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# Congressional Support of the President: A Comparison of Foreign, Defense, and Domestic Policy Decision Making during and after the Cold War

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*Recent research on congressional-executive relations has concluded that partisan and ideological forces explaining decision making in domestic policy have also become dominant in the realm of foreign policy. Accordingly, scholars have inferred the effective demise of the two-presidencies. In this analysis, the authors compare models explaining bipartisan congressional support of the president on domestic issues with that of foreign and defense. Although factors relating to the congressional context tended to be influential in both policy areas, they found important differences in the effects of factors relating to the international context. They also found that congressional bipartisan support was significantly less likely on matters related to the purse strings and on issues such as trade. The contrasting effects of the explanatory factors across policy areas suggest the importance of both the two-presidencies and resurgent Congress perspectives in explaining congressional-executive interactions.*

With the end of the cold war, it seems unlikely that a broad domestic consensus will arise concerning the role of the United States in the newly emerging international order. Charles Kegley (1993), for instance, believed that the end of the cold war has changed “all the answers and all the questions” (p. 141), and cold war icon Paul Nitze (1999) saw a new international system that offers “less direct traditional security threats to the United States” (p. 3).

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Coupled with this less dangerous international environment, there appears to be no clear agreement among policy makers and foreign policy elites regarding U.S. foreign policy priorities. As a consequence, congressional leaders and the rank and file have in recent years increasingly asserted their ideological and partisan preferences. Recently, in fact, the House Republicans embarrassed the Clinton administration by denying the president majority support for the air war against Yugoslavia.<sup>1</sup> And in the Senate, the Republicans single-handedly defeated the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) of the Armed Services Committee suggested that the vote sent a crystal-clear message to the White House, equating it with a “*two-by-four to the side of the head*” (*Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, December 4, 1999, 2916).

Clearly today—regardless of partisan affiliation—there are few on Capitol Hill that view national security and foreign affairs as solely falling under the jurisdiction of the executive. With the increasing overlap of foreign and domestic policy, high politics issues no longer command the attention they used to (Lindsay 1993). Indeed, the electoral incentives facing members of Congress in the area of foreign policy have shifted considerably over time (Lindsay 1994). Issues of trade, international finance, and immigration now dominate many important subcommittee and full committee hearings. House members may increasingly challenge international programs with an eye on parochial interests rather than on a broader strategic vision. Congressional assertiveness has even led President Clinton to publicly lament the end of the cold war. “Gosh, I miss the Cold War,” he exclaimed in 1993 (quoted in Jentleson 1997).

We address two interrelated issues regarding congressional-executive relations. One question we seek to answer is, to what extent can internal factors (e.g., institutional context) as opposed to the external or systemic political context explain over time variation in congressional bipartisan support of the president in the international arena? Second, by focusing on internal and external factors, we seek to draw a distinction between the relevance of the two-presidencies and the resurgent Congress perspectives for explaining congressional bipartisanship in international affairs. Both of these theoretical views offer different explanations for congressional support of the president. The former suggests that the president dominates foreign policy and can garner congressional support due to strategic concerns of the cold war environment, information advantages, and greater institutional powers and personal investment. In contrast, the latter view of the resurgent Congress focuses on the importance of congress-centered features like the role of committees and political parties and how these features affect interbranch relations (Bond and Fleisher 1990; Meernik 1993; Rohde 1994; Smith 1994). Binder (1999) also demonstrated that intrabranched characteristics like the degree of preference overlap between political parties may be as important for understanding policy making as features of interbranch relations. Certainly, the resurgent Congress perspective suggests that the congressional reforms and the conditions that led to them represent a significant change in the way that Congress and the president conduct the business of foreign policy making.

1. Richard Gephardt (D-MO) lambasted the GOP leadership’s role in defeating the bombing resolution, referring to the defeated vote as “the low moment in American foreign policy” and indicating to him that “the extreme right wing of the Republican Party remains in control of that party” (*Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, May 1, 1999, 1038).

Most analyses investigating congressional-executive relations combine foreign and defense policy issues and treat them as one in the same (Fleisher et al. 2000; Meernik 1993; McCormick and Wittkopf 1990). This is empirically problematic because explanatory factors, such as changes in institutional arrangements, can dramatically alter congressional-executive interactions in different ways depending on the specific policy areas (Rohde 1994; LeLoup and Shull 1999). We believe that comparing foreign and defense policy with domestic can provide insight into how congressional-executive relations may have been fundamentally altered in different ways by changes to congressional institutions and the end of the cold war (see McCormick and Wittkopf 1990 for an opposing view). Without explicitly accounting for these effects across issues, we may misinterpret the causal sources of congressional support of the president.

In assessing theories of congressional-executive interaction, we also believe that it is essential to differentiate between the more general notion of presidential success and the specific condition of bipartisan congressional support. Because bipartisanship represents a subset of presidential success, there likely exist some common factors in understanding both. However, we draw on the two-presidencies and resurgent Congress models to shed light on theoretically important differences.

According to the two-presidencies model, the executive's influence over foreign policy is rooted in strategic necessity created by a fluid and dangerous international environment as well as institutional and informational advantages. Moreover, the president's hypothesized advantages are not party specific but reflect institutional deference and cooperation from the entire Congress. This condition resulting in bipartisan support, then, implies the presence of some shared long-term goals sufficient to outweigh any immediate political incentives for partisan conflict within and/or between Congress and the president. In contrast, presidential success more generally captures the president's ability to attract minimum winning coalitions in Congress. Conditions of presidential success are primarily the result of support from the president's co-partisans but may also result from the support of the opposition party. In our view, the resurgent Congress perspective offers greater explanatory leverage with respect to these latter conditions of presidential success. Unlike congressional bipartisanship, the president's ability to attract a winning coalition from his own party is more likely a function of shared electoral and/or short-term political preferences rather than prescriptive norms of institutional deference. These contrasting conditions in presidential support are conceptually important to distinguish between because bipartisan support, and not necessarily conditions of presidential success more generally, is the most relevant for explanations offered by the two-presidencies thesis.

### **Preference Disparities, Institutional Change, and Presidential Influence**

With the end of the cold war, scholars are provided an environment to reexamine relations between the president and Congress. Certainly, evidence suggests that a much more conflictual and partisan atmosphere exists now in Washington. McCormick, Wittkopf, and

Danna (1997), for example, showed that partisanship exerted a powerful influence on congressional roll-call votes during the Bush administration and the first term of the Clinton administration. Wittkopf and McCormick (1998) also found after the cold war less overall support in Congress for a president's position than during the previous decade. This recent study appears to once again confirm that party loyalty and ideology are the two strongest determinants of an individual congressman's foreign policy support score (see Lindsay 1994).

More important, perhaps, when it comes to relations between the president and Congress is the preference disparity that now exists between the two main political parties. For example, Binder's (1999) model of gridlock showed the significance of preference alignments between the congressional parties and between the chambers in affecting the passage of public policies. One would infer from her findings that preference alignments within Congress seriously shape the character of congressional-executive relations. In addition, Rosner (1995) envisioned increased congressional assertiveness as ideological and partisan cleavages persist in defining debate on Capitol Hill. Such assertiveness was further impelled, after the congressional reforms, by party leaders who were granted the institutional tools to effectively frustrate an executive's policy agenda (Smith 1994; Sinclair 1993; Rohde 1994).<sup>2</sup>

According to Thurber (1996), "the give-and-take between national and local representation, deliberation and efficiency, openness and accountability, specific interests and the 'public good' ensures a certain amount of confrontation between Congress and the president." (p. 13). However, congressional assertiveness in foreign affairs was particularly affected by the changing preference alignments between the congressional political parties and the institutional reforms (Warburg 1989). The reforms largely uprooted traditional norms of member deference to committees, which had previously sustained consensus on presidential priorities in foreign policy. In essence, these reforms meant that congressional institutions would be less likely to shield presidential priorities from member opposition. Rather, the policy preferences of the president would increasingly compete with a broader array of member interests that used partisan institutions to challenge the president (Sinclair 2000). On this point, Seligman and Covington (1996) wrote, "the proliferation of bargaining partners in Congress and the limited ability of congressional leaders to persuade the rank-and-file to accept guidance mean that coalition building in Congress becomes increasingly time-consuming and costly" (p. 71).

### Issues and the Two-Presidencies Thesis

Models explaining the occurrence of institutional conflict over international affairs have often neglected potentially important differences across issues. For example, McCormick and Wittkopf (1990) confined themselves to only foreign policy votes, while Meernik (1993) aggregated the votes from both foreign and defense issue areas. Hinckley (1994) argued, however, that "*foreign policy is [not] a single category, consistent in itself. There are*

2. At times, President Clinton has even had difficulty among Democratic leaders. For example, Senator Sam Nunn, when he was chairman of the Armed Services Committee, clashed publicly with the president over his policy regarding gays in the military (see Ornstein 1994).

*many kinds of foreign policy*. . . . It follows that Congress might be more assertive—and more changeable in its influence—in some of these areas than in others” (pp. 6-8).

A concern for issues predictably leads to a discussion of the two-presidencies thesis. Aaron Wildavsky (1966) proposed that presidential success in Congress is more likely to occur on foreign and defense policies rather than on more divisive domestic issues. Wildavsky’s hypothesis appeared to account well for the immediate post–World War II presidency. The Soviet threat led to the expansion of the national security bureaucracy, which strengthened the president’s hand in the making of U.S. foreign policy. With data drawn from the 1950s and 1960s, Wildavsky showed that presidents were more successful in Congress when it came to foreign and defense policies as compared to domestic policy (also see LeLoup and Shull 1979). Indeed, Wildavsky observed, “presidents prevail about 70 percent of the time in defense and foreign policy, compared with 40 percent in the domestic sphere” (p. 8).<sup>3</sup>

Despite the initial findings, scholars have challenged Wildavsky’s (1966) research and conclusions. Bond and Fleisher (1990), for instance, found only limited evidence for a significant issue-area difference in presidential success. Only Republican presidents, according to Bond and Fleisher (p. 171), demonstrated an improvement on foreign and defense-related issues, and only when it comes to conflictual votes. Cohen (1991) similarly found little empirical support for Wildavsky’s hypothesis. Interestingly, Cohen showed from 1961 to 1970 that presidential success on foreign versus domestic policy was minus 14 points, indicating greater success on domestic policy proposals. However, Cohen did find that the greatest difference between foreign versus domestic policy success occurred during the years 1948 to 1964, exactly the time frame studied by Wildavsky. It seems, then, that the emerging bipolar conflict led briefly to enhanced presidential dominance over foreign and defense policy.

Neither Bond and Fleisher’s (1990) nor Cohen’s (1991) evidence will end the debate over Wildavsky’s (1966) conjecture.<sup>4</sup> Even more recently, Fleisher et al. (2000, 23) suggested “abandoning” the two-presidencies model and instead focusing on the various conditions in which one institution may possess greater powers to influence policy than another. We do not necessarily disagree with their argument. However, before dismantling the two-presidencies thesis completely, we think it is important to further investigate how various features of the international and legislative political context shape the character of congressional-executive interactions across issue areas. Indeed, one important problem in assessing Wildavsky’s thesis is that policies like economic and trade issues have become more pervasive on the foreign policy agenda (Crabb and Holt 1989; Warburg 1989). Controlling for issue areas may have implications for the two-presidencies thesis inasmuch as economic and trade issues seem more likely to affect a member’s home constituency as compared to issues of peace and national security.

3. Wildavsky (1966) also found differences in presidential success across defense and foreign policy issues. While 73.3 percent of defense policy proposals passed from 1948 to 1964, only 58.5 percent of foreign policy proposals successfully passed. The success rates of both issue areas, however, were markedly higher than the domestic policy success rate, which stood at 40.2 percent.

4. Interestingly, Shull and LeLoup (1991, 49) maintain that Wildavsky was essentially correct, albeit with some minor modifications. According to Shull and LeLoup, there is greater conflict when it comes to foreign aid, trade, and general defense and national security policies. However, high-level diplomacy and specific military and national security decisions are still dominated by the president.

## Expectations

Our discussion thus far leads to several important expectations related to the differential effects of both systemic and Congress-centered factors in explaining bipartisan support of the president. Wildavsky's (1966) two-presidencies model not only predicted high levels of congressional support on foreign and defense policy but also suggested that significant differences will exist in congressional support between foreign and defense as compared to domestic policy. We have argued that congressional bipartisanship more accurately captures the nature of executive influence over foreign policy attributed by the two-presidencies model. Consistent with this argument, we expect in general that the international environment will have significant effects on the likelihood of congressional bipartisan support of the president in the area of foreign and defense policy, while no such effects should be found on domestic policy.

We use two theoretically important variables to control for the effects of the international environment. The first is simply a qualitative indicator of the cold war consensus. During periods of heightened international tensions—like that observed during the height of the cold war—Congress should be more likely to defer to the president in the realm of foreign affairs. We hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 1:* The likelihood of bipartisan support of the president's position should be higher on foreign and defense policy during the height of the cold war (1953-73) as compared to the period after the cold war.

In addition, we include a variable measuring the annual change in military expenditures designed to capture changes in threat perception (Morgan and Palmer 1997).<sup>5</sup> An increase or decrease in this allocation serves as a useful indicator for an executive's perception of the threat level emanating from the international system. Increases in the defense budget are associated with heightened levels of perceived threat. So, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 2:* The likelihood of congressional bipartisan support of the president should be positively related with levels of international threat.

A temporal interaction is also included with defense expenditures to control for possible changes coinciding with the congressional reforms.

The type of vote, as well as the specific types of issues in debate, represents potentially important features of the institutional context that may affect bipartisan support. All else being equal, final passage votes are much less likely to elicit conflict relative to amendment votes. Amendments tend to be associated with conflict because they represent substantive challenges to committee proposals (Smith 1989; Rohde 1994). This leads to our next hypothesis:

5. The defense expenditure data derive from True, Jones, and Baumgartner (1998). The actual expenditure data are in current U.S. dollars. The percent change from one year to the next is used in the logit analysis.

*Hypothesis 3:* The likelihood of bipartisan congressional support should be lower on amendment votes as compared to other votes.

In addition, the distinction between authorization and appropriations legislation defines another important feature of the congressional environment. Not only are authorization committees more closely aligned with executive-branch departments often resulting in similar policy preferences, but control of the purse strings is fundamental to Congress, and as a result there is less reason to accede to an executive's agenda. Furthermore, appropriations bills command considerable attention on the chamber floor, often resulting in partisan conflict over programming priorities (Bacchus 1997; Aldrich and Rohde 1997-98). Therefore,

*Hypothesis 4:* The likelihood of bipartisan congressional support should be lower on appropriations legislation relative to other types of policies.

Earlier, we suggested that the growth of economic and trade issues has dramatically changed the make-up of the foreign policy agenda that Wildavsky (1966) hypothesized about. The foreign policy agenda is no longer dominated by high politics issues that are relatively less affected by domestic concerns (McCormick and Wittkopf 1992). Instead, the growing distribution of economic and trade issues constituting the foreign policy agenda tends to activate a wide range of domestic political interests across congressional districts (Oleszek 1992).<sup>6</sup> Thus, we expect to find greater evidence of congressional assertiveness in the areas of trade and foreign aid relative to other policies.<sup>7</sup>

*Hypothesis 5:* The likelihood of congressional bipartisan support should be lower on trade and foreign aid as compared to other types of policies.

Features of the interinstitutional context are also important for explaining bipartisan congressional support. Bond and Fleisher (1990, 172) surmised that the observed advantage of Republican presidents derived from circumstances related to divided government. Under these conditions, they argued that the majority opposition party was perceived as sharing the governing responsibility with the president and therefore would have a greater obligation to cooperate in passing the president's foreign and defense policy agenda. Other scholars have added that the impact of divided government on congressional support of the president is rooted in electoral forces that produce agreement (or lack thereof) in policy preferences between the president and members of the political parties in Congress (Rohde 1994). In the analysis, we assess whether divided government or the specific party of the president and majority party in Congress have an independent affect on congressional bipartisan support.

Finally, we consider the possible effects of presidential approval on congressional bipartisanship. Some scholarship has viewed public approval as an important resource from which the executive can draw to achieve congressional support of legislative programs. The

6. The China Trade Bill (HR 4444) is an illustrative example of the hosts of domestic-related interests that can be involved in trade-related policies (see *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, May 5, 2000, 1244-54).

7. McCormick and Wittkopf (1992) found greater bipartisan support in the House on defense programs, while foreign aid policies tend to generate relatively less bipartisanship as compared to other types of foreign and defense-related issues. Meernik (1993) also separated out international economic policy and found greater than average conflict in the House but no difference in the Senate.

empirical record on presidential approval and congressional support is somewhat mixed. For example, Ostrom and Simon (1985, 349) found a strong positive relationship between the president's approval rating and legislative success. Other studies, however, uncovered weak relationships at best (Rivers and Rose 1985; Bond, Fleisher, and Northrup 1988; Edwards 1989). The logic of approval suggests that the likelihood of political costs is greater to members of Congress when they vote against a popular president as compared to an unpopular one. This further suggests that congressional constituencies respond to presidential preferences and are willing to hold members of Congress accountable for voting against popular presidents. Consistent with these arguments is the following:

*Hypothesis 6:* The likelihood of congressional bipartisan support of the president should be positively related with levels of presidential approval.

### Data and Empirical Analysis

Our analysis extends previous research by discerning how factors affecting bipartisan congressional support of the president vary systematically across foreign, defense, and domestic issues. We have argued that both the internal and external political environment may affect congressional-executive relations differently depending on the issues in debate. Therefore, not only do we compare a model of bipartisanship on foreign and defense policy with domestic policy, but we also analyze each issue area separately to assess the differential effects of both the institutional context and the international environment.<sup>8</sup>

The data include all roll-call votes in which a president took a position from the 83rd Congress (1953-54) through the 105th (1997-98) Congress. This enables us to control for roll-call specific factors that have an important influence on congressional decision making. Aggregate-voting analyses (e.g., foreign policy support scores) can demonstrate broad changes in partisanship over time, but they often limit inferences that can be made regarding the specific factors explaining congressional responses to presidential behavior (Edwards 1989). Like Meernik (1993), our dependent variable indicates for each roll call in which the president takes a position whether a majority of both parties supports the president.<sup>9</sup> Bipartisan support of the president takes on the value one and zero otherwise. There are a total of 3,698 roll calls over this time period: 2,552 on domestic issues, 483 on defense, and 663 votes on foreign policy. The three issue areas were coded in the following manner. The foreign policy category includes votes on issues such as human rights, apartheid, economic sanctions,

8. Ragsdale (1996) also disaggregated roll-call votes into different policy areas. The categories she used include foreign aid policy, international economic policy, and defense policy.

9. We recognize that there are other possible ways to operationalize the dependent variable measuring bipartisanship. For example, success could capture a winning coalition primarily from the president's co-partisans only or from that of the opposition party only. Our decision to analyze bipartisan congressional support of the president's position is based on both theoretical and empirical grounds. On a theoretical level, bipartisanship provides the greatest leverage with respect to explaining presidential influence as it relates to the two-presidencies model and in testing between systemic and institutional factors. On an empirical level, using bipartisanship as the dependent variable allows us to make direct comparisons with previous research. In addition, though, bipartisan coalition support is characterized by relatively greater over-time variation as compared to other coalitions of presidential success. Thus, bipartisanship provides a richer measure to assess factors explaining congressional-executive interactions.

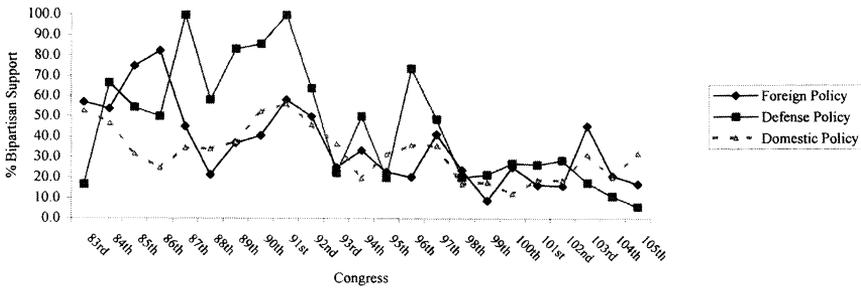


FIGURE 1. Bipartisan Presidential Support in the House of Representatives on Foreign, Defense, and Domestic Policy Roll Calls, 83rd to 105th Congresses

trade, the state department authorization, United Nations funding, arms control, and nuclear nonproliferation.<sup>10</sup> Defense policy includes roll-call votes on issues such as military pay, weapons systems, base closures, troop levels, covert activities, and commitments abroad. Finally, the domestic categorization includes issues such as energy and environment, governmental operations, civil rights, tax and budget issues, as well as welfare and human services.

### Changes in Bipartisan Congressional Support: Foreign, Defense, and Domestic Policy

Consistent with Meernik's (1993) earlier results, we find a substantial decay in bipartisan congressional support of the president after the Vietnam War. For example, Meernik found bipartisan agreement with the president's position on nearly 62 percent of foreign and defense policy roll-call votes between 1947 and 1972 inclusive (p. 571). After 1972, Meernik reported that the proportion of votes achieving this level of support dropped to only 39 percent. We find bipartisan agreement with the president's position on 56 percent of the foreign and defense policy roll calls from 1953 to 1972 and only 24 percent after. In addition, our findings indicate that the decline in congressional bipartisanship continued into the post-cold war era. For example, between the post-Vietnam era (1973-89) and the post-cold war era (1990-98), bipartisan congressional support dropped from about 26 percent on foreign and defense policy votes to less than 20 percent after 1989. This overall decline in bipartisan support parallels the findings by Fleisher et al. (2000) regarding decreases in presidential success on foreign and defense policy.

The over-time variation in congressional bipartisanship becomes even more apparent when roll calls are analyzed separately for defense, foreign, and domestic issues. Figure 1 shows the proportion of bipartisan support of the president in the House by issue area for the entire time series (1953-98). For defense issues, bipartisan support averaged more than 68 percent before 1973 and dropped to about 27 percent on average after 1972. In the area of

10. Foreign aid issues represent a subset of the foreign policy category. Foreign aid includes both appropriation and authorization legislation for foreign economic aid, military aid, the food for peace program, and the peace corp.

foreign policy, however, greater conflict tended to characterize congressional-executive relations during this earlier period. Prior to 1973, bipartisan support occurred on average on about 49 percent of roll calls and dropped to almost 22 percent of the votes after 1972.<sup>11</sup> Domestic policy, as one can see from Figure 1, has tended to be characterized by less over-time variation and greater conflict on average than either foreign or defense policy. In fact, presidential administrations rarely received bipartisan support on even 40 percent of domestic policy roll-call votes.

The aggregate findings on bipartisanship appear to challenge McCormick and Wittkopf's (1990) assertion that scholars previously overstated the extent that Vietnam and the cold war consensus contributed to congressional support of the president's position on foreign and defense policy. They argued that the effects of the war in Vietnam on the breakdown of bipartisan support cannot be distinguished from "other" concurrent political developments (e.g., institutional reforms) (pp. 1097-98). To test their assertions more systematically, we regressed the effects of time on each individual series. The regressions show significant inverse effects of the time trend for all three issue areas, but the largest effects were on defense and foreign policy rather than domestic issues. So, although there was a significant decline in bipartisanship for all three issue areas, the decay was heaviest in foreign and defense policy. This result indicates that the effects of the cold war on congressional bipartisanship were greater on foreign and defense policy, while the impact on domestic policy was less pronounced. So, the over-time patterns reveal an important caveat. To explain changes in congressional-executive relations, the effects of the cold war as well as other factors (e.g. congress centered) on bipartisanship need to be assessed across different issues.

### **Explaining Changes in Congressional-Executive Relations: Evidence from Logistic Models**

The logit models are designed to test the expectations regarding how factors relating to the international environment and institutional context explain bipartisan support of the president's position. The comparisons that our analysis makes across the three issue areas can help to uncover whether these causal variables differ in their effects across foreign, defense, and domestic policies. The appendix provides a complete description of each independent variable used in the logistic analysis. The dependent variable here is the same as in the previous part of the analysis, a dummy for bipartisan support of a president's position.

The first two columns in Tables 1 and 2 show the results of four different models explaining bipartisan support of the president's position from 1953 to 1998. Similar to Meernik (1993), the first model in Table 1 combines foreign and defense issues. The three remaining models estimate the effects of the explanatory variables on domestic, foreign, and defense policies separately. The third and fourth columns in each table present the relative

11. Average bipartisanship before 1973 is affected by the unusually large consensus during the Eisenhower administration. No other president after has received a similar level of support on foreign policy issues. Interestingly, while Eisenhower received bipartisan support on more than 75 percent of foreign policy roll calls (nearly twice as many as any other post-World War II president), both Kennedy and Johnson received considerably more support on defense-related votes.

**TABLE 1**  
**Bipartisan Presidential Support Models and Marginal Effects for Foreign and Defense and Domestic Policy Areas, House of Representatives, 1953 to 1998**

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Foreign and Defense Policy Model<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Domestic Policy Model<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>Marginal Effects Foreign and Defense Policy Model</i>	<i>Marginal Effects Domestic Policy Model</i>
Constant	.860* (.524)	.329 (.346)	—	—
Cold war consensus (1953-73)	1.51*** (.282)	.114 (.206)	.332	.021
Change in defense expenditures	3.68** (1.61)	.879 (1.24)	.124	.029
Expenditures × Cold War	-5.58*** (2.02)	-1.45 (1.46)	-1.133	-.038
Vietnam (1964-73)	-.049 (.038)	.055** (.025)	-.09	.122
Appropriations	-.738*** (.211)	-.320** (.158)	-.135	-.056
Trade	-.794*** (.250)	—	-.138	—
Foreign aid	-.715*** (.192)	—	-.129	—
Amendments	-.218 (.158)	-1.11*** (.163)	-.044	-.175
Republican president	.151 (.163)	.027 (.120)	.03	.005
Republican majority in House	-.708** (.327)	.452** (.200)	-.125	.091
President opposition to roll-call vote	-1.32*** (.143)	-2.26*** (.128)	-.274	-.395
Public approval of president	-.010 (.007)	-.012** (.005)	-.051	-.054
Post-cold war (1990-98)	.425 (.284)	-.359 (.229)	.091	-.064

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *N*s are as follows: foreign policy, 663; defense policy, 483; domestic policy, 2,550. The dependent variable is whether or not there was bipartisan support of the president's position in the House. Columns two and three represent the change in probability, *Y*, after fluctuating each independent variable one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean while holding all other independent variables at their mean values.

a. LL = -613.95;  $\chi^2 = 181.66$  ( $p < .0000$ ); pseudo  $R^2 = .151$ .

b. LL = -1250.02;  $\chi^2 = 402.88$  ( $p < .0000$ ); pseudo  $R^2 = .213$ .

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

strength of the independent variables on the likelihood of bipartisan support of the president's position for the respective models.<sup>12</sup> Table 1 reveals the significance of congressional context as measured by issue area and vote type. One can see that votes on appropriations,

12. The marginal effects for continuous variables were calculated based on a one standard deviation change in the independent variable while holding the other variables at their mean values. Dichotomous variables were assessed by fluctuating the independent variable of interest from zero to one, holding all other variables at their means.

**TABLE 2**  
**Bipartisan Presidential Support Models and Marginal Effects for Foreign and Defense Policy Areas, House of Representatives, 1953 to 1998**

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Foreign Policy Model<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Defense Policy Model<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>Marginal Effects Foreign Policy Model</i>	<i>Marginal Effects Defense Policy Model</i>
Constant	.641 (.708)	1.53* (.895)	—	—
Cold War consensus (1953-73)	1.63*** (.387)	1.48*** (.451)	.321	.344
Change in defense expenditures	4.11* (2.56)	3.63* (2.07)	.118	.137
Expenditures × Cold War	-5.12* (2.89)	-6.80** (3.00)	-.115	-.155
Vietnam (1964-73)	-.119** (.058)	-.005 (.055)	-.153	-.011
Appropriations	-.527 (.339)	-.938*** (.306)	-.085	-.181
Trade	-.654** (.286)	—	-.10	—
Foreign aid	-.457** (.238)	—	-.075	—
Amendments	-.655*** (.250)	.085 (.243)	-.109	.019
Republican president	.416* (.228)	-.726*** (.267)	.073	-.165
Republican majority in House	-.026 (.409)	-1.97*** (.651)	-.005	-.301
President opposition to roll-call vote	-1.90*** (.216)	-.825*** (.240)	-.331	-.187
Public approval of president	-.024*** (.009)	.012 (.011)	-.111	.059
Post-Cold War (1990-98)	1.01*** (.393)	-.282 (.416)	.203	-.061

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *N*s are as follows: foreign policy, 663; defense policy, 483; domestic policy, 2,550. The dependent variable is whether or not there was bipartisan support of the president's position in the House. Columns two and three represent the change in probability, *Y*, after fluctuating each independent variable one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean while holding all other independent variables at their mean values.

a. LL = -319.49;  $\chi^2 = 116.12$  ( $p < .0000$ ); pseudo  $R^2 = .210$ .

b. LL = -266.20;  $\chi^2 = 73.18$  ( $p < .0000$ ); pseudo  $R^2 = .158$ .

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

foreign aid, trade, and amendments tend to be significantly less likely to generate bipartisan support of the president's position. Certainly, this follows our theoretical expectations relating to the importance of the congressional context (hypotheses 3, 4, and 5). For the foreign and defense policy model, Table 1 column 3 shows that votes on appropriations, trade, and foreign aid each decrease the probability of bipartisan support by about the same amount. Congressional bipartisan support of the president is significantly less likely on matters

related to the purse string and on issues like trade that can activate domestic interests across congressional districts. These findings fit nicely with McCormick and Wittkopf's (1992, 32) argument that congressional support of the president tends to be less on "low politics" foreign policy issues.

In addition, the presidential opposition variable shows that when a president takes a position against a particular vote, the likelihood of bipartisan support drops significantly. These findings fit very nicely with Meernik's (1993, 582-83) results. Not only do we see that the legislative context plays an important role in congressional decision making, but presidential influence is not sufficient to shape bipartisan majorities against policy proposals.<sup>13</sup> Other findings relating to the interinstitutional context are also worth noting. Meernik found bipartisanship in the House to be less likely under unified Democratic government. Meernik argued that Democratic presidents are less likely to assemble a majority of Republicans when the Republican Party was in the minority. Looking at the combined model of foreign and defense policy in Table 1, the results demonstrate that the party of the president does not matter in securing a bipartisan majority. Although not shown, we also analyzed the effects of divided government on bipartisan support for each issue area.<sup>14</sup> Similar to the Republican president measure, divided government had no statistically significant effects on models of bipartisanship in Table 1.

Fleisher and Bond (1988), however, argued that under divided government, a majority opposition party might be politically impelled to support the president more on foreign and defense issues to maintain the nation's security. In addition, they found that Democratic House majorities provide greater support to Republican presidents than Democratic ones. Interestingly, the models in Table 1 show that Republican majorities in the House provide significantly greater bipartisan support on domestic issues but less bipartisan support on foreign and defense as compared to Democratic majorities.

The most interesting contrasts in Table 1 are the differences in the effects of the systemic variables on the combined foreign and defense model compared to the domestic model. These results allow us to assess hypotheses 1 and 2. For example, the effects of the cold war consensus (1953-73) is highly significant for the combined foreign and defense model but not for the domestic policy model. Column 3 in Table 1 shows that the effects of the cold war consensus on the probability of bipartisan support was .33 for the foreign and defense policy model—the largest effect relative to any of the other explanatory variables. These differences are also true for the effects of defense expenditures. Changes in defense expenditures have a significant effect on congressional bipartisan support in international affairs, while no such effects exist for domestic policy.

13. Indeed, relatively few of the presidential opposition votes on foreign and defense policy were on final passage votes. Rather, the majority of presidential opposition votes were on amendments. However, when a president does oppose final passage of a bill or resolution, rarely will a bipartisan majority in the House accede to the president's position. Bills are rarely defeated at the floor stage because members of Congress tend to have considerable investment in their passage. It is true that presidents are more likely to oppose amending attempts, but amendments are usually associated with challenges to the underlying bill and thus are an indication of at least some minimal partisan or ideological disagreement on the issue. Consequently, presidents are less likely to receive bipartisan support on amendments and particularly on amendments they oppose.

14. With the exception of the Clinton administration for the 104th and 105th Congresses, the Republican president and divided government variables are the same.

Admittedly, the impact of the defense expenditures variable is confined to the post-1973 era, as the interactive term indicates.<sup>15</sup> We find that systemic conditions affect congressional decision making only after the cold war consensus dissipated and reforms in the House allowed greater rank-and-file participation. During the 1953-72 period, congressional institutions more readily deferred to presidential preferences as a result of the complex and often dangerous international environment. Also important was a committee system that stacked the deck, so to speak, in favor of a president's policy prescriptions.

Consistent with our theoretical expectations, we observe differences in the effects of the systemic environment between foreign and domestic policy decision making. Once again, these findings challenge the assertions made by McCormick and Wittkopf (1990) in the same way that our aggregate statistics do. Not only do we find the overall effects of the cold war consensus on bipartisanship to be very large in these models, but the magnitude of the effects differs dramatically between the foreign and defense policy model and the domestic policy model. This further supports our argument that the role of systemic factors may differ in important ways across issue areas in explaining congressional bipartisanship. If, as McCormick and Wittkopf argued, the effects of the cold war and the Vietnam experience cannot be distinguished from other internal political factors, then we would not expect to find the significant divergence in effects between foreign and defense and domestic policies that are present in our models.

Turning to Table 2, we observe fewer differences in terms of the effects of the independent variables on bipartisan support for foreign versus defense policy relative to the differences observed in Table 1 between the domestic and combined foreign and defense models. Most of the interesting differences that emerge when disaggregating foreign and defense policies result from the interinstitutional context. For example, Table 2 shows that when Republicans have a majority in the House, there are offsetting effects dependent on the issue. On foreign policy, the party majority in the House makes no difference in terms of explaining congressional support of the president. On defense issues, though, bipartisan support of the president's position is significantly less likely under a Republican House.

In addition, the findings in Table 2 show that Republican presidents have greater success in building bipartisan support on foreign policy but significantly less on defense issues.

15. Initially, the results indicated that our measure of systemic threat had little effect on House bipartisanship, despite our theoretical expectations to the contrary. However, we wondered whether a temporal element might once again be playing a role. We therefore ran our analysis on only 1953 to 1973 observations (which reduced our  $N$  to 341 foreign and defense votes). The defense expenditures variable remained statistically insignificant. We then ran the analysis on the 805 post-cold war consensus observations. Here, the variable was positive and highly significant, as originally expected. This result is not simply the result of the  $N$  because the same relationship appeared when we ran the analyses separately on foreign policy votes and on defense policy votes. The variable is positive and significant on both issue areas in the 1974-98 period but not in the earlier period. While we readily admit that we did not theoretically expect this relationship a priori, the empirical finding is quite interesting. We include the interactive term because the relationship between defense expenditures and bipartisanship does appear to be conditioned on the time period. In assessing the marginal impact of the defense expenditures variable, one has to fluctuate both the expenditures and the interactive terms simultaneously while holding the other variables constant. What happens is that the individual effect of the defense expenditures variable and the individual effect of the interactive term cancel each other out in the cold war consensus period, given that the marginal impact of each variable is about the same but in opposite directions. In the post-cold war consensus era, however, the interactive term drops out, and the positive effect of the defense expenditures variable is all that remains. What we find, then, is that in the 1953-73 period, the probability of a bipartisan vote decreases from .541 to .529 as the defense expenditures and interactive variables are fluctuated by  $\pm 1$  standard deviation. In the latter era, however, the same fluctuation of the variables changes the probability of a bipartisan vote from .165 to .267.

In fact, the results demonstrate that on foreign policy, a Republican president increases the probability of bipartisan support from .19 to .26. The interesting point to make here is that once foreign aid and trade issues are controlled for, most other votes in the foreign policy category tend to be related to “high politics” issues in which Republican presidents do seem to have an advantage in mustering bipartisan support.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, Democratic presidents tend to receive greater bipartisan support on defense-related issues. The change in the likelihood of bipartisan support is nearly .17 when a Democrat is in the White House. Recall that for domestic policy, there was no evidence of a partisan effect. These results seem to provide an important insight into Fleisher and Bond’s (1988) argument and can be interpreted as supportive of the two-presidencies hypothesis. That is, the two-presidencies argument may hold for Republican presidents on foreign policy (e.g., high politics issues) but also for Democratic presidents on defense policies.

In assessing hypothesis 6, we find another interesting difference between foreign and defense policy in terms of the effects of the president’s approval rating on bipartisan support. When it comes to presidential approval, studies by Edwards (1989), Meernik (1993), and Bond and Fleisher (1990) have shown that public opinion ratings contribute only modestly to congressional support of the president’s position. Our evidence in Table 2 supports this conclusion, although the relationship is somewhat stronger in the results uncovered here as compared with previous research. A one standard deviation change in public approval decreases the probability of bipartisan support on foreign policy from .29 to .18 and in the area of domestic policy from .28 to .22.

While we recognize that this inverse relationship contrasts with common expectations, Shull and Shaw (1999) observed a similar relationship between approval and legislative support. Rivers and Rose (1985, 193-94) offered one possible explanation. They found that legislative success leads presidents to make subsequently larger legislative demands, which in turn tends to lower approval ratings. It may be that presidents respond to approval ratings with actions that contribute to those ratings changing. The statistical models we have specified simply do not capture the potential for this type of reciprocal interaction. The inverse relationship we find speaks to the potentially significant differences between modeling legislative success more generally and bipartisanship. According to the two-presidencies model, bipartisan support of the president in foreign policy results from an institutional deference shaped largely by the international environment and is relatively less affected by other political considerations. Certainly, our findings hint at the possibility of an interesting paradox. Presidential approval, viewed as a political resource, can increase legislative success in some situations but may actually work against congressional bipartisanship in the realm of foreign policy. Needless to say, we need additional research to explain more precisely this puzzle that emerges with regard to the relationship between congressional bipartisanship and presidential approval.

Like Meernik’s (1993) findings, we find no significant change in bipartisan support of the president’s position during the Vietnam War when foreign and defense policies are modeled together. However, when foreign policy is analyzed separately (in Table 2), the model suggests that during the Vietnam era, bipartisan support was significantly less likely to occur.

16. McCormick and Wittkopf (1992, 43) also found a difference in congressional support across issues depending on the party of the president.

Our findings demonstrate that the effect is not only significant but also much larger on foreign policy than on defense-related issues (see columns 3 and 4). In contrast, the effects of the Vietnam experience on the domestic policy model indicate a significant increase in bipartisanship during this same period. Once again, variation in the effects of Vietnam between foreign and domestic issues appears to contradict claims suggesting that systemic causal factors cannot be distinguished from other political factors.

In terms of the most recent changes during the post-cold war era on congressional bipartisan support of the president, the models from Table 1 indicated opposite coefficients, but there were no statistically significant differences. For the foreign policy model in Table 2, we observe a significant increase in the probability of bipartisan support during the post-cold war period. In fact, the likelihood of support increases by more than 100 percent (from .19 to .40) in the post-cold war period. On defense-related issues, however, there seems to be no analogous effect. This may have been a result of defense-related cuts during this time that tended to generate increases in partisan conflict. So, when foreign and defense policy is modeled separately, there are differences that parallel the aggregate changes observed from Figure 1. Although the overall levels of congressional bipartisan support of the president are lower than previous periods for both foreign and defense policy, the decay in congressional bipartisanship during the post-cold war era has been slightly greater in the area of defense issues.

## Conclusion

McCormick and Wittkopf (1990) found that the evidence relating to a bipartisan perspective of congressional-executive relations in foreign policy had been overemphasized. Instead, they argued that foreign policy was influenced by the same partisan and ideological forces that influenced domestic policy. Wittkopf and McCormick (1998) also argued that the end of the cold war has failed to substantially change a president's prerogative powers in congressional-executive relations. According to them, although the agenda of issues might change, the process of deciding outcomes would not (p. 456).<sup>17</sup> Our evidence, however, points to important over-time differences that coincide with changes in the international political environment in explaining congressional-executive relations. Like Meernik (1993), our analysis shows that congressional support of the president was dramatically lower after 1973 in foreign and defense policy. We also find that the effect of the cold war consensus on bipartisanship is very large relative to the other factors in the logistic models. Indeed, the influence of systemic threat varies by both temporal period and issue, indicating that not only does the international environment influence congressional decision making, but also the impact appears to be policy specific. We would not expect to find significant differences in congressional-executive relations like that found between the foreign and domestic policy models if the effects of changes in the international environment were not distinguishable from internal political factors, as McCormick and Wittkopf argued.

17. The one exception was on defense budgeting issues (Wittkopf and McCormick 1998, 457). But, they expected any differences in this area to dissipate with the era of budget surpluses.

The logit models additionally demonstrate that many of the same variables affect bipartisan support of the president, but the direction and degree of influence varies depending on the types of policies in debate. For example, the effects of the president's party can influence bipartisan coalition building in Congress. Here, the logit analysis provides evidence suggesting an interesting twist to the two-presidencies phenomenon. Republican presidents have had a distinct advantage in gaining congressional support in the area of foreign policy but significantly less so compared to Democratic presidents in the realm of defense policy.

Moreover, the analysis parallels previous work in that presidential popularity has only modest effects on congressional support (Meernik 1993; Bond and Fleisher 1990; Edwards 1989). But once again, the results emphasize that persistent differences across issues exist. Public approval makes little or no difference to bipartisan support of the president in defense policy, while on foreign policy higher levels of approval are associated with less congressional bipartisanship. This further suggests that the effectiveness of a president's political capital as measured by approval ratings may vary from issue to issue and depend on how presidential influence is defined (e.g., legislative success or bipartisanship). Variation in approval may have very different implications for congressional bipartisanship as opposed to a president's ability to construct winning partisan coalitions. This result, in our opinion, merits future investigation.

Finally, consistent with the findings of Fleisher et al. (2000), it is evident that post-cold war congressional decision making on issues relating to the president's foreign policy agenda have become increasingly characterized by less congressional consensus and greater partisanship. Yet, the aggregate results and the logistic models explaining bipartisanship indicate significant differences between foreign, defense, and domestic policy that are important for considering theories of congressional-executive relations. Although there has been a significant decline in bipartisanship overall, there were persistent differences in the effects of systemic factors on congressional-executive interactions in the realm of foreign affairs that were not apparent for domestic issues. Even in an era of greater partisanship and congressional assertiveness, the differential effects of international political conditions across issues provide support for the two-presidencies framework. Scholars need to further consider how features of the institutional context and international environment can differentially affect congressional-executive relations across issue areas.

## Appendix

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### Systemic context variables

*Cold war consensus.* This variable takes the value 1 for the years 1953 to 1973 and 0 otherwise.

*Vietnam.* This is a dummy variable taking on the value 1 for 1964 to 1973 and 0 otherwise.

*Post-cold war.* This variable takes on the value 1 for the years 1990 to 1998 and 0 otherwise.

*Percentage change in yearly defense expenditures.* This variable measures the percentage change in defense expenditure from one year to the next. The expenditure data are in current U.S. Dollars.

### Congress-centered variables

*Appropriations.* This is a dummy variable taking on the value 1 for roll-call votes relating to appropriations legislation and 0 otherwise.

*Foreign aid.* This is a dummy variable capturing appropriating and authorizing roll-call votes on foreign economic aid, military aid, food for peace program, and the peace corp.

*Trade.* This is a dummy indicator for trade issues such as legislation relating to unfair trade practices, export controls, compensation of U.S. businesses, tariff negotiations, import quotas, and the export-import bank.

*Amendments.* This is a dummy variable taking on the value 1 for first- and second-degree amendment votes and 0 otherwise.

#### Institutional context variables

*Republican president.* This is a dummy variable taking on the value 1 for Republican administrations and 0 otherwise.

*Republican majority in House.* This is a dummy variable capturing Republican control of the House of Representatives.

*Presidential opposition.* This is a dummy variable taking on the value 1 when the president takes a position against a particular roll call and 0 otherwise.

*Divided government.* This is a dummy indicator taking on the value 1 when the president and the majority party in both Houses share the same party and 0 otherwise.

#### Presidential resource variable

*Public approval of president.* This variable represents the percentage of presidential approval as measured by the Gallop Poll the month prior to the relevant roll-call vote.

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