

PRESIDENTIAL PERSUASIVE ADVANTAGE: STRATEGY, COMPLIANCE-GAINING, AND SEQUENCING

Gregory A. Petrow and Terry Sullivan
University of Nebraska at Omaha
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Abstract:

This paper evaluates three general approaches to understanding presidential persuasion: strategic advantages, compliance-gaining, and sequencing. It generates empirical expectations from these three approaches and then tests those against a database of recorded presidential persuasive encounters. The empirical results support the general strategic approach derived from political science suggesting that presidential leadership and persuasion differ substantially from other forms of persuasion and leadership. The empirical results do not support the other approaches.

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For forty years, political scientists have asserted that on the center-stage of American politics stands presidential persuasion. Yet, this conception of presidential power rests on an ephemera – the president’s ability to convince powerful others to do things that they would not otherwise do. The founders designed the constitutional gap between the policy-making actors in order to make persuasion both necessary and difficult. Hence, a practical politician, like a Lyndon Johnson, reflecting on his experiences as congressional leader and then as president, could sum up this essential constitutional challenge by quipping, “You can tell a man to go to hell, but you *can’t make him go.*”

Yet, theory has little to say that might help a president facing this reality. The most celebrated theories of persuasion in economics (e.g. Harsanyi 1976 or Osborne and Rubinstein 1990 and 1994) model elements of persuasion – who has the most to lose and who goes first, respectively – not likely important in bargaining between experienced, national politicians (e.g., Cameron 1998, Ingberman and Yao 1991, Krehbiel 1998, Kiewit and McCubbins 1988, and Morris and Munger 1998). The most widely known alternative to these kinds of theories, principal-agency theory (Miller 1992 and 2005), concentrates on modeling relationships not central to the struggle over authority that lies at the core of presidential persuasion.

Presidential power also rests on a second ephemera – the rarity of direct observation. Because the modern presidency remains a closed institution, empirical analysis of presidential influence has rested either on discussing a few suggestive cases or on studying congressional votes involving some imputed presidential commitment. Lacking more detailed information about the presidential experience, no one knows how well any small set of cases mirrors the presidential whole and, since votes necessarily occur only after this hidden persuasive process has run its course, vote watching resembles learning about how football coaches lead by examining where the referee places the ball at the end of each play.

In this paper, we initiate a direct assessment of those persuasive exchanges known to exist and presumed to play a role in defining influence. We also take steps to shape future theoretical discussions by exploring a number of ideas about persuasion, found in and out of political science, and comparing them to an admittedly small set of direct observations involving national political figures engaged in persuasion. We evaluate two broad ideas about persuasion drawn from outside of political science, sometimes referred to as “compliance-gaining” and “sequencing,” which try to account for the use of a number of persuasive techniques. Applied to presidential persuasion, these approaches *suggest* that presidential persuasion represents just another instance of a more general phenomenon. We say, “suggest” because these disciplines have never employed data drawn from governing nor do their theories consider assumptions allowing for the possibility that governing might differ from other persuasive settings.¹ In effect, then, we investigate the notion that *presidential* persuasion constitutes but a subset of a more general psychological phenomenon.

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¹ This analysis excludes the popular psychological approach found in research by French and Raven (see review in Raven 1992), which suggests that a set of power asymmetries drive persuasive appeals. We assume that the constitutional separation of powers

Alternatively, we consider the idea that *presidential* persuasion differs substantially from other kinds. This alternative tact derives from the claim that presidential persuasion involves highly skilled principals possessing essentially symmetric technical competencies but holding different structural positions. In this special setting, and as Neustadt (1960) has suggested, the strategic and competitive advantages of position govern outcomes more than the clever application of technique. We call this alternative idea the “strategic advantage” approach to persuasion.

In principle, of course, the use of some techniques typically found in the literatures of psychology, rhetoric, mass communications, or their related disciplines also might reflect strategic advantages and, in principle, could fall under that genre as well. For the purposes of this paper, however, we will try to draw as clear a distinction as possible between strategic advantage and the other theoretical competitors, to the point of allowing some circumstances and encounters that could have a strategic advantages interpretation to remain theoretically and empirically distinct. In this way, whatever conclusions the data support about strategic advantage will likely underestimate its empirical robustness.

In this paper, we use direct observation of actual persuasion to test the differences between these three ideas: strategic advantage, compliance-gaining, and sequencing. We utilize an emerging data source: tape recordings of presidential persuasive exchanges released by the National Archives. We present analysis based on a pilot data set, the first set of recordings released by the Lyndon Johnson Presidential Archives. While the president’s daily diary records approximately 120,000 presidential encounters, the currently available dataset of recordings contains only the first months of the administration. That period involves about 18,000 encounters with recordings made on about 5,300 of those. From those we have drawn a sample containing about 600 persuasive encounters (see Sullivan, *et al*). While the results presented here constitute preliminary results from that sample, and only suggest future work, they do lend some guidance to research and some preliminary expectations about presidential persuasion.

Analyzing the president’s selection of appeals and a Logit model of effectiveness, for example, supports the notion that presidents persuade by attempting to take advantage of their institutional strengths rather than by applying generally applicable persuasion techniques. In particular, the data suggest that strategic advantages, those built into the presidency’s institutional structure, play an important role in persuasion. In addition, and by contrast, the data suggest that other more general forms of persuasive appeals (especially those found in marketing) play little or no role in persuasion. The model of presidential advantage accounted for about one-third of the variance remaining after taking into account the “naïve, three-party model” along with an “ideology” variable most often used as a baseline account of congressional behavior. All of these results suggest that leadership in national governing presents a unique phenomenon rather than following a more general pattern of influence and leadership.

Among presidential advantages, the data suggest three particularly interesting findings. First, uniquely presidential responsibilities matter in persuasion, as Neustadt has suggested. Presidential appeals to responsibilities (e.g., as head of state or as commander in chief) regularly generate commitment. A further empirical finding emphasizes that the *collective* responsibility for governing also plays an important role in persuasion. Considering responsibilities, then, presidential appeals for support can take on a “nested” appearance, moving from specifically presidential to generally shared governing appeals. A third finding underscores the importance of uncertainty in policy-making: the president acts as a natural focal point (a Schelling point) to bend members to the administration’s position.

precludes *a fortiori* the kind of power relationships with which they begin. Instead, we presume that the effectiveness of presidential persuasion creates the kind of relationships they assume.

THE CHARACTER OF PRESIDENTIAL PERSUASION

As suggested in the introduction, some political science research has focused on assessing presidential influence. One decidedly empirical enterprise has concentrated on the results of presidential influence, examining patterns of congressional voting support (cf. Edwards 1980, 1989; Bond and Fleisher 1990; Hart 1984; and Tulis 1987). Others (e.g., Weingast and Moran 1983, McCubbins and Schwartz 1984, Hammond and Miller 1987, Kiewit and McCubbins 1988, Sullivan 1990, Ingberman and Yao 1991, Cameron 1998, Krehbiel 1998, Morris and Munger 1998, Canes-Wrone 2001, DeMarchi and Sullivan 2006) have begun developing formalized theories of the policy process. One common, formal approach (cf. DeMarchi and Sullivan 2006) concentrates on those strategic aspects of bargaining inherent in what Neustadt called “mutual dependence:” while their influence checks the influence of congressional majorities, presidents also *depend* upon those majorities for their own influence. “With hardly an exception,” Neustadt (1990: 30ff) wrote, “those who share in governing this country are aware that at some point, in some degree, the doing of *their* jobs, the furthering of *their* ambitions, may depend upon the president of the United States. Their need for presidential action, or their fear of it is his advantage.” We take this statement as the essence of strategic advantage theory. In it, presidential appeals follow decidedly institutional lines, emphasizing inherent institutional advantages or special organizational responsibilities.

Neustadt’s words, however, offer a number of meanings. What some might consider “institutional advantages,” having *strategic* implications, others might see merely as the organizational roots of perceptions. In “compliance-gaining” studies, those following the rhetorical traditions now studied in mass communications (e.g., Aristotle, Perloff 1993) emphasize appealing to perception over process. Taking a third tact on persuasion, analysts in psychology (e.g., Bettinghaus and Cody 1994) have focused on the way persuaders link appeals with one another as a way of channeling choices. Scholars call this last approach to persuasion “sequencing.” This next section draws distinctions between these three approaches, eliciting from them specific and sometimes competing empirical expectations.

Strategic Advantage in Interdependence

Those who govern do so within a constitutional setting that makes their choices interdependent and then sets them within a political context that makes those choices even more challenging. Consider the nature of interdependency with a favorite target of presidential persuasion, members of Congress. Representation combines governing with accountability. Every policy choice members make poses difficult decisions about choosing the “right” thing to do. Reflecting on this aspect of governing, President Warren G. Harding, himself a former congressman, described the situation this way, “I listen to one side and they seem right..., then I talk to the other side and they seem just as right and there I am where I started. God! What a job!” Members choices present them with these unsettling circumstances because often no one clearly knows what will happen, hence the competing, attractive presentations. Their choices also present difficulties because while their constituents expect action, available policy options may offer little leverage over their problem. While their constituents expect government policy to manage economic performance, for example, the policy choices members have at their discretion may actually have little effect on the far larger economy. Yet, Harding’s woe not only comes from the reality that every uncertain policy choice they must make poses uncertainties, but also because each uncertain choice presents an opportunity for what seems like certain retribution at the hands of cagy challengers who can pick and choose among those choices for exploitation. Members, then rightly feel “unsafe at any margin” (Mann) and conduct themselves as if always “running scared” (Jacobson).

To cope with such clearly uncertain choices and such clearly certain accountability, members adopt a number of defensive strategies. Some cloud accountability through obfuscation (cf. Arnold), pursuing obtuse procedural maneuvers and self-restraining agendas, while others wait out choices hoping to reduce uncertainties by narrowing differences (cf. Kingdon 1981, 1989). Some search for “cover”— common

ground with others that would spread potential blame (cf. Kingdon, 1981, 1989; Matthews and Stimson). In all of these strategies, members try to reduce their problems derived from not knowing for sure with whom to coalesce, over what alternatives to rally, how to proceed within the rules, and which political consequences they can avoid from inconvenient recorded votes (cf. Manley).

Effective leadership, then, addresses this troubling matrix by providing ready answers to these questions members have about proper defensive strategies (Sullivan 1990a and Beckmann 2005). For example, when the president has an advantage in useful intelligence, that information yields a strategic advantage because it can reduce the general uncertainty that representatives fear. We would expect, therefore, that presidents would devote some of their persuasive appeals to underscoring any substantial information advantages afforded the executive from its intelligence apparatus. The president might tell a member, as LBJ often did: “You wait ‘til you look at this evidence. You wait ‘til you look at this report,” (LBJL 6) while asserting the effects of that report’s conclusion on his request for the member’s support. As Neustadt notes, no one can see what the president sees, and that simple constitutional fact yields a strategic advantage. Hence, in persuasion, we expect:

- (1) *Information Asymmetry*. The president will underscore administration advantages of information or the potential for information asymmetries.

Another useful leadership strategy that takes advantage of this matrix involves shared responsibilities as a form of cover. Presidents, after all, share with their followers the perils in governing and these responsibilities, uncertainties, and vulnerabilities makes each receptive to the problems of the other. Often, commentary on the Washington or congressional process describes this connection calling it “civility.” As evidence of this transcendence of partisanship, they point out the many, past relationships across party lines: of Firello LaGuardia and John Garner or Everett Dirksen and Lyndon Johnson or Sam Rayburn and John Martin or Robert Michel and Tip O’Neal, *etc.* Mayhew (1974) identifies this connection as bipartisan support for incumbency, a shared transcendence of political differences (like constituencies) and forming a common bond.

We expect a series of nested appeals, all based on recognizing these common bonds. At the most general level, presidents might simply remind members of their long-entangled political careers, as Harry McPherson has noted (quoted in Stern, p. 107), to help members see that they have a stake in the president’s success. In a call to Senate Republican Whip Hugh Scott, for example, a call illustrating exactly this kind of transcendent appeal, the president asked for the opposition leader’s assistance after asserting that Scott’s tutelage had made the president the politician he had become. “You’re my leader,” the president told Scott and, in response, Scott pledged his needed support (LBJL 2). In the same series of calls, the president told Senator Pastore, “You’re my daddy, you made me, and you got to see to it I succeed” (LBJL 1). In another call, the president noted that Senator Abraham Ribicoff could change his mind on a vote since, as a former governor, he could surely appreciate the need for cooperation, what LBJ characterized to Ribicoff as “the problem Executive” (LBJL 7). Calling on interdependency more directly, the president might invite members to place their “hands on the wheel of history” (Weber), sharing the responsibilities for driving events and thereby committing themselves necessarily to the president’s lead. “I can’t run this country by myself!” the president would roar into the phone (LBJL 6). Lastly, and even more pointedly, the president would call on a member to assist the administration in carrying out a primary, executive responsibility, e. g., as head of state, commander in chief, or chief diplomat. The president, for example, called on this responsibility when trying to convince House Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Otto Passman to support foreign operations appropriations as the only way “as commander-in-chief I can keep your constituents’ sons and daughters out of harm’s way” (LBJL 5). This latter appeal differs from relying on the presidential “clerkship” as the appeal invokes the president’s primary constitutional responsibilities, those centered in Article II, rather than those dependent upon congressional delegations or activities justified as “necessary and proper.” Hence, we expect persuasive exchanges to evidence appeals designed to turn common responsibilities and associations into a presidential advantage, including:

- (2) *Common Professional Roots*. The president will refer to long-standing professional connections, career similarities, etc.
- (3) *Common Collective Responsibilities*. The president will refer to shared responsibilities for governing.
- (4) *Central Presidential Responsibilities*. The president will connect persuasive requests to primary responsibilities as commander in chief, head of state, chief diplomat, or budget coordinator.

We assert a further interdependence effect, this one rooted in members' pursuits of obfuscation (Arnold). "Congress is like a herd of cattle caught in a swamp," President Johnson would write in his memoir, "they're mulling around waiting for someone on a horse to lead them... to safety" (Johnson 1971). Looking for obfuscation implies finding it in the positions of others, what members call "cover." As the most visible actor in the political system, Presidents can provide representatives just such a prominent point in the coalition space to which they can rally (see also Miller 1992).² We would expect, then, that presidents would employ this prominence by repeatedly referring to their own policy preferences (and the preferences of any others who hold similar positions), almost without context in the conversation. We take this predilection to represent part of what James Wilson noted during the constitutional convention as a "unity of focus" affording the "singular presidency" its greatest constitutional advantage (cf. Madison). Hence,

- (5) *Presidential Focal Point*. The president will refer to his own position or the parallel positions of other prominent actors.

Manley (1970) and then Arnold (1990) have noted that leadership can preclude choices through procedural maneuvers designed, in unobvious ways, to limit the possibilities and thereby limit the representative's choices. Manley's (1970) famous study of the House Ways and Means Committee emphasized the extraordinary significance of such procedural maneuvers in defending the committee's recommendations, as did Sullivan's two studies of procedural control (1976, 1984) which demonstrated how these maneuvers structured influence. In attempting to garner support, then, we expect presidents to discuss potential procedural maneuvers and other strategies designed to structure the member's choice problems in a way favorable to the administration, including the sequencing or scheduling of votes. Hence,

- (6) *Process Coordination*. The president will refer to or suggest procedural maneuvers or agenda sequencing and scheduling.

Compliance-Gaining and Sequencing

As noted before, other disciplines study persuasion. Using self-reporting data on hierarchical dyads such as parents/children and doctors/patients, mass communications studies have identified a number of general "compliance-gaining" practices (see Bettinghaus and Cody 1994, Shelby 1986, or Lebow 1996 for a review). Based on self-reporting from non-hierarchical groups such as married couples and buyer/seller dyads, psychologists also have identified a number of "sequencing" techniques (see Perloff 1993).

Compliance-gaining studies rely on models, e. g., "constructivism" (see Perloff 1993) or "elaboration likelihood" (see Bettinghaus and Cody 1994, Eagly and Chaiken 1993, or Petty and Cacioppo 1981, 1986 for a review), that highlight the conceptual structure underlying perception. Effective appeals connect with these structures altering perceptions. These models parallel, but remain distinct from, strategic advantages. While strategic advantage emphasizes procedural maneuver and rally points, for example, compliance-gaining theory implies appeals designed to reshape the representative's calculations on available

² Thomas Schelling noted this tendency in game theory and discussed the importance of using focal points in convergence and coordination. Points of prominence become natural convergence points, for example, in theme parks, in cities, in malls, where separate individuals can effectively coordinate their strategies without communication. Contingency plans and simulations, as other examples, coordinate strategies in later crises by providing everyone involved with a predetermined focal point around which they can rally.

choices (Cody and McLaughlin 1990, Dillard and Burgoon 1995). Where these two general approaches differ, we will call the expectation a “marker,” distinguishing cleanly between the two.

In this regard, an important class of compliance-gaining appeals relies on the presidential “clerkship” to provide a storehouse of inducements. When convincing them to support the administration, presidents might utilize this kind of appeal by reminding members that eventually they would need administration help. To the House Appropriations Committee Chair, George Mahon, for example, President Johnson put his argument in just this way when asking for help in staving off a Republican killer amendment to his 1964 poverty bill (quoted in Sullivan *et al*), “George, I know one thing... I know I mean more to you,... and Lubbock,... and your district,... and your State,... and your grandchildren, than Charlie Halleck (the Republican House Leader) does” (LBJL 8). From compliance-gaining theory, then, we expect:

- (7) *Use of Inducements*. The president will rely on offering inducements (promises, threats, etc) or underscoring previous debts.

Since these clerkship inducements derive from congressional delegation rather than inherent institutional differences, their use, and their expected impact on conversion, constitutes a theoretical “marker,” distinguishing (7) from (1), in particular.

The nature of connections also highlights a marker distinction. While strategic advantage theory suggests that presidents persuade by calling on shared responsibilities, compliance-gaining suggests that politicians rely on shared “values” instead (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Persuasion succeeds, compliance-gaining suggests, when those with shared constituency-relevant characteristics, e. g., shared ideology or region or party, engage each other. In the latter, the president might ask for help in order to avoid the embarrassment of “my own people repudiating me,” when speaking to Democrats, or Texans, or southerners, or liberals (LBJL 9). Hence:

- (8) *Appealing to Shared Characteristics*. The president will rely on shared ideology, party, and region to persuade.

This expectation stands in contrast with the cluster of strategic advantage expectations based on connections: (2), (3), and (4), above.

Another potentially legislative dynamic consistent with compliance-gaining involves the search for policy-specific information (Krehbiel 1991). Speaker of the House John Nance Garner always told his protégés (including Sam Rayburn) to garner facts. “Your colleagues here want information,” he would tell them, “and (they) will listen to a man who has knowledge of his subject. It’s finer recreation than fishing. There is nothing more useful or more thrilling than facts” (quoted in Sullivan 2008). Compliance-gaining theory, then, suggests a distinction between presidential advice on the specifics of alternatives and strategic manipulation of the decision *process* regarding those alternatives. Instead of citing reports that members cannot access (a strategic advantage), for example, presidents should proffer technical information or other similarly detailed justifications for altering one’s perception of the choices. Politicians regularly describe their exchanges in just these terms, downplaying the importance of politics and process, while underscoring the information content of their exchanges. When asked about lobbying in 1965, for example, the president’s congressional liaison Lawrence O’Brien (1965) replied, “the vast majority of our discussions are about the nature of the policy and what works and what doesn’t in solving policy problems.” Using this appeal, the president might say, “This vote will save us 45 millions over last year’s budget” (LBJL 5). Hence,

- (9) *Citing Policy Details*. The president will rely on technical explanation and policy specific justification in persuading members of Congress.

As a means to persuasion, then, discussing merit (facts) represents a third “marker” expectation discerning between compliance-gaining and strategic advantage through either using information asymmetries (1) or focusing of coordinating processes (6), above.

Finally, because compliance-gaining relies on how an individual fits the persuasive appeals into their own perceptions, some researchers (e.g., Fisk and Taylor 1991 and Petty and Cacioppo 1981) have suggested that persuasion can result simply from prolonging appeals. Keeping the target engaged brings to the fore in the listener's mind the impact of the appeals proffered and, assuming the message in those appeals has a persuasive effect embedded in their presentations, the continued consideration of such an argument increases its potency. Hence,

(10) *Persistence*. The president will have more success the longer the persuasive encounter.

Persistence will present an unusual "marker" expectation, in a way, contradicting the operational assumptions underlying the president's own vote-gathering organization.

Developed in psychology, the analysis of *sequencing* focuses on how persuaders connect one alternative to another, both in size and in temporal relationship (Cialdini 1988). These sequences involve one of two basic transformations: from a request for a small concession first to a greater concession and vice-versa. For example, policy leaders might introduce the idea of a "pilot" project hoping to reduce the apparent size of the final step to the desired larger project. Doris Kearns recalls that LBJ often touted the need for getting a program "on the books" and then expanding it through subsequent statutes not as a rationalization of compromise but as a conscious strategy for selling programs. Scholars call this technique "foot in the door." Its mirror image they call "door in the face," asking for more than expected to create "wiggle room." While no theory in psychology accounts for how these techniques might work, researchers regularly cite them as viable.³ Thus, sequencing generates two expectations:

(11) *Foot in the Door*. The president will seek a lesser commitment in order to set up a broader or bigger commitment.

(12) *Door in the Face*. The president will ask for a greater commitment from a member in order to retreat to and secure a lesser commitment.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

We employ a database of tape-recorded presidential appeals drawn from the Lyndon Johnson Presidential Library. Though necessarily limited in coverage, other research (see Sullivan, *et al*) has demonstrated that these recordings reflect the larger population of presidential calls as well as the general range of presidential in-person encounters (e.g., meetings). To place them properly within a context, we first describe the organizational process leading to these encounters, suggesting that typically the president encounters challenging cases: recalcitrants who, for good reasons, have not already committed to supporting the administration. After establishing this context, our analysis carries out three kinds of evaluations: the distribution of presidential appeals (i. e., what a master politician hoped would work), their impact on commitment (i. e., what actually worked), and the general direction of those expectations we earlier identified as "markers" (i. e., how robust the findings).

The Process Leading to Persuasion

Time constitutes the most valuable asset any president has. The inevitability of the 22nd Amendment, honeymoons, hitting the ground running (Light), the "bank account presidency" (Sullivan 1991), and lame ducks (Demarchi and Sullivan 2006) all derive from the simple necessity of not wasting the president's time.

³ Empirical work indicates that previous sequencing studies did not control for the nature of the requested action. For example, door-in-the-face requests for self-serving actions (i.e., giving to a political party) regularly fail while the same technique applied to "pro-social" requests (i.e., contributions to blood drives) succeed. Similarly, Cialdini reports that "low-balling" (foot-in-the-door) works only in achieving "pro-social" goals.

The demands on that time intersect with the necessity of persuasion whenever the administration encounters “non-supporters,” those unwilling to commit to the president’s position. As described in Sullivan (1987), the congressional liaison operation represents the organizational system responsible for managing the president’s persuasive time. That operation, the combined efforts of agency and White House staff, begins with maintaining an on-going relationship with legislators and includes routines for identifying trouble spots, weeding out easy conversions, exploring procedural maneuvers (Beckmann 2005), dissuading potential bluffers (see Sullivan 1990b), and securing commitments. These staffers buffer the president from unnecessary demands and they focus the president’s efforts where it can make the most difference.

This system of filtering contacts leading to presidential encounters has implications for interpreting the data our recordings present and, hence, the meaning of the appeals the president makes. In general, the president’s call sheets present a list of what the staff has determined constitute the “tough nuts,” those who have already demonstrated a reluctance to convert to the administration’s position. However congenial their recorded conversations sound or reassuring their comments seem, these persuasive encounters result from conflicts others could not resolve.⁴ Thus, our data on persuasion has a flavor of subtle conflict and bias against observing presidential persuasion.

The Empirical Model of Persuasion

In these recorded encounters, targets respond to presidential persuasion in a number of ways, which we reduce to a dichotomous dependent variable called “persuasion: commit or hesitate.” “Commit” responses include several kinds of positive replies: a member might say to the president, “I’m at your command” or “I’ll do anything you want me to do” (LBJL 6) or “You can count on me, Mr. President” (LBJL 3). “Hesitate” responses on this variable have a special place in the skill set of practicing politicians. President Kennedy marveled at the capacity members of Congress regularly demonstrated for dancing around a position while maintaining their unresponsiveness. He called these “giving me the music” (quoted in Sullivan 2008): “Mr. President, I appreciate your position,” or “I can see what you mean, Mr. President” or “I’ll see what I can do to help, if I can.” Regardless of how positive they would sound, President Kennedy pointed out, each of these responses represented an unwillingness to commit just as surely as if a member had taken a stronger tact by saying (as they do), “I can’t imagine how I could do that, Mr. President” or “I can’t do that, it would ruin me with my voters.”⁵

The analysis includes a range of independent variables to match the persuasive approaches discussed here, each initially coded for assessing use as either “used” or “not used.” These include strategic advantages: referring to an information asymmetry, exploiting a common responsibility for governing or a constitutional responsibility of the Presidency, concentrating attention on the president’s position, or manipulating the rules of the game. Compliance-gaining variables include measures for inducements, policy

⁴ For now, we ignore the theoretically meaningful distinction between bargaining difficulties, those staff might not have resolved, and transactional discontinuities, those the staff can never resolve. The latter problem suggests that experienced politicians will quickly move bargaining to the tattered edges of delegated authority where staff will find it impossible to offer an appeal *that will secure* the president’s post facto commitment. By doing so, members will assure themselves the president’s direct attention and that they can get as much as possible in return for their conversion (see Sullivan 1990b and 2007). For now, we ignore these two possibilities since in both the president faces a genuinely troublesome persuasive encounter.

⁵ Listen to how John Barry (1989) recounts a meeting between Speaker of the House (and Democrat) James Wright and Senators from both partisan leaderships, and note in particular how Senator Mark Hatfield (a Republican leader) responds without committing:

Wright put together a plan for Congress to take control (of the budget), and the next day hosted a lunch for House and Senate leaders....His plan called for real deficit cuts of almost \$30 billion, and it did not touch Social Security (President Reagan had turned down a similar Republican proposal)....But Republicans would have to swallow a Democratic tax bill and Democratic spending priorities. Wright waited for a response.

Mark Hatfield, a Republican Senator, said politely, “That’s a great idea.”

But he didn’t endorse it. Neither did anyone else.

details, and a range of value-laden connections (party, region, and ideology). We also created a special variable to associate persistence with the length of the president’s conversation.⁶ Sequencing measures appear harder to describe by example since, as we will note later, the president never employed them.

To evaluate the effect of these appeals on political commitment, we use a logistic regression to model the decision to commit given the intensity with which the president made each of the appeals suggested earlier. We model intensity as how often during an exchange the president mentions a particular appeal.⁷ This approach minimizes the use of merely dichotomous independent variables.

The Relative Use of Appeals

Table 1 summarizes the empirical patterns on what the president thought would work, describing the three categories of appeals and how often specific appeals appear in two types of encounters: those with members of Congress and those with “others.” It also describes subtotals for each general appeal type showing how often any one of the relevant appeals appeared in the average interaction. So, for example, the president uses information asymmetry in around a third of congressional exchanges while the president resorts to some kind of strategic advantage appeal in virtually every other exchange. Since persistence (a compliance-gaining expectation) varies with time spent rather than use, the table reports the average time taken in persuasive and non-persuasive conversations (as a control). The last two columns in the table describe whether the distribution of appeals across the two groups represents a statistically significant difference.

The evidence from Table 1 suggests the general importance of strategic advantage. The president, for example, employed at least one form of strategic advantage appeal in a bit less than one-third all exchanges. By comparison, the president employed compliance-gaining techniques in around 6% of the cases, and the president never employed sequencing appeals. And, for exchanges with members of Congress, these relationships hold.

Table 1
COMPARING THE PRESIDENT’S USE OF PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES

Type of Persuasive Appeal		<i>Potential Follower</i>		<i>Difference^a</i>	
		Others	Congress	Factor	N
STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE	(1) citing information asymmetries	0.08	0.32	4.19* ^b	308
	(2) citing professional connection	0.08	0.20	2.62*	308
	(3) citing collective responsibilities	0.10	0.29	2.90*	308
	(4) citing a presidential responsibility	0.21	0.30	1.44*	308
	(5) president as focal point	0.07	0.24	3.43*	308
	(6) coordinating process	0.08	0.27	3.38*	308
	<i>strategic advantage</i>	0.28	0.49	1.73*	
COMPLIANCE-GAINING	(7) using inducements	0.01	0.04	4.00*	308
	(8) citing common party, region, or ideology	0.01	0.01	1.00	308
	(9) citing policy merits or details	0.06	0.22	3.54*	308
	(10) persistence in non-persuasive cases	5:53	4:43	—	338
	(10) persistence in persuasive cases	4:13	5:43	—	308

⁶ We created an additional variable for the square of persistence, to test declining marginal returns, with no effect on the reported empirical effects in Table 2.

⁷ This approach follows the practice in psychology and communications studies, cf. Petty and Cacioppo 1981, 1986, and Fiske and Taylor 1991.

		<i>compliance-gaining</i>	0.06	0.26	4.32*	
SEQUENCING	(11) lesser to greater (foot in the door)		0.00	0.00	—	308
	(12) greater to lesser (door in the face)		0.00	0.00	—	308
		<i>sequencing</i>	0.00	0.00	—	

^aMagnitude measures the ratio of appeals to members as a proportion of the same appeals to “others.”

^bSignificance (*) measured at $p < .05$, two-tailed.

Source: compiled by authors.

Among strategic advantages, the president’s reliance on information asymmetries (1) stands out and suggests what seems like the importance of the president’s leadership role, especially with reference to Congress. The president used this appeal more often on members of Congress than any other kind of appeal, appearing in one-third of all of those conversations. He regularly suggested that members did not fully appreciate the situation or the consequences of a specific alternative. “There are a good many more ramifications to this than appear on the surface,” he might say (LBJL 6) when suggesting he had better information. Recall that the first compliance-gaining effect, inducements (7), suggested a marker comparison with the first strategic advantage variable, information asymmetry (1). If just this single comparison summarizes how President Johnson viewed leadership prospects then the comparisons seem quiet stark. For both groups, the president relied on asymmetry about eight times more often than inducements.

The evidence lends initial support to the other strategic advantage expectations as well. For example, the president used his position as a focal point and as a key to the policy process significantly more often with members of Congress than with others. He encouraged members in excess of three times more often to follow his preferences and noted others who had already fallen in line behind his lead (5). And, he regularly (again in excess of three times more often) underscored the political consequences of failing to support the administration or highlighted the process implications involved (6). The comparison for all forms of strategic advantage versus all forms of compliance-gaining (excepting persistence) seem consistent with these specific findings: for others the president used strategic advantage appeals in a little over a quarter of the encounters while compliance gaining in around one in twenty (a four fold difference) and for members 49% versus 26%, a factor of two.

The table also reports on a second marker comparison: the difference between references to common responsibilities (2), (3), and (4) and the cluster of appeals referring to common “values” (8). While encounters with members regularly evoked appeals to responsibilities (between 20% and 30%) the same encounters rarely evoked appeals to common values (around 1%). This reliance on common responsibilities might reflect President Johnson’s 32 years of Washington experience. The president’s use of his presidential responsibilities comes close to parity across the two types of encounter. D. B. Hardemann, Sam Rayburn’s aide and biographer, noted that Speaker Rayburn reminded his colleagues and his constituents that leadership required sacrifice, to carry forward the president’s policy goals even if he or they had disagreed on those goals (Hardemann and Bacon). Apparently, the president also believed that the need for sacrifice would strike a similar chord in others.

The use of compliance-gaining techniques also receives some empirical support in Table 1. For example, note the comparisons between policy merit (compliance-gaining) and policy process (strategic advantage). Both kinds of appeals appear far more often in dealing with members than others and, although process appeals appear more often (27% versus 22%), the two markers share very similar patterns. Hence, we will make no conclusion in either direction.

The results of the final compliance-gaining comparison, on persistence (10), also seem inconclusive. Unlike almost all other expectations, the empirical patterns suggest no consistent persuasive difference associated with persistence: persuasive encounters did not appear to last uniformly longer. On the other

hand, encounters with members of Congress, presumed here to represent more experienced and likely more resistant encounters, did seem to last longer than persuasive calls directed at others.

Sequencing, of course, fared far worse. Though popular in marketing, sequencing techniques play no role at all here. Contrary to expectations (9) and (10), the president never used these two techniques. These results represent the clearest case that governing represents a completely different persuasive context.

The Impact of Appeals in Persuasion

Table 2 reports the results on what worked. The logistic model describes this process well, correctly identifying responses in 86% of the cases. Comparing these logistic results with what scholars recommend as a baseline comparison for congressional studies, the so-called “naïve model” (Weisberg), adding the persuasion variables achieved a 45% improvement (measured as a lambda). Given the recommendation (i. e., accept models with $\lambda > .10$), the model’s performance constitutes a “considerable” improvement.

The table includes results only on compliance-gaining and strategic advantage variables, the president having never employed sequencing techniques. Moreover, because the president rarely referred to party, region, or ideology, we have employed three standard congressional variables as surrogates for these appeals, instead, *as if the president had employed them far more often* than he actually did as reported in Table 1. For party and region, we employ the three-party distinction between northern-Democrats, southern-Democrats (the baseline), and Republicans. For a measure of ideology, we employed w-Nominate scores. Taking this approach, turning otherwise normal controls into substantive tests, represents a further (and quite strong) conservative strategy for analyzing the impact of the strategic advantage variables.

Table 2.
LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF COMMITMENT, MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

<i>General Class</i>	<i>Persuasive Appeal</i>	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>st. error^a</i>
	CONSTANT	-2.42	.65
STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE	(1) citing information asymmetries	-2.80	1.52
	(2) citing professional connection	-0.65	.76
	(3) citing collective responsibilities	1.50	.68*
	(4) citing a presidential responsibility	1.17	.48**
	(5) president as focal point	1.30	.62*
	(6) coordinating process	-0.03	.37
COMPLIANCE-GAINING	(7) using inducements	.08	.47
	(8) citing common party or region (naïve 3-party for northern democrats)	.20	1.07
	(8) citing common party or region (naïve 3-party for republicans)	1.50	.87
	(8) citing common ideology (w-nominate)	1.46	1.02
	(9) citing policy merits or details	.49	.78
	(10) persistence in persuasive cases	-171.27	137.41
<i>Summary statistics:</i>			
n of cases:	114	-2 Log Likelihood:	47.54
Correct:	87.7%	Cox/Snell R ² :	.351
λ :	54.9%		

^a Significance: * p < .05 two-tailed; ** p < .01 two-tailed; *** p < .001 two-tailed

Source: compiled by authors.

The Relative Significance of Strategic Advantage. Reviewing the table suggests three findings having to do with strategic advantage. First, while the president makes many appeals, suggesting something about the president's personal view of what ought to matter, only a few of these hit home with any regularity. Only three strategic advantage appeals, for example, appear to have a significant persuasive effect. These included appeals emphasizing both the shared governing task (3), and support of the president's constitutional responsibilities (4), both playing a positive and significant role in securing conversions. The impact of these two variables seems substantial. Making the standard translation of Logit coefficients into probabilities and assessing them while holding the other effects at their means suggests that a single reiteration of the president's responsibilities yields a 16-point increase in the probability of conversion. An additional appeal to collective responsibility yields a 28-point increase in conversion. The results in Table 2 also suggest an important role for Presidential preferences serving as a focal point (5). The coefficient on the president's stated preferences appears positive and significant and an increase in this variable would result in around a 19-point increase in conversion. Each of these strategic advantages, then, suggests a significant and powerful persuasive force.

Second, for the most part, only strategic advantage mattered. By comparison, no compliance-gaining variable had an effect on persuasion, including those typical variables used as operational measures of similarity. Hence, the data do not support these expectations: (7), (8), (9), and (10).

Third, two strategic advantage variables presented unexpectedly negative coefficients, though neither appeared significant. While Table 1 indicates that the president typically proffered appeals to information asymmetries (1) and to long-standing connections (2), they had no effect on commitment. Perhaps the context of persuasion itself made these two appeals seem disingenuous. When the president provided listeners with information they could not possibly have (e. g., taking advantage of the president's access to intelligence) this information might seem especially self-serving; counterbalancing, at least among already reluctant and potentially wary members, the effect of any information asymmetry, and thereby neutralizing the original advantage moot. Hence, the logistic results cast some doubt upon expectations (1) and (2).

LEARNING ABOUT PRESIDENTIAL PERSUASION

A picture of persuasion begins to develop from combining the analyses presented here on what the president expected to work and what actually did. First, these data support the notion that the relationship between the president and members of Congress has a decidedly persuasive flavor. These data constitute the first direct evidence that, indeed, presidential influence (as opposed to congressional support) involves, if not rests on, persuasion. Conversely, these data also suggest that the president needs persuasion less within the executive circle than across the constitutional divide. Hence, these data provide the first direct evidence that we have generally underestimated the usefulness of authority or "self-executing command."

Second, these data support the notion that political persuasion, at least among the highest practitioners, involves something qualitatively different from persuasion observed in other settings. Scholarship, therefore, which rests on observing contrived games among amateurs (like student subject pools), or those that rely on experiments involving executives experienced in the marketplace, or those relying on observing private dyads, cannot approximate the nature of persuasion in governing. This result mirrors findings in the new research on presidential transitions. Much like the candidates in transition studies, those who suggest that the presidency and its complex web of power relationships resembles the experiences found elsewhere simply miss a major empirical point: the Presidency and its politics differ not by degrees but by dimensions (see Kumar and Sullivan, Sullivan 2004).

Because presidential persuasion differs so much from other settings, we cannot simulate power at work without improvements in current experimental designs and subject pools. Meanwhile, we must value any opportunities we have, like the data here, that derive directly from this unique setting. The theories we

employ to understand power at work, however, need not emphasize special circumstances so much as they have and should attribute to all presidents the exclusive nature of that institutional setting. Of course, it seems reasonable to imagine that LBJ had special talents when it came to persuasion. Certainly, the popular literature and biography suggest it. Yet, LBJ's time in office presents just one of many opportunities for evaluating theory. And, the statistical assurances we employ here address the likely uncertainties we might face in learning exclusively from LBJ. What we can learn of the presidency, of course, will differ from what we can learn of the person who occupies the office and we will come to that in a moment.

The evidence presented here suggests that in the uniquely political world in which they work, presidents rely on specific advantages derived from their institution's unique responsibilities and the web of relationships it weaves. Appeals based on these responsibilities put others at a distinct disadvantage. No one can bear the president's special burdens; they can only assist in carrying them *when called upon*. This underlying reality seems to play an important role in building a governing consensus. So, too, does sharing the burdens in a common endeavor, and through common backgrounds, a role in building that consensus. Thus, "legislative" presidents, those who have come from careers in the Congress, with these background experiences, might possess a special advantage not plumbed before.

The empirical results on the president as a "focus" suggest another interesting insight into governing and persuasion. Amid the range of positions members could take, those of the president (or those the president suggests) stand out as prominent. Since Thomas Schelling's seminal work, published the same year as Neustadt's, we have understood that when a multitude of possibilities present themselves, as policy often does for members, almost any degree of uniqueness presents a particularly enticing focus. Maybe the appeal to follow the president's position presents just such an opportunity to find "cover" in following, especially when the appeal to rally around (as in the case of our current data) focuses on an extremely popular president. In either case, Schelling's focus, or the coordinating advantage rendered by the president's special prominence, seems theoretically consistent with what, since Neustadt, we have come to call a "strategic advantage."

As indicated above, not only can the evidence provided here tell us something about the practice of political persuasion, it can also tell us something about the practitioners, returning us to the question of LBJ. Following the biographer's lore, the evidence developed here ought to convey a President Johnson supremely in command of politicians' weaknesses or strengths. Instead, the data suggest that LBJ seemed to rely more on variety and intensity to best his targets. Consider one eighteen-minute conversation with Senator Richard Russell over participation on the Warren Commission. In it, LBJ faced a target with whom he had had a long and intimate association (cf. Caro 2002), just the kind of situation that offered every opportunity to demonstrate LBJ's keen, personalized sensibilities. During the first twelve minutes of their exchange, however, instead of offering a single silver bullet, tailor-made to Russell, an argument designed to lay down Russell's defenses, the president instead bombarded the Senator, offering eleven separate arguments for serving the president's will. This barrage itself merely replicated arguments he had used on other Warren Commissioners earlier in the day, including the Chief Justice (cf. Sullivan 2008). The president's shelling employed all of those appeals noted here: shared past experiences, collective responsibility for governing, unique presidential responsibilities, intelligence that only the president possessed, *et cetera*. Even though an earlier call (LBJL 4) had forewarned Russell of the president's intentions, giving Russell every opportunity to anticipate fully the attack to come, LBJ's onslaught dwarfed Russell's prepared defenses. Not until well into their encounter, after the president had launched many other salvos, did a few of LBJ's appeals turn to aspects specific to Senator Russell. For example, at one point, the president feigned mock disbelief at the possibility that Russell might want to avoid the Commission for fear he could not best the intellect of Chief Justice Warren. Such an appeal, clearly based on LBJ's personal knowledge of his former patron, however, did not surface in the conversation, *until after Russell had already capitulated*, and then, these special appeals seemed to reflect more of a desire to smooth

over a victory over the more senior Russell. In reality, the president simply pummeled Russell, and Russell apparently succumbed not to insight but to pervasive, presidential advantage.

While LBJ often relied on this kind of barrage, the evidence suggests that little of that barrage mattered. These data suggest that only appeals centering on the president's real institutional advantages had any discernable impact across a range of members and circumstances. The president could offer rewards, manipulate agendas, predict the positions of others, forecast policy disasters, but in the end, turning to those duties at the center of American government, or unashamedly calling on a common relationship or responsibility, had a more profound effect. LBJ persuaded most effectively when standing on his position.

Of course, the fact of multiple arguments highlights the need for more work on the sequencing of arguments, work different than that envisioned by psychologists. Does it matter, for example, that appeals to collective responsibility may have followed appeals about presidential responsibility? Does the president, for example, argue "I have these responsibilities and I can't carry them out alone. I need your help." French and Raven, probably the most popular psychological modelers of persuasion, argue that some kinds of appeals require facilitation (cf. Raven's 1992 retrospective on their work). As of yet, our data do not allow for this kind of analysis. In addition, that LBJ pummeled his listeners with arguments suggests assessing the sheer range of arguments as an independent variable, treated separately from the time it takes to expound them. Do members give in from "listener fatigue?" Surely, national politicians, realizing the stakes and themselves having had a good deal of experience at this level, would not succumb to such effects.

This research also suggests something troubling about leadership studies. While they often refer to the importance of understanding political leadership, those who train leaders rarely call on evidence from that political leadership. Instead, they presume that more readily available evidence from private, hierarchical leadership, in business, in some military organizations, and in personal relationships resembles public leadership. Curricula in schools of public affairs, for example, rely on these studies of private, hierarchical leadership almost exclusively and elected officials regularly turn to business schools for preparatory seminars for legislators. The data developing in studies like this one and in other areas of political science, however, suggest that political leadership (at least in democratic regimes) differs substantially from other forms. Hence, they overstate goal identification and techniques for establishing offers (especially so-called "security points" in game theory) while understating the importance of institutionally derived advantages, commonalities in responsibilities (e.g., outside of Pareto improvements), and purely arbitrary foci (Schelling points). Our future research ought to help highlight these needed improvements.

Lastly, appreciating the strategic context of presidential persuasion requires three innovations. First, since we know that the process of persuasion involves the president approaching those who have already resisted, we need a sophisticated understanding of "predisposition," something far beyond the current literature that models it as regionalism or party loyalty or spatial repetition. Second, the possibility of a strategic situation suggests that we ought to control for the nature of circumstances. This paper has observed appeals and their effectiveness without parsing circumstances. Possibly, specific appeals have an effect only because of specific circumstances. As of yet, we have not amassed enough data to assess that confounding possibility. Third, while we consider stated commitment to represent presidential effectiveness, commitments do not exactly mean votes and votes eventually matter. As of yet, our data analysis has not extended beyond the face to face encounter with the president. On the other hand, evidence elsewhere does suggest two things about circumstances: members rarely reverse their voting positions from the commitments they make in person and that presidents use their time to persuade on issues with outcomes in doubt. So, while we have not plumbed votes, we have good reason to suspect that these persuasive successes matter.

Despite these admitted deficiencies, two critical stories stand out. First, we can track the actions of politicians involved in this, their essential ephemera — the arena of retail persuasion between master persuaders engaged in critical governing activities. In that arena, the nature of the presidency itself, embedded in the broader constitutional system, dictates the president's influence in ways not at all

commensurate with those in business or other systems. And second, in this special realm, a leader's capacity for recognizing and articulating strategic advantages matters much more than the mastery of persuasive technique.

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