Presidential Power and Partisan Polarization

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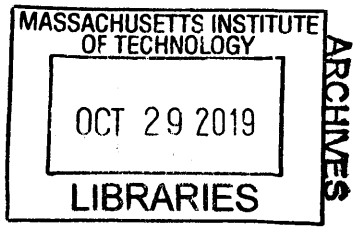

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by

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ABSTRACT

Since the publication of the first edition of Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power* in 1960 the two political parties in the United States have grown further and further apart ideologically, especially in the United States Congress. This essay evaluates how that polarization has fundamentally reshaped the opportunities for the president to influence the voting decisions of members of Congress. The first chapter lays out a basic framework for understanding the possibilities for presidential persuasion in the realm of congressional roll-call voting, and offers a basic theory of how polarization has fundamentally changed the opportunities the president has to affect how members vote. Presidents who hold office in an era of partisan polarization have fewer instruments at their disposal to be able to change the incentives for members of the opposing party to vote for a particular piece of legislation, but far more tools that they can use to alter whether members of their own party believe that voting in the direction preferred by the president is in their best interest.

The following three empirical chapters examine more closely three potential effects of the president taking a public stance on individual pieces of legislation on members' reelection goals. Chapter 2 tests whether respondents express differing levels of support for three individual pieces of legislation when they know where the president stands on those bills. I find that knowledge of the president's position on legislation appears to lead presidential copartisans to be somewhat more likely to adopt the president's position on the issue; similarly, opposing partisans appear somewhat more likely to move away from the position preferred by the president, although the effects do not quite reach the level of statistical significance for two of the three pieces of legislation. Chapter 3 turns to the effect of member loyalty to the president on primary election returns: do primary voters of the president's party reward members who are more loyal to the president? Despite endogeneity concerns that make this a particularly hard test for determining the effect of presidential loyalty (or disloyalty) on primary elections returns, I find a statistically significant effect of levels of presidential support on Republicans' primary election outcomes, although there is no such detectable effect for Democratic members' returns, nor does the effect of support scores on primary elections seem to grow over time. Finally, Chapter 4 examines changes in the influence of presidential approval on the outcomes of congressional elections. If, as ample anecdotal evidence suggests, members of Congress believe that the president's approval ratings improve when the president can take credit for the passage of legislation, then as approval becomes more important in congressional elections, members should be increasingly wary of how their votes affect their own electoral fortunes. As expected, I find that presidential approval has become more predictive of congressional election outcomes today, both when considering aggregate election outcomes and individuals citizens' voting choices.

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Chapter 1

Power, Persuasion, and Polarization

For five weeks during the months of December, 2018 and January, 2019, the United States government stood still, exceeding by fourteen days the previous longest shutdown in the nation's history. By nearly all accounts, the central–and perhaps sole–issue was President Trump's demand that Congress provide $5.7 billion to fund construction of a wall along the border between the United States and Mexico, seeking to fulfill at least one half of his most infamous campaign promise. By the time the president backed away from that demand, however, and signed the first bill to make it to his desk, the shutdown had cost the United States economy $11 billion, of which $3 billion would never be recouped, according estimates from the Congressional Budget Office. S & P Global placed the costs even higher, estimating that $6.5 billion had been lost in the dispute over $ 5.7 billion in wall funding.

President Trump's inability to obtain that funding without his subsequent declaration of a national emergency illustrates the fundamental truth of the constitutional system in the United States. Because the Constitution created, in Richard Neustadt's words, a government of "separated institutions, sharing powers" (1990, 29) it is nearly impossible for one branch to accomplish any significant positive objectives without at least the tacit acquiescence of the others.

Although the fundamental structure of separated institutions sharing powers has not changed since Neustadt first published the thesis in 1960, the context in which presidents operate undoubtedly has. Changes in the United States' role in the world, for example, have placed new demands on presidents and changed their relationships with Congress (e.g., Rudalevidge 2005). Technology has fundamentally altered the tools available to presidents, allowing presidents to shape the decisions made by other actors in the political process in new ways (e.g., Kernell 2007). Perhaps most notably, the ideological sorting and homogenization of the parties–both in Congress and in the general public–has dramatically changed the relationships between the

president and other political actors with whom she might work.

Scholars have devoted a great deal of attention to examining the causes (e.g., Polsby 2004, Hirano et al. 2010, Thomsen 2014) and effects of polarization in Congress (e.g., Rohde 1991, McCarty 2007, Lee 2009, Barber and McCarty 2015). Far less attention has been devoted to the presidency and how polarization has affected how the president operates in a climate where her policy preferences are much farther away from those of most members of the opposing party, but frequently much closer to those of her own. In this paper I examine how polarization has influenced the president's power in perhaps her most important power-sharing relationship–that is, her power to persuade members of Congress to cast legislative votes in the direction she prefers. This question seems particularly appropriate in our current era of gridlock, where political competition appears to have hindered even the passage of legislation filled with little to no ideological content, like bills to raise the nation's debt ceiling (Lee 2009).

Presidential Power in the Legislative Process

The United States Constitution is infamously laconic in its description of the president's powers. In contrast to the wide scope of powers granted to Congress, the Constitution sets out remarkably few for the president. Article II, the section of the Constitution dedicated primarily to the executive branch, sets forward just nine explicit powers for the president.[1] Not only are the enumerated powers of the president limited in number, but the Constitution explicitly requires that many–like the power to make appointments or to negotiate treaties–be shared with Congress. Others–like the president's power as commander in chief–are, moreover, checked or otherwise limited by powers given to Congress. The most notable power the Constitution grants presidents to affect the outcome of legislation–the veto–in fact appears in Article I, the article of the Constitution dedicated primarily to Congress. The veto, moreover, is necessarily a negative power, only useful in the passage of legislation in the ways in which it allows the president to bargain with Congress (e.g., Cameron and McCarty 2004). As is the case with many of the president's other enumerated powers, the veto confers on the president little ability to take unilateral positive action. The Constitution also saves a place for presidents to recommend legislative action to Congress, but nowhere in the document is there any requirement that

[1]The president, the Constitution says, "shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States;" "may require the Opinion, in writing, of the principal Officer in each of the executive Departments;" "shall have Power to grant Reprieves and Pardons for Offenses against the United States;" "shall have Power...to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur;" "by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, shall appoint Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls, Judges of the supreme Court, and all other Officers of the United States;" "shall have Power to fill up all Vacancies that may happen during the Recess of the Senate;" "shall from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient;" "may, on extraordinary Occasions, convene both Houses, or either of them, and in Case of Disagreement between them, with Respect to the Time of Adjournment, he may adjourn them to such Time as he shall think proper;" "shall receive Ambassadors and other public Ministers;" "he shall take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed;" "and shall Commission all the Officers of the United States."

Congress heed the recommendations the president makes in the State of the Union.

In the legislative process in particular, then, this system of separated institutions sharing powers means that for the president to accomplish her legislative objectives–that is, to pass desired policies–she needs the votes of individual members of Congress.[2] Those members, however, will only vote the way the president would prefer if they believe that doing so will fundamentally be in their own interests, as Neustadt suggests: "When one man shares authority with another, but does not gain or lose his job upon the other's whim, his willingness to act upon the urging of the other turns on whether he conceives the action right for him" (1990, 30).

The ability of presidents to wield any such power, Neustadt wrote, depends on their "persuasive" abilities. Persuasion, however, is more than just a president's ability to logically prevail upon others that her proposal is the correct one. Instead, it fundamentally revolves around the president's ability to convince others that they ought to take the action the president desires of them for their own sake and in their own interest. Reasoned argument might help the president in this persuasive process to some degree, but persuasion is more likely to occur when the president can leverage other tools at her disposal to influence the calculations of self-interest of members of Congress, executive branch officials, media members, foreign leaders, or any other individuals or entities whose powers the president might need to accomplish her objectives. The ambiguity and scope of the president's enumerated powers, then–combined with other informal powers given to the president by the media and other individuals who hold keys to politically relevant resources–offer the president numerous tools to use in her persuasive efforts.

Neustadt's conception of persuasion has long been misunderstood and misapplied, perhaps because he used the term bargaining almost interchangeably. The most common mistake has been for scholars and journalists alike to oversimplify what Neustadt meant by bargaining, essentially limiting the term to *quid pro quo* transactions. Kernell (2007, 3), for example, implied that bargaining primarily is made up of direct exchanges, "the kinds of exchange necessary, in pluralist theory, for the American political system to function properly." Throughout *Presidential Power*, however, Neustadt defines persuasion more broadly, as evidenced both the language he uses to describe persuasion and the examples he offers (e.g.,"the individuals he would induce to do what he wants done on their own responsibility will need or fear *some* acts by him on his responsibility" (1990, 31; emphasis added)). [3] Quite simply, persuasion involves *any* action presidents take for the sake of influencing her bargaining partners' attainment of her goals: "the essence of a President's persuasive task is to convince such men that what the White House wants of them is what they ought to

[2]Throughout this essay, for the sake of clarity I use feminine pronouns when referring to the president in the abstract, and masculine pronouns in reference to any other governmental actor.

[3]Neustadt's central example in Chapter 3–on how Truman used his powers to aid in the passage of the Marshall plan–provides an effective illustration of just how wide Neustadt intended the scope of persuasion to be.

do for their sake and on their authority;" (Neustadt 1990, 30). Direct exchange is just one method through which presidents can alter those calculations of self-interest. Presidential efforts, for example, to influence public opinion on a given issue are often intended to apply pressure to members of Congress by threatening their chances at reelection should they not take the action the public–and, indirectly, the president–would like them to take.[4]

The need for persuasion arises from the reality that in virtually no sphere can the president act alone. Even in her capacity as commander-in-chief the president must rely upon subordinates to carry out orders as she intends them; those subordinates, as free thinking individuals with their own sets of interests and responsibilities, have the capacity to resist the president. To properly judge the president's potential persuasive influence on a given power-sharing actor, we need to understand two things about that relationship: the degree of independent correlation in the president's and the actor's interests–that is, the "natural" preferences of actor in question–and the tools at the president's disposal to fundamentally alter those interests. When the member in question naturally agrees with the president–that is, when the member would have found the action the president desire to be in his best interest, regardless of any presidential actions–the president needs to take no action to alter the member's decision about how best to proceed.[5] In this respect, the need for presidential power is directly conditioned on the natural preferences of those upon whose powers the president relies to accomplish her desired objectives. When the members crucial to deciding how Congress as a whole shall act share the president's appraisal of what is in their best interest, little power is needed; when the pivotal members might otherwise believe the action desired by the president is not in their best interest, however, the president's power becomes far more relevant. These natural preferences therefore determine how persuasive the president needs to be to achieve the desired result. The tools available to the president structure the president's capacity in that persuasive task.

While the Constitution explicitly limits the president's ability to act unilaterally, the document still permits her tremendous opportunities to engage in persuasion. Although the president's specifically enumerated powers are few, the language that sets forth those powers is rather broad and ambiguous–the "take care" clause, for example, offers the president extraordinary reach into the operations of the executive branch. Even though the president's powers are indeed shared, the Constitution ensures that presidents shares powers with a greater number of other political actors than perhaps any individual in Washington; as Neustadt emphasized, these are necessarily relationships of "mutual dependence" (1990, 31). Not only do those actors

[4]Kernell, in his discussion of presidents' decision to "go public" likens the action to Neustadt's description of presidential command (2007, 25). But presidential public appeals hardly fit the standards Neustadt set out for successful command; Neustadt also argues that command is just one method of persuasion, albeit a costly one (1990, 28).

[5]Of course, it is possible that a presidential action could have a *negative* effect. When a president takes action, that action may in fact have the opposite of the desired effect, moving members who may have otherwise acted as the president would have wanted to a position where they find it is in their interest not to take that action.

who share power with the president know that they are dependent on her acquiescence to make use of that shared power, but many also realize that the president, because of her broad array of powers, may be able to help bring about desired results in spheres over which they have far less control:

> From the veto to appointments, from publicity to budgeting, and so down a long list, the White House now controls the most encompassing array of vantage points in the American political system. With hardly an exception, those who share in governing this country are aware that at some time, in some degree, the doing of *their* jobs, the furthering of *their* ambitions, may depend upon the President of the United States. Their need for presidential action, or their fear of it, is bound to be recurrent if not actually continuous (Neustadt 1990, 31).[6]

The amount of power wielded by the president is not static. Neustadt particularly emphasized that the degree to which the president is powerful depends significantly on the individual occupying the Oval Office and the choices she makes with regard to how she uses the tools available to her. His fundamental thesis, however, that the president remained weak because of the system of separated institutions sharing powers, was undoubtedly institutional.[7] The amount of power available to the president, that is, also varies on the basis of other political circumstances. Constitutional amendments (e.g., the Twenty-Second or the Twenty-Fifth Amendments), new legislative statutes (e.g., the War Powers Resolution), and judicial interpretations of existing constitutional provisions or statutes (e.g., *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld*) all can fundamentally alter the nature and variety of the powers available to the president. Even when the president's formal powers remain the same, moreover, political circumstances may fundamentally alter the effectiveness of the tools that presidents might seek to use to their advantage.

In this essay, I examine the effect of these changes in the degree to which presidential powers are actually useful to presidents as they seek to bargain with other political actors to achieve their goals in office. That is, if we were to hold constant both the individual occupying the office and the laws and statutes that formally set out the president's power, to what degree do political circumstances alter the effectiveness of the various tools presidents might use to persuade various bargaining partners to take the action they would prefer? To what degree do presidents have what their bargaining partners might want? To what degree will presidents be willing to provide what those partners might want? To what degree do potential bargaining partners fear what presidents might be able to do to alter their goals? The power available to the president is also conditioned by their potential bargaining partners' "natural" preferences. In order for presidents to achieve what they want, to what degree do they need to alter their potential bargaining partners' calculations?

[6] Although Neustadt generally used the term "vantage points" to refer to the bargaining opportunities given to a president by her Constitutional and statutory powers, throughout this essay I prefer the term "tools" because of the word's more instrumental connotations.

[7] Neustadt has long been criticized for "personalizing" the presidency, given his focus on the degree to which presidential "skill and will" was essential to bargaining. But the central and most enduring point of Neustadt's work was fundamentally institutional: the president's constitutional setting left the president with very little power that she could execute without the assistance of someone else in the realm of government. The degree to which individual presidents could gain power through bargaining, that is, was fundamentally circumscribed by these institutional constraints; presidential bargaining power existed simply at the margins.

My object of focus is perhaps the most important arena in which the president shares power with another set of actors: the passage of legislation. In particular, I center my efforts here upon roll call voting on the House and Senate floor, the most visible and perhaps most important stage of that process. When the president wishes to see a policy passed–or rejected–to what degree is she able to affect the voting decisions of pivotal members of Congress? Can the president substantially change the calculations for members of Congress regarding whether voting for or against the legislation in question is more in their self-interest?

Presidential Persuasion and Legislative Voting

Despite the immense prestige of the American presidency, and the president's central place in our legislative system, the president's task in pursuing legislative goals is rather daunting. On any piece of legislation the president wishes to see passed, at least 218 individual members of the House and 60 individual senators must be convinced in some fashion that voting in the direction preferred by the president is what they ought to do for their own sake and on their own authority. In many cases, of course, the president herself need do nothing to convince members of Congress to vote in the direction she would prefer–even independent of any presidential action, those members may find it in their best interest to vote as the president would like them to. In such cases, presidential power is unnecessary for accomplishing the president's objectives. Almost without question, however, there will be times in any president's tenure in office when fewer than 218 members of the House or 60 senators do not naturally prefer to vote in the direction the president wants. In those cases, if the president truly cares about the outcome of the legislation, she must engage in what Beckmann (2010) calls "vote-centered lobbying" by attempting to alter some legislators' calculations about which action on the bill would most help to accomplish their own objectives for their time in office.

Consider the hypothetical spatial representation in Figure 1.1, which plots the position of the status quo (q) on the issue at hand; the proposed legislation (l), which the president would like to see passed; the pivot point, which divides those legislators who prefer the status quo and those who prefer the legislation in question; and the so-called "natural preferences" of a number of legislators close to the pivotal point for the chamber in question (represented by smaller tick marks and in some cases a number ranking them from most supportive of the legislation to least supportive).

In the scenario depicted in Figure 1.1, 215 members of the House of Representatives support the legislation independent of any presidential action, three short of the margin needed for the bill to pass the House, which is the president's preferred outcome. To pass the bill, the president must somehow induce a change in the preferences of three of the members currently to the left of the pivot point such that those legislators are convinced that voting for the proposed legislation is indeed in their best interest, all while preventing any

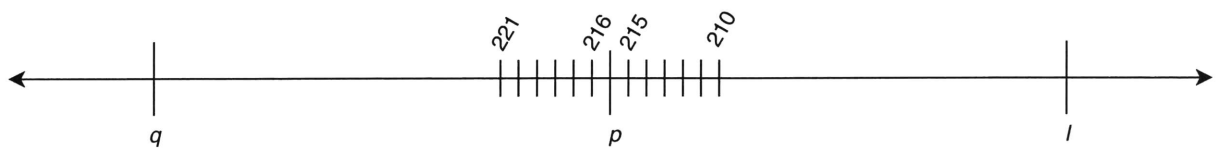

Figure 1.1: Location of potentially pivotal legislators' natural preferences. q represents the status quo on the issue in question, l the location of the proposed legislation preferred by the president, p the pivot point at which legislators will vote for or against the proposed legislation. Legislators are ranked according to their support for the proposed legislation and represented by numbers, with only those closest to the pivot point labeled for simplicity.

defections to the opposing side. It matters not which members the president attempts to persuade–for all intents and purposes, 221's vote would be just as valuable to the president as 216's or even 250's–although changing 221's calculation to the favorable side of the ledger would require more power from the president than would doing so for 216.

One possibility, suggested in the veto bargaining literature (e.g., Cameron and McCarty 2004), for how the president might win additional votes in such a scenario involves changing the content of the proposed legislation so that it moves further to the left, such that the pivot point will also adjust further to the left, capturing the votes of 216, 217, and 218. Although presidents certainly would need to exert some degree of power to reshape legislation in such a fashion, for the purpose of simplifying our examination of presidential power over individual members' voting decisions it is easiest to forego discussions of presidential power over the content of legislation. Instead, this chapter focuses on how presidents can persuade reticent legislators (i.e., 216-221) to vote in the direction they would prefer with the content of the legislation fixed.

Spatial models of legislative voting, such as the one in Figure 1.1, rely on the concept of utility to determine how legislators will vote on various proposals–that is, legislators vote for the proposal if doing so will bring them more utility than would the maintenance of the status quo. In most empirical models, authors carefully define the utility function used in their models and defend that choice of function. Rarely, however, do those authors examine what it is exactly about policies that affects the utility legislators get from voting for or against proposals. The focus on changing the content of legislation in much of the literature implies that utility is primarily generated either from members' own policy preferences or from the preferences of their constituents. To properly understand the power of presidents to shape legislators' utility with regard to legislative voting, it is important to expand the definition of utility for legislators. Certainly legislators do gain utility by voting for policies they or their constituents like, but legislators might find it to vote for or against particular policies for other reasons–for example, by trading their vote on the current bill for the vote of a fellow legislator on a bill of greater importance to them. This more expansive understanding of utility is especially important because it allows for legislators to operate in a more extended time horizon,

but also because it allows for other non-policy related considerations to be taken into account when we speak of legislators' utilities. For members of Congress, that is, the utility of any alternative revolves around the degree to which taking that action contributes to–or detracts from–achievement of their goals for their time in office. When attempting to study the effects of something as complicated and multifaceted as presidential power, it is not sufficient to simply limit those goals to pursuit of personal policy preferences or of reelection as dictated by constituency policy preferences on the bill at hand; members take into account a far more complex amalgam of goals when deciding how to cast their votes. Congressional votes rarely happen in a vacuum, and more sophisticated understandings of utility need to account for that fact.

Fenno (1973, 1978) ascribes three separate goals to members of Congress–reelection, influence in Washington, and passage of what the member sees as good public policy–while Rohde (1991) and many who have followed (e.g., Lee 2016) suggest that in the current polarized era a fourth goal–holding a majority in Washington–has also become highly important to members. Because of the centrality of the electoral goal, both in the literature (e.g., Mayhew 2004 [1974], Fiorina 1977, Arnold 1990), and for members of Congress, it is important to note the achievement of the goal naturally comes through two steps. To achieve reelection, members need to win both a primary election–or scare off all potential primary challengers–as well as a general election. This has important implications, as Fenno (1978) suggested, for how members view their constituencies and their policy preferences; as noted below, it is useful for much of this exercise to see the constituency as two concentric circles, each with influence over one of the two phases of the member's reelection goal.

As this discussion implies, presidents ultimately exert their power in these legislative processes–and, for that matter, in any other power-sharing relationship–by changing the expected utility of legislators' different voting options. Both because the president possesses an important set of formal powers, and because those formal powers create opportunities for the president to exert influence over third parties who might themselves be able to influence legislators' various interests, presidents wield a wide array of tools through which they can seek to alter the degree to which voting for or against a piece of legislation will contribute to the attainment of members' goals. Presidents, for example, might offer a member close to the pivot point help in promoting some future legislation beneficial to the member's district, a promise to divert some agency resources to an area of concern for the member, or simply a good word toward helping the member obtain a valued committee assignment in the next session.

A full model of presidential power with regard to legislators' voting decisions would require listing out all of the different tools available to presidents that could potentially affect legislators' achievement of their goals. Fortunately, given that such a list would be extraordinarily long, for the current exercise an exhaustive list is unnecessary. Instead it is best to simply highlight two broad strategies presidents can take when

attempting to alter member's perceptions of the utility of their voting alternatives. Presidents can engage in direct bargaining with members of Congress, essentially offering their resources–or threatening to withhold resources–to help members accomplish their various objectives in office in exchange for the member's vote on the bill in question. In most cases direct bargaining involves some sort of quid pro quo exchange between the president and the member whom the president seeks to persuade. For example, the president could offer a member that she will use her resources to push party leadership to bring to a vote a piece of legislation sponsored by the member in exchange for the member's vote on the current piece of legislation. The president might also offer a member of the opposing party from a competitive district that she will not campaign on behalf of the member's challenger in an upcoming election if the member votes for the bill preferred by the president, or she could threaten to torpedo a member's bid for a place on a more prestigious committee in the next session of Congress. Because the president has her fingers in so many different pots in Washington, the list of offers she potentially could make is endless, assuming, of course, that the member's vote on the bill in question is worth the cost the president would have to pay to deliver on those promises. Direct bargaining also need not imply an explicit exchange of a vote for some future aid from the president. Members may choose to give in to presidential pressure simply for the sake of currying favor with the president, in hope of obtaining the president's help on some future action of importance to the member.

Presidents thus theoretically have tools available in direct bargaining exchanges that can help members fulfill any of their three individual goals–reelection, influence in Washington, or good public policy. On the reelection front, the president can offer to use her power over the executive branch and the shaping of legislation to bring funds to members' districts, or can promise to help incumbents with their reelection campaigns–or at least to stay out of their opponents' campaigns–in either primary elections or general elections. The president can also use her influence over other members of the Washington establishment–in particular party leaders–to help members gain more favorable committee assignments, to move into greater leadership positions within the chamber, or to wield more influence over executive agencies of importance to the member. But perhaps most of all, the president has the capability of exchanging a vote on the current piece of legislation for help with future legislation or policymaking of interest to the member. Not only can the president promise not to veto such future legislative efforts, but, because of these same bargaining advantages, can lean on members in key places to help ensure that a member's favored proposal stands a greater chance of passage. Similarly, the president's relationships with those in the legislative branch allows her to offer members opportunities to influence policy even after legislation has been passed. Notably, however, while the president may have great influence over whether the member's party achieves majority status in Washington, it is rather difficult for the president, given her similar interest in majority status, to use that goal as currency in direct bargaining exchanges. Still, as discussed below, that does not suggest that

we should completely ignore the goal completely, as the president's actions intended to manipulate other goals may have tangential effects on the party's fortunes as a whole in ensuing elections.

Second, presidents can choose to attempt to alter member's calculations of which alternative will better help them attain their goals in office through indirect persuasion. Indirect persuasion involves the president using the tools available to them not to alter the opinions of members directly, but to alter the opinions of other individuals who themselves has some direct control over members goals for their time in office. By leveraging her tools to change those other players' evaluations of the bill in question, the president can take advantage of her relationships with actors with perhaps greater control over the member's achievement of his goals. Four different sets of players are particularly important intermediaries in presidents' attempts at indirect persuasion: constituents in the member's district, particularly those who are likely to vote in the general election, who naturally have a significant effect on whether the member achieves his reelection goal; a smaller circle of constituents likely to vote in the member's primary election, who similarly exercise control over the accomplishment of the member's reelection goal; the national electorate, which determines whether the member's party will hold majority status in Washington in the next session; and the member's party leadership, who dole out committee assignments, help move bills through the legislative process, and often contribute funds to the member's reelection efforts, thereby influencing the attainment of member's goals regarding influence in Washington, passage of good policy, and to a smaller degree reelection.

Indirect persuasion strategies can either target a particular member of Congress or can cast a broader net, hoping that a number of different members will be influenced by the president's action. Cohen (2009) provides perhaps the best example of targeted indirect persuasion strategies in *Going Local*, which outlines how presidents can use visits to districts and local press to drum up support for favored policies in particular members' constituencies. Such targeted indirect persuasion campaigns are unlikely to be all that efficient, however. Broader national appeals allow the president to drum up broader national support for her favored policy, thereby giving her a greater chance of moving multiple members who might be close to the pivot point. Though both individual members of Congress and majority party leadership also have opportunities to "play defense" by similarly attempting to influence public opinion, the attention paid to the president by the mass media today gives her a fair advantage in this agenda setting and priming battle (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000).

A president seeking to use indirect persuasion to influence the attainment of a member's reelection goals can have two potential targets: those likely to vote in the member's primary election or those likely to vote in the general election. But presidential public appeals also can run in the opposite direction: members are also likely aware of the effects of a vote's outcome on the president's reputation once she has taken a position, and of the downstream consequences of those effects on their own reelection efforts or on the party's chances

of holding a majority in the next session, as discussed in Chapter 4. The president can also seek to use party leaders as an intermediary, given their control over all three of member's individual goals. If presidents can convince party leaders that the passage of a piece of legislation is in their best interest, party leaders can leverage their control over the passage of legislation, committee and leadership assignments, and party funds to push members of Congress toward the alternative the president prefers.

Indirect persuasion strategies need not operate by changing the direction of public sentiment on the issue in question–as Canes-Wrone (2005) has demonstrated, attempting to altering the public's preferences can be rather difficult, and the same certainly holds for party leadership. Instead when presidents use an indirect persuasion strategy, they often find success by activating the public's previously more latent preferences, thereby altering the intensity of the public's aggregate preference on the policy. A more activated public or set of party leaders is more likely to put more substantial pressure on members, thereby causing them to reassess their evaluation of whether voting in the direction not preferred by the president is really in their best interest.

Whom the president chooses to attempt to persuade–and the strategy the president chooses–depends both on the likely effectiveness of the strategy the president employs and the cost to the president of using the tools necessary to effectively change pivotal members' calculations of the utility of their two different voting alternatives. Because members may have different degrees of need for the president's resources, it may make more sense for the president to attempt to persuade 221 to vote for the proposal in Figure 1.1 than to attempt to persuade 216, even though the president will have to alter 221's calculations more than she would have to do if she were to attempt to persuade 216. If, for example, the president is more popular in 221's district than in 216's, a presidential visit to 221's district to promote the bill might have larger effects on 221 than the same visit would have on 216. Similarly, some resources may be more costly for the president to use in consideration of her own goals. For example, a member such as 216 might offer his vote in exchange for the president's support of a future pork barrel project for the member's district. If the president had run on a promise to veto any pork barrel bills, however, she might find the cost of 216's vote too high to be worth paying.

Two things are therefore particularly worth paying attention to as we evaluate the president's potential power to change legislators' calculations about whether voting for a bill will be in their best interests. First, it is important to know the preferences members hold independent of any presidential action–their natural preferences. The distance of potentially pivotal members from the pivot point between voting for or against a bill conditions the amount of presidential power that is needed to coax members into voting for the president's preferred alternative: when members are located farther from the pivot point, the president will generally need to deploy more resources in order to change the members' calculations of whether voting

for the president's preferred alternative will be helpful or harmful in the achievement of their goals in office. Second, we need to understand the degree to which presidential resources will effectively alter members' calculations of the utility gained from voting for either of the two alternatives placed before them in any roll call vote, and the degree to which presidents are willing to use those resources themselves to change members calculations. A member's natural preferences may be quite close to the pivot point, but the president may have few things she is willing to offer the member that he really needs in order to accomplish his goals for his time in office.

To assess changes in the president's power, we need to start by assessing changes in members' natural preferences and in the usefulness of the tools available to the president. Where do members stand today on policies? On any given bill, how close are members likely to be to the pivot point? How much do presidents need to move members of Congress in order to achieve passage of a preferred piece of legislation–or to ensure the defeat of one she opposes? While the president seemingly has many tools available to aid in her bargaining efforts is she really willing to offer up those resources to the members whom she would need to persuade? Do those members really want or have need of the president's resources? Similarly, are the intermediate players who might put important pressure on pivotal members should the president choose a strategy of indirect persuasion really liable to have their opinions altered by presidential addresses or expressions of stances? These are the questions we must address if we wish to understand the president's power in the legislative process in the second decade of the Twenty-First century. To help generate hypotheses about these changes, I briefly review in the next section relevant scholarly work on partisan polarization in the United States, then return at the end of the chapter to the generation of a few hypotheses about how presidential power has changed in recent decades.

Partisanship and Polarization: American Politics in 2019

As we come to the end of the second decade of the Twentieth Century, the defining feature of American politics throughout these first two decades of the century has undoubtedly been the polarization of the two major political parties. But although few scholars question the existence and importance of polarization today, there remains a great deal of contention over how exactly to define that polarization and how far polarization extends. Extensive debates have continued, for example, over whether political opinions among members of the general public have moved toward two poles (e.g., Fiorina and Abrams 2008, Abramowitz and Saunders 2008), or whether it is really ideological principle or instead partisan competition that is really driving the divide between the two parties (e.g., Lee 2009, 2016).

Fortunately, to draw basic hypotheses about changes in the president's power with regard to how members

of Congress cast their roll call votes we can avoid the bulk of these debates, and proceed largely from two widely agreed-upon findings about the state of American politics in the early decades of the twentieth century: first that elected officials in the two major parties have polarized ideologically, and second that partisanship plays a much larger role in voters' election day decisions, particularly in congressional elections, replacing to a large degree the emphasis on individual candidates that prevailed starting half a century ago. These two basics "facts"–one essentially regarding the behavior of elected officials and the other the behavior of voters–allow an effective starting point to construct hypotheses about how the power available to the president has changed since Neustadt's final edition of *Presidential Power* was published in 1990.

Partisan Polarization in Washington

That political elites–particularly those serving in Congress–have become more polarized along party lines is today widely accepted among political scientists. Nevertheless, despite the broad agreement that partisan polarization in the halls of Congress has occurred, few scholars or commentators have taken the time to explicitly define what is meant by partisan polarization.

At its core, partisan polarization is an ideological phenomenon. It is distinguished from pure partisanship by the fact that the root of members' behavior are issue-beliefs, not political strategy or teamsmanship. Behaviorally, especially in terms of voting decisions, pure partisanship and partisan polarization may look the same, as Lee (2009) argues, but the two are distinctly different when we look at the drivers of those behaviors. When the parties are truly polarized, members of each party tend to vote with other members of their party simply because they agree with their fellow party members on the issue at hand–not because they happen to be on the same partisan team. Partisan polarization also implies that the members of the two parties are located at two separate poles, with few members occupying the ideological space between those poles. When political scientists refer to polarization today, then, they suggest that since the 1970s the members of the two parties in Congress have ideologically grown farther apart from each other on the issues of the day, so that a significantly greater distance separates the median members of each party in 2019 than median members in 1970.[8]At the same time, moreover, the members of each of the two parties have become more ideologically homogeneous, with far less variance in the issue positions of the members of each party.

As commonly understood, then, partisan polarization actually implies two separate but interconnected phenomena. First, partisan polarization requires that the great majority of members of one party hold different positions from the great majority of members of the other party on a significant proportion of issues. Party members today, that is, hold positions similar to others in their party on a greater variety

[8]The exact date when partisan polarization in Congress began is of course a matter of debate itself–see, for example, Rohde 1991, Roberts and Smith 2003, and McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006.

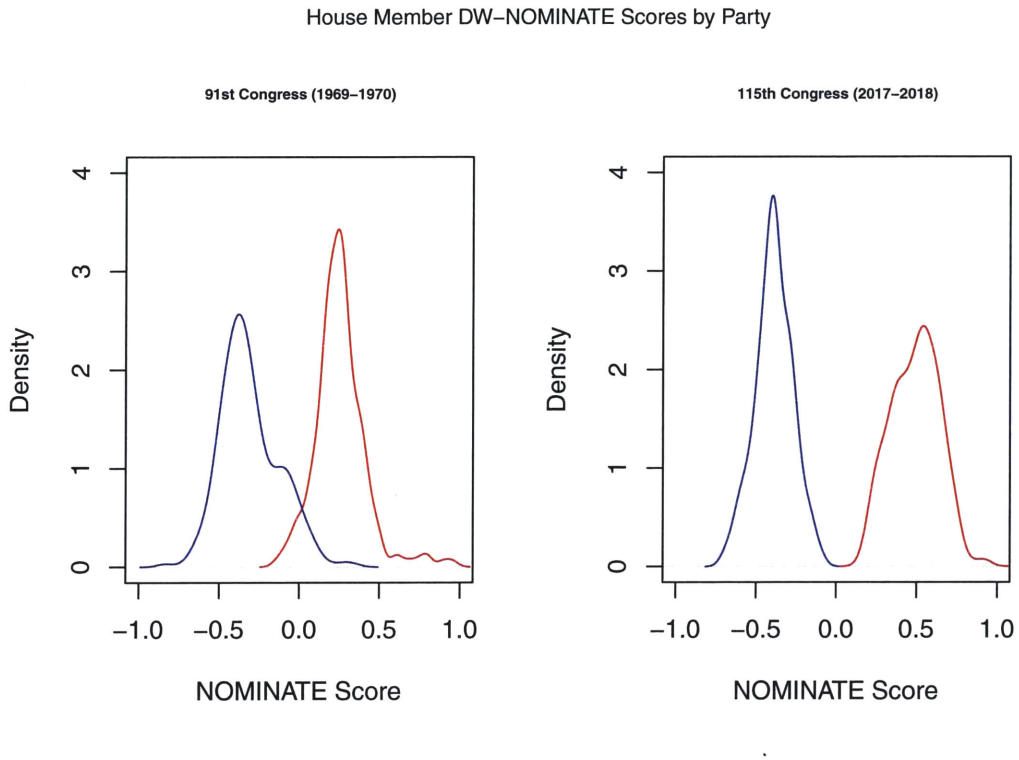

Figure 1.2: Distribution of first dimension DW-NOMINATE scores for Republican House members (in red) and Democratic House members (in blue) for the 91st Congress and 115th Congress.

of issues, while members of the opposing party hold positions on the opposite side of those issues. The evidence for this greater intra-party consistency and cross-party divergence on issues comes largely from studies of legislative voting, in particular those that assign individual legislators ideal point scores based on their voting records (e.g., Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Heckman and Snyder 1997; Clinton, Jackman, and Rivers 2004). Although different scholars have used different measures–and different numbers of dimensions–to estimate legislators' ideal points, the conclusions are essentially the same: today there is far less overlap in the ideal points of members of the two parties (see Figure 1.2), and consequently the two parties are more homogeneous and the party medians are farther apart (see Figure 1.3). As Frances Lee (2009) points out, however, members of each party voting on opposite sides of issues does not alone prove that partisan polarization has occurred. Polarization, as commonly conceptualized, requires that members' actual positions on the issues must be the source of disparate voting behavior from members of the two parties, rather than simply partisan teamsmanship.[9] Nevertheless, while Lee (2009, 71) finds that conflict between the two parties increased substantially on non-ideological Senate votes between the 97th (1981-1982) and 108th

[9]Similarly, it is difficult to distinguish whether members hold the issue positions they do because of their own preferences or because of pressure from their constituencies–it is best, therefore, to treat their issue preferences as what Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (2001) termed "electorally revealed preferences."

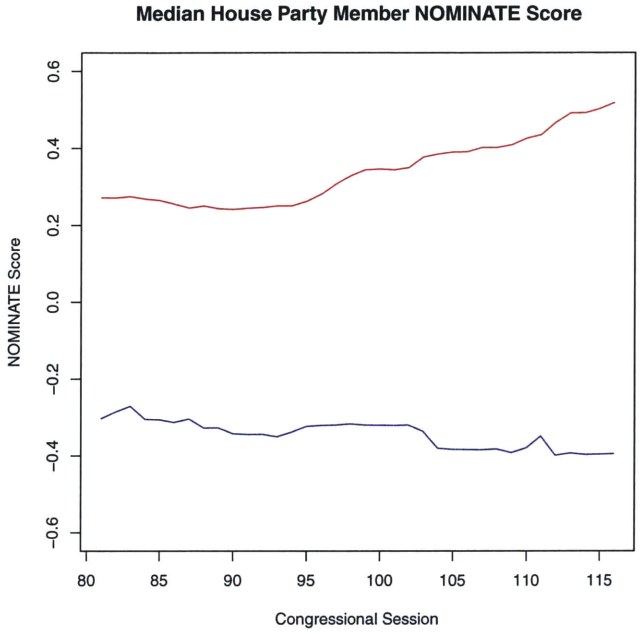

Figure 1.3: First dimension DW-NOMINATE score for the median member of the Republican Party (red) and Democratic Party (blue) for each Congress between the 81st (1949-1950) and the 116th Congress (2019-2020).

(2003-2004) Congresses, the increase in party conflict on votes regarding ideological issues has been even greater, suggesting that at least some of the polarization suggested by ideal point metrics has been driven by ideological issues.

Second, partisan polarization implies not just the two parties being on opposite sides of a greater number of issues, but greater distance between the members of the two parties on those individual issues. For true partisan polarization, it is not enough that partisans be located on opposite sides of the issues; instead, those members must be located at two separate poles. Broockman (2016) has noted problems with estimating the extremity of regular citizens' beliefs by aggregating across multiple issue positions; with members of Congress too, extremity of issue positions cannot be measured solely through consistency of direction, but must incorporate some degree of magnitude as well. This distance between the individual members of two parties on those issues makes it more difficult to attract support from members of the opposing party, resulting in more party line votes.

There is far less systematic, quantitative evidence for this second element of partisan polarization than for the first. The problem lies in the difficulty of measuring the specific location of members' views on individual issues, particularly across many different issues and across different time periods. Anecdotal evidence, however, abounds. Consider, for example, the divergence between the two parties since the 1970s

on regulation, taxation, defense spending, environmental issues, and gun control. Furthermore, although ideal point scores tell us only about which side legislators choose when issues come to a vote, and little about where on the spectrum of individual issues those legislators fall, logically more polarized ideal point scores do suggest that party members are more polarized on individual issues. Since multiple votes are taken on any given issue that comes before Congress, if the proposals on which those votes are taken occupy different points on the issue dimension, we can begin to infer more precisely the ideal points of various members of Congress on those individual issues. Assuming that the different proposals on a given issue do vary in their spatial locations, the polarization of the members of the two parties should indicate something about the distance–and not just the division–between the parties on these specific issues.

Although political scientists most commonly refer to partisan polarization within the halls of the Capitol, the conclusions drawn above about members of Congress also hold for presidents. Ideal point scaling, for example, allows for comparison of the position of presidents with members of the House and Senate. As Figure 1.4 shows, the distance between the president's DW-NOMINATE score and the score of the median member of the opposing party in the House has generally been larger than the distance between the median members of the two parties, and has generally increased over the last half-century.

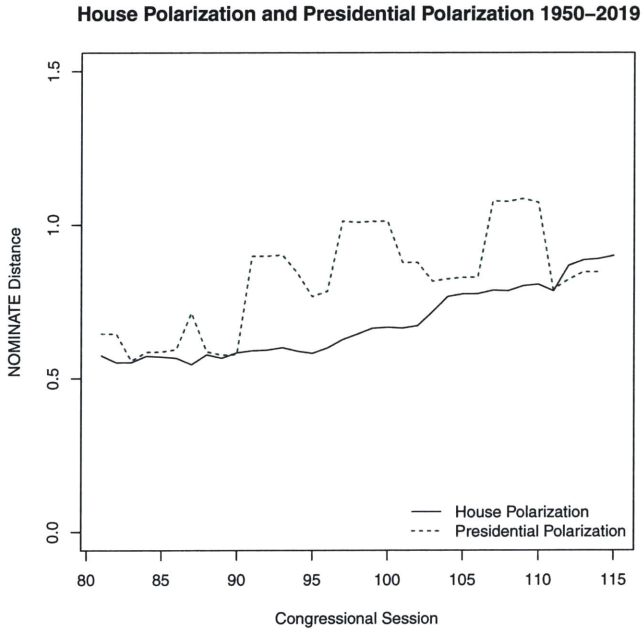

Figure 1.4: Difference in first dimension DW-NOMINATE scores between median members of the two parties in the House (black) and between the president and the median member of the opposing party in the House (green).

The consequences of this polarization for the operation Congress and the entire federal government have

been fairly dramatic. As will be discussed in greater detail below, among other things partisan polarization has made gridlock more likely, since members of the two parties are less likely to see issues in the same light, and which party wins elections has become more important, since there is a dramatic difference in the policies pursued when Republicans control the government and when the Democrats do. Both of these developments have important implications for how presidents attempt to persuade members of Congress to cast votes in particular directions, and for the success of those attempts as well.

Partisanship and the General Public

The changes wrought by partisan polarization in Congress has not been contained to Washington. That polarization has also contributed to important changes in the behavior of voters over the past 40 years. As Hetherington (2001) has argued, with the parties are located farther apart and candidates more ideologically homogeneous, it has become easier for voters to distinguish between the issue positions and ideologies of the two parties, resulting in a resurgence of partisanship at the mass level. Similarly, as the positions of the parties have become clearer over that same time period, party labels have become increasingly valuable to voters as heuristics for casting their ballots and for understanding what to believe on issues. The centrality of parties for voters, moreover, has only been accentuated by the degree of competition between the two parties in Washington, pushing voters to choose sides between these two partisan teams. The consequences of this resurgence in partisanship have been substantial, particularly with regard to voters' formation of political opinions and their decisions around election time: party is far more predictive today of voting choices in all sorts of races, for example, voters are more likely to cast straight-ticket ballots today, and approval of the president has become heavily divided along partisan lines (see Figure 1.5).

The growth of partisanship in the United States is often hidden to the public eye due to the apparent growth in the ranks of self-proclaimed Independents. [10] As Figure 1.6 shows, however, the decline in party identification since the 1960s has largely been caused the replacement of survey respondents identifying as "Weak Partisans" with "Independent Leaners," while the proportion of true Independents has remained approximately the same. Numerous studies (e.g., Keith et al. 1992; Kaufman, Petrocik, and Shaw 2008), moreover, have concluded that those leaners tend to behave very similarly to self-identified partisans, for example voting for the party's candidates at similar rates, and expressing similar ratings on feeling thermometer questions.

As Green, Palmquist, and Schickler argue, partisanship consists of more than just "mere summaries of momentous vote intentions" (2002, 31)–that is, more than just a reflection of past behavior or past partisan evaluations. While party identification certainly is formulated to some degree on the basis of voters'

[10] In 2018 Gallup surveys, for example, on average approximately 42% of respondents identified as Independents.

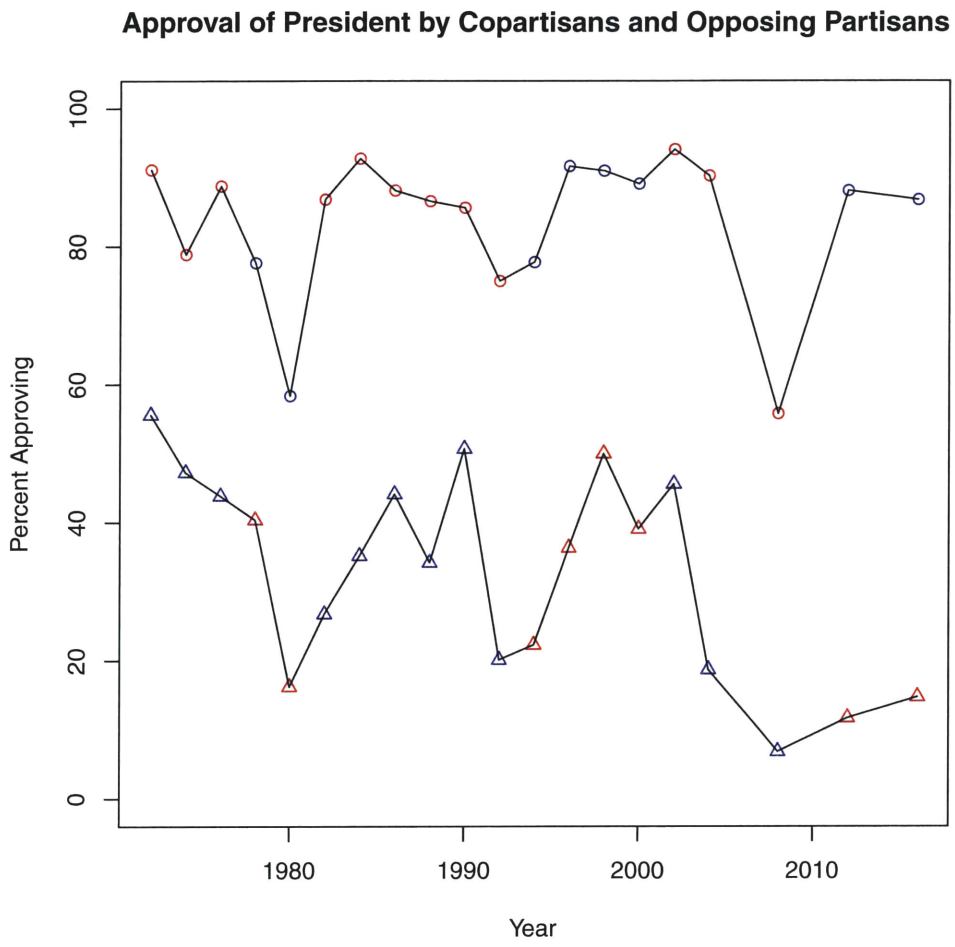

Figure 1.5: Presidential approval by voters identifying with the president's party (top line, circular points) and voters identifying with the opposing party (bottom line, triangular points), including leaners. Colors of points correspond to which party controls the White House, with blue for Democrats and red for Republicans. Data from ANES election year surveys between 1972 and 2016.

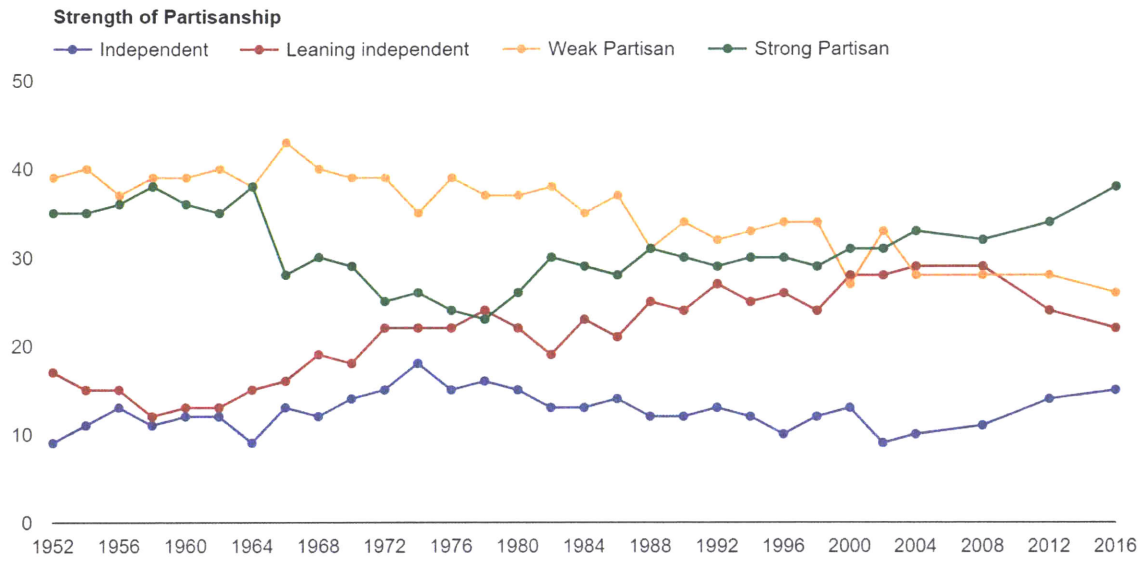

Figure 1.6: Trends in ANES respondents' self-identified partisanship, 1952-2016. From `https://electionstudies.org/resources/anes-guide/top-tables/?id=23`.

evaluations of the two parties (e.g., Fiorina 1981), it has also become apparent that voters' political identities help to shape their future attitudes and behavior. Because citizens frequently develop attachments–or in some cases aversions–to one of the parties, but also to groups of people or individual politicians, those affinities frequently tend to bias their evaluations of politicians, events, or issues (Bartels 2002). Carsey and Layman (2006), for example, found that while 1992-1996 NES panel respondents were somewhat likely to change their partisanship to match their issue stances on abortion, government services, and assistance to African Americans, party identification had a significant effect on changes in respondents' policy attitudes on those same issues. This pattern of issue conversion to match partisanship is far more likely to happen, however, when voters know of the differences between the two parties' positions on those issues, which is of course far more likely to occur under conditions of elite polarization (Layman and Carsey 2002).

The resurgence in partisanship has also had a particular effect on the voting habits of the American public. Gary Jacobson (2015) has extensively documented, for example, the drastic decline in the advantage conveyed to incumbents in Congressional elections, as voters have become increasingly unlikely to support candidates from the party other than their own.[11] Given the predominance of partisanship in Congress, and given that a candidate's partisanship tells voters more precisely today about the candidate's likely policy stances, candidates' party labels have quite logically taken on increasing importance to voters in

[11] Partisan polarization at elite levels is not the only cause of the decline in the personal vote in congressional elections, of course. Changes in the media environment over the past thirty years, for example, have also clearly played an important role in the nationalization of congressional elections.

congressional elections. This has left significantly less room for voters to evaluate their members on the basis of their individual actions in office or their individual characteristics.

Presidential Power Today

The logical consequences of these changes for the president's ability to effectively shift members' calculations about how different voting alternatives will influence the achievement of their goals are quite substantial. In this polarized environment not only should presidents have more work to do to move potentially pivotal members to their side of a roll call vote, but the effectiveness of the tools available to them should vary widely based on the partisanship of the member of Congress whom the president is attempting to persuade.

The polarization of Congress suggests dramatic shifts in the natural preferences of members of both parties. Given that members of the two parties are today far apart ideologically, on most bills we should see most members of each party clustered far apart, with significantly fewer members arrayed close to the pivot point than was the case half a century ago. As discussed above, presidential persuasion works best at the margins, where presidents only have to move members a small distance from their natural preferences to the pivot point. The president is therefore likely to either have far fewer potential targets for her persuasive efforts, or will have to do even more to change member's calculations so that they vote on the preferred side of the roll call ledger. This leads to a first hypothesis:

H1: Under conditions of partisan polarization in Congress, the president will have fewer opportunities to use bargaining or persuasion to win roll call votes, or will need extraordinarily strong tools to make up the larger distances between members' natural preferences and the pivot point.

At the same time, moreover, we should expect that the usefulness of the tools available to the president has also changed. In particular, regardless of whether the president takes an approach of direct bargaining or whether she attempts to compel changes in members' positions through indirect persuasion, the resources the president might make use of operate very differently depending on the party of the member whom the president would seek to persuade. In the case of a prospective exchange of a member's vote for the president's assistance on a future policy proposal, for example, a member from the president's side of the aisle would likely request assistance on a policy that is fairly appealing to the president. A member from the opposing party, on the other hand, is significantly more likely to pursue a policy distasteful to the president, given the large and consistent ideological distance between the president and nearly all opposing partisans. The cost to the president of moving a member of the opposing party to her side of the pivot point would be extraordinarily high, whereas the cost of moving a member of her own party should be one that the president would be far more willing to pay.

With regard to direct bargaining exchanges where the president offers to help with members' ambitions in Washington, the president will also likely struggle to grant opposing partisans what they want–not necessarily because what those members of the opposing party is distasteful to the president, but instead because the president is not able to pull the levers necessary to help the member with those ambitions. If the president were to attempt to help an opposing party member to gain a seat on a more prestigious committee, for example, given that the president has little leverage over opposing party leadership. The converse, of course, is true for members' of the president's own party seeking the president's assistance in gaining a better committee assignment–the president's strong relationship with the leadership of her own party should allow her a much easier time leaning on leadership to give the member the desired assignment. This should be especially true in an era of partisan polarization in Congress, when the distance between the president and her copartisans has shrunk, while the distance to opposing party leaders has grown substantially.

Changes in how voters make their decisions at election time and in the makeup of districts should similarly limit the president's ability to help members with their reelection goals. Since, as Jacobson (2015) has argued, a member's personal characteristics have become less important in his reelection efforts, while partisanship has become more important, the payoff to members of bringing dollars back to the district has diminished, decreasing the value of one particular currency available to presidents. This holds for members of both parties, of course–bringing home pork is less valuable today to members of the president's party and members of the opposing party. Presidents also have the ability to influence members' electoral fortunes by intervening in their campaigns, particularly by endorsing or campaigning on behalf of the incumbent or his opponent. Given the decreasing number of districts with a competitive partisan balance today, presidential interventions are likely to be more effective and more consequential in primary elections than general elections, however. But a presidential intervention in a member of the opposing party's primary is likely to have little effect or even a negative effect on the incumbent's fortunes in that primary, whereas such an intervention in a copartisan's race would likely provide a substantial boost to the candidate endorsed by the president.

This leads us to a second hypothesis, which has three component parts:

H2: Given current levels of partisan polarization and current electoral conditions, presidential direct bargaining should be far more effective with members of the president's own party than with members of the opposing party.

H2.1: Direct bargaining between presidents and opposing party members by aiding members' policy goals is unlikely, while presidents will find such bargaining with copartisans far easier. With members of the opposing party consistently far away from the president ideologically, trading policy assistance for opposing party members' votes will be more distasteful to the president; trading policy assistance for copartisans' votes,

however, will be more likely given the similar ideological tastes of the president and copartisan members.

H2.2: Given the distance between the president and opposing party leaders, presidents will have little success helping opposing party members achieve greater influence in Washington. The stronger relationships between the president and the leaders of her own party in Congress should allow the president substantial leverage in aiding copartisans' ambitions to increase their influence in Washington.

H2.3: Both because of the relative unimportance of the personal vote in congressional elections today and because of the small numbers of districts with a competitive partisan balance, presidential efforts to aid opposing party members' reelection goals will be largely ineffectual; presidential contributions to copartisans' primary campaigns can have substantial effects, however, and can serve as an important bargaining chip.

Since the president today faces great difficulty convincing either opposing partisans in the general public or party leaders to adopt her views on policies, but should have a much easier time changing the opinions of copartisans in the general public and in congressional leadership, indirect persuasion campaigns are likely to have a similarly polarizing effect on members of Congress. Because of the extraordinary dichotomy in presidential approval among the president's copartisans and opposing partisans in the general public, and the degree to which voters take issue cues from prominent figures within their own parties, we should expect that when the president takes a stance on an issue, voters in the general public react in entirely different directions according to their partisanship: copartisans are likely to approve of the policy more, while opposing partisans are likely to approve of the policy less. As noted above, since more and more members today share their partisanship with the large bulk of their districts, in only a very few districts held by members of the opposing party should the balance of district opinions change toward the direction preferred by the president. Members from the opposing party, therefore, are unlikely to feel pressure to move toward the president's position for the sake of ensuring that they win in their general elections. Members of the president's party, however, whose districts contain many voters whose opinions are likely to have moved in the direction preferred by the president, should feel increased general election pressure to vote as the president would like. General election pressures resulting from presidential public stances on issues are likely to have divergent effects, making members of the president's party more likely to vote as the president would prefer, and members of the opposing party less likely to move toward the president's preferred position.

Those forces, moreover, are only exacerbated by the effect that presidential public stances should have on voters in members' primary elections, given that primary voters especially tend to come from the member's own party, and especially given the primary voters tend to be stronger partisans and more attentive to politics. Individuals likely to cast a ballot in presidential copartisans' primaries are likely to move toward the president's preferred position when the president takes a stance on the issue, while those individuals likely to cast a ballot in opposing partisans' primaries should move in the opposite direction, away from the

president's position. The result should be polarizing primary pressures: increased pressure on members from the president's party to vote as the president would like, but also increased pressure on members from the opposing party to vote in the exact opposite direction.

Washington insiders and political scientists have long suspected that presidential legislative success causes increases in presidential approval, since presidents receive credit for leadership on those initiatives. This seems especially likely to be true in the current era, when many Americans are frustrated by gridlock in Washington. Cohen (2013) indeed finds evidence that legislative success does tend to precipitate positive changes in the president's approval rating.[12] If this is the case, copartisans should have further incentive to vote as the president would like when she takes a public stand, while opposing partisans should be disincentivized from voting for legislation for which the president could take credit. Members, concerned both about their own likelihood of success in general elections, and about the likelihood that their party will have as much control of the government as possible, therefore may feel pressure to vote to grant or deny the president success, particularly if they may cast the deciding vote.

Presidential approval should be of even greater concern to party leaders, who are far more focused on the party's control of government, and whose power is directly tied to whether the party controls their branch of government. Those party leaders should put additional pressure on members to either grant or deny –depending on their party–the president legislative successes. Given the wealth of tools at their disposal to influence members' three individual goals, pressure from party leaders may be particularly important in members' ultimate voting calculations.

These expectations can be summed up in a third hypothesis, itself with two component parts:

H3: In an era when public appraisals of the president are divided along party lines, voters increasingly take cues on issue stances from their party and party leaders, and few districts have a relatively even balance of partisans, presidential attempts at indirect persuasion are likely to be effective among the president's copartisan members, but will likely have the opposite of the intended result among opposing partisans.

H3.1: Presidential public appeals are likely to have opposite effects on copartisans and opposing partisans in the general public, causing copartisans to like policies preferred by the president more, and opposing partisans to like those same policies less. As a result of the fact that most members' general election constituencies and primary constituencies are made up of their copartisans, any indirect pressure through constituents will push the president's copartisans toward the president's position, but opposing members away from that position.

H3.2: Because members of Congress and their party leaders expect that presidential legislative accomplish-

[12]What matters in practice for the purpose of understanding member behavior is not whether this relationship really exists, but whether members of Congress and party leaders think it exists, as discussed in Chapter 4.

ments lead to increased presidential approval, and because in the current era presidential approval has an even greater effect on whether individual members win reelection and the degree to which the party controls the government, both individual members and party leaders will be driven to either help grant or deny–depending on their partisanship–presidents legislative victories.

The sum-total of these hypotheses is that the president's power differs widely depending on whether she is trying to persuade a member of Congress from her own party or a member of the other party. Not only does the president have more that she can feasibly offer a copartisan (*H1*), but the president can put significantly more pressure on a copartisan through that member's primary and general election constituencies (*H2*). This, compounded by the fact that fewer members today are likely to have natural preferences close to the pivot point (H1), means that presidential power may today have a far smaller role in roll call voting in Congress than even was the case when Neustadt first wrote *Presidential Power.*

Plan of the Essay

Over the course of the remainder of this essay, I set out to empirically evaluate how presidential power in the realm of legislative roll call voting has changed in recent decades. Presidential persuasion, however, is extraordinarily difficult to measure directly, particularly using quantitative data. Others have attempted to use aggregate voting data to identify whether supposedly more skilled presidents "win" more frequently given the partisan and political circumstances they face (Bond and Fleisher 1990), or to estimate presidential influence based on vote switches from earlier administration head counts to final roll call tallies (Sullivan 1991). My focus, on the other hand, is more instrumental. Rather than attempt to observe presidential influence at the level of outcomes, I examine the effectiveness of the tools the president might attempt to use to persuade members of Congress to change their votes toward her side of the ledger, as outlined in the hypotheses laid out in the previous section. This focus allows a glimpse into the workings of presidential power–rather than skipping over the steps of how presidents coax members into voting for their preferred policies, we can see what it is exactly that might cause those changes in roll call voting decisions. There are a couple of other advantages to this instrumental approach. Beyond providing clues regarding how presidential power has changed as politics in America has polarized, these studies provide important insights into other crucial relationships in the American political system. The empirical investigations reported in the following chapters help to answer questions about the relationship between partisanship and the formation of public opinions, the sources of congressional behavior and the roots of gridlock in Congress, and the drivers of voters' decisions at the polls. Even if these studies cannot when combined provide a conclusive answer about presidential power, on their own they tell grant important insights into our political system today.

As noted above, my cumulative hypothesis is that presidential involvement in legislation–especially when that involvement is public–should typically lead to even further polarization along party lines. This is not a new thesis. Using aggregate Senate voting data, and classifying issues on the basis of their content, Frances Lee (2009, Ch. 4) has extensively and rigorously demonstrated that when the president becomes involved in legislation, her copartisans are more likely to vote as a team, while members from the opposing party vote in the opposite direction. Lee's focus, however, unlike Bond and Fleisher (1990), is not on presidential power, nor does she examine more closely why presidential involvement produces the effects it does. My examination of the effects of presidential involvement on public opinions and voting choices therefore helps to fill in these gaps.

Of course, there are drawbacks to this approach as well. Estimating changes in the usefulness of every tool available to the president would require substantial work, and knitting all of those studies together to draw one large conclusion about changes in presidential power would be tenuous at best. Measuring the usefulness of some tools available to the president, moreover–such as those described in hypothesis *H2.1* or *H2.3*–is difficult without inside access to negotiations between the president and members of Congress, especially given that some trades may not even require specific exchanges. Therefore, I focus my attention here on indirect persuasion–that is, the component hypotheses of hypothesis *H3*, leaving for future study examination of other tools presidents might use to convince members of Congress to change their votes, such as those discussed in hypothesis *H2*. When the president appeals to the public for support on legislation, that is, how do members' calculations change? Presidential public appeals may help to set the agenda for Congress and frame policy debates in the public in a manner favorable to the president, as Kernell (2007) and others have suggested, but H3 suggests that when the president takes a public stance there can also be substantial unintended effects that often work in polarizing directions.

In the three chapters that follow, I examine three potential pathways through which presidential public stance might be expected to alter members' calculations about the achievement of their electoral goal and their partisan goal of control over Washington. In Chapters 2 and 3 I test two aspects hypothesis *H3.1*, that presidential public appeals have a polarizing effect on public opinions, and therefore exert similarly polarizing electoral pressures on members of Congress. Using an original survey experiment, in Chapter 2 I first examine the effect of voters' knowledge of the president's position on a three recent issues on their support for that issue and subsequently their member of Congress depending on that member's voting decision. I then turn in Chapter 3 to primary electorates in particular, long suspected to be a significant source of the extremism of members of Congress. Unlike in Chapter 2, where I evaluate pressures on the member on an issue-by-issue basis, in Chapter 3 I focus on the full body of members' records on those issues the president has championed. When members are more or less supportive of the president across their term

in office, does their relative security in primary elections change?

I begin to address hypothesis *H3.2* in Chapter 4 by assessing changes in the degree to which members ought to fear or seek increases in the president's approval ratings. After a brief review that helps to confirm that members do believe that public appraisals of the president are tied to her legislative victories, I examine changes in the effect of approval ratings on election results and on individual voting decisions. If the president's standing among the general public is increasingly important in members' reelection campaigns, and if members increasingly care about holding a majority in Washington, those members–and their party leaders–should have added incentive to either support or oppose the president's initiatives, depending on whether they share the party of the president. I begin the chapter by looking at the changing effect of presidential approval on aggregate House election results over the past three quarters of a century, then use ANES data from approximately the same time period to assess changes in the effect of individual presidential approval on voting in House races. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes by examining the implications of these findings for presidents, presidential weakness, the role of political parties in bridging the gaps between separated institutions, and the strategies available today to presidents in the legislative process.

Chapter 2

The Partisan Consequences of Presidential Public Appeals

The long history of presidential public addresses–from Abraham Lincoln, to Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt, to Donald Trump–has made clear that presidents believe they have the ability to move public opinion and create momentum for their favored proposals by changing the public's mind about certain policies. Drop-everything media coverage of those speeches and prepared responses by the opposing party make clear that presidents are not alone in that belief. As media technology has developed and communication with the public has become easier and easier over the past century, those efforts have only increased; today presidential speeches and presidential position-taking are omnipresent–from newspaper reports, to evening news broadcasts, and even to the president's Twitter account. A number of political scientists too have found presidential appeals to be an effective strategy for achieving policy goals. Kernell (2007 [1986]) has been the most prominent advocate of a theory of what he called "going public." Changes in media and political conditions in the 1970s and 1980s in particular, Kernell suggested, created a ripe environment for presidents rely more and more on what Teddy Roosevelt had long before called "the bully pulpit" to compel the legislative branch to pass favored legislation, allowing presidents an alternative route to direct bargaining to achieve their legislative goals.

Further political changes since that time, however, bring into question the value of going public to the president. In particular, the decline in the president's popularity among opposing partisans (see Figure 1.5) suggests that the president may find little success in persuading those opposing partisans to put pressure on their member of Congress to cast the vote the president wants. With fewer and fewer members of Congress representing districts that contain a majority of voters who identify with the opposite party, moreover,

presidential public appeals may do little to move the needle for opposing members–if anything, presidential appeals may in fact hurt. At the same time, however, presidents have remained just as popular with their own partisans, with an even greater proportion of those copartisans who approve of the president expressing strong approval. These strong feelings of affection for and identity with the president may for many copartisans create an incentive for motivated directional reasoning (Lodge and Taber 2013), or may spur copartisans to adopt a cue from a figure with whom they often have agreed in the past (Zaller 1992), potentially influencing how those partisans receive information about the policy that might have otherwise led them to a different conclusion, absent knowledge of the president's position.

If the president is to successfully make use of a strategy of indirect persuasion, pressuring members through their constituents, then she must be successfully able to alter the relevant public's opinions on policy. But if, as suggested above, the president taking a stance on legislation actually inspires negative reactions from opposing partisans in the American public, the pressure those partisans put on elected officials both in primaries and in general elections will have the opposite of the effect the president intended when she decided to appeal to the public. Even if the president has not intended to undertake a broad appeal to the public, moreover, public knowledge of the president's stance may still result in pressure on legislators to vote in a particular direction.

In this chapter, I use an original survey experiment to estimate the effect of knowledge of the president's position on legislation before Congress on survey respondents' support for those proposed policies.[1] The experiment, conducted early in the summer of 2019, manipulates whether respondents are informed of President Trump's positions on three policies proposed and debated during the first half of 2019. I find that in an environment where voters are provided with a moderate amount of information on the policies, a cue with regard to the direction of the president's stance has a polarizing effect on citizens only on some issues but not others. On one of the three pieces of legislation I put before respondents, learning of President Trump's stance had a substantial and statistically significant effect on the support for the legislation from those respondents who reported approval of the president; similarly on just one of the three pieces of legislation did the presidential cue cause those who disapproved of President Trump to move in the direction opposite that preferred by the president.

[1] I also asked respondents about how their House member's vote on the legislation in question would influence their support of the member. I do not report these results below, however, because they almost perfectly mirror those regarding respondents' support for the legislation.

Public Appeals and Elite Cues

Although presidential appeals to public opinion had a long history before the 1970s, Kernell traced the rise of going public as a presidential strategy to four nearly simultaneous developments that allowed the president both new opportunities and new incentives to appeal directly to the public. First, starting in the 1960s presidents increasingly took advantage of technological changes in media–most importantly the rise of television–allowing them to speak in a more unmediated fashion to the people. No political rivals or opponents on certain policies could rival the platform offered to the president by the three major networks, who would essentially make room for the president whenever he wanted it. Presidents, beginning with John F. Kennedy therefore began to take significantly more control of the messages they communicated to the public, also by cultivating personal relationships with particular reporters in exchange for those reporters helping to get the message across that the president wanted. Second, changes in both parties' nominating systems for presidents allowed Washington outsiders–like Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton–to capture the presidency, a post once reserved only for experienced politicians selected by the party's leaders. These presidents, unaccustomed to the bargaining and deal-making that previously had been standard practice for solving legislative stalemates, but more effective campaigners, turned to their strengths to help push their legislative programs.[2] Those presidents, Kernell argued, also were also more likely to face divided government, where policies could not simply be passed by maintaining partisan coherence; instead members of the opposing party had to be convinced to support the president's preferred policies to see them passed. At the same time, moreover, a decoupling of citizens from their partisan attachments led to congressional elections more focused on individual members. Those members, Kernell argued, had new reason to pay attention to district opinion on individual bills in a way they hadn't when voters simply cast ballots down the party line, allowing new opportunities for presidents to pressure members into voting for their legislative priorities.

In the years since Kernell first published *Going Public*, however, we've seen even further evolution on many of these same dimensions. Television has splintered, new forms of media have arisen, and many Americans can easily avoid seeing any political news at all today. Presidents are no longer guaranteed the same audiences for their major addresses, as even though major networks still dutifully cover those events, viewers can easily change the channel to find something else to watch, or can simply switch off the TV and pick up any device with internet access to find other entertainment. As noted in Chapter 1, presidents

[2] As discussed in Chapter 1, Kernell argues that public appeals fall outside of the sphere of bargaining, representing something different than the type of persuasion Neustadt found central to presidential influence. Even if going public is not wholly compatible with a direct bargaining strategy, as Kernell asserts (2007, 3), this limitation of Neustadt's concept of persuasion only to explicit exchanges is far too constricting. Persuasion, Neustadt argued, centered the president using her powers to convince others that what she wanted of them would be the right thing to do for their own sake. There seems to be no reason why that definition would not include certain resources available to the president, like appealing directly to the people.

still frequently face divided government, but party cohesion in congressional voting has clearly returned, with members again more dependent on partisanship to bring them votes in their reelection campaigns. In light of these developments, Cohen (2009) has suggested that rather than "going national," presidents today instead attempt to manipulate public opinion by "going local," especially by visiting and targeting specific localities, increasing their coverage in local newspapers, and thereby increasing their favorability in those communities. The changes in the newspaper industry since *Going Local* was published, however, cast some doubt on whether the strategy remains viable today: according to a 2018 report from the UNC School of Media and Journalism, more than 20 percent of US newspapers have folded in the past decade and a half, while many others have become part of larger news conglomerates, shrunk in size, and reduced their coverage of local events (Abernathy 2018). Cohen's work, moreover, says little about whether presidents are able to increase support for their policies, nor anything about the partisan consequences of these localized appeals.[3]

The qualitative record is replete with examples that presidents and their advisers believe that presidential public appeals are effective, as Kernell suggests (see, for example, Edwards 2006, 3-5). The empirical evidence, however, is far more mixed. A number of scholars have cast doubt on whether presidential appeals actually had much effect on public opinion, even before the growth of political polarization and the splintering of media. Edwards (2006, 2009), for example, tracks public opinion polls on issues pushed by the Reagan administration, finding little effect of Reagan's continued rhetoric on those issues. Tulis (1987) notes that in rare cases presidential appeals have been successful, but those examples are quite limited. Others have offered more robust evidence for persuasive effects when the president goes public. Barrett (2004) finds that the more often the president spoke publicly in support of legislation, the more likely it was that Congress would pass the bill, although questions of causality remain with Barrett's study, as with much of the literature on the subject. Fett (1994) found that during the first year of the Carter presidency, the president received little additional support from legislators on issues high on his agenda; Reagan, however, seemed to gain support on those issues of higher priority, especially from cross-pressured members, suggesting that popular presidents' public appeals were more effective than those from less popular presidents. Canes-Wrone (2004, 2005) suggests, however, that presidents can be successful by going public regardless of their approval ratings, since presidents are most likely to appeal to the public and be effective on issues that are already popular. In sum, Canes-Wrone suggests in her 2005 book *Who Leads Whom*, the literature suggests that presidents can influence public opinion at least on rare occasions.

These findings that presidents can influence public opinion contrast traditional account of media effects, which suggested that it was extraordinarily difficult for the media to change people's opinions about issues.

[3]Even though Cohen does briefly discuss the possibility of presidents targeting specific partisan groups when "going narrow," he does not provide any evidence that they do so, nor does he discuss the potential consequences of such a strategy.

Most theoretical accounts of why the president should be successful when appealing to the public, however, highlight the centrality of the president in the media's attention and the ability of the president to frame issues in a manner favorable to her perspective. Using a strategy of what Jacobs and Shapiro (2000) called "crafted talk," the president can help to reshape the public's perceptions of how to look at a bill, or can highlight the importance of certain legislation, moving it higher on citizens' list of priorities (see also Iyengar and Kinder 1987).

The public opinion literature supplies a separate theoretical pathway between presidential positions and voter opinions. For years, beginning especially with the work of the Michigan School (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960, Converse 1964), scholars have debated the degree to which the public's opinions on policy issues are formed based on actual information on the policy (e.g., Key 1966), or whether those opinions are instead more random or driven by other considerations. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996), for example, find citizens to be ignorant of even basic details about many policies; in such an environment it is hard to expect that public policy preferences are rationally based. Others (e.g., Zaller 1992, Cohen 2003) have argued that other information often overrides citizens' policy knowledge, causing them to come to different conclusions than they would if they were solely operating on the basis of what they know about the policy. In particular, these scholars suggest, citizens are likely to adopt the preferences of prominent elites, especially those with whom they identify or frequently agree. Presidential appeals, therefore, may be effective not because they reframe the debate or move an item higher onto voters' governmental agendas; instead, presidential appeals may simply signal to voters where the president stands, thereby causing some voters to adopt the president's position.

The literature contains ample evidence that voters do take such cues from partisan elites. Political scientists have long found that partisanship colors citizens' learning and perceptions of objective facts, such as the unemployment rate, inflation, or the number of casualties in war (e.g., Bartels 2002, Jerit and Barabas 2012), and even influences whether citizens reject misinformed beliefs when offered corrective information (Nyhan and Reifler 2010). Similarly, there is significant evidence that citizens' policy preferences are distinctly influenced by their partisanship. Berinsky's examination (2007) of public opinion polls during World War II and the Afghanistan/Iraq wars found that casualty counts are not extraordinarily predictive of voters' attitudes about war, but the attitudes of partisan leaders–especially presidents–send voters who approve or disapprove of those leaders powerful signals about whether the war is going well or poorly. Nicholson (2012) manipulated the information that CCES respondents in 2008 received about candidates Obama and McCain's, and President Bush's stances on two issue items, finding strong evidence of out-group preference polarization. While respondents receiving information about their party's candidate's stance on the issue were generally not moved toward the candidate's position, those who received information about

the opposing candidate's position tended to move away from that position. Still, there remains some debate about the relative effect of partisan cues as compared to the influence of policy details. Cohen (2003) found that even when experimental participants were given ample policy information, partisan cues overwhelmed both the objective content of the policy and voters' ideology. Bullock, on the other hand (2011) reached a slightly different conclusion–while partisan cues in his experiments did influence participants' opinions about policies, policy details were even more influential in the formation of his participants' ultimate conclusions. Druckman et al. (2013) suggest, however, that the relative strength of policy details and party cues may not constant; instead, the two factors fluctuate with changes in the political enviroment. Importantly, Druckman et al. find, the influence of partisan cues seems to be especially acute when there is greater partisan polarization among elites: when elites are not polarized, citizens turn to party endorsements to decide their own positions only when the two parties provide equally strong arguments on an issue; under conditions of elite partisan polarization, however, partisans embrace the party's argument regardless of the strength of the two parties' arguments on the issue.

Two different mechanisms have generally been posited as to why voters would adopt elites' positions on important policy issues. The first, often referred to as heuristic processing–suggests that voters may use others' positions as information shortcuts when they lack the time, effort, or capacity to evaluate policies on their own (e.g., Downs 1957, Popkin 1991, Kam 2005), with those who are less politically aware more likely to rely on heuristics than on actual policy information. In some cases, citizens may even doubt their own reasoning and choose to ignore the policy information they do have, instead relying on parties or other leaders to come to a conclusion. Zaller's famous receive-accept-sample model (1992) approaches the question slightly differently. Elite position adoption is a result of the information that citizens receive and accept, much of which comes from partisan elites. To Zaller, more politically active citizens are especially prone to taking cues from elites, since those citizens are more likely to have distinct partisan preferences, and are therefore more likely to be exposed to information about a policy from partisan sources or to accept information about a policy only from partisan sources–that is from those individuals or groups whom they support.

The second hypothesized mechanism is more psychological: citizens adopt the positions of parties or elites because once an individual or party about whom they have particular feelings becomes involved those citizens have a difficult time evaluating the policies without incorporating their feelings about the individual or party (Lodge and Tabor 2000). The attachment of new information to an object, individual, or party about which the recipient of that information has particularly positive or negative feelings, Lodge and Tabor (2013) argue, causes an immediate affective reaction to the information conveyed, unintentionally infecting the processing of the attached information. Individuals thus engage in motivated reasoning, or what Lavine,

Johnston, and Steenbergen (2012) call a "partisan perceptual screen," subconsciously molding their issue beliefs to their existing attitudes on parties or leaders. As a result, citizens adjust their perceptions of information they receive so that information supports their existing outlook on the world or specific objects in that world, rather than adjusting their worldview to fit the new information they have received (Jerit and Barabas 2012).

Fortunately for our work here, the mechanism through which citizens' adopt party elites' positions matters little–both mechanisms produce the same expectations for how citizens should behave when they receive information about where the president stands. Citizens who approve of the president or identify with the president should take up positions more in line with the president's position once they learn what that position is, while those who disapprove of the president should, upon learning of the president's position, be less supportive of the position taken by the president. When opinion of the president is polarized along partisan lines, therefore, the president's copartisans who know her stance should be naturally more supportive of the president's position than those who do not, while opposing partisans with knowledge of the president's preference should be less supportive of the position than opposing partisans who do not know where the president stands. In an era where presidential approval consistently remains evenly divided, then, we should see little overall movement in public opinion on an issue when the president takes a stand.

Research Design

To test whether presidential public appeals cause voters to put pressure on their members of Congress to support the president's preferred voting alternative, I conducted a brief survey experiment, fielded during the summer of 2019 through Lucid's Fulchrum Academia platform (n = 777). The experiment presented respondents with descriptions of policies considered by Congress over the first five months of the year, randomly assigning whether the descriptions included a brief statement of the president's position on the legislation: the "For the People Act of 2019," a large Democratic-sponsored election, campaign finance, and ethics reform bill which was opposed by President Trump; a budget plan advanced by the Trump Administration to redirect surplus funds from the Pell Grant program to NASA and other budget priorities; and a disaster-relief appropriations bill that would send money to states like Alabama, Missouri, California, and, controversially, Puerto Rico, which had been hit by natural disasters within the previous twelve months. The president initially (and vocally) opposed this bill, but eventually supported the bill before its final vote in the Senate after pressure from members of his caucus and some minor changes to the bill.

I chose these three legislative proposals in part because each met specific criteria: on each issue, the president had taken a clear position; each proposal was deemed fairly important and not so trivial that

respondents would be unlikely to care about the outcome of a congressional vote; news coverage of the issue, however, had not been so ubiquitous that even respondents in the control group were likely to know the president's stance; and the proposed legislation was not particularly ideological or partisan, again to prevent individuals in the control group from guessing the president's position on the issue. The three issues were also chosen, however, because of their differences, so that analysis would not be limited only to policies proposed by the president, for example, or bills opposed by the president. The third policy–the disaster relief bill–I chose in particular because the president's position on the issue had switched, allowing me to offer two different treatments to respondents: some respondents received a treatment that suggested that President Trump had opposed the legislation, while others received treatment stating that he supported the bill.

Each policy description was approximately 100 words in length, with many of the phrases modeled after language in various news reports about the policies so as to be as objective as possible. Respondents were required to read each vignette for at least 20 seconds before clicking to move on, ample time to read the full descriptions. For the treatment groups for both the For the People Act vignette and the disaster relief bill vignette I simply added a short sentence at the bottom of the description stating whether the president either supported or opposed the legislation; for the treatment group for the Pell Grant funds reallocation vignette I instead led off the description by stating that President Trump had proposed legislation to reallocate funds, while the control group only saw that Congress was considering a proposal such a proposal, without specifying who had proposed the legislation. I included fairly lengthy policy descriptions by survey standards in part to ensure that respondents received adequate information to be able to evaluate each policy on its own merits. This therefore presents a hard test for my theory about presidential cues: any effect from the signal of the president's position would have to override conclusions respondents drew from the details of the policy itself (see Appendix A for the descriptions of the policies included in the survey).

Respondents were assigned to treatment independently for each of the three vignettes, with outcome questions asked immediately after reading each vignette. After reading each story, respondents in both the control and treatment groups were first asked whether they knew where President Trump stood on the issue, as both a manipulation check and to identify the degree to which respondents in the control group were aware of the president's position. On both the For the People Act experiment and the Pell Grant fund reallocation experiment those in the treatment group were significantly more likely to know the president's stance, but many respondents in the treatment group nevertheless did not correctly identify where the president stood, despite having just been informed on the previous screen of his position. Overall, approximately two-thirds of all respondents in the treatment groups correctly identified the president's position in each of the two experiments, while 39 percent of respondents and 28 percent of respondents in the For the People and Pell

control groups, respectively, answered the question correctly. For a more in depth illustration, Figure 2.1 plots whether respondents in the treatment (left panels) and control groups (right panels) for each of the two experiments correctly identified the president's position, scaled by the respondents level of confidence in their answers, which I had asked as a follow up question. Respondents who scored a 4 correctly identified where the president stood on the issue, and were very confident about their answer, while those who scored -4 misidentified the president's position, but were also very confident about their answer. Those who scored 0 indicated they were not sure what the president's position was.[4]

As is evident from the figures, despite a fairly clear signal in the policy descriptions, the effect of the treatment in both experiments was not as strong as might have been hoped. Slightly fewer than half of the treatment groups in both experiments were very confident about where President Trump stood on the legislation in question, while between one-fifth and one-quarter of respondents in the treatment group were not sure of President Trump's stance. A number of treatment group respondents in the For the People Act experiment, moreover, answered incorrectly but were nevertheless very confident in their responses. There are a number of potential explanations for the lackluster effect of the treatment here. As is typical in much survey research, it is likely that many participants in these experiments were relatively inattentive or distracted, only scanning over the policy descriptions provided, despite being forced to look at the description screen for at least 20 seconds. Other respondents, however, may have simply not been convinced of the president's position by the statement in the treatment condition. On the For the People Act experiment, for example, it appears that supporters of the president were far less likely to correctly identify the president's position, regardless of whether those respondents were in the treatment or control groups. Table 2.1 shows the results of a linear regression with the same correctness/confidence index on the For the People Act experiment from Figure 2.1 set as the dependent variable, predicted by respondent's assignment to treatment, self-reported news interest, and approval of President Trump on a three point scale. The results suggest that a respondent in the control group who did not approve of President Trump is predicted to score approximately 1.704 points higher on the index than a similar respondent who approved of the President; for respondents in the treatment group, the difference is 1.172 points. As demonstrated below, the For the People Act as presented in the survey was quite popular among both Republicans and Democrats, and so it seems likely that many respondents who supported President Trump simply matched their guess of the President's position to their own appraisal of the policy. Reassuringly, the effect of presidential approval on respondents'

[4]Because President Trump switched positions on the disaster relief bill, and there is no "correct" answer regarding the president's position, it is not possible to produce comparable figures for respondents in that experiment. Of those respondents who were given the treatment that President Trump supported the legislation, 75 percent correctly identified the president's position, while among those given the treatment that the president opposed the legislation, 64 percent correctly identified his stance. Among respondents in the control group, 41 percent responded that President Trump had supported the legislation, 19 percent that he had opposed it, with the remaining 39 percent unsure of the president's stance.

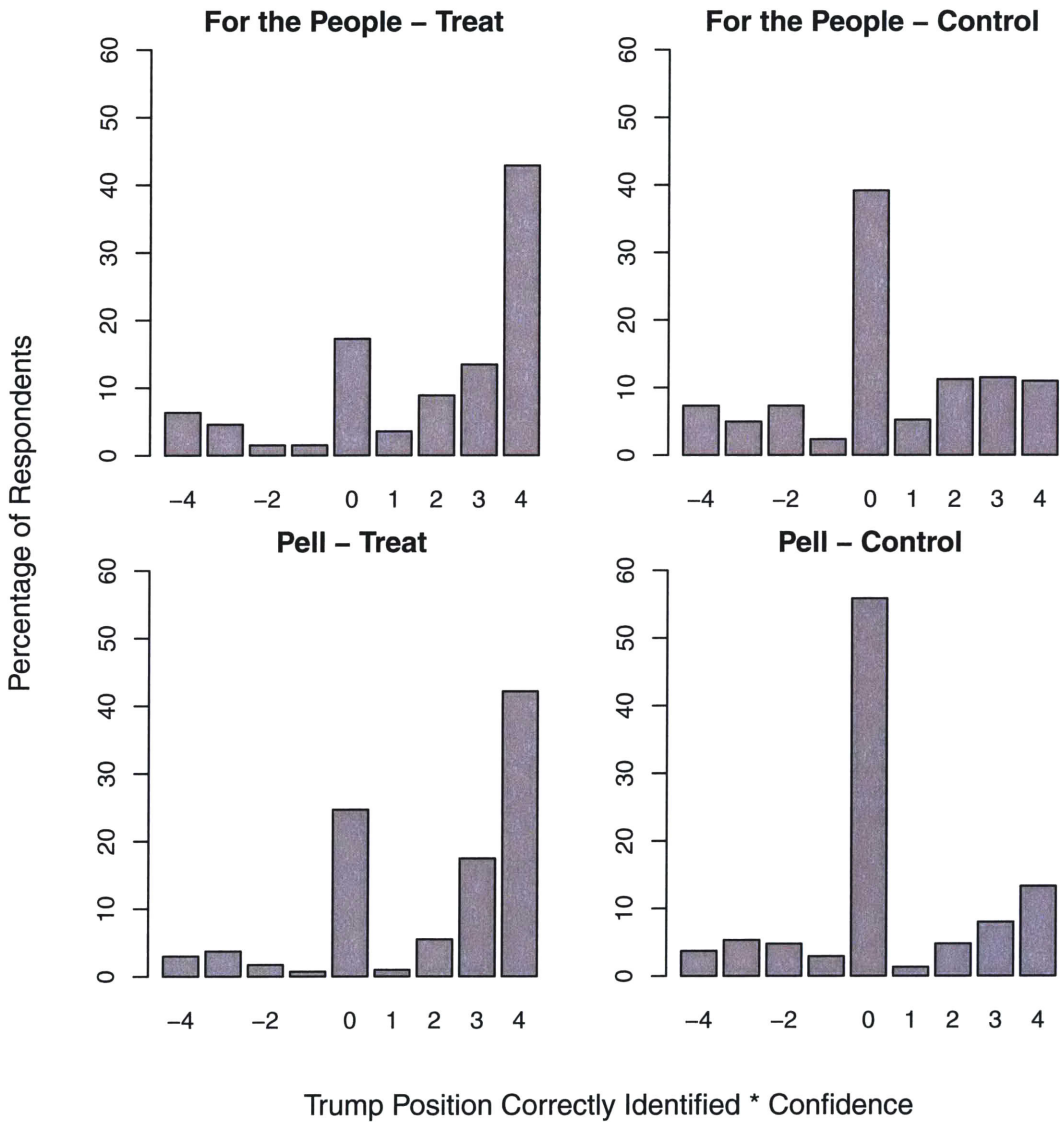

Figure 2.1: Percentage of respondents correctly identifying President Trump's position on the "For the People Act of 2019" and the reallocation of surplus funds from the Pell Grant program, scaled by respondents' confidence in their answers. Respondents who answered correctly and were very confident in their responses scored 4, those who were not sure received a score of 0, while those who answered incorrectly but were nevertheless confident in their answers received a score of -4.

identification of the president's position was smaller among those in the treatment group, as the interaction term in Table 2.1 shows, although not so much as to make up for the gap with those who do not approve of the president. Because of the lackluster performance of the treatment, in the analysis below I also make use of an instrumental variables framework with the assignment to treatment set as the instrumental variable and respondents' beliefs about President Trump's position as the treatment variable, rather than the simple difference of means test common in experimental work.

	Dependent variable:
	For the People Act Correctness*Confidence Index
Treatment	1.475***
	(0.164)
News Interest	−0.124*
	(0.069)
Trump Approval (3 point)	−0.852***
	(0.120)
Treatment*Approval	0.266
	(0.167)
Constant	0.718***
	(0.214)
Observations	777
R^2	0.169
Adjusted R^2	0.165
Residual Std. Error	2.283 (df = 772)
F Statistic	39.245*** (df = 4; 772)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 2.1: Effect of treatment status, respondent's self-reported news interest, and approval of President Trump on index of whether respondent correctly identified President Trump's position on the For the People Act multiplied by respondent's confidence in that answer. Note that respondents with the highest levels of news interest are coded as 1, whereas those with the lowest levels of interest are coded 5; respondents who approve of President Trump receive a 1 on the approval variable, those who were unsure 0, and those who disapprove -1.

Results

Experiment 1: For the People Act

The first experiment embedded in the survey involved a description of the "For the People Act of 2019," a Democratic-sponsored bill intended to secure voting rights and make voting easier, control the effects of

money in politics, and reduce corruption in government. All House Democrats voted for the bill (also called "HR1" for symbolic reasons), while all House Republicans voted against it. President Trump's opposition to the bill was not as vocal as some Congressional Republicans', but it nevertheless was clear at the time of the vote where the President stood. Respondents in the treatment group received an additional line of text at the bottom of the description of the legislation, indicating President Trump's opposition to the legislation and his threat to veto the bill.

There is little evidence that President Trump's stance on the legislation significantly moved the opinions of the whole sample. To simplify analysis, I recoded responses regarding support of the bill to a three point scale, with those supportin for the bill at 1, those neither supporting nor opposing at 0, and those opposing at -1. Notably, the bill proved very popular, at least as described, with 60 percent of individuals in the control group (n = 383) supporting passage of the legislation, for a mean score of 0.269. Among those who received treatment (n = 394), 55 percent supported the legislation's passage (mean score = 0.218), far short of a significant difference from the control group (p = 0.44).[5]

As suggested above, I also tested the effect of the treatment across the whole sample using an instrumental variables regression framework, with treatment status predicting respondents' accuracy in recalling President Trump's stance on the legislation, multiplied by their confidence in their answers (henceforth the "confidence index"), and the confidence index predicting respondents' ultimate stance on the legislation. Because of the impact on respondents' recall of President Trump's position of approval and news interest, noted earlier, I also control here for those two variables. The results are no more promising for the prospect of presidential influence on the general public as a whole. The estimated effect of knowing the president's correct position on the legislation is again negative (-0.0352), but statistically insignificant (p = 0.41)–that is, respondents who were correct and very confident about the president's position on the legislation were more likely to *support* passage of the For the People Act than were those who did not know the president's stance.

When breaking the respondents apart into groups that approve of the president and those who do not, something closer to the hypothesized pattern emerges, although not to the level of statistical significance. In the control group, as Figure 2.1 shows, both those who approved of President Trump and those who did not were more likely to support the passage of the For the People Act than they were to oppose, suggesting a perfect setting for a presidential public appeal to attempt to pressure some wayward members of his own caucus by changing the opinions of their constituents. Individuals in the treatment group, however, regardless of whether they approved of the president or not, were also more likely to support the bill than to oppose it.

[5]Balance checks show that the treatment group and control group are balanced on a variety of potential confounders, including approval of the president, party identification, ideology, news interest, age, income, and education, with a slight difference in gender.

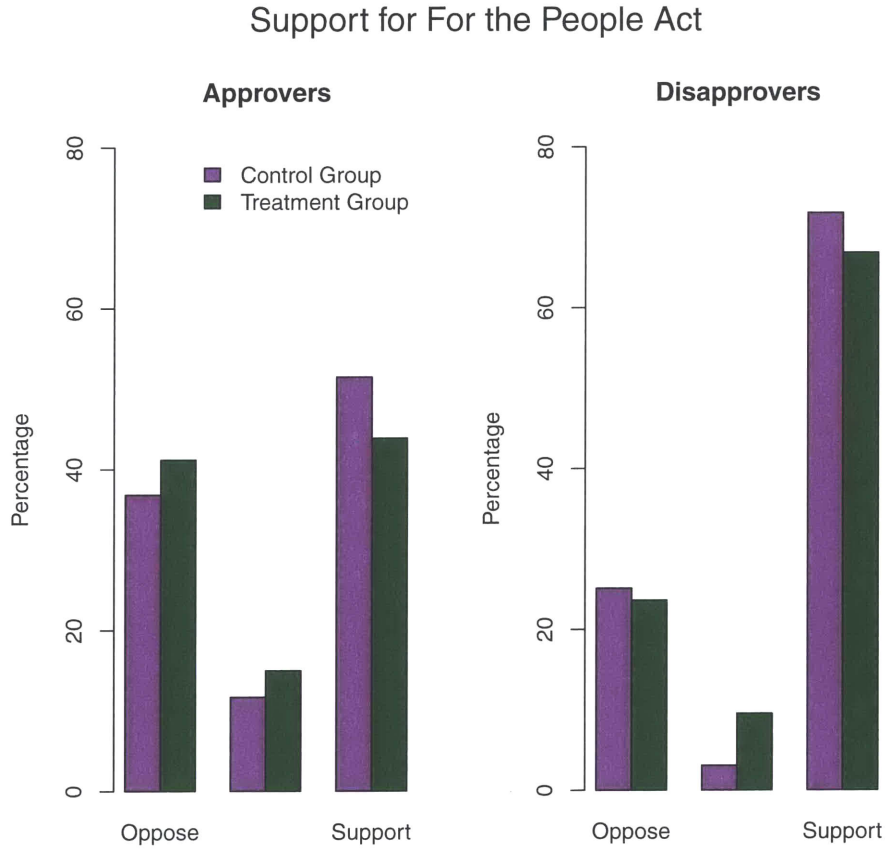

Figure 2.2: Support for the For the People Act, broken down by treatment status and approval of President Trump.

We see some evidence of the hypothesized effect of presidential cues among those respondents who approved of the president: a greater proportion (41 percent) of treatment group respondents who approved of the president opposed the passage of the legislation than was the case in the control group (37 percent), while fewer supported passage (44 percent to 51 percent). But the raw difference in means (0.146 to 0.027) between approvers in the control and treatment groups falls short of statistical significance ($p = 0.22$). The effect is even more insubstantial ($p = 0.69$) among those who disapprove of the president's performance, but also in the opposite of the hypothesized direction: fewer respondents who disapprove of the president supported the passage of the For the People Act in the treatment group (67 percent) than in the control group (72 percent), although fewer respondents in the treatment group also opposed passage of the legislation (23 percent in the treatment group to 25 percent in the control group).

The instrumental variables framework largely produces the same results, as Table 2.2 shows: respondents who disapprove of the president are barely moved by knowledge of the president's position, while a respondent who approved of President Trump and confidently knew the president's stance was likely to score 0.27 points lower on my three point scale for support of the legislation than a respondent who approved of the president but was unsure of where he stood ($p = 0.052$; recall that the confidence index uses a nine point scale, ranging from -4 to 4). Although this difference is not entirely insubstantial, and the lack of statistical significance may be the result of limited power in my experiment, given the need to cut the sample in half, we should not read too much into it. In particular, the instrumental variables framework essentially supposes–if we were to generalize to the real world–that all citizens would receive, process, and retain that the president is against the legislation in question. This seems highly unlikely, even on the most important bills considered by Congress in a legislative session.

Experiment 2: Pell Grant funding reallocation

As with the For the People Act experiment, knowledge of President Trump's stance on the proposed reallocation of surplus funds from the Pell Grant program had little effect on the whole sample population. 42 percent of respondents in the control group reported supporting the reallocation of funds, as opposed to 40 percent in the treatment group; the difference of means test from the three point support/opposition metric produces a p-value of just 0.637. Again, instrumental variables regression does little to change these results: respondents who very confidently and correctly knew President Trump's position scored approximately .16 points lower on my three point support scale than those who were unsure of where the president stood ($p = 0.33$).[6]

[6]Because balance checks revealed a discrepancy between the education levels of respondents in the control and treatment groups, I also include education as a control variable in the instrumental variable regressions reported in this section.

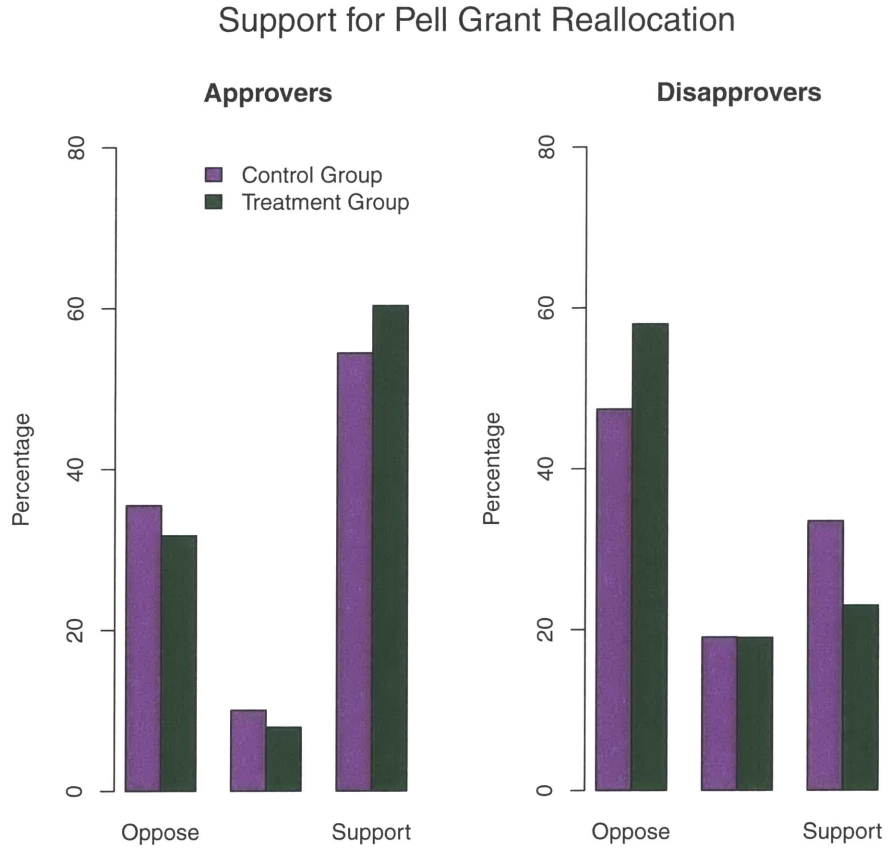

Figure 2.3: Support for proposal to reallocate Pell Grant funds to other budget priorities, such as NASA, broken down by treatment status and approval of President Trump.

	Dependent variable:	
	Support for For the People Act	
	(Approvers)	(Disapprovers)
Confidence Index	−0.067	−0.031
	(0.052)	(0.071)
News Interest	0.014	−0.166***
	(0.041)	(0.042)
Constant	0.082	0.929***
	(0.112)	(0.215)
Observations	358	394
R^2	0.126	0.013
Adjusted R^2	0.121	0.008
Residual Std. Error	0.870 (df = 355)	0.855 (df = 391)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table 2.2: Results of instrumental variables regression of respondents' support for the passage of the For the People Act on their knowledge of President Trump's stance on the legislation, with treatment status serving as the instrument.

Figure 2.3 suggests that the results are similar to the For the People Act experiment when we decompose the sample into those who approve of the president and those who do not. Again, among those who approve of President Trump, a greater proportion respondents in the treatment group (average score 0.29) were likely to take the side advocated by the president than those in the control group (average score 0.19), but the margin remained statistically insignificant, with a p-value of 0.326. For respondents who disapprove of President Trump, however, the treatment appears to have had a statistically significant effect. As Figure 2.3 shows, 58 percent of respondents informed by the treatment condition that President Trump was advocating for the proposed reallocation of Pell Grant funds, while only 47 percent of those in the treatment group were opposed to the proposal; the mean three-point score for the treatment group is -0.35, while the mean three-point score for the control group was just -0.14. The instrumental variables regression, which effectively treats all respondents as if they knew President Trump's position, largely confirms these findings (see Table 2.3). Supporters of President Trump who confidently knew the president's position on the proposal scored were 0.32 points more likely to also support the proposal ($p = 0.26$), while those who disapproved of the president were 0.46 points more likely to oppose the proposal, having learned of the president's stance ($p = 0.009$).

	Dependent variable:	
	Support for Pell Fund reallocation proposal	
	(Approvers)	(Disapprovers)
Confidence Index	0.088	−0.116***
	(0.078)	(0.044)
News Interest	−0.135***	−0.064*
	(0.048)	(0.038)
Education	0.067*	0.061*
	(0.035)	(0.033)
Constant	0.201	−0.186
	(0.217)	(0.167)
Observations	358	394
R^2	0.147	0.031
Adjusted R^2	0.139	0.023
Residual Std. Error	0.858 (df = 354)	0.856 (df = 390)
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 2.3: Results of instrumental variables regression of respondents' support for the proposed reallocation of surplus Pell Grant funds, with treatment status serving as the instrumental variable and respondents' knowledge of President Trump's stance as the treatment variable.

Experiment 3: Disaster Relief supplemental appropriations bill

The third and final experiment involved a bipartisan supplemental appropriations bill intended to provide emergency relief to communities hit by natural disasters. President Trump initially opposed the bill ultimately passed by both the House and Senate, particularly over the amount of funding directed to Puerto Rico, vocally backing other versions of the bill that contained less funding. After the House bill had passed, however, and Senate Republicans appealed to the president for his endorsement of the bill, President Trump did get behind the bill, and tweeted his support shortly before the bill came to a vote in the Senate. Because the president had taken both sides of the same bill, I was able to use effectively a two-sided treatment, with one third of respondents receiving a treatment that President Trump had opposed the bill, one third that he supported the bill, and one third seeing no indication of President Trump's stance on the legislation. As noted above, however, the treatments had somewhat different effects in terms of respondents' beliefs about President Trump's position on the legislation–respondents were far more likely to believe that President Trump supported the bill than that he opposed the bill.[7]

[7]Balance checks did reveal a slight discrepancy between the control and treatment groups in the disaster relief experiment in terms of the number of respondents in each group from a state listed in the policy description as receiving disaster relief funds. I therefore control for respondents' residence in one of these states in the instrumental variables regressions below.

Although the treatment and control groups in this third experiment are therefore smaller, we do find for the first time a significant effect of a presidential cue on the whole sample: respondents who received the treatment that President Trump opposed the bill were significantly more likely to also oppose the passage of the bill than were either those who were in the control group ($p = 0.026$) or in the treatment group that received information that the president had supported the bill ($p = 0.010$). While 81 percent of those in the control group and 83 percent of those in the treatment-support group approved of the legislation, only 72 percent of those in the treatment-oppose group approved of the legislation. A comparison of those in the treatment-support group and the control group yielded no such significant results ($p = 0.701$), however, as the above figures suggest.

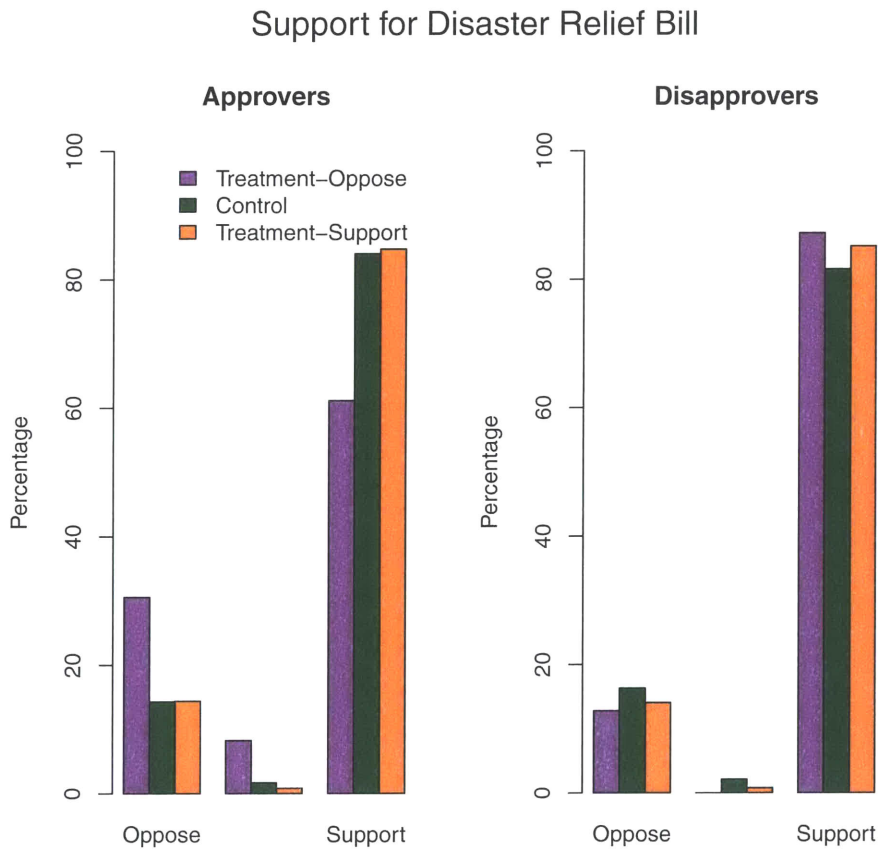

Figure 2.4: Support for disaster relief supplemental appropriations bill, broken down by treatment status and approval of President Trump.

A closer look at the data suggests that the effect of the signal that the president opposed the legislation truly only occurred among those respondents who approved of the president, while those who disapproved saw their beliefs relatively unchanged. Figure 2.4 shows the effect of the two treatments on respondents'

support for the disaster relief appropriations bill, among both respondents who reported approval of the president and those who disapproved of the president. As hypothesized, when respondents who approve of the president were told that the president opposed the bill (purple bars; left graph), a significantly larger number of the president's supporters became ambivalent about the bill or even opposed it. The three point difference of means similarly reflects this effect a presidential cue on approvers' evaluation of the disaster relief legislation: among approvers, those in the control group scored on average 0.70, while those who received the opposed condition scored on average 0.31 ($p = 0.0002$). The effect of the support condition among approvers, and of both treatment conditions among disapprovers, however, was not nearly as large, nor statistically signifant—although perhaps only because so many in those groups already supported the bill, leaving less room for change in their positions.

Once again, when we use the instrumental variables regression framework to measure the effect of where respondents believe President Trump stands, we confirm the results found by the simple difference of means tests. Moving a respondent who approves a the president from very confident that the president opposes the disaster relief bill to unsure of where the president stands, Table 2.4 shows, causes a 0.54 point change along the three point scale, a highly significant change both statistically and substantively. Among disapprovers, however, a similar change in respondents' beliefs about President Trump's position is not nearly as significant, only barely registering in the expected direction.

	Dependent variable:	
	Support for disaster relief appropriations bill	
	(Approvers)	(Disapprovers)
Confidence Index	0.137***	−0.013
	(0.029)	(0.019)
News Interest	−0.034	−0.118***
	(0.034)	(0.030)
Disaster State	0.174*	0.007
	(0.101)	(0.094)
Constant	0.425***	0.996***
	(0.107)	(0.085)
Observations	357	394
R^2	0.167	0.033
Adjusted R^2	0.160	0.025
Residual Std. Error	0.733 (df = 353)	0.698 (df = 390)
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Discussion

On the whole, the results from these three experiments are mixed. If we break down the survey as a whole into six separate tests–three experiments, with two separate groups tested in each experiment–in just two of the six experiments did we saw strong evidence of the hypothesized effect: that the presidential cue would galvanize support for the president's position among those who approved of the president, but would also engender opposition for that position among those who disapproved.[8] On three of the other four tests, the direction of the effect observed occurred in the anticipated direction, but fell somewhat short of the threshold for statistical significance.[9] As noted in the discussion of the results of the For the People Act experiment, part of the reason for that lack of statistical significance may have been a small sample size once we subdivided the sample into groups of approvers and disapprovers, but the substantive significance of the effects would still be somewhat underwhelming, even if we had enough power for the same effect sizes to be statistically significant.

The puzzle remains as to why presidential cues do have significant effects in some of these contexts but not in others. Why, for example, were voters who disapprove of President Trump dissuaded from supporting the Pell Grant surplus funds reallocation upon hearing that the president was for the proposal, but not more adamant about the passage of the disaster relief package if they learned that the president opposed it?[10] Or why were the president's supporters moved by the president's opposition to the disaster relief package, but not his opposition to the For the People Act? Because there are so many differences between the three experiments–from the policy details, to the direction of the president's stance on the bill, the amount of leadership the president expressed on the legislation, the popularity of the policy in the control group, and the placement of the presidential cue in the policy description–it is difficult to clearly establish why presidential cues had an effect in some of the tests but not others.

A few basic conclusions can be gleaned from the data here, however. First, it seems that presidential cues make little difference when there is little room for the president's stance to cause movement in the direction of the president's position. If a policy is already popular among those who approve of the president–even

[8]Note that for all of the findings reported thus far, breaking the sample down by partisanship rather than presidential approval produces quite similar results.

[9]On the fourth test, respondents who disapproved of the president became slightly less supportive of the For the People Act when they learned that the president opposed the legislation. But this may have been partially the result of an unintentional double-barreled treatment. As the text of the treatment condition in Appendix A shows, respondents receiving the treatment saw that President Trump opposed the legislation *and* had threatened to veto it if it reached his desk. Perhaps those disapprovers were therefore reacting to the prospective veto from the president, believing efforts to pass the bill would be fruitless. On the other hand, the legislation was very popular among disapprovers in the control condition, leaving little room for those respondents who received the treatment to become *more* supportive of the bill. Finally, we should not read too much into this effect, given its extraordinarily negligible size.

[10]One possibility is that the Pell Grant description was framed as a proposal advanced by President Trump, whereas the other descriptions contained no information on who had proposed the legislation. Perhaps Democratic voters cared more about defeating the president on an issue that he was actively pushing than on one where his involvement did not seem as central.

without knowledge of where the president stands–and the president supports it, the policy is unlikely to become more popular among those supporters. Second, it is apparent from these experiments that the effects of presidential cues can be strong among both those who approve of the president and those who do not, although the circumstances under which one group is moved and the other is not remain unclear. This evidence serves as a contrast to Nicholson's findings (2012) from the time of the 2008 election, perhaps because of systematic changes in politics since the 2008 election, or perhaps because of idiosyncracies in the policies we each chose to test or in the political circumstances of that moment in time–for example, that President Bush was not particularly popular among Republicans at the time of Nicholson's survey.

Third, these results give some support for the hypothesis that, as Bullock (2011) suggests, it is possible that presidential cues have far greater effects when voters know little to nothing about the policies and cannot rely on their own judgments of the policy details to come to a conclusion about which side to support. But this is hardly the case when presidents appeal to the broader public to pressure their members into supporting a piece of legislation. Precisely the point of these presidential appeals is to provide voters with information about the policy that will help to persuade them to support the side preferred by the president. In those cases, however, it is the president's presentation of the issue that would win adherents, not just the president's affiliation with the policy, as tested here.

Fourth, the simple presence of the president supporting a policy alone does not seem to produce significant support among the electorate, at least when a fair amount of policy information is provided. In one of the experiments above, the president's support for a policy actually had negative effects on the whole sample's support for that policy, while in another the president's opposition appeared to have move the whole sample in that same direction. In both cases, however, the change in the positions of either those who disapproved of the president or those who approved of him created the illusion that the whole sample was moving, as the other group in each experiment remained roughly in the same place. This suggests that the president's ability to generate support in the entire body politic for her position simply by taking a stance is quite limited, and may even backfire in some cases. That is not to say, however, that presidential public appeals cannot work. The experiments included here solely provided a directional presidential cue, not even including an explanation from the president of why he took the stance that he did, and certainly not allowing the president to frame the conversation about policies in the way that many scholars of presidential public appeals claim is central to the effectiveness of going public. As noted above, moreover, The analysis here has also focused on changes in the direction of citizens' support for policies, not on the intensity of their support, although preliminary results from this study suggest that examining changes in the intensity of respondents' support for policies largely mirror changes in the direction of respondents' support.[11] Even though this study leaves

[11] Preliminary evidence from this survey, however, suggests that the effects of presidential cues on the intensity of respondents'

room for presidents to pressure members of Congress through the persuasive effect of public appeals, it also provides a cautionary tale: at least in some cases, simply by attaching his name to a piece of legislation the president can actually imperil its popularity among citizens from the opposing party.

Conclusion

The conclusions to be drawn from this study have clearly been impacted by the size of the sample. Not only would a larger sample allow for more confident statistical analysis, but with a larger sample, it would be ideal to break these experimental results down into further demographic and political groups–for example, is the hypothesized relationship between presidential public stances and voters' positions more evident when we look only at voters who participated in the primaries? What about when we look at respondents who strongly approve or disapprove of the president?

More generally, more work needs to be done to be able to generalize these findings to other political moments. What happens when approval of the president is less polarized along partisan lines? What about when the president actually appeals to the public, rather than just taking a directional stance? As with many survey experimental settings, external validity remains somewhat elusive here, given the variety of conditions that might influence how a president's positioning on an issue affects the public's own stances. Further examination of the impact of presidential cues across different time periods would be useful–but while holding the issue to be tested constant would be relatively simple, controlling for other political changes in a similar experimental fashion would be difficult.

Past literature combined with the findings of these studies, however, suggests a limit on presidential influence on member's voting as exercised through public appeals and persuasion of constituents. Presidents in the current partisan era clearly have to contend with the fact that when they take positions on individual issues they run the risk of creating greater opposition among opposing partisans in the general public. If the president is attempting to persuade members of Congress from the opposing party to vote in the direction she would prefer, the increased opposition of that member's primary constituents in particular could be a significant detriment to the president's efforts. For a president who cares about legislating, then, going public may be a risky strategy at best, depending on the configuration of members whom the president would need to persuade to get her way.

support for policies are largely similar in magnitude to those regarding the direction of respondent's preferences on policies.

Chapter 3

Presidential Loyalties and Primary Voting

As the nation's most prominent political voice, particularly in the age of twenty-four hour news coverage, the president's ability to influence members' electoral calculus may extend not just to the way in which she can affect the public's policy preferences. Presidents may also have powerful opportunities to influence citizens' evaluations of other politicians, especially among those citizens for whom the president serves as a powerful heuristic. When the president appeals to the public for support, the president's strongest supporters may often be moved to pressure members to support the president on that issue. Even if voters are at the time of a congressional vote unaware of the president's position on certain issues, or even if voters do not care about the substance of of a policy proposal in question, a member's vote may still influence their evaluations among their constituents if that vote makes them seem more or less loyal to the president. In an era where partisanship and approval of the president are highly correlated, where primary voters are becoming more ideologically extreme (e.g., Fiorina and Levendusky 2006), and where voters maintain a significant degree of psychological attachment to political parties (see e.g., Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002), it seems reasonable to expect that presidential loyalty should be especially relevant in primary elections. Members of the president's party, for example, who develop a reputation for voting against the president too often, may suffer in partisan primaries, while those who are more loyal to the president should find themselves more secure in the ensuing primary election.

Anecdotal appraisals both of members' voting decisions and their success in primary elections frequently highlight this presidential loyalty-primary election connection. In March of 2019, for example, as Congress considered legislation to repeal President Trump's declaration of a national emergency so that he might

obtain the funds to build a wall along the Mexican border, potentially undermining Congress's role as chief appropriator, many news reports examined why more Republicans had not voted in favor of a resolution that would protect their constitutional prerogative. According to many reports, such as one published in The New York Times (Cochrane and Thrush, March 14, 2019), fear of a primary challenge was at the forefront of many senators' minds: "Senator Thom Tillis, Republican of North Carolina and one of the first to publicly say he would support the resolution, announced he had changed his mind just minutes before the vote...He had been warned in recent days by North Carolina conservatives that he could face a primary challenger next year for his stand." On CNN, former Congressman Charlie Dent, a moderate Republican during his time in office, similarly speculated that fear of primary challenges might be behind his former colleague's reticence to vote against the President: "Some must really be worried about their primaries–that's the only explanation." Similar arguments were applied to explaining the results for Republican incumbents in the 2018 primaries, as Republican strategist and former Marco Rubio (R-FL) aide Alex Conant suggested: "Many of the primaries boiled down to which candidate appeared most in line with Trump's brand of politics. Past arguments like conservative credentials or electability were not very salient messages" (Seitz-Wald, September 14, 2018).[1]

This chapter evaluates the hypothesis that members' loyalty to the president–as expressed through their roll-call voting records–influences the outcomes of their primary elections. If members of the presidents party are rewarded for casting votes in line with the president's stated position, and punished for those votes in the direction opposite the one preferred by the president, the president should be able to have substantial influence over members' voting decisions on those bills when she takes a public position or appeals to the public for support. If opposing partisans behave in the exact opposite manner, however, any power the president gains over his co-partisans' voting behavior may be lost by the support she loses among members of the opposing party. When a Republican is president, then, the theory suggests, Republicans more supportive of the president's policy preferences should see fewer primary challengers and larger margins when they do see challengers, while at the same time Democrats more supportive of the president's agenda should be more at risk in their own primaries. This relationship should only become stronger as partisan approval of the president polarizes, since partisans should care more deeply about the president's agenda, and since as the ideological distance between the two parties grows, voters may assume that members who are less loyal to the president are supporting policies aligned toward the opposing extreme.

To examine whether this is true, I rely primarily on the metric of presidential support scores, which

[1]Though not entirely a case of presidential loyalty as expressed through roll call voting, the case of Republican House Member Justin Amash (MI-3) illustrates the power of the president in primary elections quite effectively. In May of 2019, Amash, who voted with the president on just 54 percent of roll call votes during the 115th Congress, came to prominence because of Twitter statements that suggested that President Trump had engaged in impeachable conduct. Within just a few days of those statements, one member of the Michigan state legislature had already declared that he would challenge Amash in the 2020 primaries.

measure the frequency with which members voted in accord with the president's stated preference on the legislation at hand, and examine the relationship between incumbents' scores and the results of their ensuing primary elections. I begin by looking at the most recent congressional session, the 115th (2017-2018), using data from fivethirtyeight.com's Trump Score metric. I then turn to elections held between 1956 and 2010, making use of Lewis et al.'s estimates of presidential support scores and Stephen Pettigrew et al.'s primary election data (2014).

There are a number of difficulties with examining this relationship statistically, however. Most importantly, the relationship between members' voting decisions and their electoral success is clearly endogenous, especially if we assume that members are reelection seeking and calculate their votes so as to maximize their chances of reelection. Members of the president's party may find that remaining more loyal to the president's policy preferences when casting roll call votes helps to scare off primary challengers, or increases their potential margins in those primary elections. At the same time, however, those members who may feel the need to demonstrate their party loyalty in order to ward off primary challengers may be those who had been most vulnerable to primary challenges in the first place. Increased presidential loyalty (for co-partisans) should therefore lead to a boost in incumbents' chances of renomination, but if the only incumbents who need that boost from presidential loyalty are those more vulnerable to primary challenges in the first place, it might appear that more loyal incumbents actually perform worse in primaries than those who exhibit less fealty to the president's agenda (see Hirano et al. 2010 for a more formalized discussion of the endogeneity of the voting record-primary competition relationship). Unless we have a way of measuring the member's chances of renomination under a counterfactual where the member displayed less loyalty to the president, it is difficult then to estimate the true causal impact of members' loyalty to the president.

Since we should expect that presidents only take positions on the most important–and therefore often the most ideological–legislation, it may be that it is really the ideological content of the bills that drives both members' electoral calculations and their ultimate primary margins, especially given the ideological polarization of primary electorates (Fiorina and Levendusky 2006). If this is the case, presidents' positions on matters that come to roll call votes would have little independent impact on members' behavior or on voters' decisions come primary elections. Fortunately, this problem is much easier to solve than the endogeneity one outlined above–if primary voters truly evaluate incumbents on the basis of their ideological purity, then controlling for members' ideology on votes other than those where the president takes a position should help to determine that it is indeed the president that makes a difference in those incumbents' primary fates.

The relationship between presidential loyalty and primary success may also be tempered by the strategic considerations of primary voters. Some primary voters may prioritize their party's victory in the ensuing

general elections over the loyalty of whomever their party nominates for that contest. Primary voters may then actually reward those members who are less loyal to the president, particularly in districts where the opposing party has a credible chance of claiming the seat. This suggests the need to control for the partisan balance within the district and to allow for the possibility that effects of presidential loyalty may differ across those districts.

Primary election results may not also perfectly capture the true likelihood that an incumbent would be unseated in the primary. A whimsical primary challenger who never really stood a chance of earning more than ten percent of the primary vote, for example, may stay in the race until its conclusion, while a more serious challenger who would have garnered twenty-five or thirty percent of the vote, might drop out of the race once it became clear that he did not have enough votes to win. Nevertheless, the member facing the whimsical challenger appears to have been more under threat in the primary than the incumbent temporarily faced with the prospect of a serious challenger. Election results therefore capture only imperfectly the concept that we are truly seeking to measure–the likelihood that the member would be renominated by the party. The level of variance that results, combined with the number of other difficult-to-measure variables that might influence the results of the primary, poses important challenges for drawing conclusions about the effect of members' roll call record on items where the president has taken a stand.

I begin the chapter with a brief descriptive examination of primary elections from 1956 to the present. Although many primary challengers do select their opportunities strategically, and incumbents are overwhelmingly successful in primary elections, the data shows that many incumbents do face primary opponents. I then introduce the two measures of presidential support used in the analysis that follows, examining closely bivariate relationships between the support score metrics and other important variables like district partisanship and members' ideal point scores. As expected, while both district partisanship and members' ideology correlate substantially with support scores, these data show that support scores are not just a spurious product of these other variables, but represent a valid construct of their own. Nevertheless, in the analysis that follows I continue to control for the independent influence of both ideology and district partisanship, to ensure that it truly is levels of presidential support driving the reported results. I begin the analytic sections with an examination of primary elections in 2018, where I find very tentative results to suggest that Republicans who were more faithful to President Trump's legislative priorities were rewarded in the 2018 Republican primaries. Those conclusions are based on a rather small sample size, however, and contain a number of other important caveats. I therefore delve back into the historical record to examine the relationship between presidential support and primary election success across the period from 1956-2010, aiming in particular to identify whether the effect of presidential loyalty on primary results has changed over time. While these data provide support for the hypothesis that Republicans generally punish those members

who display less presidential loyalty, and moderate support that Democrats do the same, these effects do not appear to change over time–at least with any consistent pattern. These results, however, do not account for the possibility of simultaneity bias in the support-primary relationship. In the final section, I therefore attempt to employ a number of instruments to isolate the effect of perceived electoral weakness on members' patterns of presidential support. Unfortunately, identifying an effective instrument that affects members' roll call voting solely through their vulnerability to primary challenges is extraordinarily difficult, and these flawed instrumental variable regressions largely yield results contrary to both intuition and to the findings of previous sections.

Primary Elections, Challengers, and Margins, 1956-2018

Primary elections present important challenges for statistical study because of the limited number of elections in which incumbents see challengers and the limited experience of the challengers in those elections. Across the period from 1956 to 2010, although 87.6 percent of House incumbents sought renomination to Congress, on average only 29.1 percent of those faced primary challengers, with only 1.2 percent of those incumbents losing their primary challenges. Figure 3.1 shows these numbers over time, including a measure for the number of incumbents with primary margins of less than 25 percentage points. We only have figures on the political experience of challengers for elections between 2000 and 2010, but that data largely corroborates the hypothesis that potential primary challengers are strategic about when they run for office. Of the 2234 primaries in which incumbents ran from 2000-2010, they faced challengers in just 582 of those races (26.1 %), and challengers with any sort of elected experience in just 119 (5.3%).

Notably absent from the figure is any trend toward more competitive primary elections in recent years, which we might expect if members' efforts to retain their seats are now more dependent on primary elections, as many have theorized. The absence of such a trend, however, does not necessarily mean that members need not be more attentive to their primary constituencies; indeed, if members do pay more attention to their constituencies today, but need to pay more attention, then we should see no disturbance in the trend over time. A small trend is visible in the number of challengers with elected experience, rising from just seven in 2000 to 30 in 2010, but it seems possible, if not likely, that this trend is simply a statistical aberration.[2]

In 2018, discounting races in Pennsylvania because of the judicially mandated redistricting there, however, incumbents stood for reelection at a lower rate than in any other non-redistricting year in the dataset (83.7 percent), and challenger rates were dramatically higher than any other year in the dataset (45.1 percent).

[2]The most apparent trend in the data surrounds redistricting years–in years ending in "2" there is a sharp decrease in the number of incumbents running for reelection. Only in one year (1992), however, is there a similar increase in challenger success rates, suggesting that redistricting does little to affect members' standing within their primary electorates.

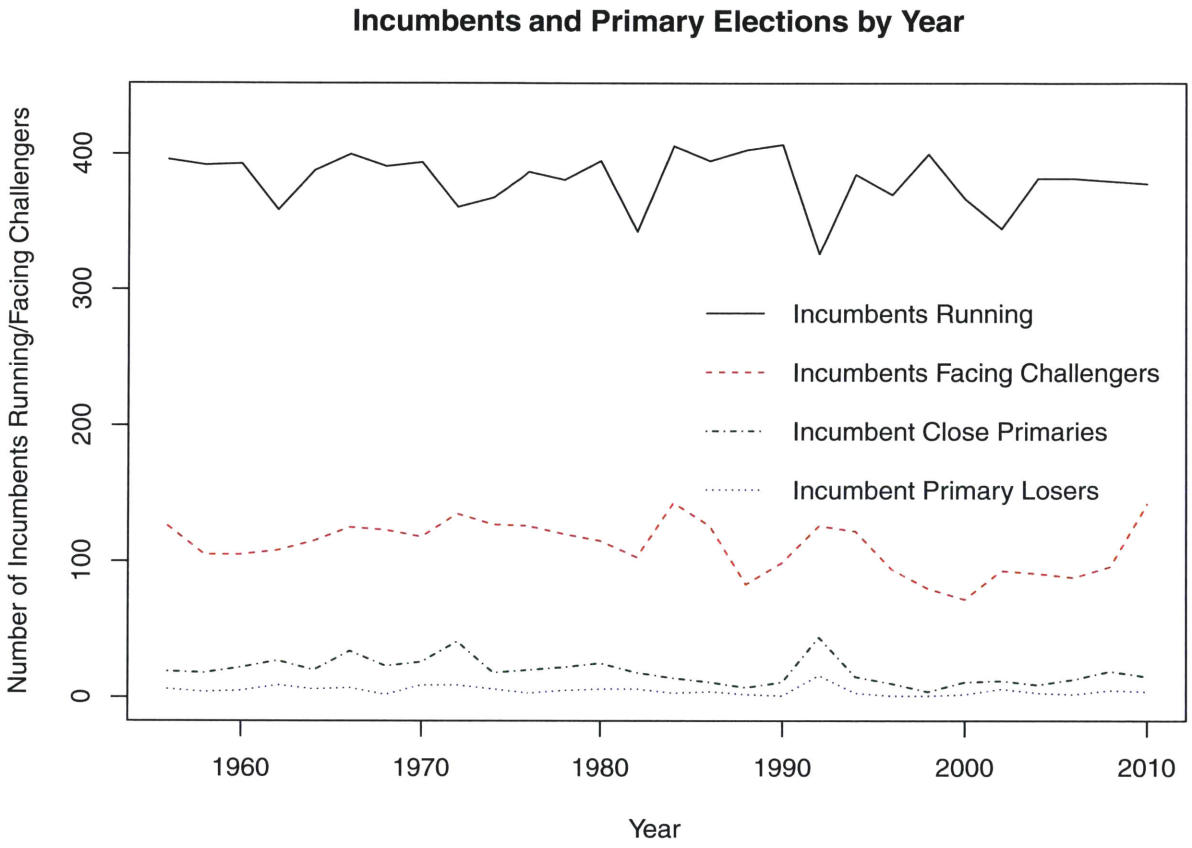

Figure 3.1: Number of incumbents running for renomination, facing challengers, facing close primaries, and losing in primary elections in each year from 1956 to 2010. Close primaries are defined as those where winning margin was less than 25 %.

Still, only five of the 364 incumbents running for reelection lost in their primaries, while in only 16 was the ultimate margin of victory less than 25 percentage points–both very much in line with rates in previous years.

In many ways, these results make it difficult to square a theory that explains member behavior through primary vulnerability with reality. If sheer electoral margins are to be believed, far more members are vulnerable in general elections than in primaries–in 2018, for instance, 35 House races where incumbents were running came down to a margin of less than five percent. Since voters operate in primary elections without the heuristic of partisanship to guide their decisions, however, it is likely that ultimate election margins are far more variable in primaries. Given the larger number of voters who might reasonably vote for any of the candidates in a primary election, members may then indeed feel that primary elections are more unpredictable and results more dependent upon their individual actions while in office.

Presidential Support in Roll Call Voting

In both this chapter and the following one, I make use of a metric of presidential support scores, the degree to which members take the same position on a roll call vote as the position inferred for the president. For the years 1956-2010 I use presidential support scores calculated from the Voteview database compiled by Jeff Lewis, Keith Poole, Howard Rosenthal, Adam Boche, Aaron Rudkin, and Luke Sonnet (2019), while for the 115th session of Congress I adapt the scores offered by fivethirtyeight.com's Trump Score metric. Because filing deadlines and primary elections dates are readily available for the 2018 elections, I am able to calculate members' scores across a range of relevant time periods; for most of the analysis below the reports 2018 results I rely on members' scores calculated only from votes taken before their relevant primary dates to avoid post-treatment contamination. There is one drawback to this approach, however–because members' support scores are calculated on different sets of votes, members with the same latent degree of support for the president may appear to have different levels of actual support since the types of bills brought to a vote in between two states' primaries may trend in either a generally liberal or conservative direction. For example, members in Texas, whose constituents vote in primaries in early March, had generally cast only 67 votes prior to their primary, while those in Florida had cast up to 90 votes before their late-August primary. If those 23 votes between March and August were substantively different in content from the 67 that came before the Texas primary, it is possible that two members who voted the exact same way on each bill might have very different presidential support scores.

At the same time, however, stopping measurement at the date when the first state held its primary would be ignoring information that voters may indeed use when casting their primary ballots. A comparison of the

change in support scores between members' relevant filing dates and their primary dates shows, moreover, very minimal differences in members' support scores–the average member's support score changed just by 0.5 percentage points, far short of a significant difference. The same holds for the change in members scores between the primary and the general election–members' scores grew more favorable to the president by just 0.4 points on average. Though both between filings and primaries and between primaries and generals Democrats' scores became moved in a positive direction more so than did Republicans', the differences are fairly small–while Democrats' scores became 1.2 percentage points more favorable toward the president between filing deadlines and primary elections, Republicans' scores stayed approximately the same. It seems best, therefore, to treat the scores from these different states equally, keeping in mind this important caveat.

For years prior to 2018, moreover, we only have available presidential support scores that cover all votes in the relevant session. The metric is therefore calculated based on at least some votes that are taken after the intended treatment period. Based on results from 2018, however, this does not seem to be a massive problem. Because the change in scores between primary and general election seems mostly to be a product of relatively random variance, and because the two parties move largely in kind during those time periods, the fact that this metric is partially calculated after the conclusion of the elections those votes are supposed to influence should not cause too many inferential problems. To calculate each member's score, I simply take the number of votes where the member voted as the president would have preferred, divided by the total number of votes on which the member cast a vote where the president's position could be inferred. I therefore forego the alternative used by Lewis et al. and by Edwards (1989), choosing not to count in the metric any votes where the member was not present, rather than counting those as "no" votes. This alleviates any concerns that members who missed substantial periods of time due to illness might see their scores artificially inflated, but does raise concerns about the reliability of scores for those members who have cast only a small number of votes. I therefore remove from consideration any member taking part in fewer than 25 percent of all roll call votes.

Figure 3.2 shows the average presidential support scores (top panel) and standard deviation of support scores (bottom panel) for members of the House from each party. [3] The figures corroborate much of what we know about polarization–there is a widening gap in presidential support between the party in control of the presidency and the opposing party–while the parties are more homogeneous in their levels of support for the president as we move toward the present.

Since support scores within each party have become more extreme over time, whenever aggregating across years in the analytic sections below, I use as the primary independent variable members' support scores

[3]Note that presidential support scores using the Lewis et al. metric are available through the end of the 113th Congress (2014) and are therefore presented here. Because the full primary data is only available for elections up to 2010, however, the analysis presented below does not include either the 2012 or 2014 election years.

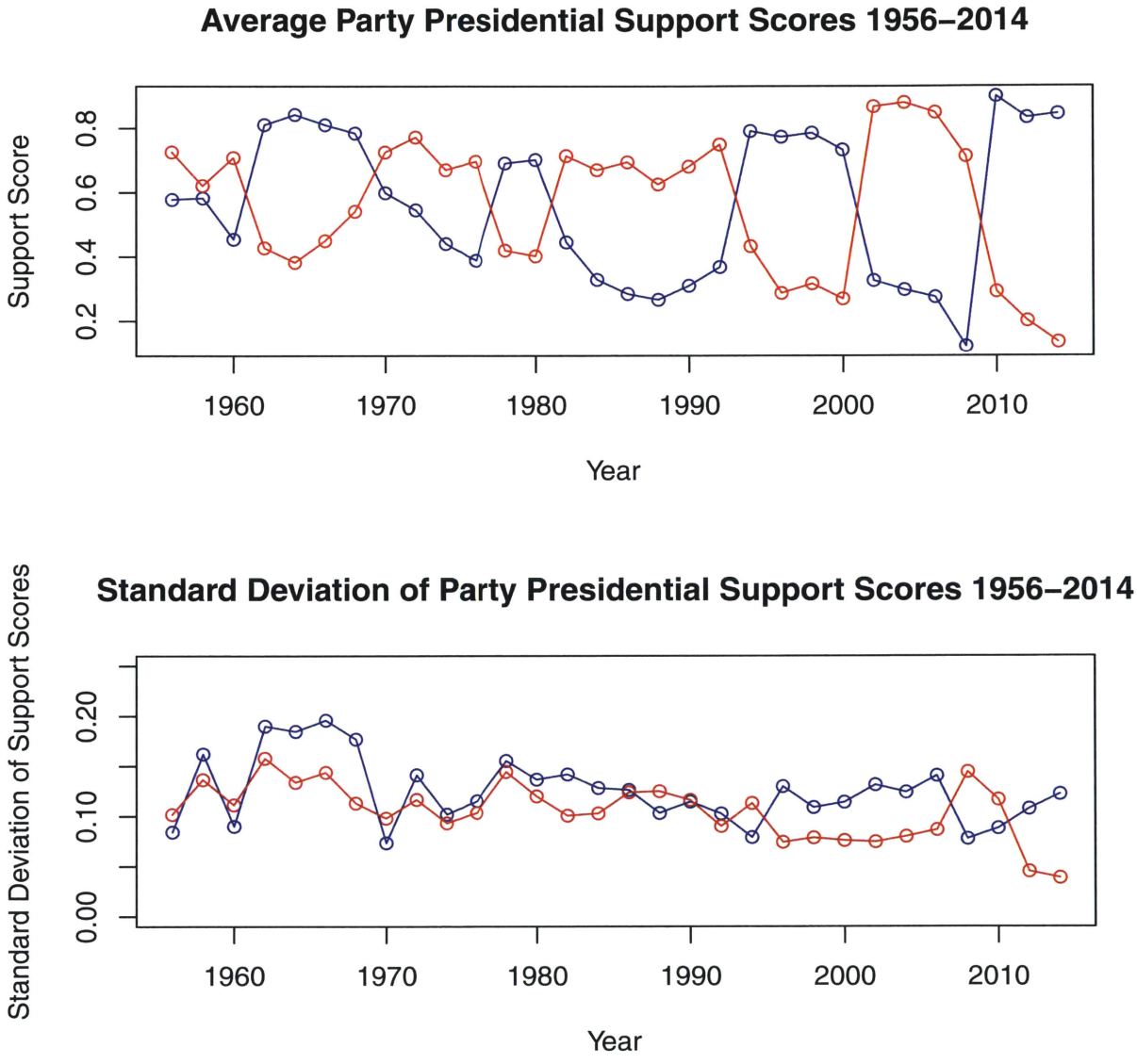

Figure 3.2: Average presidential support scores among Democrats (blue) and Republicans (red) and standard deviation of presidential support scores among Democrats and Republicans, 1956-2014.

standardized to the party's average score in a given session. As a result, Republicans who voted with the president 40 percent of the time in 1977-1978–about the average score for the party in that year–are treated far differently from those who did so in 2012–when a score of 40 percent would be almost 4.5 standard deviations above the party mean. This procedure makes intuitive sense–primary voters should evaluate members' levels of support for the president relative to other party members, not on an absolute basis, and presidents have likely lent their support to different types of legislation over time, changing the meaning of supporting the president's preferences in a substantive sense. In all cases, a more positive standardized support score indicates a representative with a more conservative record of presidential support–that is, a record that is more supportive of Republican presidents and less supportive of Democratic ones.

This support scores metric is highly correlated both with members' ideal point scores and the partisan balance of their districts, but the correlations are certainly not perfect. Figure 3.3 plots the relationship between support scores and DW-NOMINATE scores in two congressional sessions for each of the two parties. In many years, the correlation between support scores and ideal points looks more like Republicans in 2010, in the bottom right corner, but in other years the two are barely correlated or even negatively correlated, as is the case for both parties in 1960.[4]

In Figure 3.4 I examine the relationship between members' support scores–this time without the standardization to allow for comparability across parties in the same chart–and the two-party presidential vote in the district in the previous election. It is clear from the figure that presidential vote and support scores are correlated, but again not so strongly that we should be worried about identifying the independent influence of members' presidential support on primary electorates voting decisions. Among Democrats serving under Democratic presidents, for example, a 10 percentage point increase in the vote for the Republican candidate in the previous election corresponds to a decrease of just one percentage point in the frequency with which the member supports the president's preferred policies.

Presidential Support and Primary Fortunes, 2018

Because of the centrality of the presidential support narrative in the most recent electoral cycle, particularly with regard to Republican incumbents, I begin with a brief analysis of whether presidential support scores influenced members' primary fates in 2018. Since the metric used to calculate presidential support scores is different from that used for 1956-2010, moreover, it is best to treat these two periods as separate datasets.

To test the influence of presidential support scores' on members' primary election returns, I simply regress

[4]It should be noted that correlations are fairly high–0.5 and above–in most years for both parties. But there are also a number of years where correlations for one or both parties are quite low. There appears to be no trend to the naked eye–in particular, support scores and ideal points do not seem to become more correlated over time–though it is perhaps worthwhile testing whether these lower correlations are the result of presidents taking more moderate positions.

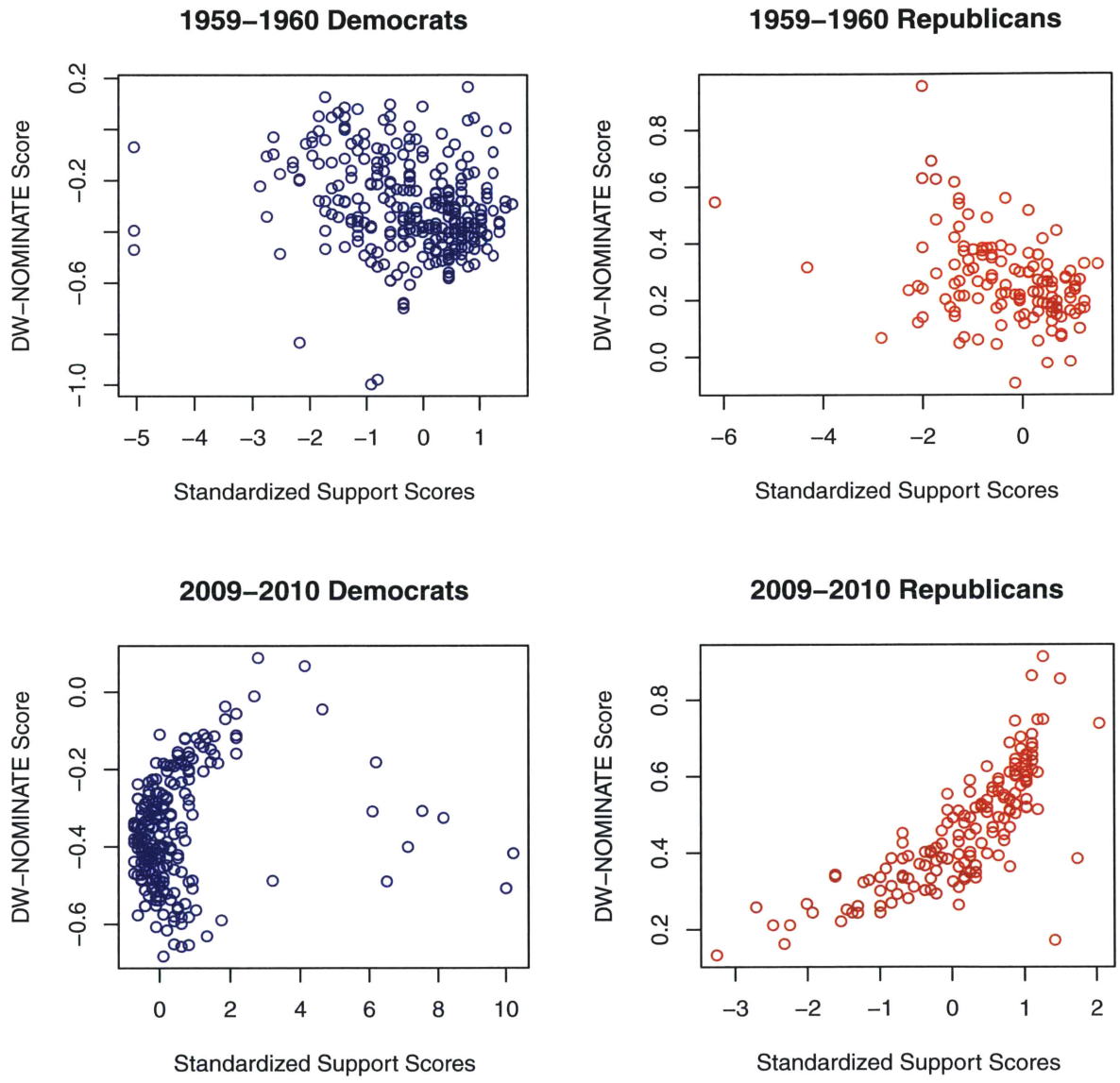

Figure 3.3: Standardized presidential support scores and DW-NOMINATE ideal points for members of each party in 1960 and 2010.

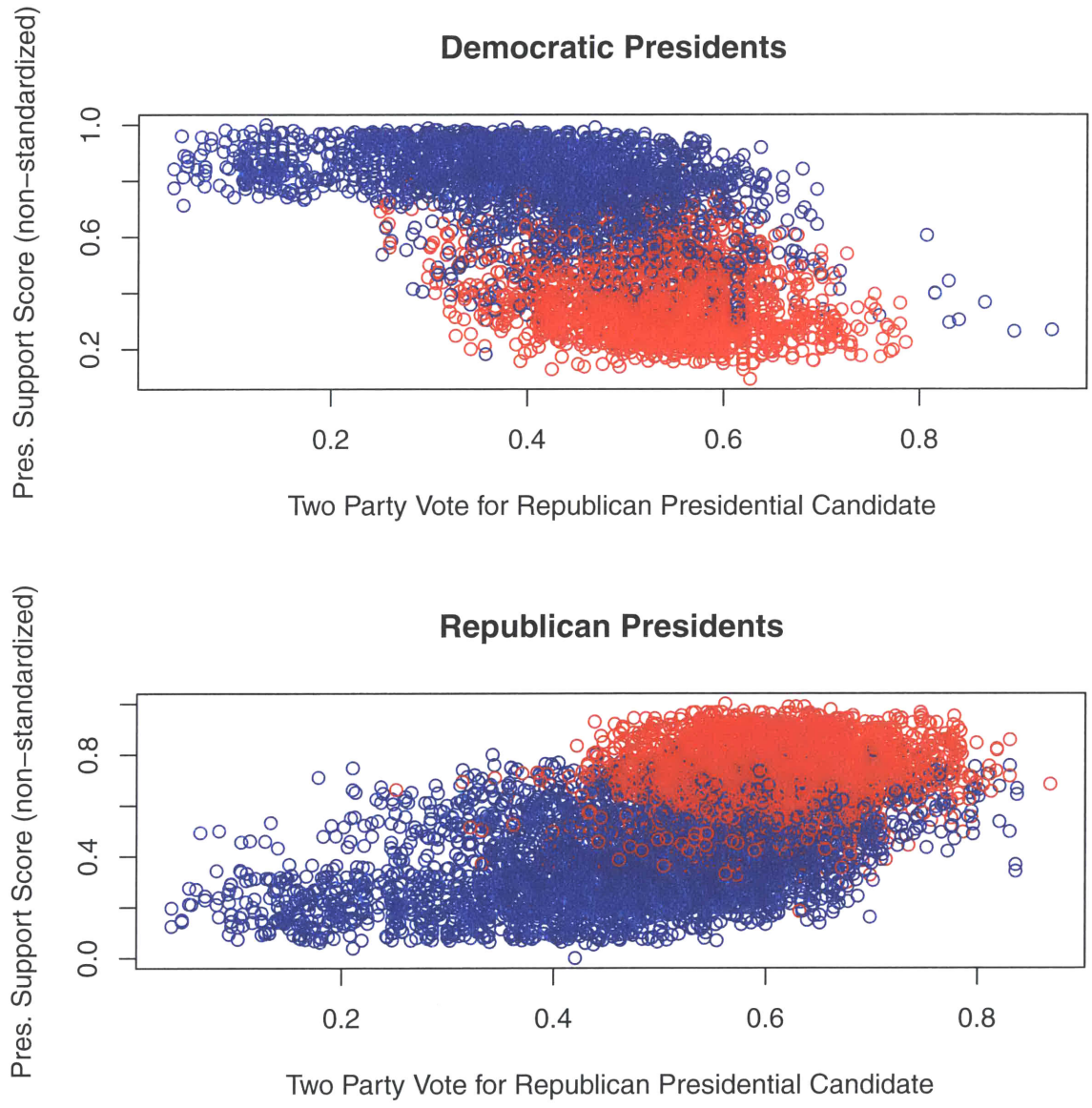

Figure 3.4: District partisanship and non-standardized presidential support scores for Democratic members (blue) and Republican members (red) under both Democratic and Republican presidents.

incumbents' primary margins on their support scores, controlling both for the district's partisanship and the member's ideal point score. This yields the following linear model:

$$PM_i = \alpha + \beta_1 PS_i + \beta_2 DP_i + \beta_3 NOM_i + \epsilon_i$$

where PM_i is the difference between the proportion of the vote in the primary election received by incumbent i and the proportion of the vote received by the highest-finishing challenger in the race[5]; PS_i is the percentage of all roll call votes cast before member i's primary election where the member took the same position as that preferred by President Trump; DP_i is the difference between the proportion of the 2016 presidential vote received by President Trump and by Secretary Clinton in district i, and NOM_i is the career ideal point score for incumbent i. All members not running for reelection are removed from the analysis, as are all incumbents from Pennsylvania.

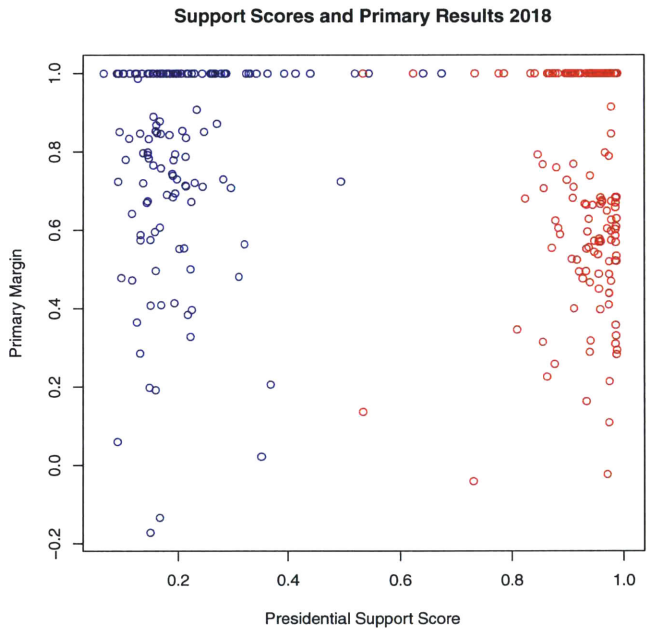

Figure 3.5: Presidential support scores and primary margins for incumbents running for renomination in 2018. Incumbents who did not see a primary challenger are given a primary margin score of 1.

The primary coefficient of interest is β_1, which measures the relationship between presidential support scores and primary margins. If the presidential loyalty hypothesis holds true, for Democrats we should

[5]For states that hold runoff primaries, I choose to include the incumbent's margin in the first round election rather than in the subsequent run-off, since many members did not need a run-off to decide their elections. In states with top-two or jungle primaries, I calculate the total votes cast for the incumbent and the highest finishing challenger from that incumbent's party, then measure the difference between percentage of party primary votes cast for each of those two candidates. As noted below, results are robust to the exclusion of these states, even though removing them drastically reduces sample sizes.

see a negative coefficient on β_1, indicating that Democratic incumbents who support President Trump less frequently perform better in their primary elections. For Republican incumbents we expect the opposite: a positive relationship between support scores and primary margins indicate that Republicans more supportive of the president do better in their primary elections. I present this basic bivariate relationship in Figure 3.5, with all incumbents who did not see primary challengers given a primary margin of 1. The figure suggests few obvious patterns regarding the bivariate relationship between presidential loyalty and members' primary fortunes. Particularly notable is the clustering of Republican House members with support scores between 0.9 and 1.0, while there is more variation among Democrats.

Table 1 assesses the fully specified model, with controls for members' ideal point scores and a measure of the partisanship of the district–or perhaps more accurately a measure of the district's support for President Trump. For ease of interpretation, I present estimates for Democrats and Republicans separately, and run the models including both all incumbents standing for reelection (columns 1 and 3) and only those facing a primary challenger (columns 2 and 4).

	Dependent variable:			
	2018 Incumbent Primary Margin			
	All D	D w/ Challengers	All R	R w/ Challengers
Support Score	0.288	−0.777	0.196	0.724**
	(0.353)	(0.642)	(0.300)	(0.307)
Net Trump Vote	0.413***	0.424**	−0.058	−0.032
	(0.124)	(0.181)	(0.127)	(0.119)
NOMINATE	−0.540	−0.146	0.020	0.134
	(0.336)	(0.494)	(0.148)	(0.153)
Constant	0.673***	0.879***	0.594*	−0.203
	(0.190)	(0.290)	(0.304)	(0.306)
Observations	143	74	181	88
R^2	0.099	0.080	0.003	0.065
Adjusted R^2	0.079	0.040	−0.014	0.032
Residual SE	0.248 (df = 139)	0.242 (df = 70)	0.269 (df = 177)	0.184 (df = 84)
F Statistic	5.07*** (df = 3; 139)	2.02 (df = 3; 70)	0.20 (df = 3; 177)	1.96 (df = 3; 84)
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3.1: Results of regression of 2018 incumbents' primary margins on their presidential support scores, the net proportion of the two-party vote for President Trump in the district in 2016, and the member's first dimension NOMINATE score. For ease of interpretation, regressions are split up by party; columns 1 and 3 include all incumbents running for renomination, while columns 2 and 4 include only those facing a primary challenger. Due to limited number of observations fixed effects for each state are not included.

The support for the presidential loyalty hypothesis is tentative at best for 2018. It holds little water

for Democrats, regardless of the subset of Democratic incumbents included in the model. Instead, we find that Democratic incumbents from districts less favorable to the party seem to perform better in primary elections, likely because Democratic voters were very strategic in 2018 about picking nominees who could win their general election races, which almost always meant choosing incumbents.[6] Among Republican incumbents who faced primary opponents, those whose voting records accorded more with policies the president preferred did perform better in their primary elections, but that effect disappears when we also include Republican incumbents not facing a primary challenger–when using the same set of independent variables to predict whether Republican incumbents saw primary challengers, Republicans with higher support scores were actually *more* likely to see primary challengers, though the coefficient was insignificant.

Nevertheless, this result provides some support for the hypothesis that for Republicans in 2018 support for the president did correlate with members' vote totals in primaries. Though we worry about the falsifiability of the hypothesis that presidential loyalty affects incumbents' primary election returns due to the endogeneity problem, a coefficient in the expected direction does provide support for that hypothesis. For column 4 above, that is, it is difficult to explain the positive and significant coefficient on Republican incumbents' support scores with a story of endogeneity. If anything, endogeneity creates a conservative bias, diminishing the size of the positive coefficient. Those members, for example, who are electorally vulnerable in primary elections–like Barbara Comstock (R-VA) or Martha Roby (R-AL) who had both been highly critical of candidate Trump during the 2016 election season–would likely be more supportive of the president's agenda to insulate themselves from primary threat. Although their loyalty may have improved their primary margins, because we cannot see what their margins had been if they did not vote so frequently with the president their relatively lackluster primary results despite high support scores would bias the coefficient of interest in a negative direction.

Each of these results is robust to a variety of different dependent variable subsets and specifications. For example, removing the three top-two/jungle primary states from the dataset changes little the coefficients in each of the four columns. Changing the dependent variable from members' primary margins to their proportion of the total vote similarly has little effect, although it does make the effect of support scores on the primary returns of all Democrats (column 1) significant, but *positive*, the opposite of the hypothesized effect.

The small sample sizes in each of the models, however, is cause for concern. The models do not explain much–note the small adjusted R^2 values and small F-statistics. In only one of the four models presented in Table 1 (column 1, all Democratic incumbents) do we find that the independent variables in the model reliably

[6]The two Democratic primary defeats in 2018 notably came in districts very favorable to the party–in fact, both winning challengers subsequently ran unopposed in the ensuing general election.

help us to predict incumbents' primary margins. With so few observations in each of the specifications, these models are, moreover, quite liable to significant influence from just a few points. Removing six points with sizable Cook's Distances, for example, reduces the coefficient on support scores in model four to just 0.468, where it falls short of statistical significance. Since many of those highly influential points are important cases in the 2018 Republican primaries–and since removing those points creates a new set incumbents with high degrees of influence on the subsequent model–the full model is still preferable. Nevertheless, these tests expose the limitations of this small sample size. For that reason, and to examine the effects of presidential loyalty on primary returns across a wider sweep of time, I turn in the next section to support scores and primary results from 1956 to 2010.

Presidential Support and Primary Fortunes, 1956-2010

As noted above, across the 28 congressional sessions and subsequent primary elections we have a much wider sample than the 324 incumbents with enough data for use in the tests for 2018. The pooled 1956-2010 sample includes support scores, ideal points, district presidential vote percentages, and primary margins for 10298 incumbents, in addition to metrics on the political experience levels of challengers beginning in the year 2000. The specification for the models used is largely the same as for 2018 but with the addition of a variable for the type of primary used in that state in the year in question, and fixed effects terms for the year and for the state. These fixed effects help to account for any yearly anti-incumbent trends that might not otherwise be captured and for any distinctive state effect hard to report and quantify through other variables.

$$PM_{ijk} = \beta_1 SPS_{ijk} + \beta_2 DP_{ijk} + \beta_3 NOM_{ijk} + beta_4 PT_{jk} + \alpha_j + \gamma_k + \epsilon_{ijk}$$

The variables in this specification are also operationalized slightly differently from those included in the 2018 models. PM_{ijk} again represents the difference between the vote for the incumbent representing district i in state j in year k and the proportion of the vote for the highest finishing challenger in that district. SPS_{ijk} is the *standardized, signed* presidential support score for incumbent i from state j in election year k. As discussed above, to understand how voters perceive an incumbent's roll call support for presidential policy preferences it is best to allow those scores to track to party averages for the year in question. Each incumbent's score is therefore measured in number of standard deviations away from the party mean, with the sign corrected so that positive scores indicate more support Republican president's preferences and less support for Democratic president's preferences. Similarly, the measure of district partisanship DP_{ijk} is signed

so that districts with larger values are more Republican-leaning districts, while those with smaller values are more supportive of Democrats; the variable again represents therefore the net vote for the Republican presidential candidate in district i in state j in the presidential election prior to election year k. NOM_{ijk} again represents the first dimension DW-NOMINATE score for the incumbent across his tenure in Congress, where conservatives are assigned positive scores and liberals negative ones, bounded at 1 and -1, respectively. The fourth independent variable PT_{jk} is a new one, indicating the type of primary held in state j in year k, with primaries classified into five types: open primaries, closed primaries, semi-open primaries, multiparty (top-two) primaries, and otherwise closed primaries that allow for same day party registration.

For ease of interpretation I again present results separately for Democrats and for Republicans in Table 2, with the full slate of Democrats and Republicans in columns 1 and 3, respectively, and only those who faced challengers in columns 2 and 4. Again, the coefficient on presidential support scores is of primary interest. The patterns on this coefficient are surprisingly familiar–while a member's support for the president's legislative priorities are unrelated to primary margins for Democrats, Republicans who are one standard deviation more supportive of a co-partisan's policy preferences–and less supportive of those of a Democratic president–see a boost of approximately two percentage points in their primary election margins. In 1956, then, for every 10.6 percentage point increase in a Republican incumbent's support of President Eisenhower's preferred policies the incumbent could expect a 2.1 percentage point increase in his margin in the ensuing primary, while in 2004 an incumbent would need to increase his support score by 8.0 percentage points to receive the same increase.

This positive and significant coefficient on presidential support scores for Republicans is also notable in contrast to the coefficients for district partisanship and ideal point scores. While members with more Republican-leaning presidential support scores tend to perform better in primaries, those from less Republican-leaning districts and those with less conservative voting records on the whole seem to fare worse in their primaries, all else held equal. Democratic incumbents, however, seem too to fare better in primaries when their districts lean more toward the opposing party. Two factors may be at the root of this finding–as theorized above, voters in more tenuous general election districts may strategically opt for the security of incumbents who have won elections in those districts rather than less well-tested challengers; alternatively, more qualified challengers may be hesitant to run in these districts because incumbency in these less partisan districts comes with less general election security, or because more ideologically motivated candidates do not want to have to cater to a more ideologically balanced general election constituency.

Controlling for members' ideal points helps to assuage some concerns about whether it is really members' ideology that is really driving primary constituents' voting decisions, rather than voters' reacting to the degree to which members support their party's leader, but doing so cannot completely undermine that

	1956-2010 Incumbent Primary Margin			
	All Dems	Dems Facing Challengers	All Reps	Reps Facing Challengers
Standardized Support Score	−0.0004	0.004	0.021***	0.022***
	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.003)	(0.007)
Net R Pres. Vote	0.154***	0.052*	−0.075***	−0.019
	(0.017)	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.083)
NOMINATE (First Dim.)	−0.054*	−0.045	−0.050*	−0.052
	(0.029)	(0.045)	(0.028)	(0.067)
Closed Primary	0.009	0.004	0.055***	0.055
	(0.018)	(0.031)	(0.016)	(0.038)
Semi-open Primary	0.022	0.016	0.067***	0.064
	(0.024)	(0.045)	(0.023)	(0.052)
Multiparty Primary	0.007	−0.099	0.063	0.202**
	(0.042)	(0.089)	(0.039)	(0.094)
Modified Closed Primary	0.007	0.048	0.021	0.024
	(0.020)	(0.035)	(0.020)	(0.056)
Unknown Primary Type	0.057**	0.073*	0.134***	0.275***
	(0.027)	(0.044)	(0.029)	(0.067)
Constant	0.843***	0.493***	0.946***	0.405***
	(0.036)	(0.062)	(0.035)	(0.113)
Observations	5,944	2,070	4,354	913
R^2	0.104	0.195	0.093	0.227
Adjusted R^2	0.092	0.162	0.075	0.153
Residual Std. Error	0.260 (df = 5859)	0.246 (df = 1988)	0.213 (df = 4269)	0.244 (df = 832)
F Statistic	8.13*** (df = 84; 5859)	5.95*** (df = 81; 1988)	5.22*** (df = 84; 4269)	3.06*** (df = 80; 832)
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3.2: Results of regression of incumbents' primary margins on presidential support scores and listed control variables. Fixed effects for state and year included.

hypothesis. There are two ways to interpret the effect of presidential support scores–on the one hand, voters may be reacting to the fact that the president expressed support for the legislation in question, while on the other, that the president took a stand on the bill may simply mean that it is consequential enough to be noticed by voters as well. If this latter interpretation is true, then the observed effect of presidential support on primary margins may simply be an artifact of the fact that voters only notice the ideological content of members votes on bills that meet a certain threshold of importance. That the effect of members' ideal points is itself significant in two of the four models casts doubt on this interpretation, particularly given the fact that its sign is opposite that for support scores for both Republican-subsetted models. It seems rather unlikely that Republican primary voters would prefer more liberal policies on legislation where the president has not enunciated a position, while otherwise preferring more conservative policies on those more major bills for which the president happens to have taken a side.

The findings reported in Table 2 leave a number of other worthwhile questions. Why, for example, does presidential loyalty seem to matter more for Republicans than for Democrats? Might the differences between parties instead be a manifestation of some omitted variable, like which party controls the presidency, or which party controls Congress? In Table 3 I add a model specification where data is subsetted to Democratic incumbents when a Democratic president is in office, Democrats when a Republican president is office, Republicans when a Republican president is in office, and Republicans when a Democratic president is in office. Democrats' support for the president–regardless of the presidents party–seems to bring about better results in subsequent primary elections, while Republicans fare better when supporting a president of their own party, but their support for a Democratic president has little effect on their primary fate.

Also worthwhile could be inquiries into how the effects of presidential loyalty change according to primary type, or whether loyalty's influence changes in more marginal districts might also yield interesting results that help us further understand the nuances of how presidential support affects members' primary election efforts. These sorts of efforts are, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this chapter.

Instead, I focus on how the effect of presidential support on primary elections varies over time. If presidents' abilities to influence members' voting behaviors has fundamentally changed as elections have become more nationalized and politics more polarized, then we should expect that the effect of presidential support on members' primary margins has increased over the period between 1956 and 2010. Perhaps more accurately, we should expect that the effect covaries with the degree of polarization in presidential approval–as partisans become more polarized in their evaluations of presidents, they should be less willing to vote for incumbents who are less supportive of presidents from their own party or more supportive of presidents from the opposing party.

To do so, I break up the dataset into periods corresponding with each presidents' time in office so as

	1956-2010 Incumbent Primary Margin			
	Ds w/ D President	Ds w/ R President	Rs w/ R President	Rs w/ D President
Standardized Support Score	−0.020***	0.019***	0.024***	−0.003
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.008)
Net R Pres. Vote	0.164***	0.128***	−0.104***	−0.011
	(0.029)	(0.022)	(0.039)	(0.043)
NOMINATE (First Dim.)	−0.005	−0.078**	−0.107***	0.132***
	(0.051)	(0.037)	(0.035)	(0.051)
Closed Primary	0.003	0.019	0.083***	0.020
	(0.028)	(0.025)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Semi-open Primary	0.060	0.025	0.094***	0.039
	(0.044)	(0.031)	(0.029)	(0.040)
Multiparty Primary	0.011	−0.016	0.079	0.034
	(0.052)	(0.085)	(0.087)	(0.044)
Modified Closed Primary	0.020	0.004	−0.015	0.030
	(0.031)	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.030)
Unknown Primary Type	−0.065	0.080**	0.153***	0.068
	(0.063)	(0.032)	(0.036)	(0.064)
Constant	0.922***	0.829***	1.044***	0.873***
	(0.064)	(0.042)	(0.046)	(0.048)
Observations	2,207	3,737	2,701	1,653
R^2	0.137	0.103	0.102	0.129
Adjusted R^2	0.111	0.085	0.077	0.093
Residual Std. Error	0.257 (df = 2140)	0.260 (df = 3663)	0.217 (df = 2627)	0.203 (df = 1586)
F Statistic	5.16*** (df = 66; 2140)	5.77*** (df = 73; 3663)	4.10*** (df = 73; 2627)	3.55*** (df = 66; 1586)
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3.3: Results of regression of primary margins on indicated independent variables, with fixed effects by state and year. Data subsetted according to incumbents' party and party of the president.

to control for presidency-specific effects but also to ensure larger samples for more effective inference. This yields eleven separate periods for comparison, with the number of elections in each period ranging from one to four. For each period, I regress members' primary margins on the same set of independent variables as above–presidential support scores, district partisanship, members' ideal points, primary election type, and fixed effects for state and year. The coefficient of interest–the relationship between members' support scores and their primary margins–for each period is shown in Figure 3.6, along with 95 percent confidence intervals for each estimate. If the hypothesis that the effects of presidential support scores on primary margins has grown over time was true, we would expect to see the coefficients for Democrats and Republicans diverge in recent years, with negative effects for Democrats, and positive effects for Republicans. That clearly is not the case here, nor is it the case that these coefficients correspond well with partisan approval of the president. Democrats register for Jimmy Carter their lowest approval rating for a co-partisan president, for example, but the coefficient on presidential support scores during the Carter presidency is the largest in the correct direction of all co-partisan presidents. These results are not just a spurious outgrowth of the selected periodization of the data, moreover: a model that interacts the variable for presidential support with a simple time counter finds no significant change in the effect of presidential support scores on primary scores over time. Notably, for Republicans, the coefficient on the interaction is negative–the opposite direction of that expected if presidential loyalty matters more to primary voters today–although it falls far short of significance.

Conclusion

This chapter examines whether presidents are able to pressure members of their own party to vote as they would prefer during roll call votes because of the potential consequences to members in primary elections if they are not loyal to the president. When presidents take a stand on legislation, the theory suggests, partisans–and particularly primary constituents–notice, and punish or reward members accordingly in the subsequent primary elections. Testing this theory is difficult because potential endogeneity in the relationship between members' presidential support scores and their primary fortunes tends to bias any such relationship in a conservative direction; we find, however, at least tentative evidence that greater loyalty to the president among co-partisans–and disloyalty among opposing partisans–is predictive of larger electoral margins in the members' subsequent primary election, particularly for Republicans. Importantly, these results do seem to capture presidential influence, independent both of the effect of members' ideology on other roll call votes and the partisan balance within their districts. Nevertheless, this effect does not seem to have changed over time, although it is difficult to tell whether that lack of change results from the reciprocal relationship

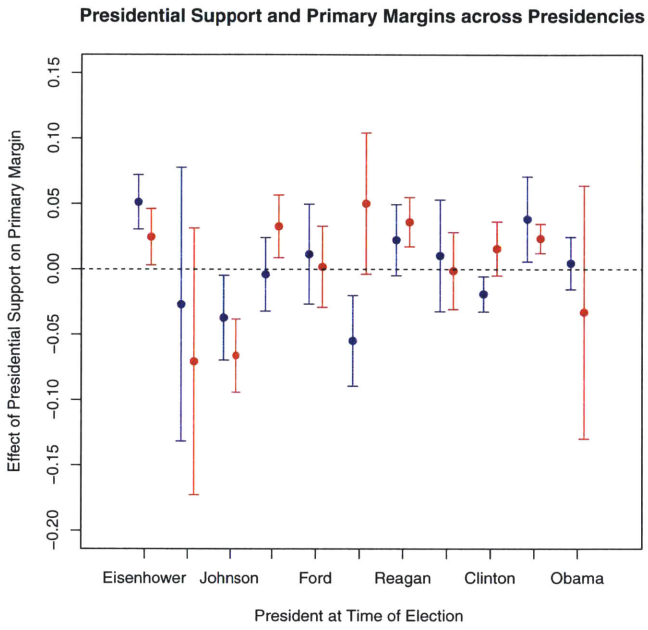

Figure 3.6: Effects of presidential support on incumbent's primary margins in the ensuing election, pooled across presidencies. Recall that presidential support scores are standardized, with signs also corrected so that a positive score indicates more Republican-leaning voting behavior on bills where the president has indicated a preference.

between members' vulnerability and their roll call behavior, or whether the addition of more recent elections would influence the rate of change of those effects. Attempts to remove that endogeneity, however, seem fundamentally flawed, with few ways forward. We are left therefore, with the conclusion that Republicans generally at least do seem to have some incentive to remain loyal to their presidents–and perhaps disloyal to Democratic presidents–while Democrats are rewarded for loyalty to both Republican and Democratic presidents. If this is the case, then primary elections seem only a minor contributor to the divergence of presidential support scores as seen in Figure 3.1, and we must look elsewhere for fuller explanations of that phenomenon.

Chapter 4

Presidential Approval, Congressional Elections, and the Consequences for Congressional Roll-Cal Voting

Ever since the publication of David Mayhew's *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (2004 [1974]) scholars of congressional decision-making have been well-trained to interpret members' actions through the lens of their electoral goals. Members take positions on issues, claim credit for federal funds allocated to the district, and cast roll call votes all with one eye on how those actions will affect how potential voters in their districts perceive them. But as numerous studies of those elections (e.g., Erikson and Wright 2009) have highlighted, voters do not evaluate congressional incumbents–or candidates more broadly–solely on the basis of their individual records, accomplishments, and policy platforms. For good reason, voters frequently take candidates' party affiliations into account when heading to the polls. Not only does members' partisanship serve as a valuable heuristic for voters to learn about individual members' likely actions in office, but, in voting for a member with a party label, voters impact which party holds control of government.

Neither Mayhew nor those whose work descended from his were ignorant of this fact. Marginal members, Mayhew (2004 [1974], 28) wrote, "have an obvious problem; to a substantial degree they are at the mercy of national partisan swings." But, Mayhew suggested, since national swings were far more dependent on the president's actions than Congress's, and individual members faced substantial collective action problems in attempting to alter the public's conception of the president, the best approach for election conscious members was to ensure that their votes correlated with the opinions of their own constituencies: "All in

all the rational way for marginal congressmen to deal with national trends is to ignore them, to treat them as acts of God over which they can exercise no control. It makes much more sense to devote resources to things over which they think they can have some control" (2004 [1974], 32). Douglas Arnold's elaboration of Mayhew's thesis, sixteen years later, expressed similar doubt about the degree to which individual members worried about the party's reputation:

> How much should legislators worry about their own policy positions and their own connections with policy effects, and how much should they worry about their party's positions and their party's performance in office? If the question is which of these four factors has the greatest impact on congressional elections, then the award may well go to the parties' general stands on the issues. Most voters support the legislative candidates of their favorite party, and for some of them, this choice reflects the differences between the parties. Unfortunately, a legislator can do virtually nothing to affect her party's general stance. Although the parties do change their positions over time, the impact of a single legislator on that change is necessarily small. A Republican incumbent from a Democratic district just has to live with the fact that many of her constituents prefer Democrats, for she can do little to make Republicans as a class more appealing (1990, 63).

Mayhew–and to some extent Arnold as well–wrote in a fundamentally different era of congressional elections, however, as has become increasingly evident over the past two decades. This paper examines the extent of those changes, particularly in an effort to connect the reputation of the president to the set of considerations members of Congress must incorporate as they make their decisions about how to vote on legislation that makes it to the floor of their respective chambers. My findings widely mirror those of others who have examined the nationalization of congressional elections (e.g., Jacobson 2015)–over the past half-century presidential approval has become increasingly correlated with both aggregate congressional outcomes and individual voting patterns, to the exclusion at least to some extent of members' individual characteristics, platforms, and voting histories. The upshot, I suggest, is that compared to members in Mayhew's time, members today have significant added incentives to consider how their votes will impact the president's reputation, and how that reputation will affect not only their own election returns, but also the returns of their fellow partisans. Members of Congress may have little ability to individually affect the fortunes of a president, but in the present day, when they do, the consequences can be substantial.

There are a number of reasons why we would expect the president's reputation to influence voters' decisions and the ultimate outcomes of congressional elections. Most directly, congressional elections allow voters the opportunity to express their approval of the president in a formal and consequential manner by altering the composition of the government. As James Bryce suggested shortly after the turn of the Twentieth Century, congressional elections allow the voting public the opportunity to "express their approval or disapproval of [the president's] conduct by sending up another House of Representatives which may support or oppose the policy he has followed" (1913; as quoted in Kernell 1977, 49). Others (e.g., Alesina, Londregan,

and Rosenthal 1993) have argued that midterm elections in particular allow voters the opportunity to balance the government, particularly by changing the party in control of Congress to reflect their evaluations of the job the president has been doing. When the president's reputation is good, voters should seek to make it easier for her to pass her preferred policies by installing compatible legislators in Congress; when the president is more widely condemned, it is of course natural that voters should attempt to prevent as much of the president's agenda from being implemented by handing control of Congress to the party more likely to actively oppose that agenda. Gary Jacobson's look at polls in 2018 that asked why voters they decided to vote the way they did highlight the importance of the president and control of Congress in their vote: across 22 polls, 37 percent of respondents in 2018 claimed they were casting their vote at least in part to oppose the president, while 26 percent claimed they were casting their vote to support President Trump. The 37 percent who cast a vote in opposition to the president represents the highest figure across the twelve midterms for which Jacobson supplies data; so too was the total of 63 percent of the voters directly reacting to the president in their voting decision. Similarly, across five polls Jacobson found that 69 percent of voters claimed to have cast their votes so as to affect control of Congress, by far the highest number in his sample of midterms since 1998 (Jacobson 2019, 23).

We should also expect that, as the central figure in the American political system, the president's reputation significantly affects her party's reputation, and, therefore, what Downs (1957) termed voters' "expected party differential." Voters likely derive from their evaluations of the president both approximations of the party's ability more broadly to govern effectively and a sense of the policy priorities and stances of the party more broadly. In this sense, then, the president serves as a valuable heuristic for voters to be able to make quick, effective judgments about the party and what it stands for. Even if presidential approval has little causal influence over voter's evaluations of the party as a whole, it may serve as a valuable proxy for studies that make use of party reputation, a concept that is measured far more infrequently. Although presidential approval may be subject to far more variation than party reputation, the two likely move in concert.

Finally, political actors are themselves very aware of the effects of the president's popularity, which fundamentally affects their behavior. Lublin (1994) and Jacobson (1989), among others, find that presidential approval strongly influences the likelihood that an experienced challenger will emerge for a congressional incumbent. They speculate too that it is not just challengers who are cognizant of presidential approval ratings–individuals seeking to maximize the effect of their donations, for example, will likely wait until conditions are better to contribute to challengers' campaigns.

As the parties in government have both grown further from each other and become more internally homogeneous, moreover, we have good reason to expect these mechanisms connecting presidents and their copartisans in Congress to have become stronger. Not only do party labels today convey more information

to voters more about who individual legislators are, but those labels also become more meaningful for voters expectations of who controls the government. On legislation where the president has taken a stand, for example, members of Congress today vote with their copartisans far more frequently than they did half a century ago; voters seeking to use their vote as a referendum on the president can be far more confident that the party label next to a candidate's name indicates whether that candidate will be supportive of or opposed to the policies the president advances. Under these circumstances, partisan control of Congress becomes all the more important for determining the extent to which the president's agenda will be implemented.

The goal of this chapter, however, is not to adjudicate between or examine the mechanisms through which presidential approval might affect congressional election outcomes. It is instead simply to prove that presidential approval does have a substantial impact on those outcomes, and that the effect of presidential approval has grown as elections have nationalized and the parties in Washington have polarized, with the necessary consequence that voter's place correspondingly less emphasis on members' individual characteristics when making their voting decisions in congressional elections.

As discussed in Chapter 1, if individual members and party leaders are aware of the impact of presidential approval on their own election results and on the party's likelihood of capturing the chamber or other branches of government, they should work to manipulate the public's approval of the president wherever possible. There is ample evidence, moreover, that members believe that the passage of the legislation supported by the president has a substantial effect on how the public perceives the president. Mann and Ornstein (2012, IX), for example, offer the story of how in 2010 a number of Republican senators who had formerly supported and even cosponsored the Conrad-Gregg resolution to create a deficit-reduction task force suddenly pulled their support for the bill once President Obama declared himself in favor of it. Frances Lee (2009, 74) relates that Karl Rove often complained that Democrats opposed items on George W. Bush's agenda not because they disagreed with the policies in principle, but because they wanted to deny Bush legislative victories for which he could claim credit with the public. Although individual members of Congress may find, as Mayhew suggests, that they can do little to affect the program of the presidency, members who are close to the pivot point–those especially targeted by presidential persuasion efforts and public appeals–are in a far more potent position, where their votes may indeed make a substantial difference to how the president is perceived by the public. Party leadership only increases that pressure on potentially pivotal members. In an era of evenly balanced, hyper-competitive parties, party leaders recognize that small changes can have dramatic results for which party controls government, and are therefore significantly incentivized to prevent their copartisans from handing the opposing side a victory.

I begin by testing the effect of presidential approval in perhaps the most simplified setting possible: aggregate congressional outcomes. Models of congressional elections have long found that presidential approval

has a substantial effect on those elections' outcomes; I find that influence to have grown over the past 50 years. I then turn to examining the impact of presidential approval on individual congressional voting decisions. As expected, I find that presidential approval correlates highly with voters' choices in congressional elections, controlling for, among other things, voter and incumbent partisanship and whether the incumbent is running for another term. Perhaps more importantly, the relationship between approval and individual voting has grown substantially over the past half-century, even when controlling for voters' partisanship and other important factors. These findings, I conclude, suggest that members of Congress have far greater incentive today to cast roll call votes that will have the desired effect of either harming or promoting the president's image among the general public, providing party members with a greater collective impetus to overcome the problems that might hinder their ability to influence the president's popularity.

Approval and Aggregate Outcomes

In this section, I examine a simple congressional election forecasting model to determine whether the effect of presidential approval on aggregate congressional election outcomes has increased over time or whether the effect has grown when the two parties are more ideologically polarized. Congressional election models–whether used for forecasting or not–have long incorporated presidential approval and consistently found approval to be predictive of aggregate results, regardless of whether modelers are examining the ultimate distribution of votes or the distribution of seats. Tufte (1975) was perhaps the first to explicitly incorporate presidential popularity into his account of midterm congressional election results. In so doing, Tufte broke from the tradition that sought to explain outcomes largely through the "surge and decline" of who participated in presidential year congressional elections and midterm elections (Campbell 1960), and adding to the work of Kramer (1971), who found that short term economic fluctuations had a significant effect on the fortunes of the incumbent president's party. Examining just eight midterm elections between 1938 and 1970, Tufte nevertheless found a statistically significant positive effect of approval on the normalized vote gain or loss for the president's party, such that a 10 point change in the president's approval corresponded to approximately a 1.3 percentage point gain in the vote share of the president's party.

Ever since, others have consistently found positive effects for approval on congressional outcomes, even when holding economic factors–which are presumably reflected to some degree in presidential approval–constant. Kernell (1977) found that disapproval of presidential performance was highly predictive of defections by the president's copartisans in terms of their congressional votes, to a greater extent than approval of the president was predictive of defections among opposing partisans. Lewis-Beck and Rice (1984), examining 16 elections between 1950 and 1980, found that an approximately one percentage point drop in

the president's popularity in May of the election year corresponded to nearly one additional seat lost by the president's party in the corresponding House elections. James Campbell (1985), examining 10 midterms between 1946 and 1982, found that combining the short-term forces of economic fluctuations and presidential popularity with the structural surge-and-decline and coattail forces into one model was far more accurate than focusing solely on one or the other; even when controlling for the percentage of vote received by the president in the previous presidential year election, a midterm gain of approval of one percent for the president predicted a one seat gain for the party in the House of Representatives. More recent models continue to make presidential approval central to their predictions. Tien and Lewis-Beck (2018) have continued to offer a simple update of Tufte's referendum model, predicting seat loss for the president's party on change in real disposable income, presidential approval, and whether the election was a midterm. Their model accounts for approximately 60 percent of the variance in aggregate House results. Although many forecasters today have focused their efforts on predicting individual races and aggregating up to the national level, this does not mean that presidential approval has been completely ignored. Campbell (2018), for example, bases his "Seats-in-Trouble" model largely on individual race ratings from the Cook Political Report in August of the election year, but updates those ratings using presidential approval. Similarly, The Economist's 2018 forecast model uses two separate stages, with the first estimating the national popularity of the two parties–using presidential approval in part–and the second applying that estimate of popularity to individual districts.

Notably, these forecasts all stipulate that the effect of presidential approval should be constant over time. But, as noted above, we have good reason to believe that presidential approval should be more consequential today–when the two parties in Washington have dramatically polarized–than it was for many past elections. With a greater number of data points, moreover, we now have a greater ability to recognize these sorts of changes than when Tufte or Lewis-Beck and Rice were first crafting their models.

Model

Although, as noted above, congressional forecasting models have become significantly more complex and have incorporated a large number of variables, I opt here for a simple model based largely in part on the Tufte/Lewis-Beck referendum models. There are two good reasons for this decision. First, and most importantly, unlike most models of congressional elections today, my primary goal is not predictive accuracy of the final outcome. It is instead the more traditional goal in political science of assessing a theory about the factors that influence a particular dependent variable–in this case, presidential approval and aggregate election outcomes. Adding variables would likely help with that predictive power, but would muddy the waters as we attempt to examine the impact of approval on outcomes. Since I am attempting to forecast

aggregate election results over a relatively short period, moreover, for which we have consistent polling data on presidential approval, only 38 data points are available. The addition of variables that might make predictions more accurate would therefore ultimately reduce the power available to predict significant effects on our independent variables of interest. Secondly, we might expect that presidential approval influences many of the other variables that could help with the predictive accuracy of the model. Presidential approval, for example, likely significantly affects the answers respondents give when polled on the generic congressional ballot; controlling for the generic ballot, then, would block estimation of the effect that approval has on outcomes through that backdoor path. I do include one economic indicator, one-year change in real disposable income, however, because economic factors are likely causally prior to presidential approval and because members of Congress seeking to affect the president's approval ratings likely do not do so through changes to the growth of the national economy.

I start with the basic model (equation 1.1), which estimates the aggregate vote share gained by the president's party over elections from 1946 to 2018 with a measure of economic conditions, the president's approval, and whether the election is a midterm or presidential year election. I include this model largely for comparison with Tufte, and to show the effect of presidential approval when held constant throughout the period of study.

$$v(P)_k = \alpha + \beta_1 E_k + \beta_2 A_k + \beta_3 M_k + \epsilon_k \tag{1.1}$$

where $v(P)_k$ is the share of votes gained by the president's party in all nationwide House races during election year k, E_k is a measure of economic conditions, the one year change in RDI per capita, A_k is the national approval of the president, using the last Gallup poll before election k, and M_k is a dummy for whether the election is a midterm election or presidential year election.

As a first cut, to measure the change in the effect of approval over the period of study, in equation 1.2 I include a simple time counter (T_k), corresponding to the session of Congress preceding each congressional election, and interact presidential approval with that variable for time:

$$v(P)_k = \alpha + \beta_1 E_k + \beta_2 A_k + \beta_3 M_k + \beta_4 T_k + \beta_5 A_k \cdot T_k + \epsilon_k \tag{1.2}$$

The true hypothesis of interest, however, is that approval varies not with time, but with the level of polarization in Washington–that is, as polarization grows and the parties become more homogeneous, presidential approval should tell us more about voter's decisions in congressional elections. In equation 1.3, I therefore replace the time counter with a variable for the level of political polarization in Washington at during the congressional session immediately preceding the election in question (P_k):

$$v(P)_k = \alpha + \beta_1 E_k + \beta_2 A_k + \beta_3 M_k + \beta_4 P_k + \beta_5 A_k \cdot P_k + \epsilon_k \tag{1.3}$$

I offer two different specifications of the dependent variable $v(P)_k$. The first mirrors Tufte's measure of the vote gain or loss for the president's party relative to the two party vote share for the party normalized over the past eight congressional elections (both on and off year). The second, the simple vote share difference from the preceding election, takes factors that linger from one election to the next, like incumbency, into consideration.[1] Finally, I run the models using a compromise between the two–the vote gain for the president's party relative to the party's share of the vote over only the last four elections. I also include three different specifications for the polarization variable P_k: the ideological distance between the two parties in the House, measured using the parties' median DW-NOMINATE scores; the ideological distance between the president and the opposing party in the House, again using DW-NOMINATE; and the difference between the two parties' mean presidential support scores in each Congress, using data from Lewis et al. (2019).[2] The three polarization measures track well with the time variable, although there is more variation in presidential polarization, as Figure 4.1 shows.[3]

Results

Table 1 presents the baseline specification, as laid out in equation 1.1, with no interaction terms or variables measuring time or polarization. As expected, the coefficient on presidential approval are significant and positive in all three models, with a 10 percentage point increase in the president's popularity corresponding to a gain of 0.89 percentage points for her party in the national vote share compared to the previous election, and just a gain of 0.66 percentage points in comparison to the average for the party from the previous eight elections. These coefficients appear surprisingly small at first blush, but the effect may not seem quite as minuscule when we recognize that the average gain or loss for the president's party from any election to the next is just 3.01 percentage points, and just 2.42 points from the party's average over the past eight

[1] Throughout the tests I check for autocorrelation in the time series data using the Durbin-Watson statistic. I find significant autocorrelation only for those models that use vote gain relative to the previous election. The autocorrelation in all regressions with vote gain from the previous election, however, is negative, and so I do not calculate and report heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors for these models. Since models with the other dependent variables report similar results, moreover, we can feel fairly comfortable with these results even without correcting for autocorrelation.

[2] For ease of interpretation, I multiply all polarization scores by 100, so that NOMINATE scores run on a scale from -100 to 100 and support scores from 0 to 100. Note that presidential support scores are only available at this time through 2014, and that support scores were calculated using a different procedure prior to 1956. I therefore include only the years 1956-2014 when using the two support score based variables.

[3] I also consider as an alternative measure for polarization the difference between average approval ratings of the president from Republicans and Democrats. This variable implies a slightly different theory about the relationship between polarization and congressional vote choice, where a vote against the president is better seen as an effort to praise or condemn the president, rather than a decision made for more purposive reasons like denying the president control over other branches of government. Unfortunately, I was only able to obtain data on yearly polarization in presidential approval going back to the presidency of George H. W. Bush, and so these tests are not included here.

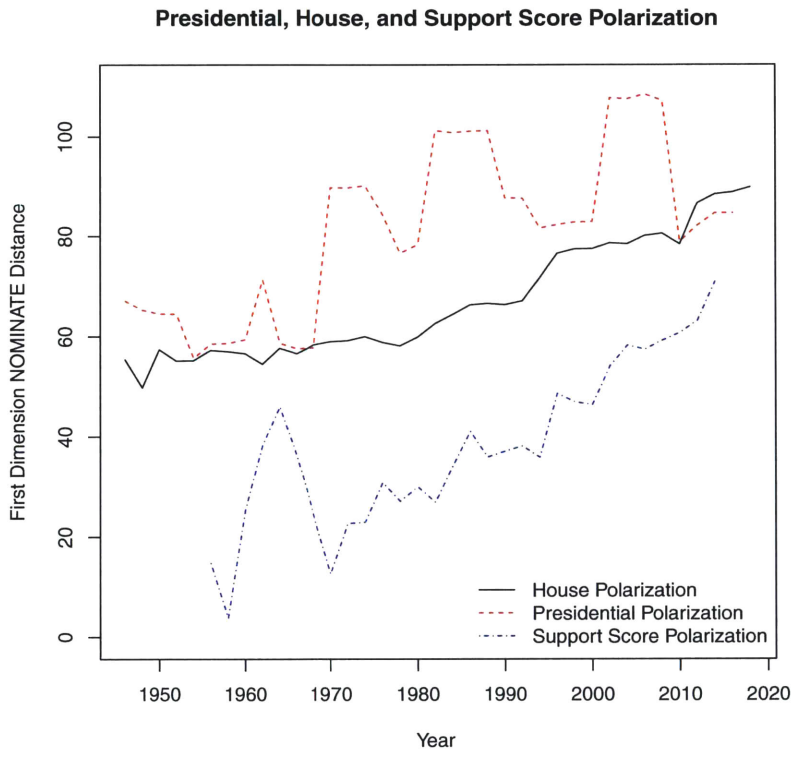

Figure 4.1: House polarization, presidential polarization, and polarization in the parties presidential support scores from 1946 to 2018. Note that the possible range for the two NOMINATE based measures is from 0 to 200, while for the support score metric the possible range lies only from 0 to 100.

elections.

	Dependent variable:		
	8 Election Normalized	Single Election Gain	4 Election Normalized
	(1)	(2)	(3)
RDI Change	0.578***	0.369*	0.548***
	(0.193)	(0.217)	(0.183)
Approval	0.066*	0.089**	0.079**
	(0.035)	(0.040)	(0.034)
Midterm	−1.111	−4.182***	−1.438*
	(0.760)	(0.855)	(0.723)
Constant	−5.224***	−4.315**	−6.007***
	(1.769)	(1.991)	(1.682)
Observations	37	37	37
R^2	0.374	0.525	0.428
Adjusted R^2	0.317	0.482	0.376
Residual Std. Error (df = 33)	2.280	2.565	2.168
F Statistic (df = 3; 33)	6.57***	12.16***	8.22***
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4.1: Results of regression of presidential vote gain or loss (with exact calculation method specified in column headers) on economic conditions, presidential approval, and whether the election was a midterm (1) or presidential year (0) election. Both dependent and independent variables are all specified as percentages with the exception of the dummy for midterms.

The other terms in the model come out with the expected signs, and, generally, levels of significance. A one point change in real disposable income consistently predicts better election returns for the president's party. For example, in a midterm election year with presidential approval at 50 percent, a change from a zero percent growth rate in RDI to a one percent growth rate lowers the percent of the vote lost by the president's party as opposed to the previous election from 4.047 percentage points to 3.678 percentage points.[4] The coefficient on midterm elections is significant when compared to the previous election, as we should expect–when the election is a midterm, all else held constant, we expect the president's party to lose 4.315 percentage points as compared to the previous presidential year election. We should also expect the coefficients on midterm to be negative using the two normalized dependent variables, but, as we see, it should not be as large as when only comparing to a single previous election. This is the case because when we use the difference between the current election and the average of previous elections, we include both midterm and presidential year elections. We should still expect the president's party to earn fewer votes,

[4]Although we expect change in RDI and presidential approval to be related, the bivariate correlation is rather small (0.23), and an OLS regression finds the relationship short of statistical significance at the $p < .1$ level.

however, in midterm elections as compared to the average that includes both on and off year elections, and more seats in presidential year elections as compared to that average.

Also notable in the model are the adjusted R^2 and the F Statistics. Both figures are significantly large in column (2), where the dependent variable is specified as the vote gain or loss for the president's party as compared to the single previous election. Because these figures suggest that we can be confident that the single election gain is the dependent variable we can predict most accurately–likely due to the way it captures incumbency and other temporary effects–I only report models that use the single election gain as the dependent variable from this point forward. Models including the other two options as the dependent variable offer similar results on the coefficients of interest, however, and are discussed where appropriate.

In Table 2 I present the results from regressions based on the specifications outlined in equation 1.2 (column (1)) and equation 1.3 (columns (2)-(4)). As the table shows, when we add interaction terms for time or polarization we see important changes in the effect that presidential approval has on the share of the vote won by the president's party. Across all four models we find the expected relationship for the interaction term, as the passage of time, an increase in House polarization, presidential polarization, and polarization of the two parties average support scores each strengthens the relationship between approval and the change in the share of the two party vote for the president's party. Consider, for example, the effect of approval in Table 2, column (2) in comparison with the effect of approval in Table 1, column (2). The coefficients in column (2) suggest that only when the party medians in the House are approximately 44.37 points apart from each other does a growth in presidential approval translate to a gain in the voting share for the president's party, while at the mean level of House polarization over the period of study (66.83 points), a 10 point change in the president's popularity corresponds to a change of 0.96 percentage points in her party's vote share.

As the table indicates, however, each of the estimates on the interaction term that is central to the hypothesis falls short of statistical significance. Indeed, our confidence that adding approval to the model at all may also be somewhat low: for three of these four models an F-test comparing a restricted model without the two approval terms to the unrestricted models with approval and the interaction term included is significant, but only at the $p < .1$ level (see row "Approval F" in Table 2).

It seems likely that the lack of confidence in the interaction term's significance is largely the result of the limited power permitted by the sample size, however. Across each of the four specifications shown in Table 2, and eight additional specifications using the independent variables listed in Table 2 and the other dependent variables as outlined in Table 1, we consistently find a positive effect of the interaction of approval and polarization or time. This result holds up too when we add other independent variables to the model, like whether the president who is the subject of the approval question will still be in office, or an interaction

	Dependent variable:			
	Single Election Vote Gain			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
RDI Change	0.3419	0.3538	0.3467	0.3298
	(0.2207)	(0.2191)	(0.2292)	(0.2923)
Approval	−0.2835	−0.1894	−0.0167	0.0186
	(0.3378)	(0.2365)	(0.1734)	(0.1322)
Midterm	−4.2413***	−4.1462***	−4.2537***	−3.4604***
	(0.8662)	(0.8630)	(0.9227)	(0.9208)
Previous Cong. Num.	−0.1953			
	(0.1704)			
Approval*Prev. Cong.	0.0039			
	(0.0036)			
House Polarization		−0.2110		
		(0.1740)		
Approval*House Pol.		0.0043		
		(0.0036)		
Pres. Polarization			−0.0603	
			(0.1114)	
Approval*Pres. Pol.			0.0013	
			(0.0022)	
Support Score Pol.				−0.1016
				(0.1516)
Approval*SS Pol.				0.0021
				(0.0029)
Constant	14.2470	9.5412	0.5503	−1.4745
	(16.3165)	(11.6099)	(9.2205)	(7.0988)
Observations	37	37	36	30
R^2	0.544	0.547	0.518	0.531
Adjusted R^2	0.471	0.473	0.438	0.433
Residual Std. Error	2.592 (df=31)	2.586 (df=31)	2.666 (df=30)	2.452 (df=24)
F Statistic	7.4*** (df=5; 31)	7.5*** (df=5; 31)	6.5*** (df =5; 30)	5.4*** (df=5; 24)
Approval F	2.97* (df=2; 31)	3.09* (df=2; 31)	2.36 (df=2; 30)	2.73* (df=2; 24)
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4.2: Regression of change in the two-party vote share for the president's party from the previous election, including terms for polarization and an interaction between approval and time or polarization. Compare to Table 1, column (2).

between whether the election is a midterm and presidential approval.

Figure 4.2 demonstrates the substantive significance of the interaction between approval and House polarization, using the coefficients found in Table 2, column (2). For each year in the sample, Figure 4.2 plots the estimated change in vote for the president's party when the president's approval improves by 10 percentage points, holding all other variables at their actual values for those years. Also added are the estimates for the share of seats gained or lost for the president's party, using the same set of independent variables but replacing vote share with seat share as the dependent variable. The effects as depicted are fairly dramatic: a 10 point gain in approval for the president is worth almost twice as many seats to her copartisans in 2018 as it was 1946.

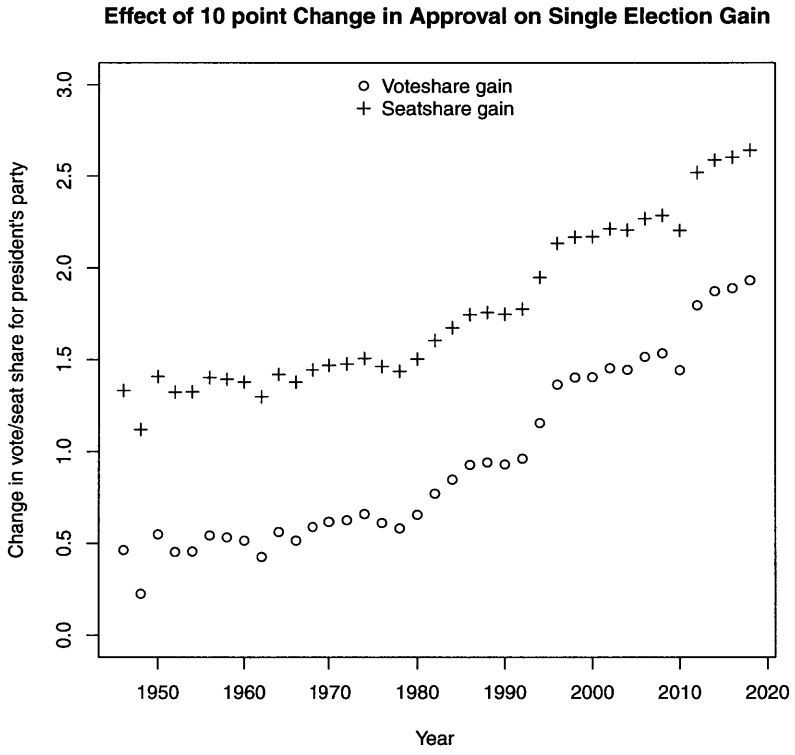

Figure 4.2: Estimated effect of a ten point improvement in presidential approval in each election, 1946-2018, holding all other variables at their actual values for those years.

Approval and Individual Voter Decisions

The results of these aggregate models suggest that the value of approval in congressional elections has increased over the past 72 years. Because our sample size is so limited–just 37 elections in total–we may

not be as confident about that conclusion as we would like to be. I turn, therefore, to a much larger sample, individual voters, and measure the relationship between their approval of the president and their reported vote choice in congressional elections. As above, this analysis centers around two hypotheses: that a respondent's approval of the president is predictive of their reported vote in their House race, and that this relationship has grown over time.

To test the hypotheses, I rely on two separate datasets. Like many analysts examining the nationalization of elections (e.g., Abramowitz and Webster 2016), I make use of the continued appearance of questions about presidential approval and reported vote in the American National Election Study (ANES) to examine primarily the changes in the effect of approval over time. The ANES has asked about both items in each presidential election year from 1972 to 2016, and in midterm election years between 1974 and 2004. I also supplement with the Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES), which has asked about the same items in both midterm and presidential year elections since 2006, and which has much larger sample sizes than the ANES.

As suggested to some extent in the previous section, one of the key questions surrounding the relationship between approval and congressional voting is causal ordering. Although it seems logical that presidential approval would influence respondents' voting decisions in congressional races, it is also possible that voters develop an affection for a member of Congress, which subsequently influences their approval of the president. To guard against this possibility, I control in all regressions below for voters' partisanship and the partisanship of the president, rather than measuring a simple correlation between approval and vote choice. I also report the correlation between approval and vote choice for each partisan grouping separately for the aggregate results. A causal path directly from evaluations of the member of Congress to evaluations of the president seems somewhat unlikely; controlling for partisanship therefore helps to eliminate fears about this reverse causation. If anything, this decision to control for partisanship would seem to bias results in a conservative direction, since it is quite feasible that voters adjust their reported partisanship to match their presidential evaluations; if this is the case, then variation caused in vote choice by presidential approval through changes in partisanship would not be included in the direct approval-vote choice relationship. Still, we should be careful about the causal interpretation of these results. Better would be a design that makes use of some natural instrument to induce variation in presidential approval that is independent of respondents' congressional election vote choices, and then measures the impact of exogenously-driven approval on that vote choice. Identifying such an instrument is difficult, however, particularly given the timing of the surveys we would like to use; even more challenging would be finding a similar instrument across multiple elections so that we could compare the true causal effect of approval over time.

The tests reported here add to an already substantial literature on the nationalization of elections.

Gary Jacobson (2015, 2019), for example, has already examined the relationship between approval and congressional voting, although he performs simple bivariate correlational tests, with no controls for the voter's partisanship or whether an incumbent is running in the congressional race. Other studies have demonstrated similar trends in tems of the nationalization of politics: we have seen a decrease in split-ticket voting, greater congruence between presidential approval and the generic congressional ballot, a decline in the incumbency advantage, and the national component of the house vote has begun to outstrip the local component (see e. g., Jacobson 2015, Jacobson 2019, Abramowitz and Webster 2016, and Fiorina 2017). While these tests fill in the story of what is happening in American elections today, their relation to our key question–how these trends affect members' likelihood of supporting the president on roll call legislation–is more nebulous.

Model

To test the relationship between presidential approval and congressional vote choice, I model whether a respondent voted for the congressional candidate of the presidents party on presidential approval, the voter's reported partisanship, whether an incumbent was running and the partisanship of the incumbent, and whether the election was a midterm or presidential year election. I run this model both on all years in the CCES dataset and then on individual election years in the ANES dataset (1972-2004) and in the CCES dataset (2006-2018). In the single-year models I remove the term for whether the election was a midterm election or not, remove the yearly fixed effects, and specify fixed effects only on individual districts. The aggregate model is expressed in formal terms in equation 2.1, while the individual year model is shown in equation 2.2:

$$v(P)_{ijk} = \alpha + \beta_1 A_{ijk} + \beta_2 P_{ijk} + \beta_3 I_{jk} + \beta_4 M_k + \epsilon_{ijk} \tag{2.1}$$

$$v(P)_{ij} = \alpha + \beta_1 A_{ij} + \beta_2 P_{ij} + \beta_3 I_j + \epsilon_{ij} \tag{2.2}$$

In both models, $v(P)_{ijk}$ is an indicator for whether respondent i in district j in election year k voted for the House candidate of the president's party; A_{ijk} represents the respondent's approval of the president (using either a binary approve/disapprove item or the feeling thermometer, as discussed above); P_{ijk} is a trichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent shares the president's partisanship (1), is an opposing partisan (-1), or a true independent (0), with leaners assigned to the parties; I_{jk} indicates whether the incumbent is a member of the president's party, scored 1 if the incumbent is a presidential copartisan, 0

if the incumbent is not running, and -1 if the incumbent is an opposing partisan; and M_k is a binary variable indicating whether the election is a midterm or presidential year election.

I estimate the models using a maximum likelihood estimation procedure with a logistic specification. Because coefficients convey little interpretable information about the effects of interest, in all the results below I report only average partial effects (APEs) with regard to the variable of interest–presidential approval. That is, I measure the effect of a voter changing from disapproving of the president's performance to approving of her performance on her likelihood of casting a vote for the House candidate of the president's party. These APEs are calculated with cluster-robust standard errors to avoid any possibility of clustering of data causing the appearance of greater efficiency in the estimates than is actually the case.

Results

I begin with an estimation of the aggregate effect across the seven elections covered by the CCES of presidential approval on a voter's likelihood of voting for the House candidate of the president's party. In Table 3, I report the estimated average partial effect of a change from disapproving of the president to approving of the president, while holding all other variables constant. The first row shows results for all respondents who reported casting a vote and who gave a response indicating their approval or disapproval of the president; the subsequent rows break down the effect into specific partisan groups–namely, the president's copartisans, opposing partisans, and true independents. For comparison, Table 4 displays the results for a change from an incumbent of the opposing party running for reelection to an incumbent of the president's party running for reelection.

	APE-Approval	CI Upper	CI Lower
All Respondents	0.3451	0.3369	0.3534
Copartisans	0.2535	0.2434	0.2643
Opposing Partisans	0.3772	0.3595	0.3935
Independents	0.5107	0.4976	0.5240

Table 4.3: Estimated average partial effect of change from disapproval of president to approval of president on the likelihood that respondent will vote for House candidate of the president's party, all else held constant. 95 percent confidence intervals calculated using the clarify method.

	APE-Incumbency	CI Upper	CI Lower
All Respondents	0.1043	0.0987	0.1100
Copartisans	0.1086	0.1006	0.1164
Opposing Partisans	0.0799	0.0736	0.0857
Independents	0.1825	0.1678	0.1965

Table 4.4: Estimated average partial effect of change from incumbent of opposing party to incumbent of president's party on the likelihood that respondent will vote for House candidate of the president's party, all else held constant. 95 percent confidence intervals calculated using the clarify method.

The two tables show the power of presidential approval on members' likelihood of voting for a candidate of the president's party, even when we are also controlling for the respondent's partisanship. In the present day, for a pair of random voters walking into their polling place from off the street, if we were just to know their binary evaluation of the presidency, we would expect the voter approving of the president to be 34.5 percentage points more likely to vote for the House candidate of the president's party; if we only knew whether the voters' incumbent was a presidential copartisan or opposing partisan, however, we would expect the voter from the district with a copartisan incumbent to be just 10.43 percentage points more likely to vote for the candidate of the president's party. These differences are quite powerful, especially given the storied focus on incumbency in scholarly discussions of congressional voting.

Also notable are the differences among respondents with different partisanship. On both variable the strongest effects are among true incumbents, with presidential approval registering a dramatic effect on the voting choice of respondents without a party affiliation or any lean toward one party or the other. The asymmetry between respondents who share partisanship with the president and those from the opposing party on both items is also quite notable. While copartisans seem more likely to dismiss negative evaluations of the president with regard to their votes for House members, for opposing partisans their evaluations of presidential approval seem to carry over into their voting choices to a much greater extent. The opposite seems to be the case, however, for incumbency–copartisans are significantly more likely to alter their vote with a change in incumbency status than are opposing partisans.

The yearly average partial effects from models using the CCES data are presented in Table 5, giving us a first glimpse at how the effect of approval has changed over time. I turn next to the ANES cumulative time series data, which covers a far broader range of time, but these data from the CCES help to fill in some of the gaps from the ANES and take advantage of the larger sample size in the CCES.

	APE	CI Upper	CI Lower
2006	0.3537	0.3324	0.3747
2008	0.1812	0.1616	0.2016
2010	0.3561	0.3362	0.3767
2012	0.3407	0.3209	0.3595
2014	0.2607	0.2436	0.2782
2018	0.3912	0.3735	0.4113

Table 4.5: Estimated average partial effect of change from disapproval of president to approval of president on the respondent's likelihood of casting a vote for the House candidate of the president's party for each election year 2006-2014 and 2018 (incumbent status data not available for 2016).

Using the ANES cumulative time series file, which provides data from 1974 to 2016, I run the same models as specified in equations 2.1 and 2.2 on this data, modeling congressional vote choice on the respondent's approval of the president, respondent's party identification, and the party identification of the incumbent in

the respondent's district, if that incumbent is running for reelection. For each of these variables, I take care to code answers such as "other," "don't know," or NA in the same way as coded for the CCES. Although the questions on the ANES and CCES are generally quite similar in wording, because of differences in the administration of the survey it is likely too great a stretch to directly the compare results from tests with the two separate datasets.

Although the ANES began surveying voters in 1946, the presidential approval question only first appeared on the survey in 1972. For some reason the survey did not appear to code the partisanship of the incumbent in 1972, however, and so our sample includes election years from 1974 to 2016. Pooling across those years, we find a much smaller effect of approval on vote choice than above when using the more modern CCES data: on average, a change in a voter's evaluation of the president from negative to positive makes the voter 17.8 percentage points more likely to vote for the congressional candidate of the president's party (95 percent confidence interval: (16.2, 19.5). Again, though, we need to be careful comparing this result to the CCES result presented in Table 3.

In Figure 4.3 I present this average partial effects for each election year in the ANES data (1974-2016, with no midterm elections after 2002), along with 95 percent confidence intervals on those effects. To examine more closely whether the effect of presidential approval on a voter's likelihood of voting for the House candidate who shares the president's party, I also plot the regression line from a regression of these point estimates on the year. As is evident from the graph, the effect of presidential approval on vote choice has increased substantially over the past 45 years. For each election, we expect that the effect of approval will be approximately 0.66 points larger than in the previous election year ($p < 0.5$, despite having only 19 observations). With the aberrational year of 1976 removed, that estimate jumps to 0.86 points per year ($p < 0.01$).

It is important to note that unlike others who have analyzed ANES approval and congressional election voting data using simple bivariate correlations, this analysis controls for the effects of both incumbency and voters' own partisanship. It therefore helps to eliminate the possibility of other causal paths that might confound the estimation of the relationship between presidential approval and congressional voting. As discussed above, this approach still is far from perfect, but represents an important improvement on what we have to this point.

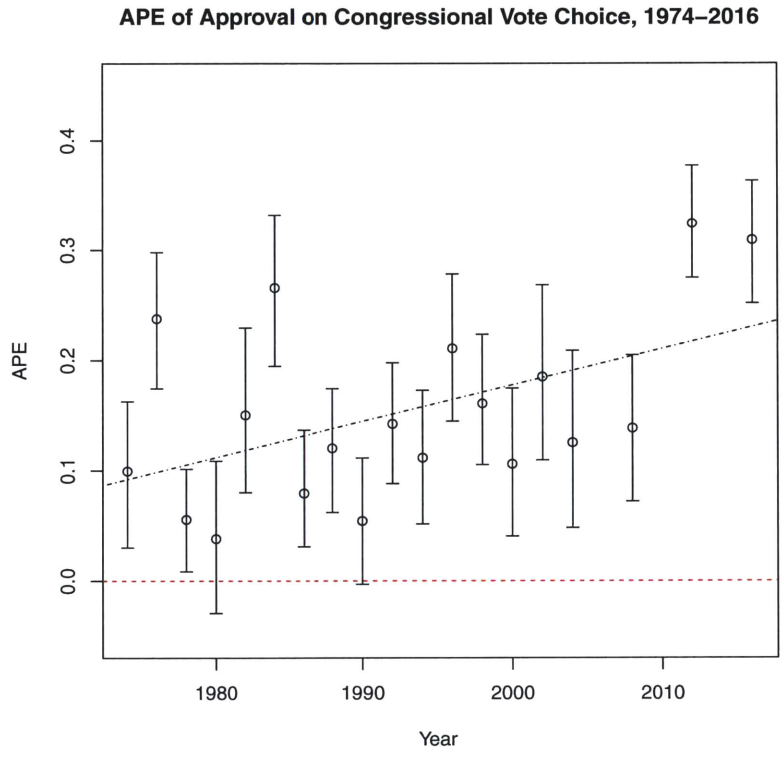

Figure 4.3: Estimated average partial effect of change from respondent disapproval of president to approval of president on the likelihood that respondent will vote for House candidate of the president's party for each election year 1974-2016. Data from ANES time series cumulative data file; note that survey did not run in midterm years after 2002. The black, dashed line is a regression line of these APE estimates on the year.

Approval, Individual Voter Decisions, and Members' Presidential Support Scores

Taken together, the two previous sections have suggested a fairly substantial growth in the impact of presidential approval on voters' choices in congressional elections. The tests presented to this point, however, treat the effect of approval as the same across Congressional districts. Gronke, Koch, and Wilson (2003) suggest a different possibility: the effect of presidential approval on voters' decisions is heterogeneous across congressional districts, varying based on the degree to which the incumbent member of Congress supported the positions taken by the president in roll call voting in the previous session. Using ANES data from the 1993, 1994, and 1996 surveys Gronke, Koch, and Wilson find that not only do members' actual presidential support records affect their perceived records of presidential support, but that both quantities are predictive of whether the respondent will ultimately cast a vote for the candidate of the president's party. As David Mayhew suggests in the preface to the 2004 edition of *The Electoral Connection*–citing Gronke, Koch, and Wilson–"To a significant degree, House members seem to be rewarded or punished *individually* by voters according to their levels of roll-call support for presidents" (2004[[1974], xx; emphasis in original). Voters, Gronke, Koch, and Wilson suggest, do not just base their votes off simple partisan heuristics–they do engage in much more sophisticated calculations about individual members and their relationships with the president.

This finding poses a challenge to the relationship hypothesized to this point that the increasing effect of presidential approval on voting in congressional elections causes members of Congress to alter their voting behavior so that they might affect the president's reputation. The more that members are evaluated on the basis of their individual support for the president, the less we should expect that the approval heuristic alone affects voters' decisions. Voters who are cognizant of members' support for the president, for example, should be able to make choices based not only on which party controls Congress, but more nuanced decisions about which individuals are more likely to support the president's initiatives.

On the other hand, as the predictiveness of partisanship with regard to members' behavior has grown over time, we might expect that voters have increasingly paid more attention to party heuristics like presidential approval than they had in the past. While it seems likely that the effect of presidential approval on members' fortunes is not constant across all House districts, we might expect to see less heterogeneity in that relationship today.

Model

To test this theory, I therefore incorporate members' presidential support scores on roll call legislation into the models presented above. The basic model, presented in equation 3.1, appears largely similar to equations 2.1 and 2.3, except for a crucial change in the specification of the dependent variable, to match the specification in Gronke, Koch, and Wilson and the addition of a term for the presidential support score of the respondent's incumbent House member and an interaction between those support scores and the respondent's approval of the president (now measured on a four-point scale from -2 to 2, following Gronke, Koch, and Wilson).

$$v(I)_{ijk} = \alpha + \beta_1 A_{ijk} + \beta_2 P_{ijk} + \beta_3 I_{jk} + \beta_4 M_k + \beta_5 S_{jk} + \beta_6 A_{ijk} * S_{jk} + \epsilon_{ijk} \tag{3.1}$$

S_{jk} is a measure of the incumbent in district j's frequency of voting as the president would prefer on roll call legislation. To calculate this figure, I take the percent of votes cast by the member that agreed with the position of the president, then subtract 0.5 and multiply by two to create a range from -1 to 1. Members more faithful to the president's agenda receive positive, higher scores, while those who more frequently oppose the oppose the president receive negative scores. $A_{ijk} * S_{jk}$ is the interaction of respondent i's approval of the president and incumbent j's support score, where, slightly differently from previous equations, presidential approval takes on values of 2 for strong approval and -2 for strong disapproval with the category zero purposefully left blank.

As above, I run a similar model on each individual year in the ANES data. Again, the model is similar to equation 2.2, with only the addition of the support score term and the interaction term.

$$v(I)_{ij} = \alpha + \beta_1 A_{ij} + \beta_2 P_{ij} + \beta_3 I_j + \beta_5 S_j + \beta_6 A_{ij} * S_j + \epsilon_{ij} \tag{3.2}$$

For each of these models, I again cluster standard errors on the district and year or just on the district for the individual year models. To capture the importance of the presidential support levels moderating the effect of voters' presidential evaluations, I report two sets of APEs for all the tests below: one for the effect on the voter's likelihood of voting for the member in question of a change in the respondent's presidential approval from "disapprove" to "approve," and the second for the effect on vote choice of a change in the incumbent's faithfulness to the president's agenda relative the rest of his party.

The sign on these estimates is a little bit tricky to interpret. The easiest was is, quite simply to understand it as the magnitude of effect. The interaction holds the key to the model–when the respondent disapproves of the president, the incumbent is rewarded for lower support scores, while when the

To better understand the nature of this interaction term, consider the following example, which uses a

hypothetical case and a simplified linear model for the purposes of easier comprehension. Consider a reduced model of the form:

$$VoteforIncumbent = \alpha + \beta_1 TrumpApproval + \beta_5 SupportScore + \beta_6 Approval * SupportScore$$

Let us imagine that we are looking to estimate the chances that a West Virginia voter who approves (but not strongly) of the job that Donald Trump is doing will cast a ballot for incumbent Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV) in 2018. Manchin voted with Trump approximately 60 percent of the time during the 115th Congress (2017-2018); he therefore receives a slightly positive support score in our metric. Plugging in the voter's approval rating (1) and Manchin's support score (0.2) and generating some relatively arbitrary coefficients ($\alpha = 0.5; \beta_1 = 0.1; \beta_5 = 0; \beta_6 = 0.4$) we get the following calculation for the probability that Manchin would receive the vote of our hypothetical voter (again treating the model as linear):

$$ManchinVote = 0.2 + (0.05 * 1) + (0 * 0.2) + (0.3 * (1 * 0.2)) = 0.31$$

Let us suppose, however, that Manchin were to have become more liberal in his voting record and recorded instead a score of -0.3. In that case, holding all other variables at the same level we find that Manchin would have just a 15 percent chance of winning our hypothetical voter's vote. If we were to examine our voter's hypothetical neighbor who disapproved (again, not strongly) of the job President Trump were doing–and returned Manchin to his original support score, we would see the full effect of the interaction term: Manchin would have only a 9 percent chance of winning this neighbor's vote.

Returning to our original voter, what if we replaced Manchin with his Republican counterpart, Shelley Moore-Capito, but arbitrarily assigned her approximately the same support score as Manchin (0.2)? Moore-Capito would have the same chance as Manchin of winning our hypothetical voter's vote in this scenario, since there is no term for the incumbent's partisanship (although there is in the full model).

These examples make clear the potential moderating influence of support scores on the effects of approval–in our examples, Manchin's fortunes change only marginally as the voter's approval of the president changes. A member with more extreme support scores, however, would have been much more exposed to changes in the voters' perceptions of the president. It is also worth noting that only the interaction term really conveys meaningful information about approval or support scores–take the first equation, for example. The coefficient of 0.05 on approval simply suggests that *any* incumbent would stand a 5 percentage point better chance of winning the vote of a voter who approved of the president.

Unfortunately, the centrality of the interaction term in this framework means that these tests largely cannot do what Gronke, Koch, and Wilson set out to do–to compare the effects of changes in respondents' approval and of changes in their representatives' presidential support scores. Since both variables get their ultimate value from the same coefficient, it is difficult to compare the effects of the two variables solely using the coefficients. We also cannot effectively compare the size of the effects using an average partial effect (APE) estimate, since to calculate APE for either variable we would need to input an arbitrary value for change in support scores that itself cannot be benchmarked to a similar change in approval rating.

Results

I start out once again with the full CCES dataset, which suggests strong effects for both approval and presidential support scores. Because the effect of the variables in the model depends on the other half of the term, it is easiest to understand them as movements toward or away from the members' presidential support or toward or away from the voter's approval. That is, for two voters in the same district–one who approved of the president and one who did not–the ramifications of a member becoming more supportive of the president would be opposite with regard to each voter's ultimate voting decision. While the voter who supported the president would now be more likely to vote for the incumbent, the voter who does not support the president would become less likely. To best understand the effect of an incumbent becoming more supportive of the president, then, we need to measure the effect of the member moving toward the specific voter in question. Similarly, for approval ratings our findings will essentially cancel out unless we specify movement of approval ratings toward the existing political support score of the member in question, wherever that support score may be.

For the full CCES, with a change in a voter's approval from no opinion to strongly toward the side of the member of Congress, that voter becomes 23.3 percentage points more likely to vote for the incumbent (95 percent confidence interval: 22.4, 24.0). Members whose voting records move from a split record of support for the president fully to the side where the voter in question is positioned see a boost in support from that voter of approximately 32.5 percentage points (95 percent confidence interval: 31.3, 33.5). These are clearly large figures, but we should again take them with a grain of salt and should hesitate to compare between the two values, seeing as both essentially emanate from the same coefficient–we are just changing the input values.

I present results from individual year tests using the ANES data in Figure 4.4. As noted above, the specification Gronke, Koch, and Wilson use does not allow us to truly compare the effects of approval and the moderating effect of support scores over time, since APE calculation would need to begin with a arbitrary

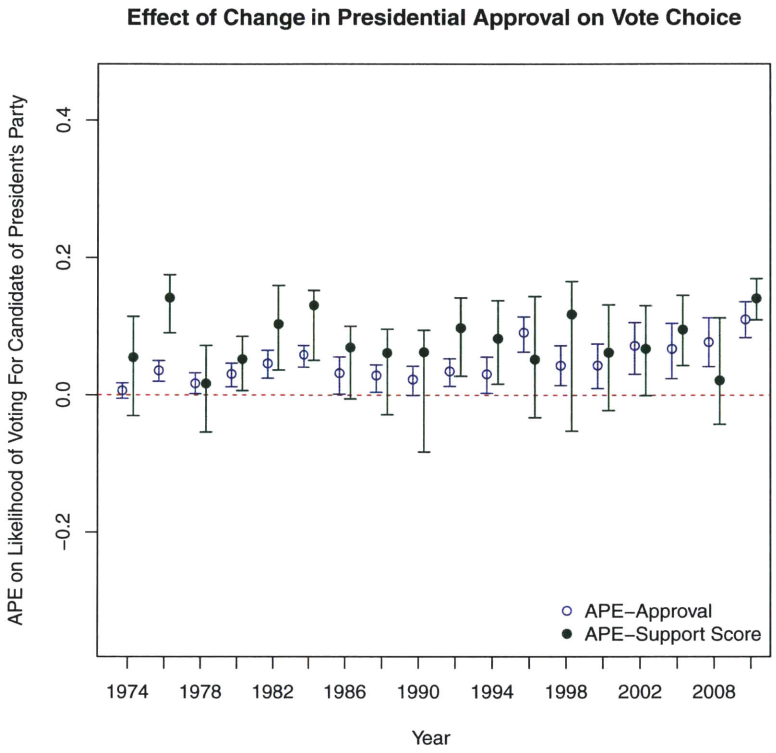

Figure 4.4: Effects of changes toward the respondent's approval in incumbents' support scores (green) and of changes toward the member's support scores in respondent approval ratings (blue).

and incomparable changes in approval and in support scores, we can perhaps see an increase in the effect of a change in the respondent's approval of the president over the past thirty years.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that presidential approval has become a significantly more important force in congressional elections over the past half century, even when we account for partisanship and incumbency status; it also considers but draws no conclusions about the degree to which incumbents' change in presidential support scores influences the relationship between voter's approval and their ultimate vote choices. But the broader question still remains: how do these forces affect members' voting behavior?

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to directly evaluate members' response to this changed electoral environment, we can draw a few logical conclusions. The growing of importance of presidential approval on their own vote margins should incentivize members of Congress to take actions that will affect the popularity of the president, perhaps even if that action may cause some harm to their own reputations.

But members are not driven to attempt to affect the president's reputation solely out of pursuit of their own reelection. Members of Congress recognize that their copartisans' fates are similarly dependent on presidential popularity, and members who place importance on their party holding control of majorities are therefore further incentivized to cast votes that might alternately bring credit to or harm the president's reputation in the nationwide voting public. In a Congress increasingly made up of members whose visions of what constitutes good public policy diverges from the preferences of opposing partisans, moreover, members driven by policy goals should place even greater weight on ensuring that their party controls as much of government as possible. That of course includes the presidency–especially in an era where Congress generally lacks the ability to pass the kind of legislation many members would like over the president's veto.[5] Furthermore, individual members are not the only ones to recognize the importance of majority control to the accomplishment of their goals while in the legislature. The party leaders in their respective chambers are perhaps even more cognizant of this basic fact, and wield a number of tools themselves that can apply additional pressure to party members to vote in a way that will help or harm the president's reputation, helping to solve the collective action problems a member may envision were he to act alone. Cumulatively, these forces make a powerful case for members of Congress incorporating how their vote will affect the president's reputation into their decision-making process.

Even so, members' recognition that their individual votes may do little to actually influence the president's reputation may still fundamentally compel members in many circumstances to instead "devote resources to things over which they can have some control" (Mayhew 2004 [1974], 32). But we should not ignore the fact that the incentives have increased substantially for members to pay closer attention to how their actions influence the party's standing with the general public since the publication of the first edition of *The Electoral Connection.* When one or two votes may make the difference for the passage of legislation preferred by the president–the circumstance when presidential power is particularly relevant–the collective action problem fades away, and the pivotal members may be confronted with the reality that they have significant power to affect how the public views the president, and therefore how the public will vote in upcoming elections.

From the president's perspective, the decision of whether or not to take a stand on an issue–to make the issue her own–can have significant consequences for the voting choices of individual members and for the bill's ultimate outcome. Both legislatively-oriented presidents and those more focused on their own reputations must carefully choose the issues they would like to champion, calculating carefully who the pivotal voters will be, where they stand, and how passage or rejection of the bill would weigh on the public's minds. A failure

[5]As then-Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said shortly after the 2010 midterm elections, "But the fact is, if our primary legislative goals are to repeal and replace the health spending bill; to end the bailouts; cut spending; and shrink the size and scope of government, the only way to do all these things it is to put someone in the White House who won't veto any of these things" (as quoted in Kessler, September 25, 2012).

to do so may endanger the president's position not just on the current legislation but on future legislative opportunities as well.

Chapter 5

Power, Parties, and Weakness: Some Concluding Reflections

When Richard Neustadt first published *Presidential Power* in 1960, he warned that the book was intended to describe presidents and their power at "midcentury" (1990, 5). Other scholars have been quick to pick up that critique, suggesting that Neustadt's concept of presidential power has limited applicability to periods outside of midcentury. Neustadt's theory, Stephen Skowronek has argued (1993, 2011), was most relevant solely in the pluralist period from 1900-1972. Outside of that era, presidents faced different operational problems putting desires into practice, given the different contexts of "political time" in which they operated, particularly with regard to the political regime into which presidents fall. Different presidents, Skowronek argued, must approach their work in different ways, given important contextual constraints created by the "warrants that can be drawn from the moment at hand to justify action and secure the legitimacy of the changes effected" (1997, 18).

A more common critique of Neustadt's theory is that presidential authority is far more contingent on a different kind of context: the institutional settings in which the president operates. Presidents can do little to control the makeup of Congress or the state of the economy, emergency policy needs or world events outside the United States. Bond and Fleisher (1990), for example, lead a line of scholars who argue that presidential success is far more dependent on how many seats in Congress are controlled by the president's copartisans than on the president's bargaining skill. The work of scholars modeling veto-bargaining games (e.g., Cameron and McCarty 2004) suggests that the president's threat of a veto has different effects depending on how those members of Congress are arrayed on a given policy. Canes-Wrone's work (esp. 2005) finds that going public is most effective–and most frequently practiced–only when the policy for which the president advocates is

already popular. And a number of scholars recently (e.g., Mayer 2001, Howell 2003) have suggested that divisions in Congress have made it easier for the president to use executive actions to "go it alone."

This essay has largely been centered around defining and understanding those institutional settings–that is, understanding how the context in which presidential power operates has changed as elites in the two political parties have grown farther apart ideologically. Like many before me, I argue that the opportunities for presidents to exercise power are contingent on the institutional settings in which they are located. Those opportunities for persuasion in the legislative branch, I argue, have been strongly shaped by changes in the distribution of members of Congress along ideological dimensions, and related changes in how voters in the general public choose their positions on issues and decide how they are going to vote: presidents today may be more capable of leaning on members of their own party for votes, but drastically less capable of doing so with regard to members of the opposing party, regardless of whether they choose a strategy of behind-the-scenes direct bargaining, or more public campaigns of indirect persuasion.

Writing of the Constitutional system of what he called "separated institutions, sharing powers," Neustadt took special care to remind readers that "what the Constitution separates our political parties do not combine" (1990, 29). In an era of partisan polarization, perhaps that statement requires some reevaluation, at least with respect to the president's relationships with members of the legislative branch. Not only are the president's copartisans today dependent for reelection on a set of primary voters who are particularly attuned and attached to the president's policy stances, but the president and members of her party share substantial political interests in ensuring the enduring popularity of the president. These electoral forces weighing on the president's copartisans–not to mention their greater likelihood of shared policy interest given the more narrow ideological dispersion of elected officials in the party–suggest that members of Congress from the president's party need to be far more attentive to and take far more direction from the president's positions on issues. With the fates of party members in both branches more intertwined, and party leaders in Congress, highly cognizant of the importance of unity to the party's electoral future, serving as a bridge between the branches, members ignore the president's wishes at their own peril.

But, as John McCain's famous "thumbs down" moment during the Republican effort in 2017 to overhaul the nation's health care system demonstrates, this is not to say that partisan polarization has completely bridged that gap between the president and the legislative branch. The results presented in the three previous chapters reinforce that notion, even as they provide evidence of the president's increased power among her own electorate. Chapter 2, for example, demonstrated that while in some cases voters of the president's party were moved toward the president when the president took sides on an issue, that effect was not unanimous–many of the respondents in the survey appeared unmoved by learning the president's position. In Chapter 3, we saw that while loyalty to the president appears to have had some effect on members' primary returns,

in a number of cases members who were not loyal to the president saw few threats to their renomination. Finally, while the effect of presidential approval on congressional election returns undoubtedly has grown, as Chapter 4 demonstrates, approval is but one of the factors that influences voters' decision-making process. Members' electoral incentives may be more aligned with the president's interests, but they are still not completely aligned–nor will they likely ever be under our current Constitutional system. President's may today be able to lean more on members of Congress from their own party, but those members certainly still have the ability to resist, should they so choose.

The president, of course, faces even larger problems today with members of the opposing caucus. The evidence here suggests that when the president becomes involved in legislation, she immediately risks further alienating members of the opposing party in Congress, who find less incentive to vote in the direction the president prefers. The result, as Frances Lee (2009) finds, is that members of the two parties end up further polarized than would otherwise be the case. During a time when the parties have competed at relatively even strengths, with few sessions of Congress when one party holds a large majority (Lee 2015), and when the use of the filibuster has greatly expanded (Sinclair 2017), moreover, the president has perhaps an even greater need for votes from the opposing party. Any strength the president has gained within her own caucus, then, has been more than balanced out by losses with regard to the opposing party.

As Matt Dickinson (2008) points out, Neustadt recognized in the years after the first edition of *Presidential Power* was published that while certain developments might have altered the ways in which the president used her powers, the president's "power problem" remained much the same. Neustadt, writing in the preface to his final edition, concluded: "Presidential weakness was the underlying theme of *Presidential Power*.... Weakness is still what I see: weakness in the sense of a great gap between what is expected of a man (or someday woman) and assured capacity to carry through" (1990, ix). It is hard to conclude differently in 2019: in the legislative arena at least, the president remains weak, able to exercise influence only when the circumstances allow, and even then, perhaps only at the margins. For proponents of an active and effective legislative government, like Neustadt, the upshot of these changes in presidential power cannot be heartening. Presidential power, used properly, allows for presidents to bridge gaps and to build consensus on policy, effectively greasing the proverbial governmental wheels in order to keep important items moving through our system. As Neustadt wrote in 1960, no other person in our system has the same opportunities to provide other political actors what they need in order to accomplish their objectives; no one else, then, has the same potential to make the system spin as the president. When the president's ability to use those powers decreases, then, we are only more likely to see the system fall into even greater periods of gridlock and ineffectiveness. In an era, moreover, when both the public and other governmental officials increasingly look to the president for direction (Mann and Ornstein 2006), the possibility of a more impotent presidency

is quite daunting for a system that already struggles to advance an agenda and reach consensus on important national priorities.

Appendix A

Below is the text of the policy descriptions from each of the three experiments embedded in the survey described in Chapter 2. All respondents saw any unformatted text, while only subjects in the treatment group saw *italicized* text, and only subjects in the control group saw underlined text. There were essentially two treatments for the Disaster relief experiment. As such, the text below that is italicized was common for the two treatments, while text that is *underlined and italicized* was the text supplied to those respondents who received the treatment that President Trump supported the bill; text that is ***bolded and italicized*** was the text supplied to those respondents who received the treatment that President Trump opposed the bill.

For the People Act experiment

"In the winter of 2019, Congress considered a piece of legislation called the "For the People Act of 2019," focused on voting rights and accessibility, money in politics, redistricting, and ethics. Among other provisions, the bill would:

- Allow citizens to register online or get registered automatically;
- Require that states provide same-day voter registration and at least 15 days of early voting;
- Make Election Day a federal holiday;
- Mandate the disclosure of the big donors behind politically active 501(c)(4) social welfare organizations;
- Take away the power of state legislatures to draw congressional districts and have independent commissions do it instead.

The White House expressed President Trump's disapproval of the proposed legislation, and the President threatened to veto the bill if it passed Congress."

Pell Grant funds reallocation experiment

"Earlier this spring, Congress considered/*President Trump sent to Congress* a proposal to reallocate $3.9 billion in surplus money from the Pell Grant program to fund other budget priorities, including increased funding for NASA. Using the Pell Grant surpluses to pay for these initiatives would allow the government to increase or maintain current spending levels in many areas without increasing the current budget request.

The Pell Grant program currently has a surplus of approximately $9 billion dollars, according to some estimates. The program helps low income students pay for college, providing a maximum of $6,095 per student per year to 7 million students from families making less than $50,000 per year."

Disaster relief appropriations bill experiment

"Earlier this spring, Congress considered a supplemental appropriations bill to provide additional funding to disaster-stricken areas. The bill, commonly called the "Disaster Relief Bill," appropriated a total of $19 billion in aid, distributed among areas such as:

- Iowa and Missouri, which had been hit by significant floods this spring;
- Alabama and Georgia, where Hurricane Michael destroyed crops this October and prevented many farmers from planting this spring;
- California, which endured the deadliest and most destructive wildfire on record last year;
- Puerto Rico, which is still recovering from the destruction of Hurricane Maria in the fall of 2017;
- Several military bases and flood control installations, which had been damaged by hurricanes and floods over the past year.

*Shortly before the bill came to a vote in the [Senate/**House**], President Trump expressed his [support for/ **opposition to** the bill.*"

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