Introduction

Some Puzzles

Since its publication in 1986, Samuel Kernell's "going public" theory has emerged as a leading explanation of presidential behavior. To a large degree, presidential leadership is built upon a going public strategy. However, since Kernell first wrote his book, the political world has evolved. The political parties are now more polarized, the news media highly fragmented, and the public less attentive to news and public affairs than it was a quarter century ago. Presidents have adapted to this changing political context. Although they have not abandoned the going public leadership strategy, presidents have modified their public leadership activities to better fit these new realities. *Going Local: Presidential Leadership in the Post-Broadcast Age* is about the changing nature of presidential going public in an era of polarized parties and fragmented media. This revised going public model better explains recent presidential behavior that seems at odds with our traditional understanding of going public.

For instance, the traditional going public perspective predicts that presidents will build a personal, broad-based following in the mass public, not a partisan one. Consider, however, George W. Bush's behavior in the wake of his narrow election victory in 2000. Bush came to office in 2001 under a cloud, winning the election only after the Supreme Court ruled in his favor regarding the recount of votes in Florida. That, the Court's party line vote on the Florida recount issue, and Al Gore's popular vote lead led to outcry and protest and potentially undermined Bush's legitimacy to assume the office. To heal the nation's divisions, some analysts suggested that Bush should build a bipartisan unity cabinet. Instead, he assembled a highly partisan administration

and governed as an ardent partisan throughout his two terms. Going public as traditionally understood does not easily account for Bush's highly partisan governing style.

Second, the going public style also treats major national addresses and national news coverage as critical elements for presidents as they try to build national public support. However, shortly after winning reelection in 2004, Bush announced his proposal to overhaul and reform Social Security. To build support for his reform, Bush embarked on a highly publicized "60 cities in 60 days" tour around the nation. When asked by reporters why he "keeps plugging away on his meticulously stage-managed and strikingly repetitive national tour on Social Security" he responded,

> Part of the reason I'm going around the country . . . is because not everyone gets their news from the national news. In all due respect to the national Pooh-Bahs, most people get their news from the local news. And if you're trying to influence opinion, the best way to do it is to travel hard around the country and give the people their dues. (Froomkin, June 3, 2005)

Why did Bush make going local the centerpiece of his campaign to build public support, rather than using the national airwaves and national media?

Third, during the past two decades, most types of going public activities have steadily risen, yet mounting research (e.g., Edwards, 2003) indicates that going public is no longer a very effective method of building public support and influencing public opinion. Why are presidents going public more if they are gaining little from doing so?

In *Going Local: Presidential Leadership in the Post-Broadcast Age*, I address these puzzles by building a new theory of presidential leadership. This theory argues that presidential leadership styles adapt to changes in context. During the past two decades, the context presidents faced has changed as parties have polarized and the news media have fragmented. Instead of "going national," as they did in the era that Kernell studied, presidents now "go narrow"; that is, they focus on mobilizing support from their party base, interest groups, and select localities. Presidents still go public, but now they emphasize a different mix of going public activities compared with a generation ago. In this book

I demonstrate empirically that presidents are reasonably effective in building support, especially local public opinion, among these narrow groups.

THE ARGUMENT

The rise of polarized parties and a fragmented news media during the past two decades have transformed presidential governing and leadership styles. Going national, a major element of going public, as described by Samuel Kernell (1986, 2006), is not very effective in building public support in the face of polarized parties and a fragmented news media. In place of going national, presidents now go narrow; that is, they focus their public activities on building support in their party base, some interest groups, and select localities.

In *Going Local*, I offer a new context theory of presidential leadership styles. It argues that presidents, as rational actors, adapt to changing circumstances or context because the context affects the ability of presidents to mobilize resources that they can use to affect congressional roll calls. This theory helps explain changes in presidential behavior across two transitions: 1) from institutional pluralism (1950s–1970s) to individual pluralism (1970s–mid-1980s) and 2) from individual pluralism to the current era of polarized parties and fragmented media (mid-1980s–present).

For instance, during the era of institutional pluralism, approximately the 1940s to the mid-1970s, presidents primarily used a bargaining leadership style because of the power of committee chairs to deliver their committee's rank and file membership, and because public support for the president held little sway with these committee leaders. From the 1970s until about the mid-1980s, institutional pluralism gave way to individual pluralism. Committee leaders lost much of their institutional power, whereas individual members of Congress gained greater career autonomy and control. Presidents could not bargain with each individual member of Congress. In place of bargaining, presidents developed the going public approach, in which they would rally public opinion to pressure Congress to support the president's policies. Going public played on members' electoral insecurity. A key feature of going public in this era was the prime-time presidential

television address, which aimed to mobilize national public opinion. Through such addresses, among other public presidential activities, going public theoretically would activate opinion across a number of congressional districts, which would make going public more efficient than striking bargains with members of Congress individually.

But in the 1980s, the mass media began to fragment through the rise of cable television and the Internet. The national airwaves did not provide the president with as much access to the public as he had in the 1970s, undermining going national as a leadership strategy. Heightened party polarization erected a further barrier to presidential activation of national public opinion – not as many people would respond to presidential calls as during the previous age. Consequently, from roughly the mid-1980s to the present, presidents have de-emphasized national going public, putting more effort into mobilizing their party base, interest groups, and opinion in localities open to presidential leadership. As in the age of national going public, the president plays on members' electoral motivations, but he does so in a different way, as member's electoral calculations have changed.

In *Going Local*, I show how presidents have responded to the changing context by adapting their leadership style to reflect this new environment. The recognition that presidential leadership styles have changed helps to explain the puzzles posed above – Bush's partisan style, his reliance on going local, and the ineffectiveness of going national.

Furthermore, I show that going narrow is relatively effective in building public support, especially in localities important to the president. Recent research has argued that presidents are not very effective at leading the public (e.g., Edwards, 2003). My argument is that these studies understate the degree of presidential leadership effects. Presidential leadership of public opinion is always problematic. However, the context theory tells us *where* we should look for leadership effects. Rather than look only at national opinion, as most research has done, we need to examine presidents' leadership of their party base and the interest groups, and local communities they target.

In *Going Local*, I spend considerable time looking at presidential influence of local newspaper coverage and the effect of that coverage on public support of the president. That analysis finds that

presidents can influence the coverage they receive in local newspapers, which in turn affects the opinions its readers have of the president. The potential to lead may be decreased in the era of polarized parties and fragmented media compared with the era of individual pluralism, but we can detect measurable and meaningful presidential leadership effects.

Rather than try to explain the puzzle of why presidents engage in so much going public activity if it has little pay off, as Edwards (2003) does, I argue that presidents adjust their behavior to maximize their leadership impact given the circumstances they confront. Those circumstances may not be propitious, but presidents rationally exploit them, however limited they may be. Much of what appears so puzzling becomes less so when understood through the lens of the context theory of presidential leadership.

SOME DATA

In the new era of polarized parties and fragmented media, presidents place more emphasis on narrow groups, like their party base, interest groups, and select localities, and less on influencing national public opinion, a key theme of going public in the era of individual pluralism. I provide evidence that presidents have increased or altered their interactions with each of these three types of "narrow" segments of the political system. Most of the empirical work, however, focuses on presidential targeting of localities, what I call "going local."

Presidents use several methods in their attempts to influence local public opinion, including visits to localities and managing local news coverage. Although management of local news coverage is the spine for going local, it presents two hurdles for influencing local opinion. First, presidents must affect their local news coverage, and second, that news coverage must affect local opinion about the president.

To test for the effectiveness of the going local strategy, I built several specially designed data sets. Two of these data sets look at whether presidents can affect the coverage they receive in local newspapers. I use local newspapers rather than local television data for several reasons. A preliminary content analysis of local television news finds very little coverage of the president in local news broadcasts, and not many

local television news stations have their broadcasts archived, a costly barrier to data collection. Many local newspapers archive; they still command relatively large readerships when compared with numerous other news media; and they publish measurable and meaningful amounts of news about the president.

One of these local newspaper data sets consists of a random sample of newspapers across a random sample of days in the calendar year 2000, for a sample of 825 news stories on the president. Other than because of resource limitations, I restricted these data to 2000 in order to match it as closely as possible with the data used to assess the impact of news coverage on public opinion, the 2000 National Annenberg Election Study (NAES). The NAES presents a unique opportunity to assess the impact of local daily news coverage on public opinion, which I discuss more fully below.

To compensate for the fact that the first local newspaper data set looks only at 2000, and thus may be unique or peculiar, I also collected a monthly time series of presidential news from 1990 through 2007 for fifty-six newspapers to look at trends in the *quantity* of presidential news. The results of the analyses of both of these data sets indicate that presidents seem to be able to affect the quantity and tone of their local news coverage.

To look at the impact of news coverage on public evaluations, the second leg of the going local approach, I again use the 2000 NAES. The NAES asked respondents for a feeling thermometer rating on then-President Bill Clinton, as well as to name the newspaper they read. I added information on the tone of news about the president for the respondents' newspaper. The analysis suggests that such news coverage in newspapers that respondents read affects respondents' evaluations of the president. Thus, presidents seem to be able to influence their local news coverage, which in turn influences public evaluations of the president.

THE PLAN OF THIS BOOK

Chapter 1 opens with a puzzle: Presidents seem to go public at higher rates now than during the era of individual pluralism, but going public does not appear to be highly effective in influencing public opinion.

To resolve this puzzle, Chapter 1 offers the context theory of presidential leadership, which suggests that the types of going public activities that presidents currently employ differ from those of the era of individual pluralism. In particular, presidents will target narrow groups, putting less emphasis on moving national opinion. The context theory is applied to explain changes in presidential behavior during two transitions, from institutional to individual pluralism and from individual pluralism to the current context of polarized parties and fragmented media.

Chapter 2 presents the first tests of the context theory of presidential leadership by presenting evidence that presidents have increased the attention they pay to their party base, interest groups, and localities, while also documenting declining use of national appeals.

Influencing local public opinion is a key element of going narrow. Presidents can try to influence local opinion by either visiting localities and/or by managing their local news coverage. Because visits are costly and rarely can persuade large numbers of members of Congress to support the president, managing local news coverage appears to provide a more systematic and continuous way for presidents to influence local opinion. In this regard, both local television and newspapers may be important, but I argue for the greater importance of local newspapers. Both local media command relatively large audiences and public respect, but local television does not broadcast much news on the president, whereas local newspapers publish considerable amounts of presidential news. Chapter 3 marshals evidence to support these claims, including a context analysis of local television broadcasts to show their meager attention to the president.

For going local to be effective, presidents must first manage or influence their local news coverage. Chapter 4 presents the theory of presidential news management. The chapter reviews and critiques the literatures on presidential news management and local news coverage of the president. I define presidential news management as the strategy presidents employ to influence their news coverage. Presidents believe that their news coverage will affect their public support. Identifying the specifics of a president's news management strategy, however, is difficult. First, presidents do not announce their news management strategy, and we may not observe some tactics or actions associated

with a news management strategy, such as preferences or easier access for favored journalists or news organizations. Perhaps the best that we can do is look at the president's public activities as an indicator of the president's news management strategy. I assume that the president's news management strategy determines important characteristics of these public activities and events, such as their timing, format, location, and content. These activities may be thought of as the public face of the president's news management strategy, an approach similar to Althaus's (2000).

The empirical sections of this book assess the effectiveness of the going local leadership style. Chapters 5 to 7 test the first leg of the going local strategy by looking at whether presidents can influence their local news coverage. Chapters 5 and 6 look at the quantity of presidential news, Chapter 5 using the content analysis of newspapers in 2000, whereas Chapter 6 turns to the 1990 to 2007 monthly time series of local presidential news. Chapter 7 returns to the 2000 content analysis, looking at the tone of local news coverage of the president. Analysis in these chapters shows that presidents can affect the quantity and tone of the coverage they receive in local newspapers.

Chapters 5 through 7 indicate that presidents can manage their local news coverage. Does that coverage affect public opinion? To address this question, I turn to the 2000 NAES in Chapter 8, which asked respondents to name the newspaper they read. I coded each mentioned newspaper for the calendar year 2000 for whether it endorsed Democratic or Republican presidential candidates to measure tone, arguing that these endorsement patterns correlate with tone of presidential news coverage and providing support on this linkage. Analysis indicates that readers of "Democratic" newspapers, with many statistical controls in place, rate Clinton more highly in 2000 than readers of "Republican" newspapers. This finding suggests that if presidents can influence the tone of their coverage in local newspapers, they will realize higher levels of public support among readers of those newspapers.

Chapter 9 recaps the findings, discusses unresolved questions, presents directions for future research, and links this study to the large and growing literature on media bias, with some suggestions for how to study the influence of the news media in modern politics.

The chapter concludes with some thoughts about the nature of presidential leadership. In contrast with other recent studies that suggest limits or slight presidential leadership effects (Edwards, 2003), my study finds potentially significant leadership effects. But to find these leadership effects, we needed to understand the larger context in which presidents find themselves so that we can look for the types of leadership effects that the context allows. Context matters for presidential leadership. Scholars of presidential leadership need to be sensitive to context and how it affects the opportunities and styles of presidential leadership.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing this book I have accumulated a number of debts. First, several individuals gave me their time and advice, especially Jamie Druckman of Northwestern University, Jeff Peake of Bowling Green State University, and Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha of the University of North Texas. Jamie got me thinking about the deeper meaning of the research reported in these pages, and how to structure and present my argument. Jeff got me thinking on how and why to study presidents and the local media, and his papers on the topic strongly influenced my own research. Matt has helped me in numerous ways, from advice on collecting data and analyzing data, to helping me flesh out conceptual and theoretical issues. Like Jeff, Matt too has done some important work on presidents and localities.

Two institutions provided me with the support to finish this project. My home institution, Fordham University, granted me some funds to employ several students, who collected the bulk of the content analysis data used in Chapters 5 and 7. Fordham also granted me a Faculty Fellowship for academic year 2008–2009, which relived me of my teaching and other university responsibilities, enabling me to devote my energies to finishing this book.

Second, I want to thank the Center for the Study of Democratic Politics (CSDP), of the Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University, which awarded me a Visiting Senior Research Scholar fellowship for academic year 2008–2009. CSDP provided me with a congenial and stimulating work environment. In particular, I want to thank Michele

Epstein and Helene Wood, who helped me get settled at CSDP and always looked after my needs. Larry Bartels, the Director of CSDP, was a most gracious host. The other faculty and staff at CSDP, the Wilson School, and Princeton University made my visit productive, enjoyable, and one of the high points of my academic career. A special word of thanks goes to Fred Greenstein, with whom I shared many engaging lunches and discussions across a wide variety of topics.

I also want to thank Cambridge University Press, in particular Ed Parsons and Jason Przybylski, who speedily guided me through the review process and offered much cogent advice for revising this manuscript. The two reviewers for CUP, Richard Waterman and Stephen Weatherford made invaluable suggestions.

I also want to thank Christopher Catropa. Chris studied at Fordham University, where he earned his bachelor of arts and master of arts degrees and enrolled in several of my courses. Chris is responsible for collecting much of the data used in Chapters 5 and 7.

Finally, a word of love and appreciation goes to my wife, Phyllis, who puts up with me and my work habits with good grace, tolerance, and a sense of humor.