

The Rhetoric of Rogue *Ethos*: Chris Christie's Swing from "Boss" to "Bully"

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In the span of a year—from January 2013 to January 2014—public perception of New Jersey Governor Chris Christie shifted from viewing him as a "Boss" and rising GOP leader to a "Bully" and a vindictive politician. This essay explains this shift in approval through the concept of "rogue ethos," loosely translated as rogue credibility, as it applies to Christie's rhetorical responses to Hurricane Sandy relief and the George Washington Bridge scandal. I argue that Christie's rhetoric provided conflicting constructions of his status as a leader. More precisely, Christie framed his response to Sandy relief from a moral standpoint of republican leadership while he framed his bridge scandal response from a personal, and hence selfish, vantage point that contradicted the earlier ethos. These two situations underscore the importance of community values undergirding rogue conduct and help theorize the risks of rogue ethos.

Key Words: Chris Christie, rogue, *ethos*, political rhetoric, value appeals

Throughout 2013, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie was a rising star of the GOP with wide cross-over appeal. In January, *TIME* magazine's cover story labeled him "The Boss."¹ In February, *USA Today* championed Christie as the GOP's "best bet" for a White House bid in 2016, noting that he has "the highest approval rating of any governor in the country."² A June Gallup survey of more than 1,500 U.S. adults corroborated this wisdom; asking about five Republican officeholders (Christie, Ted Cruz, Rand Paul, Paul Ryan, and Marco Rubio), Christie was the only politician to receive greater than 50% favorability from all respondents—Republican, Democrat, and Independent.³

And yet Christie's opportunity as the nation's political darling was short lived, seemingly an exception rather than the norm when considering public opinion prior to and since 2013. Prior to 2013, Christie was largely unknown at a national level. Gallup found that 52% of national survey respondents had no opinion of Christie in March 2011, with only 27% viewing him favorably.⁴ A year later, heading into the 2012 Republican National Convention, the story was not substantially different as Gallup polled a mere 34% favorability rating from respondents with 25% indicating

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¹ Michael Crowley, "The Boss," *TIME*, January 9, 2013, <http://swampland.time.com/2013/01/09/the-boss>.

² DeWayne Wickham, "Chris Christie, Not Rubio, Best Bet in 2016," *USA Today*, February 18, 2013, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2013/02/18/dewayne-wickham-on-christie-versus-rubio/1926109>.

³ Jeffrey M. Jones, "Paul Ryan a Favorite of Republicans," *Gallup*, June 14, 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/163082/paul-ryan-favorite-republicans.aspx>.

⁴ Jeffrey M. Jones, "Gov. Christie Unknown to Majority of Americans," *Gallup*, April 11, 2001, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/147038/gov-christie-unknown-majority-americans.aspx>.

that they had “never heard of” him and another 14% having no opinion.⁵ In October 2011, the New York *Daily News* recognized that, in some circles, Christie was a “conservative cult hero” while warning that he had greater support from U.S. citizens outside of New Jersey than he did from people of his own state.⁶

Those more familiar with him as New Jersey Governor were already on high alert that he might, indeed, be a bully. In January 2011, Bergen County’s *The Record* reported “early Christie fatigue,” in which “several independent polls showed his approval numbers sliding down fast in the final quarter of 2010. . . . Polls also found that the broad swath of the public that catapulted him to power last year has become increasingly polarized—they either love his blunt, tough-love ‘Jersey attitude’ style or they think he is a petulant bully.”⁷ This attitude was on display when, as the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported in March 2011, Christie violated an established “understanding” of the Governors’ club to avoid “trash-talking [one another] in public” and when Christie eagerly took on the public employee unions, leading the *New York Times* to report that “the lesson that Chris Christie has impressed on his contemporaries” is that “what used to be unspeakable, politically, simply isn’t anymore.”⁸ For his part, Christie has justified his actions by appealing to political results and representative obligations; *The Record* summarized his 2011 State of the State address as “arguing that he’s a brawler with a higher public policy purpose, not a thin-skinned bully who spoils for a fight simply for the sake of a viral, YouTube confrontation.”⁹

The perception of Christie as on the people’s side seemed to stimulate Christie’s rise in the polls during 2013. In particular, Christie’s public and aggressive management of Hurricane Sandy relief in late 2012 and early 2013 helped win him favor from U.S. citizens, so much so that his disapproval rating sat at just 20% from December 2012 through March 2013.¹⁰ Dana Milbank of the *Washington Post* explained that “Christie’s forceful response” to the situation “boosted the governor’s standing” because he represented citizens’ desires for “an end to ideological warfare.”¹¹ For many citizens, the ends justified the means even if Christie’s methods were unconventional and alienated other politicians.

As the calendar pages turned to a new year in 2014, Christie’s approval turned south. On January 9, 2014, various polling sources tracked by the *Huffington Post* plotted Christie’s favorability to be even with his unfavorability at 37% each.¹² From that point forward, more poll respondents indicated unfavorable views of Christie than favorable. By mid-2014, the outlook for Christie was so bleak that the *Washington Post* queried whether or not Christie can “get his

⁵ Frank Newport, “Americans See Christie, Ann Romney in Positive Light,” *Gallup*, August 28, 2012, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/156950/americans-christie-ann-romney-positive-light.aspx>.

⁶ Alison Gendar, “Regular Guy for Prez? GOPers Like Jersey Gov’s Salt-of-Earth Voter Appeal,” *Daily News* (New York), October 2, 2011.

⁷ Charles Stile, “Governor Signals He’ll Ease His Brawling,” *The Record* (Bergen County, NJ), January 12, 2011.

⁸ Matt Katz, “Even Peers Are Fair Game for Christie,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 13, 2011; Matt Bai, “When I Run Out of Fights to Have, I’ll Stop Fighting,” *New York Times*, February 27, 2011.

⁹ Stile, “Governor Signals He’ll Ease His Brawling.”

¹⁰ “Poll Chart: Chris Christie Favorability Rating,” *Huffington Post*, October 16, 2014, <http://elections.huffingtonpost.com/pollster/chris-christie-favorable-rating>.

¹¹ Dana Milbank, “Chris Christie Has Lessons for GOP,” *Washington Post*, January 8, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/dana-milbank-chris-christie-has-lessons-for-gop/2013/01/08/e28b298e-59e7-11e2-9fa9-5fbdc9530eb9_story.html. Christie similarly criticized the Congress for delaying aid following Hurricane Irene but those arguments were less developed, less publicized, and less rogue. GovChristie, “Governor Chris Christie: They Need Support Now,” *YouTube* video, 1:04, September 1, 2011, http://youtu.be/XoKv-1m-g_8.

¹² “Poll Chart,” *Huffington Post*.

groove back?”¹³ *Salon* was more declarative: “Put a fork in Chris Christie” because “he will never, ever be president.”¹⁴ Christie’s dire outlook was primarily due to “Bridgagate,” the name given to a scandal in which Christie staffers closed lanes of the George Washington Bridge in September 2013. These closures were allegedly political payback to Fort Lee Mayor Mark Sokolich who endorsed Christie’s opponent in the 2013 Governor race. Despite Christie’s denial of any prior knowledge of or involvement in the scandal, the public seems to believe that the buck stops with him.

Christie was no stranger to low approval ratings but this time it seemed different. Members of the press pontificated that the political motives displayed in the bridge scandal were consistent with Christie’s persona but lacked the moral purpose he established in earlier confrontations.¹⁵ The fact that there is no evidence to date of Christie’s connection to the lane closures makes critiquing the Governor more difficult but not impossible. For instance, the *Newark Star-Ledger* editorial board blamed Christie, arguing that his “intense focus on securing endorsements from Democratic mayors for his re-election” was what “drove [his staffers] to keep an active list of his targets, rewarding those who cooperated and retaliating against those who didn’t.”¹⁶ Christie has responded to these claims numerous times, most notably in a press conference on January 9, 2014, in an exclusive interview with Diana Sawyer on March 27, 2014, and at a widely publicized town hall meeting in Brick, New Jersey on April 24 where Christie declared: “The allegation that somehow this was a culture that was created just doesn’t have any basis in fact. These folks who are making these allegations are folks who couldn’t get a political advantage out of one tactic so now they are trying to get a political advantage out of the other.”¹⁷ From Christie’s view, he was an innocent victim of rogue agents in his administration.

In this essay, I argue that the public reaction to the bridge scandal makes the most sense in relation to Christie’s *ethos*, loosely translated as credibility. While a scandal of this nature would likely damage any politician’s favorability, my analysis suggests that Christie was more vulnerable to criticism due to his prior “rogue *ethos*.” Most notably, Christie engaged in rogue conduct following Hurricane Sandy and rhetorically depicted himself as a principled politician who used that conduct to uphold his representative obligation to the people of New Jersey and the nation more broadly. In the case of the bridge scandal, Christie paid lip service to this existing character but emphasized his *personal* relationship with the rogue agents and his *interpretation* of his duty

¹³ Jennifer Rubin, “Can Chris Christie Get His Groove Back?” *Washington Post*, June 10, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/wp/2014/06/10/can-chris-christie-get-his-groove-back/>.

¹⁴ Paul Rosenberg, “Put a Fork in Chris Christie: He Will Never, Ever Be President After this Bad Month,” May 20, 2014, http://www.salon.com/2014/05/20/put_a_fork_in_chris_christie_he_will_never_ever_be_president_after_this_bad_month.

¹⁵ Editorial Board, “Yes, Chris Christie Did Create a Culture of Retaliation,” *Newark Star Ledger*, April 25, 2014, http://www.nj.com/opinion/index.ssf/2014/04/heres_why_chris_christie_did_create_a_culture_of_retaliation_editorial.html; Paul Begala, “Christie’s Choice: Be Seen as a Crook or a Schnook?” *CNN*, January 10, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/09/opinion/begala-christie-scandal-stick/index.html>.

¹⁶ Editorial Board, “Yes, Chris Christie Did Create a Culture of Retaliation.” See also: Kate Zernike, “Stories Add Up as Bully Image Trails Christie,” *New York Times*, December 24, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/25/nyregion/accounts-of-petty-retribution-reinforce-christies-bullying-image.html>; Begala, “Christie’s Choice.”

¹⁷ Chris Christie, “Governor Chris Christie News Conference,” *C-SPAN* video, January 9, 2014, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?317101-1/gov-chris-christie-nj-news-conference-lane-closures>; Chris Christie, “Diane Sawyer’s Exclusive Interview with Chris Christie,” *ABC News*, March 27, 2014, <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/video/diane-sawyers-exclusive-interview-chris-christie-23092214>; Chris Christie, quoted in Shushannah Walshe, “Christie Calls Accusations Office Culture Inspired Lane Closures ‘Factless,’” *ABC News*, April 24, 2014, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2014/04/christie-calls-accusations-office-culture-inspired-lane-closures-factless>.

as Governor. Moreover, Christie's bridge scandal response justified behaviors that protected his own political interests. The press has certainly picked up on the egocentric nature of Christie's response to the bridge scandal but has done so largely without regard to Christie's *ethos*.¹⁸ My analysis accounts for these press interpretations but connects Christie's character to context; Christie's personal appeals in the bridge scandal appear starker in contrast to his appeal to the people's interests following Hurricane Sandy in 2012 and 2013.

I base my conclusions on an analysis of two Christie press briefings, about Hurricane Sandy relief on January 2, 2013 and about the bridge scandal on January 9, 2014. Both of the briefings began with an opening statement and concluded with questions from the press. These texts are appropriate for a few reasons. First, the opening statements represent Christie's most complete and orchestrated commentary on the two topics. Because the statements are scripted ahead of time rather than impromptu remarks, I treat them as Christie's intended messages about both situations and about his *ethos*. Using impromptu remarks might offer insight into Christie's "true" self but addressing prepared remarks makes sense from the perspective of rogue *ethos* since rogues are calculating individuals who rely on planned tactics to achieve their aims. As the *New York Times* noted, depicting Christie in a "cartoonish way, as so many critics do, is to vastly underestimate his skill as a politician," particularly his "sophisticated" communication strategy.¹⁹ Additionally, these particular remarks were widely disseminated through the press, Christie's Governor website, and online platforms such as Twitter and YouTube. These statements were not run of the mill press conferences featuring a state governor but rather national news featured in a variety of mass media outlets.

To develop my argument, I first define what constitutes a political rogue. I use this definition to offer a preliminary theoretical framework of rogue rhetoric as it relates to *ethos* and self-defense. There, I explain two functions of rhetoric—justification and enactment—that rogues might use to achieve their aims. I then apply this framework to Christie's responses to Sandy relief and the bridge scandal to illustrate the dissimilar depictions of his *ethos*. In the conclusion, I consider how Christie's case illuminates broader rhetorical challenges of "going rogue," especially the risk that a rogue rhetor who uses the bully pulpit might come to be seen as a bully.

Defining Political Rogues

"Rogues" have existed since at least Elizabethan England in the 16th century. The earliest recorded use of the English noun associated rogues with vagabonds, vagrants, jesters, minstrels, scum, and thieves.²⁰ The term implied individuals who existed—often by choice—apart from or outside the established norms of a given community. People knew a rogue based on his or her social status, economic class, and personality traits. Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz note that rogues emerged as a "class of displaced figures, poor men and women with no clear social place

¹⁸ See, for example, Frank Bruni, "The 'I' in Christie's Storm," *New York Times*, January 11, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/12/opinion/sunday/bruni-the-i-in-christies-storm.html>; Dana Milbank, "Chris Christie, the New Jersey Narcissist," *Washington Post*, January 12, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/dana-milbank-new-jersey-narcissist/2014/01/10/4a4b7d48-79ff-11e3-af7f-13bf0e9965f6_story.html; "Hard to See the Victim Here," *Buffalo News*, January 14, 2014; Karen Heller, "Christie's Apology is All About Politics," *Philadelphia Enquirer*, January 13, 2014, http://articles.philly.com/2014-01-13/news/46116468_1_chris-christie-david-wildstein-sokolich; "How Politicians Burn Bridges," *Sunday Star-Times* (Auckland, New Zealand), January 12, 2014.

¹⁹ Bai, "When I Run Out of Fights to Have, I'll Stop Fighting."

²⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd edition, s.v. "rogue," A1.

or identity.”²¹ Although rogues were historically poor people, they comprised a particular *kind* of poor people distinguished by their crafty conduct. This is evident, for instance, when the British Parliament passed in 1572 “an Act for the punishment of vagabonds, and for relief of the poor and impotent” that clearly distinguished “rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars” from other poor individuals insofar as the former group manipulated others to get ahead.²²

Drawing upon this historical counterpart, I offer the following preliminary definition of a political rogue: *Political rogues are individuals who purposefully disrupt the moral, social, or political order through unpredictable and indecorous conduct.* This definition is not only consistent with the traditional meaning of the word but also reflects the term’s usage across numerous contexts. In capitalism (“rogue trader” or “rogue banker”), international relations (“rogue nation”), weather (“rogue wave”), organizations (“rogue agent”), and national politics (“going rogue”), something is branded a “rogue” if it is unpredictable and acts outside the sanctioned norms of conduct. Rogues unsettle things within the scope of their influence, often with little regard to the impact of their rogue conduct. There is a certain playfulness to rogues, which might explain why rhetorical critic and “rogue scholar” Ted M. Coopman turned to the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Player’s Handbook* for one of the clearest definitions in recent times:

Rogues are people who feel that the world (and everyone in it) somehow owes them a living. They get by day to day, living in the highest style they can afford and doing as little work as possible. The less they have to toil and struggle like everyone else (while maintaining a comfortable standard of living), the better off they think they are. While this attitude is neither evil nor cruel, it does not foster a good reputation. Many a rogue has a questionable past or a shady background he’d prefer was left uninvestigated.²³

Having this particular demeanor, however, is not to be confused with intent. More specifically, a lack of regard for the impact of one’s conduct on others does not equate to being mean spirited or out to harm people. The *Handbook* further clarifies that “while many rogues are motivated only by a desire to amass fortune in the easiest way possible, some rogues have noble aims; they use their skills to correct injustice, spread good will, or contribute to the success of an adventuring group.”²⁴ In this regard, the ethical quality of a rogue’s aims has little bearing on his or her status as a rogue.

So it is with political rogues: They are a class of politicians who, through selfish or noble aims, engage in mischievous conduct and unsettle established norms. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to political roguery and political rogues might use numerous tactics—confrontation, isolation, erratic or unconventional behavior—to achieve their aims. And yet rogues tend to share a similar attitude, which Sarah Palin, former Governor of Alaska and self-declared political rogue, explained as rejecting a “go along to get along” mindset in favor of a “don’t tread on me”

²¹ Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz, “Introduction,” in *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*, eds. Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz, 1-29 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 1.

²² “14 Eliz. Cap. V: An Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds, and for Relief of the Poor and Impotent,” in *Select Statutes and Other Constitutional Documents Illustrative of the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I*, second ed., ed. G. W. Prothero (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), 67, 69.

²³ *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Players’s Handbook*, no. 2159 (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1995), 54; Ted M. Coopman, “Rogue Scholar Manifesto 1.0,” <http://www.roguecom.com/roguescholar/manifesto.html>.

²⁴ *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Players’s Handbook*, 35.

demeanor.²⁵ Political rogues tend to, but don't always, privilege their own personal perspective or entitlement above others and might indicate little regard for the consequences of their actions. And political rogues, some with questionable pasts that they hope are never exposed, may toil to succeed in politics despite the impact their rogue status may have on their reputation. Just as rogues in Elizabethan England "provide a potent image of the *social* adeptness required in a society premised on mobility and the endlessly changing conditions of exchange that constitute modern capitalism,"²⁶ contemporary political rogues illustrate a *political* adeptness required in a system shackled by partisanship and politics as usual; the rogue underworld of mercantile capitalism provides a metaphoric vantage point for the political underworld of the contemporary United States, in which some political rogues, to use Dionne's language, "rebound from plight and prosper in the [political] margins through covert forms" of action.²⁷ Given this definition of political rogues, the next section explores the importance of *ethos* to political rogues particularly as it relates to their rhetorical tactics.

The *Ethos* and Rhetoric of Rogues

Sixteenth century rogues were resourceful in conducting their affairs through a variety of tactics but they often relied on rhetoric, or what Dionne and Mentz describe as "linguistic prowess and social dexterity."²⁸ Similarly, contemporary political rogues use rhetoric to manage their rogue conduct and to justify their behavior when others question it. This relationship between rogues and their audience makes *ethos* central to the operations of rogue rhetoric. In this section, I define the concept of *ethos* generally before discussing two main rhetorical strategies that establish and enhance "rogue *ethos*."

In ancient times, the term *ethos* referred to a person's character but, more specifically, the communal nature of that character. William M. Sattler explained that ancient Greeks viewed *ethos* as "the usages, habits, and traditions of one social group as distinguished from another."²⁹ Aristotle provided the most robust theorization of *ethos* in classical times, describing it as a combination of intelligence, character, and good will as adapted to and directed toward the audience.³⁰ While *ethos* applies to individuals, S. Michael Halloran has noted that "to have *ethos* is to manifest the virtues most valued by the culture to and for which one speaks."³¹ Consequently, rhetors establish their *ethos* to the degree that they, among other things, respect cultural norms, reinforce shared values, emphasize community relations, and display prudential judgment. *Ethos*, then, may serve as a mode of persuasion alongside *logos* and *pathos*, but it is not entirely under the rhetor's control. Rather, Nedra Reynolds observes that *ethos* is "a negotiation or mediation between the rhetor and the community" that "cannot be determined outside of the space in which

²⁵ Sarah Palin, "Sarah Palin Is 'Team Rand,' Surprised 'Buffoon' Dems Jumping off ObamaCare Train Wreck," *Cashin' In*, *Fox News Insider*, August 10, 2013, <http://foxnewsinsider.com/2013/08/10/sarah-palin-team-rand-pleasantly-surprised-buffoon-dems-jump-obamacare-train-wreck>.

²⁶ Emphasis added. Dionne and Mentz, "Introduction," 8.

²⁷ Craig Dionne, "Fashioning Outlaws: The Early Modern Rogue and Urban Culture," in *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*, eds. Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz, 33-61 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 41.

²⁸ Dionne and Mentz, "Introduction," 1.

²⁹ William M. Sattler, "Conceptions of *Ethos* in Ancient Rhetoric," *Speech Monographs* 14 (1947): 55.

³⁰ Sattler, "Conceptions of *Ethos* in Ancient Rhetoric," 58.

³¹ S. Michael Halloran, "Aristotle's Concept of Ethos, or if not His Somebody Else's," *Rhetoric Review* 1 (1982), 60.

it was created or without a sense of the cultural context”³² Consequently, speakers often use rhetoric to strategically construct their *ethos* in line with the beliefs, traditions, and values of the audience.

Despite a wealth of research on *ethos*, scholars have not theorized the connection between rogues and rhetorical *ethos*. This paucity is surprising given that “going rogue” poses numerous risks to one’s *ethos*. First, the unpredictable behavior that characterizes rogue conduct may make members of the audience uneasy and wary of the speaker.³³ Uncertainty is a powerful agent of distrust and, hence, may damage the audience’s perception of a speaker’s character and good will. Second, rogue conduct often involves acting on one’s own, by disrupting or subverting established norms for behavior—the very norms that help inform a person’s *ethos*. In so doing, audiences might perceive a rogue to lack the virtues (such as honesty and prudence) that connect the rogue’s *ethos* to the community. By definition, rogues live at the metaphoric margins of society rather than squarely in the center. And third, the intentional rather than accidental nature of rogue behavior connects such behavior to *ethos* because it involves motivated choice. A rogue’s erratic conduct does not mean that conduct is impulsive or lacks strategy; many political rogues plan to go rogue well in advance and use a variety of strategic means to do so.

However, the relationship between *ethos* and habit offers a proviso. As individuals more frequently engage in rogue conduct and as they are more frequently characterized as rogues by themselves and others, roguishness becomes more ingrained into the individual’s *ethos*. After all, judgments of *ethos* are based on “neither accidental nor isolated behavior, but habitual behavior.”³⁴ Arthur B. Miller further explains using the character trait of nobility: “when a person observes someone who habitually does noble actions, then there is a reasonable expectation that a concomitant of the habitually noble act is a noble disposition. . . . one portrays character . . . best by showing its origin in habit and disposition.”³⁵ Consequently, people will view someone who habitually engages in rogue behavior as having a rogue disposition and, therefore, having what I label a “rogue *ethos*.” Through rogue *ethos*, political rhetors can mitigate the risks of rogue conduct by establishing and then meeting expectations within the audience. So, for instance, this particular *ethos* might enable someone to be predictably unpredictable.

In my conceptualization, rogue *ethos* is a form of self-identification and, therefore, applies to individuals who characterize themselves as rogues. This relies on an important distinction between being a rogue on the one hand and engaging in rogue behavior on the other. Rep. Joe Wilson’s (R-SC) outburst during President Barack Obama’s health care speech is instructive in this regard. Shouting “you lie!” during a presidential speech is a clear instance of rogue conduct. FOX News labeled it “an extraordinary breach of congressional decorum,” citing members of Congress from both parties who condemned Wilson’s action.³⁶ The U.S. House of Representatives even passed a formal resolution of disapproval, declaring that Wilson’s conduct “degraded the proceedings of the joint session, to the discredit of the House.”³⁷ Underscoring the deviant nature of Wilson’s act, CNN quoted Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) who said she found it “ra-

³² Nedra Reynolds, “*Ethos* as Location: New Sites for Understanding Discursive Authority,” *Rhetoric Review* 11 (1993): 328-29.

³³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd edition, s.v. “rogue.”

³⁴ Arthur B. Miller, “Aristotle on Habit (*εθος*) and Character (*ηθος*): Implications for the *Rhetoric*,” *Speech Monographs* 41 (1974): 315.

³⁵ Miller, “Aristotle on Habit (*εθος*) and Character (*ηθος*),” 311.

³⁶ FOX News, “Congressman Yells ‘You Lie’ at Obama During Speech,” *FOX News*, September 10, 2009, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/09/10/congressman-yells-lie-obama-speech>.

³⁷ *Raising a Question of the Privileges of the House*, 111th Cong., 1st sess., H. R. 744.

ther surprising” because he is “a likeable guy, seemingly reserved.”³⁸ In response to the criticism of his rogue behavior, Wilson did not justify his conduct but rather immediately apologized for his “lack of civility” and letting “my emotions get the best of me.”³⁹ Four months later, Wilson assured the public that he would behave during the State of the Union Address, remarking: “I am a gentleman. My natural inclination is to be on my best behavior.”⁴⁰ Hardly the rabble-rousing rhetoric of a rogue. In this case, Wilson lacked a rogue *ethos* heading into the outburst and he sought to reestablish that *ethos* in its wake; his rhetoric appealed to communal values of decorum, civility, and reasonable discourse as a way to reaffirm his non-rogue nature in the minds of the audience. In cases of rogue *ethos*, however, politicians use rhetoric to embrace rather than deny their rogue nature.

Rhetoric might have numerous functions within the rogue’s repertoire but two are relevant here: rogue justification and rogue enactment. Rogue justification, as the name implies, functions to explain rogue conduct and often to establish a positive *ethos*. Rogue justification may, on occasion, serve as a speech of defense, or *apologia*,⁴¹ but the rhetoric of rogue justification is a distinct genre. For a start, rogue justification does not require a rhetorical accusation, something that Halford Ross Ryan has identified to be a necessary antecedent for *apologia*.⁴² Instead, political rogues might offer justificatory rhetoric for their rogue conduct prior to or simultaneously with that action, independent of accusatory rhetoric. When 14 Democratic state senators fled Wisconsin in 2011 to protest Governor Scott Walker’s budget bill, many of them released statements or issued posts through social media to justify their rogue behavior. For instance, Rep. Lena Taylor posted “brb” (shorthand for “be right back”) to her Facebook wall while Rep. Chris Larson tweeted: “For those looking for us, we are right here, standing with the people of Wisconsin. #solidarityWI”⁴³ To prevent questions or concerns regarding their whereabouts, Wisconsin Senate Democratic Leader, Rep. Mark Miller, even released a statement to the press explaining the 14 Senators’ decision to leave the state.⁴⁴ The rhetoric, in this case, accompanied the rogue conduct to justify that behavior through various rhetorical strategies.

Moreover, while speeches of defense often focus on a person’s *character* through broad strategies of image restoration,⁴⁵ rogue justification tends to focus on the rogue’s *behavior* to illustrate an unrepentant rectitude. Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North’s testimony in the Iran-*contra* scandal illustrates. North engaged in rogue conduct when he channeled funds from Iranian weapons sales to the *contras* fighting in Nicaragua. He justified his rogue conduct across six days and more than 30 hours of televised testimony, testimony that has been condensed to the

³⁸ Sheila Jackson Lee, quoted in CNN, “Rep. Wilson Shouts ‘You Lie’ to Obama During Speech,” *CNN*, September 10, 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/09/09/joe.wilson/index.html>.

³⁹ Joe Wilson, quoted in CNN, “Rep. Wilson Shouts ‘You Lie’ to Obama During Speech.”

⁴⁰ Joe Wilson, quoted in CBS/AP, “Joe Wilson: Don’t Expect ‘You Lie!’ Repeat,” *CBS News*, January 27, 2010, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/joe-wilson-dont-expect-you-lie-repeat>.

⁴¹ See, for example, B. L. Ware and Wil Linkugel, “They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 59 (1973): 273-283; Halford Ross Ryan, “*Kategoria* and *Apologia*: On Their Rhetorical Criticism as a Speech Set,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68 (1982): 254-261; Sharon Downey, “The Evolution of the Rhetorical Genre of Apologia,” *Western Journal of Communication* 57 (1993): 42-64;

⁴² Ryan, “*Kategoria* and *Apologia*,” 254.

⁴³ Lena Taylor, quoted in Max Read, “Fugitive Wisconsin Senator Updates Facebook: ‘BRB,’” *Gawker*, February 18, 2011, <http://gawker.com/5763889/fugitive-wisconsin-senator-updates-facebook-brb>; Chris Larson, Twitter post, February 17, 2011, 11:21am, <https://twitter.com/ChrisJLarson/statuses/38317126674690048>.

⁴⁴ Jason Stein and Patrick Marley, *More Than They Bargained For: Scott Walker, Unions and the Fight for Wisconsin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 107.

⁴⁵ Joy Koesten and Robert C. Rowland, “The Rhetoric of Atonement,” *Communication Studies* 55 (2004): 70.

following rhetorical gem: “I saw that idea of using the Ayatollah Khomeini’s money to support the Nicaraguan Freedom Fighters as a good one. I still do. I don’t think it was wrong. I think it was a neat idea and I came back and I advocated that and we did it.”⁴⁶ Unlike Rep. Wilson, North promoted the benefits of his rogue conduct through adjectives such as “good,” “right,” and “neat” and he reaffirmed his status as a rogue rather than making a contrite effort to obey the established norms of political behavior. North’s rhetoric was largely expository in nature to illustrate his right judgment.

A second function of rogue rhetoric—enactment—actually *constitutes* the rogue act. That is, rhetoric itself may be the vehicle for political rogues to unsettle the political or social order. As Chris Darr has stated in the context of civility, the concept of rhetorical enactment emphasizes phenomena as “an argumentative process between speaker and audience” that accounts for “the expectations and ideologies of multiple, fragmented audiences.”⁴⁷ Like *ethos* and civility, rogue enactment is bound to context such that the same rhetorical act might or might not constitute rogue conduct depending on the audience, the situation, and the rhetor. For instance, Sarah Palin lived up to her rogue status through rhetorical enactment, by “going off-message” during the 2008 presidential race to the detriment of the McCain campaign.⁴⁸ Had she not been McCain’s running mate, her behavior would have drawn less ire from campaign staff and the campaign could have more easily dismissed her as a disgruntled Republican along the lines of her fellow Tea Party ilk. Instead, the context of her rhetoric as Vice Presidential candidate made her a rogue. Moreover, Palin’s rogue conduct during the 2008 campaign was less surprising given her already established rogue *ethos*. The day McCain selected Palin as his running mate, for example, the Associated Press was one of a number of press outlets that introduced Palin as having “genuine maverick status,” noting “she built her career in large measure by challenging fellow Republicans.”⁴⁹ Her subsequent conduct reinforced this perception. For instance, when FOX News co-host Mort Kondracke mentioned Palin’s critique of the McCain campaign for leaving Michigan, co-host Fred Barnes simply stated “She’s a maverick, Sarah Palin.”⁵⁰ Beyond rogue enactment during the campaign, she justified her conduct through rhetoric such as her 2009 autobiography *Going Rogue: An American Life*. Like Rep. Wilson, Palin’s *ethos* related to the habit of rogue conduct as well as the rhetoric she and others used to frame her conduct within a broader narrative tied to particular community values such as decorum, loyalty, and autonomy.

The two functions of rogue justification and rogue enactment are not meant to exhaustively establish a genre of rogue rhetoric.⁵¹ Instead, my purpose has been to illuminate different uses of rhetoric in relation to rogue conduct and to emphasize the connection these rhetorical choices

⁴⁶ Oliver North, “Iran-*Contra* Investigation Day 24,” *C-SPAN* video, July 8, 1987, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?9533-1/irancontra-investigation-day-24>.

⁴⁷ Christopher R. Darr, “Civility as Rhetorical Enactment: The John Ashcroft ‘Debates’ and Burke’s Theory of Form,” *Southern Communication Journal* 70 (2005): 326.

⁴⁸ Michiko Kakutani, “Memoir Is Palin’s Payback to McCain Campaign,” *New York Times*, November 14, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/15/books/15book.html>.

⁴⁹ Liz Sidoti, “McCain Taps Alaska Governor for VP,” *Associated Press*, August 29, 2008.

⁵⁰ Fred Barnes, “Sarah Palin Holds Her Own at the VP Debate and Congress Passes a Financial Rescue Package,” *Fox News*, October 6, 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2008/10/06/sarah-palin-holds-her-own-at-vp-debate-and-congress-passes-financial-rescue>. See also a more liberal perspective: John Dickerson, “Palin’s Campaign vs. McCain’s: When Sarah Palin Disagrees with John McCain, It Means Something. Or Does It?” *Slate*, October 20, 2008, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2008/10/palins_campaign_vs_mccains.html.

⁵¹ As an aside, I should note that the sharp distinction between justification and enactment is a heuristic to assist my initial theorization of rogue rhetoric. There are, however, instances of rogue rhetoric that function as both justification and enactment.

have to the rhetor's *ethos*. The risks of going rogue often demand that politicians use rhetoric to either atone for their conduct through image repair or to justify their conduct through rogue *ethos*. This theory of rogue *ethos* is evident in Christie's rhetorical responses to Sandy relief and the bridge scandal.

Rogue Enactment: Shaming Others About Hurricane Sandy Relief

Hurricane Sandy reached the eastern seaboard in late October 2012, leaving New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut the hardest hit states. All told, more than 70 people died as a result of the storm, millions were without power, and more than \$50 billion in damage was left in its wake.⁵² To assist with preparation and recovery, President Obama signed emergency declarations the day before the storm arrived and offered disaster relief immediately after its arrival.⁵³ On October 31, he toured damaged parts of New Jersey with Governor Christie and spoke with some of the affected residents.

Christie portended his rogue conduct when he publicly praised Obama's management of Hurricane Sandy as "outstanding."⁵⁴ Extolling the Democrat President—in the final week of Obama's reelection bid, no less—led some fellow Republicans to brand Christie a traitor.⁵⁵ From their perspective, Christie violated political norms of party allegiance and fortified Obama's standing heading into the election. Christie retorted that "I'm a guy who tells the truth all the time, and if the president of the United States does something good, I'm going to say he did something good and give him credit for it."⁵⁶ The press circulated comments like this with pictures of Christie and Obama walking around the damaged areas of New Jersey as visual confirmation of this budding friendship.⁵⁷

Nonpartisanship became a stronger virtue in the ensuing drama surrounding federal aid. The U.S. Senate passed a \$60.4 billion aid package on December 28, 2012 but the House did not consider it prior to the end of the session on January 2. The *New York Times* explained that Speaker of the House John Boehner "quietly moved to keep the bill from coming to the floor" following "a raucous marathon session on fiscal issues."⁵⁸ Because of this apparently political delay, both chambers of the Congress were required to take up the bill again in the next session, scheduled to begin on January 15, and those affected by the storm were left waiting for federal aid. The Con-

⁵² "Report: Sandy Was USA's 2nd-Costliest Hurricane," *USA Today*, February 12, 2013, www.usatoday.com/story/weather/2013/02/12/hurricane-sandy-weather-katrina/1912941.

⁵³ "Hurricane Sandy: Timeline," *Federal Emergency Management Agency*, U.S. Government, October 28, 2013, <http://www.fema.gov/hurricane-sandy-timeline>.

⁵⁴ Rachel Weiner, "Chris Christie: Obama 'Outstanding' in Response to Hurricane Sandy," *Washington Post*, October 30, 2012, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2012/10/30/chris-christie-obama-outstanding-in-response-to-hurricane-sandy>; Catalina Camia, "Gov. Christie: Obama Has Been 'Outstanding,'" *USA Today*, October 30, 2012, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/onpolitics/2012/10/30/obama-chris-christie-sandy-disaster/1668133>.

⁵⁵ David Halbfinger, "With Storm Response, Christie Earns Scorn, Praise and Much Attention," *New York Times*, November 7, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/08/nyregion/hurricane-response-burnishes-gov-christies-reputation.html>.

⁵⁶ Quoted in David Halbfinger, "With Storm Response, Christie Earns Scorn, Praise and Much Attention."

⁵⁷ See for instance: "Election 2012: Chris Christie, Joe Biden's Dentist and Twitter Among Big Winners; Sarah Palin, Clint Eastwood and Donald Trump Among Big Losers," *New York Daily News*, November 7, 2012, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/election-2012-winners-losers-article-1.1197912>.

⁵⁸ Raymond Hernandez, "Stalling of Storm Aid Makes Northeast Republicans Furious," *New York Times*, January 2, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/03/nyregion/congressional-members-blast-house-for-ignoring-storm-aid-bill.html>.

gress eventually passed H.R. 41, a nearly \$10 billion aid package on, January 4 and appropriated an additional \$51 billion in relief on January 28.⁵⁹ President Obama signed the relief bill into law on January 29, 2013, three months to the day after Sandy made landfall in New Jersey.

Christie had a rhetorical hand in fast-tracking the January 4 relief bill as well as putting pressure on the Congress to adopt the entire package. In so doing, however, Christie transgressed political norms by criticizing Congressional members of his party in a public platform. His rogue enactment was most evident in a press briefing on January 2 that included a seven minute opening statement followed by 30 minutes of question and answer. Christie's main lines of argument in this briefing were consistent with but more developed than other statements on the situation.⁶⁰ Analyzing this briefing from the perspective of rogue rhetoric reveals that Christie established his rogue *ethos* through republican virtues, framing himself as an irreproachable political representative, and used such credibility to shame—perhaps even bully—the House leadership for their breach of political principle. His rogue enactment, while demonstrating his vindictive and arrogant nature, helped justify his behavior within the context of the audience's pre-existing values.

Christie's statement addressed federal aid for Sandy relief but explicitly denied a need to justify that aid, asserting that the package "should be a no-brainer for the House Republicans."⁶¹ Rather, this was a speech of blame designed to critique the climate and character of national politics that blocked the aid's passage and victimized the people of New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut. Michael Crowley's cover story in *TIME* explained that "Congress managed to avoid the calamity of the fiscal cliff on Jan. 1, but only after embarrassing chaos within Republican ranks. . . . Boehner delayed a \$60 billion disaster-relief bill for Sandy-affected areas, with much of the money designated for New Jersey. Christie went rogue. 'Shame on Congress,' he said, singling out his Republican allies with bracing vitriol."⁶² Indeed, the climax of the statement involved Christie shaming Speaker of the House John Boehner and the Congress, an act that many perceived as a challenge to the political order: "66 days and counting. Shame on you. Shame on Congress." In my analysis of this speech, I argue that Christie framed his rogue conduct from a position of moral superiority through two primary tactics: focusing on the precedent for Congressional hurricane relief to blame current leaders and comparing his representative leadership to members of the U.S. House.

At the start of the statement, Christie set the tone for his eventual challenge to Republicans by establishing the norm for Congressional response to natural disasters. Through parallel structure, he identified how long it took the Congress to provide aid following Hurricanes Andrew,

⁵⁹ *To Temporarily Increase the Borrowing Authority of the Federal Emergency Management Agency for Carrying Out the National Flood Insurance Program*, 113th Cong., 1st sess., H. R. 41; *Making Supplemental Appropriations for the Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 2013, to Improve and Streamline Disaster Assistance for Hurricane Sandy, and for Other Purposes*, 113th Cong., 1st sess., H. R. 152.

⁶⁰ Chris Christie, "New Jersey State of the State Address," *C-SPAN* video, January 8, 2013, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?310248-1/new-jersey-state-state-address>. See also: GovChristie, "Governor Christie: Congress Needs To Get Their Act Together," *YouTube* video, 1:57, December 21, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFtichTgHIM>; GovChristie, "Governor Christie On The Today Show: I'll Continue To Speak Out About Things I Think Are Important," *YouTube* video, 7:10, January 9, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3V_64FJnOM; GovChristie, "Governor Christie On CBS This Morning: My Job Is To Be Governor And Advocate For My Constituents," *YouTube* video, 5:34, January 9, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bVJgQHrRQs>.

⁶¹ Chris Christie, "Governor Christie on Hurricane Sandy Federal Funding," *C-SPAN* video, January 2, 2013, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?310184-1/governor-christie-hurricane-sandy-federal-funding>. All subsequent quotations from the Hurricane Sandy press briefing come from this source.

⁶² Crowley, "The Boss."

Gustav, Ike, and Katrina. He summarized: “31 days for Andrew victims. 17 days for victims of Gustav and Ike. 10 days for victims of Katrina. For the victims of Sandy in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut, it’s been 66 days and the wait continues.” Comparing four hurricanes of similar caliber demonstrated the unusual nature of the response to Sandy. In effect, Christie argued that the Congress had violated its own benchmark for action. Because this was a deviation rather than the norm, Christie (and the public for which he stood) was justified in criticizing those responsible.

Indeed, Christie immediately turned to the current House leadership: “There’s only one group to blame for the continued suffering of these innocent victims: The House Majority and their Speaker, John Boehner.” Politics supplanted people, Christie argued, remarking that the aid package “could not overcome the toxic internal politics of the House Majority.” Furthermore, he characterized the behavior of House leaders with scornful words such as “callous indifference,” “selfishness,” and “duplicity.” This framing implied that the House Republicans, not Christie, had engaged in rogue conduct when they focused on their own personal interests and bucked prior norms of proper representative action.

In addition to demonstrating the rogue character of House leaders, Christie portrayed his own republican virtues. Beth Innocenti Manolescu has observed that “in making a shame appeal an arguer incurs an obligation to have made a responsible moral judgment about who can perform the action in what circumstances.”⁶³ Christie assumed this *ethos* by, first, emphasizing his status as an elected official. For instance, he used inclusive pronouns to note that “we respond to innocent victims of natural disasters not as Republicans or Democrats but as Americans. Or at least we did until last night.” Christie’s authority on how representatives respond to natural disasters enabled him to declare Congress’ behavior “disappointing and disgusting to watch” because “politics was placed before our oaths to serve our citizens.” His appeal to the principle of representation explained both his disgust and the discrepancy between his style of leadership and his peers; he self-identified as an elected official but not of the kind on display in the Congress. Rather, he “took an oath to serve all the people in New Jersey without regard to race or ethnicity, gender or political affiliation” and has “always put the people of New Jersey and my oath ahead of petty, personal politics.” Christie’s *ethos* afforded him a selfless superiority in criticizing members of his own party.

Beyond *claiming* to be a representative of the people, Christie also *embodied* this role. He spoke for “the people,” noting that “Americans are tired of the palace intrigue and political partisanship of this Congress, which places one-upmanship ahead of the lives of the citizens who sent these people to Washington, D.C. in the first place.” Later he remarked that “America deserves better than just another example of a government that’s forgotten who they’re there to serve and why.” And he concluded his speech by assuring “the people of this region” that “Governor Cuomo and I will not stop fighting together to see that justice is done and that our citizens’ suffering is finally addressed by this Congress.” These statements established Christie as a champion of representative government by showing—through both the form and the content of his rhetoric—that he was on the people’s side. Moreover, these statements empathized with the frustration of his constituents and appealed to common values of compassion, justice, and representation.

In the question-and-answer session following his statement, Christie expounded upon this *ethos* by underscoring his good will and interest in the welfare of the people. He argued that “it is extraordinarily frustrating to me that we’ve got people down there who use the citizens of this country like pawns on a chessboard. That’s the way the citizens of New York and New Jersey

⁶³ Beth Innocenti Manolescu, “Shaming In and Into Argumentation,” *Argumentation* 21 (2007): 383.

were treated last night; on a political chessboard of internal palace intrigue politics, our people were played last night as a pawn. And that's why people hate Washington D.C." The chessboard metaphor trivialized concern about the fiscal cliff by insinuating that members of the Congress viewed it as a game to be won or lost. Christie, on the other hand, had genuine concern with the people as "somebody who has a real job to do here, you know who's held responsible for the lives and health and safety of people in the state." This concern was manifest in his recognition that the delay had "real consequence," insofar as "every day that we don't begin to get this aid are days [*sic*] that we can't help people get back in their homes, get businesses reopened, get our economy re-moving in this state again."

In sum, Christie went rogue through this press briefing by shaming his fellow Republicans, a rhetorical enactment that some believed to be outside the scope of the acceptable political behavior.⁶⁴ When Christie was left off the invite list for the Conservative Political Action Conference in March 2013, his rogue conduct regarding Hurricane Sandy seemed to be the driving force.⁶⁵ Christie's rogue enactment may have produced sour grapes with his fellow republicans but Christie seemed unconcerned about those consequences. After all, he downplayed this charge of being a defector or a bully by framing members of the Congress as more egregious rogues and by appealing to shared values of responsibility, security, justice, and representation. Similar to the rogues of Elizabethan England, Christie showed adroit skill in challenging the political order and he did so for noble aims to protect the people. If Christie's approval ratings are any indication, his audience regarded the cultural values promoted by Christie as more important than concerns that his tactics aired dirty laundry for a public audience and bullied House leadership into submission. Christie's behavior gained traction precisely because its rogue nature symbolized something that appealed to the audience in this context.

Rogue Justification: Personal Shame about the Bridge Scandal

In late 2013, Christie was again making national headlines but for less honorable reasons than earlier in the year. The controversy surrounded lane closures on the George Washington Bridge between New Jersey and New York in early September which "triggered massive traffic jams" by funneling three lanes of traffic into one.⁶⁶ Port Authority officials have maintained that the closures were part of a traffic study but there was immediate speculation that they were punitive, targeting Fort Lee Mayor Mark Sokolich who endorsed Barbara Buono in the New Jersey Governor's race.⁶⁷ This conjecture raised enough questions to produce full-blown investigations from, first, New Jersey state officials and, later, the Port Authority.

Between October and December, Christie positioned himself as an unaware leader frustrated with the attention being placed on a dead-end story. When the budding scandal was no more than speculation in mid-October, Christie dismissed it and claimed, "So cones get put up, what the

⁶⁴ Ashley Killough, "Rand Paul: Christie Threw a 'Tantrum,'" *CNN*, January 18, 2013, <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2013/01/18/rand-paul-christie-threw-a-tantrum>.

⁶⁵ Jim Rutenberg, "Divisions in G.O.P. Are Laid Bare on First Day of Conservative Conference," *New York Times*, March 15, 2013; Daniel Ruth, "Electable Politician Need Not Apply," *Tampa Bay Times*, March 19, 2013. Christie was later left off of the invite list for the CPAC

⁶⁶ Ted Mann and Heather Haddon, "Bridge Jam's Cause a Mystery," *Wall Street Journal*, September 17, 2013, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324665604579081630876156774>.

⁶⁷ Mann and Haddon, "Bridge Jam's Cause a Mystery"; John Cichowski, "Road Warrior: Closed Tollbooths a Commuting Disaster," *The Record* (Bergen County, NJ), September 13, 2013, <http://www.northjersey.com/news/new-york-tri-state-area/road-warrior-closed-tollbooths-a-commuting-disaster-1.639923>.

hell do I know?”⁶⁸ On December 2, he made light of the situation by joking that “unbeknownst to anyone, I was actually the guy out there . . . I actually was the guy working the cones.”⁶⁹ Between December 6 and December 13, two Port Authority officials—Executive Director Bill Baroni and Director of Interstate Capital Projects David Wildstein—resigned for personal reasons and cited the bridge scandal as taking a toll on them. These resignations led Christie to question his senior staffers prior to a press conference, giving them an hour to confess any involvement. When none came, he publicly admitted to the press that “mistakes were made” but further labeled the scandal a “distraction” involving “a whole lot of hullabaloo.”⁷⁰ The following week he deemed the situation resolved, noting he had no reason to suspect that anyone had lied to him about it. He remarked that “it’s not that big a deal” and commented that the situation would have generated much less publicity were he not “a national figure.”⁷¹ In other words, his existing *ethos* mattered to the development of this story.

The scandal went from “distraction” to “big deal” on January 8, 2014 when Wildstein provided the New Jersey legislative investigation more than 900 pages of documents (e-mails, text messages, mock-up configurations, etc.) relating to the lane closures.⁷² The documents revealed that key Christie staffers—primarily but not exclusively Wildstein and Bridget Anne Kelly, Deputy Chief of Staff for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs—were the architects behind the lane closures. What is more, the documents revealed malicious intent against those who disagree with Christie, such as supporters of gubernatorial candidate Barbara Buono. The *New York Times* reported that “the emails are striking in their political maneuvering, showing Christie aides gleeful about some of the chaos that resulted.”⁷³ The scandal finally had its villains and one could almost hear Christie repeating, with minor modifications, his rhetorical assertion concerning Hurricane Sandy relief: “it is extraordinarily frustrating to me that we’ve got people [here] who use the citizens of this country like pawns on a chessboard. That’s the way the citizens of New York and New Jersey were treated last [year by my staffers]; on a political chessboard of internal palace intrigue politics, our people were played . . . as a pawn.”

Christie, of course, made no such statement. In place of rage-induced rhetoric of blame meant to shame rogue agents, Christie offered the rhetoric of self-defense—with particular emphasis on the self. He delivered this response on January 9 through a nearly two-hour press conference focused entirely on the bridge scandal. He began with a fifteen minute statement followed by question-and-answer with members of the press. As I will illustrate, Christie’s briefing

⁶⁸ Melissa Hayes, “Weinberg Wants to Subpoena Port Authority on GWB Lane Closures,” *The Record* (Bergen County, NJ), October 17, 2013, <http://www.northjersey.com/news/weinberg-wants-to-subpoena-port-authority-on-gwb-lane-closures-1.611215>.

⁶⁹ Chris Christie, quoted in Matt Katz, “Christie Sarcastically Denies Involvement in GW Bridge Traffic Controversy,” *New Jersey Public Radio*, December 2, 2013, <http://www.wnyc.org/story/christie-denies-sarcasm-involvement-gw-bridge-traffic-controversy>.

⁷⁰ Chris Christie, quoted in Ashley Killough, “Another Resignation Comes in Christie Administration Over Bridge Scandal,” *CNN*, December 13, 2013, <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2013/12/13/another-resignation-comes-in-christie-administration-over-bridge-scandal>.

⁷¹ Chris Christie, quoted in Michael Monday, “Chris Christie on GWB Controversy: It’s Only Still Being Covered Because I’m a National Figure,” *The Star-Ledger*, December 19, 2013, http://videos.nj.com/nj/2013/12/chris_christie_on_gwb_controve.html.

⁷² “Exhibit A,” Committee Meeting of Assembly Transportation, Public Works, and Independent Authorities Committee, New Jersey, *Public Hearings Transcripts 2014*, State of New Jersey, January 9, 2014, <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/legislativepub/pubhearings2014.asp#ATR>.

⁷³ Kate Zernike, “Christie Faces Scandal on Traffic Jam Aides Ordered,” *New York Times*, January 8, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/09/nyregion/christie-aide-tied-to-bridge-lane-closings.html>.

about the scandal involved strategies of *ethos* management that went against the rogue *ethos* he constructed a year prior. This was evident in two main thematic elements. First, rather than appeal to the same civic values of representation and justice from his Sandy briefing, Christie framed his justifications in a personal context around values of loyalty and honesty. Second, Christie abandoned the no-nonsense nature of his rogue *ethos* that endeared him to citizens in the wake of Hurricane Sandy while retaining the antagonism and spite that accompanied it. Thus, even though Christie has denied direct involvement in the scandal, both of these rhetorical qualities counteract the moral framework and noble aims that grounded his rogue *ethos* following Hurricane Sandy and paved the way for his high approval ratings.

Christie peppered his personal approach to the situation throughout his opening statement as well as in his responses to press questions. Even the opening lines of the speech revealed his prioritization of personal feelings above public duty:

I come out here to this office where I've been many times before and I've come out here today to apologize to the people of New Jersey. I apologize to the people of Fort Lee and I apologize to the members of the state legislature. I am embarrassed and humiliated by the conduct of some of the people on my team. There's no doubt in my mind that the conduct that they exhibited is completely unacceptable and showed a lack of respect for the appropriate role of government and for the people that we're trusted to serve.⁷⁴

Upon noting he had been there many times—a nod to his existing *ethos* as Governor—Christie structurally emphasized his confession of embarrassment in advance of his concern about the objectionable behavior. Christie is no stranger to talking about his feelings—he characterized himself as experiencing “anger and disappointment” in his Hurricane Sandy statement—but his confession of shame came much sooner in the bridge scandal statement and helped to invite sympathy from the audience. He implied that this apology was not about political precedent or public trust but about personal guilt. This personal message was also evident in Christie’s tone when he noted that the actions were objectionable “in my mind”—an interpretation—rather than a truth or reality of the situation. Some might have expected Christie to be a political rogue who challenged his staffers through public shaming given his strident assertion in the Hurricane Sandy speech: “Last night, the House of Representatives failed that most basic test of public service and they did so with callous indifference for the suffering of the people of my state.”⁷⁵ While Christie accused his staff of callous indifference and partisan maneuvering, he did not offer such a forceful rebuke. Instead, he emphasized his interpretation of and emotional response to his staffers’ behavior.

To Christie’s credit, he alluded to his republican *ethos* when accepting responsibility for their behavior later in the statement. He declared “I am responsible for what happened” and admitted that “we fell short of the expectations that we’ve created over the last four years for the type of excellence in government that they should expect from this office.” Even still, Christie’s use of “we” (“expectations that we’ve created”) suggested that he failed to live up to *his own administration’s* expectations rather than his *constituents’*. It was as though he disappointed himself rather than the people of New Jersey. Later, he offered another peculiar phrasing that implied he chose his job as Governor rather than his constituents electing him to it: “I have a job to do. And

⁷⁴ Chris Christie, “Governor Chris Christie News Conference,” *C-SPAN* video, January 9, 2014, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?317101-1/gov-chris-christie-nj-news-conference-lane-closures>. All subsequent quotations from the George Washington Bridge scandal press briefing come from this source.

⁷⁵ Christie, “Governor Christie on Hurricane Sandy Federal Funding.”

it's the job that I've asked the people of New Jersey to entrust me with." Finally, near the end of his opening statement, he further emphasized his representative role based on what *he*, rather than the people of New Jersey, believed it to be, stating that "I've considered it over the last four years to be my job to be the governor of every New Jerseyan—Republican, Democrat, independent or unaffiliated—and I've worked with elected officials on both sides of the aisle, ones that I agree with and ones that I disagree with." Christie placed himself at the center of the political universe here by discussing *his* agency to decide with whom he would work and defining bipartisan representation as engaging those with whom *he* disagrees. When Christie finally did turn to his constituent's expectations of and relationship to him, his "I" was ever present: "people, *I think*, all across this state understand that human beings are not perfect and mistakes are made. And *I believe* what they expect of me as the chief executive of this state is when that information comes into my possession, that I consider it and then act as swiftly as possible to remediate whatever ill occurred" [emphasis added]. In all of the above statements, Christie touted his own judgment above and beyond the public's.

Christie's personal emphasis was even stronger in his justification for firing Kelly and for asking Bill Stepien, his former campaign manager, to withdraw from state politics. Christie reported to the audience that he fired Kelly "because she lied to me." Later, he reiterated: "There's no justification for ever lying to a governor or a person in authority in this government. And as a result, I've terminated Bridget's employment immediately this morning." Dishonesty is certainly a justifiable reason to fire Kelly, but it did little to reinforce the good will that Christie promoted following Hurricane Sandy. To the contrary, it undercut that goodwill by suggesting he fired her as retribution for a personal sleight rather than as part of his effort to better represent the people of New Jersey. As Christie explained later in the press conference,

I'm telling you that when I ask for an answer from a member of my staff and they lie, regardless of what the conduct is they lied about, they're gone. So I never had to get to the conduct, the underlying conduct. If you lie when I ask you a question, you're fired. That's it. Now if I had to have gotten to the underlying conduct, there was plenty underlying conduct there to fire her on too. But I didn't need to get there.

I am not proposing that Christie should have manufactured a different reason or been more strategic in his justification for firing Kelly. Nonetheless, his rhetoric underscored his retaliatory nature and it did so in terms of personal relationships, not public duties. When he finally did discuss the "underlying conduct," he barely touched on the suffering of the people of his state which, just a year prior, was the foundation of his rogue *ethos* in shaming the House. His response here offered little reassurance to his audience that he understood their concerns and was reactive to them.

Christie's discussion of Stepien was similar. There, he noted "I was disturbed by the tone and behavior and attitude of callous indifference" in Stepien's e-mails. "And reading that," Christie continued, "it made me lose my confidence in Bill's judgment." Given this, Christie "instructed Bill Stepien to not place his name in nomination for state party chairman, and he will not be considered for state party chairman, and I've instructed him to withdraw his consultancy with the Republican Governors Association. If I cannot trust someone's judgment, I cannot ask others to do so." As with Kelly, his decision regarding Stepien was personal—about *Christie's* confidence and trust, *Christie* feeling disturbed. Christie's rhetorical justification seemed interested in protecting himself so that Stepien's "callous indifference" didn't reflect poorly on him. On the contrary, when Christie used the very same phrase—"callous indifference"—in relation to the House

leadership and Speaker Boehner in 2013, he argued that he was responsible for protecting his constituents from the results of such indifference. The Sandy justification created representational morality through the framework of rogue *ethos*; the scandal justification offered political cover through safe action.

Given Christie's opening statement, it is unsurprising that the press broached the climate and culture of his administration during the question and answer session. One reporter asked to what degree this situation "reveals that you are a political bully, that your style is payback." In response, Christie remarked that "some people like [my] style, some people don't" but "I am who I am." In his most Nixonesque moment, he then asserted "I am not a bully," explaining that he's "shown over the last four years in the tone that we've set here that I'm willing to compromise, that I'm willing to work with others." Christie did himself no favors by asserting a take-it-or-leave-it attitude about his personality, an attitude that preceded the emphasis of his accomplishments as Governor. Later, he again appealed to his self-knowledge, implying that those who disagreed with his style were the ones at fault for simply disliking him: "I know who I am. And I'm not that person. . . . it's easy for people to be characterized in public life based upon their personality, and I have a very direct, blunt personality. And I understand why some people would then characterize that, especially people who don't like you, as bullying, but it's not that. And I know that about myself." These explanations focused primarily on what Christie knew to be true about his *ethos*, expecting it to be self-evident, rather than fully re-establishing his credibility as a responsible public leader.

Christie's most well-defined reiteration of his Sandy *ethos* came near the end of the opening statement when he discussed "the tone that I've set over the last four years in this building." He appealed to his prior *ethos*, noting that this tone was on display "just a few months ago, and I've seen over the course of the last four years, Republicans and Democrats working together, not without argument—government's never without argument—but ultimately coming to resolution on so many different issues in a bipartisan way and running a campaign that was in fact a bipartisan campaign." Christie used his track record to argue that the bridge scandal "is the exception, it is not the rule, of what's happened over the last four years in this administration." This appeal provided a stout justification of his leadership because it used the audience's trust and judgment—including their decision to re-elect him—as a foundation. Nevertheless, this argument's location as a minor point substantially deferred to his personal justifications seems altogether too little, too late to rhetorically reinforce the *ethos* that bolstered his rogue conduct surrounding Sandy relief.

Beyond a limited reinforcement of his existing *ethos*, Christie denied his positive rogue attributes by refusing to investigate the motives behind the lane closures. Recall that rogue *ethos* relies on habitual rogue acts that indicate a rogue disposition. Part of Christie's rogue *ethos* involved his demand for accountability despite the political risks, such as his shaming the House leadership in 2013 or "trash-talking" other state governors. In this case, though, Christie implied an abandonment of his existing *ethos* through an uncharacteristic lack of effort to investigate the motives and to demand information. Christie admitted a lack of knowledge, remarking "I don't know whether this was some type of rogue political operation that morphed into a traffic study or a traffic study that morphed into an additional rogue political oper- [sic]—I don't know." When a few members of the press pursued his more passive role in this situation (one questioner even called his lack of communication with Kelly a "management mistake"), Christie retorted: "it wouldn't be appropriate for me to get in the middle of that because then there would be all kinds of other allegations about those conversations. So I think the smarter thing for me to do is, as to

those two folks who I made determinations regarding their future, to move on from there and talk to other folks who are still in my employ.” When the question came up again later, he was even more assertive: “if I did that, then you’d have the legislature complaining that I’m talking to someone who the chairman has said yesterday publicly he intends to call as a witness. And I think the higher priority is for me not to interfere with what the legislature is in the process of doing.” Christie’s response defied the rogue *ethos* on display following Hurricane Sandy; then, he was willing to rhetorically interfere with the legislative process, a rogue act that he refused to do in this context.

I have labeled this section “rogue justification” because the press asked Christie to justify—and, in the case of speaking with Kelly, live up to—his rogue *ethos*. In fact, the press asked about the damage this scandal might have on Christie’s *ethos*. He remarked that “I don’t think it’s my credibility” that’s at risk. He reiterated his apology and sense of embarrassment before noting that “I think I’ve built up enough good will over time with the people of New Jersey that I’m very hopeful they will accept my apology.” As I’ve intimated above, Christie’s prior *ethos* did, indeed, influence judgments of his response in this situation. Yet instead of reinforcing his good will, his existing rogue *ethos* invited negative judgment of his conduct when Christie was only willing to express personal shame and sadness. The failure of his staffers became a failure of Christie’s moral judgment, the very moral judgment that afforded him authority to shame the House in 2013. The blunt nature of his personality became a bully tactic of petty retribution, not an act of political representation. Ultimately, Christie’s personal focus—including, but not limited to, firing people because they lied to him and justifying his behavior as a result of personal feelings—was evidence that he is willing to push people around and engage in vindictive behavior for his own (political) betterment at the expense of those he was elected to serve. In this case, Christie demonstrated the risk that a selfish rogue demeanor “does not foster a good reputation.”⁷⁶ Within this context of his existing *ethos*, Christie was still a rogue but the moral framework behind that *ethos* was no longer present.

Conclusion

My analysis reveals how Christie’s rhetorical statements in response to the bridge scandal provided a different account of his *ethos* when compared to Hurricane Sandy relief. In the earlier statement, Christie framed his partisan betrayal in the context of republican virtues of representation; his rogue enactment advanced the desires and interests of the people he represented. Conversely, his response to the bridge scandal supplanted political values for personal ones and accentuated his vindictive nature by discharging the positive rogue qualities that he demonstrated a year prior. Essentially, his rhetorical response to the bridge scandal in conjunction with his existing rogue *ethos* facilitated a view of his behavior (and, by extension, the behavior of his rogue staff) from the perspective of political bully. In this conclusion, I consider two lessons of Christie’s case, concerning the negotiated nature of rogue *ethos* and the difficulty of sustaining it.

First, my analysis has demonstrated that rogue *ethos*, like all forms of *ethos*, involves a complex negotiation between rhetor, rhetoric, audience, and community values. It has become all too easy for the press to characterize Christie as a “bully” to make sense of his political behavior.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Players’ Handbook*, 54.

⁷⁷ Jennifer Rubin, “The Bridge Scandal Makes No Sense,” *Washington Post*, January 12, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/wp/2014/01/12/the-bridge-scandal-makes-no-sense>. Rubin challenges the bully narrative as a “sloppy talking point (or sloppy journalism).”

Yet Christie's behavior alone does not account for the narrative, particularly in light of the rogue tactics that generated acclaim prior to the bridge scandal, most notably in the wake of Hurricane Sandy. Rather, I have illustrated how Christie's response to the bridge scandal interacted with the audience's prior knowledge of Christie's character and the context surrounding his response. Christie, perhaps in recognition that his response to the bridge scandal would relate to his existing *ethos*, tried hard to shift the audience's frame of reference by pleading with the press to "try to understand this on a personal level." Christie explained his perspective:

If you've worked with someone for five years and they've been a member of your political team and then governmental team, and you look at them and you say to them, what do you know about this and did you have any involvement in it, did you have any knowledge of it, and they look at you and they say, no, and you've had—never had any reason before to believe that they were anything but a truth-teller, why wouldn't you believe them?

Throughout the two hour press conference, Christie reinforced strands of his rogue *ethos* in a personal context related to demands of accountability and trust but omitted the political values that justified such demands following Hurricane Sandy.

Second, in addition to the complex nature of rogue *ethos*, my analysis has also revealed that those with an established rogue *ethos* seem particularly burdened by the need for rhetorical character work (rogue justification, image repair, *apologia*, etc.). The ease with which the press jumped on the bully bandwagon suggests that rogues might be susceptible to more frequent criticism than non-rogues. In the subsequent months following his bridge scandal press conference, Christie continued to rhetorically negotiate his *ethos*. For instance, he has been haunted by the statement that he fired Kelly because of her dishonesty. At a town hall meeting on March 20, one citizen critiqued this justification as a "self-centered reason" that downplayed the "real offense." Christie responded that "inherent in what I was saying [at the Jan. 9 press conference] was that I disapproved of the act also." He added that Kelly "would have been fired anyway" if she had told him the truth but that "I never had the chance to hear the truth. The offense—the offense first and foremost is not being honest with the person you're working for."⁷⁸ Here, the questioner held Christie accountable for his initial rhetorical justification, seemingly expectant for Christie's republican *ethos* as the people's representative. Christie, however, declined the opportunity to recast his decision in relation to civic virtues, remaining steadfast in his personal perspective.

This personal framework, combined with Christie's rogue *ethos*, may explain why members of the press have overwhelmingly viewed the bridge scandal through the lens of Nixon and Watergate.⁷⁹ Even the label given to the scandal—"Bridgagate"—conveys the analogy and insinuates that Christie either had a role in the scandal or created a culture of bullying that made it acceptable. Kelly and Wildstein's rogue conduct has reflected poorly on Christie, who has been no stranger to rogue action himself. And yet the analogy doesn't hold up when one considers that

⁷⁸ Brian Donahue, "Chris Christie's Town Hall Bromance Ends with Tough Bridgagate Questions," *The Star-Ledger*, March 20, 2014, http://videos.nj.com/nj/2014/03/chris_christies_town_hall_brom.html.

⁷⁹ Paul Mulshine, "Chris Christie's Bridgagate Has a Lot in Common With Richard Nixon's Watergate," *The Star Ledger*, January 11, 2014, http://blog.nj.com/njv_paul_mulshine/2014/01/chris_christies_bridgagate_has.html; James Warren, "Gov. Christie Has President Nixon Moment with 'Bridgagate,'" *New York Daily News*, January 9, 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/christie-president-nixon-moment-article-1.1571666>; David Frum, "A Lesson for Chris Christie from Richard Nixon," *CNN*, January 13, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/13/opinion/frum-christie-lesson-from-nixon/>; John Aloysius Farrell, "Revenge is Sweet: Chris Christie, Richard Nixon and the Case for Retribution in Politics," *Politico*, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/01/chris-christie-was-right-102045.html>; Rosenberg, "Put a Fork in Chris Christie."

Christie's responses are predicated on the fact that he was not involved in the scandal. In fact, the entire situation more closely recalls Reagan and Iran-*contra*. Then, the press criticized Reagan's leadership, such as the *New York Times* editorial explaining that the Tower Commission "charges the President with creating the climate for these lawless initiatives and failing to inform himself even when confronted with scandal."⁸⁰ Reagan responded to these concerns about his "management style" in a nationally televised address, asserting it to be "a style that's worked successfully for me during 8 years as Governor of California and for most of my Presidency" while admitting that, in this case, "my style didn't match my record."⁸¹ Reagan, like Christie, first downplayed the significance of the scandal before internal documents revealed rogue agents in the administration. And, like Christie, Reagan suffered in the court of public opinion. Ultimately, however, Reagan was able to rebound and he concluded his term with an approval rating in the low 60s.⁸²

Perhaps then Christie could have learned a lesson from the Gipper. Despite North's insistence on the rightness of his rogue conduct, Reagan framed himself as an unwitting victim, critiqued North's behavior, and apologized to the nation through the lens of political values of trust and responsibility. Ronald Lee and Shawn J. Spano explain that, "even while claiming to take responsibility for the scandal, Reagan portrayed the Iran/contra affair as a series of correctable administrative mistakes."⁸³ In this regard, Reagan gave the situation time to develop, admitted wrongdoing, promised change, and then noted that he has "heard the message from you, the American people" to "move on" to "the business of our country and our people."⁸⁴ He also reinforced republican governance by identifying greater cooperation between legislative and executive branches as "the eventual blessing in disguise to come out of the Iran-*contra* mess."⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Reagan was no rogue. He appealed to populist principles while lacking the bully baggage that Christie carries. Ultimately, then, Christie's rhetorical *ethos* in conjunction with his rogue conduct may have paved the way for the public and the press to reduce Christie's character to a single facet, that of bully rather than boss.

⁸⁰ Editorial Board, "'The Enterprise' and the Public Trust," *New York Times*, November 22, 1987, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/22/opinion/the-enterprise-and-public-trust.html>. Christie also did not work very hard to get to the bottom of things when the scandal first arose.

⁸¹ Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Iran Arms and *Contra* Aid Controversy," March 4, 1987, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1981-1989*, vol. 7, bk. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1989), 209. He reiterated this line of reasoning in a consistent albeit more forceful fashion a few weeks later: Ronald Reagan, "The President's News Conference," March 19, 1987, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1981-1989*, vol. 7, bk. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1989), 265.

⁸² "Presidential Job Approval," *American Presidency Project*, ed. Gerhard Peters, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/popularity.php?pres=40&sort=time&direct=DESC&Submit=DISPLAY>.

⁸³ Ronald Lee and Shawn J. Spano, "Technical Discourse in Defense of Public Virtue: Ronald Reagan's Explanation of the Iran/Contra Affair," *Political Communication* 13 (1996): 116.

⁸⁴ Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Iran Arms and *Contra* Aid Controversy," 210, 211.

⁸⁵ Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Iran Arms and *Contra* Aid Controversy and Administration Goals," August 12, 1987, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1981-1989*, vol. 7, bk. 2 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1989), 943.