

**Wooing “Willing Dupes”: The Bush Administration’s Use of
Emotional Language in the Drive Toward War with Iraq**

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Abstract

The publicly available texts of the George W. Bush administration from September 11, 2001, to March 19, 2003, as presented in *The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, were analyzed for word frequency and the words themselves analyzed for emotional weight using the NRC Emotion Intensity Lexicon. Transcripts of six television news agencies (ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, FOX, and PBS) were also analyzed for word frequency to determine the extent to which these agencies may have repeated and consequently amplified the rhetoric of the administration. Public opinion polling for this same period was examined in an attempt to gauge the effect the government’s rhetoric concerning Iraq and Saddam Hussein and the echoing of that rhetoric by television news might be having on the public’s receptivity to the idea of going to war with Iraq.

Keywords: affect; emotion; Iraq; propaganda; Saddam Hussein

In the United States only the people, through their elected representatives in Congress, can decide when the nation should go to war. Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution makes this inarguably clear. Thus, when conflict seems imminent and the federal administration sees violence as inevitable, it is imperative that the people support the idea of going to war. As historian Barbara Tuchman has observed, “the presence of disunity...among the nation’s people about the rightness of the war aim, makes it impossible for a war of any duration to be fought effectively and won” (1988). Disunity also risks provoking prolonged and possibly physical backlash among citizens. The Viet Nam war is a case in point.

When the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001, it seemed an armed response was required. But against whom? Western intelligence quickly identified the culprits as agents of a shadowy conspiracy based in Afghanistan—an organization that called itself al Qaida. There was no lack of support among the people of the United States for striking those who had planned and executed the mass murder of nearly three thousand people in New York, Washington, and Shanksville. Sending troops into Afghanistan to crush al Qaida and its Taliban hosts was not a matter for debate. It was a categorical imperative.

Accordingly, the George W. Bush administration released the hounds, and in short order the Taliban regime was no more, and al Qaida had run away to lick its wounds in Pakistan.

Unbeknown to the public, days after 9/11, Bush’s national security team generated a list of three targets for retaliation: al Qaida and the Taliban were the first two. Iraq was the third (Ricks, 2006). The resounding and singularly tangible military success in Afghanistan was thus insufficient. There was another culprit—a consummate “evildoer” to use Bush’s word—who needed America’s attention, who needed the special ministrations of America’s armed forces.

Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Despite there being no evidence that Saddam or anyone in Iraq had had anything at all to do with the 9/11 attacks (Rich, 2006; Senate, 2006), Bush and the neo-conservative hawks in his administration were adamant there was culpability in Baghdad. Iraq had been a neo-conservative target since its forces were driven out of Kuwait in 1991, leaving Saddam Hussein still in power. In January and February of 1998, the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), a neo-conservative think-tank, petitioned President Clinton to militarily oust Hussein and take over Iraq, a petition to which Clinton declined to accede.

Whether to go to war with Iraq on the basis of the 9/11 attacks was an issue fraught with adamant and emotional opinions. Arguments put forward by the Bush administration were couched as warnings replete with dire consequences, garnished with language designed to frighten the American public into agreeing to the necessity of attacking a nation that had done nothing to merit such action. Such unilateral aggression was something in which the United States had not indulged since the Spanish-American War.

The government's message that Iraq and its brutal dictator were not only capable of but intent on harming the U.S. was seen by critics as amplified and spread by the mass media through uncritical news reporting. "Network television journalists, the primary source of news for most Americans, barely raised questions at all" (Rich, 2006). And, if polls are any indication of the true state of mind prevalent in the country, the public responded resoundingly.

The relentless drilling of this message of fear was purposeful. Without a constituency roiled by fear, the administration's *casus belli* could flounder. So deeply ingrained was this message of fear that questioning the government's "truth" was not only inconvenient, it was anti-American (Rucht, et al, 2010).

In speech after speech and in spontaneous comments, President Bush (as well as the top

officials in his administration) painted Iraq as a renegade nation determined to wreak havoc in the Middle East and to threaten the West, especially the United States, with weapons of mass destruction. In a January 28, 2003 address to a joint session of congress, Bush stated, on the word of the British government, that Iraq had “sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa” (United States). This was literally true in that Iraq had sought to acquire uranium, but had not actually bought any (Jackson, 2004). Was it Bush’s intention that his audience misunderstand his assertion so they would believe Iraq really did have material with which they would build a nuclear weapon to attack the United States?

Five months before Bush’s address and after consultation with their American counterparts, British planners told their government in the secret Downing Street Memo that the Americans’ “...case was thin,” and the “intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy” (2002). And six months after Bush’s address to congress, ambassador Joseph Wilson, who had investigated the African connection at the request of the vice-president, wrote, in an essay entitled “What I Didn’t Find in Africa,” “I have little choice but to conclude that some of the intelligence related to Iraq's nuclear weapons program was twisted to exaggerate the Iraqi threat” (Wilson, 2003). Despite such doubts, expressed by people in a position to doubt, it seemed clear to the British at least “that Bush had made up his mind to take military action...” (Downing Street, 2002).

While the Bush administration pronounced with certainty the WMD threat posed by Iraq, United Nations inspectors were not so sure. But ultimately, the much-feared and much-ballyhooed weapons of mass destruction were never found. As Hans Blix, head of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, has written, “...the existence of the prohibited weapons, which had been declared to the world with such certainty and been

invoked as the foremost justification of the war, was not confirmed. They were simply nowhere to be found,” echoing Gertrude Stein’s famous aphorism, “There [was] no there there.”

Literature Review

“Political trust refers to the faith people have in their government” and is derived from the assumption that institutions will behave as they are supposed to behave (Chen & Shi, 2001). In their study of the effect of media on the citizens of communist China, Chen and Shi found, to their surprise, that “media exposure has negative effects on people’s attitudes toward authority” and that political trust was “negatively correlated to the frequency of media exposure.”

Chen and Shi thus endorsed one conclusion of a 1976 study by Michael Robinson. Robinson’s study of 1968 television public affairs shows (news and documentaries) concluded “that television journalism can foster social distrust, especially among those in the lower-middle class.” He asserted that as television news was compelled to provide “sensational, aggressive, and anti-institutional” content, the audience, in response, tended to become more cynical respecting government. Robinson encapsulated this phenomenon in the term “videomalaise.”

O’Keefe’s 1980 study came to a very different conclusion, however. O’Keefe’s analysis was based on a larger study of the effect of the 1972 presidential campaign on the behavior of voters. He found that “[t]he greater the reliance on television, the more respondents appeared to indicate feelings that politicians were altruistic and that voting was efficacious, and the less they appeared to feel politically powerless or alienated or to distrust politicians.”

In 1999, Bennett, et al. re-examined the videomalaise theory using data from the 1996 National Election Study and a 1997 Pew Research Center poll of attitudes toward news organizations. Their analysis turned up a multitude of associations between news consumption and the public’s attitudes toward the government, news reporting, and society in general. Their

reading of the Pew polling data indicated a general trust in the fairness and accuracy of news reporting media, including television news. Competing inferences throughout the Bennett analysis create a certain ambiguity, however, meaning in some cases respondents polled as more negative or cynical toward government based on their exposure to television news coverage, while in other cases they did not, depending on the specific circumstances posited by the survey question. That said, their bottom-line conclusion was “[i]f video/media malaise exists, people who were exposed to more news would be more cynical, which does not occur.” (Emphasis added.)

With respect to the invasion of Iraq, coverage of the government’s rhetoric by television news may have actually acted in both directions—creating trust in the American government and cynicism with respect to the Iraqi government.

Shaping the Public’s Attitude

At the time and in the years since, many different reasons have been proposed for the administration’s fixation on Iraq in general and Saddam individually, from the deeply psychological (Oedipal phallic narcissism) (Frank, 2004) to the purely avaricious (control of Middle Eastern oil) (Greenwald, 2007) to the idea that toppling Saddam’s regime was in the national security interest of the United States (PNAC, January 1998). Whatever the foundational motivation for this Saddam obsession, it was important that Americans be as convinced as Bush, et al. of the necessity to invade Iraq and bring down its dictator.

To bring American citizens around to his way of thinking, Bush resorted to a tool that has been available since the thirteenth century: propaganda. Though benign in its original intent, propaganda has, over the centuries, taken on a more nefarious meaning, devolving from Jeckyl to Hyde as it were. “While ‘propaganda’ might once have referred to any political exhortation or

patriotic speech ('propagating the faith'), it now generally implies some element of deception, either in the statement itself or in the motives of the speaker" (Boardman, 1978).

The idea of repetition is Hitlerian propaganda dictum. As the Führer instructed in *Mein Kampf*, "It [the propaganda] must confine itself to a few points and repeat them over and over" and "...only after the simplest ideas are repeated thousands of times will the masses finally remember them" (1971). President George W. Bush himself admitted in 2005, "In my line of work you got to keep repeating things over and over and over again for the truth to sink in, to kind of catapult the propaganda" (Rich, 2006). With Bush's admission in mind, the word "propaganda" is used in this study, not as a judgement, but as a simple, literal description.

Propaganda and Information Literacy

It is the responsibility of academic instruction librarians to teach students the differences between real and bogus information, between research that has been verified by peer researchers and news reports of that research that relies on only one source. Students also learn to distinguish the credibility of sources of the same type, the Washington Post versus the National Enquirer, for example, and to judge the credibility of authors by their credentials. Using these information literacy skills students are equipped to make their own distinctions as to what to believe and whether to be persuaded.

As critical and useful as these information literacy skills are, in this age of "fake news" there is a further subtlety which, if taught in the information literacy context, could greatly supplement our students' ability to sift through the torrent of information which washes over them each day. The strategic use of specific language to persuade information consumers to think and believe what the author wants those consumers to think and believe is a rhetorical snare most commonly referred to as propaganda. Identifying propaganda through the repetition

of emotionally weighted language is the focus of this paper.

Materials and Methods

Semantics and Affect

It is axiomatic that words have meaning. Exhibit One in this regard is the dictionary. But “words often convey affect (emotions, sentiments, feeling, and attitudes)” as well, “either explicitly through their core meaning (denotation) or implicitly through connotation” (Mohammad, 2020). So, while it is obvious that words have the literal meanings expressed by their definitions, what is not always obvious is the emotional weight those words carry, the invisible prompts that trigger a subtle and visceral—yet knowable—response in the reader or listener. This reaction is necessarily subjective but is also adaptable to its syntactical environment. The word “scream,” for instance, might evoke glee or terror, depending on the context in which it is embedded. The scream of a roller-coaster rider might evoke the hilarity of joyful excitement, while the scream of someone pushed off a tall building would likely arouse a very different emotional response.

This research attempts to illuminate the role of emotional, or affective, language in United States government propaganda in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. By applying the NRC Emotional Intensity Lexicon to the texts of presidential documents, this research hopes to discern the ways in which the emotions of a vulnerable population—the American people post-9/11—may have been exploited to make the administration’s case for war.

The Public Papers was chosen as the source for this study because of its public availability. Since 1957, the Public Papers series has provided free access to papers, speeches, and other written documents produced by the Chief Executive and issued by the president’s Press Secretary. This analysis focuses on the papers of George W. Bush, September 11, 2001, to

March 19, 2003. Every document in the series that fell within this time frame was analyzed, a total of 1,403 documents, containing a corpus of 1,724,593 words. No documents were left out of the study, regardless of how apparently irrelevant to the impending invasion of Iraq, since oftentimes the topic of Iraq was spontaneously broached in an unrelated context. A computer program was created which counted the frequency of each important word (generally nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs), while ignoring insignificant words such as articles and prepositions.

The same method of analysis was applied to television news transcripts of the same time period in order to gauge the extent to which the government's message was being repeated and enlarged for the television audience. To this end 52,705 transcripts, comprising 39,163,237 words were examined.

As stated in his forward to Book II of the 2001 Public Papers, President Bush had anticipated this volume would be a record of governmental reform and of benefits accrued to the citizens of the United States. The terrorist attacks changed that. Instead, as the year drew near its end, this volume became a prologue to "the first war of the 21st century" (n.d.).

Psycholinguistics

We do not know to what extent, if any, psycholinguistics was consciously employed by the Bush administration, but the desired effect of the government's propaganda campaign was achieved nevertheless. As Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*, "The art of propaganda lies in understanding the emotional ideas of the great masses and finding, through a psychologically correct form, the way to the attention and thence to the heart of the broad masses" (1971).

Psychologists who have studied the interaction of vocabulary and emotion have observed that information conveyed by emotionally laden words is "more frequently remembered than

neutral information” (Jaeger, Santos, Bourscheid, & Stein, 2017). According to the model proposed by Lang, Bradley and Cuthbert as cited in Jaeger, et al. (2017), “the cognitive processing of emotional information tends to be faster than the cognitive processing of neutral information, because the former is essential to survival and/or to fight or flight responses.” In studies by Bowen, et al., Kunst-Wilson, and others, novel stimuli (that is, words) were interpreted by participants as “potential sources of fear” and evocative of “fear responses” (cited in Jaeger, et al., 2017). Furthermore, “the heightened emotional processing of the emotional novel words may have a cumulative effect and exert some influence on subsequent decisional processes...” (Jaeger, et al., 2017). An earlier study by Kuperman, Estes, Brybaert, and Warriner (2014) correlated language and emotion in terms of language’s effect on valence (emotional significance) and found that “a stimulus elicits a heightened effect in proportion to its negativity...” Forgas and van Kleef (cited in Kuperman, et al., 2014) leave us with the obvious conclusion that emotion “affects how we see the world, what we think, and with whom we associate.”

Over the years, researchers have sought to quantify and measure the negative-positive force of words, an attribute that has been instinctively understood by poets throughout the ages. While it is obvious that the context in which words are deployed plays a role in the impact they have on their audience, it is equally obvious that an underlying, or inherently affective element is simultaneously in play. Consider the opening line of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven”: “Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary...” The words immediately evoke a weighty despondency. There is an invisible connection between the speaker of the lines and his reader induced by the words “dreary” and “weary.” “Midnight” adds to the gloom. Even the verb “pondered,” derived from the Latin verb *ponderare* (to weigh), serves as an emotional

sinker. Instinctively, the reader knows—and feels—the speaker’s sadness. There is no need for mathematical calculations.

While poetry endeavors to spark an immediate emotional response, propaganda is more subtle. The goal of the propagandist is to bring the consumer of propaganda to an emotional conclusion without that consumer realizing it. As Nicolo Machiavelli (1988) put it in *The Prince*, “...men remain so simple, and governed so absolutely by their present needs, that he who wishes to deceive will never fail in finding willing dupes.” Thus, it is helpful in analyzing propaganda to know which words will serve this purpose. By quantifying the affect-intensity of individual words psychologists and computer scientists make a valuable contribution to this analysis.

Mohammad and Turney (2013) of the National Research Center Canada have employed crowdsourcing to identify associations of individual words with the so-called prototypical emotions of joy, sadness, anger, fear, trust, disgust, surprise, and anticipation. Mohammad and Turney’s use of crowdsourcing together with Best-Worst scaling (see Louviere, Flynn, & Marley, 2015), resulted in the creation of the NRC Emotion Intensity Lexicon of roughly 14,000 English lemmas (root words) (Mohammad, 2022). In this lexicon, words are rated 0 to 1. A score near 0 (e.g., lovely: 0.009) indicates low emotional intensity, while a rating near 1 (happiest: 0.986) denotes high intensity. A score of .5, therefore, suggests neutrality. In this study, some of the words used by the government have been evaluated on this basis.

Results

Fear

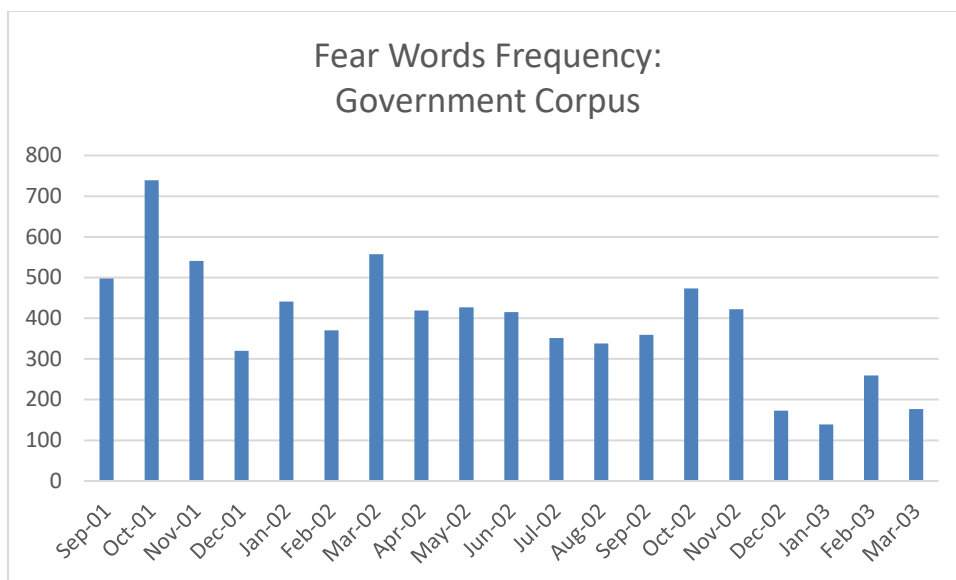
Fear, terror, terrorism, terrorist, and war are words the NRC Emotion Intensity Lexicon associates with fear. These words and others associated with fear were used repeatedly by the

Bush administration, seemingly at every opportunity. Table 1, below, shows the NRC Emotion Intensity Lexicon rating of each of these terms, the associated emotion, and the frequency with which they occurred in the government corpus. As the table indicates, terrorist is the most affective-intense of all five words, nearly reaching a maximum score of 1. It is followed closely in intensity by terror and its cognate terrorism. War, with a rating of 0.942, is a close fourth in this intensity race. Fear, strangely enough, comes in last.

Table 1.

Fear 9/11/2001 to 3/19/2003			
Word	Intensity	Frequency	Emotion
Fear	0.828	190	Fear
Terror	0.953	1451	Fear
Terrorism	0.969	1101	Fear
Terrorist	0.972	2185	Fear
War	0.942	2491	Fear

The chart below shows the distribution of these “fear” words over the course of the period under review. In the month immediately following the 9/11 attacks (October, 2001), these particular “fear” words received their most strenuous workout, understandably considering the horror of what had happened the month before. However, the frequency of these words declined over time, perhaps indicating their purpose had been served, and that they were no longer necessary.



Verbal stimulation of fear through the use of “fear” words was hardly necessary considering the grotesque nature of what had just happened in New York, D. C., and Pennsylvania. The freshness and the hideousness of the attacks had obviated government premeditation; the use of words like terror and war merely gave expression to and reinforced what everyone in the United States was thinking and feeling at the time. Nevertheless, in these frequent expressions of words calculated to inculcate fear and trembling throughout the populace, we see diligent application of the principle of repetition, a first principle of effective propaganda.

But the Bush administration was not alone in its exercise of this verbiage. It had a lot of help from mass media, which repeated, quoted, and paraphrased the verbiage until it was well-entrenched in the collective mind of the American public. “Terrorist,” as noted above, was used over two thousand times by the administration. In the same period, CNN, in its round-the-clock coverage, employed “terrorist” over 7,000 times for the benefit of its 5.7 million prime time viewers. It should be remembered that CNN was not alone among mass media in echoing Bush’s wording. Fox News Channel, with a million more prime time viewers than CNN, logged

nearly 3,000 repetitions of “terrorist,” and the other television news outlets followed suit (Lafayette, 2003). Pollsters did their part as well, relentlessly querying Americans regarding their fear of terrorists, what should be done to stop terrorists, and whether they expected more terrorist attacks. And the polling results were, naturally, reported via the mass media, creating a verbal-emotional dynamic notable for its near-circularity.

But the public’s reaction in October 2001, was, to say the least, curious. While it had been established that the culprits were al Qaida terrorists, their names and pictures plastered on every front page and television screen, the public began even this early to focus its ire—without evidence—on Iraq. Polling done just a month following 9/11 showed great public support for removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq: 66% in an NBC/Wall Street Journal poll; 81% in a Princeton Survey Research Associates/Newsweek poll; and 71% in a poll conducted by Harris Interactive for Time and CNN.

But for all its enthusiasm for attacking Iraq, based on the mistaken notion that Iraq was responsible for 9/11, the American public feared that further attacks and an increase in terrorist activity against the United States would be the result of going to war with Iraq. Expressing this confluence of seemingly contradictory attitudes, 80% of respondents in an October 2002 Time/CNN/Harris poll felt that more terrorism was likely to result if the United States attacked Iraq. This puzzling disconnect continued up to the very moment the U. S. did attack. Thus, while the vocabulary of fear scored a real victory for the administration in terms of its desire to invade Iraq, a perhaps unintended consequence was the generation of even more fear.

Demonization

Though it would seem that fear alone was sufficient for the administration’s purpose, Bush and his allies may have felt the added element of demonization purchased a kind of

insurance. “Demonizing the leader of the enemy is a tactic as old as war,” declared ABC News reporter Chris Bury on the August 13, 2002, broadcast of Nightline. If Americans could be stampeded toward the administration’s point of view, demonizing the source of that terror as some sort of “other” ought to speed that movement to the point that there was no doubt among the citizens that the push toward war was absolutely right. As stated by Debra Merskin (2005), “Once an individual is constructed as an outsider, this person is no longer thought of as having humanity.” Saddam, in other words, was a sub-human beast who deserved to be loathed.

In Bush’s rhetoric and thinking concerning 9/11, there was no distinction between al Qaida terrorists and Saddam Hussein. “[Y]ou can’t distinguish between Al Qaida and Saddam when you talk about the war on terror,” he declared September 25, 2002. “[T]hey are both equally as bad and equally as evil and equally as destructive” (United States). Thus, when Bush spoke of one, it was understood that he spoke of both, convicting Saddam through guilt by fictive association and dividing the focus of the fear of terrorism to two points instead of just one.

Table 2 below lists the various forms of the word “threat,” their intensity values, and their associated emotions as per the NRC Emotion Intensity Lexicon:

Table 2.

Word	Intensity	Emotion
Threat	0.604	Fear
Threat	0.742	Anger
Threaten	0.484	Anticipation
Threaten	0.734	Fear
Threaten	0.818	Anger
Threatening	0.555	Disgust

Threatening	0.875	Fear
Threatening	0.882	Anger

During the period of September 2002 to March 2003, the Public Papers corpus reveals over 800 uses of the word “threat” and its derivatives. Often, “threat” is used in describing Saddam Hussein specifically. At other times, the word is used in the more general context of terrorism, and since Bush made no distinction between terrorism as a general concept and Saddam Hussein, it is reasonable to conclude the word “threat” always applied to Hussein whenever it was used. A cursory scan of the seven-month corpus (9/2002-3/2003) discovers over 100 collocations in which the terms “threat” and “Saddam” are used together, in the same speech, the same sentence, or within adjacent paragraphs, making the administration’s connection between the two inescapable. At times, Bush’s assertions concerning the danger posed by Saddam Hussein were as simple and direct as “He [Saddam] is a threat to the United States. He is a threat to our friends in the region. He’s a threat to anyone who holds freedom dear to his heart” (United States, October 8, 2002).

Throughout the period of September 2002 to March 2003, President Bush was free in his use of vindictive epithets to describe Saddam Hussein, at one point getting down to basics, declaring, “He’s a murderer” (United States, March 6, 2003). Bush’s effort to thoroughly demonize Saddam is further reflected in the public record by words like brutal, dangerous, dictator, and tyrant, applied repeatedly to the ruler of Iraq. Table 3 below lists the NRC emotional intensity rating of each word together with the number of times each word was used by the government and the emotion with which each word is most associated.

Table 3.

Demonization			
September 2002 to March 2003			
Word	Intensity	Frequency	Emotion
Brutal	0.828	37	Fear
Dangerous	0.75	71	Fear
Dictator	0.656	120	Fear
Tyrant	0.812	19	Anger

The word “brutal” appears thirty-seven times in the seven-month corpus. Twenty-five of those times, it is used in reference to Saddam, sometimes used in combination with other of Bush’s words of choice, as in “brutal dictator.” While “dangerous” is used seventy-one times in various contexts, it is used thirty-six times in specific reference to Saddam. Bush calls Saddam a “tyrant” thirteen times.

As per Table 3, the word Bush most often applied to Hussein was “dictator.” It should be noted at this point that dictators (sometimes also called tyrants) have existed from ancient times to the present. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “dictatorship” as merely a “system of government by the absolute rule of a single individual” without describing it as either positive or negative (OED Online, 2022). In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the world has suffered the dictatorships of Hitler and Mussolini in Germany and Italy respectively, Stalin in the Soviet Union, Pol Pot in Cambodia, the Kim dynasty in North Korea, and many others. Regimes such as these, because of their brutality, have concretized the negative inference that attaches to the concept of “dictator,” such that the term, whenever it is used, is now invariably intended to be construed as negative. It is this negative inference that comes through every time President Bush

utters the word, especially when it is applied to Saddam Hussein.

Ninety-one times out of 120, Bush used this particular term to tag Hussein, in some speeches multiple times. The Public Papers reveal that Bush occasionally enhanced the idea that Saddam was an evil dictator in phrases like “the world’s most brutal dictator” (October 5, 2002), “one of the most brutal dictators in modern history” (October 5, 2002), and “a ruthless and aggressive dictator” (October 7, 2002).

The administration’s relentless tongue lashing had help from the news media, drilling the idea that Saddam Hussein was a despicable dictator deep into the minds of Americans.

Television news—specifically CNN, FOX, ABC, NBC, CBS, and PBS—reporting the version of reality the Bush administration wanted the public to agree to, offered the administration’s view with over 1,434 repetitions of “dictator” in the space of these same seven months (9/2002-3/2003). Note that this count does not include print or radio, which offered further augmentation.

Public opinion rallied in the wake of Bush’s relentless vilification. By August 2002, 69% of respondents to an ABC News/Washington Post poll approved of the idea of forcing Saddam from power militarily, and 80% of those favored doing it even without allies. Such support continued month after month through the remainder of 2002. In October, 72% of those surveyed by Fox News and Opinion Dynamics favored using military force. By January 2003, 68% believed removing Saddam from power was very important (Gallup/CNN/USAToday). Support for military action to remove Saddam was still high by February: a CBS News poll registered 70% approval for military action against Saddam. It would not be long before all these people got their wish.

Rally-'round-the-Flag

However uninformed average Americans tend to be about international affairs, however distracted they may be by frivolous pursuits, when the country is attacked, Americans pull together on high alert to support the Commander-in-Chief. A sudden, unanticipated war has a way of focusing the attention, such that the American public wants to be informed (Baker & O'neal, 2001) and therefore is compelled to switch from TV sit-com re-runs to the nightly news. As a reaction to any threat to the nation, it is instinctual, universal, and automatic. In 1941, following the surprise attack by Japan on Pearl Harbor, public approval for a declaration of war was 97% (Saad, 2016). Following the 9/11 attacks, nearly 90% of Americans supported George W. Bush (Feinstein, 2020), and by early 2002, 83% “approved of the U.S.-led military campaign against the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan” (Hartig & Doherty, 2021).

As predictable as this rally-'round-the-flag effect tends to be, in the case of the Bush administration's coveted invasion of Iraq, the predictable wanted some encouragement, which the administration was eager to provide in its public pronouncements, through repeated use of words like America, democracy, freedom, strong, and other ringingly positive-sounding words, all of which reflected onto the United States and its patriotic citizens. From the beginning, it was important to fertilize the idea that America was more than equal to the task of defeating its enemies.

The words in Table 4, below, are just a few of the words of encouragement used by the administration to keep Americans' spirits from flagging in the face of the monstrous attacks of September 11th. As with Table 1 above, this table includes frequencies for the entire nineteen-month period under consideration.

Table 4.

Rally-'round-the-Flag 9/11/2001 to 3/19/2003			
Word	Intensity	Frequency	Emotion
Brave	0.602	102	Trust
Courage	0.695	225	Trust
Freedom	0.561	2633	Joy
Liberty	0.555	224	Anticipation
Strength	0.438	443	Joy
Strong	0.562	1890	Trust

Notice the difference in the intensity ratings of these words as compared to those of the fear and demonization categories as well as the emotions with which each word is associated. These words are rated much lower than the fear and demonizing words and therefore would be expected to elicit a less intense emotional response from their audience. Indeed, these are words resident in what could be considered the positive emotional scale, “expressing a favorable sentiment toward an entity [the United States]” and thus having “positive polarity” (Mohammad & Turney, 2013). Additionally, the emotions with which each of these words is associated ought to be considered the opposites of fear, disgust, and anger, in a sense positive emotions.

Using the emotion words considered above, the television news media did yeoman’s service serving up the administration’s diet of affective propaganda to its news-hungry audience. Focusing on just the word “freedom,” the administration’s most frequently used siren call to flag-waving patriotism, we find that the six news organizations cited above have augmented the government’s 2,633 uses of that term with over 9,900 uses of their own.

As inspiring as the idea of fighting for freedom might be in ordinary times, a Pew Research Center survey done in October 2002 found that only two percent of respondents felt freedom was a good enough reason to go to war with Iraq. As this was the only poll that even asked the question, it appears the flag-rallying-freedom argument registered as little with pollsters as it did with citizens.

Discussion

In his 1976 study, Michael Robinson wrote, "...we are still far from producing definitive evidence; correlation is not causality." And so it is with this study. It is not conclusive that government propaganda and media amplification created the public's support for the war in Iraq. After all, as polls show, suspicion of Iraq started high and remained high. It is arguable, nevertheless, that consistent negative messaging by the Bush administration, aided by constant repetition in the media likely abetted the maintenance of that high level of suspicion.

Using the Emotion Lexicon helps us to understand a corpus's "affect composition" or "how affect of a sentence is impacted by the affect of its constituent words" (Mohammad, 2017). In other words, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. And, if we accept this idea as dictum, considering the administration's propaganda as a whole, we can then extrapolate to say a document or even a corpus has the impact of its constituent words, capable, as in the words of Jonathan Swift, of making "a patriot of a profligate" (1954).

As poll after poll demonstrates, though Americans were apprehensive that more terrorist attacks could result and though there was no clear evidence that Saddam Hussein was behind the 9/11 attacks, they were nevertheless convinced by the Bush administration that the country had to go to war with Iraq. Polling seems to indicate that citizens' reactions were influenced more by the highly negative language of fear and demonization than by the positive language of

patriotism. While Americans certainly harbored an innate patriotism, the attempt by the government to arouse the citizenry with its claxon summons to national loyalty seems to have been less of a factor in the support for war with Iraq.

This research focused on television news media and included the six major outlets. Could other mass media have tempered the public's reaction to the government's propaganda? Considering the tremendous public reaction as reflected in the polling data, not likely. The unwitting cooperation of the news agencies under analysis here was overwhelming, the echo so loud as to effectively drown dissenting voices.

It has been lamented by some that, in the case of the invasion of Iraq, American news media failed in their obligation to aggressively question the Bush administration's specious assertions regarding Iraq's culpability, that they served merely to amplify the government's propaganda, giving their audience no alternative to the Bush administration's narrative. Glenn Greenwald (2007) has mocked the news media as "docile 'watchdogs.'" In *Propaganda and American Democracy*, Nancy Snow (2014) is equally critical in her assessment of the American press, writing "...we don't have a progressive, reform-minded press corps devoted to ferreting out propaganda campaigns," while Garth Jowett (2014) states unequivocally and ominously, "Television does have a major propaganda function in the area of news reporting." News media seemed to cooperate with the government through their failure "to demand answers from the President and the Secretary of Defense, and by zealously reproducing, often verbatim, government and military directives" (Steuter & Wills, 2008). In that regard, it has been shown that in the period September 2002 to February 2003, the news divisions of the original Big Three (ABC, CBS, NBC) received more than 90% of what they reported regarding the reasons for going to war directly from the White House (Brewer, 2009).

If the news media failed America in the days before the Iraq invasion, then it was up to America's citizens to correct for that failure. Information savvy is one way to make that correction, if only the American people will extend themselves so far...a mighty big if. As Bruce Riedel, a senior fellow of the Brookings Institution, has written, "One lesson of the past 20 years is the imperative of an informed public. Sadly, we are still a long way from an enlightened public" (2022).

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Appendix 1—Polls

1. NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll [October, 2001]

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has harbored terrorists in the past. With this in mind, do you think that the United States should use military force and target Saddam Hussein and Iraq, or do you think that the United States should not use military force and target Saddam Hussein and Iraq?

66% Should use military force and target Saddam Hussein and Iraq
24% Should not use military force or target Saddam Hussein and Iraq
10% Not sure

2. Princeton Survey Research Associates/Newsweek Poll [October, 2001]

In the fight against terrorism, the United States might also consider using military force against targets in other countries. In general, would you support using military force against... Saddam Hussein and his military in Iraq, or not?

81% Yes
15% No
4% Don't know

3. Time/CNN/Harris Interactive Poll [October, 2001]

Do you think that the US (United States) should or should not use military action to attempt to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq as part of the war against terrorism?

71% Yes, should
19% No, should not
10% Not sure

4. Time/CNN/Harris Interactive Poll [October, 2002]

(Please tell me whether you think of each of the following is likely or unlikely to occur if the U.S. (United States) sends ground troops in to Iraq?)... More acts of terrorism in the United States

80% Likely
16% Not likely
4% Not sure

5. ABC News/Washington Post Poll [August, 2002]

Would you favor or oppose having U.S. (United States) forces take military action against Iraq to force Saddam Hussein from power?

69% Favor
22% Oppose
9% No opinion

What if U.S. (United States) allies opposed such military action--in that case would you favor or oppose having U.S. forces take military action against Iraq (to force Saddam Hussein from power)?

80% Favor
17% Oppose
4% No opinion

6. Fox News/Opinion Dynamics Poll [October, 2002]

Do you support or oppose U.S. (United States) military action to disarm Iraq and remove Iraqi President Saddam Hussein?

72% Support
17% Oppose
11% Not sure

7. Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll [January, 2003]

How important a goal should each of following be for U.S. (United States) military action--should it be a very important goal, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all? How about... removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq?

68% Very important
18% Somewhat important
7% Not too important
5% Not important at all
2% No opinion

8. CBS News Poll [February, 2003]

Do you approve or disapprove of the United States taking military action against Iraq to try to remove Saddam Hussein from power?

70% Approve
21% Disapprove

9% Don't know/No answer

9. Pew Research Center for the People & the Press/CFR Election Survey [October, 2002]

People give many different reasons for supporting military action in Iraq. What are the most important reasons why you support going to war in Iraq? Any other reasons?

17% Prevent future terrorism

14% Get rid of/kill Saddam Hussein

13% Link to terrorism/Al Qaida/9-11 (September 11th, 2001, the date of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon

13% Nuclear/chemical/biological weapons

9% National security/Protect the U.S. (United States)

9% Threat/Danger (general)

8% Help Iraqi people/Human rights/He's a tyrant

6% Saddam Hussein is crazy/evil/a monster

5% Military is only option/Need to end it

5% Stability in Mideast/Oil supply

5% Dangerous to delay/Will only get worse

3% Finish job from Gulf War

3% Must act to be taken seriously/U.S. image

2% Help economy

2% Defiance of U.N. (United Nations) weapons inspections

2% Protect freedom

2% Protect future generations

2% Make world safer

2% Retribution/Eye for an eye

1% Support/believe President (George W.) Bush

7% Other

7% Don't know/Refused

Appendix 2—Transcripts

In addition to the presidential documents, transcripts of the below-listed news programs from September 11, 2001, to March 19, 2003, were analyzed:

ABC

- ABC News Special Report: America Under Attack
- World News This Morning
- Good Morning America
- Nightline
- World News Tonight

CBS

- CBS News Special Report
- The Early Show
- CBS Evening News
- The Osgood File
- CBS Morning News

NBC

- Today
- NBC News Special Report: Attack on America
- NBC Nightly News

PBS

- The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer

Fox News Channel (Fox)

- The O'Reilly Factor
- Terrorism Hits America: Live Event
- Fox Special Report with Brit Hume
- Fox News Edge
- Hannity & Colmes
- On the Record with Greta Van Susteren
- Fox News Sunday
- Fox Wire
- Your World with Neil Cavuto
- The Big Story with John Gibson

Cable News Network (CNN)

- CNN Breaking News
- CNN Live Event/Special
- CNN Saturday Morning News
- CNN Diplomatic License
- Larry King Weekend
- Newsnight Aaron Brown
- Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer
- American Morning with Paula Zahn
- People in the News
- Lou Dobbs Moneyline
- Inside Politics
- Live on Location
- Daybreak
- Connie Chung Tonight
- Crossfire
- Wolf Blitzer Reports
- Showdown: Iraq
- Live Today
- Talkback Live
- Larry King Live