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Twisting Tongues and Twisting Arms: The Power of Political Rhetoric

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While scholars of International Relations and comparative politics have usually treated rhetoric as epiphenomenal, one strand of constructivism has recently returned rhetoric to the heart of political analysis, especially through the mechanism of persuasion. We too maintain that rhetoric is central to political processes and outcomes, but we argue that persuasion is theoretically and methodologically problematic. We aver that rhetoric's role may be more usefully conceptualized in the context of coercion, and we advance a stylized model that illustrates how rhetorical coercion operates, explains why it works, and identifies key scope conditions. We subsequently illustrate our model's relevance through a detailed examination of a 'hard' case. This article's agenda is twofold. First, it advises scholars in these fields to avoid focusing on unanswerable questions about actors' motives and to examine instead what actors say, in what contexts, and to what audiences. Second, it lays the groundwork for a 'coercive constructivism', complementing the liberal version so prevalent today.

KEY WORDS ♦ coercion ♦ constructivism ♦ discourse ♦ Habermas
♦ Israel ♦ military service ♦ persuasion ♦ rhetoric

Talk is often thought to belong to the realm of diplomacy, war to the realm of action. Yet, during the 2003 Iraq War, the Bush administration was nearly as preoccupied with how the combat was portrayed as with the combat itself. Its foreign policy team invariably spoke of coalition forces rather than American forces, the war to liberate Iraq rather than the invasion of Iraq,

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Saddam's death squads rather than Saddam's *fedayeen*. Rhetoric is central to politics, even when politics takes the form of war.

Yet rhetoric is curiously *not* central to much scholarship in comparative politics and International Relations. Politics is typically marked by rhetorical competition, but our theoretical frameworks are generally hard-pressed to make sense of its dynamics and outcomes. Whereas the dominant materialist tradition treats rhetoric as epiphenomenal, we argue, following recent constructivist work, that the rhetorical interplay itself provides leverage in explaining outcomes. We are less comfortable, however, with the argument advanced by some constructivists that political actors deploy resonant rhetorical forms and thereby *persuade* their interlocutors of the correctness of their preferred course of action. Although persuasion undoubtedly does occur in the political arena, it is also rare. Moreover, such mechanisms rest on a strong specification of the subjective motivations of individuals and thus are methodologically intractable. Recent mainstream constructivist research has prompted a refreshing debate on and advanced our understanding of political deliberation and argumentation. By focusing on internalized norms as the driving forces of behavior and policy, however, such research has ultimately diverted attention from the dynamics of rhetoric.

Persuasion does not exhaust the ways through which rhetoric might shape political contest. In particular, we would call attention to culturalist approaches that concentrate on observable rhetorical contests, on narrative and language games. Drawing on this tradition as well as the broad insights of the field of political communication, we propose a model of 'rhetorical coercion' as an alternative means of conceptualizing the place of rhetoric in politics.¹ Employing an expansive definition of rhetoric that includes all speech acts — whether they are oral or written, whether they take place under conditions approximating Habermas' 'ideal speech situation' or not — we argue that rhetorical maneuver can prove critical to success in political contests *even* when one's opponents have not internalized the promoted values. While claimants may deploy arguments in the hope that they will eventually persuade, their more immediate task is, through skillful framing, to leave their opponents without access to the rhetorical materials needed to craft a socially sustainable rebuttal. Rhetorical coercion occurs when this strategy proves successful: when the claimant's opponents have been talked into a corner, compelled to endorse a stance they would otherwise reject.

Most narrowly conceived, this article suggests and explores a language-focused mechanism of political influence complementing recent scholarship, but it also has a broader agenda. At the level of methodology, it calls on mainstream scholarship to avoid centering causal accounts on unanswerable questions about actors' true motives and to focus instead on what actors say, in what contexts, and to what audiences. At the level of substantive theory, it joins

other recent work in returning rhetoric to the heart of political analysis. But rhetoric is often both the medium and the locus of political contest, and thus focusing on its role in the context of deliberation can take us only so far. Rhetoric matters, we argue, when human beings power as well as when they puzzle. This article represents a step away from constructivism with a liberal flavor, focused on the transformation of values, toward constructivism with coercive characteristics, focused on the exercise of power.

This article proceeds in four main sections. First, we critically review existing approaches to rhetoric in empirical political science, examining in particular the limitations of (liberal or deliberative) constructivist approaches premised on persuasion. Second, we set forth our generalizable mechanism of rhetorical coercion and explicate both its logic and its limits. Third, we illustrate this mechanism's operation by exploring in detail a single 'hard' case: the relatively successful efforts of Druze Arabs in Israel to garner greater citizenship rights by framing them as the just deserts of their military sacrifice. This outcome is not entirely explicable without close attention to the dynamics of competing rhetorical claims, and our model of rhetorical coercion helps make sense of this puzzling and important case. Fourth, we briefly discuss the particular possibilities and limits of rhetorical coercion within *international* politics.

Reclaiming Rhetoric

Most scholars of international and comparative politics disparage rhetoric as epiphenomenal. The very phrase 'mere rhetoric' captures the view that what counts is not the language people use but the material power resources upon which they can draw. This perspective is shared by 'realist' (and especially rationalist) writers, and it accords with a well-established understanding of political power.

Disenchanted with narrow materialist approaches, some have in recent years sought to harness the power of ideas. Many have invoked beliefs, ideas, and culture to supply inputs and to serve as coordination devices in games with multiple equilibria (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993; Laitin, 1998). Political psychologists have long argued that ideas influence how actors interpret evidence and sift through information (Jervis, 1976). Students of collective action have suggested that principled commitments can motivate participants and render them unusually insensitive to the costs of protest (Cohen, 1985). However, scholars with an ideational bent have typically relegated rhetoric to the margins. For 'idealists', words matter only insofar as they reflect actors' true beliefs, with private statements seen as more revealing than public pronouncements. Public rhetoric is of causal consequence only from the top down, as leaders of states and social movements deploy resonant language in an effort to mobilize support (Edelman, 1964; Snow et al., 1986; Snow and

Benford, 1988). While devotees of ‘interests’ and ‘ideas’ vigorously debate the relative causal power of their favored variables, scholars in both traditions have little use for public rhetorical contestation.

But to treat rhetoric as epiphenomenal is to render much of politics puzzling and to do violence to politics as lived by its participants. Rhetoric is certainly a weapon of the weak, but those holding the reins of power can and must deploy it as well. The acquisition and maintenance of rule ultimately hinge as much on legitimacy as on physical coercion, and such legitimacy can be established only through rhetorical action (Weber, 1968). While political contestants unquestionably further their agenda by exploiting material resources, they generally at the same time ‘frame’ their political activity, explaining the purposes to which their material power is put (Gamson, 1992). Such contests among state leaders and societal activists should be at the center of the study of politics.

Rationalists and political psychologists might both protest that they have done precisely this. Rationalist scholars have pointed out that talk is not *always* cheap. State leaders who renege on their public rhetorical commitments may bear substantial domestic and international costs, giving them incentives both to tell the truth and to strategically manipulate audience costs (Fearon, 1994; Sartori, 2002). Though important, this insight flattens rhetoric into a purely informational tool, a way of efficiently revealing whether one is a high-cost or low-cost actor. As such, it cannot shed light on the framing competitions that often lie at the heart of politics.

Political psychologists working within the area of political communication have demonstrated that speakers who succeed in defining the relevant considerations can shape mass opinion and ultimately policy outcomes.² But nearly all framing experiments have abstracted far from reality in exposing subjects to just a single issue frame (Druckman, 2001). Even the exceptions have failed to interrogate fully the *dynamics* of framing. Recent studies have concluded that the framing effect disappears when targets are exposed to competing frames from equally credible sources and that targets then respond in accord with supposedly invariant preferences (Druckman, 2004; Sniderman and Theriault, 2004). By this account, the intense framing contests endemic to politics are peripheral in that their only effect (given the caveat of equal credibility) is to render frame competition inconsequential, and baffling in that actors continue to expend copious resources on their rhetorical efforts. Moreover, this research program has ironically diverted attention from rhetorical interplay and instead directed it towards attributes of the target (e.g. political knowledge, awareness, expertise) and the source (e.g. credibility, trustworthiness, expert status). Studies of ‘message effects’ are comparatively rare.³ Our debt to the psychological literature on framing is clear, but we wish to bring rhetoric itself back into the heart of the analysis.

Most approaches fail to accord public rhetoric per se causal status, but one major exception has been the vibrant constructivist literature in international and comparative politics (Checkel, 1998; Finnemore and Sikkink, 2001). A central problem for constructivists has been explaining how and why new norms emerge and why actors might obey norms despite contrary material pressures.⁴ Among the universe of mechanisms through which political actors develop ‘shared understandings’, and arguably occupying pride of place, is persuasion: ‘normative claims’, Finnemore (1996: 141) asserts, ‘become powerful and prevail by being persuasive’ (see also Payne, 2001; Johnston, 2001). The targets of persuasive rhetorical moves do not grudgingly comply, but rather sincerely internalize new beliefs and consequently adopt new identities and preferences. Through persuasion, ‘agent action becomes social structure, ideas become norms, and the subjective becomes the intersubjective’ (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 914). Through persuasive rhetoric, national and transnational social movements prompt not merely compliance with but consent to existing norms, and norm entrepreneurs need not resort to coercion to effect change. Persuasion — and public rhetoric as its medium — have emerged as the coins of the constructivist realm (see, among many others, Checkel, 2001; Crawford, 2002; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Risse et al., 1999; Risse, 2000).

Though sometimes only implicitly, these scholars have often drawn on Jürgen Habermas’ logic of ‘communicative action’ to explain the power of rhetoric (Johnson, 1993; Lynch, 1999, 2002; Müller, 2001; Risse, 2000).⁵ Habermas acknowledges that political actors often engage in narrowly goal-directed (teleological) action, but what makes his political vision distinctive is its affirmation of the possibility and prevalence of rational dialogue, of open-minded deliberation in the quest for truth. Every legitimate use of language, Habermas argues, is premised on mutual understandings, on ‘idealizations that transcend any particular language game’, and these ‘give rise to the perspective of an agreement that is open to criticism on the basis of validity claims’ (Habermas, 1990: 199). For Habermas, politics (at least in its ideal form) is less about contest than consensus, less about powering than puzzling, and deliberative exchange consequently takes center stage (Habermas, 1984). Ideally, actors leave power and rank at the door, and they seek to persuade others and are themselves open to persuasion. Experimental studies of deliberation in fact conclude that the key to sustaining reflective discussion lies in the willingness of participants to keep an open mind (Barabas, 2004).

We are very much in sympathy with this emphasis on public rhetorical interchange, but we are skeptical as to the utility of privileging persuasion as a causal mechanism. As Habermas himself recognizes, the unconstrained dialogue of ‘communicative action’ is not an empirically accurate portrait of politics, for power and rank are omnipresent in the political sphere. Actors do not leave

their identities at the door when entering into dialogue, and they do not employ language unadulterated by earlier political contestation. Discourse is therefore always structured — and not by reason alone. Rules of exclusion and employment dictate what arguments can be proffered, under what conditions, and by whom (Foucault, 1972). Insofar as empirically oriented constructivists invoke ‘communicative action’ to explain real-world processes, it is fair to ask whether rational deliberation characterizes *actual* political debate. Only on the rare occasions when it does can Habermasian discourse ethics yield empirical insight into political contestation. It would, therefore, seem more helpful to adopt a theoretical framework that explicates the power of rhetoric even when politics is *not* truth-seeking and truth-generating, and a conception of rhetoric that includes *all* speech, no matter how interlaced with power relations.

We are also skeptical that analysts can overcome the methodological hurdles standing in the way of demonstrating that persuasion has occurred. Such an explanation presumes that one can pin down the ‘real motives’ driving individual choice, so that one can distinguish beliefs sincerely embraced from those adopted for strategic or other reasons (Payne, 2001: 39–41). But conclusive proof of persuasion is elusive, for it requires unmediated access to people’s minds (Wittgenstein, 1953: §150–5). Did Gorbachev accede to the reunification of Germany because he had been *persuaded* by the trump card of self-determination (Risse, 2000) or because he had *calculated* that the net costs of resisting the United States were prohibitive? Did Europeans abandon their overseas colonies because they had been *persuaded* that formal empire was illegitimate (Crawford, 2002) or because they had *calculated* that the net expected costs of retaining the colonies were excessive? It is impossible to say based on the available evidence, nor is it clear what evidence could even in principle clinch the case.⁶ Relying on statements delivered in private settings does not escape the problem, since these articulations may be as strategic as their public counterparts (Scott, 1990).

Many of these questions have received attention elsewhere. Scholars of transnational activism have drawn attention to the ‘mobilization of shame’, and they too have concluded that ways of framing claims cannot be fabricated out of whole cloth (Crawford, 2002; Price, 1998, 2003; Risse and Sikkink, 1999). Elements of William Riker’s suggestive work on ‘heresthetics’ (1996) are apropos, as is Frank Schimmelfenig’s research on ‘rhetorical action’ (2004). We seek to build on and systematize these important contributions, but we also depart from them. First, while many constructivists recognize that the targets of activist efforts may comply at first for strategic reasons, they claim that *lasting* normative change requires internalization.⁷ This formulation is problematic because it relies on incompatible microfoundations in stage one (instrumental adaptation) and stage two (internalization). On methodological grounds, we prefer a mechanism of political influence highlighting strategic

action throughout the entire episode. We agree with Weber that consistency, not completeness, should be the hallmark of sound work in the social sciences (Weber, 1949).

Further, we are reluctant to characterize any normative change as ‘lasting’ in the sense of forestalling normative contestation over the long run. We proceed from the premise that norms are inherently subject to challenge and that the rhetorical arrangements sustaining norms are never fully stabilized and are at best *relatively* stable. Rhetorical contestation is thus always possible in theory, although it may not always be manifest in practice. Consequently, we focus on specific bounded episodes of contestation (McAdam et al., 2001: 29–30).

Finally, existing accounts focusing on the strategic uses of public language — both constructivist (e.g. Risse, 2000) and rationalist (e.g. Riker, 1996) — continue to be crafted around assertions about the ‘interests’ served by various rhetorical deployments and the ‘motives’ driving both speakers and targets. We seek to place the mechanism of rhetorical coercion on firmer methodological footing and, more broadly, to demonstrate the viability of a non-purposive social science.⁸ Our skepticism regarding explanations rooted in the identification of motives is not novel. Hans Morgenthau, for one, declared the search for statesmen’s motives ‘futile’ because ‘motives are the most illusive of psychological data’ (Morgenthau, 1993[1948]: 5). Scholars in the rational-choice tradition have offered similar observations (Frieden, 1999).

Our ‘solution’, however, is more controversial. We are not prepared to follow our rational-choice colleagues down the path of assuming and deducing preferences. Rather, we take a less-traveled road and argue that social scientists should not begin by specifying the intentions of actors. Let us be clear: we are not arguing that actors do not possess motives, that those motives do not shape actors’ behavior, or that such behavior is irrelevant to political outcomes. But we do aver that purposive accounts are *analytically* less useful than models in which preferences need not be specified or ranked. We therefore seek to minimize the place of motives as driving forces in our accounts of political processes and outcomes.

We do not recommend this course lightly, for it flies in the face of deeply held epistemological commitments among social scientists in general and political scientists in particular. Purging empirical narratives of the language of subjective motivation is consequently difficult indeed.⁹ Moreover, we recognize that *all* methodological choices are problematic, since the modeling of complex social processes requires abstracting from reality. Yet while this path is less traveled, it is by no means virgin ground. Many social scientists have distanced themselves from subjectivist understandings of culture as a coherent system of beliefs that might be ascertained through sophisticated survey techniques. We, like they, conceptualize culture as the always contested and often contradictory inter-subjective semiotic practices through which social actors seek to generate

meaning (Ross, 1997; Wedeen, 2002). Public semiotic codes constrain social actors regardless of whether they truly 'believe' in these codes' content, and thus the question of 'actual' belief is of little relevance (Weber, 1968; Jackson, 2002). Relational sociologists, most notably Charles Tilly, have maintained that individualist approaches commit the sin of reductionism: even if we *did* know people's motives, that would not help us explain *social* processes and outcomes. We follow these scholars in avoiding individual consciousness as a causal factor and in shifting 'the emphasis from consciousness to conversation, from action to interaction, from selves to sociabilities' (Tilly, 1998: 400; see also Emirbayer, 1997; and Shotter, 1993).

These foundational theoretical moves serve as the point of departure for our model of *rhetorical coercion*.¹⁰ We cannot observe directly what people think, but we can observe what they say and how they respond to claims and counter-claims. In our view, it does not matter whether actors believe what they say, whether they are motivated by crass material interests or sincere commitment. What is important is that they can be rhetorically maneuvered into a corner, trapped into publicly endorsing positions they may, or may not, find anathema. Rhetoric affects political outcomes even when all actors are cynical operators with little interest in genuine deliberation. The resolution of political issues through public debate need not imply any significant level of intersubjective consensus.

Thinking about public rhetoric in this fashion avoids the crudeness of vulgar materialism, the reductionism of ideational approaches, and the heroic optimism of persuasion. Our perspective, which one might term 'coercive constructivism', both relates to and is different from existing approaches. Unlike both materialist and ideational accounts, we argue that language has a real causal impact on political outcomes. Unlike ideational approaches and liberal constructivism, we are skeptical that politics is more often characterized by puzzling than powering; we are equally skeptical that actors can transcend coercion and participate in fully rational deliberation.¹¹

A Model of Rhetorical Coercion

Rhetoric lies at the heart of politics. But many accounts of politics fail to accord it much weight, and many models fail to appreciate its explanatory leverage. This section seeks to explain how and why skillful rhetorical maneuvering can underpin a successful political campaign — not by persuading one's opponents of the rectitude of one's stance, but by denying them the rhetorical materials out of which to craft a socially sustainable rebuttal. Rhetorical coercion is a political strategy that seeks to twist arms by twisting tongues. This section proceeds by clarifying what rhetorical coercion is, how it operates, and the conditions under which it can be effective.

What is Rhetorical Coercion?

We begin with a stylized account of an episode of rhetorical contestation. Seeking to effect change in some policy or ongoing course of action, a claimant (C) directs an argument toward the opposition (O) in view of a public (P). For the purposes of the model, it does not matter whether O has exclusive control over the actions at issue (if O is, for example, the government) or whether C and O share responsibility (if they are, for example, political parties in a legislative assembly). All that matters is that O's accession or resistance is critical to the outcome.

Any argument that C puts forward contains two analytically separable parts: a *frame* (or set of terms) that characterizes the issue at hand and a set of *implications* that C suggests follows from that frame. For example, C might be a group of students protesting a war; their argument, advanced against the national government O through speeches and signs at a rally, portrays the war both to O and to P as unjust and unnecessary (frame) and calls for the end of hostilities and the withdrawal of troops (implications). In responding to C, O may accept or reject either or both the frame and the implications of C's argument. These alternatives yield four different potential outcomes of this episode of political contestation, reflected in Table 1.

In case 1, O accepts both the frame and the implications of C's argument, and policy changes accordingly.¹² For C, this outcome represents an unmitigated triumph. Case 2 is more mixed. In case 2, O accepts the proposed implications and changes the policy, but it rejects C's reasoning. An example would be if an environmental movement (C) urged the government (O) to restrict logging for ecological reasons, and the government agreed to restrict logging but justified the policy shift in economic terms. Though the movement would have won the substantive battle, it might reasonably perceive its victory as less than complete; the government might in the future expand logging rights on economic grounds as easily as it had earlier restricted them on that very basis. It is possible that the environmentalists' rhetorical tactics drove the government's concessions, but determining that would require

Table 1
Opposition Response and the Outcomes of Rhetorical Contestation

	Accept Frame	Reject Frame
<i>Accept implications</i>	case 1: policy change	case 2: mixed
<i>Reject implications</i>	case 3: implication contest	case 4: framing contest

access to the authorities' true motives — something we earlier argued one can never ascertain.

Both case 1 and case 2 mark (at least temporary) terminuses; contestation might resume at a later stage, but these cells represent relatively stable outcomes in the short to medium run. In contrast, cases 3 and 4 are cases of continued contestation. In case 3, O accepts the terms of C's arguments, but rejects the implications that C draws. For example, a lobbying group (C) may argue that high taxes are an unfair burden on the citizenry and should be reduced through an across-the-board reduction in tax rates; a political party (O) may agree that high taxes are problematic but suggest instead targeted tax cuts. As this relatively narrow policy debate occurs *within* a common issue frame, it might be termed an *implication contest*.

In case 4, the two parties disagree about the very terms of debate as well as the policies that follow, and their rhetorical efforts consequently focus on advancing their preferred issue frame in the hope that their political opponents will accept it (along with the concomitant implications). Without a common frame bounding the debate, such rhetorical interchange — a *framing contest* — is far more fluid, wide-ranging, and fundamental than in an implication contest. Politics is replete with such framing contests. Advocates of bilingual instruction invoke diversity and inter-cultural respect, while critics charge that instruction in anything other than the dominant language would threaten national ideals and students' eventual success in the marketplace. Opponents of abortion call the fetus an unborn child, portray the act as murder, and label themselves defenders of the right to life; supporters of abortion rights depict the fetus as an insentient being, portray the act as a medical procedure, and dub themselves the defenders of a woman's right to choose.

Engaged in either an implication contest or a framing contest, C seeks through its claims and counter-claims to alter the rhetorical environment within which political battle is waged. While C might ideally prefer to persuade O, it must design a political strategy that can attain its desired ends even if persuasion proves impossible. The public plays a crucial role: both C and O must craft their appeals with an eye to some audience which sits in judgment of their rhetorical moves. If C can shift the rhetorical basis on which O justifies its stance to P, C can limit the range of O's possible responses and policy options, transcending the erstwhile implication or framing contest. Put simply, rhetorical coercion has taken place when this strategy proves successful — when O, regardless of its private beliefs, can no longer sustain its public opposition.

How Does Rhetorical Coercion Work?

Rhetorical contestation consists of parties attempting to maneuver each other onto more favorable rhetorical terrain and thereby to close off routes of

acceptable rebuttal. Rhetorical coercion is successful when C's rhetorical moves deprive O of materials out of which to craft a reply that falls within the bounds of what P would accept. In the end, O finds itself, against its better judgment, endorsing (or at least acquiescing in) C's stance *regardless* of whether O has been persuaded or believes the words it utters. The alternatives — enduring punishment at the hands of P or investing significant resources in creating new terms of debate — would be prohibitively costly and time-consuming. In our model of rhetorical coercion, neither the motives nor the sincerity of the parties is particularly relevant.¹³

C can succeed in rhetorically coercing O because of two key facts of social life. First, political actors can rarely take tangible steps or advance policy positions without justifying those stances and behaviors — in short, without framing. Politics may entail coercion or distribution, but at the same time it involves the struggle over meanings. Meanings, however, cannot be imposed unilaterally or through the exercise of material power alone. They are, by their very nature, intersubjective (Laffey and Weldes, 1997), and the effort to forge shared meaning implicates some audience in the process. The debate between C and O does not transpire in a vacuum: both are continually striving to legitimate their positions in P's eyes (Perelman, 1982).

Second, speakers may not say just anything they would like in the public arena: rhetoric is not infinitely elastic but is structured.¹⁴ Every community of discourse shares a number of *topoi*, or rhetorical commonplaces, that both enable and constrain speakers' rhetorical possibilities. These commonplaces are not 'fully predetermined, already decided distinctions', but weakly shared notions that can be 'expressed or formulated in different ways in different, concrete circumstances' (Shotter, 1993: 170–1). While C and O are free to weave together these commonplaces in creative ways, they are *not* free to deploy utterly alien formulations in the course of contestation: such arguments would fall, almost literally, on deaf ears. The available space for rhetorical contestation is, therefore, locally bounded, and the parties to a contentious episode cannot introduce entirely novel arguments. They must configure their appeals utilizing rhetorical tools drawn from a chest that is, in the short term, effectively fixed (Swidler, 1986).

Rhetorical innovation, while possible and even inevitable in the long run, is far less likely in the short run for three reasons. First, while structures of discourse are never fully hegemonic and are continually being reworked, coherent political action would be impossible if rhetorical universes were in a state of continuous deep flux. Relative rhetorical stabilities must emerge to permit the construction of political strategies, and thus, at any given time, 'the terrain of dominant discourse is the only plausible arena of struggle' (Scott, 1990: 102).

Second, imagining, formulating, and disseminating a brand-new commonplace requires an unusual level of commitment on the part of a claimant in terms of material resources, time, and effort. Deploying existing commonplaces — which have already been imagined, formulated, and disseminated — is far less costly (McAdam et al., 2001: 47–50). The process of transforming an unusual rhetorical form into a commonplace is necessarily lengthy and uncertain, but political actors normally possess far shorter time horizons. Arguments can prove powerful only when the commonplaces on which they draw are *already* present in the rhetorical field, which is shaped both by the unintended consequences of prior episodes of contestation and/or by campaigns undertaken in advance with the express purpose of reconfiguring the rhetorical terrain.

Third, and related, novel rhetorical resources are likely to be drowned out by existing arguments and frames. Dense networks of communication carry and regularly reinforce established commonplaces, overwhelming proffered alternatives. Rhetorical innovations consequently tend to arise at the margins, where communication networks are less dense. Overcoming such barriers is possible in principle, but it is in reality so improbable that C and O must, *in a given contentious episode*, play within the rhetorical arena that presents itself to them. And that arena privileges particular frames and places others beyond the pale, regardless of the material resources at the speaker's disposal.

If C and O were the only two actors in our stylized story, they might introduce novel arguments costlessly and endlessly, and rhetorical coercion would then be impossible. Their rhetorical maneuvers are constrained, however, because rhetorical contestation is public in nature (Bennett, 1980: 805–6). The continual competition for public legitimation ensures that P occupies a critical position, setting limits to the policy stances that the contestants can in practice advance. The relevant audience sets the contours of rhetorical contestation, and stepping beyond or reshaping them requires an investment not attractive or even feasible in the short run.

This focus on the public's role constitutes a point of intersection with scholars in the rational-choice tradition who have ascribed great importance to 'audience costs' (Fearon, 1994). In such models, the actors and the audience have clear and consistent preferences that precede the contentious episode; public pronouncements serve to signal the content and/or intensity of those preferences. By contrast, our model does not begin by identifying and ordering the parties' desires, and the outcome of a particular episode does not depend on these preferences' content or ranking. Instead, the importance of the public P lies in the imperative for appeal frames to draw on rhetorical commonplaces present in the public's everyday deliberations (Shotter, 1993: 65–9; see also Bennett, 1980). Our model presumes not that

P has a well-thought-out position in advance on the issue being contested, but rather that there is only a limited set of arguments that P would, in principle, find minimally acceptable.¹⁵

In sum, one argument ‘wins’ not because its grounds are ‘valid’ in the sense of satisfying the demands of universal reason or because it accords with the audience’s prior normative commitments or material interests, but because its grounds are *socially* sustainable — because the audience deems certain rhetorical deployments acceptable and others impermissible. One cannot, however, fashion strict covering laws regarding the audience’s response. Students of conversation and argumentation from across several disciplines (anthropology, communication, sociology, philosophy, psychology) have argued that context is unusually crucial to their field of study (Billig, 1996; Gumperz, 1982; Perelman, 1982; Sawyer, 2001; Shotter, 1993; Toulmin, 1958). Classifying structures of discourse, reconstructing the rhetorical possibilities, exploring the rhetorical interplay: these critical challenges require one to formulate arguments limited in time and space and limited by the arena of rhetorical competition. Thus, for example, we do not ask below what sorts of appeals are most effective *in general* at compelling authorities to grant oppressed minorities first-class citizenship. Rather, through an interrogation of the Israeli case, we suggest that a specific claim (framed around military sacrifice and the equation of rights and obligations) is more likely to be successful in a particular discursive context (when talk about citizenship is narrowly republican). Such an explanation is modest, yet powerful, and potentially generalizable.

When Does Rhetorical Coercion Work?

The logic of rhetorical coercion suggests that two factors are most important in explaining when the model will have explanatory value. First, is P a relevant party to C’s claims-making? Recall that C’s power is rooted in its credible threat, implicit or explicit, to bring P in on its side; C’s ability to do so deprives O of the option of refusing to respond to or even acknowledge C’s claims. If C cannot issue its threat credibly, then O can safely ignore C’s claims, no matter how they are framed. We can readily imagine conditions under which P would not be relevant to the interaction between the protagonists in our stylized story. It may be that P simply cannot hear C — perhaps because C is being actively repressed; perhaps because C lacks sufficient resources to publicize its message; or perhaps because C’s claims regard alleged misdeeds that transpire far from the public eye.¹⁶ Moreover, in some social contexts, decisions need not be justified.¹⁷ The prevalence of justificatory behavior in the political arena suggests, however, that we are correct to maintain that the scope of the model’s application is quite large.

Second, how limited is the universe of rhetorical commonplaces? We have argued that actors must, in any particular claims-making episode, forge their appeals by drawing upon existing commonplaces that represent the boundaries of legitimate framing. When these boundaries are loose, numerous rhetorical strands are available, ensuring that O can almost always put forward a meaningful rebuttal to C. In such circumstances, the terms of debate are hardly constraining. When these boundaries are relatively restricted, rhetorical coercion is more easily achieved, as O has less rhetorical ‘wiggle room’ — that is, fewer socially plausible ways of rebutting C’s claim. We recognize that verbal appeals are multivocal, that advocates and opponents of particular policies may advance their arguments employing similar terms. But public language, in our view, is never *infinitely* flexible, and even so capacious a rhetorical formulation as that of ‘rights’ in the American context disciplines the speaker. Such disciplining is more common and thus rhetorical coercion is more likely when speakers have fewer commonplaces on which to draw.¹⁸

An Illustration: Military Service and the Politics of Citizenship

One of the most venerable norms in the West is that linking military service and citizenship. ‘Whoever puts himself in the service of the state’, observed Otto Hintze, ‘must logically and fairly be granted the regular rights of citizenship’ (Hintze, 1975: 211), and the call to the colors is widely considered the supreme example of state service (Janowitz, 1976). Thus the leaders of those relegated to second-class citizenship have often counseled in wartime against draft evasion and have even urged voluntary enlistment. Afterwards they have shrewdly contrasted their people’s record of loyalty and sacrifice to the reality of entrenched political and social inequity. For instance, African-Americans volunteered in droves for the Union Army in the US Civil War and for the American Expeditionary Force in World War I, wrapping their postwar demands in the bloody flag.

The rhetoric of military sacrifice has at times proven effective. Mobilized veterans have most obviously exploited their status to gain both political rights and distributional benefits. Oppressed and marginalized ethnic, racial, and religious groups have, based upon their *collective* sacrifice, also advanced claims for citizenship rights, albeit with varying degrees of success. African-Americans, for example, have repeatedly found this path to citizenship blocked. But their lack of postwar progress is hardly surprising given the high stakes of citizenship battles. The demands of subordinate groups for first-class citizenship challenge the core of the existing social order, and the opposition to meaningful change is consequently often fierce. It is not African-Americans’ repeated failures that require explanation as much as the successes of others — such as American women after World War I, Japanese-Americans

after World War II, and Sikhs in post-independence India — in deploying the rhetoric of sacrifice to win improvements in their status. The opponents of reform typically occupy powerful positions in political, social, and economic structures, and few would expect them to give way before words alone. The politics of citizenship is thus a ‘hard case’ for the power of rhetoric, for material interests and resources would appear to provide a ready explanation for which groups’ citizenship claims are granted and which are denied.

We will argue, however, that the particular rhetorical configurations advanced by Israel’s various Arab minorities help explain these groups’ differential rates of success in overcoming the barriers to first-class citizenship in this ‘ethnic democracy’ (Smootha, 1997). Drawing on their record of military service, Druze Arabs argued that equal obligations demand equal rights. Jewish politicians found themselves unable to craft a culturally meaningful rebuttal to Druze demands, and they were compelled to concede Druze claims. In contrast, Christian and Muslim Arabs, who have never been drafted into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), insisted that Israel abide by its public commitment to liberal democracy. While this frame also drew on Israeli commonplaces, it permitted Jewish politicians to justify discrimination against Christians and Muslims by arguing that those who do not perform civic duties cannot lay claim to equivalent public rights and benefits. Although the Druze were poorer than their fellow Arabs and smaller in number, for many years they were more effective in placing their concerns on the national agenda and in garnering a favorable response from the authorities. Consequently, material factors cannot account for the success of the Druze relative to other Arabs, and Jewish politicians’ continual resistance to Druze demands suggests that persuasion was not at work. Israel’s relationship with its Arab minorities nicely illustrates the power and limits of rhetorical coercion.¹⁹

Background Israel’s Arab population — today well over a million strong — is divided by religion, with the Muslims, the Christians, and the Druze constituting the three largest groups. Possessing basic political rights, the entire Arab community has enjoyed great socioeconomic progress since Israel’s founding in 1948, particularly relative to Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and to Arabs throughout the Middle East. Yet they have also been openly labeled a fifth column, and they have, often without regard to religious affiliation, been the victims of variegated forms of discrimination on the part of the state and the majority Jewish population. The new Israeli government subjected Arabs to military rule, conducted pervasive surveillance within the Arab communities, limited Arabs’ capacity for travel and an independent economy, expropriated the bulk of Arab-controlled land, excluded Arabs from the giant labor

federation known as the Histadrut, and so on. Jewish leaders typically invoked the language of security to justify these policies, but its broad definition encompassed ideological, economic, and even partisan interests as well as security more narrowly conceived. Much overt discrimination came to an end by the late 1960s, but substantial discrimination persisted in more subtle forms (Kretzmer, 1988; Lustick, 1980; Shafir and Peled, 2002).

Starting from this common baseline, however, the paths of Israel's Arab minorities have diverged. While all continue today to endure second-class status relative to Jewish Israelis, the Druze have made greater headway than the larger and wealthier Christian and Muslim communities. Since 1956 the Druze have been able to deploy a set of rhetorical commonplaces unavailable to their Christian and Muslim neighbors. That year, male Druze became subject to the military draft, reversing a policy of exemption that had been applied to all Arabs since the passage of Israel's universal conscription law in 1950 (Peled, 1998). Some have speculated plausibly that the Israeli authorities hoped that Druze service in the IDF would provide proof of Israeli liberalism and thereby neutralize Arab nationalists and satisfy Western critics (Firro, 1999; Lustick, 1980), but even full declassification of the relevant documents would not definitively establish the government's motives. We argue that, regardless of who wanted to draft the Druze and why, conscription helped the Druze prosper in Israeli politics.

Rhetorical Moves and Political Outcomes In the mid-1960s, the Druze began to mobilize, and they regularly sought a public forum in which to air their grievances, which they consistently framed around their people's military service and the equation of rights and obligations. In 1967 Druze activists circulated widely an appeal insisting that 'since we have done our duties ... and see in the lack of equality ... an infringement and denial of our rights, we urgently demand correction of this wrong' (Firro, 1999: 187). Surveying the history of Druze claims-making, one scholar noted that, among both Jews and the Druze, 'injustices to individual Druzes are usually attacked as ingratitude toward a man who was willing to shed his blood for his country, but now his country turns against him' (Ben Dor, 1979: 134-5). Even in recent years, the Druze have continued to gravitate to this rhetorical mode. During a series of public protests in the 1990s, mayors of Druze villages and towns 'usually denounce[ed] the Israeli government for its broken promises, and stress[ed] the price paid by the community in the form of hundreds of Druze soldiers killed during their service in the Israeli army' (Yiftachel and Segal, 1998: 487). Even the minority of Druze who have objected to the draft have accepted these basic terms. As a Communist Druze Knesset representative argued in the early 1990s, 'If this is a blood covenant, then give us the feeling that we are living in our state, in our homeland, with full rights like all citizens . . . And if there is to be no equality

of rights, then do not demand equality of obligations, and allow Druze to choose — to serve or not to serve in the IDF' (Zohar, 1991).

In constructing their claims frame, the Druze have drawn on rhetorical commonplaces deeply rooted in Israel's rhetorical traditions. Although participation in the pre-state Jewish community, the *yishuv*, was necessarily voluntary, it prized individual and group commitment to the public good, defined as the historical mission of the Jewish people to rebuild the land of Israel and epitomized by the kibbutz movement. The new state preserved this emphasis on civic commitment as the basis for membership, grafting a powerful statist ideology onto the earlier discourse (Liebman and Don Yihya, 1983). In an early Knesset debate, Prime Minister David Ben Gurion insisted that women too be subject to the draft, bluntly declaring, 'There are no rights without obligations. And above all is the obligation of security, the obligation of defending our existence, our freedom, our independence, and our growth' (*Divre Ha-Knesset*, 1950: 3:537). Even dissidents have protested *within* the terms of this dominant definition of citizenship: as one conscientious objector from the Lebanon War put it, 'military service, paying taxes, and obeying the law . . . That is what makes you a citizen and makes you eligible to enjoy the defense and the fruits that [the state] equally distributes' (Helman, 2000: 324).²⁰

This civic republican tradition has long sat uncomfortably alongside an ascriptive component in the definition of the Israeli polity. The 1948 Declaration of Independence proclaimed the new country 'the Jewish state' even as it promised that Israel would promote the welfare and protect the basic freedoms of all its inhabitants. The country's formal name, the State of Israel, suggests an abiding commitment to pluralistic secularism, but its historical-religious title, the Land of Israel, remains in popular use (Kimmerling, 1985). Some have concluded that 'Jewish ethnicity is a necessary condition for membership in the political community, while the contribution to the process of Jewish national redemption is a measure of one's civic virtue' (Peled, 1992: 435). Yet this ignores the potential contradictions between these discourses. Such tensions are muted when only Jewish citizens are drafted, for then Israeli leaders can publicly embrace civic republicanism while preserving ethnoreligious priorities. But Druze claims-making framed around collective military sacrifice challenged the coherence of Israel's 'ethnorepublican' citizenship. Confronted with such a challenge, Jewish Israeli leaders had two alternatives: either they could acknowledge their exclusive definition of the political community, or they could open its doors.

While the Druze squeezed concessions out of Jewish politicians beginning in the late 1960s, there is no evidence that their appeals were persuasive: both the limited and incremental nature of Israeli concessions as well as the grudging fashion in which they were offered are not consistent with a narrative centered

around persuasion. Rather, our model of rhetorical coercion can help explain why the Druze made headway in this ethnic democracy. Faced with Druze claims, Jewish leaders could have launched a framing contest by (a) admitting openly the discriminatory nature of the state. Alternatively, they could have conceded the Druze frame but challenged its implications by (b) claiming that the Druze were not relatively disadvantaged or (c) arguing that the Druze community's problems were of its own making. The first alternative frame was unappealing — not just because of the likely international repercussions, but also because it would have contradicted both Israel's self-proclaimed status as the sole democracy in the Middle East and its dominant way of speaking about citizenship. The second put forward a claim widely known to be false, and the third possible response, while perhaps plausible with regard to questions of economic development, could not justify administrative segregation, which was, whether cleverly or fortunately, among Druze activists' first targets.

There was, however, a fourth option: Jewish politicians could have refused to reply — as long as relevant audiences were unaware of the Druze's plight. The Druze's capacity to engage in rhetorical coercion was consequently dependent on garnering attention from the Hebrew-language media. As a general rule, the Hebrew press rarely covered the Arab communities, for its readership was almost entirely Jewish. But the Druze arguments were resonant with republican rhetorical practice, producing a narrative that Jewish publics comprehended and embraced. As a result, when the Druze made noise, the press amplified it, compensating for the Druze's lack of political clout and ensuring a hearing in the halls of power (Asa'ad, 2000; Toledano, 2000).

In short, the Druze trapped Jewish leaders in a rhetorical cul-de-sac in which an implication or framing contest was unsustainable. They maneuvered their Jewish opponents onto a rhetorical playing field on which the Druze could not lose, for no rebuttal would have been acceptable to key audiences, both domestic and international. Wary of calling punishment upon themselves, Jewish leaders had little choice but to concede. Consequently, 'when the Druze demanded something, the ears were much more open' (Toledano, 2000). Despite the Druze community's electoral insignificance, cases of alleged discrimination against individual Druze received attention even in the Knesset (Ben Dor, 1979: 134–6). The Druze demand in the late 1960s for full membership in the Labor Party was irrefutable: as a prominent Labor functionary wrote in a major newspaper, 'How can we explain to that Druze ... that he is good enough to endanger his life for the state but that he is not good enough to be a member of the Labor Party?' (Lin, 1970).

Confident that their rhetorical resources have bequeathed disproportionate influence, the Druze have resisted an alliance with their numerous fellow Arabs, with whom they share many grievances. Even those Druze otherwise critical of Israel's policies have often supported continued conscription so that

the military sacrifice frame would remain available. Lacking abundant political resources, the Druze adopted a strategy aimed at rhetorical coercion, and they demonstrated that it could work. Jewish politicians were compelled to say things they (likely) did not believe and ultimately even to follow through on those promises.

Like their Druze counterparts, Christian and Muslim Arabs drew on Israeli commonplaces, arguing that Israel needed to eliminate discriminatory measures to live up to its democratic promise. Yet, in comparison to the Druze, they have encountered far greater public resistance, for Jewish politicians had a rhetorical escape hatch. Arab rights, they often argued, were not sacrosanct, for those who did not fulfill their civic obligations (that is, military service) deserved less protection than those who had made the supreme sacrifice. In seeking to convince a wavering Knesset member to support the military administration in 1962, Ben Gurion protested, 'I have recognized all these years that rights are dependent on obligations . . . I do not understand why I may limit the freedom and steal the time of young Jewish men and women when they are in the army, but why it is forbidden to limit much less the freedom of those who do not serve in the army.'²¹ That same Labor functionary who advocated offering the Druze membership in the party justified the exclusion of other Arabs on similar grounds: 'I asked them [close Arab friends] how they could sit in the party central committee . . . next to a bereaved father or mother, next to a party member who had just returned from the front, next to a member who stands ready to leave the next day for reserve service, while they still do not fulfill this obligation' (Lin, 1970).

Faced with claims framed in liberal terms, Jewish leaders had a response at the ready, evading the rhetorical dead-end into which Christians and Muslims might have hoped to maneuver them. For decades, this rhetorical move has frustrated Arab efforts to attain first-class citizenship. As one Arab activist recently complained, 'They are trying to link our rights as citizens to performing military service. That's not how a real democracy works' (quoted in Schechter, 2003). Christian and Muslim claimants have long remained mired in a framing contest, unable to persuade or rhetorically coerce Jewish politicians.²²

Alternative Explanations How else might one explain the relative success of the Druze in attaining increments of Israeli effective citizenship? The most intuitive answer would attribute this outcome to the distribution of material resources. But the Druze's potential voter base has been tiny, their per capita income has remained relatively low, they have historically eschewed violent confrontation with the authorities, and they have often had difficulty creating and sustaining effective lobbying organizations (Firro, 1999). By all standard measures of political power, the Druze should have been less successful than other Arabs, not more so.

A second alternative would invert the first. Precisely because the Druze were so small, so weak, and so moderate, Israel could countenance their inclusion in the IDF and grant them some modicum of effective citizenship without threatening the state's Jewish identity. Had the Druze's population been as large as Israel's Christian or Muslim communities, concessions would have been unthinkable. The Druze's small size made them an attractive target for cooptation (Lustick, 1980). But if this argument were correct, presumably the state should have flung its doors wide open, for the costs would have been negligible and the propaganda advantages substantial. In fact, however, while Jewish decision-makers readily offered rhetorical concessions to the Druze, they resisted implementation: 'To say that if the ears were open, things were done — there is a difference' (Toledano, 2000). The Druze made tangible progress, but they fought hard for those increments of meaningful citizenship. Nor did the Druze act like a model coopted minority. They were not content with petty favors, but rather became deeply dissatisfied with their status and continually presented Jewish leaders with difficult and uncomfortable choices.

A third alternative would posit that Israel's conquest of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 and the addition of a large, politicized Palestinian population gave Jewish politicians incentives to grant Druze citizens' demands so as to prevent the Palestinization of the Druze community. Presumably, however, they faced far greater incentives to accommodate the much larger Christian and Muslim citizen populations, whose members had not yet openly allied with the Palestinian national cause. Nevertheless, the Israeli establishment remained highly resistant to Christian and Muslim claims-making. This argument thus has difficulty accounting for the divergent patterns in Israel's relations with its various Arab communities after 1967 — a difficulty not faced by the mechanism of rhetorical coercion.

A fourth alternative account would attribute the Druze anomaly to their predilection for *taqiyya*, or the art of concealment.²³ Long viewed as heretics by their Muslim neighbors, the Druze have historically sought to shield themselves from persecution by hiding their religious observances. With regard to politics, this ultra-pragmatic doctrine prescribes neutrality when possible and 'bandwagoning' — allying with the likely victor — when necessary (Layish, 1985). One would thus have expected the Druze to avoid challenging stronger parties, but in fact the Druze displayed a rebellious streak during Ottoman and European colonial domination of the region. Despite a long history of communal tension, they made common cause with their fellow Arabs in the struggle for Lebanese autonomy early in the 20th century. And, frustrated that one foreign ruler had simply replaced another, their leadership initiated a nationalist revolt against the French in the mid-1920s — with disastrous consequences (Tauber, 1993a, 1993b; Firro, 1999). The Druze were not proto-nationalists, but they were at times willing to set aside intra-Arab differences, compelling one to ask why they

did not cast their lot with other Arabs in Israel in the decades after 1948. *Taqiyya* is obviously of little help in answering this question. Equally important, it lacks analytical bite. The doctrine is so flexible that it is less an explanation for Druze behavior than a tidy description of it.

Rhetorical Coercion in International Politics

The Druze's success in compelling Jewish Israeli politicians to grant them a modicum of first-class citizenship illustrates nicely the operation of rhetorical coercion. Although this single case study cannot of course prove that the mechanism is generalizable, we view rhetorical coercion as among the set of 'widely operating explanatory mechanisms that combine differently and therefore produce different outcomes in one setting or another' (McAdam et al., 2001: 13–14). The Druze case suggests the applicability of rhetorical coercion to domestic politics, but is the mechanism operative in the international arena? Extending the earlier theoretical discussion leads to the conclusion that rhetorical coercion is more likely as social ties in political communities, domestic and even international, grow increasingly extensive and dense. On the whole, however, rhetorical coercion will operate less effectively and less frequently in international settings.

Key factors highlighted by the model are often present in international relations: state leaders speak to international audiences, they are sensitive to those audiences' reactions, and justificatory speech acts are prevalent. Indeed, while not systematically elaborating the mechanism's dynamics, others have shown rhetorical coercion to be of critical explanatory importance in such divergent contexts as Cold War crisis bargaining (Bially Mattern, 2004), intra-Arab alliance dynamics (Barnett, 1998), eastward enlargement of the European Union and NATO (Fierke and Wiener, 1999; Schimmelfenig, 2004), and Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev's proposals for nuclear disarmament (Evangelista, 2001). Yet even these examples suggest the limits of rhetorical coercion in international politics.

Rhetorical coercion, like other forms of political communication, is premised on a political community that shares at least some understandings of the boundaries of acceptable discourse. The more tightly linked the community, the greater the possibilities for rhetorical coercion. Thus it is not surprising to find this mechanism primarily operative among regional groupings with relatively strong requirements for legitimation. The Soviet Union had long legitimated its leadership of the communist bloc by casting itself as the true force for global peace, and its routine calls for nuclear disarmament sustained that claim; Soviet generals could not publicly dispute Gorbachev's proposal without simultaneously undercutting Soviet authority among communist regimes. Similarly, Egypt had, under Nasser, positioned itself as the leader of the Arab world

based on a pan-Arab discourse that represented Israel as its inherently opposed Other; Nasser reluctantly accepted the risk of war with Israel in 1967 because deviating from the norms of Arab nationalist discourse would have imperiled Egypt's status as the spokesman for Arab nationalism and might have jeopardized his regime's stability. Finally, the European Union, the most tightly bound regional arrangement on the globe today, could not have denied membership to consolidated democracies in Eastern Europe without contradicting the community's legitimating discourse which had intertwined the European concept with liberal democracy; to have vetoed or even vocally opposed eastward enlargement would have challenged the basis for community and threatened individual members' credibility.

Such dynamics thus depend on the strength and density of the ties binding the community's members, and such ties vary substantially across the international system.²⁴ Where such ties are strong and dense — that is, *within* such regional groupings of states, where international anarchy (as even realists might concede) is most attenuated — rhetorical coercion remains distinctly possible. The cosmopolitan dream of a 'global public' remains today just that, although there are emerging global standards of legitimacy in several arenas and increasingly robust mechanisms through which norm violators might be held accountable (Grant and Keohane, 2005). Where such ties are weak and sparse — as in relations *across* such regional groupings and as in the many arenas lacking shared bases for legitimation — rhetorical coercion will be far more difficult. As the metaphor of the two-level game implies, political elites in such circumstances are likely to be engaged with and responsive to multiple and different audiences simultaneously, and these audiences are unlikely to share a single conception of what rhetorical moves are acceptable and appropriate. The more complex the social environment, the greater the opportunities for actors to evade the consequences of rhetorical interchange, and thus the more imposing the obstacles to rhetorical coercion. Where such ties have never existed or have been ruptured — perhaps as a consequence of the limits of communications technologies or perhaps as a result of enduring interstate rivalry — communication (including rhetorical coercion) is impossible, and diplomacy is a dialogue of the deaf.

As a consequence, it is not the imposing capacity of foreign publics, let alone some elusive global public, to sanction state action that makes rhetorical coercion potentially successful on the international scene. When rhetorical coercion is operative internationally, the critical punishing agent is more often a domestic audience prepared to exact costs for violations of standards of rhetorical appropriateness. While foreigners have disapproved of American unilateralism in recent years, it is not clear that this opposition has driven their governments' policies (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2005), and while anti-Americanism has unquestionably been prevalent, its political consequences

appear to have often been exaggerated (Keohane and Katzenstein, 2006). The George W. Bush administration could dismiss foreign opposition to the Iraq War, particularly because cooperation on matters of joint concern such as trade and terrorism (narrowly construed) continued seemingly unabated. But the American public's increasing disenchantment with the war has been a far greater cause for concern for the administration, as it is this public that might be directly brought into a political contest over the war — a political contest within which rhetorical coercion is far more likely to operate.²⁵

Conclusion

Machiavelli famously advised that 'a ruler need not have all the positive qualities ...but he must seem to have them... He must seem, to those who listen to him and watch him, entirely pious, truthful, reliable, sympathetic, and religious' (Machiavelli, 1994: 55). Realists, not inaccurately, read Machiavelli as warning against allowing moral considerations to impede actions necessary for the pursuit of political power. But, as coercive constructivists, we would add that these lines imply that social identity has an effect on social and political outcomes, regardless of whether or not the actor internalizes the components constituting this identity. A ruler pursuing policies incapable of public justification would find her path strewn with numerous practical obstacles. This lack of rhetorical resources might even compel her to alter her course of action. In accord with other constructivists, we aver that social norms and social identities matter.²⁶ In accord with political realists, we argue that whether or not a social actor has internalized a particular set of normative principles is not causally relevant. In accord with the broader cultural turn in the social sciences, we combine these positions by focusing on public language, on how normative principles are deployed in public debate, and by exploring the causal impact this deployment can have on what people say and consequently on what they do — not on the impossibly elusive question of what they believe.

Our model of rhetorical coercion can helpfully capture the dynamics of *framing contests*, when there is controversy about how an issue should be characterized, and of *implication contests*, when narrower (yet no less important) battles are waged over the consequences of some accepted framing. Our analysis draws attention to two key conditions affecting the applicability of the model. First, rhetorical coercion can occur only when the public is a party to the debate or when the claimant can credibly threaten to involve the audience. Second, not all structures of discourse are equally conducive to rhetorical coercion. This mechanism is more likely to operate when these structures are relatively restricted (and constraining) than when they are relatively loose (and permissive). Furthermore, our model cannot illuminate the process of rhetorical contest in two circumstances: first, when an opponent accepts a claim

without argument, and, second, when an opponent accepts the implications of an argument but not its terms. We contend, however, that much social and political life lies within our model's scope.²⁷

In short, this article seeks to invigorate the study of political rhetoric — but in a fashion relatively unfamiliar to recent debates in international and comparative politics. We argue that rhetorical contestation shapes policy outcomes and that the approaches most common in these subfields miss a significant portion of political and social reality. We further suggest that it is possible to make causal claims without trespassing into the murky waters of subjective motivation and without relying on problematic mechanisms like persuasion. Many IR constructivists would be comfortable with the first of these claims, many realists and students of political culture with the second, few from either camp with their combination. This article has sought to demonstrate that their conjunction is both logically sustainable and potentially productive.

Notes

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1. Definitions of coercion — in both political science and everyday usage — typically focus on the use of material force and the manipulation of material costs and benefits to alter behavior, but they too tightly link the instrument of influence with the nature of influence. The defining feature of coercion is (non-consensual) compliance: as David Baldwin (1985: 38) puts it, 'The basic intuitive notion of coercion refers to a high degree of constraint on the alternative courses of action available to ... the target of an influence attempt.' Coercion, therefore, may take any number of forms — including the rhetorical — that restrict the target's choices.
2. Research on framing is voluminous; for good overviews, see Druckman (2001); Kinder (1998). Scholarship on political communication is immense, and space constraints require that we focus on only a portion of that rich literature.
3. This is true as well of the literature in social psychology on persuasion: the effects of 'message variables' often boil down to attributes of the recipient rather than of the message itself. See Petty and Wegener (1998: especially 349–56); Wood (2000).
4. Note that this characterization is largely focused on mainstream American constructivism. European constructivists (reflected in collections such as Debrix, 2003; Fierke and Jorgenson, 2001) have eschewed the 'norms versus

material interests' problematic and have instead embraced a linguistic focus that is not dissimilar to our own.

5. Among those drawing on social psychology are Checkel (2001); Crawford (2002: 26–7); and Johnston (2001). Others have remained agnostic as to how persuasion operates (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). We limit ourselves here to discussion of the Habermasian version of the persuasion argument, since in our judgment it is the most clearly articulated mechanism. For an alternative treatment of Habermas in international relations, see Mitzen (2005).
6. On the lack of evidence of changed minds in Crawford (2002), see Dessler and Owen (2005: 602).
7. We are grateful to Kathryn Sikkink for helpful discussion on this point.
8. For treatments closer to our own, see, among others, Barnett (1998); Bially Mattern (2004); Fierke (1998); Goddard (2006).
9. Such language even slips on occasion into our own case study, for the conventions of historical writing insist on subjects who possess agency, articulate goals, and pursue motives. The Foucauldian alternative — interrogating the central discursive formations — might help us escape this trap, but it would come at the cost of the narrative form, which better captures the tensions and surprising reversals of actual political contest. Such traces of motivational language are consequently inevitable, but they should not cloud or draw attention from the rhetorical dynamics themselves. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing us on this point.
10. The distinction between persuasion and coercion as modes of political influence is by no means original, but our conceptualization of rhetorical contestation as potentially coercive is more unusual. Scholars, especially those working within a psychological framework, sometimes treat persuasion as synonymous with all attitude change, citing even nuclear deterrence as an example. In contrast, we define coercion as the imposition of constraint on choice, whereas normative persuasion seeks ideally to bypass choice. Both coercion and persuasion may lead the target to assent, but the coerced target merely complies, while the persuaded target consents. Put differently, persuasion speaks to change in preferences, while coercion seeks to alter the social environment confronting an actor while leaving preferences untouched.
11. For a related discussion of 'realist constructivism', see Jackson and Nexon (2004).
12. Note that 'acceptance' here does not imply agreement, but refers only to O's public reaction to C's argument.
13. While we make no strong assumptions regarding the *content* of the actors' motives, the model does rely on the thin, almost trivial, assumption that actors are fundamentally strategic — that they pursue policies that they believe will further their goals (McAdam et al., 2001).
14. For related arguments, see Cruz (2000); Spillman (1995); Steinberg (1999).
15. In this stylized model, we presume that both actors must legitimate their stance in the eyes of the *same* audience, but the reality of both international and domestic politics is often more complicated. Speakers in both arenas may be playing to entirely different audiences or may be competing to define which audience is in fact relevant. The dynamics of such contestation are not well addressed by

this paper and will be taken up in future articles. We are grateful to anonymous reviewers for raising this question.

16. This is not infrequently the case when O is a government whose commands are implemented by a secretive bureaucracy. A potential weakness of rhetorical coercion is its implication that rhetorical concessions translate smoothly into policy change. O may renege on its commitments, particularly during implementation when there may be little need for public justification. While such breakdowns are likely, we maintain that violations will prove difficult to sustain should C hold O's feet to the public fire in a new episode of rhetorical contestation.
17. Superiors often do not explain their logic to subordinates, and exasperated parents often tell children, 'Just do as I say!' In such circumstances, rhetorical contestation is not likely to be effective. We are grateful to Robert Jervis for pointing this out.
18. For more on the logic of rhetorical coercion, see Jackson (2006); Krebs (2006).
19. For a more extensive treatment of these cases, see Krebs (2006: Chs 3–5).
20. Military service occupies so prominent a site in the Israeli cultural complex that 'civic virtue has been constructed in terms of and identified with military virtue' (Helman, 2000: 320).
21. Ben Gurion to M.K. Yizhar, 12 February 1962, State Archives (Jerusalem, Israel), Office of the Prime Minister Files, C 6304/1086.
22. Christians and Muslims could not control the rhetorical playing field, but they nevertheless made significant gains in the mid-1980s thanks to their raw political power. After the 1977 breakdown of Labor Zionism's stranglehold over the political system, the electoral competition tightened, and the Arab population was actively wooed. Candidates from across the political spectrum stumped for the first time in Arab villages, and the major parties committed themselves to improving the Arabs' lot.
23. A different version of the cultural argument, which Druze and Jews alike have relished, argues that the two peoples are natural allies as fellow minorities in the Muslim Middle East. But the assertion of a natural Jewish–Druze affinity is propagandistic rhetoric that has, since the founding of Israel, served the interests of both Israeli officials and Druze leaders. Druze religious texts are typically dismissive of other religions, and while particularly disparaging of Islam — the dominant regional religious tradition responsible for their oppression — they are hardly admiring of Jews. See Parsons (2001: 70–6); and Dana (2003: 43–51).
24. As this formulation suggests, we believe that network analysis provides a more useful set of tools for grasping such variation than do metaphors regarding, for example, the 'thickness' of the 'normative environment' (Barnett, 1998: 39). For an insightful application of network logic to imperial dynamics, see Nexon and Wright (forthcoming).
25. Consider also the examples discussed earlier. That audiences in the communist bloc outside the USSR might have questioned Soviet leadership or that Arab elites might have challenged Egypt's did matter, but primarily *indirectly*. Had the Soviet generals or Nasser anticipated that domestic audiences would respond to the prospective loss of regional or ideological authority with collective indifference, they would have perceived themselves to be operating with a far freer hand. That domestic audiences were sensitive to their country's standing in the relevant

community of nations, and were believed to be prepared to act on that basis, was crucial in these cases.

26. The language of identity has not figured explicitly in this article, but it is our view that rhetoric and identity are inseparable. Identity is not the mental property of an individual, nor can collective identity be apprehended by aggregating the attitudes of the constituent individuals. Rather, identities are necessarily relational, and thus they are forged *through* the process of their articulation. Political communities are defined by a common rhetorical lexicon and coalesce around particular rhetorical configurations.
27. Our model cannot, however, capture the long-term processes through which new commonplaces enter the rhetorical space.

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