

# The President's Role in the Partisan Congressional Arena

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*Models of presidential success have sometimes focused on the importance of political capital and sometimes looked at the partisan environment of Congress. We develop time-series models of success that refine and integrate these perspectives while reframing the matter in terms of research on congressional parties. Measures of the ideological and partisan makeup of Congress are used to explain presidential success from 1953 to 2006 but the approval of the president's base is important as well. We also show the electoral consequences to congressional parties of presidential success—congressional parties gain and lose seats based on the battles won and lost by the president. This gives legislators (not) of his party an incentive to see his agenda implemented (defeated). Studying both the causes and consequences of presidential success in Congress is meant to integrate theories of the two institutions along with extant theories of party behavior.*

Of the Democrats' drive in 2009 for health care reform, Sen. Jim DeMint (R-SC) said, "If we're able to stop Obama on this it will be his Waterloo. It will break him." The following week, Sen. James Inhofe (R-OK) pointed out that the defeat of President Clinton's health reforms in 1993: ". . . started the demise of Bill Clinton that led to the 1994 Republican takeover of the House and the Senate." Inhofe continued:

They ought to know, they ought to know from history. . . we are plotting the demise on a week by week basis of where Bill Clinton was in 1993 and where Obama is today. . . I just hope the President keeps talking about it, keeps trying to rush it through. We can stall it. And that's going to be a huge gain for those of us who want to turn this thing over in the 2010 election.

This last statement is especially telling for students of parties in that it is explicit about whom the Republicans are trying to "break." DeMint, Inhofe, and congressional Republicans do not appear to be focused here on defeating President Obama in 2012. Using the lessons of 1993–94, they are counting on a legislative defeat for a Democratic president to retake majority control of Congress in 2010.

A similar perspective on the importance of legislative victories is shared by White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel. His observation that "When

a party fails to govern, it fails electorally," is indicative of a view in Washington that electoral fortunes are closely tied to legislative outcomes. This view is echoed in theories of political parties in Congress (e.g., Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005; Lebo, McGlynn, and Koger 2007). But the consequences of presidential failure to members of his party are largely unexplored in empirical research. Also, while the fairly deep literature on the causes of presidential success has focused a lot on the partisan environment within which the president's legislative battles are won and lost, it pays less attention to theories of congressional parties. Our attempt to combine these theories with a view of the president as the central actor in the partisan wars is meant to integrate the literatures on the two institutions.

Even as the study of parties in Congress continues to deepen our understanding of that branch, the role of the president is usually left out or marginalized. At the same time, research that centers on the president's success has developed with little crossover. The result is that well-developed theories of parties in Congress exist but we know much less about how parties connect the two branches. For example, between models of conditional party government (Aldrich and Rohde 2001; Rohde 1991), Cartel Theory (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005), and others (e.g., Patty 2008), we have an advanced

understanding of how parties are important in Congress, but little knowledge of where the president fits. As the head of his party, the president's role in the partisan politics of Congress should be central.

Keeping this centrality in mind, we use established theories of congressional parties to model the president's role as an actor within the constraints of the partisan environment of Congress.<sup>1</sup> We also find a role for the president's approval level, a variable of some controversy in the literature. Further, we are interested in both the causes and consequences of success. We develop a theory that views the president's record as a key component of the party politics that are so important to both the passage of legislation and the electoral outcomes that follow. Specifically, theories of partisan politics in Congress argue that cross-pressured legislators will side with their parties in order to enhance the collective reputation of their party (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005), but no empirical research has answered the question: "of what are collective reputations made?" We demonstrate that it is the success of the president—not parties in Congress—that predicts rewards and punishments to parties in Congress. This allows us to neatly fit the president into existing theories of party competition in Congress while our analyses of presidential success enable us to fit existing theories of congressional parties into the literature on the presidency.

Empirically, we look for sources of presidential success in measures of congressional partisanship and ideology (see, for example Bond and Fleisher 1990; Rudalevige 2002). Variables measuring the size of the president's party in Congress, voting cohesion within the president's party, ideological distance between the president and House leadership, and a measure of the "conditions" of conditional party government are used to explain the success rate of the president's legislative priorities. After accounting for these partisan factors, we show that the president's overall approval rating has little marginal effect on his success but that approval among his base is important. This finding is useful given both public discourse on presidential popularity and the prominent place approval has had in studies of presidential success. Finally, we look at the seat share won by Democrats in House elections since 1953 to investigate how the changing success of the president over time affects the electoral success of his party. Throughout, we employ dynamic approaches that

allow us to gauge the sources and consequences of improvements and declines in presidential success.

The article proceeds as follows: in the next section, we discuss both the extant literature on the success of the president in Congress as well as the literature on partisan conflict in Congress. We then place our work within this context, discuss our theoretical perspective, and state our hypotheses. After a brief description of the data and our methodological approach, we present the results of our analyses that show, in turn, the determinants of presidential success and its electoral consequences for the House of Representatives. This is followed by a discussion of the findings and conclusions about the direction of future work on this topic.

## Presidential Success

The seminal work of Neustadt (1960) provides the foundation for most empirical examinations of presidential influence in Congress. Writing about power in political office, Neustadt was interested in understanding both the sources of power for a president and the mechanisms by which that power could be maintained and used. While the conclusions are based primarily on carefully selected examples that often cannot be generalized to other situations (Bond and Fleisher 1980; Edwards 1980), they do provide a theoretical starting point for the literature on presidential success.

Of what is presidential power made? For Neustadt, it is the power to influence and to persuade. On the domestic front, it is the power to effectively control both the legislative agenda and process and to turn electoral mandates into national policy. So, one way to view presidential power vis à vis the legislature is through the president's ability to get legislation that he favors through Congress.

One aspect of Neustadt's (1960) argument in particular—the link between popular approval and success—attracted a lot of attention. The idea that "political capital" comes from presidential popularity and can be spent in the legislative arena is a persistent one. For Neustadt, the public prestige of the president was a key factor in his legislative success. He did temper this with the warning that prestige is a "factor operating mostly in the background as a conditioner" (1960, 87) and that it "may not decide the outcome in a given case but can affect the likelihoods in every case and therefore is strategically important to his power" (93).

<sup>1</sup>An online appendix as well as the data and RATS programs to replicate our findings can be found at <http://journals.cambridge.org/jop> and <http://ms.cc.sunysb.edu/~mlebo/details.htm>. RATS procedures are available at [estima.com](http://estima.com).

Early work sought to empirically investigate some of Neustadt's claims. First, it was necessary to evaluate whether the relationship between success and approval existed at all. In a series of work, Edwards (1976, 1980) looks at correlations between presidential approval and success across multiple scenarios. This research is notable in that it represents one of the first attempts to rigorously examine the relationships identified as important by Neustadt. Edwards' results in these studies are mixed, however. For example, the correlations between approval and support overall are very high, but much of the evidence of this relationship disappears when partisanship is introduced.

Building on the work of Edwards, scholars sought to evaluate the relationship between approval and success in more methodologically advanced ways. This research sought to both build on Edwards' findings as well as move beyond some of the limitations of relying on correlations to make causal inferences. Much of this line of research concluded that the tenuous link identified by Edwards was much stronger than previously thought (Bond and Fleisher 1984; Ostrom and Simon 1985; Rivers and Rose 1985).

Later research challenged the strength of the relationship between approval and success and found it to be marginal or nonexistent (Collier and Sullivan 1995). Separating by issue areas, Fleisher et al. (2000) find that public support of neither domestic nor foreign policy issues have much bearing on success and that partisan factors are more determinative of roll-call results.

Still, the intuitive appeal of the hypothesis—*ceteris paribus* a president should have higher success if his popularity is higher—has led to multiple attempts to rescue it. Peterson states simply that a "... lack of popularity with the American people diminishes a president's policy-making stature" (1990, 136) and finds some support when using probit analyses for data collected at the bill level. Cohen et al. (2000) look at state-level approval and conclude that there is no relationship between it and the behavior of individual Senators towards the president's legislative agenda. Canes-Wrone and de Marchi (2002) investigate the success of individual roll calls on which the president has taken a position and find the impact of approval to be indirect and conditional on other bill-specific factors such as salience. Bond, Fleisher, and Wood (2003) investigate the interactive and time-varying nature of approval and find evidence that its influence changes over time. Rudalevige (2002, 131) points out that even if popularity has a marginal effect on success, this might be key since policy is made at the margins.

In his most recent book, *The Strategic President*, George Edwards asserts that the power of the president is *not* the power to persuade. Presidents may exploit opportunities of high approval but, for the most part, "presidential legislative leadership operates in an environment largely beyond the president's control" (2009, 150). Edwards holds out a marginal role for the president's popularity: "Presidents must largely play the hands that the public deals them through its voting in presidential and congressional elections and its evaluations of the chief executive's job performance" (152).

This is representative of the shift away from Neustadt's focus on "what the president does and how well he does it" (Bond and Fleisher 1990, 12) to a perspective based more on the environment within Congress. For one, Cooper and Brady (1981) see the institutional context as more important than the personal leadership skills of the president. A thorough treatment of this viewpoint can be found in Bond and Fleisher (1990), who see success as dependent upon what they call "linkage agents" which provide the bridge through which the partisan and ideological makeup of Congress can influence presidential success. Similarly, Peterson (1990) sees the partisan make-up of Congress as critical to presidential success, and Rudalevige (2002) argues parties and ideology are where most studies of presidential success are centered.

Most of the recent work deals with the president's ability to impact the legislative process not in any overt or direct way, but at the margins. For example, Wood (2009) looks at the president's ability to shape economic policy through rhetoric and others look at the president's use of the media and his ability to "go public" on important issues (for example, Barrett 2004; Canes-Wrone 2001). Also, recent work examines the president's ability to lobby and build coalitions in Congress as a means of influencing outcomes (Beckmann 2008). However, as the quotes from Emmanuel and DeMint suggest, the impact of bargaining, coalition building, and public statements by the president can be felt long after the congressional agenda has been set. Indeed, presidential success may have an important effect on the very structure of representation in future Congresses. This leads us from an investigation of the causes of success to an interest in its consequences.

What is at stake for a president when he proposes and advocates a legislative agenda? Surely history and his legacy are important considerations, but there are more immediate and practical concerns as well. Neustadt may argue that nothing less than the

president's power is at stake. As Dickinson (2008) points out, Neustadt saw power as the ability of the president to influence government policy and outputs. This power was best retained by continually thinking prospectively about how current decisions may shape the circumstances under which future decisions are made. Choosing a course likely to lead to electoral victories for his party fits this outlook. Similarly, political insiders, such as those quoted above, seem to believe that the president's legislative agenda is an important marker for the president's power, both in terms of effective governance and in terms of the electoral and political success of his party. Emanuel's statement in particular suggests that the stakes surrounding the president's legislative agenda are very high indeed, no less than electoral success in the next election and perhaps majority control of Congress.

Yet, when we say "next election" which election do we mean: presidential or congressional? Neustadt's paradigm suggests that presidents reap the benefits or pay the costs of legislative outcomes themselves. However, Cox and McCubbins (1993, 2005) argue that congressional parties rely on their collective reputations, as established through legislative victories, to gain electoral rewards. The latter is a critical, yet untested, assumption of Cartel Theory—that electoral gains from party wins provide legislators with the impetus for "significant party behavior" (Krehbiel 1993). That is, a desire to improve the overall reputation of her party and have the corresponding individual benefit can pull a legislator from her personal preferences and those of her constituents in order to help secure a party victory.

This is a persuasive answer to Krehbiel's question to advocates of party power: *why* would a legislator choose a party over her constituents and ideology? While there have been many answers to Krehbiel's empirical challenge to demonstrate significant party behavior, Cartel Theory's identification of collective reputation is a rare and credible answer to Krehbiel's theoretical challenge to explain *why*.

Yet, implicit in this precept of Cartel Theory is a hypothesis of voting behavior; voters will gauge the success of parties in Congress and adjust their voting.<sup>2</sup> It is assumed that, seeing one party in Congress losing legislative battles, a voter will lose confidence in that party and be less likely to vote for its candidate in the future. Thus, a cross-pressured member may side with her party on a roll-call vote and still gain a benefit from a voter who disagrees

with the vote. Through this unseen mechanism, party fortunes rise and fall.

Other studies have found links between congressional elections and presidential approval, though not specifically legislative success. Abramowitz (1985) and Cover (1986) both demonstrate the effects of presidential "performance" on individual-level vote choice in congressional elections, but only using approval as a proxy for performance. Closer to the mark, Gronke, Koch, and Wilson (2003) discuss the "restricted in-party culpability thesis" (Fiorina 1983; Hibbing and Alford 1981; Stein 1990; Tuftte 1975) which expects the president's fellow partisans to gain electorally when the president is popular and successful. Still, Gronke et al. look at individual-level choices based on presidential approval and not success. This distinction is especially important for us, not only because it points out the hole in the empirical literature we wish to fill, but because it is the president's success—and not his approval—that legislators can directly affect through their behavior and voting record.

Understanding the determinants of presidential success remains important. It is through his legislative success that a president can implement his agenda. Further, this success is itself important in understanding how voters hold parties, members of Congress, and presidents accountable. Greater theory and evidence are needed to understand the extent to which presidential success as well as party success are exogenous to the elections that follow. Thus, it is appropriate to study the causes and consequences of success in tandem. In the next section we discuss our theoretical approach, which ties together work on congressional parties with a further development of Bond and Fleisher's partisan paradigm for understanding the success of presidents.

## Explaining Presidential Success in the House

The president's copartisans in Congress have electoral incentives to help him win legislative victories and those that oppose him have an interest in seeing him defeated. This is true even when we take into account the relative ideological preferences of parties, congressional leadership, and the president. Starting with the consequences of success instead of its causes is a distinctive way to begin but provides the needed setting for the hypotheses of partisan politics to follow.

<sup>2</sup>Or, perhaps, the legislative battles could affect voters without them realizing it.

Principally, we assume members are motivated by a desire for reelection (Mayhew 1974). We further assume that members will act in a manner toward the president's agenda that is going to provide them the most benefit. Studies have found that, for members of the president's party, electoral fortunes are tied very closely to the popularity of the president (Abramowitz 1985; Cover 1986; Gronke, Koch, and Wilson 2003; Jacobson 1997). Our expectation is therefore that the members of the president's party will act to support his agenda above and beyond what one might expect simply from preferences alone.

Borrowing hypotheses central to conditional party government and cartel theory gives us a framework within which to work here. First, we perceive a congressional party as wanting to improve its collective reputation in order to enhance members' electoral fortunes (Cox and McCubbins 2005). Second, members of Congress see legislative outcomes as keys to these reputations. Third—and here we depart from the cartel model—the victories/losses that member of Congress expect voters to reward/punish are those of the central actor in American politics, the president. The president's victories should rally voters to his copartisans and his defeats should drive voters from them.

From the perspective of voters, Cartel Theory's hypothesis that party reputation depends mostly on the success of parties in Congress seems questionable. We might instead expect voters' opinions about the president to be the primary variable that affects their opinions about parties in Congress and elsewhere. If Cox and McCubbins miss the exact connections here, they are not alone. Research on the sources of opinions about Congress fails to specify a role for the legislative success of the president (e.g., Box-Steffensmeier and Tomlinson 2000; Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht 1997; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995; Kimball and Patterson 1997; Patterson and Magleby 1992; Rudolph 2002). More recent work has shown that opinions about Congress have less to do with the day-to-day working of the institution and more to do with a general evaluation of the political climate and presidential evaluations (Lebo 2008). We expect that, because of his central role, the public is more likely to score wins and losses as they relate to the president, not to the parties of Congress. This should not be surprising in a country where less than a majority of people can identify the Speaker of the House.<sup>3</sup> Legislators should see their own electoral

fortunes changing with the success level of the president.

The polarizing effect of the president when he enters the legislative arena can also heighten levels of partisanship in Congress (Lee 2009). When a president sticks his neck out and is defeated, the media's attention is captured and the opposition is more easily able to paint the president as ineffective. As the single most visible member of his party, this should have a serious impact on his party's electoral success. Edwards (2009, 187) points to George W. Bush's abilities to champion and then pass Medicare Reform in 2003 and his failures on Social Security and immigration reform in 2005–2006 as examples of a president working within and outside the constraints of his strategic position. Where President Bush failed legislatively, he did so by failing to keep his copartisans in Congress squarely behind him. Thus, among the concerns of cross-pressured members of Congress, they must consider the harm to their party label when their president fails or the benefit their party can reap from a successful president and, perhaps, from his coattails as well.

Our expectations certainly fit with conventional wisdom. In the world of Washington politics, a common notion is that a direct line can be traced from the president as head of his party to the electoral outcomes of his co-partisans in Congress. This is one lesson taken from or reinforced by the 1993 failure of health care reform and the 1994 elections that followed. If the public in fact reacts to presidential success in their votes for members of Congress we should have support for our initial hypothesis:

*H1:* The level of presidential success over a congressional term will be positively related to the electoral success of his party's members in the elections that follow.

Thus, contrary to Cartel Theory, we expect that MCs will see helping a president of their party or defeating a president of the opposition as the best way to bolster their collective reputation. And, importantly, party reputation can help a legislator not only by individual electoral gain. Increasing her party's chances of maintaining or gaining majority status are additional reasons for working for the good of the party. In fact, even MCs who are electorally safe may work harder for the benefits of their party or will at least be more likely targets for party leadership seeking roll-call support (Carson et al. 2010).

Since the importance of collective party reputation stands as a main tenet of Cartel Theory,

<sup>3</sup>What Americans Know, 1989–2007. Pew Research Center (Accessed on April 12, 2010: <http://people-press.org/report/319/public-knowledge-of-current-affairs-little-changed-by-news-and-information-revolutions>).

discerning the relative rewards of successful parties and successful presidents may serve as an important revision here. But thinking about the benefits of presidential success is also useful in conceptualizing the causes of success in the partisan arena. We assume that the president's power is constrained by his position in the party system and that his role should be viewed as that of an actor in the legislative process. Our focus on the environment in Congress as a key to presidential success follows the work of Bond and Fleisher (1990) and others (e.g., Peterson 1990; Rudalevige 2002). Of particular importance are the preferences and actions of members of the president's party (whether they are in the majority or not). Here there is a great deal to be borrowed and adapted from the literature on congressional parties.

When the president enters the legislative arena he is subject to the same forces that describe inter-party dynamics. The factors that affect his chances of success should be those that measure his place within the partisan environment. How large is his party in the House? How cohesive are preferences within the parties? How unified are parties in their voting behavior? How similar are the preferences of the president and congressional leadership? What do parties gain and lose by pushing members to pass legislation? Just these five simple questions carry us a long way in explaining the dynamics of presidential success.

For one, the theory of conditional party government (CPG) (Aldrich, Berger, and Rohde 2002; Aldrich and Rohde 2001; Rohde 1991) argues that parties are active and efficacious in Congress. Specifically, party members will delegate authority to leadership under conditions of ideological homogeneity within the parties coupled with ideological heterogeneity between the parties. We would adjust CPG to say that leaders will use the power delegated to them in order to help (or hurt) a president from their (the opposition) party. If true, a high degree of CPG would mean that the president could rely on members of his party to support agenda items important to the party, thus increasing his rate of success. A given level of CPG allows a delegation to affect the president's agenda for the dual reasons of advancing preferred policies and improving the party's collective reputation. These reasons motivate our second hypothesis:

*H2: As the conditions of CPG are increasingly met, the success rate of a president of the majority (minority) party will increase (decrease).*

Next, the ability to affect the president's success and thereby affect party reputations should motivate the

voting of members of Congress even beyond what the level of CPG would suggest. Cross-pressured MCs choosing their party is explainable in terms of their hopes for improving party reputation and thereby improving chances for electoral success. Party unity is thus an important tool for presidential success:

*H3: An increase in unity from the president's party will increase his level of success.*

This differs from Fleisher, Bond, and Wood who "...do not expect party unity to directly affect presidential success. Instead we expect party unity to condition the effects of public approval and party control" (2008, 202). In contrast to that article, we conceive of unity in terms of the president's party rather than the chamber as a whole and expect it to have a significant impact.

Next, the size of the president's party should be a key to success. With more members, the level of unity required for victory goes down (Lebo, McGlynn, and Koger 2007; Patty 2008), but victory is still the goal. Both Fleisher, Bond, and Wood (2008) and Bond et al. (2003) find that beyond majority status the size of the president's party has no effect. Fleisher, Bond, and Wood explain that: "Substantively, this finding suggests that having the president's partisans control committees and the floor agenda is more important than incremental changes in the number of co-partisans in the chamber" (2008, 202). In contrast, Rudalevige (2002) uses party size and finds effects. Our methodological approach and new complement of variables allow us to sort out these competing findings, as well as others. We do expect an effect for party size in addition to majority status:

*H4: A president will have a higher success rate when his party holds the majority.*

*H5: Even when taking into account majority/minority status, an increase in the size of the president's party in Congress will lead to an increase in his success rate.*

Beyond the preferences, behavior, and distribution of Congress's members, the level of agreement between leaders of Congress and the president should matter to the president's success. This makes sense during periods of both divided and unified government. Certainly a wider gulf should exist ideologically under divided government but the degree to which this is so should matter as well. Further, within each of the parties there is enough ideological breadth so that a president and majority leader (or Speaker) of the same party may still find much to disagree about. Our sixth hypothesis summarizes our expectation here:

*H6:* When ideological agreement between the president and the majority leader (or speaker) increases, the president's success rate should rise.

Finally, once accounting for the distribution of preferences and party behavior, the popularity of the president should play a marginal role in his success:

*H7:* Higher levels of approval will be associated with a higher success rate for the president.

While these last six hypotheses tell us what factors will determine presidential success, it is the first that tells us why parties are interested in the outcome. Having laid out our principal hypotheses, we now turn to a discussion of our data, methodology, and results.

## Data

We use three sets of analyses to test our hypotheses. For the first two, data were compiled from numerous sources and consist of one observation for each year from 1953 to 2006, inclusive. The dependent variable is the percentage of votes that the president won in the House of Representatives in a given year. This value is compiled by Ornstein, Mann, and Malbin (2008, 144–45) from analysis of CQ Weekly Reports. It is calculated by simply dividing the number of votes in the House supporting the president's position by the total number of votes on which he took a position.<sup>4</sup> For the third set of analyses, we are interested in the electoral consequences of legislative outcomes. As such, we rely on data in the same time range but with one observation for each Congress. The dependent variable for these analyses is the percentage of seats held by the Democrats in the House for a given Congress. Thus, changes in the dependent variable from one Congress to the next will reveal the changing electoral fortunes of the Democratic Party. Next, we describe our independent variables beginning with those we specify as determinants of presidential success.

*Conditional Party Government (CPG).* CPG theory posits that parties will delegate more authority to leaders as conditions of ideological homogeneity within the party and ideological heterogeneity between

the parties increases. The distribution of preferences in the House is an important factor in gauging presidential success. We include an index of CPG developed by Aldrich, Berger, and Rohde (2002) that uses factor scoring on four measures of the conditions of CPG<sup>5</sup> and captures the degree to which they exist in the House.

*In-Party Cohesion.* The ability of the president to get the support of his party will greatly affect his level of success. And, given the reputational benefits to the party that can accrue, members will try, when possible, to give the president their support. The more unified the president's party is, the more success he should have, *ceteris paribus*. To test this, we use the yearly aggregate unity score for the president's party on party votes.<sup>6</sup>

*Size of the President's Party.* Along with cohesion, party size matters for legislative success. We measure size as the percentage of the House controlled by the party of the president.

*Ideological Distance between the President and the Majority Leader.* Congruence of preferences between the president and the House leadership should improve his success. To test this we include a measure of the ideological distance between the president and the majority leader that is simply the absolute value of the distance between their first-dimension Common Space DW-NOMINATE scores.

*Presidential Approval.* To fully investigate the value of approval, we measure it in several ways. The first is simply the yearly approval rating of the president as measured by averaging monthly responses to Gallup's presidential approval question.<sup>7</sup> We also disaggregate the approval numbers to see whether approval among self-identified members of the president's party, identifiers of the out-party or self-identified independents might influence the president's success rate separately (Lebo and Cassino 2007). Additionally, we use a measure of polarization,

<sup>5</sup>Aldrich and Rohde (1998) and Aldrich, Berger, and Rohde (2002) develop a measure of CPG by Congress using a factor analysis of four "conditions" of CPG. The raw CPG values are available in our online dataset. A more detailed discussion of the CPG measure can be found in the online appendix: <http://ms.cc.sunysb.edu/~mlebo/details.htm>.

<sup>6</sup>A party vote is defined as one where a majority of one party votes against a majority of the other party. This is similar to the measure used by Lebo et al. (2007) but is adjusted to reflect in- and out-party status.

<sup>7</sup>From 1953 to September, 1981 the question read: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way [president's last name] is handling his job as President?" Between October 1981 and 2000 the question read: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way [president's first and last name] is handling his job as President?"

<sup>4</sup>We focus on the House as opposed to the overall rate of success because so much legislation passes through the House each year it provides a large sample of bills with which to measure presidential success. Some work in this area has argued that presidents push legislation to varying degrees depending on their likelihood of success (see Rudalevige).

calculated by taking the absolute value of the difference between Republican approval and Democratic approval. Large values in this series indicate a large divide in the popularity of the president between the parties.

One final check on the utility of approval is to see if its volatility might affect presidential success. Squaring the standard deviation of the monthly approval data within each year gives us an indicator of volatility in the president's popularity. The logic being that a president that is experiencing increased volatility will be less secure in his popularity and thus less successful in Congress. This full set of tests should help us identify more precisely the way that approval can affect success.

In our third set of analyses, we wish to investigate the electoral consequences of presidential and congressional party success. As our dependent variable we use the change in the percent of the House won by the Democrats over the 83<sup>rd</sup> to 107<sup>th</sup> Congress. Changes in the president's success rate (adjusted by party) are compared with changes in the success rate of congressional Democrats for their respective effects. To these we add important control variables including indicators for midterm elections with a democratic president, midterms with a GOP president, and years of democratic presidential wins. We also include controls for changes in the level of presidential approval (adjusted by party), democratic seats at risk, open seats, and the number of quality Republican challengers.

## Methods

Because our data are time series, we must pay close attention to the question of stationarity.<sup>8</sup> Given recent work in the area of aggregated political times series (Box-Steffensmeier and Smith 1996; Lebo, Walker, and Clarke 2000) we should expect our series to have characteristics of both types of series and be fractionally integrated. Such series can be represented by ARFIMA (autoregressive fractionally integrated moving average) univariate models of the form:  $(Y_t - Y_{t-1})^d = \frac{\phi_q}{\phi_p} \varepsilon_t$  in which  $Y_t$  symbolizes the present value of a series,  $\phi_p$  and  $\phi_q$  symbolize  $p$  autoregressive (AR) and  $q$  moving average (MA) parameters, respectively, the stochastic error term in the present period is  $\varepsilon_t$ , and  $d$  is the differencing

<sup>8</sup>A stationary series may be referred to as either nonintegrated or integrated of order 0 (I (0)). A non-stationary may be called an integrated series, a random walk, a I (1) series or a "unit root" (Enders 1995).

parameter—the number of times the series needs to be differenced to create a stationary series. Traditional ARIMA approaches allow only integer values of  $d$  so that where  $d = 0$  the series is modeled as stationary using a  $(p, 0, q)$  set-up and when  $d = 1$  nonstationarity is implied and whole differencing is used  $(p, 1, q)$ .

We expect the primary dependent variable of interest, presidential success, to be fractionally integrated. The extent to which the president's success depends on success levels from previous years should vary across issue areas. Aggregating data over issue areas, as well as over members of Congress is a process that follows Granger's Aggregation Theorem (1980) and is likely to create fractionally integrated time series.

Our tests of Presidential Success confirm that it is fractionally integrated with a  $d$  value of 0.55, clearly non-stationary yet not a unit-root. Importantly, of the many studies in political science that have used fractional integration techniques, values are usually much closer to 1. This means that most political data should lead one to worry mostly about *under* differencing. Here, the danger of *over*differencing is equally large.<sup>9</sup> Neither leaving the variable in level form nor using the traditional fix of differencing would avoid severe inferential problems such as biased estimates, biased standard errors, and spurious regression findings (Dickinson and Lebo 2007; Granger and Newbold 1974; Lebo, Walker, and Clarke 2000).

Thus, we difference each of our series, including presidential success, by its own value of  $d$ .<sup>10</sup> Doing so minimizes residual autocorrelation and makes our estimates reliable. It also ensures that we are placing the burden of explanatory power on our independent variables. That is, our models do not rely on highly significant lags of the level-form dependent variable on the right-hand side. For the most part, we are explaining deviations of the dependent variable from its long-term tendencies using only the independent variables' deviations from their own long-term tendencies.

While the literature on presidential success has grown increasingly complex in its statistical

<sup>9</sup>For example, monthly presidential approval has been found to be in the range of  $d=0.8$  to  $d=0.9$  so that differencing will "overdifference" by only a little. Here, the mistake would be much bigger.

<sup>10</sup>We use the RGSER procedure in RATS to get estimates of  $d$  and the FIF procedure for fractional differencing. Values of  $d$  are: president's party cohesion (0.66), president's party size (0.68), CPG (0.85), president to Majority Leader NOMINATE distance (0.77), and in-party approval (0.73).

modeling, no study has yet confronted the problem that the key variable holds properties that wreak havoc on both model estimates and the substantive conclusions that follow them. Some conflicting findings in studies of presidential success, e.g., the impact of approval and the question of whether seats matter beyond majority/minority status, may be cleared up once we use properly differenced data.

Our model can be summarized as:

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta^d \text{Success}_t = & \alpha + \beta_1 \Delta^d \text{Cohesion}_t \\ & + \beta_2 \Delta^d \text{Pres Party Size}_t + \beta_3 \Delta^d \text{CPG}_t \\ & + \beta_4 \Delta^d \text{Distance}_t + \beta_5 \Delta^d \text{Majority}_t \\ & + \beta_6 \Delta^d \text{Approval}_t + \epsilon_t \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where  $\alpha$  is a time invariant constant,  $\beta_1$  through  $\beta_6$  are estimated coefficients,  $\Delta^d$  indicates that a variable has been fractionally differenced by its own value of  $d$ , and  $\epsilon_t$  is an error term  $\sim N(0, \sigma^2)$ . This basic model is one of the many specifications we test. We now move on to a discussion of the results.

## Model Results

In sum, our results show great support for a model of presidential success that emphasizes the president's place within a party system and is complemented by presidential approval among the president's base. Table 1 shows the results of our basic model.

Model 1 is our basic model without any approval measure. The model as a whole performs very well. Four of our five independent variables are significant beyond the .01 level—notable given the small sample size. We are also explaining roughly 75% of the variance in presidential success after we have already taken account of the long-term reliance of the series on its own past history. The diagnostics (e.g.,  $DW = 2.24$ ) indicate an acceptable level of residual autocorrelation and reliable estimates.<sup>11</sup>

More specifically, the substantive effects of the independent variables are each interesting and quite strong. Contrary to both Fleisher, Bond, and Wood (2008) and Bond, Fleisher, and Wood (2003), both majority status and the size of the president's party are strong and positive predictors of presidential success. The benefits of majority status are high but, beyond holding the majority, an additional

percent of seat-share increases the president's success rate by 0.67% (s.e.=0.29). Recent work such as Patty (2008) and Lebo, McGlynn, and Koger (2007) show that a larger caucus leads to lower unity but size leads to increased party and, here, presidential success.

The CPG variable also proves to be an important indicator—a one-standard-deviation (0.99) shift in the CPG variable increases success by 9.02%. As parties in the House become more ideologically cohesive and distinct from one another, the congressional leadership is delegated more power. This makes it easier for majority parties to achieve success but it also allows congressional leadership to support or fight the president's agenda.

Next, the similarity of preferences between the president and the majority leader is a good predictor of success. As expected, a wider gulf between the two leaders drives down the success of the president's agenda. This may at first seem to be unsurprising, but since the model is already taking account of the question of divided/united government, the preference structure of the House, and the size and cohesion of the president's party, it is interesting that this distance variable still has a significant—and large—impact at the margins. For example, without any change in the membership of the House, Lyndon Johnson's conservatism relative to his predecessor John Kennedy brought him closer to the Democratic Majority Leader Carl Albert and increased Johnson's predicted level of success by 3% relative to Kennedy's.

In addition, the cohesion of the president's party has a strong and positive effect. All else equal, for each additional percent more cohesive the president's party becomes, his success rate will rise 0.94% (s.e.=0.28). Even while taking account of the distribution of preferences and the size of the president's party in the House, there is still a great deal that can be done by the president's party to ensure his success. This is where party strategy plays an important role. Parties working beyond their members' preferences can help the president win and perhaps allow members to cash in on his victories. In all, Table 1 provides good support for a model of presidential success that focuses on the president's place within the party system.<sup>12</sup>

Additional models test some of our specification choices and show the overall structure to be robust. Model 2 of Table 1 eliminates the presidential

<sup>11</sup>A lagged dependent variable reduces autocorrelation without affecting model estimates by much.

<sup>12</sup>Interestingly, a dummy variable for presidents' first year in office is not significant when added to any of the models. Peterson, for one, discusses the importance of using a president's honeymoon period to make a big legislative push citing LBJ's desire to send up a "tidal wave of stuff" (1990, 120–21).

TABLE 1 Basic Models of Presidential Success, 1953-2006

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4			Model 5*		
	Coef.	(s.e.)	p <sup>†</sup>	Coef.	(s.e.)	p	Coef.	(s.e.)	p	Coef.	(s.e.)	p	Coef.	(s.e.)	p
Cohesion of the President's Party	0.94	(0.28)	0.001	0.88	(0.29)	0.004	0.97	(0.28)	0.001	1.01	(0.28)	0.001	0.99	(0.33)	0.004
Size of the President's Party	0.67	(0.29)	0.024	0.96	(0.29)	0.002	0.71	(0.29)	0.019	0.71	(0.30)	0.020	0.59	(0.34)	0.084
Conditional Party Government	9.11	(1.99)	0.000	9.82	(2.11)	0.000	10.37	(2.03)	0.000	8.85	(2.05)	0.045	9.10	(2.33)	0.000
Ideological Distance - Maj. Leader	-15.36	(5.76)	0.011	-19.58	(6.04)	0.002	—	—	—	—	—	—	21.93	(6.74)	0.002
Ideological Distance - Speaker	—	—	—	—	—	—	-18.01	(7.30)	0.018	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ideological Distance - Maj. Party Median	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-21.22	(9.25)	0.027	—	—	—
Party Control Dummy	10.71	(3.81)	0.007	—	—	—	10.74	(3.86)	0.008	10.99	(3.88)	0.007	7.27	(4.46)	0.061
Presidential Success <sub>t-1</sub>	-0.21	(0.09)	0.027	—	—	—	-0.21	(0.10)	0.031	-0.22	(0.10)	0.026	-0.18	(0.11)	0.113
Constant	-8.17	(2.06)	0.000	-3.53	(1.29)	0.009	-8.28	(2.08)	0.000	-7.99	(2.14)	0.001	-5.99	(2.41)	0.017
N	52			53			53			52			52		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.748			0.69			0.743			0.739			0.70		
Durbin-Watson	2.24			2.27			2.27			2.17			2.31		

<sup>†</sup>All p values are based on one-tailed tests.

\*The dependent variable for Models 1-4 is the president's success rate in the House on all votes on which he took a position. The dependent variable for Model 5 is this number calculated for only those votes on which the president's position received less than 80% support (see: Bond & Fleisher 1990).

majority dummy variable showing that, in its absence, the importance of party size increases (from  $\beta=0.67$  to  $\beta=0.96$ ). The impact of the distance between the Majority Leader and the president also increases since it captures some of the effect of divided/united government. Model 3 substitutes in the Speaker of the House for the Majority Leader in terms of distance to the president and finds roughly the same effect.<sup>13</sup> Model 4 uses the median member of the majority party instead of the majority leader and, again, no changes are evident except that this distance has a somewhat greater impact. Lastly, Model 5 uses Bond and Fleisher's (1990) data on conflictual votes<sup>14</sup> (rather than the wider CQ measure) as the dependent variable. Although standard errors rise in this version, the model still holds up well with two noteworthy changes. First, the significance of the Majority variable dips below the .05 level. Second, the effect of the Majority leader distance increases, indicating that for conflictual votes the congruence of presidential and congressional leadership preferences is accentuated.

Using our basic model we wish to also test the possible marginal impact of presidential popularity. After accounting for the partisan environment, perhaps we can clarify a role for approval, especially if we attempt multiple ways of thinking about how it might matter.

Table 2 outlines our search for a significant marginal impact of presidential approval. Although approval has been operationalized in its standard form in previous studies, we use several versions of it for a more thorough investigation. Model 1 of Table 2 begins with the yearly level of approval estimated contemporaneously.<sup>15</sup> Neither t-tests of Approval at time t nor F tests of the joint impact of approval at times t, t-1, and t-2 (not shown) reach traditional levels of significance. The rest of the model stays robust to the change in specification, giving more support to the basic model of Table 1.

Nevertheless, what if overall approval is too general a concept to matter in this context? Burns

<sup>13</sup>We also measured leadership variables using two-dimensional Euclidian distance in DW-NOMINATE scores instead of the absolute difference of first-dimension scores. The results are practically identical.

<sup>14</sup>Bond and Fleisher's measure is calculated identically to the dependent variable used in our analyses, except that they exclude votes on which the president received more than 80% of the vote.

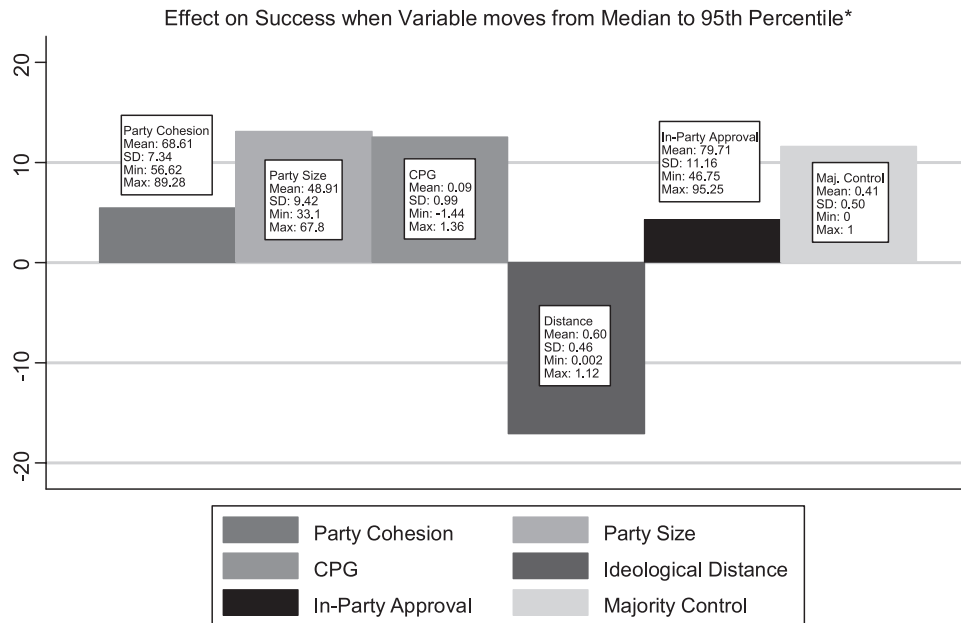
<sup>15</sup>All the approval series are fractionally differenced by their respective values of *d*. We also estimate this model and those that follow with lagged versions of approval but do not find any significant impacts.

TABLE 2 Approval's Effect on Presidential Success, 1953-2006

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7	
	Coef. (s.e.)	p*	Coef. (s.e.)	p	Coef. (s.e.)	p	Coef. (s.e.)	p	Coef. (s.e.)	p	Coef. (s.e.)	p	Coef. (s.e.)	p
Cohesion of the President's Party	0.86 (0.28)	0.002	0.65 (0.29)	0.017	0.93 (0.28)	0.001	0.84 (0.29)	0.003	0.96 (0.28)	0.001	0.94 (0.28)	0.001	0.95 (0.29)	0.001
Size of the President's Party	0.60 (0.29)	0.023	0.63 (0.27)	0.013	0.65 (0.29)	0.015	0.59 (0.29)	0.026	0.71 (0.29)	0.010	0.71 (0.29)	0.009	0.70 (0.29)	0.010
Conditional Party Government	8.59 (2.00)	0.000	7.71 (1.98)	0.000	8.66 (2.02)	0.000	8.37 (2.03)	0.000	9.38 (2.03)	0.000	9.47 (2.04)	0.000	9.21 (2.01)	0.000
Ideological Distance - Maj. Leader	-16.21 (5.69)	0.003	-19.35 (5.68)	0.001	-15.07 (5.71)	0.006	-16.52 (5.71)	0.003	-15.95 (5.88)	0.005	-16.14 (5.89)	0.004	-15.70 (6.10)	0.007
Party Control Dummy	11.29 (3.94)	0.003	11.64 (3.75)	0.002	10.93 (3.94)	0.004	12.09 (4.08)	0.002	9.80 (3.92)	0.008	9.77 (3.91)	0.008	9.84 (3.93)	0.008
Presidential Success $t_{-1}$	-0.21 (0.09)	0.012	-0.21 (0.09)	0.012	-0.22 (0.09)	0.012	-0.22 (0.09)	0.010	-0.22 (0.09)	0.013	-0.21 (0.09)	0.014	-0.21 (0.09)	0.015
Presidential Approval	0.21 (0.14)	0.070	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
In-Party Approval	—	—	<b>0.43 (0.17)</b>	<b>0.009</b>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Out-Party Approval	—	—	—	—	0.15 (0.11)	0.101	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Independent Approval	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.22 (0.14)	0.064	—	—	—	—	—	—
Variance in Approval	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.01 (0.02)	0.287	—	—	—	—
Variance in Independent Approval	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.01 (0.02)	0.245	—	—
Polarization	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.03 (0.15)	0.430
Constant	-8.13 (2.03)	0.000	-8.35 (1.95)	0.000	-7.93 (2.05)	0.000	-8.31 (2.03)	0.000	-7.97 (2.08)	0.000	-7.89 (2.08)	0.000	-8.04 (2.08)	0.000
N	51		51		51		51		51		51		51	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.77		0.78		0.76		0.77		0.75		0.76		0.75	
Durbin-Watson	2.28		2.36		2.30		2.26		2.26		2.24		2.29	

\*All p values are based on one-tailed tests.

FIGURE 1 Effect of Independent Variables in Complete Model



\* Majority effect is moving from 0 to 1

(1956, 310–15) discusses FDR's weakened legislative success in the late 1930s as a result of his diminished support among Democrats and Edwards (2009) points to G.W. Bush's successes as proof of the value of unity among the president's partisans. These points may not strictly apply to members of Congress. Perhaps presidents are more successful when they have their base voters behind them. In such a case, Congress might be more wary of defeating the president's chosen positions.

A measure of approval among only those who self-identify with the president's party is used for Table 2's Model 2. Here we have a strong indication that popularity helps the president win legislative victories. The coefficient for in-party approval, at 0.43, is more than double that of the overall approval measure in Model 1 and is significant beyond the .01 level (one-tailed test). This effect remains when lags are added for one and two years (not shown), and the model fit goes up as well.

This finding gives support for the value of approval and might be a useful start in clearing up the debate about how approval matters. If it is only approval among the president's partisans that matters, that would explain the difficulty in finding the overall measure to be useful—adding the opinions of the rest of the electorate drowns out estimates of the relationship. This finding also complements nicely Jeffrey Cohen's *The Presidency in the Era of 24-Hour News* which argues: "Presidents find it more difficult to lead the broad mass public. As a result they focus their

leadership on mobilizing segments of the public already predisposed to support them" (2008, 195). Once a president loses standing among his base, his legislative powers are diminished, but with these voters behind him, the legislature is more wary of opposing him.

We do not find effects nearly as strong when we use approval among the partisans opposite the president's party (Models 3) nor when we use approval among independents (Model 4). Congress does not seem to acquiesce to the president's position when it detects a broader base to his support or when parties fear that swing-voters side with the president. To be sure, it is the lack of importance of these two groups that drives down the overall effect of approval when they are merged with the president's partisans.

Anecdotally, we might think of President Johnson's record success scores of 93.8 and 91.3 in 1965 and 1966, respectively, as being caused by his high level of popularity created by his relatively high standing among independents and Republicans. Yet our results would suggest a different interpretation—Johnson's success rate was due to the advantageous partisan conditions of those years and his support among Democrats in the electorate. His popularity would also matter indirectly through its ability to affect the make-up of Congress in the 1964 elections.

To be sure we have exhausted all the possibilities, we try additional ways of thinking about approval. Perhaps one might expect that presidencies with wildly varying approval numbers might attract less congressional support, but we find no such evidence

**TABLE 3 The Electoral Effects of Party Success and Presidential Success on Democratic Chamber Share in the House**

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Coef.	(s.e.)	<i>p</i> *	Coef.	(s.e.)	<i>p</i>	Coef.	(s.e.)	<i>p</i>
Democratic Win Rate in Previous Congress	10.57	(3.69)	0.006	—	—	—	1.98	(6.42)	0.381
President's Win Rate in Previous Congress	—	—	—	14.48	(4.43)	0.003	12.82	(8.07)	0.066
Midterm Election with GOP President	5.88	(1.89)	0.004	6.47	(1.80)	0.001	6.94	(1.80)	0.001
Midterm Election with Dem. President	-6.59	(2.32)	0.006	-5.99	(2.15)	0.007	-6.16	(2.29)	0.008
Presidential Election with Democratic Win	6.77	(2.13)	0.003	6.57	(1.99)	0.002	6.97	(2.09)	0.002
104 <sup>th</sup> Congress Quality Republican Challengers	-12.49	(3.91)	0.003	-12.27	(3.71)	0.002	-13.11	(3.78)	0.002
Presidential Approval In Previous Congress	0.08	(0.06)	0.095	0.06	(0.06)	0.152	—	—	—
Constant	-1.73	(1.24)	0.092	-1.92	(1.18)	0.063	-2.11	(1.21)	0.051
N		23			23			23	
R <sup>2</sup>		0.77			0.79			0.779	
Durbin-Watson		2.36			2.16			2.41	
<b>Encompassing Tests</b>									
Model 1 Predicted Values	—	—	—	0.62	(0.44)	0.181			
Model 2 Predicted Values	0.90	(0.38)	0.034	—	—	—			

\*All *p* values in Models 1-3 are based on one-tailed tests. The *p* values for the encompassing tests are based on two-tailed tests.

here. Models 5 and 6 in Table 2 demonstrate that the variance of approval, either overall or among independents, does not affect presidential success. Lastly, Model 7 uses a measure of polarization, Democrats' approval minus Republicans', as a final possible way that approval could affect legislative success. Alas, no effects are found here either.

This long list of null findings, with the strongly significant impact of in-party approval alongside our full complement of independent variables, gives us confidence that our model captures the key factors of success. Given the overall explanatory power and the strongly significant coefficients, Model 2 of Table 2 is what we would call our complete model of

presidential success. Figure 1 illustrates the relative effects of the independent variables as each is moved separately from its median to 95<sup>th</sup> percentile value.

Clearly the partisan environment and the actions of members of Congress affect the success rate of the president. What remains is to show the impetus of members of Congress to affect the president's success. Cox and McCubbins (2005) argue that party members will work together in order to improve their individual electoral fortunes via their collective reputation. This traces a line of causality from party success to electoral success. Lebo, McGlynn, and Koger (2007) demonstrate empirically for both the House and Senate that as a party's success rate increases, they gain seats in the

election year that follows. But is the success of the parties in Congress truly what matters to voters?

Table 3 tests the relative importance of presidential and party success on legislative votes to electoral success for parties in Congress. The first model is that of Lebo et al. and shows the positive effect that changes in the Democratic win rate has on changes in the Democratic seat share in the following Congress.<sup>16</sup> The result is simple: as the Democrats win more often, voters reward their success with increased party size ( $p < .01$ ). The reputational benefit of legislative success described by Cox and McCubbins seems to be an obvious suspect for the unseen mechanism affecting voter decisions.

Included in the model are controls for the nature of the election and these have the expected results. Midterm elections with a Democratic (GOP) president decrease (increase) Democratic seat share and presidential elections with a Democratic win show coattail effects. More Republican quality challengers will hurt the Democrats as will drops in approval (though not quite significantly). Additional controls, such as the number of open seats and measures of seats at risk failed to approach statistical significance and were dropped from the model to conserve degrees of freedom. A dummy variable for the election of the 104th Congress cleans up the large residual from the Democrats' unusually large electoral loss in 1994.

But does the Democratic win rate really affect seat share or does it just serve as a proxy? In the second model of Table 3 we swap out Democratic win rate and replace it with the president's win rate and see the effect grow substantially from 10.57 to 14.48. Substantively, this means that a change in the president's success rate of 1% increases Democratic seat share by 0.1448% which amounts to about two-thirds of a Member of Congress.<sup>17</sup> The coefficient is statistically significant at the .01 level and boosts the

$R^2$  of the model to 0.79. The Durbin-Watson statistic indicates an absence of residual autocorrelation.

To better test the relative efficacy of Models 1 and 2, Model 3 includes both presidential and Democratic win rates. "Horse-racing" the variables in this way allows us to see if the variance explained by the party variable can be wholly subsumed by the presidential variable. Indeed, the effect of the presidential variable holds steady and the effect of the Democratic Win Rate almost entirely disappears. Note that multicollinearity between the two win rates ( $r = 0.81$ ) inflates the standard error (and thus the  $p$ -value to 0.066) for the president's win rate. The relative sizes of the coefficients are still informative.

As an additional test, we use  $J$ -tests for encompassing (Davidson and MacKinnon 1993, 386–87). Since the residuals from Model 1 are *not* significant when added to Model 2 and the residuals of Model 2 *are* significant when added to Model 1, we can conclude that Model 2 encompasses Model 1 and that Model 1 does not encompass Model 2. That is, the model with presidential success explains *all* the variance that the congressional model explains *plus* additional variance in the dependent variable. This result stands in contrast to the idea that collective reputations are built by party success—instead, party reputations are most affected by the wins and losses of the president, the central actor in American politics.

As a final check on this finding, we want to be sure that we have not misunderstood the direction of causality. Perhaps parties that look to be on the verge of electoral success increase (decrease) their support for a president of their (the other) party. It may be that the lead of party size is causing the contemporaneous increase in presidential success. Granger causality tests are a good tool for sorting out precisely this type of issue (Granger 1969).

We first test whether Democratic seat share Granger causes the president's success rate.<sup>18</sup> The result of the F-test on lags of Democratic seat share fails to reach statistical significance, and we fail to reject the null hypothesis that these coefficients are jointly equal to zero. We can thus conclude that Democratic seat share does not Granger cause presidential legislative success and that the latter series is strongly exogenous to the former. Next, we test whether the president's success rate in the House Granger causes Democratic seat share. Here the results of the F-test are approaching standard levels of statistical significance. Also, the coefficients on the

<sup>16</sup>Switching to Congress-level data, our sample size is smaller here than in the Tables 1 and 2. Given the smaller sample we set aside fractional integration methods and estimate these models in first-differences. This is because the estimation of accurate  $d$  values is more difficult in small samples. Note that our dependent variable here, Democratic seat share, is measured in the Congress *after* the independent variable, presidential success, has occurred. So simultaneity is not a problem here.

<sup>17</sup>In a 435 seat House, one member is equal to just under 0.23% of the chamber. The average win rate for a president over this period was 64.86% and the average change between congresses was -0.13%. One example of this process was the Democrats' increase in chamber share of 11.3% in the 1974 elections after President Nixon's win rate fell from 83.55% (92<sup>nd</sup> Congress) to 55.80% (93<sup>rd</sup> Congress).

<sup>18</sup>See the online appendix for a table of results: <http://ms.cc.sunysb.edu/~mlebo/details.htm>.

lagged values of Democratic seat share are individually significant at the 0.1 level. While standard practice does not allow us to fully reject the null hypothesis of no effect, we are much more confident drawing the conclusion that the president's win rate is Granger causing Democratic seat share than the other way around. Combined, these results give us greater confidence in both the statistical adequacy and the substantive conclusions of the models of Democratic seat share presented in Table 3.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Presidential success is a two-way street. In one direction, the makeup of Congress and the behavior of its members determine the rate at which presidents are successful in passing their agendas. Our findings demonstrate strong links between the partisan environment and presidential success. The conditions of the CPG model, the congruence of preferences between the president and party leadership are strong indicators of the president's success. Also, members of Congress have a great deal of control over the success of the president. When the president's party holds the majority and a larger portion of the House and when his members vote more cohesively, the president's rate of success rises. But why should MCs adjust their voting cohesion and take actions that help the president? Because of the other direction the street leads—from presidential success to electoral victories for legislators. The success of the president—not the parties of Congress—is a significant determinant of electoral success. This is a slight twist on the logic of Cartel Theory where collective reputations are built on the successes of parties within the chambers of Congress.

The implied theory of voting behavior in Cox and McCubbins' (2005) proposition seems less plausible than what we propose here. Like many areas of research about Congress, our beliefs of how legislators behave are based on assumptions of how voters will reward or punish them. This is a matter best settled using individual-level research, particularly experimental evidence. Empirical research that further investigates the motivations of voters as they decide their congressional votes will teach us more about Congress and the presidency as well as the parties that connect them.

We also find here that the approval rating of the president among his copartisans is a useful predictor of his level of success. The arguments for and against

approval are long-lasting in the literature. Looking at the many ways that approval might matter, it appears that a solid base of support is what matters most. This result, combined with the importance of our measures of partisanship and ideology combine to make a model that looks quite complete and nicely explains nearly 80% of the variance in how presidential success rates change from year to year.

Our attention to both the causes and consequences of presidential success is meant to help integrate the literature on presidential success into theories of Congress and to integrate theories of congressional parties into the literature on the presidency. The great advances in the literature on Congress over the past two decades do not say much for the role of the president. Here we can see a role for preference structure as well as party behavior in presidential success. But the costs and benefits to members of affecting the president's success need to be given a higher place in any discussion of what motivates legislator behavior.

Further, while presidency scholars have looked at congressional partisanship as a key to presidential success, they have struggled to adapt the established theories of Congress and even the vocabulary that is available and can be so helpful. When Edwards discusses President Bush's success as arising when "The distances between the parties in Congress increased as the range of opinion within them decreased" (2009, 174), he is talking about CPG even though he does not quite put his finger on it. Established theories in the two subfields do not need reinventing, they just require pushes towards integration.

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