

**Joint Master in Global Economic
Governance and Public Affairs**



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“We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be.”

Kurt Vonnegut

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Abstract

This paper provides a mixed methods thematic analysis on the rhetorical styles and vocabulary used by Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden when giving public speeches, statements, and Q&A sessions to the public on the subject of Russian interference in the US electoral process from January of 2016 to April of 2024, and compares these results against three other major topics of discussion involving Russia, namely general US/Russian relations, armed conflicts involving the US & Russia, and US cybersecurity. The paper posits that the three administrations have taken starkly varied approaches to discussing and defending the US electoral system, and that these approaches are equally reflected in their approaches to the three other topics. It further argues that these dramatic differences over a relatively short period of time undercut any reliable and long-term international strategy when dealing with hostile foreign powers interested in influencing or destabilizing US elections.

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Introduction

In recent years, the interplay between presidential rhetoric, national security, and international relations has become a critical area of study. This paper examines the evolution of rhetoric used by Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden concerning Russian interference in US elections from January 2016 to April 2024 as compared to the broader US/Russian relationship, conflicts such as those in Syria and Ukraine, and national cybersecurity concerns such as the Solar Winds hack. By analyzing the speeches, press releases, and public statements of these administrations, this study asks how presidential language shapes and reflects foreign policy priorities and public perception.

This is done through a mixed methods thematic analysis of press releases, interviews, Q&A sessions, and presidential statements as recorded on official White House websites. In analyzing and comparing how frequently these subjects have been brought up, as well as the specific tactics and language used by these presidents in relation to specific events, this paper aims to address the main research question: how has each president used the pulpit of the US presidency to diplomatically address the subject of Russian interference in US elections over the last three presidential administrations, and what implications do these varied strategies have regarding current and future foreign interference in US elections? The significance of this research lies in its ability to provide insights into the strategic use of rhetoric in governance and international diplomacy. The study of spoken presidential rhetoric on pressing issues, such as Russian interference in US elections, is of importance due to the power and influence presidents hold as a cornerstone of the international ecosystem. The ways in which presidents frame issues and the frequency with which they do so, especially in real time or on-the-fly, can be a direct reflection of their mindsets, and to a larger extent, a reflection of their policies and actions on a given issue. The vast ideological and political differences between Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden offer a perfect opportunity to compare, statistically and qualitatively, how each president has approached Russian interference to provide a baseline against which one can compare policy outcomes, foreign affairs, and future rhetorical strategies.

This paper is structured into four main chapters, each addressing different aspects of presidential rhetoric and its implications. The first chapter provides an overview of previous research on thematic analysis of presidential rhetoric, the evolution of technology and media as

related to communication and information consumption, definitions of and key information about modern instances of foreign interference in US elections, along with weaknesses in the US status quo that may make it especially susceptible to these forms of interference. This is done to highlight the relevance and context of this research and provide a background of information on which discussion will rely. The second chapter, Methodology, outlines the research design, data collection, and analytical methods used in this study. It details the process of collecting, coding, and analyzing presidential speeches and addresses the limitations and ethical considerations of the research. The third chapter, Results, is divided into four sections and presents a detailed analysis of data collected on presidential rhetoric on election interference, US/Russian relations, conflict, and cybersecurity. Each section includes qualitative and quantitative analyses, comparing the frequency with which the three administrations bring up these topics and the rhetorical strategies which they use, while also interpreting the implications of these approaches. The final chapter, Discussion and Conclusion, briefly synthesizes the findings and discusses the implications of varied approaches to addressing election interference and other US/Russian issues on policy implementation, foreign affairs, and public perception. It highlights the contributions of this research to the fields of international relations, US diplomacy, and political science. By examining the rhetorical strategies of Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden, this work aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how presidential rhetoric functions as a tool for governance and diplomacy. The findings provide valuable insights for scholars, policymakers, and the public, emphasizing the importance of strategic communication in addressing national security threats and maintaining democratic integrity.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1 Presidential Rhetoric & Its Influence

The power of the sitting US president to shape narrative and influence public discourse is a well-documented phenomenon, deeply embedded in the history of American political communication. Presidential rhetoric, wielded effectively, has the capacity to steer public opinion, frame national debates, and direct policy agendas. This section delves into the significant influence of presidential language through discussion of social political theory and relevant historical cases.

The theoretical underpinnings of presidential rhetoric can be explored through several key concepts in political communication. Agenda-setting theory, introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972), examines how media – and by extension, presidential communication – plays a crucial role in shaping the public agenda by highlighting certain issues while downplaying others. This theory underscores that when presidents prioritize certain topics, public attention and policy focus can be directed towards those issues. Goffman's framing theory further clarifies the impact of presidential rhetoric, explaining that how leaders present and construct issues within a particular narrative framework depends on their interests and goals (Goffman, 1974). Through selective emphasis and strategic omissions, presidents can shape public perception and interpretation of events.

Much academic focus has been given to the profound impact of presidential rhetoric given the crucial role it has historically played in unifying the nation, galvanizing public support, or articulating policy priorities. Franklin D. Roosevelt's "fireside chats" during the Great Depression and World War II serve as a fundamental example. Roosevelt's calm and intimate communications, regularly transmitted directly into people's homes without interference, had a strong impact on public opinion, increasing public confidence and political support through two massive crises (Hample, 2014). Similarly, John F. Kennedy's inaugural address in 1961, with the iconic "ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country," exemplifies how presidential language can inspire civic duty and collective action (Stuckey, 2015). Kennedy's rhetoric not only mobilized a generation but also set the tone for his administration's ambitious domestic and foreign policy agenda. Ronald Reagan's rhetoric during the Cold War exemplifies the strategic use of language to create and solidify ideological

boundaries, galvanizing national resolve. Reagan's speeches, particularly his depiction of the Soviet Union as the "evil empire," framed the Cold War in stark moral terms, thereby reinforcing a narrative of American righteousness and Soviet malevolence (Denton & Hahn, 1986). This framing not only rallied domestic support but also communicated his stance clearly to international audiences, shaping the global perception of the US-Soviet rivalry.

Understanding how presidential rhetoric has shifted on the topic of election interference is crucial for several reasons. First, presidential speeches serve as pivotal instruments in shaping public opinion and steering policy directions. The words of a president carry weight, not merely as expressions of personal viewpoints but as signals to both national and international communities about the priorities and strategic intentions of their administration. By meticulously analyzing these speeches, one may glean valuable insights into the evolving priorities and strategies that have guided different administrations through complex geopolitical landscapes and domestic challenges (Hart, 1984).

The relevance of these historical and theoretical insights to the current study lies in understanding how presidential rhetoric regarding Russian election interference, US cybersecurity, and related issues has evolved across the administrations of Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden. Analyzing the frequency, context, and thematic style of their speeches provides a window into the strategic use of language in contemporary governance. It highlights how each president has used rhetoric to navigate the complex interplay of domestic concerns and international pressures. By situating this analysis within the broader framework of political communication, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of how presidential rhetoric functions as a tool for governance and diplomacy. The subsequent section will explore how technology and media have dramatically changed the ways through which presidents most effectively communicate their ideas and narratives with the public, before doubly showing how modern communication tactics can also be effectively used by non-presidential actors, including foreign entities such as Russia.

1.2 Evolution of Technology, Media, & Communication

Over the past century, technological advancements have transformed the ways in which citizens, governments, and businesses collect, produce, and distribute information. In the digital age, the internet and social media have especially accelerated the speed and intimacy of

communication. The internet's capacity for instantaneous information dissemination allows for news to spread without limitation, while algorithms and data analytics allow organizations to micro-target who information, advertisements, or propaganda reaches along with how convincing, relevant, and effective it is to the user (López Ortega, 2022). This is especially relevant due to the proliferation of social media platforms such as X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, which have greatly intensified the impact of digital communication.

These factors are especially important for a variety of political actors, including both sitting US presidents and foreign actors like Russia or China. Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign is a watershed example of strategic communication through digital platforms. His campaign revolutionized supporter organization, information dissemination, and fundraising through social media, email, and text messaging. This approach to campaigning was groundbreaking and highly effective, setting a high bar for future election campaigns in the United States (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011). In many ways, these strategies paved the way for Donald Trump's communication strategies. His presidency mirrored many of these strategies and ran with them. His presidency marked a significant shift in the use of social media for presidential communication. Trump's prolific use of Twitter (now X) to communicate directly with the public, bypass traditional media, and engage with supporters and critics in real time highlighted both his and the platform's ability to shape public discourse in real-time. His tweets often set the news agenda, influenced policy debates, and sparked widespread public reaction, underscoring the profound influence of social media on contemporary political communication (Ott, 2017).

A critical aspect of this transformation is the widespread use of social media as a primary source of news and information. A significant portion of the US population now relies on platforms like Facebook, X, and YouTube for their daily news consumption (Pew Research Center, 2018). This shift has not only altered how news is disseminated but has also contributed to issues such as social media addiction, where individuals spend increasing amounts of time on these platforms, often exposed to curated content that reinforces their existing beliefs. This phenomenon has significant implications for political communication, as it amplifies the reach and impact of presidential rhetoric while also fostering echo chambers and polarization (Sunstein, 2018). Moreover, the evolution of media technology has not only expanded the reach of presidential communication but also transformed its nature. The shift towards a 24-hour news

cycle and the fragmentation of media audiences has compelled presidents to adapt their messaging strategies. In an era where news is constantly breaking and public attention is fragmented across numerous platforms, presidents must navigate a complex media landscape to effectively communicate their messages. This dynamic environment requires a strategic approach to crafting and disseminating messages that resonate with diverse audiences and cut through the noise of competing information (Chadwick, 2013). But as previously mentioned, US presidents are not the only political actors that recognize the powers of social media, instant communication, microtargeting, framing effects, and political rhetoric.

1.3 Election Influence & Interference

Foreign interference in the US democratic process has been a longstanding concern in the United States, with roots tracing back to the founding of the country (Hamilton, 1788, Washington, 1798; Schoen and Lamb, 2012). Election interference encompasses a wide range of strategies employed by foreign actors at various stages of the electoral process. One comprehensive definition provided by Executive Order 13848 under the Trump administration, *Imposing Certain Sanctions in the Event of Foreign Interference in a United States Election*, describes it as “any covert, fraudulent, deceptive, or unlawful actions or attempted actions of a foreign government, or of any person acting as an agent of or on behalf of a foreign government, undertaken with the purpose or effect of influencing, undermining confidence in, or altering the result or reported result of, the election, or undermining public confidence in election processes or institutions” (U.S. Government, 2018). This definition is broad in its scope by nature. It covers a range of potential actions that may be taken by foreign actors, from covert propaganda campaigns on social media to literal hacking of ballot counting machines or other significant technology related to elections.

In recent years, Russia, China, and Iran have been identified as major players in efforts to interfere with US elections, with Russia being particularly notorious for its extensive and well-documented campaigns aimed at undermining confidence in the US democratic process (Helmus et al., 2020). The 2016 US presidential election serves as a prominent case study where Russian operatives engaged in a sophisticated campaign involving cyber-attacks, disinformation, and social media manipulation to influence the election outcome (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2017).

The primary goals of election interference are multifaceted, aiming to disrupt the democratic process and achieve strategic advantages. Research on Russia's main objectives for interference in the United States, as outlined through the RAND corporation's research report *From Consensus to Conflict Understanding Foreign Measures Targeting U.S. Elections*, include 1.) deepening social, cultural, and political divisions, 2.) undermining trust in the US democratic process, 3.) sowing misinformation to create an apathetic and disinterested voter base, and 4.) achieving strategic control over US political policymaking and the general social atmosphere (Helmus et al., 2020). These attempts to stir unrest in the US have targeted a number of pre-existing social divisions, including race, gender, and immigration, while also pushing fringe ideas, such as secessionist movements like Texit or CalExit (Yates, 2017; National Intelligence Council, 2017). Key tactics used in modern interference campaigns include cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and social media influence campaigns.

Cyber-Attacks

Cyber-attacks are a critical component of election interference, encompassing hacking email accounts, cyber espionage, and disrupting critical infrastructure. The 2016 Democratic National Committee (DNC) hacking incident, where Russian hackers accessed and released sensitive information from several email servers connected to the DNC and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton with a highly negative outcome on the reputation and credibility of Hillary Clinton in the months leading up to the general election is a prime example (Mueller, 2019). These attacks not only compromise the integrity of political entities but also sow distrust among the electorate.

Disinformation Campaigns

Disinformation campaigns aim to spread false or misleading information to manipulate public perception. Conducted through various means, including the dissemination of fake news, creation of deep-fakes, and use of generative AI, these campaigns exacerbate political divisions and erode trust in democratic institutions (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). In the modern era, these efforts are often carried out on social media, and can be both distinct from or directly in line with more broad social media influence campaigns.

Social Media Influence Campaigns

Social media platforms have become battlegrounds for manipulating public opinion. Actors use bot networks, targeted advertising, and fake political accounts to influence and divide the populace. These tactics often rely on humor and emotionally charged content to polarize society.

By exploiting social media's algorithmic structures, these efforts create echo chambers, intensifying societal divisions and undermining democratic discourse (Tucker et al., 2018).

Understanding these aspects of election interference is crucial for comprehending the complex and evolving nature of these threats. Election interference involves sophisticated tactics and serves strategic goals that pose a serious challenge to democratic governance, and these efforts are both ongoing and evolving (Helmus et al., 2020). As a nation that is experiencing deep public and political division and polarization, along with increasing levels of political violence, from the January 6th riot to kidnapping and murder attempts made against key political figures such as former President Donald Trump, Representative Nancy Pelosi, and Governor Gretchen Whitmer, foreign influence campaigns have much material to turn back on the public.

1.4 Potential Vulnerabilities in the US Status Quo:

Election interference efforts can be particularly effective in the current US status quo due to a combination of legislative, regulatory, social, and private sector vulnerabilities. This section explores the various factors that contribute to the susceptibility of the US to foreign election interference, highlighting specific weaknesses within government, general society, and the private sector.

1.4.1: Regulatory & Political Ineffectiveness

The regulatory landscape of the United States on artificial intelligence and data protection is highly varied and nonuniform. This is a relevant issue due to the threats posed by microtargeting and foreign influence campaigns. As the federal government has no official regulation on the protection of citizen's personal data online, some states have taken it upon themselves to pass personal data protection laws similar to the GDPR in the European Union, while others have allowed for little to no regulation at all (Bloomberg Law, 2024). This has allowed technology companies, such as Meta, Google, Microsoft, and TikTok to collect, analyze, and sell browsing history, content preferences, device location, and many other pieces of user data. This lack of comprehensive regulations on data protection has created significant vulnerabilities. Multiple groundbreaking studies have shown that access to a small number of a Facebook user's likes can predict their personality traits with high accuracy, making targeted

advertising alarmingly effective (Kosinski, Stillwell, & Graepel, 2013). One notable example is the 2016 Cambridge Analytica scandal, where data was harvested without consent from Facebook users and many of their close contacts and was used to create detailed psychological profiles, which were then leveraged to target users with tailored political advertisements both in the United States and in the UK (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018).

Free speech issues further complicate the regulatory landscape. The First Amendment in the US Bill of Rights generally protects free speech, making it challenging to balance the desire to prevent harmful misinformation against the right for regular citizens to speak their mind. Such legal protection allows for a broad range of speech, including potentially harmful disinformation, which can be exploited by foreign actors to influence public opinion and electoral outcomes (Persily, 2017).

Campaign finance inequities also contribute to the system's vulnerability. Political action committees (PACs) and superPACs, funded by businesses and individuals with vested interests, can exert substantial influence over political campaigns. This financial power can outweigh the interests of local constituents, as seen in the lobbying efforts of many powerful actors in the technology sector (Vandewalker, 2020). The disproportionate influence of money in politics can skew electoral outcomes and shows that the system is inherently susceptible to external, non-constituent manipulation. At the heart of many of these issues is the fact that the current trend of congressional deadlock both prevents much legislation from being passed through both chambers of Congress and the White House and itself exacerbates the perception of governmental ineffectiveness. Political polarization leads to gridlock, preventing the passage of even routine bills such as the federal budget, which then further fosters public mistrust and anger towards Congress, impeding swift and effective responses to election interference (Mann & Ornstein, 2012).

1.4.2: Social Fractures

Deep political polarization in the US electorate also makes the nation more susceptible to manipulation. Mistrust in information presented by opposing parties and an inability to reach consensus on political and social issues create fertile ground for interference campaigns. Foreign actors can exploit these divisions through social media as discussed previously, further deepening societal rifts (Sunstein, 2018). Economic insecurity also contributes to vulnerability.

Factors such as poverty, food insecurity, and job loss exacerbate educational gaps and political polarization, making individuals more susceptible to disinformation campaigns. Economic hardship, which often correlates with lower educational outcomes, can lead to a lack of critical thinking and increased reliance on biased information sources, which foreign actors can exploit to spread misleading narratives (Hacker & Pierson, 2010). Cultural and ideological differences across the United States add another layer of vulnerability. The stark contrasts between urban and rural areas, and the ideological divides within these regions, create societal fault lines that can be targeted by interference efforts. These cultural and geographic divisions are often reflected and magnified through social media, enhancing the effectiveness of interference campaigns (Cramer, 2016). Further, political violence has become an increasingly major concern. January 6th, 2020 was the largest major riot at the United States Capitol building, leading to the direct and indirect deaths of 10 US citizens (Cronin, 2021). A large scale and highly detailed kidnapping plot against sitting Governor Gretchen Whitmer was discovered in October of 2020. Representative Nancy Pelosi's home was broken into in October of 2022 and her husband had his skull fractured by a man with a hammer. On July 13th, 2024, President Donald Trump was narrowly missed by a bullet from a sniper at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania. These attacks are clear signals that division, tension, and anger over politics are increasing to levels of violence not seen in the United States since the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr, President John F. Kennedy, and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy in the late 1960s.

1.4.3: Commercial and Private Sector

The influence of social media companies plays a significant role in shaping public discourse. These platforms are key sources of information for a large portion of the population, and their addictive nature exploits human behavior to maximize user engagement. This strategy prioritizes profits over personal health and well-being, often at the expense of spreading accurate information (Haidt & Rose-Stockwell, 2019). Additionally, the lobbying power of these companies has allowed them to grow immensely in influence over the past two decades, often outpacing regulatory efforts. Regulating private sector entities that function as public squares of free speech presents significant challenges. While these platforms operate as public forums, they are still private for-profit entities not held to the same standards for free speech, advertising, or privacy rights as government organizations, especially when operating internationally. This

difference puts companies in complicated regulatory positions, balancing profitability against civil rights, disinformation, and polarization. Further, as previously mentioned, regulatory gaps allow companies to exploit user data without adequate oversight (Zuboff, 2019). Personal data is regularly collected, analyzed, and sold to a wide number of firms and organizations, creating a robust market for targeted advertising and profiling. This practice not only raises privacy concerns but also provides foreign actors with sophisticated tools to influence US elections through highly targeted disinformation campaigns (Turow, 2017).

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This section introduces the research methodology used to analyze presidential rhetoric on Russian election interference in relation to other significant issues. It outlines the research design, data collection, analysis techniques, and the rationale behind the chosen methods. This study uses a qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) along with quantitative word frequency analysis to dissect 117 speeches, press releases, and Q&A sessions with the press given by Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden, along with tertiary materials from respective press secretaries and vice presidents on issues wherein Russia is mentioned as related to 1.) election interference, 2.) general US/Russian relations, or 3.) international conflict, while also noting areas where 4.) US cybersecurity is mentioned from January 2016 until April 2024. Using the qualitative data analysis software MaxQDA, transcripts of these 117 speeches were sorted by date and administration, before critical sections of each transcript were coded into the four deductively created categories, and then further into distinct inductive subcategories in order to differentiate specific topics and attitudes. Various statistical analysis tools, in tandem with qualitative observations, were then utilized to gain broad and granular understanding of the differences in frequency, tone, and approach to discussion of these topics between presidents and in relation to specific relevant events, (e.g., hacking of the DNC and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022).

2.2 Research Design

The research design for this study is centered around thematic analysis, using a robust data-driven approach that allows for both quantitative and qualitative insights into presidential rhetoric concerning Russian interference in US elections as related to US cybersecurity, conflict, and general US-Russian relations over the eight-year period from 2016 to 2024. A thematic analysis approach is particularly suited for uncovering the subtleties of presidential rhetoric, themes, and strategies, along with their evolution across different administrations.

Primary documents were gathered in the data collection process for direct analysis, specifically transcripts of speeches, press releases, and Q&A sessions with the press. These

documents were all sourced from the official White House websites of each administration, ensuring their authenticity and quality. The selection criteria focused on documents within four main categories to ensure relevance to the key topics. Additionally, relevant transcripts from press secretaries and vice presidents were included when available and relevant to provide a comprehensive view of the administration's stance on these issues.

To systematically analyze the collected data, the qualitative data analysis software MaxQDA was employed. This software allowed the coding of the documents into the four parent codes, and each parent code was further divided into subcodes to capture specific nuances. Table 1 in the appendix shows the four main parent codes, including definitions, key examples, and rules for coding, while Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5, also in the appendix, show the detailed codebook for each parent code's respective subcodes.

The coding process was both deductive and inductive. The four major codes—election interference, US-Russian relations, conflict, and US cybersecurity—were pre-established based on existing literature and research objectives. Election interference was a clear choice, but many other facets of presidential rhetoric on Russia were not covered by this. US-Russian relations was chosen to reflect the general attitude of presidents on Russia as a partner or oppositional force in the international ecosystem. Conflict was also chosen as a category due to its contemporary relevance, as the US and Russia have been involved in several conflicts and proxy wars over the past eight years, from Syria to Ukraine, and measuring attitudes and responses to these conflicts provides a good referential baseline to compare against mentions of election interference. Finally, US cybersecurity was chosen to highlight presidential language on major instances of hacking and cyberattacks against US infrastructure and the private sector or mentions of increased US cyber-defense. Often, Russia was brought up in relation to these attacks, warranting its inclusion in this analysis. Concurrently, several subcodes were created inductively during the coding process. For instance, specific themes such as 'Accusations of collusion between Trump and Russia' and 'Doubts or deflects collusion or interference' were identified as patterns and nuances within the data as subcodes applicable within discussions of election interference. This combination of deductive and inductive coding ensured a comprehensive and detailed examination of the presidential rhetoric.

The quantitative aspect of the research involved using statistical analysis tools to examine the frequency of mentions and the tone of the rhetoric across the different administrations. By

quantifying the occurrences of specific codes and subcodes, the study could identify significant differences and similarities in how each president addressed these issues. For example, the frequency of mentions of election interference was compared across administrations to determine any notable shifts in focus or intensity. Additionally, sentiment analysis was conducted to gauge the overall tone associated with each theme. For example, in reference to election interference, statistics about the subcode ‘Warnings & Retaliatory Measures’ within the parent code ‘Election Interference’ notes how warnings or direct retaliatory action against Russia for interfering in US elections are mentioned, or help discern specific positive, cautious, dismissive, or negative thematic strategies (e.g. ‘great’ versus ‘brutal’).

Complementing the quantitative analysis, qualitative observations were made to provide context and depth to the findings. This involved closely reading the coded segments to understand the rhetorical strategies employed by each president. Key phrases were analyzed in detail to illustrate how different presidents framed issues related to Russian interference, cybersecurity, and US-Russian relations. For example, President Trump’s infamous “Don’t meddle in the election, President [Putin]. Don’t meddle in the election” comment (Trump, 2019), notable due to President Trump’s humorous tone and President Putin’s subsequent laughter, is starkly different from the more negative comments made Obama administration’s Press Secretary Josh Earnest, often cited in the coding process with quotes such as “the President believes it's important for the United States to use our resources to protect our election's infrastructure and to consider an appropriate, proportional response [to Russian interference]” (Earnest, 2016). The codebook also incorporates subcodes related to specific events, such as the hacking of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) in 2016. These subcodes provide concrete examples of how presidential rhetoric evolved in response to significant geopolitical events.

In summary, the research design for this study integrates a systematic data collection process, detailed coding and categorization, quantitative and qualitative analysis, and detailed analysis of specific quotes. This comprehensive approach ensures a robust analysis of presidential rhetoric, offering valuable insights into the evolving communication strategies of Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden in the face of Russian election interference and related issues.

2.3 Data Collection

This section will go into detail on the methods and strategies used to collect data for this study. This study uses 117 speeches, interviews, and press releases from Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden, accessed from their respective White House websites covering the period from 2016 to 2024, which captures a number of significant events and shifts in US-Russia relations and election security. These documents were identified through a systematic search process using specific keywords (described later in this section) that are related to four main categories of this study, i.e. election interference, US/Russia relations, conflicts involving Russia and the United States, and US cybersecurity.

There was a high level of specificity involved in this process due to the large volume of potential data available and several constraining factors. Documents not directly related to the research topic, such as those addressing unrelated domestic policies, were excluded. Alternative forms of media, such as tweets, Facebook posts, and filmed interviews which were not available through the official White House websites of Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden were also excluded as to ensure clarity, accuracy, and quality of audio transcription. While some clips and recorded interviews are available through news groups such as CNN or Fox, the three respective White House websites keep much larger, more comprehensive, and searchable databases of word-for-word speeches and press interactions per president. Furthermore, as the official online database of publicly available information produced by the president and curated by his staff, the information available on these White House websites telegraph the specific intent and level of attention that each administration places on specific issues. Finally, while it is true that much data on intent and action is famously available on different platforms, for example on President Trump's X (formerly Twitter) account, the focus of this study is on spoken word, with the intention of showing the face-to-face element of communication often associated with and required during direct dialogues and negotiations in the office of US President.

In the data collection process, various sections of each website were searched. For President Obama, transcripts were collected from the 'Briefing Room' section of the Obama White House archived website. Specifically, data was collected from under the 'Statements and Releases', 'Press Briefings', and 'Speeches and Remarks' sections from the period between January 2016 and January 2017. For President Trump, data was collected from the 'News' section of the Trump White House archived website, specifically from the 'Remarks' and

‘Briefings and Statements’ sections. For President Biden, data was collected from the ‘Briefing Room’ section of the Biden White House website, specifically from ‘Statements and Releases’, ‘Press Briefings’, and ‘Speeches and Remarks’ sections from the period of his inauguration until April 8th, 2024. It is notable here that the press release sections of the Biden and Obama websites are structured and labeled in nearly identical manners.

To separate documents that were relevant to the four categories previously mentioned, transcripts of speeches in each section with titles related to relevant topics, including words such as “Russia” or “cybersecurity”, along with all press gaggles, stump speeches, and ‘boarding Air Force One’ Q&A sessions were tagged and entered into a spreadsheet. A keyword search using specific phrases was then implemented on these tagged transcripts to ensure that they contained relevant data. The keywords were as follows:

Russia, election, Putin, hack, interfere, cyber, security, democracy, attack, witch hunt, hoax, Ukraine, technology, manipulate, disinformation, AI, Clinton, DNC, Mueller, collusion, Burr, response, defense/defend, proportional

Documents that were found to contain any of these keywords in relevant contexts were placed into a spreadsheet and labeled with the title, date, respective keywords, speaker (e.g Obama or Josh Earnest), and website link. Once a thorough combing of all primary sources had been completed and the total spreadsheet finished, which resulted in 147 primary sources, the spreadsheet was transferred into MaxQDA for preparation, coding, and analysis.

The 147 initial primary documents were uploaded into MaxDQA and were chronologically sorted into three document folders: ‘Obama (2016-17)’, ‘Trump (2017-2021)’, and ‘Biden (2021-2024)’. In the process of coding and sorting the documents, 30 documents were found to be unrelated to the major topics despite the use of keywords in the transcriptions and were removed from the analysis, leaving this research project with the final 117 transcripts.

2.4 Coding and Analysis

The coding framework used in this analysis was created both deductively and inductively. Initial categories were developed based on literature, preliminary analysis, and the premise of the research questions, while subcodes were developed based on evolving trends in the literature. Some were much more frequently used depending on the administration in question, as the process of coding text was iterative in nature. Each document was preliminarily

read through in the data collection stage and given initial tags, and once uploaded into MaxQDA, the documents were all thoroughly read and cross-referenced against the initial tags. In each document, specific sentences, paragraphs, and sometimes entire speeches were highlighted and sorted into specific codes. Some sections referred to multiple codes at once, and would be double, triple, or even quadruple coded. For example, imagine if President Biden mentioned in a speech that ‘President Putin is a terrible person, responsible for the invasion of Ukraine and responsible for directly interfering in US elections’. That sentence would fall under three of four parent codes, e.g. Election Interference, US/Russia Relations, and US Cybersecurity, and would be triple coded under all three. As previously mentioned, a full and complete codebook can be found in the appendix, which includes the definitions and examples of each parent code and subcode. For reference, each parent code and subcode will be listed here.

Election Interference:

1. General Mentions of Election Interference
2. Election Security Measures
3. Warnings & Retaliatory Measures
4. Accusations of Trump/Russian Collusion
5. Casting Doubts or Deflecting from Interference or Trump/Russia Collusion
6. Non-Russian Election Interference

US/Russian Relations

1. Positive Outlook
2. Cautious Outlook
3. Negative Outlook

US Cybersecurity

1. Cyber Attacks & Incidents
2. DNC Email Hack
3. Warnings & Retaliatory Measures
4. Cyber Defense Initiatives

Conflict Involving Russia

1. Positive
2. Cautious
3. Negative
4. Warnings & Retaliatory Measures

2.5 Limitations

While this study employs a comprehensive mixed methods approach to analyze presidential rhetoric on Russian election interference, US-Russian relations, and related issues, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the scope of the data is confined to official speeches, press releases, and Q&A sessions available on the White House websites, excluding other potentially relevant communications such as social media posts or unofficial remarks. This focus may limit the comprehensiveness of the analysis, particularly given the prominent role of platforms like Twitter during President Trump's tenure. Second, the use of MaxQDA and the manual coding process, while systematic, involves a degree of subjectivity in interpreting and categorizing the content. Although steps were taken to ensure consistency and reliability, such as developing clear coding rules and conducting iterative reviews, some interpretative bias is inevitable. Third, the study's timeframe (2016-2024) provides a robust comparative analysis but may not capture longer-term trends or the full impact of evolving geopolitical events. As the situation with Russia and related cybersecurity threats and the Ukraine war continues to develop, future research will be necessary to build upon these findings and explore the long-term implications of presidential rhetoric in these areas. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into the strategic use of presidential rhetoric and its role in shaping public discourse and policy in response to critical national and international challenges.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to the highest ethical standards in conducting research and analyzing data. All data sources used in this research are publicly available documents obtained from official White House websites, ensuring transparency and accessibility. No personal or confidential information was accessed or utilized. The analysis respects the integrity of the

original texts, avoiding any manipulation or misrepresentation of the content. The coding process, while involving subjective interpretation, was conducted with rigorous adherence to predefined coding rules to minimize bias and ensure consistent application across all documents. Additionally, the study acknowledges the potential influence of the researcher's perspective and employs strategies such as iterative analysis to enhance objectivity and reliability. By maintaining transparency in methodology and analysis, this study aims to contribute to the scholarly understanding of presidential rhetoric while upholding the principles of academic integrity and ethical research practices.

2.7 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has outlined the methodological framework employed to analyze presidential rhetoric on Russian election interference, US-Russian relations, conflict, and US cybersecurity from 2016 to 2024. The research design, centered around a mixed methods thematic analysis, facilitates a comprehensive examination of 117 speeches, press releases, and Q&A sessions from Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden. By utilizing MaxQDA for systematic coding and categorization, and incorporating both quantitative and qualitative analysis, the study provides a robust foundation for understanding the nuances of presidential communication strategies. The data collection process ensured the inclusion of relevant and authentic documents, while the coding framework combined deductive and inductive approaches to capture specific themes and attitudes within the presidential rhetoric.

The subsequent chapter will delve into the results of this analysis, presenting the key findings and insights derived from the coded data. By examining the frequency, context, and tone of presidential mentions across the four primary categories, the results section will illuminate the evolving rhetorical strategies employed by each administration and their implications for public perception and policy directions.

Chapter 3: Results

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the collected data, structured into several main sections. This introduction outlines the research objectives, research questions, and significance of the study. The frequency and context of mentions section presents a comparative analysis of the mentions of election interference, US cybersecurity, conflict, and US-Russian relations across the three administrations. The rhetorical and thematic comparison section examines the styles of Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden on these subjects. A detailed analysis by topic follows, which includes election interference (covering general mentions of interference, securing elections, warnings and retaliatory measures, and accusations or deflections), US/Russian relations (exploring positive, cautious, and negative outlooks), conflict (discussing warnings, retaliatory measures, and approaches to conflict resolution), and US cybersecurity (evaluating mentions of cyberattacks, increasing cyber defense, and warnings or retaliations for attacks).

To guide this analysis, the following research questions have been formulated:

- How has the rhetoric surrounding Russian election interference evolved across the administrations of Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden?
- How has the frequency and context of presidential mentions of election interference, US cybersecurity, and related topics evolved from the Obama administration to the Biden administration in the face of increased conflict, heightened strain on the democratic process in the US?
- What rhetorical strategies have Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden used when addressing Russian election interference and related cybersecurity issues?
- How have the public warnings, retaliatory measures, and policy responses to Russian election interference and cyberattacks differed across the three administrations?
- How do the presidents' speeches reflect changes in public perception and framing of Russian interference and US-Russian relations over time?

The significance of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of presidential rhetoric concerning the facets of the US/Russian diplomatic relationship from 2016 to 2024. This analysis is crucial as it provides deep insights into the evolving strategies and priorities of different

administrations, reflected through their public communications. Understanding the shifts in presidential rhetoric is vital because presidential speeches play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and steering policy directions. The language used by presidents serves not only as an expression of their viewpoints but also as strategic signals to both national and international audiences about their administration's priorities and intentions. This study meticulously examines these speeches to uncover how each administration has addressed complex geopolitical challenges and domestic issues.

The contribution of this research to the field of political communication is notable. By analyzing the strategic use of language, this study demonstrates how presidential rhetoric functions as a powerful tool for governance and diplomacy. It highlights how different rhetorical strategies are employed to address issues of national security, manage international relations, and influence public perception. For scholars, this research offers a detailed account of how linguistic patterns and thematic focuses evolve in response to external threats and internal political dynamics, enriching the understanding of presidential communication. For policymakers, the study provides critical insights into the effectiveness of various rhetorical strategies in building public support for policy measures and managing international relations. Understanding how different approaches have succeeded or failed in the past can help current and future policymakers craft more effective communication strategies. This is particularly relevant in the context of national security and foreign policy, where public support and international perception are crucial for the success of policy initiatives. The public also stands to benefit from a heightened awareness of the underlying strategies and intentions behind presidential communications. By illuminating the importance of critically engaging with political rhetoric, this study empowers citizens to be more discerning consumers of political information. It underscores the need for transparency and consistency in presidential communications to maintain public trust and uphold democratic values. This awareness can enhance democratic engagement, ensuring that citizens are better equipped to evaluate political rhetoric and its implications for their lives and their country's direction.

3.2. Overview

This section presents the general results of the thematic analysis. The focus is on understanding how US presidential rhetoric has varied and evolved in response to Russian

election interference, cybersecurity threats, and broader US-Russian relations from 2016 to 2024. This analysis includes 117 speeches, interviews, and press releases from Presidents Obama (2016-2017), Trump (2017-2021), and Biden (2021-2024). Out of the total, 25 documents are from the Obama administration, 22 are from the Trump administration, and 70 are from the Biden administration. Immediately notable is that there is a large difference in total number of transcripts collected from Biden versus from the Obama and Trump administrations. In the case of the Obama administration, transcripts were only collected from January 1st, 2016, onwards, as the first major public acknowledgements of election interference occurred during the 2016 presidential race. Data from before 2016 included little to no mention of interference in the election process, meaning that there is little relevant data to analyze, which led to the limited data pool. Despite this, the comparable small number of documents collected from the Obama administration over a roughly 1-year period was similar to the total number of documents collected from the full four-year period of the Trump administration. The lower count of documents collected from 2017-2021 is related to a number of factors. First, the administration's foreign policy focus was largely on other issues, such as the trade war with China, meaning discussion of Russia may have taken a secondary role. Second, the Trump administration was generally much friendlier with Russia and actively attempted to use positive and non-confrontational language, and as the old news adage goes, 'if it bleeds, it leads', meaning that these attempts at a positive relationship likely led to less news coverage and public discussion of negative aspects of their relationship. Third, President Trump was highly active on other media platforms such as Twitter (now X), which may have led to a general decline in the number of speeches or live Q&A sessions as compared to Obama or Biden as he instead favored tweets or other social media posts to convey his rhetoric. Fourth, and related more so to the Biden administration's high volume of data is that while the military conflict in Syria was a prevalent topic in all three administrations, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine did not happen until 2022, which pushed the US/Russia relationship and related issues into the spotlight well after President Trump left office. This caused a significant increase in mentions of Russia and stark shifts in volume, tone, and topic during the Biden administration, which will be observed clearly through deeper analysis of the data.

3.2 Frequency and Context of Mentions

The relative distribution of mentions on each subject between administrations can be seen through Figure 1 below. It shows that, in line with the general observations of data volume disparities, the Biden administration mentioned all four subjects at higher frequency.

% Distribution Between Administrations

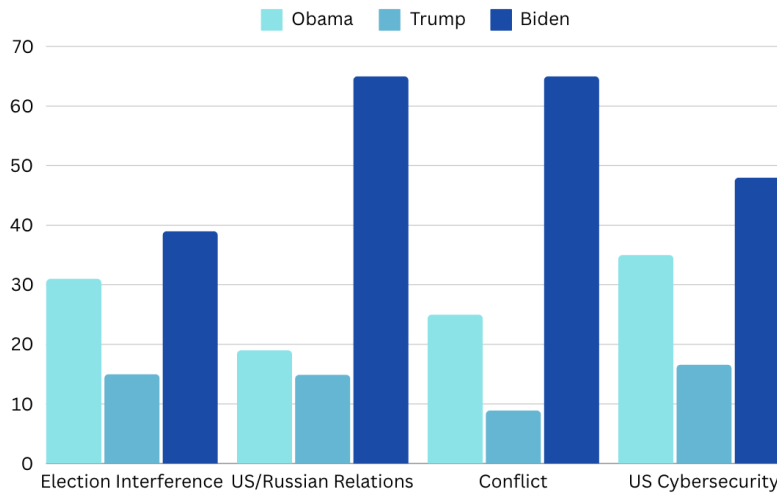


Figure 1: The total distribution of mentions of each topic by each president

However, more interesting trends are observable, as seen in Figure 2 below, when the number of documents a given subject is brought up in per administration is examined instead of the total distribution of mentions between the three groups. When examined in this way, the emphasis that each administration placed on the respective topics becomes clear.

The Obama administration spent a similar amount of time discussing election interference, US/Russian relations, conflict, and US cybersecurity. While cybersecurity was mentioned the most, in 76% of documents, all four factored into discussions, which reflects a balanced and nuanced approach to discussion of Russia. This is further clarified through detailed analysis of the Obama administration’s rhetorical and thematic styles, which generally shied away from the use of extreme language, both positive and negative, and instead valued measured, cautious, and information-based vocabulary.

During the Trump administration, the largest topic of discussion was election interference at 68%, followed by US/Russian relations at 45%. Election interference was the most frequently

mentioned due to several factors. The large amount of media attention given to the issue by both the Obama administration and the Clinton campaign through forceful mentions of the issue during the 2016 campaign season was critical in shaping this narrative and pushing President Trump to respond. They implicated ties between interference efforts and the Trump campaign, culminating in special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation, the results of which were released almost three years into President Trump's term. He spent significant time forcefully denying collusion between his election campaign and Russian efforts, mitigating the severity of the interference, and diverting attention towards other unproven or unfounded allegations against other political actors.

Most discussion within the Biden administration was unsurprisingly split between conflict and US/Russian relations, both mentioned in 63% of documents, with election interference mentioned least, in 29%. This comes as no surprise as the Biden administration has been actively responding to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and ensuring the security of American interests in the region since the invasion in February 2022. However, deeper investigation into the Biden administration's response shows a significant difference before and after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. As seen in Figure 3, the main topics of discussion for the Biden campaign from January 2021 to January 2022 were US/Russian relations and US cybersecurity (both 67%), with election interference mentioned in 52% and conflict in only 43% of documents. There were significant cyberattacks in this period, including the Kaseya VSA ransomware attack, perpetrated by a Russian-speaking hacking group called REvil, which affected nearly 1500 organizations across the US and may have cost millions in blackmail and damages (Menn, 2021). This different tone likely would have continued throughout the Biden presidency in the absence of open war in Ukraine, and election interference may have continued to receive more attention than it otherwise has.

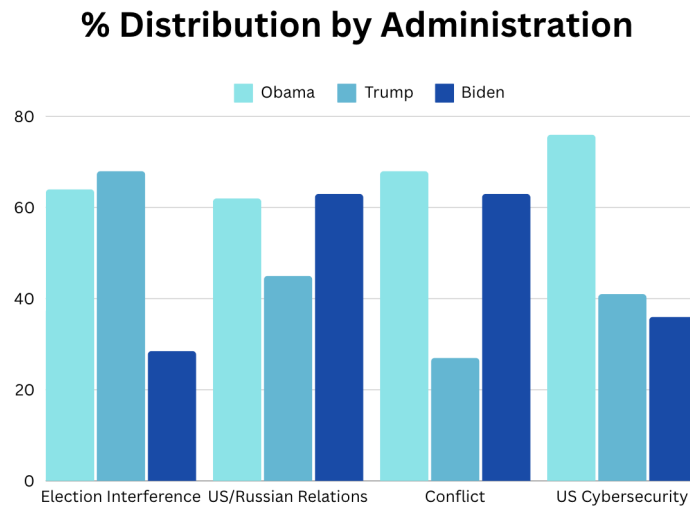


Figure 2: Frequency of mentions of each topic by percentage of coded text per president

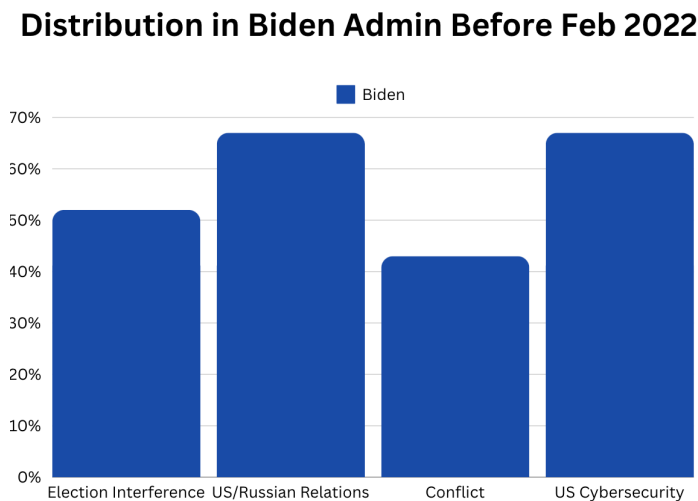


Figure 3: Frequency of mentions of each topic by percentage of coded text in the Biden administration, January 2021 - February 2022

3.3 Rhetorical & Thematic Comparison

In this section, a detailed analysis of the rhetorical and thematic styles of each president will be presented on the four main subjects. The purpose of this section is to show the specific language and attitudes used by each president over the given time period of 2016-2024 on these subjects before a more detailed breakdown of language by topic is presented in the next section.

find, server, democrat, Hillary Clinton, and email, referring to a variety of private and unsecured email servers on which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stored work-related emails which were found and released during the campaign. The ‘Clinton email scandal’ was a key rebuttal which President Trump would often bring up, prompted and unprompted, when discussing investigations into his involvement in Russia’s effort to influence the results of the 2016 election. Before a meeting with senior military leadership in April of 2018, President Trump is quoted saying, in reference to the then-ongoing Mueller investigation:

“[...] we’ve had that hanging over us now from the very, very beginning. And yet the other side, they don’t even bother looking. And the other side is where there are crimes, and those crimes are obvious. Lies, under oath, all over the place. Emails that are knocked out, that are acid-washed and deleted. Nobody has ever seen — 33,000 emails are deleted after getting a subpoena for Congress, and nobody bothers looking at that. And many, many other things” (Trump, 2017).

Other related words include *collusion, witch hunt, election, and win*, in reference to the Mueller investigation and his faith in the results of the election.

Also notable is the general theme of positivity and relationship-building which Trump brought to his term in the White House. *Putin, call, good, great, relationship, talk, strong, start, and work* all show a narrative of trust and communication which President Trump was attempting to build in reference to his relationship with President Putin, a distinct departure in tone from the Obama administration’s more measured and cautious approach.



Figure 5: Trump administration word cloud (all coded segments)

charts, and direct analysis of quotes, this section will provide a comprehensive view of each administration's stances and communication strategies on the given subjects.

3.3.1 Election Interference

The Obama administration spent the largest amount of time by percentage of coded text discussing election interference. This is in part because the sample size only includes roughly one year of documents gathered specifically from a period where political focus was directly on election interference. Figure 7 is a bar chart which provides a more detailed quantitative analysis, sorting mentions of 'election interference' into the six key subcategories: Mentions of Interference, Warnings/Retaliation, Election Security, Accusations of Collusion, Non-Russian Interference, and Doubts/Deflections. Figure 8 is a word cloud which highlights the most frequently used terms in speeches related to election interference during Obama's administration. These two key graphics provide a comprehensive snapshot of both the rhetorical tone and specific concepts under investigation.

Key terms such as *election*, *malicious*, *interfere*, *political*, *concern*, and *public* dominate the cloud, indicating the primary focus is directly on highlighting the severity, immediacy, and impact of efforts made to interfere with the 2016 presidential election. This is reflected through the 'Mentions of Interference' bar, which measures the general frequency with which the subject of interference was discussed, and the high level here proves its importance as a topic to President Obama. The prominence of words like *hack*, *malicious*, *security*, *cyberspace*, *system*, and *email* underscore a growing awareness that not only was Russia involved in hacking into private email servers to release sensitive information, but that it did so with the intent to sway the presidential election. Press Secretary Josh Earnest, on December 12th, 2016, in one of his final press conferences, said:

“[...] you didn't need a security clearance to figure out who benefitted from malicious Russian cyber activity. The President-elect didn't call it into question. He called on Russia to hack his opponent. He called on Russia to hack Secretary Clinton” (Earnest, 2016B).

The frequent use of *response, information, intelligence, confidence, fact, report,* and *clear* suggest a strong focus on the US's reaction and the role of intelligence agencies in identifying and countering interference efforts through open communication, while phrases such as *unite, protect, security, proportional response,* and *action* emphasize the administration's willingness to defend the electoral system and strike back against perceived attacks. "Proportional response" was a favorite phrase of the administration on this subject, mentioned in a large number of responses to questions on how the United States would respond to election interference efforts. This can be further proven through how prominent the 'Warnings and Retaliations' section of Fig. 7 is, reflecting the administration's proactive stance in issuing warnings and considering retaliatory measures against interference. Similarly, 'Election Security' is the third most frequent category, emphasizing efforts to secure the electoral process against threats. Two sections, 'Non-Russian Interference' and 'Doubts/Deflects Interference/Collusion' were not mentioned by the Obama administration in this sample, reflecting the focus on and confidence in their assertions of Russian involvement. Finally, while 'Accusations of Collusion' is only mentioned in about 33% of discussions on interference, it factored heavily into the media attention given to the issue and had direct implications for the rhetorical strategies used by the Trump administration over the next four years.

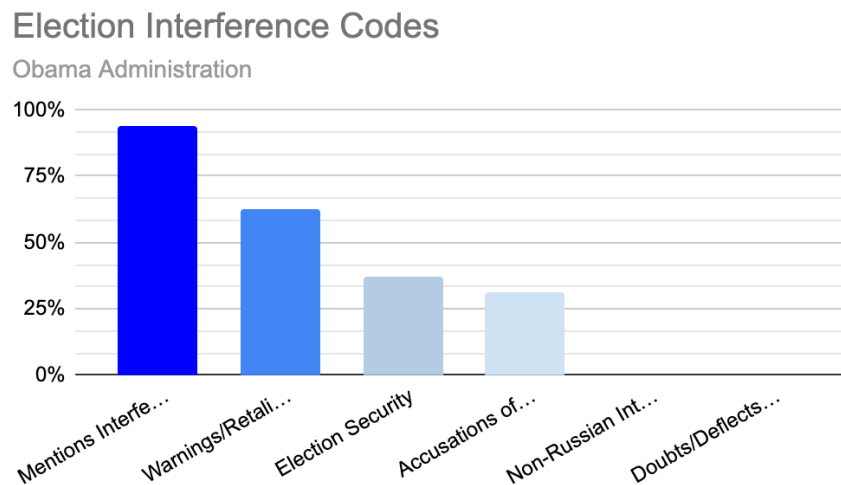


Figure 7: Obama administration bar chart (election interference)

[Reporter:] “Mr. President, will you tell Russia not to meddle in the 2020 election?”

[President Trump:] “Yes, of course, I will.^[F]Don’t meddle in the election, President.

Don’t meddle in the election.”

In a video recording of this response, given during a short photoshoot before a private meeting between the two, both men are clearly amused. President Trump makes this comment with a smile, raising one finger as if to scold President Putin, who laughs and gives a small shrug.

Election Security is even less frequent, indicating that securing the election process may not have been a primary focus in public addresses. Also of note, while mentions of Non-Russian Interference efforts are infrequent, they are only mentioned during the Trump administration. These mentions of non-Russian interference can be divided into multiple categories - claims of Ukrainian involvement in assisting Hillary Clinton allegedly hide 30,000 emails during the 2016 campaign, other general condemnations of ‘election fraud’, and mentions of Chinese interference in the 2018 midterm elections. Mike Pence, in October of 2018, in a speech outlining the Trump administration’s policies towards China, said “As a senior career member of our intelligence community told me just this week, what the Russians are doing pales in comparison to what China is doing across this country” (Pence, 2018).

The combination of the word cloud and bar chart shows that President Trump's rhetoric on election interference was heavily influenced by the need to address and refute allegations of collusion. The emphasis on terms like *democrats*, *disgrace*, and *never* underscores the contentious and partisan nature of the discourse. The high frequency of mentions and the focus on deflection as opposed to election security suggest a reactive rather than proactive approach to election interference.

Election Interference Codes

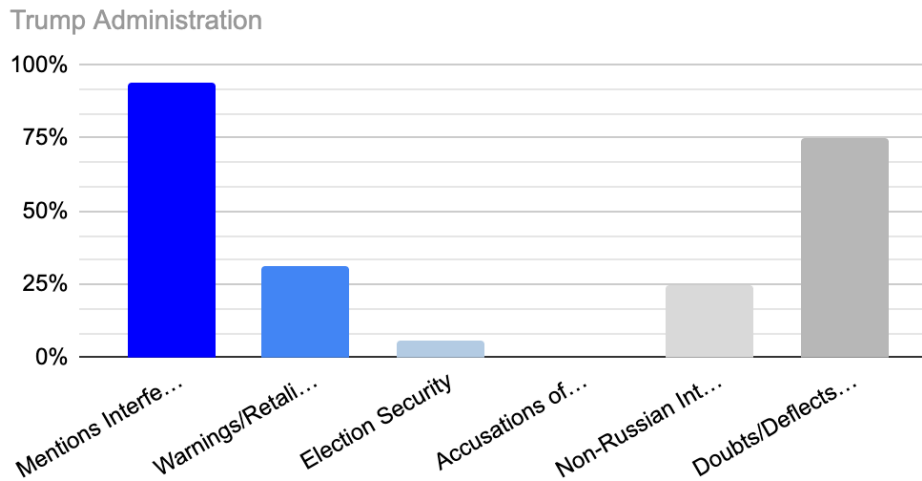


Figure 9: Trump administration bar chart (election interference)



Figure 10: Trump administration word cloud (election interference)

Between the three administrations, President Biden discussed election interference the least as a percentage of his administration’s focus between the four codes. The large majority of discussion about election interference during the Biden administration came near the beginning of President Biden’s term in 2020 when he was re-establishing relations with President Putin. Both Figures 11 & 12, the bar chart and word cloud respectively, hint at the Biden administration’s intentions and motivations when discussing election interference. In Fig. 12, the terms *Putin*, *interfere*, *consequence*, *proportionate*, *action*, *respond*, and *escalation* indicate a strong emphasis on addressing and responding to the issue of election interference in a proactive,

forceful, and strategic manner. The emphasis on *unite*, *engage*, *international*, *world*, *stand*, and *ally* reflects an effort to foster unity and collective action against interference threats with a focus on transparency, taking a firm stance, and considering the global implications of election interference. This approach falls in line with the Biden administration’s approach to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which, as will be discussed in detail later, focuses on the idea of international unity.

General mentions of interference, warnings and retaliations, and accusations of collusion are all mentioned at similar rates throughout Biden’s discussion of election interference, reflecting the administration's balanced stance in issuing warnings, considering retaliatory measures against interference, and mirroring the Obama administration’s strategy of shifting attention on this issue towards the Trump campaign as the 2024 election cycle draws near, while Non-Russian Interference and Doubts/Deflections are both minimally mentioned, suggesting a focused and direct approach.

The combination of the word cloud and bar chart shows that President Biden's rhetoric on election interference is characterized by a clear and minimalistic approach. The emphasis on terms like "respond," "action," "consequence," and "unite" underscores a strategic and unified effort to counteract interference. The relatively balanced distribution of mentions across the categories indicates a comprehensive approach to addressing the issue, focusing on both immediate responses and long-term security measures.

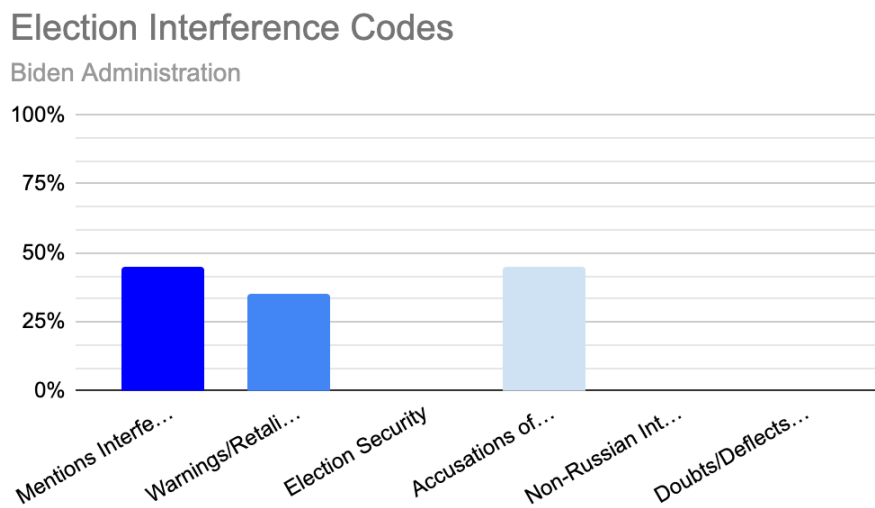


Figure 11: Biden administration bar chart (election interference)

relations in a positive light. This is further reflected in the notable number of in-person meetings which the two leaders engaged in over the Trump presidency. There is also a notable presence of cautious mentions within the data set, but this is not reflected in the word cloud, highlighting a very different approach to caution than under the Obama administration. Where the Obama administration would often frame discussion in a ‘negative but cautious’ manner, highlighting that, despite large differences, the US and Russia can and should work together, President Trump would use a ‘positive but cautious’ approach, with comments such as “So if we get along with them, great. If we don’t get along with them, then, well, we won’t get along with them. But I think we have a very good chance of having some very positive things. I thought that the meeting that I had with President Putin was really strong” (Trump, 2018). This pattern is evident in the varied responses to Russia's actions, with occasional cautious and negative remarks contrasting the predominantly positive rhetoric. The focus on personal relationships and public denials of collusion highlights the administration's unique approach to US/Russian relations.

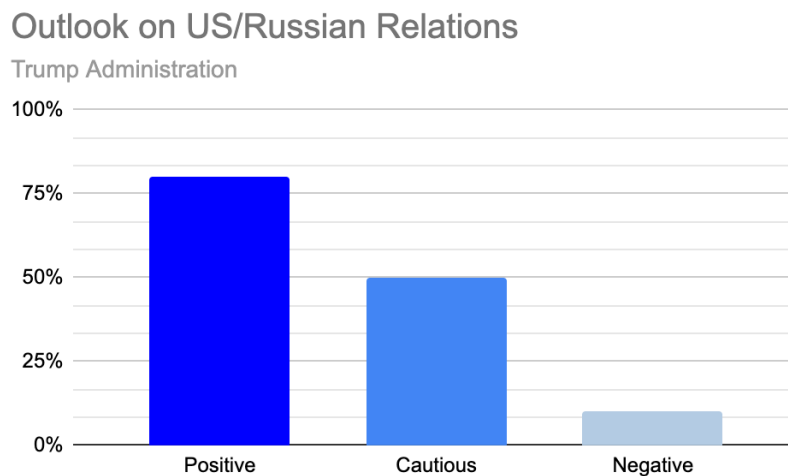


Figure 15: Trump Administration bar chart (US/Russian Relations)

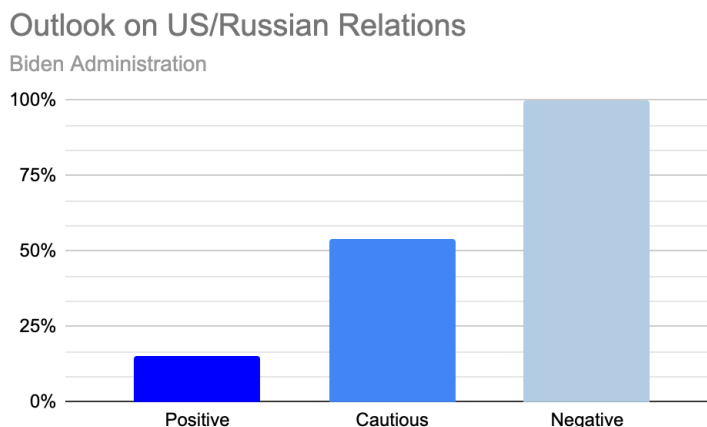


Figure 17: Biden Administration bar chart (US/Russian Relations)



Figure 18: Biden administration word cloud (US/Russian Relations)

3.3.3. Conflict

During the Obama administration, conflict discussions were predominantly focused on Russian involvement in Syria, with some mentions of Ukraine. The word cloud for Obama's rhetoric on conflict highlights terms such as *Syria*, *regime*, *Assad*, *bomb*, *civilian*, *violence*, and *military*. These terms underscore the administration's focus on humanitarian crises and military actions in Syria, often attributing significant responsibility to the Assad regime and its backers, which notably included Russia. Other key terms include *support*, *reduce*, *deeply*, *effort*, and *solution*, reflecting efforts to, despite these issues, find diplomatic solutions and reduce violence through international cooperation. The bar chart (Figure 19) shows a nearly even split between negative comments and warnings or retaliatory measures against Russia. There are no positive or cautious mentions, indicating a clear stance against Russian actions in conflict zones. This

constructive dialogue and cooperative efforts, particularly in the context of US-Russia cooperation in Israel and Syria. However, terms like *butcher*, *dead*, and *disappointing* appear, though often in contexts where Trump did not directly blame Russia but discussed the broader humanitarian impact of the conflicts.

The bar chart (Figure 21) reveals a high percentage of positive mentions and a moderate level of caution, with relatively few negative comments. This aligns with Trump's broader strategy of fostering a personal rapport with Putin and emphasizing positive outcomes from US-Russia cooperation, even in the face of significant conflicts. For instance, Trump's remarks during a joint press conference with Putin in Helsinki in 2018 highlighted mutual efforts to achieve peace in Syria and combat terrorism, showcasing his tendency to frame US-Russia relations positively, even amidst complex conflict scenarios.

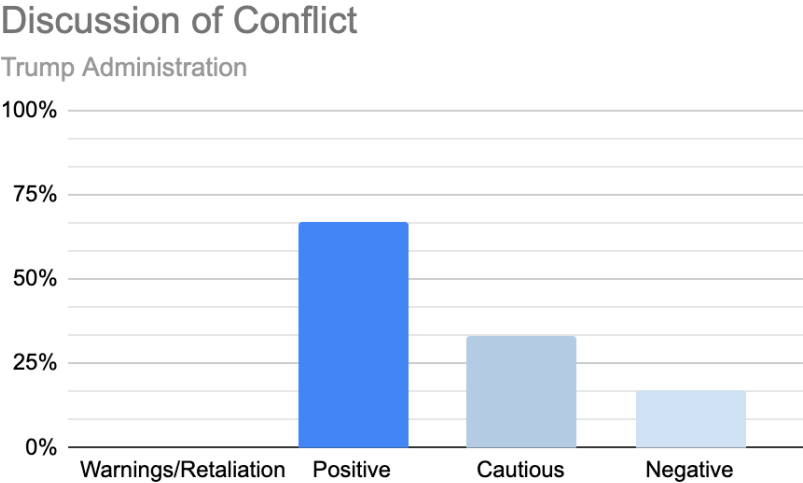


Figure 21: Trump Administration bar chart (Conflict)

The Biden administration’s rhetoric on US cybersecurity indicates a comprehensive and strategic approach. Frequently occurring words like *ransomware*, *criminal*, *attacks*, *Russian*, *private actors*, and *AI* reflect the administration's focus on the evolving nature of cyber threats, including those posed by non-state actors, and words like *companies*, *critical infrastructure*, *private sector*, and *systems* highlight the emphasis on protecting essential services and collaborating with the private sector to bolster cybersecurity.

The bar chart shows that the Biden administration spent the most time discussing cyberattacks and cyber defense, along with issuing warnings and retaliatory measures. Notably, there are no mentions of the DNC email scandal, likely to draw a clear distinction from previous administrations. High-profile incidents such as the Kaseya REvil hack, which impacted nearly 1,500 organizations, underscore the administration's focus on responding to significant cyber threats. The word cloud also features terms like *partners*, *countries*, *global*, *meeting*, and *Russia*, indicating an emphasis on international cooperation, in line with the general approach that his administration has taken since 2021. President Biden's discussions with President Putin on stopping private actors within their respective countries who attack the other were a significant highlight of this approach, showing a willingness to work in tandem with Russia on a controversial issue, however this partnership rapidly fell apart following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

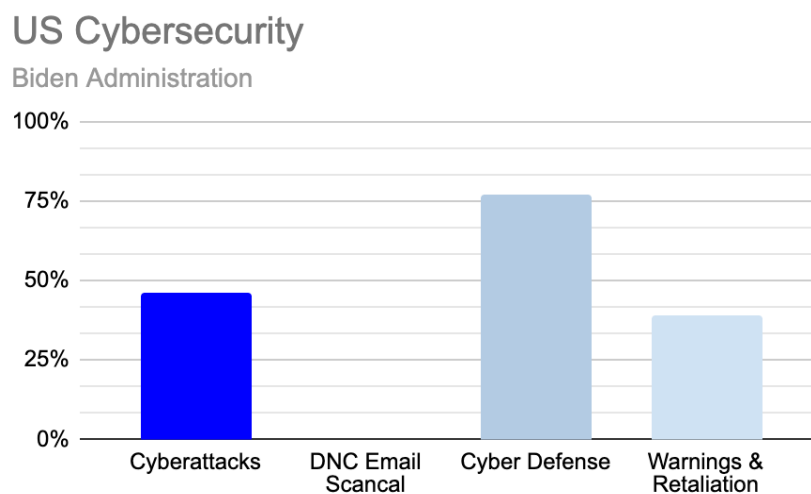


Figure 29: Biden Administration bar chart (US Cybersecurity)

This defensive posture may have been a response to the numerous allegations of collusion between his campaign and Russian actors. President Biden's rhetoric has been firm and proactive, emphasizing accountability, international cooperation, and the same sorts of 'proportional responses' threatened during his vice presidency under Obama. Key terms such as *unite*, *world*, and *democracy* in the word clouds underscore a wide ranging and uniquely international approach to addressing election interference.

The analysis of US/Russian relations also revealed distinct approaches across administrations. President Obama's rhetoric was cautious and doubtful yet diplomatic and strategic, with a focus on international cooperation and addressing violations through multilateral efforts. Words like *cooperation* and *constructive* were paired with phrases like *concern* and *violence*, indicating a balanced and nuanced approach to relations that depended on the topic at hand. President Trump's rhetoric was marked by a highly positive and constructive focus on positive personal engagements with President Putin, while at the same time adopting a defensive and dismissive tone regarding his involvement with Russia related to election interference efforts. Terms like *relationship*, *strong*, and *great* often contrasted with *collusion* and *witch hunt*. President Biden's rhetoric has been critical and strategic, focusing on building alliances to counter Russian aggression, particularly in the context of the Ukraine conflict. Words such as *unite*, *support*, and *allies* highlight this cooperative stance.

President Obama's rhetoric regarding conflict was heavily influenced by the Syrian civil war and Russia's annexation of Crimea, with a focus on balanced diplomatic solutions and international norms. The word cloud revealed conflicting terms like *violence* and *solution*, reflecting a critical stance towards Russian involvement, but one that was also willing to work with Russia to resolve conflict, while President Trump's rhetoric on conflict was overwhelmingly marked by a desire for positive cooperation with Russia to resolve a range of conflicts. Words like *Syria*, *good*, *see*, *result*, and *great* dominated the word cloud. President Biden's rhetoric has been firmly critical of Russian actions, particularly in Ukraine, with an emphasis on international unity and defense. Terms such as *aggression*, *support*, and *NATO* in the word clouds reflect a clear and coordinated response to Russian military actions.

In the final category of coding, US cybersecurity, President Obama's discourse was similarly proactive and balanced, with a significant focus on cyber defense initiatives and responses to the DNC email hack. Terms like *cybersecurity*, *critical*, and *infrastructure* were also

prominent, indicating a comprehensive approach. President Trump's rhetoric was more focused on deflecting attention to the Clinton email controversy while also discussing cybersecurity enhancements. Words like *emails*, *server*, and *deleted* were frequent, as were terms like *funding* and *national*. President Biden's rhetoric has been comprehensive and strategic, emphasizing current threats such as ransomware attacks and the importance of international cooperation. Key terms like *ransomware*, *private sector*, *global*, and *critical* infrastructure underscore a broad and proactive cybersecurity strategy.

Chapter 4: Discussion & Conclusion

4.1 Interpretation of Results

Throughout the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations, Russia has remained a significant factor in US foreign policy. However, while the focus was largely on election interference and cybersecurity during the Obama and Trump presidencies, this aspect of discussion has waned, particularly in recent years under Biden, who has primarily concentrated on the conflict in Ukraine.

Both Obama and Trump directly addressed election interference, though their approaches differed significantly. Obama's rhetoric was characterized by a strategic and cautious tone, emphasizing intelligence and security measures to counteract interference. He frequently discussed the implications of Russian actions on the integrity of US elections, underlining the need for robust cybersecurity and diplomatic responses. In contrast, Trump's rhetoric was notably defensive, often focusing on refuting allegations of collusion between his campaign and Russian operatives. While he did address election interference, it was often in the context of denying any wrongdoing and attacking the credibility of the investigations. This defensive stance marked a significant departure from Obama's more measured and proactive approach.

Biden, on the other hand, has been faced with a number of other global challenges which have led to election interference and cybersecurity being discussed the least by percentage, as seen in Fig. 2. Even before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which shifted much of his focus to the ongoing conflict, Biden's administration placed less emphasis on election interference when compared to Obama and Trump. In fact, the number of mentions of election interference by the Biden administration dropped off to nearly zero towards 2023-2024, only picking up slightly as election season has drawn near. However, this is not to say that it has not been a subject of discussion for Biden. His rhetoric has been strong on the issue when it is openly discussed, the problem may simply be that there has not been a major election interference scandal uncovered and publicized as of yet, and since there is no new public threat, it is a less relevant topic to discuss with the public. Biden has been more concerned with communicating broader cybersecurity threats and the need for international cooperation to address rising threats of conflict. This shift in emphasis highlights how immediate geopolitical

crises can overshadow other significant issues such as election interference and cybersecurity, even when they remain critical to national security.

4.2 Implications for Policy and Public Perception

As the 2024 election cycle approaches, the evolving nature of election interference will continue to pose significant challenges for policymakers and the public. Modern interference strategies increasingly rely on emotion-based propaganda disseminated through social media, leveraging bots and sophisticated algorithms to sow division within the US electorate. This malicious tactic, best explained through the classic phrase "united we stand, divided we fall", seeks to exploit societal fractures and erode democratic processes by amplifying polarizing content.

The Obama administration's approach to election interference, particularly the emphasis on clarity and public disclosure, offers valuable lessons on combating these tactics of interference. However, the effectiveness of these strategies was undermined by the timing of their implementation; the email scandal happened late in the election process, and much of the damage to Secretary Clinton's reputation had already been done by the time that the Obama administration and intelligence agencies could piece together what had happened and release their findings. Some political analysts would argue that the event played a key role in President Trump's victory. This delay highlights the necessity for timely and transparent communication to mitigate the impact of interference efforts.

President Trump's rhetorical strategy, on the other hand, was based highly in emotional and conversational language. While in stark contrast to the rhetorical styles and ideals of Obama and Biden, his messages clearly resonated with significant portions of the American population. By using feelings-based and simple language, as seen through his word clouds, dominated by three- to five-letter words, President Trump's theory of communication clearly had a lasting impact on the narratives surrounding election interference and US/Russian relations more generally. This offers valuable insight into the evolving nature of presidential communication. It must be direct, understandable, human, and on platforms which are accessible to the public. President Trump, through this study of rhetoric, much more frequently used small and digestible language based in emotion and humor, even when discussing deeply serious matters, a style which current and future leaders may copy for many years in order to have the same impact.

Looking forward to the 2024 election, there is a pressing concern that there may be a similar last-minute release of election-changing information, true or false, which, paired with a slow response from the intelligence community and White House, could have measurable impacts. The Biden administration has not consistently prioritized public discussion on this issue in recent years, as the focus has largely shifted to the conflict in Ukraine following Russia's invasion. This shift in priorities, along with the severe sanctions and punitive measures already levied against Russia by the United States and its allies may leave little room for rhetorical or policy escalation against Russia on the subject of election interference, potentially leaving the electorate vulnerable to sophisticated disinformation campaigns as all 'proportional response' options against such actions may have already been taken. As such, clear and immediate communication with the public about the nature and scope of election interference is crucial to counteract these potential effects. Effective communication strategies must not only inform but also build trust and resilience among the electorate by fostering critical media literacy and awareness. However, this approach presupposes a basic level of trust between the public and governmental institutions, which is already significantly eroded. Restoring this trust is paramount to ensuring that public warnings and disclosures are taken seriously and can effectively counteract the intended divisive impacts of interference efforts.

4.3 Contribution to the Field

This study makes several significant contributions to the fields of international relations, US diplomacy, and political science. By analyzing the rhetorical strategies of Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden regarding the main topics of this study, this paper provides a comprehensive understanding of how presidential rhetoric shapes and reflects foreign policy priorities.

In the field of international relations, the study underscores the critical role of presidential communication in shaping diplomatic interactions and international perceptions. By examining the distinct approaches of each administration, the research highlights how rhetoric can be used strategically to manage alliances, respond to geopolitical threats, and influence global narratives. This analysis is particularly relevant in understanding the US's evolving relationship with Russia.

For US diplomacy, the findings reveal the importance of transparency, clarity, and consistency in presidential communication. The study demonstrates how different rhetorical strategies can impact public trust and the effectiveness of diplomatic efforts. Obama's cautious

and information-based approach, Trump's positive but often defensive rhetoric, and Biden's focus on international cooperation show how even over the span of eight years, three vastly different leaders and approaches have been tested against a single man, President Vladimir Putin, who is the single constant in this study of election interference and US/Russian relations.

In political science, the research contributes to the understanding of political communication and the power of rhetoric in shaping public opinion and policy. By employing qualitative and quantitative methods, the study provides a nuanced analysis of presidential rhetoric, illustrating the interplay between language, perception, and action. The focus on modern election interference tactics, such as emotion-based propaganda on social media, highlights the evolving challenges in maintaining democratic integrity in the digital age, while the study of rhetoric and tone illustrates quite directly that these issues are not front and center in the current political ecosystem, despite their direct impacts on trust and faith in US democracy and media as a whole during an election year.

4.4 Limitations of the Study

This study faces several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the analysis relies heavily on publicly available speeches, which may not capture the full context or nuances of presidential rhetoric. This reliance can result in potential gaps in understanding the administrations' comprehensive strategies and responses to the subjects analyzed in this study. Secondly, coding and analyzing qualitative data present inherent challenges. The subjective nature of interpreting rhetorical strategies means that some nuances in presidential language may be missed or misinterpreted. Despite efforts to maintain consistency and objectivity, the qualitative analysis is inherently influenced by the researcher's perspective. These limitations highlight the need for cautious interpretation of the findings and suggest areas for future research to build on and address these challenges comprehensively.

4.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should delve deeper into the analysis of social media communications by presidents to understand how digital platforms influence public perception and foreign policy responses to election interference. Comparative studies with leaders from other democracies that

have dealt with interference efforts could provide valuable insights into how different rhetorical strategies impact responses, and more comprehensive and data-driven research on the rhetorics and narratives being presented about election interference by non-presidential political actors in the US, such as senators, representatives, or directors of various security and intelligence agencies, would allow for a more nuanced view into the realm of political response to this issue. Additionally, examining the long-term effects of these specific presidential rhetorics on foreign policy outcomes and public opinion, specifically regarding Russian election interference efforts, would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the lasting implications of political communication. These areas of investigation would further enhance the understanding of the dynamic interplay between rhetoric, policy, and public perception in the realm of international relations and political science.

4.6 Final Thoughts

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant role of presidential rhetoric in shaping US foreign policy and public perception. The distinct approaches of Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden underscore how different rhetorical strategies can influence the narrative around a wide number of issues, reflecting the evolving challenges and priorities in US diplomacy and national security. This research underscores the importance of clear, transparent, and consistent communication in addressing complex geopolitical issues. It is clear that a wide variety of approaches to US/Russian relations and challenges therein were taken over the past three administrations, and it is unclear which strategy has had the best rate of ‘success’, nor is it clear if all administrations would agree on what a ‘successful’ relationship would look like with Russia. In any case, foreign interference in the US democratic process has clearly not abated and indeed may escalate in coming years if tensions continue to rise, and it is further apparent that the issue of election interference has not been widely discussed on the presidential level at a rate similar to discussion of international conflict or US cybersecurity in a number of years. As the nature of threats evolves, particularly with the rise of digital interference, social media influence campaigns, and cyberattacks, the ability of presidential rhetoric to inform, unite, and mobilize the public remains crucial. This study also highlights the need for future administrations to prioritize timely and effective communication strategies to counteract disinformation and maintain public trust.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between presidential rhetoric, foreign policy, and public perception, providing valuable insights for scholars, policymakers, and the public. As the global landscape continues to change, the lessons learned from this analysis will be essential in navigating the challenges of the modern political arena and ensuring the resilience and integrity of democratic processes.

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Appendix

Table 1: Parent codes

Parent Code	Definition	Example
Election Interference	Discussion of foreign interference in US elections brought up by US presidents over the given time period, including how the topic was approached, mentions of subjects such as the Mueller probe into potential collusion between President Trump and Russia, and with mentions of non-Russian election interference from actors such as China or Iran.	“As I told him when I was running and when I got elected, before it was — I was sworn in, that I was going to find out whether or not he, in fact, did engage in trying to interfere in our election [...] He was engaged in those activities. I did respond and made it clear that I’d respond again.”
General US/Russia Relations	General attitudes of US presidents regarding Russia as a partner, competitor, or enemy on the international stage. Includes all mentions of Russia describing attitudes about the relationship, including warmth, caution, and open frustration.	“President Putin would be tremendously helpful — tremendously helpful — if I had Russia and China helping us with North Korea, I think that would solve it.”
US Cybersecurity	Discussion of non-election related cybersecurity incidents, any warnings or retaliatory actions against such incidents, and defense initiatives.	“So I’ve joined with leaders from across my administration to, over the last several months, plan on how we are going to go after this in a more aggressive way. And today, we’re rolling

		out a new Cybersecurity National Action Plan, or CNAP, to address short-term and long-term challenges when it comes to cybersecurity.”
Conflict	All mentions of Russia in relation to armed conflict, and the general attitudes on status of these conflicts.	“And as Putin continues his merciless assault, the United States and our Allies and partners continue to work in lockstep to ramp up the economic pressure on Putin and to further isolate Russia on the global stage.”

Table 2: Election Interference Subcodes

Subcode	Definition	Example
General Mentions of Election Interference	Includes all mentions of election interference, including efforts to raise public awareness or publicly downplay events.	“They have interfered in democratic elections not just here in the United States, but other countries. So one reason why I think that it is necessary to sustain these actions is because there’s every reason to believe that Russia will interfere in future U.S. elections and future elections around the world.”

<p>Election Security Measures</p>	<p>Captures discussion of measures taken to increase security of the electoral process, specifically against hacking or other sorts of foreign interference.</p>	<p>“But the steps that DHS has taken have included things like scans of the Internet-facing systems that are maintained by election agencies. They can conduct risk and vulnerability assessments to determine what sort of risk these individual systems may be facing and then help them take steps to remedy or reduce or mitigate those risks.”</p>
<p>Public Warnings & Retaliatory Measures</p>	<p>Measures warnings against interference in the electoral process, as well as announcements of specific retaliatory actions, including economic sanctions, tariffs, or expulsion of diplomats.</p>	<p>“[...] my administration has and will continue to move aggressively to repeal any efforts — and repel — we will stop it, we will repel it — any efforts to interfere in our elections. We’re doing everything in our power to prevent Russian interference in 2018.”</p>
<p>Accusations of Collusion between President Trump & Russia</p>	<p>Accusatory references to investigations and inquiries made into the goals of President Trump’s relationship with Russia before the election and involvement in election interference efforts.</p>	<p>“[Trump] who welcomes Russian meddling in our electoral process, and is now suggesting that if the election doesn’t go his way, it’s not because [of] all the stuff he said, but because it’s rigged and it’s a fraud.”</p>

<p>Doubts or Deflects Interference and Collusion</p>	<p>Includes claims that there was no collusion between Trump and Putin along with claims that mitigate the impact of Russian interference in the 2016 election.</p>	<p>“There was no collusion. There was no obstruction. There was no anything. So that’s the nice part. There was no phone calls, no nothing. We have a — I won a race. You know why I won the race? Because I was a better candidate than she was. And it had nothing to do with Russia, and everybody knows it’s a hoax. It’s one of the greatest hoaxes ever perpetrated on this country.”</p>
<p>Non-Russian Interference</p>	<p>On occasion, other sorts of election interference was mentioned, including in reference to China or Iran. While mentions of these ‘other’ interference efforts were scarce, they are worth mentioning and including to ensure accuracy of analysis.</p>	<p>“To that end, Beijing has mobilized covert actors, front groups, and propaganda outlets to shift Americans’ perception of Chinese policy. As a senior career member of our intelligence community told me just this week, what the Russians are doing pales in comparison to what China is doing across this country. And the American people deserve to know it.”</p>

Table 3: US/Russian Relations Subcodes

Subcode	Definition	Example
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<p>Positive Outlook on US/Russian Relations</p>	<p>Includes phrases that provide a positive or collaborative outlook on the future of US/Russian relations. Phrases in this section generally include compliments or highlight the aspects of US/Russian relations in which the two nations have been successful in completing joint goals.</p>	<p>“We have never been in a worse relationship with Russia than we are as of a few days ago, and I think that’s gotten substantially better. And I think it has the possibility of getting much better. And I used to talk about this during the campaign. Getting along with Russia would be a good thing.”</p>
<p>Cautious Outlook on US/Russian Relations</p>	<p>Highlight the oppositional ideologies that place the two countries in conflict, but critically also detail that there is room for negotiation, partnership, and change between the two countries.</p>	<p>“Well, first of all, there’s no guarantee you can change a person’s behavior or the behavior of his country. Autocrats have enormous power and they don’t have to answer to a public. And the fact is that it may very well be, if I respond in kind — which I will — that it doesn’t dissuade him and he wants to keep going.”</p>
<p>Negative Outlook on US/Russian Relations</p>	<p>Includes sections which may discuss collaboration between US & Russia, but normally present a negative, hostile outlook on relations. This is more common following major events such as the 2016 DNC hack or the invasion of Ukraine.</p>	<p>“Russia has engaged in activities which are — we believe are contrary to international norms, but they have also bitten off some real problems they’re going to have trouble chewing on.”</p>

Table 4: Conflict Subcodes

Subcode	Definition	Example
Positive Outlook on Conflict	Includes mentions that reflect a positive outlook or cooperative stance on resolving conflicts that involve Russia and the United States. These statements often highlight successful negotiations, peace efforts, or mutual agreements that aim to de-escalate tensions or resolve conflicts amicably.	“Well, our militaries do get along. In fact, our militaries, actually, have gotten along probably better than our political leaders for years. But our militaries do get along very well, and they do coordinate in Syria and other places.”
Cautious Outlook on Conflict	Captures rhetoric that acknowledges the challenges and complexities of US-Russian conflicts but maintains a tone of careful optimism. This includes statements that emphasize the need for vigilance and strategic patience, suggesting possibilities for cooperation under specific conditions while being wary of potential pitfalls.	“But the straightforward notion that the United States, flanked by our European allies and partners, would be prepared to talk to Russia about strategic issues in the European theater — that was on the table and we are prepared to do that, as we’ve been prepared to do that throughout both the Cold War and post-Cold War eras.”
Negative Outlook on Conflict	Encompasses mentions that portray a hostile or critical perspective on conflicts involving Russia. It includes rhetoric that emphasizes the aggressive actions of Russia, condemns military interventions, or highlights the adversarial nature of US-Russian relations.	“Yes, I called it genocide. It has become clearer and clearer that Putin is just trying to wipe out the idea of even being — being able to be Ukrainian. ^[P] _[SEP] And the amount — the evidence is mounting. It’s different than it was last week. The — more evidence is coming out of the —

	These statements often call attention to the threats posed by Russian military actions and the need for strong countermeasures.	literally, the horrible things that the Russians have done in Ukraine. And we're going to only learn more and more about the devastation.”
Warnings and Retaliatory Actions	Warnings directed at Russia concerning its military actions, as well as specific retaliatory measures taken by the US. This could involve sanctions, military responses, or diplomatic actions aimed at curbing Russian aggression and protecting US and allied interests. Statements in this subcode often reflect a firm stance and a readiness to act against perceived threats.	“It was polite, but I made it very clear: If, in fact, he invades Ukraine, there will be severe consequences — severe consequences — and economic consequences like none he’s ever seen or ever have been seen, in terms of being imposed.” ^[SEP]

Table 5: US Cybersecurity Subcodes

Subcode	Definition	Example
Cyber Attacks and Incidents	All mentions of cyberattacks and incidents mentioned by administrations over the given time period that do not include election interference efforts.	“Now we came to office of course just a couple of months after the Solar Winds hack was brought to public attention and of course Solar Winds was shot through every corner of the U.S. Government, as well as many of your governments. And it was

		very bracing lesson for us to learn.”
DNC Email Hack	Specific mentions of the DNC email hacking scandal. It is classified separately due to its unique nature as both a hack and an effort to interfere in the US electoral process.	“[...] the recent disclosures of alleged hacked emails on sites like DCLeaks.com, and WikiLeaks, and by Guccifer 2.0 are consistent with the methods and motivations of Russian-directed efforts.”
Cyber Defense Initiatives	This section includes all mentions or discussion of policies, programs, and strategies aimed at strengthening US cybersecurity infrastructure, including partnerships with the private sector and international allies.	“We’ve secured vital new funding for cybersecurity. In our first year in office, we allocated an additional \$1.2 billion for digital defense, and next year, our administration has requested a record \$15 billion to secure America’s cyber frontiers.”
Warnings & Retaliatory Measures	Specific warnings and retaliation against cyberattacks are included in this subcode. Actions taken against Russia or other private cyber criminals are of note in this section.	“If Russia pursues cyberattacks against our companies, our critical infrastructure, we are prepared to respond. ^[P] _[SEP] For months, we have been working closely with our private — with the private sector to harden their cyber defenses, sharpen our ability to respond to Russian cyberattacks as well.”