



Social Science History Association

The Truman Doctrine Speech: A Case Study of the Dynamics of Presidential Opinion Leadership

Author(s): Samuel Kernell

Source: *Social Science History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Autumn, 1976), pp. 20-44

Published by: [Duke University Press](#) on behalf of the [Social Science History Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1170931>

Accessed: 16/08/2013 11:49

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Duke University Press and Social Science History Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Social Science History*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE SPEECH: A CASE STUDY OF THE DYNAMICS OF PRESIDENTIAL OPINION LEADERSHIP*

Samuel Kernell

During the twenty year period of 1945 through 1965 perhaps the most dramatic example of presumed presidential opinion leadership is President Truman's speech proclaiming what came to be called the Truman Doctrine. Delivered to Congress and broadcast across the nation on radio, the speech has been widely acknowledged as establishing the temper of postwar U.S. foreign policy. Historians whether sympathetic or critical of the Truman administration agree that this speech more than any other single event marks the beginning of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. Moreover, its implications for the future did not require hindsight available only to historians. Immediately, contemporaries in Washington and abroad grasped that President Truman was advocating a fundamental change in the U.S. responsibility and posture toward the world.

As Joseph Jones, a State Department participant in the formulation of the Truman Doctrine and its chief chronicler, recalls, "All who participated in the extraordinary developments of the period were aware that a major turning in American history was taking place."¹ After past wars the United States had withdrawn at least temporarily into an isolationist mood and policy. Despite the United States' role in the creation and support of the United Nations, every indication from the recently elected Republican Congress was that U.S. economic and military commitments around the world would be sharply curtailed.² And yet here was the President in March of 1947, only a year after the peace, attempting to commit a hostile Congress and an unconcerned nation to an activist, international policy. Such a setting holds much promise for informing us about the nature and potential of presidential opinion leadership.

An analysis of opinion leadership for this period is interesting for another reason. Recently, a number of historians have been reevaluating the Truman presidency and concluding that the United States fomented the Cold War abroad and at home. Among them, Richard Freeland in his 1972 book *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism* identifies Truman's March 12 speech, as well as subsequent propaganda and "police" activities, as creating an opinion climate of anticommunism which made the McCarthyism of the early 1950's unavoidable.³ Freeland's and some of the other revisionist historians' depiction of events is simple. In order to prompt Congress and the nation to embrace his foreign policy, President Truman raised the spectre of internal communist subversion. Having succeeded in linking foreign and

*I wish to thank John Ferejohn, Brian Job, Clayton Koppes, W. Phillips Shively, and Aaron Wildavsky for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

domestic threats and getting his program accepted, he found himself unable to turn off this pathological fear of communist subversion he promulgated. It is a parsimonious theory. It explains eventual passage of the Greco-Turkish aid program as well as the Marshall Plan; it explains away the President's pro-civil libertarian resistance to congressional investigations in the late 1940's and the early 1950's; and it accounts for the ascendancy of McCarthyism. And finally there is a moral: we reap what we sow. During the 1952 presidential campaign, Truman and the Democrats were roasted for being soft on communism. Freeland is largely interested in demonstrating the effects of Truman's activities on what would have otherwise been a recalcitrant Congress. Arguing that President Truman's propaganda created an opinion climate conducive to the occurrence of McCarthyism several years later, he implicitly makes some interesting claims concerning the dynamics of presidential opinion leadership.

Obviously this reinterpretation of foreign affairs in the late 1940's is founded on a broad range of events, and findings on the effect of a single event no matter how dramatic can neither confirm nor deny revisionist history. Yet, this history relies heavily upon the assumption that elites could easily manipulate public opinion. The Truman Doctrine speech is regarded by some prominent revisionist historians such as Freeland, Theoharis, LaFeber, Feis, and Kolko as one of Truman's most prominent and successful efforts.⁴ In investigating the public's response to Truman's March 12 address, we have an opportunity to examine, in part, revisionist claims about how opinion climates were formed during this period. For students of the presidency, the Truman Doctrine speech provides an interesting test case for exploring the potentialities and limitations of a president's ability to shape public opinion. Before developing and testing revisionist and other models of public opinion, however, we need to have a more thorough description of the stimuli to which the public presumably responded. We need to know what the President said and how he said it.

The Political Context

Specifically, the speech called for congressional authorization to provide Greece and Turkey with \$400 million in economic and military assistance. Describing the deterioration of the Greek economy and the inability of its military to cope with communist guerilla activities, Truman starkly predicted that if the U.S. did not shortly replace the evacuating British forces, Greece would fall to the Communists, with Turkey and the rest of the Middle East succumbing in turn. But he went beyond simply requesting aid authorization. He described a bipolar world of democracy versus totalitarianism and called for the U.S. to assist "free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation." Two major sections depicted the Communist threat and the American

challenge. Midway through the speech he turned from his discussion of Greece and Turkey and spoke more generally:

The peoples of a number of countries of the world have recently had totalitarian regimes forced upon them against their will. The Government of the United States has made frequent protests against coercion and intimidation, in violation of the Yalta agreement, in Poland, Rumania, and Bulgaria. I must also state that in a number of other countries there have been similar developments.

At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one.

One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression.

The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio; fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms.

I believe that we must assist free people to work out their own destinies in their own way.

I believe that our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid which is essential to economic stability and orderly political processes.

He concluded with a peroration of even greater generality:

The seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery and want. They spread and grow in the evil soil of poverty and strife. They reach their full growth when the hope of a people for a better life has died.

We must keep that hope alive.

The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms.

If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world and we shall surely endanger the welfare of our own nation.

Greater responsibilities have been placed upon us by the swift movement of events.

I am confident that the Congress will face these responsibilities squarely.⁵

At the close of the speech the assembled joint session responded with a standing ovation and the immediate response of most news columnists and newspapers was favorable. There was some opposition, however, and it would be months before the aid authorization would pass Congress. Henry Wallace, who the next year would run for president against Truman as a third party candidate, went on nationwide radio to lambast the speech and characterize Truman "as the best salesman Communism ever had."⁶ A number of prominent Senators ranging the ideological spectrum from Taft to Pepper publicly expressed reservations.

After having experienced the Cold War rhetoric of the fifties, one may not find much in Truman's statements that is particularly arousing or inflammatory. But it must be remembered that this was the first time that a president had publicly recognized the Soviet Union as an enemy and depicted the struggle between democracy and totalitarianism. Despite the disappointments after Yalta, Truman had repeatedly resisted publicly making such statements. Even now some of his closest advisers were disturbed by the speech's tenor. Secretary of State George C. Marshall in route to a Moscow conference was "somewhat startled to see the extent to which the anti-Communist element . . . was stressed."⁷ James Byrnes, who had recently resigned as Secretary of State, complained that the speech was too general in tone and commitments.⁸ George Kennan, shortly to be head of the State Department's policy-planning staff, also objected to the "sweeping nature of the commitments."⁹ And Bernard Baruch described it as "tantamount to a declaration of . . . an ideological or religious war."¹⁰

It is obvious from reading the memoirs of those who participated in drafting the speech that President Truman had intended it to be hortatory and unrestrained. Several days earlier at a White House briefing for a number of important senators and congressmen, he had viewed the chilly response accorded Secretary Marshall's humanitarian reasons for giving assistance to Greece and Turkey. Only after Acheson's presentation of the issue in strong anticommunist terms did they warm to the proposal.¹¹ Senator Arthur Vandenberg, the respected foreign policy expert in the Senate, advised the President that he would have to "scare hell out of the country" if he wanted to get authorization through Congress.¹² Moreover, other recent administration reconstruction programs had received hostile responses from Congress and clearly would never be reported out of committee. Finally, Truman's vivid account of the speech writing reveals the dramatic rhetorical style he wanted infused into the text.

The drafting of the actual message which I would deliver to the Congress had meanwhile been started in the State

Department. The first version was not at all to my liking. The writers had filled the speech with all sorts of background data and statistical figures about Greece and made the whole thing sound like an investment prospectus. I returned this draft to Acheson with a note asking for more emphasis on a declaration of general policy. The department's draftsmen then rewrote the speech to include a general policy statement, but it seemed to me half-hearted. The key sentence, for instance, read, "I believe that it should be the policy of the United States . . ." I took my pencil, scratched out "should" and wrote in "must." . . . I wanted no hedging in this speech. This was America's answer to surge of expansion of Communist tyranny. It had to be clear and free of hesitation or double talk.¹³

As Freeland has summed up the statement, President Truman committed himself and the nation to a "broad interpretative framework" of a "global assault of the 'totalitarian' forces against the forces of 'freedom'—calculated to command immediately the maximum public support."¹⁴ When Marshall complained to the President that he had "overstated it a bit," Truman quickly replied that it had been necessary to receive favorable congressional treatment.¹⁵

We have in the event of the Truman Doctrine statement a clear attempt on the part of a president to mobilize public and congressional support behind his policies. Although it is impossible to state authoritatively how greatly the public disposition had to be altered, it was probably a great deal. All actors, including the President, perceived an isolationist mood and believed that only the most dramatic presentation would win sufficient public approval. Perhaps a closer re-examination of Gallup poll responses taken two weeks after the speech will produce a better picture of what happened to public opinion as a result of the President's appeal.

A number of standard questions will be addressed in investigating his opinion leadership. Was the President's message widely received? Did it increase the salience of the issue he was advocating? Did his efforts actually change public opinion in the *intended* direction? And, of more general theoretic importance, were there attitudinal and social attributes within the public which affected exposure to the President's communication and influenced support for his program?

Public Familiarity with the Truman Doctrine Speech

The President delivered his address to Congress on March 12. The speech and reactions to it, as well as developments in Greece and Turkey, received daily front page coverage in newspapers throughout the country from the next day until the Gallup survey on March 26.¹⁶ Even if the speech were not initially heard over the radio by all, it

would still be difficult not to be familiar with it because it was given such extensive subsequent news coverage. By March 26, 84 percent of a national sample reported that they had heard or read about the President's address. Although this is not everyone, it does compare favorably with public familiarity about other events. For example, other of Truman's proposals lagged far behind in public familiarity. In early July, only 54 percent of the public had heard about the Marshall Plan although the name coined by the President had been bandied back and forth between advocates and critics for several months. Over a year later, when the plan was being implemented, fewer were familiar with it than had heard or read about the Truman Doctrine speech within a two-week period.¹⁷ In May, 1950, only 23 percent had heard of Truman's Point Four Program. Only 71 percent claimed familiarity with the Taft-Hartly legislation in mid-1948 although it was a major campaign issue, and in 1963 the same percentage was familiar with the Peace Corps two years after it had been in operation. Only major international events and crises such as Sputnik, the U-2 incident, and the Berlin crisis in 1961 reached a higher plateau of public familiarity. Without the advantage of television, President Truman demonstrated the ability of a president to command the public's attention.

Who comprised the small minority unfamiliar with the presidential address? By identifying these segments of the population we may obtain a better understanding of his opinion leadership potential. Many studies have found that key variables such as education and political participation are correlated with attentiveness and awareness of political issues and events.¹⁸ However, as a message source, the president is special. He is the most visible person in the country, and presidential visibility means public accessibility. Personal attributes that activate individuals to seek out information may be of little importance when the president is intent on communicating with everyone. If so, only idiosyncratic factors such as illness or isolation would restrict reception.

In Table 1 we can examine the degree to which exposure to the communication was associated with the personal characteristics of the receiver. The evidence is clear. As we move from the upper left corner of the table where the poorly educated nonvoters are located to their opposites in the lower right corner, the percentage hearing or reading about the speech increases. Both education and participation display a consistent and positive effect on attentiveness. Although even a majority (60 percent) of those citizens least in touch with political events had heard or read about the speech, the President enjoyed greater access to citizens who were already highly attentive to public affairs. Only about one out of twenty of the well-educated voters was unaware of the event. If the pattern of relationships described in Table 1 is characteristic of other occasions as well, it suggests that, frequently when presidential messages receive substantially less attention, the president may be addressing a highly self-selected segment of the citizenry.

TABLE 1
Familiarity to the Truman Doctrine Speech Related to Education and
Political Participation. (Percent Reading or Hearing About Speech.)

| | | Education (Years of Schooling) | | | | | | | |
|--|-------|--------------------------------|-------|-----------------|--------|-----------------------|-------|-------|--------|
| | | Low (0-8) | | Moderate (9-12) | | High (some college +) | | Total | |
| | | % | (N) | % | (N) | % | (N) | % | (N) |
| Vote in previous presidential election? | No | 60.3 | (239) | 80.8 | (239) | 89.7 | (68) | 72.9 | (546) |
| | Yes | 79.7 | (580) | 89.3 | (869) | 96.5 | (543) | 88.5 | (1992) |
| | Total | 74.0 | (819) | 87.5 | (1108) | 95.7 | (611) | | |

Given the high overall level of public familiarity, it is not surprising to find in Table 2 that President Truman's national address coincided with heightened public salience of foreign problems. In March when asked on an open-ended question to name the nation's "most important problem," over half of the respondents identified foreign affairs, whereas only three months earlier barely a fifth had done so. By late summer pressing domestic problems had re-emerged as the dominant public concerns. Although events were beginning to occur quickly during this period, the Truman Doctrine speech was the most prominent foreign affairs event in the media between the December and March surveys, and the public's concern very probably reflects Truman's efforts in temporarily reordering public priorities.

Effects of the Speech on Public Opinion

Knowing that the President's address to the joint session of Congress was an important event not only in Washington but to the rest of the nation as well, its effect on public opinion deserves our careful examination. Revisionist history contains a model of opinion change. It emphasizes the fear arousal aspects of the rhetoric: we are told that on Senator Arthur Vandenberg's advice Truman consciously frightened the nation with the threat of communist aggression and mobilized this fear into public support for his economic aid program. According to revisionist historian Walter LaFeber, "Insofar as public opinion was concerned this tactic worked well for the Administration" And Arthur Theoharis argues that it "heightened public fears" and "contributed to a parochial, self-righteous nationalism."¹⁹ But did it really have these effects? To test this thesis we shall search for increased levels of anticommunism as a result of the speech, and for a close relationship between holding these opinions and endorsing the Truman Doctrine program.

The unavailability of "best" data has been a familiar and nagging problem to historians. And in the historical examination of public opinion where generally few reasonable assumptions and inferences are available, this problem has been especially acute. Alternative explanations abound and even with good detective work the real explanation cannot always be revealed. Secondary analysis of survey data is particularly hazardous, since an historical perspective will frequently suggest relationships not obvious to contemporary pollsters. Fortunately, the March 26 Gallup survey contains items which tap most of the variables we shall be considering. There is one deficiency, however. Although several questions in the survey deal with communism, none explicitly measures a perceived external communist threat. Instead, all are concerned with internal communism and contain a prominent civil liberties component. And all except one suffer from the additional drawback of either being too narrowly focused, subject to contamination by other events, or of exhibiting little variation in response because of poor question construction.²⁰

The one item which seems to escape these problems asks the respondent, "Do you think the Communist Party in this country should be forbidden by law?" Sixty percent agreed, 30 percent disagreed, and 10 percent held no opinion. Later the question would frequently be asked by Gallup and the other national opinion survey organizations, but the March survey represents the first occasion where it was administered to a national sample. Although its reference is clearly internal communism, this should not pose a liability in examining the revisionist model. After all, according to revisionist history, the external and internal threats were closely associated in the public's mind and this association was in part attributable to politicians' efforts to make such a connection. Presumably the ultimate result of the Truman Doctrine was the suppression of civil liberties at home.

In Table 3 we can begin to investigate the relationship between familiarity with Truman's address and responses to the Forbid Communist Party question responses. The basic difference between respondents

TABLE 2

Public Concern Over Foreign Policy Before and
After the Truman Doctrine Speech

| <i>Date</i> | <i>Percent Naming Foreign Problems As Most Important</i> |
|---|--|
| October, 1945 | 7 |
| February, 1946 | 23 |
| June, 1946 | 11 |
| September, 1946 | 23 |
| December, 1946 | 22 |
| <i>March 12, Truman Doctrine Speech</i> | |
| March, 1947 | 54 |
| July, 1947 | 47 |
| September, 1947 | 28 |
| December, 1947 | 30 |
| February, 1948 | 33 |

Source: Table drawn from Table 1 of Gabriel Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy* (New York: 1960, 73).

who had heard or read about the speech and those who had not (see Part A of Table 3) appears to be in the degree of opinionation. Exposure to the address is associated with a greater number of both anti-communist and prolibertarian opinions. In Part B we can see that, when respondents who held no opinion on the Forbid Communist Party question are eliminated from the percentaging, hearing or reading about the speech—contrary to the model—is associated with opposition to banning the Communist Party.

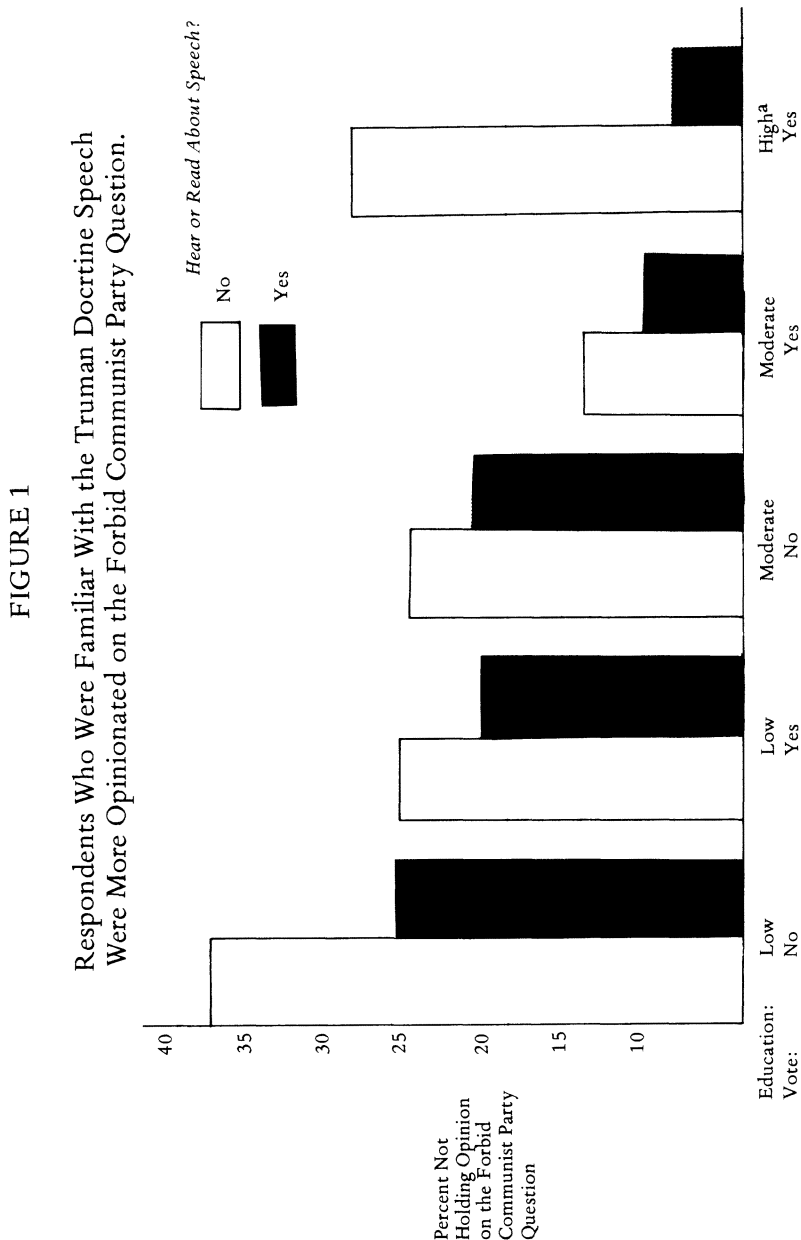
The reason for this peculiar result probably reflects other differences among these respondents rather than reflecting any effect of the speech itself.²¹ In Table 1 we found that exposure was partially self-selective with the well-educated and politically participant respondents being more attentive. Hearing or reading about the President’s speech, holding opinions on political questions, and favoring protection of civil liberties for communists may all be related to education and participation. Therefore, in order to evaluate the speech’s effect on the level and direction of opinionation, we must examine these differences for similar types of respondents.

In Figure 1, five groups of respondents were formed according to their education and participation. For each group, familiarity with the President’s speech reduces the percentage not holding an opinion on the Forbid Communist Party question. Although it would be unwise to examine too closely the size of the differences given the small N’s upon which percentaging is based, it is worth noting that for only one of the five subsamples (moderately educated voters) did hearing or reading about the speech not produced at least a ten percentage point

TABLE 3
The Relationship Between Familiarity With the Truman Doctrine Speech and Opinion About Whether “Membership in the Communist Party in This Country Should be Forbidden by Law.”

| Heard About Truman’s Speech | A. Percentaging based on all responses ^a | | | | B. Percentaging based on opinionated responses only ^a | | |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------|------------|----------------|---|------------|----------------|
| | <i>Forbid Communist Party?</i> | | | | <i>Forbid Communist Party?</i> | | |
| | <i>Don’t Know</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Yes</i> | <i>Total N</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Yes</i> | <i>Total N</i> |
| No | 24.8 | 18.3 | 56.8 | 387 | 24.4 | 75.6 | 291 |
| Yes | 8.3 | 31.4 | 60.4 | 2205 | 34.2 | 65.8 | 2023 |
| Difference | -16.5 | +13.1 | +3.6 | | +9.8 | -9.8 | |

^aPercentaging across.
Source: American Institute of Public Opinion Survey, #393, March 26-27, 1947.



^aPercentage for subsample not familiar with the speech based on only 19 cases. Too few cases of highly educated, nonvoters for percentaging.

Source: American Institute of Public Opinion Survey, #393, March 26-27, 1947.

reduction in the number not holding an opinion. As an extra precaution against spuriousness, the analysis was repeated filtering out respondents who failed to express opinions on another political, but unrelated, issue.²² The elimination of this small group had no significant effect on the distributions given in Figure 1. Although we cannot be certain that spuriousness has been wholly eliminated, it does appear that familiarity with President Truman's speech increased the salience of the internal communism issue. Whether the resulting higher levels of opinionation were disproportionately distributed in the direction of anticommunist dispositions remains to be seen.

Did Truman's speech increase antilibertarian sentiment? In one sense, it must have; as a result of hearing and reading about the speech, more people formed opinions and some surely adopted an anticommunist stance. The more important question, however, concerns whether the basic distribution of opinion was modified. Table 4 provides the data to examine the effects of the speech. *The percentage point differences among those holding an opinion fail to reveal a dominant tendency for exposure to Truman's message to increase the level of anti-communist sentiment.*²³ For all but the poorly educated, the relationship between familiarity with the speech and anticommunist opinion is opposite from the predicted direction.

Presidents and scholars alike should recognize that the public is not equally attentive, and this fact may have important implications for a president's ability to persuade the citizenry in a given political context. Before casually imputing mass attitude change from presidential efforts, we first need to identify his audience. This should provide a clue as to how consequent his message will be on public opinion. There is some evidence in Table 4 that the effects hypothesized by revisionist history may have been produced among the least educated and non-participant segment of society. For these citizens, familiarity with a speech depicting an external threat may have decreased their support of civil liberties for communists. However, the President was talking disproportionately to other segments of the population who are better able to differentiate their environment and therefore less likely to generalize in this fashion. Moreover, the highly-educated and participant public who as a group were almost wholly familiar with the President's address are also the most likely to support civil liberties, and for them to assume an antilibertarian stance would have required greater attitude change. To conclude, *those citizens who were most attentive to the President's message are the same persons who would be most resistant to linking the foreign policy statement to anticommunism at home.*

There is some evidence and much argument that the public became less supportive of civil liberties from the late 1940's through the mid-1950's.²⁴ A few historians have been anxious to blame the Truman administration for this development, claiming further that it was deliberate. President Truman was only one of a number of national leaders shaping opinion, and from his statements and policies he appears to

TABLE 4

The Relationship Between Familiarity With Truman Doctrine Speech and Anticommunist Opinion Controlling for Education and Participation
(Percent Who Favor Forbidding the Communist Party)^a

| Voted in 1944? Familiarity With Speech | EDUCATION | | | | | | | |
|--|-----------|-------|-----------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|------|-------|
| | Low (0-8) | | Moderate (9-12) | | High (Some College +) | | | |
| | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | | |
| | % | (N) | % | (N) | % | (N) | % | (N) |
| No | 80.0 | (60) | 76.6 | (94) | 69.4 | (36) | 78.0 | (82) |
| Yes | 85.0 | (113) | 76.5 | (433) | 68.5 | (178) | 69.8 | (738) |
| Difference ^c | +5.0 | | -0.1 | | -0.9 | | -7.8 | |
| | | | | | | | b | |
| | | | | | | | 41.5 | (53) |
| | | | | | | | 53.8 | (13) |
| | | | | | | | 48.2 | (508) |
| | | | | | | | -5.6 | |

^aPercentaging based only on responses holding an opinion.

^bInsufficient N for percentaging.

^cPositive percentage point differences indicate effects of hearing about speech are in the hypothesized direction.

Source: American Institute of Public Opinion Survey, #393, March 26-27, 1947.

have been more committed to the maintenance of civil liberties than most. Surely more important than political rhetoric in shaping public attitudes were events in Europe, the trial of Alger Hiss, and the Korean War. With the available data, the assertion of Truman's culpability can neither be totally confirmed nor denied. However, the Truman Doctrine speech represents his most forceful public expression of an anti-communist theme and it appears to have had little effect on public opinion about internal anticommunism. To the extent that this speech has been employed by critics to indict Truman for the McCarthy episode, such a charge is weakened by the evidence presented here.

Public Support for Truman's Greek-Turkish Aid Program

Subverting basic freedoms was plainly not the purpose of the speech. Instead its purpose was to commit the nation to the defense of Europe in general and specifically to extend economic aid to endangered Greece and Turkey. It is more important for understanding opinion leadership to discover if the speech accomplished its primary goal, and if so, to identify the dynamics of opinion change.

Two items in the survey measured public support for the President's legislative requests. In adjacent questions, the respondent was asked if he would like to see his congressman vote for or against Truman's \$250 million aid request for Greece and \$150 million for Turkey. The distribution of opinion is given in Table 5. Given the newness of the issue, it is somewhat surprising that 85 percent of the sample expressed a preference, and nearly half felt very strongly either for or against the President's proposals. Aid to Greece was the more popular of the two requests; among respondents holding an opinion, 57 percent favored aid to Greece while only 47 percent favored a smaller amount to Turkey. The President's speech, as well as subsequent daily news reports, clearly identified Greece as being in a more precarious position. Turkey was described as having a relatively healthy economy and being in no immediate danger unless Greece collapsed. Critics of the proposal were quick to argue this point. Although perhaps short of a mandate, President Truman was immediately able to generate substantial public enthusiasm for his policy and in doing so obtained a valuable political resource for pushing the legislation through Congress. If contemporaneous readings of public opinion, admittedly uninformed by survey data, were correct in describing an isolationist opinion climate, then for much of the citizenry the percentages represent a sizable turn-around in public opinion. We come now to the question of who rallied behind the President's policies.

The second prediction of the revisionist model is that Truman traded upon anticommunism in mobilizing support for his foreign aid package. Although the Truman Doctrine speech does not appear to have stirred higher levels of anticommunist sentiment, such opinions

could nonetheless, have served as a useful resource. If Truman rallied extant anticommunist sentiment behind his program, this would still fit well with a revisionist portrayal of events. On the test question, this would mean that respondents who would ban the Communist Party should be more enthusiastic for the \$400 million aid package. In Table 6 we can see that approval of these requests is only slightly associated with anticommunist opinion, and the small percentage point differences may wholly result from random measurement error. This finding—surprising as it may be—corresponds closely with a finding reported by John Mueller in his recent study on public support for the Korean War. Examining responses to an October, 1950 Gallup survey, he discovered that opinions on the same Forbid Communist Party question were unrelated to two different measures of support for the Korean War.²⁵ Although some attitude research during the mid-1950's found an empirical association in the public's perception of internal and external communist threats on diffuse, generalized variables, the evidence reported here should caution us from imposing a simple opinion structure on the mass public.²⁶ Anticommunism at home does not necessarily strengthen a president's hand in fighting it abroad.

A voluminous and rich literature has accumulated in social psychology which describes an alternative model of opinion change.

TABLE 5

Distribution of Public Support for the Foreign Aid
Requests of the Truman Doctrine

| | Aid for Greece | Aid for Turkey |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Strongly oppose | 20% | 22% |
| Weakly oppose | 18 | 23 |
| Uncertain (Don't Know) | 14 | 16 |
| Weakly favor | 29 | 22 |
| Strongly favor | 20 | 17 |
| | 101 | 100 |

Source: American Institute of Public Opinion Survey, #393, March 26-27, 1947.

Simply stated, evaluation of the source should largely shape evaluation of the message. Decades of research in a variety of experimental settings have shown this to be a primary means of achieving cognitive balance in one's beliefs and opinions.²⁷ Below is displayed the basic P-O-X triad common to virtually all of the consistency theories. The triad consists of the evaluator (P), the message (X), and its source (O).

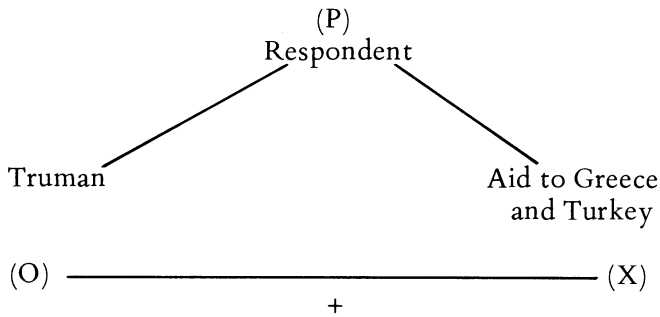


TABLE 6

Relationship Between Anticommunist and Favoring Aid to Greece and Turkey

| Truman's Foreign Aid Requests | | Forbid Communist Party | | |
|-------------------------------|---------|------------------------|--------|------------|
| | | No | Yes | Difference |
| Aid Greece | For | 55.6% | 57.6% | + 2.0 |
| | Against | 44.4 | 42.4 | |
| | N = | (753) | (1280) | |
| Aid Turkey | For | 44.5% | 48.1% | + 3.6 |
| | Against | 55.5 | 51.9 | |
| | N = | (730) | (1249) | |

^aNeither percentage point difference is statistically significant.

Positive differences are in the predicted direction.

Source: American Institute of Public Opinion Survey, #393, March 26-27, 1947.

Given is a positive valence between the source and message. On occasion, individuals have shown surprising facility for distorting the environment rather than altering their own otherwise inconsistent preferences, but this is less likely to be true under a highly visible and salient context such as we have with the Truman Doctrine. Only respondents who reported familiarity with the speech were questioned further concerning their opinions about the foreign aid proposal. Few indeed who heard or read about the speech could have dissociated its proposals from the President with such a brief period of time.

Assuming then that misperception and other distortion mechanisms were for the most part absent and there is a positive valence between O and X—that is, President Truman is perceived as favoring aid to Greece and Turkey—the reference model predicts the following patterns in achieving consistency:

$$\begin{array}{c} P - O \text{ and } P - X = + \\ \text{or} \\ P - O \text{ and } P - X = - \end{array}$$

Respondents will either like the President and prefer his policies or will dislike the President and oppose his policies. Of course, everyone may not arrive at a consistent set of opinions. Some may not find the incongruence “uncomfortable,” and others may compartmentalize their evaluations to a point where the contradiction is unapparent. We speak then of a tendency or strain toward consistency.

Unlike the relationships for the Forbid Communist Party item, President Truman's job performance rating is moderately associated with endorsing his policies. On both policy questions in Table 7 the President's approvers show up more supportive than his detractors. His opinion leadership was not limited to his admirers, however. A third of those respondents who disapproved of his job performance agreed with his aid program. Given a president's traditional role as spokesman for the nation in foreign affairs, this finding is not wholly surprising. That such support among disapprovers would be available on a variety of domestic issues is highly doubtful.

As a test of the reference model, a careful inspection of the percentages in Table 7 reveals that approximately two-thirds of the opinionated respondents consistently evaluated the source (P-O) and the message (P-X) in the same direction. About a third held an opinion on the aid request divergent with their evaluation of Truman as president.

Implicit in the model is the assumption that evaluations of Truman shaped preferences about his policies. Of course, the reverse causal relationship—namely, opinions about his policies influenced evaluations of his overall performance—would produce the same results. Either relationship is plausible and with the available evidence it is impossible to pin down conclusively which is the dominant causal direc-

tion. There is some “circumstantial” evidence, however, to suggest that the relationship described in the reference model (that is, $P-O \rightarrow P-X$) is the “best” estimate of the underlying causal structure.

Consider the nature and context of the event. At issue was foreign policy, a subject area on which students of public opinion have noticed for some time that the public tends to be less strongly opinionated than on domestic issues and, therefore, more willing to follow government policy.²⁸ Add to this the fact that the Truman Doctrine represented a new issue of crisis proportions for which competing cues from traditional alternative sources were as yet unformed, and we have an almost ideal setting for the reference process of opinion leadership.

Moreover, if views on the Greek-Turkish aid program were shaping Truman’s popularity and were, therefore, primarily responsible for the statistical relationships in Table 7, we should expect to find some change in the overall popularity of President Truman after the speech. On the March 26 poll the President’s job performance rating stood at 60 percent approving, an increase of 11 percentage points since the January survey. It is difficult to read much in this change, however, since the President’s popularity had been improving each month without exception since the previous October when only 27 percent approved. In fact, the January to March improvement is almost identical to the rate of increase his popularity had experienced for the previous three months. The Truman Doctrine pronouncement does not appear to have altered an upward trend already in progress. Finally, adoption of the reference model where evaluation of Truman shapes support of his program helps to explain other relationships presented below.²⁹

For a closer examination of the sources of opinion change, the sample has been partitioned into twelve subgroups in Table 8 according to their evaluation of Truman as president, partisanship as measured by the respondent’s 1946 presidential vote, and education. Several patterns emerge among these groups in their level of support for aid to Greece. First, from the summary statistics and the percentage point differences between approvers and disapprovers, we can see that, for five of the six pairings, persons who approved of the President were more likely to endorse his aid request to Greece. The one exception is the group of poorly educated Dewey voters and this exception may be attributable to sampling error from the small number of disapprovers ($N = 27$).

The percentage point differences between approvers and disapprovers are greatest for Roosevelt voters. Two separate relationships appear to be producing these large differences. As expected, Democratic voters who approved Truman’s job performance proffered the strongest endorsement to the Democratic President’s legislative request. But partisanship is not simply additive for all of the subgroups. If that were the case, we should find Democratic disapprovers more supportive of the President’s program than Republican (Dewey voters) disapprovers and perhaps even more than Republican approvers. Yet, with-

in each educational category, Democratic disapprovers were the *least* supportive of the President's program. Perhaps for Democrats (Roosevelt voters) who for one reason or another had come to disapprove of the President, favoring his policies would create strong cognitive strain. For Republicans, disapproval of Truman may have been arrived at simply by referencing this opinion on their own partisan loyalty. Democrats who disapprove reached their opinion *despite* their partisanship, and thus likely invested greater ego commitment in it, to agree with Truman's proposals would be more disruptive of existing attitudes.³⁰

TABLE 7

Relationship Between Approval of President Truman's Job
Performance and Support for His Foreign Aid Requests

| | A. Aid for Greece | | B. Aid for Turkey | |
|--|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| | Disapprove Of Truman | Approve of Truman | Disapprove of Truman | Approve of Truman |
| Strongly oppose | 38% | 13% | 41% | 16% |
| Weakly oppose | 21 | 16 | 26 | 21 |
| Uncertain (Don't Know) | 9 | 14 | 9 | 17 |
| Weakly favor | 24 | 32 | 14 | 26 |
| Strongly favor | 9 | 25 | 10 | 20 |
| | 101 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| r | .27 | | .25 | |
| gamma | .33 | | .31 | |
| significance level based on chi square | p < .001 | | p < .001 | |

Source: American Institute of Public Opinion Survey, #393, March 26-27, 1947.

TABLE 8

Relationship of Approval of President Truman With Favoring Aid to Greece
Controlling for Education and Participation
(Percent Who Favor Aid to Greece Among Respondents Who Heard
or Read About the President's Speech.)

| Voted for: Job Evaluation of Truman | EDUCATION | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| | Low (0-8) | | Moderate (9-12) | | High (Some College +) | | | |
| | Dewey % (N) | FDR % (N) | Dewey % (N) | FDR % (N) | Dewey % (N) | FDR % (N) | Dewey % (N) | FDR % (N) |
| Disapprove | 48.1 (27) | 23.9 (46) | 46.2 (80) | 33.8 (74) | 57.7 (71) | 35.3 (51) | | |
| Approve | 47.8 (69) | 59.9 (187) | 64.4 (146) | 64.9 (259) | 74.7 (150) | 86.0 (150) | | |
| Difference ^a | -0.3 | +36.0 | +18.2 | +31.1 | +17.0 | +50.7 | | |
| Correlations Between Presidential Approval and Favor Aid for Greece ^b | | | | | | | | |
| r | .00 | .27 | .18 | .23 | .17 | .49 | | |
| gamma | -.01 | .48 | .32 | .41 | .31 | .76 | | |
| sign level | n.s. | .001 | .01 | .001 | .05 | .001 | | |

^aPositive percentage point differences indicate the beneficial effect of approval on favoring aid to Greece.

^bCorrelations based on trichotomous coding of Truman "job performance" (Disapprove, DK, APP).

Source: American Institute of Public Opinion Survey, #393, March 26-27, 1947.

As we change the focus from comparing percentage point differences within educational categories to comparing across them, a third pattern emerges. The percentage point differences across educational groupings have been extracted from Table 8 and are presented in a more readable format in Table 9. With but one exception, the higher the educational level, the more pervasive was support for aid to Greece.³¹ When controlling for the 1944 vote and evaluation of Truman, the well educated citizenry was the most supportive of the Truman Doctrine.³² One might think that just the opposite tendency would be more likely—that is, persons with a weak informational base, as indexed by poor education, should be more susceptible to influence from a prestigious source such as the President. Yet the finding corresponds to other research on opinion change in the mass public. Mueller has reported that support for both the Korean and Vietnam wars came disproportionately from the well-educated segments of the public.³³ And similarly from an analysis of a large series of cross-sectional surveys, Johannes Pederson concluded that attentive citizens provide the main source of change in public opinion on emergent issues.³⁴

Summary and Conclusion

The Truman Doctrine speech is exceptional as a historic event, yet typical as an exercise of opinion leadership. It is exceptional from a historical perspective because it has come to be viewed as ushering in

TABLE 9
Educational Differences in Support for the Truman Doctrine
(From Table 8)

| 1944 Vote | Truman Evaluation | Difference Between Moderate and Low ^a | Difference Between High and Moderate ^a |
|--------------|----------------------|---|--|
| Dewey | Disapprove | -1.9 | +11.5 |
| Dewey | Approve | +16.6 | +10.3 |
| FDR | Disapprove | +9.9 | +1.5 |
| FDR | Approve | +5.0 | +21.1 |

^aPositive percentage point differences in the predicted direction.
Source: American Institute of Public Opinion Survey, #393, March 26-27, 1947.

the Cold War. It is exceptional also because contemporaries—at least those in Washington—sensed its profound significance. In another respect, it is exceptional as a test case for studying opinion leadership because the President was so intent on reconstructing the nation's perception of the world.

The Truman Doctrine speech has been found here, however, to be typical in its influence on public opinion. While the overall level of exposure to his declaration was indeed high, the President's message did not equally penetrate all segments of the citizenry. The same individual features of the receiver which are normally influential in self-selection to communication were operating here as well. Despite the highly charged rhetoric, the President's influence on public opinion remained specific to the issue. And while large numbers of citizens rallied behind his legislative proposals, there is little evidence that the speech triggered a massive anticommunist phobia, nor does it appear that he mobilized extant anticommunist sentiment behind his program.

Instead, opinion formation seems to have followed a normal pattern. The appeal of Truman's program varied among the public according to evaluations of him as president. The findings suggest that the effect of approval on policy support is related to the individual's party loyalties. Also, approval of aid to Greece and Turkey came disproportionately from among the well-educated segments of the public, which perhaps partly explains why anticommunism failed to materialize as an important ingredient in public support for the Truman Doctrine.

We have arrived then at a somewhat different view of the effects of President Truman's speech on public opinion than the one advanced by revisionist history. And although the information on which these conclusions are based is, in some details, less than ideal, it is probably the best we shall ever have available. Taken together, the findings portray a consistent and reasonable image of opinion formation. Public support for the Truman Doctrine does not appear to have resulted from fear arousal on a massive scale of anticommunist phobia. Extraordinary events such as Pearl Harbor or Sputnik may be so influential, but presidents are not. Instead, President Truman's capacity to lead the nation into a new, foreboding era of foreign affairs reflected in large part the citizenry's evaluation of him as the nation's leader.

Samuel Kernell

Assistant Professor of Political Science
University of Minnesota

NOTES

1 Joseph Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks* (New York: 1955), vii (1964 Harbinger edition). Much of the subsequent account of the context of the Truman Doctrine speech will be drawn from Jones' book.

2 Ibid., 89-99. David S. McLellan and John W. Reuss, "Foreign and Military Policies," in Richard S. Kirkendall, ed., *The Truman Period as a Research Field* (Columbia, Missouri: 1967), 55-57.

3 Richard M. Freeland, *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism* (New York: 1972), 207-26. There are as many revisionist interpretations as there are scholars writing on the subject. In some respects Freeland's thesis is among the bolder reinterpretations. All, however, tend to agree in emphasizing the effects of elite rhetoric on mass opinion formation.

4 Alan Theoharis devotes five pages in his *Seeds of Repression* (Chicago: 1971) to describe and excerpt the speech. He concludes that the "oversimplified moralism of this [the speech's] rhetoric was to effectively reduce the administration's own political maneuverability," (56). See pages 47-49 and 51-53 for discussion of speech. Also see Theoharis' "The Rhetoric of Politics; Foreign Policy, Internal Security, and Domestic Politics in the Truman Era, 1945-1950," in Barton Bernstein, ed., *Politics and Policies of the Truman Administration* (Chicago: 1970), 196-241. Walter LaFeber is more explicit in concluding the speech's effect on public opinion, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1971*, 2nd edition (New York: 1972), 43-48. Joyce and Gabriel Kolko give exhaustive attention to the speech's construction on pages 338-46. They suggest that the speech "manipulated" public opinion and "did not so much mirror the global facts as tend to transform and create them," *The Limits of Power* (New York: 1972), 333, also 338-46. Herbert Feis, *From Trust to Terror* (New York: 1970) devotes two chapters (25 and 26) to the Truman Doctrine speech and obliquely refers to its effect on public opinion: "Most Americans found temporary relief for their own exasperation and fears in Truman's blunt challenge to Communism and its agents in many lands," (198).

5 Jones, 272-73.

6 Ibid., 178.

7 Charles Bohlen, *The Transformation of American Foreign Policy* (New York: 1969), 86-87.

8 Freeland, 100-01.

9 George F. Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925-1950* (Waltham, Massachusetts: 1967).

10 Freeland, 100-01.

11 Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: 1970), 292-94.

12 Strangely enough the quote is absent from Vandenberg's own memoirs but is cited in McLellan and Press, 55, Freeland, 89, and LaFeber, 45.

13 Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs: Vol. II, Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, New York: 1956), 105-09.

14 Freeland, 114-18.

15 Bohlen, 87. This comment has received widespread circulation in revisionist accounts (Feis, 193, and Kolko and Kolko, 342).

16 Three daily newspapers during the period were examined, and subsequent references to the news media reflect the coverage of these: *New York Times*, *Chicago Daily Tribune* and *San Francisco Chronicle*.

17 David O. Sears, "Political Behavior," in Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson, eds., *The Handbook of Social Psychology: Vol. 5*, 2nd edition (Reading, Massachusetts: 1969), 324-28.

18 Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald Stokes, *The American Voter: An Abridgement* (New York: 1964), 62-63, 215-16, 251-54. Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, *Voting* (Chicago: 1954, Phoenix edition, 1966), 24-34. Lester W. Milbrath, *Political Participation* (Chicago: 1965), Chapter 3.

19 LaFeber, 45 and Theoharis, "The Rhetoric of Politics . . .," 206.

20 For example, one item questioned whether communists should be allowed to hold civil service jobs. During the two-week interval between the March 12 speech and the March 26 survey, President Truman issued an executive order instituting a procedure for conducting loyalty checks of federal employees. This makes the item susceptible to contamination from events other than the March 12 declaration. Also, the question was administered to only half of the national sample making elaborate statistical analysis difficult because of the reduced N. However, since the same question had been asked eight months earlier in late July, 1946, it does provide some information about change in public opinion over time. In the earlier poll, 69 percent said that communists should not be permitted to hold civil service jobs, 17 percent said that they should, with 14 percent holding no opinion. On the March 26 survey, the public displayed a more *libertarian posture*—not less—with 62 percent against holding jobs, 20 percent for, and 18 percent with no opinion. Although the time interval between the polls makes any conclusions tenuous, this finding complements the one reported below.

21 Donald T. Campbell and Julian C. Stanley refer to this quasi-experimental design as "static group comparison" and emphasize the difficulty in adequately eliminating the effects of self-selection in preserving the experimental quality of the test. See *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research* (Chicago: 1963), 12-13.

22 The question used as a filter stated, "It has been suggested that Presidents of the United States should be elected directly by the vote of the people instead of having people vote for electors who choose the president. Do you favor or oppose this suggestion?" Don't Know's and No Responses comprised over 11 percent of the responses.

23 One might argue that familiarity in itself is insufficient and more direct exposure such as having heard the address live over radio or read the text in the newspaper would have differentiated the public opinion on the civil liberties question in the predicted direction. Given the present findings, this appears unlikely. The 15 percent who claimed unfamiliarity represent a rather pure category and the 85 percent who said they had heard or read about the speech contain respondents who were directly exposed to the stimuli. Therefore, if there is an underlying relationship in the predicted direction, it may be weaker with the cruder operational measures, but there still should be some relationship. Yet, there is none. Only if respondents in the middle range of familiarity are assumed to have responded in the opposite direction—which seems implausible—could this argument be maintained in the face of the slight inverse relationship for most of the subsamples.

24 Herbert H. Hyman, "England and America: Climates of Tolerance and Intolerance," in Daniel Bell, ed., *The Radical Right* (Garden City: 1963), 268-306.

25 The questions are, "In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Korea, do you still think the United States made a mistake in deciding to

defend South Korea, or not?" and "Now that Communist China has entered the fighting in Korea with forces far outnumbering the United Nations troops there, which one of these two causes would you, yourself, prefer that we follow?" The first choice was "pull out . . . as fast as possible" and the second, "keep our troops there" There was a one and three percentage point difference in the pro-war responses to the questions. John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York: 1973), 161.

26 Daniel J. Levinson, "Authoritarian Personality and Foreign Policy," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 1957, 1, 37-47. The scale is described and evaluated in *Measures of Political Attitudes* edited by John P. Robinson, Jerrold C. Rusk, and Kendra B. Head (Ann Arbor: 1968), 306-08.

27 David O. Sears and Richard E. Whitney, *Political Persuasion* (Morristown, New Jersey: 1973), 3-6. R. B. Zajonc, "Cognitive Theories in Social Psychology," in Lindzey and Aronson, 1, 320-411.

28 This point is noted in Aaron Wildavsky, "The Two Presidencies," in Aaron Wildavsky, *The Presidency* (New York: 1969), 230-43. Also see Kenneth Waltz, "The Electoral Punishment and Foreign Policy Crises," *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy*, edited by James Rosenau (New York: 1967), 263-93.

29 Campbell and Stanley provide an insightful discussion of the "time-series experiment." By their criteria, the evidence available here fails to satisfy all of the validity requirements. They emphasize that the critical test is the departure from the trend rather than simply change from T_1 to T_2 , 37-46.

30 An alternative explanation which cannot be evaluated is that some Democrats—such as Wallace supporters in 1948—were alienated by Truman's address and therefore switched over to disapproval in their evaluations of his job performance. Whether correctly or not the "Wallace" Democrat has been viewed as coming disproportionately from the intelligentsia of the party. In Table 7, however, we can see that it is the poorly educated, FDR voting, disapprovers who are the least willing to endorse the Truman Doctrine (24 percent)—not the well-educated.

31 Note that the exception involves the same subsample noted above which has few members and is particularly susceptible to sampling error.

32 Controlling for education, the relationship between approval of aid to Greece and Forbid Communist Party improves among the poorly educated and to a lesser degree among the well-educated. However, among the moderately educated, the relationship becomes strongly opposite that hypothesized by the revisionist model.

33 Mueller, 122-36.

34 Johannes Pederson, "Sources of Change in Public Opinion: A Probability Model With Application to Repeated Cross-sectional Surveys," delivered at the 1972 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 1972, 17-21.