\) are found in the “Positive Trendline” column, and the opposite goes for the “Negative Trendline” column. Remarks are ranked by their slope, or magnitude of their increase. For example, “Problem”, the comment with a highly significant slope of -.023, has a trendline beginning around eight uses per 1,000 words and ending at four. One can refer to the graphs from this chapter to assess the nominal change of frequency for each piece of rhetoric given.

The comments have also been distinguished by their Aristotelian category. Those that we have deemed to possess *pathos* qualities are highlighted grey, while those of *logos* are not. For both “Solv**” and “Problem”, the President rationally explains that there is a problem, and that it needs to be solved. For “Inheritance”, the President is arguing the merit of passing on one’s unused Social Security contributions. For “Liv* Long*”, “Rate of Return”, and “2041/2”, the President is attempting to convince the audience that certain ‘facts’ logically lead to certain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Trendline</th>
<th>Negative Trendline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solv*</td>
<td>+.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Deal</td>
<td>+.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Povery</td>
<td>+.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inheritance</td>
<td>+.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOUs</td>
<td>+.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDR</td>
<td>+.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>+.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankruptcy</td>
<td>+.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrift</td>
<td>+.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\) Except PPI and Accounts. These do not represent persuasive appeals. They are the objects of the appeal, that about which the president is attempting to convince the audience to support.

\(^2\) Excel creates a least squares fit linear trendline using the equation y=mx + b. Here, a “positive trendline” means one with a slope, or m, of zero or more.
conclusions. These both include that there is a Social Security financial crisis approaching, and
that accounts would help. Lastly for *logos*, “No Change” is a reason why elders should not be
worried about the change.

The highlighting indicates comments that include less fact, at least in proportion to
manipulation. These words will exact influence beyond their logical force. Though the
President’s descriptions of his accounts’ limiting guidelines may not persuade an audience, his
‘no lottery’ language might. Though the President’s refusal to consider increasing the payroll tax
would not convince anyone of his open-mindedness, his “All ideas are on the table” (Bush,
Raleigh, 2/10/05) rhetoric might. Though the idea of increased rates of return may not excite
voters, FDR’s rhetoric of a “Better Deal” might. Though the concept of trust fund exhaustion
may not activate an increased readiness for reform within an audience, “bankruptcy” might.
These four exemplify how *pathos* rhetoric might supplement or even replace *logos* rhetoric to
persuade an audience. Though not all the highlighted remarks are pure *pathos*, we categorize
them as we saw fit. There is flexibility in some because this is a qualitative judgment, but they all
exhibit a strong element of persuasion beyond what one might classify as solely ‘reason’.

**b) The Use of Pathos Over Logos**

As the explanation of the highlighted words progresses, it becomes exceedingly apparent
that the *pathos* appeals mostly fill the “Positive Trendline” section, while the *logos* remarks take
up more of the “Negative Trendline” section. Because these comments were found by looking
for markers of the central arguments made by President Bush, reduction or amplification of them
represent significant trends in the President’s stump speech.

From the table given then, it appears that the President shifted his speech in favor of

[27] Here, “facts” are those truths that are at least debatable.
manipulative rhetoric rather than reasoned argument as he progressed through his campaign. His rhetoric describing Social Security’s problems and proposing the accounts, the two largest sections of his stump speech, show this to be true. For accounts, one *logos* appeal, “Inheritance”, increases, while one, “Rate of Return” decreases. For problems, both *logos* remarks, “Liv* Long*” and “2041/42” decreased. But, three out of four *pathos* appeals increase for accounts: “Better Deal”, “Class”, and “Thrift”. And, both *pathos* arguments increase in the problems section: “IOUs” and “Bankruptcy”. In both of the President’s two central arguments he shifts toward *pathos*, and either maintains or decreases comments we mark as *logos*.

One would suppose that any trend in the President’s rhetoric portrays the kind of speech that he believes will best persuade his audiences. Today, such a belief would be grounded in the focus groups and polling of his strategists. We do not have the time or resources to conduct enough survey experiments to test each of these rhetorical devices, but we hypothesize that those the President maintained and increased were advantageous, or at least believed to be so. Of course, his decision to pursue *pathos* rhetoric at the expense of, or while decreasing *logos* rhetoric, is somewhat disheartening. If the public in our democracy truly has influence over our leaders and their decisions as many argue (Waldman, 47), and as the President’s campaign suggests\(^\text{28}\), then it seems only reasonable to believe that citizens should evaluate such decisions with their individual and collective interests as a priority. We argue that basing policy decisions on *pathos* rather than *logos* rhetoric, while perhaps frequent, does not serve such interests. In fact, it is quite easy to see how such a distraction from the logic of important decisions could work against such interests. It is for this reason that we call the President’s preference for *pathos* manipulative and disheartening.

\(^{28}\) Why else would he spend so much time attempting to persuade the public unless it has influence over his proposal’s chances?
Chapter 3: Dishonest Rhetoric – Educating the Public

1. A Primed Public:

2. Questioning the President’s Claims:
   a) Stating the Problem
      – The Trust Fund is Going Bankrupt
      – We Will Have an $11 Trillion Deficit:
   b) Proposing the Solution
      – Solving the Financial Problem:
      – Accounts will get Better Rates of Return:
      – Accounts are Supplemental:
      – Accounts can be Inherited:
      – Progressive Price Indexing Solves Most of the Problem:

3. Conclusion: True Democracy

1. A Primed Public:

   Chapter 3 delves into the level of honesty that President Bush employed during his 2005 Social Security campaign. In his travels the President both argued that the Social Security system was nearing a serious problem, and that he offered an idea for the future. After discussing what political psychologists and political commentators have written on the subject of audience persuasion and manipulation, this chapter will assess the veracity of several central assertions that the President repeatedly made during his tour of the country. Many of these will be found to be misleading, if not wholly false.

   When analyzing how President Bush attempted to persuade the country, there are two interesting academic arguments to keep in mind. First of all, many political psychologists have investigated audience priming. For example, some have found that “After being primed by stories that focus on national defense… viewers judge the president largely by how well he has provided, as they see it, for the nation’s defense; after being primed by stories about inflation, viewers evaluate the president by how he has managed, in their view, to keep prices down; and
so on” (Kinder, 364). Knowing this, someone attempting to persuade an audience would attempt to focus a debate on the areas in which they believe they can win. Another study done, this one using President Bush’s 2002 State of the Union address convincingly argues that his priming successfully established the “criteria on which citizens [based] their approval evaluations” (Druckman and Holmes, 755). In this way, campaigns are often “not so much debates over a common set of issues as they are struggles to define what the election is about” (365).

Equally, as discussed in the previous chapter on the President’s rhetorical titles for his accounts proposal, information does not necessarily help one to persuade their audience. In fact, the performed experiment shows how ignorance can lead to a more positive evaluation of a proposal. We found that for each of the eight multiple choice quiz questions asked about social security29, the average participant would evaluate the President’s proposal .34 lower on a 1-10 scale. This means that the average person who could answer six of these questions would rate the proposal more than two points higher. In this way, one might argue that the President had, and continues to have an interest in not educating the public about Social Security if he wants his proposal to succeed.

Unfortunately, that a politician would want to discuss only the issues that portray his or her proposal positively, and that one might have an interest in keeping the public ignorant, could have serious negative consequences to the public’s ability to evaluate governmental decisions and choices for the future. Often called demagogic politics, “presenting an issue in such an oversimplified way as to distort or misrepresent it” (Waldman, 50) could have corrosive effects.

29 1. Who pays the payroll tax? 2. How much of payroll tax revenue is used to pay for current Social Security benefits? 3. Does the Social Security Trust Fund, to some degree, invest in the stock market? 4. At approximately what age does a non-disabled American currently become eligible for Social Security benefits? 5. From what you knew prior to this survey, would [the accounts] proposal increase Social Security’s ability to pay all benefits promised to current workers? 6. From what you knew prior to this study, would [the accounts] proposal increase or decrease benefits for the middle-income earner? 7. From what you knew prior to this study, would progressive indexing increase Social Security’s ability to pay all benefits promised to current workers? 8. Would progressive indexing increase or decrease benefits for the middle-income earner?
on the level of democracy in our country. It is for these reasons that we spend an entire chapter
detailing some of the more significant departures from truth that the President took during his
campaign for Social Security accounts.

2. Questioning the President’s Claims:

   a) Stating the Problem

The Trust Fund is Going Bankrupt:

   One of the central points of contention over the President’s words concern his
representation of the Social Security trust fund as “a cabinet file of IOUs…[not] real assets”
(Bush, Atlanta, 7/22/05). He states that, “In 2041, it’s bust…you’re paying into a bankrupt
system” (Bush, Atlanta, 7/22/05). President Bush said in his State of the Union Address, “By the
year 2042, the entire system would be exhausted and bankrupt” (Bush, “State of the Union”).
Different political contributors at non-profit organizations and media outlets have criticized this
rhetoric as dishonest. They argue that such assertions lead to statistics like the 1997 poll by the
Employee Benefit Research Institute finding that around one third of the public believes “trust
fund exhaustion” to mean a total inability to pay benefits (Heclo).

The Facts –

   Currently, the system is collecting more income than it is spending. The SSA has
estimated that in 2006, it will have received over $740 billion and spent $564. The surplus $177
will go into the trust fund, which will rise to over $2 trillion. This trust fund is made up of
purchased U.S. treasury bonds.

   This balance should be seen as a percentage of the program’s annual expenditure. $2
trillion is about 275% of this year’s expenditures. Thus, if the SSA lost its source of funding, it
could likely still operate uninterrupted for over two years. This surplus acts as a buffer, and can
be called upon to supplement or replace the program’s income. The trust fund is expected to peak in 2015 at 409% of expenditures before it begins to progressively decrease (2006 Social Security). It is important to note that by the time this fund is “exhausted”, expected in 2040 (2006 Social Security) and 2046 (Updated Long-Term Projections) by the SSA and Congressional Budget Office (CBO) respectively, general revenues will have had to pay back its debt.

In 2017 (2006 Social Security) or 2019 (Updated Long-Term Projections), the SSA and CBO predict benefits will cost more than contributions. At this point, rather than the interest that the trust fund earns being used to purchase more bonds, an increasing portion of it will be used directly to pay for benefits. In 2028 (2006 Social Security), the SSA predicts the trust fund’s earned interest on treasury bonds will no longer satisfy output requirements. After this point, the interest on the treasury bonds, and the bonds themselves in increasing amounts will be sold to pay for benefits. It is during this period that one can see, in Graph A, the rapid elimination of trust fund assets.

Finally, in 2040 (2006 Social Security) and 2046 (Updated Long-Term Projections), the SSA and CBO expect the trust fund to be completely depleted, or “exhausted”. Without additional infusion of capital, the SSA and CBO predict that the system will only be capable of paying 74% (Summary of the 2006) or 79% (Updated Long-Term Projections), respectively, of promised benefits. It is between the second date (around 2028) and the third (2040) that general revenues will be hit hardest, requiring around $3 trillion. It is enough information to note, for purposes of this discussion, that $3 trillion represents a very large sum of money that the

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A central point of contention is whether or not the Social Security fund truly holds value. Because the surplus income in the fund is U.S. Treasury Bonds, their use would call upon general revenue moneys. Thus, President Bush has referred to the trust fund repeatedly as “a cabinet file of IOUs…there’s no real assets in them. It’s paper.” (Discussion on Senior Security in Atlanta, 7/22/05)
government will have to match, by either increasing taxes, or reducing the debt by decreasing
benefits.

Rhetoric Analysis –

From these facts, it is apparent that the trust fund does in fact hold treasury bonds rather
than assets. When the President calls them “a cabinet file of IOUs...[not] real assets”, he is not
technically changing the facts. However, the term “IOUs” may tend to diminish the reliability of
treasury bonds, which are “backed by the full faith and credit of the U.S. government”
(“Assessing the Fed’s Moves”). Still, because recovering their value would in essence mean
using general revenue funding, it is somewhat uncertain whether the Congress would not
decrease benefits in order to avoid paying the trust fund the entire amount that it had previously
borrowed. In this way, such benefits are not truly guaranteed.

On the other hand, the discussion of “bankrupt” is highly misleading. As discussed,
incoming contributions will be capable of satisfying at least 74% of benefits in 2040\(^{31}\).
Democrats (The Associated Press, “Bush Admits”) and institutions like FactCheck.Org say the
term “bankruptcy” is dishonestly “scary” (“Bush’s State of the Union”). The Social Security
system would not “go out of business the way a bankrupt business does. It would continue to pay
benefits – just not as many” (Bush, “State of the Union”). The Council of Economic Advisers
argues that “bankrupt” is accurate since the system would be incapable of paying all of its
obligations (The Associated Press, “Bush Admits”). This may be true. However, not once in any
of the stump speeches analyzed does the President mention the ability for the majority of benefits
to be paid in or after 2040. One can compare this to the way President Bill Clinton explained the
upcoming shortage during his “Save Social Security First” campaign in the late 1990s:

By the year 2030, there will be twice as many seniors as there are today, with only

\(^{31}\) We are using the SSA numbers. These are the ones that the president uses.
two people working for every one person drawing at present rates of birth, 
immigration, and retirement. Around that time, 2030, if we just leave the system 
the way it is and we do not do anything, there will only be enough money coming 
in to fund 75 cents on the dollar current benefit. (Clinton, 7/28/98)

President Clinton had a similar motive to convincing the public to recognize upcoming Social 
Security financial problems. More doubt would likely lead to increased support for change, as it 
would today. Thus, when President Clinton informs the public that even when the trust fund is 
exhausted Social Security could still pay most of its benefits, he chose a tactic that was perhaps 
more honest than politically savvy. In analyzing the rhetorical honesty of the current President’s 
rhetoric, one is led to think that President Bush chose strategy over honesty. This lack of 
information and the use of “bankruptcy” rhetoric make his speeches appear at least substantively 
incomplete, if not highly misleading.

**We Will Have an $11 Trillion Deficit:**

Another assertion the President made during his 2005 campaign was the ‘fact’ that future 
benefits would cost the government $11 trillion more than contributions could cover. For 
example, the President said, “If we don't act, we're looking at about an $11 trillion hole for the 
American taxpayers that are coming up” (Bush, Westfield, 3/4/05). In fact, it is true that future 
contributions fall $11 trillion short of expected benefits. However, this is over what economists 
call the “infinite horizon”, meaning forever into the future (“Does Social Security Really Face”).

To understand this number, one needs to know that the value of the taxable payroll for 
the infinite horizon is $275 trillion. Until 2003, the “infinite-horizon projection has not been 
included in the annual report” (“Does Social Security Really Face”). FactCheck.Org reports a 
letter to the Social Security Advisory Board by the American Academy of Actuaries saying, “the
new measures…provide little if any useful information…and indeed are likely to mislead anyone lacking technical expertise…into believing that the program is in far worse financial condition than is actually indicated” (“Does Social Security Really Face”). While the President’s words and numbers are technically accurate, they result in an exaggerated perception of the problem.

Most Social Security experts use the necessary immediate increase of payroll tax to cover the next 75 years as a way of looking at the Social Security deficit. The 2006 Trustees Report estimated that a 2.02% payroll tax increase would cover the “actuarial deficit” (Summary of the 2006). Each year this will increase as a future year with longer life expectancies is added on to the 75-year outlook. For this reason, some look at the “infinite horizon”. A payroll tax increase of about 3.7% is projected to permanently provide Social Security promised benefits. These percentages would make more sense to the President’s audience, as opposed to nominal dollar figures. However, it appears that since, “Everything is on the table except raising payroll taxes” (Bush, Omaha, 2/4/05), he chooses not to make use of this more accessible explanation. In these ways, President Bush discusses the problem facing Social Security with language that adds complexity to an already difficult subject, perhaps encouraging excessive anxiety and concern.

b) Proposing the Solution

Solving the Financial Problem:

While the President spent his entire 2005 Social Security campaign discussing the problem of Social Security’s upcoming exhaustion as well as his accounts proposal, it was only three days before the end of his “60 Stops in 60 Days” campaign that he proposed a solution. This solution, or at least partial solution, was Progressive Price Indexing (PPI). However, until he proposed it on April 28, 2005, his speeches implied that accounts would either fix or help to solve the funding problem.
This was done through his speech format. His stump speech first outlines Social Security’s problems. Second, he argues that, “it’s important for me to say to the Members of Congress, ‘If you’ve got a good idea, bring it forward’” (Bush, Portsmouth, 2/16/06). Third, he says, “Now, I’ve got an idea that I’d like for Congress to consider, and I want to share the idea with you here.” (Bush, Portsmouth, 2/16/05) In moving through these points during each of his speeches, President Bush implies that his accounts would help to solve the funding problem.

However, as will now be shown, the accounts proposal does not decrease or delay the upcoming funding shortfall. In fact, it brings the event closer. The President’s plan calls for contributions made to Social Security not needed to pay current beneficiaries to be diverted into accounts. As discussed, without changes, Social Security will begin drawing on trust fund moneys as early as 2018. By 2040, the entire trust fund will be empty. If money is to be diverted away from the fund, it will run out earlier. **Graph B** shows the expected earlier arrival of the fund depletion in the case of a 2% diversion for accounts, as well as the President’s proposal of up to 4%. As shown, the trust fund would run empty more than two decades earlier. The inability to pay more than three-quarters of benefits would occur in quite the same fashion, but much sooner than expected without the change. The President repeatedly warns of the upcoming “bankruptcy” in 2040, and yet the proposal he advocates for the majority of his Social Security campaign would hasten the occurrence of exhaustion. Indeed, because the government would have to borrow an equal amount of money that is being diverted in order to pay for current beneficiaries, one could clearly say that the funding problem would be worsened, at least for a long period of time. Again, while these points do not mean that the proposal should not be enacted, they are important elements that the public should be aware of, and that the President is not discussing.
Accounts will get Better Rates of Return:

A significant attraction and campaign component to the President’s plan is the ability of accounts to earn more from their contributions. The President has said, “the reason you ought to be allowed to do this is you get a better deal on your own money” (Bush, Atlanta, 7/22/05). Further, that “The government does a lousy job on getting a good rate of return…You see, if you have a personal savings accounts, you could do a lot better than 1.8 percent. A conservative mix of bonds and stocks, you can get up to 7 or 8 percent” (Bush, Milwaukee, 5/19/05). With these statements, the President has made two significant implications that must be analyzed. First, that the rate-of-return on individual accounts can be fairly compared to Social Security contributions and benefits. Second, he and his administration have advertised that a “portfolio mix of stocks and bonds” allowed under the proposed constraints would perform with a 4.6% rate of return (“Social Security: By the Numbers”). However, there are significant problems with both assertions. Before delving into them however, we provide a short explanation of rates of return.

When a person chooses to invest their money in a bank account, real estate, or equities (i.e. stocks and bonds), the expected rate of return will be at the top of their list of investment priorities. When investing, the rate of return is, effectively, the money one will recoup per amount of time that a person’s investment is invested. It is expressed in terms of the percentage of invested assets. So, if a person invests money in a bank that provides a 3% interest rate above inflation, than this person will achieve a 3% real rate of return. The President, in stating that Social Security’s rate of return is 1.2% (Bush, Atlanta, 7/22/05), 1.8%, (Bush, Greece 5/24/05) or sometimes 2% (Bush, Falls Church, 7/29/05), approximates the 1.6% to 2.2% estimated by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (Orszag, 18).

First, like mutual funds, accounts would be entirely focused on their rate of return. It is a tool used specifically for building a pool of money. The more one puts in, and the better return
made while investments are held in the account, the more one has to retire with. However, Social Security is different in three fundamental ways. It is an insurance program. One does not evaluate insurance programs mostly, if at all, by their rates of return. Think of how one might evaluate their car insurance; he or she would not consider it to be without value even if it is never used. Social Security’s Disability Insurance will protect the projected 30% of today’s 20 year-olds that “will become disabled before reaching age 67” (“False Promise”). This appears to be crucial, as 70% of employees in the private sector do not have any kind of long-term disability insurance. Moreover, “comparable insurance products would be extremely expensive to buy in the private insurance market, if one could find such products at all” (“False Promise”). Social Security’s insurance program is quite useful, especially because it offers an inflation-indexed annuity until death, so that one receives an annual benefit that never decreases in real value.

Also, unlike investment funds, those in the Social Security program pay a legacy debt because benefits were issued during the Great Depression even though many recipients had contributed little or nothing. In the same way, current workers pay for current beneficiaries. Because of this, their money cannot be pooled and invested apart or the surplus left over. The legacy debt cannot be circumvented. If not paid through Social Security contributions, another venue would have to pick up the slack, like general revenues.

Lastly, the program is progressive. The more wealthy contribute more dollars and then receive a smaller percentage of their contributions back during retirement. It is a communal system. Measuring a progressive system against accounts, which would not include progressivism, is not legitimate. These three attributes, so intrinsically different than investment fund accounts, make the comparison between them and Social Security benefits analogous to contrasting apples and oranges. Social Security may cost more, but it does more as well. One can argue whether or not it should do more, but to compare accounts to benefits with only rates of
return in mind highly biases any judgments made.

The second assertion of the 4.6% return must be dealt with through economic terms. Stocks are often thought to perform much better than bonds. On the other hand, many know that bonds are ‘safer’; “it is impossible to access the opportunity for the higher average returns offered in the stock market without subjecting oneself to a substantially greater risk of lower returns” (Furman, “Would Private Accounts”). Many economists argue, and the Congressional Budgeting Office agrees that, “the effects of the higher expected returns in [individual accounts] investments [should be] computed net of the cost of the additional risk. Thus, the returns are ‘risk-adjusted’ and set equal to the returns on Treasury bonds” (“Long-Term Analysis). When analyzing the expected performance of stocks, this “adjustment” is absolutely essential. It predicts the rate of return based both on the rate expected, but also on the chance that such a rate will actually be achieved. An analysis by Goldman Sachs investment firm concurs (Goldman Sachs). The President’s plan prescribes any diversion of money to an account to be offset by an equal amount of benefits later on plus 3%32 (expected Treasury bond rate) so that the government can continue paying promised benefits to current retirees by issuing Treasury bonds. This means that in order for an account to earn a positive rate of return, it must perform at a rate more than 3% above inflation. Many will earn a rate higher than 3% on their investments, but others will not. One analysis published at Yale University found that retirees would have received less than expected benefits33 32% of the time with the President’s plan under economic

32 In fact, a later announcement would make this 2.7%. In this way the government would subsidize accounts by .3%, helping those who use them to earn better rates of return. However, this would substantially increase the cost of the change, removing its long-term financial neutrality. We do not use this in the analysis because it was only changed in July of 2005, at the very end of the president’s campaign. For more information on this subject, refer to: Furman, Jason. “The Impact of the President’s Proposal on Social Security Solvency and the Budget.” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. 7/22/05.
33 Shiller only proves that it would be less, and but does not calculate how much less.
conditions between the years of 1871 and 2004 (Shiller). For those beneficiaries mentioned early in the paper who strongly depend on their benefits, lower benefits, or even uncertainty could pose a substantive problem. The accounts would likely help many, but would insert risk into a system built to provide financial ‘security’.

It is true that risk currently exists in the system, in that Social Security benefits are entirely based on legislation. Legislation is inherently temporary. Congress can, and has in the past, change how much beneficiaries receive. Thus, one might argue that though the President’s proposal contains risk, so does the existing condition. However, these are two different types of risk. The proposal passes risk on to individuals, allowing them the opportunity to do well or poorly based on their investment portfolio and economic conditions. Quite differently, Congressional risk, which lies at the root of all national benefits, is comparatively more communal. Because a legislative change would affect a large portion of the American population, reductions in benefits would not only be critically discussed, but would likely spread sacrifice more evenly across the general population to prevent causing significant harm.

The President’s two assertions, that the rate of return for accounts is comparable to current Social Security benefits, and that “you get a better rate of return on your money” (Bush, Portsmouth, 2/16/05), do not hold up to thorough analysis. And in fact this has been documented several times over by the different writers and organizations quoted and referenced in this section. The President and his strategists would certainly know this. However, he chooses to make the rate of return argument without any of the explanations given above. In this way, the President appears to be misleading his audience. For those who do not turn to more rigorous investigations, including media personnel who fail to fact check or investigate, the President’s partial story becomes the whole story.
Accounts are Supplemental:

Another maneuver the President makes with respect to his proposal is the implication that accounts would be wholly in addition to one’s expected benefits. For example, he says, “The account is set up to help supplement your Social Security check” (Bush, Portsmouth, 2/16/05). However, this is not true for two reasons.

First, any funds that are diverted to an account would be automatically deducted from one’s benefits upon retirement. Second, an additional 3% would be deducted to pay interest on the money the government would need to borrow to pay current beneficiaries the money that is unavailable because it is now in an account. CNN calls the President’s assertion “incorrect” (CNN) for these reasons. It gives the public the impression that they are getting a “free lunch”.

Accounts Can Be Inherited:

One of the central positive elements that the President assigns to his proposal is the ability to pass on the account. Currently, a worker or retiree who dies leaves behind “eligibility” for survivors’ benefits. A spouse and each child, up to a limit, can receive half of the amount the departed worker would have received (“Benefits for Your Spouse”) (“Benefits for Your Children”). However, there are parts to the system some find disagreeable. For example, a working spouse, in the case of his/her partner’s death, can only receive one set of benefits. Accounts would be immediately inheritable if a worker dies before retiring. For this reason, the President states, “It makes sense for younger workers to hold their own accounts, because when they pass on, they can leave their own assets to whomever they choose” (Bush, Portsmouth, 2/16). But, as some media outlets have reported (CNN), this is not wholly true.

Upon retirement, the President’s proposal requires that an annuity of at least a certain minimum value be purchased to guarantee that the retiree avoids poverty (Strengthening Social
Security for the 21st Century). Only the moneys leftover can be inherited. For those whose accounts could barely pay for such an annuity, inheritability would likely mean little. Moreover, the President does not say that the current cost of annuitization is around 18%” (“False Promise”). In fact, the President fails to mention either “annuity” or “annuitization” once in any of the discussed stump speeches. By totally avoiding the discussion of an element of his proposal that would decrease the efficacy for inheritance and retiring, he misleads his audience.

**Progressive Price Indexing Solves Most of the Problem:**

As of April 28, 2005, PPI is a component of the President’s proposal. The President consistently introduces it with four points: first, “future generations [should] receive benefits equal or greater than the previous generation”, second, “you’re not going to retire into poverty”, third, “the system is going to go broke [because] the benefits are growing to fast”, and fourth, PPI “will solve, by far, the vast majority of the solvency issue of Social Security” (Bush, Atlanta, 7/22/05). With this systematic introduction of his secondary proposal, he then explains what it does; it sets the rate of benefit increases for wealthier people slower (at the speed of inflation) and maintains it for the poorest (at the speed of wages). For those in the middle, it will be progressively set between the two speeds. Beyond this, however, no examples are ever given of how a person’s benefits might be affected.

The Facts –

The PPI portion of the President’s plan, on its own, has much simpler effects on Social Security than do individual accounts. By looking at Graph C and Graph D, one can see the significant impact that fixing benefits to prices rather than wages has. Graph C’s column “After Indexing” shows the percent of promised benefits that differing earners would receive in 2075. Those earning 45% of the Average Wage Index would obtain currently expected benefits; those
contributing the maximum amount would receive about half of what is now promised. In **Graph D** one can compare expected benefits under the “Current-Law Formula” to “With Progressive Price Indexing” for 2075 in 2005 dollars. The low earner continues to receive the same $16,599, but the maximum earner’s benefits are $44,236 rather than $22,428.

It is especially important to note the substantive decreases on promised benefits exacted on middle-income earners. By 2075, expected benefits would already decrease by almost 30%. To many, this difference is quite important. While benefits keep their “real” value, the loss of wage indexing will untie benefits with targeted replacement rates, the income one receives in retirement expressed as a percentage of average lifetime income. This is important because it represents the change in lifestyle that one will face without additional savings.

PPI will eventually result in differently earning workers receiving the same benefits. Because low earners’ benefits will rise faster, probably by 1.1%, than the highest earners’ benefits, the former will catch up to the later. As seen in **Graph E**, benefits for these different groups would eventually be identical. This could pose political problems, to be discussed soon.

Along side PPI, personal accounts would not cumulatively make much difference to beneficiaries. As discussed, when stocks are adjusted for risk, on average they return the same rate as bonds. Since the proposal calls for an offset of 3%, the expected Treasury bond rate, there should be no difference on the whole to beneficiaries except for increased risk. The fluctuations will reward some and harm others. Seen in **Graph C**, those who achieved higher rates will offset PPI’s effects, while those who obtain lower rates will reinforce their effect.

As mentioned, PPI could also have political implications for the traditional Social Security program’s existence. Even with a higher rate of growth than the President expects, **Graph C** shows high earners receiving 69% of their promised benefits in 2075. As time goes on, PPI decreases the replacement rate of benefits for those above the bottom third of earners. As
one’s contributions become progressively less important to the benefits one is entitled to, the perception of the program as unfair could increase. Even more importantly, in looking at Graph D, one can see that for all but low earners, a progressively small amount is actually received from the traditional system. In fact, by 2075, under the President’s proposal, medium earner’s entitled to around $20,000 would be receiving only $7,000 from the traditional system, high earners entitled to $21,000 would be receiving only $1,000 from the traditional system, and maximum earners entitled to $22,000 would receive nothing from the traditional system. As all but the bottom 30%, incidentally the group least likely to hold political power, see all their benefits coming from accounts, the political capital for the traditional system could plummet. Under the current system, a portion of higher earners money is redistributed to lower earners. When a third of higher earners’ money is unavailable, that one third appears to achieve comparatively high rates as it escapes redistribution, while the other two thirds appears to perform extremely poorly, as they are used for redistribution disproportionately more. Even further, the flattening of benefits may be perceived as ‘un-American’, because it in no way rewards higher contributions. It is for these reasons that institutions like the liberal Center on Budget and Policy Priorities write articles titled “Why the President’s Social Security Proposal Could Ultimately Lead to the Unraveling of Social Security” (Furman, “Why the President’s”).

Lastly, PPI will only solve a majority of the Social Security funding problem if enacted on its own. The President’s progressive indexing would mitigate 60% of the deficit. However, in combination with individual accounts, the entire plan saves less than 25% of the 75-year deficit. This is because individual accounts, as discussed before, divert contributions away from the Trust fund (Furman, “The Impact of the President’s”).

A Rhetoric Analysis –

So, looking back at the President’s remarks, there are several lacking components, and
other inconsistencies. First, while the last section gives one an accurate idea of how the typical beneficiary would be affected, the President does not even attempt to do so. Second, the evening out of benefits over time resulting from PPI, and thus the reduction of the system’s progressiveness, never comes up during any of the President’s stump speeches. For many, such information would be important in attempting to evaluate the proposal. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the President’s assertion that PPI “will solve, by far, the vast majority” of the funding problem, is simply inaccurate. PPI alone would solve 60%, ‘the majority’. But, the President is proposing PPI in combination with accounts. Together, they solve less than 25% of the problem. In these many and varied ways, it appears that the President misleads his audience, both in words and in silence.

3. Conclusion: True Democracy

Having explored the President’s arguments both about the problems of Social Security, and his proposals, we see a certain disregard for ‘the whole truth’. This is certainly neither unique to Social Security, to this president, nor to the highest office in American politics. This kind of fact cherry-picking and biased\(^\text{34}\) argumentation leads to the public’s cynicism (Waldman, 67) so often discussed in political science academia. How can a democracy work when those leading us are purposefully misleading us? What does it say that ignorance helps the President’s proposal, whether it is maintained by the President’s non-attempt to inform or public disinterest\(^\text{35}\)? The answer lies either in the betterment of the President’s words, or in those of politicians, the media, and non-profit political organizations. Unfortunately, these others may fail to reach the public when combating the rhetoric of someone as powerful as the President.

\(^{34}\) In the sense that the speaker purposefully biases his comments.

\(^{35}\) This question spawns many others. Would any proposed policy, when the public learns more about it, be evaluated less positively? Does education always lead to decreased support? Why are citizens so disinterested? These questions should be taken up in further research.
Conclusion:
A Democracy of Manipulation

Chapter 1 explored both the ethos and pathos of the President’s campaign. With respect to ethos, we found that the President demonstrably fostered the perception that he acted in a bipartisan fashion. He did so even as he pursued highly biased committees and refused to consider certain Democratic Party recommendations. We illustrated the President’s use of linguistic modification that, in our experiment, resulted in increased support for the proposal.

Chapter 2 built on the pathos discussion from Chapter 1. By tracking the progression of the President’s stump speech arguments, we found significant reductions of the President’s logos appeals, but increases in those rhetorically manipulative, or pathos, remarks.

Chapter 3, lastly, put the President’s claims to the test. We found that many central arguments made to support his proposal were flawed, and in fact distortions of reality. Though one hesitates to use the term “lying”, some of these assertions may deserve such a description.

In fact, only Chapter 1’s finding of the accounts rhetorical packaging was not dishonest in any fundamental way. The rhetorical ‘no risk’ emphasis may have, in fact, been somewhat misleading. As shown, accounts do come with inherent risk. Of course, there were many factual statements made through the President’s speeches. But, the central arguments repeated during his stumps were found to contain substantial departures from the truth. Thus, we feel it appropriate to conclude that his campaign rhetoric was substantively ‘dishonest’. One could perhaps use the label ‘immoral’, since he is manipulating and encouraging citizens to evaluate an important situation without personal or communal interests in mind.

This is not to say that President Bush is necessarily more ‘dishonest’ or ‘immoral’ than other politicians. The only comparative example this paper provides is a piece of information that President Clinton chose to inform his reform audience about though President Bush has
chosen not to. And yet, President Clinton’s time in office was certainly not a perfect exhibition of morality in practice (Berke). There is a reason why politicians are often seen as dishonest (Williams). This analysis speaks as much about the current President as it does about American politics in general. Democracy inherently gives politicians, and others who wish to enact change an incentive to persuade the public. Richard Neustadt states that persuasion “deals in the coin of self-interest with men who have some freedom to reject what they find counterfeit” (Neustadt, 40). Boiled down, Neustadt believes a president needs to convince the public that his proposals are in their self-interest. We can see how President Bush manipulates facts and distorts reality to perform such an act. But, he also designs his rhetoric to attract parts of the human mind that are not strictly logic-based. The many-faceted and varied mind of the public encourages politicians to utilize a diverse set of methodologies in their attempt at persuasion. In this fashion, ‘manipulation’ is also important. It is for this reason that political language experts argue, “Candidates have the greatest incentive to be ambiguous when specificity would alienate significant numbers of voters” (Waldman and Jamieson, 146). In fact, these same authors found that President Bush acted similarly in his 2000 presidential campaign, “[cloaking] discussion of unpopular positions in terms that might have convinced many paying less than perfect attention that [his] positions were something they were not” (Waldman and Jamieson, 147). Such discourse spurred Thomas Hobbes to argue that democracy becomes an “aristocracy of orators” (Hobbes), allowing “the best speakers [to be] allowed the upper hand” (Garsten, 3).

And yet, using such methods, President Bush was ultimately unsuccessful in his campaign. As Chapter 1 noted, The Washington Post reports that the proposal has “failed” (“A Weakened President”). Moreover, though different polls show different levels of public approval for the President’s handling of Social Security, Graph F shows a fairly consistent decline. Such a failing begs the question: If the President manipulated his audiences through rhetorical
packaging, misleading remarks, and deception, why did he not succeed?36

First of all, such a question assumes that the President did, in fact, manipulate his audience. We did observe in the experiment that at least one of his rhetorical decisions was beneficial to his proposal. It certainly seems possible that the other manipulations listed in this paper were also advantageous. So, if the President was persuasive whenever his words reached the general public, either directly or through the media, why did his proposal not become legislation? Clearly, there is a possible disconnect between speaker and audience. Many in the public do not watch C-SPAN or access mediums from which they might read or hear the President’s words. Some have argued this has become increasingly true with the advent of cable television (Young and Perkins, 1190). In fact, this could very well be the reason why the President failed. But, we argue that three forces present obstructed and opposed the proposal’s advancement for those who ‘received’ the President’s words: reality, criticism, and his own spotlighting of the issue. These three do not include the average reaction of the public to the policy proposal outside of all these rhetorical and counter-rhetorical effects. Of course, if the proposal had been immediately acceptable to the public, or immediately rejected, these three anti-proposal variables, and the President’s pro-proposal efforts, would not have mattered.

The first of these, reality, can be seen through psychological and practical lenses. From the psychology perspective, Freud delineated the reality principle as delaying the immediate search of pleasure in favor of seeking long-term pleasure (Freud, 16.357). The tenet of maturated thinking as “taking account of reality” (16.357) makes the difference between relying on what one hears, and what one believes. Professor Sidney Waldman of Haverford College argues that

36 One area this paper does not delve into is the president’s attempt to convince Congress. The reform would, in fact, be enacted by congress and not through a national referendum. However, the president toured the country to promote public support, which would indirectly lead to congressional support. It is this attempt to garner public support that we investigate here.
this can be applied to rhetoric in that those who are manipulated by language may, either while listening or some time afterward, recognize a disconnect between what they were told and what they know to be true (Waldman, 2/2/06). This is also in line with the discussion of the peripheral versus the central processing route discussed in Chapter 1. Those who think more critically are thought to be influence less by rhetoric. From the practical perspective, Brookings Senior Fellow Thomas Mann argues, “marketing campaigns have limits when the public is familiar with the program” (Mann). Both arguments lead to the same conclusion, though rhetoric has the power to influence an audience, such force declines as those listening line up what they hear with what they know. Though the public is not knowledgeable about Social Security, Mann argues they know enough about the program to not desire change. This is likely because most people know someone who receives benefits. Thus, Mann maintains, “Social Security is the best current example of the failure of message politics” (Mann).

The second obstacle, criticism, originates from two sources. The first of these is political opposition. The Democratic Party was the strongest political foil to the President’s plan, though groups like the American Association of Retired Persons buttressed their efforts. Such groups supplied their own counter-rhetoric, and counter manipulation. For example, after announcing their opposition from the FDR memorial, all but one Democrat signed a letter calling the President’s plan “immoral, unethical, and unsustainable” (Stolberg and Hulse). The official Democrat Party website states that the President’s accounts plan is the only one that will take away benefits, (“Bush Privatization Plan”) often ignoring that the 2040s will force the government to reduce benefits unless new legislation is enacted. If analyzed in depth, one finds in these statements rhetorical influence and misleading messages analogous to the President’s.

The second critical source was the media and other relatively impartial analytical sources. It was from these that this paper produced the logos criticisms to the President’s arguments in
Chapter 3. Sources like *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Brookings Institution*, and *FactCheck.Org* all make the President’s words available. But, in doing so, they provide educated and critical dialogue alongside it. Television stations like *CNN*, *MSNBC*, and *CBS* also would have provided an analysis not only of the President’s arguments, thus weakening the persuasiveness of his misleading assertions, but also of the President’s rhetoric. For example, many news outlets published stories on the “personal” vs. “private” debate. By calling attention to such rhetoric, the audiences of these outlets will be much more likely to think critically about the President’s words. In essence, the President’s opposition brought “the reality” to the public, encouraging “the reality principle” to take effect.

The last of the obstacles to the President’s campaign was self-made. As discussed in Chapter 2, it is very clear that the more one knows about Social Security in general, and about the President’s proposal, the less one supports the reform. That is, the more one can answer the questions used in the survey quiz, the less one will support the proposal. Thus, the President had a real interest in keeping the public uninformed. Obviously, he believed that speaking about Social Security and his reform, as he did through 2005, would encourage support. Perhaps this is similar to the importance of name recognition for politicians (Langer and Craighill). However, by traveling the country and putting his Social Security reform at the center of the media stage, the President’s actions encouraged the media to report on and analyze the proposal, as well as source his political opposition. The increase in media attention can be seen in Chapter 1’s Figure 6. By initiating his campaign, he encouraged the media to discuss his proposal at a much higher level than before, at least temporarily. In this way, it is possible that the President, though he carefully avoided critical pieces of information in his speeches, indirectly made sure that many in the public would receive them from elsewhere. Thus, President Bush’s “60 Stops in 60 Days” tour likely hurt his proposal as much or more than it helped.
It was likely a combination of these three forces, the reality principle, criticism, and the President’s placement of his proposal at center stage, that led to the reform’s death. Because the population was split on the proposal, these antagonistic forces were very important. Changes of 5-10% could have made or broken a majority of support. No doubt, such change would have impacted congressional action on reform.

Having explored the President’s campaign rhetoric in a holistic fashion, from psychological, linguistic, and political perspectives, we have learned much about the methods available to any president when preparing to persuade a nation. Because President Bush was the leader of this campaign, and because he was not joined by most of his party, he was forced to rely on himself to promote the proposal. Thus, by analyzing his rhetoric in such a holistic fashion, we can see what tactics a president can and does pursue when attempting to promote a controversial policy on his own. Such a critique follows in the steps of many academics, since it utilizes several fields. It certainly follows George Lakoff, the psycholinguist professor from Berkeley who has recently enveloped himself in political rhetoric discussions. While he has gone one step further in producing new rhetoric through theory and polling, this analysis provides an analysis that can be applied to any politician’s campaign stump speeches. By outlining the major points of a politicians stump, finding the words that most encompass these arguments, and then tracking them over time, one can observe their subtle, and not so subtle shifts in emphasis. Such analysis is important; in a democracy where the people govern best when most informed, breaking down a politicians’ attempts to manipulate the public helps to prevent important decisions from being made based not on ethos or pathos, but logos.

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37 This would take a separate paper to investigate, but we assume it as a practical statement.
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Appendix of Graphs

Chapter 1 Graphs:

Figure 1: Bush's Account Rhetoric

- Personal...Accounts: 83%
- Retirement Accounts: 7%
- Savings Accounts: 5%
- Other: 4%
- Private Accounts: 1%

Figure 2: Bush's Personal...Account Rhetoric

- Personal Accounts: 42%
- Personal Savings Accounts: 33%
- Personal Retirement Accounts: 13%
- Voluntary Personal Savings Accounts: 10%
- Voluntary Personal Accounts: 2%
Figure 6: Media Usage of "Private" vs. "Personal"

- Total Articles
- "Private...Account" Articles
- "Personal...Account" Articles

February: The media seizes on the Feb. 2nd State of the Union Address and the preparation for "60 Stops in 60 Days"

March - May: Even as President Bush begins and continues his reform campaign tour, the media decreases its attention.

Figure 7: 'No Risk' Rhetoric

No Risk = Conservative[ly], Lottery, Gambl[ing], and Dice

Terms per 1,000 Words

20-Jan-05 11-Mar-05 30-Apr-05 19-Jun-05 8-Aug-05
Table 2 - Account Rhetoric and Evaluations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation (1-10)</th>
<th>Partisanship (1-5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private</strong></td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Savings</strong></td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voluntary Personal Savings</strong></td>
<td>.42*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soc. Security Knowledge (0-8)</td>
<td>-.34***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Orientation (1-5)</td>
<td>.80***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Activism (0-5)</td>
<td>-.29***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.38***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 397, N = 275
Adj. R²: .23, Adj. R²: .10, Prob > F: .00, Prob > F: .00
Significance: *p<.15, **p<.10, ***p<.05

*a Personal is the omitted category.

Performed with STATA 8.0
Chapter 2 Graphs:

Intro 1: "No* Chang*" and "FDR" or "Roosevelt"

When Change* is Within 3 Words of No*

Intro 2: "Table" and "3rd Rail"

"Problem" vs. "Solv*"
Problems 1: "Liv* Long*" and "2041/2042"

Problems 2: "IOUs" and Bankruptcy

Proposals: "PPI" and "Account"
Accounts 1: "Rate of Return" and No Risk Rhetoric

Accounts 2: Inheritance and "Better Deal"

Accounts 3: "Class" or "Ownership", and "Thrift"
**Figure 9** – Dependence on Social Security (“SSA’s Performance and Accountability Report”)

**Figure 10** – Effects of PPI and 2% Accounts (Goss)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>After Indexing</th>
<th>Benefits + Account (2.7% Growth)</th>
<th>Benefits + Account (4.92% Growth)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45% of AWI</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>108%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100% of AWI</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>160% of AWI</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While 4.92% growth is used rather than 4.6%, these were found to be the most helpful statistics available. The extra .32% would only help the plan to obtain higher returns. Also, this table gives results for 2% accounts. This is both problematic and useful. The president’s plan allows for the diversion of up to 4%, so many people will divert less, perhaps 2%. But, this table was the most useful prediction table that we found to be available.

AWI = Average Wage Index
45% = 26th Percentile (Lower Earner)
100% = 57th Percentile (Medium Earner)
160% = 85th Percentile (High Earner)

Calculation performed by SSA Actuaries with 2% Accounts, and an assumed annuity purchase.
Chapter 3 Graphs:

Graph A – Trust Fund Assets (Munnell)

Graph B – Trust Fund with Accounts at Different Levels (Anrig and Wasow)


Graph C – Effects of PPI and 2% Accounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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160% = 85th Percentile (High Earner)

Calculation performed by SSA Actuaries with 2% Accounts, and an assumed annuity purchase.

Graph D – Reduced Benefits from Traditional System (Furman, “An Analysis”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Current-law Formula with Progressive Price Indexing and Benefit Offsets for 2% Accounts</th>
<th>With Progressive Price Indexing and Benefit Offsets for 4% Accounts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low earner</td>
<td>$16,599</td>
<td>$13,811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium earner</td>
<td>$27,344</td>
<td>$19,715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High earner</td>
<td>$36,254</td>
<td>$21,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum earner</td>
<td>$44,236</td>
<td>$22,428</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 2005 dollars, this table shows the benefits that will continue to be received from traditional benefits, but not those from created individual accounts.

Graph E – PPI’s Effect on Benefits (Furman, “An Analysis”)

Progressive Price Indexing Flattens Benefits  
(Benefits by retirement year, average benefits = 100)

![Graph E](image-url)
Conclusion Graphs:

**Graph F - President Bush's Handling of Social Security**

Polls Available at: [www.pollingreport.com](http://www.pollingreport.com)