

Abstract

The United States of America emerged from the dissolution of bipolar Cold War order as the sole superpower, able to pursue its foreign policy goals uncontested. Even though war is generally considered negative practice in American ideational context, American presidencies are able to garner public support for their military adventures. Use of rhetoric is deemed central in the process of convincing the public of legitimacy and necessity of war. The thesis therefore aims at exploration of the language American presidencies use to justify military involvements in war-affirmative speech acts, represented by public presidential addresses. For each respective conflict, one address has been singled out, while in total eight addresses, four by Republican and four by Democratic Presidents have been examined. These selected speeches represent a data set. The matter is then explored in several contexts throughout the period of 1989-2011. Methodically, the Qualitative Content Analysis framework is being used, in order to find evidence in form of defined set of codes. Principally the thesis assesses the employment of just war theory frame by American presidencies in the examined period as a mean of legitimating a conflict. Second, the thesis explores usage of polarizing imagery throughout selected speech acts. It then proceeds to evaluate the development of war rhetoric on a timeline, as well as to analysis of the role of partisanship in usage of pre-defined categories of war legitimating speech. The thesis establishes, that just war framework is a deeply embedded concept when it comes to war legitimation, used by all examined presidential addresses. Importantly, the research points out partisan differences in employment of just war criteria - Democratic presidencies are more likely to champion multilateralism and global governance, while Republican ones accentuate self-sustainability and exclusive partnerships. The research as such contributes to understanding of how rhetoric is used in order to convince the public of war legitimacy in American context.