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Alongside the stump speeches are Truman's major campaign speeches of 1948. Here is a different kind of presidential rhetoric, the reasoned policy address that has all but disappeared from modern election campaigns. Truman's major addresses shaped logical arguments for his domestic and foreign policies. On 12 June, at a University of California commencement, he presented "the steps the United States has taken to obtain peace in the world . . . [and] what future measures we must take" (p. 29). In Detroit, on Labor Day, he detailed the Democratic party's contributions to the security of working people and argued that Republican policy preferences would abolish that security. At the National Plowing Match, in Dexter, Iowa, Truman explained the policies developed since 1933 that had increased commodity prices, lowered interest rates for farmers, and expanded crop storage facilities.

Neal's two very useful volumes help us see Truman whole. They unite the folkloric Truman with the far more complex president whose leadership was often prescient in both domestic and foreign policy. One might hope that contemporary American presidential politicians would honor by emulation that more-complex Truman when they invoke the spunky little guy who fought on against the odds.

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Out of Touch: The Presidency and Public Opinion by Michael J. Towle.
College Station, Texas A&M University Press, 2004. 162 pp. \$37.95.

George Gallup, the famous pollster and student of public opinion, was wrong—at least with respect to American presidents: the proliferation of opinion polling has not led presidents to be increasingly responsive to what citizens want from government. Michael J. Towle's modest but engaging book provides a potent explanation for this, along with many interesting and intriguing historical details (such as eyebrow-raising communications between presidents and pollsters such as Gallup and Louis Harris themselves). Although Gallup was wrong, Richard Neustadt (*Presidential Power*) was on the mark in how presidents cared about their public prestige and reputation, for which Gallup's and other polls have provided measures with their presidential popularity ("approval") questions. Presidents perceive their popularity as a political resource in policy making and bargaining, and as an indication of their prospects for reelection.

According to Towle, who draws heavily on archival evidence, the extent to which presidents Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson, and Jimmy Carter were responsive to public opinion on issues important to the public depended on whether these presidents had high or low levels of support, as measured by the polls or other indicators of public opinion (including mail, phone calls, press coverage, and the perceptions of leaders inside and outside of government). It

also depended on psychological processes that political scientist John Kingdon and psychologist Leon Festinger had previously identified. Specifically, in periods of high popularity, such as immediately after a president takes office, feelings of exuberance and self-acclaim (Kingdon) and confidence that they can maintain public support—and a sense that the public is worth listening to, inasmuch as they elected the president—lead presidents to be responsive to the public. In contrast, presidents sour on the public during periods in which they are unpopular, perceiving the public as poorly informed and in need of persuasion. At these times, presidents are dismissive toward the public, or even completely out of touch with what the public might genuinely have reason to want. According to Towle, this is their way of reducing the “cognitive dissonance” (Festinger) that they are experiencing.

Towle’s finding that presidents have difficulty maintaining high levels of popular support and that they tend to become less responsive is persuasive and compelling. More puzzling, however, is precisely *how* this occurs. Towle does not cite the work of Robert Jervis, Deborah Larson, and Douglas Foyle, among others, who have written about elite-level psychology, and who would surely assert that other psychological processes are at work, including how leaders perceive (and misperceive) the problems they face and their role as leader vis-a-vis the public. Towle depicts presidents as strikingly irrational, turning the accepted difference between elite opinion versus mass opinion on its head: the public apparently has understandable concerns and opinions on important issues, which presidents think they can ignore when their popularity has fallen and their psyche has been shaken.

Towle also does not wrestle with the two other more-rational motivations that presidents have: pursuing policy or ideological goals and pursuing reelection. At this writing (May 20, 2004), President George W. Bush’s approval ratings are at a low point (under 50 percent), with an election approaching. Is it cognitive dissonance that has caused him to ignore public opinion in taking positions on the Iraq occupation and other issues that appear at odds with the public? Or is he continuing to pursue doggedly the foreign and domestic policy goals that he most values? Or is he expecting the U.S. occupation to succeed in establishing a stable Iraqi government and the economy to rebound fully on all fronts before the 2004 election? In contrast, the presidents Towle describes are not attentive in this way to the actual performance of their administrations. It could be, of course, as Towle acknowledges, that his cases are not exhaustive; and it is possible that presidents since Carter have behaved differently as the result of changes in politics or in the capabilities and strategies of presidents in using polling and other information. *Out of Touch* and other recent work on presidents and public opinion should provoke others to answer these questions.

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