THE PRESIDENT’S AGENDA:

POSITION-TAKING, LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT, AND THE PERSISTENCE OF TIME

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

The president’s agenda and Congress’s support for the president’s programs are key drivers in American public policy and electoral politics. The study of presidential-legislative relations, however, lacks a broad and rigorous treatment of the normal legislative process, from initial presidential position taking on votes before the House to final veto override votes cast by Congress.

This dissertation broadly examines two stages of the normal legislative process, presidential position-taking and House support for the president’s positions, using a data set consisting of more than 3,200 House votes representing the first terms of the Carter through Clinton administrations. The dissertation suggests that three temporal contexts—regime time; political, or intra administration time; and policymaking or discrete time—prominently shape the politics of presidential position taking and legislative support for the president. My analysis then employs a series of uniquely constructed variables to account for the personal and external context within which the president legislates and attempts to persuade members of the House. By doing so, this dissertation tests the degree to which the legislative or executive branch dominates the policy process.

Drawing from a data set that treats presidential position-taking—and subsequent legislative action—as discrete decisions and using a series of binary cross-sectional probit models, the dissertation finds strong evidence suggesting that the waxing and
waning of the president’s political capital over regime and political time is among the most critical factors to consider when examining legislative-executive relations. These findings call into question past analyses of presidential-congressional relationships that fail to account for the dynamic nature of presidential and/or legislative dominance of the policy process. The dissertation concludes by discussing directions for subsequent research.
Dedicated to Angela + 1
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION
UNDERSTANDING RELATIONS BETWEEN
THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS

1.1 Preface

Immediately after confirming that Ohio was a “red state” in 2004, President George W. Bush and his advisers began a dialogue with the public and Congress. He made both aware that a majority of Americans had conferred a clear mandate on him and his administration. Bush, however, went a step farther and, during an early November 2004 news conference, articulated to the press corps a new vision of what sort of mandate the election had provided. Responding to a question about what the election meant for his next term and the legislative initiative he intended to forward, Bush stated:

“Let me put it to you this way: I earned capital in the campaign—political capital—and now I intend to spend it. It is my style” (Froomkin 2004).

Early in his second term, Bush set about cashing in some of that political capital with an aggressive agenda that included radical changes to Social Security and a making permanent of his first-term tax cuts. During his first State of the Union Address following the 2004 elections, Bush challenged Congress to live up to tax cuts that were “promised [to taxpayers] for future years” and to “work together to keep Social Security sound and
reliable [by offering] younger workers a chance to invest in retirement accounts that they will control and they will own” (Bush 2005).

Sensing resistance from a recalcitrant Congress—and facing a coordinated “Fix It, Don’t Nix It” Social Security campaign initiated by Democrats—Bush and his advisers in early March 2005 began an aggressive campaign of their own. Traveling to nearly 60 events in 60 days, Bush and officials in his administration stumped for personal savings accounts and the president’s changes to the Social Security system. According to press accounts, Bush:

“…conducted forums before screened audiences of cheering supporters beneath giant campaign-style banners. Selected panelists hailed his leadership from the stage, and young fans chanted his name from the hall” (Baker and Birnbaum 2005).

Bush attempted to mobilize the public and direct its opinion before taking formal proposals on Social Security reform to Congress. Bush hoped to build consensus by generating public appeals that would, over time, influence not only what Congress thought, but what Congress thought about (Kernell 1997). He attempted to strike early and often on major pieces of his legislative agenda, acknowledging that political capital was readily available early in this term while implicitly suggesting that such capital dissipates as time passes.

As Ronald Reagan did in 1981 and Bill Clinton did again in 1993, George W. Bush took his policy agenda to the public, hoping to engender its support for the pillars of his agenda. All of these presidents—whether on economic policy (Reagan), energy policy and the expansion of government (Carter), education (George H.W. Bush), health care (Clinton), or Social Security (George W. Bush)—immediately attempted to take advantage of having political capital. By first believing that an electoral mandate
conferred political capital and then setting about turning that capital into a series of
policies to become administration hallmarks, these presidents attempted to build
momentum and translate that momentum into a successful agenda in Congress.

But not all of these presidents achieved the successes they hoped. Carter began
the term as an outsider, with a steep learning curve and faced with a fractured Democratic
Party and heated inter-party rivalry, and presided during extraordinary social and political
events—such as the continuing energy and Iran hostage crises—making relations with
Congress difficult throughout. Abhorring dealing with economic policy (Kessel 2001,
218), Carter struggled with wage-price stability and inflation and attempted to work with
Congress in the immediate post-Nixon era—a time of extraordinary cynicism toward the
presidency. All told, these factors combined to bog down the first two years of his
administration and, ultimately, subsume his legislative agenda and reelection hopes.

Ronald Reagan, on the other hand, came away from the 1980 elections during a
period of fundamental partisan realignment in the South (Hershey and Beck 2004).
Southern Democrats who grumbled during the Carter administration—but whose
dissatisfaction with their party traced back to the Dixiecrat secession in the late 1940s—
reached across the aisle to the charismatic former actor and California governor. Reagan
swept into office with a small majority, but one he trumpeted effectively to the public as
a clear policy mandate. His administration benefited early on from the release of the Iran
hostages that so troubled the latter years of the Carter administration. This success was
followed by a near-tragedy—John Hinckley, Jr.’s assassination attempt—and provided
Reagan an additional uptick in public support.
Reagan connected with the public and used television as no previous president had as a means to lobby the public to action and as a mechanism to pressure Congress to action on his legislative priorities. Although his momentum later subsided—owing much to declining public support for his administration—Reagan’s early-term agenda was warmly received by Congress.

The next Democrat in the White House, William Jefferson Clinton, had a significantly different experience. Despite his strong victory over the incumbent senior Bush in 1992, Clinton struggled to achieve agenda success in Congress, particularly on big-ticket items such as health care reform. The early legislative problems in Clinton’s presidency and his inability to build consensus within his own majority party limited congressional support for his agenda and set the stage for the 1994 Republican revival in the House of Representatives.

On its face, Clinton’s health care reform effort had all the hallmarks of a successful campaign to pressure Congress into supporting the results of his health care panel’s findings. In 1992, 35 million Americans were without health insurance of any kind, and millions more were likely to lose their health care upon a change of employment (Kessel 2001, 232). The issue was far from easy: myriad interests were bound to weigh in on the question of universal health care.¹

Early in his first term, Clinton turned to the First Lady and Ira Magaziner to helm a taskforce designed to produce recommendations for his health plan. The taskforce, however, was rigid and cumbersome, and the president’s two principal advisers were regarded as difficult and inflexible. The two taskforce leaders clashed repeatedly with
outside groups, waylaying opportunities to draw in these groups and creating enemies to any proposal the taskforce developed. The lull between Clinton’s election and the taskforce’s final report to Congress was long, and Congress was unable to seriously take up the taskforce’s recommendations until early 1994. During the waiting period, Clinton ran aground with Congress in his attempts to integrate the U.S. Armed Forces, settling for a “don’t ask, don’t tell” solution to gays in the military. At the same time, a series of lingering scandals—from Gennifer Flowers to concerns about draft dodging—first discussed during the 1992 presidential campaign chipped away at his political capital.

When Congress finally considered his health care proposal—all 1,342 pages of it—legislators found it long and complex. Its breadth required referral to five congressional committees for consideration. While health care was being debated, members of his own party began to gin up for their own reelection efforts, eager to distance themselves from Clinton and his support for NAFTA and the prolonged gays in the military fight. In addition, they anticipated that a hard-charging GOP was hoping to unseat many Democratic incumbents and forward an agenda diametrically opposed to Clinton’s left-leaning political agenda. The opposition too had the next congressional election on its mind. Republicans circled their wagons in near-universal opposition to Clinton’s legislative agenda, using it—and Clinton’s personal and moral troubles—as flashpoints for a GOP resurgence in Congress.

Clinton’s health care proposal, the politics of reelection, and the controversies surrounding Bill Clinton the person were enough to tip the balance away from support for his key legislative agenda items. Two of the House committees considering the health

1 This case study draws from Kessel (2001) and additional materials from Fein (1992); Clymer, Pear, and
care reform legislation—Energy and Commerce and Ways and Means—stifled the health care bill, because neither committee had sufficient Democratic support to push the proposal forward. Opposition to the bill ultimately doomed it, and Clinton failed to hit the ground running with his highly prized health care reforms.

The mixed results that his predecessors had—Carter’s failures on energy and economic policy; Reagan’s extraordinary successes on budgetary matters; and Clinton’s failure on his health care initiatives—could have provided President George W. Bush a signal about what to expect as he took his Social Security reform agenda to Congress. Previous presidencies suggest that a president’s successes in Congress hinge on more than public appeals, presidential personality, or even the merits of the policy proposal being considered by the legislative branch.

Presidential-legislative relations also depend on more than “electoral mandates” and the persistence of political capital. Instead, the relationship between Congress and president is conditional on myriad factors, both inside and outside the president’s control. These variables include the president’s political timing and the general passage of time and political capital; the president’s legislative momentum; external events beyond the president’s control; and the complexion of the Congress he faces as he introduces new agenda items into the legislative process.

This dissertation examines the complex relationships between Congress and the president. It attempts to address the complicating factor of political timing, the deleterious effect time has on presidential capital, and the importance of events, inside and outside the president’s control. Using these variables as a backdrop, this dissertation

Toner (1994); Ellwood 1994; Quirk and Hinchcliffe 1996; and Sinclair (1999).
most importantly examines presidential and legislative relations beginning with presidential agenda-setting and proceeding through the legislature’s final decision on those agenda items. The delicate dance presidents and Congress do during the policy process is wrought with pitfalls, with each institutional “actor” alternately dominating and being dominated. It is to that discussion we now turn.

1.2 Who Dominates?

The literature examining legislative support for the president is robust and varied, owing both to its tractability and clear importance in American politics. Two themes emerge in this literature. In one, the president is regarded as the dominant actor in the legislative process; in the other, the legislature dominates a president constrained by waning political capital.

Early analyses of presidential influence in Congress focused on the formal powers afforded the chief executive and how their personalities affected the way the executives operated within that framework (Corwin 1957; Rossiter 1960; Barber 1992; Fisher 1993). In these analyses, the president is the dominant agenda-setter and policymaker in government (Rossiter 1960; Neustadt 1991; Huntington 1961). Even so, scholars emphasizing the “presidency-centered” approach realized that presidential capital was frail and that a host of variables outside the president’s control could diminish the president’s power to successfully legislate in Congress (Neustadt 1991).

More recent scholarship on the presidency-centered model concedes that, at most, presidential outcomes in Congress are “presidency-augmented,” relying on the president to be a cue-giver and to build coalitions from his own party and from fence-sitting
members of the opposition (Sullivan 2004; 1990; 1989; Peterson et al. 2003; Covington et al. 1995; Hager and Sullivan 1994). In perhaps the most comprehensive study of executive-legislative relations, Peterson argues that presidents can be effective in Congress, but only if they selectively legislate and carefully choose, formulate, and present their policy proposals (Peterson 1990, 222).

Most scholarship on executive-legislative relations regards the president as a constrained actor that struggles to gather support for his position on House and Senate votes (Meinke and Anderson 2002; Brady and Volden 1998; Bond and Fleisher 1990; Jones 1994; Peterson 1990; Edwards 1989, 1980). The results of this research overwhelmingly suggest that the legislature is a dominant figure in the executive-legislative dyad and that presidents are able to exert only marginal influence over the voting behavior of members of Congress (see in particular Edwards 1989). Recent scholarship, however, suggests that presidents exert powers “upstream” by issuing executive orders and veto threats that circumvent the normal legislative process (Howell 2003; Cameron 2000; Lewis and Strine 1996; McCarty and Poole 1995; McCarty 1997; Groseclose and McCarty 2000).

This chapter and subsequent analyses offer more fulsome discussions of these competing perspectives and attempt to adjudicate between them. I suggest that the president and Congress operate as tandem institutions, sharing power over the period of the president’s term. As surely as the president can shape Congress’s behavior by framing the issues about which that institution deliberates, Congress can complicate or facilitate presidential efforts in the legislative arena. In addition, the political and economic
realities the president faces during his term also will condition his ability to forward his agenda and to engender support for his policies in Congress. Finally, I suggest and test the hypothesis that time shapes both what the president puts before Congress and how the House and Senate receive those agenda items.

In sum, these perspectives paint the president as a constrained actor, able on the one hand to influence his colleagues in the House and Senate, but handcuffed by legislative and external political events and realities outside his control. I discuss the important types of influence that the president, Congress, time, and external political events have in shaping the president’s agenda and Congress’s evaluation of that agenda.

1.2.1 Presidential Dominance

The president is a singular actor in American politics—with his popular election comes significant power to shape the legislative agenda and the behavior of members of Congress. In a series of interviews with legislators in the U.S. House of Representatives, Kingdon (1989) found that members of Congress used the president’s position as a significant cue to guide their roll call behavior. Sullivan (2004; 1987) and Hager and Sullivan (1994) suggest members of Congress, particularly those who are ambivalent or uncertain, are susceptible to presidential influence on matters of particular importance to the chief executive.

The scholarship on presidential policymaking in Congress is clear: presidential power in Congress evolves from two separate sources. First, the president is afforded power through the formal strictures of the Constitution. Second, the president trades on

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2 See also Kingdon (1989) for a review of the array of actors and processes that influence a legislator’s
informal powers—often magnified by his personality—his activities outside the president-Congress dyad, and his ability to individually persuade members of the “people’s body” (Neustadt 1991) to support his stance on critical legislative issues.

Presidential power—conceptualized here as presidential capital—thus relies on external and internal resources (Light 1999; Sullivan 1991). The first of these, external resources, are those the president receive by virtue of the powers granted to him in the Constitution—both to ex ante shape the legislative agenda and to ex post determine how and when policy is implemented.

The President’s Formal Powers

The formal structures and powers afforded the president by the Constitution are the first and most obvious means by which presidents can shape the legislative agenda. In the modern era, the size and importance of the executive branch has grown substantially (Hart 1995), and the executive power of the president has expanded accordingly (Cronin 1989). Corwin (1957) suggests the growth of the executive branch in both size and scope of powers is ample empirical evidence of an aggrandized presidential power.

Rooted in the bureaucratic expansions of the New Deal era, the simple heft of the executive branch presents a substantial institutional advantage to the president. In relations between Congress and the president, the executive branch always lurks as the ultimate arbiter and implementation agent for bills enacted in Congress. The executive branch’s sheer size and scope complicates the legislature’s ability to unilaterally dominate the policy process. Scholarship on executive branch policy implementation
emphasizes that presidential power and capital—operationalized as the president’s ability to persuade members of Congress—rely on the president’s ability to effectively shape the bureaucracy.

By shaping the bureaucracy’s size, ideological make-up and scope of powers, the president is able to control, or at least proscribe, Congress’s policymaking abilities early in the policymaking process. Presidents can expand or contract the bureaucracy or make bureaucratic appointments that shape the legislature’s ability to pass policies and later implement and evaluate those policies (Moe 1984; 1989; 1991; 1993). Presidents also can widen or narrow a legislature’s policy “berth” by establishing a bureaucratic structure that encourages or discourages specific legislative policy initiatives (Moe 1989). Thus, the bureaucracy’s willingness or ability to implement policy constrain the emergence of policy windows (Kingdon 1989), condition Congress’s ability to pass sweeping legislation, or could even sap the legislature’s will to legislate on specific issues.

Apart from exerting bureaucratic control over the legislative branch, presidents can circumvent the legislative process when pressing policy requirements exist or when the president’s initiatives are unlikely to survive the normal legislative process. The modern president increasingly has used the executive order to pass programs that would likely meet with defeat during the normal legislative process (Mayer and Price 2002; Mayer 2001; 1999). Howell (2003) and Moe and Howell (1999a; 1999b) find compelling evidence that presidents use the executive order during periods of divided government or

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3 Here, I define “normal” as the process of the president submitting agenda items to Congress via taking positions on floor votes; the legislative body considering those positions and either supporting or rejecting them; and the President using the veto to override Congress when he feels it appropriate.
when the president’s majority in Congress is small. These findings suggest that the
normal legislative process—during which presidents take positions and the legislative
body adjudicates over those positions—easily is subverted by presidents primarily
interested in passing their agendas even over strenuous objections from members of
Congress. In addition, Howell (2003) suggests that large-scale foreign policy initiatives—
over which presidents typically have been given more latitude by Congress—are a critical
component of this tendency toward executive orders (see also Mayer and Price 2002).

Presidents need not only use executive orders to overcome an organized
opposition in Congress. Using the torrent of executive orders by President George W.
Bush after 11 September as a case study, Howell suggests that critical exogenous shocks
may also give the president license to rely on his formal powers as a means to speed past
the normal legislative process. Thus, the formal powers afforded to the president allow
him to circumvent Congress to do the politically expedient or critically necessary thing.
As Howell (2003, 13) notes that “the extent that presidents use these ‘power tools of the
presidency’ more now than they did a century ago…speaks to what is distinctively
‘modern’ about the modern presidency” (see also Cooper 2002; 1997; 1996).

An extensive body of presidency research on the presidency also is devoted to
understanding the importance of the veto as a key instrument in the president’s arsenal of
formal powers. Like the ability to shape the bureaucracy, the veto threat has the power to
deter legislative action (Groseclose and McCarty 2000). Most important, the veto,
however, provides the president with the ability to negotiate his preferred policy outcome
while threatening gridlock in circumstances when the legislature fails to meet the president’s policy expectations.

Formal theories of veto games between the president and the Congress find distinct policy windows within which the ideal points of the president and the median member of Congress can rest. The width of these windows is determined both by the president’s and the median member of Congress’s ideal point. As the preferences of the president and the median member of Congress shape policy window “width,” so too do these preferences help determine the width of gridlock spaces that subsequently shape whether or not a bill passes and is signed into law (Cameron 2000; Krehbiel 1998).

In these gridlock spaces, the ideological array of members of Congress will be sufficiently diffuse as to prevent the House or Senate from overcoming the president’s veto with a three-fifths majority. In addition, the veto override power conferred to the legislative branch provides Congress with some measure of flexibility to overcome unilateral presidential action. Whipping members from both sides of the aisle into a coalition to oppose the president—often on complex or controversial bills—however, is sufficiently difficult that the president’s veto becomes the final move in the game between the president and Congress.

The veto option also provides the president an informal means by which to pressure Congress, particularly when it is used as part of a “blame game” (Groseclose and McCarty 2000; Krehbiel 1998; Cameron 2000). This theoretical and empirical approach relies on presidents leveraging the veto to first prevent legislative action and then to blame Congress for that inaction. The blame game concept, then, is a means by which Congress can be intimidated into inaction and also scolded by the president and the
public for failing to act on matters of pressing public concern (Cameron 2000). The blame game veto also provides the president with leverage to draw Congress closer to his policy ideal point. Congress, threatened with a veto and the subsequent embarrassment of blame game politics, is more likely to offer the president a policy that more closely reflects his policy preferences.

Damned if they do and damned if they don’t, Congress must choose between the president executing his constitutional power to veto—one form of embarrassment—or acceding to the president’s threats to veto and suffering an embarrassment couched in the politics of blame. The veto and veto threats are formal means by which the president can cause gridlock, benefit from legislative policies that more closely mimic his policy preferences, or encourage legislative inaction and the resulting blame game embarrassments.

Perhaps no president better exemplified the effective use of the veto threat than Bill Clinton. For the first two years of his presidency, Clinton struggled to find legislative consensus on his agenda, and those struggles were reflected with a striking Republican victory in the 1994 congressional elections. As Davidson (2000, 258) describes, Clinton went through a number of stages during his two terms, many of which hinged on the effective use of the veto threat.

“As a minority president working first with a fractious Capitol Hill majority (1993-1994) and then a minority that was by turns disheartened (1995-1996), resurgent (1997), defensive (1998), and again emboldened (1999-2000), Clinton and his aides were obliged to forage for votes wherever they could find them. […] Clinton actively played the veto card as a last-resort bargaining device. His tough bargaining goaded the Republicans into calling his bluff and shutting down the government on two occasions during the winter of 1995-1996—an impasse for which the public blamed mainly on the GOP Congress. Resolving not to let this happen again, Republican leaders thereafter dealt more cautiously with the White House on spending bills.”
By gauging the political environment and using his constitutional veto power as a constantly looming and credible threat, Clinton was able to amend the behavior of an entire institution controlled by members of the opposition party. The veto prerogative provided him with the leverage to influence what members of Congress considered, how they considered it, and the final outcomes of bills and procedures being considered by the opposition majority in Congress.

The formal powers afforded to presidents come in many flavors and significantly influence the legislative decision process. Presidents can, through the patronage/appointments process or via the creation or elimination of bureaucratic elements, condition Congress’s policymaking. In addition, presidents may preempt the legislative process by issuing executive orders that solve pressing issues or, Congress aside, unilaterally press forward the president’s agenda. Finally, a president can employ the veto or veto threat to draw legislative policies closer to his ideal point, blame Congress for inaction, or formally block legislative initiatives. In sum, the Constitution affords the president a wide array of formal powers, all of which offer him a singular advantage in his dealings with Congress.

**Informal Powers: The President’s Power to Persuade**

Presidential power is, as Neustadt (1991, 11) noted, “the power to persuade.” In Neustadt’s consideration of presidential power, the president is a solitary actor imbued with constitutional authority who frequently must rely less on those formal powers and more on the ability to cajole, outwit, and bargain and to reach consensus with the breadth of personalities in and outside Congress. Thus, presidential power thus is personality
driven, with presidents relying on their formal powers only when attempts to persuade have failed (Neustadt 1991, 24). The president’s ability to persuade is conditioned by factors such as external events, the winds of public approval, and the partisan and ideological predispositions of members of Congress. In short, despite the formal powers the president possesses, the deck is stacked against him and his ability to effectively push through legislation—via building and maintaining political capital—more often is personality- rather than formal powers-driven (Light 1999; Sullivan 1991).

The literature built on Neustadt’s insights is robust but contentious. Scholars, in particular, have focused on presidential personality as a primary element of a president’s power (Greenstein 2004; Barber 1992; Pfiffner 1989; George 1974; Hargrove 1966). This stream of research suggests that presidential personalities fall neatly—or somewhat neatly—into typologies, such as active-passive and positive-negative leadership types (Barber 1992). This literature also argues that the president’s personality “type” frequently drives presidential decisions and the president’s eventual successes or failures. Presidents that pursue active legislative agendas, engage with the public, and do so without engendering enemies—Barber’s (1992) “active-positive” presidents—more likely will legislate successfully and find their agendas to be well received by Congress and the public. Passive-negative presidents, on the other hand, are less likely to engage the legislature, achieve fewer legislative successes, and find those failures reflected in poor public opinion and a downward-spiral of legislative support over time.

Such studies of the presidential personality are, however, inherently static. The presidential personality evolves over the course of the president’s term. Presidents learn and update their behaviors by reacting to the public’s policy demands, the shifting
political sands in Washington, and the president’s personal successes and failures in Congress. To label a president with one personality type fails to account for how unstable that personality type might be on any particular day in an administration. Neustadt’s (1991) analysis suggests as much, noting that presidents must be chameleonic in order to achieve agenda success in the eyes of Congress and the public.

Although many classic studies of the president’s personality rely on “the public face” of the president, presidents, in fact, display many of them. Hager and Sullivan (1994) and Sullivan (2005; 1987) find that the image that Lyndon Johnson portrayed to the public as president was far different from the one of a president that privately bullied and coerced members of his party to fall in line with his policy initiatives. Presidents must employ many personalities and show many faces to outwit and outlast crafty adversaries in Congress. The modern president who achieves success in Congress or with the public is the one able to absorb shocks from the external environment, shift to the current day’s demands and needs, and do so in a manner that builds coalitions while limiting the creation of “coalitions of minorities” (Mueller 1970) in Congress.

The presidential personality manifests itself in the day-to-day relations the president maintains with members of Congress. As Kingdon (1989) notes, presidents are a primary cue-giver for members of Congress, and presidential lobbying efforts often are sufficient to influence legislators to support the president’s position (see also Asher and Weisberg 1978; Clausen 1973; Kingdon 1973). Sullivan (2004; 1987), coining the term “presidential sway,” finds that the president’s ability to influence marginal legislators in Congress depends heavily on his ability to leverage his own personality in very subtle (and personality-driven) bargaining with legislators.
Even with this personality component to presidential-legislative relations, a president’s persuasiveness also is influenced directly by his public standing, the legislator’s own partisan and ideological predispositions, and the president’s past policy and personal successes and failures with Congress and the public. Although the president’s personality certainly matters when lobbying legislators, other external factors play an important role in determining how successful the president will be in convincing members of Congress to support him.

In sum, the president’s power to informally influence the legislative branch relies on the president’s personality, but often indirectly so. Rather, the president’s personality manifests itself in behaviors that build or deplete his capital. External events—Peterson’s (1990) “fixed” factors—drive presidential behaviors, and the evaluation of those behaviors by the public and Congress determines the capital levels in the president’s political bank account. This capital enables the president-as-lobbyist to sway individual legislators and contribute to his own successes or failures in Congress (Sullivan 1991; 1989; 1987; Hager and Sullivan 1994).

1.3 **Fixed vs. Malleable: Presidents’ Obstacles and Opportunities**

Peterson (1990) suggests that a president’s interactions with Congress depend on two separate but intertwined sets of factors. First, presidents are subject to external forces over which they have little control and to which they can only react. How presidents react to those external events can determine whether or not the president gains or loses capital with Congress and the public. These “fixed” factors include variables such as the partisan and ideological make-up of Congress and external events that shape the activities—such
as travel and speeches—during the terms of the president and Congress (Fleisher and Bond 2000; Bond and Fleisher 1990; Edwards 1989).

Apart from the intricacies of interbranch relations, presidents must respond to and often be America’s voice regarding prevailing economic and social phenomena (Edwards and Wood 1999). Skowronek (1993; 1986) argues that presidents are constrained by the course of history, rendering the politics presidents exercise deeply embedded in the historical context within which the chief executive operates. Presidents inherit economic, social, and political conditions from their predecessors (Skowronek 1993; Peterson 1990), and this, in turn, can limit or expand presidential possibilities in the legislative arena (Broder 1981).

1.3.1 Fixed Factors

Many of the fixed factors presidents face are the unforeseen circumstances they must respond to over the course of their administration. Again, following Light’s (1999) concept of political capital, periods immediately following significant international events, such as wars, terrorist attacks, or natural disasters, should provide the president with an uptick in support from partisans of all stripes (Mueller 1970). The evidence supporting the rally phenomenon, however, is tenuous—Callaghan and Virtanen (1993) and Brace and Hinckley (1993; 1992; 1991) find that rally effects are ephemeral, at best, and are minimally effective among opposition party members.

In addition, the enormity of external events, such as the September 11 terrorist attacks, may require the president to issue executive orders or to take other unilateral action that circumvents the normal legislative process (Howell 2003). Even so, presidents
may seize upon the public and legislative goodwill following such events to further their legislative agendas.

The Legislature and the President’s Agenda: When Presidents Run Aground

Besides the serendipity of external events, presidents also must struggle with the reality they face in both houses of Congress. According to much of the legislative politics literature, Congress holds a dominant position in its relationship with the president (Bond and Fleisher 1990; 2000; Edwards 2000; 1989). The legislative-centered perspective of presidential-congressional relations suggests that presidential capital and the president’s agenda items only become reality after being filtered by the preferences and predispositions of members of the House and Senate. A number of key Congress-centric variables appear to condition the relationship between the legislative and executive branches.

Whether the president faces a House or Senate of a different party radically shapes the president’s ability to garner support for his legislative initiatives (Jones 2002; 1994; Bond and Fleisher 1990; Edwards 2000; 1999; Mayhew 1991). Presidents facing a friendly House, with like-minded partisans in control, will be more likely to achieve their legislative goals quickly and with less damage, over time, to their political capital. Conversely, presidents faced with a majority of hostile partisans will begin their terms with a handicap that will only grow during the first four years of their administration. Presidents who legislate during periods of divided government are less likely to find a favorable reception in Congress than presidents legislating during periods of unified government (Jones 1994; Mayhew 1991; Pfiffner 1989; Light 1999).
The presence or absence of divided government, however, will not be the only legislative determinant that shapes the success or failure of a president’s legislative agenda. In addition to having a majority—indicated above as a dichotomous “divided” or “unified” variable—the size of the president’s majority also plays an important role in the final disposition of the House’s votes for or against the president’s position (Edwards 1989).

As Bond and Fleisher (1990) note, presidential policymaking often is more conditional on the strength and direction of the legislature’s ideological bent than it is on the presence or absence of divided government. Congress’s median member is important in aiding or blocking the president’s agenda inasmuch as his ideology is distinct, not only from the president’s, but from the median members of his and the opposition’s party.

Krehbiel (1998) finds that gridlock between the legislative and executive branches depends almost exclusively on the spatial orientation of the median member of the president’s party, the median member of the legislature, the median member of the opposition party, and the ideological predisposition of the president himself. As several scholars have found (see Jacobson 2004; Cameron 2002), the House is becoming a more polarized body, with a greater ideological gap dividing members of the Democratic and Republican parties. This gap shapes how successful presidents are in both introducing their legislative agenda and successfully getting this agenda passed by Congress (Cameron 2002).
1.3.2 *Malleable Factors*

The other context in Peterson’s analysis—when presidents are able to control their strategies in response to external events and to adjust their own personal and professional behaviors to build capital with Congress and the public—are referred to by Peterson (1990) as “malleable factors.” The president, in Peterson’s and Light’s (1999) terms, is presented with a series of opportunities caused by events outside his control and he is able to first evaluate and then calibrate his responses to those external events. With effective responses to external events, he bolsters his political capital; conversely, poor responses depress his capital. These activities—the president’s actions in response to or even exclusive from external events—provide an objective series of measures with which presidential policymaking success in Congress can be evaluated.

Presidents, however, are not wholly prone to fate or at the whim of the legislative branch. The next section details some of the activities the president can undertake to influence members of Congress, given that he is constrained by the realities he faces in Congress and with the public.

1.4 *Malleable Factors: Seizing the Initiative and Building Momentum*

The singular power a president possesses is the ability to tell Congress not just what to think, but what to think about. Congress considers thousands of bills each year and can make only a very few priorities. The president’s endorsement of particular bills and his ability to convince fellow partisans—or those of the opposition—to introduce items from the presidential campaign platform are key cues or signals to members of Congress about what bills deserve the most serious consideration. In general, the
president provides Congress with a strong set of ideas about what merits inclusion on the legislative agenda.

More important, the president’s endorsement of a series of bills or votes in Congress not only provides a cue about potential legislative agenda items, but also a sense for how Congress should behave with respect to those votes (Kingdon 1995; Jones 1994; Light 1999). The president’s agenda setting power thus becomes perhaps the most important power the president holds in Congress. Presidential agenda setting, however, is a double-edged sword. As Greenstein (2000, 37) suggests:

“Modern presidents have come to be the chief agenda setters in federal-level policy making, but the advent of official presidential programs that are the centerpiece of Washington politics has also led presidents inevitably to create expectations that they can rarely fulfill.”

Presidents thus must be cautious about over-promising as they set their agendas and must be skeptical interlocutors with their counterparts in Congress, as their agenda-setting power is proscribed. Even though the modern president has a good deal of influence over agenda-setting, Weisberg et al. (1999, 394) rightly note one of the principal limits that Article I, Section I of the Constitution places on the president’s ability to influence Congress, stating that:

“...presidents cannot control the outcome of the legislative process, even for their own proposals. Presidents cannot introduce legislation; they must rely on a member of Congress to introduce bills on their behalf. Presidents, then, are dependent on Congress to consider their legislation and preserve its content.”

So, while presidents are able to provide a policy menu from which Congress can pick and choose, thereby shaping what Congress thinks about, presidents are severely limited in what they can force Congress to do as it considers and sets priorities for pieces of the president’s agenda. As previously noted, presidents lack the power to force
Congress to consider particular agenda items, forcing them, instead, to employ other formal powers, such as executive orders (Howell 2003; Moe and Howell 1999a; 1999b).

Establishing the “things about which Congress thinks” is only one dimension of presidential agenda-setting: blindly taking positions on policies before or after they reach Congress or erroneous referrals of policies or bills risk eroding a president’s political capital. The chief executive must carefully take positions on bills before Congress and selectively introduce policy items to Congress. As important, then, as setting Congress’s agenda are the items the president puts on that agenda and when those items are placed before members of Congress.

\textit{Hitting the Ground Running}

Presidents must hit the ground running early in their administrations and build momentum upon a record of legislative success (Cronin 1989; Light 1999; Kessel 2001). To help their causes with Congress, presidents can rely on formal structures—such as a president’s staff and how he organizes it—and the informal expertise presidents bring in their relations with Congress. Recent presidential history is littered with examples of presidents that hit the ground running and those that were almost immediately grounded.

Lyndon Johnson hit the ground running. After a distinguished career as a leader of his party in the Senate, Johnson came to the presidency with a strong ability to sway members of Congress, an understanding for congressional procedures, and the willingness to lobby or bully members of his own party (Sullivan 2005, 1987; Hager and Sullivan 1994). His strong background with, and series of established relationships in,
Congress allowed him to forward Great Society programs that less capable presidents-as-legislators likely would have been unable to achieve (Skowronek 1993).

Jimmy Carter, on the other hand, came to Washington at a two-fold disadvantage: first, his administration was comprised of Washington outsiders. Unlike Lyndon Johnson, Carter had to establish relationships with the legislative branch from the ground up after having run his campaign as an outsider and criticizing the Washington establishment. His principal staffers and confidantes in Washington, rather than members of Congress or even of his own party’s leadership, were members of his gubernatorial staff from Georgia. Carter found himself a stranger in a strange land, having little upfront capital with the legislative branch by virtue of being a Washington outsider with a staff full of outsiders.

Second, Carter preferred to disengage from the legislative process, leaving lobbying to others and the interpretation of congressional traditions to others. Unaware of protocols, Carter enraged Democratic leaders, such as Tip O’Neill, by offering O’Neill and his guests inferior seats at his inaugural concert.

Although Carter’s most immediate Democratic predecessor, Lyndon Johnson, preferred the face-to-face “treatment” and personalized his contacts with individual members of Congress, Carter entered the White House lacking a formal liaison relationship with Congress. According to House Speaker O’Neill, top Carter aide Hamilton Jordan met with the Speaker only three times in four years. Carter early in his term failed to make the formal and informal connections that presidents such as Lyndon Johnson or Ronald Reagan ably made through their insider status (Johnson) or gifts, such as cuff links and theater tickets (Reagan).
Carter’s fitful start and preference to leave the lobbying to others hampered his ability to effectively influence legislation in both the House and the Senate. The resulting two lost years at the beginning of his administration severely hampered his subsequent efforts with Congress. Combined with exogenous events, such as dramatic energy price increases and the Iran hostage crisis, Carter’s public standing suffered and eventually precipitated his loss to Ronald Reagan in 1980.

In contrast, Ronald Reagan approached the presidency with old hands from previous presidential administrations and was able to hit the ground running early in his terms. Reagan, despite being a Washington outsider, reached across the aisle in Congress by having in place an experienced and credible team of advisers, many of whom transitioned from the Nixon and Ford administrations. The Reagan administration sutured together coalitions of moderate southern Democrats and a fully aligned Republican minority in the House (and majority in the Senate).

Reagan’s effective staffing choices, coupled with his telegenic personality and ability to reach out to the American public, enabled him to hit the ground running. He lost little political capital early in his term and, particularly during the first two years of his administration, found staggering legislative successes on the three major planks of his legislative agenda: increased military spending, substantial budget cuts, and a three-year tax cut. As Davidson (2000, 254) notes:

“Ronald Reagan’s first year in the White House…for example…was a modern-day model of leadership through agenda control. It is easy enough to say in hindsight that ‘Reaganomics’ was an unworkable mixture of incompatible and wrong-headed initiatives. The Reagan program swept through the nation’s capital not because it was a ‘better idea,’ but because at that moment it was the only game in town. Acting swiftly and communicating skillfully, the new president imposed his agenda at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue.”
Strong planning, Reagan’s outsider image, and his ability to marshal support from both sides of the aisle in Congress helped Reagan achieve productivity in Congress on a par with the legislative accomplishments of Franklin Roosevelt during the first New Deal and Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society (Kernell 1997). Reagan had in place a strategy to immediately seize on his political capital, build momentum, and hold that momentum through a substantial series of legislative initiatives.

*The Formal Structures: Presidential Designs for their Relations with Congress*

The president’s Office of Legislative Affairs was created by Dwight Eisenhower to follow bills of the most import to the president and his administration. The work of the Office of Legislative affairs was to explain the legislation being introduced by the president to Congress and to provide staff members an opportunity to “soft-sell” members of Congress on the president’s priority legislation. Kennedy followed Eisenhower’s precedent, maintaining the staff’s size and capitalizing on it to provide members of Congress a service, defining and softly pressing the president’s legislative agenda in the House and Senate. According to Kessel (2001, 31), the size of the Office of Legislative Affairs has persisted over time.

Of equal importance as the formal staff of the president is how the president has used that staff to maintain connections with Congress. Lyndon Johnson made persistent and aggressive use of his legislative liaison staff to persistently lobby members of Congress. By getting to legislators first, before the party politics and bickering subsumed the president’s message and overwhelmed his hopes for a successful legislative conclusion, presidents could use their legislative staffs to inform and persuade Congress.
Quoting a first-term Democratic member of the House, Kessel (2001, 33) suggests that Johnson’s legislative liaison efforts were organized and pointed:

“I had heard about lobbyists before I came to Washington, and I expected to be besieged when I arrived. I was. To my amazement, the first ten lobbyists who came to see me were from the ten executive departments, offering assistance, literature, and advice on their legislative programs.”

Effective lobbying on behalf of the president’s program is only a small fraction of the formal programs under the Office of Legislative Affairs. Equally important is the president’s ability to leverage his Office of Legislative Affairs to provide members of Congress with incentives for their support of the president’s program. Presidents can provide members of Congress with a number of types of support, including support for members’ bills, congressional pork, campaign assistance, symbolic goodwill, and formal and informal information gathering.

In addition to lobbying members of Congress, the president’s Office of Legislative Affairs is responsible for serving as a conduit for members’ legislative proposals. In his interviews with Kenneth Duberstein, Reagan’s principal assistant for legislative affairs, Kessel (2001, 36-37) found that Duberstein and his staff were accessible to members and, thus, culled a number of ideas in which those members were interested. Duberstein saw that the ideas put forward by members of Congress got “…a fair hearing and [made] sure that one way or another they get a good response and sometimes [liaison personnel] would weigh in on their behalf.” Kessel (2001) further suggests that the Carter administration’s liaison staff followed through with the bureaucracy and cabinet to ensure that members’ ideas received proper attention and accommodation. Thus, the legislative affairs staff is responsible for providing a member a
fair hearing and answers about his/her proposed legislation, regardless of the merits of that legislation.

Besides providing members a sympathetic ear, the president and his staff work to offer members of Congress supportive of the president’s plan with political pork. The Kennedy administration worked closely with supportive members of Congress to ensure that Pentagon spoils were spread among those members’ districts (Kessel 2001, 37). To garner support for the president’s program, members of Congress would be notified that a specific Pentagon program would be awarded to his or her district, and members of Congress, if they supported the president’s program, would be rewarded with announcing the spoils to their districts.

The Johnson administration followed the Kennedy administration’s aggressive approach, making nearly 13,000 phone calls to legislators in 1965 to lobby on behalf of the president’s program (Bowles 1987, 78). Jimmy Carter had a more difficult time in this facet of his relationship with Congress, eschewing the pork barrel politics of his predecessors and suffering for it (Kessel 2001, 38). By abruptly and without notice ending the largesse provided by his Office of Legislative Affairs, Carter separated himself from his own party’s leadership in the congressional committees. In the name of good policy, Carter unwittingly damaged his own ability to influence legislation in Congress (Kessel 2001, 38; Jones 1988, 143-149).

The roles that the legislative staff play also extend to political campaigning. During his 2005 Social Security whistle stop tour—and as the momentum for his plan began to wane—President Bush threatened his own partisans with electoral harm if they chose not to support his entitlement reform plans. Bush’s threat of electoral harm and
support was already established well before the Social Security discussions; during the 2004 election, Bush campaigned aggressively against opposition partisans who vigorously opposed his legislative agenda during the previous four years. He also provided exceptional support—via visits by him and his senior advisers to members’ districts—to those legislators who supported his legislative agenda.

Similarly, Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush crossed the country campaigning on behalf of their party’s candidates. When Bush or Reagan were unavailable, vice presidents campaigned in their stead. The activities of these Republican presidents on behalf of their party’s legislators were much like those conducted during the Kennedy, Johnson, and Clinton administrations (Kessel 2001, 39-40). Although the effectiveness of presidential campaigning on behalf of their fellow partisans has recently been called into question (Keele et al. 2004), presidents clearly set priorities for such campaigning as a symbolic reward for their fellow partisans’ loyalty. In sum, presidents and members of Congress regard presidential campaigning as a key means by which presidents can interact with, and garner support from, those members.

Finally, presidents can serve both as cue givers and information repositories for members of Congress (Kessel 2001, 40-41). The Johnson administration put a premium on legislative head counts, keeping meticulous records of the likely supporters of bills favored in Congress by Johnson (Sullivan 2005; 1990; 1989; 1987). By keeping meticulous records of the probable final vote “head counts,” Johnson administration legislative affairs officials were able to carefully target their lobbying activities. This approach allowed Johnson to spend political capital without wasting it; and employ his “sway” without tilting at windmills.
Officials in the Kennedy through Reagan administrations were scrupulous data gatherers, constantly monitoring where the headcounts stood and then constructing packages for individual legislators that would garner their support for the president’s program. Specifically, President Carter’s staff during the battle over his 1977 energy bill and Reagan’s staff efforts during the 1981 budget season provide strong evidence that presidents’ efforts to catalogue members’ preferences, and to target their lobbying efforts accordingly, provide presidents with leverage when their bills are before Congress.

Summary

Presidents have a number of opportunities to influence both the legislative agenda and the outcome for the preferred policies. Presidents must carefully choose the issues upon which to stake political capital. In addition, they must put in place the infrastructure or have the inside connections necessary to find early and frequent success in Congress. The ability to frame Congress’s agenda and the ability to influence members of Congress during their decisionmaking process can hinge disproportionately on these early periods in the president’s administration. If the president is able to present members of Congress with agenda items that galvanize his party’s members and rope in the opposition, he can maintain his political capital and generate legislative momentum. Policy success will, at a minimum, allow the president to continue to maintain his level of political capital with the public and the legislative branch. Presidents who are able to build momentum are horses worth betting on as the president’s term wears on.
1.5 Influencing Individual Members of Congress

Besides setting the agenda and determining the appropriate time to invest resources by taking positions on bills before Congress, presidents are able to influence decisionmaking in Congress by shaping members of the legislature’s behavior on presidential position votes. A robust literature suggests a number of ways that presidents can increase or harm their ability to influence Congress and the public, many of which are clearly under the president’s control. Overarching many of these activities is the president’s standing with the public, although there is a mixed consensus about the causal relationship between public approval of the president and legislative support for the president’s initiatives.

1.5.1 Presidential Approval and Public Appeals: Simple Signal or True Influence?

It is unclear how important the president’s public standing is in influencing legislative decision-making, but it is clear that presidential public approval must be considered in examinations of legislative and presidential relations. Neustadt (1991, 78) offers that public opinion is connected to the president’s legislative success, noting that “prestige” with the public is “a factor that may not decide the outcome in an individual case but can affect the likelihoods in every case and therefore is strategically important to [the president’s] power” (Neustadt 1991, 78; see also Meinke and Anderson 2001).

Public approval may provide the president more latitude as he introduces his agenda and lobbies for it before Congress. As Light (1991, 28) notes:

“Though [the president’s] public approval cannot create vast gains in Congress, the absence of public approval eventually undercuts potentials for success.”

Quoting an aide from the Carter administration, Light (1991, 28) finds that:
“…public approval [was] mainly valuable as the well [ran] dry. When we reached the 30 percent level, it became paramount that we reverse the approval trends. We became small depositors in a big bank.”

Edwards (1980) finds that approval may, indeed, be important, but for counterintuitive reasons: as presidents struggle to increase their approval and, thus, establish a more solid base of political capital, surges in presidents’ approval ratings trigger intensified efforts by the minority party to bolster its efforts to tear away at the president’s approval-linked fortunes.

The president’s public standing not only influences his willingness or ability to introduce legislation, but also his ability to succeed when introducing bills before Congress (Canes-Wrone and deMarchi 2002; Canes-Wrone et al. 2003). Citing Edwards’ (1989, 114-116) analysis of the precipitous, 30-percentage-point drop in Nixon’s approval rating between December 1972 and December 1973, Kessel (2001, 24) notes that, as public approval drops, lawmakers are more likely to oppose the president’s legislative priorities. Kessel (2001, 24), however, suggests that “a high approval rating… usually helps the president only if it is combined with other favorable circumstances” and that “reluctant legislators will not go along with presidential proposals just because a chief executive has high approval ratings. For example, George Bush had considerable difficulty in arriving at a budget agreement late in the summer of 1990 even though he was enjoying a 75 percent approval rating at the time.”

Presidential approval fits into the broader discussion of fixed and malleable variables that shape presidential and legislative relations. Although certainly owing to any number of external factors, such as the economy (Edwards 1985; Norpoth and Yantek 1983; Shapiro and Conforto 1980a; Shapiro and Conforto 1980b; Kenski 1980;
Kernell 1978; Kenski 1977), and external phenomena, such as major foreign policy events (Brace and Hinckley 1993; Brace and Hinckley 1991; Ostrom and Simon 1989; MacKuen 1983; Ostrom and Simon 1985; Hibbs et al. 1982; Mueller 1970), presidential approval can be manipulated by the president’s activities and his responses to external stimuli.

In this way, presidential approval is malleable—presidents can control to some degree the direction of public approval by their actions and activities to bolster their image with the public. Presidents may seize on external events, through speechmaking and subsequent activities, to perpetuate the “rally around the flag” effect (Brace and Hinckley 1993; Mueller 1970). In addition, presidents can bolster their image with the public by avoiding political scandal (Ostrom and Simon 1985; Meinke and Anderson 2001), or by working with the public against a common enemy—most often Congress (Kernell 1997). In sum, presidents have the ability to chip away at negative public perceptions. But to what end?

In general, few studies have been able to demonstrate that public approval significantly shapes legislative decisionmaking. Even fewer have tested the hypothesis that presidential approval shapes presidential agenda-setting and position-taking (Shull and Shaw 1999). The broadest generalization that can be drawn in examining the relationship between presidential approval and either legislative decisionmaking or presidential agenda setting is that there are no general truisms.

Few studies demonstrate a significant relationship between presidential approval and presidential-legislative relations. Although some early studies of presidential approval effects in Congress demonstrated statistically significant relationships between
high levels of presidential approval and legislative activity (Rivers and Rose 1985; Meinke and Anderson 2001), most find only marginal support for the importance of presidential approval in conditioning legislative outcomes (Kessel 2001; Shull and Shaw 1999; Bond and Fleisher 1990; Edwards 1989). The causal relationship between high or low levels of presidential approval and legislative outcomes seems to vary according to the administration, the time period, and other characteristics outside the president’s control (Canes-Wrone and deMarchi 2002; Meinke and Anderson 2001).

Even so, the period immediately following the inauguration—the potent “honeymoon period”—provides presidents with a reasonable enough bump in presidential approval. This post-election approval bolsters the president’s capital and his confidence, permitting him to take more positions and legislate more effectively in Congress (Kessel 2001, 24; Jones 1994; for an alternate view, see Peterson et al. 2003). Following the initial bump in presidential approval and capital, presidents ride a roller coaster of presidential approval and, thus, influence in Congress.

In fact, the waxing and waning of presidential approval over time may be an artifact of the flow of time across a president’s administration. The erosion of a president’s standing with the public and Congress is correlated with the march of time and presidents that are able to stabilize a public’s deteriorating impression of the administration will be better positioned to legislative more frequently and effectively. Presidents who are unable to stem that capital loss will find that legislating frequently and effectively simply is harder going.

Presidents, too, have realized that getting the public on their side and keeping it there yields benefits as they interact with Congress. Presidents rely on many tools that
their direct connection with the public provides them. Among the most important such tools are the public acts a president takes during his administration.

First among these activities is the president’s ability to use the bully pulpit, either to reach out and lobby the public or members of Congress, or to mobilize either into action. This latter form of presidential activity can take the form of positive reinforcement by encouraging the public or Congress to rally behind a specific issue through speeches, public appearances, and addresses to Congress. Conversely, presidents can look to negative public outbursts, admonishments, or warnings to the public or Congress to foment action. Both types of presidential activities can serve to augment a president’s capital with the public and Congress and may, in turn, influence public opinion and legislative behavior on pressing public policy issues.

1.5.2 Making Public Appeals

Presidents can attempt to muster congressional support for their priority agenda items by reaching out directly to the public. Public outreach activities by the president have increased during the past 30 years (Ragsdale 1998) and most recently have included the strong pitch to the public by George W. Bush to cultivate support for a substantial restructuring of the existing Social Security system. These appeals to the public—through public speechmaking, press releases, and travel (Brace and Hinckley 1993) serve to provide the public with a clear cue about the president’s position on a policy or issue.

By appealing publicly and being an advocate for their preferred policies, presidents are able to first frame the debate around a particular issue and subsequently encourage the public to rally around the president (Kernell 1997). Such public appeals
can be made by presidents in a calculated fashion to either deter congressional activity contrary to the president’s position or to push legislative action in the direction of the president’s preferences. Moreover, such presidential outreach to the public often provides the president with a short-term bump in presidential approval, a variable that may serve to influence members of Congress who either made it to Congress on the president’s coattails or are wary of voting contrary to a popular president’s position.4

Public appeals by the president, although having the effect of influencing a legislature’s final vote, also can be used to cue the Congress about the president’s likely activity if the legislative branch chooses a particular policy course (Canes-Wrone 1999; 2001). In exercising their power, presidents can use the bully pulpit to threaten vetoes or to mobilize the public against particular members of or factions within Congress. Ronald Reagan, for example, after making appeals to the public, found extraordinary support in Congress for his radical budget cuts and changes. Reagan’s public appeals, however, faltered over time, and during the second and third years of his administration, his ability to use the public to his advantage dwindled, marking the importance of time in conditioning presidential-congressional relations. This finding is on par with Light’s (1999) acknowledgement that the fuel in presidential administrations—that mysterious capital—wanes as the next electoral cycle approaches.5 More discussions of presidential

4 Although strong empirical support exists suggesting that “going public” directly influences Congress, others, using archival research, find strong support suggesting that presidents that “stay silent” may be as influential as those who make public appeals (Covington 1987; Covington et al. 1995; Edwards 2000).

5 Edwards (2000) is not as sanguine about Reagan’s ability as the great communicator, noting that Reagan had a difficult time changing minds. Instead, Reagan was adept at taking advantage of waves of popularity and subsequently swaying public opinion in support of his policies, even if it only was for short periods. As Edwards (2000, 134) notes: “[Reagan] had the good fortunate to take office on the crest of a compatible wave of public opinion and he effectively exploited the opportunity that voters had handed him. When it came time to change public opinion or to mobilize it on his behalf, however, he typically met with failure.”
capital, the importance of time in conditioning that capital, and how time shapes presidential activities in Congress will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

1.6 Conclusion: A Tandem Perspective on Presidential-Congressional Relations

The relationship between Congress and the president is complex, relying on many competing and intermingling variables. A variety of competing perspectives on who dominates this relationship suggests that, rather than one being preeminent, neither is. Both the legislative and presidential branches have institutionally- and more personally-driven advantages in this relationship, but it is unclear the degree to which either one is able, unilaterally, to dominate the other as bills are debated, policies are created, and legislation is enacted and signed.

Both the executive and legislative bodies are inured with constitutionally-mandated powers that provide each with leverage during the legislative process. Although presidents can provide Congress with the series of agenda items upon which a legislative calendar can be set, presidents cannot introduce that legislation, instead relying on Congress to initiate and see through the president’s priorities. Even though Congress chooses whether or not to take up presidential bills and to subsequently act upon them, presidents are well-positioned to adjust the substance of the legislation through the veto threat. When the veto threat fails to suffice in drawing policies closer to the president’s ideal policy point, the president has the option of making the veto threat a reality—a conclusion to the legislative process that often survives Congress’s attempts to override his negative power. Given a bill’s passage and the president’s nominal support for it, the president can stack the deck in the bureaucracy (Balla and Wright 2001; Balla
1998; Bawn 1995; Bendor et al. 1987) to either slow a policy’s implementation or modify it to better reflect the president’s ideal point. Similarly, Congress’s oversight over the bureaucracy provides its members with leverage to challenge the bureaucracy and enforce congressional policy mandates through hearings and congressional directives (Ferejohn and Shapin 1990; McCubbins et al. 1989).

Apart from the formal powers afforded to each branch, the relationship between Congress and the president relies on myriad variables outside the control of both entities. These fixed factors condition both bodies’ reactions to real-time phenomena; drive the president’s activities and expenditures of political capital; and shape the legislative branch’s decisions to support the president’s direction on votes before the House and Senate. Extraordinary foreign policy events, turns in the economy, political and ideological divides in the legislative branch, and the ebb and flow of public approval for the president all present dynamics that overlay executive-legislative relations and must be accounted for in analyses of those interactions.

Finally, presidents have levers they can exercise to strongly influence their fates with Congress. These malleable factors that influence congressional decisionmaking include how the president invests his personality in his relations with Congress; how presidents structure their Office of Legislative Affairs and other bureaucratic structures that interact with Congress; and how presidents undertake public activities that can both buy the president capital or take that capital away. Presidential scandal, public approval of the president, presidential speeches and travel, and the president’s own skill in mustering “sway” over individual legislators all shape the president’s agenda and how that agenda is received in the legislative branch.
In sum, presidents are constrained actors who operate within a proscribed environment shaped by the legislature’s predispositions, the economy and world events, and the president’s skills as a legislator and chief interlocutor with the legislative branch. Accounting in some form for these variables is necessary to accurately measure the importance of both branches as they shape a president’s legislative agenda activity and the legislature’s response to that activity.

The relationship between Congress and the president, however, relies on much more than the static realities of the legislative and executive branches and the public or the dynamic nature of external events. In the next chapter, I explore the importance of presidential capital, the president’s momentum in Congress, and the relationships between time, capital, and presidential agenda-setting and success in the legislative branch.
CHAPTER 2
THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS IN TIME

2.1 Introduction

Relations between the president and Congress are not shaped in a vacuum—instead, they are much like tides, ebbing and flowing over time as political winds blow in favor of one branch or the other. At times, the president dominates owing to favorable winds such as high levels of public approval, the honeymoon period immediately following a presidential election, or a striking rally around the flag event that galvanizes the public. Some presidents are able to put in place a legislative liaison staff or personally finesse members of Congress, making the best use of presidential influence on legislation.

At other times, the legislative branch is in the driver’s seat. Members of Congress aim for reelection first and must subordinate the president’s interests to those of their constituents, even if the president is of the same party (Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1978; Kingdon 1989; Bond and Fleisher 1990; Fleisher and Bond 2000; Kessel 2001). As members of Congress examine the president’s agenda and evaluate its consistency with their constituents’ preferences, members may decide that it is necessary to deviate from the president’s preferred policy. These decisions are shaped by the political capital the president has at any point during his term—capital shaped by public evaluations of the
president or external crises handled by the chief executive. Procedurally, the legislative branch can choose to introduce the president’s legislation, lose it in committee (Deering and Smith 1997; Oleszek 2003), filibuster the president’s agenda, or override the president’s veto.

The chief executive and the legislative branch can—depending crucially on timing—either limit or press ahead with the president’s agenda. In this chapter, I will examine two important facets of the interaction between Congress and the president. First, I will discuss the importance of political and regime time and how both types of time shape a president’s agenda and its eventual success in Congress. I will introduce my expectations for the relationship between political capital and executive-legislative relations, suggesting that models that fail to account for time’s effect on presidential capital also fail to capture the ebb and flow of congressional and presidential dominance in this relationship.

Second, I will assess the literature on presidential-executive relations, arguing for a serial approach to examining presidential policymaking in Congress. This approach begins with presidential agenda-setting—via position-taking—and concludes with a congressional vote for or against those presidential position items. In addition, this section of the chapter will suggest that analyses of relations between Congress and the president should use individual House votes as the unit of analysis. Doing so presents

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6 This research agenda eventually will incorporate presidential vetoes and legislative override votes and will complete a stem-to-stern analysis of the series of interactions between Congress and the president during the policymaking process, providing a true picture of presidential-legislative interactions through the terminal point of a legislative veto override, the rarest and least likely event in relations between the executive and legislative branches (Oleszek 2004). In addition, modeling the entire series of interactions between Congress and the president—using individual bills as the unit of analysis—lends itself to nested nonlinear models and a one-model result, a condition that satisfies an elegance requirement that scholars of the presidency should strive for in their analyses (King 1993).
scholars with an opportunity to trace subsequent actions over time by Congress and the president that stem from a particular vote. I present an analytic approach using a unique data set that treats each stage of the legislative process as a unique set of interactions between Congress and the president.

Before examining each individual stage of these relations, it first is important to illustrate how time shapes presidential capital and thus drives legislative or presidential policy dominance. In the following section, I make this argument, offer case studies from the Reagan and Clinton administrations that illustrate the importance of political time and historical context, and conclude with a general assessment about how one might anticipate presidential or legislative dominance to wax or wane within and between presidential administrations.

2.2 The Persistence of Time: Shaping Executive-Legislative Relations

Time is critical in shaping relations between Congress and the president. Scholars have speculated that presidents persist through periods of decreasing influence and increasing effectiveness (Light 1999); struggle through external circumstances beyond their control (Skowronek 1993; 1986); or ride journalistic tides of positive coverage while later hunkering down during political storms that may emerge during their terms (Kumar and Grossman 1981).

The president’s ability to legislate effectively also may owe exclusively to the time period in which he was elected. In his *The Politics Presidents Make*, Skowronek (1993; 1986) offers a historical institutionalist perspective on the presidency, suggesting that the successes or failures of individual presidents primarily are guided by the social,
political, and economic environments in which the president is elected. Running counter to the personalized presidency strain of research (Barber 1992; Greenstein 2004; 1994; George 1974), Skowronek argues that all presidents are to some degree created equally, each possessing similar skill sets and leadership qualities. The differences in presidential policymaking—rather than beginning with the president’s personality and working outward—begin, instead, with the circumstances in which the president finds himself. How the president behaves in those contexts eventually determines the complexion of his policies. But Skowronek’s notion is that temporal differences—and the different time periods within which presidents find themselves—are the true drivers of presidential politics. Lewis and Strine (1996) suggest that this type of presidential time—intra-administration time—is suggestive of differences in regimes.

Beyond an interest in “regime time,” scholars have found evidence to support Neustadt’s “reputation” hypothesis, suggesting that “presidential capital” waxes and wanes over the course of an administration (Canes-Wrone and deMarchi 2002; Canes-Wrone et al. 2003; Shull and Shaw 1999; Shull 1997; Lewis and Strine 1996; Light 1999). This line of research matches Fenno’s (1978) suggestion that political elites traverse expansionist and protectionist periods over the course of their careers. Much like legislators early in their careers, presidents early in their terms may attempt to generate capital by building and maintaining coalitions, only to protect those coalitions later in the term as the honeymoon period wears off and external forces tug at the president’s capital reserves (Neustadt 1991).7

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7 Fenno’s (1979) work on a legislator’s “home style” suggests that members of Congress go through expansionist and protectionist periods during their careers. By analogy, a president’s career could be (and very often is) limited to one term. During that four-year period, it seems possible that the president may too
During their terms, presidents ride waves conditioned by media coverage (Grossman and Kumar 1981), the presence of external “rally events” (Mueller 1970; Ostrom and Simon 1985; Callaghan and Virtanen 1993), and the shifting sands of presidential popularity (Edwards 1985; Rivers and Rose 1985; Brace and Hinckley 1991, 1992, 1993; Canes-Wrone and deMarchi 2002; Canes-Wrone 2005). In addition, presidents must periodically address adverse events of their own doing—such as political scandals (Meinke and Anderson 2002; Gronke and Newman 2003; 2000)—that deplete a president’s capital over time and, thus, decrease his efficacy as a legislator and leader.

In this section, I propose that these two separate types of time—political and regime—condition legislative behavior and help shape the degree to which Congress is likely to support the president’s position on votes before the House. Moreover, I argue that legislative support for the president may owe to whether or not the president is operating during expansionist or protectionist periods of his term.

2.2.1 Political Time

Time plays an important role in conditioning presidential activity and success in Congress (Peterson et al. 2003). The president’s capital waxes and wanes during his term (Light 1999), and presidents, like legislators building careers during many years (Fenno 1978), may capitalize early in the term on postelection honeymoon effects, expanding governing coalitions and building support for big-ticket legislative items. Later in the term—as the honeymoon period wears away, coalitions of minorities form in opposition...
to the president (Mueller 1970), and the media evinces a willingness to openly criticize the president and his policies—members of Congress may look to their constituents for cues in preparation for the next round of House elections (Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1978). By the end of the term, presidents must rely on guile, legislative acumen, and strong coalition-building skills to achieve the same success that may have come much more easily earlier in the term (Light 1999).

**Political Timing**

Perhaps the most important facet of presidential influence over members of Congress is the president’s legislative timing. As Light (1991, 36-41) notes, presidents early in their terms often have the best opportunity to see to fruition their legislative agendas. Although Neustadt (1991) argues that presidents spend the first two years of their terms learning the ropes in Congress, that time cannot be spent on learning alone, and presidents must significantly engage with Congress to succeed in passing their priority agenda items. Presidents must be prepared to provide Congress with clear cues during this early period of the administration.

When many members of Congress similarly are learning the ropes and looking to external cues to shape their floor behavior (Kingdon 1989; Fenno 1978), presidents have the greatest opportunity to introduce their bills into the legislative mix. In addition, legislators during this period may be more easily swayed, particularly if they rode the incoming president’s coattails (Campbell 1997; Jones 2002; 1994). Although the literature on coattail effects is mixed (see Jones 2002; Campbell 1997), it is clear that members of Congress—and particularly those of the president’s party (Mayhew 1991;
Cox and McCubbins 1993)—have some measure of responsibility to support the implied mandate that a president’s election confers (Peterson et al. 2003; Kingdon 1989). Thus, effectively pushing through legislation early and often and taking advantage of their election honeymoon periods (Jones 1994) increases the probability that presidents will continue to find open policy windows through which even more of their legislative priorities will pass (Kingdon 1995).8

When legislating early in their terms, presidents tie legislative priority first to those issues that have the best chance of receiving support in Congress. Echoing this notion of seizing on policy windows as they open, a Ford assistant (in Light 1991, 161) noted:

“Sometimes you have the potential for action in a rather brief time span. You might find a hearing or floor vote which could aid your effort. That instant could mean the difference between success or failure.”

In general, policy windows are opened more frequently earlier in the president’s term rather than later, owing to the flexibility the president is provided policy- and action-wise in the year immediately following the presidential election (Lewis and Strine 1996; Jones 1994). This requires that presidents seize on this opportunity to clearly articulate their legislative agendas early and often. By setting priorities for their policy initiatives early in the term and selecting those issues for which they are most likely to find open policy windows, presidents will establish a legislative agenda that has a high probability of achieving success in Congress.

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8 Peterson et al. (2003) however, find little empirical support for the claim that the electoral mandate rally exists at all.
As the term wears on presidents, however, very often lose ground in midterm congressional elections, and nearly all presidents since Gallup first measured public approval have experienced a decline in public support. A president’s momentum slows over the course of the term, and, as Light (1991, 36-27) notes,

“Declines in capital eventually bring the domestic process to a halt. Toward the end of each term, the president must spend increasing capital just trying to unclog the legislative calendar. Unless the president is highly successful with early requests, the agenda becomes dominated by “old” business…[Moreover,] as the term winds down, the president simply does not have enough attention to pursue major initiatives. Attention turns away from the domestic agenda and toward the coming election…there is less energy and creative stamina to draft major new initiatives.”

Early legislative momentum, then, is a critical component for presidents to achieve success. Presidents during this period have the most “sway” in the legislative branch and, thus, can cash in that political capital by forwarding their agendas and mustering legislative support for pet policies and roll call votes in Congress. Later in the term, presidents become more skillful negotiators, better able to navigate the halls of Congress, but lacking the critical upfront capital that automatically builds momentum into their agendas. Presidents, thus, need to seize that early legislative momentum, put items on the legislative agenda that reflect their domestic and foreign policy priorities, and find success early and often. Failing this, presidents will rapidly lose momentum over

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9 Data supporting this point, from the Eisenhower through Clinton administrations, is available from John Wooley and Gerhard Peters’ American Presidency Project at the University of California at Santa Barbara, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/popularity.php.

10 Even though presidents are viewed as having more legislative sway early in their terms, presidential capital in the past few administrations has taken a severe early hit, owing to the increasing challenge the legislative branch has posed to presidential nominees for advice and consent positions. Coupled with a challenging legislative agenda, the difficulty of achieving consent from the Senate on cabinet and judicial nominees has become not only a challenge to early presidential capital, but also to the president’s sway over the entire course of his term.
the course of the term, and early presidential agenda items will turn to late-term baggage upon which the opposition party can seize as the presidential election approaches.

Presidential agenda-setting and success early in the term also relies on congruence between the president’s legislative agenda and Congress’s preferences. Presidents must choose agenda items that broadly reflect the preferences both of the electorate and members of Congress. Presidents are elected—and members of Congress ride—upon the public’s positive feedback on a presidential candidate’s policy objectives. By introducing a set of bills that generate little controversy in the president’s electoral coalition and subsequently finding success with that legislation among members of the House and Senate, the president builds additional legislative momentum that allows him to dig deeper into his queue of legislative agenda items. Conversely, the president can stifle his subsequent legislative endeavors by poorly choosing among legislative priorities or failing to persuade members of Congress to support the early-term legislative agenda items.

*Timing and Policy Type*

The extensive debate over the two presidencies (Wildavsky 1966; but see also Shull 1994; 1991) suggests that presidents will find more success in Congress when endorsing foreign policy votes. Domestic policy votes more often hit on core issues that divide the constituency and prevent broad-based consensus among factions in Congress. Early in the term, however, presidents may—as Light (1999) notes above—find domestic policy success as long as they are able to introduce and lobby for such legislation early in the term. So although foreign policy could meet with little resistance from Congress,
presidents that push legislation on controversial domestic issues should do so early and often.

*Expansionism and Protectionism*

Besides policy congruence and taking advantage of policy windows, presidents build their personal skills while solidifying in their own minds the risks they are willing to accept as they take positions on bills and lobby before Congress. Like members of the House (Fenno 1978), presidents move through expansionist and protectionist periods during their administrations, with expansionist periods more likely to immediately follow the election when political capital is high and legislative deference more common. The president’s coalition is larger, and he has more latitude to even further expand that coalition—a tactic that may serve him well during the next electoral cycle.

Presidential capital, however, erodes over time: a president’s mistakes during the term erode political capital more than victories replenish it, and activist presidents expose themselves to greater “capital risk” than reticent executives. Thus, the president’s accumulated legislative record from earlier in the term may harm his legislative and electoral chances later in the term (Light 1999).

The early months of the first Clinton term illustrate how difficult it is to seize on the momentum elections provide. Clinton’s struggles with health care reform and his missteps with peripheral issues—that eventually harmed agenda items more germane to his presidential platform—suggest how important early presidential momentum is in shaping subsequent relations between Congress and the president.
Building Early Legislative Momentum: Bill Clinton’s Difficulties

William Jefferson Clinton’s experiences during his first term illustrate the flexibility with which presidents begin their administrations and how quickly policy windows can close. President Clinton opened his term with high levels of political capital on the heels of a dramatic victory over incumbent president George H.W. Bush, owing much of that victory to a declining economy over the final two years of the elder Bush’s administration. In addition, Clinton was fortunate to press his legislative agenda through a Democrat-controlled Congress. The stars were aligned for President Clinton to find tremendous legislative success early in his term and, if properly managed, that success could persist throughout the remainder of his first four years.

During the first few months of his term, President Clinton focused his legislative agenda on a series of eventual failures. First among those was a comprehensive overhaul of the United States’ health care system, including an initiative to provide universal health care to Americans, a lynchpin of his previous electoral success. Moreover, President Clinton found similar frustration in passing comprehensive welfare and campaign finance reforms, both of which were lynchpins of his presidential campaign. Finally, President Clinton pressed forward with an initiative to integrate the military by encouraging the acceptance of homosexuality in the armed services. This latter agenda item was introduced early—within the honeymoon period in the months immediately following his election. President Clinton, thus, built his agenda and framed the first two years of his presidency in a manner that depleted his electoral capital and eventually led to the dramatic Republican takeover of the House in 1994 midterm elections.
Into this storm, Clinton introduced his health care plan and, owing to the storm, reforms upon which he based his 1992 campaign were stalled before they could get started. The series of high profile losses by the Clinton administration—first “don’t ask, don’t tell,” and next, health care, welfare, and campaign finance reform—set the stage for the dramatic Republican victory in the 1994 House midterm election. The Republicans were able to seize on Clinton’s early losses and the depletion of his political capital to convince the electorate that the president was out of step with the values of the broader American public. The Republican vanguard portrayed the health-care effort as simply another big government program and vilified the First Lady’s participation, hinting that nepotism came before solid fiscal and social policymaking.

The resulting policy ramifications also were profound: although espousing moderation in social policies, Clinton was forced much further to the right on welfare reform than he likely would have been with a House of Representatives controlled by his own party. In sum, the early period of the Clinton administration was marred by questionable domestic policy decisions that, in the end, cashed out much of President Clinton’s political capital before he was able to make substantial gains with the legislative branch.

Clinton’s experience suggests that early presidential momentum—particularly among modern presidents—is essential to ensure that big-ticket agenda items find success in Congress. Ronald Reagan’s early budgetary successes affirm this and also illustrate how even an effective president, with high public support, experiences declines in political capital as his term winds to a close. This decline supports my assertion that analysis of executive-legislative relations is conditional as much on the point of the
administration at which legislation is being considered as it is on the skills and tools both branches bring to bear at any point during a president’s administration.

Ronald Reagan’s First Three Budgets

Ronald Reagan’s budget proposal in 1981 benefited from an external event in the midst of declining public approval.11 In March 1981, Reagan’s approval-to-disapproval ratio was the lowest in Gallup’s history for a president early in his first term, standing at 59 percent approving to 24 percent disapproving. Later that month, John Hinckley Jr.’s assassination attempt pressed the American public to rally around Reagan, demonstrating the importance of forces outside the president’s control and how they shape presidential fortunes (Skowronek 1993). Reagan’s approval-to-disapproval ratio shot up from two-to-one to three-to-one, and his staff concluded that pursuing an aggressive economic plan—a critical plank of his electoral platform—would be the best way to draw on his newfound political capital. The Republican National Committee pressured Democrats from moderate states—most of which supported Reagan in the 1980 elections—to support the president’s budget program when it was unveiled.

By the time Reagan began his national campaign for his budget in late April 1981, moderate Democrats were already being swayed by Reagan’s strength in their congressional districts. Reagan went public with his budget on April 28th to a rousing cheer from Congress and to an overwhelmingly positive reception that would bode well for any legislative proposal Reagan was willing to put to the members of Congress. Not a week after the speech, House Speaker Tip O’Neill saw his coalition of budgetary doves

11 For an excellent, detailed review of Reagan’s first term, see Kernell (1997).
slipping away and the Republicans’ Gramm-Latta budget substitute, offering the administration’s philosophy for reducing the federal government’s budget in FY 1982, passing with an overwhelming majority. Reagan had earned his first big victory in Congress.

Realizing defeat likely was imminent when specific programs and budget items were to be cut in accordance with Gramm-Latta, the House Democratic leadership sought to use special procedures via the House Rules Committee to separate the votes on appropriations for individual programs. This procedure forced House members to carefully consider their votes in favor of Gramm-Latta’s general principles and support of the president’s fundamental approach to the budget. Learning of the Democrats’ procedural maneuvers, Reagan and his advisers crafted a strategy of quick public comments that received considerable nightly news coverage and an aggressive communications strategy that included conversations with sympathetic representatives and prominent private business figures. The strategy resulted in a tremendous backlash against the Democratic leadership’s rules-based approach, and the House overturned the Rules Committee’s parsing of Reagan’s budget proposal by an overwhelming margin.

Consideration of Reagan’s actual budget in 1981 continued in much the same fashion, with the Democrats consistently on their heels while Reagan and his advisers used effective bargaining tactics and the bully pulpit to deter the Democratic opposition. Bargaining over the Kemp-Roth bill, reflecting Reagan’s budget, began in earnest in early June 1981 and met immediately with resistance from Democratic majority leaders in the House, including Speaker O’Neill, Majority Leader Jim Wright, and House Ways and Means Chair Dan Rostenkowski. Unable to secure an agreement with Reagan on tax
cut levels, the Democrats circled the wagons throughout June, attempting to piece together a so-far-unsupportive coalition to oppose Kemp-Roth. Reagan again rose to the occasion in late June with a series of speeches in Texas—a traditional Democratic stronghold—and worked to persuade moderate Democrats, including those already leaning toward him, to support his plan. Finally, on June 27th and on the eve of the House vote on Kemp-Roth, Reagan took advantage of a nationally-televised speech by calling the American public to arms and encouraging it to join him in lobbying Congress to support his budget and tax cuts.

The American public responded, bombarding members of Congress with an unprecedented number of phone calls and letters in support of Reagan’s budgetary program. Undecided Democrats used the speech as both a heuristic and message: it was clear that the momentum was on the president’s side and failure to support his budgetary initiatives could have severe ramifications during the next midterm elections. In the end, the House approved Kemp-Roth and the broader Reagan budgetary agenda items resoundingly. Reagan’s public activities—lobbying, traveling, and making prominent public speeches—allowed him to take advantage of a groundswell of public and congressional support to see through a critical piece of his public policy agenda.

The importance of seizing on political capital early in the administration and pushing legislation accordingly is well illustrated by Reagan’s FY 1983 budget proposal to Congress. Unlike 1981, when public opinion swelled following Hinckley’s assassination attempt, Ronald Reagan in 1982 was mired in the lowest levels of public approval since he took office. Reagan offered a budget to Congress that maintained the hard line first articulated in the 1981 budget: deeper cuts, increased defense spending,
and tax increases that seemed small in comparison with the growing deficit. House Republicans grumbled, and House Democrats were aligned against Reagan’s proposals. Any success to be had by the president would rely on more than appealing to the American public, which was, at the time, deeply skeptical of the job the president was doing and his ability to effectively lead the economy (Kernell 1997, 157).

To shore up his support in Congress, Reagan’s advisors immediately began an under-the-table bargaining process that attempted to bring Republicans in line and to persuade Democrats to support the president’s proposal. The administration’s senior advisers maintained a hard line against dissenting Republican members of the House, promising that a failure to support Reagan’s budget would be a cause for presidential disinterest in their upcoming reelection bids. As hollow as that threat may have been given the president’s declining popularity, it made it clear that the administration would use all of the tools at its disposal to maintain the budgetary momentum wrought during the 1981 budget deliberations.

Reagan, on the other hand, made adjustments to two critical portions of his public strategy. First, he arranged press conferences during prime-time television periods, allowing him to reach a broader segment of the American public. Second, he continued to maintain a hard line with the public regarding the need to cut budgets, bolster military spending, and keep tax increases to a minimum. At the same time, Reagan’s advisers, however, were bargaining furiously to provide sufficient concessions to House Democrats and Republicans. The concessions would allow the president to achieve a qualified “success” on his budget while sparing him the humiliation of a budgetary stalemate after his stunning budget victories the previous year. The Reagan
administration preferred—as other presidential administrations do—to save face and provide concessions rather than suffer significant losses on issues key to his previous (and likely, subsequent) campaign (Peterson 1990).

In late April 1982, Reagan opened to the public his deliberations with House Democrats through a series of public addresses. The addresses framed his budget as a moderate line opposing the smaller cuts Democrats proposed to rein in the deficit. Subsequent public speeches and travels to Europe and his ranch in California were accompanied by shorter appeals to the public to mobilize, to communicate with their members of Congress, and to help Reagan see through his budget. Realizing, however, that his tax increase substantially underfunded the deficit and could, according to his aides, be a deal-breaker on the floor of the House, Reagan’s advisers negotiated a more robust tax hike.

Through the back-and-forth with House Democrats, in particular, Reagan and his aides settled on a budget that increased the proposed tax hike by nearly 50 percent but absolved the Democrats of blame for that hike. With these concessions in place, the Democrats aligned behind the amended budget proposal. The tax hike concessions, however, were a thorn in the side of many House Republicans who, despite a desire to support their president, also were facing a difficult midterm election. Waning public support for the president in late summer of that year gave House Republicans even more reason to distance themselves from Reagan and any policies—budgetary or otherwise—he brought before Congress. Reagan, thus, would have to overcome declines in his own political capital, not with the Democrats, but with his own partisans. The president and his advisers targeted House Republicans from districts that were strongly supportive of
Reagan during the 1980 elections and likely still were positively disposed toward him and his policies.

Realizing that he needed 100 votes from his fellow partisans, Reagan embarked on presidential travel and gave public addresses that encouraged the public to press their representatives to support the tax hike portion of his 1982 budget. Framing the issue as one of fiscal responsibility, the president—just three days before the final budget vote—again appealed to the people to mobilize their representatives in favor of his budget. A marked departure from the seamless budget process of 1981, Reagan was able to secure the necessary 100 Republicans to support the budget and finished with a 226 to 207 victory on the House floor.

Illustrating Light’s (1999) cycle of “increasing effectiveness and decreasing influence,” Reagan and his advisers set the legislative agenda and worked Congress back from his optimal policy to one with which he could settle. He sutured together a coalition that included skeptical Democrats and hesitant Republicans. Without question, the Republicans that chose to support Reagan suffered—his party’s midterm losses in the House were among the worst in the modern presidency and could be attributed both to Reagan’s declining political capital and to the members of Congress who went along with Reagan for that ride on the budget. Nonetheless, Reagan’s budget efforts in 1982 were a qualified success that required much more political savvy and capital to convince members of Congress than did his previous budget proposals in 1981.

By 1983, Boll Weevil Democrats, however, began receding back toward their own party while House Republicans—having suffered a large loss in the 1982 midterm elections—were marginalized by the powerful Democratic House leadership. Reagan’s
ability to bring along those Republicans subsided when his perceived policy mandate ended at the midterm (Peterson et al. 2003; Jones 1994; Kernell 1997). In short, Reagan’s political capital had faded, and his ability to go public and engender support, both with the American people and their representatives in Congress, had been severely curtailed. Scrambling to piece together a renewed communications strategy in 1983, Reagan shuffled his staff and recrafted his message so it better resonated with the public. He enhanced the White House travel budget to take his message more frequently and effectively to the blue collar American public and entertained in early 1983 announcing his interest in seeking his party’s nomination for president.

Reagan offered his budget in March 1983 and shortly after, the Democratic leadership passed its own budget proposal after one short day of deliberations. The Democrats’ bill slashed military spending, mandated additional taxes, and restored many of the social programs cut in previous Reagan budgets. The Democratic majority—bolstered by the midterm elections—unilaterally prevented southern Democrats from amending the budget proposal during floor debate. In addition, the Democratic leadership initiated procedures that provided for a single up-or-down vote on Reagan’s budget, knowing that its 100-plus majority would easily defeat his request, even with southern Democrat defections.

Reagan again attempted to use the bully pulpit to his advantage, decrying the Democrats’ efforts. Calling the Democrats’ alternative budget resolution “a dagger aimed straight at the heart of America’s rebuilding program,” he questioned the Democratic party’s patriotism, further noting that the Democrats’ cuts in military spending would provide the Kremlin with a certain measure of happiness and satisfaction (Kernell 1997,
Using business groups against targeted members of the Democrats’ 103-seat majority, the president mounted an aggressive campaign against the Democratic alternative, again opening up fissures among House Democrats. Even with Reagan’s efforts to the contrary, the Democrats were able to endure 22 defections by southern Democrats and take to conference with the Senate the Democrats’ first unilaterally-constructed budget since Reagan took office in January 1981. Reagan again attempted to spur the public and pressure the conference, first calling a television news conference just after his budget’s defeat and later holding a national address ostensibly intended to talk about military development that devolved into pointed barbs at the Democrats’ budget alternative.

Far from shrinking from the president’s public attacks—and a testament to the decline in Reagan’s political capital—House Democrats constructed a mild reply indicative of the confidence they had in their budget resolution passing conference. Reagan and his advisers—seeing an election battle in the near term and not wishing to spend additional capital keeping alive a budget proposal with little hope for survival—turned their attention elsewhere. Senate Republicans, expecting a more vigorous effort by Reagan, evinced disappointment at his strategy and, although displeased with the bill submitted to conference, brokered a deal with the Democrats that clearly reflected, not the Reagan administration’s preferences, but, rather, the decrease in Reagan’s political efficacy in 1983.

The 1981-1983 budget process under Ronald Reagan’s watchful eye and public relations strategies illustrates two very important points about the president’s ability to persuade. First, the president effectively can use multiple public relations strategies to
mobilize the American people and their representatives behind his agenda items.

Momentum from prior elections, external events, the make-up of the White House staff, and the presidential personality work together to generate agenda items for Congress and to engender legislative support for the president’s programs.

Second, and perhaps most important, the persistence of time erodes the president’s political capital, rendering strategies that once were able to convince members of Congress less, or not-at-all, effective. A president with the ability to bring along the public found that he could influence Congress early, but that his influence faded over time, as his political capital gradually eroded. Reagan’s “going public” strategy and its declining intra-administration effectiveness illustrates that, all presidential skills equal, time, and the resulting declines in political capital, is perhaps most important in turning a successful strategy of going public into an ineffective stratagem. This suggests that, to ensure agenda success, the president must introduce legislative proposals early and often, succeed, and continually build or maintain that momentum over the course of his term.

A Contemporary Example: George W. Bush and the Battle Over Social Security

The most recent and striking example of a president taking preemptive action to engender support for his legislative agenda is President George W. Bush’s stumping for Social Security reform in early 2005. After a 51 to 49 percent victory over challenger John Kerry in the 2004 presidential elections, President Bush touted the beginning of his second term as a mandate for change. Promising to use the political capital built during his campaign to make radical changes to the tax code and prominent social programs, the younger Bush put Social Security reform first on his list. He opened his second term in
early February by encouraging Congress to give serious consideration to private accounts as a means to remedy Social Security’s insolvency.

Almost immediately, members of Congress from both sides of the aisle reacted aggressively both for and against President Bush’s proposed changes to Social Security. Democrats predictably chafed at the challenge to a political sacred cow, vowing to align universally to oppose Bush’s proposed privatization policy. Congressional Republicans, on the other hand, were reluctant to make radical changes to a longstanding social program that was particularly important to the party’s growing voting bloc: the elderly and the conservative, Reagan-era baby boomers. Moderate Republicans, in particular, were specifically concerned about a complete privatization of Social Security, suggesting that a program more in line with the federal government’s Thrift Savings plans could offer younger Americans an investment option without bankrupting Social Security or borrowing against the growing deficit. Seeing these potential problems, President Bush chose a strategy similar to Ronald Reagan’s during his first and second budget bouts with Congress: he took his message to the public.

In a series of public forums reminiscent of whistle stop tours conducted by Progressive-era Republicans, such as Theodore Roosevelt, Bush criss-crossed the country in late February through mid-March 2005. Using a town hall format, Bush and his advisers carefully scripted speeches and question-and-answer periods to ensure that healthy skepticism from the audience was limited and that supporters of the program floated questions that could be easily answered within the proscribed construct of the town hall setting.
In early April 2005—seeing the public support for his Social Security reforms dwindle—Bush overtly threatened members of both parties, promising electoral reprisals if members of Congress failed to support changes to Social Security. Bush’s strategy—like Reagan’s before him—attempted to use the tools of presidential travel, meetings with the people, threats, and mobilization of the public to press members of Congress to support his Social Security reform proposals.

President George W. Bush’s Social Security mobilization efforts likely will rely on the shape of the external environment and how different his actual political capital is from his own perception of his political capital. Reagan in his first term and during the first year of that term was empowered by a striking election victory and a critical event that provided an early term opinion “bump,” while Bush early in his second term found himself in a slightly different set of circumstances. The second Bush election, although providing a clear victory built on strong mobilization of his core constituency, came during a period when his foreign and domestic policy judgments were being broadly questioned by the American public.

In the weeks leading up to the election, Bush’s popularity fluctuated around 50 percent. Immediately after his election, his popularity faded precipitously under the continued glare of the Iraq war and the needed rebuilding of his administration’s relationships with US allies worldwide. His election as a second-term president also introduced a new dynamic between himself and Congress: Bush as a lame duck president. With Bush’s lame-duck status providing him with only slight leverage over Congress, the legislative body had little incentive to go along with unpopular presidential policy agenda items, particularly when doing so came at its members’ electoral expense.
Moreover, polling numbers in early 2005 put support for Bush’s Social Security reforms at only 31 percent in favor,\(^\text{12}\) suggesting a public skeptical of fundamental changes in a broad-based social program such as Social Security. In fact, the public displayed surprising political sophistication, connecting reforms to Social Security to possible increases in the near-term federal debt and possible long-term governmental insolvency beyond the social program President Bush intended to reform.

Although Reagan went public to engender support for his own policies and to discourage the opposition, Bush early in his second term went public to first build momentum in the electorate and next to raise public pressure on members of his own and the opposition party. The circumstances of the public overtures differed dramatically: while Reagan was rallying a public already behind his initiatives, Bush had the two-fold challenge of convincing a skeptical public and then mobilizing the populace into action to influence the behavior of members of Congress.

Although the jury is still out on the Bush Social Security plan, protracted debate over the issue is likely—as was the case with Clinton’s health care proposal—to derail serious hopes for reforming the system. Bush’s attempts to go public—unlike Reagan’s—suggest that political mandates may not have the singularly important effect we might typically attribute to them, particularly in the president’s second term. Finally, Bush’s efforts suggest that external dynamics—such as the Iraq war and a public skeptical not only of the president, but of his plans more generally—shift the locus of power in the executive-legislative dyad to the House and Senate. This observation aligns with the

2.2.2 Accounting for Political Time

In the chapters that follow, I test the importance of political time in shaping relations between Congress and the president. To account for the waxing and waning of presidential capital and power and the possibility of legislative dominance during the president’s term, I separate my models of presidential position-taking and legislative support for the president by year. Doing so allows me to assess the degree to which presidents are able to shape their agendas, influence Congress, and accomplish their policy goals. I anticipate significant differences between the politics that presidents make in their first year in office and those same politics during the second, third, and fourth years of their terms. I also expect that, as presidential capital declines, the legislature will become even more dominant in shaping these politics, requiring the president to rely more on his sway with members of Congress. I offer a more robust discussion of these expectations and hypotheses in Chapters 3 and 4.

Summary: The Importance of Political Time

Presidential capital wavers over time and is difficult to maintain after the honeymoon period subsides. External events, shifts in public opinion, and legislative losses or victories by the president—and any momentum resulting from those wins and losses—affect the president’s bank account with Congress and the public. Presidents with
more capital are able to accept more risks, legislate more frequently, and more easily absorb losses in Congress than are presidents that lack such capital. The loss of political capital over time suggests that presidents later in their terms will take positions on votes and succeed in that activity less frequently.

Light (1999), however, suggests that presidents may later in their terms introduce fewer pieces of legislation but do so with guile; that is, the bills presidents endorse as part of their late-term agendas are only those bills that have a chance to pass or that will bolster the president’s reelection chances. Time consistently appears in Light’s analysis as a variable critical in shaping relations between Congress and the president. Thus, any analyses of the relationship between Congress and the president must account for political time. *Failing to account for political time risks drawing erroneous conclusions about presidential or legislative dominance during the policy process.* It also risks over- or underestimating the importance of external events, public opinion, or presidential or legislative activities as drivers in executive-legislative relations.

But intra-administration “political time” is not the only temporal consideration in models of legislative and executive branch relations. In the next section, I discuss inter-administration differences among presidents that owe primarily to the historical period within which the presidents press their legislative agenda items. During these historical periods, presidents with many of the same personality and skill sets are subject to external pressures that sap or enhance political capital at different rates. Incorporating the concept of regime time in a rigorous manner will provide an even fuller picture of how presidents, Congress, and external events shape the politics between the legislative and executive branches.
I incorporate the concept of political time by separating my models in Chapters 3 and 4 by year, anticipating that the politics that presidents make vis-a-vis Congress—and how members of Congress respond to those politics—will differ markedly across years of an individual president’s term. This expectation and the empirical approach I take to testing it is supported theoretically (Light 1999; Neustadt 1991; Fenno 1978) and should provide substantial insights into presidential policymaking in Congress.

2.2.3 Regime Time

Regime time—the peculiarities of the historical period in which a particular president was elected—may play a significant role in determining how much support the president is able to garner in the House and Senate. Presidents operating in social, political, and economic contexts driven by circumstances well out of their control often are victims of those contexts, finding themselves incapable of effectively pushing legislation through Congress, not because they are incapable, but because the circumstances render presidents ineffective.

President Carter, upon taking office, inherited a public hopeful for change but cynical following the Watergate scandal and President Ford’s pardon of President Nixon. During this same period, southern Democrats, wary of their party’s presence as the driving force behind civil rights legislation, were well into a gradual separation from their party’s ideological median. These partisans were unwilling to stretch too far to satisfy a president of their own party with designs on more progressive legislation that further marginalized the southern core.
The U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam and resurgence of the legislative body as a regulator of presidential foreign policy aspirations further constrained the president while magnifying the public’s frustration and distrust of his authority and judgment. The Iranian revolution and the taking of hostages in the U.S. Embassy by Shia forces loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini—followed by the failed rescue attempt of those hostages by U.S. Special Forces soldiers—came during a period late in the administration when political capital, having already been spent earlier in the term, ran deeper into the red. Finally, Carter met with a country already sliding toward an energy crisis driven by fuel oil shortages and embroiled in a period of economic uncertainty that his eventual opponent, Ronald Reagan, would seize upon in the subsequent presidential election.

All of this is not to say that President Carter was solely a victim of circumstance—Light (1999) details Carter’s unilateral approach to lawmaking early in his term and suggests that this drove a wedge between the executive and legislative branches, unnecessarily spending political capital that was already tenuously held in the post-Watergate era. Nevertheless, President Carter—as Skowronek (1993) notes—faced an uphill battle framed by social, political, and economic forces chanced upon by his administration.

The opposite can be said of Ronald Reagan. In the period leading up to his election, he benefited from the gradually conservative turn the southern Democrats took following the civil rights reforms of the 1960s. This advantage continued through the early portions of his term, with a Congress that provided Reagan extensive latitude in forwarding and achieving his legislative agenda. Moreover, Reagan’s core electoral coalition encompassed moderate Democrats and the host of partisans to the right of that
slightly liberal coalition, seizing on the broad-based coalition that previous political events and Carter’s own legislative failings prevented him from realizing. Reagan was able to parlay the energy crisis as a failing of Carter’s economic and foreign policies, which he viewed as too conciliatory. Early in his term, Reagan learned from Carter’s mistakes in the legislative arena by immediately creating a legislative affairs office to broker deals with Congress and to smooth the legislative process for his perceived policy mandate from the public. It could be said that Reagan was elected president at a time when social, economic, cultural, and political circumstances permitted him a better opportunity to achieve success in the legislative arena. Ronald Reagan was the right person at the right time, while Carter was perhaps the right person to be president, but he was not elected at the right time.

In both of these instances, the president’s latitude to propose and make public policy was shaped by the social, political, and economic contexts within which he pressed his agenda with Congress. By accounting for regime time in models of executive-legislative relations, it should be possible to measure inter-administration affects above and beyond the traditional presidential and legislative variables typically included in models of these relations.

The Regime Time Typology

Skowronek (1993) introduces four regime types that account for the prevailing social, political, and economic contexts within which presidents push their legislative agenda. Using this typology as a guide, he finds that variation in the politics that a
president “makes” relies more on these contexts than it does on an individual president’s strengths as leader or in dealing with members of Congress.

First among this series of archetypes is the regime reconstructor. Presidents, such as Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Jackson, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, receive mandates from the public that provide them extraordinary upfront political capital. This capital translates to wide latitude in the president’s use of formal powers to push his legislative agenda. Presidents of regime reconstruction are more likely to use the veto (Lewis and Strine 1996), grow the bureaucracy, and (historically) circumvent Congress by employing the executive order (Howell 2003). The berth afforded reconstruction presidents is prompted by the prevailing historical and social context as they take office: for Lincoln, slavery and the possible split of the Union; for FDR, the Great Depression; and Reagan, a substantial post-Watergate southern electoral realignment and efforts toward defeating the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

Presidents of regime articulation (Monroe, Polk, Teddy Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, and George H.W. Bush) retain the power to shape the regime’s message but are more constrained. These presidents maintain strong congressional majorities and high levels of public support but are unable legislate as press forward with their legislative agendas as freely as regime reconstructors, instead attempting to build upon the reconstructors’ agendas by forwarding legislation that encourages moderate change to the social and political order (Lewis and Strine 1996). Regime articulators may legislate as frequently as reconstructors but will spend political capital more quickly and have fewer substantial legislative achievements over time. Articulators will be less likely than reconstructors to see their legislative agendas to fruition and, even if articulators are able
to achieve legislative success, will do so for a shorter durations during their administrations than reconstructors.

Presidents of disjunction—John Adams, Franklin Pierce, James Buchanan, Herbert Hoover, and Jimmy Carter—are elected during periods when the president presides over growing cleavages between the parties and within the public. These presidents are the most limited in their ability to effectively push their agendas because, as cleavages grow, the president is viewed as the symbol of everything wrong with government. He is punished both by Congress (via poorer support among its members) and the public (at the ballot box during reelection campaigns). Unlike reconstructors and articulators, disjunction presidents will begin their terms with lower levels of political capital. Although they may attempt to legislate frequently, they will fail in those efforts more frequently and be unable to generate or maintain legislative momentum over the course of their term.

Finally, preemptive presidents—those from the opposition party who assume power from another regime, such as Tyler, Johnson, Wilson, Nixon, and possibly presidents Clinton and George W. Bush—are the most constrained. These presidents often legislate with a Congress in which vestiges of the old regime still wield power that usurps the new president’s. Such presidents may have activist legislative agendas, frequently attempting to introduce sweeping changes on the heels of their election. As they enter the Oval Office, preemptive presidents believe they do so on the wings of a political mandate. This mandate, however, is false: the electorate, preferring to vote out the incumbent, simply chose to bring the challenger into office.
Although these presidents are a change from the previous administration, incumbency advantage (Jacobson 2004) and the prevalence of divided government (Mayhew 1991; Jones 1994) suggest that such presidents may still have to face a hostile Congress. Even when not facing a majority opposition party, elements of the past regime intent on preventing the president’s policies from going forward can complicate or even stop the president from making progress in Congress.

Even though the concept of regime time seems to divorce presidential personality from the equation, the president’s personality does make a significant difference. The typology developed by Skowronek suggests that the historical and institutional realities within which presidents find themselves widen or narrow a president’s opportunity for success. To borrow a gambling metaphor, presidential personality matters, however, only after his hand has been dealt; whether to fold or bluff; to play slowly or aggressively is conditioned by the president’s leadership style and personal preferences.

One other matter becomes evident when examining the historical context of presidential policymaking: whether reconstruction, articulation, preemption, or disjunction, presidents more often receive latitude as they introduce foreign policy agenda items into Congress. Fitting into the broader discussion of the two presidencies thesis, policy context appears to provide or prevent presidents from flexibly solving vexing, large-scale domestic political problems with innovative solutions.

All presidents come to office with platforms that presume to solve the country’s pressing ills. Not all presidents, however, will have the opportunity achieve those platform items. Some presidents will be better positioned to introduce and effectively see through large-scale domestic agenda items, while others founder. Regime reconstructors,
such as FDR, are able to push through the creation and expansion of federal government programs like the New Deal, while regime preemptors such as Bill Clinton are unable to secure such policy changes as health care reform. Regime time, thus, plays a considerable role in conditioning presidential policymaking—both in terms of setting the agenda and convincing members of Congress to support that agenda.

2.2.4 Accounting for Regime Time

In the chapters that follow, I argue that analyzing executive-legislative relations by regime type provides a test for the importance of regime time in shaping the politics that presidents make in Congress. To account for regime differences in the analysis to follow, I separate my models of presidential position taking and legislative support for the president by president under the assumption—based on Skowronek’s (1993) typology—that the Carter through Clinton administrations each represent unique regime types. Each president came to the presidency with varying social, economic, and political liabilities and strengths. I expect that these liabilities and strengths will temper and augment each president’s ability to bring to bear the arsenal of tools at his disposal to both place items on the legislative agenda and subsequently shape Congress’s decision (or not) to support those policy items.13

13 It could be argued that the limited number of presidents in this data set (one of each regime type) could, when modeled, capture differences in presidential personalities vice anything generalizable about the president’s regime type. This point is a valid one and one that will be addressed further in Chapter 5. As a preview, I suggest in Chapter 5 that although the conclusions drawn in Chapters 3 and 4 about regime type differences could be both regime and presidential personality idiosyncrasies, a more robust data set—requiring a substantial collection effort—would provide more leverage over regime-to-regime differences. For example, a data set encompassing all of the modern presidents would provide a data set with multiple presidents of each regime type. Analyzing presidential position-taking and legislative support for the president with this expanded data set will provide a sharper distinction between presidential personality types and the regime period/type during which individual presidents pushed their agendas vis-à-vis Congress.
Summary

Regime time—the series of social, political, and economic contexts within which presidents work with Congress—is an important consideration rarely discussed in empirical examinations of presidential policymaking. Although all presidents have a similar set of leadership skills and personalities that enable them to reach the nation’s highest office, the hands they are dealt prior to and while in office shape the frequency and eventual success of the president’s agenda items. It is likely that models of presidential policymaking that account for regime time differences will find significant explanatory differences, owing to these context differences. Properly specifying models to capture these contextual differences is critical to analyzing presidential policymaking, from agenda-setting through eventual congressional consideration of those agenda items.

2.3 The Second Theoretical Construct: Executive-Legislative Relations as Stages

Presidents interact with Congress in a series of stages that include discrete, real-time decisions by both branches of government. The president first chooses the bills upon which he will stake his personal and political capital. Congress considers these votes, next determining as a collective body whether or not to support the president. The president then considers this decision and makes one of his own: whether or not to veto. Finally, Congress and its members decide whether or not to accept the president’s veto or attempt to override it.

The entire normal legislative process—the steps by which presidents introduce legislation or take positions on votes before Congress all the way through the possible
veto override by Congress—is infrequently studied in analyses of executive and legislative relations.\textsuperscript{14} Legislative support for the president is perhaps the best studied of all inter-branch relationships in the legislative politics literature (Edwards 1989; Fleisher and Bond 2000; Bond and Fleisher 1991; Peterson 1990; Light 1999; Kessel 2001; Edwards et al. 2002; Krehbiel 1998; Howell 2003; Groseclose and McCarty 2000; Lewis and Strine 1996). The executive-legislative relations literature, however, often considers legislative support for the president as an isolated set of decisions rather than considering the support as part of a broader series of activities between Congress and the president. It is as instructive to understand the conditions under which presidents take positions on votes before Congress as it is to examine the conditions under which those votes are considered by members of the House and Senate.

I place my research in the context of recent analyses that couch a president’s power in his ability to circumvent the normal legislative process. This dissertation works in concert with the vanguard of presidency scholarship, most of which focuses on negative or preemptive steps presidents can take prior to pursuing their agendas through the legislative process (Howell 2003; Cameron 2002; 2000; Moe and Howell 1999a; 1999b). Although it is important to understand how the president circumvents the legislative process by taking positions via executive orders, I suggest that these new approaches should take into account a president’s decision to work with the legislature. I

\textsuperscript{14} The exception is Shull (1997) and Shull and Shaw (1999) who offer analyses of presidential position taking through the veto decision. The approach Shull and Shaw, however, employ for analyzing presidential position-taking fails to treat that activity as a discrete choice—instead, Shull and Shaw aggregate presidential position taking in a count model. Although this approach gets at general levels of political activity, it does not capture presidential position-taking as a decision the president makes over the universe of bills before Congress.
argue that it is equally important to study each individual interaction between the president and Congress under normal legislative circumstances.

In addition, this research fits within the broader discussion of time and its effect on executive-legislative relations. The serial, micro-level interactions on individual votes in Congress fit into the broader political and regime time constructs mentioned earlier. At the macro-level, regime time shapes the external context within which presidents and legislators interact. One step down, political time is the beginning-to-end relationship, presidents and legislators have during the president’s term. Finally, individual votes in Congress go through the series of steps mentioned above, from presidential position-taking through—though outside the scope of this dissertation—eventual congressional veto overrides.

Understanding all of the temporal effects that shape executive-legislative relations requires a data set that acknowledges the discrete nature of the choices that presidents and legislators make during the normal legislative process. In the next section, I discuss such a data set, the construction of which permits me to examine nested decisions by presidents and legislators, from presidential position-taking through (eventual) congressional veto override votes.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{15} The data set is structured in a manner to allow easy “add-ons,” such as analyses of presidential vetoes and congressional override votes. This dissertation, however, will focus primarily on the first two stages of the normal legislative process: presidential position-taking and legislative votes on the president’s positions. In addition, the information in my data set is arrayed in such a way as to simplify more robust analyses of executive-legislative relations. In this conception of the data, the behaviors of individual members of Congress can be analyzed, similar to the cross-sectional time series analysis by Meinke and Anderson (2001). Such analysis will be a fruitful direction for further research using this data set, but it is beyond the scope of this particular project.
2.3.1 Addressing the Normal Policy Process: The Data

In order to examine the normal legislative process—and in particular in this dissertation, presidential position-taking and subsequent legislative voting behavior on those positions—I constructed a data set that treats the president’s decision to take a position on a vote as a discrete event. Following that event, I treat the legislature’s decision as to whether or not to support the president’s position as the second discrete item in the policy process. Thus, each vote taken on the floor of the House is seen as an opportunity for the president to either articulate a position or remain silent and for Congress to adjudicate over the president’s decision to take a position.

Beginning the executive-legislative policy process with a discrete presidential decision requires the collection of two separate samples of House votes: votes upon which the president took a position and those upon which he did not. For this dissertation, the dependent variables then are the president’s decision to take a position on or stay silent on a House vote and the legislature’s decision whether or not to support the president’s position. The unit of analysis is a vote on the floor of the House that is coded “1” for instances in which the president took a position and “0” otherwise and legislative support for the president garners a “1” and votes against a “0.”

Analyses of presidential position-taking are sparse. Shull (1997) and Shull and Shaw (1999) examine presidential position aggregating all of the votes upon which the president took a position during a year and using count models to assess the importance of a variety of covariates, including presidency, legislative, and executive-centered variables. Although this approach is reasonable, it fails to treat presidential position taking as a discrete choice. Treating presidential position-taking as a discrete event
allows me to examine real-time decision processes and not simply the phenomenon of presidential legislative activity over the course of a year.

Moreover, treating presidential position-taking as a discrete event comports with recent formal models on the exercise of presidential power in Congress (Howell 2003; Canes-Wrone 2001; Moe and Howell 1999a; 1999b; Cameron 2000). According to Howell (2003) and Mayer (1996), presidents’ use of the executive order has grown in the modern era and has become a critical tool for presidents who increasingly face hostile, polarized legislative bodies (Cameron 2002). If the president chooses not to issue an executive order, the normal legislative process ensues and the president must next decide whether to take a position on a vote in Congress or to remain silent (Covington 1987). This discrete choice is followed by the position the president takes—yay or nay—and finally, by the legislature’s eventual vote for or against the president’s position. By analyzing presidential position-taking as a discrete choice—in the chain of choices a president has to make before the legislature votes—I may be on more appropriate theoretical and empirical ground than studies examining presidential position-taking as a summary of yearly activity.

For this study, I collected all bills upon which the president took a position as noted in the yearly editions of the CQ Almanac.16 Congressional Quarterly determines

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16 Bond and Fleisher (1990) and others make a compelling argument that noncontroversial legislation be excluded from analysis of presidential success in Congress, given that “sure-fire wins” for the president may skew analyses of presidential success by overemphasizing the president’s ability to succeed in Congress. It is easy to make a similar argument for presidential position-taking by suggesting that we should eliminate votes that were unanimous or nearly-unanimous because the president took a position on those votes simply to guarantee success in Congress. Eliminating unanimous or nearly-unanimous votes, however, risks two problems that are difficult to ignore: first, examining presidential position-taking without the benefit of those sure-fire victories selects on the dependent variable because the sample of votes is biased in favor of the “hard votes.” Second, presidential position-taking needs to account for the low hanging fruit that presidents may choose to harvest via articulating a position on a particular vote—
the list of “presidential position votes” by examining presidential public statements—including presidential speeches and addresses, statements to Congress, and White House press releases. The list includes valence issues upon which the eventual vote was unanimous or nearly so and issues where final vote dispositions were close enough or controversial enough to achieve status as a CQ Key Vote. Only bills from the first four years of each president’s administration were collected so that comparisons across and even within particular administrations are easier and the sample of congressional votes are similar.17

To capture the universe of bills from which the president might choose to take a position on (but does not), I collected a random sample of votes cast by the House during the Carter through Clinton administrations that draws exclusively from the bills upon which the president failed to take a position.18 These votes were collected in numbers eliminating these votes artificially truncates the decision a president might make when taking a position, leaving the sample of votes being analyzed biased in favor of difficult presidential choices.

17 Slightly more than 50 percent of the modern presidents (Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon, Reagan, Clinton, and George W. Bush) have been elected for second terms. Although these presidents all came to their second terms with a legislative agenda, the dynamics of a second presidential term—and each president’s lame duck status immediately after the election—may be problematic given that the remaining 50 percent of the modern presidents failed to achieve a second term. Each of the presidents in the data set, however, served his full first four-year term and, as such, provides a reasonably comprehensive representation of presidential position-taking and subsequent legislative decisionmaking. Although second-term presidents may be an interesting addition to the data set, examining second-term presidents’ position-taking and the legislative response to those positions is outside the scope of this dissertation.

18 To randomly select a pool of votes, I employed an Excel spreadsheet and a random number generator that constrained the values generated to integers between 1 and n, where n is equal to the number of votes cast on the floor of the House in a particular year. If a vote was drawn that corresponded to a presidential position vote, another number was drawn until a nonpresidential position vote was generated; otherwise, the first number drawn by the random number generator was mapped onto the vote number listed in the CQ Almanac, and the vote was included in my sample.
equal to those upon which the president took a position during a particular year and were filtered for trivial procedural votes, such as the opening and closing of business.\textsuperscript{19,20}

This data collection approach treats the president both as a proactive and reactive agent. He is proactive in that he is an important agenda-setter and cue-giver for members of the House (Kingdon 1989, 1995; Neustadt 1991; Light 1999; Peterson et al. 2003; Canes-Wrone and deMarchi 2002). He also is reactive given the primacy of House leaders and the congressional parties in formulating and pressing legislative agendas (Peterson et al. 2003; Cox and McCubbins 1991). The president sets the agenda by articulating positions in his campaign and during his term. He drives what Congress considers and can frame the tone and substance of the debate in the legislature. He also cultivates relationships with his fellow partisans, campaigns for them, and puts them in a position either to succeed or fail in their bids to be reelected (Mayhew 1978).

Nevertheless, the continuing dominance of the party and congressional leaders—particularly in periods of divided government (Jones 2002, 1994; Mayhew 1991)—suggests that the president is just as often likely to be confronted with votes upon which

\textsuperscript{19} The only votes that were excluded from this analysis were bills opening and closing business on a particular day. Although representative of the broader set of bills from which the president might choose, the probability of the president taking a position on opening or closing business is low. In the universe of presidential position votes collected for this analysis, the president failed to take a position on any of these trivial procedural votes.

\textsuperscript{20} I attempted to ensure that the presidential position votes and nonpresidential-position vote samples were similar. All of the presidential position votes in the data set—explained further in Chapter 3—were coded as foreign, domestic, administrative, procedural, or economic policy votes using Ragsdale’s (1998) coding scheme supplemented by \textit{CQ}’s own coding system. When Ragsdale’s scheme conflicted with \textit{CQ}’s vote code, the \textit{CQ code} was employed. To further ensure that the sample of nonpresidential-position votes was similar to the presidential position sample, I employed the random number generation technique discussed above. After examining the randomly drawn sample, I compared the proportions of vote types in both samples. Where substantial inequalities on the high side existed in the nonpresidential-position vote sample, I randomly selected a vote from that coding category, removed that vote from the sample, and randomly selected votes until one was found that fit into a category that was proportionately lower. Although the samples are not identical proportion-wise, the votes from the nonpresidential-position sample were randomly drawn and removed (as necessary) and randomly drawn and redistributed (as appropriate).
he must decide to take a position. By modeling presidential position-taking at the individual vote level, I hope to more accurately capture what appears to be a growing reality in legislative-executive relations (Edwards 1989; Bond and Fleisher 1990; Krehbiel 1998; Moe and Howell 1999a; 1999b): the president as a reactive agent.

The president’s expressed position on a roll call vote is a signal about his preferences and a heuristic that is publicly available for all members of the House to consider as they decide how to vote (Weisberg et al. 1999; Clausen 1972; Matthews and Stimson 1970; Kingdon 1989). Moreover, the correlation between the president’s agenda—expressed in major speeches and in the presidential campaign—and those votes upon which he takes a position in Congress is high. This suggests that those bills upon which the president takes a position are indicative of the president’s true preferences vice a strategic gambit (Edwards 2000; Fett 1992). Assessing the conditions under which presidential position-taking occurs, thus, also provides insights into presidential agenda-setting writ large.

In the next two chapters, this data set will serve as a foundation for a serial-based analysis of executive-legislative relations. The data are structured in a manner that allows me to examine presidential position-taking and legislative support for the president as discrete choices. By starting at the widest possible policy point—the universe of bills over which the president can take a position and push as part of his agenda—and then narrowing that policy universe to only those bills upon which the president has taken a position, it becomes possible to treat legislative support for the president as a choice nested within this broader executive-driven policy construct.
2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed two theoretical assumptions upon which the remainder of my analysis will be based. The first revolves around time. I noted that executive-legislative relations happen in two different time frames. The first, political time, is an intra-administration measure that relies on the concept of waxing and waning political capital. As a term wears on, the president struggles to maintain the capital his election afforded him. External events, changes in the partisan makeup of Congress, and the president’s own actions are critical in determining how well his political capital weathers time. I argued that political time must be accounted for in models of executive-legislative relations and noted that I will do so by modeling presidential position-taking and the legislature’s support for the president by year. I expect that these models will demonstrate a marked difference in how presidential power is both administered and restrained across a president’s term.

In addition, I discussed regime time—the inter-administration differences that shape executive-legislative relations. These differences are primarily historically-based and rely on the trajectory of external events, such as changes in social, political, and economic winds. In this conception of political time, the president’s personality matters but history constrains the options any president has during his administration. Presidents are the primary decisionmakers while in power, but the decisions they have to make are conditioned by the path of social, political, and economic history. My analysis of presidential power will account for these inter-administration differences by modeling presidential position taking and legislative support for the president by regime type.
Finally, I argued that the decisions Congress and the president make must be regarded as parts of a greater sum. This micro-level view of time suggests that presidents begin the agenda-setting process by choosing the votes upon which they are willing to risk political capital. Not long after, members of Congress individually—and eventually in the aggregate—decide whether or not to support the president’s position on those votes upon which he has risked his capital. Congress’s decision flows from the president’s choice of bills, suggesting a nested relationship. My analysis in Chapter 4 will account for this nested relationship by examining House decisions to support presidential position votes. Finally, in Chapter 5, I will suggest further research that could provide additional leverage on more deeply nested presidential and legislative decisions, such as vetoes and veto overrides.

Before discussing congressional decisions to support the president, it, however, is important to address one of the least studied but most important questions in the normal, executive-legislative policy process: What are the conditions under which presidents will take positions on votes before Congress? It is to that question I now turn.
CHAPTER 3
PRESIDENTIAL POSITION-TAKING IN CONGRESS

3.1 Introduction

In the two previous chapters, I suggested that, at any given time, either Congress or the president will have primacy in executive-legislative relations. This presidency-augmented (Covington et al. 1995) argument suggests that, at times, presidential activities can shape the interactions between the legislative and executive branches. Dominance of the policy process is conditional on presidential capital, external events, and the congressional reality in which presidents find themselves. And all of these variables run on temporal roads: presidents enter the policy fray at different points historically and during their terms. Historically, presidents are constrained by the economic, social, and political conditions in which they press their agendas. These conditions shape the policy wiggle room and potential sway presidents can have, suggesting that presidential capital baselines may be higher or lower, depending on the historical period and the irregularities of those periods.

Apart from the baseline capital with which presidents enter their administrations, presidents also must immediately confront declining political capital as political time marches on. Although presidents may receive a post-election bump that enables them to pursue their agendas more often and more successfully, higher political capital gives way to negative media coverage, midterm congressional elections and self-interested members
of Congress, and unforeseen external events that chip away at the president’s bank account. By the end of the term, the president struggles to maintain momentum, build coalitions, and achieve agenda success. Political time—that intra-administration measure—and the events that occur over the course of the president’s term inevitably sap the president of capital and can provide Congress with the upper hand as the term drives forward.

Fitting in the broader context of time and its effects on legislative and executive relations, I also suggested in the last chapter that these relations should be considered in a series, from initial presidential agenda-setting through final congressional overrides of presidential vetoes. This chapter begins to address this concern by examining presidential agenda-setting through presidential position-taking on votes before the United States House of Representatives.\(^1\)\(^2\) I employ a unique data set of more than 3,200 House votes from the first terms of Presidents Carter, Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Clinton.

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\(^1\) Presidential position-taking is an actual manifestation of what was, up to that point, only a series of rhetorical flourishes, first by the president as a candidate and, next, as a newly-elected chief executive. By officially taking positions on votes before Congress, the president stakes a tangible claim to specific bills that he wishes to highlight to legislators and the public. Although Covington’s (1987) argument that presidents often will remain silent, lobby in private, and attempt to influence Congress without drawing attention to salient bills on the president’s agenda is compelling, data for such analyses are few and far between. Presidential position data, on the other hand, is readily available, easily and objectively coded, and subsequent scholarship can easily replicate the analyses. Another compelling empirical question that I do not address in this dissertation—but which Covington’s (1987) research suggests—is to examine the conditions under which presidents choose to remain publicly silent (but still quietly lobby members of Congress) on bills before Congress. It is likely that some votes examined in this chapter are precisely this kind of vote: the president fails to take a formal position but privately lobbies members using his legislative liaison staff. This suggests that presidential silence may be of two sorts—disinterest or quiet interest and activity—and could be examined using archival research techniques, such as those employed by Sullivan (1991; 1990; 1989; 1987) to analyze presidential lobbying and sway.

\(^2\) The analyses in this chapter and subsequent chapters could as easily apply to the Senate as the House of Representatives. The sheer number of votes before the House of Representatives—upon which the president stakes a position or remains silent—however, allows for a more robust modeling opportunity than do the limited votes taken by the Senate. The greater number of votes in the House makes this the more difficult and appealing body to study first.
Most recent studies of executive-legislative relations have focused on legislative variables, both in the aggregate and at the individual level, as the primary drivers shaping executive-legislative relations. My research advances this line of work by focusing on a more limited slate of independent variables with clear theoretical connections, allowing me a greater degree of parsimony than some of these previous studies have achieved (see Peterson 1990, for example). Moreover, I improve upon some of the existing work on presidential position-taking by examining the president’s discrete decision to take a position on votes before Congress. This approach is a significant departure from the limited past studies of presidential position-taking that employ yearly aggregate measures of presidential position-taking as dependent variables in regression or count models (Covington 1987; Shull 1997; Shull and Shaw 1999).

Finally, in this chapter I examine presidential position-taking with a slate of innovative independent variables that more completely accounts for past presidential activity and success in Congress. These variables more accurately portray the context within which the president considers bills upon which he takes a position. Moreover—as I argue later in this chapter—these variables reflect more precisely the baseline from which the president evaluates whether or not he should spend political capital on the floor vote being considered by the House.

3.1.1 Summary

In this chapter, I intend to test the following hypotheses:
1) A president’s decision to take a position on a vote before the U.S. House of Representatives will be shaped by his legislative context, previous and current presidential actions, and external variables beyond the president’s control;

2) The importance of each of these sets of variables—presidential, legislative, and external—and the explanatory value of my models will wax and wane over time, as presidential capital surges and declines and electoral winds drive decisions by the executive and legislative branches; and, finally,

3) Particular presidents will respond differently to potential challenges to their political capital over the course of their administrations and the variation in their approaches will be shaped by the regime period during which they are pressing their legislative agendas.

In the next sections, I detail the “discrete decision approach” I employ in my analysis of presidential position-taking; describe the data set I will employ to do so; and provide theoretical justifications for the variables included in my models of presidential agenda-setting in Congress. I include a series of independent variables unique to this analysis to test the importance of presidential context and past presidential activity as influences in shaping a president’s decision calculus.

Finally, I test the hypotheses above using probit models and first differences simulations that shed light on the conditions under which presidential position-taking occurs. Breaking presidential position-taking apart by year and by president, I demonstrate that changes in political capital—often shaped by the president’s past activities, the context with Congress, and shifts in the external political and economic
environments—subtly but robustly shape presidential position-taking in the House. I also show how political and regime time shape the president’s decision to expend his political capital with Congress.

First, I suggest that, although few and far between, previous models of presidential position-taking have failed to account for the dynamic nature of the president’s interactions with Congress. In the next section, I propose a different approach that employs individual votes before Congress as the most appropriate unit of analysis for assessments of presidential agenda-setting.

3.2 Analytic Approach

To test the influence of presidential, legislative, and exogenous variables on presidential position-taking, I constructed a data set that treats the president’s decision to take a position on a vote as a discrete event. Each vote taken on the floor of the House is seen as an opportunity for the president to either articulate a position or remain silent. This requires the collection of two separate samples: votes upon which the president takes a position and votes upon which he did not. For this chapter, the dependent variable is the president’s decision to take a position on or stay silent on a House vote. The unit of analysis is a vote on the floor of the House that is coded “1” for instances in which the president took a position and “0” otherwise.

Analyses of presidential position-taking are sparse. Shull (1997) and Shull and Shaw (1999) examine presidential position-taking by aggregating all of the votes upon which the president took a position during a year and using count models to assess the importance of a variety of covariates. Although this approach is reasonable, it fails to
treat presidential position-taking as a discrete choice. As noted in Chapter 2, a president must individually determine the votes upon which he will articulate a position and then enunciate that decision to the public and Congress. Position-taking is a dynamic process—as noted in Figure 3.1 later in this chapter—and examining aggregated presidential position-taking fails to account for the declines and surges in presidential capital over the course of the administration. To account for this dynamic process, I instead treat each position a president takes—and this can include remaining silent—as a discrete decision. By doing so, I am able also to address how the previous decisions a president has made during the legislative term and the political realities the president faces as he makes a decision affect that decision. I can then examine real-time decision processes over the course of a year, term, or series of presidential terms.

3.3 Data and Descriptives

As noted in the last chapter, I collected a data set of more 3,200 individual votes on the floor of the House covering the first terms of the Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations. Table 3.1 provides a picture of the president’s yearly legislative activity during the first terms of the Carter through Clinton administrations (see Table 3.1).³

Two things are clear in Table 3.1: first, individual presidents vary in the number of positions they take overall and in each year of their administrations. President Carter voiced a position the least frequently—340 times during his only term—while President

³ First terms were examined to make my results comparable across presidents and to not bias the sample in favor of individual presidents (Clinton, Reagan) who served more than one term during the period of this study. Although the raw numbers of positions taken by the president are reported in Table 3.1, the ratio of positions taken by the president to overall vote volume in the House is available by request.
George H.W. Bush was the busiest (479 positions taken). Presidents Reagan and Clinton, a regime reconstructor and “preemptor,” respectively, were in the middle of the four presidents in my data set with respect to legislative proclivity.

These findings comport with the broader historical, or regime time archetypes established by Skowronek (1993). Presidents of disjunction, such as Carter should be expected to have little legislative wiggle room, prompting them to push legislation less frequently and to spend political capital more judiciously. On the other end of the scale, articulation presidents, such as George H.W. Bush, should be expected to build on the success of regime reconstructors like Ronald Reagan and attempt to legislate more frequently. It is possible that articulators, in their eagerness to forward a perceived mandate handed over from the previous administration, may overreach and unintentionally spend political capital under the assumption that they will be able to cash in on their predecessor’s policy momentum.

Regime reconstructors, such as Reagan, may better understand that the public is tapping them to rebuild trust in government and to make sweeping public policy changes. Such presidents may use their sway with the public to take positions and receive more certain support—even if fleeting (Peterson et al. 2003)—for those positions. The moderate number of positions Reagan took during his first term suggests that he was selective about the votes in Congress upon which he spent his political capital. The capital that he had following his 1980 election perhaps provided him with the ability to articulate positions infrequently but on larger-scale items, such as amendments to the federal tax code and massive budget restructuring initiatives.4

4 This point brings up a broader question worthy of testing: do presidents with perceived mandates or those who preside over a partisan realignment take positions less frequently, but with more gravity? In other
Finally, President Clinton, a preemptive executive, followed 12 years of Republican control of the White House, and his position-taking frequency reflects that. Among the presidents in my data set, Clinton was the second most prolific agenda-setter. Preemptive presidents, such as Clinton, are in a position to make long-awaited changes, but many of the changes they are capable of making are marginal, because at least one legislative branch has sufficient opposition to stop larger-scale agenda items from passing. President Clinton’s position-taking volume reflects that he was prolific, but, on self-initiated, large-scale domestic agenda items, such as health care reform, he faced significant opposition. The larger domestic agenda items he passed during his first term—such as welfare reform—reflect the power of the Republican House majority elected in 1994. Overall, then, the presidents included in my data set seem to generally match the temporal archetypes established by Skowronek.

Table 3.1 also illustrates variations in presidential legislative activity across individual years of the administrations in the data set, providing initial support for the “political time” hypotheses forwarded in Chapter 2 and noted in this chapter’s introduction. Presidents during the first year of their administrations are, according to the data in Table 3.1, substantially more likely to take positions on votes before the House of Representatives. During the first year, presidents Carter through Clinton took the most positions on House votes than during any other year of their administrations. Reflecting the regime time hypothesis also forwarded in the last chapter, President Carter—a president of disjunction—took the fewest positions during his first year. This suggests that Carter may have had less wiggle room, a circumstance conditioned by the public’s words, do regime reconstructors sacrifice quantity of legislation for substance and quality given the often thorny issues the public has provided them capital upon which to spend?
negative perception of the post-Watergate presidency. It also suggests that Carter realized he faced an unstable legislative coalition that was rapidly slipping due to fractures in his party’s southern base.

Ronald Reagan, on the other hand, took nearly 35 more positions on votes before the House during his administration than did Carter. A regime reconstructor, Reagan seized on the momentum generated by his election and the broader partisan realignment that brought southern Democrats into the Republican camp (Hershey and Beck 2004). Table 3.1 suggests that during Reagan’s first year, he had more latitude to take positions and that he did so. George H.W. Bush—a regime articulator—built on Reagan’s momentum and took the most positions on votes before the House. Regime articulators, anticipating ready support from the public for the previous president’s agenda and a perceived mandate for that agenda reflected in their own election to the presidency, are likely to be aggressive position-takers. As noted above, the latitude articulators perceive they have, however, is not always matched by the public’s (or Congress’s) ability to accept such an aggressive legislative agenda. As such—and something I will discuss more in Chapter 4—it is likely that articulators, such as George H.W. Bush, will have a more difficult time finding success after staking positions on votes before the House.

Finally, preemptive presidents, such as Clinton, have an open window to aggressively pursue their agendas during the first year honeymoon period. President Clinton pushed legislation more frequently during his first year than any other president except George H.W. Bush, suggesting that Clinton perceived a mandate and acted on it. Other preemptive presidents, such as Woodrow Wilson and Richard Nixon, had aggressive legislative agendas but found that, rather than being the tip of a new political
revolution, they were a market correction by the electorate after years of another party’s control of the White House. In sum, I expect preemptive presidents such as Clinton to have broader legislative agendas, although—and it will be tested in Chapter 4—these presidents likely will struggle to have their positions accepted by the legislative branch.

Presidents take positions unevenly across the first four years of their administrations. In each administration listed in Table 3.1, presidents took fewer positions during year two than in years one and three. This likely owes to two factors: the capital presidents spend during the first year of their administrations and the approaching midterm election of members of the House of Representatives. Presidents lose momentum for their agendas as the term wears on and the number of viable issues upon which the president can take a position narrows (Light 1999). Issues that make it to the second year of the president’s administration without having been previously considered or approved by Congress likely are less viable or have less visibility or punch. As such, presidents may be reluctant to take positions on these issues and risk political capital.

Moreover, presidents in year two may choose to limit their position-taking to help their fellow partisans in the upcoming midterm elections. By being aggressive during the second year and forcing their own partisans to vote on tough issues, presidents may put their own party members in awkward positions. When the president remains silent, his party members are relieved of the burden of reconciling support for the president’s agenda with their own constituents’ preferences. Silence during the second year of the term may be golden for presidents, and the data in Table 3.1 reflect this. This risk aversion, however, may dissipate as presidents have more comfortable partisan majorities or when they are working during periods of divided government. With a larger partisan
split in the president’s favor, the chief executive has more latitude in Congress to legislate without putting his legislative majority at risk. The comfort of a large majority then buffers the president and allows him to be less concerned with the upcoming legislative midterm elections as he decides to take positions on House votes. During periods of divided government, the president may attempt to differentiate himself and his party from the opposition in order to gain House seats. During these periods, we might expect the president to speak up more often on the House floor.

Again fitting within the political time construct, year three in Table 3.1 suggests that presidents renew their legislative agendas after the dust settles at the midterm. Each president in the data set upped his position-taking during year three except Bill Clinton. President Carter increased his legislative activity by 15 percent; President Reagan by 37 percent; and President George H.W. Bush by 35 percent.

Presidents during the third year of their administration have two items to consider as they examine the utility of taking positions in Congress. First, presidents can evaluate the contours of the legislative landscape following the midterm election and push toward the next election. Second, the president’s party often loses House seats at the midterm. President Carter lost 15 seats (from 292 to 277) to the Republicans in the 1978 midterm elections. Similarly, President Reagan lost 27 seats to the Democrats (from 242 to 269) in the 1982 midterms. George H.W. Bush lost seven seats (from 260 to 267) to the Democrats in 1990, and Bill Clinton lost both seats (54) and party control to the Republicans during the 1994 midterms. In the prior three cases—Carter, Reagan, and

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5 The Clinton aberration likely is due to the radical change in seats and party control following the 1994 elections. Although other presidents faced declines in their party’s seats, Clinton presided over a massive seat turnover in the House, leaving it surprising that his position-taking in 1995 remained even close to his
George H.W. Bush—presidents lost just a few seats and subsequently increased their legislative position-taking following the midterm election year.

A president, following a midterm loss for his party, has two incentives to increase his engagement with Congress. First, as the president reaches the home stretch in his first term, the public and media again will be attentive to the job the president has done during the term. Applying the “what have you done for me lately” principle, the president should be driven to increase his position-taking to clarify his positions on issues that could be critical to his reelection. In addition, the third year is perhaps the last opportunity the president will have to fully employ his skills as a legislator—in lobbying members of Congress, hosting events, and campaigning—before turning his full attention to his reelection campaign. At this point in the term, the president has learned the rules of the road and can make up for lost time, as happened in the Carter administration.

Second, a president has an incentive to take positions on legislation to highlight the differences between his party and the opposition. By staking claim to specific issues before Congress or even demanding legislative action, the president can preemptively strike against the opposition party and force decisions by opposition party leaders that could prove electorally damaging for the opposition’s legislative and presidential candidates. The president, in this situation, is able to suggest to the public that he has given his best efforts to pass legislation but has been rebuffed by a recalcitrant, polarized, and politicized opposition. Year three provides the president the means and time to inject such issues into the public’s consciousness.

The previous two years’ activities. The exceptional 1994 congressional elections and the Gingrich revolution clearly forced Clinton to decrease his position-taking, although not by a significant amount.
I again find some indication in year four that elections shape the dynamics between Congress and the president. Table 3.1 suggests that there is little that is systematic about presidential position-taking during the fourth year. Two factors may lead presidents to scale back their legislative activity during the fourth year. First, presidents, such as Ronald Reagan, may already have accomplished a number of their large-ticket agenda items, having successfully pushed through their priority legislation early in their terms. These presidents can coast on their strong legislative records achieved during the prior three years and have little need to frequently engage Congress. In fact, doing so may be a liability because potential points of vulnerability could be created for the president that remaining silent would not engender. Moreover, presidents may find that taking positions is riskier during the fourth year: members of the president’s party could become alienated because their constituents’ preferences fail to align with the president’s position. Rather than putting fellow partisans in such a position, presidents may choose to “remain silent” during the fourth year.

The second possible explanation is that presidents, such as Bill Clinton, remain silent to prevent further damage to their party or presidential candidacy. After presiding over an unprecedented Republican seat swing during the 1994 House elections, the Clinton administration had a strong incentive to remain silent, campaign hard, and direct attention toward the president’s policies during the previous three years. In addition, it is possible that the reasons Reagan and Clinton limited their legislative agendas during year four were flipped. Clinton may have accomplished all of his legislative goals while Reagan may have been focused on protecting his administration and instead allocated his time and energy to campaigning.
Table 3.1 also suggests that some presidents ramp up their legislative agendas during the fourth year. Presidents George H.W. Bush and Jimmy Carter—both incumbents facing potential reelection losses—more frequently took positions during the fourth year than in any of the previous years of their administrations. At the same time, both presidents were suffering from failing popular approval, with Bush slipping from a high approval rating of nearly 90 percent in March of 1991 to 46 percent and rapidly declining in February 1992. By more actively engaging in the legislative process, he may have felt that he could shore up popular support as the 1992 elections drew near. Carter similarly ramped up his legislative efforts as his presidential approval declined. Carter, however, was in the unenviable position of suffering from low presidential approval ratings beginning in March 1978 (48.5 percent). By the time the 1980 elections were held, his popularity was at 35 percent. Carter may have accelerated his legislative activity to shore up what electoral support he had left, an empirical observation supported by recent theoretical work on presidential approval and congressional support for the president (Canes-Wrone and deMarchi 2002).

In summary, Table 3.1 suggests that presidential position-taking varies across regime and political time. Presidents legislate early and often, slow their pace leading to the midterm and then accelerate their efforts during the third year of their administrations. They conclude their terms with less systematic approaches to position-taking that may be prompted by having satisfied their first-term goals, making up for lost time during the prior two years, or shoring up public opinion in anticipation of the next presidential election. Table 3.1 also suggests that examining presidential position-taking by year,
regime, and even at the point of decision—treating each presidential position as a discrete decision—may offer insights into how presidential agenda-setting is shaped by time and legislative, presidential, and exogenous variables.

Another optic on presidential position-taking over time is the monthly data presented in Figure 3.1. Figure 3.1 makes clear that, even within each year of the president’s administration, surges and declines occur in presidential position-taking (see Figure 3.1). Figure 3.1 suggests that there is an element of periodicity to presidential position-taking, with greater levels of presidential activity occurring at specific months during each year of the president’s administration. Perhaps most striking about Figure 3.1 is that four very different presidents clustered their position-taking activity around similar months. Presidents were most active during months 10, 20 through 22, 31, and 42, suggesting a regularity exists to presidential position-taking in Congress that might be paired with rushes to push legislation before Congress goes out of session.7

President Carter, during the first two years of his term, appears to have pushed legislation on a slight lag compared with Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Clinton. This comports with Light’s (1999) judgment that the Carter administration failed to hit the ground running and continually worked from behind as he and his advisers pushed their legislative agenda in the House. By years three and four, Carter appears to have made up for the apparent lag in activity during years one and two. Although he legislated with a greater fervor both in volume and timeliness, his ability to work effectively and productively with Congress had been eroded. Figure 3.1 again highlights the relatively

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7 It is important to note that the surge in legislative activity by the presidents in this study may correlate highly with the approach of legislative recesses. Legislators and executives alike press their cases prior to recesses to avoid having to hold over the members. The significant spikes in legislative activity during
low levels of position-taking activity in the Carter administration, as compared with Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Clinton, suggesting that, beyond political time differences, Carter may have been constrained by social, historical, and political realities beyond his control. His depressed legislative activity may be attributable to the era of disjunction over which he presided.  

President Reagan’s monthly position-taking is perhaps the most intriguing. In nearly all cases of elevated legislative activity, Reagan was on the leading edge compared with the other presidents in the data set, suggesting that Reagan moved more aggressively to take positions on issues important to his administration. The other important point from Reagan’s position-taking activity is his robust activity levels just prior to the 1984 presidential election. His activity during this period well exceeded that of Carter, Bush, or Clinton, suggesting that Reagan was unconcerned about his reelection chances and that he was willing to spend political capital on issues before Congress. Another possibility, however, is that he was attempting to shore up his base and, thus, force Democratic members of Congress and his opponent, Walter Mondale, to stake positions on votes that could have been damaging to both as the November elections approached.

President George H.W. Bush evinced a different pattern of position-taking activity during his term. He began the term pressing his legislative agenda at months 10, 20-22, 31, and 42 directly precede legislative breaks. In the case of months 10 and 20-22, the winter recess is forthcoming; for months 31 and 42, the June/July summer recess is on the horizon.

8 This explanation, although plausible, is a bit unsatisfying: by making the argument that all unexplainable variation in presidential behavior is attributable to the “black box” that is political or regime time explains much and very little, highlighting the potential pitfalls of relying too heavily on historical institutionalist approaches to presidential policymaking, such as Skowronek’s (1993) discussion of presidential regime archetypes. Rigorous tests of these historical institutionalist theories may be required to understand how much variance can be explained by robust models of, in this case, presidential position-taking. The remaining, unexplained variance either can be chalked up to the broader temporal context (regime and political) in which the president finds himself or can serve as a guide to more properly specifying the models or refining the modeling techniques.
approximately the same levels as his peers. In year two, however, his legislative activity peaked well beyond that of Presidents Carter, Reagan, and Clinton. The substantial increase in legislative activity between months 20-22 clearly is correlated with a bump in his presidential popularity in the period immediately preceding the United States military’s intervention in Kuwait. At the beginning of September 1990, Bush’s popularity was at 75 percent and remained at between 70 and 75 percent through the remainder of 1990. Given the extraordinary political capital that such popularity—particularly that generated by a “rally event” (Mueller 1970) confers—Bush and his advisers may have calculated that the public would support a more aggressive presidential agenda with a Democrat-controlled House. Presidential dominance in the legislative process—or at least a perceived sense of the capital required to dominate the legislative process—would appear to be linked to the president’s sense for what the public will accept and Congress will support (Canes-Wrone and deMarchi 2002; Canes-Wrone et al. 2001). The data support the general hypothesis that legislative and presidential dominance in the legislative process is more subtle and conditional on political time than the bulk of previous studies of legislative-executive relations have suggested.

The remainder of George H.W. Bush’s term mirrored the month-by-month legislative activity of his peers, although Bush clearly outstripped his contemporaries in overall position-taking volume. That volume quieted substantially after the burst of legislative activity in late 1990, then cycled back up and remained high during years three and four. Bush’s position-taking during year four suggests a paradox: as the public’s perception about the economy and his own popularity dropped in late 1991 and early 1992, he escalated his legislative activity, perhaps in an attempt to reestablish his base
and solidify it for his upcoming reelection campaign. Presidents, thus, may be using position-taking to spend excess political capital or generate political capital when it appears to be slipping.

President Clinton’s legislative activity was typical of the other presidents (see Figure 3.1), except that he clearly shifted into position-taking overdrive as his first year closed. Clinton’s legislative activity started quickly in months two through four and just as quickly quieted. With his health care plan and other domestic agenda items, however, ripening at the end of his first year, he dramatically increased his position-taking activity, voicing opinions on 25 votes before the House in November 1993. Following that burst of activity, Clinton appears to have been on the leading edge of activity during years two and three as compared with Presidents Carter, Reagan, and Bush. Clinton’s overall legislative activity during his first term was steady, with a significant decrease coming only during year four. This likely owes again to President Clinton’s overall popularity during the period leading up to the 1996 presidential election. Clinton held steady at between 53 and 55 percent approval and easily could have risked his political and electoral capital by taking positions in Congress. By remaining silent, Clinton may have been attempting to maintain the electoral coalition he had rather than give fence sitters a reason to support Robert Dole for president.

In sum, Figure 3.1 argues again for the importance of evaluating executive-legislative relations on a temporal road. The three dimensions of time previously discussed—regime, political, and iterative, decision-based—all are clearly present in Figure 3.1.
Table 3.2 provides a summary of the types of votes on which Presidents Carter through Clinton took positions in their first terms. The votes are an aggregation of presidential position-taking during each administration in the data set, are separated by policy type, and shed additional light on how presidents choose to spend political capital during their terms (see Table 3.2).

All of the presidents in this data set allocated capital toward domestic policy votes in Congress more than any other vote type. President George H.W. Bush most frequently took positions on domestic policy votes, staking 52 percent of his positions on such votes and allocating the smallest percentage of his positions to foreign policy votes (29 percent). President Clinton similarly dedicated many of his positions to domestic policy votes, 49 percent of his positions were on votes that centered on domestic policy issues. Similarly, Clinton dedicated only 25 percent of his positions to foreign policy votes, perhaps an indication of the emphasis the Clinton administration put on foreign policy during his first term.

Presidents Carter and Reagan more evenly divided their positions among foreign and domestic policy votes. Reagan allocated 31 percent of his position-taking to foreign
policy votes while putting 37 percent toward domestic policy votes in the House. Carter similarly favored domestic policy, but by a narrow margin. He dedicated 40 percent of his positions to domestic policy votes while allocating 35 percent toward foreign policy votes in the House.

Overwhelmingly, presidents ignored votes in the House that addressed bureaucratic, economic, or procedural matters. Although presidents step forward on budget votes, these votes are few and far between and increasingly are wrapped in complex omnibus bills, making it difficult to separate the economic ramifications of a floor vote from the domestic and policy components tacked on to the omnibus legislation (Krutz and Patterson 2001). Overall, presidents tend to dedicate approximately 15 percent of their positions to economic policy votes, while allocating roughly only two and four percent of their positions to bureaucracy- or procedurally-focused policy votes.

Figures 3.2 through 3.5 better illustrate the monthly dynamics of presidential position-taking, broken down by policy type. The results suggest that a periodicity exists to position-taking by policy type and highlights how presidents set priorities by policy types during their administrations (see Figures 3.2 through 3.5).\(^\text{10}\) Figures 3.2 through 3.5 demonstrate that surges in presidential position-taking occur across issues. Regardless of the administration, bursts in activity appear proportional and connected: when a president takes a position on a policy vote, he accompanies that activity with similar, but proportional activity across other policy types. These bursts suggest that larger policy

\(^\text{10}\) These figures, although helpful, also can be deceptive: foreign policy position-taking by presidents often occurs in response to international crises. For example, President Bush allocated more resources to foreign policy matters in the period leading up to and immediately following the Gulf War in 1994. Similarly, President Clinton allocated more political capital toward deploying troops in Bosnia in 1994, and President Carter more frequently took positions on foreign policy votes during the Iran hostage crisis. Periodicity in foreign policy position-taking, then, may be an artifact of exogenous events—presidents simply respond to crises by staking positions that they may have had no intention of taking prior to the exogenous event.
windows (Kingdon 1989) may have presented themselves and that presidents seized on those opportunities to legislate aggressively and broadly. Figures 3.2 through 3.5 also suggest that presidents take advantage of opportunities in one policy area to see through domestic initiatives that otherwise may have been on the backburner, owing to a lack of open policy windows.

During their periods of highest legislative activity, Presidents Carter through Clinton allocated capital toward issues such as the 1978 Revenue Act, economic aid to Panama and Egypt, and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (Carter, 1979); military aid and economic assistance to Central American allies and the Philippines and authorizations for child nutrition programs (Reagan, 1984); condemnation of the Chinese violations of human rights in Tiananmen Square and reauthorization of federal farm price- and income-support programs (Bush, 1990); and limitations to the expansion of law enforcement agencies’ power against suspected domestic terrorists and a provision authorizing the United States to defend Taiwan if invaded by China (Clinton, 1996).

Finally, these figures suggest that it is important to include measures of the type of policy upon which the president takes a position, particularly for domestic and foreign policy votes. Inclusion of such measures may provide insights into the conditions under which presidents are willing to spend capital vice choosing to remain silent.

Creating the Dependent Variable: Accounting for Presidential Silence

The president must selectively choose bills given his limited political capital and the threat that the opposition will be mobilized by any presidential action on a vote before Congress (Covington 1987; Fett 1992, 1994). To capture the universe of bills from which
the president might choose to take a position (but does not), I collected a random sample of votes cast by the House during the Carter through George W. Bush administrations. This sample, discussed in Chapter 2, draws exclusively from a pool of bills upon which the president failed to take a position. These votes were collected in numbers equal to those upon which the president took a position during a particular year and were filtered for trivial procedural votes, such as the opening and closing of business.11

With my votes selected, I tested a series of hypotheses surrounding one basic premise: factors inside and outside the president’s control will affect presidential position-taking, conditional on the historical period and political time within which a House vote is being decided. To test this premise, I first combined data from the Carter through Clinton administrations into one matrix. I then employed probit analysis (King 1989; Long 1997) to explore the impact my independent variables (see below) had on my dichotomous dependent variable, the president’s decision to take a position or remain silent on a vote being cast by the House of Representatives.

3.4 Organizing Theoretical Concepts and Variable Operationalization

My examination of presidential position-taking rests on the assumption that the president, although able to set the agenda for Congress, also must be responsive to external legislative, political, and social contexts. Even though past examinations of presidential position-taking have examined the influence of some of these contextual

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11 For the distribution of these votes, please see Appendix A, Table A.1.

12 All models were calculated using the Stata 8.0 software platform. Although probit may seem to be a relatively simple approach to this analytic question, Box-Steffensmeier and Jones (2004) find support in the temporal modeling literature for cross-sectional analyses, such as those to be subsequently employed. The structure of the data set, however, can allow for event history or time series analyses to assess the importance of time in conditioning presidential activity on the floor of the House.
variables, (Shull and Shaw 1999; Shull 1997; Lewis and Strine 1996), my analysis includes a number of improvements that more accurately capture the presidential position-taking environment on the floor of the House of Representatives.

Below, I discuss the variables I have both created and carried over from past analyses of executive-legislative relations. I address presidency, legislative, and externally-centered concepts to assess their importance across regime, political, and even discrete-decision time. Finally, I employ models with more precise variable concepts and clearer assumptions about how the included covariates will affect a president’s propensity to take positions on votes before the House.

3.4.1 Time and Presidential Power

Presidency scholarship very often acknowledges but rarely tests the importance of time in models of executive-legislative relations. Lewis and Strine (1996) detail four different types of time—secular (or “clock” time), regime time, the modern and early time dichotomy (Burke 1992; Lowi 1985; Neustadt 1991), and presidential or political time (Light 1999; Kumar and Grossman 1981)—commonly seen in the presidency literature. In this analysis, I focus on two of these measures: presidential or political time and regime time.

Political Time

Presidential power waxes and wanes over the course of the administration but can be broken into the period following the election and the time nearing a president’s re-election (Neustadt 1991; Lewis and Strine 1996). Early in the term, the president receives
positive media coverage—the famous honeymoon period—and has the greatest opportunity to use this postelection euphoria to his advantage (Kumar and Grossman 1981; Light 1999).

This period of increased influence, however, slides away as the media evinces a willingness to openly criticize the president and his policies and Congress members look to their constituents for cues in preparation for the next round of House elections (Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1978). By the end of the term, presidents must rely on guile, legislative acumen, and strong coalition-building skills to achieve the same success that may have come much more easily earlier in the administration (Light 1999). Presidents during the course of their administrations, also may move from an expansionist period during their first two years to a protectionist period during the final two. This shift is intended to protect the political capital they have (Fenno 1978). Conversely, presidents that failed frequently and early in their terms may see the last two years of their administrations as an opportunity to make up for lost time. I test these assertions about political time by running two sets of models.

The first model examines presidential position-taking in the aggregate to determine if generalizations can be made about covariate effects across the span of a president’s administration. This model will serve as the baseline for my second set of models that individually examine presidential position-taking during each of the first four years of the president’s first term in office. I expect that while presidents are likely to use perceived political capital during their first year to forward aggressive legislative agendas, the year-one models will explain less of the variance in presidential position-taking than that model for years two and three.
This expectation follows from Light’s (1999) assertion that presidents learn to more effectively push legislation later in their administrations; earlier, they rely simply on momentum and the postelection penumbra to drive their decisions with regard to Congress. Thus, presidential and legislative realities are more in equilibrium in years two and three—presidential power is better defined and legislative power reemerges after sitting on the sidelines during the presidential honeymoon period (Peterson et al. 2003). During year four, I anticipate that presidential position-taking again will be less systematic, this time due to the upcoming presidential election. Members of Congress will be jockeying for position and staking out positions either in support of or opposed to the president as the midterm elections approach, eliminating the equilibrium legislative behaviors established during years two and three. I expect that the year four model will explain less of the variance in presidential position-taking than will the models of years two and three.

Regime Time

I also separate my models by president to assess the validity of Skowronek’s (1993) assertion that the politics presidents make vary according to the political era in which the president is embedded (see also Lewis and Strine 1996, 687). For example, Ronald Reagan was elected to helm a reconstructive regime (Skowronek 1993), was provided more open policy windows, and had the flexibility and support from the public and Congress to take more progressive public stances on votes in the House. Jimmy Carter—a president of disjunction—was historically constrained and thus prevented from organizing and leading a scattered public and mustering the support of his fractured
congressional party. Presidents of disjunction may frequently take positions on votes before Congress but seem more likely to do so symbolically with little anticipation of having those positions strongly supported by members of the presidents’ or the opposition party. Moreover, presidents of disjunction will be more likely than regime types to legislate “from behind;” that is, their patterns of legislative activity will stem from desperation to build political capital rather than to spend it. During these regimes, covariates that would normally provide leverage in predicting presidential position-taking likely would be ineffective in understanding presidential behavior because the president is trapped in time and context.

I expect that parsing out the models by administration will reveal differences in presidential power, and those items spurring presidents to take a position on a House vote during one regime cycle may be completely irrelevant during others. As I noted earlier, regime reconstructors, such as Reagan, begin their terms with a higher probability of succeeding when they take positions on House votes. This suggests that reconstructors will be more likely to take positions and that presidential variables included in models of position-taking should weigh more heavily in pushing reconstructors to take positions. Regime reconstructors also have the widest latitude to let their presidential personality shape how they pursue their legislative agendas; they are less constrained by the public, Congress, and the external political and economic environment than any of the other regime types. As a result, the models of the Reagan administration likely will explain less of the variance in Reagan’s position-taking before Congress than will the other regime

13 I acknowledge that these models are as likely to capture peculiarities associated with individual presidents as much as they illustrate Skowronek’s (1993) concept of regime time. Even so, the models do provide nice comparative statics that help us understand how administration shifts condition the importance
archetype models. This likely owes to the intangibles—be they presidential personality or ideological realignments in the public, among others—that regime reconstructors bring with them to the White House.

Presidents such as Jimmy Carter begin their terms with low levels of political capital and the capital continues to dip at a precipitous rate. These presidents are shaped by their environments rather than shaping their environments. Such presidents of disjunction have little presidential power, and variables that represent the president’s influence should have little effect in my position-taking models. When they have a statistically significant effect, these coefficients likely will represent the desperation that disjunctive presidents feel as their administrations creep on, legislative failures accrue, and presidential capital spirals away.

In sum, I anticipate that presidents of disjunction, reconstruction, articulation, and preemption will display markedly different covariate effects in models of presidential agenda-setting in Congress. In the next section, I discuss the variables that shape my analysis of presidential position-taking. These variables divide into three types: presidential, legislative, and exogenous.

3.4.2 Presidency-Centered Variables

The presidency-centered perspective, wherein the president is able to shape and mold politics, earn and spend political capital, and, thus, influence legislative outcomes emerges from Neustadt’s (1990) classic work on presidential power. The literature, however, varies in the importance placed on a president’s ability to shape member voting

of certain covariates in my models. The inter-administration comparisons also allow me to assess the degree to which my findings are generalizable. I explore the implications of this further in Chapter 5.
in the House (see Edwards 1989; Bond and Fleisher 1990). In this section, I describe three separate series of measures including two—past presidential activity in the House and the president’s prior success rate in Congress—that capture presidential influence and that, in turn, may provide the president more (or less) leeway to take positions on bills before the House.

**Past Presidential Activity**

Past presidential activity also seems likely to be a precursor of future presidential position-taking. I employ three separate measures of past presidential behavior to examine how presidential activities and legislative outcomes influence a president’s current position-taking probability in an attempt to begin to satisfy Neustadt’s (2002) desire to understand past presidential behavior as a predictor for current executive decisionmaking.

First, I include a unique measure that calculates the president’s average daily legislative activity immediately prior to the next bill up for his position-taking consideration. Support for the inclusion of such a variable comes from the legislative politics literature in which Anderson et al. (2002) have demonstrated that activist legislators can be punished if they legislate too often. Despite this, individual legislators who are more active are more likely to introduce additional bills than are legislators whose baseline activity levels are lower (see Box-Steppensmeier and Sinclair-Chapman 1996). Following the idea of the “activist president,” I similarly expect that the relationship between prior presidential activity and current presidential activity will be positive in my aggregate model. That is, the more bills per day that the president took
positions on in the past, the more likely that same president will take a position on subsequent votes before the House.

When the models are disaggregated, though, an entirely different pattern may emerge. In the first two years, activist presidents that hit the ground running may develop momentum and continue to build on past activity by aggressively taking positions on House votes. During the first two years, then, I expect that the coefficient associated with a president’s previous legislative activity will be positive. Following this expansionist period in their administrations, these presidents may step back during the last two years of their administrations in an attempt to preserve capital and to protect their electoral coalitions. This protectionist hypothesis suggests that the coefficients for this variable will be negative during years three and four. Moreover, presidents who fail to hit the ground running during the first two years of their terms likely bolster this hypothesis. These presidents must make up for lost time and more aggressively take positions in years three and four to build capital and establish an electoral coalition. These late-term expansionists and late-term protectionists should work together in years three and four to generate negative coefficients for the legislative activity variable in my models.

Besides past behavior regarding position-taking, a president also accrues a win-loss record documented by the number of times the president’s adopted position was supported on the floor of the House. Often aggregated into CQ Box Scores (see Edwards 1980, 1985, 1989; Bond and Fleisher, 1990), these measures of presidential success in Congress provide a useful concept for examining presidential position-taking: presidents who were more successful in the past seem more likely to try to continue the winning tradition by taking positions on subsequent bills before the House. I operationalized this
concept by calculating the president’s ratio of presidential positions supported by Congress divided by the total number of bills upon which the president took a position during the term. I then lagged this variable so that the covariate in my models represents a president’s success rate up to the vote upon which he must decide whether or not to take a position. I expect that presidents having more past legislative success—or legislative momentum—will be more likely to take a position on the next bill they see.\textsuperscript{14}

I also include a measure that accounts for the presence of major presidential messages to the public during the period prior to a president’s decision to take a position on a vote before the House. I coded major presidential speeches culled from the \textit{Public Papers of the President}, using Ragsdale’s (1998) coding scheme. I then created a dummy variable\textsuperscript{15} where “1” indicates that a major presidential speech or speeches occurred during the month directly preceding each vote in my data set, a lag supported by previous research on presidential agenda-setting (Fett 1992). I hypothesize that the presence of a strategically placed presidential speech (see Canes-Wrone 2001; Kernell 1997) may give the president the impression that he has motivated the House to support his position on a vote or series of subsequent House votes. The president may attempt to leverage this perceived capital by taking more positions on House votes under the assumption that his previous speeches will increase the probability of his success, although empirical evidence linking presidential speeches and presidential activity is mixed (Fett 1992; Shull

\textsuperscript{14} The opposite, however, also is possible and should be considered: perhaps presidents, as any good competitor at the apex of their careers, will be more likely to stay silent and rest on a string of successes vice face the possibility of subsequent defeats. This proposition leaves the coefficient and significance of this variable somewhat questionable, but the “success breeds more attempts” hypothesis seems a reasonable starting point.

\textsuperscript{15} I also constructed a continuous measure that is a count of the number of presidential speeches during the month prior to the vote being considered by the president. The model results were substantively equal to
and Shaw 1999). I expect that presidents giving major speeches in the month prior to a House floor vote will be more likely to take a position on floor votes within a month of those speeches, but—supporting previous research—the causal relationship will be tenuous and is not likely to be statistically significant.

Presidential Approval

I also include the public standing of the president in my model of presidential position-taking. Neustadt observed a connection between public opinion and the president’s legislative success, noting that “prestige” with the public is “a factor that may not decide the outcome in a given case but can affect the likelihoods in every case and therefore is strategically important to [the president’s] power” (Neustadt 1991, 78). This factor is, to an extent, under the president’s strategic control (Brace and Hinckley 1991, 1992, 1993; MacKuen 1983), and is one of the key resources, like professional reputation, that Neustadt exhorts presidents to guard carefully (1991, 90). Few scholars have been able to demonstrate a consistent approval effect across presidential administrations (Rivers and Rose 1985), and other tests of Neustadt’s presidential prestige hypothesis have provided only marginal support for presidential approval effects in the legislative arena (Bond and Fleisher 1990; Edwards 1989).

I recognize that approval is a tenuous predictor of influence at best, but I include it in my analysis for two reasons. First, although presidents may empirically receive little benefit in Congress from higher levels of public approval, public support may provide presidents with more presidential capital to spend by taking more positions in Congress.

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those using a dummy variable; the coefficients for the “major speeches” variables, however, were more robust and reliable.
Moreover, Light’s (1999) notion that presidential administrations progress from periods of high influence to greater effectiveness suggests that I should expect varying effects for presidential approval on presidential position-taking according to the point in a president’s term we are examining. When the honeymoon period fades and Congress begins to seriously evaluate the president’s policies and challenge his authority to legislate (Peterson et al. 2003), higher public approval levels could bolster a president’s confidence in taking a position before Congress. Conversely, presidents with the lowest approval ratings may, out of desperation, push legislation more frequently to attempt to regain lost political capital (Canes-Wrone 2001; Canes-Wrone and deMarchi 2002; Canes-Wrone et al. 2001). I anticipate that, in the aggregate and by-year presidential position-taking models below, the presidential approval coefficient will be positive. This coefficient, however, may change as presidents move through expansionist or protectionist periods in their terms.

I operationalize public approval of the president by using data obtained from the Gallup archive of presidential popularity.16 Because the influence of public opinion is unlikely to be immediate, I coded (for each bill in my analysis) the president's public approval for the month prior to that vote. For months in which more than one poll was taken, the mean approval rating is used. For cases in which approval data was unavailable for the month immediately before the vote, the approval rating from the closest preceding month serves as my measure.

16 The data for this analysis were obtained from the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut. The data can be found at http://roperweb.ropercenter.uconn.edu/cgi-bin/hsrun.exe/roperweb/PresJobRatings40/PresJobRatings40.htm;start=HS_presapproval_home. This site offers presidential approval ratings from FDR through George W. Bush.
3.4.3 The Legislative Context

Even though the president is able to influence legislative outcomes through his own actions, (Neustadt, 1960), the chief executive is a constrained actor operating within a legislative context that is often outside his control (Jones 2002; 1994). Partisan splits in Congress (Fleisher and Bond 2000; Edwards, Barrett, and Peake 1997; Bond and Fleisher 1990; Edwards 1989), legislator ideology and polarization (Cameron 2002; Edwards 2000; Shull and Shaw 1999; Bond and Fleisher 1990), and the increased probability of divided government in the modern presidential era (Mayhew 1991; Jones 1994; Cameron 2002) constrain the president’s ability to legislate in a traditional manner (Moe and Howell 1999a, 1999b; Howell 2003).

I include two measures that attempt to capture the legislative constraints under which presidents act. First, I generated a dummy variable for divided government that takes a value of “1” for those years in which the presidency and the House were controlled by different parties and “0” otherwise. Jones (1994, 2002) suggests that the rise in divided government over time places constraints on a president but also presents the executive with an opportunity to build coalitions. Cameron (2002) notes that divided government leaves the president with fewer bargaining options in Congress outside negative (vetoes) or unilateral (executive order) activity (see also Howell 2003; Mayer 1999; Krehbiel 1998).

Combining these two perspectives, I assess that divided government presents the president with more opportunities to take positions on votes in the House, but not for the same reasons cited by Jones (2002). I believe that divided government and polarized politics between the executive and legislative branches will increase the likelihood of the
president taking a position on House votes because doing so will allow him to highlight differences between himself and his opposition, muster votes from the opposition where possible (Canes-Wrone 2001), and, if necessary, blame policymaking failures on the opposition party in Congress (Groseclose and McCarty 2000; Cameron 2000). Moreover, I expect that this relationship will vary in sign and significance over the course of the president’s administration given the comparatively easier time presidents have legislating earlier in their terms and the need for presidents to play politics later in their terms in anticipation of the reelection season (Light 1999).

I also include a variable measuring the partisan split in Congress. As Edwards (2000) notes and Bond and Fleisher (1990) reinforce, the distribution of seats in the House is a critical factor in determining presidential success in Congress. As the president’s party sinks deeper in the minority, the probability of a president finding support from the House is lower, but a president with a large majority is more likely to meet with legislative success. Presidents with strong majorities seem more likely to take positions because legislative success is more likely.\textsuperscript{17} I expect that the coefficient in my aggregate model will be positive but not statistically significant. I also expect that, early in the president’s term, the partisan split will be overtaken by electoral momentum, making little difference in the president’s likelihood of taking a position. Nevertheless, as the president’s influence declines, deeper party divisions and reelection-seeking legislators may force the president to use his party’s advantage in the House to take positions more often, particularly during midterm and presidential election years.

\textsuperscript{17} Presidents with small numbers of members in the House, however, also may take more positions to blame the majority for failing to enact presidential initiatives or to draw a contrast between the president’s party and the opposition. This hypothesis is likely given the increasing presence of divided government, but
3.4.4 The External Environment: The Economy and the Legislative Agenda

Apart from the intricacies of inter-branch relations, presidents must respond to, and often be, America’s voice regarding prevailing economic and social phenomena (Edwards and Wood 1999). Moreover, Skowronek (1993) argues that presidents are constrained by the course of history, rendering the politics that presidents make deeply embedded in the historical context within which the chief executive operates.

The Economy

Presidents inherit economic conditions from their predecessors (Skowronek 1993; Peterson 1990), and this, in turn, can limit or expand presidential possibilities in the legislative arena (Broder 1981). Tight economic times trim presidential agendas (Light 1999) and force presidents to remain silent when they might have otherwise taken a position, and better economic conditions may provide the president with additional room to maneuver within Congress. To control for the economy’s potential effect on presidential position-taking, I include two economic measures: the quarterly change in the GDP (adjusted to FY 2000 dollars) and the monthly change in unemployment rate. Because the impact of changes in these indices is unlikely to immediately change a president’s behavior, I lagged each indicator by one unit (one quarter for GDP growth and one month for the unemployment rate). I expect that a president working in a positive economic environment will attempt to forward his agenda by taking more positions on House votes. Increases in the quarterly GDP and decreases in monthly unemployment
rates should be positively related to presidential position-taking. I further anticipate that the statistical significance of these coefficients will wax and wane over the course of the administration as presidents attempt to seize on good economic news for their own electoral and personal advantage.

Choosing Policies: The Two Presidencies and Key Votes

As discussed in Table 3.2 and Figures 3.2 through 3.5, the type of policy being considered in the House appears to drive some presidents to take positions but discourage others from spending capital on the floor of the House. Research on the two presidencies (Pepper 1975; Shull and LeLoup 1979; Sigelman 1979; Edwards 1986; Meernik 1993) suggests that presidents taking positions on foreign policy votes are more likely to receive deference from Congress and, thus, be more successful in having their positions adopted, a claim supported by Andres et al. (2000) who suggest that foreign policy—what the authors consider a “macro policy system”—easily receives broad bipartisan support and, thus, is likely to receive presidential attention when it comes before the House.

I account for the two-presidency notion (Wildavsky 1966) by including a dummy variable for which bills that specifically address foreign policy are coded “1,” all others “0.” A forward-looking executive probably will understand that Congress gives more leeway to presidents on foreign policy-related issues and will be more likely to take positions on foreign policy votes than on other votes before the House. I expect that the relationship between this variable and presidential position-taking will be positive and
statistically significant, reflecting the president’s calculus about Congress’s deferential stance.

I also have included in my models a variable that represents whether or not the vote being considered by Congress and the president was determined to be a “key vote” by *Congressional Quarterly*. Shull and Vanderleuw (1987) suggest that key votes provide researchers a representative measure of the important issues facing Congress. Edwards (1989) indicates the same, choosing to use key votes as the critical dependent variable in his analysis of presidential influence in Congress (see also Anderson and Meinke 2002). Key votes map closely to the president’s agenda (Edwards 2000) and should be included, if not as the selection criteria for a dependent variable, as an independent variable in any analysis of legislative support for the president. Howell (2003) supports a version of this approach by employing Mayhew’s (1991) *Sweep One* coding scheme to introduce a variable that measures a bill’s importance into his analysis of presidential executive orders. I expect that this variable will be positive and statistically significant in each of my models of presidential position-taking: salient issues facing Congress likely will be commented on by the president or, in fact, may have been driven to Congress’s agenda by the president.18

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18 Including this measure as an independent variable risks concerns about endogeneity: some key votes are designated as such specifically because the issue was part of the president’s platform or because the president took a public position. Of the 256 key votes in my data set, the president took a position on 180 of them, suggesting some variance in this variable and inclusion is merited. Acknowledging the potential endogeneity problems with models that include the key vote variable, I excluded that variable and ran the models again. The parameter estimates generated were nearly identical to those models in which the key vote variable was included.
3.5 Results and Discussion

The results of my probit analyses of presidential position-taking are displayed in Table 3.3.\textsuperscript{19} \textsuperscript{20} I find broad support for my hypotheses regarding the new measures I created to assess the importance of previous presidential activity. In addition, I find strong support for my hypotheses about variations in presidential position-taking over time. The data in Table 3.3 makes clear that presidency-centered variables shape presidential position-taking; the data also demonstrates that the legislative and external contexts within which the president pushes his agenda also wax and wane in importance during his term (see Table 3.3).

The results in Table 3.3 suggest that aggregate examinations of executive-legislative relations may misspecify or fail to assess with appropriate granularity differential covariate effects over time. As such, my models make a strong argument that analyses of any presidential or legislative activity must account for these variations across presidential regimes and within presidential terms. Column 1 in Table 3.3 presents the results of a model that aggregates House votes across the first four years of the administrations in this study, while Columns 2-5 present results examining presidential

\textsuperscript{19} The use of probit analysis typically requires the researcher to accept the assumption that the observations in the model are independent. Due to the nature of my data, particularly with respect to multiple instances of multiple positions being taken by individual presidents, a president’s decision to take a position, however, is likely to be conditioned by his personality, the regime period within which he takes positions, and possibly his prior behavior. In order to correct for these biases, I estimate my models using robust standard errors, applying Huber’s (1967) formula and clustering on individual members of Congress. This approach allows me to control for what may be potentially troublesome cross-unit correlation. Such methods also find support in scholarship utilizing similar data sets (Meinke and Anderson 2001; Caldeira and Wright 1998, Hojnacki and Kimball 1997).

\textsuperscript{20} Robust standard errors allow me to more properly estimate the standard errors of the parameter estimates, thus preventing potential Type I or Type II errors resulting from temporally- or spatially-correlated errors. The uncorrected standard errors, in my case, would likely possess some measure of temporal correlation due to the nature of multiple observations (presidential positions) per unit (the individual presidents). The use of robust standard errors in models of binary time-series cross-section data (which mine is) makes proper allowances for the temporal and spatial autocorrelation, essentially “tightening” or “loosening”
position-taking during each year of the administration. The proposition that covariates in
the model are fluid across political time is reflected in the results shown in the latter
columns. My assertion that the explanatory value of my model is conditional on the point
in a presidential administration during which the president takes a position also is
reflected in the results shown in Columns 2 through 5.

3.5.1 Presidential Effects Conditional

Presidency-centered covariates included in the model vary in direction and
significance, both within and between the probit models. As I expected, presidents who
were active in taking positions on House votes were more likely to take a position on the
next bill they considered. In the aggregate model, this coefficient is positive but not
statistically significant. This finding holds during the first and second years of the
president’s administration, when position-taking by the president is driven by
postelectoral forces and a president is interested in expanding his electoral coalition.

By the third and fourth years, the coefficients associated with previous legislative
activity are turned on their heads: presidents, who previously were active, slowed their
position-taking activity, and presidents, who previously were inactive, began taking
positions in earnest. The coefficients for years three and four are negative and, in year
three, statistically significant, offering support for my hypothesis that presidents have
expansionist and protectionist phases of their administrations. Presidents that fail to hit
the ground running try to make up for lost time in years three and four, sometimes after
their party loses ground following the midterm elections. Conversely, those presidents

parameter standard errors where appropriate (Beck and Katz 1995; Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1999). The
overall model fit (via likelihood-ratio tests), however, does not change.
that hit the ground running stand pat on their previous record during the last two years of the administration.

Past presidential policy success also varies in its influence on the probability of presidential position-taking in the House. The negative coefficient in the aggregate model suggests that a successful president may choose to protect a winning record and thus be less likely to take positions after periods of successfully pushing through other portions of his legislative agenda. Disaggregating these results by year indicates that presidents are aware of their successes and failures: when they fail frequently, presidents take positions more frequently following those losses; when presidents succeed frequently, they withhold subsequent positions and rest on their successes. During years one and two, the coefficients are positive and in year two, statistically significant. This suggests that, as presidents find success early, they build on that momentum, particularly during the second year after the honeymoon period has faded. In year three the coefficient, however, is negative and statistically significant. This suggests that the period immediately after the midterm election presents the president with an opportunity to make up for a poor record or protect a solid record later in the term.

With an election looming slightly more than a year away, the beginning of the third year of the president’s term is the last opportunity to define or redefine his legislative record. Presidents with solid legislative records may instead spend capital on campaigning, and those with poor legislative records may trade campaign time for legislative activity. In year four, the coefficient is again negative but not statistically significant. This suggests that, by the fourth year, presidential position-taking gives way to election year politics—illustrated in Figure 3.1—and that past legislative successes or
failures, although somewhat negatively shaping the president’s congressional activity, have little effect on his legislative strategy.

Although the major speeches variable had little effect in shaping a president’s willingness to take positions on House votes, it does mirror a broader conclusion one can draw from Table 3.3: there are marked differences in covariate effects across political time. In year one, the major speeches coefficient was positive, as expected—presidents during this first year were slightly more likely to take positions if they gave a major speech during the previous month. In years two and three, the sign, however, switched, suggesting that major speeches are not necessarily indicators of broader presidential initiatives in Congress. The sign again changed in year four—to positive—but the coefficient lacked statistical significance. Changes in variable sign and significance across political time suggest that presidential position-taking is fluid and conditional on the point in the administration at which a president legislates, providing preliminary support for the hypothesis that executive-legislative relations must be examined across time versus taking an aggregate analytical approach.

Finally, I included in my models a measure of public support for the president, suggesting that higher levels of presidential approval provide the president with a more permissive environment in which he can freely legislate. In the full model, the coefficient direction supports my hypothesis: presidents use public support to their advantage during the expansionist phase of their terms, and then protect that public support during the latter periods. This finding holds across the models of my first two years, as presidents expand their coalitions and use the capital with the public to legislate more aggressively. In the second year model, the coefficient is positive and statistically significant, suggesting that
presidents who are able to maintain momentum from the honeymoon period are likely to transfer that capital to the legislative arena in the form of more frequent position-taking in the House.

After the expansionist phase ends, presidents, however, appear to be more risk averse or acceptant, depending on their approval ratings. The negative and statistically significant coefficient in year three and the negative coefficient in year four indicate that popular presidents more frequently remain quiet as they solidify their political base and build electoral coalitions. Unpopular presidents, however, appear to increase their legislative activity in years three and four, both to recoup lost political capital and to begin to establish an electoral coalition. Not surprisingly, the two presidents with the lowest approval ratings in years three and four—Carter and Bush—were the most active in both years.

Overall, it is clear that variables emanating from and related to the executive branch asymmetrically shape the president’s willingness or ability to take positions on House votes. The president’s prior legislative activity, successes in Congress, and interactions with the public at differing times in the term are important in conditioning presidential position-taking. Most important, the models in Table 3.3, however, demonstrate that presidents work through phases in their administrations, much as members of Congress do over the course of their careers. Early in the administration, presidents appear to rely most on the penumbra of the honeymoon period to push forward their legislative agendas, and Republican presidents facing a Democratic majority were willing to push aggressively to define their party and their administrations. By year two, the president, however, must begin to use popular opinion, spend his political capital
more wisely, and rely on his own ideological predispositions to press forward with his agenda.

During years three and four, presidents clearly begin to use their prior legislative activity and success rates to shape how they approach legislating in the House. Presidents that failed to hit the ground running—either in terms of overall legislative activity or success in the House—appear more likely to be proactive during years three and four, perhaps to make up for time lost. These presidents invert the expansionist-protectionist expectation as they attempt to reestablish credibility with Congress and the public in advance of their upcoming reelection campaigns. Presidents that were successful and active early in the term appear more willing to rest on that success, protect the ground they claimed during the first two years, and focus their energies on their reelection campaigns. It is not surprising that the two presidents that trimmed back their legislative activity during years three and four—Reagan and Clinton—were successful in their reelection efforts, and those who scrambled during years three and four—Carter and Bush—failed with their reelection campaigns.

3.5.2 Constraining the President: the Legislative Context

A quick examination of Table 3.3 suggests that presidential position-taking is shaped by the president’s legislative context, but only during the middle two years of the term. I included a dummy variable for periods of divided government and a variable

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21 For example, presidents such as Jimmy Carter are likely to have been attempting to make up for lost time after early in his term he failed to establish an effective liaison relationship with his colleagues in the House. Conversely, Bill Clinton likely shied away from activity in the House during his third and fourth years because of the near-certain defeat of his legislative proposals at the hands of the GOP-controlled House. In both instances, it is possible to disentangle the coefficient effects for each presidency in the data set by examining archival data. Such analysis may shed additional light on what motivates presidents to take positions and how those decision dynamics change during the president’s term.
measuring the difference between the number of House seats held by the president’s party and that of the opposition. I expected that presidents in periods of divided government would be more likely to take positions to distinguish their own policies from those of the opposition party.

I find support for this hypothesis: coefficients for the divided government variable, although negative for the aggregate model, were positive in all model years except year one. The divided government variable is statistically significant in years two and three, suggesting that, as the midterm election approaches, presidents increase their legislative activity. This finding also supports the idea that divided government, rather than suppressing the probability of presidential activity in Congress, bolsters it.

Finally, I suggested that presidents having larger majorities in Congress would be more likely to take positions on House votes than those presidents facing a large majority of hostile partisans. Moreover, I suggested that this variable would vary in direction and significance, with honeymoon and reelection year effects complicating a president’s probability of taking positions in Congress. Finally, I hypothesized that strong partisan support in the intervening years—years two and three—would increase the likelihood that the president will take a position on House votes. The aggregate model supports this general assertion—the relationship between presidential majorities in Congress and presidential position-taking is positive but fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

During the intervening years—years two and three—my hypotheses suggested, and the models support, the conclusion that presidents are more likely to take positions on House votes when their parties control higher numbers of seats in Congress.
Presidents during these periods, according to Light (1999), rely more on being effective legislators and wield less affective influence over House members. Finally, presidents during year four, although still taking advantage of larger legislative majorities to take positions on votes before the House, were not significantly more likely to do so. This result reflects the complications that election year politics present for these models and for presidents attempting to forward their legislative agendas later in the term.

3.5.3 The External Environment and Building Political Capital

I earlier suggested the environment external to the executive-legislative dyad would either augment or deplete the president’s capital reserves, thereby bolstering or limiting the president’s ability to legislate in Congress. I included four measures intended to capture the president’s external environment—change in GDP, change in unemployment rates, foreign policy votes, and CQ key votes. I expected that prosperous economic times (higher GDP and lower unemployment) would provide the president with more capital and, thus, make it more likely that the president will spend that capital by taking positions on votes in the House. The aggregate results in Table 3.3 suggest that presidents presiding over GDP growth are more likely to take positions in Congress than presidents during periods of economic contraction. These results hold across each of the yearly models of presidential position-taking except year three, with statistically significant coefficients in years one, two, and four.

The coefficients for changes in the unemployment rate conform to my expectations during years one, two, and three, although the coefficients are not statistically significant. During year four, presidents were more likely to take positions on
House votes when unemployment was on the rise. The most likely explanation for this result is that presidents—seeing that political capital is sliding away due to economic downturns—attempt to mitigate the decline in political capital by being active in Congress. In this way, presidents can either divert attention away from the bad economic news or be able to claim that bad economic news is prompting immediate presidential action via position-taking in the House. Regardless, none of the unemployment coefficients reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

The foreign policy and CQ key vote coefficients conform to my expectations as well. Presidents were significantly more likely to take positions on foreign policy votes than they were on any other vote type. This finding is consistent both with the “two presidencies” thesis and the notion that presidents have more leeway on foreign policy. Presidents capitalize on that leeway by taking positions more frequently on foreign policy votes, likely in anticipation of receiving little resistance from members of Congress. In addition, presidents are significantly more likely to take positions on key votes in Congress across the aggregate and year-by-year models. This finding suggests—not surprisingly—that presidents seek out and take positions on the most salient votes before the House of Representatives.

3.5.4 Comparing Models: When Is It Easier to Explain Presidential Position-Taking?

As a brief aside, examination of the explanatory values of each my models is worthwhile to test the broader hypothesis that presidential agenda-setting—via position-taking—follows Light’s (1999) concept that presidents go through a cycle of decreasing influence and increasing effectiveness during their terms. With that theory, Light
suggests that presidents early on will have to do little but rely on the presidential
honeymoon period and the perception of a mandate to sway members of the House. I
would expect that my models would have a difficult time explaining presidential agenda-
setting during the first year, because myriad variables outside the president’s control—
including legislators’ own perceptions of the president’s mandate and viability as an
executive (Peterson et al. 2003)—shape how the president introduces his policy priorities.
As the term wears on, the luster of the presidential election, however, wears away,
requiring the president to rely on his legislative acumen, his fellow partisans, and perhaps
even personality to judge when it is best to spend political capital by taking a position on
a House vote. Models for the latter years of the president’s administration should be able
to escape the noise of the honeymoon period and better explain presidential position-
taking.

The data in Table 3.3 support this hypothesis: although the log-likelihoods
reported in model year one were statistically distinguishable from zero, the log-
likelihoods associated with model years two, three, and four suggest that those models far
better explained presidential position-taking during those periods. The models were most
strongly predictive during years two and three and tapered by a bit during year four. The
year four results is not surprising—as in year one, electoral forces are at hand and
presidents turn to campaigning rather than pressing forward their legislative agendas.

The statistical significance of the coefficients in Table 3.3 also indicates support
for Light’s (1999) “decreasing influence, increasing effectiveness” hypothesis. During
year one, only the foreign policy, CQ key vote, and GDP variables are statistically
significant, suggesting that all of the other variables either were unimportant in shaping
presidential position-taking or that they are being masked by variables not included in the models, such as variables measuring the honeymoon effect. In years two and three, many variables, however, are statistically significant, suggesting that presidents move quickly beyond the honeymoon period and begin shaping their agenda based on the capital they have and the capital they have already spent. By year four, only three variables, however, are statistically significant, suggesting, again, that electoral forces trump the coefficient effects. In summary, year-by-year modeling appears to provide support for Light’s (1999) assertion and sheds light on how presidents set agendas.

Summary: Presidential Position-Taking Across Political Time

The results reported in Table 3.3 are listed again in Table 3.4, although in the latter, the coefficients were converted to probabilities and then first differences were calculated using Tomz et al.’s (2003) Clarify plug-in for Stata (see also King et al. 2000). The first differences in Table 3.4 offer an intuitive representation of the probit coefficients provided in Table 3.3 (see Table 3.4).22

As expected, the first differences for the foreign policy and CQ key vote variables are positive and statistically significant. Particularly striking are the first differences in year four, when presidents were 22 and 20 percent more likely, respectively, to take positions on foreign policy votes and CQ key votes than on other votes before Congress. Similarly robust positive first differences are reported in all but the year two model. In

22 The bolded estimates in Table 3.4 are those coefficients that were statistically significant in Table 3.3. Highlighted estimates in Table 3.4 indicate results that were particularly striking because of their magnitudes or directions. The bolded and highlighted estimates allow for inter- and intra-administration comparisons of the probit coefficients from Table 3.3.
year two, other forces appear to have a greater impact in conditioning presidential position-taking.

Among the presidency-centered variables, a few first differences stand out. Increasing a president’s previous legislative activity from the 20th to the 80th percentile during the first two years of their terms rendered presidents 1 and 5 percent more likely to take positions, respectively, on the next vote in the House. Things, however, change in the third and fourth years: a substantial increase in the president’s legislative activity in years three and four produced 12- and 17-percent decreases, respectively, in the likelihood of presidents taking a position on the next vote in the House.

The president’s winning percentage evinces a similar, substantial turn toward the negative between years two and three, as does presidential popularity. The probability of a legislatively successful president taking a position drops precipitously from a 24-percent increase in year two to a 45-percent decline in year three. Similarly, presidents at the apex of their public popularity in year two were 11 percent more likely to take positions on House votes. Popular presidents only one year later evinced a 26-percent decrease in their likelihood of taking positions on House votes. These findings confirm that analyzing presidential position-taking in Congress requires a more subtle look than simply running aggregate models. Presidents respond to different incentives, constraints, and opportunities during each year of their administration, and accounting for these differences can shed additional light on what prompts presidents to take positions in Congress.

Finally, the two legislative context first differences suggest a substantial shift in likelihoods depending on whether or not the president is legislating during periods of
divided government and how advantaged the chief executive is by having a large
majority in the House. Although divided government depressed by 21 percent the
president’s likelihood of taking a position during year one, it substantially increased the
likelihood of the president taking positions on House votes later in his first term,
particularly during years two and three. A president legislating during his second year
and facing a hostile Congress was 85 percent more likely to take positions on House
votes than a unified government president. Results in year three were similar: divided
government prompted a 63-percent increase in the likelihood of presidents taking a
position. The House seat split variable similarly had robust effects in years two and three.
A shift in seat deficit (20th percentile) to overwhelming advantage (80th percentile)
produced 40- and 76-percent increases, respectively, in the president’s likelihood of
taking a position during years two and three.23

Overall, Table 3.4 provides a more intuitive picture of how presidential,
legislative, and external variables shape yearly presidential position-taking in the House.
In the next section, I will focus on regime time and how different presidents—constrained
by the historical period within which they legislate—leverage and spend their political
capital as they take positions on House votes.

3.5.5 Regime Time

I earlier discussed Skowronek’s (1993) concept of regime time, and although I
offered little detail regarding my expectations among regime types (disjunction,

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23 Such a radical first difference calculation suggests that the number may be an artifact of one particular
administration being picked up in the 20th percentile and another exclusively in the 80th percentile. With a
larger data set this result likely will settle to a more reasonable number.
articulation, reconstruction, and preemption), I indicated that I expected significant differences in the coefficients that help to explain the politics presidents make during each regime type. Table 3.5 suggests that presidents, across regime types, were uniformly more likely to take positions on foreign policy votes. In addition, the politics of the president of disjunction in this study (Carter) were more responsive to items outside the president’s control, such as changes in the GDP and the dissipating time-based effects of rally events (see Table 3.5).

Presidents of reconstruction (Reagan) were more likely to take advantage of legislative circumstances favoring their party—indicated by the positive and statistically significant coefficient for the party split variable. Moreover, Reagan appeared less likely to take positions on House votes during periods of high unemployment rates. Taken another way, Reagan was more likely to take positions during periods of low unemployment, a finding that suggests that Reagan was an opportunist who well used the political capital generated during periods of positive economic news. George H.W. Bush—a president of articulation—was less likely to take advantage of instances when political capital may have been built, such as good economic news, a higher win-loss record, or periods of higher presidential popularity. In fact, it appears that Bush, instead, more frequently took positions when he was in trouble, as the negative coefficient on presidential popularity suggests. Finally, Bill Clinton—like George H.W. Bush—saw opportunities to take positions during periods of increased unemployment and withdrew from position-taking following major speeches. He also was far less likely to take positions later in his term, particularly after the high win-loss record he attained in Congress during the first two years of his administration.
Table 3.5, however, says little about particular presidential regime types. Appendix A, Tables A.1 through A.5 provide more insight into how presidents of disjunction (Carter), reconstruction (Reagan), articulation (Bush), and preemption (Clinton) press forward their agendas in the House (see Appendix A, Tables A.1 through A.5).

Presidents of disjunction begin their terms with little political capital, struggle to build momentum, and often find themselves in precarious situations as their reelection draws nearer, as appears to have been the case for Jimmy Carter. According to Table A.2, Carter frequently took positions on foreign policy and votes later determined to be key votes. Early in his term, Carter appears to have been conservative with or incapable of effectively using his political capital: the more he legislated previously, the less likely he was to subsequently take positions. Moreover, Carter took advantage of high presidential approval; increases in public approval were positively related to President Carter’s activity in the House.

Perhaps the most striking results in Table A.2 are those for 1979. In that year, three presidency-centered variables (prior legislative activity, winning percentage, and presidential popularity) were all negatively and significantly related to the probability of President Carter taking a position on a House vote, as though Carter attempted to make up for lost time early in his administration by hitting the ground running following the

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24 This coefficient suggests that the less he legislated previously, the more likely he was to subsequently take positions. Given that Carter had a difficult time establishing a liaison relationship with Congress and that he failed to hit the ground running as a result, the coefficient very well could be attributable to that slow start and the gradual acceleration of his legislative efforts during the second year of his term. Carter’s outsider status may have left him uncertain about how to best approach Congress with his legislative priorities and, while struggling to get started with his agenda, was overly protective of his political capital. Both conditions resulted in his administration moving more slowly and gradually accelerating its legislative activity over time—circumstances that would produce a negative coefficient in Table A.2.
midterm. Middling legislative activity during years one and two was scuttled in favor of a more aggressive agenda. As the public turned against Carter, he attempted to turn down the heat by taking positions on salient issues before Congress. During his reelection year, Carter again took more positions in Congress when his approval ratings were at a low point, but also was responsive to upticks in the GDP, perhaps attempting to seize on good news—and more political capital—to squeeze in a few more agenda items in the House.

The year-by-year models (see Table A.3) for the Reagan administration present similar results, although as a president of reconstruction, Reagan had broad latitude early in his administration that is not easily reflected in these models.\(^{25}\) During his first year, the presence of a major speech during the month prior to a House vote was a positive, but somewhat weak, a sign that a presidential position was on the way. As noted in Chapter 2, President Reagan effectively used public speeches to press Congress to action, and public speeches, not surprisingly, were cues by Reagan that he intended to take positions on House votes. Reconstruction presidents during their first year should be expected to use the mandate the public conferred on them to carry their legislative agendas forward.

During his second year, Reagan used the capital generated by his popularity to continue pushing his legislative agenda, even after the honeymoon subsided. Reagan attempted to maintain his political capital by taking fewer positions as the unemployment rate rose 0.4 percent in 1982. Reagan also seized on the presidential capital resulting from GDP growth by taking more positions more frequently. In all, Reagan managed his political capital very well in 1982 and 1983. Following the midterm, Reagan effectively closed up shop, trimming back his legislative activity in year three after having a

\(^{25}\) Presidential personality or the broader “policy mandate” associated with reconstruction presidents may play a significant explanatory role.
successful first two years. Major speeches no longer were signals of pending presidential activity in the House, and his successes failed to spur subsequent attempts to build legislative momentum. As his popularity increased, Reagan became less involved in Congress—likely in an attempt to protect his reelection coalition.

By his fourth year, Reagan used the bully pulpit to foreshadow his legislative activities. He also built on legislative failures and a lower position-taking regimen during his third year by aggressively legislating during his fourth year, as the previous legislative activity and winning percentage coefficients indicate. In all, Reagan conformed to what one might expect from a reconstruction president: he had significant latitude to legislate during the first year of his administration, and that latitude allowed him to pursue a protectionist strategy during the third year of his term. He then followed that protectionist strategy by taking a number of positions during his fourth that distinguished himself and his party as his reelection approached.

President Bush, as a regime articulator, followed a president who made significant legislative strides during his two terms. Regime articulators attempt to maintain the status quo and perceive their elections as a continuation of the reconstruction mandate. Articulators, however, may mistakenly assume that they will have the wiggle room afforded to their predecessors. This appears to be the case in Table A.4: President Bush legislated infrequently early in his term, despite positive economic news and high levels of public approval (see Table A.4).

During his first two years, Bush had opportunities to build political capital by seizing on good news and then pressing forward with his agenda, but did not. Only after suffering a significant midterm loss and watching the public approval generated by the
Gulf War slip away did Bush initiate an aggressive legislative agenda. Regime articulators, such as Bush, often find that the course of history catches up to them, and, before they realize it, the sheen from the reconstruction president’s administration has worn off and the difficulties for the regime articulator have begun. Years three and four for President Bush appear to be those difficult times, and he attempted to make up for lost ground by following major speeches with position-taking in the House. He also attempted to attenuate the bad news of higher unemployment by legislating more frequently during his fourth year. Overall, my models conform to my expectations about regime articulation presidents: their sense of security during the first two years of their terms subsides, and they spend the remainder of their term trying to rebuild political capital that was fleeting and, perhaps, only present immediately following their elections.

Finally, Table A.5 presents coefficients for each year of the preemptive president in my data set, Bill Clinton. Preemptive presidents believe that they are the vanguard of a new realignment and legislate according to that belief. The policy mandates these presidents believe they have, however, may be illusory. I would expect that preemptive presidents would hit the ground running and call on the levers they have available to press forward with a reformist agenda. Table A.5 appears to offer evidence to support this: during his first year, Clinton legislated more frequently on foreign policy and votes determined later to be key votes. Although he appeared to build on his momentum during the first year—legislating more frequently based on past position-taking volume and building on a winning record—these coefficients failed to reach conventional levels of significance. Clinton used the capital generated by a rise in GDP to stake out positions in the House. The unemployment coefficient in the first year model suggests that Clinton
legislated more frequently when unemployment was on the rise; a closer look at the data, however, reveals that during most of his first year in office, unemployment surged and declined. This suggests either that Clinton failed to take advantage of the political capital that lower unemployment may have afforded him (by legislating less frequently vice more) or that when unemployment rose, Clinton legislated more frequently to distract Congress and the public from the bad economic news.

After the first year, one would expect a preemptive president to maintain an aggressive agenda and to begin using his faculties as president to see through his priority policies or to protect his remaining capital in advance of the midterm election. Clinton’s second and third years—1994 and 1995—support the latter notion. Clinton—seeing a storm rising on the Republican side of the House—tapered back his legislative activity in mid- and late-1994 after pushing a substantial legislative agenda in Congress in 1993. He also rested a bit on the successes he had in 1993 and early 1994 by scaling back his position-taking, as evidenced by the negative and statistically significant coefficient associated with the previous winning percentage variable. He, however, continued to make hay as the economy grew: in the 1994 model, the coefficient associated with change in GDP is positive and significant.

By 1995, Clinton’s legislative activity suggests that the revolution he believed he was leading had crumbled. Republican control of the House and the staggering seat swing that accompanied it drove Clinton to expand rather than limit his legislative activity. The midterm losses thrust Clinton back into an aggressive position-taking mode after he
limited such activity in 1994. Clinton took advantage of rises in the GDP and later spent
the political capital on position-taking in the House. As in 1993, decreases in the
unemployment rate were positively and significantly related to increases in the likelihood
of the president taking a position on House votes. As before, this relationship either
suggests a failed opportunity on Clinton’s part or that, when bad economic news came,
Clinton tried to legislate his way out of it.

In either case, the positive relationship between rising unemployment and
presidential position-taking persists during Clinton’s fourth year, although the
relationship fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. The only other
variable that is statistically significant is the prior legislative activity measure. In 1996,
Clinton again cut back his legislative activity after having aggressively legislated during
the previous year.

Summary

In sum, Tables A.2 through A.5 suggest that regime time—perhaps in concert
with the personalities of presidents elected during these regime periods—clearly deserves
more investigation, perhaps with an expanded data set accounting for all of the modern
presidents. Presidents during Skowronek’s (1993) regime periods respond differently to
their external environments and bring different sets of tools to bear as they determine
whether or not to act in the legislative arena. A broader analysis of presidential position-
taking may allow me to make stronger generalizations about the politics presidents make
during the regime types Skowronek notes in his work.

26 Clinton’s veto threats activity, highlighted in Chapter 2, indicate that he was forced more frequently
during the second half of his term to take negative stances on the floor in response to the GOP majority’s
3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored presidential activity in Congress by employing a novel approach to studying presidential position-taking in the House of Representatives. Combining a sample of presidential position votes with a randomly generated sample of votes upon which the president stayed silent, I analyzed the relationships between variables under the president’s control and those in the legislative and external environments. Perhaps most important, I explored the relevance of political time and regime time, two concepts that overlay and may ultimately shape the politics presidents make.

I discovered a number of important results. First, models of presidential position-taking—and perhaps presidential activity more generally—may draw erroneous conclusions if they fail to include measures of political or regime time. Many of the aggregate models in this study suggested few relationships between my covariates and my dependent variable, presidential position-taking. Disaggregating those models by time periods, I found that the expansionist and protectionist periods of a president’s administration (Fenno 1978), the cycle of increasing effectiveness and decreasing influence (Light 1999), and the regime period within which the president is embedded all shaped presidential activity.

Second, I discovered that the concept of presidential capital must be a part of studies of presidential activity. Attaching many of my hypotheses to concepts of accrued political capital, I was able to offer some explanations of how presidents are able to selectively take positions when political capital is at its highest and remaining silent when
doing so mutes the opposition and allows the president to build coalitions without much
fanfare. I incorporated novel measures of past presidential activity and success to better
understand how the politics presidents made shape the politics presidents make.

Finally, I demonstrated that the vanguard of presidency scholarship, most of
which focuses on negative or preemptive power, should take into account a president’s
decision to work with the legislature. Understanding the conditions under which
activities, such as presidential position-taking, occur and the consequences presidential
position-taking has for all subsequent presidential activities seem to be ripe for study
given the growing prevalence of formal models describing presidential-executive
relations (Cameron 2000; Moe and Howell 1999; Howell 2003). I believe my work on
presidential position-taking—along with similar work by Shull and Shaw (1999)—is a
start in the right direction and could become part of the broader research agenda on
unilateral and cooperative presidential activities that currently is generating momentum
among presidency scholars.

In the next chapter, I examine the next stage of the executive-legislative
relationship—legislative support for the president. I incorporate the concepts of political
and regime time and demonstrate that past studies of legislative support for the president,
by failing to account for these different temporal concepts, threaten to draw erroneous
conclusions about executive or legislative dominance in the policy process.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President (Years)</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ronald Reagan (1981-1984)</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Clinton (1993-1996)</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>1595</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.1:**
**Presidential Position-Taking by Year**
Figure 3.1:
MONTHLY PRESIDENTIAL POSITION-TAKING, CARTER THROUGH CLINTON
### TABLE 3.2:
**Presidential Position-Taking by Policy Vote Type, 1977-1996**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President (Years)</th>
<th>Foreign</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Bureaucracy</th>
<th>Procedural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy Carter (1977-80)</td>
<td>157 (0.349)</td>
<td>178 (0.396)</td>
<td>59 (0.131)</td>
<td>19 (0.042)</td>
<td>25 (0.056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronald Reagan (1981-84)</td>
<td>106 (0.306)</td>
<td>128 (0.370)</td>
<td>53 (0.153)</td>
<td>1 (0.003)</td>
<td>7 (0.020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George H.W. Bush (1989-92)</td>
<td>119 (0.291)</td>
<td>213 (0.521)</td>
<td>57 (0.139)</td>
<td>3 (0.007)</td>
<td>11 (0.027)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Clinton (1993-96)</td>
<td>99 (0.253)</td>
<td>191 (0.487)</td>
<td>71 (0.181)</td>
<td>11 (0.028)</td>
<td>13 (0.033)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>481 (0.316)</td>
<td>710 (0.467)</td>
<td>240 (0.158)</td>
<td>34 (0.022)</td>
<td>56 (0.037)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

47 Listed in parentheses is the proportion of positions taken on a particular vote type based on all the votes upon which the president took a position.
Figure 3.2:
Presidential Position-Taking by Policy Type,
Carter Administration, 1977-80
Figure 3.3:
Presidential Position-Taking by Policy Type
Reagan Administration, 1981-84
FIGURE 3.4:
PRESIDENTIAL POSITION-TAKING BY POLICY TYPE
GEORGE H.W. BUSH ADMINISTRATION, 1989-92
**Figure 3.5:**
Presidential Position-Taking by Policy Type
Clinton Administration, 1993-96
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy Vote</td>
<td>0.491</td>
<td><strong>0.249</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.571</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.626</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.588</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQ Key Vote</td>
<td>0.621</td>
<td><strong>0.482</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.642</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.874</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.553</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presidency Centered</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Activity</td>
<td>0.501</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>7.585</td>
<td><strong>-7.661</strong></td>
<td><strong>-7.120</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning %</td>
<td>-0.083</td>
<td>0.205</td>
<td>3.612</td>
<td><strong>-5.366</strong></td>
<td><strong>-1.996</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Speeches</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>-0.057</td>
<td>-0.125</td>
<td>0.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td><strong>-0.024</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.009</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legislative Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divided Gov’t</td>
<td>-0.101</td>
<td>-0.547</td>
<td>3.385</td>
<td><strong>2.328</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.263</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seat Split</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td><strong>0.015</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.007</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ GDP %</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>* 0.036</td>
<td>* 0.025</td>
<td><strong>-0.028</strong></td>
<td>0.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ Unemployment %</td>
<td>0.193</td>
<td>0.137</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td>-0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.285</td>
<td>-0.469</td>
<td>-8.496</td>
<td><strong>5.043</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.258</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Obs.</td>
<td>3252</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>784</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2 log-likelihood (d.f. = 10)</td>
<td>146.29</td>
<td><strong>17.59</strong></td>
<td>* 57.69</td>
<td><strong>86.67</strong></td>
<td><strong>47.26</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Probit maximum likelihood estimate coefficients reported. Statistical significance calculated using robust standard errors.

* p < 0.10  ** p < 0.05

**Table 3.3:** Predicting Presidential Position-Taking in the U.S. House
TABLE 3.4: PRESIDENTIAL POSITION-TAKING IN THE U.S. HOUSE: FIRST DIFFERENCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Full</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy Vote</td>
<td>+0.19</td>
<td>+0.09</td>
<td>+0.06</td>
<td>+0.18</td>
<td>+0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQ Key Vote</td>
<td>+0.24</td>
<td>+0.18</td>
<td>+0.06</td>
<td>+0.24</td>
<td>+0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presidency Centered</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Legislative Activity</td>
<td>+0.01</td>
<td>+0.01</td>
<td>+0.05</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Win-Loss Record</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>+0.03</td>
<td>+0.24</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Speeches</td>
<td>+0.01</td>
<td>+0.04</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>+0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Popularity</td>
<td>+0.01</td>
<td>+0.03</td>
<td>+0.11</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legislative Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divided Government</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>+0.85</td>
<td>+0.63</td>
<td>+0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Seat Split</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>+0.40</td>
<td>+0.76</td>
<td>+0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ GDP %</td>
<td>+0.02</td>
<td>+0.03</td>
<td>+0.01</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>+0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ Unemployment %</td>
<td>+0.03</td>
<td>+0.02</td>
<td>+0.01</td>
<td>+0.01</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

48 First differences calculated using Tomz et al’s (2003) Clarify plug-in for Stata available at http://gking.harvard.edu/stats. First differences for continuous variables were calculated by setting all other model variables at the mean, median or mode and setting the continuous variable at the 20th and 80th percentile values, and subtracting the predicted probability of the latter from the former. For categorical variables, all other model variables were set at their mean, median, or modal values and predicted probabilities were generated for each category for the variable of interest. In all cases, these categorical variables were dichotomous (p(max) – p(min)).

49 The bolded estimates in Table 3.4 are those coefficients that were statistically significant in Table 3.3. Highlighted estimates in Table 3.4 indicate results that were particularly striking because of their magnitudes or directions. The bolded and highlighted estimates allow for inter- and intra-administration comparisons of the probit coefficients from Table 3.3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Carter</th>
<th>Reagan</th>
<th>Bush</th>
<th>Clinton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( \beta _A )</td>
<td>( \beta _A )</td>
<td>( \beta _A )</td>
<td>( \beta _A )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POLICY TYPE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy Vote</td>
<td>0.710 **</td>
<td>0.363 **</td>
<td>0.406 **</td>
<td>0.424 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQ Key Vote</td>
<td>0.456 **</td>
<td>0.501 **</td>
<td>0.716 **</td>
<td>0.860 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRESIDENCY CENTERED</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Legislative Activity</td>
<td>-0.220</td>
<td>0.602</td>
<td>-0.802</td>
<td>1.203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning Percentage</td>
<td>-1.829 **</td>
<td>-0.332</td>
<td>0.223</td>
<td>-0.726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Speeches</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>-0.089</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>-0.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Popularity</td>
<td>0.007 **</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.009 **</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Seat Split</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>0.010 *</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.002 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXTERNAL CONTEXT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \Delta ) GDP %</td>
<td>0.016 **</td>
<td>0.029 *</td>
<td>-0.061 **</td>
<td>-0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \Delta ) Unemployment %</td>
<td>0.178</td>
<td>-0.706 *</td>
<td>0.545 **</td>
<td>0.649 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.960 **</td>
<td>0.687</td>
<td>0.721</td>
<td>-0.603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Obs.</td>
<td>923</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2 log-likelihood</td>
<td>72.41</td>
<td>28.81</td>
<td>40.96</td>
<td>51.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Probit maximum likelihood estimate coefficients reported. Statistical significance calculated using robust standard errors.

* p < 0.10
** p < 0.05

**TABLE 3.5:**
**Presidential Position-Taking in the U.S. House, By President**
CHAPTER 4

LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT FOR THE PRESIDENT

4.1 Introduction

Presidents rely on Congress to make their agendas a reality. Congress, in turn, cues on the capital a president possesses and the time period during which challenging issues are being discussed and debated. In this chapter, I introduce two dominant strains in the literature on legislative-executive relations on the floors of Congress. I next integrate the concepts of presidential capital and political and regime time into the discussion, arguing that extant studies of legislative-executive relations that fail to include these concepts likely reach misplaced conclusions about the dominance of one branch of government over another. I test the relevance of the unique measures discussed in the last chapter—such as past presidential activities and legislative success—in shaping legislative support for the president.

Finally, I introduce models of legislative support for the president that include these temporal and capital-related measures, finding that carefully and properly specified models of a legislature’s propensity to support the president challenges existing conclusions about legislative or presidential dominance of the legislative process. These findings build upon those in the last chapter and provide again a more detailed picture of the normal legislative process than provided in existing studies of presidential and
legislative relations. Most important to my analysis of legislative support for the president is an understanding of how and when the legislative and executive bodies dominate one another, thus, shaping the president’s legislative agenda. It is to that question I now turn.

4.2 Analytic Approach and Expectations

In this section, I detail the analytic approach and hypotheses undergirding my discussion of House support for presidential positions. I first discuss the sample of votes to be analyzed: the complete set of votes upon which the president took a position during the first terms of Presidents Carter through Clinton. I next outline my dependent variable—the legislature’s decision whether or not to collectively support the president’s position on a vote before the House—by arguing that an examination of all presidential position votes provides a more accurate picture of the breadth and depth of legislative support for the president.

I then turn to a discussion of time as a critical component in conditioning presidential success in Congress. As in previous chapters, I suggest that temporal phenomena, such as those suggested by Light (1999), Skowronek (1993), and Fenno (1978), are relevant to our understanding of presidential success in the House of Representatives.

Finally, I divide my explanatory variables—including past presidential activity variables unique to this dissertation—into familiar categories from previous chapters: presidency, congress, and externally-centered covariates. I examine the impact of these rigorously collected independent variables to forward the argument that political and
regime time and past presidential activity shape Congress’s support for the president’s agenda.

4.2.1 The Dependent Variable: The House’s Support for the President

I draw again from the data set used in the previous chapter to examine presidential position-taking in Congress. The data set includes nearly 1,600 votes upon which the president took a position. I use these presidential position votes as a leaping-off point for understanding presidential position-taking in the U.S. House.

Presidential position-taking and legislative support for the president are among the most studied subjects in presidential scholarship (see Weisberg et al. [1999] for a review of much of this literature), and the extensive analysis of legislative support for the president provides a number of potential points of departure in selecting a dependent variable for this chapter.

One approach to measuring legislative support for the president is the presidential box scores and support scores developed by Congressional Quarterly (Hammond and Fraser 1984; Cohen 1982; Edwards 1980). Edwards (1989) and Peterson (1990), however, note that indexed presidential box and support scores—the raw percentage of bills upon which the legislator or legislature, respectively, supported the president during a particular year—may mask the importance of particular bill types or the priority that the president put on ensuring the vote’s passage or inflate the importance of bills that generated a number of presidential positions and subsequent House votes during a particular year. Light (1999) further notes that the gravity of the bills upon which the president takes a position varies greatly among the years of the president’s
administration; aggregate support or box scores fail to account for this asymmetry and risk producing biased or mistakenly interpreted estimates of legislative support for the president.

Edwards (1989), Bond and Fleisher (1990), and Covington et al. (1995) propose analyzing legislative support for the president by examining only those roll call votes that failed to generate unanimous support. Arguing that analyzing controversial legislation—those votes upon which 80 percent or fewer legislators supported the president’s position—provides a more accurate picture of the true universe of bills over which the president may need to have an effect, these authors suggest that passage of those bills is more difficult than bills receiving unanimous or near-unanimous support. Analyzing presidential support in Congress in this manner, however, selects on the dependent variable and again risks producing researcher-introduced bias into the parameter estimates generated in any quantitative analysis (King, Keohane, and Verba 1989). Assessing the degree to which presidents can influence legislators becomes difficult if only a subset of the votes upon which the president took a position is included in the data set.

Legislative support for the president may also be assessed by examining individual votes before Congress. Edwards (1989, 22) creates a “Single Vote Support Index” that aggregates the most important nonunanimous votes upon which the president took a position during the period analyzed. Edwards therein acknowledges that there is no objective way to determine the most important vote on a bill and, thus, chooses Congressional Quarterly “key votes” as an indicator of the most important vote on an issue. When a “key vote” designation, however, is unavailable, he includes the vote on
the final passage of the bill or the most closely contested remaining vote on the same bill. Bond and Fleisher (1990) disaggregate Edwards’ index, instead examining legislative support for the president at the individual vote level. Both of these methods better capture the decision of the legislative collective to support the president’s position, but select on the dependent variable and rely on subjective evaluations of vote importance that may not map to politics surrounding the vote.

The presence—or lack—of conflict between the president and Congress represents another means by which legislative support for the president has been measured. Peterson (1990) suggests that the potential outcomes of legislative votes map to a hierarchy of presidential preferences. Here, the president strictly prefers consensus outcomes, in which both the president and legislature agree to an executive initiative, to outcomes that evince presidential dominance, compromise, strategic inaction, or opposition dominance.

Peterson’s examination of legislative concurrence with executive initiatives goes farther than most analyses of legislative support for the president. Peterson carefully assesses the disposition of all presidential initiatives—even those that fail to make it through committee. Even so, his approach suffers from two potential pitfalls. First, his dependent variable requires that bills be subjectively coded to conduct subsequent ordered probit analysis. Ordinal categories also present a host of concerns. First, ordinal dependent variables provide insight into the order of an individual’s preferences but cannot account for the strength of those preferences nor map the ordinal categories
distances to individual preferences.\textsuperscript{50} Second, the structure of the dependent variable assumes that the distance between categories is equal when, in fact, may not be.

Finally, examinations of legislative support for the president have opted for broad analyses of “key votes” before the House. Shull and Vanderleuw (1987) suggest that key votes provide researchers a representative measure of the important issues facing Congress, and Edwards (2000; 1989) indicates the same, choosing to use key votes as the critical dependent variable in his analysis of presidential influence in Congress. Anderson and Meinke (2002) examine legislative support for the president on key votes, but disaggregate the measure further to examine individual legislator support for the president.

Key votes clearly are important but also risk selecting on the dependent variable by analyzing legislative support for the president only on bills that received significant play in the press or via presidential platforms. Contrary to the use of key votes, Covington (1987) suggests that a president, rather than attempting to make news with his position on a vote before Congress, may instead opt to make his position clear but keep it as quiet as possible. Doing otherwise—particularly on the grand scale suggested by a key vote designation—could complicate a president’s efforts to have his agenda items passed by the House. Key votes, however, map very closely to the president’s agenda (Edwards 2000) and should be included, if not as the selection criteria for a dependent variable, as an independent variable in any analysis of legislative support for the president. Howell (2003) supports a version of this approach by employing Mayhew’s (1991) \textit{Sweep One}

\textsuperscript{50} That is, that an individual using ordered probit implicitly assumes that the preferences being imputed to the actors being analyzed—in this case, the president—proceed by one unit increments or that “opposition dominance” is one unit less in a president’s preference structure than “strategic inaction.” Ordinal
coding scheme to introduce a variable that incorporates a bill’s importance into his analysis of presidential executive orders.

For the purposes of this analysis, my interest is in the legislature’s discrete decision to support the president on a bill before the House. That discrete choice suggests an unadulterated dichotomous dependent variable—the House’s decision whether or not to support the president on all bills upon which the president took a position. This measure has the advantage of being an objective assessment of the legislature’s decision to support the president; minimizing concerns about selection on the dependent variable;\(^5\) and increasing the \(n\) value in my quantitative analyses, a problem that often plagues presidency research (see King 1993). Moreover, this measure is agnostic as to presidential preferences—apart from the assumption that he would rather have his position supported than ignored—and it conveys the legislature’s collective decision to support or deny the president’s agenda in the House.

Including all votes upon which the president took a position during the Carter through Clinton administrations allows for an examination of the breadth and depth of the bills facing Congress and how the House disposes of all legislation upon which the president takes a position. Table 4.1 provides descriptive data for the dependent variable—the House’s support for presidential position votes. The table is broken apart

---

5\(^1\) Peterson’s (1990) appendix on dependent variable selection makes a strong case that understanding presidential outcomes in Congress requires an examination of all presidential agenda items, which concurrently requires examination of the disposition of all presidential initiatives, from committee to final votes on the floor of the House. Van Doren (1990) further notes that examination of roll call data, in and of itself, is biased given that votes achieving floor status in the House are but a small subset of all bills facing Congress. Edwards (2000), however, suggests that roll call votes—and in particular, key votes—map very closely to the president’s agenda, suggesting that a comprehensive examination of the votes upon which the president took a position should closely approximate the breadth and depth of interactions between the president and Congress.
according to political time, with each presidential administration year listed separately (see Table 4.1).

One trend emerges from Table 4.1: presidents that take positions during periods of divided government are much less likely to receive House support than presidents that legislate during unified periods. Presidents Carter and Clinton—who presided over unified government for two and four years, respectively—had remarkably high levels of support in the House. Carter’s winning percentages of 75, 70, 72, and 77 percent reflect the majority his party had during each period of his first term, respectively. After the honeymoon period—and after he failed to hit the ground running—Carter appears to have been able to build momentum and, following Light’s (1999) notion, increase his effectiveness over time.52

Clinton, too, had tremendous success during his first two years. After 12 years of Republican rule in the White House, Clinton’s partisans in the House appeared willing to fully support his agenda. Two consecutive years of 87 percent support in the House were the highest among the presidents in this analysis. Clinton’s extraordinary support in the first two years, however, slipped dramatically in his third and fourth years. With Republicans earning control of the House in 1995, Clinton’s success rate slipped just over 60 percentage points to 26 percent in 1995. Similar to Carter, and following Light’s assertions about increasing effectiveness, Clinton was able to muster more support in the 1996 election year, which may have been due as much to Clinton’s legislative acumen as

52 These results comport with those found in Fleisher et al. (2005) who also found—after analyzing in a step-wise fashion presidential success in Congress—that no president is unusually successful above all of the others. This argument strengthens my assertions regarding political and regime time and calls into question presidential personality findings that argue that some presidents have the innate ability to be overwhelmingly successful in their dealings with Congress.
it was to Republicans moderating their policy positions in advance of the upcoming presidential and House elections.

Presidents Reagan and Bush—both legislating during periods of divided government—achieved more legislative victories early in their terms, with that success tapering off dramatically in subsequent years. Reagan built momentum early, garnering support for 72 percent of the bills upon which he took a position; a striking result given that he faced a Democratic majority in the House but consistent with Skowronek’s (1993) assertions about the coalition-building power of reconstruction presidents. Reagan’s relative legislative success continued in his second year but tapered off after his party’s significant seat losses in the 1982 midterm elections. By year four, Reagan, however, was again able to at least achieve support for slightly more than 50 percent of his legislative initiatives.

President George H.W. Bush was not as fortunate as Reagan; in his first year, Bush garnered support for slightly more than 50 percent of the positions he took, a number that dropped precipitously in his second year and ticked up just slightly in year three, before again dropping in year four. Bush’s presidency suggests that the momentum that articulation presidents believe they inherited from their predecessors plummets not long after they take office. Moreover, articulation presidents, such as Bush, may simply be victims of circumstances beyond their control, such as a poor economy or a polarized opposition. Finally, Bush may have been a victim of his own success: although his polling numbers reached record highs in years two and three of his administration, his support in the House remained at remarkably low levels. Bush’s lack of support in the House may have been due precisely to his high public standing—Democrats in the House
subverted Bush’s legislative agenda to render him more vulnerable during the next election.

Figures 4.1 through 4.4 illustrate some of the same points, but in a month-by-month manner, allowing an even closer examination of the dynamics of the House’s support for the president (see Figures 4.1 through 4.4). These figures break apart the number of times the president’s position was supported by the House (labeled “win”) and the number of times the House chose not to accept the president’s position on a House vote (labeled “loss”). The figures suggest that there is a relatively consistent periodicity to presidential wins and losses. Presidents appear to build on House support by legislating more frequently and reaping the benefits of that activity. Between months 21 and 23 (September through November of the second year of the term) the difference between presidential “wins” and “losses” was greater than during most other months listed in Figures 4.1 through 4.4. This finding supports the concept of presidential momentum; when presidents win, they win in bundles during discrete periods of their terms.

Moreover, different presidents—perhaps owing to the regime period over which they presided—experienced some variance in the House’s support for their vote positions.

Figure 4.1 indicates that President Carter’s win-to-loss ratio peaked during months 19-22, but also saw surges during months 29-31 and month 41. The president’s wins during months 19-22 owed primarily to a cluster of foreign policy votes in the House, such as lifting trade embargoes against Turkey, purchasing Indian rupees, and maintaining funding for the Inter-American Development Bank. His legislative wins during months 29-31, however, were a more even mix of domestic and foreign policies, from foreign assistance to Egypt to amendments for and against the creation of the
Department of Education. During the months leading to the 1980 presidential election, Carter’s legislative peak in month 41 was again a mix of foreign, economic, and domestic policy votes. President Carter’s successes during this period included votes on the elimination of funds for the MX missile, approval of the House concurrent budget resolution for FY 1981, and the maintenance of funding for the Federal Food Stamp program.

President Bush’s term closely mirrored Carter’s with respect to his win-to-loss ratio. Figure 4.3 indicates that President Bush’s margin of support in the House peaked in month 22 and again between months 40 and 44. During month 22—October 1990—President Bush successfully took positions on the expansion of the number of crimes considered capital offenses; Federal funds appropriations for FY 1991; and foreign aid to Angola. In the latter part of his term—between April and August of 1992—Bush successfully took positions on national energy policy and a joint resolution authorizing foreign aid expenditures. He also received support on a veto override motion that attempted to overturn the president’s gag order requiring all women with unintended pregnancies to receive nondirective counseling on all options, including abortion. In sum, the House’s periods of peak support for President Bush appeared to include a variety of votes on foreign, domestic, and economic issues.

Presidents Reagan and Clinton were more varied in the times at which their win-loss ratios were higher. Figure 4.4 suggests that Clinton was more frequently successful than Reagan was and that Clinton’s first two years evinced the highest win-to-loss ratios. He received the greatest net support from the House during months 11, 16-17, and 41-43. November of 1993 found him receiving House support on federal spending cuts, handgun
waiting periods, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), all significant legislative victories. During months 16-17—April and May of 1994—the House supported President Clinton’s positions on allocating $27.5 billion for federal law enforcement programs; re-funding the Appalachian Regional Commission; and on Department of Defense appropriations amendments addressing the Trident submarine, military burdensharing agreements with Europe, and the elimination of draft registration requirements under the military selective service act.

During his final year in office, Clinton received House support primarily on foreign policy votes during the May through July periods, including cuts to USAID and the Overseas Investment Corporation, Most Favored Nation (MFN) status for trade with China, and the end of the embargo on the export of Alaskan North Slope oil. In general, although Clinton’s win-to-loss ratio dropped significantly following his midterm election, the results suggest that the opposing majority in the House still was willing to grant him a few foreign policy victories late in his term. The results also hint that the opposition party—during periods of divided government—may be more flexible with presidents who take foreign policy positions than those who emphasize domestic policy votes when spending their political capital.

President Reagan had three periods during his administration when his win-to-loss ratio was high. Figure 4.2 suggests that during months 18-20, 30 and 31, and 41, Reagan received significant support for his vote positions in the House. Between June and August of 1980, Reagan received support from on House votes that loosened clean air regulations on steel manufacturers, initiated Reagan’s three-year tax cut, and introduced the budget reconciliation savings bill and amendments for fiscal years 1982-84. The focus on
economic policy early in Reagan’s term is consistent with his focus on the federal budget and the use of tax cuts to stimulate the economy.

The House, however, shifted the complexion of its support for President Reagan during his third year. Following the midterm elections, Congress during the months of June and July of 1983 focused its support on foreign policy and defense issues. The House supported President Reagan on limiting United States military intervention in El Salvador, continuing support for B-1 bomber funding, and permitting the deployment of the Pershing II missile to Europe. By his last year in office, the House continued to support Reagan on foreign and defense policy initiatives such as the Trident II missile program and the procurement of MX missiles.

During the month of May in 1984—Reagan’s fourth year in office—the House diversified its backing of the president by authorizing funds for domestic infrastructure and symbolic projects, such as the Hoover Dam, the Holocaust Memorial Council, and California and Pony Express Trails development initiatives. In general, the Reagan and Clinton administration’s foreign policy—and in Reagan’s case, symbolic policy—initiatives appear to have benefited during periods of divided government.

Table 4.2 cuts the data differently and indicates House support for the president, by policy type (see Table 4.2). Most telling in Table 4.2 is that Democratic presidents—both of whom legislated, at least for a time, during periods of unified government—received equal support whether or not they took positions on foreign or domestic policy votes. President Carter received support on his foreign and domestic policy positions 72 percent of the time, and President Clinton received support for his positions 61 and 59 percent of the time, respectively.
The House was less willing to support the Republican Presidents—Reagan and Bush—equally on foreign and domestic policy votes. Table 4.2 indicates that President Reagan, although receiving some deference from the House on foreign policy votes (68 percent support), was supported less frequently in his domestic policy stances (49 percent). President Bush fared more poorly than Reagan, but the disparity between the House’s support for his foreign and domestic policy positions was less striking. The House supported his positions on foreign policy 45 percent of the time and supported his domestic policy positions at only a 37-percent clip.

These results suggest two things. First, unified government unquestionably helps a president looking to garner support among members of the House. Presidents who are fortunate to have a unified Congress should expect more deference on both foreign and domestic policy votes. Moreover, the support the House grants should be approximately equal between these vote types. Second, Republican presidents—by and large—received relatively higher support on foreign policy than on their domestic initiatives, suggesting that Congress, regardless of partisanship, is more deferential to the president on foreign policy matters than it is on domestic policy votes. Republican presidents also may be given more leeway when legislating on foreign policy than are their counterparts from the other party.

Figure 4.5 offers another view of the House’s support when the president takes a position. Mirroring the results in Table 4.2, Figure 4.5 provides a glimpse of the House’s yearly support for presidential positions on foreign and domestic policy votes and suggests that marked differences exist between the House’s willingness to support foreign versus domestic presidential policy positions (see Figure 4.5).
Most interesting in Figure 4.5 are the year-by-year tallies. For three of President Carter’s four years in office, the House preferred to support the domestic policy votes upon which he took positions than to supporting his foreign policy stances. In 1979, when the Iran hostage crisis was looming and the energy crisis was at its apex, the House appeared to take more seriously Carter’s foreign policy positions, perhaps even giving them primacy over his domestic policy agenda items.

Ronald Reagan, on the other hand, entered office on a wave of foreign policy support bolstered by the freeing of the hostages in Iran. In his first year, Reagan’s domestic policy support in the House, however, outstripped his foreign policy support. After the first year of his term, foreign policy reigned supreme for Reagan. In 1982, he received House support on 73 percent of the foreign policy votes upon which we took a position. This number dipped slightly to approximately 68 percent in 1983 and rested there during the 1984 election year. His domestic policy success was more limited across each year of his administration, with the House supporting 48 percent, 33 percent, and 45 percent of the domestic policy votes upon which he took a position in 1982, 1983, and 1984, respectively. Overall, this suggests that the Democrat-dominant House was more deferential to Reagan when he took positions on foreign policy votes and was more reserved when he took positions on domestic policy votes.

Bush’s success in the House also was foreign policy heavy, with foreign policy support for votes upon which Bush took positions receiving support 58, 37, and 50 percent of the time, respectively, during his first three years in office. In his election year, Congress gave Bush’s domestic policy positions a slight advantage over his foreign policy preferences, supporting his domestic positions 41 percent of the time and weighing
in favor of his foreign policy positions only 33 percent of the time. In sum, Figure 4.5 suggests that Republican presidents facing majority opposition in the House will find more success in the foreign policy arena, where Republicans typically have been regarded as stronger.

Bill Clinton’s experiences closely mirror those of President Carter. In each of his first three years, the House’s support for Clinton’s foreign policy positions lagged behind its willingness to stand behind his domestic policy positions. One interesting point, however, is that the Republican majority in the House was willing to cede some foreign policy ground to Clinton in 1995 and even more in 1996, much like the Democrats offered Reagan and Bush during their administrations.

In periods of divided government, the results suggest that the controlling party in Congress has little to lose by giving a bit on foreign policy issues in return for standing firm on its own domestic agenda. This result comports with even the earliest studies of presidents and foreign policy (Wildavsky 1966; Mueller 1970) in which the public is painted as naïve regarding presidential politics outside our borders. Because the public is willing to offer wiggle room to the president on foreign policy matters, Congress, too, is willing to cede that ground.
Summary

In sum, the results make it apparent that House support for the president varies, both among administrations and between years of each president’s administration. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 and Figures 4.1 through 4.5 provide a picture of a House that supports the president more frequently on foreign policy votes, particularly when the president is of the opposite party. The tables and figures also suggest that there likely are a number of variables that could help assess the conditions under which presidents receive support from the House. Moreover, the tables and figures argue for a more complete treatment of House support for the president, both within and between presidential administrations. In the next section, I detail the covariates that may provide some leverage on the question of House support for the president.

4.3 Organizing Theoretical Concepts: Time, See What’s Become of Me

Time is regarded as a critical variable in examinations of presidential politics. Scholars have speculated that presidents persist through periods of decreasing influence and increasing effectiveness (Light 1999); struggle through external circumstances beyond their control (Skowronek 1993; Neustadt 1990); or ride journalistic tides of positive coverage and then hunker down for political storms that may emerge later in their terms (Kumar and Grossman 1981). In this section, I propose that two separate types of time—political and regime—condition legislative behavior and help shape the degree to which Congress is likely to support the president’s position on votes before the House. Moreover, I argue that legislative support for the president may owe to whether or not he is legislating during expansionist or protectionist periods of his term.
4.3.1 Political Time

As in previous chapters, I model the effects of political time by separately running probit models for each year of a president’s first term. In the aggregate, I expect covariate effects to vary across the president’s term. Like members of the House (Fenno 1978), presidents also are likely to move through expansionist and protectionist periods during their administrations, with expansionist periods more likely to immediately follow the election when political capital is high and legislative deference more common. I expect that presidential activity—as defined below—during the first two years of the administration’s term will be positively and significantly related to the legislature’s decision to support the president’s position in Congress. Active presidents—cashing in on their increased levels of political capital—are more likely to receive legislative support during this first year.

Presidential capital, however, erodes over time: presidential mistakes during the term erode political capital more than victories replenish it, and activist presidents expose themselves to greater “capital risk” than reticent executives. I expect that higher levels of presidential activity and success early in the term will fade over time or may be negatively related to legislative support for the president as the end of his term draws near.

This latter expectation deserves some clarification. As Anderson et al. (2002) demonstrated in their analysis of legislative success in the U.S. House, overly-activist legislators are significantly less likely to see their bills receive support from their colleagues in the House. Activist legislators may receive less support due to one of two
factors. First, the legislator is introducing high volumes of low-quality legislation that drive his or her colleagues to vote against the legislation; or second, the legislator’s propensity for introducing bills signals sufficient desperation by the legislator to allow his or her colleagues to reject the legislation out of hand.

Both possible circumstances apply in the analysis of legislative support for the president; presidents that take many positions and succeed early may find House support more at the ready early in their terms when political capital is high and House member sensitivity to such activity is low. As the term presses on, presidents that continue to pursue such an aggressive agenda, however, may find little support among those in the legislative branch.

High volumes of presidential activity later in his term may signal legislators that the president has failed to achieve agenda success early in the term and is trying to make up lost ground. Pressing the president’s agenda later in the term—regardless of volume—also risks Congress’s rejection if only because legislators are circling their policy wagons and preparing for reelection, just as the president is. By failing to support the president later in his term, legislators may be attempting to cultivate their constituency, stand on the merits of their record, or dissociate themselves from the president’s policies.

All of these possibilities suggest that the president could have a tough row to hoe if he introduces legislation late in the term. This line of reasoning comports with Light’s (1999) assertion that presidents who meet with agenda success in Congress do so by “legislating early and often.” By the end of the term, higher levels of presidential activity present early in the term should be replaced by better legislative acumen and selectively
placed activities intended to ensure the success of smaller numbers of bills with a marginal relationship to the president’s core agenda.

4.3.2 Regime Time

As noted in earlier chapters, regime time also may play a significant role in determining how much support the president is able to garner in the House. Presidents often are victims of the political, social, and economic context in which they were elected. The U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam and resurgence of the legislative body as a regulator of presidential foreign policy aspirations during this era further constrained the president while magnifying the public’s frustration and distrust of the president’s authority and judgment.

Finally, Carter came to office with a country already mired in or sliding toward an energy crisis driven by fuel oil shortages. All of this is not to say that President Carter was solely a victim of circumstance. Light (1999) details Carter’s unilateral approach to lawmaking early in his term and suggests that this drove a wedge between the executive and legislative branches, unnecessarily spending political capital that was already tenuously held in a post-Watergate era. Without question, the president, however, faced an uphill battle framed by social, political, and economic forces chanced upon by his administration.

The opposite can be said of Ronald Reagan. Reagan’s core electoral coalition encompassed moderate Democrats and the host of partisans to the right of that slightly liberal coalition. He framed the energy crisis as a failing of Carter’s economic and foreign policies, which Reagan viewed as too conciliatory. Moreover, Reagan very
quickly established a legislative affairs office to broker deals with Congress and to smooth the legislative process for his perceived electoral mandate.

In addition, Reagan benefited from an unwanted rally event—John Hinckley, Jr.’s assassination attempt and Reagan’s public recovery. Thus, Reagan was elected president at a time when social, economic, cultural, and political circumstances permitted him a better opportunity to achieve success in the legislative arena. Ronald Reagan was the right person at the right time; Carter was perhaps the right person to be president, but he was not elected at the right time.

In both of these instances, the president’s latitude—whether with the public, in foreign policy matters, or in the president’s ability to press his agenda effectively in Congress—was conditioned as much by what the president inherited socially, politically, and economically as by what the president was capable of doing or actually did. This comports with Skowronek’s notion that, although the presidency depends on the president’s personality (Barber 1992), the presidential difference depends to a significant degree on the context within which the president is embedded during his term. Presidents, says Skowronek, are artifacts of the history within which they act, and although they are able to influence the course of history, they are only able to do so inasmuch as history permits them the latitude to do so. Presidential personalities matter in the choices presidents make (Barber 1992)—in the legislative arena or otherwise—but the decisions presidents must consider are conditioned by social, cultural, political, and economic factors well outside an individual president’s control.

Regime time—the external environment that conditions presidential decisions and eventually, legislative support for the president—is likely to cause variation, not only in
the president’s success in Congress, but how other variables shape legislative support for
the chief executive. The importance of regime time can be tested by running separate
models for each president in my data set. I expect that the significance and direction of
the coefficients in these separate models will vary according to the presidential
administration being examined.

It seems reasonable to attribute those differences to the presidential personality
undergirding the decisions that presidents make and that subsequently shape the
legislature’s decision to support his position. Attributing coefficient differences to
presidential personality, however, suggests that the president *ex ante* shapes the
environment within which presidential decisions occur. The accumulation of presidential
decisions in the administration undoubtedly shapes the environment in which the
president must subsequently act. My models attempt to capture this phenomenon and
include these accumulated presidential activities as covariates as predictors of legislative
support for the president.

### 4.3.3 Presidency-Centered Factors

Presidents are a key influence in legislators’ voting decisions (Kingdon 1989) and
the president is able to frame issues, place them on the agenda, and tell legislators, if not
what to think, what to think about (Edwards 1989; Bond and Fleisher 1990). Peterson
(1990) suggests that factors within the president’s control, items Peterson calls
“malleable,” may have a significant influence, at least marginally, on legislators’ voting
decisions (see also Edwards 1989; Meinke and Anderson 2001). I include a number of
measures of presidential influence that may spur the House’s decision to support the
president’s position on floor votes.

**The Two Presidencies**

I first include a dichotomous measure of the policy type of the vote upon which
the president took a position in the U.S. House of Representatives to examine
Wildavsky’s (1966) two presidencies hypothesis. Bond and Fleisher (1990) found
evidence that presidents more often meet with success in the House on foreign policy
votes, a conclusion supported by Edwards (1989). In line with these scholars’ findings, I
expect that the House will be more likely to support presidents who take foreign policy
positions on House floor votes than those who take positions on other votes in the House.
The coefficient for this variable should be positive and statistically significant in the
aggregate model and maintain its level of significance and direction across each of the
models of political time.

Coefficient direction and significance, however, are less likely to be as consistent
across regime time: Democratic presidents—traditionally perceived as stronger on
domestic issues but weaker on foreign policy—seem less likely to garner support from
both sides of the aisle. Republican presidents—generally perceived as stronger foreign
policy and defense leaders—however, are more likely to receive support from the House.
I, thus, expect that the coefficients in models for the Republican presidents will be
positive and statistically significant, and the coefficients for Carter and Clinton will be
positive but lack statistical significance. This latter hypothesis suggests that Democratic
presidents will garner more support on foreign policy than on other policy types, but that support will fail to be noteworthy.

_Presidential Activity and Prior Success_

Models of the House’s support for the president must include measures that account for the president’s overall activity level. As in the last chapter, I accounted for presidential activity using four separate measures. I included the president’s previous legislative activity, the president’s legislative success rate—win-loss percentage—and the number of major presidential speeches prior to a House presidential position vote. Finally, my models account for the president’s public standing as a key measure of the capital the president has with the electorate and, ultimately, members of Congress. I also include the type of position the president took—in favor or dissenting—on those votes upon which he took a position during his term.

As with legislators (Anderson et al. 2003), presidents must find that optimal position-taking balance, wherein they are able to find success with little legislative resistance, later building coalitions that support core presidential agenda items. At the same time, the president should be prudent and not take positions so frequently or frivolously as to numb the legislature with presidential activity (and the resultant lobbying) or to spend capital unwisely in a shotgun approach that demonstrates little about the priorities of the president’s agenda or legislative interests. The president’s activity in Congress is, therefore, a careful balancing act that must aim to move the legislature toward the president’s core agenda items without overwhelming the system with those items.
To measure presidential activity in the House, I include in my models a variable that captures the percentage of all of the votes upon which the president took a position divided by the total number of votes taken up to that point by the House. This variable is a real-time tally of how active the president is in Congress while controlling for how active Congress is *writ large* during a particular legislative session.

In the full model including all presidents and years, I anticipate that the relationship between the president’s previous legislative activity and the House’s support for the president will be negative and statistically significant. The models of each year of the president’s term also should evince negative and statistically significant coefficients for this variable. Members of the House will eventually penalize overly active presidents because too much activity fails to provide legislators with reasonable cues about the president’s legislative priorities. In fact, high levels of legislative activity by the president may be regarded by House members as a nuisance that prevents them from attending to other business they perceive to be more important.

I expect that the coefficients for presidential activity will vary according to the presidential regime being considered. Reconstruction presidents—those that receive mandates from the public to make sweeping policy changes—are likely to receive more latitude with respect to their legislative activity levels. The reconstruction president included in this analysis—Ronald Reagan—had a wide, deep governing coalition based on a solid Republican right and a new group of southern Democratic cooptees. During his term, Reagan faced a House controlled by Democrats that consolidated power as his term progressed. Even so, Democrats gave Reagan a wider berth than would be given to presidents of articulation, disjunction, or preemption. The variation in latitude that the
Democrats provided Reagan during his entire term likely will produce either a mildly positive or mildly negative coefficient that fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. If the aggregated model of Reagan’s presidency, however, is examined year-by-year, I expect that the coefficient for the presidential activity variable will be positive and possibly significant for the first year and gradually trail off to being negative and possibly significant during years two through four.

Presidents of articulation such as President George H.W. Bush, carry on the legacy of their predecessors but are given less latitude by the public and legislators. Articulators are expected to continue on a specific policy path and believe that members of the House will readily support the president’s legislative activity. Articulators also often misread the public’s electoral intentions and face more resistance from Congress than they might have expected. President Bush likely was no exception to this rule: the data in Table 4.1 indicate that he was among the most aggressive position-takers in my data set. Figures 4.3 and 4.5 suggest that such activity rarely met with support from the House. Because of his poor legislative record—despite being very active—I expect that my aggregate model for the Bush administration will yield a negative coefficient.

Presidents such as Jimmy Carter—those serving during periods of disjunction, when presidents increasingly face cleavages within their own party and the electorate—face still more limitations. During periods of disjunction, the president is less likely to be able to build and maintain stable coalitions among members of his own party as well as the opposition. I expect that presidents such as Carter will be less likely to see the benefits of greater levels of legislative activity and that Congress’s tolerance for more presidential activity will be lower earlier in the president’s term. Disjunction presidents,
when they are able to cobble together legislative coalitions, do so with little permanence. Because of this, I anticipate a negative relationship between President Carter’s legislative activity and Congress’s support for his positions in the House.

*Presidential Momentum*

Presidential success in Congress also may be based on inertia: success may breed more success. Conversely, presidential support in Congress may be like a bank account: for every victory the president achieves, House members may choose to withdraw support him the next time around (Sullivan 1991). Both hypotheses are plausible, but the concept of presidential momentum, and Light’s (1999) notion of “hitting the ground running,” seems more realistic. Winners continue winning and losers continue losing. I anticipate that the relationship between “prior legislative success” and the likelihood of supporting the president’s position will be positive and that this relationship should hold across political and regime time.

*The President’s Position*

The use, or even suggestion of using, negative presidential power also may affect the perceptions of House members about a presidential position vote (Howell 2003; Cameron 2000; Krehbiel 1998). Presidents that support a vote before the House are attempting to rally members and provide them with a signal about his policy preferences. Although presidents may take positions in favor of a particular vote for purely symbolic reasons, presidents are more likely to be sincere about their policy preferences when they speak out in favor of a vote before the House. Negative power, on the other hand, carries
with it connotations of potential ramifications if the House chooses to oppose the president. Moreover, presidents who articulate a position against a vote may, rather than galvanizing a coalition to oppose the vote, encourage the opposition to muster a coalition in favor of it, particularly during periods of divided government when the president’s articulation of a position against a bill or vote obviously clashes with the preferences of majority leaders and committee chairs who choose to bring the vote to the floor.

I include in my models a dummy variable that represents the president’s position on the vote being considered by the House. The variable is coded “1” if the president has articulated a position in favor of the vote; “0” otherwise. I expect that presidents who indicate a positive preference for a vote will be more likely to receive support for that position because they provide markers about the president’s legislative agenda and express a preference that hides little.

Presidents who choose to articulate a negative position on a vote may be signaling something deeper. The president may, indeed, see no merit in issue upon which a vote is being taken. The president also may intend to veto the House’s decision if the vote bears on a bill or issue that runs contrary to the president’s agenda. Finally, a negative position may imply that the president lacks a policy alternative and simply is being an obstructionist. In general, then, I anticipate that members of the House will support presidents who take positive positions on bills or votes, but reject bills or votes upon which the president has taken a negative position. I expect that the coefficient for the “president’s position” variable will be positive and statistically significant in the aggregate model and the political and regime time models, as well.
**Major Speeches**

My models also include a dummy variable indicating whether or not the president gave a major speech during the month prior to a vote being considered by the House. I collected this variable from Ragsdale’s (1998) data on the major presidential speeches given by Presidents Carter through Clinton and attempted to capture efforts by the president to leverage his political capital and engender support for his position on a floor vote by “going public” prior to that vote. Kernell (1997) and Canes-Wrone (2001) suggest that presidents who “go public” will more likely receive support from members of Congress under particular conditions, often related to the legislature’s ideological predispositions. Going public also enables presidents to attribute the failure of their agendas to an inflexible and impertinent Congress (Groseclose and McCarty 2000).

Going public, however, also implies that the president recognizes that he has a fight on his hands. The votes before which presidents go public often are close, and his public activities are, thus, intended to sway marginal legislators. This makes predicting the coefficient direction difficult. I anticipate that the coefficient associated with the president’s public speeches will be positive, but, because the president is more likely to go public on difficult issues, the House will only be able to sporadically support his position on those bills. This mixed support will likely produce coefficients that are positive but fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

Light (1999) suggests that presidents become more savvy legislators over time—presidential activities late in the term are more calculating and political capital is more efficiently spent for likely gains. This assertion suggests that presidents who choose to go public later in the term are doing so in a specific, targeted manner, and with the
expectation that doing so will bear fruit. In my year-by-year political time models, I thus expect that, if the major speeches coefficient ever reaches accepted levels of statistical significance, that will happen later in the term, reflecting greater presidential awareness of likely wins and losses. In those third and fourth years, presidents are better able to gauge when to “go public” and when to remain silent. When presidents do go public in the latter portion of their terms, the results are likely to be more productive than earlier in the term.

*Presidential Approval*

Finally, my models include a measure of the president’s mean public approval levels during the month prior to the presidential position vote being considered by the House. Presidential approval is both a formal measure of how the president is doing and a proxy for the capital the president retains with the public (Rivers and Rose 1985; Light 1999). Presidents with high public approval levels signal legislators that voting against the president’s agenda risks a public backlash from the president’s supporters. Moreover, presidents with high public approval ratings have more capital with which to legislate outside their electoral coalitions, providing the president with an opportunity to gather in more moderate members of the opposition and to garner more support across the House’s ideological continuum.

I anticipate that during periods when the public approves of the job the president is doing, the legislature will be more likely to support the president’s position on House votes. The coefficient for this variable should be positive in my aggregate models. Past scholarship on the relationship between legislative support and presidential approval...
suggests that the statistical significance of this variable is inconsistent (Rivers and Rose 1985; Edwards 1989; Meinke and Anderson 2001). I, thus, expect a positive relationship but am uncertain as to whether or not the variable will be significant in the aggregate models.

Breaking out the models across political time, I anticipate that the postelection public approval surge will provide the president with important capital in the first year of his term and that the presidential approval coefficient will be positive. This relationship may hold during year two, but could turn as the midterm election shifts the partisan balance in Congress. During years three and four, increases in presidential popularity may be met with less support in the House because opposition members of Congress attempt to disrupt the president’s legislative agenda in the runup to the next presidential election. Finally, I anticipate that the positive relationship between presidential approval and legislative support for the president will hold across the regime time models. As in the political time models, however, statistical significance is likely to vary. A regime reconstructor like Ronald Reagan is more likely to find a statistically significant boost from presidential approval, but presidents of articulation, preemption, and disjunction—lacking any sort of public mandate—will see that significant relationship fade.

4.3.4 Legislative Variables

Whether or not the president faces a House or Senate of a different party radically shapes the president’s ability to garner support for his legislative initiatives (Jones 2002; 1994; Fleisher and Bond 2000; 1991; Edwards 2000; 1999; Mayhew 1991). Presidents facing a friendly House with more like-minded partisans in the House will be more likely
to achieve their legislative goals quickly and with less damage, over time, to their political capital. Conversely, presidents facing a hostile Congress will begin their terms with a handicap that only will grow over the first four years of their administration.

To capture the effects that divided government have on House support for the president, my models include a divided government variable, coded “1” when the House was considering a presidential position during divided government periods and “0” otherwise. I expect that this coefficient will be negative and statistically significant, representing the difficulty that opposition party presidents have in garnering support for their legislative agendas. The negative relationship should hold in the aggregate models and across political and regime time.

4.3.5 External Influences: GDP and Unemployment

The political, social, and economic environments significantly shape the president’s ability to legislate effectively. Volumes of scholarship on presidential approval affirm that the economic, social, and political realities of a president’s term drive public assessments of the president and, ultimately, may determine the president’s reelection fortunes. In turn, positive public assessments of the president help the president by bolstering his political capital with the legislative branch. Similarly, negative assessments harm the president and deplete his capital in Congress (Light 1991; Edwards 1989; Edwards 2000; Fleisher and Bond 1999). Peterson (1990), in his robust examination of cooperation between the president and Congress, identifies two classes of variables that significantly shape presidential success (as he defines it) in Congress: changes in the macro economy and changes in the labor force. My models include a variable measuring the change in GDP during the quarter immediately preceding a
presidential position vote in the House. Higher values suggest good news for the president. The models also include a measure of the change in the unemployment rate during the month immediately preceding the presidential position vote in Congress. Lower values for this variable signal positive economic news for the president.53

I expect that positive changes in GDP will be accompanied by an increased likelihood of House members’ support for the president’s position. This expectation is consistent with Peterson’s (1990) examination of presidential-legislative relations and stems from good economic times bolstering the president’s political capital in Congress. I anticipate that the positive relationship will hold in my aggregate models and in each of the political time models because positive changes in GDP should bolster a president’s capital at any point during his term. I expect the same results for each of the regime time models, again relying on the logic that presidents that press their legislative agendas during positive economic periods should receive a bump in House members’ support for the president’s legislative programs.

I anticipate a similar series of results for my measure of unemployment change during the month prior to a presidential position vote in Congress. Changes in unemployment—as changes in GDP—are a broad measure of economic prosperity and also a baseline measure for a president’s ability to shepherd the country’s economy into more prosperous or through more difficult times. The coefficients for this variable, however, should be negative because decreases in the unemployment rate spell better

53 The one-quarter and one-month lags in both of these variables comport both with Peterson’s (1990) analysis and Meinke and Anderson’s (2001) findings that congressional responses—via voting on the floor of the House—are not immediately responsive to upturns or downturns in presidential capital. In the previous chapter, I found some evidence to indicate that the one-month lag is a robust measure of the environmental context in which presidents press forward with their legislative agendas. I argue that the one-month lag also is a fair measure of the environmental context within which legislators decide whether or not to support the president’s position on a House vote.
news for presidents. I anticipate that the relationship between unemployment change and legislative support for the president will be negative, and that this result will hold across the aggregate, political time, and regime time models.

Summary

My models include a number of variables that capture the presidential, legislative, and external influences that shape House members’ decisions about whether or not to support the president’s floor vote positions. My expectations hinge on the concept of the president’s baseline political capital—conditioned by his ex-ante legislative and economic/social/political contexts—and how the president is able to bolster that capital by his actions and keen sense for political opportunity. My models and hypotheses also account for the passage of political and regime time and are sensitive to how time overlays and shapes House support for the president.

4.4 Results and Discussion

The results of my probit analyses of House support for the president’s positions are displayed in Table 4.3 (see Table 4.3).\(^5\) Column 1 presents the results of a model that aggregates House votes across the first four years of the administrations in this study and Columns 2-5 present results examining presidential position-taking during each year of

5\(^\text{As in Chapter 3, I report coefficients with robust standard errors, allowing me to more properly estimate the standard errors of the parameter estimates and thus prevent potential Type I or Type II errors resulting from temporally- or spatially-correlated errors. The uncorrected standard errors, in my case, would likely possess some measure of temporal correlation due to the nature of multiple observations (presidential positions) per unit (the individual presidents). The use of robust standard errors in models of binary cross-sectional data makes proper allowances for the temporal and spatial autocorrelation, essentially “tightening” or “loosening” parameter standard errors where appropriate (Beck and Katz 1995; Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998). The overall model fit, (via likelihood-ratio tests), however, does not change.
the administration. The latter columns test the proposition that covariate effects are fluid across political time.

As in Chapter 3, I find broad support for my hypotheses regarding the new measures I created to assess the importance of previous presidential activity. Moreover, I find strong support for my hypotheses about over-time variations in legislative support for the president. It is clear from Table 4.3 that presidency-centered variables shape the legislature’s decision to support the president; the table also demonstrates that the legislative and external contexts within which the president pushes his agenda also vary considerably in their effects on the legislature’s support for the president.

The results in Table 4.3 further support the assertions made earlier that aggregate examinations of executive-legislative relations may misspecify or fail to assess with appropriate granularity differential covariate effects over time. My models make a strong argument that analyses of any presidential or legislative activity must account for these variations across presidential regimes and within presidential terms.

4.4.1 Presidential Effects Inconsistent but Telling

Apart from emphasizing the validity of the two presidencies thesis, Table 4.3 suggests that House support for the president is conditional on what the president does or does not do, bolstering scholarship suggesting that the presidency often is a dominant actor in executive-legislative relations. In general, Table 4.3 suggests that what a president does—and how much of it he does—shapes House support for his positions on floor votes.
Presidents that take positions in favor of floor votes are more likely to have those positions supported by members of the House. The aggregate and year-by-year models in Table 4.3 suggest that a president that takes positions in favor of House votes is significantly more likely to receive support from the House than a president that chooses to take positions against specific votes or issues on the floor. As noted in the previous section, positive positions on the floor of the House provide members with shortcuts about the president’s legislative priorities. By articulating a position in favor of a House bill or amendment, the president is attempting to work within the bounds of the legislative process to clearly articulate a position and gather support for that position.

Negative positions, however, lack clarity; they indicate only that the president stands opposed to the issue being voted upon but provide little guidance as to what he supports. Moreover, negative positions may imply additional difficulties for the House in the form of vetoes or veto threats. Finally, negative positions may suggest a broader pattern of presidential obstructionism, particularly during periods of divided government. The presidents in this data set more often were pushing their agendas during periods of divided government, making the last possibility more likely: legislators perceive negative positions on floor votes as contrarianism and punish the president accordingly.

The president’s prior legislative activity also conforms to my expectations: presidents that legislate more frequently are less likely to receive support for their positions in the House. Overall, these results suggest that presidents must find a careful balance when they decide whether or not to take positions on House votes—clearly there are times when silence pays (Covington 1987). The coefficients across all of the models are negative and achieve statistical significance in the aggregate and year three models.
The year three results are particularly important; they suggest that the time immediately following the midterm election perhaps is an adjustment period for the president. Previously active presidents are penalized for activity after the midterm because the more powerful opposition challenges the president’s positions in advance of the next presidential election.

In addition, a president active early in his administration may have accomplished all of his core agenda items. As the term wears on, votes upon which the president takes a position may be peripheral to his agenda, stretch the bounds of support by a more hostile Congress, or simply be positions taken to solidify his image and policy positions in the public eye. Regardless, Table 4.3 suggests that activist presidents reach a point where their activism becomes a detriment.

The models also appear to support my hypotheses regarding presidential momentum: by-and-large, Table 4.3 suggests that success breeds success when presidents seek support from the House. The coefficients for the winning percentage variables are positive in the aggregate and year-by-year models, with the year three model the only exception. This result, however, is not entirely surprising. Following from the discussion of the president’s prior legislative activity, winning presidents may suffer after the midterm because the opposition gained strength and attempted to put the brakes on the president’s momentum. The year three coefficient is statistically significant, suggesting that the House—often with a stronger opposition coalition following the midterm—is more effective at slowing the president’s momentum. The relationship between the president’s prior winning percentage and the House’s likelihood of supporting his position in the House is positive and statistically significant in year four. This pattern
follows Light’s (1999) “cycle of increasing effectiveness” because the president, by year four, is able to again build momentum and convince Congress to support a winner.\textsuperscript{55}

Table 4.3 indicates mixed support for my hypotheses about presidential appeals to the public and legislative support for the president. I earlier suggested that the relationship between major presidential speeches and House support for the president should be positive. Table 4.3, however, suggests that this relationship is positive in years two and four—and significant in year four—but negative and not statistically significant in the full and years one and three models. The discrepancy may be due to two electoral dynamics, one in the first year and another in the third.

As presidents appeal to the public during the first year of their terms, House members may choose to punish the president rather than support him, simply to slow what already is likely to be a successful first year for the president. The dynamics for the third year may be slightly different. After losing seats at the midterm, presidents may attempt to generate political capital by appealing to the public. The opposition party—having gained seats at the midterm—is unlikely to be persuaded by the president’s public activities and will instead push back, choosing to deny him support on his position votes in Congress.\textsuperscript{56}

Finally, the presidential popularity coefficients also are a mixed bag. The full model in Table 4.3 indicates a positive relationship between presidential approval and House support for the president’s position. The lack of statistical significance persists in

\textsuperscript{55} The other read on these coefficients is equally likely: presidents who lose will continue to lose. As the opposition puts the brakes on the president during year three, his momentum slows. In year four, the slower momentum yields fewer instances of House support for the president’s positions. Winning begets winning, and losing is as—if not more—contagious.
years two through four. The ambiguous relationship between presidential approval and House support for the president is consistent with the literature (Rivers and Rose 1985; Edwards 1989) on the subject. Meinke and Anderson (2001) found similarly ambiguous results when examining legislative support for the president during the Nixon, Reagan, and Clinton administrations.

The one exception to this ambiguity is the negative and statistically significant relationship in year one between presidential approval and House support for the president’s positions. This relationship likely can be explained by examining the context within which it occurs: president’s during their first year ride waves of public approval. Congress responds to that approval by allowing the president increased leeway and sway during his first year in office. Nevertheless, the marginal returns to higher levels of public approval decrease. At some point, members of the House can no longer go along with the president’s positions—House support for the president may simply reach a maximum level, regardless of how high his public approval is. Another possible explanation is that House members, in an attempt to rein in a president during his honeymoon period, actually punish him as his approval ratings increase.

4.4.2 Does Congress Dominate?

Among the most frequently addressed questions in studies of Congress and the presidency is: which branch has the upper hand? Table 4.3 offers at least a partial answer: Congress does, particularly when the opposition party is in control. Although not surprising, these results suggest that speculation about the president’s productivity and

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56 It is important to note that the coefficients for both years one and three, however, fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Little inference can be drawn beyond speculating about why
potential for success during divided government periods (Jones 1994) may not have it quite right.

The divided government coefficients in my models are negative and statistically significant for the full model and for each year except year four. Periods of divided government clearly are harmful to the president as he takes positions on House votes: he is significantly less likely to receive support for those positions than are presidents legislating during periods of unified government.\textsuperscript{57} Table 4.3 makes a compelling case that presidents will lose more often than they win when they take positions during divided government periods. Perhaps, then, Covington’s (1987) admonishment to remain silent holds more sway during periods of divided government.

4.4.3 The External Environment and House Support

I earlier suggested that House members may look to positive or negative economic news to shape their support for the president (see Peterson 1990). I also hypothesized that presidents with good economic news to report would be more likely to receive support from members of the House, and presidents at the helm of economic downturns would be more poorly positioned to draw on the capital that any good economic news generates. Consequently, House members would be less willing to grant the president legislative latitude during those sour economic times and be less likely to support the president’s position on House votes. Table 4.3 offers mixed support for these hypotheses.

\textsuperscript{57} The contrary argument to these findings is that, although presidents may lose more frequently, divided government provides presidents with an opportunity to legislate more carefully and stitch together disparate coalitions that more fully advance a complex policy agenda (Jones 1994).
According to Table 4.3, as quarterly GDP rose, members were less likely to support the president’s position on House floor votes. This relationship held for the full and years one, three, and four models, with the coefficients reaching statistical significance at the 0.10 level in the full and first year models. The coefficient for the year three model was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

These results are telling: they suggest that, as presidents accrue political capital through good economic news, Congress stands ready to eat away at that political capital by denying the president support. These results also parallel the findings for presidential approval; that is, when the president is in what seems to be a capital generating period, the House is less willing to let him successfully spend that capital.

Or perhaps more likely is that, when the president receives good economic news, he prefers to take negative positions or positions on votes that deviate significantly from what is acceptable to the median member of the House. In this scenario, the president perceives positive political capital as something to be spent by taking more daring positions on House votes. Following Krehbiel’s (1998) model of veto points, presidents perceive—perhaps erroneously—that good economic news or even positive presidential approval provide them with the flexibility to legislate more aggressively. Congress then responds by voting against the president’s position. So, although good economic news may generate positive political capital for the president, it may fail to buy him as much wiggle room as he perceived. This result is even more likely during periods of divided government, when the opposition party in control of the House looks warily at any presidential policy—even those that are closer to the preferences of the median member of the House (Krehbiel 1998).
Following the above logic, the coefficients for changes in unemployment are more intuitive. For the full and years two and four models, the coefficients are positive and, in the case of years two and four, statistically significant at the 0.10 level, suggesting that, as unemployment rates decline, House members are less likely to support the president. As above, during periods of good economic news, presidents may take more aggressive legislative positions that deviate significantly from the median member of the House. The members of the House respond by voting against the president’s position, effectively reining him in.

The coefficients match my expectations during years one and three: monthly increases in the unemployment rate are negatively related to House member support for the president’s position. In year one, this relationship is statistically significant, suggesting that presidents may have more latitude to take advantage of good economic news during the honeymoon period. Members of the House are more flexible during this year, but, as the full and other yearly models suggest, this tolerance is limited.

Table 4.3 also indicates support for the “two presidencies” theory discussed throughout the previous chapters. Presidents are more likely to receive support on foreign policy votes vice any other type of vote, a result consistent with past studies on presidential relations with Congress. The coefficients in each model are positive and statistically significant, both in the aggregate and year three models, suggesting that presidents are by-and-large more likely to receive support when they take positions on foreign policy votes, even during periods of divided government. Perhaps most interesting is that the year three coefficient is positive and statistically significant. This
suggests that, after presidents lose seats at the midterm, the House membership may be more willing to give some slack on foreign policy issues, if only because the president has less of a chance to receive support on his other legislative initiatives.

Summary: Presidential Position Taking Across Political Time

According to Table 4.3, the president can help shape his fortunes in the House. Although far from consistently dominant, he can cultivate support in the House by taking positive positions more frequently, limiting his legislative activity—or remaining silent more often—and articulating a position on foreign policy votes. Moreover, the president on the margins may be able to periodically cash in on public approval and his own legislative momentum to bolster his chances for building House support.

Speaking to the broader concept of political time, the results in Table 4.3 certainly suggest that presidential power—via his public activities—wax and wane in importance over the course of the term. Analyses that fail to account for these yearly, and possibly even monthly, variations in presidential activity likely miss important subtleties in the relationship between Congress and the president.

Table 4.4 provides first difference estimates that make more concrete the coefficients reported in Table 4.3 (see Table 4.4). As in Chapter 3, the numbers reported in Table 4.4 were calculated using Tomz et al.’s (2003) Clarify plug-in for Stata and are probability estimates. Probability estimates that correspond to significant coefficients in Table 4.3 are highlighted in bold.

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58 This also can be interpreted as “as the unemployment rate decreases, the probability of the House supporting the president’s position increases.” Regardless, the findings still match the hypotheses suggested earlier in this chapter.
The probability estimates in Table 4.4 provide insights into how my independent variables affect changes in my dependent variable. In the full model, presidents choosing to take positions on foreign policy votes will increase their chances of receiving the House’s support by 10 percent. Similarly, presidents who take positive positions on floor votes—that is, support votes on the floor of the House vice taking positions contrary to the spirit of the vote—are 30 percent more likely to receive support for those positions than are presidents who take negative positions. During periods of divided government, presidents are 33 percent less likely to receive support for their positions; as quarterly GDP rises, presidents are 2 percent less likely to receive support from members of the House.

The year-by-year models in Table 4.4 offer interesting insights as well. Positions taken on foreign policy votes help the president, but not nearly as much as they did in the full model; a president who takes positions on foreign policy votes increases his chances of receiving House support by only 1 percent. Presidents increase their chances of receiving House support in years two through four by taking positions on foreign policy votes, but with little confidence in the robustness of these figures.

As in the first year, presidents that take positive positions on votes before the House are 30 percent more likely to receive support from members of the House. This trend continues in years two and four: presidents that came out in favor of votes or issues in the House increased their chances of garnering member support by 23 percent and 34 percent, respectively. When presidents take positive positions, they clearly are reinforcing something about House members’ decisions.
Presidents that hit the ground running will meet with more success, and those who fail to do so will receive lower overall support from members of the House. Table 4.4 suggests that, during the president’s first year in office, an increase in his winning percentage—from the 20th to the 80th percentile—will increase by 8 percent his chances of culling House support. This figure increases dramatically in year two—to 51 percent—reflecting the potential importance of presidential momentum during the first two years of his term. The number tapers significantly in year three, going from positive to negative. According to Table 4.4, previously successful presidents were 25 percent less likely to receive support from the House during their third year in office. By year four, winning presidents kept winning, and losing presidents continued to fail—successful presidents were 28 percent more likely to receive House support for their positions on floor votes.

Presidents that make major speeches prior to taking positions in their fourth year increase by 12 percent their likelihood of receiving House member support for those positions. A president popular during his first year in office must exercise caution: an increase in presidential approval could contribute to a 9-percent decrease in the likelihood of receiving House member support for his floor vote positions.

Presidents legislating during periods of divided government also are at peril. As in the full model, divided government chips away at the likelihood of House members supporting his positions on the floor. During years one through three, Table 4.4 suggests that presidents pushing their agendas during divided government periods were 14, 12, and 51 percent less likely to receive support from members of the House.

Finally, presidents taking positions on floor votes in their first year were 8 percent less likely to receive House member support during periods when GDP swelled.
Similarly, good unemployment news in the first year of a president’s term contributed to a 5-percent increase in the likelihood of House members supporting his legislative positions. In years two and four, presidents, however, were unable to capitalize on positive unemployment news; decreases in unemployment from the 80th to the 20th percentile generated 9- and 3-percent decreases in the likelihood of House members supporting the president’s floor vote positions.

In sum, Table 4.4 reinforces the findings from Table 4.3, providing an intuitive and mixed picture of House support for the president across each year of the president’s first term. The suggestion from Table 4.4 is that the legislature—by virtue of its partisan makeup—can be a dominant actor in the Congress-president relationship. The president, however, can take a number of steps, including taking positive positions or positions on foreign policy votes, to shore up his support in the House. Moreover, presidents that hit the ground running and build legislative momentum truly can help their causes as they take positions on House votes. Finally, the president may be able to strategically make a major speech—particularly later in his term—to shore up his base and perhaps convince House members to support his position on floor votes in the U.S. House.

4.4.4 Regime Time

In assessing regime effects on House members’ support for the president, I earlier suggested that running separate models for each president in my data set would generate differences in my model parameters’ direction and significance. Regime reconstructors, such as Ronald Reagan, seem more likely to rely on the public to bolster their efforts with Congress, and regime articulators, such as George H.W. Bush, may labor under the
illusion that their administration has the latitude with Congress that the previous
reconstruction regime had. These differences should manifest themselves in unique
covariate effects. Table 4.5 provides a glimpse at how different regimes employ—or are
constrained by—variables, both in and outside their control (see Table 4.5).

The strongest and most consistent variable across all of the presidential regime
models in Table 4.5 is the covariate measuring whether or not the president took a
positive position on a House floor vote. In each model, this variable was positively and
statistically significant, suggesting that, regardless of the regime type or administration,
the president can help his legislative cause by coming out in favor of votes being
considered by members of Congress. Presidents that take positions on foreign policy
votes also were significantly more likely to garner support from members of Congress.
Only the Carter administration failed to do so; as Figure 4.5 demonstrates, President
Carter had nearly identical domestic and foreign policy success rates.

President Clinton—a president of disjunction—ran into trouble exactly where one
might expect. As he pushed his agenda and was more successful doing so, he was
punished later in his term by a House that was controlled by Republicans during the last
two years of his first term. Presidents of disjunction, believing they are on the leading
edge of a substantial social and political realignment, press their agendas aggressively
when they have the opportunity to do so. When an opposition party inherits power in the
legislature following the midterm—as happened during the Franklin Pierce
administration just prior to the Civil War, for example—presidents of disjunction,
however, lose their influence with Congress. Winning momentum during the first half of
the term becomes a cycle of losing during the second half.
The Clinton administration followed this pattern: early in his administration, his high success levels nearly guaranteed later failures. By the time Newt Gingrich ushered in the Republican Revolution in 1995, down was the only place left for Clinton to go. Losing prompted more losing, perhaps explaining why the “winning percentage” coefficient for President Clinton in Table 4.5 is negative and statistically significant. Similarly, the presence of a divided government coefficient in the Clinton model is telling as well. He was the only president to preside over a complete party shift in the legislative branch, and, with little doubt, that change harmed his opportunities to receive support from the House’s membership.

President George H.W. Bush—a regime articulator—struggled to use public opinion as effectively as his predecessor, Ronald Reagan. Table 4.5 suggests that Reagan was able during his administration to parlay higher levels of public approval into member support for his House vote positions. Bush, however, was unable to make hay even when public opinion was higher. As noted earlier, regime articulators often overestimate their ability to marshal public and congressional opinion behind agendas, primarily because regime articulators are under the impression that their presidency is a renewal of the mandate set forth during the previous administration. Table 4.5 indicates that quite the opposite was true: as Bush’s approval went up, the Democratically-controlled House worked to tamp it down. The reason may be two-fold. First, the uptick in presidential approval may have prompted President Bush to press policy positions that were beyond what the Democrats assessed to be supportable. Second, House members may have denied President Bush legislative victories in an attempt to both rein in his position-taking activities and harm his stature with the public.
Finally, Table 4.5 suggests some consistency in the effects of economic variables on House support for the president. Presidents Carter, Reagan, and Bush all were significantly harmed by quarterly GDP growth. As above, increases in GDP may have prompted each of these presidents to attempt to widen their policy portfolios by taking more extreme positions on votes before the House. The imagined political capital that economic growth provides presidents should be tempered by these findings: presidents, rather than receiving a boost from economic growth may, in fact, have to more closely protect their political capital by remaining silent or choosing to take positions on more politically-moderate votes. Staying silent during periods of good economic news may be the optimal strategy for presidents thinking about how best to work on issues in Congress.

In sum, it is clear that different regime types bring different tools to bear—and differently at that—as they attempt to build coalitions and find success in the U.S. House of Representatives. Although far from a complete treatment of regime types and the varying effects such regime types have in conditioning presidential success in the House, the general typology and approach developed here—and in the previous chapter—provide a very useful framework for evaluating regime type differences in a larger-scale fashion and over multiple presidential administrations.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored House support for the president, treating it as the logical next step in the series of discrete decisions that occur as presidents attempt to navigate the policy process. I analyzed the relationships between variables under the
president’s control and those in the immediate legislative and external environments. I found that the unique measures of presidential activity and success included in my models have a significant impact in shaping legislative support for the president across his term and between administrations. I also addressed—as in previous chapters—how political and regime time shape these relationships, noting that both intra- and inter-administration dynamics must be accounted for when making generalizations about legislative or executive dominance of the policymaking process.

A number of important items from this chapter deserve mention. First, models of House member support for the president should account for political and regime time. As in the last chapter, a look at the aggregate model in Table 4.3 suggested few statistically significant relationships between my covariates and the dependent variable, House support for the president’s position on a floor vote. Disaggregating those models by political and regime time periods, I found that the president’s past legislative activities and successes or failures significantly shaped whether not the legislative branch supported his positions on House floor votes.

In addition, I found that positive presidential power—articulating positions in favor of votes on the floor—might yield the best chance for the president to garner support for his positions in the House, further indicating that presidential influence upstream— influencing what Congress considers in the first place—may be among the most important activities the president can undertake during his term. Finally, it became clear in this chapter that foreign policy still can bear some fruit for presidents. Presidents that more frequently take positions on foreign policy votes will find the House more supportive, and more often. Moreover, presidents facing a hostile Congress may be able
to cull more legislative victories—or at least create the conditions to receive congressional support—by taking positions on foreign vice domestic or other policy votes.

Second, I found compelling evidence suggesting that capital-generating events, like increases in presidential popularity or growth in fundamental economic indicators, rather than buying the president latitude with Congress, actually risk harming his political capital and decreasing his chances of obtaining House support for his legislative initiatives. Although counterintuitive on the surface, the formal theory literature on legislative-executive relations (Cameron 2000; Krehbiel 1998) suggests why this is the case. Presidents that receive capital in the form of good polling numbers or positive economic news may choose to take more risks with that capital rather than preserve it. Because political capital is difficult to come by during the term, the president may choose to use the good news stories of the day to draw congressional policy further from Congress’s ideal point and closer to his own. Congress—particularly during those sessions controlled by the opposition party—punishes the president for doing this, resulting in a negative relationship between good news and presidential support in Congress.

Finally, I found additional support for Skowronek’s (1993) thesis that fundamental differences exist between political regimes. The political era within which presidents are elected shape what they are able to do, how effective they can be, and how constrained those presidents will be by the legislative body and the external political and social environments. Although needing more empirical validation in the form of a
broader data set, these findings are promising and could provide a useful theoretical and empirical framework for subsequent research.59

In the next chapter, I summarize the findings in this dissertation, covering briefly the theoretical principles that guide it and the empirical results generated in Chapters 3 and 4. I also discuss potential directions for subsequent research, building on the research program outlined in this dissertation. I suggest additional means by which I can test how presidents use their “sway” to convince members of Congress to support the president’s agenda in the House and Senate. Finally, I discuss potential improvements to this research project, focusing on the expansion of my data set to include all of the modern presidents.

59 A discussion I have in more detail in the next chapter.
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Table 4.1: Percentage of the U.S. House Supporting the President’s Position, 1977-1996
FIGURE 4.1:
MONTHLY PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT IN THE U.S. HOUSE
CARTER ADMINISTRATION, 1977-80
FIGURE 4.2:
MONTHLY PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT IN THE U.S. HOUSE
REAGAN ADMINISTRATION, 1981-84
Figure 4.3:
MONTHLY PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT IN THE U.S. HOUSE
GEORGE H.W. BUSH ADMINISTRATION, 1989-92
Figure 4.4: Monthly Presidential Support in the U.S. House Clinton Administration, 1993-96
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<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush (1989-92)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton (1993-96)</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2:  
U.S. House Support for the President, By Policy Type
FIGURE 4.5:
LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT FOR THE PRESIDENT, BY POLICY AND YEAR, 1977-1996
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy</td>
<td>0.278**</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.218</td>
<td>0.448**</td>
<td>0.203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presidency Centered</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For/Against</td>
<td>0.773**</td>
<td>0.876</td>
<td>0.589</td>
<td>0.805</td>
<td>0.897**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Activity</td>
<td>-2.903**</td>
<td>-0.768</td>
<td>-0.216</td>
<td>-10.588</td>
<td>-1.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning %</td>
<td>0.254</td>
<td>0.561</td>
<td>3.556**</td>
<td>-2.789</td>
<td>2.565**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Speech</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td>-0.133</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>-0.036</td>
<td>0.309**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>-0.014**</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>-0.010</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legislative Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divided Gov’t</td>
<td>-0.850**</td>
<td>-0.362</td>
<td>** -0.313</td>
<td>** -1.463</td>
<td>** 0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ GDP %</td>
<td>-0.014*</td>
<td>-0.068</td>
<td>* 0.001</td>
<td>-0.047**</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ Unemp.%</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>-0.486**</td>
<td>0.756</td>
<td>* -0.631</td>
<td>0.298**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.916**</td>
<td>1.281**</td>
<td>-3.257**</td>
<td>5.628**</td>
<td>-1.155*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Obs.</td>
<td>1591</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2 log-likelihood (d.f. = 9)</td>
<td>314.26**</td>
<td>60.99**</td>
<td>83.32**</td>
<td>117.05**</td>
<td>84.22**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Probit maximum likelihood estimate coefficients reported. Statistical significance calculated using robust standard errors.

* p < 0.10 ** p < 0.05

**TABLE 4.3:**
U.S. House Support for the President’s Position, 1977-1996
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Full</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy</td>
<td>+0.10</td>
<td>+0.01</td>
<td>+0.09</td>
<td>+0.13</td>
<td>+0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presidency Centered</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For/Against</td>
<td>+0.30</td>
<td>+0.30</td>
<td>+0.23</td>
<td>+0.26</td>
<td>+0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Activity</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning %</td>
<td>+0.03</td>
<td>+0.08</td>
<td>+0.51</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>+0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Speeches</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>+0.04</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>+0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>+0.01</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>+0.20</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legislative Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divided Gov’t</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>-0.51</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ GDP %</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>+0.00</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ Unemployment %</td>
<td>+0.01</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>+0.09</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>+0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.4:**
House Support for the President: First Differences

---

60 First differences calculated using Tomz et al.’s (2003) Clarify plug-in for Stata available at [http://gking.harvard.edu/stats](http://gking.harvard.edu/stats). First differences for continuous variables were calculated by setting all other model variables at the mean, median, or mode, setting the continuous variable at the 20th and 80th percentile values, and subtracting the predicted probability of the latter from the former. For categorical variables, all other model variables were set at their mean, median, or modal values and predicted probabilities were generated for each category for the variable of interest. In all cases, these categorical variables were dichotomous (p(max) – p(min)).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Carter</th>
<th>Reagan</th>
<th>Bush</th>
<th>Clinton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.799</td>
<td><strong>0.265</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.352</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presidency Centered</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For/Against</td>
<td>0.446</td>
<td><strong>0.909</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.751</strong></td>
<td>1.131 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Activity</td>
<td>-4.437</td>
<td>-2.409</td>
<td>-1.759 **</td>
<td>-7.436 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning %</td>
<td>-5.538</td>
<td>-0.911</td>
<td>0.497</td>
<td>-5.654 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Speech</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>-0.147</td>
<td>0.188</td>
<td>0.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td><em>0.027</em>*</td>
<td><strong>-0.006</strong></td>
<td>*0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legislative Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divided Gov’t</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-2.617 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ GDP %</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td><em>-0.080</em>*</td>
<td><strong>-0.035</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.040</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ Unemp. %</td>
<td>-0.182</td>
<td>-0.043</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>5.697</td>
<td>*-0.328</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>6.952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Obs.</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2 log-likelihood</td>
<td>21.600</td>
<td><strong>69.204</strong></td>
<td><strong>36.958</strong></td>
<td><strong>179.78</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Probit maximum likelihood estimate coefficients reported. Statistical significance calculated using robust standard errors.

* p < 0.10    ** p < 0.05

**Table 4.5:**
House Support for the President, by President

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CHAPTER 5
THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS IN TIME

5.1 Who Dominates? The President and Congress in the Modern Era

Relations between Congress and the president take place over time—political, regime, and normal policy process time—and this passage of time clearly shapes how both branches carry weight during the policy process. In the previous four chapters, I have provided an analytic framework; a unique, extensive, and rigorously collected data set; a series of innovative measures of past and present presidential activity; and empirical tests that find compelling evidence indicating that time shapes presidential position-taking and legislative support for the president. The models in Chapters 3 and 4 clearly demonstrate that evaluations of presidential and legislative activity must account for political and regime time to draw more accurate conclusions about legislative-executive relations during the policy process.

I also demonstrated that presidents can effectively maneuver—even when their political capital fluctuates—articulate strong positions on House votes, and engender support for those positions among members of the legislative branch. By taking advantage of political momentum, minding the amount of legislation they “go public” on, and pursuing a measured approach to position-taking during surges in public approval and positive economic news, presidents can both be more active and, if they are fortunate, effectively push their agendas in Congress.
In this chapter I briefly review the findings from the previous chapters, focusing on the analytic approach I took and my model results. I suggest that a substantial difference between presidential position-taking and legislative support for the president exists, an argument in favor of clearly understanding executive-legislative relations as a discrete series of interactions between both branches. Finally, I offer a series of subsequent tests and a research agenda that will enrich the discipline’s knowledge of legislative-executive relations, an area of scholarship that would benefit from more methodologically- and data-rich analyses.

Before that, a review of the theoretical and empirical findings in this dissertation is in order. I will begin with a discussion of political, regime, and normal policy process time.

5.2 Malleable and Fixed Factors: Shaping the Policy Process

In Chapters 1 and 2, I discussed Peterson’s (1990) concepts of malleable and fixed factors—those variables within and outside the president’s and legislature’s control that shape presidential or legislative decisionmaking. The results in Chapters 3 and 4 make clear that the president’s past activities can both bolster and constrain presidential policymaking in Congress.

The Malleable Factors

Some of the most compelling findings with respect to malleable factors—those items under the president’s control or discretion—come in my analysis of presidential position-taking. Chapter 3 suggests that presidential position-taking is conditional on how
often presidents have pressed their agenda items in the past and how successful they have been in doing so. Following the concept of the expansionist and protectionist typology developed by Fenno (1978), the results in Chapter 3 suggest that presidents who hit the ground running and effectively stake legislative ground on a variety of issues will, later on, have little to do but prepare for the next election. Presidents that fail to build momentum early in their terms, however, will scramble later in the term to make up for lost time. The expansionist period—high levels of legislative activity and momentum building—during the early years of the administration give way to decreased levels of legislative activity late in the term, as the next election looms. Conversely, presidents that begin as protectionists early in their terms will push hard to expand their potential electoral coalition as the clock ticks toward the end of their first term.

Chapter 4 suggests that previously successful presidents or those who were more active during the first two years of their terms will be more likely to have legislative support withheld by members of Congress immediately following the midterm. Presidents, thus, attempting to protect their political capital during the last two years of their administrations are dealing with a Congress—particularly during periods of divided government—that continues to seek ways to sap that capital. Although presidents recover following the midterm election and build momentum during their fourth year, the damage already may have been done by the opposition in Congress.

Presidents early in their terms ride the honeymoon period and whatever perceived electoral mandates they have, but as the term wears on, the results in Chapter 3 suggest that presidents must rely more on experience and expertise to press forward their legislative agendas. The results from Chapter 3 are consistent with Light’s (1999)
assertions regarding presidential cycles of “decreasing influence and increasing effectiveness.” Chapter 3 suggests quite clearly that presidents are more careful with their legislative activities, preferring to be more targeted about their position-taking particularly, when they were active and successful early in their terms.

Presidents also make more effective use of presidential approval during the second year of their terms. When approval is high during the second year, presidents press their agendas more frequently, aggressively taking positions during the summer months leading up to the midterm elections. During the third year—and often following a midterm defeat—popular presidents, however, shut down their position-taking while unpopular presidents attempt to build public momentum by more forcefully pushing their agenda.

Even so, Chapter 4 suggests that these attempts to leverage political capital in the form of presidential approval are generally unsuccessful: the coefficients associated with presidential approval are negative and lack statistical significance. Presidents are, however, able to parlay major speeches during the fourth year of their administrations into a higher likelihood of legislative support. So although major speeches rarely signal a presidential position, they might encourage the legislature to support the president’s position if one follows a major presidential address.

Perhaps most interestingly, Chapter 4 suggests that the simple act of standing for something—taking a positive stance on a vote before the House—buys the president tremendous leverage as Congress considers supporting that position. This suggests that if the president can encourage the votes, issues, or bills that are to be considered by the
legislative body—and the president is subsequently able to take a stance on those votes—he will be more successful in seeing those items passed.

Otherwise, and consistent with Covington (1987), remaining silent may be the best means by which presidents can see their legislative agendas to fruition. Presidents—according to the results in Chapter 4—may be best to remain quiet, particularly when they disagree with a vote, bill, or issue being considered in Congress. Presidents, rather than taking positions, may instead find it more effective to lobby members of Congress personally without politicizing an issue or galvanizing the president’s opposition by the simple of act of taking a public position on a House vote.

Fixed Factors

Fixed factors, such as the partisan and ideological makeup of the legislative branch, and the external economic and policy environment balance malleable factors, such as public approval, prior activity, and even previous legislative success. Particularly striking is the obvious disconnect between how divided government shapes presidential position-taking and what it means for the president’s positions as Congress adjudicates them.

Chapter 3 indicates that presidents, during their second and third years, are significantly more likely to take positions during periods of divided government than they are during periods of unified government. This finding is consistent with the formal theory literature on blame games—presidents wish to stake positions and when Congress fails to support those positions, he is able to clearly distinguish himself from the play of politics in the legislative branch. This finding also is consistent with Jones’s (1994)
assertion that presidents, during periods of divided government, may be able to be more productive because these periods provide them with ready opportunities for compromise.

Given the findings in Chapter 4, the former explanation seems more satisfying. According to the models in that chapter, presidents pushing their agenda during periods of divided government were significantly less likely to be successful in engendering House support for their vote positions. This suggests two things: first, presidents expecting to receive support from the opposition based on a perceived electoral mandate may, in general, be dead wrong. Second, presidents, during periods of divided government, may take positions with the expectation of losing more often. Losses during divided government periods permit the president to clearly establish where his policies deviate from those of Congress, lay blame accordingly, and use that blame to advocate for greater presidential party representation in the House or Senate during the next election.

Between Chapters 3 and 4, one thing is particularly and unsurprisingly consistent: the type of policy being considered in the House positively shapes both the president’s probability of taking positions and the legislature’s likelihood of supporting them. Foreign policy votes—again illustrating the power of the “two presidencies” thesis”—were more often seized upon by presidents and supported by the House than any other vote type. Presidents, as Wildavsky (1966) and others suggest, find foreign policy appealing, perhaps because the American public is less informed about it or because foreign policy by-and-large avoids dividing the public and Congress as sharply as does domestic policy. Regardless, the lesson from this analysis clearly is that presidents should attempt to and can be more productive on foreign policy votes above all others.
As Chapter 3 demonstrates, presidents leverage positive economic news by taking more positions on votes before the House. This activity, however, does not presage legislative support for those positions: Chapter 4 suggests that a wary Congress moves quickly to tamp down the president’s eagerness to leverage the political capital generated by good economic news. Presidents may see good economic news as license to introduce more controversial pieces of legislation or to take positions on bills that significantly deviate from the preferences of the median House member. Congress, in turn, “market corrects” the chief executive’s aggressiveness by failing to support his positions on votes before the House, particularly following the upheaval that the midterm election typically means for the president and his policies—a conclusion supported in Table 4.3.

5.3 Over-Time Relations Between the President and Congress

The president and Congress move in tandem over time, with branches alternately dominating or being dominated as the policy process plays in the background. In this dissertation, I have suggested that examinations of executive-legislative relations must account for time in order to draw appropriate conclusions about how each branch shapes the policy process.

The Consequences of Political Time

I found broad support for my hypothesis that political time—the countdown that begins when presidents take office and ends when they leave it or are reelected—casts a consistent shadow over a president’s position-taking and legislative support for those positions. The effectiveness of presidential activities waxes and wanes during the term,
often conditional on the electoral politics that constantly frame the relationship between
the executive and legislative branches. The honeymoon and reelection years affect both
the executive and legislative branches, often precluding either branch from breaking
through the broader political environment to either unilaterally shape the president’s
agenda or affect the success of his agenda in Congress. The variance explained by the
models in both Chapters 3 and 4 clearly illustrate how electoral politics condition
presidential position-taking and legislative support in the House.

Past presidential activity and the political environment the president faces—both
in Congress and outside of it—condition his position-taking and legislative success
during years two and three. As noted earlier in this chapter, a clear asymmetry exists
between presidential activity effects early and late in the term. This finding suggests that
presidential windows open and close over the course of the presidential term, allowing
presidents to leverage political capital at times and forcing them to closely guard it at
others.

The Need to Consider Regime Time

The results in Chapters 3 and 4 also argue for analyzing legislative-executive
relations across regime time. The hands presidents are dealt condition how successful
they can or will be in engaging Congress. So, although reconstruction presidents, such as
Ronald Reagan, may be able to seize on high levels of presidential approval and see
through an aggressive legislative agenda, articulation presidents, such as George H.W.
Bush, may struggle. I earlier argued that these differences would persist regardless of the
president’s ability as a leader or despite the president’s personality—instead, these
differences narrow or widen the berth an individual president has to let his personality and decisionmaking prowess come to the fore.

The implication of Skowronek’s (1993) work is that all presidents have roughly the same sets of skills. The political era during which they are elected, however, renders some of those skills obsolete, magnifies others, and brings forward either positive or negative personality traits, conditional on the situation in which presidents find themselves. The models in Chapters 3 and 4 support this general notion. Some presidents, no matter how hard they try or what momentum they gather, still will have difficulties both introducing agenda items and seeing them passed by Congress. Items that might confer additional political capital—such as upticks in economic indicators or presidential approval—instead sometimes deplete that capital or galvanize the opposition. Presidents during these periods of high public approval and good economic news may be tempted to take positions on votes and issues that deviate significantly from the median preferences of the House, leaving moderate and opposition partisans aligned against the president’s agenda.

Overall, Chapters 3 and 4 suggest that regime time is an important element to model and evaluate when examining executive-legislative relations. Findings in those chapters also suggest that aggregated models of presidential activity or legislative support also should account for differences across presidential regimes.

*The Policy Process as Discrete Decisions*

Finally, I found that executive-legislative relations should be examined as a series of discrete decisions over time. Using an innovative data set that treats presidential
position-taking as a decision on individual votes before the House, I discovered clear
differences between the politics of presidential position-taking and the legislature’s
support for those positions.

The models in Chapters 3 and 4 represent the realities that presidents and
members of Congress face. Presidents must determine first whether or not to circumvent
the legislative process—something they continue to do in growing numbers (Howell
2003)—or enter the normal legislative process. After deciding to work with Congress, the
president highlights agenda items by bringing forward issues from the campaign,
articulating new priorities through his presidential speeches, or simply engaging in the
legislative process as items of interest come to his attention.61 62

The president must determine where his capital will be best spent. My models are
clear on this question: presidents are most likely to succeed on votes upon which they
take positive positions or on foreign policy votes. Presidents generally will make the most
of their capital by building on past successes in Congress, and some presidents can

61 This point suggests that the votes upon which the president takes a position can either be reactive or
proactive. That is, presidents may—through public speeches, the electoral convention, or the previous
election campaign—convey a series of agenda items that eventually make their way to the floor of the
House. In this way, the president is a proactive agenda setter. Other issues, however, come to the
president’s attention after they already have made their way to the House floor. In these circumstances, the
president is a reactive agent who takes positions on votes and, by doing so, makes those votes part of his
broader agenda or, when the vote or issue being considered is at odds with his preferences, makes his
agenda known because of his opposition to a particular issue. In both the reactive or proactive cases, the
president shapes what Congress thinks about, whether or not the issue being considered was or was not part
of the president’s upfront legislative agenda.

62 The reactive versus proactive question could possibly be disentangled by examining the types of votes
upon which the president states a position. One could infer that the president is proactive when votes being
considered on the floor follow bills or amendments sponsored by his own partisans. The inference, thus, is
that the president’s agenda was communicated to his party members in the House and his party’s leadership
brought those agenda items to the floor. Conversely, examining the votes stemming from opposition party
amendments and other legislative activity may provide insights into the president as a reactive agenda
setter. While both questions are compelling and could, with additional data parsing, be analyzed using the
data set employed in this dissertation, such analyses are beyond the scope of this discussion. The questions,
however, deserve subsequent attention as part of this broader research agenda.
augment those successes by selectively taking advantage of upticks in public approval or positive economic news.

Presidents, thus, are given an opportunity to consider the legislative context; their past successes, failures, and activity; the policy vote type being considered; and whether or not the position taken is a positive or negative one. After factoring together all of these items, presidents then decide whether or not to risk capital by taking a position. My models capture this decision and offer a perspective as to when presidents are most likely to leap into the legislative process by articulating positions on votes before the House.

The normal legislative process, however, is a series of narrowing, nested decisions. After presidents choose to take positions, the ball is in Congress’s court. My models suggest marked differences between presidential position-taking and legislative support for those positions. Although presidents attempt to build momentum in their position-taking activity, Congress—particularly during periods of divided government—attempts to slow that momentum. The models in Chapter 4 suggest that foreign policy votes, positive presidential positions, and a major speech here or there may be able to shape Congress members’ votes in favor of the president’s position. Examining executive-legislative relations in a series thus allowed me to more accurately describe the policy process: as a number of discrete decisions shaped by the most salient political and external variables at the moment a presidential or legislative decision occurs.\(^{63}\)

\(^{63}\) Though far from conclusive, the results in the dissertation suggest that the president truly is a constrained actor. He is subject to the whims of public approval, the ebb and flow of the economy, foreign and domestic policy events, and myriad other drains on his political capital. Add to this legislative opposition, fickle median legislators, and the politics of congressional elections, and the president, indeed, faces an uphill battle in his attempts to dominate or even sway members of the legislative branch. This dissertation suggests, however, that there are opportunities for the president to take advantage of momentum, selectively legislate, and periodically use public approval and good economic news to his advantage. So while the president may be dominated by the sheer weight of forces that drain his political capital, he still wields substantial potential to influence Congress’s decisions on presidential position votes.
Capturing Relations Between Congress and the President: A Summary

The results in Chapters 3 and 4 are telling and offer a substantial growth over past empirical research on presidential agenda-setting and legislative support for the president. This dissertation has argued and found compelling evidence for more carefully integrating time into studies of executive-legislative relations. Moreover, this dissertation has suggested that either the president or Congress might each equally dominate the legislative process, conditional on the capital either actor has at any particular point in the term—or across terms—and the opposition in Congress to thwart the president as he pushes forward his legislative agenda.

Perhaps most important, this dissertation research employs a unique data set with a series of novel covariates that capture presidential policymaking and legislative activity against and on behalf of the chief executive. This work examines, for the first time, presidential position-taking in Congress as a discrete decision conditioned by the president’s capital as it waxes and wanes across his term, providing a different optic on legislative support for the president by casting the question of support as one among the discrete decisions that lead to codified policies.

Although the dissertation presents compelling results using unique data and newly-conceptualized independent and dependent variables, a number of additional research directions may prove fruitful. In the next section, I suggest data additions and alternative methodological approaches that may provide different optics on the same questions addressed in the dissertation. These approaches also may offer additional
leverage on one of the most important topics in American politics: the relationship between the president and Congress.

5.4 Expanding the Research: Examining the Modern Presidency

The results in Chapters 3 and 4 provide a robust picture of the first two stages of executive-legislative relations: presidential position-taking and legislative support for the president. The data suggest that covariate effects differ between years of the president’s administration and between different presidential administrations. In sum, this dissertation is an important first step in a broader research agenda that will grow stronger with the addition of data and analyses supported by appropriate statistical methods.

Seams in the dissertation, however, exist, and some questions could be examined more closely or, alternatively, some arguments that already have a solid theoretical and methodological foundation could be bolstered. Perhaps the most important next step, then, is suggesting improvements that can be used as steps to a broader research program on executive-legislative relations.

Collecting More Data: Accounting for the Modern Presidency

The data in the dissertation span the period 1977-1996, with an even mix of Republican and Democratic presidents. The data set also represents the first terms of Presidents Carter through Clinton, a choice that reflects a desire for generalizability over completeness.\(^{64}\) The data set, however, is time limited, and may risk having too little

\(^{64}\) Here, I refer to generalizability as comparability: all modern presidents have served at least one term (except Gerald Ford), and, thus, results gathered in any model of these presidents are comparable. By introducing second terms into the equation, there is an increased need to account for the “lame duck” factor that inevitably intrudes on the president’s ability to influence the happenings in Congress. Modeling lame
variability in the independent variables especially. In such circumstances, variables such as presidential ideology—via Poole and McCarty’s (1995) and Poole and Rosenthal’s (1997) presidential W-NOMINATE coordinates—had to be excluded, to the possible detriment of my models.

To mitigate these potential problems, future iterations of this research will expand the data set to include all of the modern presidents, from Franklin Delano Roosevelt forward. Data on presidential position-taking is available via Congressional Quarterly and by culling information from the Public Papers of the President, if CQ data is unavailable. Similarly, random samples of nonpresidential position votes can easily be constructed using the approach already employed in this analysis.

Such an expansion of my existing data set would allow me to include more covariates in my models. For example, ample theoretical and empirical justification exists for including presidential and legislative ideology variables in both the models of presidential position-taking and legislative support for the president. In the former,

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65 Although I am suggesting that this is a risk, the model parameters included in Chapters 3 and 4 reflected a trimming of possible model covariates based on some independent variables having too little variability. In other words, where too little variability existed or where such lack of variability suggested collinearity problems, I simply excluded those variables from the analysis. I am suggesting that an expanded data set could, in fact, allow for the inclusion of these variables, thereby producing more robust, reliable, and easily generalizable parameter estimates.

66 Expanding the data set is intuitively appealing and necessary but also has potential pitfalls. The dynamics between Congress and the president vary significantly over time, so it could be argued that generalizations even across the past forty years will be difficult and will be even more pronounced if one were to, for example, analyze legislative-executive relations beginning at the turn of the early 20th century. Although I above cite the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration as a potential cutoff for analyzing the modern presidency, such data questions are subject to debate: one could argue that the modern presidency—including the creation of the legislative liaison function within the White House—began with the Eisenhower administration. Similar debates could be had across multiple eras of presidential administrations and may suggest that examining limited periods of legislative-executive relations is the most appropriate approach to understanding (without over-generalizing or drawing erroneous conclusions about) those relations. If this is the case, this dissertation takes an important first step in such analyses.
extreme ideologue presidents might be more strident in their approach to taking positions, because they may perceive that the electorate will support, or at least provide “more rope” for, such extreme policy stances.

Following Groseclose and McCarty (2000) and Cameron (2002), such ideologues also may be attempting, through their extreme policy position, to draw distinctions between their own policy preferences and those of the opposition in Congress. An expanded data set that offers more variability on the presidential ideology variable—a variable that is relatively static and can nearly act like a dummy variable in small samples—also would allow for tests of the “extreme ideologue” hypothesis. In sum, the data set would benefit from additional variables cataloguing the entire normal legislative process and could expand its scope from the 1977-1996 timeframe to 1948-2004.

**Collecting More Data: Bolstering the Regime Time Findings**

As noted in Chapter 3, the regime time findings—differences in covariate effects that conform to Skowronek’s (1993) analysis of presidents of reconstruction, articulation, preemption, and disjunction—are suggestive. Nevertheless, the findings also beg the question: to what degree are the covariate effects due, not to regime differences, but to

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67 Early versions of my models and subsequent first difference estimates included the presidential ideology variable. It performed as one might expect given the lack of variability: parameter estimates were generally wild, variables were thrown from the models due to collinearity problems, and first difference estimates were obviously attributable to particular presidents in the data set. On the latter, shifting the “presidential ideology” variable or other similar variables (such as the absolute value of the difference between the president’s NOMINATE coordinate and that of the median member of the House) from the 20th to the 80th percentile shifted the first difference estimate from a look at the Carter administration to the Reagan administration. In other words, the general lack of variability among presidents in the data set prevented the first difference estimates from having heft.
differences in presidential personalities? The question is a reasonable one and worthy of additional consideration.68

The hypotheses about regime time discussed in both Chapters 3 and 4 argue for the perspective that *ex ante* environmental, political, and social tolerances and contingencies shape what presidential personality is able to affect during the president’s term. In other words, the politics that presidents make is constrained, and the president’s personality is only able to shape those politics according to what the social, political, and external environments will allow.

With a data set consisting of four presidents—one of each of Skowronek’s (1993) regime types—it could be argued that any difference in covariate effects across the presidential position-taking and legislative support models are the manifestations of each president’s personality. Even if the differences among the regime time models in Chapters 3 and 4, however, are due exclusively to the personalities of individual presidents, the analytic framework for assessing those differences appears to be a good one for examining regime time differences.

An expanded data set that includes all of the modern presidents will include multiple observations on each of the presidential regime types: two reconstruction (FDR and Reagan), four articulation (Truman, Johnson, Ford, and George H.W. Bush), four

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68 Although the results can be read to suggest the degree to which regime time ex-ante shapes executive-legislative relations, they also could indicate how presidents use their personalities during the regime period in which they were elected to similarly shape those relations. The data set, as it exists, may make it difficult to parse out the ex-ante “regime” effects noted by Skowronek and more personality-based effects noted by scholars, such as Barber (1992) and Greenstein (1994). By accruing more observations for each regime type, stronger generalizations may be made about the influence that regime time—and the institutional, cultural, political, and social realities that come along with it—exclusively has on executive-legislative relations.
preemption (Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon, and Clinton), and one disjunction (Carter).\textsuperscript{69}

In sum, providing more substantial tests of the regime time hypotheses may be possible with a data set that offers more observations on each regime type. Moreover, such tests would allow me to more easily disentangle differences in covariate effects that are due to regime types from those owing to variations in presidential personalities.

\textit{Collecting More Data: Changing the Unit of Analysis}

The analyses in Chapters 3 and 4 focus exclusively on a collective decision by the House of Representatives to either provide or deny support on presidential position votes. This methodological decision has some limitations. First, it assumes that legislative bodies make decisions, assigning “actor” status to the House membership as a whole. This assumption anthropomorphizes the House as a body and does not account for the decisions made by individual legislators that undergird the collective body’s decisions.

Moreover, analyses of presidential “sway” (Sullivan 1987; Hager and Sullivan 1994; Sullivan 2004) suggest that the president’s true power comes at the individual legislator level. So, although analyses of the House’s overall decision on presidential position votes may be helpful as a heuristic to understanding some dimensions of the executive-legislative relationship, a true measure of presidential sway in the House probably should account for the behavior of individual members on presidential position

\textsuperscript{69} The George W. Bush administration remains to be classified according to the Skowronek typology. Bush Jr., however, has presided over a partisan split in Congress; been unable to muster substantial electoral victories in either 2000 or 2004; and has had a significant, but still untested, policy effect, primarily owing to the expansion of the government’s security efforts following the attacks of September 11th. After the dust settles, consideration of one of two typologies for Bush is possible: preemption, reflecting his administration’s hand-off from eight years of Democratic control in the White House; or disjunction, reflecting a public soured by the scandals of the Clinton administration and on the doorstep of a potential partisan split among libertarian and Evangelical members of the Republican Party. Only time, however, will tell on the latter categorization of the Bush administration.
votes. As Meinke and Anderson (2001) demonstrate, such analyses—when conducted as cross-sectional time series studies—provide a rich picture of how malleable and fixed forces shape an individual legislator’s support for the president.

Although Chapter 3 would still employ the individual House floor vote as the unit of analysis, Chapter 4 could be augmented or reconsidered by shifting the unit of analysis from the House’s collective vote on the president’s position to the individual legislator’s floor vote on the same. Although beyond the scope of this analysis, this revised dependent variable may help address the question of how presidents sway individual legislators.

*Stretching Out the Normal Legislative Process: Beyond Position-Taking and Support*

As noted in Chapter 2, the series of potential interactions between Congress and the president extends beyond presidential position-taking and legislative support for those positions. Presidents also retain the veto option and, according to Cameron (2000) and Krehbiel (1998), increasingly use it, both to threaten Congress and to create institutional gridlock.

These findings suggest that analyses of executive-legislative relations could and likely should account for presidential vetoes and votes on legislative overrides. The dataset used in this dissertation could be augmented to account for these additional interactions between Congress and the president and may shed additional light on the gamut of relations between the executive and legislative branches. Moreover, including these presidential and legislative options as dependent variables and possibly even
independent variables lends itself to other methodological innovations that could provide
leverage on the broader question of executive-legislative relations.

Alternative Methodological Approaches

Using individual votes on the floor of the House as the unit of analysis provides
unique methodological opportunities to analyze the breadth of executive-legislative
relations in the House. The normal policy process between the legislative and executive
branches begins with presidential position-taking and, potentially, ends with legislative
overrides of presidential vetoes, suggesting that nested logit models (Ben-Akiva 1974a;
1974b; 1973; Greene 2003) may be an appropriate methodological solution.\textsuperscript{70} Nested
logit models analyze discrete choices as a series of decisions over time and frequently are
used in marketing research, among other disciplines.\textsuperscript{71}

The nested decisions begin when the president first determines whether or not to
take a position on an individual floor vote. The House membership votes next as a whole
either to support or reject the president’s position. If the House rejects the president’s
position, the president retains the option to either veto or let stand the House’s position.
Finally, the House can either support that veto (tacitly or via an override vote failure) or
override it. The nested model can account for the dichotomous choices early in the
model—through the veto—while including the three-way decision that the House
encounters when assessing the utility of a veto override.

\textsuperscript{70} Additional applications of the nested logit model are available in Heiss (2002).

\textsuperscript{71} An excellent discussion of structural and discrete choice models, including nested logit, is offered at Ken
Train’s website at the University of California at Berkeley,
http://elsa.berkeley.edu/eml/qca_reader/7a.nested.pdf.
Apart from examining the data as a series of decisions, the binary cross-sectional approach employed in Chapters 3 and 4 also may be augmented by more robust event history models (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004). With its current structure, the data set would support an event history analysis of presidential position-taking, where the dependent variable would be the timing of presidential positions. Each presidential position would be a recurring event, and one might expect that as the presidential term wears on, the time between positions is likely to increase. Moreover, one may also be able to more accurately analyze how potential upticks in presidential capital—such as an increase in presidential approval, good economic news, or seat gains by the president’s party following the midterm election—shape presidential position-timing.

Finally, event history models also may illuminate how legislative support for the president occurs in the House. For example, the House choosing to withhold support from the president could be an event that interrupts a series of House votes supporting the president. The dependent variable—the timing of legislative support (or not) for the president—could then be assessed to determine how items such as presidential approval, economic growth or decline, and past or present presidential activities shape the occurrence (or lack thereof) of such events. This type of analysis may shed more light on

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72 Preliminary models run for Chapters 3 and 4 employed clock variables—and squared clock variables—as proxies for political capital. The hypothesis was that, as the clock ticked toward the end of the president’s term, the president’s political capital would concurrently decline, leaving the president less likely to take positions and Congress less likely to support those positions. Although the analyses found preliminary support for these hypotheses, subsequent analyses could employ the BTSCS approach advocated by Beck and Katz (1995), Beck, Tucker, and Katz (1998), and available in Stata .ado format via Tucker (1999) to clarify the relationships among time, political capital, and either presidential position-taking or legislative support for the president.

73 In much the same manner that a death, the acquisition of a disease, or the breakdown of a machine represents an event.
presidential momentum and the tools Congress might either employ or signals House members might cue from to retard that momentum.

5.4 Conclusion

President George W. Bush, after winning 51 percent of the vote in the 2004 presidential election, claimed a mandate and set to work cashing in political capital. Although the concept of the political mandate is possibly in question, as recent research (Peterson et al. 2003) suggests, President Bush believed that he had capital to spend and intended to cash it in, beginning with a broad restructuring of a political sacred cow, Social Security. What might the findings in this dissertation say about the likelihood of President Bush finding success with such a proposal among members of the House of Representatives?74

All told, the president’s position on Social Security—even before it comes to Congress for a formal vote—is likely to encounter significant obstacles as it winds its way to and possibly through the House of Representatives. With low public support for the president, a tough domestic policy position, tepid economic news, and the ticking of time toward the end of President Bush’s second term, Social Security reform, according to the findings in this dissertation, will be a challenging issue to frame for Congress and successfully sway legislators’ votes. The models provide a means by which to examine the votes upon which presidents are most likely to take positions and the conditions under

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74 For transparency’s sake, it is important to note that President George W. Bush began pressing for Social Security reform during his second term. As discussed earlier, presidential second terms were excluded from my analysis. That said, my models do offer some hints as to the possible end to President Bush’s Social Security agenda.
which the positions are taken. The models offer additional insight into legislative support for the president’s positions.

    More important than the decision on Social Security is the analytic framework this dissertation provides for understanding executive-legislative relations on issues such as Social Security. The Social Security example, however, ably illustrates the four most important elements of the dissertation. First, it suggests the importance and influence of time in eroding political capital and shifting political dynamics. Second, it conveys the importance of capital generation via presidential approval and economic good news. Third, it demonstrates the value of hitting the ground running and building a record of legislative success and balanced activity. Finally, it highlights the relevance of examining each presidential position and subsequent legislative vote as discrete events rather than aggregated yearly activities (see Shull and Shaw 1999, for example).

    In sum, executive-legislative relations are a compendium of opportunities to build or erode capital, seize on open policy windows, and alternatively share power between the branches, as tandem institutions. This dissertation offers a new optic on those relations and provides a firm foundation for subsequent research agendas that extend and improve upon research about arguably the most important relationship in American politics.
APPENDIX A

CHAPTER 3 SUPPLEMENTARY TABLES
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President (Years)</th>
<th>Foreign</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Bureaucracy</th>
<th>Procedural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy Carter (1977-80)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.144)</td>
<td>(0.459)</td>
<td>(0.116)</td>
<td>(0.080)</td>
<td>(0.135)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronald Reagan (1981-84)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.198)</td>
<td>(0.461)</td>
<td>(0.168)</td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
<td>(0.089)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George H.W. Bush (1989-92)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.175)</td>
<td>(0.492)</td>
<td>(0.116)</td>
<td>(0.017)</td>
<td>(0.137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Clinton (1993-96)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.152)</td>
<td>(0.596)</td>
<td>(0.126)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.054)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>834</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.174)</td>
<td>(0.532)</td>
<td>(0.136)</td>
<td>(0.046)</td>
<td>(0.111)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE A.1: REMAINING SILENT: NONPRESIDENTIAL POSITION VOTES, 1977-1996

The data reflect the first terms of Presidents Carter through Reagan. The data reported represent a sample of randomly generated votes taken from the sample of House votes upon which the presidents noted failed to take positions. The samples of non-position for each administration are approximately equal to the sample size of the presidential position votes during the same period. The numbers listed are the numbers of votes of each type in the sample; the numbers in parentheses represent the proportion of the total sample each vote type represents.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy Vote</td>
<td>0.869 **</td>
<td>1.005 **</td>
<td>0.722 **</td>
<td>1.016 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQ Key Vote</td>
<td>-0.078</td>
<td>0.832 **</td>
<td>0.755 **</td>
<td>0.442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presidency Centered</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning Percentage</td>
<td>-1.885</td>
<td>-25.219</td>
<td>-28.161 *</td>
<td>-69.017 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Speeches</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>-0.460</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Popularity</td>
<td>0.066 **</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>-0.103 **</td>
<td>-0.064 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>∆ GDP %</td>
<td>0.306 **</td>
<td>-0.019</td>
<td>-0.017</td>
<td>0.087 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>∆ Unemployment %</td>
<td>-0.796</td>
<td>-0.382</td>
<td>-0.588</td>
<td>-0.167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.745</td>
<td>16.380</td>
<td>30.636 **</td>
<td>57.419 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Obs.</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2 log-likelihood (d.f. = 8)</td>
<td>23.70</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>28.38</td>
<td>32.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Probit maximum likelihood estimate coefficients reported. Statistical significance calculated using robust standard errors.

* p < 0.10
** p < 0.05

**Table A.2:**
Presidential Position-Taking in the U.S. House
President Carter, By Year
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy Vote</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>0.167</td>
<td>0.601 **</td>
<td>0.214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQ Key Vote</td>
<td>0.648 *</td>
<td>0.431</td>
<td>0.688 *</td>
<td>0.403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presidency Centered</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Legislative Activity</td>
<td>-3.445</td>
<td>13.775</td>
<td>-22.043</td>
<td>15.835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning Percentage</td>
<td>-0.350</td>
<td>-12.010 **</td>
<td>-35.170 **</td>
<td>-51.148 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Speeches</td>
<td>0.603 *</td>
<td>-0.314 **</td>
<td>-0.776 **</td>
<td>0.740 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Popularity</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>0.331 **</td>
<td>-0.208</td>
<td>0.485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ GDP %</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>0.101 **</td>
<td>0.053</td>
<td>0.432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ Unemployment %</td>
<td>1.319</td>
<td>-3.191 **</td>
<td>0.143</td>
<td>-1.478 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.652</td>
<td>-8.014</td>
<td>35.121 **</td>
<td>-4.557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Obs.</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2 log-likelihood (d.f. = 8)</td>
<td>8.97</td>
<td>25.20 **</td>
<td>21.82 **</td>
<td>21.07 **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Probit maximum likelihood estimate coefficients reported. Statistical significance calculated using robust standard errors.

* p < 0.10
** p < 0.05

**Table A.3:**
Presidential Position-Taking in the U.S. House
President Reagan, By Year
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>POLICY TYPE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy Vote</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.369</td>
<td>* 0.531</td>
<td>**0.741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQ Key Vote</td>
<td>0.568</td>
<td>* 0.884</td>
<td>**1.071</td>
<td>**0.688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRESIDENCY CENTERED</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Legislative Activity</td>
<td>3.233</td>
<td>-6.597</td>
<td>4.022</td>
<td>-10.430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning Percentage</td>
<td>0.442</td>
<td>-2.972</td>
<td>-0.652</td>
<td>-5.584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Speeches</td>
<td>-0.181</td>
<td>-0.052</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Popularity</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>* -0.036</td>
<td>* -0.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXTERNAL CONTEXT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ GDP %</td>
<td>0.396</td>
<td>-0.059</td>
<td>-0.125</td>
<td>* -0.216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ Unemployment %</td>
<td>-1.113</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.215</td>
<td>2.470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-3.786</td>
<td>-0.781</td>
<td>1.514</td>
<td>9.991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Obs.</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2 log-likelihood</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>18.44</td>
<td>* 23.57</td>
<td>**19.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d.f. = 8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Probit maximum likelihood estimate coefficients reported. Statistical significance calculated using robust standard errors.

* p < 0.10
** p < 0.05

Table A.4:
PRESIDENTIAL POSITION-TAKING IN THE U.S. HOUSE
PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH, BY YEAR
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy Vote</td>
<td>0.536</td>
<td>** 1.047</td>
<td>** 0.507</td>
<td>** 0.353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQ Key Vote</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td>** 0.860</td>
<td>** 1.261</td>
<td>** 0.769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presidency Centered</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Legislative Activity</td>
<td>2.527</td>
<td>** -44.171</td>
<td>** -63.185</td>
<td>** -68.288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning Percentage</td>
<td>0.808</td>
<td>-36.706</td>
<td>* -15.422</td>
<td>** -21.808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Speeches</td>
<td>0.206</td>
<td>-0.173</td>
<td>-0.588</td>
<td>** 0.338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Popularity</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>-0.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>∆ GDP %</td>
<td>0.327</td>
<td>** 0.296</td>
<td>* 0.179</td>
<td>* 0.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>∆ Unemployment %</td>
<td>3.426</td>
<td>** -0.729</td>
<td>3.091</td>
<td>** 1.196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.281</td>
<td>41.135</td>
<td>** 27.371</td>
<td>35.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Obs.</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2 log-likelihood</td>
<td>26.32</td>
<td>** 22.99</td>
<td>** 48.22</td>
<td>** 9.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Probit maximum likelihood estimate coefficients reported. Statistical significance calculated using robust standard errors.

* p < 0.10
** p < 0.05

**Table A.5:**
Presidential Position-Taking in the U.S. House
President Clinton, By Year


