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Strategic Position Taking and Presidential Influence in Congress

The rise and fall of presidential success in Congress remains a central puzzle in the literature. We model success as two interrelated processes: presidential position taking and Congress's decision to support or oppose the president. The analysis emphasizes the importance of strategic position taking in determining presidential success. We show that presidential approval significantly influences success, not only because it affects congressional behavior, but also because it shapes presidential decisions to take positions. Moreover, we explain that legislative success during the honeymoon period is driven by presidential position taking. Our findings highlight the role of a president's strategic decisions for theories explaining congressional-executive relations.

The framers of the U.S. Constitution envisioned an executive who would be limited in legislative affairs. Since the founders' time, Congress and the president have sought to redefine their respective legislative roles (Wayne 2002), clashing over judgeships, budgets, war, and nearly all other matters of public policy. Presidential power is, more often times than not, a zero-sum struggle for policymaking influence fueled by both interinstitutional and partisan considerations. Scholars have made significant strides in explaining the conditions that have an effect on changes in the relative influence of these institutions on public policy. Still, the role and effects of strategic behavior on congressional-executive relations constitute a critically important yet relatively unexplored topic in the literature (Andres and Griffin 2002; Lindsay and Steger 1993). To date, most empirical studies have assessed the effects of executive power on outcome measures, such as congressional support scores or presidential success as defined by roll-call votes. The scholarly focus of "who wins" on such outcome measures can be quite misleading, not only because these measures tend to capture only one stage of congressional-executive bargaining,

but also, and more important, because they fail to account for strategic behavior.

Indeed, a rich variety of executive actions—making speeches, issuing veto threats, selective arm-twisting—reflects the president's strategic choices in the legislative realm. Presidents have limited resources and so must carefully choose agenda items, legislative bills, or even specific votes that they will try to influence. One common factor governing these strategic decisions to get involved in the legislative arena is the president's anticipation of whether or not Congress will provide sufficient support for his or her policy views. In this article, we answer the following questions: Do presidents anticipate congressional behavior in their decision making, and can such anticipation influence their success with Congress? We argue that a president's anticipation of what Congress will do weighs heavily on the president's decisions. This kind of strategic decision making significantly shapes congressional-executive relations and is thus critical to assessing explanations of presidential power. Without a theoretical and empirical accounting of how a president's strategic anticipation of Congress shapes executive decisions, we are left with a distorted and incomplete view of presidential influence.

For this analysis, we developed and tested a theory of anticipated reactions suggesting that the strategic behavior of presidents when they are taking roll-call positions significantly influences their levels of legislative success. Our analysis utilizes a Heckman two-staged probit model to assess the dependence between a president's decision to take roll-call positions on legislative proposals and Congress's collective decision to pass or defeat those proposals. We demonstrate a strong association between position taking and the likelihood of success, supporting the theory of anticipated reactions. Further, our results offer insight into the importance of incorporating strategic position taking in explanations of how presidential approval and the honeymoon effect bear upon presidential success. For example, the strategic model demonstrates that approval levels do significantly increase success in Congress when one accounts for presidential position taking. If one does not control for the president's strategic position taking, then approval appears to have no impact on presidential success. Similarly, we discuss the considerable differences that arise for the effects of the presidential honeymoon on presidential success when one does and does not control for the president's position-taking behavior. Our results suggest that the honeymoon is not a phenomenon driven by congressional behavior. Rather, the honeymoon effect is driven by the strategic position-taking behavior of the president.

More generally, the results illustrate the importance of incorporating a president's anticipatory position taking in models that seek to explain presidential success, as well as the necessity of incorporating strategic behavior in our models of congressional-executive relations.

Explanations of Presidential Success in Congress and the Role of Strategic Behavior

What causes the pendulum of policymaking power to swing back and forth between the president and Congress? Understanding the conditions that foster variation in policymaking influence remains one of the perennial challenges facing scholars who study congressional-executive relations. Traditional approaches to this problem have attempted to identify the conditions that shape the executive branch's ability to wield influence over legislation in Congress. Much of the early work in this area was presidency-centered, focusing on the institutional and legal powers of the executive branch, as well as the characteristics of presidential leadership (Herring 1940; Neustadt 1980; Rossiter 1956; Wildavsky 1969). For example, Wildavsky's two-presidencies argument characterized differential power relations such that presidents dominated foreign policy and Congress played a more-substantial role in domestic issues. Applying the presidency-centered approach, scholars have found that presidential influence with Congress stems from inherent advantages of the executive branch, but also from individual skills and discretionary actions (Light 1982; Neustadt 1980; Sullivan 1991).[1]

Another approach in this tradition focused on the importance of the legislative environment in explaining patterns in presidential influence. According to this Congress-centered view, electoral and institutional changes in Congress play a critical role in shaping interbranch conflicts. Much of this work pointed toward the importance of congressional institutions, and especially changes in the ideological makeup of its membership, to explain variation in presidential success (Bond and Fleisher 1990; Edwards 1989; Krutz 2001; LeLoup and Shull 2003; Meernik 1993; Rohde 1994; Shull 1997).

Both Congress-centered and presidency-centered approaches have contributed significantly to the literature on congressional-executive relations, but neither has sufficiently emphasized the effects of strategic behavior. Particularly negligent in this regard are roll-call analyses examining factors that explain presidential success in Congress (Lindsay and Steger 1993). One key problem of this literature is that, by focusing on a single stage of behavior, these analyses implicitly

assume that prior or subsequent stages of behavior are independent of each other. In the context of the analysis here, this assumption would be analogous to assuming that the president's position taking is not conditioned by expectations of what Congress is going to do at subsequent stages of the policymaking process. If true, such an assumption would not present any problems for analyses. But if the condition of independence does not hold across different stages of congressional-executive behaviors, then focusing on only one stage offers a limited, and perhaps even biased, explanation of congressional-executive relations.

A relatively small, yet emerging literature emphasizes the importance of strategic behavior with respect to presidential influence in Congress (Canes-Wrone 2001). For example, Rivers and Rose (1985) have found that a president's success in Congress is associated with strategic decisions determining the size of his or her legislative program. Other research provides evidence that presidents maintain a strategic advantage in passing legislation they propose as compared to legislation proposed by Congress (Covington, Wrighton, and Kinney 1995). Moreover, Mouw and MacKuen (1992) have demonstrated that members of Congress also act strategically by moderating policy stances made salient by the president. And Kiewiet and McCubbins (1985) have shown that both Congress and the president act strategically by jointly accommodating each others' preferences in the context of budget requests.

One topic that has received considerably more attention is the effect of presidential approval on a president's success in Congress. The literature has offered very mixed results. Some of the empirical work suggests that the effect of approval levels on a president's legislative success is very limited or nonexistent, while other work suggests that presidential success is responsive to the president's public popularity (see Brace and Hinckley 1992; Collier and Sullivan 1995 or, alternatively, Ostrom and Simon 1985; and Edwards 1989). For example, Canes-Wrone and de Marchi (2002, 505) have shown that a president's approval rating can influence legislative success on salient and complex policy issues. Their results imply that presidents can improve their chances to win in Congress by strategically choosing certain types of policies to support. Although Canes-Wrone and de Marchi's analysis did not directly control for the role of strategic position taking, their work emphasizes the potential importance of position taking for explanations of presidential success.

A second topic that seems to invoke the potential importance of strategic position taking is the executive's initial honeymoon period with Congress and the public. Neustadt (2001) has suggested that the

presidential honeymoon cannot be explained by any inherent good-will on the part of Congress. In fact, the institutional and partisan incentives for Congress to compete for power are likely as intense at the beginning of a president's term as at any other time. To the extent that Congress does choose to lower overt displays of interinstitutional rancor, it does so out of concern for public opinion and only as long as the public mood dictates. Presidents seek to build momentum from their recent electoral victory and use it to influence Congress (Conley 2001). Presidents naturally want the positive public mood to extend as long as possible in order to translate public goodwill toward their legislative agendas (Peterson 1990). So presidents are very careful to choose issues and take positions that define their legislative agendas (Behr 2003). Thus, understanding presidents' strategic behavior is likely crucial for our understanding of the extent to which both presidential approval and the honeymoon period can affect presidential success in Congress.

While the emerging literature on strategic decision making offers great promise for explanations of executive-legislative interaction, a notable gap remains between theoretical expectations and empirical evidence. Our work builds on extant models of strategic decision making and makes two additional contributions to this literature: (1) a theory that explains how presidential decisions to take policy positions are conditioned by expectations of congressional behavior and (2) an empirical test that demonstrates the significant linkage between these presidential decisions and presidential success with Congress.

Anticipated Reactions in Presidential Position Taking

We have argued that the Congress-centered and presidency-centered explanations are limited because they tend to neglect the interactive nature of influence between the White House and Congress. The institutional advantages of the presidency are substantial, but their primary effect occurs when the president decides whether or not to enter the legislative arena and less so in the later stage(s), when legislators respond to presidential positions. This waning influence is important because the literature typically conceives of executive influence in terms of coalition building. Models of presidential influence usually begin by assuming that the position or policy stance of the president is given (that is, exogenous), and then they aim to explain how features of the political environment and the president's use of political resources influence coalition building. If presidential positions are truly exogenous with respect to subsequent congressional actions,

then this method poses no inferential problems. The premise of our theory, however, is that presidents do act strategically. So presidential positions are not exogenous but endogenous with respect to what the president expects (anticipates) Congress to do.

The theory of anticipated reactions offers an explanation for how the president's strategic decisions to take positions on legislation are linked to Congress's subsequent decisions determining success (that is, to agree or disagree with the president). Presidents take positions according to expectations about the policy preferences and actions of Congress. These expectations help to determine not only the president's initial decision to take a position, but also the president's likelihood of success with Congress.

The underlying assumption of our theory is that presidents are rational utility-maximizing individuals with multiple goals, but their policy goals loom larger than other goals. Policy goals are instrumental in helping presidents achieve a historical legacy, reelection, and the realization of their policy preferences (Canes-Wrone 2001; Moe 1985). So at the heart of anticipated reactions is the president's desire to maximize policy gains with Congress. Policy gains with respect to Congress are realized when the president shifts a given policy away from the status quo and closer to his or her preferred position or when the president prevents a shift in the status quo away from his or her preferred position. To achieve such gains, presidents strategically allocate their resources (or capital) on policies they think such behavior can successfully influence the legislative outcome. In the context here, presidents will take legislative positions when they believe that doing so will substantially increase their likelihood of success on the particular policies being considered by Congress.

We can think of the decision context facing the president as one in which the president can either take a position or not on a given proposal under consideration by the House of Representatives. This decision context provides four possible outcomes: a victory when the president takes a position on a proposal and Congress supports the president's position; a defeat when the president takes a position and Congress opposes the president's position; a victory when the president does not take a position (but favors the proposal) and Congress supports the proposal; a defeat when the president does not take a position (but opposes the proposal) and Congress opposes the proposal. There is an important caveat to this simplified decision process. Presidents can take positions in opposition to or in support of proposals, but these decisions are not equivalent with respect to the likelihood of legislative success. Legislative success is much more likely on

proposals that the president supports than on proposals the president opposes (see, for example, Covington, Wrighton, and Kinney 1995). We recognize this important distinction in presidential behavior, and our empirical analysis controls for it in explaining presidential success.[2]

The president receives utility from taking legislative positions resulting in policy gains and from credit claiming. But entering the legislative arena is not cost free. Position taking may include some minimal commitment of resources by the president in order to receive information about Congress's legislative preferences or to push policies of interest through the legislative process once a presidential commitment has been made. This employment of finite resources reduces the president's ability to influence future policy outcomes. The cost of position taking, we assume, is always less than the benefit derived from credit claiming (that is, taking a position on the winning side). Thus, even when there are few policy gains at stake, the president will have an incentive to take a position. In contrast, when the president takes a position and suffers defeat, there is a credit-claiming loss (or loss to reputation). A president therefore prefers a defeat with no position taking to a defeat with position taking.

Presidential position taking is dependent on the president's assessment of the probability of victory and the utility of such an outcome. Indeed, our theory emphasizes the importance not only of the president's utility for policy gains but especially of the president's expectations for success with Congress to explain his or her decision to take a legislative position. The president's expectations of Congress shape his or her strategic decision to take positions on certain legislative policies, informing the president's estimations of how much capital will have to be invested to move members of Congress on a given vote and the likelihood of success on that particular policy absent any presidential prodding.

Assuming that presidents care about the outcomes of legislative debate and receive some benefit for outcomes that coincide with their preferences and from credit claiming, we expect the probability of position taking to increase with the probability of the president's position being upheld by Congress. When the likelihood that Congress will pass a legislative policy is high and the president has an opportunity to claim credit on that policy, the president will be inclined to do so. When Congress is highly likely to vote against a president's preferences, position taking by the president makes little sense. Spending political resources on position taking and losing is likely to be worse than simply losing; presidents will have little incentive to take positions on policies they know will lose. This logic parallels arguments by Rivers

and Rose (1985) as well as Canes-Wrone and de Marchi (2002) that position taking carries a cost for presidents. As the probability of success increases, however, say from 0 to .50, and if the potential for policy gains is sufficient, presidents should increasingly use political resources to generate their most preferred legislative outcomes. As presidential success becomes increasingly assured, presidents should take positions but expend few political resources. That is, presidents should credit-claim on votes likely to go their direction. In this way, presidential position taking should increase with anticipation of a victory in Congress.

     The theory of anticipated reactions suggests that presidential success in Congress depends significantly on a president's initial decisions to take policy positions. Indeed, presidents do not randomly take positions on policy but do so selectively, according to the antici-pated reactions of Congress. In the next section, we provide a stylized model to explain the president's decision to take certain policy positions and then the collective decision of Congress to support or reject the president's position on those respective policies.

A Stylized Model Linking
Presidential Position Taking and Success

     First, consider the president's decision whether or not to take a position on a particular policy.[3] The president has an underlying unobservable utility to achieve policy gains, credit claim with Con-gress, or both; call it Y_{1i}*. This unobservable utility, Y_{1i}*, governs the president's decision rule for taking positions on particular policies. If the president's utility from taking a position is greater than the utility associated with not taking a position, then we observe a presidential position, $Y_{1i} = 1$. If the president's utility from taking a policy position is less than the utility for not taking a position, then we observe no presidential position, $Y_{1i} = 0$.

$Y_{1i} = 1$ when Y_{1i}* > 0 or utility from position taking – no position taking > 0.
$Y_{1i} = 0$ when Y_{1i}* $= 0$ or utility from position taking – no position taking ≤ 0.

     For ease of argument, then, our sample of data, Y_{1i}, represents the president's behavioral response to this decision rule as determined by the unobserved utility function from achieving policy gains with Congress, Y_{1i}*. An underlying relationship exists between the president's utility for policy gains, a vector of independent variables, X_i, and a disturbance term, U_{1i}, such that

$$Y_{1i}^* = X_i\beta_k + U_{1i}.$$

X_i represents observable factors related to the president's political resources and the political environment that inform presidential expectations about congressional reactions (for example, likelihood of success), which are used to estimate the parameters of interest, β_k, in the equation above. But we cannot observe Y_{1i}^* directly, only the behavioral realization of Y_{1i} when presidents choose to take positions (or not) on legislation considered in Congress. We therefore estimate the regression relationship from the observable Y_{1i} as

$$Y_{1i} = X_i\beta_k + Z_i\theta_k + U_{1i}, \tag{1}$$

where X_i represents a vector of variables affecting the president's utility for policy gains and Z_i represents a vector of variables affecting the president's decision to take a position.

The second decision stage incorporates the collective decision made by Congress that results in presidential success or failure. Let us also assume that Congress's decision is based on an underlying unobservable utility for policy; call it Y_{2i}^*. Y_{2i}^* governs Congress's decision rule to support or oppose the president's position on a particular policy. If Congress's utility for supporting the president's explicit legislative position is greater than Congress's utility for not supporting it, then we observe presidential success, $Y_{2i} = 1$. If Congress's utility for supporting the president's explicit legislative position is less than Congress's utility for not supporting it, then we observe a presidential defeat, $Y_{2i} = 0$. The sample of observable data for this process, Y_{2i}, represents the congressional response to this decision rule that results in either presidential success or defeat. As with equation (1), we can estimate the following regression relationship on presidential success (Y_{2i}) as a function of a vector of variables (X_i) that affects Congress's utility for policy, a vector (V_i) that affects Congress's decision to support (or oppose) the president, and a disturbance term, U_{2i}, such that

$$Y_{2i} = X_i\gamma_k + V_i\zeta_k + U_{2i}. \tag{2}$$

For simplicity, we assume that Congress's utility for policy is governed in a similar fashion as the president's, so the independent variables represent some of the same observable factors related to presidential resources and the political environment that are used to estimate the parameters of interest.

The selection of policy positions by the president from equation (1) poses an estimation problem for the second stage of the decision process, when presidential success is estimated. That is, we can only observe equation (2), presidential success or failure (Y_{2i}), when the president's underlying utility $Y_{1i}* > 0$. When this condition holds, the president will take a position. And based on these positions only, we estimate the regression function in (2). Put simply, the realization of Y_{2i} used to estimate presidential success is not a random draw from Y_{1i}. The problem with considering the decision processes (1) and (2) separately is that the parameters of interest governing the president's utility function determine whether or not presidential success or failure (Y_{2i}) can be observed. Thus, dependence exists between the parameters in equation (1) for position taking and the decision rule in equation (2) determining presidential success. Ignoring this linkage by treating the regressions separately is equivalent to omitting an important variable (for example, the inverse Mills ratio) when estimating presidential success. In the regression context, equation (2) will result in biased parameters of interest in models of presidential success.[4]

In this section, we have outlined the theory of how anticipated reactions explain the president's strategic decision to take policy positions, shown how position taking is linked to success, and explained why this linkage is important to theories of presidential success in Congress. To evaluate models of presidential success, then, we must understand the effects of the president's strategic behavior when taking policy positions. Presidents do not participate in the legislative arena by chance; they strategically choose to do so. Indeed, presidents take policy positions when they foresee making policy gains or claiming credit with Congress. When making such decisions, presidents consider the costs associated with position taking and the likelihood of success with Congress. The decision to take a position therefore represents anticipatory behavior that is not independent of the president's success in Congress.

This dependence suggests two testable hypotheses regarding anticipated reactions and the relationship between presidential position taking and legislative success in Congress. If the president's anticipation of congressional reactions is reflected through position taking, as we have suggested, then the effects of such behavior on presidential success should occur in one of two ways. Not all proposals in Congress have an equal probability of success. Some proposals are more likely to succeed than others, and presidents exploit this advantage for the purpose of pure credit claiming. On other proposals, the president's decision to take a position may hinge more on policy gains and whether or not the president thinks executive efforts can turn a loss into a win

in Congress. In both scenarios, the president's decision to take a position is driven by expectation of success in Congress:

Hypothesis 1: The president's decision to take legislative positions should be positively correlated with the likelihood of presidential success in Congress.

There is a secondary expectation directly relevant for empirical models explaining presidential success. If the role of anticipatory behavior as reflected in position taking is important for explaining presidential success, then we should find significant differences between empirical models that account for position-taking behavior and those that do not:

Hypothesis 2: Controlling for strategic position taking should enable us to account for significant differences in the conditions shaping presidential success.

Our earlier discussion suggested that strategic position taking by the executive may be especially important if we wish to understand the effects of public approval levels and of the honeymoon period on the president's success with Congress. So we expect that the executive's position-taking behavior will be particularly relevant for these variables with regard to presidential success.

Data, Measures, and Model Specification

Our analysis relies on all roll-call votes in the House of Representatives from the 83d Congress (1953–54) to the 105th Congress (1997–98), more than 17,000 roll-call-vote observations. The data we employ are superior to other aggregate success measures for our purposes, because we wish to model the presidential decision to take a position on any given roll-call vote and the subsequent congressional response that determines success or defeat. Aggregating the two decision processes of position taking and legislative success (for example, using annual analyses) would reduce our ability to assess the interdependence between these decision processes.
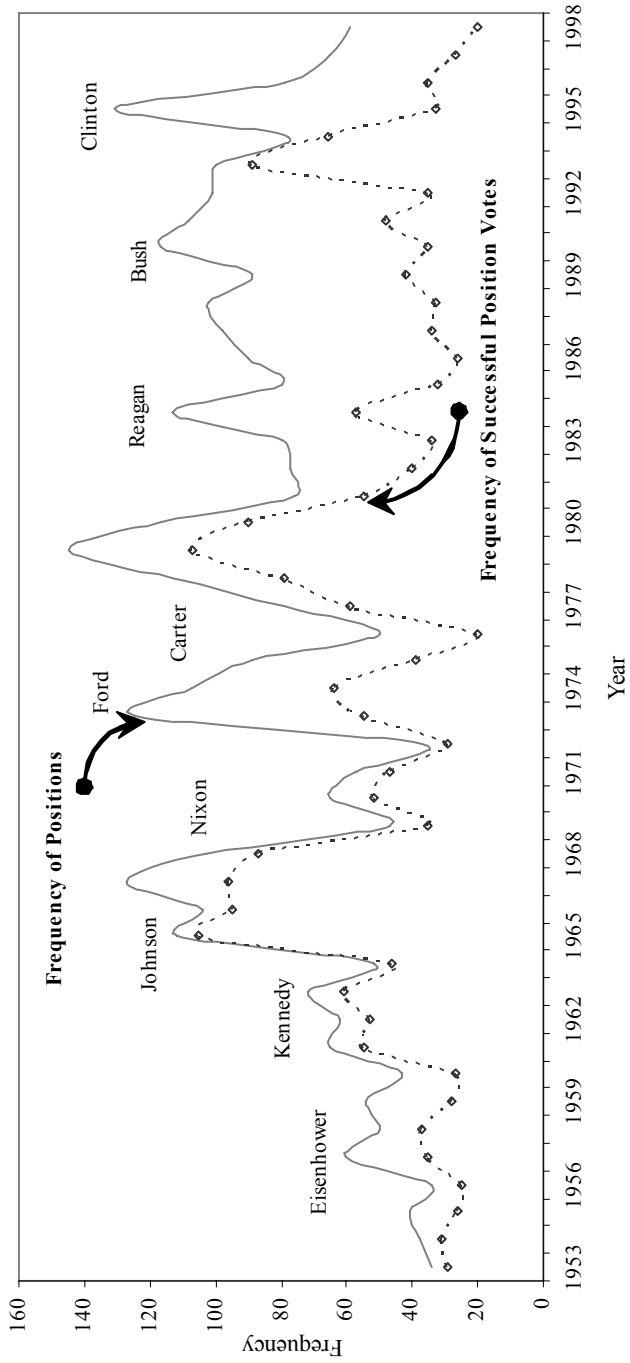
Dependent Variables

We employed two dependent variables. The first represents the president's decision to take a position on a roll-call vote in the House. Presidential positions are tracked and recorded by Congressional Quarterly (CQ). The positions are determined from public statements

made by the president and authorized personnel of the executive branch prior to the actual roll-call votes. The president's position regarding final passage, amendments, and so forth are then matched by CQ to the particular roll call. The relevant roll call is coded as 1 if the president takes a position and as 0 otherwise. The second dependent variable denotes the House's collective response to the roll-call vote on the floor. If a majority of House members votes in the same direction as the president's stated position, then this variable is coded as 1 (success); otherwise, it is coded as 0 (failure). Figure 1 illustrates the relative frequency of presidential position taking and the president's relative success over the period covered by our analysis. The figure shows considerable variation in position-taking activity and, consistent with previous studies, an overall decline in presidential success over time (Fleisher et al. 2000).

Independent Variables

We utilized a number of independent variables similar to those in previous studies assessing explanations of presidential success in Congress. These variables include many of the same key constructs emphasized in both presidency-centered and Congress-centered research. We recognize that these variables do not exhaust the list of influences on presidential position taking and legislative success, but our intention was to utilize a core set of covariates to isolate more effectively the impact of anticipated reactions. These measures can be classified into two categories relating to the president's political resources and the political environment. In terms of presidential resources, we included the president's public approval level and an indicator of the president's previous legislative victories. The president's approval level is defined as the percentage of the public approving of the president, according to the Gallup public opinion survey closest to, but not after, the actual vote.[5] We expected approval level to be positively related to presidential success. The prior legislative victory variable is simply the percentage of legislative successes the president achieved the month immediately preceding the given roll-call vote (Rivers and Rose 1985). With this variable, we attempted to more directly assess the argument that entering the legislative arena is not cost free. A president's legislative success (other than credit claiming) burns valuable presidential resources that can subsequently alter the future ability of presidents to enter the legislative arena.[6] Because presidential resources are finite, one would expect previous successes to be inversely related to position taking and subsequent legislative successes.

FIGURE 1
Frequency of Position Votes and
Successful Position Votes in the House, 1953–98

In addition, we included variables for the ideological disparity between Congress and the president, unified or divided government, presidential support, economic performance, and honeymoon year, as well as a dummy variable differentiating the pre-reform from the post-reform legislative environment. These measures capture some of the key features of the political environment that the president faces and that shape presidential expectations of legislative success in Congress. We measured ideological disparity as the absolute difference between the DW-NOMINATE score of the president and the median member of the House. We expected larger ideological differences to significantly reduce the likelihood of presidential success. Unified Government is coded as 1 if the government is unified and as 0 otherwise. We expected presidents to be more successful during periods of unified rather than divided government. Covington, Wrighton, and Kinney (1995) have suggested that majority party presidents have an easier time in the legislative arena than presidents facing opposition control. They found that not only are presidents more likely to support final passage of proposals under unified government but these measures are more likely to pass. Our analysis includes additional controls for when presidents support the passage of measures under unified government, allowing us to examine whether or not majority party presidents have greater success resulting from an increased tendency to support bills and resolutions pushed by same-party members in the House.

Our analysis also includes an unemployment variable measuring economic performance, which is the monthly percentage of citizens looking for work in the month preceding the vote. We expected stronger economies (lower levels of unemployment) to provide presidents with greater chances for legislative success. Like previous work, our analysis employs a control for the honeymoon year to test for higher levels of success due to congressional deference during a president's first year in office (Canes-Wrone and de Marchi 2002). The post-reform variable reflects the stark changes occurring in Congress from the committee-dominated system (before 1974, coded as 0) and the party-dominated system (after 1974, coded as 1). The post-reform Congress has been characterized by greater policy uncertainty, which should make policymaking more difficult between the president and Congress (Sinclair 2000). We expected presidential success to decline substantially during the post-reform period.

Finally, the analysis includes an electoral cycle variable as the selection instrument to properly identify the model. The variable is coded as 1 during election years and as 0 otherwise. The electoral cycle is a key variable as the selection instrument, because it influences

the president's utility for achieving policy gains with Congress ($Y_{1i}*$) and is thus important for determining the likelihood of observing presidential positions (Y_{1i}). To properly identify the Heckman model of position taking and success, we must ensure that the electoral cycle variable does not appreciably influence the likelihood that Congress will support the president's policy position. In fact, this condition is empirically met; the electoral cycle does not significantly influence presidential success for the model specification we employed. Accordingly, we included the electoral cycle variable in the position-taking model, but not in the model explaining presidential success. We expected presidents to take positions less frequently during election years, when they should be more heavily involved in campaigning. In particular, we expected the electoral cycle variable to significantly decrease the likelihood of position taking for the period considered in our analysis.

Model Specification

We estimated the basic two-equation model to explain variation in presidential position taking on each roll-call vote (Y_{1i}) and the president's legislative success in Congress (Y_{2i}), respectively, as

Presidential Position Taking$_{1i}$ = f(presidential approval$_{1i}$, previous success rate$_{1i}$, ideological disparity$_{1i}$, unified government, post-reform$_{1i}$, unemployment rate$_{1i}$, honeymoon year$_{1i}$, election year$_{1i}$, u_{1i}),

and

Presidential Success$_{2i}$ = f(presidential approval$_{2i}$, previous success rate$_{2i}$, ideological disparity$_{2i}$, unified government$_{2i}$, presidential direction$_{2i}$, post-reform$_{2i}$, unemployment rate$_{2i}$, honeymoon year$_{2i}$, u_{2i}).

We estimated these equations using a Heckman two-stage probit model.[7] The Heckman two-stage model estimates the impact of the covariates on success while controlling for the president's initial decision to take policy positions. The Heckman two-stage probit model also estimates an extra parameter indicating the correlation between the error terms for the position-taking and success equations. The correlation is represented by the ρ parameter that measures the direction and strength of the dependency in the errors from the equations. The Heckman model allowed us to estimate the separate effects of the independent variables on both presidential position taking and success. In effect, the Heckman model corrects for the bias in presidential success resulting from the censoring of position taking by strategic presidents.

Results

Table 1 displays the results from two models of presidential success, a standard (or nonstrategic) probit model and the Heckman two-stage probit (or strategic) model. The standard probit model does not control for position taking when estimating the effects of the independent variables. In contrast, the Heckman model does control for the dependence between position taking and success. Each model incorporates a common set of independent variables relating to executive resources and the political environment.[8] So data column one presents the results from the standard probit model (nonstrategic), which estimates the effects of the independent variables on presidential success but does not account for the president's prior decision to take legislative positions. The last column presents the results from the Heckman (strategic model), which does account for the impact of position taking on presidential success.[9] Data columns two and four from Table 1 provide the marginal effects of each of the independent variables on the probability of presidential success, so we can conduct a more-substantive comparison of differences between the models and the individual variables. We calculated the marginal effects by assessing the change in the probability of a success given a one-standard-deviation change from the mean of the independent variable of interest or from 0 to 1 for dummy variables while holding all other variables at their respective means.

The nonstrategic probit model provides a baseline for assessing the effects of the independent variables of interest on presidential success. These effects are fairly consistent with previous findings in the literature. For example, a president's success rate is higher during the first year in office, and preference differences between the president and the median member of the House marginally decrease legislative success.[10] The nonstrategic model shows that unified government appreciably increases presidential success but that presidents have been significantly less successful in the post-reform era compared to the pre-reform era. Like the findings of Covington, Wrighton, and Kinney (1995), our findings from the standard model indicate that presidents are significantly more likely to be successful when supporting proposals and when supporting passage of proposals during unified government. Importantly, the instrument in the selection equation—election year—does not significantly influence the probability of success. Likewise, presidential approval has little impact on success, but this result is not necessarily inconsistent with the mixed results found in the literature (see, for example, Cohen et al. 2000 and Collier and Sullivan 1995,

but also Brace and Hinckley 1992, Canes-Wrone and de Marchi 2002, Ostrom and Simon 1985, and Rivers and Rose 1985, respectively).

There are a few unexpected relationships in the nonstrategic probit model. Although we expected the unemployment rate to negatively influence presidential success in Congress, the results suggest the opposite. This finding seems to counter the logic that the public would hold the president accountable for higher unemployment rates, resulting in the president's weakened political standing relative to Congress. In addition, the results of the nonstrategic probit model indicate that a president's past successes are positively correlated with current legislative success. This pattern contradicts the argument that prior legislative successes should reduce the amount of capital that presidents have to promote future policy successes. Admittedly, our analysis is limited because it cannot differentiate between presidential positions for credit claiming or for the purpose of prodding Congress in order to win on presidential initiatives. Perhaps this limitation is responsible for these counterintuitive results. Perhaps presidents react to the rise of unemployment levels by taking positions only on those measures that they know will win (credit claiming) and foregoing more opportunities to take positions that would require the expenditure of significant capital to win. Also, the positive relationship found for previous success may be driven by credit-claiming behavior if popular proposals are grouped together on the legislative agenda. This analysis cannot speak to these conjectures, however, which will have to await further investigation.

Turning to the strategic (Heckman) model, we note that the results in the last column of Table 1 allow us to directly assess the main hypothesis derived from the theory of anticipated reactions. This model provides coefficient estimates of the effects of the independent variables on position taking and presidential success, but it also assesses whether or not there is any dependence between these two decisions by estimating an additional ancillary parameter, rho (ρ). The Heckman results not only indicate significant dependence between the president's initial decision to take a policy position and Congress's collective decision to pass or defeat a measure; they also indicate that the direction of dependence is exactly what the theory of anticipated reactions predicts. The rho parameter ranges between 1 and –1. In the Heckman model, the rho measuring the correlation between position taking and success is relatively large, positive, and significant, .64. This result strongly supports the main hypothesis, suggesting that the president's strategic decisions to take positions are very important in determining legislative success. Presidents seek to claim credit, make policy gains with Congress, or both, by selectively taking positions on legislative

TABLE 1

A Nonstrategic Probit Model of Legislative Success and a Strategic (Heckman) Model of Presidential Position Taking and Legislative Success in the House of Representatives, 1953–98

(standard errors in parentheses)

Variable	Nonstrategic Probit Success Model	Δ P[Y] Nonstrategic Model	Strategic Two-stage Probit Model	Δ P[Y] Strategic Model
Position-taking Constant			-1.166**	—
			(.096)	
Presidential Approval			1.167**	.08
			(.099)	
Previous Presidential Success			-.065	0
			(.045)	
Preference Difference (DW Nominate)			.136	0
			(.097)	
Unified Government			.294**	.09
			(.034)	
Post-reform Period			-.597**	-.19
			(.033)	
Unemployment Rate			.022*	.02
			(.009)	
Honeymoon Year			-.187**	-.04
			(.037)	
Election Year			-.094**	-.03
			(.024)	
Success Constant	-.864**	—	-1.43**	—
	(.349)		(.293)	
Presidential Approval	.025	0	.547*	.03
	(.362)		(.246)	

TABLE 1 (continued)

Variable	Nonstrategic Probit Success Model	Δ P[Y] Nonstrategic Model	Strategic Two-stage Probit Model	Δ P[Y] Strategic Model
Previous Presidential Success	.372*	.09	.168	0
	(.165)		(.091)	
Preference Difference (DW Nominate)	-.531	0	-.207	0
	(.294)		(.159)	
Unified Government	.903**	.34	.568**	.16
	(.130)		(.069)	
Yea Position	1.38**	.47	.685**	.21
	(.087)		(.108)	
Yea Position & Unified Government	1.80**	.33	.695**	.27
	(.295)		(.151)	
Post-reform Period	-.568**	-.22	-.576**	-.17
	(.132)		(.082)	
Unemployment Rate	.096**	.11	.057**	.04
	(.034)		(.018)	
Honeymoon Year	.441**	.18	.108	0
	(.131)		(.076)	
Election Year	.132	0	—	—
	(.086)			
ρ Selection Effect	—	—	.64**	
			(.183)	
Log-likelihood	-1,930.52		-10,455.42	
Sample Size	3702		17045	

Note: Dependent variable is position taking on legislative roll-call votes in the House or success on position votes in the House. Marginal effects calculated as the change in Y after fluctuating X_i by one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean or 0 to 1 for dichotomous variables, while holding all other variables at their mean values. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

measures they think can win—those in which the expected probability of sufficient congressional support is relatively high. Presidents carefully consider the costs associated with position taking before entering the legislative arena, and this preliminary attention pays off, on average, when it comes to vote victories.

In addition, a comparison of results between the nonstrategic and strategic Heckman models provides support for the secondary hypothesis. If anticipated reactions do play an important role, then models of presidential success that control for strategic position taking should be substantively different from models of presidential success that assume position taking is independent of success. The results reported in Table 1 indicate clear and important distinctions between the models. In fact, the results reflect significant differences between the models for many of the variables estimated to explain presidential success.

One of the most notable differences may shed light on the continuing puzzle regarding the influence of presidential approval on legislative success. Some of the most important and recent work in the literature has developed explanations of how presidential approval generates policy influence in Congress. In particular, Canes-Wrone and de Marchi (2002) have demonstrated the importance of issue salience and complexity for determining the extent to which presidential approval influences legislative success. One logical implication of their work is that presidents may wisely employ their popularity by championing complex and salient legislation (2002, 505). Our results directly speak to this important finding, because we explicitly analyzed the role of a president's strategic position taking on measures considered by Congress. From the nonstrategic probit model, we can infer that a president's popularity has no significant impact on his or her legislative success. This inference is consistent with previous findings in the literature (Cohen et al. 2000; Collier and Sullivan 1995). The strategic model suggests a very different result, however. The results from the Heckman model show that a one-standard-deviation change in the president's approval level significantly increases the probability of success by .03.

But the effects of presidential approval are certainly not limited to the success equation. In fact, the Heckman model illustrates that the effects of presidential approval are important to success, not so much because approval influences congressional voting (the success equation), but because approval influences the positions that presidents take in the first place (the position-taking equation). That is, a one-standard-deviation change in approval level increases the probability that the president will take a legislative position by .08. The results

relating to presidential approval provide direct support for the Canes-Wrone and de Marchi argument that presidents can act strategically to shape their legislative success in Congress.

Indeed, there is a significant role for presidential approval in explanations of position taking as it affects a president's success in Congress. This result should challenge the way scholars think about presidential influence. The Heckman model suggests that presidential approval ratings do not simply provide presidents with greater leverage to build winning coalitions in Congress, but are also important for our explanations regarding presidential decisions to take legislative positions. The results seem to suggest that popular presidents are more risk acceptant, taking positions on more-difficult or harder-to-win issues, whereas less-popular presidents employ a risk-averse strategy, taking positions on issues that are likely to win in order to claim credit. Without controlling for the president's position-taking behavior, one would conclude from the nonstrategic model that approval levels do not matter to legislative success. Consistent with the theory, presidents anticipate how the political environment and their own approval levels will impact their likelihood of success in Congress. When conditions are favorable—for instance, when presidents enjoy high levels of popularity—they are more likely to enter the legislative arena and win.

Another important difference between the nonstrategic and strategic models relates to presidential honeymoon effects. The findings from the standard model show a honeymoon effect. During the president's honeymoon year, the probability of success significantly increases by .18. From this result, one would conclude that presidents are more successful, on average, during their first year in office. But the Heckman model indicates that there is no significant effect of honeymoon on the probability of success. Instead, the strategic model shows that the effect of the honeymoon-year variable manifests at the position-taking stage: presidents are significantly less likely to take legislative positions during their first year in office. This result seems to suggest that presidents are more cautious (risk averse) about taking positions during the honeymoon period. To the extent that the honeymoon effect does exist, it seems to be driven by presidential behavior and not the goodwill of Congress. Once one controls for presidential position taking, the honeymoon effect disappears. This result seems consistent with Neustadt's (2001) argument that the honeymoon period does not negate the competition for power between the branches. Thus, not only do we see success unaffected by a president's first year, but we also see presidents selectively shy away from the legislative arena immediately after entering office.

There is also a distinction in the results found for the previous-success variable. In the standard probit model, the president's previous success significantly increases the probability of success, by .09. But when one controls for position taking in the Heckman model, this variable exerts no significant effect on the probability of success. As mentioned earlier, we cannot discriminate between presidential behaviors designed to claim credit and those intended as congressional prodding. Yet our finding that, once we control for position taking in the Heckman model, the effects of previous successes drop out lends support to the argument that credit-claiming behavior may drive this particular finding. Prior successes in Congress may use up valuable presidential capital, but only those successes on positions taken for the purpose of prodding members of Congress to pass a particular proposal.

A further comparison of the remaining covariates offers some consistent and interesting results. For example, both models in Table 1 indicate that presidential success decreased significantly during the post-reform era. The probability of success decreased by .22 and by .17 in the nonstrategic and strategic probit models, respectively. Considering the increase in voting in general in the post-reform era and the increase in the roll calls taken on amendments and procedural votes, we think it likely that the legislative environment has become more complex, more uncertain, and thus more difficult to predict. Not surprisingly, presidential success in the post-reform environment seems to have decreased dramatically. As expected, presidents are much more successful during unified government; the probability of presidential success increases significantly under the condition of unified government in both models (.34 and .16). Also, presidential direction is important for explaining success in both models. When presidents support a measure, the probability of success increases by .47 in the standard model and by .21 in the strategic model. In addition, presidential support for passage under unified government significantly increases the likelihood of presidential success. These findings support those of Covington, Wrighton, and Kinney (1995), who also have observed different success rates for yea versus nay positions by presidents. Supporting passage of final disposition votes during unified government increases the probability of success by .33 in the standard model and by .27 in the Heckman model.

Implications and Conclusion

When considering the question of why the pendulum of policymaking power swings back and forth between the Congress and the president, we are left with some of the same limitations that other scholars have encountered using roll-call data (Covington, Wrighton, and Kinney 1995; Edwards 1989; Lindsay and Steger 1993). Admittedly, we cannot untangle the different purposes for which presidents enter the legislative arena. Sometimes presidents may have an eye toward credit claiming; other times they may purposefully attempt to build support in Congress to pass their favored measures. Clearly, this inability to ascertain presidential motivation presents problems for how we employ measures of legislative successs. But regardless of how we gauge outcome measures like success, the theory of anticipated reactions can shed light on the power of a president's strategic behavior and influence with Congress. Indeed, this analysis highlights the important relationship between a president's strategic behavior and outcomes in Congress.

In particular, our analysis illustrates that we cannot ignore a president's position when we develop explanations of success. The rho parameter in the strategic Heckman model indicates a strong positive association between position taking on roll-call votes and presidential success with Congress. We infer from these results that presidential decisions to take positions are strategic and that these decisions increase a president's likelihood of success with Congress. We attribute this correlation to the effects of anticipated reactions—the president's expectation of how Congress will react.

Not only is there significant linkage between position taking and success, but the analysis also demonstrates the relevance of this dependence in explanations of presidential success. Comparison of the strategic and nonstrategic models of presidential success reveals important differences in the effects of variables related to the political environment and presidential resources. The analysis demonstrates that these differences can be accounted for by the president's initial decision to take a policy position. One of the most intriguing findings provides insight into the effects of presidential approval on legislative success. Previous analyses found significant effects of approval on presidential success; others did not. The findings of Canes-Wrone and de Marchi demonstrate the importance of issue saliency and complexity in conditioning the influence of presidential approval on success. Their finding suggests that presidents can better exploit their popularity by championing these types of issues. Canes-Wrone and de Marchi did

not, however, explicitly assess the relevance of strategic position taking. Our analysis focused on the role of position taking and adds to their findings by showing that presidential popularity is important for explaining success, not so much because it influences congressional behavior, but because it affects the president's decision to take positions.

Indeed, the results of the analysis speak to a more-general point regarding the exogeneity assumption in models that seek to explain presidential influence in Congress. The standard or nonstrategic probit model is consistent with such a theoretical assumption. But the theory of anticipated reactions makes no such assumption and instead holds that presidential behavior (for instance, presidential position taking) is conditioned upon the president's expectations of congressional behavior (such as legislative success). Moreover, the Heckman model demonstrates empirically that the "theoretical linkage" between these decision processes exists and that this linkage can illuminate our understanding of how various factors shape presidential success in Congress.

Certainly, our analysis suggests that we need to think carefully about models of success that assume presidential positions are given or exogenous with respect to congressional actions. This caveat does not diminish the importance of models that explain how presidents use their political resources to build winning coalitions in Congress, but it does suggest that one important aspect of coalition building takes place at the position-taking stage, prior to when presidents may be compelled to use such resources to influence members. The Heckman results highlight the fact that presidential behavior at the position-taking stage is very important for determining presidential success in Congress. So, although presidential influence may be relatively indiscernible at one stage, it may not be at other, critical stages. Understanding how the various decision stages are linked is an important step toward explaining the variation in presidential power that so intrigues scholars of congressional-executive relations. Our analysis justifies incorporating the theory of anticipated reactions into other models of presidential behavior and that behavior's consequences for congressional-executive relations more generally.

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NOTES

1. Some scholars have argued for a more-refined distinction that classifies explanations into "presidency-centered" and "president-centered" (see, for example, Gilmour 2002 and Mayer 2001). The former highlights the constraints imposed by the executive's institutional setting to explain behavior, while the latter highlights variation in the characteristics of individual presidents.

2. Indeed, presidents tend to be much more successful when supporting passage of a proposal than when opposing it: the probability of presidential success increases more than 50% when the president approves passage compared to when he or she opposes passage. This relationship makes sense, since, by the time a policy proposal reaches the floor of the House for debate, a large coalition typically favors passage because of the time and effort expended getting it to the floor.

3. To illustrate the "selection problem" that results in the dependence between position taking and presidential success, we draw heavily on Heckman 1979 and Johnston and DiNardo 1997.

4. The assumption that the correlation between U_{1i} and U_{2i} or $\rho = 0$ from equations (1) and (2) will not be met.

5. Our analysis utilizes the presidential approval rating the month prior to the vote to explain success and position taking. We recognize that this rating is not temporally ideal, because presidents sometimes take positions several weeks prior to the actual vote. Still, we do not expect the results would be dramatically different if another temporal indicator was used, since presidential approval is highly autoregressive and nearly meets the conditions of a unit root from month to month.

6. Our measure of the president's prior success rate incorporates the idea that position taking expends presidential capital. It is not necessarily the raw number of positions that matters so much, because this number is likely driven by Congress's agenda and credit claiming. Success rate is a better gauge because what is important in terms of presidential capital is the number of policy wins relative to policy losses.

7. The model utilizes the following log likelihood for the ith observation and where Φ is the standard cumulative normal:

$$L_i = \left\{ w_i \ln \Phi \left\{ \frac{z_i\gamma + (y_i - x_i\beta)\rho/\sigma}{\sqrt{1 - \rho 2}} \right\} - w_{i/2} \frac{(y_i - x_i\beta)2}{\sigma} - w_i \ln(\sqrt{2\pi}\sigma) \text{ for observed } y_i \right.$$
$$\left. w_i \ln \Phi(-z_i\gamma) \text{ for unobserved } y_i \right\}$$

8. As mentioned previously, we included extra control variables for presidential direction in the success equation to capture differences in the propensity of presidents to support proposals and to support passage of proposals under unified government. To check for stability, we estimated models with and without this variable in the specification. There were no substantive differences between the models, suggesting that the inferences we draw from them are robust. To further check the model for fragility, we included other controls, such as a dummy indicator for final passage, and found the results remained consistent.

9. It is important to note that the number of observations for the probit success model is different from the number of observations for the Heckman model in Table 1. The Heckman model has two dependent variables. The 17,045 observations represent the number of roll calls during this period that the president could have taken a position on. The second dependent variable represents whether or not the president was successful after taking a position. There were a total of 3,702 presidential positions on roll calls during this period that were used to estimate the presidential success models.

10. Preference difference falls just short of conventional significance at p = .07.

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