

**Patriotism, or Bread and Circuses?
A Brief Discussion of the September-October 2001
Rally ‘Round the Flag Effect**

Mark Tallman
Illinois State University, USA

*“I can hear you, the rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon.”
George W. Bush, Sept 14, 2001¹*

*“...a little over a week after the terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. a Sept. 21-22 poll found 90% of Americans approving and only 6% disapproving of Bush. In contrast, the current results represent the worst ratings of Bush's presidency.”
Joseph Carroll, Gallup Organization²*

On August 2nd, 2001, through August 8th, 2001, a Pew Research Center Poll indicated a fifty percent job approval rating for the Commander in Chief. By October 8th, 2001, an ABC news poll indicated an approval rating of ninety two percent.³ Other polls of the period indicated similar results.⁴ In the space of two short months, George W. Bush had experienced not only the most pronounced “rally ‘round the flag” effect ever recorded in United States presidential politics, but also came, albeit briefly, to enjoy the highest approval ratings on record for any American president since approval polling began in the late 1930’s.

¹CNN Live Event Special. *America's New War, President Bush in New York*. Impromptu speech of 09-14-2001. Online Transcript Copyright 2003, Cable News Network LP, LLLP. Time Warner. Available at <<http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0109/14/se.55.html>>

² The Gallup Poll. “Historical Look at Presidential Disapproval Ratings.” June 28, 2005. The Gallup Organization, Princeton NJ. Available at <<http://www.gallupoll.com/content/default.aspx?ci=10534&pg=2>>

³ Roper. “General Approval Trend for President Bush (2001-).” The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. Available at <http://137.99.36.203/CFIDE/roper/presidential/webroot/presidential_rating_bush.cfm>

⁴ Roper. “General Approval Trend for President Bush (2001-).”

Superficially, the causes of this effect appear obvious. The World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks of September 11, 2001, were indeed unprecedented in the history of the United States. Rarely in the history of the United States has US soil been attacked directly, and rarer still, has mainland US soil been attacked by sub-national actors who lacked the legitimacy of national sovereignty, and, of course, never before had a modern terrorist attack occurred on the enormous scale of the September 11 attacks. Within this context, it comes as no surprise that most Americans were resolute in their opposition to the forces they perceived to be behind the attack, and that much of this resolve translated into approval for executive action.

But could it really be that simple? What accounts for the rally effects enjoyed by President Bush relative to the more moderate rallies experienced during other crises in American history? What factors made this, the largest rally in US history, possible? In what ways does this rally differ from previous ones, if at all? And, perhaps most importantly, what does the rally of September-October 2001 tell us about the likelihood of rally effects in the wake of similar future attacks? A commonsense observation of current events may lead an interested observer to conclude that a similar attack will produce a similar rally, my interpretation of the data, however, will suggest that a rally on the scale of that observed in September-October 2001 is unlikely, even in response, and perhaps especially in response to a similar event, except under extraordinarily specific circumstances.

The Rally ‘Round the Flag Effect: Understanding an American Phenomenon

The term “rally around the flag effect,” was first introduced to the political science lexicon by John E. Mueller of the University of Rochester, in his 1970 analysis of the constituent factors of presidential popularity from the administrations of Harry Truman to Lyndon Johnson. In this analysis, Mueller identified four basic independent variables which appear to effect presidential approval ratings: First, there is the coalition of minorities, which suggests that over time, as opposition parties organize, coalesce, and form coalitions, a president’s popularity will tend to trend downward with time. Second, the “rally ‘round the flag effect,” which can account for short term boosts in presidential approval in response to a perceived foreign threat or national security crisis. Third, the economic slump variable, which associates recession with decreases in approval, and fourth, the war variable, which Mueller argued would predict a steady decrease in popularity under conditions of drawn-out conflict typified by the wars in Korea and Vietnam.

By the time of his article’s publication, both academics and laypersons alike had reached a nascent description of the rally phenomenon by observing a general

trend towards increased presidential popularity during sharply occurring instances of foreign threat or crisis. Mueller gives credit to these early observers, including Waltz, who wrote that “in the face of such an event, the people rally behind their chief executive,” and Wicker, who wrote that “simply being President through a great crisis or big event...draws Americans together in his support.”⁵ Mueller sought to describe and analyze this phenomenon in more detail, and to observe its effects on popularity trends in a systematic way. To accomplish this, he first had to define the rally effect around a rally point, that is, a specific event in time that could produce a legitimate rally effect. The definition of a rally point revolved around three distinct traits—first, a rally point had to be international in nature, as international events tend to confront the nation as a whole, rather than some discrete elements of society. Next, it had to involve the United States and the president directly so that the public would have an expectation of executive action, and additionally because events confined only to or between foreign powers would tend to produce split loyalties among Americans. Lastly, the event had to be “specific, dramatic, and sharply focused,” in order to assure public interest.⁶

Conspicuously excluded from this definition of rally points, are major domestic events such as disasters, riots, and scandals, which Mueller argued “are at least as likely to exacerbate internal divisions as to soothe them,” and any events which occur gradually, such as the build up to a war, or the slow souring of relations, as the impact of gradual events is more likely to be diffused and difficult to measure in terms of public approval.⁷

The exclusion of these types of events from the definition of rally points is intentionally limiting. While Mueller accurately observes the general effects of domestic crises, it is not impossible to envision domestic circumstances or events in which the executive might enjoy a rise in approval simply by demonstrating his presence and concern during a crisis, or in which international events gradually develop until they reach a sort of “critical mass,” suddenly capturing the national attention, though the event itself has been developing long before it came to widespread public scrutiny. The limitations of Mueller’s definition of rally points, are, however, methodologically reasonable. Mueller sought to isolate specific and discrete rally points and their accompanying rally events. This would have been difficult if not impossible had he broadened his definition to domestic or continual

⁵ John E. Mueller. 1970. “Presidential Popularity From Truman to Johnson.” *The American Political Science Review* 64 (1): 18-34.

⁶Mueller. “Presidential Popularity From Truman to Johnson.”

⁷Mueller. . “Presidential Popularity From Truman to Johnson.”

events. A discussion of the implications of a redefinition of rally points to include domestic events may be necessary in the future, but for the moment, let us proceed with Mueller's definition, as it is the definition commonly accepted by many subsequent analysts in their work on the subject.

For his part, Mueller preferred to err on the side of caution, excluding all rally points that fell on his definitional border line. Even so, in his twenty-four year period of analysis, Mueller was able to isolate thirty four specific rally points, occurring on average every 1.9 years.⁸ Also notable in Mueller's original analysis was the distinction between "positive" and "negative" events. Mueller initially attempted to weight rally points differently based on the nature of the event itself. Therefore, an event such as the Cuban Missile Crisis could be labeled "good," as the public perception of the event would most likely be considered to reflect well on executive leadership, and possibly produce a longer-lasting surge in public approval. On the other hand, an event such as the U2 spy plane incident could be labeled "bad," as Mueller imagined events of this nature to reflect negatively on executive policies, and to subsequently produce a more transitory surge in public approval, which might quickly drop off after the public analyzes the situation more closely.

Interestingly, Mueller found only small and inconsistent differences in public responses to "good" and "bad" rally points. This led him, ultimately, to weight all rally points equally, as "the public seems to react to 'good' and 'bad' rally points in about the same way."⁹ It is also necessary to mention here, that regardless of rallying dynamics, Mueller also confirmed another important element which must be considered; the mirror dynamic of approval and disapproval. In his analysis, Mueller discovered a -.98 correlation between approval and disapproval, strongly implying that any substantial increases or decreases in approval are generally not a function of the movement of individuals into or out of the "neutral" category, but of movement of individuals between the categories of "approver" and "disapprover."¹⁰ While Mueller allows for the realignment of neutral identifiers to approver or disapprover, he finds that as certain portions of the neutral identifying population realign, an equal portion of approvers or disapprovers tends to take their place as neutral identifiers. At all points of his analysis, the percentage of respondents who identified as "neutral" tended to hover at between eight and fourteen percent despite substantial fluctuations between approval and disapproval

⁸Mueller. . "Presidential Popularity From Truman to Johnson."

⁹Mueller. . "Presidential Popularity From Truman to Johnson."

¹⁰Mueller. . "Presidential Popularity From Truman to Johnson."

categories.¹¹ This is significant to our consideration of rally phenomena as it pertains to the rally constituency because it implies that any moderately sizable rally, that is, a rally of eight percent or more, will require the capture of disapprovers to approval, rather than the simple realignment of disapprovers into a neutral response. It can therefore be argued, as does Baum, who we will discuss shortly, that in the case of major rallies like Bush's September-October 2001 event, movement of disapprovers to approvers played a decisive role. Clearly, this framing of approval as a mirror of disapproval had important implications for the development of subsequent rally research as well as other areas of public opinion study. Later it may be necessary to briefly consider some of the methodological limitations which will follow Mueller's framing of the issue, and the effect of his theoretical framework on the efforts of subsequent researchers and analysts, but for the moment we will proceed, and having followed Mueller to a loose description of rally points and rally events, as well as a very loose understanding of approval/disapproval dynamics, it is now necessary to consider another crucial question: who rallies?

Isolating the Rally Constituency

By understanding who rallies, it is possible to predict the magnitude of future rallies, if, and when, they will occur. To this end, we may consult Edwards and Swenson, who sought to answer precisely the question of who rallies in their analysis of the rally following President Clinton's order for a missile attack on the Iraqi intelligence headquarters on June 26, 1993.

Instead of relying on aggregate data, as did most previous analysts of rally phenomena, Edwards and Swenson relied on a specific panel study of CBS News/New York Times Poll respondents in which a national sample of adults were interviewed shortly before the attack, and re-interviewed shortly after. Though reliance on aggregate data is no doubt instrumental in describing and analyzing the existence of rally phenomena, it generally does not include enough information about respondents to provide a glimpse of the pre-rally status of those who rally. In short, reliance on the type of aggregate data gathered by Mueller and others, is more useful in describing the existence of a phenomenon, rather than discovering which particular demographics tend to rally, and then deconstructing the particular motivations of the actors involved. So, where Mueller relied on large data sets to describe rally events, Edwards and Swenson take data collected before and after a single confirmed rally event, and observe which individuals were most likely to rally.

¹¹Mueller. "Presidential Popularity From Truman to Johnson."

The answer they arrived at was simple; those most likely to rally were those whose party identifications made them most disposed to support the president in the first place.¹² But how can this be? If approval is essentially a mirror of disapproval, as Mueller finds, then major rallies must simply move individuals from the category of disapproval to approval. This seems, at first, to be in dissonance with Edward and Swensons' findings. But another of their statements is more illuminating: "those who rally... are those who have the lowest thresholds to overcome to move to approval of the president."¹³ From this we may reach a tentative conclusion which Edwards and Swenson implied but did not state explicitly; rallies tend primarily to recapture disenfranchised pro-presidential partisans, rather than move strong presidential critics to the neutral or approve categories. Unsurprisingly, this constituency is largest among marginally disapproving individuals who share the president's party identification. This "partisan threshold" model, predicts that rallies are more a result of the movement of marginal disapprovers into the approval category, then of increased approval among independent identifiers, or the capture of strong disapprovers.

This also lends credence to another aspect of rally theory, which observes that executives may opportunistically engage in actions abroad in order to rally domestic support.¹⁴ What Edwards and Swenson add to this mix, is the implication that whether a legitimate executive response to a key event, or a cynical exploitation of a presumably mechanistic public reaction, or perhaps some mix of the two, the most likely individuals to rally at any rate are those marginally below the level of approval. But we clearly have further to go; though this constituency of marginal Republican-identified disapprovers may have represented the largest single bloc of ralliers during the September-October 2001 rally, the unprecedented scale of that rally surely suggests that more was at play than the simple realignment of previously unenthusiastic Republicans.

We may gain additional insight on this issue from another area of Edwards and Swensons' analysis, but as we will see, elements of this analysis may lead us to ask more questions than they answer. Edwards and Swenson found that in addition to pre-existing political affiliation, media priming seemed to play an important role in an individual's inclination to rally. According to their analysis, those who already

¹² George Edwards and Tami Swenson. 1997. "Who Rallies? The Anatomy of a Rally Event." *The Journal of Politics* 59 (1). University of Texas Press.

¹³ Edwards and Swenson. . "Who Rallies?"

¹⁴ Patrick James and John R. O'Neal. 1991. "The Influence of Domestic and International Politics on the President's Use of Force." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 35.

held positive evaluations of Clinton's foreign policy were even more likely to rally if they were exposed to media coverage of the event. Conversely, media coverage seemed to have little effect on opposition-identifiers.¹⁵ Add to this Morgan and Bickers' finding that presidents are more likely to use force abroad when low in approval among their own party identifiers,¹⁶ and we may come to the conclusion that those most likely to rally are the marginal disapprovers with the executive's party-affiliation, who are also most exposed to media coverage of the event. On the other hand, those least likely to rally are the strong opposition party identifiers, regardless of their media exposure. The findings of Morgan and Bickers, coupled with the findings of Edwards and Swenson, seem to imply not only that the "wag the dog" syndrome is alive and well, but that, at some level, policymakers are aware of its dynamics.

One problem that arises, however, is the peculiar nature of media coverage of rally points, particularly controversial as it pertains to media coverage of the Clinton and Bush Jr. presidencies. If exposure to media coverage is to be considered a factor in rally behavior, it may be necessary, particularly in the emerging environment of the twenty-four hour cable news cycle, to differentiate between media sources in future analyses of media effects on rally behavior. If the perception of pro-executive mainstream media bias exists, this may have a dampening effect on the potential for opposition identifiers or marginal disapprovers to rally, and one can imagine that under these conditions, media exposure might even producing a downswing effect in place of a rally. Furthermore, the increasing ability, through cable and internet news media, for strong party identifiers to selectively consume news coverage of major events, may substantially change the dynamics of future rally events. Whereas mass media news analysis of an event like the Cuban Missile Crisis was largely confined to the major news networks and a handful of prominent newspapers, the advent of cable, satellite, and internet programming now provide news consumers a dizzying variety of coverage, as well as an equally dizzying set of editorial viewpoints often packaged as "fair and balanced" news. The emergence, accessibility, and inevitable rise in popularity of this type of media coverage, may alter rally dynamics in ways unexamined by the previous authors. If the rally effect is to be systematically studied into the future, it will be necessary to conduct further research on these media trends as a factor in rally phenomena.

¹⁵ Edwards and Swenson. . "Who Rallies?"

¹⁶ T. Clifton Morgan and Kenneth N. Bickers. 1992. "Domestic Discontent and the External Use of Force." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36 (1): 25-52.

Though Edwards and Swenson focus primarily on the importance of pre-rally context and the threshold of approval model, their consideration of media exposure reflects the importance of another rally theory, which concentrates on media and elite opinion formation as a primary factor in rally phenomena. The opinion leadership model of rally effects first proposed by Brody in 1991, and elaborated upon by Zaller in 1992, asserts that rally effects are less attributable to any sort of mechanistic patriotic sentiment that arises when the country appears to be threatened, or to pre-existing demographics, then as a result of elite opinion formation, in which political and cultural elites shape public opinion and the subsequent reaction to rally points.¹⁷¹⁸

Baker and O'Neal analyzed all 193 Militarized Interstate Disputes with US involvement between 1933 and 1992, as compiled by the Correlates of War Project, and considered them alongside presidential popularity indicators. The data led them to some surprising conclusions that may reframe the rally phenomenon, leading us towards an explanation of rally phenomena not as a mass public opinion reaction to rally points themselves, but as a reaction to the specific representations of rally points by elites and the major media. Through the analysis of a substantially larger data set and time frame, Baker and O'Neal found that "the rally effect is neither as sizable or as certain as anecdotal accounts would contend; of the 167 rally events [points, in Mueller's terminology] for which public opinion data on the president were available, only sixty five resulted in increases in the president's approval ratings."¹⁹ Baker and O'Neal found that even under ideal circumstances, the Chief Executive "cannot expect a rally greater than five percentage points, with considerable uncertainty regarding this figure."²⁰ Baker and O'Neal argue that if a reflexive sense of patriotism is behind rally events, then there should simply be more of them. But, since only a minority of possible rally points studied actually produced rallies, they conclude that other factors are clearly in play. Further along in Baker and O'Neals' research, the implication becomes clear; rallies have less to do with patriotic or

¹⁷Richard A. Brody. 1991. "International Crises: A Rallying Point for the President?" *Public Opinion* 6. Stanford University Press, Stanford CA.

¹⁸ John R. Zaller. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK.

¹⁹ William D. Baker and John R. O'Neal. 2001. "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership? The Nature and Origins of the 'Rally 'Round the Flag' Effect." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45 (5).

²⁰ Baker and O'Neal. "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership?"

nationalistic sentiment, and more to do with elite opinion formation, i.e. the president's and others' handling of events, and mass media interpretation of these events.

This conception of the phenomenon in which the occurrence of a rally is dependant on the representation of events, rather than the events themselves, leads us to a number of dilemmas. Baker and O'Neals' thorough analysis of a much larger data set than that considered by Mueller may contribute to a paradoxically myopic conclusion. Mueller intentionally chose to exclude cases which were not sufficiently public to garner national attention, whereas Baker and O'Neal studied the public reaction to a wide variety of disputes which may or may not have resonated with a majority of the American people. Where Baker and O'Neal see strength in this approach, and found that it easily lent doubt to Mueller's conclusions, they do so by including a great many situations which would not be considered legitimate rally points according to Mueller's definition. It is, after all, not surprising that the low profile landing of US troops in Shanghai in 1932 produced no appreciable rally effect while the events of September 11, 2001 did. Only a minority of informed citizens were aware of the landing of troops in Shanghai, and this at a time when general access to news of this type was more limited, and during which the majority of Americans were more concerned with domestic economic issues than minor demonstrations of force in East Asia. In contrast, it is unlikely that there are more than a handful of fully functional adult Americans who are not at least casually aware of the events of September 11th, and it seems a safe assumption that only a small minority of those who were aware of the events found themselves entirely neutral on the matter.

Despite this criticism, Baker and O'Neal do clearly establish the inconsistency of rally phenomena. This inconsistency seems to lead us in one of three directions: that rally phenomena are not primarily driven by patriotic sentiment, that the level of patriotic sentiment varies considerably between rally points, or that patriotic sentiment is only one of a number of relevant factors that can lead to rallies. The question then becomes, what are the other possible constituent elements of rally events? If rallies are not simply a function of nationalist response to perceived threat, and media priming as well as elite opinion formation are clearly major, but let us assume, not necessarily the sole factors in play, what else is driving the phenomenon?

Matthew Baum seeks to answer this in his research on public opinion and rally phenomena. Baum attempts to address a central question posed in the wake of the September-October 2001 rally-- what factors can account for the unprecedented scale of this rally? (Particularly in relation to Pearl Harbor, its closest historical analogue, which produced only a twelve percent increase in Franklin Roosevelt's approval ratings.) Baum's answer relies on various elements of the research

previously discussed. Though Baum's analysis of the data considers a variety of domestic political and economic indicators that are relevant to rally research, it is necessary to mention here only those areas of research most germane to the first of the two primary questions before us: what factors account for the unprecedented scale of the September-October 2001 rally event? Baum's answer is intuitive, but like so much of the research on the subject, also leads us toward speculative predictions at best.

Put simply, if we take elements of the previously discussed literature to be accurate measures of rally phenomena, then we will reach a conclusion much as Baum does; that the disparity in scale between the rally effects enjoyed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and George Bush depends not only on patriotic sentiment as Mueller suggests, or media priming/elite opinion formation as Baker and O'Neal argue, or pre-rally demographics as Edwards and Swenson argue, but on a unique confluence of all of these factors.

Baum asserts, in part, that the moderation of Roosevelt's rally was a result of his relatively high pre-rally approval ratings, and the unprecedented scale of Bush's rally was possible through a unique set of demographic factors that produced relatively low approval, but only a small percentage of strong disapprovers. This becomes clearer upon further examination. Just prior to Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt enjoyed a seventy two percent approval rating, including sixty six percent approval among Republicans. In contrast, prior to the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, Bush enjoyed a general approval rating around fifty percent, with a majority of disapprovers identifying as close to the threshold of approval. This produced two very different pre-rally contexts—Roosevelt's high approval among opposition identifiers meant he had only a small pool of candidates available to rally. Furthermore, the minority who disapproved of Roosevelt at the time of Pearl Harbor were primarily strong disapprovers, the very demographic that are least likely to rally. On the other hand, the relatively high percentage of slight disapprovers available to Bush, offered him a uniquely large pool of candidates to rally in the wake of an obvious rally point. Put simply, Bush's rally effect was so pronounced, in part, because at the time of the attack, a larger than average percentage of the population was available to be rallied.²¹ This is not to say that pre-rally demographics were the only factor, although in this particular case they were probably the decisive one. Media priming and reflexive patriotism clearly played their own roles.

²¹ Baum, Matthew A. (2002). "The Constituent Foundations of the Rally-Round-the-Flag Phenomenon." *International Studies Quarterly* Vol.46. Blackwell Publishing, Malden MA.

Panem et Circenses ab Amor Patriae?
Some Additional Discussion of the Constitutive Factors of a Rally

The nature of the event that preceded the 2001 rally, which involved an illegitimate attack on United States civilians by an international terrorist group, tended to invite reflexive patriotic sentiment. Baker and O'Neal notwithstanding, it is difficult to imagine a rally on the scale of September-October 2001 occurring without a natural appeal to patriotic sentiment. In this regard, it may also be necessary to discuss a few more implications of the definitional problem we have contended with from the beginning. As mentioned previously, Baker and O'Neal tended to discount the impact of patriotic sentiment, as they observed that a majority of possible rally points did not produce rallies. On the other hand, they were able to come to this conclusion by considering a larger number of events, some of which were naturally somewhat obscure, and many of which might have had only a marginal appeal to patriotic sentiment.

Not so with the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, which inarguably produced one of the most obvious upswings in patriotic, and some would lament, jingoistic, sentiment in American history. Furthermore, media priming clearly played a role, though the extent of its role is difficult to evaluate. Many observers have noted that in the wake of the attacks, television media, and particularly the network news media, seemed unwilling to overtly criticize many aspects of executive policy. Whether this was due to the patriotic and demographic elements of the rally effect acting upon those within the news media, a market-based appeal to the obviously increased patriotic sentiment of the mainstream, or a fearful kowtow to patriotic norms as defined by new political and social realities, is today a matter of speculation, and a discussion for another article. At any rate, and for whatever reason, the media environment in the month following the attack was clearly favorable to rally conditions. When we extend our analysis further, to a consideration of the specific demographic elements at play, we also find an environment conducive to producing a major rally in September 2001.

As mentioned, Bush's pre-rally approval rating was around fifty percent, and trending downward. When the pre-rally data are disaggregated, however, we come closer to an understanding of the phenomenon. Bush's pre-rally approval rating stood at eighty three percent among Republican identifiers, which is, as Baum observes, "very near the post-World War II average for Republican presidents among their fellow partisans."²² At the same time, Bush's approval ratings among

²² Baum. "The Constituent Foundations of the Rally-Round-the-Flag Phenomenon."

Democrats and Independents were twenty six percent and forty eight percent, respectively. Polls taken after the attacks indicated a modest seven percent rise among Republicans to ninety percent approval, an unsurprising development; however, the same polls taken after the attacks indicated a rise of forty two points among Democratic identifiers. Baum observes that “as the partisan threshold model anticipates, a majority of the post-attack rally took place among opposition party members.”²³

The Interplay of Rally Factors

Though it was demographic elements that made the September-October 2001 rally possible on the scale at which it occurred, this does not remove the other constituent factors from consideration. These factors could well have played major moderating or catalyzing roles, had they existed at different levels than those observed. For example, had the major news media taken a monolithically critical stance against the executive for allowing such an attack to occur, rather than a largely encouraging and supportive stance for his response to it, a rally, while perhaps still inevitable, probably would not have reached the scale and scope of the event in question. Similarly, if the nature of the attack itself did not appeal so clearly to patriotic sentiment, a much more moderate rally, and perhaps no rally, would have occurred. This is evidenced by the relatively subdued rally effect after the first World Trade Center attack in February 1993, and the lack of significant rally effects after the al-Qaeda related bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

But if rally effects are so clearly attributable to a confluence of the three primary factors consisting of the appeal to patriotism, elite opinion formation, and pre-existing demographics, then why do we find it so difficult to predict the existence, scale, and scope of future rally effects with any certainty? The problem may lie in methodology, as well as the types of data available for analysis. Mueller and his contemporaries consulted polling data in their efforts to establish the existence of rally phenomena. Likewise, despite their use of larger data sets, and their various divergences of opinion with Mueller as to the primary causes of a rally, Baker and O’Neal nevertheless relied on a similar type of data—testing a correlation between approval/disapproval ratings and rally points. Edwards, Swenson, and their “threshold model” contemporaries, added an additional level of nuance to the analysis; by including pre and post-event data, they were able to ascertain which identifiers were most likely to rally. Baum and other modern analysts have managed, with some success, to reinterpret the data while accounting for the theories which preceded them. The problem, however, is that reliance on approval data alone

²³ Baum. “The Constituent Foundations of the Rally-Round-the-Flag Phenomenon.”

necessarily confines the analyst to testing his or her conjectures as to the motivating factors behind the individuals who rally, when it seems that the next logical step in studying rally phenomena should be to the use of direct survey techniques. Researchers on the subject should simply ask the ralliers themselves why they rallied in the first place.

This kind of direct, multivariate analysis, will become more and more relevant in light of the changing nature of current events, public discourse, and news media exposure, which will only make the task of isolating statistical factors more difficult. In short, the increasing complexity of the rally constituency will make it necessary to gather more complex original data, instead of teasing out correlations from more limited data using advanced statistical techniques.

And while statistical analysis has certainly yielded important discoveries on rally phenomena, there is also a related paradigmatic constraint. Mueller discovered and described rally phenomena, and so it was his definition through which most subsequent analysts examined rallies. The elite opinion formation and threshold of approval models, while novel and original developments, remained fundamentally grounded to Mueller's definitions, and largely relied on the same types of survey and polling data. But the reliance on polling data, and the previous paradigmatic assumptions that tend to be accepted in new analyses of the phenomenon, may also lead to a lack of imagination. If "the patriotism explanation for the rally effect does not appear to be well founded,"²⁴ as Baker and O'Neal argue, are we to assume that elite opinion formation and demographic context were the sole factors contributing to the September-October 2001 rally? This would seem unlikely, even to a casual observer, but it is implied in the absence of an alternative framework. Or, were Baker and O'Neal perhaps correct, and analysis of Bush's rally is much ado about nothing, since it was not technically in response to a "militarized international dispute," and hence, not a legitimate rally at all? To dismiss it on such grounds seems absurd, but clearly a definitional problem persists, and if we cannot even come to definition that clearly places the September-October 2001 event into the category of a legitimate rally, then the inadequacy of the previous methodologies becomes clear.

The Next Rally

Not unmindful of these constraints, it is necessary to address the question of future rallies. If we can arrive at as holistic a definition of rally phenomena as possible, we may be able to conjecture as to future events. Let us take as our point of departure, Baum's analysis, which finds that rallies are attributable to a confluence of factors:

²⁴ Baker and O'Neal. "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership?"

the rally point's appeal to patriotic sentiment, the complimentary representation of executive action by media and elites, and a favorable pre-rally demographic context. As it applies to Bush, the implication is clear; had any of these elements been absent, a rally on the scale of September-October 2001 may not have occurred. But, once again we run into methodological constraints. As a simple method of testing that the framework we have thus far is an accurate accounting of rally events, we need only to subject it to a commonsense question: if precisely the same events of 9/11 happened again and again under precisely the same conditions, would precisely the same rallies occur? If we take the current paradigms as our starting point, we might conclude that subsequent events would produce rallies, albeit probably of decreasing scale due to successively smaller available rally constituencies, leading ultimately to an ever increasing approval rating for the executive in which only the minority who were initially very strong disapprovers ever remain in disapproval. This may be a logical conclusion based on the accepted paradigms, but it seems a *reductio ad absurdum*. The limitations of this approach are apparent, but let us continue, putting our own theoretical twist on the formula. Under what conditions, could rally points produce the opposite of a rally, a downswing in approval? To satisfactorily answer this question will take original statistical analysis, but it is not unreasonable to speculate that it is possible, and this is key. It seems possible to conjecture that rally points, that is, events that in some cases could lead to a rally, could in fact become "anti-rally" points, leading to a downswing at other times.

The Jading Effect

In reference to the scenario of repeated 9/11 attacks, I argue that a downswing is possible, and perhaps even more likely to occur, due to another phenomenon I will call the "jading effect," in which repeated terrorist attacks produce frustration with authorities for their failure to prevent attacks, rather than unity against those who carry them out. This is, in some ways, analogous to Mueller's observation of war weariness, in which an environment of drawn out war tends to produce steady decreases in approval. We might see elements of this phenomenon in action already, with the increasing prominence of self-styled "9/11 conspiracy theorists" in academia and popular culture. We can also observe analogous indicators of this effect in historical responses to terrorism campaigns against civilians in Russia, Peru, Uruguay, and Iraq, in which state authorities came under renewed criticism after terrorist attacks, rather than receiving upswings in support. This is not to turn our analysis into a comparative one, which would be a monumental task in light of the limited data available to us, but there is indication enough to suggest that a jading effect is possible, and if it is possible, then perhaps the existing rally paradigms ought to be adjusted.

Once again, in the absence of original data analysis, we are left to test our conjecture on the possibility of a jading effect with common sense. Is it plausible to imagine that in a scenario of repeated World Trade Center style attacks, Bush, or any executive for that matter, would enjoy consistently rising approval ratings? Perhaps the data leads us to think so, but somehow common sense leads us to think not. A jading effect appears, while far from confirmed, at least a legitimate topic for future discussion.

And so we face the question of future rallies with an embryonic description of the jading effect as one additional monkey wrench that could fall into the rally machine. Where can we go from here? The most important conjecture we can make with the information at hand, which also takes into account both the established paradigms and their limitations, is that future rallies of the scale of that which occurred from September-October 2001, are unlikely to occur except under the extraordinary confluence of circumstances that gave rise to that rally in the first place. Furthermore, it seems not only possible, but probable, that given a scenario of repeated attacks under precisely the same circumstances, the executive's approval would not rise monotonically as might be suggested by current paradigms, but could drop, and in fact might be more likely to do so.

Taking Baum's framework into consideration once again, there is one more speculation we might make. If we consider the possibility of an "anti-rally" effect owing to the jading effect under circumstances of repeated attack, then what exactly would it take, within Baum's framework, to produce a rally after future terrorist attacks? The answer may lie in the intensification of one or more of the constitutive elements of a rally. If similar future attacks can be expected to produce diminishing rally returns, then we might assume that this can be overcome in one or more of the following ways: a more outrageous attack against the nation, more favorable media coverage, and a larger pre-existing percentage of marginal disapprovers. Since neither of the latter two elements appear likely during the remainder of Bush's tenure, and for a variety of reasons probably would not materialize for another executive for a generation, we are left with the chilling implication that the only way to produce another rally of the size enjoyed by George W. Bush, is to experience a more outrageous attack on the United States or its interests.

Conclusions

In many ways, the rally of September-October 2001 was an affirmation of the existing research on the subject. Consistent with Mueller's findings, the American people tended to rally behind the president in response to a clear and present danger to the United States, and patriotic sentiment appeared to be an element in this

response. Also, consistent with the “partisan threshold” model, this rally primarily involved the re-capture of marginal disapprovers. Perhaps the relevance of Baker and O’Neals’ elite opinion formation is less clear cut, as the role of media in this case, while undeniable, cannot easily be measured. The smaller, but significant, spike in approval shortly before the Iraq War does tend to reinforce some elements of their theory however, as media and elite opinion formation seemed to play a much more central role in public approval of that particular policy decision.

Other aspects of the phenomenon, however, exposed the limitations of currently accepted rally paradigms, and the methodologies used to reach them. Polling data, while useful for discovering and measuring the extent of rallies, does not offer direct information on the motivations behind a rally. This information has generally had to be teased out with complex statistical analysis when it probably could, and should, be gathered from the outset. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the possibility of other variables affecting the outcome when rally points emerge. These other variables may include, but should not be limited to, a jading effect, which would theoretically produce renewed criticism of an executive in the wake of repeated terrorist attacks, rather than a unifying rally response.

Though unprecedented, Bush’s rally is more or less consistent with the existing rally frameworks. It was possible due to an extraordinarily unique set of circumstances, including favorable media coverage, an unusually large pool of individuals available to be rallied, and of course, an outrageous attack against the homeland.²⁵ If one or more of these constitutive elements had not existed, a rally on such a scale might not have occurred. The recipe for future rallies might be assumed to be similar, but the possibility of a jading or other “anti-rally” effect, as well as the low probability of another attack occurring under circumstances identical or even sufficiently similar to those during the first, makes a further rally on the scale of the September-October 2001 rally highly unlikely, unless it takes place within a context involving one or more of the following: extraordinarily favorable media shaping of public opinion in the wake of an attack, a substantially larger than average pool of marginal disapprovers, and an equally, if not more outrageous attack against the United States and its interests.

Since the possibility of a jading effect, as well as the dynamics of modern media marketing, make extraordinarily favorable coverage of executive action unlikely, and conditions involving high percentages of marginal disapprovers are somewhat rare, we are left to conjecture that the most important element of a future rally around the flag effect of the scale of the 2001 rally, is the nature of the event itself; in the case of repeated attacks of lesser prominence and destructiveness than 9/11, we might expect consistently lackluster spikes in approval, and perhaps even

²⁵ Baum. “The Constituent Foundations of the Rally-Round-the-Flag Phenomenon.”

downswings. However, the shock and outrage over an attack of substantially greater scale and destructiveness than 9/11, may outstrip the effects of jading and unfavorable pre-rally context, unifying the American people to produce a rally of similar, and perhaps even greater scale.

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