

## **Symbols and Advocacy**

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## **ABSTRACT**

We study the decision to “go symbolic” using a random sample of public policy debates in Washington, DC. Previous studies of the use of symbols in the policy process often have been based on studies of highly symbolic debates. We approach the question from the perspective of the individual policy advocate: Should they “go symbolic” or not? What are the likely and possible reactions of others in the policy process? We identify five scenarios: complete rhetorical victory through symbolic appeals (the typical focus in the literature); emotionally charged stalemate with powerful symbols used on many sides (also common in the literature); symbols being ignored; symbols being countered by technical and feasibility arguments; and the strategic avoidance of symbols. Each of these scenarios suggests a different outcome for an advocate, and only the first is typically preferred. There are many reasons to avoid symbolic arguments. Further, there are specific conditions under which symbolic appeals are most likely, and these differ for those proposing a policy change from those attempting to protect a status-quo position. We develop a number of hypotheses designed to explore the use of symbolic arguments and we provide relevant illustrations from a random sample of issues that are part of the advocacy and public policymaking project.

## Introduction

- Routine screening of all infants for hearing disorders is good for America's families. It will save untold millions of dollars in mis-diagnosed learning disorders, reduce educational costs, remove unneeded stress from thousands of families each year, and promote early childhood development.
- Reducing the sulfur content of gasoline is the quickest way to improve automobile emissions standards and therefore to promote the public health through cleaner air.
- Strong standards for ergonomics in the workplace will help America's workers and avoid thousands of injuries each year, especially those due to repetitive stress. America's workers deserve protection against needless and avoidable injuries.
- A moratorium on road construction in the national forests should be maintained because these are our last refuges. America's forests must be protected from the aggressive and irresponsible timber companies too long supported by a Forest Service completely captured by industry.
- Maintaining trade sanctions against Cuba is our only hope in denying Castro the ability to export the resources of the Cuban people. The Castro dictatorship is on its last legs; maintaining sanctions will ensure its immediate collapse.

Lobbyists use highly symbolic arguments every day in Washington. It is tempting to believe that the strategic use of a carefully chosen symbolic argument, linking one's policy alternative to such unassailable values such as helping children, promoting clean air, protecting the environment, promoting liberty, fighting against arbitrary actions by faceless bureaucrats, encouraging the spread of democratic reforms overseas, fostering domestic security, furthering civil rights and equal opportunity for all Americans, or promoting the public's health can carry the day in any Washington debate. How can such arguments be countered? Which elected officials want to stand in the way of families, democracy, peace, safety, liberty, equal rights, or the public health?

Many authors have noted the importance of symbolic arguments in the policy process, but few have laid out the trade-offs associated with their use. We have little idea of how

prevalent such arguments are in the Washington policy process; the types of issues in which they are most likely to be used; whether these arguments are more often used proactively or in a defensive posture; the conditions under which these arguments are effective; the degree to which these arguments are countered by other symbolic arguments, with technical or cost-based rebuttals, or merely ignored by the other side; or whether symbolic arguments are made in concert with or instead of other types of arguments. In this paper we explore the opportunities for and pitfalls of the use of symbolic arguments in the Washington policy process. We note the range of uses of symbolic versus other types of arguments and we focus on developing hypotheses about the strategic choice to “go symbolic.” While many have written about the use of symbols in politics and in the policy process in particular, there have been few systematic treatments of the question of what happens when a policy advocate attempts to go symbolic. We explore questions about the use of symbolic appeals in detail using a large and systematic new resource for the study of lobbying and advocacy: the advocacy and public policymaking project.<sup>1</sup>

### **Previous Studies of Symbolic Arguments**

A voluminous literature describes the importance of symbols in politics, and their use and misuse by decision makers and advocates to achieve public policy goals (Cobb and Elder 1983; Cobb and Ross 1997; Edelman 1971, 1988; Elder and Cobb 1983; Hirschman 1991). Symbols and symbolic rhetoric most certainly play a significant role in engaging the public’s attention to issues, in shaping the terms of debate about an issue, and in the array of solutions proposed to address an issue. Although there is no single definition of what constitutes symbolic rhetoric or

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symbolic arguments, such arguments are commonly portrayed as relatively simple, affect-eliciting narratives that involve accessible images or appeals to widely accepted social values (Carmines and Stimson 1980; Cobb and Kuklinski 1997; Edelman 1971). By their very nature, then, these arguments are difficult to contest.

Much of William Riker's work on heresthetics and issue-definition (for examples see 1984, 1986, 1988, 1996) focuses on the strategic use of symbols by strategic policy entrepreneurs as they attempt to introduce new dimensions into a policy debate. For Riker, introducing destabilizing new dimensions of debate is one of several possible routes to political victory (though not the only one, to be sure). He notes the ability of skillful policy entrepreneurs to manipulate the terms of a political debate, and many of his examples have at their core the effective use of symbols as leaders attempt to bring attention to certain dimensions of debate rather than others.

Certainly, we can conclude that symbolic appeals often play an important role in the policy debate and that these appeals often can be difficult to contest. But there is no reason to conclude that symbols are universally effective. Symbolic arguments often fail; we should not assume that they are always or even most often effective. Yet by focusing predominantly on situations in which symbolic appeals are effective, research on lobbying and policy advocacy conveys an impression that the crafting of a symbolic argument offers a clear route to achieving policy success (see, for example, Cobb and Ross 1997 and McKissick 1997). Efforts to specify and test under what conditions these appeals are used and are more or less effective have not been undertaken.

It is particularly surprising that little work has been done to explain under what conditions symbolic arguments are used and under what conditions they are effective given

current understandings of lobbying and advocacy. A wide range of recent studies, indeed a growing research consensus, focuses on the importance of costly information, technical expertise, and scientific consensus in affecting the terms of a policy debate and the reactions of decision-makers to the appeals of lobbyists.

Several studies focus on lobbying in terms of the provision of “costly information.” Portrayals of lobbying as diverse as Austen-Smith and Wright (1994) and Hall (2000) are rooted in the notion that the provision of costly information by lobbyists to decision makers is the currency of the lobbying exchange. If lobbyists act to mobilize allies to serve as legislative agents on their behalf (Hall and Wayman 1990; Hall 2000), lobbyists would need to offer more than symbolic claims to encourage legislative allies to devote time and effort to an issue. If an organization is depending on legislative allies to work effectively on its behalf, that organization will attempt to illustrate how taking action for the group will help legislators achieve their electoral, policy, or procedural goals using costly information such as how a proposal is likely to impact different districts, who will pay the costs, and what those costs will be. Symbolic information would probably do little to sustain or subsidize an ally’s efforts (Gandy 1980; Hall 2000). Similarly, both Ainsworth (1993) and Austen-Smith and Wright (1994) argue that legislators are more likely to listen to and perceive as credible lobbyists’ messages when they present information that is costly for a lobbyist to collect. Although the attachment of a symbol to a cause may require effort, a symbolic appeal is unlikely to be perceived as conveying information that would be hard for the legislator to acquire on his or her own. Symbols, in short, are not costly, and there are strong theoretical reasons to expect lobbyists to focus their efforts on more specific arguments rather than on symbolic appeals, at least in many circumstances.

Another set of studies focuses on the role of technical and scientific information in the process. Here we ignore the large literature on scientific policymaking to focus on a simpler point in the literature: the importance of policy analytic information such as cost-benefit studies, cost and revenue estimates, and other bits of technical, rather than symbolic, information. It is not enough simply to have a good symbol; these must be seconded by good evidence about impact, cost, and other relevant factors. Peterson (1995), for example, has shown that members of Congress and their staff can and do avail themselves of policy-analytic knowledge in an effort to reduce their uncertainty about the programmatic implications of legislative decisions. Although no one, including Peterson, would argue that policy-analytic information is easy to use in the context of congressional policy making, or that it is brought to bear in an objective way on the formation of policy options, it is true that Congress has created and fostered institutions such as the CRS and CBO that can provide its members with this type of information. In addition, Stone (1989) argues that causal theories linked with “widespread and deeply held cultural values” as well as those rooted in scientific evidence may be beneficial to policy advocates who seek to have their ideas guide public policy decisions. Esterling (2002) actually takes up the question of when an advocate is likely to bear the costs of conducting research and making a research-based argument. He argues that these costs are likely to be borne when issues are “non-ideological, conflictual, partisan, and publicly salient” (2002, 28). According to Esterling, these are precisely the same conditions that are conducive to political deliberation. Clearly, then, a wide range of scholars have focused on the importance of technical information in the policy process; symbols matter, but there is little reason to expect that they matter alone. Few studies have done what we propose here, however: specify the conditions under which symbolic, as opposed to other types of arguments, will be used.

Although the literature does not directly speak to the questions we pose about the conditions under which symbolic arguments are used and when they are effective and ineffective, it can inform our approach to that question. For example, the literature offers both implicit and explicit linkages between the utility of symbolic arguments and the visibility of policy issues. For instance, because symbolic appeals require little or no explanation of underlying issues or relationships between events, they are more likely to be taken up by the media, and thus more likely to make their way into the public consciousness. Indeed, a number of studies suggest that groups go symbolic in order to increase attention to their concerns and to mobilize their supporters (Cobb and Elder 1983; Terkildsen, Schnell, and Ling 1998). West and Loomis (1999) are more direct about the relationship between the arguments of advocates and issue visibility, predicting that the scope of conflict and the number of interests affected by an issue shape the type of narratives that will be used to define that issue. “As the scope of the conflict broadens, narratives become less complex and their meaning more frequently conveyed by metaphor and symbol” (West and Loomis 1999, 40-41).

Relatedly, both McKissick (1997) and Cobb and Ross (1997) argue that advocates should be expected to rely as much as possible on arguments that appeal to valence issues because they invoke images and ideas that are hard to oppose—they mute the opposition. Further, according to McKissick, they minimize an advocate’s uncertainty about the reactions his or her arguments will elicit. If these expectations are correct and if advocates use arguments strategically in order to minimize opposition and maximize support for their policy objectives, advocates who are active on issues that engender diffuse or unorganized opposition (which is unlikely on a highly visible issue) might see few benefits in using symbolic appeals. A symbolic appeal may not be sufficient to build a coalition of support even if no vocal opposition exists. A great many



problems can be linked with images and ideas that are commonly and easily understood, but agenda space is limited so an appeal of this type cannot be expected, on its own, to generate sufficient support. At the same time, symbols and other appeals to values may become important when support exists but is latent. That is, symbols may work to draw the attention of the uninterested rather than convert those who are paying attention to change their opinions on matters of policy (Cobb and Elder 1983). In fact, many advocates face “impediments” to action rather than active “opposition” to their ideas. Impediments are such things as diffuse lack of interest in the proposal, simple concern with any costly proposals (e.g., their impact on the federal deficit or tax rates), but no specific opposition to the particulars of what is being proposed. Often times advocates seek things that no one else actively opposes with a particular rival proposal, but which nonetheless cannot be achieved because of the various impediments to action that are strewn across the legislative highway. One of these, having diffuse rather than specific opposition to overcome, may inhibit the usefulness of symbolic appeals. These are simply not enough; in these issues no one disputes the goal, they simply do not share any sense of importance or urgency about it.

Our review of the literature concerning how visibility and opposition affect argument effectiveness shows a number of expectations, but these are quite imprecise; further, they are derived from studies that focus selectively on cases where symbolic arguments are effective. Moreover, in most of these studies the unit of analysis is the issue not the argument or advocate (cf. Baumgartner 1989; Kollman 1998; McKissick 1997). Thus, these projects can usefully explain and demonstrate various aggregate-level implications of using symbolic arguments, including how these arguments affect the level of conflict in a debate, who participates in policy decisions, and the salience of a debate. A much weaker foundation exists to examine when and

why individual lobbyists attempt to link symbols to issues. As we explain below, our project allows us to contribute significantly to this foundation both by identifying the conditions that are associated with the use (both effective and ineffective) of symbolic appeals, and examining the likelihood that a typical advocate would encounter these circumstances in a typical policy debate.

### **Theoretical Approach**

We consider the question of attempting to link an issue with a symbolic argument from the perspective of a policy advocate. Should they try? What are the possible outcomes of such an effort? Let us consider several possible outcomes. For simplicity, we consider the process where one advocate “A” (or group of advocates) has the choice of going symbolic or not. After this first move, then others involved in the issue (“B”) may react. Several possible outcomes are possible:

- First, A may not go symbolic. The issue will not be linked to a symbol.
- Second, A may go symbolic and B may agree with the symbol chosen. The issue will become firmly linked to that symbol.
- Third, A may go symbolic and B may ignore A’s effort. The issue remains unattached to the symbol in spite of A’s efforts.
- Fourth, A may go symbolic and B may counter with a rival symbol. The issue becomes symbolically charged, but with competing symbols on more than one side.
- Fifth, A may go symbolic and B may counter with technical information disputing not the symbol, but the cost or feasibility of the proposal. Essentially, B grants the value of the goal, but disputes whether it can be achieved. The issue is not effectively linked to the symbol. B argues that the policy will not, in fact, lead to the valued goal everyone shares.

While this is a simplification, it is worth noting that two of the scenarios lead to a symbolic linkage and three do not. This suggests that symbolic appeals would be relatively rare in any random set of issues. Moreover, between the two symbolic outcomes, only one is

preferred by A. Outcome four, rival symbols, may in fact be an inferior outcome to outcome one, making no effort to introduce symbols into the debate in the first place.

Let us consider these scenarios in turn. For clarity and simplicity, we simply treat actor A as the first mover and allow B to represent all other actors in the process. In the real-world examples to follow, of course, A and B are sometimes multiple actors and they all are involved in the process simultaneously, not moving in any sequence. Indeed, most advocates most of the time are reacting to the arguments and developments created by forces outside of their control, at least in those salient cases that involve many advocates simultaneously (see Baumgartner and Leech 2001 on the large numbers of advocates involved in some policy debates; none can be said to control this process). Clearly, lobbyists must expect that rival advocates will react to their arguments; predicting the likely rebuttals to one's arguments, and knowing the strongest arguments that the other side might be able to use, is an important element of what an effective advocate does. This reactive and often defensive nature of the policy debate is rarely portrayed in the literature, creating an impression that lobbyists always act proactively with a symbolic appeal in order to mute the opposition. In fact, as we lay out in this paper, there are many other possible scenarios. Still, for the purpose of understanding the strategic dynamics of the actions and reactions of those involved in a policy debate, we can discuss them in terms of sequential moves with no loss of generality.

Let us start with scenario two; we will consider scenario one at the end. In scenario two, A goes symbolic and B accepts the symbol. In this case, the preferred policy alternative is successfully linked to an unassailable American value such as "saving the family farm," "enhancing international peace," or "fighting terrorism." In this best possible case, an initial effort to tie the policy with a symbol can lead to a cascade of support with no possible counter-

argument. This is the complete success scenario envisioned in much of the literature on lobbying and symbols. If one were able to produce these types of linkages, one would be powerful indeed. Clearly, whether or not these are the result of individual lobbying efforts, many policies are linked to such powerful valence positions that counter-arguments are extremely unlikely or ineffective. So complete dominance of the rhetorical field of maneuver is one possible outcome of the use of symbolic arguments.

In this complete-success scenario, it is worth noting that exogenous events can sometimes draw attention to powerful symbols, or serve a similar purpose as a new symbolic argument. Such attention-riveting events as the World Trade Center bombing of September 11, 2001 or the space shuttle disaster of February 1, 2003 are not merely symbolic, of course—these were real catastrophes, not just symbols. While they are real enough when they occur, these events can later become symbols for a broader issue as policy makers try to justify future proposals. Whether created by a real-world event or by the rhetorical use of symbols, some policies become firmly linked to widely shared goals such as fighting terrorism, promoting individual opportunity, or furthering public health. Linking a policy to such an unassailable goal, and convincing others that no other more contested value is also associated with the policy, is the focus of many policy advocates and government leaders. This is easier said than done, however.

The third scenario laid out above is that B ignores A's efforts to attach the policy to a symbolic touchstone. Not all issues are ripe for symbolic exploitation. In the cacophony that is the Washington policy process, many people claim to be promoting widely shared values; being seen by others as doing so requires getting their attention and overcoming their skepticism: not always an easy task. Whereas one might argue that the Medicare reimbursement rate for pathologists that screen Pap tests will affect women's access to these tests, few will be convinced

that screenings will cease in the absence of a rate increase. On such a technical financial matter, Members of Congress want to see more than just a statement that the policy furthers some general goal. They want to see cost estimates, evidence of voter or constituent concern, or other things besides only a good symbol. In other words, there is no reason to expect that every effort to link a policy to a symbol, however powerful, will be successful. Most efforts, in fact, may fail. They may be seen for what they are: strategic efforts by entrepreneurial policy advocates to manipulate the process. Since others involved in the Washington policy community were not typically born yesterday, they are often skeptical in accepting others' arguments about how a given subsidy program, higher reimbursement rate, or restrictive regulation may do more than simply add money to that group's collective income. (In the literature, the "success rate" of lobbyists' efforts to establish symbolic linkages is completely unknown; there are no studies of which we are aware that provide direct evidence on this question.)

It is worth noting that being ignored or discounted may be especially likely in low-cost, low-visibility issues, or other issues that involve a relatively small constituency. Sometimes cost and impact may be a benefit—a larger impact makes some symbolic claims more credible. One might think of the home mortgage deduction. Whereas many other special tax concessions were stripped away in the 1986 tax reform geared towards simplifying the tax code, this one remained firmly in place. Supporters of it had two strong sources of support: a symbolic linkage with the American dream of owning one's own home, and a massive financial impact on the construction and banking industries. While the cost to the federal government of the home mortgage deduction is enormous and while most other similar deductions were excised from the tax code in 1986, the large cost and financial impact of this policy may have helped rather than hindered the real estate interests intent on gaining a continued exemption for this special tax treatment for

home mortgages. Comparing the mortgage, banking, and construction industries, along with the voting block represented by those benefiting from the home mortgage deduction, with the doctors and technicians referenced in the previous paragraph may give an idea of why Members of Congress were more attuned to the symbolic value of home ownership than to that of protecting women's access to health services through Medicare. Few are probably opposed to insuring the widest possible access to these services in the abstract, but that simply is not enough to get a decision maker's attention. The threshold for attention in Washington is high.

Lobbyists and other advocates tied with large voting constituencies and massive financial resources have an easier time passing this threshold than such lobbyists as the College of American Pathologists, American Speech Language Hearing Association, National Association of Social Workers, National Association for the Mentally Ill, and others we have observed. When the American Motorcycle Association argues that access to roads in the national forests is a matter of liberty, this claim gets less attention than when the entire pharmaceutical industry lines up against some policy that they argue will erode profits or reduce incentives for research and development. The financial clout and electoral impact of the affected groups matter; this is not simply because of PAC contributions or any other single reason. It has to do with getting attention. Symbols alone, especially when wielded by politically inconsequential interests, are not enough.

The fourth scenario in our set of possible outcomes in the strategic decision of going symbolic is even worse than being ignored: Other advocates may point to even more potent symbols working against one's preferred outcome, making compromise and marginal improvement in the status quo more difficult. This scenario is akin to the process of "non-contradictory argumentation" described by Baumgartner and Jones (1993) in which various sides

of a debate point to symbolic values that are widely shared and which support opposing policy options. Rather than engage directly in challenging the other side's definition of the issue, opposing sides simply ignore each other, promoting rival but non-contradictory symbols. Jobs and economic growth are widely shared values, as is saving the environment. A debate on these terms is non-contradictory because neither side appears to be contesting whether the policy will achieve the goal the other side argues; rather, each side simply points to additional goals.

While no one taken seriously in the United States is opposed to the combat against terrorism, and none would condone appeasement of hostile foreign powers, few policies are or can be linked *only* to these values without also raising questions about civil liberties, privacy protection, opposition to racial profiling, due-process rights, or other cherished values.

Americans support peace, naturally. But they also value their constitutional liberties and freedom from government intrusion. When policy debates occur on these lines, both sides of the debate have powerful and widely shared symbolic if not constitutional touch-stones that can be used to counter the arguments of the other side. Whereas A might argue that a policy enhances the public health, to which no one is opposed, B may say that it is merely a budget-busting example of ever expanding government intervention in the private workplace. Stalemate is always a possibility in an argument that becomes linked to powerful symbols on more than one side.

Just as one side may argue that a given policy promotes international understanding by promoting free trade, opponents may argue that the country in question is an arms proliferator, a human rights abuser, an abortion-inducer and generally no target for American indulgence. Many debates in American politics feature powerful *competing* symbolic touch-stones on various sides of the debate. Gun control advocates and supporters of the gun industry each link their preferred views to widely shared symbols with which few Americans disagree. Family planning and anti-

abortion advocates similarly link their policy objectives with widely shared symbols of fairness, equality, women's rights, and morality. Clearly, one possible outcome stemming from the decision to go symbolic is that the other side goes symbolic as well and that both sides then harden into emotionally charged positions.

In fact, given the multidimensional nature of most complex public policies, it is hard to imagine issues that could not be linked with a competing more negatively-charged symbol than a policy advocate might prefer. The question is a practical or strategic one, not a theoretical one; theoretically, almost any issue could be linked to both good and bad symbols. The strategic question of concern to a policy maker is whether there is a set of policy advocates with the interest, the inclination, the skills, and the resources to link one's policy with a set of symbols and values that would be detrimental to the outcome. Considering the on-going nature of most policy issues within professional communities of experts, the decision to go symbolic by expanding the scope of discussion beyond the set of those normally involved may lead to an opposing effort to point out some more negative symbolic linkages that may be equally compelling to outsiders. In any case, the public debate surrounding a given policy is not determined by proponents acting alone. The actions of one side must be expected to produce a predictable reaction by those on other sides of the debate.

The fifth scenario we lay out is A goes symbolic and B responds non-symbolically such as by contesting the cost or feasibility of the plan to reach the goal of the policy. Rather than contest the value of the goal, or propose a rival symbol also associated with the policy, B argues on a more technical level. Essentially, this argument can be summarized as: "Much as all support the goal, unfortunately present technology simply does not allow its achievement" or "in spite of the value of the goal, the proposed policy will be pose serious implementation problems; there is



no proven technology or process to guarantee that the policy will actually lead to the outcome we all desire.” No competing symbolic argument is presented; rather the counter-argument is simply that the proposal will not reach its goal or that it will pose unintended consequences that no one wants.

The fifth scenario, technical counter-argument to a symbolic appeal, is quite different from scenario four, response with a rival symbol. In scenario five, B admits that the policy focuses on a worthwhile goal. If implementation or other problems could be overcome, this argument would no longer work. Acceptance by others of the goals one seeks to achieve is no winning formula. Technical arguments, feasibility and cost issues, may remain.

Given the possible outcomes from the decision to go symbolic, it is worth considering scenario one in some detail. A simply decides not to go symbolic in the first place. One point is especially important here. Issues are not automatically linked to a symbol; some policy advocate must make an effort to bring attention to the symbol. Considering that most issues most of the time are considered within the confines of professional communities of specialists already familiar with the arguments, symbolic arguments may not be paramount for a given issue at a given time. In fact, there are strong reasons for policy advocates to avoid the elevation of their issue to a symbolic level in the first place.

Whereas almost any policy could hypothetically be linked to some common public value such as promoting peace, security, economic growth, or the public’s health, few individual policy advocates will ever single-handedly make this occur. They may make little effort to link their policies to symbolic values unless and until they see that others are primed to accept these linkages. Certainly, if they expect that the outcome may be number three (derision), number four (stalemate), or number five (technical morass), they will prefer to avoid symbols in the first

place. Only scenario two ensures victory (though scenarios four and five have the potential for a hard-fought victory as well). Policy advocates have important investments in their own reputations and they work hard to maintain these. Ineffectual efforts to make symbolic arguments where all others in the community see only a money-grab can seriously erode credibility. Even worse, the decision to go symbolic in an area where the other side actually has better symbols to work with, a greater ability to mobilize public opinion, and a larger public relations machine may produce a long-lasting policy disaster with victory precluded and even marginal improvements to the status quo made less likely after a possible hardening of positions as each side engages in symbolic and emotional appeals.

In sum, there are some good reasons to go symbolic in the Washington policy process. There may be even more reasons to avoid it. We explore these dynamics in the pages to come.

## **Hypotheses and Expectations**

In the previous section we laid out five different scenarios ranging from no attempt to go symbolic to various reactions by B to A's attempt to inject symbolic elements into a given debate. These five scenarios suggest a number of specific hypotheses about the use and effectiveness of symbolic appeals. We outline some hypotheses in this section; we will test these and other hypotheses when our project and argument coding are complete.

We begin with a hypothesis about the prevalence of uncontested symbolic appeals.

**H1:** Most symbolic claims will be either contested or ignored rather than uncontested and accepted.

Because issues are multidimensional, and can therefore be linked to a variety of different appeals, we believe it is likely that an opposing advocate would be able to contest another advocate's claims. Whether by suggesting a powerful counter-symbol or by arguing against the feasibility of achieving a policy goal, advocates are unlikely to give in to accepting their

opponents' claims. This hypothesis runs counter to the impression offered by the literature that symbolic claims are readily used and effective. As noted above, we believe that this impression results from researchers' tendencies to focus solely on instances in which symbolic appeals are effectively employed.

Our next set of hypotheses outlines our expectations about when an advocate is likely (or not) to go symbolic. Consider first that changing policy is generally more difficult than maintaining the status quo so that proponents of change might be more willing to attempt a symbolic appeal. Although that attempt may fail (the symbol may be ignored, it may be countered with a non-symbolic appeal, etc.), so too could a non-symbolic appeal. To an advocate of change, the relatively difficulty of contesting a symbolic argument might make it especially appealing in the face of an otherwise low expectation of success. For status quo defenders, there may be less to gain from a symbolic appeal. Since maintaining the status quo is typically easier than changing it, opponents of change probably see little value in employing an argument that potentially could broaden the conflict. Instead, it would be more reasonable to contest whatever claim is made by proponents of change in a way that contains the conflict and minimizes the chances of drawing attention to a debate. Thus, our second hypothesis is:

**H2:** Symbolic appeals are more likely to be used proactively than by advocates who prefer to maintain the status quo.

The logic of conflict expansion also underlies the contention that symbolic appeals are commonly associated with very public and visible debates (West and Loomis 1999). Although this may be true, it is difficult to know whether these arguments lead to increased visibility or whether in the case of a visible or highly salient issue, advocates believe that deploying symbolic arguments is likely to increase their chances of success. It may take a relatively large and easily mobilized constituency to be associated with an issue for symbolic arguments to appear

acceptable. On an issue that involves a very limited population, the effort to link it to a symbol may strike many as dubious. Thus:

**H3:** Symbolic arguments are less likely to be used by advocates who represent small, geographically focused, and/or not readily mobilized constituencies than by advocates who represent large, geographically dispersed and/or easily mobilized constituencies.

Researchers also rely on the logic of conflict expansion when they suggest that symbols can be very effective in drawing the attention of those who are uninterested but not necessarily opposed to an advocate's policy goals (Cobb and Elder 1983). The benefits of using a symbolic argument may be substantial when an advocate believes that a large constituency is available to be mobilized or when a group feels it has effectively been shut out of a policy process. Even if a group expects to lose, it may engage in a symbolically charged conflict expansion strategy as a means of mobilizing its supporters. This leads to a fourth hypothesis:

**H4:** Symbolic arguments are more likely when one side of the debate can use the issue to mobilize supporters or to exploit the issue in a future election.

Aside from differences that we may observe across different types of advocates, the use and effectiveness of symbolic appeals also may vary across issues. For instance, the nature of the opposition an organization encounters or expects to encounter on an issue may affect the choice of argument. Many issues engender opposition that is diffuse and is complemented by minimal support. In these situations, the opposition or impediment an advocate faces derives not from a group, member of Congress, or the public but from a perception that the issue at stake is not linked with any problem, that it is not sufficiently important to address, or that it is not sufficiently worthwhile to fund. Advocates who are active on issues of this type should see few benefits in using symbolic arguments. Agenda space is limited so invoking symbolic appeals, exclusively, cannot be expected to generate support sufficient for action. The absence of a tangible and loud set of opponents brings no special credibility to the claims that are made by

advocates. In contrast, when a set of vocal organizations or members of Congress oppose an advocate's interests, symbolic arguments probably are perceived to be more effective at maximizing support because the presence of opposing voices (even if these voices are trying to define the issue space differently) will be seen as lending a sort of legitimacy or importance to the values invoked. Decision-makers are placed in a position of explaining a basis for their issue-related choices on something other than the symbolic dimension. Thus, our fifth hypothesis is:

**H5:** Symbolic arguments are less likely to be used by advocates that anticipate/encounter diffuse opposition to their claims than by advocates that anticipate/encounter organized opposition.

Symbolic arguments also may be viewed as questionable or ineffective when the issue is relatively low cost or has an otherwise limited scope. As we note in our description of the third scenario where a symbolic appeal is ignored, not all issues are ripe for symbolic exploitation. On matters of relatively limited scope, members of Congress want to see more than a statement that a policy furthers some general goal. They want to see cost estimates, evidence of voter or constituent concern, or other evidence that the matter merits their scarce time and attention. Our next hypothesis follows directly from this logic:

**H6a:** Symbolic arguments are less likely to be used in debates over issues that are small in scope/expense than they are in debates over issues that are large in scope/expense.

Relatedly, we can expect that symbolic appeals will be especially rare on issues that involve professional regulation or on other matters where bi-partisan debate is more highly valued. Specifically:

**H6b:** On issues of professional regulation, non-symbolic counter-arguments such as those based on technical, cost, or feasibility concerns, will be more common than symbolic ones. As a result, these issues are less likely than others to become highly charged symbolic debates.

In contrast to issues of relatively small scope, there is tremendous potential for a symbolic appeal to resonate when the affected constituency is large and readily mobilized for political action. Thus, we expect that symbolic rhetoric will be contested with other symbolic rhetoric when both (or multiple) sides of a debate are associated with large, dispersed, and potentially mobilizable constituents. That is:

**H7a:** Advocates are more likely to go symbolic on issues where more than one perspective represents a large, geographically dispersed, and easily mobilized constituency.

Moreover, when issues that affect large and active constituencies map onto existing partisan cleavages, conflict is likely to be heightened and communities of advocates polarized (Salisbury, et al. 1987). Under these conditions, symbolic appeals are likely to be perceived as an effective rhetorical strategy by both sides of the debate. Specifically, we expect:

**H7b:** Advocates are especially likely to use symbolic arguments on issues that involve a partisan cleavage.

Finally, although policy communities may contain diverse and often opposing advocacy coalitions that may espouse fundamentally opposing core belief structures (Jenkins-Smith, et al. 1991), communities of professionals working in a policy area may value their ability to develop a shared language and to work together towards solving policy problems. Thus, these divergent core beliefs will not be made apparent in symbolic arguments unless and until the issue emerges as a highly salient one. Our next hypothesis, then, is:

**H8:** Competing symbolic arguments will outnumber technical and other symbolic arguments only in the case of the most highly salient political issues.

These are not a complete set of all the possible hypotheses that could be developed about the use of symbolic arguments, but they give a sense of the types of relationships that we expect to be able to test.

## Research Design and Approach

To determine whether there is empirical support for our expectations we are collecting data as part of a broad, collaborative research project on advocacy and public policymaking. The primary data being collected for that project comes from over 300 interviews with Washington, DC-based policy advocates (e.g., representatives of organized interests, congressional staff, agency personnel) active on approximately one hundred randomly selected policy issues.<sup>2</sup>

The issues that comprise the study are being identified by a set of organizational advocates (i.e., the issue identifiers). These issue identifiers are selected at random from the list of organized interests that registered to lobby Congress in 1996, the last year for which these registration data are compiled in a usable format (see Baumgartner and Leech 1999). During the interviews, the issue identifier is asked to select the most recent issue he or she has spent time on, and to describe what he or she has done and what the organization is trying to accomplish on the issue.<sup>3</sup> Interviewees also are asked to narrate the appeals and arguments they make when they speak with others about the issue, to specify with whom they are talking about the issue, to describe the type of opposition they face, and to provide a variety of other information about their organizations.

Subsequent interviews are conducted with the main actors representing each of the distinct perspectives on the identified issues. Some issues (e.g., policies about building roads in

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<sup>2</sup> In addition, for each issue we study, we obtain from public sources relevant congressional floor statements, bills, hearing testimony, print and broadcast news stories, organizational press releases, and other similar items. The research, then, is therefore a combination of fieldwork and data collection from publicly available sources. The latter information for each issue is available on our web site (<http://lobby.la.psu.edu>).

<sup>3</sup> The question is: “Could you take the most recent issue you’ve been spending time on and describe what you’re trying to accomplish on this issue and what type of action are you taking to make that happen? The issue we talk about doesn’t have to be associated with a particular bill, rule, or regulation, and it doesn’t have to be an issue that’s been receiving coverage by the media—whatever issue you’ve most recently spent a significant amount of time on is fine so long as it involves the federal government.”

national forests) involve many additional interviews whereas other issues (e.g., funding for the Legal Services Corporation) involve very few. These personal interviews are being followed up by short telephone interviews roughly eighteen months after the initial interview is completed. The telephone interviews are used to determine whether any changes or developments have occurred in the appeals used, objectives sought, and targets selected by advocates. Attention also is given to the passage or definitive rejection of a policy action or proposal.

For this paper, we are interested in the arguments advocates use to gather support for their objectives. During the interviews advocates are asked:

So you're talking to these various people about why it's necessary to move forward on this issue [or, if relevant, why it's necessary to prevent something from happening, etc.]. What's the fundamental argument you use to try to convince people to do this?

Our objective in coding these policy arguments is threefold. First, we want to be able to distinguish arguments by their type (e.g., cost, implementation). Second, we want to distinguish arguments made about the status quo from those made about a new policy proposal. Third, we want to distinguish symbolic arguments from those that are not symbolic. To achieve these objectives, we need to define what constitutes an argument so that only arguments and not descriptive statements or other comments about an issue that are made during the course of the interview are coded. For our purposes, an argument is a statement that links a policy goal with either a justification for the policy or a discussion of its implications. In some cases, the linkage between the justification/implication is not explicit but can be gleaned from the context of the overall interview discussion. The primary point is that for a statement to be considered an argument, the policy consequences or rationale must at least be implicit in the discussion.

With this definition in hand, two coders independently read all of the interview summaries available for an issue. These coders highlight any arguments they encounter in the



summaries, distinguishing arguments offered by the advocate being interviewed from those arguments that are presented as being made by others who are interested in the issue.<sup>4</sup> Once all the arguments are identified, the coders (again acting independently) determine whether an argument pertains to the status quo or to a new policy proposal, and then assign it to a “type” category. Currently, we have defined fourteen types of arguments (plus one miscellaneous category), each with between two and six subtypes. These argument types are presented in Appendix 1. The types are intended to describe, generally, the content of the appeal.

Coders also determine which arguments are symbolic.<sup>5</sup> We define a symbolic argument as one that evokes a condition, characteristic or situation that is universally perceived as positive or negative. In this way, our definition is equivalent to the concept of a “valence issue” as defined by Stokes (1966) and used by McKissick (1995, 1997). According to Stokes, (1966) a valence issue is one for which there is consensus on a single alternative. This is in contrast to a “position issue” about which there are different alternatives that draw varying levels of support.<sup>6</sup> This definition captures at least one dimension of what researchers who study symbolic rhetoric have in mind in that it focuses on the impossibility of contesting the claim. Moreover, our definition reflects the idea of a shared understanding or response that is common to most

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<sup>4</sup> We are coding arguments made by interviewed advocates and the arguments mentioned as being made by others. To obtain the arguments of others we ask: What impediments do you face in achieving your objectives on this issue – in other words, who or what is standing in your way? What arguments do they make?

<sup>5</sup> When the coders have completed their independent work, they meet with a principal investigator to resolve any differences in coding.

<sup>6</sup> Stokes (1966) offers a contrived but very clear example to distinguish “position issues” from “valence issues.” He assumes that some part of the electorate wants something less than full prosperity for the country. If this were the case, and “the parties maneuvered for support by advocating different degrees of prosperity or distress, the issue of prosperity would be transformed from a valence issue to a position issue. That it is not such an issue in our politics is due solely to the fact that there is overwhelming consensus as to the goal of government action” (172).

descriptions of symbols (Cobb and Elder 1983; Elder and Cobb 1983), and it presumes an ease of understanding that also is commonly referenced in the literature (Carmines and Stimson 1980; Cobb and Kuklinski 1997). But ease of understanding is not sufficient for an argument to be symbolic. Rather the critical characteristic is a universal response. To underscore this distinction, consider two “easy” arguments that Cobb and Kuklinski (1997) identify as part of the debate over health care reform. One argument for a national health care plan states that such a plan “is the only way to prevent poor children from needlessly continuing to die or suffer from severe health problems” (118). A second argument in support of a national health care plan indicates that the plan “will stop drug companies from making obscene profits” (118). Although both are easy arguments to comprehend, only the first argument would be classified as symbolic according to our definition. There is no chance that an advocate opposed to national health insurance would claim that an alternative plan would lessen but not prevent children dying and suffering. However, it is quite reasonable to expect that an advocate would argue that an alternative allowed company profits to remain intact.

Importantly, appeals that we consider to be symbolic include those that evoke conditions, characteristics or situations that have an emotive component (e.g., protecting children’s health, feeding the hungry, and keeping neighborhoods safe) as well as those that do not (e.g., preventing bureaucratic fraud and abuse). But by focusing foremost on the difficulty of contesting a symbolic appeal, and by coding type of argument separately, we will be able to describe these appeals more completely. Specifically, we will be able to describe the frequency with which valence-type symbolic appeals and other types of appeals are made, and whether these appeals are couched in emotive or other terms (e.g., cost, efficiency).

Perhaps most important, our decision to focus on the valence aspect of a symbolic argument allows us to define precisely a concept that has eluded careful definition. Because researchers typically have been more interested in describing symbolic rhetoric and its uses rather than in distinguishing symbolic rhetoric from other types of appeals, it has been possible to offer fairly loose definitions of what constitutes symbolic rhetoric (Cobb and Ross 1997; Edelman 1971; Elder and Cobb 1983). For example, for Edelman (1971) “[A] symbol can be understood as a way of organizing a repertory of cognitions into meanings...symbols make messages assimilable by reducing their originality, the degree to which they complicate cognitions, and the degree to which they lessen ability to predict” (34). Elder and Cobb (1983) focus on political symbols which “provide a linkage between the individual and the larger social and political order. They mediate the relationship between the individual and social reality, structuring people’s perceptions and allowing them to find meaning in events beyond their own immediate experience. By the same token, symbols serve to constrain people’s vision and make them vulnerable to manipulation” (30). Although illustrative of the potency of symbols, neither of these definitions would allow us to validly or reliably distinguish a symbolic argument from a non-symbolic one.

### **Illustrative Examples**

Our argument coding is still in progress so we are not able, at present, to test systematically the hypotheses outlined above. Instead, we draw upon examples from our set of 100 issues to illustrate our ability to observe the characteristics of issues, advocates, and arguments that are contained in our set of hypotheses, and to describe more fully the conditions that tend to be associated with the use of symbolic and other types of arguments.

One of the patterns emerging through our coding of the argument data is the relative infrequency with which symbolic arguments are present. In this way, several of our issues clarify the circumstances under which symbolic appeals are unlikely. Among these are issues that target a relatively small population or one that is not easily mobilized to undertake political activity (H3). For example, in the case of efforts to achieve parity of coverage for the treatment of mental illness under Medicare, the advocates who support parity mentioned the difficulty of addressing a policy problem that affects a constituency that is reluctant to come forward politically for fear of being stigmatized as suffering from mental illness. Although policy issues related to mental illness are taken up by a number of professional associations (e.g., American Psychiatric Association), several champions in Congress (e.g., Senator Domenici, Representative Roukema, Representative Stark), and organizations of “consumers” (e.g., National Alliance for the Mentally Ill), these issues are not ones that touch the general public or stir up scores of constituents back home. And, when one observes the arguments made by advocates who support parity, there is no evidence that the appeals are tailored to mobilize those affected. Rather, without exception, the advocates supporting parity attempt to broaden support by making a variety of non-symbolic appeals: treating mental illness like other illnesses is cost-effective (“it reduces other health care costs” and “reduces costs to business from absenteeism, etc.”); isolating mental illness from other illnesses results in misdiagnosis of disease; and mental illness is, in fact, a physical problem in that it is a disease of the brain. Interestingly, although the insurance and general business communities are the primary opposition to coverage parity, they also opt not to go symbolic, arguing instead that mandating parity of treatment for mental illness will increase premiums and costs to business.

Our data also provide numerous examples that lend support to the idea that status quo opponents are more likely than defenders of the status quo to use symbolic appeals (H2). Consider the case of low-power FM radio stations. The general idea of this policy is to allow the FCC to license individuals and small groups to broadcast via low-power stations on the FM band. The goal, according to proponents of adding these low-power stations is diversity of the airwaves. Arguments offered by advocates of low-power stations range from claims that “media consolidation impedes citizens’ participation in public life,” to concerns about equal opportunity for less “marketable” demographic groups, to appeals to “equal rights for the little guy.” Indeed, proponents of low-power FM offer little else but symbolic appeals. In contrast, none of the defenders of the status quo contest the diversity goal set forth by their opponents. Instead those who support the status quo argue almost exclusively that interference with existing FM stations will result as the spectrum is divided into smaller and smaller pieces. Rather than increase the diversity of the airwaves, in fact the proposal would threaten the clear reception that listeners expect from their current FM radio dial.

A similar pattern of argumentation is apparent on an issue termed “Parents’ Right to Know.” This issue is about an amendment to the No Child Left Behind Act that would require prior parental consent before a minor child could receive non-emergency health services (e.g., treatment related to substance abuse, reproductive health, and mental health) in a public school. Consistent with their description of this a “pro-family” measure, amendment supporters argue that the issue is a simple one: “schools exist to serve families...public schools should not be keeping secrets from parents...parents have a right to know about their kids’ health.” In fact, one of the supporters we interviewed made plain why proponents offer no other arguments on this issue: “nobody’s gonna come out publicly and say ‘I don’t think parents have a right to

know’.” Not surprisingly, opponents of the measure have not contested the right of parents to know about what happens to their child in school. Instead the status quo defenders have emphasized how difficult such consent would make it for researchers who study children in a effort to “come up with solutions” to social problems and how important it is for school districts to make decisions like this locally rather than at the federal level. But unlike the pattern we observed on the issue of low-power FM, some status quo supporters have augmented their claims about the difficulty of obtaining parental consent with more symbolic appeals claiming that the measure would make it difficult for rural and inner city students to get health care and that the “amendment would put young people’s, especially young women’s, health in jeopardy.”

In contrast to these examples, our random sample does include issues in which symbolic arguments are predominant. As hypotheses 7a and 7b predict, we do observe the use of symbolic appeals both by status quo opponents and supporters when both represent large and readily mobilized constituencies, and when the issue is associated with a partisan cleavage. Most illustrative of hypothesis 7a is the range of powerful symbols on both sides of the debate concerning granting Permanent Normal Trading Relations (PNTR) status to China. Business proponents of granting PNTR to China and the opponents from the labor community each marshaled the use of powerful symbols, promoting different linkages between the proposed policy and either positive or negative symbols. Neither side succeeded in convincing the public or their opponents that China trade was linked *only* to a single set of positive or negative values. Rather, a rhetorical competition ensued with no clear winner (although PNTR status was granted).

Competing television ads were run by opposing sides in the China Trade / PNTR debate in 1999. One ad, sponsored by the AFL-CIO, is ripe with references to labor camps, low wages,

and lost American jobs. This particular ad was tailored to Senator John Kerry (D-MA) and ran in his home state of Massachusetts 46 times in February 1999. Identical ads, tailored to different elected officials, appeared in Texas, Michigan, North Carolina, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Missouri. In all, the ad appeared a total of 638 times in a single week. (Full documentation on the China Trade debate, including these ads and placement data, is available at our web site: <http://lobby.la.psu.edu>.)

Of course, pro-trade advocates did not allow the AFL-CIO to dictate the terms of this debate. Business organizations flooded the airwaves with thousands of television ads promoting an alternative vision of the issue during the same period, in the spring of 1999 when the issue was being debated in Congress. According to this vision, more open trade policies represent the “next frontier” in America’s destiny to improve the world. Through free trade, we will expose China’s people to our democratic values; prominent dissidents and human rights activists as well as religious leaders within China support free trade because they see it as a way to force democratic reform and greater personal freedom within China, according to these business advertisements. Whether these claims or those of business would be possible if the two sides were not representative of large swaths of the American public is unlikely. We see similar battles of symbolic rhetoric on managed care reform and efforts to pass a prescription drug benefit.

A further illustration of the likelihood of symbolic arguments in areas that correspond with large constituencies corresponding to a partisan cleavage (H7b) comes from OSHA’s efforts to enforce new ergonomic standards in the workplace. OSHA enacted regulations designed to limit repetitive stress injuries. Labor and the Clinton administration lined up with a focus on protecting America’s workers; Republicans and business organizations focused on cost

estimates, to be sure, but also on broader ideas such as that there was no clear scientific evidence ensuring that the regulations would be effective, that the matter was beyond the scope of regulatory action, and that OSHA was not following its own procedures. As Republicans laid it out, the proposal was an outrageous example of a power-grab by faceless bureaucrats not following their own procedures, likely to cost tens of thousands of American jobs, and another indication of how the Clinton administration was anti-business. Worse, it wouldn't work. Compromise on this issue was almost non-existent, and the regulations were passed in the last year of the Clinton administration. With the 2000 elections and the shift in power in 2001, Republicans moved quickly to rescind the regulations before they were ever enacted. In this case, both sides were firmly attached with a partisan coalition, indeed were integral to the partisan coalitions, and the policy debate was effectively decided on the basis of the election and change in power that it created.

We have focused attention on many issues where symbolic appeals have been avoided or where they have been effectively countered. However we do have examples where they work wonders, just as policy advocates sometimes dream. The clearest case of this may be in the case of EPA's decision to mandate a reduction in the sulfur content of gasoline, a regulation enacted in 1999 and not overturned after the arrival of the Bush administration in spite of its large impact on the oil and petroleum industry. This issue saw environmentalists and automobile companies in an unusual alliance, with both pointing to scientific studies showing that reducing sulfur in gasoline would be the equivalent of removing 54 million cars from the highways. Car companies liked the proposal mostly because it shifted the burden and cost for cleaner burning cars to the oil companies, not the engine manufacturers. There was some opposition to this proposal, of course, but the major oil companies apparently reasoned that the extra costs could be borne, and they



refused to engage in a large-scale battle on this issue. (Small refiners, especially in the West, complained bitterly about the proposal, arguing that many of them would be put out of business, but the largest oil companies, feeling that they had greater efficiencies of scale, apparently did not mind this secondary consequence of the policy: increasing their own market share.) With the only opposition coming from a geographically isolated industry group not supported by the major leaders of their own industry, and with a rival coalition consisting of such congressional supporters as Henry Waxman (D-CA) and John Dingell (D-MI), EPA administrator Browner signed the regulations and the Clinton administration took credit for a major environmental victory. The issue led to a dramatic and substantial policy change, almost without a fight. Proponents had good science on their side, good symbols, and opponents simply chose not to mobilize. From the perspective of the petroleum industry, this is the lobbying equivalent of choosing to fight another fight, or admitting defeat on one issue so that one might remain alive to contest other issues in the future.

The illustrations and examples we have chosen are by no means systematic and they do not constitute compelling evidence that our hypotheses will be confirmed in our larger study. However, they do make clear that we can isolate these processes and study them systematically. In our larger project, we plan to do exactly that.

## **Conclusions**

There is no doubt about the occasional use of symbolic appeals in the policy process. Just last month in the US Senate, Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA), a leader of the successful opposition to a proposal to allow oil drilling in the ANWR natural preserve in Alaska described the process in these terms: “There’s something more powerful out there than any senator, even than any president, and that’s God’s gift to us. And we stood on that side of preserving this wondrous

gift” (quoted in Firestone 2003). Standing on the side of preserving God’s gifts to mankind is the type of stance that most politicians can support. In this paper, we have explored some of the strategic issues associated with this type of symbolic rhetoric in politics. From ANWR to Ergonomics to Trade with China, we have seen a number of cases where high-level symbolic rhetoric has dominated the debate in Washington and on the airwaves. However a broader look at the full range of issues in our sample shows that symbolic appeals are rare and most likely to occur in certain types of situations.

Previous studies of the uses of symbols in politics have often been based only on issues where symbolic appeals have been used, if not on those where they have almost completely dominated the debate. We study a random sample of issues that are the object of lobbying efforts in Washington, and we note that a great number of them involve virtually no efforts, on any side, to evoke symbolic argumentation. Further, we have specified a number of hypotheses concerning the conditions under which policy makers are most likely to use symbolic appeals, and we have provided illustrations from our cases to demonstrate the use of these strategies. As we move forward to the next stage of our project, we plan to demonstrate systematically that these types of strategies can be observed and that a theoretical model of the decision to go symbolic can be tested empirically.

We have given a number of explanations in this paper for why policy advocates may choose to avoid symbolic appeals. Of the five scenarios we laid out, only one (complete rhetorical victory) ensures a preferred policy outcome. We have also observed (informally at this stage) through our cases that symbols are relatively rare. However, they may be more common than can be explained through a focus on policy outcomes. In our future work, as we identify every example of symbolic argumentation, we plan to investigate another possibility as

well: that these arguments are used not to affect the policy outcome, but to mobilize core constituencies on an issue. Many policy advocates, from U.S. senators seeking the presidency to single-issue organizations that seek to raise funds and increase their membership, may have an incentive to increase the salience of an issue through highly symbolic appeals. While policy success may be a goal, many advocates would welcome a dramatic increase in membership or an election to the White House.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Types of Arguments**

#### **1. Policy will promote / inhibit the achievement of some goal.**

- 101.** Claims linking the policy to shared goals
- 102.** Proposal is equitable; treats all fairly
- 103.** Proposal will inhibit shared goals
- 104.** Proposal is not equitable; does not treat all fairly

#### **2. Costs to government**

- 201.** Policy imposes costs to government; is inefficient
- 202.** Policy reduces costs to government; increases efficiency
- 203.** Not enough evidence to determine cost to government
- 204.** Policy will not impose costs to government or decrease efficiency
- 205.** Policy will not reduce costs to government or increase efficiency

#### **3. Costs to non-government actors**

- 301.** Policy imposes costs to non-government actors; is inefficient
- 302.** Policy reduces costs to non-government actors; increases efficiency
- 303.** Not enough evidence to determine cost to non-government actors
- 304.** Policy will not impose costs to non-government actors or decrease efficiency
- 305.** Policy will not reduce costs to non-government actors or increase efficiency

#### **4. Secondary consequences of the policy, other than cost**

- 401.** Whatever the value of the proposed policy goal, the policy will have some unintended negative consequence, other than cost
- 402.** In addition to the primary goal, the policy will also have some secondary benefit, other than cost
- 403.** Not enough evidence to determine what secondary consequences will result

#### **5. Policy implementation/feasibility issues**

- 501.** Whatever the value of the proposed policy goal, severe implementation problems
- 502.** Policy will work as expected; no problems with implementation
- 503.** Not enough evidence to determine the feasibility of the policy

#### **6. Equality of Treatment/Discriminatory Impact**

- 601.** Policy will affect some groups unfairly
- 602.** Rebuttal to this argument; this policy will not have unequal impact

**7. Magnitude of the policy**

- 701. Policy will set a large precedent
- 702. Proposed change is moderate, prudent, or otherwise not radical

**8. Problem is bigger/smaller than estimated; is misunderstood**

- 801. Problem is big or bigger than other side/perspective claims
- 802. Problem is small or smaller than other side/perspective claims
- 803. Problem is misunderstood

**9. Appropriateness of government action**

- 901. Claims about market failure; government needed to solve the problem
- 902. Claims about government inefficiency; problem is not one for government to solve

**10. Window of opportunity**

- 1001. A crisis looms; we must act now
- 1002. There is no crisis or threat; better to wait

**11. Proposed policy will enhance security; references to terrorism, national defense, public safety****12. Policy supported/opposed by constituency or other group**

- 1201. Positively viewed group or member of Congress supports
- 1202. Positively viewed group or member of Congress opposes
- 1203. Negatively viewed group or member of Congress supports
- 1204. Negatively viewed group or member of Congress opposes
- 1205. Supporting coalition is large or growing; momentum favors supporters
- 1206. Opposing coalition is large or growing; momentum favors opponents

**13. Partisan or electoral considerations**

- 1301. Electoral benefits; votes to be gained
- 1302. Electoral costs; votes to be lost
- 1303. Partisan actions within government preventing/spurring action; no explicit reference to elections
- 1304. References to campaign contributions or grassroots/lobbying/mobilization campaigns



**14. Government procedures/jurisdiction**

- 1401. Jurisdictional disputes between agencies and Congress; between other levels or branches of government; separation of powers; committee conflicts; turf fights
- 1402. Constitutional claims
- 1403. Congressional or other governmental procedures are not being followed or are not appropriate; policy has been set by previous court cases or clear precedent; misrepresentation of congressional intent
- 1404. Federalism issues; states v. local communities v. federal level responsibilities.

**15. Miscellaneous**