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*The Bank Account Presidency: A New Measure and Evidence on the Temporal Path of Presidential Influence**

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Using headcount data covering the years 1953–74 and focusing on the Johnson administration (1963–68), the research investigates whether or not presidents experience a “bank account presidency”; whether they lose congressional support and influence over their tenure in office. This paper applies a new data set and defines a useful approximation of presidential influence called *presidential sway*. The paper tests two expectations about the “temporal path” of initial support and sway. The paper also tests four conjectures to account for temporal paths. The evidence suggests that President Johnson lost initial support but maintained sway over his tenure. The research then compares the Johnson experience with that of three other presidents, finding no support for the bank account model. It further demonstrates that dynamic forces like the president’s prestige, the state of the economy, the organization of the opposition, and the focus of the administration’s agenda help determine its temporal path.

Presidents are always concerned with at least two things: their influence and the time they have in office. Some politicians believe that in fact these two concerns are irrevocably linked. They often presume that a president’s influence diminishes over the administration’s tenure in office; that presidents have a constantly dwindling “bank account” from which to draw their influence. For example, analysts often cite President Lyndon Johnson as having told his staff: “I’ve just been elected and right now we’ll have a honeymoon with Congress. With the additional congressmen that have been elected, I’ll have a good chance to get my program through. But after I make my recommendations, I’m

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going to start to lose the power and authority I have because that's what happened to President Woodrow Wilson, to President Roosevelt and to Truman and to Kennedy. . . . Every day that I'm in office and every day that I push my program, I'll be losing part of my ability to be influential, because that's in the nature of what the president does. He uses up his capital" (Wilbur Cohen quoting Johnson in Miller 1980, 497). For some indirect measures of presidential influence, for example, presidential prestige, the evidence may support this view.¹ For other indirect measures, for instance, support scores and "batting averages," the evidence (although sparse) is less clear-cut (see Edwards 1980).² But since it has never utilized a direct measure nor data that closely mirror the coalition process, research has not addressed the question directly. What are the actual patterns of congressional support and presidential influence over time? This failure is understandable given the discipline's incomplete conceptualization of presidential influence and the general unavailability of direct data (Sullivan 1988a).

This paper focuses on measuring presidential influence and its "temporal path." The first section specifies some common contradictions in the literature and outlines the central operational elements of measuring influence. It also proposes a new "sequential" approach to analyzing influence. This approach requires and utilizes a new data collection that better replicates the coalition formation process and a better approximation of influence (called *presidential sway*). It concludes by describing two common expectations of the temporal path of presidential influence along with a brief discussion of conjectures that might account for these expectations. A second section tests these expectations by utilizing both data derived from congressional roll calls and more direct, originally confidential data developed from the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson (1963–68). This empirical analysis identifies the trends in two segments of the coalition formation process: in "initial support" for the administration's program and in the administration's sway over initial nonsupporters. The paper compares these results with results from other administrations (Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Nixon), concluding with an examination that accounts for temporal paths.

¹Presidential prestige is taken to mean popularity or, as it often is defined operationally in studies of public opinion, popular approval of the way in which the president is handling the job. It is even the case that much of the evidence on popular approval is mixed as well, so that some analysts argue that the "temporal path" for presidential approval is not monotonic but much more complicated (see also Brody and Page 1975; Kernell 1978; Mueller 1970; Ostrom and Simon 1985; and especially Ostrom and Simon 1988).

²Presidential support scores measure the average number of times that a member votes with the president on a policy motion on which the president takes a position according to Congressional Quarterly Press. A president's batting average is the proportion of presidential proposals that are affirmed by the Congress in the year in which they were proposed. For more detail, see Edwards (1985).

Influence and Temporal Path

Different Notions and Prescriptions

Presidents, their associates, and their competitors are concerned with the temporal path of presidential influence. They discuss transitions to power and honeymoons and contemplate “folk” theorems about the inevitability of dissipating influence. Often politicians describe influence as if it were a “bank account” into which a single deposit is made and to which is charged a regular service charge. For example, in a newspaper interview, retiring Vice-President Walter Mondale discussed Carter’s administration in just those terms (Greenfield 1981, I:21): “You know, a president . . . starts out with a bank full of good will and slowly checks are drawn on that, and its very rare that it is replenished. It’s a one-time deposit.” Paul Light (1982, 41–42) describes the politician’s theory of the bank account presidency in these terms: “Presidents and staffs are painfully aware that their most valuable resources *dwindle over the term*. They understand that the essential resource, capital, *evaporates over time*, that the first year offers the greatest opportunity for establishing the domestic program. Though information and expertise are rarely at a peak in the first year, *capital does not keep*, and Presidents must take advantage of whatever momentum they have; to wait is to squander the most important advantage” (emphasis added).

To those politicians who anticipate it, and most do, the *bank account presidency* suggests a couple of important implications. First, it imparts a specific “rhythm” to the presidential agenda, which Light (1982, 1985) has succinctly characterized as “move it or lose it!”³ Light (1982, 33) quotes a Ford aide, who in an age of rising inflation, likened influence to the dollar: “Unless you spend it fast, it will fall in value.” This rhythm leads politicians and their aides to extol the virtues of “hitting the ground running,” of avoiding getting bogged down in the early months, and so on. For example, analysts often quote longtime executive agent and eventually Secretary of HEW Wilbur Cohen, who recounted a fateful meeting of LBJ with his liaison staff immediately following the inauguration in 1965. In that meeting the new president exhorted his staff to pursue his agenda quickly: “Every day that I am in office, I lose part of my power. Every day that I use that power, I have less power left. You must get this legislation through immediately. I want you to go out and work! . . . I want you to get this legislation through now—while I still have the power (LBJ quoted by Wilbur Cohen, in Livingston, Dodd, and Schott 1979, 301). In this context David Stock-

³The bank account presidency could be a model of the more general theory from March (1966) about “force-conditioning” power. March assumes that something (and in this context it might be something like “reputation”) acts as an important discount so that others judge the president’s power based upon its current level of use. Thus, a president who does not use power is assumed to have less power than earlier anticipated. Over time, failure to “move it” results in the inevitable estimation that the president has “lost it.”

man's now famous memo to President-elect Reagan, shortly after the November 1980 election, urging that swift action on the budget was essential to "avoiding a GOP economic Dunkirk" makes sense. Hedrick Smith (1982) describes President Reagan's first year in office by suggesting that Stockman's advice struck a chord with the administration: "The President's political brain trust . . . understood that Mr. Reagan's opportunity to achieve radical change was perilously short. "Normally," said Gergen, "a new president has an open window for just so long and it shuts very quickly." Light (1982, 42–43) provides similar assessments from other administrations: "Consider the views of a Kennedy aide: 'If we didn't get a good jump in 1961, we would be stuck for four years. . . . We had to get off the mark fast and make a good showing. Otherwise, who would take us seriously?' . . . In the words of a Carter official, 'It's definitely a race. . . . If you don't get off the blocks fast, you'll lose.' This concern with the bank account presidency and its rhythm also explains in part why administrations often are preoccupied with FDR: after all, Roosevelt's first administration is the classic example of running.

Second, the bank account presidency suggests to politicians that the president's success during the "first 100 days" is an appropriate gauge of relative presidential power. President Nixon was so concerned with observing this benchmark that he ordered Ehrlichman and Haldeman to develop "a complete battle plan with regard to what the National Committee, Harlow's staff, Klein, et al., plan to do to see that a number of Senators, Congressmen, Governors, etc. make appropriate statements on the first 100 days" (Memo, Richard Nixon to Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, President's Personal Files, Box 1, Nixon Papers Project). So popular is this comparison that there is something of a popular debate about what is the proper period for comparison. For example, in a recent *New York Times* editorial, former presidential hopeful Eugene McCarthy (1989) argued that because of the twentieth amendment the "inevitable '100 days' test" was unfair (emphasis added). "Before we compare the Bush transition and Roosevelt's first 100 days," Senator McCarthy concluded, "we should at least give Mr. Bush 100 days since March 4." And this popular belief in the inevitability of and necessity for filling up the 100 days suggests to practitioners that the need for a well-orchestrated agenda is paramount to every other executive necessity. Even a recently published report on presidential management from the National Academy of Public Administration suggests (under the subtitle "Moving Fast") that planning a legislative agenda begin early (NAPA 1988, 44) in order to avail an administration of hitting the ground running.

The Reagan transition team acted on these implications by beginning their programmatic planning in April 1980, even before the Republican nominating convention, with a charge to "develop specific policy and budget recommendations for use in *the first 100 days of the Administration*" (Kirschten 1980, 1925, emphasis added). In that sense Reagan's was a prototypical bank account transi-

tion. And when it succeeded early on, the Reagan experience demonstrated the prototypical advantages of “hitting the ground running”: after the early budget successes, every Reagan victory in the Congress was greeted with such headlines as: “Reagan Wins, *Again!*” while *Time* magazine heralded Reagan as the “Great Persuader.”

On the other hand, some (including several political scientists) argue that the optimal programmatic strategy is less clear-cut. For example, Light (1982) and Richard Neustadt (1960) both discuss what Light appealingly describes as the “cycle of increasing effectiveness,” another rhythm that improves the administration’s skills and knowledge. This rhythm mitigates “hitting the ground running” in two important ways. First, administrations learn their jobs, making them more efficient and presumably more effective. Some politicians seem to be aware of the advantages that learning affords. For example, Eisenhower, possibly acting as an experienced manager, eschewed vigor and speed in favor of rationalization and sent Congress his first agenda a full year *after* inauguration. Instead of hitting the ground running, he preferred to concentrate on creating an effective system for controlling agenda submissions and laying “a groundwork of personal acquaintance and persuasion on the Hill” (Neustadt 1969b, 561).

Second, Neustadt (1960, 61) notes that reputation plays a large role in developing presidential influence: “The greatest danger to a President’s potential influence with [Congress] is not the show of incapacity he makes today, but its apparent kinship to what happened yesterday, last month, last year. For if his failures seem to form a pattern, the consequence is bound to be a loss of faith in his effectiveness ‘next time.’” Presumably, since current success portends future influence, successes achieved slowly but without faltering contribute to influence while early disasters dissipate confidence and, hence, influence. Indeed, the Carter administration gave every appearance of hitting the ground running. They had a complex, well-orchestrated transition complete with massive briefing books and a honeymoon filled with a plethora of proposals. Yet, *their* agenda became characterized as “too much too soon,” and even though they had made several midcourse corrections both in congressional liaison and in resolving other staff problems (like Bert Lance), “those [first] mistakes echoed over the four years” (Mullen 1982, 531). What seems apparent from the Carter and Reagan experiences is that running early may not be as important as *winning* early.

This cycle of increasing effectiveness suggests that optimal influence occurs later after the administration has developed a reputation (for winning) and learned its job. Thus, an administration ought to be concerned less with hitting the ground running and more with deciding when to run and when to walk. A good example of how success can reinforce influence is described in Holtzman’s account of the 1962 Kennedy tax bill, which the administration saw as the key to the more important trade bill to come. The administration believed that if they could win on the tax bill then their success would redound to their credit with the Ways and Means leadership that was stalling on the trade bill for fear of

being rolled on the floor. The administration's tax success against tough opponents and in dire circumstances "sold the Ways and Means Committee that we could win," recounted Henry H. Wilson (Holtzman 1970, 280). Eventually, because of the right choice in timing and perseverance (i.e., first walking to a success) and with the assistance of a newly confident and willing Ways and Means, the administration was able to push through its major trade bill when most considered one an impossibility.

This second rhythm (of learning and reputation), however, does fly in the face of the only real empirical research in the area. Those that argue for some optima suggest that something like skill (and possibly organization) not only plays a role in presidential influence but that it can be developed and honed to an administration's benefit during its tenure. In two surveys of the topic, Edwards (1980, 1989) examined patterns of presidential influence based upon the various standard measures of presidential success (batting averages and support scores). He concluded (1980, 202) that⁴ "presidential legislative skills do not seem to affect support for presidential policies, despite what conventional wisdom leads us to expect. Sources of information about presidential-congressional relations, particularly the press, seem to have focused upon the more unique examples of these relations, implying that what they were presenting was typical. When we rigorously and systematically evaluate the evidence, however, we reach different conclusions." Instead, Edwards found that in place of skill, presidents had to rely upon prestige and the pull of their party ties with members, the length of their coattails, and the numbers of their partisans in Congress, in short, the kinds of capital resources that are deposited in the general election and *once*. Given that across administrations there is a fairly consistent temporal pattern of decline in prestige and midterm losses in Congress, Edwards's findings would be consistent, then, with the bank account picture.

In the end, then, it is clear *only* that while there is a popular conception of normally declining resources for the president, there is considerable disagreement about what is the common temporal path. Two concerns do come through, however. The first is whether influence declines: whether there is a bank account presidency. And the second is whether there is an optimal mix of learning and action that would maximize an administration's influence. It is to the study of declining influence that this paper now turns, leaving for later the issue of optimal patterns of influence.

A Sequential Approach to Measuring Influence

To assess the bank account presidency, this paper utilizes a new approach that in two ways improves the already rich literature. First, it employs data that capture more of the coalition process than have past empirical assessments (e.g.,

⁴In an update to the 1980 study, Edwards's appraisal of the role of skill is somewhat tempered, although the basic conclusion remains the same (1989, 221).

Wildavsky 1966; Edwards 1976, 1977, 1980, 1985, 1989; LeLoup and Shull 1979; Sigelman 1979).⁵ These studies begin and end with data derived from floor voting that assess presidential “success” as support in the final stage of the legislative process. The “sequential” approach used here assumes that it is important not only to know where an administration eventually ends up, but it is important to understand from where it begins. It assumes that research ought to mirror the process of coalition formation in order to obtain as much information as possible. As in standard success studies, the analysis here utilizes data on member support in the voting stage (what will be called *final support*). In particular, it concentrates on a set of votes that internal administration memoranda and other sources (including the CQ index of presidential position taking common to success studies) identify as critical to the administration. For data on the earliest stages of the coalition process (what will be called *initial support*), the research draws upon administration headcounts. For the first part of the paper, the data derive from the LBJ Presidential Library. Data for the conclusion derive from three other presidential archives (Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Nixon) and one public archive (the Carl Albert Center).

Second, the sequential approach more closely mirrors common notions of “influence.” In the substantial literature on the topic (as a sample, see Simon 1953; Fredrich 1963; March 1966; White 1972; or Lukes 1974), there is a fairly common definition of what constitutes influence. Dahl’s (1963, 40) description is a standard: “A influences B to the extent that he gets B to do something that he would otherwise not do.” This analytic definition is very similar to Harry Truman’s famous practitioner’s definition (by example) of leadership: “A leader is someone who gets someone else to do something that they would rather not do, and like it.” These definitions are so widely accepted among both the analysts and users of influence because they capture what appears to be three essential constituents of influence. The first is *change*: influence involves some political actor (e.g., B) dropping one position and adopting another (see also Dahl 1957). The second constituent is *predisposition*: the change in position must involve doing something the target (B) “would otherwise not do,” that is, something at variance with B’s “natural” tendency. And the final constituent (implicit in Dahl’s formulation) is *involvement*: change in the target’s position results from some other actor’s participation as a partisan for the newly adopted position (i.e., A prompts B to act).

The influence measure used here takes as its basic approximation of influence the difference between the levels of initial and final support on the closest

⁵Edwards (1985) has proposed a number of different approaches to the use of floor voting data depending upon the kinds of information in which one is interested. In the end all of the data have two characteristics in common: they are issues on which CQ has decided the administration took a position, and the data are still limited to final support without regard to initial positions.

roll call on which the president took a position.⁶ Then by applying “proportional reduction in error,” the research generates a specific measure, called presidential *sway*, by evaluating the basic difference between initial and final support with regard to the proportion of members uncommitted to the administration on the initial count.⁷ The specific calculation for sway is

$$\lambda = \frac{\% \text{ Right}_{\text{vote}} - \% \text{ Right}_{\text{initial}}}{1 - \% \text{ Right}_{\text{initial}}}$$

This approach is similar to that taken in assessing improvements in the analytic capacity of voting models and is the familiar Goodman and Kruskal lambda (λ) statistic (see Weisberg 1978). Utilizing this approach has the advantage of reducing the correlation between initial support levels and the measure of influence.

Sway extends the current success measures by incorporating the distinction between final voting positions and initial positions. Hence, sway operationalizes *change*. While current success measures operationalize presidential involvement by assuming that a public position on an issue is an indication of presidential commitment, sway focuses only on those issues to which the administration actually commits the full force of its resources. Since the threshold for inclusion into the data set is very high (involving White House activity), the use of sway avoids the problem of administrations merely affirming their commitment on an

⁶The president’s position was discerned primarily with the help of internal White House memoranda, rather than referral to the CQ statements. Covington (1987) found the CQ position taking to be misleading. Despite the fact that most votes are resolved by large margins, most of the votes identified here are very close. The Johnson administration data represent the splits with the largest margins and these are not wide. The average splits on the issues included in the data set are as follows:

Average Splits on Critical Votes, by Administration, 1952–74

	Average Vote Split (for/against Administration)							
	DDE		JFK		LBJ		RMN	
House	203	193	228	183	225	175	196	206
Senate	40	47	49	40	52	32	43	49

Source: Compiled by author.

⁷Of course, it is impossible to eliminate the correlation between the two variables, since sway is a function of the number of initial “rights.” The Pearson correlation between initial support and sway is -0.505 . In the analysis to follow, the sway variable is weighted by the closeness of the initial situation (ω). The exact weighting is 1.0 for cases in which the number of members “right” on the initial count represent less than 40% or greater than 60% of the members. When the initial count is “close” to a majority, a function is applied that returns a maximum weight of approximately 2.5 for cases whose initial support is 50%. The function is defined as:

$$\omega = \begin{cases} 2[4(1 - \% \text{ “right”}) - 3(1 - \% \text{ “right”})^2 + 2(1 - \% \text{ “right”})^3 - 5(1 - \% \text{ “right”})^4] & \text{where } (.4 \leq \% \text{ “right”} \leq .6). \\ 1 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

issue destined to win or on “hurrah votes.” By picking easy issues on which to volunteer a public position, the president can bolster support scores (success) (see Rivers and Rose 1985) that employ no further criterion for selection. The data for sway include only those few issues on which the administration’s internal and confidential documents suggest that the president needed to invest the full force of the administration’s resources. A quick glance at the six-month agenda listed in the Appendix, for example, indicates no easy targets for the Johnson administration; each topic on that list was explosive and troublesome. Thus, while sway is a natural extension of the success approach, it is a closer approximation of *involvement*. And while no analysis of individual positions is attempted in either measurement approach, sway does make it possible to assess different stages in the legislative process, making it possible to identify periods when predispositions are more likely to be relatively powerful (see Sullivan 1990a).⁸ Thus, although neither measure shares any outstanding advantage in terms of *predisposition*, sway is more consistent with the concept. In sum, then, sway is an extension of current success measures to the full range of the coalition formation process. Of course, because the difference between initial positions and final votes may include more than just the exercise of presidential influence (e.g., it might include the interaction of current context and member predispositions), sway necessarily is broader than the underlying concept of influence. Hence, the use of sway represents an intermediate range improvement in operationalization over current measures.

Because it more closely mirrors the coalition-building process than does the success model, the sequential approach is potentially more complicated empirically. Because the sequential approach models the change process as well as the outcome, it raises questions about the “authenticity” of observed changes; whether, for example, the potential for strategic activities might create a significant empirical bias. The Appendix considers several potential estimation problems. While some of these considerations lead to interesting empirical findings, each underscores the reliability of this research.

Expectations of the Temporal Path

The empirical analysis concentrates on assessing two empirical expectations, each describing a temporal path for a stage in the coalition process:

Bank account path to initial support. The temporal path for initial support in the House and Senate is generally declining over an administration’s tenure: the coefficient is negative and significant.

⁸Unlike the congressional studies literature on member voting (e.g., Clausen 1973; Fiorina 1974; Kingdon 1977, 1981, 1989; Poole and Rosenthal 1985) and except for the work of Bond and Fleisher (1986, 1987) and Covington (1988), few have pursued the notion of predisposition in success studies.

Bank account path to sway. The temporal path for sway in the House and Senate is generally declining over an administration's tenure: the coefficient is negative and significant.

Conjectures Accounting for the Bank Account Path

While there is a common discussion regarding the existence of a bank account temporal path, there is very little discussion of the service charge assessed to the account, that is, what generates a decay. There are, however, a variety of potential explanations for a bank account path (or at least some constituents of that path). This section will propose some conjectures as a means for developing a more complex model of temporal paths.

The cycle of declining prestige. One possible explanation is that since presidential *popularity* declines generally over time, this decline slowly undermines presidential influence. Often, for example, when they talk about influence, it is clear that what presidents really are concerned with is simply public approval.⁹ Again, Lyndon Johnson presents the perfect summary of a president's concern with public approval in the same postinaugural meeting with the liaison staffs quoted by Cohen earlier, here described by Doris Kearns (1974, 226): "In January, 1965, the congressional liaison men from all the executive departments were assembled in the Fish Room to hear Johnson explain his rationale for pushing forward on every front at once. 'I was just elected President by the biggest popular margin in the history of the country—16 million votes. Just by the way people naturally think and because Barry Goldwater had simply scared the hell out of them, I've already lost about three of those sixteen. After a fight with Congress or something else, I'll lose another couple of million. I could be down to 8 million in a couple of months.'" Of course, a president's tendency to equate prestige with influence is natural, since members of Congress, concerned with their reelection, probably see in declining approval ratings a portent of their own troubles in direct proportion to their previous identification with (or possibly how much they have been swayed by) the administration. It should be noted that analysts differ over whether this connection with congressional behavior has weakened in recent years (see Fiorina 1984 versus Edwards 1989; Edwards and Wayne 1990; Jacobson 1987b; Ostrom and Simon 1985). It seems likely, however, that this relationship certainly held for the period covered in these data. And overall the evidence seems to suggest that this "electoral connection" is a powerful force in determining presidential support and sway. Despite the scholarly controversy, when discussing influence, politicians are quick to mention such a linkage with public approval. For example, Bonafede (1979, 830) re-

⁹For a discussion of this view of public support, see Buchanan's (1988) excellent consideration of the six-year term.

counts how a Carter staffer described this linkage: “When the President is low in public opinion polls, the Members of Congress see little hazard in bucking him. . . . After all, very few Congressmen examine an issue solely on its merits; they are politicians and they think politically. . . . They read the polls and from them they feel sure in turning their backs on the President.” Another Carter staffer complained that despite its sizable congressional majority, the Carter administration’s problems with prestige hamstrung the administration in its dealings with the Congress. The aide complained (Light 1982, 31): “The 292 Democrats in Congress were potential supporters—that was only three fewer than LBJ had. But with the close election and the *drop in approval*, they remained that way: potential. We couldn’t force them to be active supporters” (emphasis added). In addition, though in a slightly different vein, John Barry’s (1989) description of the Wright speakership underscores his successful use of polling results in persuading members to challenge the Reagan administration’s policies.

Such a decline in prestige would suggest a decline even in initial support where even core supporters distance themselves from administrative proposals. It would also reduce congressional responsiveness to conversion efforts, undermining sway. Thus, declining prestige could generate both temporal paths associated with the bank account presidency. This is particularly true, since each of the four administrations in the data set here experienced declining popular prestige over their tenure: DDE (lost about 1.5 points per year), JFK (lost about 5 points per year), LBJ (lost about 8.4 points per year), and RMN (lost about 7 points per year). It should be noted that this argument directly contradicts those who argue that prestige is less important to the core supporters who make up the bulk of initial support (e.g., see Edwards 1989, 110f).

The impact of the political economy. A second kind of explanation can be associated with the economy. There is wide agreement that the state of the economy plays a role in presidential prestige (e.g., Hibbs 1982; Kernell 1978; MacKuen 1983; Ostrom and Simon 1985). Even presidents acknowledge the connection.¹⁰ There is, however, little assessment of how the state of the economy is related to the exercise of influence. It is assumed here that a failing economy, measured by, say, increasing unemployment for Democratic administrations and rising inflation for Republican administrations, prompts core supporters to “distance” themselves initially from the administration thus undercutting initial support. Worsening economic conditions also undermine the president’s sway while improving conditions strengthen the president’s hand. Thus, this conjecture would suggest that declining economic conditions would affect the temporal path of both initial support and sway.

¹⁰For example, President Carter told editors (Office of Press Secretary 1979, 12), “The President is naturally held to be responsible for the state of the economy.”

The cycle of an increasingly organized opposition. A third potential explanation is based on the opposition's strength. Following a successful campaign, a winning administration *by definition* faces an opposition in disarray. There is no clearly identified voice for the opposition's position nor any natural policy focus that suggests successful development. While the opposition is disorganized, the administration is not. It has a clearly identified purpose and a clearly identified leader. As a result, those members generally assumed to be "cross-pressured" (i.e., those standing between the administration's core supporters and opponents) are more likely to feel effective pressure only from the administration. As time goes on, however, an organized opposition develops around a new leadership and a newly discovered policy focus.¹¹ That opposition becomes more adept at articulating its position, at attracting cross-pressured members, and at confronting the administration's appeals for conversion. This possibility, of course, suggests that the temporal path of initial support would remain unaffected as a reflection of the administration's abiding core supporters, while the temporal path of sway would decline as more potentially cross-pressured members become actually cross-pressured.

The rhythm of a strategic agenda. Several analysts have noted that presidential agendas expand and contract and that support is associated with these changes in size (Edwards 1980, 1989; Light 1982; Rivers and Rose 1985). Some suggest that these variations are based on the political objectives of the administration while others suggest that ambition varies with the size of the president's core of support. For example, Henry Wilson, the JFK-LBJ liaison with the House is quoted as describing administration decisions about the agenda in the following way (Kearns 1974, 246): "When we have a fat Congress as we did in the Eighty-ninth, then we can hike up our demands to fit the situation. When the votes are not razor thin in either case, then we are not doing a good job." Regardless of its exact form, the size of the president's agenda of legislation should influence temporal paths. As the agenda grows, it drains the administration's resources for converting members, thus exerting downward pressure on the administration's sway. On the other hand, there is no reason to expect that the size of the administration's agenda of demands should influence the responsiveness of its core supporters. Hence, a larger agenda should have no effect in defining the temporal path of initial support.

Summary of conjectures. Given the two separate stages of coalition formation under study here, these four conjectures yield eight specific hypotheses:

¹¹For a good example of this kind of policy search and discovery, see Light's (1985) discussion of the Democratic leadership's response to the Reagan administration's plans for Social Security reform and how that was used to rally opposition.

The cycle of declining prestige. (H1) In distinguishing between the temporal paths of initial support, the coefficient for prestige should be positive and significant. (H2) In distinguishing between the temporal paths of sway, the coefficient for prestige should be positive and significant.

Trends in the political economy. (H3) In distinguishing between the temporal paths of initial support, the coefficient for a measure of the deteriorating economy should be negative and significant. (H4) In distinguishing between the temporal paths of sway, the coefficient for a measure of the deteriorating economy should be negative and significant.

The cycle of increasingly organized opposition. (H5) In distinguishing between the temporal paths of initial support, the coefficient for presidential opposition should be insignificant. (H6) In distinguishing between the temporal paths of sway, the coefficient for an increasing presidential opposition should be negative and significant.

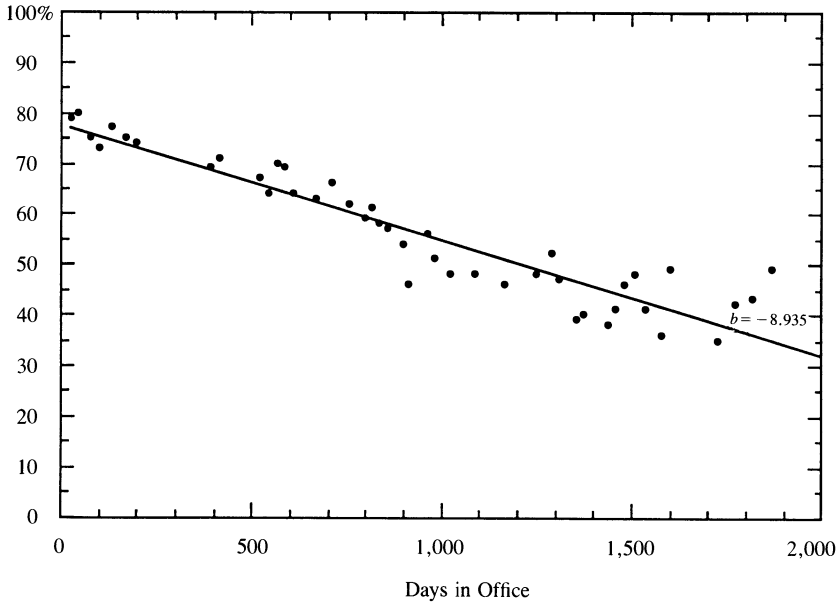
The rhythm of a strategic agenda. (H7) In distinguishing between the temporal paths of initial support, the coefficient for agenda size should be insignificant. (H8) In distinguishing between the temporal paths of sway, the coefficient for a larger agenda should be negative and significant.

Findings

As described above, the expectations associated with the bank account presidency suggest a general temporal pattern of steady decline for both initial support and sway. Given that expectation, it is easy to test for such temporal patterns by employing a simple regression line generated with a time counter as the independent variable.

Measurement Strategies

Available data. The research reports on data derived from the office files of the Johnson administration: 83 counting efforts in the House and 42 in the Senate. These counts covered a wide variety of issues (see Appendix for a sample). In assessing sway, issues were dropped when there was no controversial vote on the bill (when no vote was resolved by less than 80% voting together). This research concentrates initially on the Johnson administration data because the clearest indirect evidence, both anecdotally and empirical, of a bank account presidency comes from the Johnson presidency. For example, Figure 1 illustrates the Gallup approval ratings for Johnson, suggesting a steep decline in popular support (particularly if, as in this case, the trend line excludes the upsurge in approval following the Johnson's March withdrawal from the 1968 presidential race). Anecdotal research also suggests that Johnson understood the Congress better than any modern president. So, although it is an unusual presidency in many respects, using data from the Johnson administration is a logical, analyti-

Figure 1. Gallup Approval Rating of President Johnson over His Tenure

cally conservative choice with which to begin an intensive exploration of the temporal path to presidential influence using more direct evidence of the phenomenon.

Like others, the average Johnson count consisted of a sequence of polls and began early in the legislative process: the Office of Congressional Relations reported its initial poll an average of 44 days before the House vote and 41 days before the Senate vote. Administration pre-voting efforts terminated in a count completed just hours before the bill came onto the floor. When counting, the Johnson administration summarized the detailed responses of members as falling into one of seven categories ranging from “right” to “wrong.”¹² Table 1 sum-

¹²The categories include “right,” “leaning right,” “undecided,” “absent,” “leaning wrong,” “no comment,” and “wrong.” It was common for the administration to decide that it must build its coalition within the Democratic party. In those situations the staff often treated Republicans as “no comments” rather than as “wrong” even though they were not likely to vote with the administration on such partisan issues. This approach probably overreported “no comment” (75% of which were Republicans) while underreporting “wrongs.” For this reason the analysis arrays “no comment” closer to “wrong” than to “undecided.” Using Poole and Rosenthal (1985) ideal points (arrayed from -1.0 to 1.0), an analysis of the spatial location of member responses verifies that the average member coded by the administration as “no comment” is very similar to those members who responded “wrong.” The average locations are “right” (-.274), “leaning right” (-.042), “undecided” (.172), “leaning wrong” (.169), “no comment” (.317), and “wrong” (.388).

Table 1. Average Position on Headcounts by Congress, LBJ

Initial Position	House			Senate		
	88th	89th	90th	88th	89th	90th
“Right”	187	152	149	52	42	39
“Leaning right”	15	17	14	5	8	9
“Undecided”	33	25	19	7	13	7
“Absent”	2	4	6	0	1	2
“Leaning wrong”	12	6	8	2	4	7
“No comment”	136	147	177	5	9	12
“Wrong”	62	80	60	26	22	23

Note: Some rounding has occurred.

Source: Compiled by author.

marizes the average count in this data set for each of the three Johnson Congresses. The table demonstrates three things. First, the administration started out with far less than an absolute majority of initial support (right).¹³ Only during the 88th Senate, did the administration receive more than a majority through initial support. Second, there is a clear pattern of decline in initial support from Congress to Congress in both houses, suggesting that there might be some reason to expect a bank account presidency in the Johnson administration. Third, the data summaries in Table 1 suggest the reliability of these data. For example, as is indicated the administration garnered about 149 commitments on the average

¹³Table 1 reports the actual figures as recorded by the administration. Given the problem of identifying Republicans mentioned in note 12, it might be appropriate to correct Table 1. The following table reports adjusted totals for the 90th House by taking an average only from those efforts in which Republicans were not treated as “no comment”s:

Compensating for Treatment of Republicans: Responses on “Broad Effort” Counts, 90th House		
Position	<i>n</i>	%
“Right”	168.6	39
“Leaning right”	7.8	2
“Undecided”	14.8	3
“Absent”	8.7	2
“Leaning wrong”	3.9	1
“No comment”	137.9	32
“Wrong”	92.3	21

Even with this revision, 68% (94) of the remaining “no comment”s are Republicans. If they are counted as “wrong,” then the normal situation for the 90th House would have been 169 to 186 against the administration.

count for the 90th House (1967–68). This figure corresponds very closely to the published recollections of the chief OCR officer during the 90th Congress. Harold “Barefoot” Sanders recalled that the administration “could always start out with 145 to 150 votes in the House . . . , give or take twenty on a particular issue” (Sanders 1969, Tape 2, 13–14, LBJ Library). It seems clear that Mr. Sanders’s comments reflect his experiences with what actually happened rather than what he expected based upon his own “theory” whence came administration support. Hence, as best that can be determined these data are reliable and valid.

Measurement. In assessing the various elements of the bank account thesis, the analysis employs a variety of variables. As indicated, the proportion of initial headcount responses that were recorded as “right” represent the level of initial support. Those voting with the administration on the closest critical vote represent the administration’s final support. The difference between initial and final support is taken as the basis for measuring sway, although the exact measure also uses a proportional reduction in error. The standard Gallup poll information measures presidential popularity. Each administration lost prestige during its tenure: Eisenhower lost a bit more than 1.5 percentage points a year; Kennedy’s decline was much steeper at more than five points per year; and Nixon’s popularity slid more than seven points per year. The state of the economy variable differs with the administration’s party: it is the monthly unemployment rate in Democratic administrations and the annualized six-month change in the consumer price index during Republican administrations. The analysis measures both unemployment and inflation in tenths of a point. On the relevant measure, each administration experienced a variety of economic conditions: Eisenhower experienced a .4 annual *increase* in inflation; JFK experienced a .5 annual *decrease* in unemployment; LBJ experienced a very similar .4 *decrease* in annual unemployment; and inflation varied greatly during the Nixon administration from a low of about 3.0% to a high of 12.5%. The annual rate of opposition to the president’s position on CQ votes by the opposition party is a first approximation of how much opposition the administration faced. This indicator is weak, of course, because based as it is on final support the measure also reflects presidential influence. Administrations in this data set experienced slightly increasing opposition: in the House, for example, Eisenhower’s rate of opposition increased about one point per year; Kennedy’s rate was double that increase; Johnson’s opposition actually declined about four points per year, while Nixon’s remained fairly constant. Last, as is the standard practice, the number of administration proposals reported in the CQ presidential boxscores measures (though crudely) the size of the administration’s agenda. For each administration the trends in agenda size are as follows (based on regressions of submissions by year): Eisenhower increased proposal submissions at a rate of about five per year; Kennedy’s rate was far more ambitious at 27 per year; Johnson’s was even greater at 44 per year; and Nixon’s

agenda reversed the LBJ trend by cutting back but only slightly to about 41 proposals per year.

The Bank Account Presidency

Figure 2 illustrates initial support in the House and Senate with regression lines to suggest the temporal path. Johnson's initial support declined in both houses. In the House this decline resulted in a loss of almost two percentage points per year or a margin of about eight commitments. The Senate slope also represents a three percentage point drop per year or a margin of about three commitments. Given that in the 90th Congress, the average critical administration vote was resolved by a margin of 16 in the House (217–185) and 6 votes in the Senate (46–35) (also Sullivan 1988b), such an annual loss probably was important to the fortunes of the administration. This evidence clearly supports the expectation of declining support over tenure and, hence, the first element to a bank account temporal path.

The findings for sway, however, are different. Figure 3 illustrates Johnson's sway. In both houses the administration could typically count on converting slightly more than 25% of the "nonsupporters" (those not initially committed to support) between the first count and the critical vote. This pattern remained basically constant over the administration's tenure. For example, although the pattern of House sway is given to wild swings, peaking in the fourth quarter of the 89th and 90th Congresses, the slope on House sway is essentially flat. Likewise, sway in the Senate is flat. Of course, it should be remembered that the measure of sway used here, which is flat for LBJ, is one that makes adjustments for the base of nonsupport that the administration initially faced. Thus, to maintain sway at a flat rate *despite declining* initial support suggests that the administration was converting more and more members over its tenure.¹⁴ By estimating the average initial support for each year and each house (reported in Table 1) and evaluating the constant in the regression equations behind Figure 2, it is possible to estimate how many commitments the administration garnered. Given the declining initial support, the administration picked up an increasing average of commitments running between 74 for the 88th and 86 for the 90th Houses and between 13 for the 88th and 16 for the 90th Senates. This kind of evidence does not support the bank account expectation for sway and, hence, does not suggest a bank account presidency.

Popular wisdom would suggest that surely LBJ, more so than any other modern president, lost influence over his tenure; surely *his* bank account dwin-

¹⁴One possibility, of course, is that over time members became more reluctant to take positions, but an analysis of the time trend for "no comment" responses is flat and nonsignificant, suggesting that the declining initial support was not just a reporting problem but one that involved more reluctance on the part of members.

Figure 2. Initial Support during LBJ's Tenure

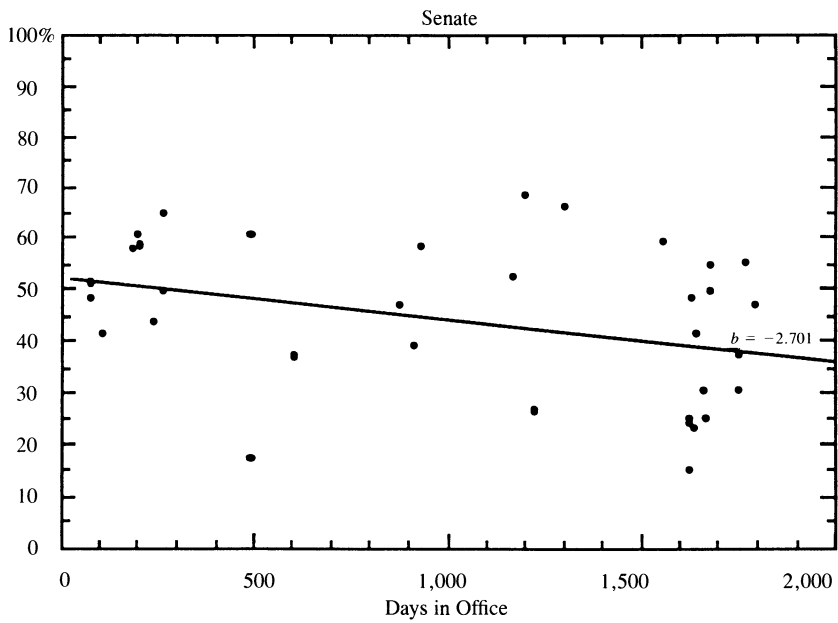
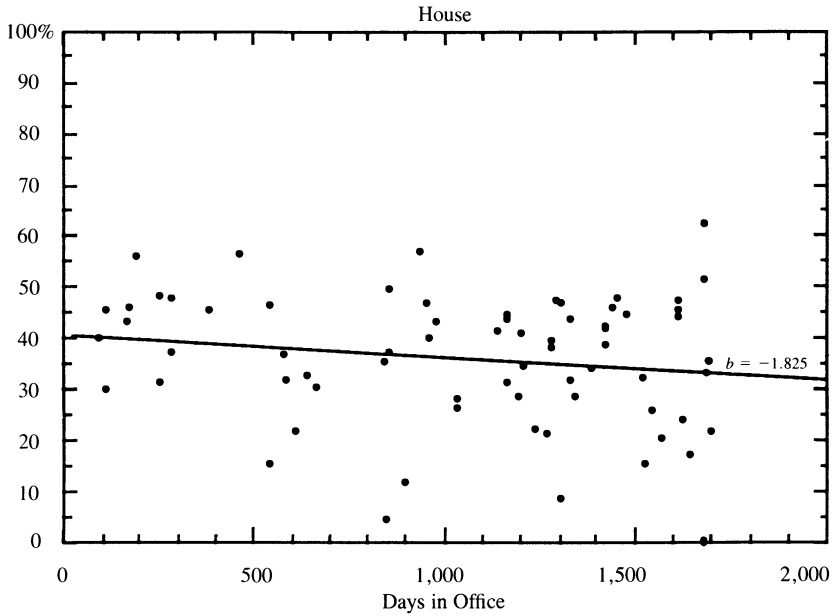
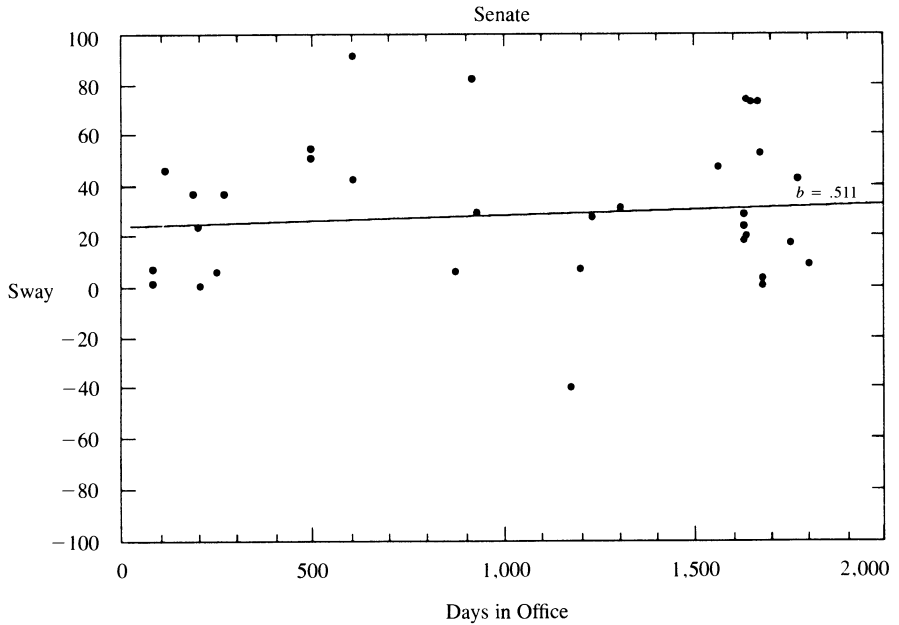
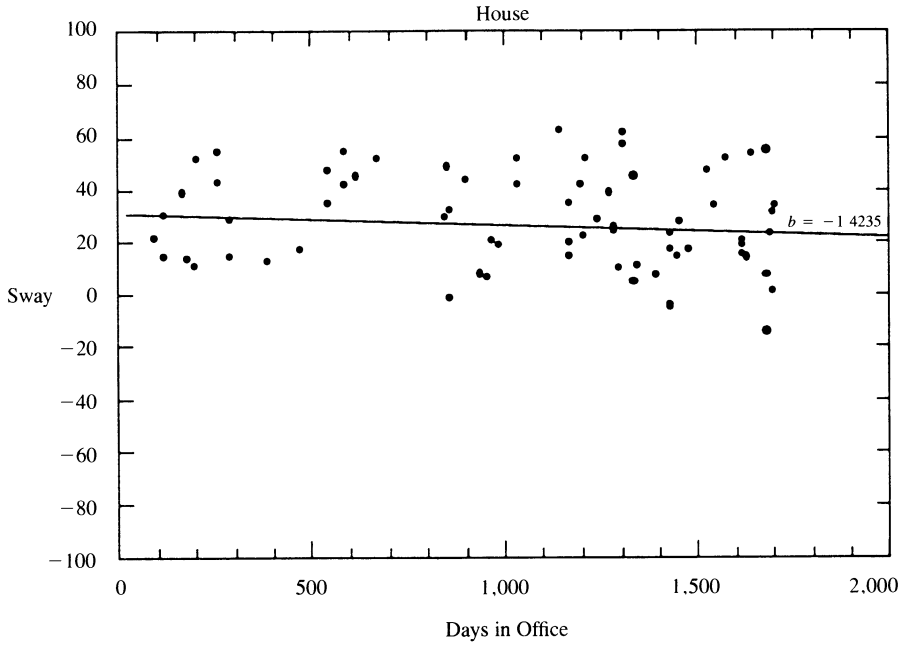


Figure 3. Sway, during LBJ's Tenure



dled. Yet the data do not support that expectation. One interesting aspect to these results, of course, is that while the popular image of declining fortunes is true for Johnson in one sense, it is unambiguously true only of that portion of the legislative process that is the least observed by the public: support declined on *confidential* initial headcounts. This may suggest that over time it is not that resources decline (as in the bank account presidency) but that demands increase, that is, members bargain more.

Extensions to Other Presidencies

An important question to answer is how well do these data from the Johnson administration (or from any single presidency) reflect some pattern common to all presidents? There is some standard evidence with which to address that question. For example, these LBJ findings reinforce results reported in Shull's (1983) study of the adoption of presidential proposals across several policy dimensions and over time. Using standard success data, Shull paid special attention to rates of success in the first and last years of administration terms. His findings suggested that there were no consistent patterns of declining success from first to last years across the variety of policy dimensions surveyed. On some dimensions presidents were more successful in their last year than they were in the first and vice versa.¹⁵

Similar headcount data drawn from other administrations can also address the question of comparability. The research here combines the LBJ data with data from three other administrations: 77 counts from the Eisenhower administration, 36 from the Kennedy administration, and 45 from the Nixon administration. Table 2 reports "switching regime" regressions for these other administrations by distinguishing between the different presidential parties.¹⁶ Except for Republican administrations facing the House, where sway declined, the regres-

¹⁵Domestic Initiation and Adoption

Years	Success Rates (%)					Poverty
	Price Supports	Public Works	Crime	Antitrust	Civil Rights	
First	42	62	21	75	43	46
Last	21	42	70	25	56	65
Declined?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No

Source: Table 1, Shull (1983, 553).

¹⁶This technique is a variation on dummy regression. It allows for direct observation of slope coefficient over a particular period (or regime) in the data. It is an appropriate technique when it is assumed that the different regimes are drawn from separate underlying populations. Thus, using switches account for potential heteroscedasticity.

Table 2. Trends in Support and Sway, 1952–74

Type of Administration	Trends ^a per Year in			
	Initial Support		Sway	
	House	Senate	House	Senate
Constant	42.596 ***	50.879 ***	25.586 ***	13.002 *
Republican ^b	1.46 **	-1.78 *	-8.91 ***	-2.37
Democrat ^c	-2.15 **	-2.52 **	-.51	3.50 *
Adjusted R ²	.211 ***	.06 *	.155 ***	.09 ***
Number of cases	183	105	212	131
			(Weighted <i>n</i>)	

^aThese are switched regression coefficients (see n. 16).

^bData from Eisenhower Presidential Archives, Abilene, Kansas; Johnson Presidential Archives, Austin, Texas; the Albert Center, Norman, Oklahoma; and the Majority Whip’s Office and the Nixon Presidential Materials Project, Washington, DC.

^cData from Kennedy Presidential Archives, Johnson Presidential Archives, and the Albert Center.

One-tailed significance: **p* ≤ .05; ***p* ≤ .01; ****p* ≤ .001.

Source: Compiled by author.

sion coefficients for sway are either flat or positive. In the specific situation of a Republican administration and the House where sway declined (accounting for an annual loss of about 19 commitments), the temporal path for initial support is positive (accounting for a modest increase of seven commitments per year). The net total in these situations, then, is a loss of about 12 commitments for Republicans annually. By contrast, Democratic administrations generally faced declining initial support (reflecting an average annual decline of nine commitments in the House and less than three commitments in the Senate); yet their paths for sway were flat (i.e., the coefficient is not significant), suggesting a slight increase in conversions over time, or positive, suggesting an aggressive use of skill and organization to maintain a winning coalition.

“Disaggregating” these data into specific presidencies produces some interesting patterns, although the data partitions begin to get too small, and no results are reported on any administration that does not average at least five counts per year in a particular house. Table 3 reports these patterns. An assessment of the constant term summarizes something of where each administration started its tenure. These patterns seem to reflect the historical facts. Eisenhower and Johnson, for example, began their administrations with fairly strong congressional support. Eisenhower’s reflected a strong bipartisan effect, while LBJ’s reflected the impact of the assassination coupled with the extraordinary size of the 1965

Table 3. Disaggregated Trends in Support and Sway, 1952–74

Administration	Trends ^a per Year in							
	Initial Support				Sway			
	House		Senate		House		Senate	
α	Tenure	α	Tenure	α	Tenure	α	Tenure	
Eisenhower ^b	50.85	-1.25	^e		14.13	-4.17*	^e	
Kennedy ^c	35.22	4.39*	20.17	13.44*	46.86	-16.04**	11.68	4.97
Johnson	41.18	-1.83*	50.97	-2.70*	30.45	-1.42	27.10	.53
Nixon ^d	28.27	4.64**	^f		-1.62	-3.87	^f	

^aThese are regression coefficients for aggregated data over the term.

^bData from Eisenhower Presidential Archives, Johnson Presidential Archives, and the Albert Center.

^cData from Kennedy Presidential Archives.

^dData from Majority Whip's Office, the Albert Center, and the Nixon Presidential Materials Project.

^eBecause the Eisenhower Senate averaged less than five counts per year, the analysis excluded these data. However, the best approximation of the existing data was initial support ($\alpha = 51.041$, $b = -1.103$); sway ($\alpha = -5.679$, $b = .435$). Neither was significant.

^fBecause the Nixon Senate averaged less than five counts per year, these data are excluded from the table. However, the two trends are for initial support ($\alpha = 50.970$, $b = 5.682$) and for sway ($\alpha = 47.762$, $b = -6.532$). Neither is statistically significant.

One-tailed significance: * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Source: Compiled by author.

congressional majority. According to this empirical model, Kennedy and Nixon started their administrations with little in the way of congressional support. Their lack of support probably reflects the impact of their respective narrow election margins along with the partisan makeup of their Congresses.

Table 3 clearly suggests that only the Johnson administration experienced anything close to a bank account presidency. In the House, for example, the Eisenhower administration appears to represent the pattern associated with the "cycle of increasing opposition": a flat pattern to initial support but a declining path to sway.¹⁷ The Kennedy and Nixon administrations present two interesting variations on a basically positive, temporal path to initial support. Both admin-

¹⁷The Eisenhower administration apparently bunched Senate counts, and these did not satisfy the "five counts per year" rule. As a result, the analysis excluded modeling the Eisenhower Senate from the disaggregated results. However, several models were applied to these somewhat restricted Eisenhower data. A variant of the standard model, one which utilized a second order variable for tenure, performed well and obtained the following results: trend in initial support = 0.0; trends in sway = -0.1603^* (main); 0.0001^* (squared).

istrations increased their initial support. The Kennedy administration, for example, followed a path of increasing initial support that averaged an increase of 19 commitments per year in the House and 13 commitments in the Senate. The Nixon pattern is similar. These data may be the tracks of a different kind of rhythm to the presidency, aimed not at managing a dwindling capital account constantly being drawn upon, but one aimed at acquiring resources that have not already been deposited.

In their days both the Kennedy and the Nixon administrations had to build support during their first terms after the narrowest election victories in history. Kennedy, whose administration started its tenure with an initial support score of 35%, of course, chose not to push civil rights legislation. It avoided that divisive issue even though as a candidate Kennedy had made civil rights a major item in the 1960 campaign agenda and despite the fact that there was substantial emphasis on hitting the ground running among Kennedy staffers. Instead, the Kennedy administration chose to emphasize less divisive elements of the agenda that could have established (and possibly did establish) a stronger working relationship with a congressional majority, especially the Senate's southern leaders. That analysis certainly would coincide with the administration's own interpretation of their election mandate. In addition, the administration's strong showing over its tenure by increasing the level of initial commitments that it received corroborates the notion that in 1963, the Kennedy administration was "on a roll," building resources and influence for a set of inevitable legislative victories (e.g., O'Brien 1975). One element that undermines this Kennedy "inevitability thesis" is that in the House, the administration's success at converting members declined sharply over its tenure. In conjunction with growing initial support, this trend of declining sway could represent the tracks of a potential confrontation that was building up late in Kennedy's second Congress, one from which these data suggest it is not clear that the Kennedy administration would have emerged victorious. Clearly, however, the Kennedy administration's strategy of concentrating on taxes and trade and less on social reform was squeezing every possible vote out of the congressional membership.

The Nixon administration presents an unusual variation on this theme of strategic adjustment. While winning in 1968 with the narrowest electoral margin and then facing a sizable congressional opposition in his first administration, Nixon then faced a growing Watergate confrontation following his otherwise stunning success in 1972. The unusual combination of first narrow victory and then constitutional struggle may have forced the Nixon administration to rely upon a strategy of building throughout most of its tenure. At first the administration adopted its celebrated "Southern Strategy," and then after the 1972 landslide depended upon an appealing policy agenda to undercut the movement for impeachment (Sullivan 1991). Despite the impeachment proceedings, for example, initial support among Democrats for administration policies remained

strong and initial support of the majority's impeachment strategy declined. The positive pattern to administration support on policy issues probably underwrote the administration's hopes that "stone-walling" could eventually stay the impeachment process.

In sum, then, there are a variety of temporal paths trod by different administrations. While some reflect elements of the bank account path, not one administration resembles a bank account presidency. What appears to affect the path of each administration is not some common trend but the nature of the strategic situation facing each administration.

Accounting for Temporal Paths

This section explores what causes the variation in temporal paths estimated in the previously reported model. It tests eight hypotheses proposed earlier against a model of the temporal paths for initial support and for sway.¹⁸ In this analysis each case is an administration coalition effort (identified by the counts). Each case reflects one of the three possible temporal paths (decreasing, flat, and increasing) depending upon the size and significance of the tenure coefficient taken from Table 3. The research utilizes OLS regression to test the hypotheses for initial support. Since the actual data for Senate sway exhibit no variance (each administration experienced more or less constant sway), the research will test hypotheses for House sway only using a probit model in which the dependent referent value ($Y = 1$) represents a flat temporal path while ($Y = 0$) represents having a bank account path.

Table 4 reports the results for the temporal path of initial support. These estimates of initial support include three "control" variables that measure different presidential endowments often cited in the literature. The first control describes the size of the president's base using the Bond-Fleisher "base support" measure that identifies core supporters based upon members' partisan, regional, and ideological identifications (see Bond and Fleisher 1990). The second identifies whether the data result from an election year ("election year?").¹⁹ The third controls for partisan comity ("president of the majority?") (Edwards 1980, 1989). The two models performed well in identifying the appropriate temporal paths for initial support: adjusted R^2 for the two equations are 0.711 (House) and 0.475 (Senate). Thus, the results in Table 4 allow for an apparently strong test of the hypotheses.

The results support three of the four hypotheses about the temporal path of initial support. For example, in both equations the coefficient for presidential prestige was positive and significant, suggesting that as presidential popularity

¹⁸The data for the Senate includes the Eisenhower and Nixon counts despite the fact that the patterns to these data do not allow for a separate analysis of trend. See note 17.

¹⁹An alternative specification of this control utilized presidential election years with little difference in results.

Table 4. Accounting for Temporal Paths of Initial Support

Variables	House			Senate		
	OLS Coefficient	SE	β	OLS Coefficient	SE	β
Constant	-1.182	.519**		-.309	.911	
<i>Determinants:</i>						
Prestige	.016	.004***	.275	.021	.009**	.402
Economic deterioration	.015	.023**	.583	.013	.005**	.512
Opposition ^a	.009	.007	.077	.005	.016	.043
Agenda size ^a	-.000	.001	-.034	.000	.002	.134
<i>Controls:</i>						
Base support	-.005	.011	-.032	-.037	.020*	-.308
Election year?	-.124	.099	-.073	-.013	.240	-.007
President of majority?	-1.030	.185**	-.608	-.808	.314*	.488
Number of cases		200			105	
Adjusted R^2		.715			.453	

^aThe hypothesis for opposition and agenda size suggest a two-tailed significance test.

One-tailed significance: * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Source: Compiled by author.

increases it buoys up the temporal path of initial support (H1). The effect was stronger in the Senate, possibly suggesting that senators are more vulnerable to presidential prestige. It is a bit unusual to consider the Senate more closely linked to popular approval than the House. However, it should be remembered that this result directly links congressional support with the public's assessment of the president rather than with the public's assessment of the Congress. When the relationship of concern is between popular approval and presidential performance, it would certainly be the case that senatorial responses would be more closely linked. During this period the Senate was the breeding ground for would-be presidential candidates. These potential challengers would be considerably more sensitive to the president's standing than their colleagues in the House with far less lofty possibilities. The coefficient for the level of organized opposition in both the House and Senate was as expected (H5), that is, it was not a significant determinant of the temporal path of initial support. Also the coefficient for the size of the agenda was insignificant, as expected (H7).

The only curious results involve the impact of a deteriorating economy. The coefficient for the economic indicator was significant but in the wrong direction. While the original hypothesis (H3) supposed a negative effect on temporal path, the model suggests that a deteriorating economy buoys the path of presidential

sway. It is possible, of course, that the general relationship between the economy and presidential approval could have biased the coefficient for economic deterioration, producing the unusual effects noted here. Empirical analysis of the relationship, however, between economic deterioration and prestige suggests that for the data used here there is little troublesome bias. For example, when the analysis excludes prestige, the coefficient on economic deterioration remained stable and positive. In addition, although this buoyancy effect was unexpected, others have reported similar results. Fleisher and Bond (1986) reported a similar effect when analyzing the impact of economic issues on cross-pressured members and core opponents.²⁰ One important difference is that while they produced similar results, the Fleisher-Bond study generated OLS coefficients that were not significant. They concluded that the insignificant coefficient implied that economic conditions generally played little role in congressional support. They did not comment on the fact that the coefficient was in the “wrong” direction. The results reported here suggest the contrary. It may be that economic conditions play a significant role; it is just an unexpected one.

This result suggests a provocative interpretation—something like a “rally-round the president” effect. It is clear, for example, that there is an asymmetry in public opinion that holds the president responsible for the shape of the economy without necessarily holding the Congress responsible (Jacobson and Kernell 1983).²¹ Yet members of Congress participate in the policy process that affects the economy’s course, and they have a long-term stake in the economy’s performance. When economic conditions deteriorate, the president may benefit from this asymmetry of attributable responsibility, at least as far as congressional support is concerned. Of course, a deteriorating economy still means that the administration suffers dropping popular approval. On the other hand, because there is this asymmetry of responsibility, the Congress may be able to support the president’s efforts at guiding the economy without necessarily risking anything (at least up to some threshold). It is not clear how long this window of

²⁰On separate equations for each group of members and in each house, Fleisher and Bond (1986) report the following.

Impact of Economic Deterioration on Final Support on Economic Roll Calls, by House and Group

Statistic	HOUSE			SENATE		
	Core	×	Opponents	Core	×	Opponents
Coefficient	-.45	3.78	.95	-1.74	8.61	5.16
(Two-tailed <i>P</i>)	(.83)	(.18)	(.64)	(.75)	(.22)	(.30)

Source: Fleisher and Bond (1986).

²¹Researchers have not been able to link results that appear to take place at the aggregate level in congressional elections (i.e., seat changes where the economy plays a role), with what happens in individual voting decisions and elections. See Jacobson (1987a) for a review of this literature.

opportunity lasts for an administration nor whether the Congress also is insulated from the boon of improving economic conditions. As unexpected as they may seem, though, these empirical patterns clearly imply that presidential leadership during an economic crisis is attractive and powerful. This result is doubly intriguing, since only the minority administrations of Eisenhower and Nixon experienced declining economies during their tenures. Hence, the tendency to rally around the administration's efforts (at least for a little while) is particularly reflective of a tendency to avoid partisan politics in favor of responsible government. It may be that incumbents (regardless of party) are affected by a sliding economy and every incumbent wishes well the president's economic programs when things are deteriorating.

Table 5 reports the model for House sway. The model includes the same three control variables found in analyzing initial support's temporal path and a measure of the initial situation on a count. The latter is merely the percent "right" on the initial count. The model did fairly well. The pseudocoefficient of determination for the House equation is $\approx R^2 = 0.64$, but the model strongly supports only one of the four hypotheses. Only the coefficient for the size of the agenda (H8) was as expected, that is, negative and significant. The coefficient

Table 5. Accounting for Temporal Paths of House Sway

Variables	Probit Coefficient	SE	Standardized ^a Coefficient
Constant	7.886	3.570*	
<i>Determinants:</i>			
Prestige	-.137	.025***	-4.487
Economic deterioration	.025	.015*	1.980
Opposition	-.006	.045	-.106
Agenda size	-.010	.004**	-2.513
<i>Controls:</i>			
Base support	.054	.058	.571
Election year?	.276	.637	.294
President of majority?	2.717	.884**	2.896
% "right" on initial count	-.025	.013*	.631
Weighted number of cases	260.5		
Log likelihood ratio ^a	229.964		
$\approx R^2$: ^a	.469***		
% predicted correctly	91.2		

^aThe formula is from Aldrich and Nelson (1984).

One-tailed significance: * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Source: Compiled by author.

for the level of organized opposition (H6) was in the right direction, but it was not significant. Thus, it is clear only that as an administration increases the size of its agenda, its resources are stretched to their limits and ultimately their sway over members is diminished. The performance of the agenda variable suggests that presidents want to eschew increasingly large and complex agendas.

Two variables, the level of the president's prestige (H2) and the state of the economy (H4), had coefficients suggesting counterintuitive results. According to the model's estimation, as the president's prestige increases or as the economy improves, the administration temporal path for sway deteriorated, trending downward. The latter result about an improving economy is consistent with the interpretation of results on initial support. That is to say, because there is an asymmetry of attributable responsibility, the real impact of a deteriorating economy is to rally members behind the administration. While most practitioners see this public expectation of presidential responsibility for the economy as a liability, it may be an asset after all. Thus, while Edwards (1980, 1989) characterizes the weak economy as a liability for the Carter administration when discussing its performance, weakness in the economy may have been one of the dynamic forces buoying up the Carter fortunes. A strategy of leadership in tough economic times may actually have its rewards, and these rewards may extend well beyond support on economic issues. Again, it is worth recalling that the Fleisher and Bond (1987) results about improving support during economic deterioration focused on economic legislation.

By contrast, the results on presidential prestige are very curious and require some interpretation. Recall that increasing prestige strengthened the president's hand, while a pattern of declining prestige tended to drive downward the temporal path of congressional support. If declining prestige made more core supporters wary of supporting their administration, it also provided each administration with a ready-made cadre of potential converts, the very core supporters who were becoming more wary. If the administration could secure these conversions, it would be able to strengthen its position. The fact that most administrations experienced flat or positive temporal paths in sway suggests that they were able regularly to transform that potential coalition into a useful voting force.

Discussion

Comments on the Optimal Temporal Path

Earlier it was suggested that there were two temporal questions to answer. Does influence decline and what is the optimal temporal path? This section summarizes what of that optimality can be understood from the research reported here. Any reasonable specification of optimality first requires assessing the "natural" patterns of influence, if (as most practitioners are convinced) such patterns exist. The bank account presidency describes one such natural pattern,

one which most practitioners are convinced exists. As this research has indicated, however, influence (at least as approximated by either initial support or sway) seems to vary without respect to any such natural decay. Hence, whatever patterns there are to optimality, they are independent of any monotonic time trend.

Light (1982) characterizes something of optimality by supposing that it might be defined by two central characteristics, calling these two forces the "policy cycles." One is the "cycle of decreasing influence" (what here has been called the "bank account presidency") and the other the "cycle of increasing effectiveness." In this specification the optimal path reflects a convergence of the two cycles: it is the point at which the maximum learning has been achieved without losing too much influence over outcomes (Light 1982; Wallace and Reopel 1986). Light also suggests that the impact of this convergence on events at any given time depends upon the endowments of the administration, "including the level of resources at the start of each term" (Light 1982, 60).

Characterizing optimality as the convergence of cycles modified by electoral resources has a certain appeal, especially from the practitioner's point of view. Administration officers are often struck by the fact that they race ahead to utilize (and consequently exhaust) their mandate at the same time that they are just beginning to perfect their skills. Yet at least one element in that characterization is faulty. None of the administrations surveyed with the data here followed a bank account temporal path. While initial support for some administrations did decline, for others it did not. And for those for whom initial support declined, their sway (controlling for their initial situations) did not. It seems clear that administrations that adopt such dictums as "move it or lose it" or "hit the ground running," derived as they are from a bank account perspective, are following bad advice.

What of the other elements in this characterization of optimality? Of course, that administrations hone their skills and streamline their organizations as time goes by seems undeniable; there surely is a cycle of increasing efficiency if not effectiveness. Even data from this study illustrate some of that learning. For example, the average span of time between completing an initial count and voting on the floor reflects an administration's learning curve. As it becomes more familiar with legislating and with the Congress, an administration takes less time to build coalitions and, thus, requires less advanced intelligence on members. The average time between count and vote for the three Congresses during the Johnson administration illustrates such learning. In the House the average time between count and vote steadily declined from a high of 70 days in the 88th Congress to a low of 35 in the 90th or an improvement of 50%. In the Senate the administration decreased its time from initial count to vote from a high in the 88th Congress of 88 days to 30 days in the 90th, which is an improvement of

nearly 70%. Similar reductions were experienced by the Kennedy and Nixon administrations, although the Eisenhower administration did not. Moreover, the results reported in Table A.2 in the Appendix that cover the temporal path of recurring issues suggest not only that administrations learn but that they can put that learning to use by structuring policy proposals in order to generate anticipated reactions. Whether they put that learning to use in better agendas and more successes is, of course, an open question beyond the scope of this paper. Elsewhere, research is ongoing into the process of legislative momentum and timing (see Bozarth and Sullivan 1991).

As with the dictums of the bank account presidency, the research results reported here suggest that placing too much confidence on the benefits of learning poses a hazard.²² Often as an administration becomes more efficient, it is tempted to translate that proficiency into an expanded list of "priority items." The potential for such an organizational decision is reinforced by the fact that, even when there is strong presidential-congressional cooperation, many policy requests linger on, unresolved by the Congress. These "widows" threaten to reduce the administration's ability to commit itself to new legislative directions (see Light 1982, Table 2). Thus, an administration is naturally tempted to broaden its agenda, especially when the number of such widows is large. The pressures to broaden the agenda are even greater when an administration believes (maybe rightfully) that it has learned to master the process. The Johnson administration, for example, not only improved its efficiency in counting but then translated that efficiency into an increasing number of counts, committing administration resources to an increasing number of issues. The results in Table 5 suggest that transforming efficiency into a larger agenda, though understandable given the pressures, is probably a mistake. Administrations may think that time is their major resource constraint (see Light 1982), but probably focus (or its lack) is the bigger threat. Recall that the size of the administration's agenda undermined the path of presidential sway. Maybe the most appropriate temporal dictum, then, has less to do with a ready agenda and more to do with a focused one; that is, it is not "move it or lose it" but "*concentrate or lose.*" Reportedly, this lesson was one that the Reagan transition team learned from the Carter first 100 days. For example, one of Reagan's chief liaison officers, Max Friedersdorf

²²Of course, a great deal of what is learned in the White House does not necessarily have to do with the construction of winning coalitions on major policy initiatives important to the administration. Except for the truly uninitiated (like the Carter group), a great deal of what White House people learn may have to do with the intricacies of other necessary but nonlegislative tasks, such as how to oversee agency operations and how to handle top-secret memoranda. Thus, while there is undoubtedly a cycle of increasing effectiveness, it may be that staffers actually are concerned with an administrative cycle rather than a legislative cycle. For an analysis of the Eisenhower learning experience, see Neustadt (1969a, 1969b).

admitted that (Wayne 1982, 56) “the president was determined not to clutter up the landscape with extraneous legislation.”

Last, the results of this research suggest that too much attention has been given to the impact that endowments exert as controlling factors and that not enough attention has been paid to those apparently more “marginal” yet more dynamic processes that affect the direction of temporal path.²³ For example, the one static control that performs well fairly consistently was whether the president was of the same party as the congressional majority. The result, of course, is the fairly standard one that party identification is a major presidential resource (see also Edwards 1980, 1989). Yet dynamic variables performed as well as or better than party comity. In both models of temporal path, often the other variables like prestige or the economic situation were just as important in affecting the administration’s temporal path. The interesting thing about these results, of course, is that because each dynamic variable is manageable to some degree, an administration’s temporal path cannot be predetermined.

Because of the myriad of potential paths to support and influence, the capacity for learning, and the power of the dynamic variables, what an administration does with its time may differ greatly from those simple dictums in which practitioners have so heavily invested their resources. In sum, when it is possible to manage deposits of power as well as withdrawals and when there is no regular service charge, sound advice may be vastly different. To develop new, more appropriate maxims, improvements are necessary in the theoretical specification and then empirical estimation of a more complete model of influence. For example, while it extends success measures by operationalizing *change* and *involvement*, sway does not improve on *predisposition*. Rather, it fuses three distinct elements, the administration’s ability to mobilize its normal core of support, to convince the cross-pressured, and to persuade the core opposition. Obviously, each of these three groups is important, and their conversion involves real influence, but it involves differing degrees of influence. The stronger the normal tendency to oppose, the greater the influence necessary. And the degree of influence involved also may vary with policy issue. Thus, converting William Proxmire on civil rights issues may take less “juice” than converting Sam Ervin. A better measure of induced conversion, based on prior expectations about support but also utilizing individual-level data, is being developed (see Sullivan 1988b). When that improvement is made, then aggregated results from individual behavior will incorporate fully all of the traditional elements of influence.

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²³For example, neither Neustadt (1960), Light (1982), nor Edwards (1980, 1989) discuss the relationship between the economy and presidential influence or leadership more broadly defined.

APPENDIX

A Sample of Counted Issues

Table A.1 illustrates the kinds of counts taken during the Johnson administration and used in this data set. The sample illustrated here covers the first six months of 1967.

Table A.1. A Sample of Johnson Administration Counted Issues for the House, January–June 1967

Leadership Signals	Subject of the Count	Date
Favor	1968 Fair Housing Act, final passage	1 5 67 ^a
Favor	Debt limit increase to \$336 billion	2 2 67 ^a
Oppose	Recommit motion on debt limit: exclude certificates	2 2 67 ^a
Favor	Office of Economic Opportunity, final passage	3 15 67 ^a
Favor	Elementary and Secondary Education Act, reauthorization	4 19 67 ^a
Favor	Debt limit increase	5 15 67 ^a
Favor	Setting Inter-American Development Bank at \$250 million	5 25 67 ^a
Favor	Setting Inter-American Development Bank at \$300 million	5 25 67 ^a
Favor	Seven-year debt limit	6 2 67
Favor	Debt limit increase at \$358 billion	6 8 67 ^a
Favor	Railway dispute resolution bill	6 14 67 ^a
Favor	District of Columbia reorganization plan	6 19 67
Favor	Elementary and Secondary Education Act, conference report	6 20 67 ^a

^aIndicates a sequenced counting effort.

Assessment of Potential Estimation Problems

This section assesses three potential estimation problems with the sequential approach and sway. The potential for such problems arises directly from the fact that the sequential approach offers a more detailed picture of the coalition-building process. First, as it suggested by Sullivan (1988a, 1988b), members might *feign* an initially nonsupportive position to create opportunities to demonstrate their “loyalty” to an administration or to generate some bargaining leverage. Then they appear to convert during the voting stage when all along their predisposition was to vote with the administration. Such bluffing would decrease the level of initial support while also artificially increasing the numbers of “converts.” Thus, the measure of sway could overestimate influence.

Several things suggest that this is not a major concern. First, of course, the calculation of sway, itself, works to counter any such bias, since it measures sway as a function of initial nonsupport. Mass conversions when there are few initial supporters is simply underemphasized by sway. Second, the bargaining calculus that leads a member to feign nonsupport is extremely complex and conditioned in such a way as to make such bluffs a rare occurrence (see Funderberg and Tirole 1983; Kreps and Wilson 1982; Sullivan 1990a). There is no rational reason to feign initial support, and feigning opponents must adopt a mixed strategy, so that few bluff at any given time and each member bluffs rarely. The only empirical research on the issue (Sullivan 1990a) suggests that there are in fact very limited opportunities for members to bluff in this way and shows that for the Johnson adminis-

tration, at least, there are not only few opportunities for bluffing but few members who bluff. Thus, the potential for systematically overestimating the amount of influence evidenced is likely to be small, especially as it is compared to the advantages of more closely replicating the coalition formation process.

It is possible, however, to treat such bluffing bias as a specification error and to assess empirically whether such bias exists. Since bluffing is the direct result of imperfect information, then it is reasonable to assume that bluffing tapers off as information is accumulated. Thus, if there is a bluffing bias in the observations, then sway will overestimate influence initially, but over time the bias will disappear until eventually the observed data should resemble the actual data. As a result it is possible to assess the presence and strength of such bias by modeling sway as the product of tenure that tests for the temporal path and a counter that counts down until reaching zero at some arbitrarily selected time and then remains at zero thereafter. If there is a bias to sway, this counter ought to have a significant coefficient. The analysis included such a test.

A second kind of potential problem derives from the fact that the sequential approach identifies a point of initiation, in addition to a point of conclusion, for the coalition formation process. The introduction of sequence while creating useful data also poses the problem of excluding some forms of influence that, like "anticipated reactions" develop outside the specified boundaries of the model.²⁴ Since the president has some control over how an issue is framed, addressing a policy question as one kind of issue (as opposed to another) may make a considerable difference in the degree of initial support the administration receives as members anticipate the administration's commitment on the issue. This reaction represents a kind of presidential influence apparently not captured by the sequential analysis. Thus, sway might underestimate influence. Moreover, with experience, an administration ought to become more adept at generating such reactions, thus making sway less accurate over tenure.

Of course, there are some reasons to suspect that anticipated reactions may not be a problem. First, many public policy issues do not repeat themselves during an administration, so that while an administration may learn how to generate anticipated reactions on an issue, this bias would not greatly affect the general pattern. It is possible to assess the proportion of issues that recur and the degree to which the temporal paths of such issues differ from other, nonrecurring issues. Second, since this underestimation would occur with its greatest severity later in an administration, the bias would be to favor finding a bank account trend in sway. Thus, findings that suggest the absence of a bank account temporal path, especially with the Johnson data, are likely to be strong support for the null hypothesis. Third, as in the case of bluffing, it is possible to respecify the model to test whether a bias associated with anticipated reactions exists. As with bluffing, the analysis will include an assessment of anticipated reactions.

The analysis of estimation problems will examine three special expectations about the authenticity of data using sway:

A bluffing bias. The counter for overestimating sway is significant, of greater value, and generally in the same direction as the temporal path for sway.

Anticipated reaction: learning. The temporal path for initial support on recurring issues in the House and Senate is positive and significant.²⁵

²⁴For the classic examination of how anticipated reactions of this nature might be important, see Simon (1953). For example, when an administration asks for a vague commitment on a count (see Sinclair 1983 for a discussion of wording counts), it maximizes the numbers of anticipated reactions.

²⁵This phrasing assumes support of the bank account path to initial support. If that expectation fails, then this expectation would be "positive, substantially steeper, and significant."

Anticipated reaction: a bias. The counter for underestimating sway is significant, of lesser value, and generally in the same direction as the temporal path of sway.

Empirical Results: Bluffing and Anticipated Reactions

This section explores the degree of bias from bluffing and anticipated reactions. In testing for bluffing, a time counter was introduced into the basic equation for the Johnson temporal path on sway. The counter counted down to some selected zero point that was alternately fixed from between one year to three years in office. Thus, the counter would reflect any overestimation of the true temporal path until the time the counter went to zero, which is taken to be the point at which the administration learning dissuades members from bluffing. Under each alternative specification, the coefficient for the counter remained insignificant, suggesting the absence of such bias. These test results, of course, do not preclude the existence of bluffing, rather they suggest that (as is theoretically reasonable) bluffing is carried out only rarely by members and because members wish to avoid any reputation for bluffing, the incidence of bluffing does not result in a significant bias.²⁶

Table A.2 affords some idea of the learning bias; it reports on regression equations on initial support similar to those underlying the temporal paths in Figure 1 but distinguishing (with switches) between those issues that recurred during the Johnson administration (defined as Civil Rights and Foreign Aid) and those that did not. The expectation was that when issues recur, the administration develops an approach that will elicit “conversions” prior to the initial count stage. Hence, it is anticipated that on those issues initial support will increase over tenure while the normal pattern of decline is evident on the other issues.

Table A.2. Trends in Support and Sway, by Recurrence, LBJ

Switched Effect	Trends per Year in Initial Support	
	House	Senate
Constant	40.375 ***	49.071 ***
<i>Temporal path (tenure):</i>		
Regular issues	-2.56 **	-3.43 **
Recurring issues	2.37 **	4.38 **
Adjusted R^2	.123 *	.284 ***
Number of cases	83	42

One-tailed significance: * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Source: Compiled by author.

As is evident from the table, recurrence does distinguish between the temporal path of initial support, quite dramatically in fact. The coefficient for each switch is significant and the opposite direction from that of the other. This result suggests that on those issues that do recur, the administration can learn to position its proposals in order to affect the initial positions of members. Despite

²⁶The author wishes to thank his colleague David Lowery for his assistance in framing these empirical tests for bias.

the impact of administration learning in generating anticipated reactions on recurring issues, this learning does not seem to result in a systematic bias, however.

In order to test for whether anticipated reactions tend to bias downward the measurement of sway, the analysis included several models that experimented with different time counters set into the basic equation on the Johnson temporal path. These experimental counters began at different zero points ranging from one year to three years before the end of the Johnson administration. As before, the coefficient for each of these counters was insignificant, suggesting that there was no measurable bias associated with the presence of anticipated reactions. Again, this result does not imply that there were no anticipated reactions, since obviously there were, but that these anticipated reactions did not affect the estimation of the sway variable. In a way these experiments tested whether the measurement strategy that utilized proportional reduction in error insulated the sway variable from such biases. Apparently it did. Thus, these results suggest the authenticity of the sequential approach and sustain the results based on the Johnson data. The attempt to estimate any specification bias from either bluffing or anticipated reactions was extended to the separate equations for each presidency and to equations for the combined data of each house, with the same results.

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