President Barack Obama's Responses to the Terrorist Attack at San Bernardino

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Introduction

On December 2, 2015, two self-radicalized terrorists carried out the deadliest terrorist attack on US soil since the September 11th attacks, which remained the deadliest until the attack in Orlando. President Barack Obama made several statements in the days following the attack, and the way he addresses the nation in a time of crisis is of great significance due to the fragile emotional state of the public. Much can be learned from these statements about the President's priorities in the wake of an attack. His views about the people who commit these acts of terror, the religion they claim to follow, and securing the country are all very apparent in these public addresses. Among Obama's top priorities following a terrorist attack are reassuring the public and gaining their trust and support, characterizing the attackers and explaining their motivations, presenting a plan for recovery and prevention, and insisting that the US is not at war with Islam. Evaluating the effectiveness of these statements for gaining support for proposed policies and general approval provides useful insight into the President's rhetorical strategies. President Obama successfully conveys his thoughts about Islam, terrorism, and mass shootings, but does not effectively gain support for his proposed policy changes.

Literature Review

The attack on San Bernardino began after Sayed Rizwan Farook, a health inspector, attended a holiday party, left, and returned in a rage and opened fire, with the help of his wife, Tashfeen Malik. After 14 people were killed and 21 injured, the couple fled the scene, and were soon killed in a shootout with the police, injuring two officers as well.¹ As the attack began, Malik made a public statement on Facebook pledging allegiance to the Islamic State. Yet,

¹ Editors - USA TODAY, "San Bernardino Shooting: What We Know Now."

authorities have found no evidence of the couple associating with ISIL or any other organized group or cell. The couple did travel to the Middle East, but it is unclear what they did while there or if the trip is related to the incident. There is, however, evidence that significant planning led up to the attack, and it is evident that the couple was self-radicalized. That is, they were not recruited into terrorism, but they developed their own ideology and identified with other terrorist ideologies. The FBI announced officially in the days following the shooting that it was being investigated as a terrorist attack.^{2,3,4}

San Bernardino is one of many examples of lone wolf terrorism, which has proven in recent years to be particularly complicated and difficult to counter. Many lone wolves, like Malik and Farook, never make any detectable contact with known terrorist organizations.⁵ These terrorists do not show early warning signs because they do not have the infrastructure or group activity of organizations. This complicates the understanding of terrorism the American public is accustomed to, which involves large groups and operations, like al Qaeda's hijacking attack on September 11th, 2001. That type of attack is less likely to occur than it was a decade ago, and lone wolves appear to be a growing threat.⁶ There is no longer a well-defined enemy. Rather, unknown individuals could choose to attack at any time from within US borders. Because this is a more complicated threat, addressing the nation regarding such attacks, particularly when the terrorists were US citizens, becomes increasingly difficult.

² Faith Karimi, "San Bernardino Shooting: What We Know -- and Don't Know - CNN.com."

³ "San Bernardino Shooting - LA Times."

⁴ Gass, Gerstein, and McCaskill, "FBI Investigates Shooting as Act of Terrorism."

⁵ Barnes, "Confronting the One-Man Wolf Pack: Adapting Law Enforcement and Prosecution Responses to the Threat of Lone Wolf Terrorism."

⁶ Ibid., 1631.

President Barack Obama made four statements following the attack. The first was during an interview with CBS on the day of the shooting, during which he urged legislators to consider “common sense gun safety laws,”⁷ including banning people on the terror suspect no-fly list from purchasing weapons.⁸ On December 3rd, he made a statement from the Oval Office, and was very cautious about labeling the shooting as an act of terror, as he was still waiting for the FBI to collect evidence.⁹ In his Weekly Address on the 5th, the possibility of the killers being extremists was discussed, and the President sent a strong message: “we will not be terrorized.”¹⁰ Finally, an Address to the Nation was delivered on the 6th, when the President confirmed the attackers were radicalized, and classified the shooting as an act of terror.¹¹

Many themes were carried through all four of the President’s statements. First, it is important to note how cautious he is to jump to conclusions about the killers’ motivation, and that he is slow to label the attack as terrorism. In his statement on the 3rd, he acknowledges the possibility of terrorism, but also points out it could have been a non-terrorism workplace shooting.¹² It wasn’t until his fourth statement on the 6th that Obama confirmed the shooters were radicalized and supported the Islamic State.¹³ Obama is also very consistent in avoiding the terms “radical Islam” and “radical Islamic terror,” and these phrases are characteristically absent from all of his statements following this shooting. He does refer to the “dark path of radicalization”¹⁴ and “perverted interpretation of Islam”¹⁵ when describing these attackers and

⁷ Obama, “President Obama Speaks about San Bernardino Shooting.”

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Obama, “Statement by the President on the Shooting in San Bernardino , California.”

¹⁰ Obama, “Weekly Address: We Will Not Be Terrorized.”

¹¹ Obama, “Address to the Nation by the President.”

¹² Obama, “Statement by the President on the Shooting in San Bernardino , California.”

¹³ Obama, “Address to the Nation by the President.”

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

terrorists in general, but evidently refuses to refer to Islam as radical. In fact, Obama is very clear that Islam is not the enemy; the US is at war with terrorism, not with Islam. Specifically, he emphasizes “ISIL does not speak for Islam”¹⁶ and there are “millions of patriotic Muslim Americans who reject their hateful ideology.”¹⁷ He also calls for cooperation and partnership with Muslim majority countries and Muslim communities in the US.

This kind of reassurance is a staple in the four statements Obama made. In addition to assuring the public that Muslims are overwhelmingly peaceful, he also attempts to comfort the nation by reminding them what his administration is already doing to keep the country safe. In his most detailed statement, the Address to the Nation, the President reminds the public that the infrastructure in the US has been hardened since 9/11, and that many domestic and international terrorist threats have been neutralized before being executed. He goes on to say that terrorist safe havens have been destroyed, Osama bin Laden was killed by Navy SEALs, and al-Qaeda’s leadership has been severely disrupted, all in an effort to assure the public that no expense is spared in securing the nation.¹⁸

Still, President Obama’s ability to fight terrorism is often called into question, most notably by President Elect Donald Trump. In the second Presidential Debate against Democratic Candidate Hilary Clinton, Trump attacked the ability of both Clinton and Obama to counter terrorism because of the way they address terrorism to the public:

And [Clinton] won’t even mention the word and nor will President Obama. He won’t use the term “radical Islamic terrorism.” Now, to solve a problem, you have to be able to state what the problem is or at least say the name. She won’t say the name and President Obama won’t say the name. But the name is there. It’s radical Islamic terror. And before you solve it, you have to say the name.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ New York Times, “Transcript of the Second Presidential Debate.”

Secretary Clinton's response mimics the words of Obama after the attack at San Bernardino – both agree that the US is not at war with Islam, and it is a mistake to call attacks such as this one “radical Islamic terror.”²⁰ Clinton told ABC News “that sounds like we are declaring war against a religion.”²¹ Similarly, Obama went on record saying “these terrorists are desperate for legitimacy. And all of us have a responsibility to refute the notion that groups like ISIL somehow represent Islam, because that is a falsehood that embraces the terrorist narrative.”²²

Several experts in counterterrorism and public affairs have stated using the term “radical Islamic terror” is “detrimental...or simply not strategically important” to fighting terrorism.²³ Daniel Serwer of the Middle East Institute and Conflict Management Program at Johns Hopkins supports Obama's position, saying the many peaceful Muslims who reject everything terrorists stand for should be trusted and accepted, so denying ISIL's claim of a connection to Islam is a legitimate political practice. Serwer goes on to say “would it make the fight against [ISIL] more successful if our officials were willing to call it [Islamic extremism]? I doubt it.”²⁴ He also notes that the term may alienate Muslims who may otherwise assist in combating terrorism, and anything that could turn away the support of Muslims should be avoided. Bruce Riedel, former CIA officer and director of the Intelligence Project at the Brookings Institution says the name is simply not important. Rather, the actions taken in combating terrorism are what matter.²⁵ Republicans have also argued for a more aggressive counterterrorism approach, while Obama

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Jeremy Diamond and Nicole Gaouette, “Islamic Terrorism : Does It Matter If Obama Calls It That ? -.”

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

has ordered drone strikes and sent troops to support the local troops who are doing the majority of the ground work.²⁶ A study by Scott Englund supports this method, as he found “the American public values US trustworthiness and diplomatic cooperation”²⁷ as well as strategies not likely to damage US reputation and create friends rather than enemies.²⁸ Following this logic, the cooperative strategy implemented by Obama is likely to gain more public support than a more aggressive ground war.

President Barack Obama’s responses to terror attacks are extremely important, as they serve to comfort the public in the face of tragedy. These responses have the ability to unify a nation or further divide it, so it is appropriate that the President responds very carefully. He seeks to unify the nation by assuring the public that the majority of Muslim Americans are peaceful, patriotic, and can be trusted, while articulating that terrorism is in no way representative of Islam. His characterization of Islam shows that he views Islam as a valid religion, equally worthy of respect as Christianity, any other religion, or atheism. Obama makes a special effort to show that he views Muslim Americans as valuable members of the community, just like other citizens. Furthermore, as shown by his call for Muslim Americans to join in fighting terrorism and radical ideology, it is clear Obama views Muslim Americans, and Muslims worldwide, as important partners in local and global counterterrorism.

Gun Control

Obama also spoke about gun control in all four of these speeches. In his interview the day of the shooting, he spoke about “common sense gun safety laws,” background checks, a making

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Englund, “At What Cost? United States’ Counter-Terrorism Strategy, Reputation, and Public Opinion.”

²⁸ Ibid.

it illegal for those on national terror suspect “no-fly” lists to buy guns in the US, topics he echoes in his following statements.²⁹ On December 3rd, Obama mentioned the need to take “basic steps that would make it harder – not impossible, but harder – for individuals to get access to weapons.”³⁰ During his weekly address, Obama again proposed banning people on the no-fly list from buying weapons. He also called the weapons used by the shooters “military-style assault weapons, weapons of war,” a term which has been a staple of gun control talk during Obama’s presidency.³¹ The President made this argument a third time during his Address to the Nation, when he again also used the term “powerful assault weapons.”³²

Analysis

The Rhetorical Situation

Lloyd F. Bitzer writes about the Rhetorical Situation, detailing the elements of a situation that calls for the production of discourse and how to evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of the discourse produced. A rhetorical situation is created by an exigence – an event that requires or encourages discourse, and creates a situation which can be positively modified through discussion.³³ The attack at San Bernardino is the primary exigence, as it created a situation that nearly required discourse, but also added to the existing situation characterized by a pattern of mass shootings carried out by self-radicalized terrorists and other non-terrorist actors. The debate around gun violence and gun control has also been an ongoing situation in the US, which has its own discourse, but is also inherently involved in these

²⁹ Obama, “President Obama Speaks about San Bernardino Shooting.”

³⁰ Obama, “Statement by the President on the Shooting in San Bernardino , California.”

³¹ Obama, “Weekly Address: We Will Not Be Terrorized.”

³² Obama, “Address to the Nation by the President.”

³³ Bitzer, “Philosophy and Rhetoric, Vol. 25, No. 1,1992. Copyright © 1992 The Pennsylvania State University, University Park PA.,” 6.

discussions.

A rhetorical audience must be made up of people who can be influenced by discourse and can act as mediators of change in order to be truly rhetorical, as well as effective.³⁴ If the audience cannot be persuaded through the speech, or cannot contribute to change, the discourse cannot, then, produce change, which is the purpose of rhetoric. President Obama addresses the American public in his four statements following this shooting. As the US is a federal presidential republic,³⁵ the American people are responsible for electing the legislators that are essential to passing Obama's proposed policies into law, making the public a true rhetorical audience. However, since no laws to reduce gun violence have been passed since 2009, the effectiveness of addressing the public to gain support appears to have limited effectiveness. Congress is directly responsible for passing laws, so it is easy to see the disconnect between public support and proposed legislation. Still, it would not be wise to ignore this method, as public trust and support is crucial to the presidency. The public is also able to elect new congressmen regularly, making addresses to the public a worthy endeavor, in addition to the obvious benefits of connecting emotionally to the public.

A rhetorical situation also has constraints, which are "beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives" et cetera, which are able to influence the decision making process of possible mediators of change.³⁶ In this situation, the most significant obstacle to the Obama Administration's goals appears to be partisan lines. For example, for the two bills intended to reduce mass shootings immediately following the shooting, the vote was split almost

³⁴ Bitzer, "Philosophy and Rhetoric, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1992. Copyright © 1992 The Pennsylvania State University, University Park PA."

³⁵ "The World Factbook — Central Intelligence Agency."

³⁶ Bitzer, "Philosophy and Rhetoric, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1992. Copyright © 1992 The Pennsylvania State University, University Park PA.," 8.

perfectly along partisan lines. “Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, a North Dakota Democrat, voted with Republicans against both bills, while Sen. Mark Kirk, an Illinois Republican, supported Democrats on the watch list bill and Republicans Kirk, Toomey, John McCain of Arizona and Susan Collins of Maine supported the Democratic background check bill.”³⁷ The tradition of gun ownership in the US, as well as the fear of too restrictive gun control measures or confiscation also subtracts from support of many gun safety bills among many (generally conservative) Americans and congressmen. There is also great debate over how the Second Amendment to the US Constitution should be interpreted. One camp believes in an absolute right to gun ownership by law abiding citizens, a second camp believes the Amendment is outdated, and many fall somewhere in between. For these reasons, gun control rhetoric seems to be effective in gaining support from the part of the population, and Congress, that is already likely to support these measures.

Gun Control

It is evident one of the President’s major priorities during his statements on the shooting is to gain support for his proposed gun control policies. “Common sense gun control” legislation has been a key goal of the Obama Administration, and, because gun control is such a heated and partisan debate, how he attempts to gain support for these laws is crucial to achieving his goal. Obama proposes his gun control policies to the American people as a simple method for significantly reducing gun crime, particularly mass shootings. Obama considers mass shootings such a national security crisis, in the month following the shooting at San Bernardino, he gave additional directions to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF),

³⁷ “Democrats’ Bid for Gun Control after San Bernardino Shooting Blocked by GOP | Daily Mail Online.”

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Attorney General Loretta Lynch, and many others for combatting gun violence more effectively.³⁸ To examine the effectiveness of Obama's methods of gaining support for his gun control policies, a brief examination of whether or not these policies should be reasonably expected to succeed will provide useful context, and analyses of congressional and public support will serve as the measures of effectiveness. These measures will also help determine if President Obama has chosen the most effective points of argument for achieving his desired outcomes.

Theoretical Efficacy of Gun Control

Many experts agree stricter gun control legislation is the best way to reduce gun violence and mass shootings. Lawrence O. Gostin, JD of Georgetown University Law Center (2016) wrote an essay outlining the first four steps he thinks should be taken, which are dedication of federal funds for firearms research, requiring universal background checks, a ban on assault weapons, and regulation of firearms safety.³⁹ In response to the shooting at Newtown, Connecticut, Mozaffarian, Hemenway, and Ludwig (2013) conducted a literature review of successful public health interventions, extrapolating the implications for reducing gun violence. They concluded a public health approach should be used, focusing on reducing gun violence, rather than reducing gun ownership. Examples of this method include public education, such as the educational campaigns used to curb tobacco use, and safety regulations, such as those used to make vehicles safer.⁴⁰ In further support of gun regulations, Lemieux (2014) found that across cultures, "gun access predicts death by guns." He also points out that punitive measures are

³⁸ Office of the Press Secretary, "FACT SHEET: New Executive Actions to Reduce Gun Violence and Make Our Communities Safer."

³⁹ Gostin, "4 Simple Reforms to Address Mass Shootings and Other Firearm Violence."

⁴⁰ Mozaffarian, Hemenway, and Ludwig, "Curbing Gun Violence."

unlikely to be effective, as 69% of mass shooters are killed by police or commit suicide. His evidence also shows that limited ammunition capacity results in fewer deaths, while targeting specific types of weapons would likely not be as effective. Additionally, since 56% of shooters studied had known mental illnesses, and many had a history of domestic violence or divorce and custody issues, it is clear that measures of psychological and home stability should be included in background checks.⁴¹ However, a 2013 study found that news portrayals of mass shootings by people with mental illnesses did increase support for gun control policies, but also increase negative attitudes toward people with mental illnesses,⁴² implying this method of seeking support for policies also comes at a certain social cost. These papers do not show a consensus among authors. Only Gostin advocates for broad bans on weapons, while Mozaffarian, Hemenway, Ludwig, and Lemieux do not. Research and safety regulations, however, seem to be agreed upon by these authors.

Congressional Support

Gun control policies are clearly based in evidence, yet President Obama has been unable to gain bipartisan support for his proposals. According to the congress.gov legislative search engine, at least 50 bills and resolutions to curb gun violence have been introduced to the 114th Congress, none of which have passed their chamber of origin to date. For comparison, at least 30 similar proposals were introduced to the 113th Congress, and none were passed. At least 10 were introduced to the 112th Congress, and about 8 to the 111th. No bills or resolutions to reduce gun

⁴¹ Lemieux, “Lemieux – Effect of Gun Culture and Firearm Laws on Gun Violence and Mass Shootings in the United States Effect of Gun Culture and Firearm Laws on Gun Violence and Mass Shootings in the United States: A Multi-Level Quantitative Analysis.”

⁴² McGinty, Webster, and Barry, “Effects of News Media Messages About Mass Shootings on Attitudes Toward Persons With Serious Mental Illness and Public Support for Gun Control Policies.”

violence have been made law since the 111th Congress of 2009-2010, and none even passed one chamber of Congress.⁴³ Just days after the shooting at San Bernardino, Republican senators blocked a bill that would have banned the sale of firearms to US citizens who are on a terrorism watch list, and another that would have made background checks universal.⁴⁴ Obama has, however, issued a few executive actions to reduce gun violence, one a month after San Bernardino, and, previously, following Sandy Hook.⁴⁵ These executive actions, however, need the support of legislature to accomplish what Obama has proposed and promised the American people.

Surveys of Public Opinion

Four Gallup reviews analyze surveys public support for gun control legislation and several anti-terrorism methods, as well as how effective the public believes these measures would be. A 2011 review explored public support for stricter gun control legislation since 1990. The data shows a downward trend in support for gun control: 78% of respondents favored “more strict” gun control laws in 1990, 62% in 1995, 51% in 2007, and 44% in 2010.⁴⁶ In 2009, a slight majority favored no change or less strict gun control laws.⁴⁷ The longitudinal design of this study reveals the downward trend continues even following high-profile mass shootings, when support for stricter laws increases slightly, then subsides again.⁴⁸ However, public support for gun

⁴³ “Legislative Search Results.”

⁴⁴ “Democrats’ Bid for Gun Control after San Bernardino Shooting Blocked by GOP | Daily Mail Online.”

⁴⁵ Office of the Press Secretary, “FACT SHEET: New Executive Actions to Reduce Gun Violence and Make Our Communities Safer”; Obama, “President Obama Announces New Measures to Prevent Gun Violence.”

⁴⁶ Saad and Newport, “Gallup Review : Public Opinion Context of Tucson Shootings.”

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.; Newport, “American Public Opinion, Terrorism and Guns.”

control policies is rising again, reaching 55% in 2015.⁴⁹ Breaking down gun control policies into subcategories provides more telling details. In 2015, 86% of Americans favored universal background checks, and 77% supported banning people on terrorist watch lists from buying guns, known as “no fly, no buy.”⁵⁰ Contrary to the support for these laws, “Just 19% said these laws would reduce the number of mass shootings a great deal and 28% said a moderate amount.”⁵¹ Americans do not support banning classes of weapons, though. In the same polling update, only 27% of respondents supported a handgun ban, and in 2012, 44% supported a ban on semi-automatic rifles, which 51% opposed.⁵²

Another Gallup review examined how effective the public viewed various counterterror measures on December 11th and 12th, 2015, immediately following the attack at San Bernardino. The cross-sectional design of this survey shows which methods the respondents supported in the wake of this high-profile attack, in the midst of extensive media coverage, and after all four of the analyzed statements by President Obama were given. 79% of respondents thought increasing US airstrikes against ISIS and overhauling the federal visa waiver program would be very or somewhat effective, 71% thought no fly, no buy laws would be effective, and only 55% thought new assault weapons restrictions would be effective.⁵³ Therefore, the Obama Doctrine favoring airstrikes to ground deployments is received favorably with most Americans, as well as his proposed no fly, no buy law, while his proposed assault weapons restrictions appear to be split down partisan lines. On the same post-San Bernardino survey, three measures surveyed which would specifically target Muslims were the three proposals which scored lowest for perceived

⁴⁹ Newport, “American Public Opinion and Guns.”

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Newport, “Anti-Terror : Visa Control , Airstrikes Seen as Most Effective.”

effectiveness. Laws preventing Muslims from entering the US scored 38%, requiring Muslims to carry an ID scored 32%, and a religious test scored 28%.

Many of the key points Obama made in his responses to the San Bernardino shooting are supported by the vast majority of Americans, even across party lines. His proposed universal background checks and no fly, no buy laws are both supported by a quarter of the population or more, and his preference of airstrikes and small special operations rather than large ground deployments are also widely accepted.⁵⁴ It is unclear from the data whether or not Obama's speeches were a factor in the respondents' answers, but considering the cross-sectional survey following his speeches, it would be reasonable to assume many respondents saw at least one of them. At the very least, a majority of Americans agree with these propositions. However, about half of the population either thinks an assault weapon ban would be ineffective, or would not support such a ban. Considering the political climate is becoming more polarized,⁵⁵ emphasizing these policies in a time of emotional tension is not likely the best approach to gaining support for these laws. It is likely, since support for an assault weapons ban seems to lie on party lines, that pushing for these laws in a time of crisis would actually decrease support for such a law. Thus, leaving out these more extreme forms of gun control from post-attack rhetoric may allow support for the other policies to be realized. Since most Americans support his other propositions, pushing for those and focusing on passing them into law should be a first priority.

Radical Islamic Terror

President Obama's refusal to use the term "radical Islamic terror" has been a topic of heated debate, but again, apparently only across party lines. Democrats generally support and

⁵⁴ Ibid.; Newport, "American Public Opinion, Terrorism and Guns."

⁵⁵ Saad and Newport, "Gallup Review : Public Opinion Context of Tucson Shootings."

utilize this model, while some Republicans generally disagree. President Elect Donald J. Trump is perhaps the most outspoken on this issue, which he perceives as very significant. This is another example of Obama succeeding in gaining the support of his own party, with much less effectiveness among republicans.

This policy, however, is well thought out, and supported by logic and theory. First, logic would suggest that any rhetoric that has the possibility of offending or alienating the Muslim community in the US and abroad should be avoided because of the importance of gaining the support of the Muslim community in the fight against terror. It is necessary for this issue to be addressed inside local and greater Muslim communities because terrorists claim a legitimate connection to Islam. The Muslim community denies and condemns this claim, as the ideology of terrorists is completely counter to that of Islam. Addressing this issue within communities is a logical first line of defense against radicalization. This model is also theoretically supported, as many experts agree the use of the term “radical Islamic terror” would be either detrimental or useless.⁵⁶

Conclusion

President Obama’s rhetorical strategy following the terror attack at San Bernardino successfully gains support from his own party and much of the public, but is not successful at gaining support from Republicans in Congress, or a significant portion of Republican citizens. Many of Obama’s key points are widely supported by the public, but he draws hard opposition from his proposed ban on semi-automatic rifles. Not only does about half of the country oppose such a ban, but the vast majority does not believe the law would significantly reduce mass

⁵⁶ Jeremy Diamond and Nicole Gaouette, “Islamic Terrorism : Does It Matter If Obama Calls It That ? -.”

shootings. Future addresses should be adjusted to appeal to the moderate and moderate-leaning republican populations, as democrats, in general, are already likely to support his proposed policies. It is evident that the more drastic the policies he pitches to the public, the more opposition he receives from conservatives. Additionally, all indications imply that continuing to push for a ban on semi-automatic rifles and high capacity magazines will result in increased opposition from most republicans. It is likely that focusing on the policies which the majority of the public supports would allow for some of his proposed legislation to be passed. Focusing on those measures which the public views as likely to be effective would also likely increase support. Evidence does support gun safety legislation, so this should still be pursued. However, the current proposed policies and the rhetoric promoting them are decreasing support from the republican population, whose support is necessary for passing any legislation.

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