



BATTLE SPEECHES OF THE REPUBLIC

THE ROLE OF LEADERS' RHETORIC IN THE
INITIATION, CONTINUATION, AND CESSATION OF
ACTS OF AGGRESSION

BEKEZELA MBOFANA

THESIS FACULTY SUPERVISORS: PROF. DAVID EISENHOWER & DR.

VALERIYA KAMENOVA

THESIS SEMINAR SUPERVISOR: DR. KIMBERLY WOOLF



INTRODUCTION

01 9/11 AND THE WAR ON TERROR

02 THE RUSSIAN UKRAINE CONFLICT



9/11 & THE WAR ON TERROR



Photo By
Det. Greg Semendinger



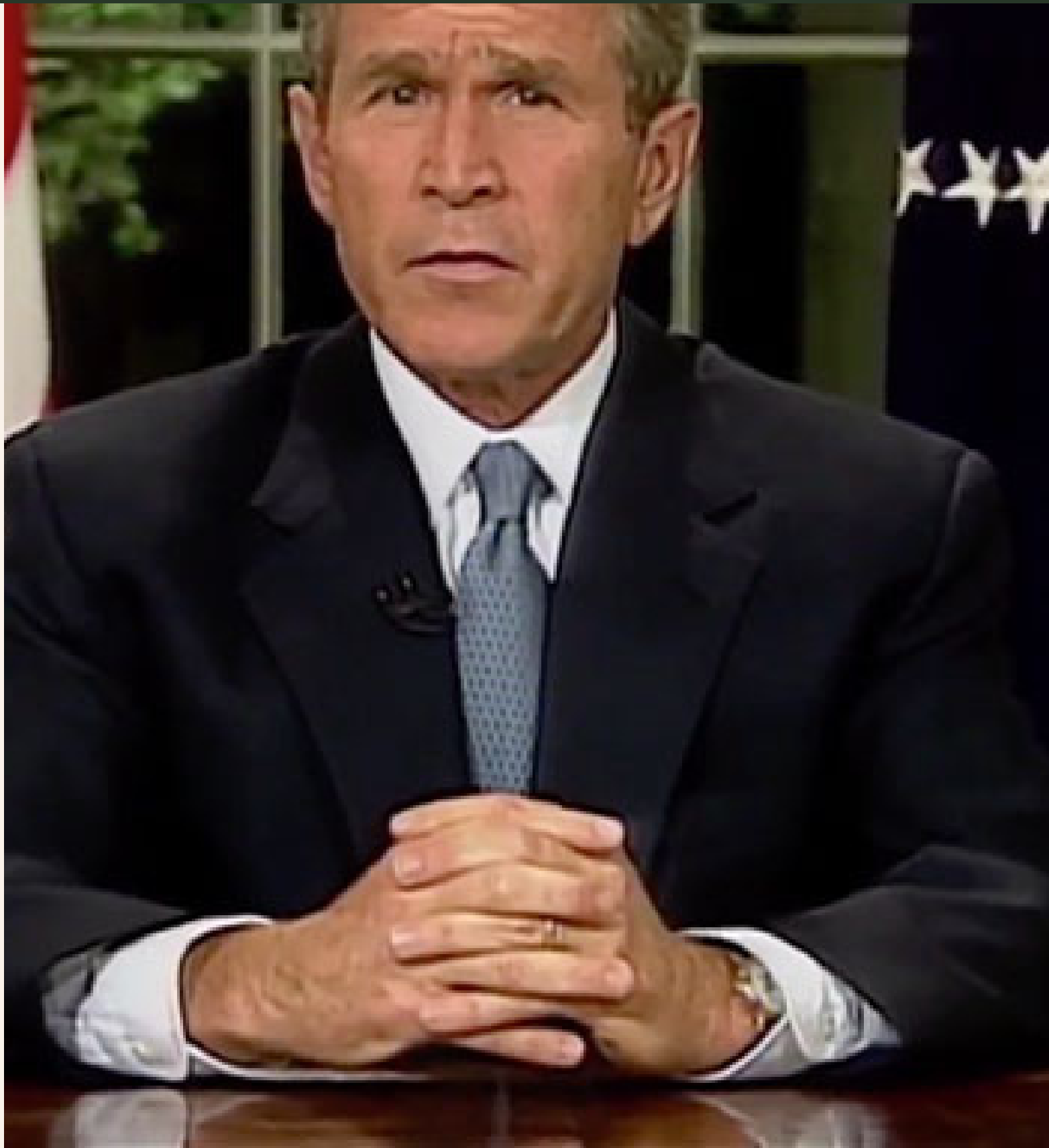
RHETORIC BEFORE THE ATTACK

The United States' Defense of Defense's is criticized for its inability to preempt these attacks given that they had been warned that the attack was coming..

In an address in 1998 Osama bin Mohammed bin Awad bin Laden, First Emir of Al-Qaeda, warned the United States of this attack.

ANNENBERG SCHOOL FOR COMMUNICATION





RHETORIC AFTER THE ATTACK

On the day of the attacks, President George. W. Bush addressed the nation three times, reassuring the nation of his administration's commitment to seeking justice and retribution for the attacks

THE WAR ON TERROR

- Originally targeting al-Qaeda and terrorist groups linked to them, the war on terror was an international military campaign launched by the United States government after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks targeting Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries believed to be harboring extremists that could launch attacks.
- After over 20 years of ongoing operations related to the war on terror in places like Afghanistan and Iraq, President Biden ordered troops to fully withdraw from Afghanistan by late 2021, signaling the end of the War on Terror.



THE RUSSIAN UKRAINE



CONFLICT



RHETORIC BEFORE THE ATTACK

Putin has been staunch in his stance that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is an action taken to restore Russian sovereignty and self-determination, both of which he feels have been undermined by NATO and the United States .

ANNENBERG SCHOOL FOR COMMUNICATION





RHETORIC AFTER THE ATTACK

Biden and the United States condemn the attacks and continue to supply Ukraine with support in the form of financial aid and military armaments and levy a plethora of sanctions against Russia .

ANNENBERG SCHOOL FOR COMMUNICATION

THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINE CONFLICT

- Since the war began on the 24th of February, 2022, the Biden administration and the U.S. Congress have directed more than \$75 billion in assistance to Ukraine, which includes humanitarian, financial, and military support, according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, a German research institute.



In two conflicts, a quarter century apart, Osama bin Laden, George W. Bush, Joseph R. Biden and Vladimir Putin employed remarkably similar rhetoric to justify acts of aggression against the United States and its allies.

This thesis aims to create a new framework for understanding and drafting war communications that builds upon the works of previous scholars in the field.

RESEARCH

OBJECTIVES



EXISTING FRAMEWORKS

- **Bilateral identification** theory examines use of "us vs. them" language to vilify opponents
- **Storytelling** and narratives provide justification for aggression (e.g. American exceptionalism)
- **Political myth and fantasy** frame uses mythical rhetoric to shape perceptions of legitimacy
- **Fear** used as rhetorical strategy to persuade public by playing on different fears
- **Self-presentation theory** - states strategically manage image to influence international perceptions
- **Cognitive-interactionist framework** looks at how public opinions on circumstances shape war views
- **Retributive theory** analyzes how framing as necessary retribution garners public war support
- **Campbell & Jamieson framework** identifies key features of war communications like narratives and unanimity

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **Research Question 1**

What rhetorical elements are most prevalent in speeches from the executive in the War on Terror and the Russia-Ukraine conflict? Are there significant differences in prevalence of certain elements between the two cases?

- **Research Question 2**

Are there similarities in the ways the United States and Al Qaeda and Russia use rhetorical elements to justify acts of aggression? If so, what are they?

- **Research Question 3**

In the case of the United States, do rhetorical elements found in speeches match with what diplomatic officials considered to be the prevailing stance of the State? If not, are there explanations for why that is the case?

- **Research Question 4**

In what ways can the elements found in analyzing speeches from the executive be put together to create a new framework for understanding war rhetoric?



METHODOLOGY

- **Thematic Content Analysis and Quantitative Content Analysis**
 - Involves analyzing four speeches from each leader in the two case studies.
 - Speech transcripts sourced from reputable archives like the UC Santa Barbara's *The American Presidency Project* undergo qualitative coding based on an established codebook, focusing on elements such as National Security, International Relations, Domestic Policy, and Values.
 - This method aims to quantify and categorize the frequency and usage of specific rhetorical elements in the speeches, enabling an in-depth examination of key global actors' discourse on these conflicts.

METHODOLOGY

- **Semi-structured interviews with journalist and US diplomatic establishment members**
 - Interviewed four individuals including three from the US diplomatic establishment and one journalist, selected based on specific criteria and involvement during critical periods of the War on Terror and Russian-Ukraine conflict.
 - Through semi-structured conversations, participants shared insights on rhetorical influences in public perception, diplomatic stances, and associated risks.
 - Recorded interviews were thematically analyzed, complementing textual analysis to capture nuanced perspectives on state stances vis-à-vis diplomatic establishment perceptions.

RESULTS

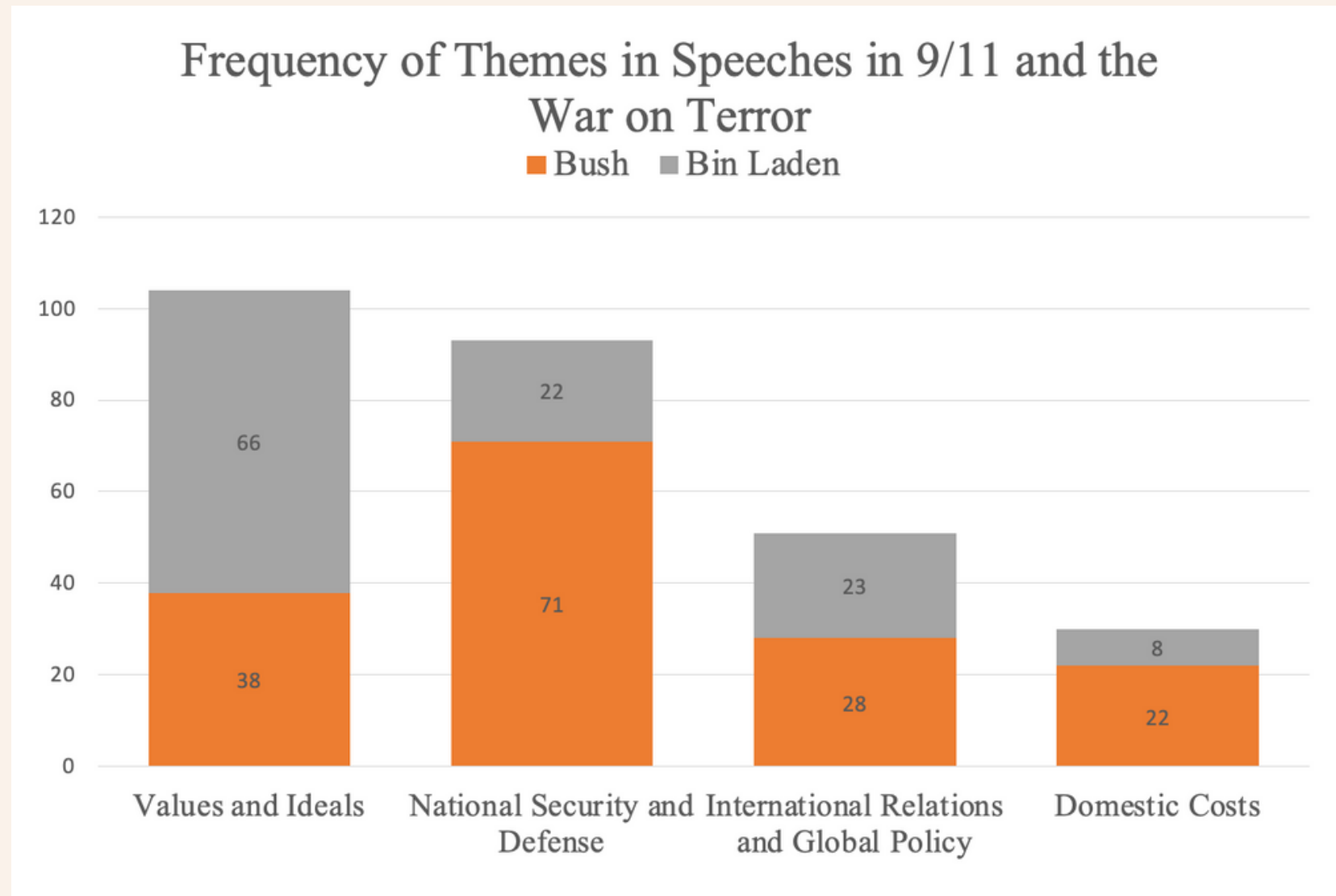


Fig 1. Frequency of themes in 9/11 & War on Terror Rhetoric

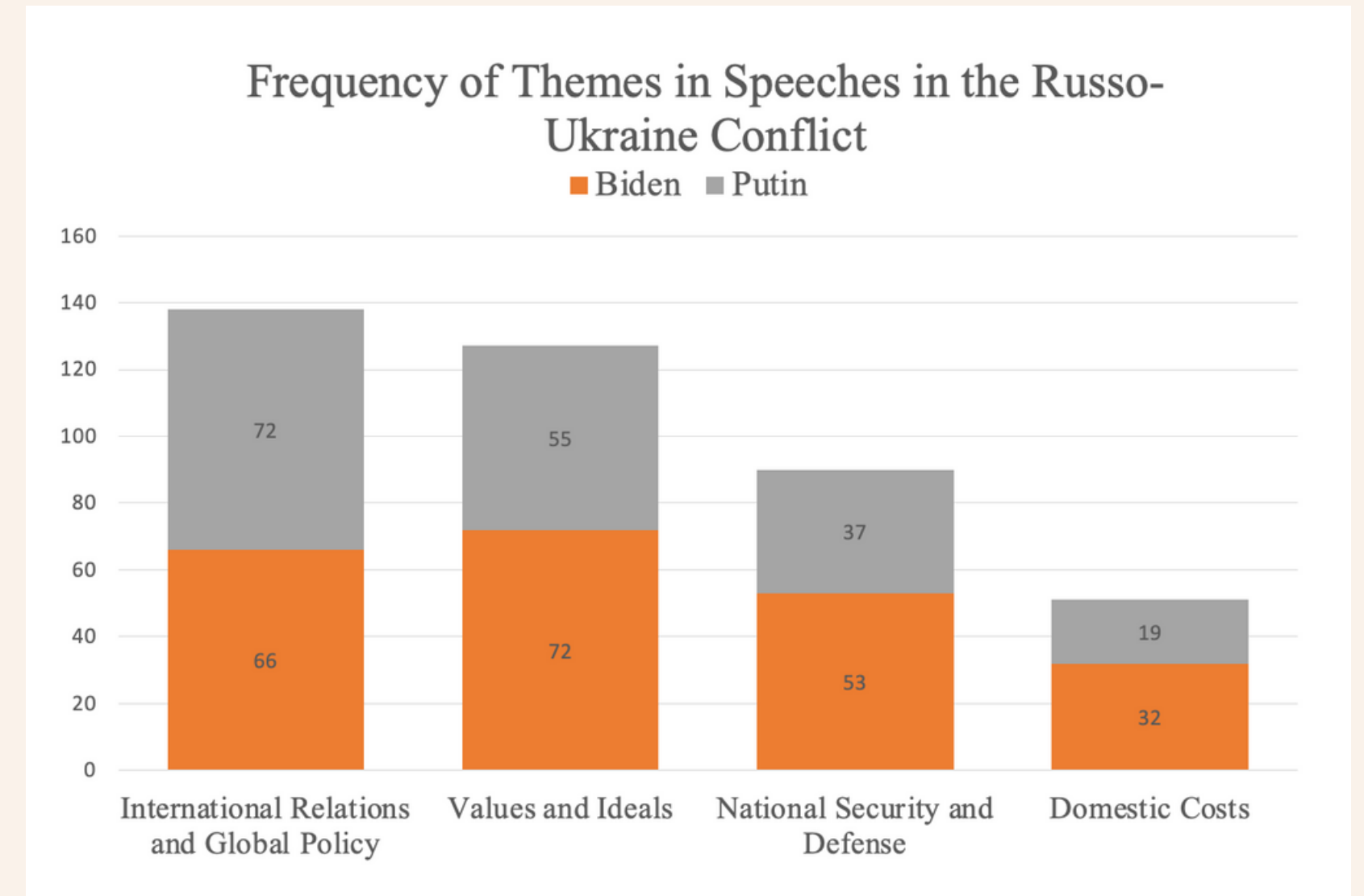


Fig 2. Frequency of themes in Russo-Ukraine Conflict Rhetoric

KEY FINDINGS

Thematic analysis of case studies on the War on Terror and the Russo-Ukraine conflict reveals that rhetorical elements forecast a conflict's trajectory.

National security concerns: limited objectives and compromise

Value-based and ideological framing: protracted conflict due to unlimited nature of war

Bin Laden and Bush exemplify this contrast in the War on Terror. In the Russo-Ukraine conflict, Biden emphasizes values, whereas Putin indicates openness to negotiation. The War on Terror ended due to fulfilled conditions, while the Russo-Ukraine conflict persists due to ideological stances and unmet demands.



COMMUNICATIONS FRAMEWORK

- Establish the threat and need for action
- Justify the cause and principles at stake
- Emphasize national resilience and commitment
- Build coalitions and partnerships
- Address domestic costs
- Leverage religious and cultural narratives
- Negate the strength of the enemy's rhetoric

SCAN THE QR CODE FOR A DETAILED VERSION OF THE FRAMEWORK:



THANK YOU

Please feel free to ask any questions at this time.



Presentation by Bekezela Mbofana
This research was generously funded by the
University of Pennsylvania's Center for
Undergraduate Research and Fellowships

