The Conditional Effects of Party Polarization and Presidential Popularity in Congress:
Explaining the Puzzle of Why Minority Presidents Win Less when They Are Popular

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Abstract

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Neustadt suggested that electoral self-interest motivates members of Congress to raise or lower their support for the president in response to his public approval. Although past research generally supports this hypothesis, some studies find that the effect of rising public approval is negative for minority presidents. This presents a puzzle: why would public approval lower presidential success under any condition? This paper proposes a theory to explain why polarization creates conditions that might lead reelection oriented incumbents to ignore public opinion. We find that opinion polarization results mostly from exceptionally low support from opposition party identifiers. Consequently, increasing support for a president of the other party does not produce electoral gains—a small increase in support is unlikely to attract additional votes from the president’s partisans, but it may alienate many voters in incumbent’s base. Analyses of presidential success on roll call votes from 1953-2014 supports this conditional theory.
The Conditional Effects of Party Polarization and Presidential Popularity in Congress: Explaining the Puzzle of Why Minority Presidents Win Less when They Are Popular

Richard Neustadt (1960) teaches that public approval enhances the president’s ability to persuade Congress to support his preferences. Although past research generally supports this expectation, a recurring finding in the literature presents a puzzle—several studies find that while rising public approval has the expected positive effect for majority presidents, the effect for minority presidents is negative (Bond, Cohen, and Fleisher 2014, Bond and Fleisher 1980; 1984). This paper addresses the puzzle of why minority presidents might win less when they are popular.

The paper proceeds as follows. We begin with a brief review of the literature establishing reelection as the theoretical motivation to expect a relationship between presidential popularity and success in Congress—to improve the chances of reelection, members of Congress raise or lower support in response to the president’s popularity with voters. Building on this foundation, we propose a theory of conditional relationships. We argue that party polarization alters how members of Congress respond to presidential popularity. In particular, decisions of voters and elected politicians are refracted through a partisan lens, and party polarization strengthens that lens. Analysis of the conditional effects of presidential popularity and opinion polarization on partisan support in Congress from 1953-2014 provides support for this conditional theory. We find that polarization of presidential popularity is due almost exclusively to a sharp drop in approval of opposition party voters. Because members of Congress are more responsive to presidential approval among their party’s identifiers than to overall approval, the asymmetric divergence of partisan opinion creates incentives for opposition partisans in Congress to reduce support when the president is popular overall. Although opinion polarization reduces opposition party support for both majority and minority presidents, minority presidents’ overall success rate declines because they need opposition party votes to win. We conclude with a discussion of implications for the study of presidential-congressional relations.
Neustadt (1960) laid a theoretical foundation for the Public Approval Hypothesis: as public approval of the president increases, success in Congress increases. Electoral self-interest is the underlying motivation for members of Congress to respond to presidential popularity. As Neustadt (1960, 86) explains, “Most members of the Washington community depend upon outsiders to support them. . . . Dependent men must take account of popular reactions to their actions. What their publics may think of them becomes a factor, therefore, in deciding how to deal with the desires of a President. His prestige enters into that decision; their publics are part of his.” Although Neustadt expected a positive relationship, he viewed public approval as a factor operating in the background “as a \textit{conditioner}, not the determinant” of presidential success (1960, 87, emphasis added). He concluded that public support is “a factor that may not decide the outcome in a given case but can affect the likelihood in every case” (Neustadt 1960, 93).

Past research provides support for Neustadt’s expectations—public approval generally has a statistically significant but substantively marginal positive effect on support from members of Congress (Edwards 1989) and on presidential success rates (Bond and Fleisher 1990).\footnote{Other studies that find marginal effects include, Canes-Wrone and de Marchi (2002), Cohen et al. (2000), Collier and Sullivan (1995), and Fleisher et al. (2000).} Furthermore, while Neustadt was not using “conditioner” in the sense of statistical interaction, subsequent research that tests for interactions finds that the effects of public approval, party control, and party polarization are indeed conditional (Bond, Cohen, and Fleisher 2014; Bond, Fleisher, and Cohen 2012, 2015; Bond, Fleisher, and Wood 2003). Yet the direction of the relationship between public approval and presidential success on floor votes is not consistent with Neustadtian theory under all conditions—
several studies find that the effects of public approval are positive for majority presidents but negative for minority presidents (Bond, Cohen, and Fleisher 2014, Bond and Fleisher 1980; 1984).

If members of Congress want to get reelected (and they do), it seems reasonable to expect rational actors to support a president who is popular with voters and oppose one who is unpopular. In light of the central importance of public support in an electoral democracy, why would public approval lower presidential success under any condition? The short answer is that if public opinion is polarized, marginal adjustments in presidential support do not produce electoral gains. We propose a theory to explain how party polarization creates conditions that might lead re-election oriented incumbents to oppose a popular president and support an unpopular one, and why this behavior results in lower success only for minority presidents. Analysis of presidential roll-calls from 1953-2014 provides empirical support for the conditional theory.

A THEORY OF CONDITIONAL PRESIDENTIAL-CONGRESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Our theory of Conditional Presidential-Congressional Relationships integrates insights from four theories of congressional behavior—Cue Theory, Conditional Party Government Theory, Cartel Theory, and Strategic Politicians Theory. We present the theory in three parts. The first part identifies the primary and secondary determinants of congressional behavior. The second part discusses party polarization in American politics, and why it alters the relationship between approval and success. The third part discusses the conditional nature of the relationships.

Primary and Secondary Determinants of Congressional Behavior

Congressional scholars assume that members of Congress are rational actors motivated largely by two goals—reelection and policy (Aldrich 1995; Aldrich and Rohde 2000; Arnold 1990; Fenno 1973; Rohde 1991). Because members must make decisions with imperfect information under acute time constraints,

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2 Lockerbie, Borrelli, and Hedger’s (1998) analysis found a significant negative effect of approval in the House, but no significant relationship in the Senate. This analysis did not test for different effects for minority and majority presidents.
they rely on shortcuts, or cues, to help them cast votes that advance reelection and policy goals. Cues from party, ideology, and constituency are the primary determinants of how members of Congress vote (Kingdon 1973; Jackson 1974; Matthews and Stimson 1975). Elections generally select representatives with partisan and policy preferences that are compatible with their constituents’ interests. Consequently, members of Congress normally do not experience conflict between party and ideology/constituency (Fenno 1978; Mayhew 1974). In the absence of conflict, following party leaders (including a same-party president) does not threaten reelection.

Only when primary cues are in conflict do members look to secondary cues for guidance. Secondary cues include inputs from interest groups, the news media, and public opinion, and the president (Kingdon 1973). Although the president’s preferences are a secondary cue, he is, nonetheless, a partisan actor from the ideological mainstream of his party. As a result, presidential support from co-partisans is consistently higher than is support from members of the opposition (Edwards 1989). The level of support, however, depends on the degree to which the president’s preferences reinforce a member’s ideological predispositions (Bond and Fleisher 1990).

Congruence between party and ideology in Congress varies over time. From the 1950s through the 1970s, both party caucuses had numerous cross-pressured members—conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans—who regularly experienced conflict between party and ideology. When many members frequently experience such conflict, defections of co-partisans with ideology distant from the president are common, but the president can attract support from opposition partisans with more compatible ideology (Bond and Fleisher 1990). If primary cues are in conflict, secondary cues such as the president’s popularity are more likely to influence congressional decisions (Bond, Fleisher, and Wood 2003). As cross-pressured members leave Congress, the center shrinks and party and ideology become more congruent (Fleisher and Bond 2004). Without a critical mass of ideological mavericks in party caucuses to encourage compromise across the aisle, intra-party cohesion rises and inter-party differences widen, or polarize.
Party Polarization in American Politics

Party polarization has become a conspicuous feature of American politics. It is a multifaceted concept defined by three characteristics: (1) high intra-party cohesion resulting in a bimodal distribution of preferences; (2) the disappearance of moderates with little or no overlap in the center; and (3) a divergence of party means toward opposite extremes or poles (DiMaggio, Evans and Bryson 1996; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2008, 566; Fiorina and Levendusky 2006; Fleisher and Bond 2004). Polarization is best viewed as a process resulting in more or less party cohesion, overlap, and divergence rather than a binary state of polarized/not polarized.

Party Polarization in Congress. Party polarization first appeared on roll call votes in Congress. Various measures\(^3\) show similar trends: Congress was highly polarized from the end of Reconstruction to the early 20\(^{th}\) century; polarization began to decline in the 1930s, reaching a nadir in the 1970s; the downward trend reversed and began a steady rise in the 1980s; by the 2000s and continuing to the present, party polarization rebounded to the point that both the House and Senate are more polarized than at any time since the end of Reconstruction (Bond, Fleisher, and Cohen 2015; Poole 2015).

Conditional Party Government (CPG) theory (Rohde 1991; Aldrich and Rohde 2000; Aldrich 2011) offers a convincing explanation of the party polarization process in Congress. The core of CPG theory is homogeneous preferences in party caucuses.\(^4\) The “condition” is met when preferences become sufficiently homogeneous that members adopt reforms giving party leaders new tools to forge greater discipline to pass policies on which there is partisan consensus.

\(^3\) Common measures include the difference between party medians of DW-Nominate scores (Poole and Rosenthal 1997), the percentage of party votes (Bond, Fleisher and Wood 2003; Brady, Cooper, and Hurley 1979; Cohen, Bond, and Fleisher 2012, 2013a, 2013b; Fleisher, Bond, and Wood 2008), number of moderates (Fleisher and Bond 2004) or extremists (Poole 2015), and the mean distance between Democrats and Republicans on roll call votes (Bond, Cohen, and Fleisher 2014; Bond, Fleisher, and Cohen 2015).

\(^4\) Mainly the majority party, though the minority party is not powerless (Krehbiel, Meirowitz, and Wiseman 2015).
The primary motivation in CPG theory, however, is electoral forces outside of Congress. To win re-election, representatives must satisfy local re-election constituencies (Fenno 1978). If partisan re-election constituencies in different regions have dissimilar policy preferences, party members in Congress will reflect that heterogeneity. This was the case in the mid-20th century when Democratic voters elected liberals in the North and conservatives in the South. If diverse preferences of partisan re-election constituencies become more similar across regions, as occurred in the South after implementation of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, preferences in party caucuses become more homogeneous (Rohde 1991). If few members experience conflict between party and ideology/constituency, empowering party leaders to forge party discipline does not threaten re-election. As a result, intra-party cohesion increases, the center disappears, inter-party preferences diverge, and Congress becomes polarized.

Research on party polarization in Congress typically looks at the distance between preferences (revealed by votes) of Democrats and Republicans. For the analysis of presidential support, however, we need to reorient party divergence relative the party of the president, and look at support from members of the president’s and the opposition parties.

Figure 1 shows that the distance between mean levels of support from the president’s and opposition parties more doubled since 1953. In both chambers, there is a long term trend of a widening gap in presidential support from the parties.\(^5\) Means for different periods show that presidential support in Congress polarized in three distinct stages. In the first period from 1953-1980 (Presidents Eisenhower to Carter), the mean party difference was around 30 percent; the gap widened 16 points to about 46 percent for Reagan, Bush sr., and Clinton; and then expanded another 20 points to 66 percent for Bush and Obama.

\(^5\) See trendline equations in the Appendix.
Polarization occurs when party means diverge, but divergence can be symmetrical or asymmetrical. If both parties move about the same distance in opposite directions, divergence is symmetrical and responsibility for polarization is shared. If one party moves toward the extreme while the other party’s position remains stable, divergence is asymmetrical, and primary responsibility for polarization rests with the party that moved. Some research suggests that polarization in Congress is asymmetrical because Republicans have moved farther right than Democrats have moved left (Mann and Ornstein 2012; Poole 2015). Reorienting party relative to the president, however, reveals that asymmetric polarization results more from how Democrats and Republicans respond to presidents of the opposite party rather than to changes in the behavior of either party.

Figure 2 plots the annual mean distance between same-party and opposition party presidential support. We see long term trends of rising support from president’s party and declining support from the opposition party in both chambers. The means for the three stages indicate that both parties contributed to polarization of presidential support in Congress, but the drop in opposition party support is about twice the size of the same-party increase. Same-party support increased from 69 percent in stage one (Eisenhower to Carter) to 74 percent in stage two (Reagan to Clinton), and then to 86 percent in stage three. Same-party support started to rise earlier in the Senate, however. Same-party support in the Senate increased in both the second and third periods, while the House mean did not increase until the third period. Relative to the first stage, same-party support for Bush and Obama is about 20 percent higher in the House and 25 percent higher in the Senate. In contrast, opposition support for Bush and Obama (about 20 percent) is 50 percent lower than that received by presidents before Reagan (around 41 percent).

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6 See trendline equations in the Appendix.
Thus, while both parties contributed to polarization in presidential support, the opposition party diverged more. We turn now to the question of polarization of public opinion.

**Polarization of Public Opinion of the President.** Although evidence of party polarization in Congress is convincing, there is spirited scholarly debate about ideological polarization of the mass public (Abramowitz 2010; Abramowitz and Saunders 2005, 2008 vs. Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2011; Levendusky 2009; Levendusky and Pope 2011). Ideological polarization, however, is not necessary for public opinion about a prominent party symbol to polarize. And the president is the most visible party symbol in American politics. Partisan opinions of presidential job performance have diverged markedly over the last six decades, and the gap has widened enough to justify calling it polarized (Jacobson 2000, 2006, 2014).

Specifically, the distance between same and opposition party identifiers’ presidential approval nearly doubled (from 35 percent to 68 percent) since 1953 (see Figure 3), a similar divergence as party support in Congress (cf. Figure 1). And as in Congress, we see a secular trend\(^7\) of growing divergence of partisan job approval. Public opinion polarized in three steps: the mean party difference before Reagan was 35 percent; opinion polarization jumped to about 50 percent for presidents from Reagan to Clinton; and then to 68 percent for Bush and Obama.\(^8\)

Moreover, while the opposition party contributed disproportionately to polarization in Congress, polarization of public approval of the president is due almost exclusively to plummeting support from

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\(^7\) See trendline equations in the Appendix.

\(^8\) Means adjust for the Desert Storm rally for Bush-41 (about 9 months) and the 9/11 rally for Bush-43 (about 22 months). These rallies resulted from spikes in approval of opposition partisans. Keeping the Desert Storm data points lowers mean polarization for period two by 1 percent. Keeping the 9/11 data points lowers the mean for Bush and Obama about 5 percent.
opposition partisans. We see a long term secular trend of declining support from opposition partisans, but no trend in increasing support from the president’s co-partisans (see Figure 4). Approval from the president’s partisans averaged 76 percent for presidents from Eisenhower to Carter, and crept up only 5 points to means of 82 percent for subsequent presidents. Note that on average Bush and Obama were no more popular among their co-partisans than were Reagan, Bush sr., and Clinton. Support from opposition partisans, in contrast, dropped sharply in three distinct steps. Opposition partisans’ approval averaged 41 percent for Presidents from Eisenhower to Carter, falling 10 points to a mean of 31 percent for Presidents Reagan, Bush sr., and Clinton, and then plunging another 17 points to a mean of 14 percent for Bush and Obama. Opposition partisans’ support for Bush and Obama is only about one-third the level received by presidents from Eisenhower to Carter. This finding is consistent with Hetherington and Rudolph’s (2015) analysis showing that opposition partisans’ trust in government dropped to near zero for Bush and Obama.

[Figure 4 about here]

The Conditional Effects of Party Polarization in American Politics

Consistent with Neustadt’s (1960, 87) view that public approval is “a conditioner, not the determinant” of presidential success, previous research finds that the effects of party control and public approval depend on the level of polarization. Because party polarization of presidential support extends to elites (roll call voting in Congress) and to the mass public (opinions of the president’s job performance), we need to test for conditional effects of both types of polarization.

Conditional Effects of Elite Polarization. Previous research shows that elite polarization conditions the effect of party control, and why it works differently in the Senate. This research finds that in the

9 See trendline equations in the Appendix.

10 Party means adjust for the Desert Storm and 9/11 rallies.
House, governed by majority rule, party polarization amplifies the benefits of majority control—as party polarization rises, majority presidents win more and minority president win less. In the Senate, increasingly governed by the 60-vote requirement to invoke cloture, party polarization suppresses success—majority presidents still win more, but rising party polarization reduces success rates of both majority and minority presidents (Cohen, Bond, and Fleisher 2013a, 2013b). The steep increase in both the frequency and partisanship of cloture votes for Bush and Obama explains why party polarization suppresses success rates of majority presidents. Cloture votes were rare until the Reagan years when they began to rise. By the Bush and Obama years, around one-fourth of presidential roll calls were on cloture, and over 80 percent were highly partisan.11 Majority presidents favor cloture over 97 percent of the time. As a result, they normally lose on cloture because getting 60 votes requires votes from a cohesive opposition. Minority presidents, in contrast, oppose cloture over 80 percent of the time. Thus, they usually win on cloture because the minority party can block invoking cloture with 41 votes from their own caucus (Bond, Fleisher, and Cohen 2015; Bond, Cohen, and Fleisher 2014).

Recent research finds evidence that party polarization in Congress also alters the effect of public approval. This research reports a puzzling finding—if congressional parties are polarized, the effect of rising public approval is positive for majority presidents and negative for minority presidents in both the House and Senate (Bond, Cohen, and Fleisher 2014).12

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11 A highly partisan vote is one on which the absolute difference between the percentages of Democrats and Republicans voting “yea” is at least 80%. Notice that a difference of 80 includes party votes under the 90 vs. 90 definition of a “true party vote” (Lowell 1908, 76 fn.1), but it picks up highly partisan votes that would not qualify under the traditional definition because one party was highly unified but at less than 90 percent (e.g., 100 vs. 80, 95 vs. 85).

12 Research analyzing presidential success from 1953 through the 1970s when partisanship was at its lowest, also found a negative relationship between public approval and presidential success for minority presidents (Bond and Fleisher 1980, 1984). These papers did not attempt to explain the puzzling finding, but party polarization obviously can’t account for it. This evidence does, however, indicate that the unexpected effect did not occur by chance.
The conditioning effect of opinion polarization has not been analyzed. The next section offers theoretical reasons to explain how opinion polarization alters rational calculations of partisan voters and members of Congress, and why it might lead to lower success of popular minority presidents.

**How Opinion Polarization Alters Congressional Support of the President.** The hypothesized relationship between public approval and presidential success in Congress involves decisions of two sets of actors—voters and members of Congress. The reelection motivation suggests that to avoid retribution at the polls, rational incumbents modify their support in response to the president’s popularity with voters. Neustadt (1960, 33) downplayed the importance of parties—“What the Constitution separates our political parties do not combine.” Yet six decades of empirical research shows that decisions of both voters and members of Congress are refracted through a partisan lens—party identification is the “single most important influence” on vote choice in congressional elections (Jacobson 2013, 124-130), and party is the strongest influence on presidential success in Congress (Bond and Fleisher 1990; Edwards 1989).

When policy preferences of partisan voters and their representatives are heterogeneous, as during the mid-20th century when Neustadt wrote, it was not unreasonable to expect that members of both parties would respond to presidential popularity in similar ways—i.e, increasing support as approval rises. But party polarization strengthens the partisan lens through which decisions are refracted. If public opinion is polarized, few of the president’s co-partisan voters disapprove of his job performance and even fewer opposition partisans approve. This sorting alters rational calculations of elected representatives. We identify several related reasons that might explain why polarized opinion creates conditions that lead some members to ignore cues from overall public opinion and follow partisan predispositions.

First, consider how partisanship affects who gets credit or blame for the president’s job performance. Most voters express an opinion about whether they approve or disapprove of the
president, but few have specific information about how often their representative voted with the president. Strategic Politicians Theory teaches that the effect presidential popularity in congressional elections is indirect. If the economy is booming and the president is popular, the president’s party is able to recruit a disproportionate number of politically experienced, well-financed candidates to challenge vulnerable incumbents in the opposition party; if the president is unpopular, the opposing party recruits more high quality candidates to challenge vulnerable incumbents of the president’s party (Jacobson 1989, 1990; Jacobson and Kernell 1983). Because quality challengers run vigorous campaigns that cast the incumbent in a negative light, voters receive information that leads them to blame incumbents of the president’s party for unpopular policies even if they opposed them, and not give credit to opposition party incumbents even if they supported popular policies.

Second, polarized opinion reinforces which party’s candidates get credit or blame for the president’s record. Neustadt (1960, 30) suggests that members of Congress should respond to public opinion because “their publics are part of his.” Yet, public opinion polls measure presidential approval among voters in his national constituency, not in the parts (states and districts) where voters have power to reward or punish representatives for their support. Nevertheless, national approval contains useful information because party identification influences whether a voter approves or disapproves of the president’s job performance. When national approval is broken down by party, members of Congress can observe presidential popularity among the types of voters they need to satisfy.

CPG theory suggests that how well national partisan approval of the president reflects voter’s preferences in any given state or district is a function of the homogeneity of policy preferences in reelection constituencies (Rohde 1991; Aldrich and Rohde 2000; Aldrich 2011). If voters’ preferences across reelection constituencies are dissimilar, presidential approval will not be polarized. Under this condition, members of the president’s party who represent dissimilar constituencies may benefit
electorally if they distance themselves from an unpopular president—lowering presidential support can appeal to co-partisan voters who disapprove of the president without alienating voters in the party base.

But if public approval is polarized, marginal adjustments in presidential support in response to changes in overall approval are unlikely to produce electoral gains. Recall that opinion polarization is due mainly to a sharp decline in approval of opposition partisans (Figure 2). Thus, opposition party incumbents who vote against party cues to support a popular president may be worse off electorally. Increasing presidential support from say 20 percent to 30 percent is unlikely to sway voters of the president’s party. But because opposition partisans’ approval is exceptionally low, even a small increase in support may alienate voters in the incumbent’s party. They are unlikely to vote for the presidential party’s candidate, but they may support a primary challenge or sit-out the general election. Either way, an opposition party incumbent is worse off.

Conversely, attempts of co-partisans to run away from an unpopular president are unlikely to provide cover if public opinion is polarized. A marginal reduction in support for an unpopular president from say 80 percent to 70 percent will not appease voters who disapprove of the president. Almost all voters who disapprove identify with the opposition party, and a quality challenger reminds them that the incumbent supported the reviled president on most votes.

Finally, Cartel Theory (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005), offers additional theoretical rationale for members to vote contrary to public opinion and follow party leaders. Cartel Theory suggests that party leaders use legislative victories to enhance the party’s collective reputation for electoral gain in the upcoming election. Although Cartel Theory refers to victories of the legislative party, Lebo and O’Geen (2011) present evidence that voters are more likely to reward presidential victories. Thus, opposition party incumbents facing a popular president may get greater electoral benefits if they work with party leaders to defeat presidential proposals. Even if the minority opposition cannot defeat a presidential proposal, they may turn public opinion against him by trashing the policy, as Republicans
did with President Obama’s signature legislative accomplishments, the economic stimulus and the Affordable Care Act. And since same-party incumbents cannot run away from an unpopular president, they may do better electorally if they help him win more legislative victories.

Why do these micro-level decisions translate into a negative relationship between public approval and presidential success only for minority presidents?

**Why Opinion Polarization Turns the Effect of Public Approval Negative.** We have seen that polarization of presidential approval is due mainly to exceptionally low support of opposition partisans. Asymmetric responses of opposition partisans create the conditions to turn the marginal effect of public approval negative for minority presidents. Edwards (1976, 1977) presents evidence that members of Congress are more responsive to presidential approval among their party identifiers than to national averages. This suggests that neither same-party nor opposition party members will respond strongly to overall public approval. As public opinion becomes more polarized, the president’s partisans in Congress may respond somewhat more positively to public approval, but opposition party support should drop sharply because approval of opposition voters is exceptionally low. Since minority presidents need opposition votes to win, their success declines if public opinion is polarized.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

Previous research finds that a parsimonious model with just three variables—party control, public approval, and party polarization—plus their interactions, captures the fundamentals of presidential success in Congress. We use this basic model to test our theory’s predictions. First, we present a logit analysis of presidential success (win/lose) on roll call votes to show that the effect of public approval is negative for minority presidents when public opinion is polarized. Next, we present an OLS analysis of same and opposition party support on roll call votes to show that members of the party caucuses respond to opinion polarization as predicted by our theory.
Units of Analysis

Previous studies analyzed annual presidential success rates (Bond, Fleisher, and Cohen 2015; Cohen, Bond, and Fleisher 2013a, 2013b), and whether the president’s position won or lost on individual roll call votes (Bond, Cohen, and Fleisher 2014). To analyze the conditional effects of opinion polarization, we need to observe variation in public approval at the time of each vote, and party support on each roll call. Thus, individual roll calls are the appropriate units. Cases are presidential roll calls from 1953-2014 (n=4231 House votes, 4356 Senate votes).

Methods

To analyze the conditional effects of public approval and opinion polarization on the probability of success, we estimate the following logit model for the House and Senate:

$$Win/Lose = B_0 + B_1(Party\ control) + B_2(Approval) + B_3(Opinion\ polarization) + B_4(Party\ control*Approval) + B_5(Opinion\ polarization*Party\ control) + B_6(Opinion\ polarization*Approval) + B_7(Opinion\ polarization*Party\ control*Approval)$$

Where:
1. $Win/Lose$ = a binary variable coded 1 if the president’s position won, 0 otherwise;\(^{13}\)
2. $Party\ control$ = a binary variable coded 1 if President’s party has a majority, 0 otherwise;
3. $Approval$ = the mean Gallup presidential job approval in the month before the vote;
4. $Opinion\ polarization$ = the annual mean difference between Gallup job approval ratings of the president’s and opposition party identifiers;
5. $Party\ control*Approval$ interaction;
6. $Opinion\ polarization*Party\ control$ interaction;
7. $Opinion\ polarization*Approval$ interaction;
8. $Opinion\ polarization*Party\ control*Approval$ interaction.

To analyze the conditional effects of these variables on party support in the House and Senate, we estimate the following OLS model for the House and Senate:

$$President’s\ (Opposition)\ party\ support = B_0 + B_1(Party\ control) + B_2(Approval) + B_3(Opinion\ polarization) + B_4(Party\ control*Approval) + B_5(Opinion\ polarization*Party\ control) + B_6(Opinion\ polarization*Approval) + B_7(Opinion\ polarization*Party\ control*Approval)$$

\(^{13}\) Full variable definitions and sources are in the Appendix.
Where:

1. President’s (Opposition) party support = the percentage of president’s (opposition) party voting in agreement with the president’s position on each roll call; and
2. Right-hand side variables defined as above.

Logit coefficients have no direct substantive interpretation, and interpretation of interaction terms can be tricky. In regression models, the coefficients for constituent variables in interactions are not estimates of direct effects. Rather, they are estimates of conditional effects—i.e., the effect of one variable depends on the value of the other. Thus, the coefficient for each constituent variable is the effect when the other variable in the interaction equals zero. Centering continuous variables on their means eases interpretation because zero is a meaningful value. Interpretation of significance should focus on the joint significance of the constituent variables and the interaction. Insignificant variables remain in the model because they help evaluate the hypothesis of conditional effects. Interpretation of interactions is further complicated because the effects of interaction terms are symmetrical. Applied to our models, this means that if “the effect of [public approval] on [presidential success] is conditional on the value of [party polarization], the effect of [party polarization] must be conditional on the value of [public approval]” (Berry, Golder, and Milton (2012, 653). We present marginal effects plots to facilitate interpretation.

RESULTS

Conditional Effects on the Probability of Presidential Wins

Table 1 reports estimates of logit models for the House and Senate. The models are statistically significant, and they reveal significant interaction.14

[Table 1 about here]

14 Note the models cluster standard errors on year because opinion polarization is measured as an annual mean. Results are robust with alternative specifications available on request.
Figure 5 shows marginal effects plots for minority and majority presidents in the House and Senate. The figure shows marginal effects of two continuous variables (approval and opinion polarization) in three-dimensional plots with the dependent variable (probability of winning a vote) on the y-axis, and continuous independent variables on the x- and z-axes. The plane in the three-dimensional space is the estimated probability of winning at each level of polarization and approval for minority presidents (panels 5a and 5c) and for majority presidents (panels 5b and 5d) in the House and Senate. At low levels of opinion polarization, minority presidents tend to benefit from high approval ratings in both chambers, but as polarization increases the probability of winning declines. Majority presidents appear to get modest benefits from rising public approval in both chambers, and opinion polarization appears to have a slight positive effect on that relationship. But beyond these general observations, seeing precisely how relationships change is difficult, especially with minority and majority presidents in different panels.

[Figure 5 about here]

Figure 6 shows relationships for majority and minority presidents in the same plot from two perspectives—the effect of public approval conditional on opinion polarization in the House (panel 6a) and Senate (6c), and the effect of polarization conditional on approval (panels 6b and 6d). These graphs are cross-sections of the three dimensional plots at average opinion polarization and at average approval at the time of vote. This presentation shows more clearly how the slopes for majority and minority presidents change under different conditions.

[Figure 6 about here]

As expected, majority presidents are more likely to win a roll call vote than are minority presidents at all levels of public approval and opinion polarization. The majority control advantage appears in both chambers, though, consistent with past research, the benefit is muted in the Senate—majority presidents’ probability of winning a roll call vote is .25-.29 higher in the Senate compared to
.25-.41 higher in the House. Non-overlapping confidence intervals indicate that majority presidents’ probability of success is significantly higher than that of minority presidents at all levels of public approval and opinion polarization.

At average polarization, rising public approval has a small positive effect on the probability of a win in both the House (panel 6a) and Senate (panel 6c). The conditioning effect of opinion polarization is positive but small for majority presidents, and negative for minority presidents (see panels 6b and 6d). This indicates that majority presidents receive a slight boost from higher popularity, and rising opinion polarization adds a small increment. Minority presidents, in contrast, may get a small increase in success if public opinion is not polarized, but as opinion polarization climbs above average, the effect of public approval turns negative. This pattern of relationships is similar in both chambers, though the magnitude is smaller in the Senate.

Thus, this analysis replicates the puzzling finding in earlier research— if public opinion is highly polarized, increasing popularity of minority presidents reduces the probability of winning a floor vote. Our theory suggests that differences in how the president’s and opposition partisans in Congress respond to public approval and opinion polarization accounts for this result.

**Conditional Effects on Support from Co-Partisans and Opposition Partisans**

Table 2 presents OLS estimates of the conditional effects of party control, public approval, and opinion polarization on partisan support for the president in the House and Senate. Although the variance explained is modest ($R^2 \leq .10$), theory does not lead us to expect a strong correlation. We find evidence of conditional relationships. Same-party and opposition party members respond differently to the interaction of approval and polarization.

[Table 2 about here]

We look first at support from the president’s party. Figure 7 shows marginal effects plots at average polarization and approval. At mean polarization, as the president becomes more popular,
support from his party tends to go up, though co-partisans in the House are unresponsive to rises in public approval if they are in the minority (see Panel 5a). The effect of opinion polarization on same-party support, however, is strongly positive in both chambers, regardless of majority or minority status. This indicates that as opinion polarization climbs from average to high, support from the president’s party will increase regardless of which party is in the majority.

[Figure 7 about here]

Opposition party members respond quite differently to the interaction of presidential approval and opinion polarization (see Figure 8). The effect of public approval on opposition support at mean polarization is modest—the slopes of regression lines are relatively flat (slightly negative for majority presidents, slightly positive for minority presidents), indicating that opposition party members are unresponsive changes in overall public approval (see panels 8a and 8c). The effect of opinion polarization, however, is strongly negative at average approval (see panels 8b and 8d), indicating that a modest rise in polarization reduces opposition party support for both majority and minority presidents. Responses of opposition party members are statistically indistinguishable regardless of majority or minority status in both chambers.

[Figure 8 about here]

This asymmetric behavior of the opposition party in Congress explains why high opinion polarization turns the relationship between public approval and winning floor votes negative only for minority presidents. Declining support from the opposition has little effect on majority party presidents’ success rates, because they can still win roll call votes with cohesive support from their co-partisans. Minority presidents, in contrast, can’t win roll calls without votes from the opposition.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, opinion polarization can turn the effect of public approval negative.

\textsuperscript{15} The relationships are similar in both chambers, but recall that the Senate model excludes cloture because the 60-vote super-majority required to invoke cloture affects success rates of majority and minority differently. Other research finds that public approval has no significant effect on winning cloture votes (Bond, Cohen, and Fleisher 2014).
CONCLUSIONS

These results are consistent with our theory of conditional presidential-congressional relationships. We find that opinion polarization is mostly due to exceptionally low approval of opposition party voters. Members of Congress are most responsive to presidential approval of their partisan base (Edwards 1976, 1977; Lebo and O’Geen 2011). When public opinion is highly polarized, members realize that even a slight increase in support for a popular president of the other party may alienate many voters in their base, but fail to attract additional support from the president’s partisans. Although both majority and minority presidents receive less opposition party support if public opinion is polarized, the impact is greater for minority presidents because they can’t win without votes from the opposition. Thus, this analysis offers theory and evidence to explain why popular minority presidents win less when public opinion is polarized.

Furthermore, this analysis has implications for the study of presidential-congressional relations. Neustadt’s *Presidential Power* (1960) and Mayhew’s *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (1974) changed how we study the President and Congress. Both dismissed party as something that could help explain politics in the executive and legislative branches:

- “What the Constitution separates our political parties do not combine” (Neustadt 1960, 33);
- “No theoretical treatment of the U.S. Congress that posits parties as analytic units will go very far” (Mayhew 1974, 27).

These classics are based on observations during a time that Neustadt (1960, 3) called “Mid-century”—that’s mid-20th century (1950s-1970s) when parties were at their weakest. Downplaying the impact of parties was not unreasonable for studies based on observations exclusively from a period of weak partisan influence.

The influence of parties in U.S. politics varies over time, however. We now have data to measure party polarization in Congress over the long term. Looking at party polarization in broader historical
perspective from the end of Reconstruction to the present, we learn that low partisanship at mid-20th century is an anomaly. In the decades before and after mid-20th century, highly polarized parties are the norm (Aldrich, Berger, and Rohde 2002; Brady and Han 2006; Fleisher and Bond 2013; McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006; Poole 2015; Theriault 2006).

Thus, it is now clear that partisanship systematically influences the behavior of voters and elected elites. It always has—even at mid-century when numerous observers of American politics were lamenting the decline of parties. But adding observations over several decades of increasing partisanship in American politics clarifies that the effect of party is conditional—how much party influences decisions of elected elites and voters depends on the level of party polarization.

More broadly, this analysis adds to mounting evidence that relationships in the political world are often conditional on the value of another variable. Our theories and analyses of political phenomena need to look beyond linear relationships and routinely test for interactions.

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References


http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=9542766&fileId=S2049847014000417. (Accessed 12-17-15)


Appendix

Table A.1 Variable Descriptions and Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Dependent variable</th>
<th>Description and Justification</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Win/Lose</td>
<td>Whether the president’s position won on presidential roll calls (win=1; lose=0), excluding consensus wins (more than 90% supporting the president) and excluding cloture votes in the Senate. This consensus win definition differs from the 20 percent threshold used in previous work (Bond and Fleisher 1990; Fleisher and Bond 2000). The lower threshold still excludes the most routine issues, but it increases the n slightly. Cloture votes increased precipitously and became highly partisan since 2000, which greatly affects the probability of winning a roll call vote. Excluding cloture votes provides a mix of majority rule and other types of supermajority rule votes (veto overrides, suspend the rules, etc.) similar to the House (Bond, Fleisher, and Cohen 2015).</td>
<td>Congressional Quarterly, Inc. Annually 1953-2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2 Dependent variable</th>
<th>Description and Justification</th>
<th>Source</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President’s party support</td>
<td>Percent of president’s party supporting his position on each roll call</td>
<td>Congressional Quarterly, Inc. Annually 1953-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition party support</td>
<td>Percent of opposition party supporting the president’s position on each roll call</td>
<td>Congressional Quarterly, Inc. Annually 1953-2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Description and Justification</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party control</td>
<td>Whether the president’s party has majority control of the chamber at the time of the vote (1=majority party president; 0= minority party president). Using a binary variable instead of percent of the president’s party throws out information. But theory suggests that the primary benefit of majority status is control of institutional levers of power, and there is evidence that the continuous variable does not add significant explanatory power over the majority/minority dichotomy (Bond, Fleisher, and Cohen 2012; Bond, Fleisher, and Wood 2003). The party division in the Senate was a tie in 2001. With VP Cheney breaking the tie, Republicans organized the Senate. On June 6, Sen. Jeffords (R-VT) switched to caucus with Democrats. Bush is coded as a majority president from January 20-June 6, and a minority president from June 7 to the end of the 107th Congress.</td>
<td>Library of Congress Thomas <a href="http://history.house.gov/Institution/Party-Divisions/Party-Divisions/">http://history.house.gov/Institution/Party-Divisions/Party-Divisions/</a> <a href="http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/history/one_item_and_teasers/partydiv.htm">http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/history/one_item_and_teasers/partydiv.htm</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>Mean of all Gallup presidential job approval polls in the month before the vote, adjusted to exclude Don’t know/No opinion centered on mean of all Gallup job approval polls 1953-2014 (mean=.550).</td>
<td>Gallup polls 1953-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion polarization</td>
<td>Annual mean difference between Gallup job approval ratings of the president’s and opposition party identifiers centered on its mean of all Gallup job approval polls broken down by party 1953-2014 (mean=.515).</td>
<td>Gallup polls 1953-2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A.2 Summary Statistics for Variables Used in the Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOTH CHAMBERS</th>
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<th>MEAN</th>
<th>STD. DEV.</th>
<th>MIN</th>
<th>MAX</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Win/lose</td>
<td>8587</td>
<td>0.615</td>
<td>0.487</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>President's party support</td>
<td>8587</td>
<td>0.727</td>
<td>0.245</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opposition party support</td>
<td>8587</td>
<td>0.273</td>
<td>0.245</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.475</td>
<td>0.499</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approval (centered on mean)</td>
<td>8587</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.154</td>
<td>-0.264</td>
<td>0.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion polarization (centered on mean)</td>
<td>8587</td>
<td>-0.074</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td>-0.299</td>
<td>0.238</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOUSE</th>
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<th>MEAN</th>
<th>STD. DEV.</th>
<th>MIN</th>
<th>MAX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>0.528</td>
<td>0.499</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President's party support</td>
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<td>0.716</td>
<td>0.255</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Opposition party support</td>
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<td>0.284</td>
<td>0.255</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0.352</td>
<td>0.478</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Approval (centered on mean)</td>
<td>4231</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>-0.264</td>
<td>0.412</td>
</tr>
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<td>Opinion polarization (centered on mean)</td>
<td>4231</td>
<td>-0.053</td>
<td>0.143</td>
<td>-0.299</td>
<td>0.238</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SENATE</th>
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<th>STD. DEV.</th>
<th>MIN</th>
<th>MAX</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Win/lose</td>
<td>4356</td>
<td>0.699</td>
<td>0.459</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President's party support</td>
<td>4356</td>
<td>0.738</td>
<td>0.234</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition party support</td>
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<td>0.262</td>
<td>0.234</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party control</td>
<td>4356</td>
<td>0.594</td>
<td>0.491</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval (centered on mean)</td>
<td>4356</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>0.158</td>
<td>-0.262</td>
<td>0.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion polarization (centered on mean)</td>
<td>4356</td>
<td>-0.094</td>
<td>0.137</td>
<td>-0.299</td>
<td>0.238</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Public approval and opinion polarization were centered on the mean of all Gallup polls from 1953–2014. The means here are not zero because they are means of centered value on roll call votes in the data set.

Table A.3 Correlation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOUSE</th>
<th>Trend</th>
<th>Party control</th>
<th>Approval (centered)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trend</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party control</td>
<td>-0.218</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Approval (centered)</td>
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<td>0.074</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opinion polarization (centered)</td>
<td>0.765</td>
<td>-0.353</td>
<td>-0.391</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SENATE</th>
<th>Trend</th>
<th>Party control</th>
<th>Approval (centered)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Trend</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party control</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval (centered)</td>
<td>-0.448</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion polarization (centered)</td>
<td>0.734</td>
<td>-0.072</td>
<td>-0.385</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A.4 Trendline equations from Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4

| Trends in polarization of partisan support for the president in Congress referencing Figure 1 |
| Trendline equations are similar in both chambers: |
| House: \( y = 0.0002(yr^2) - 0.002(yr) + 0.29; R^2 = 0.65 \) |
| Senate: \( y = 0.0002(yr^2) - 0.003(yr) + 0.29; R^2 = 0.75 \) |
| A second-degree polynomial is a slightly better fit than linear (House \( R^2 = 0.59 \); Senate \( R^2 = 0.68 \)). Higher order polynomials do not improve the fit. |

| Trends in divergence in support from members of the president’s and the opposition parties referencing Figure 2 |
| Trendline equations for same-party support are similar in both chambers: |
| House: \( y = 0.0001(yr^2) - 0.006(yr) + 0.74; R^2 = 0.40 \) |
| Senate: \( y = 0.0001(yr^2) - 0.006(yr) + 0.75; R^2 = 0.61 \) |
| A second-degree polynomial is a better fit than linear (House \( R^2 = 0.23 \); Senate \( R^2 = 0.43 \)). Higher order polynomials do not improve the fit. |
| Trendline equations for opposition party support also are similar: |
| House: \( y = -0.005(yr) + 0.46; R^2 = 0.63 \) |
| Senate: \( y = -0.005(yr) + 0.49; R^2 = 0.64 \) |
| Higher order polynomials do not improve the fit over linear for opposition partisans. |

| Trend in polarization of partisan opinion of the president’s job performance referencing Figure 3 |
| Trendline equation: |
| \( y = 0.0001(yr^2) - 0.003(yr) + 0.36; R^2 = 0.70 \) |
| A second-degree polynomial is a slightly better fit than linear (\( R^2 = 0.62 \)). Higher order polynomials do not improve the fit. |

| Trends in presidential approval of same and opposition party identifiers referencing Figure 4 |
| No secular trend in support from the president’s co-partisans: |
| \( y = 0.0001(yr) + 0.78; R^2 = 0.008 \) |
| Secular trend of declining support for opposition partisans: |
| \( y = -0.002(yr) + 0.51; R^2 = 0.57 \) |
| Higher level polynomials provide little improvements in fit. |
### Table 1
Conditioning Effects of Party Control, Public Approval, and Opinion Polarization on Presidential Success in Congress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Win/Lose</th>
<th>House Coef.</th>
<th>Coef. (non-cloture)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party control</strong></td>
<td>1.884***</td>
<td>1.587***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12.08)</td>
<td>(10.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Approval</td>
<td>1.125*</td>
<td>0.392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.65)</td>
<td>(0.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Polarization</td>
<td>-3.097***</td>
<td>-1.803**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-4.84)</td>
<td>(-2.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Control*Public Approval</td>
<td>0.964</td>
<td>-0.989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.02)</td>
<td>(-0.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Polarization*Party Control</td>
<td>4.862***</td>
<td>3.134***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.60)</td>
<td>(3.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Polarization*Public Approval</td>
<td>14.051**</td>
<td>-2.866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.80)</td>
<td>(-0.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Polarization<em>Party Control</em>Public Approval</td>
<td>-11.998*</td>
<td>-7.806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-2.05)</td>
<td>(-1.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.426</td>
<td>0.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-4.29)</td>
<td>(1.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>4231</td>
<td>4356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald chi²(7)</td>
<td>332.83</td>
<td>165.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob &gt; chi²</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log pseudolikelihood</td>
<td>-2528.59</td>
<td>-2431.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>0.088</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Entries are logit coefficients with standard errors clustered by year (z-score in parentheses).

***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05; #p<.10
Table 2
Conditioning Effects of Party Control, Public Approval, and Opinion Polarization on Partisan Support for the President in Congress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent Supporting</th>
<th>President’s Party Support</th>
<th>Opposition Party Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party control</td>
<td>0.103***</td>
<td>0.064**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.82)</td>
<td>(2.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Approval</td>
<td>-0.062</td>
<td>0.290***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-0.67)</td>
<td>(3.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Polarization</td>
<td>0.342***</td>
<td>0.419***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.36)</td>
<td>(3.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Control*Public Approval</td>
<td>0.419**</td>
<td>-0.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.24)</td>
<td>(-1.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Polarization*Party Control</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>0.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.74)</td>
<td>(1.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Polarization*Public Approval</td>
<td>-0.556</td>
<td>0.374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-0.92)</td>
<td>(0.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Polarization<em>Party Control</em>Public Approval</td>
<td>1.105</td>
<td>-0.292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.44)</td>
<td>(-0.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.694</td>
<td>0.740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(56.42)</td>
<td>(41.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>4231</td>
<td>4592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F( 7,61)</td>
<td>33.37</td>
<td>23.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob &gt; F</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>0.101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors clustered by year (t-test in parentheses).
***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05; #p<.10
Figures

Figure 1: Polarization of Party Support on Presidential Roll Calls in Congress

House trendline: $y = 0.0002x^2 + 0.002x + 0.29$, $R^2 = 0.65$

Senate trendline: $y = 0.0002x^2 + 0.003x + 0.29$, $R^2 = 0.75$

- Senate Mean Polarization GWB-BHO: 66%
- House Mean Polarization GWB-BHO: 65%
- Senate Mean Polarization RWR-WJC: 48%
- House Mean Polarization RWR-WJC: 43%
- House Mean Polarization DDE-JEC: 30%
- Senate Mean Polarization DDE-JEC: 28%
Figure 2: Partisan Presidential Support in Congress in Congress

- **House Pres' Pty Trendline**: $y = 0.0001x^2 - 0.006x + 0.736$
  - $R^2 = 0.404$
- **Senate Pres' Pty Trendline**: $y = 0.0003x^2 - 0.006x + 0.753$
  - $R^2 = 0.613$
- **Sen mean Pres' Party spt GWB-BHO, 88%**
- **Sen mean Pres' Party spt RWR-WJC, 78%**
- **Hse mean Pres' Party spt GWB-BHO, 83%**
- **Hse mean Pres' Party spt RWR-WJC, 69%**
- **Sen mean Opp. Party spt DDE-JEC, 70%**
- **Hse mean Opp. Party spt DDE-JEC, 69%**
- **Sen mean Opp. Party spt DDE-JEC, 43%**
- **Hse mean Opp. Party spt DDE-JEC, 39%**
- **Sen mean Opp. Party spt RWR-WJC, 30%**
- **Hse mean Opp. Party spt RWR-WJC, 26%**
- **Sen mean Opp. Party spt GWB-BHO, 22%**
- **Hse mean Opp. Party spt GWB-BHO, 18%**

Figure 3: Polarization of Public Opinion of Presidential Job Performance

Distance between Partisan Approval Ratings


Mean polarization DDE-JEC, 35%
Mean polarization RWR-WJC, 51%
Mean polarization GWB-BHO, 68%

Opinion Polarization Trendline

\[ y = 0.00001x^2 - 0.0028x + 0.3649 \]

\[ R^2 = 0.7031 \]
Figure 5: Effects of Party Control, Public Approval, and Opinion Polarization on Presidential Success in Congress

Panel 5a: Minority Presidents in the House

Panel 5b: Majority Presidents in the House

Panel 5c: Minority Presidents in the Senate

Panel 5d: Majority Presidents in the Senate
Figure 6: Conditional Effects of Public Approval and Opinion Polarization on Presidential Success in Congress

Panel 6a: Effects of Public Approval in the House (at mean polarization)

Panel 6b: Effects of Opinion Polarization in the House (at mean approval)

Panel 6c: Effects of Public Approval in the Senate (at mean polarization)

Panel 6d: Effects of Opinion Polarization in the Senate (at mean approval)
Figure 7: Conditional Effects of Public Approval and Opinion Polarization on President’s Party Support

Panel 7a: Effects of Public Approval in the House (at mean polarization)

Panel 7b: Effects of Opinion Polarization in the House (at mean approval)

Panel 7c: Effects of Public Approval in the Senate (at mean polarization)

Panel 7d: Effects of Opinion Polarization in the Senate (at mean approval)
Figure 8: Conditional Effects of Public Approval and Opinion Polarization on Opposition Party Support

Panel 8a: Effects of Public Approval in the House (at mean polarization)

Panel 8b: Effects of Opinion Polarization in the House (at mean approval)

Panel 8c: Effects of Public Approval in the Senate (at mean polarization)

Panel 8d: Effects of Opinion Polarization in the Senate (at mean approval)