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Presidential Success in Congress

Factors that Determine the President's Ability to Influence Congressional Voting

Christine Gibbs

Abstract

This study examines the factors that contribute to presidential success in Congress. Results show that, overall, presidential popularity, the president's party's margin of control in Congress and the misery index positively and significantly affect presidential success in Congress, whereas party unity, presidential effort and saliency are, overall, not significant determinants of success. The study also demonstrates that the honeymoon period does not increase a president's success rate. The results indicate that these variables interact differently within foreign policy than domestic policy and in the Senate than the House.

April 15, 2009
Advisor Greg Shaw
Research Honors

Introduction: The President's Unique Responsibilities and Powers

The President is the only elected official in the United States that has the mandate of the entire nation; he is the only figure that is elected by and represents the whole nation. As the burden falls on the president to serve the interests of those that elected him "it is the president's job to seek out public opinion and be responsive to it" (Crockett 2003, 470). John Kennedy stated in 1962 that "'it is a responsibility of the President of the United States to have a program and to fight for it'" (Mayhew 2005, 2). It has become expected that the President initiate an agenda for each Congress. The president's attempt to pass legislation that is the by-product of his agenda, or that is concurrent with his policy preferences, has been at the heart of the responsibilities and the difficulties of the president. Following the "tidal wave of New Deal bills, the president was dubbed 'chief legislator' and the Congress deemed a very junior partner in the ignition of public policy" (Mayhew 2005, 42).

Understanding how Congress responds to the President's demands and preferences is essential to understanding how the government is responsive to popular demand. As Stephen Skowronek explains, "the president becomes the lightening rod of national politics, attracting and objectifying contending interpretations of the existing state of affairs" (Skowronek 1994, 20). The President, as the central figure of representation for the American people, has the sole ability to focus attention to work to respond to the needs, expectations and demands of the American electorate.

In addition to the mandate from the people, the president is also armed with several other powers. The annual State of the Union address, budget message and economic report all enable the president to set "a comprehensive legislative program" (Pika, Thomas and Watson 1994, 202). Equipped with the ability to initiate action on legislative issues, the president is able to

frame debate, which gives him the "power to shape the substance of these initiatives" (Barrett and Eshaugh-Soha 2007, 103). In other words, if the president is the initiator of policy, it is the president who is able to set the initial framing and objective of such policy, making the legislation more likely to reflect the president's policy preferences.

Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power*, published in 1962, set the basis for continued studies on the president, the president's authority and the factors limiting his authority. Although he claimed that the presidency "amounted to little more than a clerkship," it appears that scholarly thought has moved away from that idea towards the thought that the president has significant legislative powers, but that those powers are often very limited by Congress (Pika, Thomas and Watson 1994, 207). By clerkship, Neustadt meant that the president was expected to be at the service of the rest of the government. He wrote that the president's "authority and status" were his means to getting his legislation passed through Congress by way of negotiation and persuasion (Neustadt 1962, 35).

As time has progressed and new studies have been done on the presidency and presidential powers, scholars have come to believe that the president is much stronger than Neustadt gave the position credit for. Stephen Skowronek describes the president as having the ability to "seize control of the powers of his office to try… to establish order anew on his own terms" (Skowronek 1994, 20). Baumgartner and Jones have found that the "president is the dominant leader if he wants to be" indicating that the president is able to be a powerful legislator if he possesses the will and creates the environment to be successful (Thurber 1996, 113). Rudalevige claims that the president has more influence in legislative agenda setting than any other political actor. He has written that "the president's legislative initiatives almost invariably receive congressional attention and agenda space – and that the scope and content of the

president's program will frequently form the backbone of national policy debate" (Rudalevige 2002, 3). If this is true, it puts significant power in the hands of the president, not only in forming policy but also in capturing the demands of the electorate.

In this study, I look to identify the specific factors that determine a president's ability to get Congress to vote in accordance with his preferences. The study examines how presidential popularity, margin of the president's party's control of Congress, party unity and economic conditions affect presidential success in Congress, as independent variables. I also examine how the honeymoon period, which house in Congress the vote is in, whether the vote is on a foreign or domestic issues, and presidential effort influence presidential success.

Literature Review

The ability of the president to have a degree of success in Congress has been explained in numerous ways. Some scholars on the topic tend to explain presidential success by factoring in many variables that may predict presidential success, such as Bond and Fleisher. Other scholars look to explain presidential success looking more narrowly at a variable that they believe looks to explain most of the variance in presidential success, such as David Mayhew's explanation of presidential success based on the premise of a unified government.

<u>President-Centered</u>

As the importance of political parties is thought to have declined in recent years, the importance of the president is thought to have increased. This in turn, increases the importance of understanding the president's role in legislation. James Thurber, in particular, points out that since the 1970s party structures are weaker (Thurber 1996, 68). Before the 1970s, "party organizations provided candidates with a sure and certain route to presidential nominations" as well as "with the structure and strategy necessary for running in the general elections" (Thurber

1996, 68). Due to the move from candidate selection by process of the caucus/convention system to direct primaries, parties have become less influential on presidents. Presidents also rely less on their parties once in office. Whereas presidents used to rely on state party officials for help in persuading members of Congress on policy issues, they now often rely on the White House congressional liaison staff. Political appointments, also once handled by state party officials, are now directed by the White House.

Likewise, whereas presidents depend less on their party, less is expected of the president from their political party. The method by which interest groups seek expression has also changed, decreasing the role of parties. Whereas before, interest groups would seek out their interests through parties, these single-issue interest groups now seek answers independently of political parties.

The weakening of president-party relations has given more leverage to the president to act independently. This has allowed the president to use his unique resources, such as media attention, to further policy proposals. It has also allowed the president to bully members of Congress by essentially threatening their popularity in their electoral districts if they do not support the president. It is necessary to understand how the president can boost the office's powers in the legislative arena to increase voting preferences for his policies in order to understand how the president, in general, can influence policies.

Presidential Effort

Scholars have also attributed presidential success to the president's ability to "go over the heads" of members of Congress to take their message directly to the people (Tulis 1987, 4). Jeffrey Tulis states that the President acts as a spokesperson for "the people," bringing their proposals not only to the people but also to members of Congress. Edwards and Wood claim

that presidents have the ability to use their elevated position to create attention where none exists (Edwards and Wood 1999).

Due to the limited resources of presidents, Steger, Prins and Marshall have stated that presidents need to allocate their resources carefully in order to make them useful. Steger claims that "[resource] limitations compel presidents to set priorities and choose fights selectively [because] they cannot afford to waste scarce resources and political capital pursuing futile legislation" (Steger 2005, 315). If a president is using his resources on a particular policy measure, it can be assumed that the issue is of particular importance to the president.

Samuel Kernell has stated that presidents will use their "bully pulpit" powers to influence the populace to become more activated on a particular topic or to influence Congress directly. In similar studies, Jacobs and Shapiro have found that politicians "attempt to change public opinion not by directly persuading the public on the merits of the policy choices" but by priming public opinion (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000, xiv). Priming refers to the politicians' aim to increase publicity of certain policy themes in order to boost favor for particular policies (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000). Jacobs and Shapiro came to the conclusion that presidents use public opinion polls not to create policies that reflect the opinions of the nation, but in order to craft speeches and allocate resources to package their proposals in a way that will convince the public and members of Congress to support their proposals (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000).

By taking his influence directly to the people, the president has the ability to target constituents of the politicians who depend on their vote. This puts significant power in the hands of the president in that what he needs to do "is convince a sufficient number of politicians that the political cost of resisting his policy is greater than any potential gain" (Kernell 1997, 250). This power is so strong, says Kernell, that at times, even when the representatives knows that

their position is not the same as the president's, they may vote with the president in order to avoid the political backlash that may occur should the president "take his case to the people" (Kernell 1997, 250). The assumption that Kernell makes is that when the president takes his message directly to the people, they will be more aware of how their representative will vote in regards to the policy issue. The representative, being aware of this increased focus on the issue, will feel pressured to vote in favor with the president in order to avoid electoral repercussions.

Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt were two of the first to use the strategy of "going public" to win favor for policy measures. The diverging strategy, as opposed to simple negotiations that were previously used, was necessary to use for these presidents due to their progressive proposed reforms that would have stripped power from the politicians that would need to vote to enact them (Kernell 1997). Since it was first employed by these presidents, it is now seen to be used by presidents to appeal to the public for support and in turn to influence Congress to support the president's policies.

Popularity

Out of Neustadt's theory of president-centered power of persuasion emerged the widely upheld theory of presidential success in Congress being attributed to popularity. This theory claims that "the president's public approval provides leverage with Congress" (Bond, Fleisher and Wood 2003, 92). Neustadt states that good popularity among the electorate does not necessarily guarantee victory for the president, but that it would provide a "leeway" (Neustadt 1962). Although leeway does not guarantee government action, it does encourage it.

Other times, a president's high popularity is seen as a confirmation of his mandate. Members of Congress that take their representative role very literally may see his popularity as validation of the policies that he is trying to pursue. Along with this idea, scholars propose that

members of Congress "fear electoral retribution if they oppose a popular president or support an unpopular one" (Bond, Fleisher and Wood 2003, 95).

A bad popularity rating, on the other hand, could have more widespread consequences, according to Neustadt and his followers. According to Neustadt, public disapproval increases resistance from members of Congress and leaves the president with "his opportunities diminished [and] his freedom for maneuver checked" (Neustadt 1962, 90).

The theory that popularity influences presidential success, while debated by some, has gained wide support. Past research designs have analyzed the "extent to which the president's leadership skills and popularity with the public *influence* Congress to do something it otherwise would not have done" (Bond, Fleisher and Wood 2003, 105).

It has been found by some that popularity has no significant impact on legislative success but that it may influence other factors, which may in turn influence success in Congress (Marshall and Prins 2007). For example, some scholars have found that greater popularity may encourage a president to pursue complex and salient legislation as well as increase their willingness to take positions on more difficult issues (Marshall and Prins 2007). Less popular presidents, on the other hand, may attempt to champion only the more popular bills. Others, such as Bond, Fleisher, and Wood, have acknowledged that popularity is an accepted influence on presidential success, although they believe that it "has only a marginal effect" (Bond, Fleisher and Wood 2003, 95).

Presidential Skill

Bond and Fleisher's theory of the president-centered explanation for variance in success expanded the definition of president-centered to include that it is a "function of his leadership and persuasive skills" in addition to popularity (Bond and Fleisher 1990, 221). Although

researchers have acknowledged that the leadership skills of the president may affect his ability to get his legislation through Congress, they have tended to leave testing of skill out of their designs due to the topic's subjectivity. Rudalevige, Bond and Fleisher have all stated that testing for leadership skill becomes difficult and almost unreliable because defining skill elicits controversy. It is unclear what defines skill and how those traits would be comparable across presidencies. As Bond and Fleisher state "the evidence that variation in presidential leadership skill systematically affects legislative success is limited and ambiguous" (Bond and Fleisher 1990, 39). In addition, Bond and Fleisher's testing of skill did not indicate that, what they defined as, skilled presidents win more often than unskilled presidents.

Congress-Centered

The Congress-centered argument takes the view that "whether the president succeeds or fails is mainly a function of the partisan and ideological make-up of Congress" (Bond and Fleisher 1990, 221). Most modern scholars have recognized the president-centered theories but have also added another layer to the already present ideas. Bond and Fleisher proposed the idea of Congress-centered explanations for variance in the president's success rate in getting "their way" in Congress.

Margin of Control of Congress

Although the president has significant powers of his own, he must rely on members of Congress to vote for his policy preferences. Bond and Fleisher have said that members of Congress often "provide levels of support for the president that are generally consistent with their partisan and ideological predispositions" (Bond and Fleisher 1990, 221). That dependency is so strong, in fact, that they claim that "whether the president succeeds or fails is mainly a function of the partisan and ideological make-up of Congress" (Bond and Fleisher 1990, 221).

Bond and Fleisher have concluded that Presidents serving with a Congress made up of more members of their own party increases the likelihood that they will have success in Congress (Bond and Fleisher 1990).

Steger concurs with Bond and Fleisher's opinion in his assertion that the more members of Congress that are the same party as the president, the more support the president can expect to receive in Congress (Steger 2005). Peterson also found that there was an association between the number of seats held by the president's party Congressional-consideration of old proposals (Peterson 1990). This indicates that as the president's party gained more seats, proposals that had previously been overlooked were being given more attention. Peterson also found that with a Senate dominated by the president's party, he was more successful than he was without a majority (Peterson 1990).

Unity

Scholars have tried to explain variance in success rates with the idea that "the president's legislative success results from the extent to which the president and members of Congress share policy preferences" (Thurber 1996, 105). Although one would assume that a member of Congress is likely to vote along the lines of his or her party, Rudalevige points out that "party and preference cannot be assumed to be equivalent" (Rudalevige 2002, 94). As seen in several 1994 Congressional races same party candidates have explicitly run against the record of a president's record or asked him not to campaign on their behalf.

Increasingly, "voters are calling themselves independents and a shrinking number are calling themselves 'strong' partisans'" (Bond and Fleisher 1990, 17). In addition, candidates running for Congress "have become less dependent on their parties for campaign organization and finance" (Bond and Fleisher 1990, 17). As the effectiveness of coattails has decreased,

members of Congress from the president's party feel less that they owe the president for their successful campaign, which affect "presidential leverage with Congress" (Pika, Thomas and Watson 1994, 217). This means that as members feel that they have gained less by a candidate from their party successfully running for president they will be less loyal to and less likely to vote in accordance with that president.

Bond, Fleisher, Thurber and Wood have also advanced the idea of cross-pressured members of Congress, who often represent a local constituency with policy preferences that are different from their party's mainstream. Cross-pressured members are members of Congress that are influenced heavily by local issues that are not necessarily in agreement with their party's national issues. This in turn, causes members to take cues from other influences than their party, mainly from constituency-related issues.

However, even though there has been a marked decline in party voting, there remains "unambiguous evidence that party exerts a crucial influence on presidential-congressional relations" (Thurber 1996, 124).

Saliency of Issue

Another position that scholars have taken is that presidents will use the saliency of a particular issue to a promote policy preference. Rottinghaus, Canes-Wone and Shotts have pointed out that presidents tend to take popular positions on issues that are familiar and important to voters in their everyday lives, while putting issues of less importance to the public on the backburner. Rottinghaus hypothesized that presidents would select policies on salient issues in order to be able to claim credit for responding to the public's needs. Seventy percent of the cases that Rottinghaus studied showed congruency between the president's policy statements and majority public opinion.

Jacobs and Shapiro claim that presidents will use increased prominence of an issue to pursue policies that they would otherwise not pursue in the fear that it would not pass. Jacobs and Shapiro state that "politicians latch on to any evidence of changes in public opinion that are favorable to their positions in order to justify their policies and to increase the electoral risk of their rivals for opposing them" (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000, 8). In other words, as an issue becomes more salient and also is in congruence with the president's position on the issue, the president will pursue policy on the topic. Jacobs and Shapiro also take the position that because the populace rarely forms detailed policy opinions, the president is then able to pursue his policy preference with the populace's backing, although it may not have been very close to the original preferences of the populace. For example, in the 1990s, a large majority of Americans agreed that the health care system was fundamentally, although there was never support for a particular proposal. This window of saliency gave President Clinton the ability to pursue health care reform (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000). Peterson has also stated that increased saliency should be beneficial for presidents pursuing policy issues. He claims that saliency of issues should help the president by getting the attention of Congress as well as in winning acceptance of proposals.

Economic Conditions

It has long been hypothesized that economic conditions factor into presidential success in Congress. The common thought regarding economic conditions was that as the economy strengthened, Congress would be "more content and more likely to defer to presidents" (Prins and Shull 2006, 28).

The results of past studies regarding economic conditions have surprised scholars. They have shown that poorer economic conditions have actually increased presidential success. One study showed that as the misery rate increased from 3% to 11%, presidential success actually

increased by 39% (Prins and Shull 2006, 34). This may indicate that Congress is more willing to give up responsibility, and thus, fault, when they view the economy as declining.

Honeymoon

Other scholars have focused on the effects of a president's honeymoon period on success in Congress. Rottinghaus found that presidents tend to "use the momentum of their reelection (and higher popularity) to... involve the public in their policies" (Rottinghaus 2005, 730). Other scholars have found, however, that presidents who are most successful in an election by achieving a landslide victory, are not more successful in Congress (Byrne and Dominguez 2005).

Extensive research has shown that presidents are more successful during the first 100 days in office than during the second or third hundred day periods in office (Byrne and Dominguez 2005). This confirms that a honeymoon period is strongest in the first 100 days, although inaugural years of a presidency are also more successful than non-inaugural years. During inaugural years, the average success rate is 87%, while it is only 65% for noninaugural years (Byrne and Dominguez 2005, 69).

One particular study that was done by Prins and Marshall, which controlled for strategic-position-taking by presidents, indicated that the honeymoon period was not a significant factor in determining success. This could indicate that although the honeymoon period does give a president more success in Congress, it is due to the president's discriminatory selection of bills that they chose to support.

The reasons for this effect also vary. There are theories that suggest that the honeymoon effect is due to risk-averse position-taking by the president, during which time he supports less salient issues. Another reason for increased success during this period may also be that they have not drained as many resources yet. As Thurber states "Presidents have the most potential to

influence the agenda early in their terms, because that is when they have the most 'capital'; if they do not act quickly before their capital runs out, Congress will dominate" (Thurber 1996, 117). This idea was confirmed by President Johnson as he said: "'I keep hitting hard because I know that this honeymoon won't last. Every day I lose a little more political capital'" (Bond and Fleisher 1990, 23).

Many believe however, that the presidents' days of a honeymoon period are over or have been masked by other affects. Neustadt says that "The Hundred Days of 1933 remain as exceptional as they were memorable" (Neustadt 1962, 87). As quoted by Barrett and Eshbaugh-Soha "presidents and their staffs will be less skilled in bargaining with congressional leaders than they will be later in their tenure," attributing the appearance of a honeymoon period to the possibility that the president is "more willing to bargain away legislative content" (Barrett and Eshbaugh-Soha 2007, 102, 108).

Strategic

Another competing theory, supported by Mayhew, Steger and Rottinghaus, is that rather than supporting legislation for ideology or policy preferences, the president and Congress will often "strategically" select legislation to boost their overall success rate. David Mayhew suggests that members of Congress need to engage in "credit claiming," or the purposeful selection of bills to increase their success rate (Mayhew 2005, 103). But as Steger suggests, it is not just members of Congress, "presidents need to protect and maintain their reputations because their reputation can either enhance or hinder their ability to persuade others in government" (Steger 2005, 315). By increasing their success rate, presidents are enhancing their reputations, which will contribute to their ability to succeed on other policy preferences. So although the

president may have the tendency to support a particular bill, they may be acting strategically by moderating policy preferences to reduce their chances of being opposed.

Foreign v. Domestic

Bond and Fleisher have championed the idea that the '"United States has one president, but it has two presidencies; one presidency is for domestic affairs, and the other one is concerned with defense and foreign policy'" (Bond and Fleisher 1990, 50). The past has demonstrated that Congress is more likely to defer to the president in matters of foreign and defense policy whereas Congress is less inclined to give in to the president's preferences in matters of domestic policy. Pika, Thomas and Watson declared in their findings that "throughout most of U.S. history the president has been and is today the 'most important single factor in the determination of American foreign policy'" (Pika, Thomas and Watson 1994, 407).

The president's influence on foreign policy is most likely due to their increased responsibilities in the domain. The president's specific constitutional provisions include "the power to receive ambassadors and ministers, the power to negotiate treaties, the clause designating him as commander in chief of the armed forces, the general grant of executive power, and the clause enjoining him to 'take care that the laws be faithfully executed'" (Pika, Thomas and Watson 1994, 407).

As limitations have increased on the president's ability to practice foreign policy independently from Congress, so too has his success on foreign policy decreased. Pika, Thomas and Watson claim that the failure of the Vietnam War, which is often considered a presidential war, brought the end to "Congress' deference to White House domination of national security policy" (Pika, Thomas and Watson 1994, 218).

Senate versus the House

There has been some debate as to whether the Senate or the House gives more deference to the President and how each house affects presidential success differently. As is theorized by Thurber, the Senate tends to be somewhat less ideological than the House (Thurber 1990). Bond and Fleisher found however, the president's political base tends to unify more often in the Senate than in the House (Bond and Fleisher 1990).

Although it may not be clear what effect the difference being a member of the House versus the Senate has, we do have some indication as to why they are different. As Senators serve a six-year term, only one-third of Senators must face the voters in any given election whereas the entire House faces election every two years. This factor would make Senators less likely to be influenced by factors of the national environment, such as popularity and economic fluctuation.

Summary

When examining how presidents are able to influence legislation to their favor, scholars have often focused on two broad categories of factors: president-centered and Congress-centered. President-centered factors, including presidential effort, popularity and skill, focus on how the president can directly influence the success of legislation based on actions and characteristics unique to the president. Congress-centered factors, including the president's party's margin of control of Congress and party unity, focus on how the composition and characteristics of Congress affect a president's success in "getting their way" on policy preferences.

President-centered and Congress-centered variables are not the only variables that can be used to examine and explain presidential success in Congress, however. Whether or not an issue is salient, the current economic conditions, whether the bill is a foreign or domestic policy,

whether or not the vote occurs during a president's honeymoon period and in which house of Congress the bill is being voted on all are thought to affect the ability of a president to succeed in influencing legislation.

Research Design/Hypotheses

This study looks to identify the factors that influence presidential success in Congress. The study examines the effects of six independent variables on the dependent variable of presidential success. The independent variables that are examined are presidential popularity, the national misery index, the president's party's margin of control in Congress, party unity, presidential effort and issue saliency. Also the honeymoon period, the difference between the House and the Senate, and foreign versus domestic policy issues will be examined. Overall, the study looks to explain what factors have continued to be significant since other studies have been done and which ones appear to have dropped off in importance.

Bills from each year of the presidencies of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush are examined in this study. The year 2008 was left out of the model due to incomplete data for the year. In particular models, certain bills are removed from the analysis for reasons that will be further explained in following sections. Both Bush and Clinton served during both a divided and unified government, and during periods of high and low popularity. In addition, they are the two most recent and complete presidencies.

The dependent variable is the president's success rate. Success is measured dichotomously as either a success or a failure. If the bill was voted according to the president's preference, it was labeled with a 1. If the bill was not according to the president's preference, it was labeled with a 0. These statistics are found in the annual editions of the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*.

The first independent variable is the president's party's margin of control in Congress, measured by the percentage of seats that the president's party controls in the Senate and in the House during each year. These statistics are found in the annual editions of the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*. Scholars have found that as Congress was composed of more members of the president's party, Congress was more predisposed to support the president's policy preferences. Theory behind this states that members of Congress often vote along party lines, so when more of Congress is controlled by the president's party, more support should be given to the president's policy preferences. I hypothesize that as the percentage of members of Congress that is composed of the president's party increases, so too will presidential success in Congress.

The second independent variable, presidential popularity, is measured as the percentage of those that responded that they approved when asked the question "Do you approve or disapprove of the way [first & last name] is handling his job as President?" These ratings are taken from The American Presidency Project, which have been adapted from the Gallup Poll.[1] The polls were taken every 3 to 15 days. When measuring a president's popularity, the poll that ended most previously to the vote on the legislation will be used. It is expected that as a president's popularity increases, so too will his success rate.

The third independent variable is economic conditions, measured using a misery index. A misery index is the unemployment rate added to the inflation rate. The unemployment rates are obtained from the U.S. Department of Labor.[2] The inflation rates are obtained from Financial Trend Forecaster. It is expected that as the misery index rises, so too will the president's success rate.

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[1] http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/popularity.php. Accessed December 8, 2008.
[2] http://www.miseryindex.us/customindexbymonth.asp. Accessed December 8, 2008.

The fourth independent variable is the party unity rate defined as how frequently during roll call votes a majority of Democrats aligned against a majority of Republicans. Party unity rates are obtained from the annual *Congressional Quarterly Almanacs*. When members of Congress are inclined to vote with the party, it is expected that they would also vote with the president if he belonged to the same party. It is predicted that as party unity increases, so too will the president's success rate.

The fifth independent variable is presidential effort, measured by assigning particular policy issues with an indicator of presidential effort. This is done by examining on how many pages an issue was mentioned in the indices of the *Public Papers of the President*. For each year, the issues of the environment, Iraq and welfare are examined due to supposed changes in their importance to the president over the years being looked at. The number of pages that each issue was mentioned on was counted and added up to come to an aggregate number that will represent the effort of the president on each issue for each year.[3] The more pages that each issue is mentioned on, the greater the effort is that the president is expected to have has invested into that particular issue. With greater effort from the president on a particular issue, it is expected that he will see greater success on those issues in success in Congress.

The sixth independent variable is issue saliency, measured by classification of a bill as a "key vote" by the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*. A key vote is selected by the *Congressional Quarterly* "judged by the extent to which it represents:"

> A matter of major controversy. A matter of presidential or political power. A matter of potentially great impact on the nation and lives of Americans. For each group of related votes on an issue, one key vote usually is chosen – one that, in the opinion of CQ editors, was most important in determining the outcome. (Congressional Quarterly 1995, C-36).

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[3] Other ways of measuring presidential effort were considered, such as doing a word search in online media sources. This method was discarded due multiple ways that words such as "environment" can be used. Also, examining the amount of space the issue being discussed took up on the page was considered but also discarded as a viable option due to the tremendous time that method would take as well as the subjectivity of that method.

A bill will be labeled as a salient issue if the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* defines it as a key vote. Theory behind saliency of an issue indicates that if an issue is salient, the president will use the increased media attention to promote a particular policy issue of preference. It is expected that as saliency increases, presidential success will increase as well.

The seventh variable, the president's honeymoon period, is defined as the first 100 days that the president is in office. Presidents typically receive more than a 10% higher success rate during the first 100 days than the later 2/3^{rds} of the year (Byrne and Dominguez 2005). It is expected that the president's success in Congress will be positively influenced by the honeymoon period.

The relative strengths of each independent variable will be compared for foreign and domestic bills. This datum is also found in the annual *Congressional Quarterly Almanacs*. It is expected that the president will have more success on foreign policy bills than domestic bills and that less of the variance will be explained for foreign policy bills than for domestic bills.

Differences between how the variables interact with presidential success will also be determined while separating cases on the basis of which house of Congress they were voted on.

Data Analysis and Results

Bivariate correlations were computed to test the relationship between the dependent variable, presidential success in Congress, and the independent variables, presidential popularity, misery index, the president's party's margin of control of Congress, party unity and saliency,. The tests indicate the direction, strength and significance of the relationships, as well as how much of the variance is explained by each set of tests. Forty-six percent of the bills that Presidents Clinton and Bush took a position on were voted in opposition with the President and fifty-four of the bills were voted in support with the President.

Given the Presidents' overall success rate in Congress, the independent variables were examined to determine how strongly and in what direction each affected the dependent variable. The results were as expected, with the direction of correlation as predicted, with a few exceptions that will be discussed in further detail.

Overall Model

The overall model suggests that although only 22% of the variance can be explained using the independent variables, four out of five are in fact significant in explaining variance. Before running the binary logistic regression, only 54% of the results could be predicted correctly. The overall model was able to improve this prediction rate to 68%, which is a significant jump. The increased rate of predictability indicates that the model used is a good indication of how presidential popularity, the misery index, the president's party's margin in Congress, party unity and saliency affect the president's success rate in Congress.

As Table 2 indicates, each of the variables affects presidential success positively. This means that as presidential popularity, the misery index and the president's party's margin of control in Congress increases, so too will his success rate in Congress. Saliency and party unity are not significant in predicting presidential success and are not considered useful in determining success.

Table 1: Overall Model	
	Dependent Variable
	Presidential Success
Independent Variables	B (standard error)
Popularity	.033 (.006) ***
Economy	.344 (.073) ***
Margin	14.230 (1.853) ***
Party Unity	.053 (.019)
Saliency	.007 (.172)
Sample Size	1398
Nagelkerke R^2	.219
* indicates significance <.05	
** indicates significance <.01	
*** indicates significance <.001	

These results were, overall, as expected and are not surprising. More interesting is the strength of the variables in predicting the president's success rate, in comparison with each other. Margin of control by the president's party was the strongest indicator of presidential success, with a Wald score of 59, followed by presidential popularity, with a Wald score of 28 and then by the misery index, with a Wald score of 22. This indicates that in determining which factors, of these four, are most useful in predicting presidential success, margin of control of Congress is the most useful, followed by popularity and then the misery index.

Domestic v. Foreign Policy

To examine the extent to which a bill being a domestic or foreign policy bill affects presidential success, a binary logistic regression analysis was done. Also, to examine the effects of each independent variable on domestic and foreign bills a separate regression was done for each. This allows us to see how the independent variables of presidential popularity, the misery index, margin of control of Congress, party unity and saliency affect domestic and foreign policy bills differently.

Table 2: Foreign v. Domestic and Overall		
	Dependent Variables	
	Presidential Success	
	Overall Model with Foreign or Domestic Dummy (Issue)	Overall
Independent Variables	B (standard error)	B (standard error)
Popularity	.034 (.006) ***	.033 (.006) ***
Economy	.352 (.074) ***	.344 (.073) ***
Margin	14.126 (1.855) ***	14.230 (1.853) ***
Party Unity	.053 (.019)	.053 (.019)
Saliency	.026 (.173)	.007 (.172)
Issue	.288 (.131) *	
Sample Size	1398	1398
Nagelkerke R^2	.223	.219
* indicates significance <.05		
** indicates significance <.01		
*** indicates significance <.001		

Pursuant to the postulation that presidents are given more power in shaping foreign policy over domestic policy, a dummy variable was created, such that foreign bills are labeled with a one and domestic bills are labeled with a zero. After controlling for domestic and foreign policy bills, as seen in Table 3, not much more of the variance in success is explained; the Nagelkerke score barely rises at all. The percentage of prediction did rise significantly however, from 54% before the model was run to 68% after the model was run. In addition, separating the issues, foreign and domestic, proved to be significant in explaining variance at the .05 level. This result is in concurrence with what was expected. Issue is the weakest indicator of success, among the variables that were significant, with the smallest Wald score.

Foreign and Domestic Bills

Table 3: Foreign and Domestic Policy		
	Dependent Variables	
	Presidential Success	
	Foreign Policy Bills	Domestic Bills
Independent Variables	B (standard error)	B (standard error)
Popularity	.005 (.011)	.049 (.008) ***
Economy	.020 (.132)	.527 (.092) ***
Margin	14.921 (3.355) ***	13.445 (2.248) ***
Party Unity	.062 (.036)	.050 (.023)
Saliency	.305 (.358)	-.060 (.199)
Sample Size	399	999
Nagelkerke R^2	.167	.259
* indicates significance <.05		
** indicates significance <.01		
*** indicates significance <.001		

Foreign Bills

The empirical evidence for the foreign policy bills, as indicated in Table 4, shows that, of the variables examined, only the president's party's margin of control in Congress can significantly predict a president's success rate in Congress. The Nagelkerke score of .167 indicates that about 17% of the variance can be explained by examining the five independent variables for just the foreign policy bills. The binary logistic regression test, while looking at just the foreign policy bills, was able to increase the predictability of presidential success from 58% to 65%

The positive B score indicates that as the president's party controls more seats in Congress he is more likely to have success in Congress, as was expected. Constituents are less likely to be aware of or as directly affected by foreign policy issues and thus presidential popularity was expected to not significantly increase a president's success rate. In keeping with this idea, because constituents are less likely to be aware of the foreign policy issues, members of

Congress are given more freedom in their vote. The increased freedom that members have in voting for foreign policy issues leads party unity to not be a significant determinant of success. Typically, the economy is not as directly related to foreign policy issues as domestic issues so foreign policy also was not likely to be influenced strongly by the misery index.

Domestic Bills

The results reveal that the president's success rate in Congress is explained more by the five independent variables for domestic bills compared with foreign policy bills. The binary logistic regression shows that within domestic issues, presidential popularity, misery index, and margin of control in Congress all positively and significantly predict presidential success in Congress. Saliency and party unity remain insignificant. Within domestic bills, these four independent variables are able to explain about 26% of the variance, as indicated by the Nagelkerke value for domestic bills. The test also increases predictability more for domestic bills than for foreign policy bills, indicating that the variables are better able to predict the president's success in Congress for domestic bills than for foreign policy bills. The binary logistic regression for domestic bills increased predictability from 52% to 69%.

The results for the domestic bills confirm the hypotheses that the president is given more power over domestic policy when popularity increases, when the misery index increases and when his party has more seats in Congress.

Honeymoon Period

To test the effect that the honeymoon period has on success, a logistic regression was done. The analysis shows that the honeymoon period is not a significant determinant of presidential success. This is confirmed by the fact that the Nagelkerke R^2 value does not change, indicating that more of the variance is not explained when factoring in the honeymoon period.

Table 4: Honeymoon, Overall Model		
	Dependent Variable	
	Presidential Success	
	Overall with Honeymoon	Overall Model
Independent Variables	B (standard error)	B (standard error)
Popularity	.033 (.006) ***	.033 (.006) ***
Economy	.348 (.074) ***	.344 (.073) ***
Margin	14.249 (1.855) ***	14.230 (1.853) ***
Party Unity	.053 (.019)	.053 (.019)
Saliency	.006 (.172)	.007 (.172)
Honeymoon	-.112 (.326)	
Sample Size	1398	1398
Nagelkerke R^2	.219	.219
* indicates significance <.05		
** indicates significance <.01		
*** indicates significance <.001		

Honeymoon, Clinton and Bush

In order to ensure that the effects of the Honeymoon period on presidential success were not disappearing or reappearing within the specified time period, both presidencies were examined. The analysis shows that for both presidents, the honeymoon period was not significant in determining success, confirming that the honeymoon period does not increase a president's success in Congress.

Table 5: Honeymoon, Clinton, Bush and Overall			
	Dependent Variables		
	Presidential Success		
	Clinton	Bush	Both
Independent Variables	B (standard error)	B (standard error)	B (standard error)
Popularity	.026 (.018)	.037 (.011) **	.033 (.006) ***
Economy	.418 (.125) **	.086 (.194)	.348 (.074) **
Margin	10.897 (2.079) ***	28.522 (4.659) ***	14.249 (1.855) ***
Party Unity	.064 (.035)	.011 (.060)	.053 (.019)
Saliency	.286 (.229)	-.454 (.267)	.006 (.172)
Honeymoon	-.222 (.404)	-.004 (.600)	-.112 (.326)
Sample Size	906	492	1398
Nagelkerke R^2	.185	.309	.219
* indicates significance <.05			
** indicates significance <.01			
*** indicates significance <.001			

Senate v. House

Separate analyses were done for the House and for the Senate to determine whether or not the variables affected the houses differently.

Table 6: How Variables Change in Senate and House		
	Dependent Variables	
	Presidential Success	
	House	Senate
Independent Variables	B (standard error)	B (standard error)
Popularity	.046 (.009) ***	.038 (.011) **
Economy	.535 (.102) ***	-.018 (.123)
Margin	13.506 (2.472) ***	18.225 (3.667) ***
Party Unity	-.093 (.027)**	-.072 (.034) *
Saliency	.241 (.246)	-.234 (.245)
Sample Size	867	531
Nagelkerke R^2	.316	.112
* indicates significance <.05		
** indicates significance <.01		
*** indicates significance <.001		

House

While examining only the bills in the House, the variance explained is 32%, much more than has been explained in past tests. Predictability also rose much more, from 51% to 73%. The significance of the variables remains consistent with past tests, with presidential popularity, the national misery index, the president's party's margin of control in Congress and party unity all showing significance and a positive correlation. In the House, the margin of control in Congress proves to predict presidential success most strongly, with a Wald score of 29, followed by the misery index, with a Wald score of 27, followed by presidential popularity, with a Wald score of 25, followed by party unity with a Wald score of 11. Saliency remains insignificant. These findings are consistent with the hypotheses.

Senate

Results in the Senate prove to be much less significant. The binary logistic regression explains much less of the variance, 11% compared to 32% in the House. The analysis barely raises the predictability, from 58% to 61%. The results from the Senate are surprising and unexpected. Presidential popularity, the president's party's margin of control in Congress and party unity are all significant, leaving the misery index and saliency insignificant in predicting presidential success in Congress. Of the significant variables, margin of control in Congress is the strongest predictor, with a Wald score of 25, followed by the president's popularity, with a Wald score of 12, followed by party unity, with a Wald score of 5. The most surprising result here is that as party unity increases, the president's success rate in Congress actually decreases.

The differences between the effects of variables between the House and the Senate may be due to the longer terms of Senators as well as their increased power and independence within politics. Due to the fact that Senators are elected less frequently than Representatives, decisions

they make with or against the president have less of a chance of being brought up in an upcoming election and harming the candidate during election. The increase of the unity score predicting a decrease in the president's success rate may be due to the fact that members of the Senate tend to act more independently, so when the party is uniting members may actually be uniting against the president.

Presidential Effort

Due to the small number of cases, regression analysis was not feasible. Instead, bills that the president took a position on regarding a particular issue, environment, Iraq or welfare, were graphed to see if there appeared to be correlation between presidential effort and success. Please see the appendix for the graphs.

By examining the Iraq bills, it can be seen that there appears to be very weak correlation, if any, between effort and success. As effort increases for Iraq bills, the president sees both success and failure. Although when the president put in considerable effort, with effort of 250, it appeared to pay off with a success.

By examining the environment bills that the president took a position on, as effort increased, it is not necessarily the case that success increased as well. When the president put in effort of 10, he had success of about 86%. When his effort rose to 21-23, he actually had a lower success rate at about 80%.

For welfare bills, it can also be seen that there is not significant correlation between effort and success. Although significant effort again appears to pay off, with effort of 21 page appearances receiving success, the other welfare cases about even out. While the president saw success on a bill on which he spent considerable effort, he was also successful for three bills on which he spent relatively no effort.

A Pearson correlation was run which shows that there is no significance in the relationship between presidential effort and success. These results demonstrate that, contrary to predictions of Tulis, Jacobs and Shapiro, while in some cases the president does see greater success when he puts in more effort, it is largely insignificant in determining presidential success in Congress.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the multiple tests, several conclusions can be drawn. Overall, for Presidents Clinton and Bush, presidential popularity, economic conditions and the president's party's margin of control in Congress have shown to be significant in determining presidential success in Congress. Issue saliency was shown to be insignificant in explaining success in every analysis, contrary to past theories and a hypothesis of this study. Party unity was shown to be significant in two of the analyses that were conducted. Margin of control in Congress was demonstrated to be the strongest indicator of success, followed by popularity, and then by economic conditions.

As was expected, as presidential popularity increased, so too did presidential success in Congress. The only analysis in which popularity was not significant in determining success was in the area of foreign policy bills. This supports the idea that presidents are given more freedom to set the agenda when the public is not watching as closely or being affected as directly.

The study shows that as economic conditions worsened and the misery index increased, so too did presidential success. This supports the idea that as economic conditions become worse, members of Congress are more willing to defer to the president in order to avoid blame for a worsening economy. The only test in which popularity was not a significant determinant of success was when examining success in the Senate. I speculate that this is due to the idea that

Senators tend to be somewhat removed from the fluctuations of the national environment due to term length.

In concurrence with past theories, the president's party's margin of control in Congress was demonstrated to be significant in explaining variance in presidential success in Congress. It was also typically the strongest predictor of success of the significant variables. The analyses have shown that as the president's party controls more seats in Congress, his success in Congress increases as well.

Party unity was significant in explaining presidential success in the both the House and the Senate, although they affected success in opposite directions. In the Senate, party unity actually affected presidential success in the opposite direction than was expected. Results showed that as unity increased, presidential success decreased. This result may be due to parties uniting against the president. In the House, increased unity suggested increased presidential success. Unity may correlate positively with success in the House, due to Representatives taking cues from their party more often in the House than in the Senate. Members of the House have the propensity to be more loyal to their party than in the Senate.

Saliency of a bill was shown to not be significant in determining success in Congress in any of the tests that were run. This contradicts the hypothesis that the president would be able to capitalize on a policy's increased media attention.

Results on foreign and domestic policy differences show that, as expected, a bill being foreign or domestic was significant in explaining presidential success. More interestingly, and also in concurrence with past theories, the president is more likely to have success on foreign issues over domestic issues. These findings give credence to the theory that members of Congress are more likely to defer to the president because they are less likely to receive electoral

retribution if their constituents do not agree with their vote on a foreign issue as well as because the president typically has more information and power available to him in foreign policy issues.

Through this study, the honeymoon period was demonstrated to be insignificant in explaining presidential success in Congress. The diminished honeymoon effect was confirmed by studying both presidencies separately.

While examining the House and the Senate separately, differences between the two become clear. The variables used to examine presidential success in Congress explained only 11 percent of the variance in the Senate and 32 percent in the House. This finding indicates that members in the Senate behave more independently and may be influenced by other factors that may need to be examined further in future studies.

Presidential effort was demonstrated to be insignificant in determining presidential success in Congress. This indicates that, along with past theories, presidential success in Congress is largely the result of Congress-centered variables, as well as factors that are neither Congress-centered, nor president-centered.

This study reveals that three of the five independent variables were typically significant in determining presidential success in Congress. The variables that were typically significant were presidential popularity, economic conditions and margin of control of Congress. This is interesting because of these three variables, one is considered a president-centered variable (popularity), one a Congress-centered variable (margin of control), and one of them is neither (economic conditions). Issue saliency and presidential effort were determined to be insignificant in determining success. Party unity was only significant when examining bill passage in the House and in the Senate separately. These results indicate that although the president has the ability to influence Congress, his influence is limited and concludes that the president can, by no

means, determine the legislative outcome alone. The president relies on the support of Congress and its members and the fluctuations of the national environment through variables of popularity and the misery index to pass policy preferences.

Given that no single explanation can explain the variance alone, it must be noted that Congress-centered factors are the most numerous in explanative abilities, in that both unity and margin of control of Congress can be used to explain success. Furthermore, in every study margin of control was not only significant but the strongest predictor of success. This concludes that of the explanations for success, the Congress-centered tend to be the most explanatory. These findings question Neustadt's original claim that the power of presidents is the power to persuade. Findings indicate that the president's ability to influence legislation is little more than what can be accounted through his national popularity levels.

This study is particularly useful in that it allows an examination of both the president-centered and Congress-centered variables, as well as other factors. Moreover, it allows the variables to be weighted against each other to determine not only which are significant in explaining presidential success, but also, which are the strongest indicators of success. This study has also tested and updated past studies and theories to determine which remain relevant in modern politics.

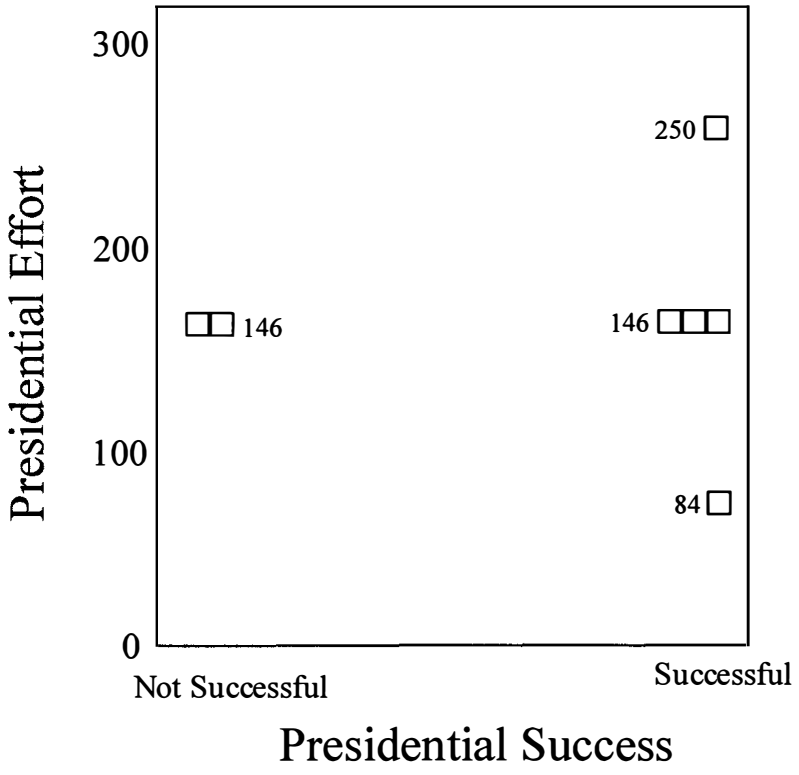
This study questions the overall strength of the president. It questions the validity of campaign promises and the ability of the president to influence legislation, aside from simply being popular. The president is demonstrated not to be strong enough to utilize public opinion to fulfill his national mandate. A question possibly raised by this study is the ability of the president to provide a system of checks and balances on Congress. Given that the president's

strength stems mainly from the ideological makeup of Congress, it seems as though the president is more at the disposal of Congress, rather than being a partner of Congress.

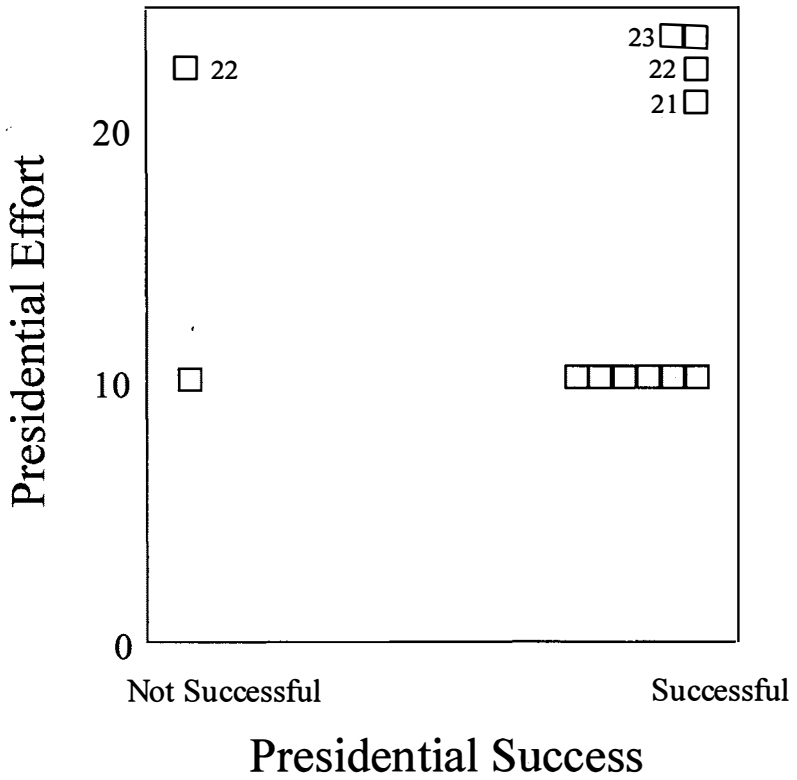
These findings are not wholly conclusive. They leave the question of what accounts for the remaining 70 percent of the variance in explaining presidential success. Presidential effort may explain more than what is indicated in this study. Due to the few number of cases studied, the possible effects of effort may not have been fully explored. Furthermore, presidential skill, although very difficult to define and measure, may account for a significant portion of the president's ability to influence legislation. Another area that has left much to be speculated is what affects success in the Senate, if not the variables studied.

Appendix

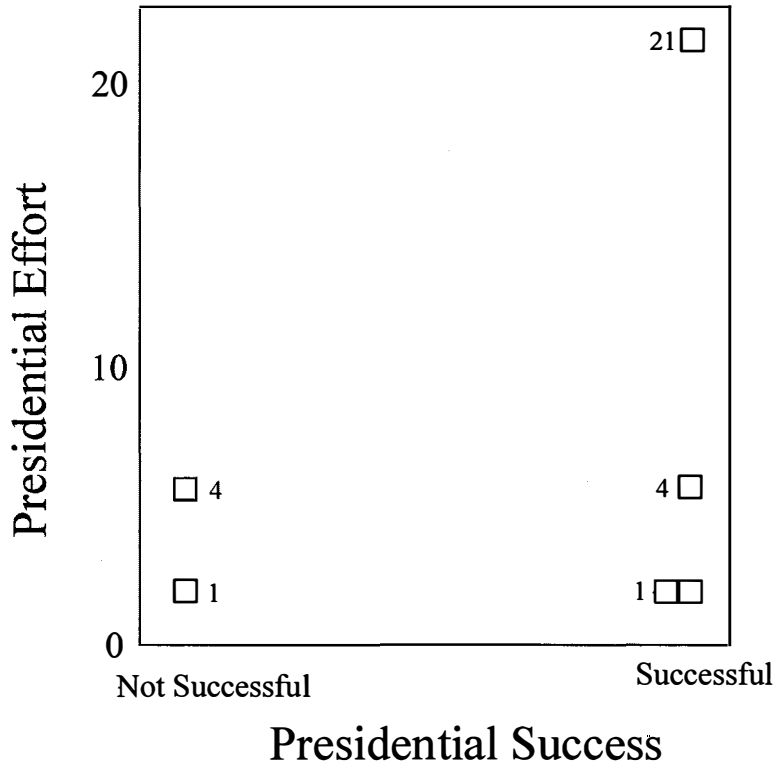
Graph 1: Iraq Effort



Graph 2: Environment



Graph 3: Welfare Effort



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