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An analysis of the president-press relationship in solo and joint press conferences in the first term of President George W. Bush

Susan Billingsley
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, susankbillingsley@yahoo.com

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRESIDENT-PRESS RELATIONSHIP
IN SOLO AND JOINT PRESS CONFERENCES
IN THE FIRST TERM OF PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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ABSTRACT

A comparative analysis of presidential press conferences was conducted to determine whether the previously established adversarial relationship between the United States president and the American press was alleviated to some degree by the presence of a foreign dignitary. The study applied a system for quantifying adversarial behaviors as exhibited by the press to the questions asked of President George W. Bush in solo conferences and where he was joined by another head-of-state in joint press conference sessions. Questions from selected conferences during his first term were coded according to four indicators of adversarialness: initiative, directness, assertiveness and adversarialness. Results showed that the president-press relationship is indeed less adversarial in joint press conferences than in solo. This conclusion may serve as justification for increases in general press conference frequency in the last three administrations and the disproportionate increase in joint sessions.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The development and evolution of the relationship between the president of the United

States and the press has remained a topic of interest for scholars over the last several decades.

The complex nature of the relationship may be primarily due, as Samuel Kernell (1997) suggests,

to the increased use of the media as a way of communicating with the public. The president is

likely to better accomplish his public relations and political goals (Blumler & Gurrevitch, 1981)

by conveying his established message personally to the increasingly active American citizenry

(Kernell, 1997). Though the press does share the president's interest in the dissemination of

political information, there exists an inherent conflict of interest. The role of the American press

has been called an "extra-constitutional form of checks and balances" (French, 1982, p. 30), a

democratic watchdog who must protect the public from its government (Bennett, 1990; Blumler

& Gurrevitch, 1981) and a de facto equivalent to English Parliament that has evolved from

custom and tradition (Grossman & Kumar, 1981). As such, there is often friction between the

executive and press agendas. Both claiming to be the spokesman of the people, they are

dependant on each other, yet "inextricably intertwined" (Blumler & Gurrevitch, 1981, p. 469) in

a competition to gain the most from their sometimes cooperative, often contentious interactions.

Hager and Sullivan (1994) used empirical evidence to identify five categories of public

activity in a study that showed the means by which an administration chooses to go public is

largely determined by the context of the office. The frequency and circumstances under which

the president employs each of the activities depends on what he hopes to accomplish by going

public and the degree of control he must maintain in delivering and framing his message. The

trends they uncover show that in the forty year period between the Truman and Reagan

administrations major speeches addressed to the nation remained stable, while minor speeches,

appearances as head of state and appearances at partisan functions increased (Hager & Sullivan, 1994), slowly at first and then rapidly beginning in the 1970s (Kernell, 1997). The presidential press conference was the only of the public activities to show a decline in practice.

Scholars have paid particular attention to the press conference as an evolving institution within the American democracy, further exploring and acknowledging this shift away from its use. For the researcher interested in unmasking why the press conference might have lost presidential favor, there are historical accounts of the inception, evolution and institutionalization of the press conference (Cornwell, 1960; Kumar, 2003). There are also studies like Hager and Sullivan's (1994) that attempt to explain presidential decision making (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2003; Lammers, 1981) critiques of the uses of the conference (Kumar & Grossman, 1981), and descriptive analyses of the contemporary conference (Koffler, 2003) and its operations (Gizzi, 2004).

More recent compilations of press conference utilization compiled by Martha Joynt Kumar (2003b) acknowledge the decline in press conference incidence in successive presidencies, but only until George H. W. Bush's election. Beginning with his time in office and continuing to George W. Bush's current term, the frequency with which the president has held press conferences has consistently remained above levels prior to 1989. Rather than running contradictory to disadvantages associated with the press conference, however, a closer look at the data reveals an interesting inclusion that warrants further exploration. Though the total number of conferences held by George W. Bush and Bill Clinton exceeded those used by each of their predecessors at the same period of their presidencies, the number of solo conferences does not.

The difference lies in the developing tendency to involve foreign dignitaries or other heads of state in press sessions. Non-existent in the Regan administration, these joint press conferences accounted for 41.5%, 67.9% and 82% of George H. W. Bush's, Bill Clinton's and George W. Bush's total conferences, respectively (Kumar, 2003b, p. 227).

In an application of a study by Clayman and Heritage (2002) concerning the adversarial nature of the presidential-press relationship within the confines of the press conference, this study will attempt to provide a potential justification for the reversing trend in conference frequency. In *Questioning Presidents: Journalistic Deference and Adversarialness in the Press Conferences of U.S. Presidents Eisenhower and Reagan,* Clayman and Heritage (2002) examined the questions asked of both presidents, comparing the 'adversarialness' exhibited by the journalists in their question design. Adversarialness, or the degree to which journalists exhibit one of four identified dimensions, is shown to have increased with time, contributing to more aggressive, controlling behavior by modern reporters. Capitalizing on the freedom they have to compose their questions according to their own individual objectives, often attempting to perform the watchdog functions they believe mandated by the public and attempting to out-maneuver the president in a struggle for control, the press corps has extended "the general trend toward adversarialness…documented in journalism…to direct encounters with the highest elected official in the land" (p. 771). Their findings do not support a systematic, ideological opposition to the president, nor do they challenge his authoritative role as leader. Their participation in his public activities, in fact, implies a legitimizing respect for his position as an important information source. Nevertheless, the "substantially more enterprising" (p. 771) questions posed at modern press conferences are more likely to delve into controversial, unflattering issues and to exert pressure on the executive than they were in the past. The study

was updated in 2004 to include a sampling of conferences from each administration beginning with President Eisenhower and concluding with Clinton (Clayman, Elliot, Heritage & McDonald, 2004).

The works are important not only because they established a systematic way to analyze posed questions in public settings like the conference, but also because of their implications concerning the decreased willingness of presidents to hold such events. The less deferential role currently occupied by reporters has "tightened the reigns" on the conduct of the president, transforming "the presidential press conference into a formidable instrument of political accountability" (p. 772). Historical accounts of public opinion that allude to the increasing distrust in political figures following the years of Vietnam and Watergate and alleviated concerns associated with the accessibility of the president (Kernell, 1997) may serve as explanations for the ability of the adversarial press to develop and thrive. Whatever its origins, the resulting inability of the chief executive to exercise the control or enjoy the deferential treatment once afforded his position at the press conference clearly makes it a less desirable way for going public. This is compounded by the fact that technology has made other avenues for communicating with the people more attractive in terms of control, speed, and cost effectiveness.

Using Clayman and Heritage (2002) and Clayman et al. (2004) as seminal works, this study will compare the adversarialness exhibited in questions asked of the president in both joint and solo press conferences. The dramatic increase in press conference frequency in general over the three most recent administrations suggests that something in the nature of the joint conference alleviates the negative pressures generally associated with the public activity. What is it about the inclusion of another dignitary in the process that rationalizes the popularity of this adaptive form of the conference?

By applying established criteria of four dimensions of adversarialness, this study seeks to provide a possible set of answers to this question. Should it be shown that the president is able to enjoy more deferential treatment in the presence of another head of state it would allow him to more readily control the issues raised and messages conveyed while still realizing the benefits associated with conducting a conference.

To understand the necessity of maximizing control of public activities, the role of the press conference and the relevance of this study in attempting to explain, at least in part, an emerging format and reversing trend, one must understand the nature of the presidential-press relationship and how it applies specifically to the press conference. The necessary information for doing so is provided next, followed by a methodological explanation appropriate for understanding and replicating this study.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study is inspired by scholarly and interdisciplinary research in political science, communication, and interpersonal relations relating to the American president, the media and the public. To appreciate the value of this examination of the contemporary press conference and current executive communicative strategies, an understanding of a variety of subjects and where they intersect must be ascertained. The following section will provide that understanding through a description of the relationship between the president and the press as it has changed and been adapted over time. Next, the evolution of the press conference both as a result and a catalyst for the changes in press relations will allow for an understanding of one of the most historically ubiquitous avenues for communicating publicly. Finally, the recently conceived joint press conference is explained as the culmination of past work that has led to the ultimate question posed in this thesis.

The President-Press Relationship

The only law mandating that the president interact with the press at all is what Arthur Krock, former dean of Washington political writers, describes as a law of self-preservation (Rivers, 1982). The relationship between the president and the press is a product of a mutual dependence resulting from the common goal of informing the public audience. As Severin and Tankard (1997) point out, the president must heed the news media because they have the capacity to highlight and explain the issues to the public, while they, in turn, rely on him for the production of newsworthy information to report. It may take "two to tango" as Herbert Gans (1979, p. 2) who likened the interaction to a dance suggests, but as each attempts to stay in step with the other one wonders which party does the leading. The analysis by Ansolabehere, Behr and Iyengar (1993) compared the relationship to a game of chess with each side constantly

competing for the upper hand. Most recently, Kernell (1997) emphasized the changes in the "modern relationship . . . where each side anticipates and responds to the distant actions of the other" (p. 52). No longer part of a "collaborative undertaking," (p. 53) he describes an intricate new system characterized by a "more assertive press [and] contention over control" (p. 71).

The president is powerful in the sense that he is always newsworthy. Automatically at the center of all national news and events, he is equipped with a "potent arsenal" of "rhetorical weapons" (p. 106) from which he can pick and choose according to the amount and kind of influence he would like to have over any particular issue or message (Ansolabehere et. al, 1993). Choosing wisely among this artillery of public activities is important because, "the news media do not just passively transmit information" (McCombs & Bell, 1996, p. 93), and so are powerful as well. Scholars differ according to the degree of power that they attribute to the press; some, like Cater (as cited in Bartels, 1996) having gone so far as to call them an additional branch of the American government. Others find it sufficient to describe reporters as participants in the governmental process. None limit their role to that of a simple recorder. Thus, when attempting to convey a message to the public at large the president faces a formidable force upon which his "policies, the length, vigor and thrust of [his] public life" (Graber, 1984, p. 232) depends.

Historical Overview. The important but adversarial relationship between the president and the press dates back to the earliest days of the American presidency when George Washington distributed information preferentially according to executive privilege. Over time it has changed and been adapted according to personality and circumstance. As Patrick Anderson (1968) noted in *The President's Men*, "perhaps the central fact about the relationship . . . is that no rules govern it" (p. 184). The changing dynamics that exist between press and president at

particular times in US history, most recently exhibited in press conferences held by George W. Bush, confirm its malleability.

Through the late nineteenth century relations between the president and the press were largely informal. Journalist visits to the White House were likely to be uneventful and uninteresting. Correspondents were few and typically concerned more with Congressional committees than the presidency (Kernell & Jacobson, 1987). Still, even the earliest executives recognized the need to manage the press, to "release news in such a way . . . as to secure the most favorable impact" (Cornwell, 1965, pp. 68-69). Adams wielded the Sedition Act to suppress information and discourage press criticism (Small, 1972). Jefferson openly advocated a free and adversarial press, all the while stifling unfavorable stories through heavy private influence and reserving most presidential news for his own paper (Smith, 1990). News management "reached its zenith" (Rivers, Peterson & Jensen, 1971, p. 109) during Andrew Jackson's administration whose payroll included fifty-seven editors and reporters (Smith, 1990).

Marketability. The press corps was officially recognized in the late 1850s when registered journalists were first listed in the annual *Congressional Dictionary*. Fifty-eight reporters were registered in 1868, less than one fourth of those listed by 1918 (Kernell, 1997). The influx of reporters covering political beats at the turn of the century spurred the development of more professional practice. A set of veteran reporters recognized the benefits inherent in establishing personal contacts over time and began to cover Washington more consistently, committing themselves to developing rapport and covering public officials. Turnover rates that had kept ritual norms unlikely and personal relationships short lived further declined when reporters began writing for multiple newspapers (Willey & Rice, 1933). This was a significant change in the world of reporting and a catalyst for the establishment of a more adversarial press.

Writing for several papers equated to career stability. Where reporters had formerly depended on a specific paper or editor as their employer, they could increase their independence by serving as a sort of contractor, working for more than one publication at a time.

The implications of this shift were profound because journalists began to concern themselves more with marketability than partisanship. Though newspapers at the time were sponsored by specific political parties, societal changes were beginning to lead American journalism in new directions. James Madison, James Monroe and John Quincy Adams used selected partisan papers as semi-administration organs. But the intimate link between the party and press was weakening due to a loss of interest in politics by the electorate and the availability of other forms of official communication. This decline in political culture heightened just as the literate, urban populations coming out of the Industrial revolution grew large enough to support multiple papers. Technological advancements allowed for quick, mass production and widespread distribution; both factors that made independent papers more abundant and less concerned with political interests (Mindich, 1998). The establishment of the Government Printing Office in 1860 was the final step in ending the patronage printing contracts that had subsidized the Washington papers (Smith, 1990). "Divisive ideology [replaced] violence with detached nonpartisanship," (p. 39) and, in so doing, freed reporters from editorial and partisan ties.

Where adhering to a particular editorial posture had previously been a prerequisite to publication, the move to independent papers and client relationships allowed a flexibility and neutrality in reporting. In fact, aligning themselves too closely with any one position was likely to limit marketability (Kernell, 1997). "Creed, collegiality, and the recognition of collective

goals" (p. 73) led to a professionalism among independent newspapers from which the adversarial relationship began to flourish.

Earliest Relationship. Smith (1990) suggests that the Lincoln administration is a good benchmark for the early adversarial president-press relationship. The press, beginning to recognize their growing prestige, clashed with the "strange, anti-establishment but powerful personality of the president," (p. 22) who they accused of encroaching on freedoms of the press. Friction increased with the beginnings of the Civil War and the introduction of censorship in 1861 (Small 1972; Smith, 1990). Abraham Lincoln leaked information to critical newspapers and exchanged favors for flattering coverage. His attempts at handling the press this way were not always successful. Leaks and negative reporting became more prevalent, as the press began to stretch its legs. Parts of his State of the Union address, for instance, were leaked and printed in the *New York Herald,* despite their frequent receipt of presidential favor. Subsequently, attempts by the executive office to punish offenders and discourage negative bias increased dramatically.

When readers began paying more attention to published interviews than his oral presentations, Andrew Johnson allowed the first private interview. His successors followed suit on occasion. At the turn of the century, William McKinley sometimes distributed his speaking schedule and copies of speeches, but most of his press relations were chance happenings (Kernell, 1997). Unwritten rules forbade correspondents from initiating contact with the president. Occasionally, McKinley would stop and exchange a few words with an unsuspecting newspaper man (Pollard, 1947), but correspondence was still at the discretion of the executive to whom the press deferred.

Evolution. The election of Theodore Roosevelt was a major milestone in the evolution of the president-press relationship. He has been called the first president to understand the

profundity of the effect of public opinion on Washington politics, to effectively guide it, and to appreciate the treatment of news as well as its content (Kernell, 1997; Smith, 1990; Cornwell, 1965; Barry, 1924). Rather than trading favors or managing news to avoid negative bias, Roosevelt used the press to generate positive stories to create news. His presidency was transitional because he was the first president to play to the egos of reporters. He courted them, hiring a press secretary to visibly collaborate with them and personally acquainted himself with individual correspondents. Unprecedented access to the president and the White House was granted to selected wire services with the understanding that information given them was confidential and majority control over what was printed remained in the hands of the president. Because they were still a ways from being professionalized Roosevelt was able to dissect the press corps into White House insiders and outsiders (Kernell, 1997) by controlling who had access to information. According to historian George Juergens (1981), a more mature press would never have relinquished control over the terms of who had access to information and when. A journalist was ineffective without insider information, however, and the president and press were on unequal footing in the early twentieth century. The latter was neither convinced of their rights, nor empowered to defend them. By the end of his presidency, Roosevelt had taken the relationship with the press to a point of no return. The practice of "direct and continuous contact . . . [though] in its infant stages . . . was semi-institutionalized" (Smith, 1990, p. 25).

Woodrow Wilson served as another transitional figure in adversarial relations as the first to hold regular, formal press conferences open to all reporters. He was more lax with the press than Theodore Roosevelt, certainly more than Taft, allowing questions to cover any range of topics. Attended by almost two hundred correspondents, most of them inexperienced in engaging the president, the weekly press sessions proved disappointing to both parties. Nevertheless, they

represented a step toward equality for the press as they struggled for power. Where Roosevelt protected his off-the-record remarks with threats of exile from insider status, Wilson's press corps feared no such reprisal (Kernell, 1997). This president was angered and personally offended by reports on personal matters and stories that featured what he had given as confidential information. As his attitude worsened, exchanges with the press became more and more hostile. Each were more careful with their words: Wilson stating simple, technical truths, the press retaliating by following up and re-asking the same questions.

William Harding referred to his press conferences as "the essence of a healthy adversarial" (Cornwell, 1965, p. 64) rapport. Still, the mutual dependence inherent in the relationship was undeniable and continued to create unique problems as each side struggled to assert itself. Reporters were prohibited from quoting the president directly beginning in the Wilson administration. Late in Calvin Coolidge's second term magazines mocked the "White House Spokesman" (Small, 1990, p. 81) title they were to use instead, attributing information to monikers like "the Figure of Speech" and "The Presidential Larynx" (Clapper, 1946, p. 59). The growth of the professionalized press was further exhibited by Herbert Hoover's failed attempts to favor certain members of the press and refuse choice questions as Roosevelt had done twenty-five years earlier. An emerging sense of security allowed even Hoover's harshest critics to write with impunity.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was a breath of fresh air for the press. He made innovations in the conference, favored press exchanges over less mediated forums for expressing hard news, and "never sent reporters away empty-handed" (Pollard, 1947, p. 139). To ease tension, the president would often lash out against editors and publishers when he was unhappy with a story, allowing the writers to distance themselves from the transgression. Kernell (1997) tells of

Roosevelt's congenial relationship with his pressmen. Even his biggest adversaries agreed that they were treated fairly and were given "all that the profession required in relations with the White House" (Smith, 1990, p. 81). Still, the less contentious relationship fostered at the outset did not survive his attempts to pack the Supreme Court, waning support of his New Deal and espoused interest in World War II (Smith, 1990).

It was proposed later that part of the success Franklin Roosevelt enjoyed in press relations could be attributed to circumstance. The Great Depression, the New Deal and professionalism of the press bred, for a moment, a spirit of reciprocity, "intimacy, informality, and a set of institutionalized procedures . . . like that of any other responsible deliberative body" (Boorstin, 1955, p. 425). However it developed, the arrangement was unable to survive the proliferation of rapid air travel, television and radio broadcast. The president was less dependent on the Washington reporters when technological innovation created new avenues of communicating directly with the American public (Kernell, 1997).

The relationship with his immediate successor was adversarial at the outset. Harry Truman treated his dealings with reporters as "contests of whit" (Cornwell, 1965, p. 170). The social distance he created by separating himself physically from reporters, standing while they sat, looking out at their mass from a distance, was more conducive to competitive questioning and adversity than the conversational atmosphere previous presidents had enjoyed. Dwight Eisenhower tried to evade "the meaner aspects of the adversarial relationship" (Smith, 1990, p. 38) by refusing to complain about his counterparts and avoiding personal controversy. His press secretary, James Haggerty, advised him to profess ignorance rather than refuse questions. He did avoid inciting open aggression but reporters recognized evasion when they saw it. Rather than accepting his supposed ignorance, they included with their questions prefatory statements, often

tilting them in one direction or another. News management on behalf of the president, by way of Haggerty and successive press secretaries, played a part in increasing adversarial relations as well (Smith, 1990; Rivers et al., 1971).

Modernity. John F. Kennedy took the "last step in a long process that made the adversarial relationship a public reality" (Smith, 1990, p. 44) when he displayed their interactions on live television. The risks of seeming ill prepared, uninformed or incompetent are obvious, but Kennedy embraced the new media because he understood his role as adversary. Recognizing the inherent conflict of interest between the White House and those that wrote about it and accepting its place in democratic government, he expected hostile treatment and so devised a way to communicate directly with the people (Salinger, 1966). Simultaneously, though, examples of his news management and courting the press are plentiful. He was so successful at affecting news, in fact, that the press initiated a critical self-evaluation following his presidency. Numerous correspondents admitted to having held stories related to the Bay of Pigs at the president's request. When it became apparent that news of the invasion could have prevented such a huge mistake, the press became forever more wary of their association with future presidents (Rivers, 1982; Smith, 1990).

The resulting antagonistic rapport with Lyndon Johnson worsened as he attempted to treat them as part of his administration. Though he continued to manage news, he wooed reporters and played to their egos. Rather than reveling in the inclusion, however, the press asserted their independence, seeking and publishing all the instances of misrepresentation they uncovered. His tendency to intentionally mislead the press with little white lies inspired what Murrey Marder of the *Washington Post* referred to as the "credibility gap" (Thompson, 1983).

Kennedy's enduring strategies for going directly to the people had already disrupted the traditional equilibrium, treating the press more as a prop than a formidable counterpart (Pollard, 1964). The credibility gap, intensified by opposition to Vietnam and supplemented by Richard Nixon's actions during Watergate, permanently thrust the relationship in a new direction. With the president's eye now concentrated on the public, pressmen adapted their role to include several self-appointed functions. Objective, deferential reporting gave way to demands for explanation, fact checking and criticism (Kernell, 1997). By the time of Nixon's impeachment, the relationship had gone from adversarial to hostile. The root of "mutual suspicion and hostility" (Blumler & Gurrevich, 1981) is often traced back to the Johnson and Nixon administrations.

Though Gerald Ford was able to curb some of the hostility felt by Nixon in his later years, reporters continued in their role as critics. They sought justification for all official announcements, cross-examining and compelling the president to explain his actions. Blaire French (1982) noted that reporters seemed to engage each other in competitions to make the executive the most uncomfortable, probing him with mean-spirited, controversial questions. At one press conference, reporters went so far as to demand that the White House produce Ford's school transcripts after he used his class rank as a defense against accusations that he was "too dumb to be president" (Rivers, 1982, p. 45). Though Jimmy Carter's press exchanges were largely successful he avoided them whenever possible, referring to them as altercations to "balance the nice and pleasant" (Smith, 1990, p. 52) aspects of his presidency.

Contemporary Relationship. Thus, scholars agree that by Ronald Reagan's election the adversarial, sometimes hostile relationship was a well-established part of American politics. Often sources of embarrassment, less deferential correspondents were by this time media stars in

their own right. Presidential aides have since attempted to diffuse contentions by tampering with schedules, timing and audience composition, but none have been able to escape the adversarial nature of the modern relationship.

The creation of news, according to Kernell (1997) and supported by others (Smith, 1990; Blumler & Gurrevich, 1981; Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Clayman et al., 2004) is no longer collaboratively undertaken (p. 94). The president's staff plans public activities and drafts statements to shape press output while news bureaus assert their own control of what they produce. George H. W. Bush often used photo opportunities to claim accessibility but minimize contentious questioning, for instance (Kernell, 1997). His strategy did not go unnoticed by journalists, however, nor did his administration escape the evening news unscathed.

Robinson (1976) writes of media emphasis on negativity and conflict both in their dealings and coverage of political figures. Kernell (1997) illustrates how presidential failures are consistently emphasized over successes and presidential statements are dramatically edited and editorialized. Coverage of Presidents Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, different in ideology and practice, has been primarily negative. Even in light of record setting approval ratings following the Gulf War, positive treatment of Bush Sr. in the press just barely exceeded the negative.

Patterson (1993) goes so far as to say that adversarial behaviors by the press corrupt the election campaign process. He argues that the talking heads and modern celebrity media men speak more frequently, and often for candidates, undermining the entire process and weakening the American democratic system. The inextricable nature of the relationship and the increase in aggressive behavior by reporters is further supported in election campaign coverage (Hallin, 1984) and in areas of foreign affairs (Entman, 2003) and general political news (Sabato, 1991).

Presidents Clinton and Bush clearly seek out more readily controlled means of communicating as they go public more frequently. This is a result of the persistence with which the assertive press continues to be problematic for the modern president. An investigation by Martha Joynt Kumar (2003a), a leading expert on White House press relations, looks at communications operations under the current president and suggests that communicating on the president's own terms requires organization, planning and preemption. Different kinds of communication require different strategies. Bush's communications staff is organized like a business with a three tiered organizational structure focused on strategy, operations and implementation. He employs the same basic departments concerned with communication that have been in place since the 1960s: the Press Office, the Office of Communications, the Office of Media Affairs and Speechwriting. Since the launch of the war on terrorism the Bush administration created the Coalition Information Centers and the Office of Global Communications. Kumar concludes with the assertion that a President's organization must reflect his specific individual strengths and accommodate those who surround him. This particular administration, as a result of historical presidential experience works from a foundation of distrust for newsmen. Apprehensive in talking to reporters because of spin and clumsy characterization they have developed their own sources. Dan Bartlett, in a personal interview with Kumar said, "I know who my friends are in the press who I can trust, and they get better information. They get better contacts, they get better color" (Kumar, 2003a, p. 26).

Quantification. Still, "the adversarial aspect of presidential-press relations is an elusive quality, difficult to quantify" (Kernell, 1997, p. 92). Smith admits that little evidence exists to enumerate relations between elite sources and media men (Smith, 1990), but Graber (1984) and others assert that an obvious development of the adversarial relationship between the press and

each president can be seen, if not quantified, resulting in "an urge to malign, manipulate and manage" (Smith, 1990, p. 11).

In the last half century, scant attempts at providing empirical evidence of various dimensions of the relationship have been made. Content analyses of the first half dozen Kennedy conferences were conducted by Sanders (1965) in an effort to understand agenda control and structure. McGuire (1967) added surveys to his methodological approach to examine participant attitudes and more structural characteristics. The prevalence of follow-up questions was included in his study but was the only dimension related to aggressive or adversarial behavior. Later, Manheim (1979) looked at question and answer combinations recorded in 247 manuscripts collected from the news conferences of Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Ford to test for the existence of a honeymoon period in the press relationship. He explored various aspects of questioning related to press hostility, efforts at agenda control and their effectiveness, presidential references to action, responsibility and the future and elements of presidential style. While his findings supported a period of in-role socialization for the president and a shift in several aspects of behavior on both sides, comparisons were made within each presidency, not among them.

Until Clayman and Heritage's 2002 quantification of adversarialness in question design, long-term trends remained unexplored. Based on qualitative studies grounded in conversation analysis and speech in broadcast news interview, the scholars developed a system for applying basic questioning forms to quantitative, comparative research. Relating this system to the press conferences of Presidents Eisenhower and Reagan, they coded for initiative taking, directness, aggressiveness and hostility in questions asked of the president. Their study revealed that journalist behavior toward the US president was generally more aggressive based on ten

indicators of question design. The 2004 adapted update by Clayman et al. refined the coding process and applied the four dimensions of adversarialness to conferences of Presidents Eisenhower through Clinton.

The Press Conference

Smith (1990) describes presidential press conferences as "semi-institutional, quasi-spontaneous, inherently adversarial public encounters between the president and representatives of the press" (pp. 73-74). They are a form of political communication Manheim (1979) refers to as democratic confrontations because of the way they pit presidential persuasion against the press' watchdog function. Since the days when Theodore Roosevelt attempted to control public opinion through regular contact with the news media, open discourse with the president has evolved into the modern day press conferences whose intricacies are debated by pundits and broadcast over live television into living rooms across America. The first television broadcast of Kennedy's press conference in the mid-twentieth century sparked academic interest in the communicative format, leading to the publication of several articles that placed them in a historical perspective. Though they did little by way of providing empirical evidence of shifting relations between press and president, or systematic changes in news conference use or form, works by Lorenz (1966), Moynihan (1971), and Reedy (1976) supplied a foundation for their future study and understanding.

Foundations. Often mentioned as the founder of the modern press conference, President Theodore Roosevelt set a new standard by focusing the majority of his persuasive efforts on the press (Smith, 1990). Loathe to leaving the news up to reporters, he designed to create the news himself. Motivated by public relations, he set aside a special room for the press at the White House, later moving them to an office in the executive wing. Intent on appearing collaborative

and friendly he was the first to employ a press secretary and to openly converse with small groups of correspondents. The sessions were designed to show off his seeming accessibility, to leak pertinent information informally and to provide edification and background information for the pressmen. Conversation was confidential and off the record. The reporters he acknowledged considered themselves fortunate and adhered to his gag rules and threats for fear of being denied access to future gatherings.

Accusations that William Taft was withholding information when he failed to promote himself proved that future executives would be unable to avoid open contact with the press. President Woodrow Wilson, in response to the adverse reaction to Taft's supposed secrecy, took a cue from Theodore Roosevelt and held the first formal news conference in 1913 (*The press*, n.d.). In its earliest stages, the press conference was a free for all of questions and topics. Wilson held press conferences because he believed it was his duty as a representative of the general public. Unlike Roosevelt, he made no attempts to direct conversation or shape public opinion. Rather, he granted equal access to all reporters opening the floor to a full range of questioning. The acts of good will on the part of the administration, however, proved problematic. Without fear of being barred from future conferences or restricted from broaching controversial issues, correspondents probed the president with questions of accountability. Citing national security risk, Wilson avoided press conferences for a year during World War I and held only three during his second term (Smith, 1990).

Conferences emerged again as a primary communicative effort in the 1920s when professional speechwriter Judson Welliver advised Harding to reinstitute their biweekly practice (*The press*, n.d.). He held them on Tuesday and Friday afternoons and, like Wilson, allowed spontaneous questions, usually twenty or more. To deal with the problems revealed in Wilson's

conferences and the unexpected questions for which he was unprepared or wished to avoid, he allowed only fifty to one hundred reporters in his office and, in his last year, instituted the use of a question box. Prior to meeting with the president, newsmen were asked to submit their questions in writing. They were allowed to verbally follow-up their submissions, but had to attribute all information gained at the session to what was called the "White House spokesman" under Harding (Small, 1990, p. 81). It was never appropriate to directly associate the president with any of his remarks. For some, it was Harding's conferences that closed the door to the possibility of evading regular news sessions in the future (Cornwell, 1965). Others contend that his tendency to be unprepared and unclear not only highlighted the risks involved in the conference format, but called for damage control by the press secretary immediately following most sessions (Lyons, 1964).

President Calvin Coolidge initiated additional restrictions so that nothing in his press conferences "could be construed as irregular" (Smith, 1990, p. 29). Frequent and consistent, he held 520 conferences over six years. At this point, quotations or the mention of having personally seen the president were prohibited, as was any mention of his avoiding or ignoring any line of questions. Official remarks were to be presented by the press "as if they had dropped from Heaven" (Sharp, 1927, p. 29).

The frequency with which Hoover held conferences in his first 120 days in office has gone unmatched. His were the most frequent and the most consistent until his scheduling patterns unraveled toward the end of his term (Lammers, 1981). Though he continued to require questions in written form twenty-four hours in advance, he sought advice from reporters (Kernell, 1997) and from the first formally established press secretary (*The press*, n.d.) on how to improve conferences. From this advice, the administration made several changes. They decided

that three types of information could be obtained at the encounters. For the first time, there were statements that could be directly quoted and attributed to the president. The practice of crediting an unidentified spokesman was formally abolished (Kernell, 1997; Smith, 1990). Backgrounders could be attributed to the White House in a more general way. These were helpful to the administration because they were a relatively safe way of proposing policy ideas to other Washington officials without being specifically identified (Graber, 1984). Off the record statements remained as a way of educating reporters. To regain some of the control lost when Wilson opened the floor to all reporters, the administration broke precedent and screened out unwanted reporters (French, 1982; Small, 1972).

By this time, the independent reporters in the press corps were fully engaged in market competition. As such, they were more reliant on official sources and newsworthy stories for their livelihood. Open press conferences served them well because they leveled the playing field, giving all reporters equal access to the president where private interviews and closed press sessions created clear advantages for some. By Franklin D. Roosevelt's election the now corporate media "had a vested, collective interest in the integrity of the open press conference . . . not because it satisfied the competitive urges of journalists but precisely because it denied them" (p. 78). As they grew to appreciate and rely on the conference, though, they also recognized the value of their own role in the process. Their strength in numbers and ubiquity in American culture made them a force of political consequence (Kernell, 1997).

Though he made few novel changes, Franklin Roosevelt strengthened the role of the press conference because of his almost exclusive reliance on it as a channel of communication. He eliminated the written question and added a fourth class of information, the indirect quote. He

also arranged for planted questions by friendly reporters. In the first nod toward transcribed conferences, his White House aides took notes for future reference (Smith, 1990).

Broadcast. Minor changes to the format in the late 1940s and early 1950s served as steps toward preparing the conferences for live television. Reporters identified themselves personally and professionally before asking their questions of President Truman. Cameras were allowed to capture fifty feet of silent film for media use, though the film was edited for its most newsworthy parts by the press secretary before being released (Smith, 1990). The relationship between the president and the press had changed (Kernall, 1997), so rather than attempting to educate the press, the executive usually answered in shorter, less prepared statements. The sessions became increasingly more public as radio began broadcasting excerpts during Truman's second term and a professional transcriber made written documentation available just hours after Eisenhower's closing statements. The issue of direct quotation was certainly a thing of the past as verbatim transcripts and recordings captured the events in real time. To regain some control, Truman and Eisenhower's sessions became more scripted, required more preparation and almost always included a formal presidential statement prior to questions that lay out official positions and statements (Smith, 1990; *The press*, n.d.).

Truman made one other important variation when he moved them from the Oval Office to the Indian Treaty Room in the State Department, now Eisenhower's old executive office building. As mentioned earlier the president stood looking out at the seated press whose physical proximity to him was greatly increased. The message in social distance and authority was clear. His conferences were more infrequent, reduced to once a week. Eisenhower perpetuated the more formal format, averaging a press encounter about once every two weeks (*The press*, n.d.).

Days after his inauguration Kennedy allowed the first live television broadcast of a press conference on January 25, 1961. More room was needed to accommodate the cameras and the 418 reporters that attended, so the sessions were moved again, this time to the new State Department Building. Different schools of thought exist concerning the value of live sessions, even today. Critics say they enable too many unqualified journalists to question the president, thereby relieving him of "proper adversarial accountability" (Smith, 1990, p. 41). Others argue that the cameras create a contrived atmosphere where relations appear more adversarial as a result of presidential posturing and digging by correspondents. Nevertheless, replacing cameras with live feeds required little innovation and allowed Kennedy to step outside the rigid boundaries of the formal Roosevelt conference. He saw the potential in appealing to the American people directly as increased adversarial relations made losing press favor an ever more pressing concern (Smith, 1990). This realization inspired scholars to determine that the move to live broadcast was less a response to technological progress as a move of political acumen.

Kennedy's presidency had other important implications because along with televised press conferences, he also introduced other ways of going public that allowed for greater executive control of mediated messages. One was the informal press conference held with various samples of reporters and publishers, often from a particular region or interest (Kernell, 1997). Various forms of these informal conferences have been held by each of his successors, through George W. Bush. He also held private interviews with increased frequency, eventually opening even the Oval Office to television and video cameras. As he experimented with new ways of public communication facilitated by technological advancement, Kennedy uncovered ways to be accessible without subjecting himself to the contentious conference.

Obligation. By the Johnson administration, the grand, live format was unavoidable, even when it might put the president at a disadvantage. He did what he could to minimize the negative effects, moving them out of the enormous auditorium back to the Indian Treaty Room and, in 1969, to a new Press Briefing Room in the west terrace (*The press*, n.d.). He gave little notice before many sessions, hoping an impromptu style would lead to fewer reporters and less antagonistic, improvised questions. This technique caught on and has become a mainstay in press conference methodology. Announced press conferences all but disappeared while Nixon and Ford held office. Ford's reluctance to engage in them can partially be attributed to left over hostility following Watergate and Nixon's poor press performances. He reestablished regular meetings, but premeditated conferences during the Carter administration and ever after have generally been announced with just one day advanced warning (Grossman & Kumar, 1981). Ronald Reagan made few innovations to what is still the contemporary format of the press conference, preferring instead to pursue other avenues of communication. No more than six press conferences were held in any year of his two terms, most of which were held at night to reduce the time networks had to edit his comments (*The press*, n.d.).

The press conference today is semi-institutionalized (Kumar, 2003c). Institutionalized because it is an obligatory part of presidential communication; semi- because the White House maintains control over the location, schedule, occasion and participants. Like those before them, the most recent presidents have wielded this control as best they could to minimize the negative effects of the conference and capitalize on the ability to appear accessible, accountable and competent under pressure.

Modernity. The first President Bush, attempting to work around his poor performance on television, held early morning, impromptu sessions when networks had but a few minutes to

assemble their equipment. They were rarely newsworthy, poorly attended by the media and held at a ratio of thirty-eight to one against formal conferences. Though these mini-conferences hardly qualified as press conferences in the traditional sense, the press was unable to chastise him for being too detached (Kernell, 1997). Though more inclined toward verbose answers and lax rules, Clinton's sixty-two conferences over two terms paled in comparison to his predecessor's eighty-three (Sheridan, 2004). Perhaps this has roots in his very first press conference as president when his response to questioning on gays in the military pigeon-holed his position and drew so much attention that he was unable to successfully focus on any of his programs (Kumar, 2003a). Mike McCurry, former Clinton press secretary, argues that it was the constant demands of the twenty-four hour news cycle that abridged Clinton's press conference schedule (Sheridan, 2004). Cable television, perpetual news outlets like C-Span and CNN and on-line news sources have made news more readily available but have also made other ways of going public more plentiful. Kumar (2003c) shows that when cable networks increased their presences at the White House in 1996 his public speeches and public appearances increased while his short question and answer sessions and press conferences saw a marked decline. The ability to provide greater coverage overall enabled him to favor settings where he was less likely to be surprised or made vulnerable by the press.

The current president Bush excuses his unprecedented lack of solo press conferences, only fifteen during his first term as compared to his father's eighty-three (*Question Time*, 2004), by calling attention to the more than three hundred press events he racked up in the same amount of time. Press Secretary Scott McClellan waives criticisms related to formal incidences of conferences when confronted by media, countering arguments by saying that Bush makes himself accessible and "takes regular questions from you all, and does so in different formats"

(Gizzi, 2004, p. 7). Capitalizing on the spontaneous quality of his father and Clinton's conferences, he, too tried to pre-empt the drafting of too varied a pool of questions by giving very little, if any, notice. Fiber optic technologies that were planned during the Clinton administration and implemented in the beginning of the Bush years have eliminated the need for a satellite truck and the associated bulky equipment formerly necessary for television broadcast. Fiber drops have decreased the amount of time needed to go live to between fifteen and twenty minutes (Kumar, 2003a). Often, George W. Bush's conferences have been held with less than half an hours notice (Koffler, 2003b). Marlin Fitzwater commented that if press conferences only counted when they were announced in advance "you would take out about half of the ones President Bush held" (p. 172). Even critics who recognize that individual presidents fare differently in direct press encounters lament that Bush has so blatantly sidestepped the traditional conference, almost completely ending their regular practice (Shenkman, 2001). Many suggest that this may be due to seemingly inarticulate moments, fumbling words and self-professed weaknesses in public speaking. Press Secretary under Ford and Detroit *News* Washington bureau chief from 1960-1973, Jerry TerHorst, however, believes Bush could benefit from more sessions. He says his performances are better received than those of Johnson or Eisenhower whose Cabinet secretaries were reportedly more heavily burdened by presidential error and misstatement (Gizzi, 2004).

In a report for the White Burkett Miller Center on Public Affairs, French described three accepted purposes for the presidential press conference. At the end of the twentieth century, scholars said the press conference ought to be a "conduit for accurate information between the president and the public, as represented by the press," (French, 1982b, p. 29) a representation of checks and balances exhibited by an inherent power struggle (p. 30), and a public way of

appraising the personality and poise of the chief executive (p. 33). Frequently asked questions of the president include information questions, consistency questions, attitude questions, questions for the record and variations on each (Smith, 1990).

It has been established that more recent executives go public more often than those of former years (Kernell, 1997; Lammers 1981; Koffler, 2003, Sheridan, 2006). Scholars have examined press conference frequency, regularity and behavior in an attempt to justify the trend away from conference occurrence. In their study concerning choices associated with when and how to go public, Hager and Sullivan (1994) discovered that presidents are likely to make decisions based upon the conditions of the presidential office, rather than individual personality. In spite of opportunities for presidential control, their results showed that relative to alternative methods, press conferences "offer few attractive opportunities for presenting the president's position" (p. 1094). Though Eshbaugh-Soha's (2003) replication of the study supported a more president-centered theory for going public, he does agree that the president's attempts to begin each conference with a speech are largely futile and that the event works holistically for the press. In her analysis, Doris Graber, author of *Mass Media and American Politics* (1984), described presidential efforts to divert attention away from potentially detrimental issues and set the tone with lengthy opening statements. No president, she says, has been successful at preventing uncomfortable questions or avoiding controversial topics and expressions of reporter's personal viewpoints. Lammers (1981), in his study of conference avoidance in the period 1929-1979, said that while personality does have an impact, explanatory factors also include international involvement and televised conferences. He goes on to reveal that conferences are often held when the president has little of import to say because avoidance is particularly apt to occur when major policy decisions or dramatic actions are taking place. The

study reveals, also, that there does not seem to be justification for irregular or infrequent conference schedules based on decreased popularity ratings or length of time in office.

Many suggest that the president-press power struggle lies at the forefront of explanatory factors for the avoidance of conferences lies. As the "ultimate mediated message" (Smith, 1990, p. 69), control over what is communicated to the public is divided between the president and the press. This balancing act is apparent in each exchange as the president attempts to manipulate the dialogue so as to persuade while the press carries out its watchdog function, attempting to hold the president accountable. Cornwell (1960) notes that "each in short, must, in the nature of things, attempt to use the press conference for its own purposes – purposes that cannot help but be mutually exclusive" (p. 388).

Smith's (1990) comprehensive book concluded with a methodological proposition for critiquing presidential press conferences. She determined from her research that the ideal questions are those that incite new pieces of information from the president concerning his administration, policies or person. The best responses emphasize the president's leadership skills and boost his positive image to the public. Well received by scholars and a step forward in press conference scholarship, the standards she set were designed to gauge the effectiveness of press conferences from a theoretical or democratic standpoint. They are ineffectual in supporting or disproving arguments involving changes in the adversarial president-press relationship.

In their analysis of aggressive journalist behavior in a comparative study of press conferences held by Presidents Eisenhower and Reagan, Clayman and Heritage (2002) developed an original encoding system according to ten different features of question design. Their findings showed significantly greater levels of aggression and adversarial behavior by the press in dealings with the more recent president. Clayman, Elliot, Heritage & McDonald's

updated study (2004) refined the coding process and used a more continuous sample to test the validity and reliability of the original study. Their comparison of journalistic adversarialness covered each president from Eisenhower to Clinton and supported original results that show a long-term decline in deference to the president. The continuous sample revealed more volatility than the simpler work on which it was based but is a further testament to the increased aggressiveness, sometimes adversarial treatment prevalent in press conferences regardless of partisanship or personal idiosyncrasy.

These findings would suggest that the increasingly contentious, adversarial relationship between the press and the highest ranking executive official has created a modern press conference where the president must relinquish more agenda-setting control than in other communicative processes. In each session, he subjects himself to open questioning that is shown to be significantly less deferential, more direct and often more aggressive and hostile than ever before. This would seem an appropriate justification for the dwindling numbers of traditional solo press conferences in recent administrations (Kumar, 2003b).

Thus far the research conducted on question design and the adversarial relationship deal with American political figures and journalistic behavior toward them. None has dealt with any kind of comparison of behavior, initiative or treatment of those political officials in the presence of a foreign dignitary with which they have no institutionalized relationship. Among the encounters that have yet to be examined are the joint press conferences that have grown in popularity since their introduction by George H. W. Bush.

The Joint Press Conference

Kumar has reported that the press expects to meet with the president regularly. In the new century, he should anticipate questions at least twice a week and plan on addressing the public at

least once a day six days a week, on average (Kumar, 2003a, 2003b). Nationally broadcast cable TV, legacies for fairly frequent meetings left by former presidents, and the popularity of CNN, MSNBC and Fox have made daily remarks and public addresses the norm. For modern presidents, Kumar says, "there are no off the record remarks, no statements made on the background, or speeches to a limited audience . . . [He] is on the record and broadcast to live audiences around the world" (Kumar, 2003c, p.1). Alternative ways of going public are now accepted in place of the traditional press conference of previous years. Among these are a "much lower risk session that now has become the standard: the joint press conference" (Kumar, 2003c, p. 8).

A look at the data reveals that solo press conferences are experiencing a tectonic decline, irrespective of partisanship, public opinion or historical context. Truman infrequently invited others to participate in his press conferences; most often in matters involving the domestic budget. In sixteen of his conferences Johnson answered questions alongside another. Again, they were most often there to field queries on the budget, though Secretary of Defense McNamara did help the press understand policy associated with Vietnam. Foreign leaders joined him from time to time, but reporters were instructed to direct all questions to the US president (Kumar, 2003c).

Johnson's successors chose not to involve federal, state or foreign officials in their press sessions until the beginning of the first Bush administration. Following his election, press conferences have more commonly been taken out of the East Room and often involve another foreign head of state or dignitary. According to Kumar (2003c) the joint press conference, now a regular format, has evolved as an adaptation to the needs of reporters and leaders, both foreign and domestic. Prior to Bush's reintroduction of the joint conference, correspondents questioned the US president and the visiting head of state or their representatives individually. Designed to

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be informal, simple affairs they dealt only with the topic and meeting of the day. Joint press sessions offered a formal way to coordinate both sides so that the impression each gave was the same. Allowing each official to field questions alongside the other gave the administration more control over the message generated from the event. Fitzwater said it developed casually because parties were readily available and it was easier than organizing separate media events.

The joint press conference, ignored by four presidents after Johnson, was reinstated by the first President Bush because "it was a situation where everyone got more than they would have" (p. 243) in a conventional conference. Kumar argues that they are advantageous for the president because they assure synchronized messages from both officials following collaborative events; they can expect and prepare for them and be credited for making themselves accessible for direct questioning. He is generally also subjected to fewer total questions, a difference of seventy-five percent, in fact, when joined by another. The press benefits because they have access to the president rather than an anonymous surrogate, they can be confident in its happening, and they have the opportunity to use their floor time to bring up unrelated issues if they choose to do so.

Kumar's analysis of the joint conference suggests that if Bush's predecessors were any indication, the press could have expected a single press conference a month, if that, from the three most recent presidents. Following the adoption of the joint conference as a habitual practice, however, there has been a spike in the number of press conferences held by each president. While not a single one of Reagan's conferences involved a foreign head of state, joint conferences accounted for almost half of the following administration's sessions. The following table shows the number of press conferences, total, solo and joint, held by the last four presidents as well as the percent of total conferences where the US president is not alone. Reagan is

included as a benchmark to illustrate not only that the number of joint press conferences has consistently grown as a percent of total conferences, but that total conferences since Reagan have become more numerous as well. Exactly what press sessions constitute a press conference is debated among scholarly sources but has been established according to precedent and uniformly applied standards by the National Archives and Press Office Staffs. Frequencies through 2002 only are available through *The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* compiled and published by the Office of the Federal Registrar, National Archives and Records Administration. The conference frequencies for George W. Bush are compiled from the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* provided by the Government Printing Office.

Table 1: Solo and Joint Press Conferences by President 1981 – 2004:

President	Total	Solo	Joint	Joint Sessions as Percent of Total
Reagan*	46	46	0	00.0%
George H.W. Bush*	142	83	59	41.5%
Clinton*	193	62	131	67.9%
George W. Bush†	88	20	68	77.3%

*Cited in Kumar, 2003b
†Compiled from *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*

This table is illustrative of the fact that the last three administrations have used the joint conference more than the more traditional solo conference that was so ritualized in the American presidency. It indicates, too, that though press conferences in general have seen a tectonic decline since Kennedy, the joint press conference may very well be the cause of a reversal in this trend.

Research Question

It seems appropriate, then, to expect that something in the nature of the joint press conference works to alleviate, at least in part, the negative aspects associated with direct press

exchanges. It has been shown that the relationship between the US president and the press has evolved into one of adversity and contention and has resulted in press conference exchanges where reporter's propensity for aggressive, hostile, direct, initiative-taking behaviors leave the president on the defensive. Thus, they are more apt to opt for alternative forms of going public. This study seeks to combine the ideas set forth by Clayman and Heritage (2002) and refined by Clayman et al. (2004) with the information provided in the works of Kumar (2003b) by asking the question:

RQ1: Is the relationship between the US President and the press less adversarial when another foreign head of state is questioned alongside the President?

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

According to Bennet (1990), the most effective way to study the intricacies and developments of presidential-press relations is to observe and analyze explicit behavior. Clayman and Heritage (2002) took an important step in quantifying adversity between the President and the press that covered him by doing just that. In their study, they labeled the presence of adversarial behavior adversarialness and quantified it by identifying ten criteria divided among four dimensions. In doing so, they developed a systematic way to reflect the nature of relations between the two parties. Their attempt to understand the role each plays in the presidential-press relationship resulted in the creation of a process for observing and measuring face-to-face personal interactions between the press and the executive.

In order to update and apply their findings in a comparative examination, this thesis follows the coding methods for content analysis established in the initial study conducted in 2002 and applied again in 2004, (Clayman et al.) coding for the exact features used in the refined 2004 system. Content analysis is an appropriate method according to Krippendorf (1980) who calls it the best method for making "valid inferences from data to their content" (p. 21) and Holsti (1969, p. 14) who supports its use for gathering information from specific message characteristics. Further, two advantages associated with content analyses are the ability to study otherwise inaccessible communicators and archived documents that survive a temporary event (Riffe, Lacy and Fico, 1998, pp. 30-31). Thus, the analysis for this work is appropriate in spite of the physical, social and professional distance between both parties, the events being studied and the researcher.

Clayman and Heritage's (2002) study builds upon scholarly inspection of social norms and conventional news interview situations to create the first systematic test for measuring

adversarial levels of questions posed to public figures. Rather than focusing on subject matter or specifically *what* is being asked, the researchers emphasize the formal aspects of the design of each question. Each question posed in four conferences per year for the first terms of Presidents Eisenhower and Reagan served as a unit of analysis and was coded for the presence of adversarial relations. The conferences selected were chosen partially because the officials are similarly characterized as two-term, popular, Republican presidents whose terms were relatively peaceful and prosperous and because they span a time period when American journalism is recognized to have become more aggressive. In Clayman et al.'s study, four conferences per year from 1953 – 2000 were selected as a sample, covering the presidencies of each president Eisenhower through Clinton. For the purposes and scope of this study, comparison across presidents is not necessary as the relevant findings compare the differences between the press conferences where the US president is the sole dignitary taking questions and those where he is joined by a foreign head of state. The press conferences coded in this study pick up where Clayman et al. (2004) leave off. The sample is limited to those sessions conducted by President George W. Bush in his first term of office. As the most recent occupant of the White House, his conferences most accurately reflect the modern presidential-press relationship. Having been used by two preceding executives, the joint conference is by now well established, often accepted as the standard (Kumar, 2003b; 2003c). Temporally selected conferences from his first term are sufficient for analysis, too, as the presidential-press relationship is accepted as cyclical (Brody, 1991). Scholars contend that each presidency is divided into a honeymoon phase immediately following the president's election where the press has little to criticize and the president makes himself readily available, a second phase characterized by heavier manipulation by both parties,

and a third, often occurring around reelection time, where both sides return "from mutually hostile behavior to a more moderate stance" (Graber, 1984, pp. 245-246).

Manheim's (1979) quantitative study shows the honeymoon period to last anywhere from two months to a full year; typically falling nearer the two month mark. He argues, though, that based on self-imposed overcompensation reporters are often more hostile, more likely to challenge the president's leadership ability by focusing on questions of domestic politics and less likely to adhere to his agenda in the initial phase. Nevertheless, he concludes that the "honeymoon period is a temporal characteristic of journalistic behavior, a time when certain kinds of questions are less likely to be raised" (p. 60). The sample used here is stratified to include four solo and four joint conferences selected from those held in the period 2000-2004. This accommodates the cyclical nature of the relationship and the honeymoon period, whatever the direction of its shift in tone, as well as accounts for the small pool of solo conferences from which to choose.

Question Dimensions

In adherence with standards set by Clayman and Heritage (2002) and again by Clayman et al., (2004) each question is coded for the presence of four basic indicators of adversarialness, initiative, directness, assertiveness and adversarialness. These indicators are not discrete or mutually exclusive. Individual questions may include varying degrees of any or all of the categories. Greater adversarialness is indicated by inclusion in multiple dimensions.

1. *Initiative*: relates to the ability of the journalist to set an independent, constraining agenda for the president as opposed to taking a more passive role that allows substantial leeway for crafting a response

2. *Directness*: relates to whether journalists are blunt or cautious in raising issues; is actually measured as a lack of indirectness

3. *Assertiveness*: relates to the extent to which the posed question invites a specific response; is opinionated rather than neutral

4. *Adversarialness*: relates to whether or not the question broaches an agenda in opposition to the administration

Dimension Indicators

Each of the four question dimensions that, together, convey the extent to which press relations are adversarial in nature, is operationalized according to ten facets of question design. For instance, initiative is characterized by the prevalence of three measures: statement prefaces, multiple questions and follow-up questions. *Statement prefaces* deal with how the reporter exploits his time. He increases by prefacing a question with statements that allow for only one interpretation or introduce hostile information.

In *multiple questions* the initial question is followed by other versions of the same question that further narrow the boundaries of response, possibly providing a specific idea for the president to confirm or reject. The focus of the query is stable across versions, but what is considered an acceptable response is substantially restricted. The demands placed on the president increase with the multiplicity of questions. *Follow up questions* typically signal that the reporter finds the president's initial response inadequate. Numerous journalists are forced to bid for the president's limited time and so are generally relegated to one turn at speaking. Occasionally, though, a single journalist will abuse his privilege by pressing for a more substantial answer or raising a similar issue immediately following the president's response to his allotted question. They are salient indicators of adversarialness as they blatantly violate the

"one-question-per-turn" norm. A question was coded according to whether or not the president's response to it was followed immediately by another question from the same reporter. That question was also coded. In the event that a question was followed up multiple times each question, except the last one posed by the single reporter would be coded as having a follow-up, as each one represents an instance of initiative taking behavior. Cumulatively, these three measures – statement prefaces, multiple questions and follow-up questions – indicate the degree to which journalistic initiative is prevalent in a given press conference.

The directness of a question is actually measured as a lack of indirectness and is said to "function as a ritual display of politeness that reduces the magnitude or forcefulness of the imposition" (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 759). Indirect questions are manifestations of cautiousness in interacting with the president. It is usually apparent in the preface or statements immediately preceding the question which are categorized as either self-referencing or other-referencing question frames. *Other referencing question* frames refer to whether or not the executive is willing or able to answer the question. By beginning with "Can you/Could you . . . " or "Would you/Will you tell us . . . ," the reporter can indirectly proceed with a question having acknowledged outside contingencies that might allow the president to avoid a question. *Self-referencing frames* include prefaces like "I wonder whether . . . , "I want/would like to ask . . . " or "Can I/ Could I/ May I ask . . . " that refer to the role of the reporter. Posing questions indirectly is a polite way of showing respect and deference for the president. When these frames are not used press conference reporters seem less cautious and more directly interrogative. The decline of indirectness as measured by the decreased usage of other-referencing question frames and self-referencing question frames is an indication of a more straightforward, less deferential relationship.

Assertiveness, the third factor in identifying adversarialness, deals with the degree to which an implication or suggestion is made by the journalist concerning the desired or appropriate response. Operationalized for yes/no questions only, this indicator reveals an opinionated, non-neutral tone either in the question preface or in the actual question itself. When a question's preface tilts the question toward an answer it is known as preface tilt and is an indication of assertiveness on the part of the reporter. They are delivered in the form of *innocuous tilts* when the reporter is pushing for a certain answer that is inoffensive or harmless to the president or *unfavorable tilts* whose allusions are potentially injurious. When he or she begins with negative interrogatives like "Isn't it time . . .," " "Couldn't you . . ." the question is considered negatively formulated due to its obvious allusion to a "yes" answer. Adversarialness is a component that applies to questions that are blatantly critical to the president or his administration and peruses an oppositional agenda. Indicators account for the presence of one of three measures: preface adversarialness, global adversarialness and accountability questions. Like assertiveness, conflicting agendas can be encoded in the questions preface or in overall question design. *Preface adversarialness* seeks out those prefaces that include opposition to policy, the administration or prior statements. More aggressive prefaces are presupposed by the subsequent question. In other words, the following question does not ask for comment on prefatory information. Rather, it continues on the assumption that the statements are true, drawing inferences and raising issues based upon the information. These are overtly more adversarial as they deny the president the opportunity to counter prefatory declarations, presupposing its truth. Less adversarial prefaces allow the president a chance to rebut or respond to prefatory declarations because those statements are the focus of the question that follows. Adversaralness can also be exhibited in questions without prefaces. *Global adversarialness* takes

each question in its entirety and measures the degree to which it can be considered holistically hostile. Without regard to length or sophistication questions are considered globally hostile if an assessment reveals any critical, oppositional posturing. Finally, questions that seek explanations for adopted policies or specific courses of action are called *accountability questions*. They indicate hostility because they place the president in a defensive position where he risks rousing skepticism if he does not reply. Questions that begin with "Why did you . . ." are relatively neutral in regard to the presidential policy or action. Conversely, the president is in a more precarious position when he is forced to respond to a question that implies in its "How could you . . ." beginning some sense of doubt or skepticism in his person or actions.

The researcher and another coder reviewed press conference transcripts obtained from the *The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* through 2002. These official transcripts prepared and made available by the White House Press office are only available through the middle of Bush's first term. Transcripts for press conferences during the second half of the selected period were obtained through the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* published by the Government Printing Office. Each question was used as the unit of analysis and was coded according to the criteria provided on the coding sheet (Appendix A). The second coder was trained appropriately in a one hour training session conducted and using coding instruction materials provided by the researcher. These instructions contained definitions for each of the ten criteria and the four broad categories of adversarialness. Detailed explanations for each indicator were provided along with multiple examples of questions adhering to each description. The coder was instructed on how to recognize and effectively identify the characteristic of each question characteristic according to the standards set in the seminal studies and as applied by the researcher. The following table summarizes each dimension of

adversarialness, the indicators by which it is identified and the value each was given in the

coding process.

Table 2: The Question Analysis System:

Dimension	Indicator	Description	Value	Characterization of Each Value
Initiative	Statement Preface	Q preceded by statement(s)	0	No Preface
			1	Preface
	Multiple Questions	2+ Qs in a single turn at talk	0	Single Q
			1	Multiple Q
	Follow-up Question	Subsequent Q by the same journalist	0	No Follow Up Q
			1	Follow Up Q
Directness	Other-referencing Frame	No Frame	0	No Frame
		Frame refers to president's ability or willingness to answer	1	*"Can you/Could you"*
			2	*"Will you/Would you"*
	Self-referencing Frame	No Frame	0	No Frame
		Frame refers to journalist's own intention or desire to ask	1	*"I wonder"*
			2	*"I'd like to ask"*
			3	*"Can I/May I ask"*
Assertiveness	Preface Tilt	Preface favors either yes or no	0	No Tilt
			1	Innocuous Tilt
			2	Unfavorable Tilt
	Negative Questions	Formation of question refers to presence or lack of negativity	0	No Negative Formation
			1	"*Isn't it*"
			2	"*Couldn't you*"
Adversarialness	Preface Adversarialness	Q preface is oppositional	0	Non-adversarial preface
			1	Adversarial preface focus of Q
			2	Adversarial preface presupposed
	Global Adversarialness	Overall Q is oppositional	0	Not oppositional overall
			1	Oppositional overall
	Accountability Question	Q seeks explanation for administration policy	0	Not an accountability Q
			1	*"Why did you"*
			2	*"How could you"*

Reliability

The accepted quantity of selected materials among the entire body of content that is sufficient for reliability examination is ambiguous among scholars. Some suggest that between 10% and 20% is preferable (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997), others are satisfied with 5% to 7% (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989). Krippendorf 's (1980) analysis of available testing methods advises that the sample of material "appropriately reflect the full range of potential coding decisions that must be made in the entire body" (p. 124). With these suggestions in mind, a sub-sample of two conferences, one solo and one joint, was recoded to test for reliability.

Analysis was based on measures of the four question dimensions that deal with primarily formal elements of question design. As opposed to thematic content analyses that would be more highly interpretive (Krippendorf, 1980), these design features are more concrete and, therefore, can be more readily coded. Cohen's kappa was used for assessing the reliability of the nominal-level data. This is appropriate because disagreements are of equivalent gravity, it will yield a slightly higher reliability figure than Scott's pi, (Riffe et al., 1998, pp. 131-132) and it conforms to the standards set in each of the replicated studies.

Table 3: Composite and Individual Kappa Scores for Reliability:

Kappa	Dimension	Kappa	Indicator	Kappa
.83	Initiative	.81	Statement Preface	.66
			Multiple Questions	.86
			Follow-up Question	.92
	Directness	.87	Other-referencing Frame	.85
			Self-referencing Frame	.89
	Assertiveness	.81	Preface Tilt	.74
			Negative Questions	.87
	Adversarialness	.84	Preface Adversarialness	.95
			Global Adversarialness	.79
			Accountability Question	.79

Reliability scores varied between .66 and .95 for individual indicators of the four

dimensions. Kappa scores were above .95 in one indicator, between .85 and .95 in five

indicators, between .74 and .85 in two indicators and below .70 in one indicator. These fall

within similar ranges to Clayman and Heritage (2002) and Clayman et al. (2004) whose kappas

fell between .62 and 1.0 and .66 and .99, respectively. The lowest kappa scores in this instance,

though not ideal, do not fall below those of the seminal works. Additionally, because this is an

exploratory study that applies a relatively new codification system in a unique situation, .66 is

acceptable. As in similar studies, the system, as a whole, yielded high levels of reliability.

The adversarial president-press relationship is particularly concerned with the four

dimensions that were broken down for the coding system. Taken as aggregates, the reliability of

initiative, directness, assertiveness and adversarialness range between .81 and .87 (see Table 3).

The kappa score of the combined dimensions is .83. Aggregated scores more precisely

demonstrate the reliability of the system as it is intended to be applied (Clayman, et al., 2004).

Validity

The validity of the design features of question design is at this point well established.

Extensive prior research on questioning practices in interpersonal interaction and in journalistic

questioning specifically has shown that particular design features and their variants are

understood and acknowledged as indicative of aggressive behavior. Clayman and Heritage

(2002) and Clayman et al. (2004) base their coding system on general interactional norms

formed from basic human desires. Negative and positive rites dealing with the aversion to

imposition and the desire for validation have been studied and operationalized in terms of

linguistic strategies (Goffman, 1967; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Clayman and Heritage (2002)

based the initiative, directness and assertiveness variables on this understanding. The varying

degrees of pressure placed on the president constrain his responses and encroach on his negative rite, where adversarial questions threaten his positive rite or need for approval.

Further, they say, initiative, assertiveness and adversarialness, especially as they are exhibited by multiple questions, follow-up questions and prefaced questions, are closely associated with journalistic norms and the independent, objective behaviors of the contemporary, watchdog press. Each, exhibiting initiative, narrow the range of responses acceptable to the simple question imbedded among the elements. Follow ups directly communicate dissatisfaction and rejection of presidential statements. The authors acknowledge that directness differentiates itself from the other indicators by being specifically unrelated to journalism or broadcast, but assert that its criteria are tied to "more general norms of politeness and civility" (p. 764) and are found in innumerable personal interactions and ordinary human conversation.

Limitations

As an exploratory project, these methods represent a first attempt at answering the posed research question.   The range in reliability scores may be reduced by further application of the quantification system as applied in similar situations. As coders and coder trainers become more familiar with the system and with conference transcripts, the discrepancy in coding results will likely be reduced. An element of subjectivity exists in the analysis of each unit. For instance, questions are sometimes preceded by unrelated statements, often resulting in different decisions regarding whether or not to include such statements as prefatory. Also, codifications that ask the coder to identify questions that begin with frames such as *I'd like to ask"* may result in discrepancies between coders as they apply their own judgments to questions that begin similarly without including the phrase verbatim. Inconsistencies related to human judgment may be reduced in further applications and with further refinement.

The sample size is small and includes a disproportionate number of questions from each conference type. Only transcripts from sessions conducted at the White House were included in for the sake of consistency. Many conferences, both solo and joint, are held outside of the nation's capitol. The president often conducts solo sessions at the Crawford Ranch in Texas or other domestic locations, while joint conferences included among Press Office statistics include those held in foreign locations where the president may face a majority of foreign press. Additionally, the full transcripts used in this and seminal samples do not include the identify of the reporter asking each question.

Joint press conferences, by nature, involve fewer questions. They usually accompany an

event, meeting or affair of some sort. As a result they are subject to conditional constraints

related to time, subject matter, flexibility and control (Kumar, 2003c). The temporally stratified,

balanced sample of solo and joint press conferences resulted in an inequality in total number of

questions asked. The final sample consisted of a total 133 questions; 111 from solo, 22 from joint

press conferences. Comparisons between adversarial indicators are, therefore, made using

percentages rather than actual frequencies or numbers of question types.

Initiative

Increased initiative taking behavior by journalists, specifically those covering the

president, have been demonstrated through temporal changes in the inclusion of question

prefaces, the number of questions packed into the single exchange allowed each reporter, and

insistences of follow-up opportunities. Tables 4, 5 and 6 illustrate the frequencies of each in the

sampled sessions.

Table 4: Presence of Question Preface:

	Solo Conferences		Joint Conferences	
	N	%	N	%
No Preface	37	33.3%	9	40.9%
Preface	74	66.7%	13	59.1%
Total	111		22	

Table 5: Presence of Multiple Questions:

	Solo Conferences		Joint Conferences	
	N	%	N	%
Single Question	66	59.5%	7	31.8%
Multiple Question	45	40.5%	15	68.2%
Total	111		22	

Table 6: Presence of Follow-Up Questions:

	Solo Conferences		Joint Conferences	
	N	%	N	%
No Follow-Up Question	75	67.6%	19	86.4%
Follow-Up Question	36	32.4%	3	13.6%
Total	11		22	

Overall, statements with prefaces outnumber those without. Two-thirds of the questions asked of the president alone began with prefatory statements. This shows that reporters took initiative in introducing complicated information in 7.6% more questions in solo conferences than in joint.

A 27.7% difference existed between the multiple and single questions. Bush, therefore, can expect to be subjected to 27.7% more single and 27.7% less multiple questions in a solo conference than when he is joined by another. This reveals that though questions were fewer in joint conferences, they were typically multi-faceted in that each reporter's exchange contained more than a simplistic, single question. Rather, they tended towards exposing the desire for more than one response or a response that covered several nuanced topics. This shows more initiative taking under joint conference circumstance.

In both conference types follow-up questions were less likely to occur than their counterparts. The likelihood that a question would be followed up at the completion of the president's response, however, is nearly 20% higher when a president does not field questions alongside another dignitary. The greatest violation in deferring to presidential power, the follow up question signifies a disregard for the norm whereby each reporter called upon has one chance to quiz the president. The 20% differential is illustrative of more aggressive press behavior in solo conferences.

Directness

Though the lack of directness is what actually indicates adversity between relationship participants, the system codes for how indirectly the reporters interrogate or approach the executive. The coding process focuses on how the question begins and whether it allows the president room to avoid or sidestep a specific line of questioning or topic. The presence of other-referencing frames in sampled questions indirectly acknowledges Bush's right or ability to answer a question and their frequencies are presented in Table 7. The findings related to deferential, self-referencing frames are recorded in Table 8.

Table 7: Presence of Other Referencing Frames:

	Solo Conferences		Joint Conferences	
	N	%	N	%
No Frame	79	71.2%	17	77.3%
"Can you / Could you"	12	10.8%	4	18.2%
"Will you / Would you"	20	18.0%	1	4.5%
Total	111		22	

Table 8: Presence of Self-Referencing Frames:

	Solo Conferences		Joint Conferences	
	N	%	N	%
No Frame	92	82.9%	16	72.7%
"I wonder"	10	9.0%	0	0%
"I'd like to ask"	5	4.5%	5	22.7%
"Can I/May I ask"	4	3.6%	1	4.5%
Total	111		22	

The majority of the units of analysis contained no frames in both the categories of other-referencing and self-referencing frames, approximating about three-fourths in both types. In other words, frames that represent acts of deference toward the executive were absent in a majority of the entire sample. Thus, regardless of whether the session is joint or solo, questions for the most part are direct and, therefore, initiated without concern for Bush's position or the press' own right to broach a subject. Of those that could be considered indirect, as indicated by the established criteria, solo conferences were more likely to include other-referencing frames.

Journalists more often made some kind of allusion to the fact that outside circumstances might effect the president's ability to answer their question or he might simply be unwilling, by a margin of 6.1%. Further differentiating among other-referencing frames, framed questions in solo conferences were more likely to begin with the "*Will you/Would you*" prefix, as opposed to the "*Can you / Could you*" frame that was more likely to occur in joint conferences. The *"Can you / Could you"* prefix is considered more cautious than the former. So, though the proportion of other-referencing frames, and therefore indirect behavior, is slightly less in joint conferences, those that are indirect are more cautious and allow the president more leeway than the indirect questions in solo sessions.

Regarding self-referencing frames, about one in four questions in joint conferences started out with one of the established criteria as opposed to one of six in solo sessions. Reporters asked 10.2% more questions with no self-referencing frames and were 9% more likely to begin with "*I wonder*" or some variation thereof. More of the joint conference questions were framed with self-references in general, the largest increase occurring in the 18.2% jump in the "*I'd like to ask*" category. In other words, where the press exhibited more deferential behavior when referring to the president's willingness or ability to field a question in solo conferences, this was not the case when referring to themselves and their right to broach a subject. Press behavior was less direct and more favorable for the president in joint conferences according to the presence of self-referencing frames.

Assertiveness

Summarized in Tables 9 and 10, assertiveness merges preface tilt and negative formation indicators into a single criterion for adversarialness. Assertiveness is null when a question is in no way tilted toward an answer or either yes or no through preface information or complete

formation. Questions become aggressive when they are tilted in favor of one answer over another. Tilted prefaces are further differentiated according to whether they are neutral or unfavorable in tone. This difference can mean the difference between more or less interrogative and assertive questions, regardless of Bush's presidential position.

Table 9: Presence of Preface Tilt:

	Solo Conferences		Joint Conferences	
	N	%	N	%
No Tilt	26	23.4%	10	45.5%
Innocuous Tilt	27	24.3%	9	40.9%
No Tilt or Innocuous Tilt Composite	53	47.7%	19	86.4%
Unfavorable Tilt	58	52.3%	3	13.6%
Total	111		22 (w/o composite)	

Table 10: Presence of Negative Formation:

	Solo Conferences		Joint Conferences	
	N	%	N	%
No Negative Formation	88	79.3%	20	90.9%
"Isn't it"	22	19.8%	2	9.1%
"Couldn't you"	1	0.9%	0	0%
Total	111		22	

In both solo and joint conferences, questions were more likely than not to be tilted in a specific direction, though by a much greater margin, 22.1%, in solo exchanges. This in and of itself indicates increased assertiveness. For the sake of comparison, an additional column has bee added to Table 9 that combines the frequencies of non-tilted questions with those having innocuous tilts. This amalgamated data more clearly shows that the president can expect to field a critically tilted question more than half the time in solo sessions. By contrast, when accompanied, he may be subjected to hostile or adversely tilted interrogatives about one-sixth of the time. This supports any assumption that might suggest that joint conferences are less critical, and therefore, more beneficial to the president than its traditional form.

As for negatively formed questions, the data revealed them to be used almost negligibly. Though they did occur more often in solo conferences, the difference in ratio is hardly worth discussion insofar as it would be applied to the total population of press conference questions. A case in favor of either type of conference would be difficult to make based solely on this criteria. Adversarialness

Table 11 shows the results of coding for adversarial prefaces that, when they exist, may range from not adversarial at all to containing accusatory or unfavorable information presented as truth. Table 12 depicts incidences of global adversarialness which accounts for levels of adversarialness in the preface, follow-up or question in its entirety. Hostile or adversarial prefaces make even a neutral or deferential question more adversarial overall. The proportion of questions that are globally hostile, therefore, is greater than those shown in Table 11. The proportional differences illustrate the ability of a question, without prelude information or initial negative undertones to end with hostility. This specific criterion accounts for those questions whose minutias are difficult to pigeon-hole. The presence of accountability, a measure that is blatantly adversarial because of the demands it places on the president to defend his person, policies or administration can be seen in Table 13.

Table 11: Presence of Adversarial Preface and Form:

	Solo Conferences		Joint Conferences	
	N	%	N	%
No Preface	22	19.8%	10	45.5%
Non-adversarial Preface	25	22.5%	8	36.4%
Adversarial Preface Focus of Question	42	37.8%	2	9.1%
Adversarial Preface Presupposed	22	19.8%	2	9.1%
Total	111		22	

Inquiries asked of the president can be considered non-adversarial when coded as either having no preface at all or as having one that is non-adversarial. Taking these as a composite factor, it is revealed that 42.3% of those asked in solo events can be deemed as such. By comparison, those asked in joint incidences reached levels just under 82%. The difference shows a greater tendency for non-adversarial questioning in joint conferences, according to preface. Similarly, compounding the various forms of adversarial prefaces results in a proportional difference of 39.4%; the greater quantity occurring in solo conferences. The difference shows a greater tendency for non-adversarial questioning in joint conferences which suggests that the press is more likely to be easier on the executive, according to preface, when he does not stand alone.

Table 12: Presence of Global Adversarialness:

	Solo Conferences		Joint Conferences	
	N	%	N	%
Not Oppositional Overall	50	45.0%	20	90.9%
Oppositional Overall	61	55.0%	2	9.1%
Total	111		22	

These results illustrate that fewer than 10% of questions in joint conferences are generally oppositional while more than half, 55%, of those asked at sampled solo conferences tend toward adversarialness. The relative difference in questions that are overall not in opposition to president, staff or policy favors joint conferences by 49.5%. As an indicator, global adversarialness which considers each question in its entirety, taking all frames, prefaces, follow-ups, tone and other nuances into account, indicates that questions are substantially less adversarial in joint sessions than in solo. As shown here, the exhibited relationship between the president and the press is less contentious and more collaborative when the president is joined by another dignitary.

Table 13: Presence of Accountability Questions:

	Solo Conferences		Joint Conferences	
	N	%	N	%
Not an Accountability Question	73	65.8%	19	86.4%
"Why did you"	18	16.2%	2	9.1%
"How could you"	20	18.0%	1	4.5%
Total	111		22	

The difference among the specific *"Why did you", "How could you"* question preludes is negligible, especially as accountability is but one of three factors used to gauge general levels of adversarial behavior by the press. The significant result presented in Table 13 is the comparison of accountability questions overall between the conference variations. Roughly one-third of questions in solo conferences will attempt to hold Bush or some part of his administration accountable for specific actions. By comparison, only one seventh of those posed in joint conferences will do so. Thus, the president is 79.4% more likely to avoid the pressures associated with accountability questions when joined by a foreign dignitary. With just this criteria in mind, the, he would be 79.4% more likely to prefer joint conferences to solo.

Composites. The ten criteria relate to one of four indicators of adversarialness established in previous codifications. Each supplements the others to provide a level of understanding of the relationship between the president and the press in public press conference exchanges. A question that errs on the side of adversarial in more than one such indicator would be more imposing and more detestable by the chief executive. A press conference with such questions would, therefore, be undesirable and lack benefit when compared with a conference characterized by less adversity. According to these criteria, questions overall are more likely to exhibit adversarial elements in solo press conferences as compared to joint conferences.

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CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research question posed in this thesis asked whether the relationship between the US President and the press was less adversarial when another foreign head of state is questioned alongside the president. The data result in the general conclusion that the president-press relationship is indeed less adversarial in joint press conferences. Findings show greater adversarialness to exist in the relationship exhibited between the president and the press in solo conferences.

A proper discussion of the conclusion will delve into the results of each particular indicator, as the results of all ten criteria are not unanimously supportive of this conclusion. Considered in the broader context of the four dimensions of adversarialness, however, the sample does indicate that the pressures associated with the modern press conference are holistically alleviated in joint sessions, potentially providing a justification for the return of the press conference in general to presidential favor.

Discussion

Initiative. Two of the three indicators of initiative taking press behavior substantially favor the joint press conference in terms of agenda setting and control for the president. The specificity and constraints imposed by background information and lengthy initial remarks by reporters are alleviated in joint conferences as are the problematic impositions associated with follow up questions. General acceptance of an answer, as implied by a lack of a follow-up query by a single pressman, is more prevalent when another dignitary is present. The rejection or suggested unacceptability of an initial response, in this sample, is far more likely to occur when Bush bears the brunt of the questions alone. Further, Clayman and Heritage (2002) admit that a reporter's success in posing a follow up questions is "contingent on the president who can

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choose to acknowledge the journalist and thereby facilitate" (p. 758) its inclusion or more stringently enforce the one-question-per-turn norm. Several of the solo conferences within the sample included attempts at follow ups that were denied by Bush who admonished the offending reporter for disrespecting his rules or interrupting his time. The dissuaded attempts may be illustrative of greater initiative than these results show. These two criteria suggest that the press will take more initiative when operating in the institutionalized, familiar confines of a traditional solo conference. When the conference is adapted to include the dignitary with whom a relationship or rapport is not well established, initiative taking occurs much less often.

The results do show, however, that one indicator of initiative taking behavior does not imply an easier route for presidential control. By a margin of 27.7%, questions are more likely to come in multiples in joint sessions. This makes things more complicated as multiple questions are more demanding than their simpler counterparts which are more evenly spread within interrogations of the president alone. Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that so few opportunities for posing questions are available at joint affairs. As mentioned and proven by Kumar's analyses, the length and number of journalists called upon are severely limited in joint sessions, possibly inciting those afforded the opportunity to engage Bush to pack as much into one speaking opportunity as possible. By contrast, the follow-up questions that are more prevalent and more severely indicative of initiative taking behavior (Clayman & Heritage, 2002) may be depended on for expelling more information. Perhaps the knowledge that more time and more journalists will have the chance to speak helps explain the dependence on fewer questions at each opportunity.

It is worth noting, too, the support provided by these data for the results of past studies. In the seminal works, very few multiple questions were recorded. According to the 2002 study,

only 8.7% of questions asked of Reagan were complex, multi-part questions; 4.87% of Eisenhower's. Here, even in Bush's solo conferences where multiple questions were less prevalent, they made up almost 60% of total questions. Thus, this data overwhelmingly supports the previously established trend of increasing initiative taking by the press over time.

Directness. Regarding other-referencing frames, more indirect behavior was exhibited in solo conferences. Though the proportional difference is small, this factor alone would indicate that the press is more cautious in their dealings with the president alone because greater deference is demonstrated. The overall lack of framing, both self- and other-referencing in both types of conferences, though, dulls the impact of this finding. It also conforms to the 2002 and 2004 studies, sustaining the argument for less cautious, more straightforward press behavior over time. Clayman et al. (2004) describe this second dimension as more secular and less tied to journalistic norms that the other three. The study reports directness to have shown a more monotonic increase, a shift they call tectonic because of the lack of volatility in its prevalence despite historical event or sociopolitical condition. They would not be surprised to find, then, that only about one-fourth of the questions asked in the entire sample exhibited any kind of attempt by the press to verbalize concern with capability or willingness to ask or answer any questions.

In addition, the use of indirect self-referencing frames in joint press conferences far outweighed that of solo sessions. By beginning their questions with phrases like "*I wonder*," "*I'd like to ask*," or "*Can I / May I ask*," reporters make a kind of acknowledgement to the social distance between their role and that of the recipient of their question. The greater use of indirect framing when a foreign dignitary is present is potentially demonstrative of their respect for the office or status held by that visitor. This is not to say a similar respect is absent in solo

conferences. Rather, it is to suggest that the sense of self-entitlement and power that is well engrained in their relationship with the American president is lacking with whoever stands beside him. It is possible, too, that the lack of other-referencing frames in joint conferences is a result of the fact that the very presence of another head-of-state constrains the event and the topics most likely to be discussed. Because the majority of questions are likely to relate to the issue involving both dignitaries it may be that willingness and capability are assumed.

Assertiveness. The exposure of President Bush to significantly more tilted questions when he stands alone indicate that reporters are less neutral, less inclined to limit their agendas to information seeking and inordinately "more opinionated and assertive" (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 766) in sessions of this type. Not only are tilts more prevalent, they are substantially more hostile than those that exist in joint sessions. This data suggests that the press is more engaged in less aggressive fact gathering during joint events, but shifts the balance toward adversarialness when contending only with President Bush.

The negligible results in differences between negatively formulated questions in solo and joint conferences and their near lack in usage in general is intriguing. In the 2002 study, negative formation increased by 10% between Eisenhower and Reagan still only reaching proportions of 12%. Clayman and Heritage showed that journalists had become more assertive not just in prefaces, but in the design of the question themselves as well. These results that show hardly a negatively formed question at all are better understood when taking Clayman et al. (2004) into consideration. Their work allows for the possibility that certain dimensions might be contextually sensitive. They propose, for example, that the rise in aggressiveness beginning in the late 1960s might be due in part to a loss of journalistic trust following the Tet offensive, Watergate and the publication of the Pentagon Papers. They also suggest that aggressive

questioning into Reagan's term could be due to high levels of unemployment and inflation as post World War II economic expansion began to wane. Perhaps improvements in the economy and his ability to withstand the Iran-Contra scandal, then, would justify noted dips in aggressiveness during his second term. Clayman et al. (2004) also identified a phase of increased assertiveness during scandal ridden periods of Clinton's presidency. If this is in fact the case, and aggressiveness is a more historically volatile dimension, the lack of negatively formulated questions may be circumstantially explained. The sampled conferences spanned Bush's first term of office, from his inauguration in 2001 through his re-election in 2004. Following the proposed logic, Bush's honeymoon period and positive relationship with the press may have been intensified by his position as a post-scandal president. Then, the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent War on Terror rallied the public and unified the nation against a foreign enemy. Like the effects of a "countervailing set of factors" (p. 23) illuminated by the larger sample in the later study, distinct conditions may have contributed to the negligibility of the negative formation criteria in the small sample studied here.

Adversarialness. The three indicators for adversarialness directly imply that the press is less adversarial in joint press conferences. Adversarial prefaces, global hostility and accountability question ubiquity are all considerably more prevalent in solo conferences. Presidential avoidance of the traditional conference format can be justified by the data obtained according to these criteria. The incredible discrepancy between adversarial prefaces in either type of conference conspicuously highlights the benefits associated with the joint conference. Certainly, the statistics related to global hostility argue in favor of joint sessions. The expectation is that a great majority of questions in solo sessions are hostile in nature emanating from a formidable adversary. The 45.9% reduction in adversarialness when another dignitary is added to

the roster makes the argument seem self evident. Finally, the figures show that journalists are more likely to avoid accusatory questions that seek presidential defense or accountability in joint affairs.

In general, accountability questions have remained fairly uncommon since Eisenhower. In fact, Eisenhower was never faced with any variant of the "*How could you*" question. The more aggressive press did subject Reagan to the more skeptical version of accountability question, but both were still fairly infrequent. Here again the evidence of a continuing rise in aggressive president-press relations is supported as the overall incidence of accountability questions regardless of conference type surpassed previously recorded levels.

Limitations. Clayman and Heritage (2002) warn against overstating levels of adversarialness revealed by their codification system. "There is no evidence . . . that contemporary journalists are systematically a coherent political ideology in opposition of that of the president" (p.771). The same remains true here. Whether the press conference is a joint or solo event, press presence legitimizes the president, the austerity of his position as a national and world leader and a newsworthy source of pertinent information.

The joint conference is a relatively new form of the long-standing, evolutionarily refined press conference. Its implications, longevity and effects remain yet to be seen. This thesis is an exploratory first look at its place in political communication and its effects on the presidential-press relationship. The sample size is small and takes place at a unique time in history. The acts of terrorism, events of September 11, 2001 and subsequent acts of war in the middle of the sample period may very well have affected presidential communication and press relations.

The discrepancy in actual number of questions coded for each type of conference represents another limitation to this study. Though the temporal stratification and selected

sample were representative of the total population in terms of question incongruence, it may well be worth looking at an increased number of joint press conferences to make the total number of questions of each session type more equivalent.

Future Study. It is possible that levels of hostility or adversarial behavior may be related to the atmosphere and pool of reporters that is likely to differ outside Washington, DC. Future research might look into demographic details of those asking the questions. Perhaps press behavior may be more idiosyncratic than represented in these analyses. It may be that adversarialness is related to political or professional affiliation, type of media represented or personal elements related to gender, culture or ideology. In spite of attempts to control for this limitation by including only White House transcripts, it is impossible to tell, also, which press members in joint conferences may represent foreign press. Further, it is possible that behavior is more or less aggressive depending on the nature of the US relationship with the visitor's country of origin, reason for meeting with the president or nature or tone of the attended event. This study evaluates conferences conducted by only one president representing one party, one discrete point in history, one specific rapport with the press. Just as the press conference has been adapted and the relationship evolved with past presidents, this new format is likely to develop over time and across administrations.

Conclusion

Solo press conferences and joint press conferences are not created equal. This study synthesizes and applies previous works in an attempt to justify the reversing trend in press conference usage. These results support previous conclusions that the adversarial relationship between the president and the press is indeed increasing over time. It further legitimizes the

codification system for quantifying such relationships and emphasizes the malleability of the presidential press conference in general.

The conclusions provide the first empirical evidence that adaptations to traditional formatting are able to ease the adversity apparent in presidential press conferences. This has important implications for political office holders and political consultants as it highlights the ways that successive presidents have attempted to adapt its execution so as to obtain the greatest benefit. Understanding the nature and foundation of the relationship between those that mediate political messages and how their behaviors are exhibited interpersonally, speakers may better prepare themselves for press interactions. Conversely, journalists can benefit from the same understanding by recognizing executive stratagem and adapting their behaviors accordingly.

This and related studies also contain pertinent information for the public in general. News production is effected by the intricacies of the relationship between government officials and those that report on them. As this study shows, the behaviors of pressmen can alter the presidential agenda, constrain answers, assume information and affect the overall tone and atmosphere of press conferences. An informed citizen must recognize the implications of the president-press relationship as it is exhibited in press exchanges to make informed decisions about the information communicated to them through mass media.

By suggesting that the adversarial relationship that makes the solo conference a contentious struggle for control is lessened in joint sessions, this data opens the door for further research concerning press relations, press conferences involving foreign heads-of-state and decision making related to political mass communication.

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APPENDIX
CODING SHEET

1) Conference Type: ☐ Solo (0)   ☐ Joint (1) 2) Conference Date: _____
3) Location of Conference: _____

Other head of state (if any):
4) Name: _____   5) Title: _____
6) Nation: _____

Initiative:

7) Statement Prefaces: ☐ No Preface (0)   ☐ Preface (1)

8) Multiple Questions: ☐ Single Question (0)   ☐ Multiple Questions (1)

9) Follow-up Questions: ☐ No Follow up Question (0) ☐ Follow-up Question (1)

Directness:

10) Other Referencing Frames:

☐ No Frame (0)   ☐ *"Can you/Could you"* (1)   ☐ *"Will you/Would you"* (2)

11) Self Referencing Frames:

☐ No Frame (0)   ☐ *"I wonder"* (1)   ☐ *"I'd like to ask"* (2) ☐ *"Can/May I ask"* (3)

Assertiveness:

12) Preface Tilt:

☐ No tilt (0)   ☐ Innocuous Tilt (1)   ☐ Unfavorable Tilt (2)

13) Negative Questions:

☐ No negative formation (0)   ☐ *"Isn't it...?"* (1)   ☐ *"Couldn't you..?"* (2)

Adversarialness:

14) Preface Adversarialness:

☐ No Preface (0)   ☐ Nonadversarial preface (1)

☐ Adversarial preface focus of question (2)   ☐ Adversarial preface presupposed (3)

15) Global Adversarialness:

☐ Not oppositional Overall (0)   ☐ Oppositional overall (1)

16) Accountability Questions:

☐ Not an accountability question (0) ☐ *"Why did you...?"* (1)   ☐ *"How could you...?"* (2)

VITA

Susan Billingsley was raised in Plano, Texas. She received her Bachelor of Business Administration with honors from the Mays Business School at Texas A&M University in 2004. Her interest in political affairs and diplomacy were piqued while participating in an international business program at American University in 2002. Following admittance into the Fellows Program, composed of the top 1% of the business school, Susan developed close relationships with a handful of likeminded women. Together, they founded the largest operating chapter of the American Business Women's Association in 2003. Supplementing internships with the Washington Capitals, Neiman Marcus Direct and DDB Dallas, these experiences led her to the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University.

Her research interests include political communication, interpersonal relationships and message mediation. While working toward her Master of Mass Communication she received a scholarship to the annual Direct Marketing Association conference conducted by the Direct Marketing Educational Foundation.