

## Introduction

# *Party Control and Presidential Leverage in Political Time*

SPLIT-PARTY CONTROL OF THE PRESIDENCY and Congress—divided government—has occurred just over six out of every ten years since 1946. Surely the permanence of divided government for all but two short years between 1981 and 2000 argues for the need to theorize about the impact of party control of Congress on the modern presidency. As Paul Quirk and Bruce Nesmith assert: “Whether the president and the majority in Congress have compatible ideological and electoral goals or conflicting ones almost certainly matters somehow. The question is how.”<sup>1</sup>

Scholars have not sufficiently explored or analyzed how presidents have approached leadership of Congress under single- or split-party control of national institutions. Analyses of the impact of divided government have tended to focus either on the electoral causes or on questions of legislative productivity without a thorough specification (or consideration) of the president’s role in lawmaking.<sup>2</sup> Allegations that split-party control naturally contributes to policy deadlock have not withstood empirical scrutiny. Yet the scholarly preoccupation with gridlock has obscured an appreciation for the precise ways in which party control of Congress has affected the exercise of presidential legislative leadership differently across time.

This book attempts to fill this void, using a close comparative analysis with an emphasis on presidents who have faced divided government since 1945. The analysis focuses on presidential strategies and successes in the domestic policy realm. The domestic and foreign policy realms are sufficiently different to warrant separate examination.<sup>3</sup>

Party control of Congress *does* matter for the legislative presidency, but the impact has been highly uneven in the postwar era. The central argument of this book is that electoral contexts and institutional circumstances in Congress have produced substantial variation in presidential leadership strategy and success in the legislative realm. The conceptual framework for the study lays emphasis on the considerable differences in the exercise of legislative

leadership not only *between* periods of unified and divided government but also *within* cases of single- and split-party control. The contrast in presidential strategy, and the form of legislative influence presidents have been able to wield over Congress, is most visible when early periods of the postwar era are contrasted to the closing decades of the twentieth century. In particular, presidential reliance on the veto power when faced with divided government in the 1980s and 1990s bore little resemblance to presidents' frequent coalition-building activities during periods of split-party control spanning the 1950s through the early 1970s.

In the years following World War II through the early 1970s, presidents were typically able to engage in cross-party coalition building in Congress for their legislative goals, whether party control was unified or divided. Shifting voting alignments in Congress necessitated brokering legislative support across party lines. Weak organizational structures and lack of leadership coordination in Congress prompted members to look to the president for policy leadership. Stronger presidential electoral resources—"coattails"—enhanced presidents' *coalition-building leverage*. Depending upon the interplay of the institutional setting in Congress, presidents' electoral resources, and the overlap in agenda objectives between the branches, presidents facing unified and divided conditions could influence individual members and leaders in both parties and frequently build sufficient support to carry their legislative slates to victory. Winning coalitions translated into high floor success rates, which was important because significant domestic legislation of the day was frequently linked to the president's stated policy objectives.

Changes in Congress' structural dynamics and weakening electoral resources have altered the nature of presidential influence and the type of legislative success to which chief executives have been able to lay claim since the 1970s. Stronger partisan voting cohesion in Congress, better leadership coordination, and less deference to the president's policy objectives have combined with tenuous presidential electoral resources to diminish the basis for strong executive influence and independent policy success. These factors produced a subtle yet important distinction in the type of legislative leadership presidents were able to exercise under unified conditions compared to the 1950s and 1960s. The contrast has been most stark, however, when presidential strategy and success in early periods of divided government are compared to the nearly permanent situation of split-party control in the 1980s and 1990s.

Presidents facing unified conditions in recent decades have increasingly derived most of their support from loyal partisans. As party labels became

meaningful in Congress, presidents were less able to marshal—or were compelled to seek—cross-party support. Party control engendered greater reciprocity in policy goals between the branches and yielded high floor success rates for occupants of the Oval Office. Nevertheless, better-organized partisan majorities in Congress have showed less deference to presidents' independent policy goals. Presidents have had few or nonexistent coattails. Their copartisans' strong incumbency advantage has eroded electoral connections and diminished a sense of shared electoral fate between the White House and the majority on Capitol Hill. These factors were pivotal in moderating presidents' basis for considerable *autonomous* policy success. Most of the presidents' efforts and greatest policy successes entailed reinforcing support for *continuing party objectives* in Congress.

The incidence of divided government since the 1980s has significantly recast presidents' legislative strategies. Compared to earlier periods of split-party control, presidents run behind and are less popular in electoral terms than members of the opposition majority in Congress. The geographic realignment of the southern electorate sharpened the ideological divide between presidents and the opposition majorities they confronted.<sup>4</sup> Assertive congressional leaders undertook organizational reforms aimed at challenging presidents' policy leadership and pursued agendas with little or no overlap with the White House's policy objectives.<sup>5</sup> Party-line voting has robbed presidents of the ability to garner reliable support from opposition legislators. These factors have militated against the type of cross-party coalition building presidents once routinely engaged in when faced with divided government.

Presidents not only lost far more frequently on their legislative stands, they also were driven to seek alternative means to influence legislative outcomes. They sought to ensure partisan support for their legislative stands and endeavored to turn narrow margins in Congress to their advantage. Unable to persuade congressional majorities to give attention to their own policy priorities or construct winning legislative coalitions for their policy stands, presidents turned to *veto leverage* to defensively ward off the most objectionable elements of the majority's agenda and delimit the range of acceptable outcomes. Vetoes and preemptive veto threats became the presidential weapon of choice in an era of party unity in which opposition majorities in Congress typically lacked the necessary votes for successful overrides. This set of circumstances posed far more significant challenges to presidents' bids to claim credit for significant legislative outcomes compared to the 1950s, 1960s, or early 1970s. This policy-making context also increased the potential for considerable disagreement and stalemate between the branches.

*Beyond Gridlock: The Presidency and Party Control of Congress*

The impact of unified and divided government on the legislative presidency has been variable, and occasionally quite volatile, in the postwar era. This book's focus on the electoral and institutional contexts that have shaped presidential legislative strategies in the last half century moves the debate about the consequences of party control of national institutions beyond the basic question of legislative productivity. It is imperative to "bring the presidency back" into the debate about party control of national institutions in order to grasp how presidents have chosen to adapt strategically to changing political contexts. Only then is it possible to fully gauge the effect of single- and split-party control on legislative leadership, policy outcomes, and credit-claiming opportunities.

David Mayhew's assertion that party control matters little because "System production should be the final test, not whether presidents happened to get what they wanted" obviates the question of presidential strategy and where chief executives have fit into "significant" legislative outcomes.<sup>6</sup> Gridlock must not be the *only* criterion used to assess the impact of divided government. A "tandem institutions" perspective on executive-legislative relations does not preclude recasting the question of legislative output to inquire about the president's role and success in the legislative sphere and the range of strategies presidents may employ under unified and divided government across time.<sup>7</sup>

The yardstick of legislative productivity to measure the effect of party control of national institutions fails to account for popular expectations of presidential leadership. Such expectations of American chief executives may, alas, exceed institutional capacity.<sup>8</sup> Whether control of the presidency and Congress is unified or divided means little to voters, who continue to expect the president to act as "chief legislator."<sup>9</sup> Contemporary presidents thus rely on their legislative achievements to win reelection. Their policy legacies are the principal criterion against which voters and historians judge their success or failure. Modern presidents cannot escape the "shadow" of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's early legislative accomplishments.<sup>10</sup>

While we may take solace from the systemic perspective that legislative output is not inevitably that much lower under conditions of split-party control, Mayhew's "important contention that divided government does not matter very much in the long run offers very little comfort to presidents or to opposing congressional majorities."<sup>11</sup> Presidents oppose more significant legislation and veto more legislation under divided government.<sup>12</sup> Powerful

electoral motives may discourage cooperation between the branches.<sup>13</sup> There may be incentives at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue for what John Gilmour calls “strategic disagreement,” or the conscious choice by the president and Congress to delay policy decisions until more favorable conditions for partisan credit-claiming arise.<sup>14</sup> It becomes essential to analyze how presidents who have confronted opposition majorities in Congress have failed or succeeded in adjusting their strategic behavior to surmount such obstacles to legislative leadership under different political contexts.

Contemporary proponents of a “responsible party government” system, such as James Sundquist and Lloyd Cutler, contend that unified control of the presidency and Congress is vital for presidential policy leadership.<sup>15</sup> Harmonious relations between the president and Congress, though rare, have always occurred when the same party has controlled both the White House and Capitol Hill.<sup>16</sup> Many scholars stress that unified government is more responsive to public demands and have shown that more partisan legislation passes under unified government.<sup>17</sup> These studies do not, however, provide a precise analysis of the president’s legislative leadership role under unified government. At the same time, several instances of unified government in modern times—including the Kennedy, Carter, and Clinton presidencies—have not proven a panacea for presidents in the legislative sphere. It thus is critical to examine more closely the factors that either buttressed presidents’ abilities to successfully pursue autonomous policy objectives or moderated their basis for influence and prompted them to concentrate on the advancement of “continuing legislative agendas” in Congress.<sup>18</sup>

A broader view of the impact of party control of national institutions, then, must consider presidents’ strategic responses to differing governing contexts and their impact on policy outcomes. One major task of this book is to test the normative claims of contemporary “party government” advocates about the advantages of unified government for presidential leadership. Another central objective is to detail why divided government has had such a profound impact on presidential success and the *type* of influence presidents have been able to wield in recent decades compared to the early postwar period.

### *Presidential Leverage in Political Time*

The theoretical perspective of presidential leverage in “political time” developed in this book stresses the sources of variation in the impact of party control of Congress on the legislative presidency as political contexts changed during the postwar era.<sup>19</sup> The empirical analysis in subsequent chapters investigates presidents’ floor success, influence over individual legislators, and

strategies and involvement in nationally significant legislation. The main argument pivots on the ways in which unified or divided government has interacted with voting alignments and organizational structures in Congress, policy activism by the governing majority in Congress, and the breadth of the president's own policy objectives to shape executive strategy and influence, or *leverage*, differently over the last fifty years.

Analyzing presidential leverage across periods of unified and divided control represents an extension of the scholar's quest for an understanding of periodicity and its impact on American national institutions.<sup>20</sup> The basic premise is that recurring cycles of presidential influence and strategy are evident under single- and split-party control in the postwar era. This is not to suggest that individual presidents and their styles do not matter. Presidents can most certainly aid their legislative efforts through organizational choices, legislative liaison, and timing of proposals.<sup>21</sup> Rather, the perspective stresses how the merger of electoral forces, the internal setting of Congress, and the policy-making environment frame presidential influence, strategy, and success in predictable ways when party control of national institutions is unified or divided.

Presidential leverage over Congress is best conceptualized by degree along a bounded scale. At one end of the spectrum is Richard Neustadt's ideal of assertive presidential direction of congressional lawmaking and cross-party *coalition-building leverage* or "positive" leverage.<sup>22</sup> At the other extreme is a defensive strategy of partisan coalition building and *veto leverage*—"negative" leverage—to forestall congressional activism. Where presidents fall between these endpoints of types of leverage depends in large measure on how party control interacts with the agendas of the two branches, the president's electoral resources, and internal dynamics on Capitol Hill.

When the same party holds both the presidency and Congress, a "shared policy agenda" is much more likely to emerge and engender a closer working relationship between the branches. The president and the governing majority in Congress are more prone to join together as "legislative partners" to pass policies that will prove mutually beneficial in electoral terms. When divided government prevails, the president and the congressional majority are often likely to develop an adversarial relationship. The relative degree of contention depends on the extent to which policy objectives between the branches conflict. Divided government yields a much larger potential space for a "contested agenda."

When government is divided, presidents may frequently intervene in the legislative process to build legislative majorities *in opposition* to the congres-

sional leadership. When they are not successful in achieving floor outcomes consonant with their policy preferences, they may be compelled to turn to the veto power to halt legislation and force compromise. Presidents are thus more likely to act as legislative combatants who fend off elements of the governing majority's agenda with which they most strongly disagree, settling for less legislative success relative to their own agenda preferences or preferences shared by their copartisans in Congress.

The electoral and institutional context presidents face in Congress shapes the type of leverage they can exert. When presidents confront electorally vulnerable members, poorly organized leadership structures among partisan majorities in Congress, and less stability in the composition of legislative coalitions, they can then use their electoral resources and institutional position to exercise persuasive power over congressional leaders and rank-and-file members to build majority policy coalitions for their legislative stands. Popular presidents with strong electoral victories are likely to be more successful in achieving high levels of floor success and steering the congressional majority toward their independent policy objectives.

If presidents face electorally secure members, well-coordinated leadership structures, and party cohesion among the congressional majority, they are less likely to have the same level of autonomous influence over legislative outcomes. Their success will depend considerably on the extent of shared policy agreement with the congressional majority. In cases of high levels of agreement under unified government, presidents can reinforce majority party support for the "shared agenda," which may derive more or less from their own preferred agenda and historical agendas in Congress that carry over from one period to another. The result may be high levels of executive-legislative concurrence on floor votes and legislative outcomes, with the president frequently lending support from the bully pulpit for the majority's continuing legislative objectives. When policy agreement is lower and presidents face an opposition majority with greater independent electoral security and a strong leadership structure, they will have much more difficulty exercising persuasive influence over floor outcomes. As the range of the "contested agenda" expands vis-à-vis policy-focused congressional majorities, a president's ability to build winning coalitions decreases. A lack of electoral resources weakens coalition-building leverage and may impede both the president's floor success rate and his ability to turn congressional attention to his policy priorities. He may be compelled to rely on vetoes and preemptive veto threats to negotiate legislative outcomes.

Figure I.1 illustrates the potential for variation in the types of leverage

		Party Control	
		Unified	Divided
President's Leverage	High	Weak leadership structure in Congress Electoral vulnerability in Congress Shifting legislative coalitions in Congress Strong electoral victory for the president/coattails <i>Presidential leadership role</i> Setting the shared agenda Cross-party coalition-building leverage	Weak leadership structure in Congress Electoral vulnerability in Congress Shifting legislative coalitions in Congress Strong electoral victory for the president/coattails <i>Presidential leadership role</i> Setting shared agenda Negotiating contested agenda Cross-party coalition-building leverage
	Low	Centralized leadership structure in Congress Incumbency advantage for members of Congress Shifting voting coalitions or party cohesion in majority Weak presidential electoral linkages to majority party <i>Presidential leadership role</i> Variably setting/reinforcing support for shared agenda Partisan coalition building	Centralized leadership structure in Congress Incumbency advantage for members of Congress Party cohesion in the opposition majority Weak presidential electoral victory/few linkages to opposition majority <i>Presidential leadership role</i> Selective legislative engagement Partisan coalition building Negotiating contested agenda through veto leverage

Fig. 1.1. Presidential Leverage: Party Control, Congressional Organization, and Electoral Factors

presidents are able to exert, and the legislative leadership role they are able to play, as party control interacts with the strength of their electoral resources and institutional position. The framework is such that when the president sustains a strong electoral victory and faces an auspicious setting in Congress, he will generally have greater resources to independently and positively influence legislative outcomes. The factors contributing to such a favorable environment in Congress include a decentralized leadership structure, frequent cross-party alliances in the composition of legislative coalitions, and low incumbency advantage for members. The latter provides the president with a basis for “coattail effects,” defined as bringing more members of his own party into Congress at the time of the presidential election and/or outpacing the

electoral margins of members in their districts. In times of unified government, these key resources can enable the president to set the basic contours of the shared legislative agenda with his partisan majority in Congress and exercise stronger leadership in mapping the direction of domestic policy. Lyndon Johnson's overwhelming victory in 1964, strong coattails, and resultant success in Congress stands out as the unique postwar example of exceptional positive presidential leverage from this perspective.

When divided government prevails, an electorally popular president who confronts a favorable environment in Congress may also be able to wield considerable influence. Much depends on the breadth of the shared policy agenda between the branches and policy activism championed at either end of Pennsylvania Avenue. In the context of overlapping policy objectives, the president may be able to persuade the congressional majority to accept his priorities. In cases of less correspondent legislative goals between the president and the governing majority in Congress, he may still be able to proactively influence elements of the contested agenda by dint of his electoral resources. Dwight Eisenhower's experience with divided government bridges these scenarios. Eisenhower was enormously popular in the 1952 and 1956 elections. He and the Democratic Congresses he faced from 1955–60 had relatively limited legislative objectives that restricted the development of an expansive contested agenda. Eisenhower, facing a decentralized environment on Capitol Hill, was able to ally himself with shifting legislative coalitions and influence leaders and members of both parties to produce preferable outcomes, obviating the need to rely frequently on vetoes to force compromise.

The president's capacity and strategy to influence legislative outcomes will vary more considerably by party control of Congress when his electoral resources and institutional position are weak. Incumbency advantage in Congress negates the coattail influence when presidents "run behind" members who face little or only weak opposition in their home districts. Candidate-centered presidential campaigns may only exacerbate the weakened linkage between the president and members of Congress. Members and leaders whose electoral fortunes do not overlap with the president's may show less deference to his policy objectives.

Congress' organizational features are pivotal when a better-organized majority meets a president with few electoral resources. A centralized leadership structure provides party leaders with the machinery for self-sustained policy-making capacity and diminishes the president's independent influence over the legislative branch. The foundation for a stronger internal leadership structure can stem from external sources in the electorate when parties play a

critical role in the recruitment of candidates and there is a strong constituency basis to the elected membership. Alternatively, stronger leadership structures may emerge when rank-and-file members perceive that the benefits of leadership coordination outweigh the costs of a loss of individual autonomy.<sup>23</sup>

Under unified government, a stronger congressional organization is less likely to defer to presidential directorship of the legislative agenda. The president may have more frequent cause to extend support for an agenda shared with his congressional majority rather than pursue his own independent policy agenda. Bill Clinton, for instance, reinforced efforts to pass longstanding Democratic initiatives blocked by George Bush, such as family leave and “motor voter” legislation, and claimed credit for the accomplishments in 1993–94. Clinton’s weak electoral links to the Democratic majority in Congress, the incumbency advantage for members of both parties, and stronger independent congressional leadership in the 103d Congress were significant factors in his inability to push through the more controversial elements of his own agenda, including the economic stimulus plan, crime legislation, and, most notably, comprehensive health care reform.

Presidents face the most limiting conditions for proactive coalition building, high floor success rates, and independent policy leadership when unfavorable institutional and electoral resources merge with divided government. This is particularly true when midterm elections reverse party control of Congress. The president has far fewer opportunities to advance his own policy preferences or persuade the opposition majority to shirk the party line when intraparty cohesion prevails, a centralized opposition leadership takes forceful control of the legislative agenda, and there is minimal overlap between presidential and congressional electoral constituencies. He will be forced to engage selectively in the legislative process and will frequently be in the position of reacting to, or preempting, the opposition majority’s agenda if he cannot build cross-party coalitions for his legislative positions. As the range of the contested agenda expands, his principal bargaining chip for negotiating with the governing majority is the veto power. The credibility of this trump card in the legislative game will be largely contingent upon the combination of the party balance in Congress and the ability of his copartisans to successfully fend off override attempts.

Bill Clinton’s experience with divided government points to the power—and the limitations—of veto leverage as a legislative strategy when the president has little sway to engage in coalition building with an opposition majority. Clinton turned his copartisans’ unity in opposition to the Republican

“Contract with America” to his advantage in his standoff with Speaker Newt Gingrich and GOP leaders in 1995–96. His repeated vetoes of spending bills that originally passed by narrow, partisan votes forced the Republicans to compromise and move legislative outcomes closer to his preferences. The stability of voting coalitions in Congress buttressed Clinton’s veto power, even while party unity and divided government lowered his floor success rate to all-time lows in the postwar period and dashed his hope of any considerable advances of his—and his copartisans’—preferred agenda.

*The Presidency, Party Control, and Political Contexts:  
Electoral Resources, Congressional Organization, and Agenda Control*

In the early postwar period, a president’s ability to persuade members of Congress was typically greater in the legislative sphere because of the weakness of the internal organization of the legislature and stronger presidential coattails. Presidents more frequently fell into the “high positive leverage” category. The lack of well-organized leadership structures and members’ own electoral vulnerability pressed them to look to the president for agenda leadership in the domestic realm.<sup>24</sup> Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson, in particular, had relatively hardy bases from which to exercise positive leverage over Congress, set the legislative agenda, and build coalition support for their independent policy objectives. Under divided party control, Eisenhower and even Richard Nixon had far less recourse to veto leverage than recent presidents.

The defining feature of the last quarter of the twentieth century has been the uniformly weaker positive leverage of presidents over Congress. The political context for Presidents Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Bush, and Clinton differed significantly from chief executives in the decades immediately following World War II, and the impact on presidential strategy and policy success was more or less substantial depending on the configuration of party control. Under unified conditions, Presidents Carter and Clinton did not possess the electoral resources and strong institutional position commensurate with those of Eisenhower or Johnson. Carter and Clinton consequently found their congressional copartisans far less deferential to their independent policy objectives.

The effect of weaker positive leverage was much more dramatic under divided party control. Factors far less prevalent in early periods of split-party control—including intense partisan polarization in Congress, assertive opposition leaders, and little connection between the constituencies of the president and members of the opposition majority—left Presidents Bush and

Clinton with quite limited opportunities to influence the structure of voting coalitions and control legislative outcomes through cross-party coalition-building activities. As a result, they relied on veto leverage far more than earlier presidents facing an opposition majority in Congress.

Presidential influence in Congress is, of course, complicated by other factors that are both idiosyncratic and unique to individual presidents. A landslide electoral victory like Johnson's in 1964 or Reagan's in 1980 can surmount, at least temporarily, some of the regular impediments to leadership of Congress. Presidents intent on passing an extensive program are advised to act quickly, as influence in Congress is greatest at the beginning of their term and tends to wane over time.<sup>25</sup> The scope of presidents' agendas, their interest in domestic policy, and their mastery of legislative politics in Congress and "going public" are just a few of the additional elements worthy of consideration.<sup>26</sup> However, when the larger trends of the last half century are examined, it is remarkable how well the dual dimensions of party control of Congress and the relative level of presidential electoral and institutional resources interact to account for the lion's share of the variation in influence in Congress across fairly distinct historical periods. A brief examination of developments in electoral and congressional politics that have cut across the postwar period, and their effect on presidents' floor success rates and agenda-setting potential, aids in placing individual presidents more exactly on the continuum of leverage in political time under single- and split-party control.

### *Declining Electoral Resources and Presidential Leverage*

The long-term decline in presidential electoral resources is a key factor in the increasingly fragile basis for positive presidential leverage during the last quarter century. The variability of presidential electoral resources in the early postwar period was replaced by a general loss of coattail strength.<sup>27</sup> Candidate-centered "outsider" candidacies and narrow victories robbed presidents of electoral legitimization of their agendas. Competitive presidential races merged with the growth of the incumbency advantage for members of Congress.<sup>28</sup> These developments undermined the interinstitutional electoral linkages vital to strong, positive leverage in the legislative realm.

The president's electoral popularity in Congress members' home districts is an essential ingredient in persuasion and coalition building. A strong margin of victory in legislators' districts thus forms a key component of a president's political "capital."<sup>29</sup> Electoral popularity is qualitatively different from aggregate public approval as a source of presidential influence over Congress. In the case of highly visible votes of great controversy and conflict that involve

presidential preferences, national approval trends are less relevant to legislators in either party than cues from their perceived reelection constituencies. The president's district-level electoral popularity provides a firmer basis from which to rally members of Congress to his legislative stands than shifting trends in his job approval, which have much to do with economic conditions or short-term events in the foreign policy sphere.<sup>30</sup> The president's electoral performance validates constituents' basic support for his legislative preferences and lends legitimacy to his appeals to members of Congress for support of his agenda and policy priorities.

The president's electoral popularity consolidates partisan bonds and can be instrumental in gaining the support of members of the opposition party. When the president runs ahead of members in their districts and/or brings more members of his own party into Congress, his coattails amplify a shared partisan linkage in the electorate and can contribute to greater party cohesion on the president's agenda.<sup>31</sup> As James Campbell and Joe Sumners contend, "candidates receiving coattail votes may be a bit more positively disposed, out of gratitude, to side with a president who had helped in their election."<sup>32</sup> Support of a popular president thus may aid legislators' reelection chances.<sup>33</sup> In times of divided government, the president's electoral popularity in opposition members' districts is not a complete substitute for a shared partisan electoral bond. Members of the opposition majority may, however, fall under greater pressure to back an electorally popular president's legislative stands if they fear electoral retaliation. Legislators are acutely concerned with their voting records because they believe constituents pay attention.<sup>34</sup>

There are several ways to measure presidential coattails. One measure is simply the number of seats the president's party gains at the time he is elected. A second measure is the extent to which the president's district margin of victory outpaced members' own electoral margins. Using both measures to analyze coattails highlights variability in presidential electoral popularity in the early decades of the postwar period and a significant dwindling of coattail resources for presidents who faced nearly constant opposition party control of Congress since 1980.

Figure I.2 traces "seat-gain coattails" from 1948–96. Harry Truman's narrow election in 1948, Eisenhower's victory in 1952, and Johnson's landslide in 1964 ushered in unified government with significant congressional seat gains for the president's party. Other presidents, however, failed to bring a sizable contingent of copartisans to Capitol Hill on the heels of their electoral victories. The lack of coattails has frequently left Republican presidents with opposition control of Congress. Save for Eisenhower's strong victory in 1952,

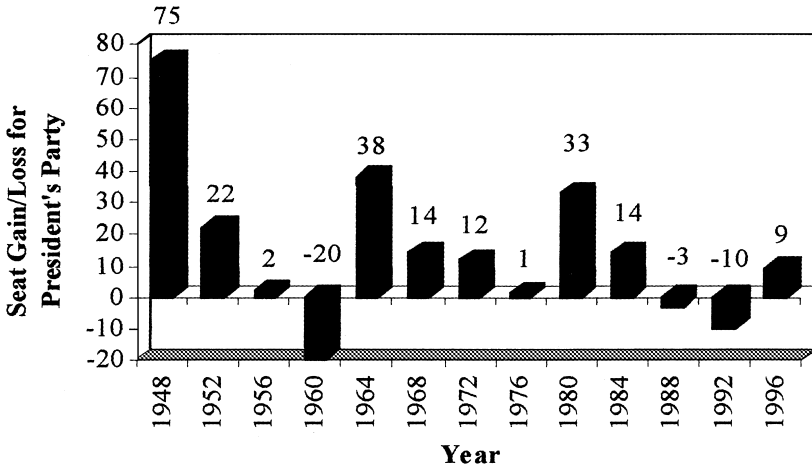


Fig. 1.2  
 Seat Gains for the President's Party in the House of Representatives, 1948–96  
 Source: *Congressional Quarterly Almanacs*, 1948–96.

Republican presidents' coattails have been insufficiently long to yield a GOP majority in Congress. George Bush has the dubious distinction of being the first postwar Republican president to be elected to the presidency with a net *seat loss* for the GOP in the House.

Recent Democratic presidents elected alongside a majority of their copartisans have failed to achieve Truman's and Johnson's strong seat-gain coattails. Jimmy Carter's election in 1976 yielded a net increase of just a single Democratic seat in the House in a very narrow contest with incumbent Gerald Ford. Bill Clinton's election in 1992, like John Kennedy's in 1960, produced "negative coattails," meaning that congressional Democrats lost seats in the House. The absence of coattails challenged their claims to a policy "mandate," thus eroding the basis for considerable positive leverage.

An alternative conceptualization of coattails is whether the president's share of the two-party vote in House districts exceeded or lagged behind members' own share of the two-party vote. In other words, regardless of whether presidents carry more members of their party into office on their coattails, this measure of "marginal coattails" shows how their electoral victories stack up to the victory margins of members who are elected alongside them. In terms of potential presidential leverage over legislators, members with victory margins less than the president's can expect to experience more pressure to back his legislative stands. Figure I.3 reports the percent of legislators in the president's party and the opposition party who had margins of

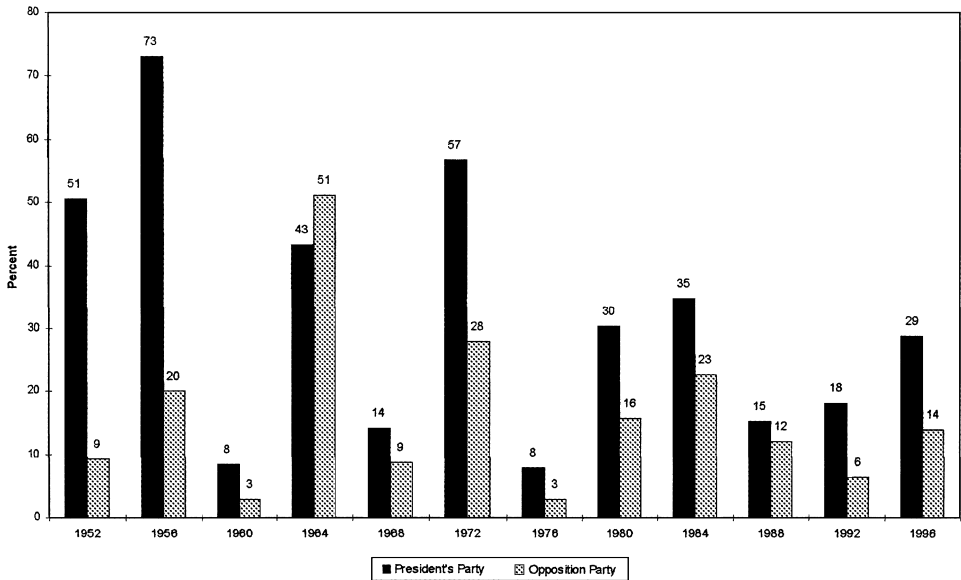


Fig. 1.3  
 "Marginal Coattails": Presidents' Share of the Two-Party Vote  
 Compared to House Members', 1952–96

Source: Calculated by the author from the *Congressional Directory*, *Congressional Quarterly Almanacs*, *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Reports*, and *Almanac of American Politics*. The author thanks Gary C. Jacobson for data on presidents' district-level margins for the 1950s and 1960s.

victory less than the president. The data are unequivocal. This contingent of legislators, particularly in the opposition party, shrank rather considerably throughout the postwar period.

In assessing the potential for presidential leverage through the lens of coattail strength, several trends are noteworthy. All presidents except Johnson (1964) have run ahead of a greater percentage of members *of their own party* compared to the opposition party. Electoral coattails thus are a potentially powerful catalyst for shoring up partisan support. However, the absence of coattails in the opposition party suggests that presidents have a harder time attracting the congressional majority's needed support in times of divided government. It is ironic that Republican presidents' coattails have been the greatest upon reelection, but that each of those elections yielded split-party control. Eisenhower (1956), Nixon (1972), and Reagan (1984) ran ahead of large numbers of their copartisans at the district level, but no more than just over a quarter of House members in the opposition majority. These second-term presidents confronted an opposition membership whose electoral victories owed little to their popularity.

Lyndon Johnson's coattail leverage was indeed exceptional. Not only did a sizable contingent of liberal Democrats ride to victory on his coattails when he defeated Barry Goldwater, his victory margin also exceeded the margins of 40 percent of all Democrats and just over half of all Republicans elected to the 87th Congress. Johnson's electoral victory thus yielded the potential for substantial influence over members of both parties.

Democratic presidents have typically not been in a strong position in terms of electoral resources. John Kennedy (1960), Jimmy Carter (1976), and Bill Clinton (1992) had scarce marginal coattails despite being elected alongside a partisan majority in Congress. The 1960 and 1976 elections were among the most narrowly decided races in the postwar period in terms of the popular vote. And the three-way race between incumbent George Bush, Bill Clinton, and Ross Perot—in many ways reminiscent of the three-way split between Nixon, Hubert Humphrey, and George Wallace in 1968—prevented Clinton from claiming a majority of the popular electoral vote and robbed his election of substantial coattails. Most Democratic candidates for Congress ran ahead of Clinton, complicating the president's bid for legislative leadership on an expansive set of objectives. Paul Light quotes an assistant to President Kennedy who noted: "If the President runs behind in your district, he becomes a liability. If the President can't help you, why help him?"<sup>35</sup> Such was the nature of Clinton's predicament. He lacked the strong electoral base needed to build a case for consistent congressional support of his agenda in either party during the fleeting return of unified government in 1993–94.

The weakening of marginal coattails has been most pronounced during periods of divided government in the 1980s and 1990s. No president since Reagan has outpaced the victory margins of more than a quarter of all House members. Presidents Bush and Clinton not only had few coattails relative to their own party base in Congress, they also had much more limited electoral leverage over opposition members. Bush ran ahead of only an eighth of all Democrats elected in 1988, while Clinton achieved coattail effects in less than a tenth of GOP districts in 1992.

Implicit in the "marginal coattail" analysis in figure I.3 is the increased incumbency advantage for members of Congress. Incumbents' seat safety eclipses presidential coattail effects. The potential for presidential coattails decreases proportionately as electoral vulnerability among congressional incumbents abates and competition in presidential races heightens. The incumbency advantage for members of Congress began to increase in the 1960s.<sup>36</sup> The effects became more fully apparent by the mid-1980s, when the proportion of House incumbents winning reelection with 60 percent or more of the

two-party vote share reached nearly 90 percent.<sup>37</sup> With members' increased ability to develop competent campaign organizations and fund-raising operations independent of the political parties, incumbency may serve as a better cue for voting in congressional elections than party affiliation or the popularity of presidential candidates.

Incumbency advantage is an important factor buttressing the split-ticket voting that is the proximate cause of divided government (figure I.4).<sup>38</sup> Ticket-splitting reduces the probability that presidents will run ahead of Congressmen from either party or carry members of their own party to victory in presidential election years.<sup>39</sup> Explanations proffered to account for split-ticket voting, including the rise of candidate-centered presidential and congressional campaigns, are beyond the scope of this discussion and have been detailed elsewhere.<sup>40</sup> It is worth noting, however, that the number of split districts has declined since the 1960s and 1970s as a result of stronger party-line voting by the electorate.<sup>41</sup> A smaller number of key "swing" districts have been responsible for robbing presidents of partisan majorities in Congress in the last two decades as the electoral coalitions supporting the president and members of the opposition majority have increasingly diverged.

In sum, the significant decline in presidents' electoral resources as a source of influence is one of the distinguishing features of executive-legislative relations since the 1970s that has placed presidents in the "low leverage" boxes in

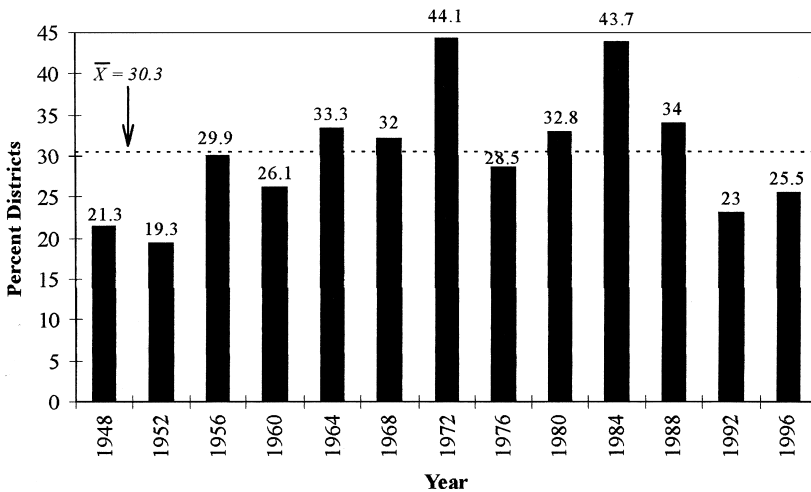


Fig. I.4  
Percent of Split Districts, House of Representatives, 1948–96

Source: Calculated by the author.

figure I.1 under unified *and* divided control. Yet diminishing electoral resources must be weighed against the development of greater organizational strength, leadership coordination, and party cohesion within Congress. It is not the lack of coattails that has single-handedly transformed the contours of presidential influence in the legislative realm, but the convergence of weak electoral resources *and* organizational change in Congress that have had remarkable effects on presidential leverage.

### *The Internal Configuration of Congress and Presidential Leverage*

Presidency research has failed to focus adequate attention on the ways in which structural change in Congress has affected executive-legislative relations.<sup>42</sup> The context of the few brief interludes of unified government since the 1970s and the quasi-permanent condition of divided government that has befallen presidents since the 1980s entailed fewer electoral resources for chief executives at a time when opposition majorities in Congress became better organized, more internally homogeneous in ideological terms, and more policy and constituency focused. The coincidence of these factors has been most damaging to positive presidential leverage under divided government since the 1980s, but it also limited the influence Presidents Carter and Clinton had over Congress under single-party control.

The shift toward stronger institutional parties in Congress has been a progressive, if gradual, process. Several factors, including presidential politics, the realignment of the southern electorate, and enhanced leadership coordination in Congress culminated in greater partisan cohesion on Capitol Hill in the last two decades. The Nixon and Reagan presidencies marked critical turning points. Nixon's confrontational approach to Congress and the Democrats' response in his second term was one pivotal juncture in "congressional political time." Reagan's early policy successes and the Democrats' second round of leadership reforms formed another crossroads. Over the course of two decades, the Democratic majority sought to redress the weakness of congressional policymaking capacity by instituting measures squarely aimed at challenging presidents' legislative influence. The sum of organizational changes yielded internal structures in Congress that outlasted Democratic legislative majorities in the House. When the Republicans gained majority status in Congress in the 1994 elections, GOP leaders continued the centralization trend.

Party unity replaced the more fluid voting coalitions of the early postwar period that presidents had successfully employed. Operating in tandem with

organizational transformations in the national legislature were the long-term effects of the Voting Rights Act, which had precipitated a gradual geographic realignment in the two parties' core electoral constituencies. This realignment produced greater parity in the electorate, differentiated the parties' basic policy positions, and solidified institutional partisanship. Republicans' steady electoral gains in the South eroded the strength of the conservative wing of the Democratic Party in Congress and resulted in much more stable voting alignments. Partisan voting, at all-time lows in the 1950s and 1960s, increased dramatically and became commonplace. The decline in consensus among party leaders in Congress produced policy debates more frequently cast in terms of zero-sum conflicts across policy areas.<sup>43</sup> The evolution of these changes and their consequences for presidential legislative leadership merit closer scrutiny.

### Congressional Organization and Voting Alignments in the Early Postwar Period

The lack of intraparty cohesion and weaker leadership coordination in Congress from the end of World War II through the early 1970s provided presidents with more opportunities to intervene proactively in the legislative process and forge supporting coalitions for their policy preferences. Presidents were more frequently in the "high leverage" categories depicted in figure I.1. As the discussion of electoral contexts suggested, presidents could attempt to marshal legislative support on the basis of their electoral popularity. Yet much depended on the predominant configuration of voting alignments and the structure of cross-party coalitions, which did *not* always work to their advantage. Democratic presidents were often frustrated by the paucity of support they were likely to receive from southern conservatives in the party. When southern Democrats allied with Republicans, the "conservative coalition" periodically thwarted liberal policy goals, even under nominally unified party control of the presidency and Congress.

However, like their Republican counterparts—such as Eisenhower, who faced divided government and internal fissures among his own copartisans—Democratic presidents with a fractious majority in Congress were forced to solicit support for their legislative agendas and policy positions on both sides of the aisle.<sup>44</sup> The general weakness of congressional organization aided this effort by prompting members to look to the president for policy leadership. All told, the decentralized setting within Congress, while clearly not a boon to presidents in every instance, frequently facilitated their task of coalition

building across party lines. Their legislative success was contingent upon the extent to which they could ally themselves with elements in both parties on Capitol Hill.

From the beginning of the postwar period through the 1960s and early 1970s, voting alignments in Congress were variable and subject to broad, cross-cutting conflicts. The diffusion of power among senior committee members eroded the Speaker's influence and militated against strong party leadership.<sup>45</sup> To diminish the uncertainty of legislative outcomes legislators engaged in "logrolling" on distributive issues that undercut partisan voting.<sup>46</sup> To the degree that presidents could read the political landscape on Capitol Hill, link with key power brokers, and wed their policy objectives to alternating congressional coalitions, they could claim a modicum of legislative success in times of both unified and divided government.

Party control of national institutions was less salient for presidents because fewer votes consistently pitted a majority of one party against a majority of the other from 1954–72 as compared to later decades (fig. I.5). The "conservative coalition" of southern Democrats and conservative Republicans formed a de facto policy majority on many issues spanning economic policy to civil rights. In other cases, moderate Republicans and liberal Democrats joined together to carry the day. James MacGregor Burns's classic formulation of "four-party" politics captured the essence of the variable composition of legislative coalitions in Congress in this early postwar period. Liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans faced an important contingent of their copartisans, whose ideological stance was often more closely aligned with the other party.

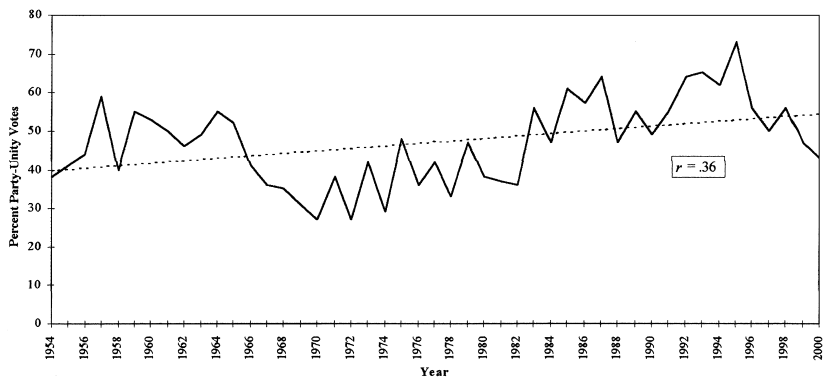


Fig. I.5  
Percent Party-Unity Votes, 1954–2000

Source: *Congressional Quarterly Almanacs* and *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Reports*.

Weak parties with large numbers of moderates holding the balance over outcomes produced broad, shifting policy coalitions composed of lawmakers on both sides of the aisle.<sup>47</sup>

Presidents had periodic opportunities to lobby individual members and party leaders and craft supporting voting blocs in this contextual environment that lasted through the 1970s. To be sure, the union of southern Democrats and conservative Republicans could and did hamper elements of the progressive domestic agendas of Democratic presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Kennedy.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the conservative coalition was not monolithic. Room still existed for Democratic presidents to forge favorable cross-party coalitions because of the numbers of moderates in both parties, even if it required both a good bit of creativity and credit sharing with members of the opposition party. Lyndon Johnson's astute and judicious leadership in guiding the Civil Rights Act of 1964 through Congress despite southern Democrats' staunch opposition is perhaps the best-known example.<sup>49</sup>

Republican presidents could occasionally turn the conservative coalition to their advantage, but reaching out to members of different ideological persuasions on both sides of the aisle remained essential. Eisenhower, for example, who was popular both electorally and in terms of job approval, had a moderate and limited agenda and negotiated with members of both parties largely behind the scenes.<sup>50</sup> He was sometimes able to marry southern Democratic support with GOP backing to prevail on issues of domestic spending. In other instances, he turned to different congressional factions on issues like civil rights and foreign policy that divided his copartisans.

The lack of strong intraparty conflict through the early 1970s was not solely due to the ubiquity of the conservative coalition in Congress. President Johnson's sweeping domestic agenda, the "Great Society," and its consolidation during the Nixon and Ford presidencies, also contributed to a lack of intraparty cohesion on floor votes. Much of the legislation over this period was passed by large, bipartisan coalitions that reflected enhanced interest group activism and broad congressional agreement on the contours of public policy.<sup>51</sup>

Low intraparty cohesion continued into Nixon's first term (1969–72), and the continued weakness of congressional organization enhanced his institutional position to selectively negotiate policy coalitions to his advantage. Nixon was pulled in Congress's direction by the momentum of the consolidation of the Great Society. The shifting policy coalitions in the 91st and 92d Congresses sometimes allowed him to ally himself with broad policy issues and exercise some influence over the particulars of legislation that emerged primarily from the Democrats' continuing legislative agenda.

### Critical Turning Points: Nixon II and Reagan

Nixon abandoned his conciliatory strategy of participating in broad congressional policy coalitions by his second term. The short- and long-term consequences were substantial. The executive-legislative conflict that existed prior to his resignation left a lasting imprint on Congress's internal structure and had a far-reaching impact on the potential for positive presidential leverage in the future. The congressional response to Nixon initiated a trend toward more stable, partisan voting blocs. Along with the organizational reforms Democrats pursued a decade later in light of Ronald Reagan's threat to the party's domestic objectives, the greater organizational strength and partisan cohesion of congressional majorities increased Congress's independent policy-making capacity. While this shift was at least partially responsible for placing greater barriers to forceful legislative leadership for Democratic presidents Carter and Clinton under unified conditions, the most pronounced impact has been visible during the periods of divided control that have dominated since 1980. In a more structured congressional environment exemplified by centralization around the Speaker and an extended party leadership apparatus, Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Clinton found far fewer opportunities to influence opposition members of Congress on floor outcomes.

Nixon's extensive impoundment of funds for domestic programs and the Watergate scandal set in motion conditions supportive of stronger party leadership and intraparty cohesion among Democrats prior to substantial shifts in the two parties' geographic electoral alignments. Liberal Democrats sought to check the monopoly of power of conservative committee "barons" in their party as early as Nixon's first term. Action began with the Hansen reforms in 1971, which limited the number of committees a member could chair and rescinded the seniority rule as the basis for committee assignments.<sup>52</sup> The "Watergate babies" who rode to victory in the 1974 elections in the aftermath of Nixon's resignation went much farther. The Democratic Caucus adopted the "subcommittee bill of rights," ensuring a floor vote on committee chairs, increasing the number of subcommittees, and securing subcommittee chairs' access to staff and resources. The result was not only a wide dispersal of power in the House, but also greater stability and increased party loyalty on partisan votes by committee chairs after 1974.<sup>53</sup>

The diffusion of power and authority in the House coincided with reforms that strengthened the party leadership's ability to control policy outcomes. While loosening the conservatives' grip on the committee system, Democrats reasoned that an extended whip system and a strengthened Speakership were

essential to battle Nixon's antipathy to the party's domestic policy goals. "Nixon's landslide victory in 1972, his vetoes of major Democratic legislation, and his impoundment of appropriated funds created a crisis atmosphere among congressional Democrats that solidified the desire for stronger party leadership."<sup>54</sup> The enlargement of the whip system co-opted members into the leadership structure and allowed the Speaker and majority leader to keep a finger on the pulse of the rank-and-file membership. Party whips gather and transmit information to and from leaders, count votes and attempt to convert recalcitrant members, and engage in coalition building to ensure that floor outcomes correspond to party goals.

Democrats also moved to increase the Speaker's formal authority over policy outcomes during the Nixon and Ford presidencies. "Sixty years after the downfall of Speaker Cannon," James Sundquist notes, "liberal reformers had come, if not full circle, surely no little distance back toward finding merit in the centralized system they had cast aside."<sup>55</sup> Achieving liberal policy goals necessitated a responsive and more powerful leadership structure. In the early 1970s, Democrats restored the Steering and Policy Committee to a position of importance in setting the party's legislative goals.<sup>56</sup> The gradual movement toward a stronger Speakership included granting the Speaker stricter control over committee appointments, greater authority over the referral of legislation to committees, and the ability to create select committees. The sum of these reforms produced a more structured legislative environment that limited President Nixon's and President Ford's ability to set the legislative agenda and marshal support among Democratic leaders, committee chairs, and rank-and-file members in Congress.

Ronald Reagan's policy successes in 1981–82, which caught the Democratic leadership off guard, represent a second critical turning point in congressional organization and party cohesion. Democrats reinvigorated the whip operation and renewed efforts to centralize leadership. Their logic for reform was consistent with thinking in the early 1970s. Reagan, like Nixon, posed a considerable threat to the party's liberal agenda. The president's electoral popularity in 1980 provided substantial leverage in Congress, making legislation vulnerable both to Republican challenges on the floor and defections by southern Democrats facing constituency pressure to support his fiscal and defense policies.<sup>57</sup> Just as the Democratic leadership reforms in the early 1970s had been a reaction against Nixon's confrontational tactics, organizational restructuring in the early 1980s was vital to shore up party unity and minimize Reagan's ability to control the domestic agenda.

Democrats found that the benefits of further centralization of authority in

the Speakership outweighed the costs, particularly as the party base in the electorate grew more solidly liberal. The bolstering of the Speakership under Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill and Jim Wright included renewing the strength of the whip system to ensure greater party cohesion.<sup>58</sup> Multiple referrals of legislation and the adoption of rules restricting floor amendments buttressed the Speaker’s control over legislative outcomes.<sup>59</sup> In the short term, heightened centralization contributed to a sharp decline in President Reagan’s legislative success rate after 1981. In the longer term, the reforms supported a more active agenda-setting role for the House Democratic leadership.<sup>60</sup> The reforms contributed to President Bush’s extensive use of the veto from 1989–92 to block Democratic legislation in a period of intense leadership and policy stalemate between the president and Congress. President Clinton also faced a more independent and self-assured majority that was less willing to follow his policy lead during the brief period of unified government in 1993–94.

### The Constituency Bases of Congressional Voting and Organizational Strength

The development of better organized leadership structures and greater intra-party cohesion in Congress from the 1970s through the 1990s was subtended by an incremental change in the constituency bases of the two parties and the intensification of party competition in the electorate. As southerners shifted their support to the GOP and northern Democratic constituencies became more solidly liberal, the parties became more evenly matched nationally. “Party strength,” Joseph Cooper and David Brady contend, “is rooted in polarized constituency configurations.”<sup>61</sup> As legislators and leaders search for resources in a more competitive electoral environment, they are pushed away from the center to the poles.<sup>62</sup> The result is that they look less to the concerns of the “median voter” and instead take their voting cues from their perceived “reelection constituency”: the staunch partisan backers whose votes are essential for reelection.<sup>63</sup> This set of voters may, in fact, be a small proportion of the total eligible electorate, but the low turnout endemic to American elections heightens the pressure on legislators to safeguard the interests of these core constituents.

The gradual Republicanization of the South has had a tremendous impact on national electoral alignments and, consequently, the internal dynamics in Congress. The initial fissures in white southerners’ staunch support of the Democratic Party can be traced to Strom Thurmond’s bid for the presidency in 1948 under the Dixiecrat banner. Two decades later, Lyndon Johnson failed to carry five of the eleven states of the old Confederacy—due in no small part

to his stand on civil rights. Six states in the “Solid South” then turned a cold shoulder to Democratic presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey in 1968 and threw their support to Alabama governor George Wallace’s independent candidacy.

Republicans also made progressive gains in congressional representation in the South in the 1970s and 1980s. Turnover and generational replacement linked both to redistricting in the 1990s and congressional scandals in the late 1980s and early 1990s culminated in the party’s breakthrough of 1994. The shifting geographical balance of power between the parties was central to the GOP’s winning control of Congress. The conservative themes outlined in the Republican “Contract with America” formed a consistent campaign message that resonated particularly well with southern voters. The GOP’s targeted financial assistance to candidates gave the party sixty-four of the 125 seats in eleven southern states and a majority in the House of Representatives for the first time in four decades.

The electoral realignment of the South affected dynamics within Congress and between the president and Congress by shrinking the contingent of rightward-leaning southern Democrats, dissolving the basis of the conservative coalition, and yielding more stable, partisan voting blocs. The growing homogeneity of the Democratic Party’s electoral constituencies narrowed the gap in ideological stances that traditionally divided southern and northern Democrats.<sup>64</sup> Democrats elected from the South—particularly African Americans—now share their northern colleagues’ policy goals to a much greater degree than in prior decades.<sup>65</sup> As the two parties’ ideological positions grew wider, party labels became increasingly significant.

The fluid coalitions of yesteryear thus grew scarce by the mid-1980s, leaving presidents facing divided government with far fewer opportunities to successfully engage in strong agenda leadership and cross-party coalition building. When the Republicans captured Congress after forty years of quasi-permanent minority status, the electoral forces that contributed to more ideologically cohesive parties continued to bolster the trend toward stronger party government in the House. The principles outlined in the Contract with America on which GOP candidates campaigned served as the basis for Republican unity in the 104th Congress in much the same way that Democratic Caucus rules “bonded” members and conditioned their party support in the 1980s.<sup>66</sup> To make good on election promises to bring sweeping policy change to Washington, Barbara Sinclair posits that “House Republicans have given their leaders many of the same tools that Democratic leaders utilized when they were in the majority.”<sup>67</sup> Consequently, the Contract with America supplanted

Clinton's domestic agenda in Congress and relegated the president to the sidelines—at least until he resorted to veto leverage to halt and reshape important elements of the GOP's policy program.

### Presidential Support and Success in Political Time

How have the dual developments of diminished electoral resources and stronger parties in Congress affected presidential support and success on legislative outcomes? What empirical evidence is there to substantiate classifying recent presidents in the “weak leverage” boxes in figure I.1 across instances of unified and divided control in the last quarter century? A multifaceted approach is necessary to ferret out the subtleties across time. To this end, basic roll call and agenda-setting measures corroborate fundamental assertions of the theoretical framework of presidential leverage in political time.

The impact of weak electoral resources, increased congressional partisanship, and better organized governing majorities had the most visible effect on presidents' legislative influence over floor outcomes under divided government. Presidents were far less able to attract the support of members of the opposition party, they more frequently lost on position votes, and they controlled less of the agenda in Congress compared to the early postwar era. In the rare instances of unified government since the 1970s, presidents received consistent support from their copartisans and garnered high floor success rates, but they faced stiffer competition in their bid to steer congressional activity toward their independent policy objectives. The opportunity structure was more suitable for latching on to what William Lammers and Michael Genovese call “promising issues” typically linked to continuing agendas in Congress.<sup>68</sup> Presidents' high success rates more often reflected the “facilitation” of shared agendas between the branches rather than “directorship” of congressional lawmaking, to put it in George Edwards's terms.<sup>69</sup> Compared to select periods of unified government in the early decades of the last half century, the basis for presidential credit claiming was narrowed. An examination of presidential position votes and agenda-setting data bears out the changed basis of presidential legislative strategy and success over time.

Roll-call measures convey basic levels of presidential-congressional “concurrency” and are useful in identifying fundamental changes in presidential influence in Congress across time.<sup>70</sup> Roll-call votes are a key decision point in the legislative process.<sup>71</sup> Presidents take stands on legislation prioritized by one or both branches, not simply on their own agendas. The president is one of the most important cue givers to members of Congress. A president's public

stands communicate an issue's priority status to the White House and signal resolve to legislators.<sup>72</sup>

Figure I.6 shows unambiguously that presidents *do* have a much easier time building support for their legislative stands under single-party control. Across the postwar era, presidents' copartisans supported them an average of 73 percent, with a small standard deviation of just over 6.5 percent. "Party," as Thomas Cronin and Michael Genovese posit, "is a bridge linking the institutional divide between the president and Congress."<sup>73</sup> Presidents' policy preferences are inherently ideological. The president's copartisans thus are far more likely to share his policy goals and be positioned closer to him in ideological terms than opposition members. Although legislative support and success on roll calls are not synonymous, they are interrelated dynamics. Under unified government, stronger consistent support will translate into high success on floor outcomes. Presidents can also enlist the aid of party leaders to shore up support for their legislative stands and agenda and use procedural levers governing debate, amendments, and the timing of votes.<sup>74</sup> They can also employ the extended leadership organization, such as the whip office, to verify members' positions and engage in partisan lobbying.<sup>75</sup> Presidents can maximize these advantages of party control with an experienced legislative liaison team.<sup>76</sup>

When the opposition party controls Congress, presidents are left without commensurate procedural and organizational benefits. The absence of these advantages, particularly in light of the centralization of authority in leaders

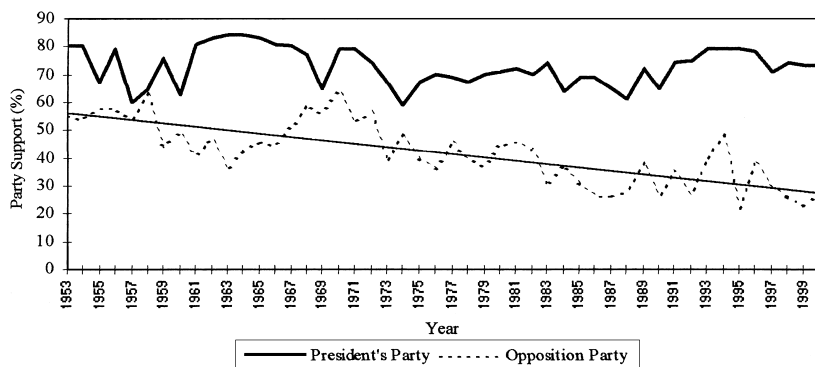


Fig. I.6  
Aggregate Party Support for the President's Positions, 1953–2000  
Source: *Congressional Quarterly Almanacs* and *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Reports*.

and partisan polarization in the last quarter century, is evident in figure I.6. Support for the president's positions among opposition party members was highly variable, averaging just below 42 percent (with a standard deviation of just over 11 percent) from 1953–2000. The trend line shows the steady decline in opposition support over time ( $r = -.73$ ). Using a 50 percent threshold as a benchmark, Presidents Eisenhower (1953–58), Johnson (1967–68), and Nixon (1969–72) were fairly successful in reaching across the aisle. But in the post-Watergate period (1973–2000) *no president has attracted the opposition party's support in Congress more than half the time*. The data are particularly significant in light of nearly continuous divided government since 1980. Aggregate party support scores for presidents facing an opposition majority in the last two decades of the twentieth century were an average of 11 percent lower compared to the entire postwar period. The Democratic majority supported George Bush's legislative stands only 33 percent of the time from 1989–92. Opposition support reached its nadir when Republicans supported Clinton only 22 percent of the time in 1995. Without vital opposition support, these presidents encountered an onerous set of obstacles to legislative success.

Presidential success on floor outcomes diminished considerably during periods of divided government at the century's end. Figures I.7 and I.8 show

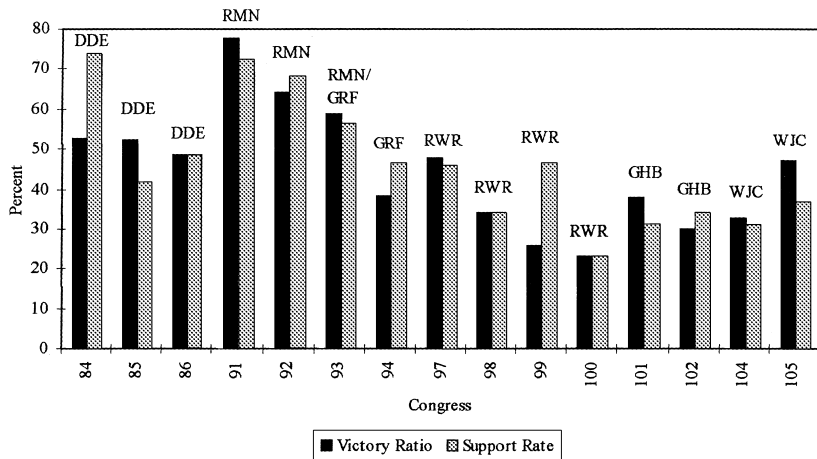


Fig. I.7  
Divided Government: Presidential Floor Success and Positions in Support of Legislation, House of Representatives

Source: Calculated by the author from *Congressional Quarterly Almanacs*.

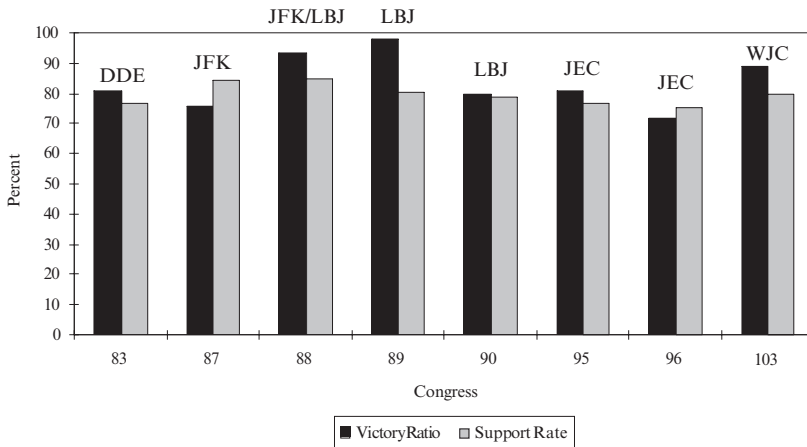


Fig. 1.8  
Unified Government: Presidential Floor Success and Positions in Support of Legislation,  
House of Representatives

Source: Calculated by the author from *Congressional Quarterly Almanacs*.

presidential-congressional concurrence rates on single-issue domestic policy votes for divided and unified government, respectively.<sup>77</sup> The percentage of presidents' positions in support of legislation reaching the floor is also reported. The contrast in presidential floor success, and positions in favor of legislation, is stark between early periods of divided control and the 1980s and 1990s. Presidents Eisenhower and Nixon maintained respectable annual victory ratios of 50–70 percent and higher, and typically supported legislation that made it to the floor more than half the time. Ronald Reagan's 48 percent mark in the 97th Congress (1981–82) tops the floor success rates of all presidents who have faced divided government since 1980. Growing ideological conflict between presidents and opposition majorities, increased party cohesion in Congress, and party leaders' authoritative control over the legislative agenda took its toll on presidential influence over roll-call outcomes. During the last two decades, presidents opposed bills reaching the floor far more than they supported them. By the end of Reagan's second term, he opposed more than three-quarters of the bills on which he took a stand, and his position carried the day only about a quarter of the time. Similarly, Clinton opposed over two-thirds of votes taken after the Republicans captured Congress, and his position prevailed only about a third of the time.

Presidents elected earlier in the postwar era found far more common ground

with the opposition majorities they confronted and could maneuver publicly and behind the scenes to build winning policy coalitions for their legislative stands. With the exception of the 85th Congress, Eisenhower favored half or more of bills reaching the floor, and his success rate hovered around 50 percent across six years of sustained split-party control. Nixon's success rate of 78 percent—the highest for any president under divided government—was linked to his support of almost three-quarters of the votes taken in the 91st Congress (1969–70).

Party control of Congress is the best predictor of consistently high levels of presidential-congressional agreement. Figure I.8 shows that even when the president's "natural" decline in influence is discounted, presidents under unified government had, without exception, success rates of 70–90 percent. Presidents supported by a partisan majority are better able to influence legislation reaching the floor. On average, presidents expressed their support for 80 percent of the votes on which they took a position in the last half century. As the next section clarifies, this does *not* imply that these presidents universally controlled legislative outcomes or that those outcomes always reflected their independent agendas. Rather, the data highlight the greater mutuality of legislative objectives between the White House and Capitol Hill that single-party control engenders.

### Presidential and Congressional Agendas in Political Time: Linkages to Presidential Success

The breadth of presidential and congressional policy objectives, whether such policy objectives are shared or contested between the branches, and the strength of the president's institutional position have important implications for floor success rates and the type of leverage chief executives can ultimately wield over legislative outcomes. Two points deserve immediate elaboration. The first concerns the weaker leverage of Presidents Carter and Clinton compared to their counterparts in earlier periods of unified government. Embedded within the high legislative success and support rates in times of single-party control are important distinctions in presidents' *independent direction* of the legislative agenda and *facilitation* of "historical" or continuing agendas in Congress. Second, the early and later periods of divided control are clearly differentiated by the extent to which the legislative agenda reflected presidential policy priorities. A central feature of divided government in recent decades is the dwindling proportion of the legislative agenda set by presidents as opposed to assertive opposition majorities in Congress. The development

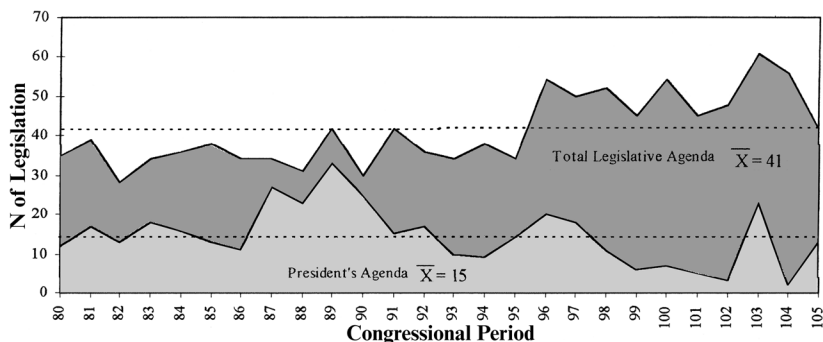


Fig. I.9  
 Presidential Agenda Setting in Proportion to the Total Legislative Agenda of Congress,  
 80th–105th Congresses (1947–98)

Source: Adapted by the author from Andrew J. Taylor, "Domestic Agenda Setting, 1947–1994." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 23 (1998): 373–97.

of a much larger contested agenda driven by the governing majority on Capitol Hill explicates presidents' low floor success rates and steadfast stands *in opposition* to bills reaching the floor since the 1980s.

Figure I.9 shows presidents' agendas in relation to Congress' total agenda. Andrew Taylor supplied the agenda-setting data, which were updated to include the 104th and 105th Congresses.<sup>78</sup> Taylor researched *Congressional Quarterly's* annual listing of "major" legislation on domestic policy alongside presidents' State of the Union addresses and congressional leaders' speeches to determine whether initiatives were linked to the president's agenda or that of the majority party in Congress. The definition of the national legislative agenda is consequently limited to either the president or Congress. To qualify for inclusion, initiatives needed only to receive congressional attention, they did not have to pass.<sup>79</sup>

The data show that Congress plays an essential, if sometimes underestimated, role in setting the national legislative agenda.<sup>80</sup> On average, Congress sets about two-thirds of the total agenda and the president sets the rest. Yet congressional policy activism varied considerably. Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Clinton fixed far less of the agenda compared to Presidents Eisenhower and Nixon under earlier periods of divided control (84th–86th Congresses and 91st and 92d Congresses), and congressional agenda setting increased considerably. In times of unified government, the Kennedy-Johnson years (87th–90th Congresses) were exceptional in terms of agenda setting. Ninety percent or more of the legislative calendar reflected presidential priorities.

Presidents Carter (95th and 96th Congresses) and Clinton (103d Congresses) set much less of the agenda than their copartisans in the majority.

The Kennedy-Johnson period of unified government is clearly unique. Single-party control translated into many more *presidentially led* initiatives compared to any other point since 1947. Much of what was placed on the congressional docket was derived initially from Kennedy's "New Frontier."<sup>81</sup> The subsequent legislative charge was wedded to Johnson's "Great Society;" Johnson's electoral resources and the decentralized setting in Congress provided an exceptionally favorable set of circumstances to steer congressional law-making toward his policy agenda. The data suggest that Johnson's success rate, and to a lesser extent Kennedy's (fig. I.8), reflected an emphasis on their independent policy objectives.

Carter and Clinton had more limited agendas and struggled to fit them into the congressional calendar. They also faced more independent and internally homogeneous congressional majorities. Both had weak electoral resources and faced periods of economic recession and uncertainty. They shifted attention toward the consolidation of existing programs rather than emphasize grand policy departures, including elements of "historical" or continuing party agendas in Congress.<sup>82</sup> Carter focused on adjusting "Great Society" programs to the realities of federal budget restraints, whereas Clinton championed elements of the Democratic agenda blocked under George Bush, such as family leave, "motor voter" legislation, and gun control. The data convey a fundamental point about the more limited basis for independent policy success in light of these presidents' weaker leverage: Their legislative successes derived much more from lending support to issues that carried over on the congressional docket from earlier years, and their independent objectives often met with controversy and conflict in Congress.

Figure I.9 points to the cementing of a much larger contested policy space as a regular feature of divided government in the last twenty years. One of the central reasons presidents opposed legislation more frequently and lost more consistently on their roll-call stands is that assertive opposition majorities drove the legislative agenda and pursued policies that had little appeal to presidents. Barbara Sinclair explains that "as party polarization increased in the late 1980s and 1990s, so did party leaders' agenda-setting. Furthermore, during the latter years the congressional majority party's agenda became even more clearly a direct challenge to the president's agenda. . . . The Republican agenda in the 104th Congress is the best known example. . . . But the Democratic agenda in the 100th Congress also consisted mostly of items the president opposed, as did the Republicans' agenda in the 105th Congress."<sup>83</sup> It is

also the case that recent presidents have not had burgeoning domestic agendas, in part due to economic constraints and their own ideological preferences. Reagan's "activist" first-year agenda in 1981 was aimed at *scaling back* rather than expanding the role of government. After achieving his most important legislative goals in the 97th Congress, Reagan's interest in advancing legislation diminished significantly. George Bush's legislative agenda focused largely on ensuring the continuity of Reagan's legacy by *halting* Democratic proposals rather than promoting new programs.

"Proposing legislation," Wayne Steger reminds us, "gives presidents a means of influencing the legislative process that does not exist when the administration fails to propose legislation."<sup>84</sup> Reagan and Bush found themselves in a much more reactive situation in the legislative realm due to their own limited policy objectives and to congressional Democrats' attempts to fill a perceived agenda gap. Clinton had few electoral resources and was in an inferior institutional position to influence agenda setting in the Republican controlled Congresses from 1995–2000. As chapter 1 shows, these presidents frequently shifted their legislative strategy to mediating, selectively preempting, or fending off the most disagreeable elements of the majority's agenda through vetoes and veto threats.

### *Interpreting Individual Presidents' Leverage across "Eras of Congress": An Integrative Approach*

Presidents must discern what they can and cannot achieve within the temporal boundaries of their term in office.<sup>85</sup> The objective of the framework of presidential leverage in political time is to account for presidential legislative strategy, success, and forms of influence throughout the postwar period. The theoretical foundation emphasizes how presidential leverage has been fundamentally shaped by two predominant factors in the last half century. The first is party control of Congress—unified or divided government. The second is the nature of the electoral context and organizational setting in Congress surrounding party control of national institutions. The framework stresses how the interaction of these factors shaped presidents' agenda-setting capacity, coalition building and legislative success, and the basis for strong, moderate, or weak levels of independent policy success across time.

Attention to broad developments in electoral and institutional politics facilitates classifying modern presidents on the continuum of positive and negative leverage over Congress according to the criteria elaborated earlier in figure I.1. The interplay of the factors stressed by the framework suggests that the postwar period can be broken into distinguishable "eras" marked by decisive

turning points. The matrix in figure I.10 simplifies the nexus between party control, presidential electoral resources, institutional dynamics in Congress, and each president’s relative “positive” leverage across time.

Borrowing from Roger Davidson’s typology of “congressional eras” in the postwar period according to voting alignments and organizational features in Congress, figure I.10 arranges individual presidents’ leverage by party control. The classification extends Davidson’s typology to include presidents’ electoral resources, party cohesion and leadership strength in Congress, incumbency advantage, and agenda magnitude and mutuality between the branches. Presidents’ leverage may be grouped within the three distinct eras that define the postwar period. Unified and divided government have occurred within the “bipartisan conservative era” (1947–64), the “liberal activist era” (1965–78), and the “postreform/party-unity era” (1979–2000).<sup>86</sup> The schema underscores the essential point that congressional “time” does not tick on the same clock as presidents’ quadrennial terms. Continuity marks voting coalitions and organizational features in Congress. Let us examine the political contexts in which presidents sought to govern under unified and divided conditions across the three eras and the type of leverage—positive and negative—they were able to wield.

The Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy presidencies fall into the bipartisan conservative era. The central feature of this period was weak congressional organization and significant variation in presidential coattails. Pervasive intraparty divisions in Congress gave the “conservative coalition” of

	Bipartisan Conservative Era (1947–64)	Liberal Activist (1965–78)	Postreform/ Party-Unity (1979–2000)
Unified Government	<i>Moderate/High Leverage</i> Eisenhower (1953–54)	<i>Moderate/High Leverage</i> Johnson (1965–68)	<i>Moderate/High Leverage</i> N/A
	<i>Low Leverage</i> Truman (1949–52) Kennedy (1961–63)	<i>Low Leverage</i> Carter (1977–78)	<i>Low Leverage</i> Carter (1979–80) Clinton (1993–94)
	<i>Moderate/High Leverage</i> Eisenhower (1955–60)	<i>Moderate/High Leverage</i> Nixon I (1969–72)	<i>Moderate/High Leverage</i> Reagan I (1981–82)
Divided Government	<i>Low Leverage</i> Truman (1947–48)	<i>Low Leverage</i> Nixon II (1973–74) Ford (1974–76)	<i>Low Leverage</i> Reagan I, II (1983–88) Bush (1989–92) Clinton (1995–2000)

Fig. I.10  
“Positive” Presidential Leverage in Political Time: The Eras of Congress

southern Democrats and Republicans the upper hand over policy making. Power and coordination of legislative business generally resided in a cadre of conservative southerners who chaired the committees responsible for fiscal policies. Congress's internal configuration combined with presidents' electoral popularity and the scope of their policy objectives to delimit leverage in the legislative sphere in different ways under unified and divided government.

The import for Democratic presidents under unified government was indisputable in the bipartisan conservative era. "This Capitol Hill regime proved a hostile environment for activist presidents and their ambitious legislative agendas."<sup>87</sup> A strong incumbency advantage allowed southerners to thwart attempts at forceful legislative leadership by Truman and Kennedy, who had expansive agendas. Both presidents fall into the "weak positive leverage" category. Unified government was a tenuous arrangement between activist presidents and an entrenched conservative *de facto* policy majority that undermined any basis for "party government."

Nor did the period of single-party Republican rule in 1953–54—the only such period from 1945–2000—resemble party government. Dwight Eisenhower had moderate to high leverage based on his coattails and popularity, but chose to intervene selectively in lawmaking. His circumscribed agenda defied the typical FDR model of unified government that Democratic presidents hoped to emulate, but it meshed fairly well with a congressional policymaking environment averse to action and geared toward maintenance of the status quo. The significant policies that emerged were largely a product of the president's priorities and his support for continuing GOP initiatives that had been stifled by years as the minority on Capitol Hill.

The eight years of split-party control in the bipartisan conservative era yielded contrasting experiences between the Democratic Truman and the Republican Eisenhower. Truman had the lowest positive leverage of all presidents in the period—and little veto leverage. Divided government proved a volatile and unique arrangement not repeated in the postwar period. Because he assumed the Oval Office upon Franklin Roosevelt's death, Truman had no electoral resources. He faced an assertive Republican Congress in which the conservative coalition gained near-supermajority status in the midterm elections of 1946. The swelling of the ranks of the conservative coalition in the 80th Congress (1947–48) enabled GOP leaders to trample his vetoes of major legislation on numerous occasions.

The policymaking context for Eisenhower under divided government from 1955–60 proved far more favorable to cross-party coalition-building leverage. Eisenhower sustained moderate to high positive leverage because of

his strong electoral resources in 1952 and again in 1956, and because the range of the contested agenda between the branches remained relatively small until the closing years of his second term. Unlike the GOP majority Truman faced in the 80th Congress, the Democratic majority had *not* been relegated to quasi-permanent minority status in prior decades and did *not* regain the majority with an active policy program in 1954. Eisenhower used the combination of his electoral popularity and popular approval to influence policy making on an occasional basis, drawing from different partisan factions to build legislative support.

The liberal activist era from approximately 1965–78 comprised substantial legislative innovation and internal reform in Congress over an extended period. Lyndon's Johnson's landslide electoral victory ushered in the liberal activist era. One of the chief features of the period is that "Legislative activity soared by whatever measure one chooses to apply—bills introduced, hearings, reports, hours in session, floor amendments, recorded floor votes, and measures passed."<sup>88</sup> This era spanned the presidencies of Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and a portion of Jimmy Carter's term, with presidential leverage varying rather significantly.

The Johnson and Carter experiences under unified government are contrasting cases of positive presidential leverage in this era. Lyndon Johnson's decisive defeat of Barry Goldwater in 1964 set the stage for considerable executive-legislative synergy on the "Great Society." Johnson's strong coattails enhanced his institutional position to take charge of a decentralized Congress that turned to him for policy leadership. He possessed what neither Truman nor Kennedy had: a working legislative majority of liberal Democrats in Congress, many of whom owed their electoral victories to his coattails. By contrast, Jimmy Carter came to the White House with exceedingly weak electoral resources. His "outsider" campaign created a tenuous electoral connection to the Democratic majority. Moreover, Congress's internal organization and mood were hardly conducive to strong deference to the president after eight years of combative relations with President's Nixon and Ford. Carter had a much more limited basis for independent policy success.

The incidence of split-party control in the liberal activist era presents a somewhat anomalous set of circumstances. "Nixon may have been a conservative president," Davidson observes, "but the legislative record compiled during his administration was expansive and liberal."<sup>89</sup> Nixon's floor success rate was high and his support of legislation strong (fig. I.7). This enigmatic finding continues to leave scholars in search of a satisfactory explanation.<sup>90</sup> His high floor success rate is somewhat deceptive, however, as it depended

upon a willingness to collaborate with Democrats and make changes at the margins of legislation. Nixon did not have the requisite electoral resources to halt the Democrats' march on the domestic front following his narrow victory in 1968. But the fluidity of legislative coalitions during this period did create limited opportunities to build some support for his legislative stands. Nixon's first term fits uncomfortably between the opposite poles of a shared and contested agenda between the branches, although further analysis reveals clearly that his preferred agenda did not drive the legislative charge in Congress. His "moderate to high" leverage over Congress in his first term thus requires qualification.

Nixon's positive leverage dwindled to low levels by his second term, which was truncated by Watergate and the certainty of impeachment that forced his resignation. His rather imperious tactics to halt policy activism by the majority rekindled the Democrats' desire for a stronger leadership organization. A series of institutional reforms centralized authority in party leaders in order to combat the executive threat to the consolidation of the Great Society. It was into this environment that Gerald Ford was thrust in 1974. Unelected, Ford had no electoral resources with which to persuade Congress. Often unable to build viable legislative coalitions, Ford turned to the veto power as a legislative strategy.<sup>91</sup> However, low party cohesion, broad policy coalitions in Congress, and constituency pressures on GOP members to address growing economic problems made it difficult to retain his fragile minority based on override challenges.

Nearly sustained divided control has defined the postreform/party-unity era. The structure of divided government has varied, pitting Republican presidents Reagan and Bush against a Democratic Congress, while Democratic president Clinton faced a Republican Congress for six years. The common feature of the period is the rise of the contested agenda between the branches, scarce fiscal resources, and far lower positive presidential leverage to persuade the opposition majority—Reagan's first two years notwithstanding. Reagan, unlike Bush and Clinton, had strong electoral resources upon his victory in 1980 and faced Congress at a critical juncture. The last strong appearance of the conservative coalition in the closing decades of the century enabled Reagan to forge narrow majority support for his early agenda. Yet, just as Democrats responded to Nixon's threat to the party agenda in the 1970s with leadership reforms, a resurgent liberal majority vowed to minimize Reagan's influence in subsequent years. Stronger congressional leadership coordination followed Reagan's first term, and his positive leverage declined dramatically. Weak coattails for his successors and the continuation of strong, well-organized

governing majorities in Congress seriously hamstrung Bush's and Clinton's cross-party coalition-building potential. Frequently thwarted in their bid to influence the congressional agenda or build support for their own policy preferences, the defensive politics of vetoes came to play a central role in their experiences with split-party control. Bush and Clinton had a stronger foundation, then, for partisan coalition building and veto leverage.

Two brief years of unified government intervened in the postreform/party-unity period with Bill Clinton's election in 1992, and far greater agenda synergy developed between Clinton and the Democratic Congress. Yet Clinton's electoral victory by a plurality yielded weak leverage to direct congressional lawmaking. The return to unified government did not represent an electoral legitimization of Clinton's agenda, and Congress's institutional setting was far more centralized than in prior eras. The constant battles of nearly twelve years with a Republican president in the White House had strengthened the Democrats' independent policy-making capacity. The context of unified government was better suited to the president's facilitation of more modest and shared goals with the governing majority. Some of Clinton's most notable successes, from social policy to international trade, were on legislative items linked to Congress's carryover agenda.<sup>92</sup>

The classification in figure I.10 places into sharp relief the unequal impact of party control of Congress for presidential leverage across "eras" in the last half century. The framework of presidential leverage in political time elaborated in this chapter has laid the groundwork for closer analysis in subsequent chapters. This theoretical framework emphasizes how the development of electoral and institutional forces beyond presidents' control has affected legislative strategy, success, and credit claiming.

### *The Road Ahead: Organization of This Book*

Subsequent chapters are organized chronologically around comparative case studies of presidential-congressional relations in the bipartisan conservative, liberal activist, and postreform/party-unity eras. A comparative case study approach surmounts elements of the "small N" problem common in presidency research.<sup>93</sup> The focus on individual presidents across time complements the next chapter's integrative and systematic analysis of aggregate data on presidents' legislative strategy and success.

Chapter 1 applies the theoretical perspective of presidential leverage in political time to floor success rates and types of presidential involvement on nationally significant legislation over the last half century. The chapter also closely examines presidents' use of vetoes and veto threats. The empirical

analysis validates the utility of the “eras” perspective in accounting for the considerable variation in presidents’ floor success and the *type* of legislative leadership they have been able to exert under unified and divided government. The deconstruction of Mayhew’s significant laws reveals that divided government has translated into many more congressionally led policy achievements in the last two decades and frequent use of the veto and veto threats by presidents. The result has been qualitatively different forms of presidential involvement in lawmaking that have changed the dynamics of, and opportunities for, credit claiming. Furthermore, analysis of presidents’ agenda leadership and legislative strategy on significant domestic legislation in periods of unified control shows how weaker presidential leverage since the 1970s has entailed a limited basis for presidential direction of congressional lawmaking.

Chapters 2–7 present case studies of presidents’ relations with Congress under divided and unified government in each of the three eras. The case studies provide a more in-depth analysis of the nature of presidential involvement in significant legislative outcomes. Additionally, the case studies introduce systematic analysis of individual-level congressional support for the president’s legislative positions. The model of legislative support complements the aggregate-level analysis in Chapter 1 by accentuating how electoral and institutional forces, in conjunction with party control of Congress, conditioned presidential leverage.

Chapter 2 explores the contrasting experiences of Truman (1947–48) and Eisenhower (1955–60) under divided government in the bipartisan conservative era. The 80th Congress was one of the more productive periods of divided government, but what passed was largely opposed by Truman or adopted over his objections.<sup>94</sup> By contrast, Eisenhower’s limited legislative agenda and moderate positions were more suited to building cross-party support in Congress, and he was largely successful on the legislative front due to his personal influence and electoral popularity.

Chapter 3 takes up the puzzle of Nixon’s first term (1969–72) in the liberal activist era. Nixon’s position vote success rate is enigmatic in light of the impressive legislative output of the period and the large Democratic majorities in Congress. The chapter shows how Nixon’s reelection incentive 1972 prompted him to *cooperate in*—but not necessarily lead—the shifting policy coalitions of which the highly decentralized 91st and 92d Congresses were susceptible.

Chapter 4 details Reagan’s bout with divided government (1981–88) in light of a second congressional resurgence and geographic electoral realignment between the parties. Reagan’s early policy victories were striking but

short-lived. Paradoxically, Reagan's masterful success was the source of his lower positive leverage after 1982. Democratic leadership reforms curtailed his coalition-building potential in Congress, and Reagan set far less of the domestic agenda.

Chapter 5 examines the experiences of George Bush (1989–92) and Bill Clinton (1995–96) under divided government during a period of intense partisan polarization in Congress during the postreform/party-unity era. Although the two had different domestic agendas, Bush and Clinton have the poorest floor success rates in the analysis. Most of the significant legislation originated from the congressional opposition's endeavors, and both presidents wound up opposing much more legislation than they favored. The chapter traces why they resorted to wielding the veto and issuing veto threats to excise the most objectionable provisions from the legislation that emerged from the majority's agenda.

Chapter 6 examines periods of unified government by contrasting the experiences of Kennedy (1961–62) and Johnson (1965–68) in the bipartisan conservative and liberal activist eras, respectively. Although Kennedy faced an entrenched conservative majority in Congress following a narrow electoral victory in 1960, close analysis of his relations with the 87th Congress shows that the limited amount of significant legislation that passed in the two-year period evidenced a direct connection to his activist agenda. Yet, in terms of the quantity and scope of initiatives passed, Lyndon Johnson is the only postwar president whose policy successes approximate the model of FDR's legislative leadership in the domestic policy realm. Analysis of Johnson's term accentuates the importance of a massive electoral victory and strong coattails as factors legitimizing the president's agenda.

Chapter 7 compares the experiences of Jimmy Carter (1977–80) and Bill Clinton (1993–94) under unified government in the late liberal activist period through the postreform/party-unity era. The chapter emphasizes how Carter and Clinton endured trying times in dealing with their congressional majorities. The analysis reveals that the significant domestic legislation passed generally had a direct connection to the president's stated policy objectives. Nonetheless, some of Carter's and Clinton's most notable successes were in support of historical and continuing party objectives in Congress rather than their own independent policy goals. Unified government facilitated proactive presidential leadership, just not to the degree or in the same way that it did for Lyndon Johnson.

Chapter 8 concludes by emphasizing how the framework of presidential leverage in political time helps us to grasp the impact of party control of na-

tional institutions on presidential legislative influence and strategy. The chapter reinforces why it is that presidents like Nixon and Bush or Truman and Clinton, who faced similar partisan constellations of divided government, responded differently and employed different strategies of legislative leadership. The chapter also stresses the commonality in the experiences of Kennedy, Carter, and Clinton in terms of a shared agenda between the branches. These Democratic presidents did not profit from the extraordinary convergence of environmental, electoral, and institutional factors that followed Lyndon Johnson to the Oval Office in 1964. The constraints each of these presidents faced across different eras did not yield the type of executive-legislative synergy coveted by responsible party government advocates. At the same time, unified government did furnish many more opportunities for these presidents to reinforce support for a shared party agenda in Congress, engage in joint credit claiming with their congressional copartisans, and lay the groundwork for future policy innovations. The significance of this difference in legislative leadership is not trivial to presidents' policy legacies when compared to the type of influence they have been able to exercise during recent periods of divided government.