PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT AND THE POLITICAL USE OF PRESIDENTIAL CAPITAL

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the University of North Texas in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Michael E. Ault, B.A., M.P.

Denton, Texas

December, 1998

This research incorporates a decision-making theory which defines the linkage between the public, the media, the president and the Congress. Specifically, I argue that the public holds widely shared domestic and international goals and responds to a number of external cues provided by the president and the media in its evaluation of presidential policies. Although most studies examine overall presidential popularity, there are important differences in the public's evaluations of the president's handling of foreign and domestic policies. Additionally, I am concerned with how the Congress responds to these specific policy evaluations, the president's public activities, and the electoral policy goals of its members when determining whether or not to support the president. Finally, I link together the theoretical assumptions, to examine the influence of varying levels of support among the Congress and the public, and the president's own personal power goals on the type, quantity, and the quality of activities the president will choose.

Ultimately, the primary focus of this dissertation is on the sources and consequences of presidential support and the influence of such support on presidential decision-making.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| LIST OF TABLES | ................................................................. v |
| LIST OF FIGURES | ................................................................. vi |

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION ............................................................... 1
   - Purpose and Significance of the Study
   - Outline of the Work

2. PUBLIC EVALUATIONS OF U.S. PRESIDENTS' POLICIES ................. 6
   - Introduction to the Problem
   - The President, the Public, and the Role of Presidential Policies
   - A Model of Public Evaluations of Presidential Policies
   - Measuring and Explaining Public Support
   - Analysis and Discussion
   - Conclusions

3. PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESS IN CONGRESS ................................. 36
   - Congressional Uncertainty, Information, and Voting
   - Predicting Presidential Success
   - Methodology and Analysis
   - Conclusions and Implications

4. PRESIDENTIAL DECISION-MAKING ....................................... 69
   - Presidential Responsibility and Activity
   - Predicting Activities
   - Methodology and Analysis
   - Conclusions and Implications
APPENDIX A ................................................................. 101
APPENDIX B ................................................................. 110
REFERENCES ................................................................. 118
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Augmented Dickey-Fuller Unit Root Tests</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Public Support for U.S. Presidents' Economic and Foreign Policies, 1977-1994, Ordinary Least Squares Estimation</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Public Support for U.S. Presidents' Economic and Foreign Policies, 1977-1994, Two-Stage Least Squares Estimation</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Presidential Success in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1953-1990</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Presidential Success in the U.S. Senate, 1953-1990</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Presidential Success in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1977-1990</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Presidential Success in the U.S. Senate, 1977-1990</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8</td>
<td>Presidential Activity, 1962-1990</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1. The Theoretical Model</td>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2. Economic Support and Presidential Approval, 1977-1994</td>
<td>112</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3. Foreign Policy Support and Presidential Approval, 1977-1994</td>
<td>113</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4. Percentage of Presidential Victories in House and Senate by Issue, 1953-1990</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5. Percentage of Presidential Victories in House and Senate by President, 1953-1990</td>
<td>115</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6. Uses of Force, Major Addresses, and Foreign Travel by Presidents</td>
<td>116</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7. Annual Uses of Force, Major Addresses, and Foreign Travel</td>
<td>117</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The president's role as the most visible, and yet "elusive" actor in the American political landscape has been the focus of much attention from the early years of the Founding to the present. Presidential biographies are filled with clever anecdotes, famous speeches and sayings, and accounts of presidents' noble and ignoble deeds. Daily newspaper reports and weekly news magazines are filled with presidential foibles, distinguishing characteristics, and their sometimes glorious/ignominious achievements. Politicians from both sides of the aisle have spent enormous amounts of energy lauding or condemning presidential actions and inactions. Since the New Deal era, three of the seven Amendments to the Constitution of the United States have attempted to clarify the contours of the president's power. And, finally, sociologists and psychologists have investigated presidents' upbringings, psychological make-ups, and personal habits in an attempt to understand the execution of presidential power.

Despite such a magnitude of interest, the Office of the Presidency as an object of systematic empirical political inquiry has somehow lagged behind other areas in political science. While previous empirical research has made modest gains in the understanding of the presidency, it has been primarily conducted by separately investigating presidents' public support (e.g., Edwards 1983; Ostrom and Simon 1985, 1988), levels of
congressional success (e.g., Bond and Fleisher 1990; Edwards 1989) and presidents’
public activities (e.g., Brace and Hinckley 1992; Kernell 1993; Ragsdale 1984, 1987).
Taken as a whole, each of these analyses has been conducted in isolation from one
another. Lacking in the field is an understanding of the theoretical and empirical linkages
between each of the separate analyses. Such an investigation is, I argue, a necessary step
toward building cumulative knowledge in the field of the presidency.

Specifically, all of the previous studies neglect two critical considerations. First,
each study neglects to provide a truly integrated theoretical framework for each of the
variables of interest. For example, they neglect the fact that the public has considerable
expectations of the president and Congress, and as such, they fail to consider the way in
which these expectations affect each political actor under investigation. Second, each
study provides a static, and therefore incomplete, portrait of the interrelationships that
exist between the different variables of interest. For example, by examining public and
congressional support for presidents, without considering presidents’ attempts to
influence such support, the previous studies risk understating the role of a number of
important factors that operate in the public’s and Congress’s decision-making process.

I argue that the findings of these previous studies can and should be assembled to
form the basis of a truly integrated theory of presidential public support and the political
use of such support in the president’s and Congress’s decision-making process. United
around the central theme of the presidency, the following Chapters attempt to fill these
gaps by providing a systematic inquiry into the actions presidents undertake to garner
support from their two key audiences—the American public and the Congress of the
United States—and the effects of differing levels of support on presidents’ own actions. In doing so, I investigate the theoretical linkages between: (1) the American people and the Office of the Presidency, (2) the presidency and the congressional policy-making process, and (3) the effects of different levels of public and congressional support on the decision-making process of U.S. Presidents. Figure 1 illustrates the linkages (Appendix B, p. 111). I draw upon literature from all three of these areas in the presidency literature to build a parsimonious, yet integrated model of the dynamics of presidents’ public support, and the effects of such support on the president’s and Congress’s decision-making process.

At the same time, I maintain that there are important distinctions among the different policy domains in which presidents act. Simply, public and congressional expectations vary depending on the policy domain in question. While it has long been argued that presidents enjoy greater leverage on issues within the foreign policy domain than in the domestic policy domain, no one has attempted to build these features into an integrated model of public and congressional support for presidents’ policies. By specifying models of public support for each policy domain, and then incorporating these important distinctions into a model of congressional support for presidents in each domain, I believe previously undiscovered, but theoretically relevant, relationships may appear.

In the first paper, I examine the sources of public support for presidents’ foreign and domestic policies. I maintain that the public holds widely shared domestic and international goals and responds to a number of external cues provided by the president
and the media in the formation of its evaluations of presidential policies. Although most studies of presidential support examine overall presidential popularity, there are important differences in the public's evaluations of presidents in the foreign and domestic policy realms. While presidential scholars have long acknowledged the president's enhanced leverage in the foreign policy domain, no one to my knowledge has directly investigated whether the president enjoys similar advantages in the public's evaluation of his foreign policies. Using Gallup poll data on presidents' handling of domestic and foreign policies, I test a series of hypotheses concerning the relationship between the activities of presidents (e.g., speeches, travel, and uses of force), the public's concern with economic prosperity, international peace and security, and the public's evaluations of his policies.

In the second paper, I address how the Congress responds to these public evaluations of the president's policies, his public activities, and the electoral policy and power goals of its members when determining whether or not to support the president on roll-call votes. I argue that important distinctions exist in the foreign and domestic policy-making process, and congressional support of presidents' policies ought to vary depending on issue specific factors and electoral considerations. Using individual presidential roll-call votes on foreign and domestic policy from 1953 to 1990, I analyze the conditions under which the Congress and its members support the president's positions.

Finally, to complete the portrait of presidential support and presidential capital, I synthesize the theoretical assumptions and empirical models described in the previous
two papers. I argue that varying levels of support among the Congress and the public, and the president's own personal power goals influence the type, quantity, and the quality of activities the president will choose. I construct a data-set of presidential activities (e.g., speeches, uses of force, and travel) to understand the conditions surrounding the timing of these activities.

Ultimately, the primary focus of this dissertation is on the sources and consequences of presidential support and the influence of such support on presidential decision-making. By considering the dynamics between and among these actors, I believe, we can come to better understand the meaning of the "elusive executive."
CHAPTER II

PUBLIC EVALUATIONS OF PRESIDENTIAL ISSUES

Introduction

Observers of democracy have long investigated the dynamics of public support for elected officials. In a representative system, it is argued, such support provides an important indicator of the public's confidence in its elected officials, as well as the level of government responsiveness to the public's wishes. In short, as Abraham Lincoln cogently noted, "[P]ublic sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed." In accordance with its theoretical importance, an immense body of empirical research has examined the sources and rationale of American public opinion. One particular area of this research has focused primarily on the public's support for presidents. Because the president is the most visible leader of the nation, his standing in the public's eye is continuously monitored by political elites and is taken as an indication of the public's confidence in the president's leadership ability.

The literature analyzing public support for presidents, however, almost exclusively examines their overall approval ratings. From this literature, we know that changes in a president's monthly approval rating result from fluctuations in the nation's economic business cycles, the public's own perceptions of the economy's performance, and other sensational events such as war (e.g., Clarke and Elliot 1989; Clarke and Stewart 1994; Edwards, Mitchell and Welch 1995; MacKuen 1983; MacKuen, Erikson and...
While we know that issues of war and the economy underlie overall evaluations of presidents, we know little about the way in which the public evaluates presidents’ handling of these issues. Do presidents enjoy greater leverage (i.e., higher evaluations) on foreign policy issues than they do on domestic policy issues? Or, are the two policy domains similarly evaluated by the public? And, if there are differences between the two domains, what are the reasons for differing levels of support underlying these issues?

In this chapter, I seek to move beyond models of overall presidential approval, by directly examining the public’s evaluations of two critical components of presidential responsibility—the handling of economic and foreign policy matters. These issues provide the foundations of overall approval, provide presidents with opportunities to distinguish themselves in the public’s eye, and are the most obvious indicator of a president’s “professional reputation” (Neustadt 1960, 68-72). I argue that the public holds widely shared domestic and international goals, and evaluations of presidential policies are directly linked to the president’s fulfillment of these goals. Moreover, I maintain that the public responds to a number of external cues provided by the president and the media in its evaluation process. Using Gallup poll data on presidents’ handling of economic and foreign policies for the years 1977 to 1994, I test a series of hypotheses concerning the role of presidential and media cues, the public’s concern with economic prosperity, international peace and security, and the public’s evaluations of his policies. I find that evaluations of presidential issues can and should be distinguished from measures of overall approval. Also, the media’s reporting of presidential events and the role of
economic variables play two of the most important roles in the public's evaluation process; but presidents who utilize the "bully pulpit" can also influence in a limited, but important manner, the public's evaluation of their policies.

The President, The Public, and the Evaluation of Presidential Issues

No subject in public opinion research has attracted as much attention as presidential approval. Although our understanding of public opinion has considerably improved over the past several decades, several issues within the presidential approval literature still need to be addressed.

First, and of crucial theoretical importance, is discovering how the public evaluates the president's handling of presidential policies. As almost every study of presidential approval demonstrates, the economy and foreign affairs serve as the underlying components of presidential approval (Kernell 1978; MacKuen 1983; MacKuen, Erikson and Stimson 1992; Mueller 1970, 1973; Norpoth and Yantek 1983; Ostrom and Simon 1985). But as others have recently demonstrated, these issues also vary in their importance on the evaluations of presidents (Edwards, Mitchell and Welch 1995). If we assume then that economy and foreign policies form the foundations of overall approval of presidents, and that there is substantial variation in the public's evaluations of these issues, we next must account for the varying levels of public support for each issue area. Does the public evaluate presidents' handling of these issues similarly or does the variation in these issue evaluations simply mimic the variation in overall approval ratings?
Others have already begun to address this issue. Edwards, Mitchell and Welch (1995), for example, argue that the impact of presidential issues on overall approval ratings fluctuates according to issue saliency. They write,

"[u]nderstanding presidential approval...requires identifying not only what issues Americans think about but also gauging the degree of salience Americans place on these issues. One cannot assume that people always judge the president by the same benchmarks" (p. 110).

Continuing, they claim, "[f]or an issue that is salient to the public, the quality of the president’s performance on that issue should become a factor in presidential approval" (p. 113). While the concept of issue saliency as a "mediating factor" (p. 122) introduces an important ingredient to our understanding of overall presidential approval, we are still left wondering what direct impact the public’s perceptions of the president’s competency in handling the salient issue has on the evaluation process.

According to the so-called issue-priority model of voting, changes in the saliency of economic and foreign policy issues occur simultaneously with changes in the objective conditions of a voter’s environment (Alt 1985; Budge and Farlie 1983; Hibbs 1977, 1987; see also Clarke, Stewart and Zuk 1986). For example, changes in the rate of inflation or unemployment cause voters "[t]o offer or withdraw support according to the perceived priorities and competencies of the competing parties" (quoted in Clarke and Elliot 1989). A voter’s support or lack thereof is attributed, in part, to the perceptions of the priorities and competencies of the party in office. In the case of presidential approval, during times of salient economic or foreign events, citizens are more likely to support the president if
they believe he gives "high priority" status to salient issues, and handles them in a competent manner. As Edwards, Mitchell and Welch argue, "the unemployment level was virtually identical in the summer of 1984 as in the summer of 1992, but the public evaluated the economic performance of Presidents Reagan and Bush... quite differently" (p. 114). We are left wondering why this is so. I argue below that, in part, the public's evaluations of the president's handling of issues is directly related to the activities presidents engage in to persuade public opinion. Presidents, I argue, strategically engage in these activities to demonstrate their priorities and competencies in the handling of economic and foreign affairs.

Moreover, since the 1960s, scholars have investigated the so-called "two presidencies" thesis. And, according to this literature, a presidents' level of congressional support is determined in part by the policy domain in which presidents act (Bond and Fleischer 1990; Edwards 1986; LeLoup and Shull 1979; Peppers 1975; Shull 1997; Sigelman 1979; Wildavsky 1966). While there is still disagreement over the explanations of the "two presidencies" thesis and whether or not the trends discovered in the 1960s occurred in later periods, one wonders whether the public also evaluates presidents differently depending on the policy realm?

A second, and yet related question, concerns the role of political elites in the public's evaluation of presidential issues. According to Zaller (1991), elite discourse provides perhaps the most important cue in the formation of mass opinion. He writes, "If elite cues can change racial opinions, which appear to be among the most deeply felt of mass opinions...they can probably affect most other types of opinions as well" (p. 13).
While most information concerning politics, in general, comes directly from political elites in the media, there is also substantial variation in the type of information the public receives on specific issues. As Page, Shapiro and Dempsey (1987, 24) argue,

"the media report the policy-relevant statements and actions of a wide variety of actors...news from such different sources is likely to have quite a range of salience and credibility, and therefore quite a range of impact on the public" (emphasis in original).

All political elites, then, are not equally credible and rarely share the same opinion regarding specific issues. Presidents, in pursuing their own goals, attempt to dilute the impact of unpopular news reports concerning, for example, the economy or foreign affairs, as well as attempt to increase support for their policies by taking their case to the public (Kernell 1993; Ragsdale 1984; Brace and Hinckley 1992). The media, wanting to appeal to the largest audience, increase public awareness about salient events and national conditions (Ansolabehere, Behr, and Iyengar 1993). Therefore, analyses of presidential approval in general, and presidential issues in particular, should control for the variation in elite attention given to presidents.

To address these issues, I assemble the findings of previous research to form an integrated model for analyzing the public's evaluation process. I argue that the vital link in understanding the public's evaluation process is a comprehensive, yet parsimonious theoretical framework which emphasizes the public's competing aspirations for peace, security and prosperity, and the role of political elites in the "framing" of American discourse. In the next section, I explain how such a framework can be realized.
A Model of Public Evaluations of Presidential Issues

To explain the public's evaluations of presidential issues, the model must treat the public as a collective entity. While this is not the case in reality, the model should be understood to refer to the public's most widely held aspirations concerning economic and foreign policy matters, just as models of presidential approval employ the most salient features to explain approval ratings of presidents. The advantage of such an approach is that it allows a direct test of the public's evaluation process of important issue domains for which presidents are held responsible.

I conceptualize the public's evaluation process as analogous to a boundedly rational decision maker under conditions of uncertainty (Downs 1957; Page and Shapiro 1992; Simon 1957). By doing so, I assume the primary goal of a decision maker is its own survival, or in this case, the political body on which the decision maker relies for its existence (e.g., the state). Rationality, in this sense, simply means that the number of goals or "ends" is limited so as to promote efficiency in the decision making process (Ashby 1960, 1964; Simon 1957, 1959, 1969; Steinbruner 1974). Accordingly, the public's aspirations are associated with the principal functions of the state. In this sense, the public expects presidents to maintain peace, security, and economic prosperity. Moreover, these aspirations correspond to the broadest categories of state responsibility, and are therefore constant across all presidential administrations (Ostrom and Simon 1985). As Ostrom and Simon (1985) write,

"Regardless of the president's stated philosophy, party identification, or prior experience, these institution-based expectations are imposed by the
public because it is believed that the office provides any president with the necessary means to ensure that these desirable conditions are maintained” (p. 336, emphasis in original).

While the means by which the U.S. fulfills these aspirations often form the basis of partisan disputes (i.e., position issues), the aspirations themselves remain relatively fixed across time and are positively valued by the public (i.e., valence issues). Most importantly, the public holds presidents accountable for their successful realization (Kernell 1978; MacKuen 1983; Ostrom and Simon 1988).

**Public Aspirations: Peace, Security, and Prosperity**

First, I assume the public expects presidents to maintain peaceful relations with other countries (Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida 1989; Ostrom and Simon 1985). As America’s political interests have become increasingly intertwined with other nations, presidents must take great care to ensure that disruptions to the international system are resolved peacefully. The public’s aspirations for peace require presidents to walk a fine line between aggressive and passive actions when reacting to disruptions in the international environment (Nincic 1988). While the public may rally its support behind presidents who pursue measures that ensure peace (e.g., arms reduction), it also demands that presidents not embroil the nation in foreign wars that lead to the extensive loss of American life (Mueller 1973).

At the same time, however, the public also expects presidents to maintain U.S. security, and by extension, the security of its key allies. It expects the president to maintain and promote the U.S.’s status as the world’s foremost military power so that no
other nation might be in a position to undermine U.S. sovereignty and influence. Moreover, presidents who fail to protect America’s security interests, or appear passive in the face of external threats, suffer the consequences of lower overall evaluations, and fail to achieve electoral success.

I also assume the public expects presidents to maintain U.S. economic prosperity by pursuing policies that ensure America’s status as an international economic leader, as well as maintaining a reasonable level of domestic economic growth. While the president’s power over economic issues is largely circumscribed by the politics of Congress (Cohen 1996; Kettl 1992) and the policies of the Federal Reserve (Freideis and Tatalovich 1994; Woolley 1984), the public still expects presidents to maintain the economic prosperity of the nation (MacKuen, Erikson and Stimson 1992). It reacts by punishing presidents who fail to respond to downward shifts in the nation’s economy. Moreover, as the American economy has become inextricably linked with the economies of other industrialized nations, the public expects the president to pursue global economic policies that ensure, first and foremost, national economic prosperity.

**Elite Cues**

The second feature of the model is its conception of individuals as boundedly rational decision-makers who engage in limited searches for relevant information. As all human decision-makers who operate in an environment of uncertainty—an environment which certainly pertains to evaluations of the president’s handling of foreign and economic issues—the search for relevant information is often limited by time and resources. In his classic study, *Administrative Behavior*, Herbert Simon writes,
"[A Boundedly rational decision-maker] is content to leave out of account those aspects of reality--and that means most aspects--that appear irrelevant at a given time. He makes his choices using a simple picture of the situation that takes into account just a few of the factors that he regards as most relevant and crucial" (p.xxx).

Moreover, the limited "picture" created by the decision-maker comes from the stimuli most important and hence, most closely monitored in his/her environment. Simon continues, "[a] stimulus, external or internal, directs attention to selected aspects of the situation to the exclusion of competing aspects that might turn choice in another direction" (p.90). The stimulus then is utilized by the decision-maker to provide relevant information and render a decision, or in terms of public opinion, an evaluation.

Therefore, I argue that the public utilizes several stimuli or what I call "cues," to gain information concerning the president's handling of policy issues. Such cues provide the public with easily accessible and understandable information regarding the president's handling of economic and foreign policy matters.

The most important cues, I argue, originate from both the president and the media, and operate to influence directly the public's evaluations of presidential issues. First, both act to provide the public with information regarding economic and foreign policy matters. In this sense, they shape the public's priorities (i.e., agenda-setting), focus the nation's attention on a limited set of salient topics, and provide information to the public concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the nation's economic and foreign affairs.

While these functions of presidents and the media are well documented in the public
opinion literature (Ansolabehere, Behr, and Iyengar 1993; Cohen 1995; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Wood and Peake 1998), no one has attempted to build these features into a model of public evaluations of presidential issues.

Second, the media and the president both operate to frame issues for the public. By framing issues in an “episodic” or “thematic” manner, the media is able to attribute responsibility for national issues and either expose or shield politicians from issue accountability (Ansolabehere, Behr, and Iyengar 1993; Iyengar 1991; Iyengar and Kinder 1987). The president, on the other hand, also attempts to frame issues, but in a way that presents his administration in the most positive light. Whether he is explaining administrative failures or taking credit for successes, presidents try to advance the image of a single leader of the nation protecting America’s economic and foreign policy interests.

In the following section I describe the measure of the dependent variable, and then derive several hypotheses from the decision-making model.

Measuring Public Support for Presidential Issues

Using data from the Gallup Poll, I construct a data set of public support for presidents’ foreign and domestic policies from 1977 to 1994. The Gallup Poll asks respondents to evaluate the president’s handling of foreign and economic policies.\(^3\) Gallup conducted 125 surveys between 1977 and 1994 in which the economic policy question was asked and 109 surveys in which the foreign affairs question was asked. Because the Gallup Poll does not ask these policy-related questions as regularly as the
overall approval question, these data are not measured at a constant time interval, and hence several cautionary notes are in order.

First, because Gallup asks these policy questions irregularly, there may be a possible selection bias in the timing of the poll. That is, when an issue is salient and in the news, Gallup may be more inclined to ask questions about the public’s evaluation of the president’s handling of that particular issue. I tested for the potential difficulties raised by selection bias by constructing an auxiliary data-set consisting of 215 monthly units (beginning in January 1977 and ending in December 1994). I then created a dummy variable for the Gallup’s foreign policy polls coded “1” when Gallup asked the foreign policy question and “0” otherwise. Using Ragsdale’s data on positive and negative presidential international events (i.e., foreign events which required direct presidential involvement) I created a variable coded “1” for all months in which there was a presidential event and “0” otherwise. The correlations between the occurrence of a foreign policy Gallup Poll and the occurrence of an international presidential event was -0.01, indicating an extremely low relationship between the two measures.

Next, I used Gallup’s series of the most important problem facing the nation as an indicator of economic salience. Taking the percentage of the public who identified the economy as the most important problem facing the nation, I constructed three variables measuring economic salience coded “1” if the percentage was above the 33rd, 50th and 66th percentile, and “0” otherwise. The correlations between the occurrence of a Gallup Poll and the measures of economic salience were 0.33, 0.11, and 0.03 respectively. As these tests indicate, the Gallup Poll asks its issue-oriented questions in a non-obvious or
random manner, and any potential difficulties due to selection bias are minimal.

Although there are a number of instances in which a Gallup Poll followed a salient international event (e.g., Persian Gulf War) as well as periods of high inflation and unemployment, the frequency of these occurrences is not systematic.

Figures 2 and 3 display the levels of overall public support for Presidents Carter, Reagan, Bush and Clinton, and the levels of public support for their handling of economic and foreign affairs (Appendix B, pp.112-113). As can be seen from the figures, there are great differences between levels of overall support and levels of support for presidential issues. Most striking, and perhaps most well known, is the case of President Bush. While Bush enjoyed high overall approval and high evaluations for his handling of foreign affairs, his level of support for his handling of the economy is significantly lower. Similarly, while we see that President Reagan enjoyed high levels of overall and economic support, his level of support for foreign policy suffered as he neared the end of his presidency.

Most importantly, however, for the purposes of this study, is the fact that we see substantial differences between levels of overall support and levels of support for presidential issues. Again, the gaps between foreign policy support and overall support for Presidents Carter and Reagan, and between economic support and overall support for Presidents Carter and Bush suggest that citizens do not simply evaluate presidential issues according to their overall evaluations of the president. On the surface, this suggests that the public does not blindly evaluate presidential issues based on their overall impressions of presidents, but rather, is more discriminating in its judgments.
Moreover, the correlations between overall approval and presidential issue approval reveal a similar pattern. For overall approval and economic approval, the correlations for presidents Carter, Reagan and Clinton are relatively high ($r = .84$, .80 and .71, respectively). Whereas for president Bush, his overall approval and economic approval is comparatively low ($r = .62$), in fact the lowest of all the presidents. Conversely, the correlations for Bush’s overall approval and foreign policy approval is relatively high ($r = .86$), and the other three presidents are quite low ($r = .44$, .46 and .41, respectively). This evidence suggests that a more complex relationship exists between overall approval and issue approval, than has been previously recognized. Understanding the relationship between these different types of policy evaluations, and explaining the variation, I argue, is an important step in building cumulative knowledge in the field of public opinion.

**Explaining Public Support for Presidential Issues**

Public attitudes of the president’s handling of foreign and economic affairs are not just shaped by the objective levels of unemployment and inflation, or the occurrence of salient events in the international arena. Important also is how the public perceives the president is maintaining peace, security and prosperity. As discussed above, I conceptualize the public’s aspirations as “ends” which transcend any specific or particular presidential policy (Ostrom and Simon 1985). I use several measures to gauge the public’s evaluation of the president’s ability to maintain peace, security and prosperity. First, Gallup has consistently asked respondents questions concerning the likelihood of war. I use these data to determine how the public perceives the president is maintaining
peace. Because these questions are not consistently asked using the same wording, I rely on several similarly phrased poll items. The questions are: 1) Is President ____ doing all he can to keep the nation out of war? 2) Is the U.S. doing all it can to keep the peace? 3) Is President ____ making progress on keeping the nation out of war? 4) Do you approve or disapprove of the decision to go to war against Iraq? I hypothesize that public evaluations of a president's ability to maintain peace increase evaluations of his foreign policies.

Second, to measure the public's evaluation of the level of security in the world, I use a measure of public attitudes on American military spending. While the ideal measure would be an objective indicator of U.S. security threats, such a measure is unavailable. Instead, I employ a proxy measure using public attitudes about U.S. military spending because it measures the belief that the nation is not spending enough on defense and hence is not secure enough to defend itself in the world. I argue that the percentage of the public which believes the U.S. is spending too little on defense should indicate the degree to which the president has not done enough to promote security. I hypothesize that as the percentage of the public that agrees with the statement: "The United States is spending too little (or not enough) on defense", increases, as indicated in the Gallup Poll, support for presidents' foreign policies should decrease.

Third, to measure the public's evaluation of a president's ability to maintain prosperity, I employ several measures. I use two objective measures consisting of the nation's inflation and unemployment rates. I also measure the public's subjective concerns with prosperity by using a question from the University of Michigan's, "Survey
of Consumer Attitudes and Behavior.” The question asks respondents “Looking ahead, which would you say is more likely—that in the country as a whole we’ll have continuous good times during the next 5 years or so, or that we will have periods of widespread unemployment or depression, or what?” I first added those respondents who answered, “(Continuous) good times” and “Good times, qualified (not bad)” to create an favorable category, and then added those respondents who answered “Bad Times, qualified (not good)” and “Bad times” to create an unfavorable category. I then subtracted the percentage of favorable from unfavorable respondents to create a “balance” variable of the public’s perceptions of the economy’s long term prosperity. I hypothesize an inverse relationship between levels of issue approval and inflation and unemployment. Also, I hypothesize that as the balance of people positively evaluating the economy increases, levels of presidential approval should also increase.

**Elite Cues: Presidential Activities**

An important interest of this study is the way in which presidents influence the public’s evaluations of their policies. As was mentioned above, presidents use a number of high profile public activities to garner support for their policies among the public. Through these activities presidents are able to mobilize support, go over the heads of Congress and the political parties, and speak directly to the people (Minow, Martin, and Mitchell 1973, 14). In both foreign and economic policy making, presidents use these activities strategically to take credit for the successes and provide explanations for the failures of America's policies.
Major Addresses. First, nationally televised speeches are used to alert the public to the pressing needs of the nation in both foreign and domestic policy. They serve as an opportunity for the president to take credit for successful actions and explain the reasons for policy failures (Kernell 1993). Presidents use these opportunities to provide the public with information about their economic programs, the federal budget, national security, and foreign crises. To meet the inclusion criteria, a major address had to address an economic or foreign policy and been made at least 30 days prior to the Gallup poll. The variable is coded “1” for such addresses and “0” otherwise. I hypothesize that a major address to the nation increases public support for presidential issues.

Travel. A second indicator of presidential activities is foreign travel. Throughout the World War II era, travel by presidents has become an important resource in the presidential calculus (Kernell 1993). By traveling abroad, presidents can attempt to divert the public’s attention from the domestic ills plaguing the country. Furthermore, presidents can create a symbolic connection between the chief of state and the America people (Ragsdale 1996). To assess the impact of foreign travel on public evaluations, I include all foreign trips by presidents which occurred 30 days prior to the Gallup Poll. The variable is coded “1” for all such trips and “0” otherwise. I hypothesize that foreign travel increases support for presidential issues.

Use of Military Force. Another indicator of presidential activities, is the use of military force. Perhaps the most obvious indicator of a presidential action, uses of force by American presidents have become the object of inquiry by a number of scholars in international relations. While it is common to find uses of force characterized as “rally
events," others have questioned the subtle complexities involved in this presidential action. For example, Lian and Oneil (1993) claim, the influence of uses of force on presidential popularity is close to zero (Lian and Oneil 1993). I incorporate a measure of presidential uses of force which includes all major uses of force by the president. I hypothesize that uses of force increase evaluations of presidential issues.

Elite Cues: The Media

A large body of research suggests that the media serve as a mechanism of influence over the public’s evaluation of the president and his policies (Jordan and Page 1992; McLeod, Becker, Byrnes 1974; West 1991). To measure the quantity and quality of media coverage of presidential policies, I employed the extensive coding procedures developed for the major network news reports (Jordan and Page 1992; Page, Shapiro and Dempsey 1987; West 1991). Using data from the Vanderbilt News Archives, I randomly selected one of the three major networks each night for each of the fifteen days prior to the Gallup Poll. For each night I recorded the content and time (in seconds) of all reports concerning the economy and foreign affairs. Individual reports were coded “-1” for a negative report, “0” for a neutral report, and “1” for a positive report. The total amount of time devoted to positive, neutral and negative reports was summed up for the entire fifteen day period prior to the poll question. Since I am interested in both the absolute and relative amount of coverage devoted to presidential issues, I created interactive variables for positive and negative media coverage. I first calculated the percentage of news coverage devoted to an issue that was positive and the percentage of coverage that was negative. Second, I developed a ranking of the overall level of coverage that
distinguished between low (1), medium (2), and high (3) levels of the time spent on presidential issues. Third, each percentage, ranging from 0-1, was multiplied by this ordinal variable. Thus, the final variables reflect both the relative and absolute levels of positive and negative media coverage of presidential issues. I hypothesize that negative news decreases and positive news increases support for presidential issues.

I represent the fully specified economic approval model as a partial adjustment model, which yields

\[
ECONSUP_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ECONSUP_{t-1} + \beta_2 PRESPOP_t + \beta_3 ASUBECON_t + \\
\beta_4 \Delta INFLAT_t + \beta_5 \Delta UNEMP_t + \beta_6 SPEECH_t + \beta_7 TRAVEL_t + \beta_8 FORCE_t + \\
\beta_9 POSNEWS_t + \beta_{10} NEGNEWS_t + \beta_{11} HCARTER_t + B_{12} HREAGAN_t + \\
B_{13} HBUSH_t + \varepsilon_t \quad (\text{EQ. 1})^{13}
\]

where: \(ECONSUP = \) Economic Approval, \(ECONSUP_{t-1} = \) lagged economic approval, \(PRESPOP = \) overall presidential approval, \(ASUBECON = \) first difference of subjective economic evaluations, \(\Delta INFLAT = \) first difference of inflation, \(\Delta UNEMP = \) first difference of unemployment, \(SPEECH = \) economic major address, \(TRAVEL = \) foreign travel, \(FORCE = \) major uses of force, \(POSNEWS = \) positive news, \(NEGNEWS = \) negative news, \(HCARTER, HREAGAN,\) and \(HBUSH = \) honeymoon effect for Presidents Carter, Reagan, and Bush,\(^{14}\) and \(\varepsilon = \) stochastic error process \((\sim N(0,\sigma^2))\). The foreign policy approval model is also estimated as a partial adjustment model,

\[
FORSUP_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FORSUP_{t-1} + \beta_2 PRESPOP_t + \beta_3 PEACE_t + \\
\beta_4 SECURITY_t + \beta_5 SPEECH_t + \beta_6 TRAVEL_t + \beta_7 FORCE_t + \beta_8 DSTORM_t + \\
\beta_9 POSNEWS_t + \beta_{10} NEGNEWS_t + \beta_{11} HREAGAN_t + \beta_{12} HBUSH_t + \\
\beta_{13} HCLINTON_t + \varepsilon_t \quad (\text{EQ. 2})
\]
where: FORSUP = Foreign Policy Approval, FORSUP_{t−1} = lagged foreign policy approval, PRESPOP = overall presidential approval, PEACE = public aspirations for peace, SECURITY = public aspirations for Security, SPEECH = foreign policy major address, TRAVEL = foreign travel, FORCE = major uses of force, POSNEWS = positive news, NEGNEWS = negative news, HREAGAN, HBUSH, and HCLINTON = honeymoon effect for Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton, and $\varepsilon$ = stochastic error process ($\sim N(0,\sigma^2)$)

As illustrated in Equations 1 and 2, the hypothesized partial adjustment model includes a lagged economic and foreign policy approval term. In this model, random shocks—shocks that might not be accounted for in the model—are taken into account in the lagged approval terms as well as the error process.

**Analysis and Discussion**

Due to the non-constant time interval of these data, a cautionary note is in order. In the analysis that follows, I have attempted to take into account the dynamic properties of the series as determined by theory, the underlying data generating process, and empirical tests of the data. Although there is a plethora of literature on presidential approval, no one to my knowledge has developed a statistical procedure to estimate a case such as this. In estimating the model, I treat the series as if they are a constant time interval, and test for the presence of unit roots and serially correlated errors as is typically done in other models of presidential approval.

Along with testing the theoretical model, I am also concerned with three crucial and related questions: 1) Does issue approval influence overall approval? 2) Does overall
approval influence issue approval? or 3) Is there a simultaneous relationship between issue approval and overall approval? To begin investigating these questions, I tested several different specifications of the hypothesized model.

**Specification 1.** First, because the public’s evaluations of presidential issues may simply be a product of its overall evaluation of the president, I performed the analysis with and without the measure for overall presidential approval. It is possible that public evaluations of specific policies reflect nothing more than the public’s general feelings toward the president, or aggregate party identification/ideological leanings. If specific policy evaluations are driven by overall approval, the other independent variables should not have much of an impact. The estimates in Table 2, however, illustrate that the addition of overall approval makes little difference in interpreting the substantive meaning of the explanatory variables (Appendix A, p. 103). In the discussion that follows, I will therefore refer to columns 2 and 4 in Table 1.

Model 2 (column 2) explains 80 percent of the variance of the public’s support for the president’s handling of the economy, and model 4 (column 4) approximately 83 percent of the variance for the president’s handling of foreign affairs. The standard error of the estimate, 4.71 for the economic model and 5.25 for the foreign affairs model, also indicate that the models have a reasonably good fit to the data.

The public’s aspirations for peace, security and prosperity all are signed in the hypothesized direction, but only the prosperity measures are statistically significant. Confirming the conventional wisdom of the overall approval literature, the objective measures of the nation’s economy, and the public’s subjective evaluations of the
economy, all have a statistically significant impact on the evaluation of presidential issues. The public's aspiration for peace is only marginally significant in column 3, and with the inclusion of the overall approval measure in column 4, it fails to reach the critical threshold for significance at the .10 level. The public's aspiration for security is not statistically significant.

Of particular interest in this study is the way in which political elites influence the public's evaluation of presidential issues. The effects captured by the models are striking. First, of all the presidential activity variables, only major addresses concerning the economy are statistically significant (p < .05). In other words, presidents who demonstrate their commitment to a strong economy by speaking to a national audience enjoy greater confidence in their handling of economic policies than those who do not. National addresses provide a rare opportunity for presidents to discuss their economic proposals (e.g., Reagan 1981, 1985 and Clinton 1993), focus the public's agenda, and thus create an atmosphere in which the economic progress of the nation appears as a top administration priority. In conjunction with the measures for economic prosperity (i.e., inflation, unemployment, and national prospections) this finding suggests that that the public's confidence in a president is linked not only to present economic conditions and citizens' outlook of the nation's long term economic future, but also to the president's ability to persuade the public of his ideas, competency, and policies. While the influence of such addresses is obviously far from deterministic, the limited use and strategic timing of these addresses allows for the maximum positive political impact (Brace and Hinckley 1992; Ragsdale 1996).
Surprisingly, however, in the foreign policy arena—an arena in which presidents presumably have the most institutional leverage—a president's power to influence the public's evaluations is largely circumscribed. None of the presidential activity variables are statistically significant and it appears that foreign policy evaluations are largely influenced by events in the international arena, as well as the media's reporting of foreign affairs. Despite the research which reports a rally-round the flag effect following a use of force (Mueller 1973; Lee 1977; MacKuen 1983; Marra, Ostrom and Simon 1990), a major foreign policy address (Brace and Hinckley 1992; Kernell 1993) and foreign travel (Mackuen 1983), this finding suggests that the public does not automatically increase its support for presidents who engage in these activities (see, for example, Jentleson 1992; Lian and Oneal 1993).

Rather, it appears as if news concerning international affairs, and the president's handling of those affairs is filtered through the media. Clearly, the media's reporting of news related to presidential issues tends to dominate the public's evaluation process. For both economic and foreign policies, the reporting of positive news increases and the reporting of negative news decreases the public's evaluations for presidential issues. The substantive interpretation of the variables is somewhat awkward since they are the product of relative coverage, which is measured on a 0-1 scale and total coverage which is measured on an ordinal 1-3 scale. When television networks devote more time proportionately and absolutely to reporting positive news stories, public evaluations of presidential issues increases. Conversely, the higher the relative and absolute level of time spent focusing on the failures and difficulties of the president, the public's approval
of his handling of these issues decreases. Before reasoning any further about the substantive meaning of the variables, however, we should continue investigating the relationship between overall approval and issues approval.

**Specification 2.** I continue exploring the relationship between the issue measures and the overall approval measure by developing instrumental variables for overall approval, and then re-estimating the equation using Two-Stage Least Squares. This method is appropriate if a variable on the right-hand side of the equation (e.g., overall presidential approval) is possibly correlated with the error term. The instruments are introduced as predetermined variables (i.e., uncorrelated with the error term) and are used in the first stage regression to find the component of the endogenous variable that is attributable to the instrument. Then, the first-stage fitted values are used to replace the endogenous variables and the coefficients are again estimated. This procedure is appropriate for testing when one suspects a potential simultaneity problem between the dependent variable and one or more of the independent variables (Pindyck and Rubinfeld 1991). If such a problem exists and is not addressed, Ordinary Least Squares estimates will be biased and inconsistent. Table 3 shows the Two-Stage Least Squares estimates (Appendix A, p. 104).

The analysis suggests that in both the economic and foreign policy models, estimation by Two-Stage Least Squares dramatically changes the substantive interpretation of the overall approval measures. In both models, the overall approval measures are not statistically significant, implying that issue approval evaluations are not simply a product of the public's overall evaluation of the president. In fact, according to
these results, an interpretation of the models based solely on Table 1 would lead to mistaken inferences concerning the role of overall approval in the public’s evaluation process.

Furthermore, this finding suggests that the public distinguishes between a president’s job performance in general and a president’s performance on specific policies. For example, while President Bush was enjoying record high levels of approval in early 1991 (89 percent), the public’s assessment of his handling of the economy sank to record depths (30 and 37 percent approval). As we know in retrospect, Bush’s reluctance to recognize and acknowledge the economic problems facing the country ultimately cost him his re-election bid. But, long before the economy became a campaign issue in the 1992 election, the public’s confidence in Bush’s economic leadership began to erode. In short, Bush appeared passive throughout the last two years of his presidency, never mentioning the economy in a national address after October 1990. His hesitancy to address citizens’ economic hardships and his failure to offer concrete economic proposals proved to undo the public’s confidence in his leadership abilities. The public’s record high evaluations of Bush’s overall job performance and his handling of foreign affairs did little to enhance his levels of approval for his handling of economic policies.

Consistent throughout is the media’s influence over the public’s assessment of presidential issues. In all the models, the media variables are statistically significant and they exercise a tremendous influence over the public’s evaluation process. As Iyengar and Kinder (1987) suggest, the media influences what the public thinks is important, as well as how it evaluates its leaders. By framing issues and reporting the positive and
negative events associated with the president, the media is in a unique position to influence the interpretation of presidential events. In other words, events alone do not drive public evaluations. Rather, it is the interpretation of events by political elites that either stimulates or stifles support for presidents.

Lastly, returning to column 4 of Table 1, we see the counter-intuitive finding that the statistical and substantive effect of Desert Storm is close to zero. After estimating the equation with Two-Stage Least Squares, however, the effect of Desert Storm is again captured, just as common sense would inform us. Without estimating the equation using Two-Stage Least Squares, inferences about the substantive effect of Desert Storm would be misleading.

Taken as a whole, these findings suggest that the relationship between overall approval and issue approval is more complex than has been previously assumed. Presidents who are generally popular, may be failing miserably in one important policy domain, and the failure to address the issue persuasively may lead to a decline in public support.

Conclusions

Three general implications follow from the findings presented above. First, and most important is that our knowledge of presidential approval can improve considerably by extending research to the issue level. As the preceding analyses have demonstrated, there are substantial differences between overall approval and approval for the president's handling of issues. In fact, as the statistical results demonstrate, the variation in issue approval cannot merely be explained by the public's general assessment of the overall
level of presidential popularity. While these findings certainly complement previous research on overall presidential approval, they also extend our knowledge of the way citizens’ evaluate their leaders.

Second, by examining the attention political elites give to presidential issues, this study investigates the dynamics that operate in the complex evaluation process. Although scantily discussed in previous studies of presidential approval, the role of the media in framing presidential policies provides an important indicator of what citizens think about, and how they evaluate their leaders’ policies. Additionally, it illustrates the way in which presidents can use the powers of “bully pulpit” to address the salient concerns of the nation, and build confidence in their leadership abilities.

Although these findings are suggestive, we should continue our efforts by investigating a larger number of presidential issues. Issues such as social spending, health care, and policies toward specific foreign nations should be analyzed to discover the way in which the public evaluates the complete range of presidential policies. Only then, I argue, will we better understand why some presidents are successful in gaining the public’s confidence, and why others fail. In the next Chapter, I examine the effect of presidential support in Congress across numerous issues.
Endnotes

1 Quoted in Edwards (1983, 1).

2 For a complete account of the “two presidencies” literature, see Shull (1991).

3 Specifically, for economic policies, respondents were asked, “How would you rate President Carter on his handling of the economy?” and “Do you approve or disapprove of the way President [Reagan, Bush or Clinton] is handling the nation’s economy?”. The respondents could answer, “excellent, pretty good, only fair or poor” for the Carter surveys, “approve or disapprove” for the other presidents. Respondents were also asked, “How would you rate President Carter on his handling of foreign affairs?” and “Do you approve or disapprove the way President [Reagan, Bush or Clinton] is handling foreign affairs?”. The respondents could answer, “excellent, pretty good, only fair or poor” for the Carter surveys, “approve or disapprove” for the other presidents. For President Carter, I combined the percentage of the public who rated his handling “excellent” or “pretty good” to create an “approve” category.

4 These data were supplied by Ragsdale and extended through to 1994. Her coding criteria for such events are outlined in Ragsdale (1984).

5 I use the polling data on these questions gathered closest and prior to or simultaneous with the polling data for the dependent variable.

6 Again, I use the polling data on these questions gathered at the closest and prior to or simultaneous with the polling data for the dependent variable.

7 These data were taken from Ragsdale (1996).

8 Blechman and Kaplan (1978, 50) define the major force levels as including at least one of the following: a) two or more aircraft carrier task groups, b) more than one battalion ground unit, c) one or more air combat wings. I include the initial phase of Operation Desert Shield, the major augmentation of U.S. forces in the Gulf region in November of 1990 and Operation Desert Storm as individual, major uses of force.

9 The Vanderbilt News Archive is located on the world wide web at http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.

10 The methods used to code the “directional thrust” of the news reports followed the efforts of Page, Shapiro and Dempsey (1987, 26-27). Positive stories were considered to be those that primarily emphasized: 1) beneficial or salutary presidential involvement in successful international activities such as diplomacy, the use of force and treaty signings; and also beneficial or salutary presidential involvement in successful economic
activities such as economic recovery programs, and bipartisan budget agreements; 2) event outcomes that redounded to the president’s benefit, such as the capture of Manuel Noriega, reports of economic recovery and growth; 3) comments by expert analysts and American politicians that portrayed presidents’ policies in a positive light, and 4) stories noting public and/or bipartisan support for the presidents’ policies. Negative stories were coded as the reverse of these criteria. All stories that were not clearly positive or clearly negative were considered neutral.

11 In other words the calculations were: 1) positive coverage/(positive+negative+neutral coverage) and 2) negative coverage/(positive+negative+neutral coverage). The advantage of this measure is that it equalizes coverage across presidential issues so that even though one issue is not salient, I can still get a sense of the nature of the coverage. The drawback is that, for example, if the only media report on a presidential issue is a ten second positive story, the coverage is considered 100% positive, as would be the case for a policy that generated nothing but several hours worth of positive coverage. However, there are also costs associated with using just the overall level of coverage since the amount of time devoted to a few big stories like the Gulf War tends to overwhelm the coverage on less visible topics and may potentially bias the analysis. Therefore, I elected to create the interactive variables that produce the best of both measures.

12 These categories were determined by dividing the total amount of coverage at the 33rd and 66th percentiles.

13 The Augmented Dickey-Fuller test for a unit root indicated that several of the variables were nonstationary, but became stationary after first differencing. The differencing operator is denoted by the Greek letter, Δ. The modeling of nonstationary data risks mistaken inferences. A time series is said to be stationary if its mean, variance and covariance are invariant with respect to time, i.e., E(x_t) = μ_X and E[(X_t - μ_X)^2] = σ_X^2 and E[(X_t - μ_X)(X_{t+k} - μ_X)] = Cov(X_t, X_{t+k}). See, Pindyck and Rubinfeld 1991, 444-446. All tests and estimates were conducted in Econometric Views (E-Views) 3.1. The results of the Dickey-Fuller tests are presented in Appendix A, p. 102.

14 The honeymoon variable is coded “1” for the first six months of the president’s term, and “0” for all time periods following (See, Norpoth 1983).

15 The non-constant time interval creates several unique difficulties for standard time-series analysis. For example, potential problems with time-series data range from serially correlated errors and autoregressive conditional heteroskedasticity to unit roots and cointegration (Beck 1991). Simply put, the properties of a given time-series, as determined by statistical tests, should inform the dynamic specification of the model. In this model, however, where the time-series observations are not constant, determining the
properties of the data and the dynamic specification of the model are a bit more precarious.

16 Bush did, however, mention the economy in his 1991 State of the Union Address. But again he demonstrated his lack of leadership in the economic realm with statements such as, “[y]es, the largest peacetime economic expansion in history has been temporarily interrupted. But our economy is still over twice as large as our closest competitor” (quoted in the Public Papers of the President).
CHAPTER III

PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESS IN CONGRESS

Introduction

Having examined the effects of presidential activities on the public’s evaluation process, I now turn to an investigation of their impact on the congressional decision-making process. As was discovered in the previous Chapter, the president’s public activities exercise an important, yet limited effect on the public’s evaluation of his handling of important issues. In this Chapter, I discuss the theoretical linkages between the Congress and the president, and the Congress and the public. I examine the decision-making process by which Congress decides to support or reject presidential preferences and the conditions under which external cues provide meaningful guidance in congressional voting.

The literature analyzing presidential-congressional relations has coalesced around two theoretical frameworks: presidency-centered and Congress-centered models. The former began from Neustadt’s observation that presidential power is the power to persuade members of Congress. An important factor in this persuasion process, it is argued, is the president’s reputation among the public and Congress as a strong and willful leader. Such a reputation, Neustadt argued, provides the basis of presidential leverage in the congressional arena and constitutes the elements of what he called, “presidential capital”. Simply put, the more capital a president is able to accumulate
throughout his term, the more successful that president will be. After Neustadt, a
generation of scholars investigated his claims and found evidence for his arguments.
Today the presidency-centered approach typically employs factors such as presidential
bargaining skills, his approval among the public, and party support in Congress to explain

Meanwhile, the Congress-centered approach developed in direct response to such
claims. According to this approach, the congressional environment is immune to many of
the possible influences that earlier presidency scholars investigated. Bond and Fleischer
(1990), for example, argue that the outcome of roll-call votes in Congress is often times
beyond the control of actors at the periphery of the congressional environment. Instead of
understanding the president as an actor in the legislative arena, they argue, he should be
understood as operating on the periphery. The development of Congress-centered models
hinged upon the inclusion of several important factors such as members' ideology, party
opposition in Congress, and party support in Congress. After developing a Congress-
centered approach to understanding roll-call votes, they then proceed to include other
presidential factors, namely presidential approval and legislative bargaining skills. Not
surprisingly, they found that presidential popularity and his legislative bargaining skills
do little to increase the president's chances of success.

Recognizing the theoretical importance of both approaches, there have also been
several attempts to integrate the two (Covington, Wrighton and Kinney 1995; Lockerbie
example, use a "presidency-augmented" approach to study the effects of what they call, presidential "agenda" bills. They find that Congress-centered models can and should be integrated with a presidency-augmented approach to understand the nature of presidential-congressional relations. Lockerbie and Borrelli (1998) also find evidence that an integrated approach to studying presidential-congressional relations can aid our understanding of the process. They conclude that "incorporating multiple models capturing different aspects of presidential-congressional relations gives us a fuller statistical and substantive explanation of presidential success than that offered by any one particular model" (169). Such models would take into account "structural" factors such as political time, policy, and chamber effects.¹

As is obvious, the president's role in the legislative arena has attracted a tremendous amount of scholarly attention. In fact, any attempt to return to the subject is tantamount to watering the lawn after a torrential rain. Perhaps. Upon closer examination, it appears as if substantive theoretical discussions of the congressional decision-making process are almost nonexistent. That is to say, to the detriment of theory building, the field has been locked in a battle over the classification of variables that correlate with presidential success in Congress. Instead of allowing theory to guide the model building process, scholars seem content to conclude that presidential power in the legislative arena is simply limited to a specific set of circumstances. Without specifying what those circumstances are, the mechanisms presidents use, and the process by which Congress decides, the field of presidential-congressional relations is left with only arguments and assertions based on a few general notions about particular presidents.
After all, as Gary King (1993, 388) recently noted, “[the field of presidential studies] needs much less inclusive and more specific theoretical concepts: a very few precise or even incorrect theories would serve the discipline much better.”

In this Chapter, I intend to meet this challenge. While I share the Congress-centered model’s view of the importance of the internal composition of Congress, and the presidency-centered model’s expectation that presidents can be influential, neither approach theorizes from the standpoint of the congressional environment. By limiting the scope of the congressional environment, the Congress-centered approach risks understating the role of several important factors that operate at the periphery of the congressional environment, namely cues provided by the president and the public. On the other hand, by focusing solely on the president’s approval rating, the presidency-centered approach risks understating several key features of the modern presidency, namely the president’s high-profile public activities.

To address these issues, I turn to a discussion of congressional decision-making. I first outline several key features of the congressional environment, and then discuss the way several external features can provide meaningful guidance to members voting decisions. I then discuss the meaning of presidential success, and derive several specific expectations from the above discussion. Using all conflictual presidential position roll-call votes from 1953 to 1990, I examine the conditions which contribute to presidential success in the legislative arena.
Congressional Uncertainty, Information and Voting

Almost every observer of Congress agrees that the congressional decision-making environment is characterized by uncertainty. Members of Congress are elected by their constituents, averaging around 600,000 in the House and more than five million in the Senate (Edwards 1997; Smith 1989). It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for members to have direct knowledge of what more than a few constituents think on any given policy issue. And, to compound their problems even more, those constituents that do communicate their wishes are often times a relatively small, unrepresentative sample of citizens (Kingdon 1973). On the other hand, members are exposed to a barrage of information and policy preferences from special interests, policy entrepreneurs, experts, and other interested individuals desiring public and private goods (Hall and Wayman 1990; Denzau and Munger 1986). As Kingdon (1997, 233) writes,

"Congressmen often complain that they have insufficient information on which to base an intelligent judgment. Actually, the information is rarely insufficient; rather, it is overwhelming. It simply often does not come to them in a usable form. What they need is not more information, but information which has the characteristics of brevity, evaluation, and political calculus."

If credible information from constituents is sparse and potentially biased, and the information provided by interested groups is overwhelming and unusable, then where do members of Congress look for information to overcome uncertainty surrounding congressional votes?
As all human decision makers who operate in an environment of uncertainty, the search for information is limited by time and resources. In his classic study, *Administrative Behavior*, Herbert Simon (1945) writes,

"[A Boundedly rational decision-maker] is content to leave out of account those aspects of reality—and that means most aspects—that appear irrelevant at a given time. He makes his choices using a simple picture of the situation that takes into account just a few of the factors that he regards as most relevant and crucial" (p.xxx).

Moreover, as observers of congressional decision-making argue,

"Congressmen simply engage in a routine search procedure most of the time. They do not search for information at all, simply notice things that come their way, rely on a few fellow congressmen, or do something of the sort. They engage in a more extended search, involving staff work, extra reading, or somewhat more thorough process of consultation, only infrequently. The infrequent use of reading or staff work, especially, would lead one to the conclusion that congressmen’s information search is usually quite perfunctory" (Kingdon 1997, 230-231).

Therefore, Kingdon concludes, under most conditions, members vote along party or ideological lines. After all, members bring these two features with them to Congress, and they provide structure, reduce complexity, and induce stability within the congressional environment (Bond and Fleischer 1990; Kingdon 1981; Koenig 1981; Schneider 1979).
There are, however, several limitations to the efficacy of party and ideology in congressional voting. For example, with the increase in the percentage of the public identifying themselves as 'independents', the decline in the percentage calling themselves 'strong' partisans, and the increase in split ticket voting, party identification among the electorate has been steadily declining (Broder 1971; Crotty 1984; Fiorina 1984; Hill and Luttbeg 1983; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1979). The weakening of party identification in the electorate has had profound effects on the role of parties in the government. As Epstein (1986) points out, American parties have become less cohesive in the policy-making arena after being stripped of their nominating authority by the establishment of the direct primary. Also, Sinclair (1981, 107; 1983) reports, throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, Northern and Southern Democrats often provided a base of support for Republicans more than they did for Democrats. Moreover, as Kingdon (1981, 286) demonstrates, since most members of Congress avoid the ideological extremes and are instead rather pragmatic politicians, ideology provides a less important voting cue for the majority of moderate members than it does for the minority who are ideological extremists (also see, Bond and Fleischer 1990, 22-23).

Despite the limitations, however, most observers still agree that party and ideology provide two of the best indicators of the way a member of Congress will vote (Bond and Fleischer 1990). This is not to suggest that these factors are the only important devices members use to cast their votes, but it does suggest that under ordinary conditions, party and ideology are important aids used to structure congressional voting and overcome the persistent hindrance of uncertainty. Temporary and permanent changes
to the external environment, however, can cause disruptions to the congressional environment's stability. As Kingdon (1997, 231) notes, "A high salience issue is capable of generating somewhat more extended search behavior, apparently because congressmen are impressed in such cases with the greater probability that they might be called upon to explain their vote or otherwise to discuss the issue publicly." In other words, the presence of disturbances or outside cues threatens the utility of party and ideology, requiring members to "extend" their search for information beyond the typical characteristics provided by the congressional environment. As Simon (1945), argues, "[a] stimulus, external or internal, directs attention to selected aspects of the situation to the exclusion of competing aspects that might turn choice in another direction" (p.90). In the presence of such cues, I maintain, members of Congress monitor their external environment. These cues are designed to provide information, reduce uncertainty, and "sway" electoral votes. The cues are then utilized by members to reach a decision. In the presence of such external cues, I maintain, members of Congress are able to reduce information gaps, structure their decision-making, and overcome the persistent problem of uncertainty. These cues resemble "cognitive heuristics" or "environmental stimuli" which permit economical judgments under conditions of uncertainty (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Steinbruner 1974; Ostrom and Simon 1985; Ostrom and Job 1986).

The most important external cues monitored by the Congress, I argue, are those provided by the president and the public. While the president wishes to portray himself as the premier leader of his party by creating the image of a strong and effective legislative leader, the public holds the key to reelection efforts for the party and
individual members. The cues provided by these two actors provide information regarding national policy preferences—information that possesses the three characteristics Kingdon identified as “brevity, evaluation, and political calculus” (Kingdon 1997, 233). But which cues, if any, do members utilize in their decision-making process? And how are these cues processed by members—members who are already barraged with information from special interests, policy entrepreneurs and experts—and, most importantly, under what conditions can we expect them to be influential in the legislative arena?

First, I maintain, the presidential cues originate from the president’s concern with his legislative success. Since presidents campaign on their legislative proposals, and their performance in the legislative arena is tied to their “professional reputation” (Neustadt 1990), presidents have an immense stake in seeing that the Congress passes their programs. While a president takes positions on numerous votes each year, few are among the list of his top priorities. Presidents, I maintain, engage in a number of high-profile public activities designed to persuade members of Congress to pass his top priority items. In direct contrast to the Neustadtian conception of personal bargaining skills, I argue, presidents use these high-profile public activities to alert the attention of the public and Congress to their legislative priorities, and to focus the nations’ attention on their passage (Kernell 1993). Through these high-profile public activities presidents are able to mobilize support, go over the heads of Congress and the political parties, speak directly to the people, and provide the potential threat of public opinion (Minow, Martin and
Mitchell 1973, 14). I contend that presidents vigorously champion their top priorities before the public to achieve their desired outcome in the legislative arena.

The second set of external cues is provided by the public. Theoretical as well as empirical evidence suggests a link between public opinion and the policy-making process. According Stimson, MacKuen and Erikson (1995, 543), “Public sentiment shifts.Political actors sense the shift. And then they alter their policy behavior at the margin.” Also, Kingdon (1997), reports high correlations (.76) between congressional votes and the instances in which the public expresses a preference on issues (p. 30). That is, when a cue is provided by the public, the Congress is almost certainly to vote in line with the public’s wishes. He writes (31),

“Simply because a congressman wins by a substantial margin, for example, he is not necessarily free to ignore the wishes of his constituents. Indeed, the fact that he abides by their wishes, at least in matters about which they have an attitude of some intensity, may be one reason why he wins by substantial margins and has little primary opposition.”

Therefore, I maintain that the public’s evaluation of the president’s handling of an issue provides an important cue in the congressional decision-making process. That is, if an overwhelming majority of the public approve of the president’s handling of an issue, then the president should have the upper hand on those issues when they arrive for a vote in Congress. Conversely, if the public thinks the president is handling an issue poorly, then the amount of presidential leverage with Congress will most likely be diminished. While it is difficult to determine how well informed citizens are of a given issue (Converse
1964), there is evidence that policy-making adjusts to shifts in mass opinion (Page and Shapiro 1992). Moreover, by having the public's confidence and support in handling a specific issue, should provide the president with a persuasive tool in the legislative arena.

Taken as whole, the model of congressional decision-making indicates that members of Congress will at times utilize stimuli or cues provided from sources other than their own party members and personal ideologies. While uncertainty is a normal part of the congressional arena, members' attempts to overcome it, I argue, is contingent on the public's evaluation of the president's handling of an issue. Again, I am not arguing that these factors determine the outcome of congressional decision-making, for that would be a highly suspect claim even to the most casual observer of the legislative process. I am arguing, however, that by institutional design, presidents and the public are intimately linked to the congressional arena. And, under a very specific set of circumstances, circumstances which are outlined below, presidents and the public provide important cues to members, thus providing pressure for the passage of legislative policies. Generally speaking, in the absence of these cues, we can expect a highly stable set of outcomes. In their presence, however, presidents may become influential actors in the congressional arena.

In the following section, I derive several specific expectations from the discussion of the congressional environment. First, I define the meaning of presidential success and explain the advantages as well as limitations of the measure. Next, to explain the link between presidential success in Congress and presidential and public cues, I outline the conditions under which we may expect them to be influential in the congressional
decision-making process. From these expectations I derive a set of specific hypotheses and then proceed to test the model.

**Predicting Presidential Position Roll-Call Votes**

**Measuring Presidential Success**

Using roll-call votes as the unit of analysis, I employ a measure of presidential success in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate on all presidential position roll-call votes from 1953 to 1990 as determined by *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*. When *Congressional Quarterly* did not provide direct evidence of the president's position, the yearly almanac was used as the primary data source. The dependent variable is defined as occurring when the president's position on a roll-call vote is supported by 80 percent or less of the members in either the House of Representatives or the Senate. By excluding all votes on which the president's position was supported by 80 percent or more of the members we are left with the so-called "conflictual" roll-call votes (Bond and Fleischer 1990). Eliminating non-conflictual votes minimizes the risk of overstating president's success on routine and noncontroversial matters. Included in the data set are all conflictual presidential position roll-call votes taken on domestic, foreign, and defense policy issues from 1953 to 1990. Each vote was coded for the president's position (i.e., did the president favor or oppose the bill's passage), the issue involved (i.e., foreign aid, foreign trade, defense, economic management, social welfare/civil rights, natural resources and agriculture), and the type of vote (i.e., amendment or final passage).

While using roll-call votes as the unit of analysis overcomes the limitations of Presidential Box Scores and Individual Presidential Support Scores, there are still several
concerns that need to be addressed. First, as Bond and Fleischer (1990) point out, a roll-call vote may not be the only important decision point in the congressional decision-making process. In fact, individual roll-call votes may actually miss instances in which a president’s proposal stalled within the committee system or was blocked by the actions of party leaders who coordinate scheduling votes to the floor. Although these are inherent limitations to using roll-call votes as the unit of analysis, the concerns have been found to be minimal. For example, Bond and Fleischer (1990, 67) argue that the “most important policy issues show up on the floors of the House and Senate for resolution by roll-call vote” and therefore provide a “representative picture of presidential-congressional relations.” Also, as Peterson’s (1986) study of congressional action on presidential proposals demonstrates, from 1953 to 1981, only eight percent of the president’s proposals failed to receive action in Congress. Therefore, while not an absolutely perfect measure of presidential success, individual roll-call votes capture the most important interactions between the president and Congress.

Second, while roll-call votes may not be a desirable venue for studying say the influence of PAC contributions on congressional voting, they can be useful for gauging the interaction between the president and Congress. For example, using the roll-call vote as the unit allows us to identify the only point in the legislative process where we can observe the preferences of both the Congress and the president over a large number of cases. Also, we can identify the types of issues (e.g., foreign aid, foreign trade, economic, welfare, etc.) on which the Congress voted and analyze support within as well as between the different policy domains.
Modeling the Congressional Environment

There are of course numerous factors associated with the congressional environment, many of which cannot be modeled. The goal of this section is to identify the general classification of its most salient characteristics--characteristics that are not overwhelmingly complex or time bound. To do so, I rely primarily on the congressional literature, and identify the factors that have been argued to be the most important.

*Issue Type.* Wildavsky's (1966) original argument that presidents enjoy greater leverage on foreign and defense issues than they do on domestic issues, originated from the observation that the substantive content of a policy affects the motivations, expectations, and behavior of policy actors (Shull 1991, 1997; Wildavsky 1966). For example, because of the presidents' near information monopoly and greater institutional authority in foreign affairs, congressional deference to presidential foreign policy proposals is virtually automatic. While scholars have debated the verity of such a claim (Peppers 1975; LeLoup and Shull 1979, 1991; Sigelman 1979; Edwards 1989; Bond and Fleischer 1990), the underlying concern throughout the "two presidencies" literature was discovering the systematic patterns underlying presidential support between these two domains.

In accordance with their interest in studying the claims of the "two-presidencies" thesis, however, all of the previously mentioned studies merely control for variations in presidential support between the two policy domains. I argue, however, that within each policy domain, there are important variations among the types of issues considered by Congress, and that this variation may affect patterns of presidential success (see, for
example, Clausen 1973; Kessel 1974, 1977; King and Ragsdale 1988; LeLoup and Shull 1979, 1991; Pritchard 1983; Ragsdale 1996; Shull 1997). Specifically, a more detailed division of issues within each policy domain will allow patterns to emerge that may not have been previously discovered. It should be noted that I do not attach any specific hypotheses to these variables, nor do I try to predict presidential success within each domain. Instead, I introduce these variables into the model to control for these important issues areas. While according to the “two presidencies” thesis, there are theoretical reasons for lower presidential success on domestic issues than on foreign policy issues, without controlling for the variation within the types of issues, all such arguments may prove to be inaccurate. Disaggregating and controlling for the types of issues within foreign and domestic policy, I argue, will take us a long way to discovering the nuances and intricacies of presidential-congressional relations. Therefore, as explained above, I employ the King and Ragsdale (1988) typology of issues. Again, each roll-call vote was coded for its substantive policy content: foreign aid, foreign trade, and defense within foreign policy and economic management, social welfare/civil rights, natural resources, and agriculture within domestic policy. All other issues, such as symbolic issues, presidential nominations, and others remain in the data-set only if they were conflictual—that is, if the bill was passed by 80 percent or less of the voting members.

As Figures 4 and 5 illustrate, there have been wide variations in presidential victories on presidential position roll-call votes in both the House and the Senate for Presidents Eisenhower to Bush (Appendix B, pp. 114-115). While in the House, presidents perform the best on defense (74.2) and economic issues (73.9), their
performance is lowest for issues covering natural resources (49.3). In the Senate, however, presidents clearly have an advantage on foreign policy issues: presidents win overwhelmingly on issues of foreign aid, foreign trade and defense. In the domestic arena, namely welfare and agriculture issues, they are consistently less successful. Taken as a whole, it is apparent that there is wide variation in presidential victories within each of the seven policy domains. More important than such a scorecard, however, is the fact that the specification of multiple categories for issue types allows patterns to emerge that may otherwise be missed. As Rohde (1994, 104) argues, “if we expect that presidential success or support would be systematically different across different types of votes, failure to control for these variations could lead to incorrect conclusions from the patterns we see in the data.” In short, without controlling for the multiple categories of domestic and foreign policy issues, analyses risk underestimating the extent of presidential influence within each of the policy domains.

President’s Party in Congress. According to the Congress-centered model, members of the president’s own party in Congress provide an important base of support for presidents in the policy-making process (Bond and Fleischer 1990; Edwards 1984). According to Light’s (1991, 27) interview with a member of Johnson’s liaison staff, “You can cajole Congress and try to buy the votes, but if you don’t have your party on board there isn’t much hope.” Similarly, a Carter aid noted, “we can always find support in Congress, even when we are under fire in the polls. The Congress is still a party institution.” Members of the president’s party are predisposed to support the president because they share similar electoral coalitions, and hence policy preferences. Even more,
as members of the same party, there is an incentive to help the president pass his legislative program (Kingdon 1981; Tufte 1975). To test for the influence of the president’s party in Congress, I recorded the percentage of the president’s party in the House and Senate for each legislative session. I hypothesize that the greater the percentage of the president’s party in Congress, the greater the likelihood of presidential success.

**Congressional Ideology.** Ideological agreement with members of Congress provides presidents with an important linkage in the congressional arena (Bond and Fleischer 1990). Although a supportive member may not share the president’s party identification, his or her policy preferences may overlap with the president’s policy preferences. Conservative southern Democrats, for example, provided President Kennedy with almost 27 percent less support than did other Democrats (Froman 1963). Similarly, Kingdon (1997) reports that many southern Democrats supported President Nixon because of ideological agreement on numerous issues. To construct a measure of congressional ideology, I first recorded the annual ideological score for each member of the House and Senate from 1953 to 1990.\(^8\) I then calculated the mean annual ideological score for three groups of individuals: southern Democrats, non-southern Democrats, and Republicans. For Republican presidents, the variable takes on the values of the mean annual ideological score for Republicans and southern Democrats, and for Democratic presidents the variable takes the values of the mean annual ideological score for non-southern Democrats.\(^9\) I hypothesize that the mean annual ideological scores for southern Democrats and Republicans should correlate with Republican presidential success and
that the mean annual ideological scores for non-southern Democrats should correlate with Democratic presidential success.

**Vote Characteristics: Amendments.** The congressional reforms of the 1970s contributed to changes in the institutional behavior of members of Congress. These reforms increased constituent demands, interest group activity, and public scrutiny of congressional activity, thus leading to changes in the strategies members use on the floor of Congress (Edwards 1989, 1997; Rohde 1994; Smith 1989). Before the reform era, for example, committees and committee leaders dominated the policy-making process, and amendments to bills on the floor were allowed only in rare cases. Whereas prior to the 1970s, amendment activity was not allowed in the Committee of the Whole, after the 1970s, as few as twenty members could request a hearing on an amendment. Moreover, while presidential positions on amendment votes were rare before the 1970s, accounting for only 7.2 percent of the votes from the years 1961 to 1968, they dramatically increased to around 44.8 percent of all presidential position roll-call votes between the years 1981 and 1988 (Rohde 1994). In other words, amendment activity became an important tool for non-committee members to alter the committee's version of the bill. Hence, it is an often highly contentious type of vote. We should expect then that presidents who express positions on amendments ought to find their chances of success diminish. To test the effects of amendment votes on the president's success, I construct a measure for amendment votes. Because first-degree amendments are typically used to change a committee's bill, whereas second degree amendments (i.e., amendments to amendments) are typically used to return to earlier versions of bills (Rohde 1994), the measure includes
only first-degree amendments. The variable is coded “1” for such amendments, and “0” otherwise. I hypothesize that the probability of presidential success on amendments should decrease.

**Vote Characteristics: Presidential Opposition.** While overlooked by many who study presidential support in Congress, an important aspect of presidential position taking on congressional votes is whether the president opposed the bill’s passage. Considering the number of partisan obstacles legislation must overcome in order to make it to a floor vote, the chances of it being passed at this stage are very high (Rhode 1991). Therefore, when the president opposes the passage of a bill, there is very little he can do to derail passage which is almost guaranteed. By controlling for the president’s opposition to a bill, a clear distinction can be made between the types of limits facing presidential influence in the legislative arena. That is, without controlling for whether the president favored or opposed a bill, the success rate of presidents may be artificially underestimated. The variable is measured “1” when the president opposes the passage of legislation, and “0” otherwise. I hypothesize that the probability of presidential success should decrease when the president opposes the passage of legislation.

**Modeling Presidential Resources and Cues**

Since the founding of the country, energy in the executive has been considered the essential resource in the executive of presidential power. Today, when describing energy in the executive, scholars have turned to the public activities of presidents defined as high-profile presidential drama—presidential speeches, travel and the use of military use of force. Through these activities presidents are able to mobilize support, go over the
heads of Congress and the political parties, or speak directly to the people (Minow, Martin, and Mitchell 1973, 14). The ultimate aim of these activities, however, not the voters; instead it is the fellow politicians in Washington (Kernell 1993).

Presidential Addresses. The first activity is presidential speechmaking-major addresses. Major addresses are defined as live nationally-televised speeches to the country that preempt all major network programming (Kernell 1993; Ragsdale 1996). By reaching beyond the parties, Congress, and interest groups, and eliciting public support for his position, the president can “create a symbolic connection between [himself] and the public more dramatically than any other type of public appearance” (Ragsdale 1996, 147). On average, public support for the president increases 3-6 percentage points after a major address (Ragsdale 1984; Brace and Hinckley 1992). By building support for his policies the president is able to send an important signal to Congress concerning his legislative objectives. To assess the impact of major addresses on congressional voting, I included only those instances in which the president asked the public to support the passage of a specific issue or bill in Congress. Using The Public Papers of the Presidency each major address was coded for the president’s preference (i.e., passage or defeat of the bill), the substantive policy (e.g., foreign aid, social welfare, taxes, etc.), and then matched to each roll-call vote which covered the same policy. To meet the inclusion criteria, the address had to made at least thirty days prior to the final passage of the bill. The variable is coded “1” for such addresses and “0” otherwise. I hypothesize that the probability of presidential success should increase after a major address.
Foreign Travel. The second indicator of a presidential cue is foreign travel. Although there are a number of reasons for traveling abroad (e.g., summit meetings and treaty signings), each of these instances shares the common thread of rallying support around the symbolic leadership of the president. By traveling to a foreign country, the president portrays the image of a "single executive representing the entire nation before the world" (Ragsdale 1996, 149). To assess the impact of presidential foreign travel on congressional success, I included only those instances in which the president traveled to a foreign country thirty days prior to a congressional vote. I hypothesize that the probability of success should increase when the president travels abroad.

The Use of Military Force. The next indicator is the political use of military force by the president. Although scholars in international relations currently dispute whether the public rallies around the president following the use of force (Jentleson 1992; Marra, Ostrom and Simon 1990; Lian and Oneal 1993), some argue that such a rally effect occurs in the Congress (Stoll 1987). Also, according to Hinckley (1994), the number of roll-call votes on specific uses of force are rare, but when presidents go before Congress "to ask for a resolution or other support, they have received what they asked for—with speed, little debate and virtually unanimity" (82). The political use of military force then serves to heighten public and congressional awareness, and may make Congress more receptive to the president's demands. I hypothesize that the probability of presidential success should increase after a major use of military force.\(^11\)

Presidential Approval. The percentage of the public that approves of the president is often thought to be a factor in congressional voting. In theory, the desire for reelection
may sway members to support popular presidents, instead of risking conflict. In short, as Neustadt (1990) argues, it may be in a member's self interest to support a popular president when his standing in the polls indicates he is well liked by a majority of Americans. Even policy-makers attest to the fact that presidential approval influences their decisions. Newt Gingrich claimed, "If the President's popularity is at 80 percent, I think the president can do whatever he wants." In Edwards' (1997) most recent effort, he finds presidential approval may not directly influence the congressional vote, but it is an important "background influence" for presidential support. In fact, numerous studies have found at least a marginal influence (Brace and Hinckley 1992; Edwards 1989; Ostrom and Simon 1985; Rivers and Rose 1985). To gauge the effect of presidential approval, I use Gallup's measure of the public's evaluation of the president's job performance. I hypothesize that the greater percentage of approval for the president, the probability of presidential success should increase.

**Modeling Public Cues**

**Presidential Issue Support: The Public.** According to democratic theory, there is an inherent connection between elected officials and the public that elects them. Since the public placed elected officials in office, the argument goes, policy should respond to the public's concerns. According to Fenno (1973), every elected official faces two overlapping and sometimes conflicting goals—reelection and making good policy. While members of Congress may be tempted to simply pursue their own ideological or partisan preferences, they must temper their preferences to the political realities they face. Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson (1995) find that the House and the Senate both respond
to shifts in public opinion, albeit at different rates, and that policy outcomes reflect these shifts. Earlier, I discussed the well known fact that members often times lack information regarding constituent preferences. In the absence of clear indicators of constituent preferences, I maintain, the public’s approval of the president’s handling of an issue is a cue which is monitored by members. The public’s evaluation of the president’s handling can provide information to members regarding the policy preferences of the nation. If presidents enjoy overwhelming public support for a specific policy then it should be reasonable to expect that he would also enjoy greater leverage on congressional votes. To gauge the responsiveness of congressional decision-making to the public’s wishes, I create a measure of the public’s support for the president’s handling of an issue.\textsuperscript{14} I hypothesize that greater the percentage of the public that approves of the president’s handling of an issue, the likelihood of presidential success should increase.

\textbf{Methodology and Analysis}

Because the realization of presidential support is a discrete outcome, the dependent variable takes only two possible values, and is inherently non-linear. Classic Ordinary Least Squares regression techniques produce misleading results under these conditions and are therefore considered inappropriate estimation techniques (Aldrich and Nelson 1984). To correct for the violation of the linearity assumption, I obtained maximum likelihood estimates using probit analysis (King 1989). The results from the probit analysis are presented in Tables 4 and 5 (Appendix A, p.105-106).\textsuperscript{15} All estimates were derived using STATA 5.0
The goodness of fit measures indicate that the House model correctly predicts approximately 65 percent of the cases, while the Senate model correctly predicts 71 percent of the cases. The reduction in error over the null model is 12.5 percent for the House and a modest 3.5 percent for the Senate model. That is to say, the House model improves our predictions by 12.5 percent over blindly guessing the modal category of the dependent variable. While the reduction in error measure is extremely low for the Senate model, the reason is that the dependent variable is highly skewed in favor of a presidential success (71 percent). Also, probit coefficients cannot be interpreted like standard OLS estimates. Instead the marginal effect of each variable is calculated as the increase or decrease in the probability of congressional support associated with a one-unit change in the independent variable, holding all other variables constant at their mean value.

The effects of issues in both chambers are rather striking. Contrary to a number of scholars who continue to employ simple dichotomous categories for foreign and domestic policies, we find that distinguishing issues within each policy domain reveals several important insights. First, the House model reveals that presidents are more successful in the foreign policy domain, but only on foreign aid and defense issues. Foreign trade issues actually decrease the likelihood of presidential success; in fact, holding all other variables at their mean value, the likelihood of presidential success decreases by 12 percent when a foreign trade issue is involved in a vote. According to the estimates, there is no statistically significant relationship between the probability of presidential success on social welfare and agricultural issues. Interestingly, on economic issues, presidents are
more likely to enjoy success, and on resource issues, they are less likely. Both variables are statistically significant at the .01 level. In the Senate model, we find a similar story. Again, on foreign aid and defense issues presidential success increases, and on foreign trade issues it decreases. In the Senate's domestic arena, there is no statistically significant relationship among any of the variables.

Taken as a whole, we see that controlling for multiple issues within each of the two major classifications of policy domains can strengthen our understanding of presidential-congressional relations. The House model suggests that there are important and systematic distinctions to be made between domestic economic issues and foreign economic issues. While some observers of presidential-congressional relations have argued that economic issues have simply replaced the domestic and foreign policy distinction (Peppers 1975; Sigelman 1979), the findings in Table 4 suggest that such a conclusion may be a bit premature. In fact, in terms of presidential success in Congress, there appears to be an important distinction between foreign and domestic economic issues. As America's economic interests become increasingly intertwined with other nations, international economic issues have become an increasingly contentious arena for presidents. One need only consider the factious debates surrounding the North American Free Trade Agreement (not included in this data-set) to witness the extent of presidential/congressional disagreement over international economic concerns.

Interestingly, the effects of the president's party in Congress are mixed for the House and the Senate. According to the Congress-centered model, the president's party in Congress provides an important base of support for presidents. This study finds that in
the House, such support works to the advantage of the president, but in a limited manner.

The coefficient is positively signed and statistically significant at the .01 level, but the marginal impact suggests a limited (1 percent) effect. In the Senate, however, there appears to be no such effect. It should be kept in mind that for several of the Democratic presidents in this study, a significant portion of their own party members (Southern Democrats) often shared opposite ideological leanings, and opposed the president on numerous domestic and international issues. Thus, before reaching any definitive conclusions about this variable we should turn to the effect of ideology.

Ideology, indeed, proves to be an important indicator for presidential success. For both chambers, the variable is positively signed and statistically significant. As Kingdon (1997) points out, one the most important determinants of congressional voting behavior is the ideological makeup of the members of Congress. As expected, then, presidents who share the same ideological perspective as members of Congress are more likely to enjoy support for their policies. Ideological forces, it appears, have the ability to bring members of both parties together to support the president’s policies. These findings complement Edwards (1989) findings that ideology provides presidents with an important base of support. For example, as Edwards (1989) points out, President Eisenhower benefited from the support of Democrats, and Presidents Kennedy and Johnson often benefited greatly from the support of Republicans.

As hypothesized, the characteristics of a vote, in both the House and the Senate, is an influential indicator of whether or not the president’s position is supported. In both the House and the Senate, the coefficient for amendment votes is negative and statistically
significant at the .05 level. As was discussed earlier, the use of amendments in the House and the Senate is one strategy members have to change the composition of a committee's bill. The presence of an amendment vote suggests a high degree of disagreement over the original substance of a particular bill. And when such disagreement occurs, it appears that there is little a president can do to influence congressional decisions. Furthermore, when the president's policy preference is in opposition to bill, there is little he can do to stop its passage. In the House, the probability of presidential success decreases when the president is lobbying to block the passage of a bill; the variable is statistically significant and negatively signed. In the Senate there is no statistically significant relationship. Given the tremendous amount of congressional resources needed to bring a bill to a final vote, there appears to be little the president can do to stop its passage.

Moving to the presidential cues and their effects, we find mixed results. For the House, major addresses to the nation are the only activities that are statistically significant, whereas in the Senate, uses of force and major addresses are both statistically significant. In both models, however, foreign travel is not significant. It was argued earlier that presidents engage in these activities to build public support for their policy preferences. From these findings, it appears that there is some reason to believe that presidents can gain leverage in the congressional arena by speaking to the nation and thus, placing public pressure on members of Congress. While President Reagan is perhaps the most well known example of a president who used major addresses to place pressure on the Congress, all presidents from Eisenhower to Bush have engaged in this activity (Brace and Hinckley 1992). As mentioned, these activities have been found to increase the
president's approval ratings from around 3 to 6 percent (Brace and Hinckley 1992), but these findings suggest that presidents can also use them to increase their success in Congress. As Kernell (1993) points out, presidents use these activities to "promote themselves and their policies before the American public," yet, "the ultimate object of the president's designs is not the American voter, but fellow politicians in Washington" (xiii).

Second, the findings support what others have reported as a rally effect in Congress after uses of force, but it appears to be limited to the Senate (Stoll 1987). This is not to suggest that Senators simply pass presidential legislation after a use of military force, but, it does suggest that, being a high-profile activity, uses of force can create of "mood of acceptance" for the president's legislation. Uses of force tend to rally public support behind the president. And in the month after a use of force, members of the president's party, or those who share his ideological perspective, may be mobilized and invigorated to pass the president's preferences. Of course, the reason for such a relationship warrants further investigation of the instances in which force was used and the resulting actions by Congress.

Also, the presidential approval coefficient has negligible effects in the House, but in the Senate, it is statistically significant and positively signed. This is not to suggest that popular presidents have carte blanche in the legislative arena. Rather, it suggests that members who face popular presidents may find that it is in their self interest to support the policies of the president (Neustadt 1990). Since presidential position votes make up approximately 30 percent of all congressional votes between 1953 and 1990, it
seems reasonable for moderate members not alienate their constituents by opposing a popular president.

Lastly, to investigate the effect of the public's evaluation of the president's handling of issues on congressional decision-making, I ran the analysis on a subset of data. First, as was mentioned earlier, these data cover the years 1977 to 1990. All other years were dropped from the analysis. Also, the only questions Gallup asks with any regularity are the ones concerning the president's handling of foreign and economic policies. Unfortunately, all other issues were dropped from the analysis. Nevertheless, we are still left with a large number of observations (530 in the House and 589 in the Senate). Caution must be used when interpreting these findings. Interestingly, as Tables 6 and 7 illustrate, it seems that presidents who enjoy the public's support of their handling of issues, do not enjoy greater leverage in either the House or the Senate (Appendix A, pp. 107-108). The House model indicates that a president is more likely to lose when the public approves of his economic policies. In the Senate there is no relationship between the two indicators. It appears then that the Senate is insulated from the public's outside pressures, while the House actually works against public opinion. Although there are many difficulties in gauging the congressional response mechanism to public opinion (see, for example, Page and Shapiro 1983), I hesitate to generalize based on this sub-set of data.

Conclusions and Implications

The goal of this study has been to investigate the president's ability to influence Congress. From a theoretical standpoint, I have attempted to demonstrate how the
congressional environment is characterized by uncertainty and is susceptible to a number of external influences. Under certain conditions, the public and the president provide important cues to members of Congress. Contrary to the Neustadian concept of “personal bargaining” with Congress, I argue, presidents engage in a number of high-profile activities which are designed to build public support for their policy preferences. As rational decision makers who seek to retain their elected offices, members of Congress respond to these cues. While this study intends to answer some of the more perplexing questions of presidential-congressional relations, it is important to review how my findings differ from previous scholarship.

First, by theorizing about the congressional environment and attempting to model its most salient features, I have attempted to embrace King’s (1993) recent call for “theory building.” Instead of focusing on congress-centered or presidency-centered explanations, this research attempts to spark a discussion about the way in which Congress responds to changes in its external environment. Such a discussion, I believe, is a necessary step toward cumulative knowledge in the field of presidential-congressional relations. It should be informed by the Congress and presidency-centered approaches, but would be focused primarily on the decision-making process of Congress. Such an approach, I believe, will complement both the Congress and presidency-centered approaches and lead the field into other productive arenas of research.

Second, while most scholars agree that presidents are linked to the policy-making process, there is little agreement about if and how they actually affect the outcomes. Instead of traveling over well trodden ground by studying the effects of presidential
approval on presidential success, this study attempts to integrate the qualitative concerns of those who argue for its influence and the quantitative concerns of those who fail to find patterns of association. By examining the manner in which presidents attempt to build public support for their policies, and then integrating this feature into a model of presidential success, I have attempted to demonstrate how presidents can be influential actors in the legislative arena.

As always, however, there is still more that needs to be done. Perhaps, and probably the most important is we need better measures of the salient issues facing the nation. Ideally, we would like to have measures that gauge direction and intensity of preferences over numerous issues. That way, we would be better able to determine the impact such concerns have in congressional decision-making.
Endnotes

1 Political time is a concept introduced by Skorownek (1993). It includes factors such as temporal trends and electoral cycles.

2 On the difference between “problemistic searches” and “extended searches” see, Kingdon (1997) pages 227ff..

3 “Sway” is obviously a loaded term. For a complete discussion of “sway” in the congressional arena, as well as the difficulties in measuring it, see Sullivan (1991). He uses a sequential approach to measure sway, maintaining that it can be captured by the difference between support for a bill at its initial stage and support for the bill at the final stage. Using confidential headcount data from Johnson’s presidency allows him to measure the difference between the two, and thus tap into one notion of “presidential sway.”

4 The issue typology employed in this study comes from, what Shull (1997) defines as, “the King and Ragsdale (1988) typology.” King and Ragsdale’s typology is a refinement of the original “two presidencies” typology (i.e., foreign and domestic policy). A more detailed division of issue areas has been found to provide a more accurate portrait of presidential-congressional relations (Clausen 1973; Kessel 1974, 1977; King and Ragsdale 1988; LeLoup and Shull 1979, 1991; Pritchard 1983; Ragsdale 1996; Shull 1997). All of these studies indicate that the substance of the policy domain is an important consideration when studying the behavior of presidents and Congress.

5 For a complete account of the limitations of these measures see, Bond and Fleischer (1990, 53-66). For a justification of their merits see, Edwards (1980, 51-52).

6 Hall and Wayman (1990) argue, for example, that PAC contributions are typically allocated to mobilize legislative support and demobilize legislative opposition, particularly in the committee process. Therefore, those who argue that PAC contributions exercise a limited influence on the outcomes of congressional voting behavior, have been looking in the wrong arenas (i.e., roll-call votes) for evidence of influence.

7 Bond and Fleischer (1990, 67-68) argue we should not “analyze roll-call votes simply because we can observe them, like the drunk who searched for his keys under the streetlight where the light was good instead of in the dark part of the block where he dropped them. Roll-call votes are a fundamental part of a democratic process and therefore are exactly the right place to look to find explanations of presidential-congressional relations.”
These data were calculated by the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) and were compiled by Feigert and Ault (1999).

While such a coding procedure may not be ideal, it does allow a direct test of an important feature of the congressional environment.

This is not to suggest that changes to the rules governing amendment activity were the only institutional changes resulting from the 1970s reforms. In fact, between the 1950s and 1980s, the institutional arrangements of both houses underwent several "radical changes." For a complete account see, Smith and Deering 1990.

Blechman and Kaplan (1978, 50) define a major use of force levels as including at least one of the following: a) two or more aircraft carrier task groups, b) more than one battalion ground unit, c) one or more air combat wings. The cases were individually coded and include all uses of major force thirty days prior to a congressional vote.


I use the poll nearest to the date of the roll-call vote.

Ideally, I would like to have measures of the public's evaluation of the president's handling for all seven issues. Unfortunately, this is not presently possible. Gallup began asking issue specific questions around 1977. Earlier questions typically addressed very specific or narrow issues, such as the Watergate investigation, Korea and Vietnam, and are therefore largely unusable. Also, the only questions that are asked with any consistency relate to foreign affairs and economic policy. Therefore, in the analysis below, I use these two policy areas--foreign and economic policies--to investigate the impact of the public's evaluation of president's issue performance on the congressional decision-making process. These measures gauge two salient issue domains for which presidents are held accountable.

Due to the nature of the public opinion data, I investigate the relationship between public cues and presidential success in a separate Table.

The Reduction in Error measurement is found in Hagle and Mitchell (1992, 781). It is calculated as follows:

\[
ROE = 100 \times \frac{\% \text{ correctly predicted} - \% \text{ modal category}}{100 \% - \% \text{ modal category}}
\]
CHAPTER IV

PRESIDENTIAL DECISION-MAKING

Introduction

The unifying theme throughout the previous Chapters has been the investigation of how presidential activities can and have been used to influence the evaluation process of the public, and the decision-making process of Congress. As was discovered, presidential activities play an important, although not deterministic role in the legislative arena and the forum of public opinion. In this Chapter, I complete the portrait of presidential power by integrating the theoretical assumptions of the two previous Chapters, and examining how changes in the levels of public and congressional support as well as changes in the domestic and international environments affect the presidential decision-making process.

The literature analyzing “the public-relations presidency” maintains that, since the end of World War II, presidents have become preoccupied with giving high priority status to their levels of public support. Public support, it is argued, is considered an important resource because it provides a source of influence in the legislative arena (Edwards 1997; Kernell 1993; Ragsdale 1984; Rivers and Rose 1987), assures reelection (Brace and Hinckley 1992, 1993; Kernell 1993), and is the source of a good historical legacy (Barber 1992; Neustadt 1990). Such preoccupation with public support, it is argued, leads presidents to utilize several types of actions whose sole purpose is to highlight the
positive features of the administration and distract public attention from domestic
problems. These "diversionary" tactics originate from experiences on the presidential
campaign trail, and contribute to the perpetual campaign once a president is in office.

But what constitutes the chief arsenal of activities available to presidents depends
largely on the body of literature one consults. On the one hand, presidential scholars have
identified and investigated several general classifications of activities: major addresses to
the nation, foreign and domestic travels, news conferences, and interviews. According to
Kernell (1993,104), for example, Eisenhower's "good will" voyage in 1959 was
conducted primarily for boosting his public image. Brace and Hinckley (1992) cite the
Reagan staffer who admitted, "Because the polls were showing a drop in the president's
popularity--which made him vulnerable in Washington--his advisers decided that
conferring on location with European heads of state would be good for his image as
leader." Also, Ragsdale (1984, 971-972) points out, major addresses "may enable
presidents to create or modify public opinion at key points during their terms. Upon
listening to the speeches, citizens may evaluate more favorably presidents' performance
in office or support more readily specific presidential policy proposals." While less high-
profile activities (e.g., domestic travel, news conferences, and interviews) are considered
part of the "public-relations presidency," they lack the same import since they lack the
public sensation surrounding foreign travel and major addresses.

On the other hand, scholars of international relations investigate the presidential
decision to use force as a way of rallying public support for presidents, and diverting the
public's attention away from domestic ills such as a poor economy or low approval
ratings. For example, low-cost uses of force can elicit the so-called 'rally-round-the-flag' effect, which boosts short-term public support in times of crisis (Benson 1982; Brody 1984; Hugick and Gallup 1991; Lee 1977; Marra, Ostrom and Simon 1990). According to DeRouen (1995, 673), “uses of force are afforded wide-scale television coverage and tend to portray the president in a favorable light as a decision maker of great resolve and expertise. Because long-term strategies aimed at providing substantive change in general quality of life have a low probability of success, presidents are more apt to reply on dramatic events to boost approval constantly.”

While there appears to be a consensus among presidential and international relations scholars that presidents place a great deal of importance on public approval ratings, and that presidents engage in sensational acts to improve these ratings, these two bodies of literature have somehow “passed each other in the night.” That is, if we assume that presidents are preoccupied with their approval ratings, and that they engage in sensational acts to increase such ratings, then we must next ask, how it is that presidents decide among the possible activities. Or, to put the question another way, would a president really send troops to foreign lands simply to increase his own popularity ratings, or to divert the public’s attention away from domestic ills, when he clearly has other sensational activities in his political repertoire? Such questions are far from being answered by either body of literature.

To address these issues, I first outline the key Constitutional duties of the office of the Presidency, as a possible alternative explanation to other “diversionary theories.” I maintain that as a leader of the world’s foremost military and economic power, presidents
are charged with the task of ensuring domestic tranquillity and maintaining international peace and security. I then outline each of the activities in fuller detail and discuss how each can and has been used to fulfill the president's primary responsibilities of office. From my discussion of presidential responsibilities, I then derive several hypotheses and discuss the multiple measures used to capture the important aspects of the president’s realm of responsibility. Using probit analysis, I analyze the conditions which influence the president’s decision to use major addresses, uses of force, and foreign travel. I find that, by overlooking the types of activities available to presidents, scholars have typically understated the reactionary manner, and have thereby overstated the diversionary manner, in which presidents use such activities.

**Presidential Responsibility and Activity**

The following discussion of presidential activities is founded on the assumption that, regardless of personality, leadership style, or partisan agenda, all presidents share three primary responsibilities: 1) the protection of America’s vital interests abroad, 2) the maintenance of a stable and prosperous domestic environment, and 3) the maintenance of their own reputation with the American public and the Congress. As is evident, these responsibilities correspond respectively to the president’s role as leader of the international community, leader of the United States, and his own personal power goals. In this sense, they pertain to the principal Constitutional duties relating to foreign and domestic policy, and the “faithful execution” of the Office of the Presidency. While presidents may place different emphases on each responsibility, they all compose an essential element of presidential responsibility and pertain to the most salient
responsibilities of the Office. In essence, presidents must strike a delicate balance among these three responsibilities, and neither dedicate all of their time and energy to, nor completely neglect, any one of the three. Presidents who successfully strike this balance enjoy higher public evaluations, greater leverage in the legislative arena, and more favorable accounts in the chronicles of history. Presidents who fail to achieve this balance are punished by the electorate, meet with greater congressional resistance, or have their historical legacies marred with ill-repute.

Presidents, I maintain, attempt to fulfill these three primary responsibilities when deciding to use public activities, such as uses of force, major addresses to the nation, and foreign travel. Of course, there are numerous reasons for presidents to travel or send troops to a foreign country, or to address the nation in a prime time address. Each of these activities, however, allows the president to capitalize on a unique opportunity of capturing the attention of a nation-wide audience, while demonstrating his ability as a strong and forceful leader. As Neustadt (1990, 6-7) argues, “a striking feature of our recent past has been the transformation into routine practice of the actions we once treated as exceptional. ....Everybody now expects the man inside the White House to do something about everything.” Or, as Brace and Hinckley (1992, 49) put it, “[p]residents are expected to be world leaders who make foreign policy as they travel abroad. ...[A]nd traveling the country and addressing the nation on prime-time television symbolically extend[s] their constituency to all of the people.” In short, presidential activities provide an effective way for presidents to demonstrate their leadership abilities. Presidents who use these activities effectively, are able to build public support for themselves (Brace and
Hinckley 1992; Ragsdale 1984), and their legislative priorities (Kernell 1993; Rivers and Rose 1985; Hinckley 1994). In this sense, these activities are an important ingredient in the execution of presidential power by providing a symbolic connection between the Office of the Presidency, the American public, and congressional policy-making (Kernell 1993; Ragsdale 1996).

But, how exactly do these activities and displays of leadership aid in the fulfillment of the president’s responsibility? And, what factors are associated with the timing of these actions? As was mentioned earlier, many observers have argued that these activities should be simply related to sluggish approval ratings, declines in the domestic economic performance, and national elections (Brace and Hinckley 1992, 1993; James and Oneal 1991; Ostrom and Job 1986; Ragsdale 1984, 1996). Despite such diversionary assumptions, however, I maintain that the use of these activities is directly related to the primary responsibilities of the Office of the Presidency.

First, although there are a number of vital American interests throughout the world, presidents must protect, first and foremost, the security of American citizens, military personnel, and key allies. Of the numerous interests, economic investments, military and economic aid, and the presence of military troops in a region are but a few of the most important. Threats to these interests may emanate from a variety of sources—e.g., civil wars in Central America, aggressive behavior of states like Iraq—but presidents must be ready to demonstrate and possibly provide a credible defense. While not every openly aggressive act by a foreign enemy warrants a full scale military response, presidents must walk a fine line between appearing too timid and too warlike. On the one
hand, they must not risk entangling the United States in a prolonged and protracted war, while on the other they must not appear cowardly in the face of open aggression.

Presidents must prudently apply America's foreign policy devices to limit unnecessary conflict, and yet, when necessary, bring swift resolution to foreign acts of aggression.

One way for presidents to remedy this dilemma, and fulfill their first responsibility of Office, is to engage in actions or displays of leadership which are directly intended to discourage further international threats to American interests.

Second, presidents must take care that America's domestic conditions remain stable and prosperous. While this task is primarily viewed as overseeing the domestic economy, an arena in which presidential power is severely circumscribed (Cohen 1996; Kettl 1992; Frendeis and Tatalovich 1994; Woolley 1984), it also includes ensuring domestic tranquillity. Civil disorder (e.g., Desegregation in Little Rock and the L.A. riots), social problems (e.g., drugs in the inner cities and social welfare), and other tumultuous domestic events (e.g., the seizure of the nation's steel mills and the Space Shuttle Challenger) require presidents to respond vigorously and energetically.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the scope of presidential responsibility slowly expanded to encompass almost every aspect of domestic life (Lowi 1985). Presidents who shirk from this responsibility or who perform these duties inadequately, are not likely to be considered effective leaders (Barber 1992; Neustadt 1990).

Third, a president must maintain his professional credibility to ensure his reputation in the public eye and among members of Congress. As Neustadt (1990, 52) argues,
"In a world of perfect rationality and unclouded perception it might turn out that Washingtonians could take the past performance of a President as an exact, precise, definitive determinant of future conduct, case by case....In the real world, however, nobody is altogether sure what aspects of the past fit which piece of the present or the future."

Therefore, he concludes,

"A president who values power...has every reason for concern with the residual impressions of tenacity and skill accumulating in the minds of Washingtonians-at-large. His bargaining advantages in seeking what he wants are heightened or diminished by what others think of him" (54).

Moreover, with the increase in candidate-centered elections and the attendant weakness of political parties, the president must rely on the public as a source of support for effective policy leadership. Such support, it is argued, serves as a meaningful element in the battle over the congressional agenda (Edwards 1989; Kernell 1993). During campaigns, presidents travel around the country building support for their candidacies. Once in office, such activities are used to garner support for their legislative agendas. Lack of support in Congress or declining support in the polls for the president's policies are both considered to be indicators of a decline in the president's professional reputation (Neustadt 1990). As presidents face declining public support, public activities can provide an effective way of either slowing their political decay, or re-building the public's trust in the Office's occupant. On the other hand, presidents who enjoy high approval ratings may engage in a public activity to capitalize on the outpouring of support. Either
way, a president’s public activities can aid in the realization of the president’s personal power goals.

In the following section I derive several hypotheses from the discussion of presidential responsibilities and activities. I first define the meaning of presidential public activities, and discuss how each activity is measured. Next, to explain the link between presidential responsibility and presidential activity, I analyze how presidents use these activities in a ‘strategic’ versus ‘reactive’ manner. I then outline a set of environmental variables that gauge the three components of presidential responsibility.

Predicting Activities

Defining and Measuring Public Activities

Due to the disparate definitions of presidential activities a more precise explanation of each activity is in order. First, using Blechman and Kaplan’s (1978, 50) criteria, I employ a measure of the political use of major military force. While Blechman and Kaplan outline several categories of the military use of force, ranging from minor to major degrees of force, I only include major uses of force. To be included in the analysis, the use of force was considered “major” if it included at least one of the following: a) two or more aircraft carrier task groups, b) more than one battalion ground unit, c) one of more air combat wings. Second, using King and Ragsdale’s (1988) criteria, I constructed a measure of major addresses to the nation. I consulted consecutive volumes of the Public Papers of the President, The Vanderbilt Television News Archives (http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu), and The New York Times Index to create a measure of a major addresses. A speech was identified as a major address if it was telecast live to a
national broadcast audience that preempted the scheduled programming of the major networks (King and Ragsdale 1988). Lastly, departing from King and Ragsdale's measure of foreign appearances, I constructed a measure of foreign travel. The foreign travel variable is defined as beginning one month prior to the month in which a trip occurs. That is, if the president traveled in August, the variable is defined as occurring in July and August.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of presidential activities for each president (Appendix B, p. 116). As can be seen, there is substantial variation among the types of activities used by presidents. On average, Reagan has the highest frequency for all three activities. Throughout his two terms of Office, there were numerous opportunities in the Middle East and Central America where the use of force was a viable foreign policy option. Conversely, for Presidents Ford and Carter, there were fewer actual uses of force. Reagan also made more major addresses to the nation. Perhaps, no president has enlisted this public activity to better advantage than did President Reagan. After the early years of his first term, in which he successfully appealed his legislative and budgetary priorities to the public, Reagan continued to use this public activity for the rest of his tenure. Not surprisingly, of all the activities, foreign travel is the least used by all the presidents. Since the benefit of this activity is realized when exercised with restraint, it makes sense that presidents would use this activity with reserve.

Turning to Figure 7, we observe the activities on an annual basis (Appendix B, p.117). In several years, no activities were used by the president. Whereas in 1966, for example, there were no public activities, the years 1971, 1976, and others, found
presidents using multiple activities. Taken as a whole, Figures 6 and 7 are suggestive, but definitive conclusions regarding presidential activities based solely on them would, of course, be premature. Instead, I attempt to build the most salient theoretical features of presidential responsibility into a model of presidents' decision-making to determine the nature of presidential activities.

**Strategic versus Reactive**

To understand the nature and timing of presidential public activities requires a discussion of the strategic versus reactive manner in which they are used. To begin, major addresses and foreign travel have become a part of the so-called ‘behavioral’ features of the modern presidency. That is, these actions are conducted at the discretion of the president, and he is considered to be the sole decision-maker. It is generally argued that the ‘behavioral’ features are distinguished from the ‘structural’ or ‘formal’ features, which include periodic elections, the executive branch organization, budgetary acts and other ‘constitutional’ aspects which require presidents to share responsibility with other institutions (Neustadt 1990). The behavioral features arose during the technological boom at the turn of the century and have become a requirement of the office (Tulis 1987). According to some, presidents are increasingly “going public,” and such practices have replaced older styles of personal bargaining and compromise (Kernell 1993). Similarly, despite recent congressional attempts to limit presidential uses of force, the decision to use or not to use force remains within the domain of presidents, and is therefore considered a part of the behavioral presidency (Crabb and Holt 1980).
While technological advances have certainly made it easier to use all of these activities, the nature of modern elections and campaigns has institutionalized the behavioral practice of "going public" (Kernell 1993, 29-51). And, once in office, the perpetual campaign continues. As Brace and Hinckley (1992, 50-51) note, "Presidents are electorally strategic actors, who, in order to gain their office, have learned to campaign, strategize, and allocate scarce resources effectively. It is unlikely that, once in the White House, they would suspend these strategic tendencies."

Yet, as almost all presidential biographies attest, a president's 'strategic tendencies' must conform to the political realities of the Office. That is to say, presidents cannot overburden the public by their too frequent use. Instead, to have any political impact, they must be used in a way that allows the president to capitalize on their occurrence. In this sense these activities can be used to maximize positive political impact or be used to minimize negative political impact.

On the one hand, there are those activities that are simply reactionary and tend to be used to minimize the negative political impact of events. In 1986, for example, when the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded before a nation-wide television audience, President Reagan scheduled a major address to speak to the nation in its time of "mourning and remembering" (The Presidential Papers). Similarly, in 1975 President Ford authorized military airstrikes against Cambodia for its seizure of the U.S. merchant ship Mayaguez. Such activities are triggered by "real-world" events--events that are outside the president's immediate control. As Ragsdale (1993, 279) points out, "the
single executive image assures Americans that presidents, as the most powerful, important, visible, and unique national figures, will direct the country when jarring events... occur."

Other activities, however, are performed for more strategic reasons and tend to be used to maximize the positive political impact. For example, as was discussed earlier, some international relations scholars argue the use of military force may be part of the president’s diversionary tactic of distracting the public from domestic ills. For example, low-cost military intervention may be used to counter falling public opinion, a sagging economy, or both (Brace and Hinckley 1992; Mintz and Russett 1992; Morgan and Bickers 1992; Russett 1990). Moreover, presidents may use a major address to “go over the heads of Congress” and attempt to influence members of Congress (Kernell 1993). Whether it is a speech requesting supporters to call or write their members of Congress, or a speech outlining specific presidential priorities, major addresses can be strategically used to garner public support. Similarly, presidents can engage in foreign travel to spotlight their diplomatic achievements. Summits and treaty signings allow the president the unique opportunity to demonstrate their competency in the foreign policy arena (Brace and Hinckley 1993). Taken as a whole, these activities are strategically used to influence the president’s standing in the public eye.

Therefore, to understand the behavior of presidents, we must identify the characteristics of the president’s environment that are associated with his primary responsibilities of office. Doing so leads to the identification of several types of domestic and international environmental variables, which may require presidential attention. All
of these variables, have been identified as part of the president's institutional responsibilities, and are therefore closely monitored by the president.

**International Environment**

As Commander in Chief of the world's foremost military power, the president is responsible for the advancement and protection of U.S. interests abroad. Threats to these interests, and the interests of its key allies, must be dealt with promptly and swiftly. Presidents who take strong measures against aggressive nations are typically rewarded by the public (e.g., Libya 1986), while presidents who appear passive are typically punished (e.g., Carter in 1980). In part, the actions that presidents take will be influenced by the events within the global environment that are out of the president's immediate control. Therefore, to gauge the effects of international events on the presidential calculus, and to determine which events induce presidential actions, I introduce several measures of the global environment into the model.

**Presidential Events.** International events, such as the Dominican Republic crisis in 1965, the hijacking of the TWA airliner by Lebanese Shiites in 1985, and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, might be expected to prompt a response from American presidents. By endangering American interests and challenging its international prestige, these events often become an immediate priority for the president's foreign policy. The entire nation's attention is focused on the president to see how he will respond; failure to act decisively could endanger his credibility at home as well as among international actors. Since the president's response to an international crisis is considered an important indicator of his overall foreign policy competence, I include a measure for presidential
events. Using Ragsdale’s (1984) definition of international presidential events, I created a variable coded “1” for the month in which an event occurred, and “0” otherwise. I hypothesize that international presidential events increase the probability of all presidential activities.

Anti-American Threats and Violence. Second, direct threats and violence to American citizens are taken as both a direct threat to the nation and a challenge to the president’s prestige as a world leader (Brands 1987; Tillema 1973). After the 1986 Grenada invasion, for example, President Reagan justified the invasion by claiming over one thousand American lives were in danger. Given a threat to American citizens abroad, presidents are expected to retaliate with some form of political response. Whether it means getting on television and denouncing an act of aggression, or responding with a use of force, presidents are expected to respond in some meaningful and effective manner. To gauge the effects of violence and threats against Americans on the presidential decision to act, I created a variable coded “1” for all months in which violence against Americans occurred, and “0” otherwise. I hypothesize acts of violence and threats against Americans increases the probability of presidential addresses and uses of force. I also hypothesize that the decision to travel to a foreign country should not be altered.
Domestic Conditions

Since the president is the most visible leader of the nation, he is also responsible for ensuring that the domestic environment remains stable and prosperous. The president's handling of important domestic conditions (e.g., the economy, social uprisings) influences not only the way the public views his presidency, but also the reelection efforts of his own party members. It is in this sense that midterm elections are thought to be referendums on the president's party (Ferejohn and Calvert 1984; Mayhew 1974). Presidents then stand to lose a vital base of support in Congress, as well as among their public supporters by failing to act decisively. Therefore, to gauge the effects of the domestic events and conditions on the president's decision to act, I employ several measures of the domestic environment.

Positive and Negative Events. While positive and negative domestic events require the president's attention, positive events typically result in the outpouring of positive public sentiment. These events provide presidents with the opportunity to assume the spotlight, take credit for the success, and galvanize public support in his favor. Such events include the congressional passage of a presidential legislative priority (e.g., Budget accord in 1990 and the tax reduction bill in 1963 and 1975), and other patriotic events (e.g., the successful launch the Mercury spacecraft in 1961). Negative events, on the other hand, typically result in an outpouring of negative public sentiment. Typically these events involve national "emergencies" and require swift and deliberate action. Also, according to some scholars, negative domestic events increase the likelihood that presidents wishing to divert negative attention, will use force against a
foreign nation. Such events include social unrest (e.g., Detroit riots in 1967 and the L.A. riots in 1992), personal scandals (e.g., Watergate and the Iran-Contra affair) and other disturbances directly related to national policy (e.g., Kent State Shootings and national guard troops being sent to Selma). To measure the effects of positive and domestic events on the president’s decision-making process, I used Ragsdale’s list of domestic events to create two measures. I hypothesize that both negative and positive domestic events increase the probability that presidents will act.

**Domestic Economic Conditions.** Second, presidents are held responsible for the economic ‘health’ of the nation. Public evaluations of the president’s leadership over the economy are a crucial factor influencing the overall evaluation of his job performance (Edwards, Mitchell and Welch 1995). Presidents who face sagging economic indicators typically suffer from lower approval ratings, are vulnerable to midterm election loses, and often fail to have their legislative agendas passed. Moreover, as Ostrom and Job (1968, 548) point out, “The absence of prosperity...may lead the president to look for strategies to deflect attention from the lack of economic success and to bolster his sagging image.” Such strategies may increase the likelihood that a president will travel abroad, take forceful action against an aggressive nation, or appeal to the nation for its support. I employ two measures of economic conditions: inflation and unemployment. I hypothesize that high inflation and unemployment increase the probability that presidents will act.
Presidential Power Goals

Along with the numerous international and domestic factors, the president's own personal power goals influence his decision-making process. As Neustadt (1990) argues, the ability of presidents to achieve their own personal goals in office is directly related to the maintenance of a credible professional reputation. Presidents who enjoy the trust and confidence of the world, the American public, and the Congress typically enjoy higher evaluations, meet with less congressional resistance to their legislative priorities (Edwards 1997; Rivers and Rose 1985), and enjoy greater respect in the international arena. While the president's key audiences are the American public and Congress, the president must also take care he has the confidence of other world leaders. The concern with credibility and reputation leads to the identification of several variables that, I argue, presidents gauge as indicators of their professional reputations. I discuss below how this concern shapes presidents' decisions and then derive several more specific hypotheses to gauge the importance of these concerns.

Presidential Approval. One obvious gauge of presidential reputation is the president's approval ratings. As some argue, the ability of presidents to influence the public and congressional agendas largely depends upon how well he is perceived to be performing his duties in office. However, according to the so-called "Bank Account Presidency," presidents face inevitable declines of public support (Sullivan 1991). In response to decaying support, presidents may be tempted to capitalize on opportunities to demonstrate their leadership ability. That is to say, presidents who are suffering at the polls will not risk further deterioration by failing to take swift and decisive actions, when
the opportunity presents itself. Moreover, presidents facing sluggish approval ratings may also wish to bolster their approval ratings by engaging in international summits or introducing popular policies. Therefore, the greater the percentage of the public who approves the president's job performance, the less likely he is to resort to these activities.

Partisan Approval. At the same time, presidents are viewed as leaders of their political party. During congressional campaigns presidents spend a great deal of time and money either endorsing members of their party, attending political rallies, and making speeches to partisan audiences to increase the party's status among the voters. As leaders of the party, then, it is obviously important for the president to attend to his approval ratings among partisan supporters. Without their support the president can do little. Therefore, not only is the president's overall approval rating an important indicator of his reputation, but so is his standing among members of his party. I hypothesize that the greater percentage of partisans who approve of the president, the less likely he is to resort to these activities.

Congressional Support. The next indicator of a president's personal power goals is the level of support he receives from Congress. Since one of the goals of "going public" is to influence fellow politicians in Washington (Kernell 1993), congressional responses to White House proposals will be watched closely by the president. Signs of increasing congressional resistance to the president's proposals may serve as warnings for the president that he is not succeeding in the legislative arena. Such resistance can effectually be countered by garnering public support for his policies (Ault 1998, Chapter 3; Rivers and Rose 1985). Therefore, to gauge the influence of congressional support on
the president's decision-making process, I calculate the president’s percentage of successes on presidential position roll-call votes during each month. I hypothesize that presidents are less likely to use presidential activities during months of high congressional support.

**Elections.** Vast amounts have been written about the factors influencing voters in presidential elections, as well as the effects of elections on presidential behavior. Several authors find evidence that during electoral seasons presidents are more inclined to use military force (James and Oneal 1991; Oneal and James 1992), or deliver major addresses (Ragsdale 1984; Brace and Hinckley 1992). It is argued that, as a part of the political drama, uses of force and major addresses can galvanize support for the president, giving him and his party a necessary boost in the voting booth. On the other hand, traveling abroad during an election season, can actually harm a president by making him susceptible to arguments that he is paying inadequate attention to domestic problems. Therefore, I include a variable measured “1” for the three months prior to an election, and “0” otherwise. I hypothesize that the use of military force and national addresses should increase, and the use of foreign travel should decrease during the three months prior to an election.

**President's Party.** Lastly, there may simply be differences between Republicans and Democrats. Ragsdale (1984) reports a "strategic difference" in Republicans' and Democrats' approaches to speechmaking, with Republicans being more responsive to changes in public opinion than Democrats. It is perhaps a truism of American politics that Republicans are identified as strong and credible leaders of the foreign policy
domain. In fact, there appears to be scholarly evidence as well. Bond and Fleischer (1990) report that the “two presidencies” phenomenon has largely been limited to Republican presidents. They argue that opposition party members and congressional leaders are more likely to lend their support to Republican presidents than they are Democratic Presidents on foreign policy issues (161). President Nixon’s trips to China, Reagan’s meetings with Gorbachev, and Bush’s coalition building during the Persian Gulf War are all cited as examples of Republican dominance in the foreign policy realm. Democrats, on the other hand, are often portrayed as being more concerned with domestic social issues. For example, President Kennedy’s moving speech about the situation at the University of Mississippi, or the racial strife in Birmingham, or President Johnson’s legislative action on behalf of the civil rights movement have typically been the arena in which Democratic presidents are most confident and credible. Considering the amount of media and scholarly attention devoted to discussions about the distinctions between Republicans and Democrats, I introduce a control variable for the president’s party.

Analysis

To understand the factors that influence the president’s decision to act, I constructed a data-set of 342 monthly observations from June, 1962 to December, 1990. I first created three separate measures of presidential activities: major uses of military force, major addresses, and foreign travel. The dependent variables for the three models are dichotomous measures coded “1” for the months in which an activity occurred and “0” otherwise.
Table 8 shows the estimates for each of the activities, as well as the marginal impact for each variable (Appendix A, p. 109). The marginal effect is calculated as the increase or decrease in the probability of a presidential activity associated with a one-unit change in the independent variable, holding all other variables constant at their mean value. Taken as a whole, there is strong support for the theoretical model. The model correctly predicts approximately 85 percent of the uses of force, 76 percent of major addresses, and 80 percent of foreign trips.

First, the effects of the international environment are striking. Generally speaking, when events occur that threaten Americans abroad, presidents are quite likely to respond with deeds not words. Interestingly, the old cliché that “actions speak louder than words” seems to characterize presidential responses to violence and/or threats against Americans. The severity of threats against Americans, as in the case of hostage taking and terrorist activities, lead presidents to take these threats as direct threats against the nation itself. President Reagan’s bombing of Libya in response to the terrorist attack on a popular disco frequented by American soldiers is one such example. Given the media’s tendency to focus on these sensational and tragic events, presidents feel tremendous pressure to find an outlet for the public’s frustration. And, uses of force provide, perhaps, one of the surest outlets. The mere denunciation of such violence from the “bully pulpit” or traveling to a foreign nation are not enough to quench the public’s desire for punishing aggressors who endanger American lives.

Other international events—events that entail threats against America’s vital interests and/or allies—do not have the same effect on the president’s calculus. These
events have a statistically significant impact in both the decision to use force and to address the nation; however, it is the degree of the impact that varies. That is, examining the marginal impact, we see that these events increase the probability of a major address around 24 percent whereas they increase the probability of force around 12 percent. In other words, presidents are twice as likely to respond to events such as attacks against allies with strong public denunciations, as they are to respond with force. Clearly, the use of force is not the only foreign policy instrument available to presidents wishing to respond to foreign aggression against allies. While presidents may opt for other diplomatic avenues, such as the use of sanctions or international embargoes, the use of a national address affords presidents the opportunity to stand before the world and issue strong condemnations against such violence. Again, however, these events appear not to affect the president's decision to travel abroad.

Despite arguments about the diversionary nature of the use of force, domestic political and economic conditions appear to have little impact on the decision to use force. Domestic political conditions do, however, directly influence the decision to act domestically. That is, with the one notable exception of inflation, neither positive and negative domestic events, nor economic conditions appear to alter the president's decision to travel abroad or to send military troops into action. Inflation is statistically significant only in the use of force model, but, contrary to the diversionary use of force literature, it actually decreases the probability that a president will use force. Instead, presidents are more likely to respond to positive and negative domestic events by addressing their national constituency. In fact, of all the variables in the speech model,
the marginal impact of the positive and negative events is the highest, with positive events increasing the probability of an address by 60 percent and negative domestic events increasing the probability by 52 percent.

Taken as a whole, several implications may be drawn about the effects of international and domestic conditions. First, a president's decision to use force is largely influenced by factors in the international arena, namely whether or not American citizens are in danger. Far from there being a diversionary tactic to distract the American public from domestic ills such as a sluggish economy, it appears instead that presidents respond to threats and violence against Americans, our allies, and vital interests with forceful military action. In other words, a sluggish economy by itself is not a justification for risking the lives of American troops, but aggressive behavior against American citizens or our allies is. Second, when positive and negative events do occur at home, presidents attempt to capitalize on the symbol of the single energetic leader by appearing before a national audience. From this position, presidents can attempt to minimize the political fallout from negative situations, or to maximize their political clout by taking credit for the outpouring of positive sentiment. Either way, domestic political events provide important reasons for presidents to use the "bully pulpit." As Brace and Hinkley (1992, 28) argue, "because the president is the symbol of the government, and held responsible for it, the problems and disunity reflect on the job he is doing."

Turning to the president's own personal power goals, we find mixed results. Presidents who enjoy the support of their party members are less likely to engage in any of the three activities. In all three models, the variable is statistically significant and
negatively signed. In other words, presidents who already enjoy the support of their core constituents may experience a "ceiling effect" of sorts. That is, the marginal gains resulting from high-profile public activities among supportive party members, may be viewed by presidents as minimal. Instead of acting publicly in front of a national audience, and possibly even jeopardizing loyal party members' support, presidents instead devote their limited time and resources to other activities. Conversely, when support among party members is sagging, presidents may wish to bolster it by engaging in a diplomatic venture overseas, addressing the nation on prime time television, or possibly even engaging in a use of force. But, as we cautioned earlier, the decision to use force is largely determined by events in the international arena—we can see this by comparing the marginal impact of several of the variables. The probability that a use of force will be used increases 24 percent after Anti-American violence and 12 percent after events that endanger our vital interests or allies. However, when there is low party support for the president, the probability that force will be used increases a mere 1 percent.

Interestingly, we observe a similar pattern for the overall approval measure. The variable is negatively signed, but it is only marginally significant in the force and travel models, and insignificant in the speech model. Taken as a whole, it appears as if there is marginal support for the hypothesis that the timing of a use of force is directly related to a president's low domestic political standing. The marginal impact of the overall approval measure indicates that the probability of force increases one-third of one percent when the president is suffering in the polls. Again, it is the international arena, more than the domestic arena, which triggers a use of force. Although presidents may attempt to bolster
support by traveling to a foreign nation, low approval ratings appear to have a minimal impact (again, one-third of one percent) on the decision.

Looking to the president's standing in the congressional arena we find several interesting relationships. High levels of congressional support increase the likelihood that a president will use force or address the nation, but not travel abroad. In both the force and speech models, the measure is statistically significant and positively signed. Although its marginal impact is relatively small, the positive relationship suggests several features about the interaction between the Congress and the presidency. First, these findings support the idea that speeches to the nation are used to influence the president's primary audience: Congress. The interesting aspect of this finding, however, is that there appears to be a "coattail" effect. That is, presidents who enjoy high levels of congressional success ride "the coattails" of previous congressional successes to influence congressional support in the future. Or to put it another way, presidents who experience high levels of congressional support are more inclined to garner public support for other legislative priorities by appealing to a national audience in prime time. Conversely, when congressional success is low, presidents may resort to other less public tactics, such as behind the scenes bargaining, to build support for his policies among members of Congress (Covington 1987). Second, presidents are more likely to engage in uses of force when they enjoy higher congressional support. This is not to suggest that presidents simply use force as their level of congressional support increases. Rather, it suggests that previous congressional success is an important requirement for presidents wishing to act with force. According to the War Powers Resolution, presidents must
notify Congress of the military use of force. It appears, however, that having prior congressional support on other legislative proposals may minimize the negative repercussions associated with endangering American personnel. In other words, if the Congress is acquiescing to the president’s legislative priorities, then the use of force may be looked at more seriously as a viable policy option by presidents.

Moreover, the effect of the electoral season also produces mixed results. Presidents are not inclined to schedule foreign travels, nor are they inclined to speak to nation-wide audiences once the national campaign seasons begins. For the speech and travel models, the variable is negatively signed and statistically significant. Moreover, despite arguments about the diversionary use of force by presidents, these findings again suggest no such tactic on the part of presidents. Brace and Hinckley (1992, 54) find evidence that foreign trips tend to increase as elections near, but they also note that most trips occur in the spring of the election year. The discrepancy between our findings can be explained by the fact that the variable in this study covers only the three months prior to the election. Instead of traveling to foreign nations and making national addresses prior to an election, presidents tend to focus their activities in other arenas. Given that the number of domestic campaign trips dramatically increase during election periods (Ragsdale 1996), it is no wonder that presidents are apt to do little else.

Turning to the differences between Republicans and Democrats, we see one important difference. The variable is statistically significant only in the use of force model, and is negatively signed. Since the variable is coded “1” for the presence of a Democrat in the White House, this seems to suggest that Republicans are more war-like
than their Democratic counterparts. However, when we examine the data more closely (Figures 1 and 2), we observe that President's Reagan and Nixon had the highest frequency of uses of force. While one may be tempted to conclude that these two presidents were simply more “hawkish” than other presidents, we must also consider that there were more opportunities presented to these two presidents. As one observer notes, "When examining the distribution of opportunities [to use force] across administrations it can be seen that...the world appears to have been a quieter place for Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter than for their predecessors, whereas it heated up again during the Reagan Administration with crises occurring primarily in the Middle East and Central America” (Meernik 1994, 125-126).

In the foreign travel and speech models, however, the difference between Republicans and Democrats is not systematic.

**Conclusions and Implications**

The goal of this study has been to integrate the extant studies investigating presidential behavior. From the theoretical standpoint, I have attempted to demonstrate how, according to many observers of presidential behavior, presidents may profit electorally as well as personally by taking public actions that portray themselves and their administrations in the most positive light. In direct contrast to the Neustadtian tactic of "personal bargaining" with Congress, the modern presidency has been armed with powerful tools of public manipulation that may be used strategically to rally support around presidents and their policies. Despite such arguments, however, the empirical
picture that emerges from this study of presidential behavior differs in several important respects.

First, and most importantly, while presidents have the ability and Constitutional authority to “go public” or use force in a way to manipulate public opinion, they use these activities with a surprising amount of restraint. The portrait of presidential behavior that emerges in this study indicates that, lacking an international incident or a direct threat against American lives, presidents are not likely to endanger the lives American soldiers simply because they are interested in diverting the public’s attention away from domestic ills. Instead, presidents appear to use military force in a highly “responsible” manner; that is, often for the preservation of the nation’s interest, and not personal political gain. Despite arguments that the domestic political and economic conditions are the most important predictors of a president’s decision to use force (Ostrom and Job 1986; James and Oneal 1991), I show that international conditions and the president’s policy-making relationship with Congress exercise the greatest effects on the decision to use force. Instead of painting portraits of presidents as Imperial Czars, scholars may have to revise their assessments and stick to less sensational explanations of presidential behavior. Such arguments are not unique to students of presidential-congressional relations: As Hinckley (1994, 5) argues, “[t]he conflict [between the president and Congress over foreign policy] is in large part an illusion, perhaps at times deliberately encouraged...The two branches support each other in this symbolic display, staging dramatic last-minute compromises or complaining about each other’s usurpation or meddling. [O]verall there is more illusion and less policy making than meets the eye.”
Second, while “going public” may appear to be a valuable tool to build public support for the president and his policies, presidents tend to use this resource in a much more reactive manner. That is to say, according to the theoretical discussion, presidents are thought to time their public activities to bolster sagging approval ratings and increase their own and their party’s chances in upcoming elections. The empirical findings presented in this study, however, demonstrate that the president’s decision to address the nation is influenced more by the domestic political climate, than it is simply for a desire for private political gain. Scholars, then, should place more emphasis on the way presidential activities allow presidents to fulfill their primary responsibilities of office, instead of simply arguing that the dawn of “the public-relations presidency” has descended upon America (c.f., Kernell 1993).

All in all, there is still work that needs to be done. Future research needs to focus on even greater distinctions among the types of activities, including news conferences and domestic travel. Until such investigations have been conducted the fields of presidency scholarship and international relations may be tempted to commit the errors of many popular media outlets.
Endnotes

1 Blechman and Kaplan divide force levels into three categories: Major, Standard, and Minor uses of force. Standard and Minor uses of force do not share the high-profile nature as the other activities do. According to the above discussion, presidents use activities to highlight their accomplishments and demonstrate their leadership. Therefore, since standard and minor uses of force lack this high-profile quality I have excluded them from the analysis. Also, all instances in which there were several uses of force during a single month are treated as a singular event.

2 Again, there were several instances when two speeches occurred in a month. The inclusion of these extra observations would have produced selection bias in the sample, so they were omitted from the data (c.f., King’s 1989 example). Because there were few months in which a president addressed the nation more than once, the findings reported here were not significantly altered. Simon and Ostrom (1989) use a broader set of criteria rules in coding major addresses. They begin with the Public Papers of the President, and then verify their preliminary findings with indexes of the New York Times. As noted by Simon and Ostrom, the differences between inclusion criteria can, at times, be quite substantial. The abstracts of the nightly news were obtained from the web site, Vanderbilt Television News Abstracts. Because the abstracts begin in 1968, I consulted the New York Times Index for the years prior to 1968.

3 I exclude obligatory addresses such as nationally televised Inaugural Addresses and State of the Union Addresses. Also, I excluded other public activities which did not preempt the major network programming, such as press conferences and speeches to smaller audiences because they lack the sensationalism of major addresses.

4 King and Ragsdale measure foreign travel as the total number of foreign appearances made by a president during his travel outside the United States. A foreign appearance, according to their criteria, includes formal remarks, toasts to other heads of state, airport greetings, remarks to reporters, and remarks to American citizens who reside in the host country. Such a measure of foreign travel would be largely meaningless in this analysis, as I am interested in analyzing the factors that led to the decision to travel abroad.

5 In several instances, the president traveled near the end of a month and into the next month (e.g., the last week in August until mid September). In these instances, the variable is still coded for the month in which the trip originated and the month prior to it. The reason for this is to limit, as much as possible, the bias in the indicators which may be caused by “forward counting” a foreign trip. That is to say, the domestic and international conditions that exist during the months before a foreign trip begins, may be quite different from the conditions that exist during the month of the actual trip. Yet, if
one was to code "forward", mistaken inferences would be drawn about the changes in domestic and international conditions, even though they may have had nothing to do with the decision to travel in the first place. Be that as it may, as we will see, there are already numerous difficulties in trying to predict the decision to travel abroad. By counting foreign trips forward, greatly increases the difficulty of such a task.

6 Of course, this is not to suggest that the president operates in complete isolation of his inner circle advisors. It does suggest, however, that the choice to act or not to act is ultimately the decision of the president.

7 This is not to suggest that the military use of force is not part of the president's Constitutional duty. It is to suggest, however, that despite attempts to limit the president's ability to use force (e.g., War Powers Resolution), he remains the sole and final decision-maker. For a complete account, see, for example, Fisher's (1995) lamentations.

8 For a complete explanation of the coding procedure, see Ragsdale (1984). Also, Brace and Hinckley (1992) outline a similar coding practice in Appendix A.

9 These data were taken from the International Crisis Behavior Project, 1918-1994, available from Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research.
APPENDIX A

TABLES
Table 1: Augmented Dickey-Fuller Unit Root Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Series</th>
<th>Unit-Root Test (t)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Approval</td>
<td>-3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy Approval</td>
<td>-3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Approval</td>
<td>-3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Evaluations</td>
<td>-2.82*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation</td>
<td>-2.84*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-0.63*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = fails to reject null hypothesis of nonstationarity.
Table 2: Public Support for U.S. Presidents' Economic and Foreign Policies, 1977-1994
Ordinary Least Squares Estimation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Economic Policy (1)</th>
<th>Economic Policy (2)</th>
<th>Foreign Policy (3)</th>
<th>Foreign Policy (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>10.88***</td>
<td>7.50***</td>
<td>10.63***</td>
<td>3.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy Support&lt;sub&gt;-1&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0.64***</td>
<td>0.59***</td>
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<td>Economic Policy Support&lt;sub&gt;-1&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0.74***</td>
<td>0.72***</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Presidential Approval</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
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### Aspirations

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<tr>
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<th>Economic Policy (1)</th>
<th>Economic Policy (2)</th>
<th>Foreign Policy (3)</th>
<th>Foreign Policy (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prosperity</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Evaluations</td>
<td>0.15***</td>
<td>0.14***</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation</td>
<td>-1.93**</td>
<td>-1.77**</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-4.95**</td>
<td>-5.17*</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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### Presidential Activities

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<th>Economic Policy (2)</th>
<th>Foreign Policy (3)</th>
<th>Foreign Policy (4)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy Speech</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic Policy Speech</td>
<td>2.83**</td>
<td>2.89**</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presidential Travel</td>
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<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of Force</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.91</td>
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<tr>
<td>Desert Storm</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>10.03**</td>
<td>5.33</td>
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</table>

### Media

<table>
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<th>Foreign Policy (3)</th>
<th>Foreign Policy (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive News</td>
<td>5.61**</td>
<td>5.60**</td>
<td>21.08***</td>
<td>19.04***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative News</td>
<td>-6.16***</td>
<td>-6.44***</td>
<td>-11.84***</td>
<td>-11.61***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honeymoon Carter</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honeymoon Reagan</td>
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<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>-0.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honeymoon Bush</td>
<td>12.29**</td>
<td>12.08**</td>
<td>6.68</td>
<td>6.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honeymoon Clinton</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-1.56</td>
<td>-1.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N       | 123                 | 123                 | 107               | 107               |
| R²      | 0.79                | 0.80                | 0.82              | 0.83              |
| SEE     | 4.75                | 4.71                | 5.37              | 5.25              |
| Durbin-Watson | 2.11               | 2.09                | 2.11              | 2.06              |
| Durbin h | -0.74               | -0.61               | -0.71             | -0.40             |

* = p < .10; ** = p < .05; *** p < .01
Table 3: Public Support for U.S. Presidents’ Economic and Foreign Policies, 1977-1994
Two-Stage Least Squares Estimation

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>9.00***</td>
<td>3.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foreign Policy Support</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0.57***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic Policy Support</strong></td>
<td>0.73***</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Presidential Approval</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Aspirations**
- Peace: X, 0.14
- Security: X, -0.00
- Prosperity: 0.15***, X
- ΔSubjective Evaluations: -1.84**, X
- ΔInflation: -5.07**, X
- ΔUnemployment

**Presidential Activities**
- Foreign Policy Speech: X, 1.04
- Economic Policy Speech: 2.86**, X
- Presidential Travel: 0.20, 1.09
- Use of Force: -0.29, 0.20
- Desert Storm: X, 7.24*

**Media**
- Positive News: 5.60**, 19.13***
- Negative News: -6.32***, -11.61***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Economic Policy</th>
<th>Foreign Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Honeymoon Carter</strong></td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Honeymoon Reagan</strong></td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>2.84</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Honeymoon Bush</strong></td>
<td>12.17***</td>
<td>7.10</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Honeymoon Clinton</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>5.07**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **N**                    | 123             | 107            |
| **R^2**                  | 0.79            | 0.84           |
| **SEE**                  | 4.73            | 5.14           |
| **Durbin-Watson**        | 2.11            | 2.15           |
| **Durbin h**             | -0.75           | -1.04          |

* = p < .10; ** = p < .05; *** = p < .01
Table 4: Presidential Success in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1953-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Z</th>
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Table 5: Presidential Success in the U.S. Senate, 1953-1990

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Percent Correctly Predicted 71.4
Reduction of Error 3.5
Table 6: Presidential Success in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1977-1990

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### Presidential Resources

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Percent Correctly Predicted: 60.0
### Table 7: Presidential Success in the U.S. Senate, 1977-1990

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Table 8: Presidential Activity, 1962-1990

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APPENDIX B

FIGURES
Figure 1: The Theoretical Model
Figure 2: Economic Support and Presidential Approval, 1977-1994

Carter
$r = .84$

Reagan
$r = .80$

Bush
$r = .62$

Clinton
$r = .71$

--- ECONSUP --- PRESPOP
Figure 3: Foreign Policy Support and Presidential Approval, 1977-1994
Figure 4: Percentage of Presidential Victories in House and Senate by Issue, 1953 to 1990
Figure 5: Percentage of Presidential Victories in House and Senate by President, 1953-1990
Figure 6: Uses of Force, Major Addresses, and Foreign Travel by Presidents
REFERENCES


123


