

Steven Zhang
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Washington Program Application Essay

I am applying to this program to take advantage of the outstanding networking and academic resources that Penn State has to offer. I discovered my passion for politics, diplomacy, and leadership in my senior year of high school. I admired many upperclassmen before me who demonstrated the power of leadership and shaped the world for the better with their own hands. Despite being terrified of putting myself out in the open, I dove head first into my school's Model United Nations Club by assuming the role of the United States in a competitive committee. My fear transformed into exhilaration for the first time as I spoke and slowly saw heads nodding around me in affirmation of my ideas. What imprinted on me in that club was the ability for my voice to impact other people and drive cooperation. From a simple club, my world view drastically expanded and I saw the power I had to improve the lives of the people around me, both in my family and beyond.

Here at Penn State, I continue to use my voice to advocate for issues I believe in. Having actively sought out opportunities these past two years, I now maintain active roles in student government as well as the APIDA Caucus, working with students every day to make sure their voices are heard and issues are addressed by administration. From my work, I found that many Asian Americans here on campus do not have much experience or understanding of our political system nor of university politics. To find a solution, I've actively sought out mentors across the university to aid me in empowering my community with a voice.

I see the Washington Program an opportunity to increase my impact on campus. As a Stanley E. Degler Washington scholar, I hope to work with my peers and faculty to connect

with firms in DC that can help me gain real world experience in advocacy and leadership. While I am proud of the work I am doing here at Penn State, I would love to have the opportunity to work with like minded scholars for a Summer where policy is created every day. When I hear DC, I visualize the busy streets, coffee shop networking, and the conference rooms where policies are being passed and press conferences are being held every second--I want to be a part of this bustling energy that defines Washington.

From this experience, I hope to gain knowledge on how to better advocate for students, analyze data, and organize movements on campus. As an example, one of the issues I am passionate about is sustainability on campus. However, given the massive scale of sustainability reform on campus as well as the costs, I can not currently see a clear path forward in making the changes I want to see at Penn State. I believe that by working with some of the largest firms in the company that regularly advocate or create policy, I will be able to bring back experience that helps me effectively address this issue with the time I have left at Penn State.

I bring to an internship sponsor the ambition to learn and take my future into my own hands. I love actively seeking out opportunities that help me grow and help me better advocate for issues that I believe in. Academically, I knew that I wanted to enter the Paterno Fellows Program and Schreyer by the end of my freshman year and worked with my advisors to put in the hours to achieve these goals. Today, I continue to push my limits and grow my ambitions, now working with my advisor to enter the Integrated Undergraduate-Graduate program and attempt to finish a Masters in International Affairs along with my two majors in my four years here. In my internship, I will use this same ambition and drive to dive deeper than what is required of me and really learn the internal structures of government and policy.

I believe another ability that will serve an internship sponsor well is my ability to work under stress. From working as a manager in my family's restaurant, I learned to thrive under stressful situations and lead in many different scenarios. When something goes wrong in the kitchen, a customer argument needs to be diffused, or orders are sent in wrong, one needs to maintain a clear mindset and organize tasks by their importance to complete everything in a timely manner. I will bring these skills to the workplace so that my employer can be assured of my ability to handle a heavy workload.

I would love to intern in public policy or work with a think tank. As a student advocate, I am fascinated by the process and effort that goes into an effective pitch to faculty and administration to move forward on student body initiatives. I believe experience at a think tank would allow me insight to how an organization effectively organizes information and gathers statistics, while a public policy firm would help me understand the general processes an organization has to go through in order to advocate on specific issues to a much larger audience. Through my internship, I hope to learn how to start a movement and advocate to improve student life on a much larger scale than I am currently capable of.

I am applying to the Penn State Washington Program because I believe this program will greatly enrich my Penn State experience. Having worked on governmental policy and student affairs in our university, I am excited to expand to federal and national level advocacy, and this program appears to be the perfect opportunity to do so. I hope to use this opportunity to empower myself so that I can give back to the Penn State community in a more effective manner.

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PLSC 466H

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Analysis on Trump's Fear Politics

Politics were, prior to the 21st century, regarded as a logical field. Many political scientists based theories and norms around the idea that politics is rational and believed that many politicians engaged constituents in ways that eliminate emotional influence.¹ However, as we observe today, emotions are one of many tools politicians are able to use to mobilize individuals and win votes for their position. As political science advanced, more people have dove into research on the effect that emotions have on politics. Using this research, we can analyze how politicians use emotions to move a crowd. Specifically, we examine in this paper how President Trump uses fear to manipulate his voter base.

Literature Review

Fear is a response that taps into human vulnerability in order to manipulate voters in certain directions. As an emotion, fear is particularly easy to control as it provokes a predictable mental state that prioritizes self preservation above all.² Politicians can simply design an opportunity for self preservation in anticipation of the response before provoking fear in constituents. In more kleptocratic and tightly controlled governments, ethnic groups can be mobilized from fear of losing their position in society. Even if the policies are ineffective or irrational, or there is another candidate that provides a net positive for a society, fear of losing

¹ Miller, Patrick R. "The Emotional Citizen: Emotion as a Function of Political Sophistication." *Political Psychology*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2011, pp. 575–600., doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2011.00824.x.

² Rutter, Robert A.c., et al. "Scary Warnings and Rational Precautions: A Review of the Psychology of Fear Appeals." *Psychology & Health*, vol. 16, no. 6, 2001, pp. 613–630., doi:10.1080/08870440108405863.

the status quo and current way of life causes voters to gravitate towards the fear user.³ An example of these different effects is the actions of the Bush administration when they declared war on Iraq: Many analysts warned that the Iraq War would be expensive, was rooted in illogical conclusions, and would lead to unnecessary lives lost.⁴ However, the fear of terrorism after 9/11, combined with Bush's powerful speech on the 'Axis of Evil', clouded public judgements and made the aforementioned self-preservation the primary response--at all costs. In hindsight, a majority of the public agree that the Iraqi War was unnecessary, and this sentiment was reflected in the drastic point difference in Bush's approval score after he left office: 34 points at the end of his term as compared to his peak of 90 points after the 9/11 bombings.⁵

Analysis

By using the same tactics that Bush used to rally the country around 9/11, Trump uses immigration as one of his primary platform initiatives that preys on fear. Perhaps one of the most cited pieces of evidence for using fear can be found in his announcement for the Presidential nomination in 2015: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists."⁶ In this quote, we can decipher many of the seeds that Trump plants in strengthening his campaign around immigration in the future.

³ Miquel, Gerard Padró I. "The Control of Politicians in Divided Societies: The Politics of Fear." *The Review of Economic Studies*, vol. 74, no. 4, 2007, pp. 1259–1274., doi:10.1111/j.1467-937x.2007.00455.x.

⁴ Was the Iraq War Worth It?" *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 15 Dec. 2011, www.cfr.org/expert-roundup/was-iraq-war-worth-it.

⁵ Gallup, Inc. "Presidential Approval Ratings -- George W. Bush." *Gallup.com*, Gallup, 15 May 2019, news.gallup.com/poll/116500/presidential-approval-ratings-george-bush.aspx.

⁶ Staff, Washington Post. "Full Text: Donald Trump Announces a Presidential Bid." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 1 May 2019, www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/full-text-donald-trump-announces-a-presidential-bid/.

By referencing drugs, crime, and rape, Trump taps into the fear and concern for safety that many of us have for our family members and close relatives. Through the rest of his speech, he focuses on defense and the military before closing the speech by proposing a wall to be built between the United States and Mexico to prevent or stem illegal immigration. By beginning his speech with the issue of immigration, he primes the instinct for self-preservation. This response causes listeners in the crowd to become more perceptive of language and actions that increase their self-efficacy and safety: language that manifests in Trump's promises to strengthen the military and build a wall. This speech becomes especially powerful because Trump proposes both an abstract and physical safeguard from danger--While military strength can help curb anxiety about danger, it is an intangible force that people may not recognize in their daily lives. To supplement this, Trump's promise of a wall between the United States and Mexico becomes a tangible and physical incentive to vote for Trump and literally see progress occur.

To expand on the fear narrative that he creates, Trump deliberately raises the perceived threat of immigration by targeting how threatening immigrants are viewed in society. As noted in *What's to Fear from Immigrants? Creating an Assimilationist Threat Scale*, "Assimilation is a concept with which Americans feel familiar and one against which they feel able to judge the appropriateness of immigrant values and behaviors...which manifests itself in three general areas, language, productivity, and citizenship."⁷ In essence, someone who targets a group's perceived willingness to assimilate to the United States' culture can manipulate the public's opinion of that group of people...

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⁷ Paxton, Pamela, and Anthony Mughan. "What's to Fear from Immigrants? Creating an Assimilationist Threat Scale." *Political Psychology*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2006, pp. 549–568., doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2006.00520.x.