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Explaining Why Presidents Count: Signaling and Information

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This paper suggests why presidents, despite their reliable knowledge of Congress, utilize headcounts. It examines two general conjectures: The first emphasizes the opportunity counting provides for "signaling." Four signaling effects are hypothesized: the count mobilizes members, additional effort increases mobilization, counting increases the retention of commitments, and counting prompts crystallization of positions. The second conjecture asserts that headcounts provide vitally specific information and thus, improve upon the expectations of administrations about their current legislative situation. Two information effects are hypothesized; one suggesting that headcounts supplement administration expectations, while the other suggests headcounts provide a better prediction than administration expectations.

The data do not suggest a signaling effect beyond the basic mobilization of core supporters. The data support both information hypotheses suggesting that even an administration with no prior experience can function well as a legislative leader *if* it invests heavily in an effective liaison organization.

This paper assesses one important organizational element of the modern presidency, the *headcount*, and attempts to prove with empirical data what analysts heretofore only could imagine to be true: that it is the information supplied from counting which makes them valuable. While often employed, it is not clear that counting has an advantage over other alternatives in managing the coalition-building process. For example, there are several models

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of how members vote, and each is a powerful predictor (Cherryholmes and Shapiro 1969; Clausen 1973; Fiorina 1974; Kingdon 1977; and Matthews and Stimson 1975). Even the so-called “*naive* three-party model” of voting, based upon only the distinction between the two parties and the two Civil War regions, is capable of correctly predicting most voting (see Weisberg 1978). And since these models do very well indeed, why do politicians go to the trouble of counting when they already are able to anticipate their colleagues quite well? To date, no empirical analysis suggests what presidents gain by counting.

The paper’s first section offers two explanations: one emphasizes the advantages of contact (i.e., a “signaling” advantage), and the other emphasizes intelligence (i.e., an “informational” advantage). The second section assesses hypotheses drawn from these conjectures using a unique collection of presidential headcounts from the Johnson administration. The final section draws two conclusions about the proper use of counts as an organizational tool.

EXPLAINING COUNTING

Signaling Conjecture

The first potential explanation rests upon the fact that regardless of what else is accomplished, counting allows the administration to signal to members. In his study, John Kingdon (1981, 131) described what is a common perspective among practitioners about such a signaling effect: “Said one staffer: ‘Even if you don’t try to persuade him at all, if you contact him two or three times, you get the message across that the leadership and the administration want this one badly.’” Sinclair (1983) also reported that practitioners recognize this signaling value. From the administration’s perspective, counting can carry two organizational signals: First, it can trigger the coordinated actions of those wishing to support the administration: counting signals “follow me, *now!*” to congressional partisans. This will be called a “mobilization” signal (see Dodd and Sullivan 1979 for an example or Covington 1987a, Holtzman 1970). Second, a count can focus disparate factions around a specific administration policy approach. In effect, the count affords the administration the opportunity to say, “follow me, *this way!*” This will be called a “crystallization” signal. That, in tight situations, the administration activates counting simply to convey information about which is the right position to take underscores this crystallization signal (see Sinclair 1983 for a discussion). And finally, counting (especially when repeated as Kingdon suggests) serves notice that the bill is top priority and seals whatever commitments the administration has received. In this way, counting signals “I’m watching and you’re following me, *right?*” This signal will be called a “retention” signal.¹

¹This particular signal is due to my colleague Andrew Scott.

Informational Conjecture

A second explanation for counting is that it can be an intelligence gathering tool. Thus, a count may not provide a signal (“follow me!”), rather it may be used to gather in the signals of members (“will you follow me?”). A carefully drafted count can provide a range of information. For example, a question that simply asks about support may generate vague commitments. Wording a count in this way informs the administration as to the size of its *potential* coalition. A more tightly worded question, say asking about support for the bill *as reported*, may generate fewer commitments but ones which are more unalterable. This second count informs the administration about its *hard-core* support.

The Structure of Counting

When considered with what is known of how administrations conduct their counts, these two conjectures suggest some empirical tests. While this research report focuses on data derived from just the Johnson administration (1963–1968), they are part of a larger data set containing individual responses to about 600 headcounts from the Eisenhower through the Ford administrations, and for all of these administrations, the process of counting is basically the same. Each counting effort begins with an *initial* count typically completed weeks prior to voting. Other *intermediate* counts might follow leading to a *final* count reported only hours before voting. Members respond to a question or series of questions intended to identify their positions and make their requests known, and (during the Kennedy/Johnson era) the staff records these answers in one of seven responses that ranged from *Right* to *Wrong*.² Aggregate totals for 82 counting efforts, taken from the Eighty-eighth through the Ninetieth Houses compose the data base for assessing both of the signaling effects. On these counts, about 143 members reported as committed to the Johnson administration’s proposal (i.e., were recorded as *Right*), while the others adopted positions that the practitioners often lumped

²Across the five administrations in the larger data set, the categories differ slightly but are based on the same basic philosophy, i.e., “a President finds himself measuring Congress in terms of the coalitions for him and against him on specific issues” (Cater 1964). The categories included *Right*, *Leaning right*, *Undecided*, *Leaning wrong*, *No comment*, *Wrong*, and *Absent*. On some bills, the Johnson administration decided to build its coalition from the Democratic membership alone. In those situations, the staff did not poll Republicans, recording them instead as *No comment*. From the administration’s standpoint, however, the overwhelming majority of these *No comment*(s) ought to have been coded as closer to *Wrong* than to *Undecided*. This adjustment has been made in the analysis. As a check on this decision, the average spatial location of members in each category (using Poole and Rosenthal [1985] ideal points arrayed from -1.0 to $+1.0$) were examined. These averages suggest that the typical member coded as *No comment* was indeed very similar to the typical member coded as *Wrong*, which confirms this array of the data: *Right* ($-.274$), *Leaning right* ($-.042$), *Possible* (.172), *Absent* (.123), *Leaning wrong* (.169), *No comment* (.317), and *Wrong* (.388).

together as “non-support.” In addition, about 12,000 individual responses from 49 counts for the Ninetieth House make up the individual level data used in assessing hypotheses about the mobilization signal, retention signal, and the informational uses of headcounts.

An administration can and does vary its effort so that often it counts only once on a bill while other times it counts repeatedly. Hence, the research partitions the data into two basic groups: those from “sequenced” and those from “non-sequenced” counts. Further, on some sequenced efforts, the administration can invest its maximum effort. The research distinguishes “intensive” sequenced counts from “non-intensive” yet sequenced efforts by whether or not there is an intermediate count in the first half of the legislative process (i.e., within one-half the time spanning from the initial count to the vote). Thus, there are three groups of efforts, each progressively more intense: Nonsequenced (29 counts), Nonintensive Sequenced (34 counts), and Intensive Sequenced counts (19). On each issue, the closest roll call on which the president took a position is identified as the critical vote on that bill.

Empirical Tests

In order to assess the signaling potential of counts, it is assumed that final (voting) support for the administration is a product of several forces including initial support, signaling, and persuasion. It also is assumed that members have predispositions for policy outcomes generated primarily from basic constituency interests (see Mayhew 1974 or Cox, McCubbins, and Sullivan 1984). These predispositions lead some members to be staunch or “core” supporters of the administration’s typical position and others to be staunch or “core” opponents, and still others to be “cross-pressured.”³ While persuasion and vantage can be brought to bear on every member who does not initially respond supportingly, it is reasonable for an administration to utilize its advantages in varying degrees preferring to expend its most important resources in the most effective ways.

In the earlier stages of coalition-building, it is assumed, the administration relies more on signaling, i.e., on mobilizing and crystallizing support. Members respond in direct proportion to their predispositions for support with core supporters responding quickly while those less disposed respond less quickly. As the legislative process develops, the administration brings to bear more of its persuasion and vantage. Thus, the difference between the use of signaling and the use of power is a matter of timing. So, the changes wrought during the early stages are more reflective of signaling than changes wrought just prior to voting. Hence, it is useful in assessing signaling to have drawn a distinction between the early stages of the legislative process and

³ For other studies of “cross-pressured” members see the work of Bond and Fleisher, in particular Fleisher and Bond 1987 but also 1986, 1988, or Covington, in particular 1988.

the later stages, for it is in the former that an administration presumably relies more upon signaling.

There are four testable signaling effects, given the data and distinctions just outlined. First, given their predispositions, core supporters are expected to mobilize more quickly than others. Thus, the proportion of final support recorded as initial commitments should be highest among the administration's core supporters. Second, the more signals the administration sends, the more core supporters should rally to the administration. Thus, while it is expected that there should be a marked improvement in support among all groups generated by the introduction of an intermediate count, that improvement should be pronounced among core supporters. Third, since repeated contact greatly increases the stakes for any member contemplating renegeing on a commitment, it is expected that (particularly among those members who are cross-pressured) the use of more effort should result in fewer incidents of renegeing by members who initially commit to the administration. Fourth, the degree to which members take a firm position (either for or against the administration) increases as the administration increases signaling: there is more crystallization on intensive efforts.

These considerations suggest four specific signaling hypotheses:

S1. A Mobilization | Predisposition Effect: Counting generates normal initial support based upon a member's predisposition. So (*S1a*) initial support should vary in direct proportion to predispositions, and (*S1b*) the greatest proportion of the administration's final support among its core supporters is recorded on the initial count.

S2. A Mobilization | Effort Effect: Intensive counting increases commitments, particularly among the administration's core supporters during the initial stages of the coalition-building process. Hence, (*S2a*) on intensive efforts the change from initial to intermediate count should represent a large percentage of the total improvement from initial count to vote. And, (*S2b*) given their predisposition, the greatest such improvement should occur among the administration's core supporters.

S3. A Retention | Effort Effect: Intensive counting increases the permanence of commitments made initially to support the administration. Hence among cross-pressured members who initially commit to the administration, more members keep those promises when the administration invests in intensive efforts.

S4. A Crystallization | Effort Effect: Intensive counting increases crystallization. Hence, on intensive efforts, the larger proportion of changes from middle to extreme positions (i.e., from "leaning" etc. to either *Right* or *Wrong*) occurs between the initial and the intermediate count as opposed to between the intermediate and the final count.

The informational value of counting rests upon whether or not a count actually affords the administration not just a good idea about what members will do, but it also must provide them with *a better idea than they already have*. Since many presidents have been in the Congress, their knowledge of constituency and other more institutional pressures on their former colleagues surely yields them considerable detail. In addition, an administration may learn during its tenure. For example, in its first year, the Carter liaison effort was organized around policy areas: There were specialists for energy, foreign policy, health, etc. Within six months that organization was scrapped in favor of one which developed information about members. One Carter aide, cited in Light (1982:37–38), described the change in this way: “We recognized that liaison had to involve intimate contact with the members of Congress, not with the specific issues. We learned that liaison had to be much more sensitive to the needs of Congress. . . . The issue-based system wasn’t adequate for a liaison office that needed votes. We eventually learned that we had to shepherd the members, that we had to give them our attention.” Thus, each administration adds to its experiences as its tenure develops. Coupled with an administration’s own expectations about members, derived from its past experiences, then, count information may be just a minor supplement. This might be called a “weak” informational effect: counting *supplements* prior knowledge. On the other hand, a stronger version of the information hypothesis suggests that the headcount is an organizational *substitute* for expertise and expectations: counting alone does better than prior expectations.

The following hypotheses express these informational uses of counts:

I1. Weak Information Effect: Headcount information about the position of members significantly increases the predictive capacity of models of administration expectations.

I2. Strong Information Effect: Headcount information about the position of members is a significantly better predictor of a member’s voting than models of administration expectations.

TESTING THE TWO EXPLANATIONS

Modeling Predisposition

In order to test *S1* and *S2*, it is necessary to estimate member predispositions, assumed to be a function of constituency interests: consistent differences in behavior between members result from differences in their constituencies. In order to identify such predispositions, the analysis utilized two techniques. First, a hierarchic cluster analysis identified consistent voting patterns in an earlier Congress (e.g., the Eighty-ninth for the Nine-

tieth data).⁴ The technique identified clusters similar to those Clausen (1973), Sinclair (1983), and others have identified: in particular “civil liberties” and “governing the economy.”⁵ A *PROBIT* analysis then described member voting behavior on these two clusters by calculating parameters on some 27 constituency characteristics (see the appendix). Applying these coefficients to constituency characteristics, updated for redistricting prior to the Ninetieth Congress, produced a prediction (p) about how a member *should* have responded when a count appeared to have come from one of the previously clustered issue groups. Members were defined *prima facie* as having a strong tendency to nonsupport (here called *core opponents*) if the *PROBIT* generated a probability of 0.2 or less ($.2 \geq p$). Conversely, a probability of 0.8 or better ($p \geq .8$) indicates a strong proclivity to take the *Right* position on a count (here called *core supporters*).⁶ *PROBITs* between the two extremes ($.2 < p < .8$) indicate a proclivity to be *cross-pressured*, sometimes supporting the administration and often not (see also Fleisher and Bond 1986, 1987, 1988, or Covington 1988 for different approaches to identifying the predispositions).

Two Baseline Models of Expectations

This paper utilizes two empirical models with which to approximate the baseline accuracy of an administration’s experiential knowledge (see also Sullivan 1987 or 1988b). Since these two models are used merely as benchmarks from which to judge the usefulness of headcount information, it is not necessary to offer a full theoretical justification for their use.⁷ They are, however,

⁴The measure of similarity employed in the cluster program was Yule’s Q and the parameter for the algorithm was set at an extreme value, by the discipline’s standards, of 0.80 (cf. Clausen and Van Horn 1977, Unekis and Rieselbach 1984, or Sinclair 1982 which use 0.60 as the relevant parameter).

⁵The “civil liberties” cluster included such votes as: three votes on the Jury Reform Amendments, six votes on various aspects of the DC charter act, passage of the Voting Rights Act, etc. The cluster called “governing the economy” included votes on the Appalachian Regional Development Act reauthorization, some amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act, repeal of Section 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act, Clean Air recommital, urban renewal, Fair Labor Standards Act, etc.

⁶The use of $p = 0.8$ is a robust selection since results were not markedly different for higher cutoffs. Its use as the cutoff between *prima facie* strong supporters and questionably strong supporters was employed in order to avoid mistakenly identifying a member as feigning nonsupport when in fact they were merely acting according to their own normal probabilities. Of course, any choice of cutoff is perforce arbitrary, but $p = 0.8$ seemed a fairly conservative standard.

⁷There are several voting models available as baselines. In particular, the research did not utilize two very popular models: The first is to utilize ADA scores. The second is to utilize the spatial unfolding techniques described in Poole and Rosenthal 1985. Both models are *post-dictive* which is contrary to the notion of expectations. Moreover, while it is possible that Poole-Rosenthal and the ADA scores are capturing some deep ideological structure to the American political system, the case has yet to be fully established, and it is not clear even then that such

consistent with the mainstream theories of voting behavior. The first employs the *naive three-party* model (Weisberg 1978). The expectations derived from this model depend upon only two distinctions between members: their partisan and regional orientations. Weisberg reports an impressive performance in predicting member voting. For example, in the Ninetieth House, the model correctly predicted 76.9% of the votes.⁸ Weisberg argues that, given such performance, it ought to be the baseline for comparing all other models. The second model extends the "reelection" model (described earlier to specify predispositions) by adding some *institutional* factors which are often mentioned in the literature (Fenno 1973 or Kingdon 1981). These additional variables determine the degree of flexibility members possess within the context of constituency forces. The appendix describes the operational definition of this second model which will be called the "basic" model.⁹

In testing the count information against the two expectations models, the dependent variable is the probability of supporting the administration on the critical vote $P(Y = 1)$. Since this probability is theoretically continuous but observed dichotomously as a vote, the statistical model employed is a multivariate *PROBIT*. For the most part this poses no serious problems in interpreting the results since although fundamentally different, the *PROBIT* model can be discussed in terms of the more familiar Ordinary Least Squares regression model. And indeed, the estimation employed even reports a "coefficient of determination" (*adjusted* $\approx R^2$) for ease of exposition, although the central summary statistic used most often will be merely the percentage of correct predictions.¹⁰ A standard technique for measuring the degree to

ideological structure is likely to drive congressional voting except possibly as the reflection of the more commonly accepted reelection motive with its emphasis on the differences between constituencies. The two baselines used here, of course, reflect the reelection motive. Thus, while there is some reason to be interested in the extension of the analysis to other baselines, there is no strong justification for replacing the current baselines with any others. Moreover, as indicated in notes 16 and 19, there is a strong justification for continuing to use the basic model as the chief target of consideration since it performs better than any of the other models in predicting votes on those highly controversial issues in this restricted data set.

⁸This is the average reported from table 4 in Weisberg 1978. Table 4 makes a technical adjustment on the data reported in the text and is more accurate for the purposes of this study.

⁹Both models utilized here apply this technique to "current" data (i.e., the Ninetieth House data). While somewhat unusual, two points justify this approach: First, the approach does represent a form of political expectations, but it emphasizes less the weight of past information and relies more heavily upon information obtained in the *immediate* process facing the administration as it builds coalitions. Thus, this interpretation could describe the two models used here as forms of *updating*, and since this seems a reasonable approximation of expectations, the "current"-time approach to the data is reported. Second, the adoption of these current models is a conservative approach to the data analysis placing maximum weight on expectations and, thus, is likely to underestimate the comparisons between expectations and counting by overestimating the explanatory power of the expectations models.

¹⁰Of course, there is no clear interpretation of $\approx R^2$ as there is in OLS regression models,

which new information “improves” an existing model is the Goodman and Kruskal *lambda* statistic (λ). Used here, *lambda* is the difference in the predictive capacities of the two models divided by the complements of the proportion predicted by the first (or restricted) model, i.e., divided by the behavior that the first model could not predict accurately (see Weisberg 1978). The informational conjecture suggests that the *lambda* between a restricted model and the restricted model enhanced with head-count information should be “considerable.” Weisberg (1978) suggests that for estimation of voting models (where accuracy is already high) a significant improvement occurs when the enhanced model improves on the restricted model by at least 10% (i.e., $\lambda \geq 0.10$).¹¹

FINDINGS

Signaling

Table 1 summarizes the evidence of a mobilization effect, i.e., (S1). It reports the average levels of initial support (% *Right* on the initial count), the average number of members converted from initial positions of nonsupport to voting with the administration, and the average proportion of the final support for the administration which is derived from commitments received on the initial count. The table also summarizes these figures for each group of member predispositions. As is obvious, mobilization is directly related to predisposition. Reading down the first column of data, there is a monotonic increase in initial support as the predisposition to support the administration increases. These data support S1a. The data also support S1b. Comparing groups in column three, it is clear that nearly 70% of those identified as core supporters commit on the initial headcount. This is a rate which is 64% greater than the rate among cross-pressured members and almost 400% greater than the rate among core opponents. Thus, these data are strong evidence in support of S1 suggesting that counting has an important signaling value given the initial predispositions of members.

Table 2 reports data on the impact of “effort” on mobilization (i.e., S2), by detailing the effect of different levels of effort on average mobilization (% *Right*). In addition, the table reports final support on the critical votes and the improvement (λ) from initial count, through intermediate and final

hence the reliance upon comparing correct predictions and the appropriate coefficient is really the Likelihood Ratio Statistic which is distributed as a X^2 .

¹¹ In assessing the signaling hypotheses, *lambda* is especially appealing because it adjusts for different initial legislative situations. So, for example, *lambda* operationalizes the notion that the same number of conversions is more impressive when there are fewer initial nonsupporters from which to draw converts than when initial nonsupport is very high.

TABLE 1
MOBILIZATION, PREDISPOSITIONS, AND FINAL SUPPORT

Groupings Based on <i>p</i> (<i>Right</i>)	Average Levels (%) of		% of the Final Vote from Initial Count
	Initial Support	Converted	
Core opponents	5.6	35.6	13.6
Cross-pressured	45.9	67.4	40.5
Core supporters	69.9	35.0	66.6

Notes: Some rounding has occurred.

TABLE 2
MOBILIZATION AND IMPROVEMENT BY
TYPE OF EFFORT AND PREDISPOSITIONS

2a: All Members

Type of Effort	% <i>Right</i> on the		λ
	Count	Vote	
Nonsequenced	.369	.603	
Sequenced			
Nonintensive			
Initial	.350	.602	
Final	.418		.271 to final .729 to vote
Intensive,			
Initial	.345	.569	
Intermediate	.353		.036 to intermed
Final	.411		.258 to final .706 to vote

2b: Divided by Predispositions

Effort	Classes of Predispositions								
	for Core Opponents			for Cross-Pressured			for Core Supporters		
	% <i>Right</i> on		λ	% <i>Right</i> on		λ	% <i>Right</i> on		λ
Count	Vote	Count		Vote	Count		Vote		
Intensive,									
Initial	.044	.242		.295	.525		.655	.816	
Intermediate	.057		.066	.297		.009	.674		.118 to intermed
Final	.048		-.045	.347		.218	.751		.478 to final
			.979				.773		.404 to vote

Notes: Some rounding has occurred.

counts, to voting. Table 2a describes these patterns for all members and thus is useful in assessing whether intensifying efforts improves support generally (i.e., *S2a*). Table 2b reports the same information for just intensively sequenced efforts but details these data for each member type and is useful in assessing *S2b*.

Before assessing *S2a*, it is important to note two general patterns in table 2a: First, initial support differs little between types of effort ranging from 37% (nonsequenced counts) to 34% (intensive sequenced counts). Given variances, this 3-point difference is not significant suggesting that the administration's decision to intensify its effort probably has little to do with the initial legislative situation.¹² Thus, any effects on support associated with differing signaling efforts are not simply the spurious result of differing initial situations. Indeed, a *PROBIT* model which tested whether the level of initial support was a determinant of when the administration sequenced a count effort indicated that the initial situation was not a significant influence, although the overall equation performed fairly well (*adjusted* $\approx R^2 = .647$). Second, it is clear that the administration secures a consistent number of total commitments prior to voting, regardless of effort: both kinds of sequenced efforts added about 28% of the remaining votes.¹³ The independence of effort from initial situation and this similarity in final support suggests that assessing effort in this way is a reasonably strong test.

In that light, the data on improvement in table 2a indicate that despite mobilizing initial predispositions (*SI*), intensifying efforts leads to very little general improvement. For example, on intensive efforts the λ from the initial to the intermediate count (when signaling is expected to have its greatest effect) represents only about 4% of the total improvement from the initial count to the final vote, while the λ for the second half (intermediate count to the critical vote) is more than 25 times greater!¹⁴ Clearly, it is in the second stage, presumed to be dominated by persuasion and not signaling, that the administration improves on its support. And even then, most of the observed improvement comes after the final count. Table 2b summarizes the evidence for different groups on the intensive efforts (*S2b*). Here the impor-

¹²Standard deviations among the three groups of effort are: Nonsequenced (.1300), Nonintense Sequenced (.1162), and Intense Sequenced (.1194).

¹³Final support was distributed: Nonsequenced (.603), on Nonintensive Sequenced (.602), and on Intensive Sequenced (.569). The standard errors are: .140, .184, and .130, respectively.

¹⁴The calculations are:

$$\lambda_{\text{signaling}}: \frac{(\%Right_{\text{intermediate}} - \%Right_{\text{initial}})}{(\%Right_{\text{vote}} - \%Right_{\text{initial}})}$$

$$\lambda_{\text{persuasion}}: \frac{(\%Right_{\text{vote}} - \%Right_{\text{intermediate}})}{(\%Right_{\text{vote}} - \%Right_{\text{intermediate}})}$$

tant data is the pattern to λ from one count to the next and across different groups. The data in this table support the notion that intensification of effort mobilizes core supporters more than it does any other group. For example, core opponents actually slip backward on intensive efforts, as if there is a polarization effect that could be associated with the intensification of counting. Among core opponents, all of the administration's support has to be garnered (or recovered) at the very last minute. Cross-pressured members are a slightly better story improving with each effort and finally core supporters are distinctly responsive, as expected.

Table 3 summarizes evidence about the retention hypothesis (S3) by detailing the degree to which cross-pressured members who initially committed to the administration carried out those commitments and how the administration's effort affected the retention of those commitments. The evidence does not support the hypothesis that increasing counting efforts increases retention. Indeed, the pattern is in the *opposite* direction from what had been anticipated: the *loss* in retention from nonsequenced to intensively sequenced efforts is 76% by comparison with the high level of retention on nonsequenced efforts. It is not clear why this unexpected pattern to retention occurred, but one possibility would be to link the loss of commitments with administration compromise strategies. If the administration employed counting to gather intelligence on their legislative predicament (a hypothesis to be considered below), then it would intensify its efforts when its predicament was precarious, trying to fathom what could be done to improve the situation and to monitor what was happening in response to new strategies. Compromises, of course, change the situation in which members made their original commitments. Hence, the introduction of compromise could result in a loss of retention as the situation became more fluid. The administration might prefer to risk declining retention of cross-pressured members if the potential conversions among its core supporters (for example) were large enough to offset the losses.¹⁵ Unfortunately, the data do not provide for the distinction

¹⁵There is another possibility related to the level of administration effort. Based upon similar kinds of archival data, Covington (1987b) suggested that there is another kind of distinction to be made in describing administration efforts. He draws the distinction between whether or not the administration makes the coalition-building process a "public" or a "private" process, the former allowing for greater constituency and the latter allowing for greater "intramural," political pressure. It may be that a larger proportion of commitments observed in nonintensive counting efforts are from issues on which the administration remained "private" while the intensive efforts more naturally translated into "public" battles. In the latter, presumably, the administration trades the advantages of "going public" for the losses incurred by making coalition-formation public. These losses may be particularly reflected in the performance of cross-pressured members while table 3 does not illustrate the gains from going public observed among other groups of members. I gratefully acknowledge one anonymous reviewer for making this suggestion.

TABLE 3
RETENTION OF COMMITMENTS AMONG CROSS-PRESSURED MEMBERS
AND BY TYPE OF ADMINISTRATION EFFORT

Type of Effort	% Right on Vote	λ
Nonsequenced	.938	
Sequenced,		
Nonintensive	.918	-.331
Intensive	.890	-.764

Notes: Some rounding has occurred.

between issues on which the administration adopted compromises and those on which it did not, although some such distinctions have been examined elsewhere for individual data from a smaller number of counts (Sullivan 1987, 1989) and plans call for application of these studies to the broader aggregate level.

Table 4 details evidence regarding the crystallization hypothesis (S4). It describes crystallization on initial count and critical vote for each type of effort and describes improvement. Evidence about crystallization is mixed, at best. For example, by looking at λ , there is a weak (but not significant)

TABLE 4
CRYSTALLIZATION AND IMPROVEMENT BY
TYPE OF ADMINISTRATION EFFORT

Type of Effort	Solid (<i>Right or Wrong</i>) Response on the		λ
	Count	Vote	
Nonsequenced	.528	.869	
Sequenced,			
Nonintensive,			
Initial	.458	.859	
Final	.551		.232 to final .768 to vote
Intensive,			
Initial	.496	.937	
Intermediate	.534		.087 to intermed
Final	.617		.187 to final .726 to vote

Notes: Some rounding has occurred.

increase ($\lambda_{\text{nonintense}} = 0.232$ while $\lambda_{\text{intense (totalled)}} = 0.264$). On the intensively sequenced efforts, the λ from initial to the additional intermediate count represents only about 9% of the total increase or about 12% of the similar rate for the persuasion stage from the final count to the vote.¹⁶ In all, then, there is evidence to support S1; little evidence to support S2, except for core supporters; and there is no evidence to support S3 or S4. If there is a signaling effect, it is weak and restricted to initially mobilizing core supporters and this seems insufficient justification for counting.

Informational Effects

Assessment of the information hypotheses depends upon the use of the two benchmark models: the naive three-party model and the basic model. Using information on a data set reported by Weisberg (1978) which includes all Ninetieth House votes and the more select set of votes critical to the administration, it is possible to compare the two models. These comparisons are reported as part of table 5 (under the column “% Correct”). Both models predicted nearly three-quarters of the voting. One point to note is how well the naive model captures what the more detailed constituency model captures. Introducing the much more complex basic model achieves only a small improvement in predictive power. And for this reason, the naive model is often touted as superior. Measured as a *lambda*, however, the improvement achieved by adding the constituency variables is 14.3% which is slightly higher than what Weisberg identifies as the minimum improvement (i.e., 10.0%).¹⁷ And given their relative appeal as *explanations*, the analysis retains comparisons with the basic model.

Table 5 also summarizes the *enhancement* of these two baselines. The table reports two measures of improvement. The first, of course, is *lambda*. The count information clearly improves the baselines: the difference is nearly 36% for the naive model and 27% for the basic constituency model. The second measure of improvement is the more familiar change in the adjusted coefficient of determination. The difference between the restricted and enhanced models is quite striking as reported by the *F*-statistic. Headcount enhancement improves the *adjusted* $\approx R^2$ by almost 90% for the naive

¹⁶To wit:

$$\lambda_{\text{signaling}}: \frac{[\%Right + \%Wrong]_{\text{intermediate}} - [\%Right + \%Wrong]_{\text{initial}}}{[\%Right + \%Wrong]_{\text{vote}} - [\%Right + \%Wrong]_{\text{initial}}}$$

$$\lambda_{\text{persuasion}}: \frac{(\%Right + \%Wrong)_{\text{vote}} - (\%Right + \%Wrong)_{\text{intermediate}}}{(\%Right + \%Wrong)_{\text{vote}} - (\%Right + \%Wrong)_{\text{initial}}}$$

¹⁷Of course, Weisberg's standard is arbitrary. As a result, there are arguments about parsimony and the vapid content of the three-party model in a weak party system by comparison with the basic constituency model driven by the electoral connection. Fortunately, since these two models are merely used as benchmarks in this research, neither argument is relevant.

TABLE 5
COMPARISON OF NAIVE AND BASIC MODELS
WITH HEADCOUNT ENHANCEMENTS*

	Type of Restricted Model			
	Naive Three-Party		Basic Constituency	
	<i>adj.</i> $\approx R^2$	% Correct	<i>adj.</i> $\approx R^2$	% Correct
Restricted model	.257	.730	.334	.769
Enhancement	.480	.827	.506	.831
Difference	.223	.096	.172	.062
λ		+35.8%		+26.9%
F-statistic	1753.6***		1509.0***	

Notes: *See also Appendix.

Some rounding has occurred.

Significant at better than: *.05; **.01; ***.0001.

Number of weighted cases: 11,699.

model and by more than 50% for the basic model.¹⁸ These data are strong support for the weak informational hypothesis and could suggest why even the most sophisticated of administrations counted.

If the strong information hypothesis is correct, of course, administrations need not be sophisticated at all. One simple measure of the power of the strong effect is whether the count information is a better predictor of vote than either of the baselines. This *strong* headcount model (containing only the initial and final counts) produced the largest *adjusted* $\approx R^2$ (0.47169), the largest likelihood ratio statistic (4786.04), and predicted more correctly (82%) than any of the other models presented here. Both variables were significant, as well.¹⁹ A second brief measure is the stability of individual coefficients in the basic model, once it is enhanced (see appendix). Of the 16 variables which initially performed well in the basic model,²⁰ the introduction of headcount information causes six to become insignificant. Moreover, few of the remaining variables have stable coefficients when the headcount information is introduced. Clearly, the introduction of count information substitutes for a great deal of the other information inherent in the basic constituency model.

¹⁸ Similar statistics are available for the enhancement of both the ADA and Poole-Rosenthal models (when using *predictive* data from the Eighty-ninth House) mentioned in note 7 *supra*. The relevant improvement scores are also impressive: $\lambda_{(\text{enhanced ADA})} = 35\%$ and $\lambda_{(\text{enhanced Poole-Rosenthal})} = 30\%$. See also note 19 for a discussion of the reverse enhancements.

¹⁹ The values for the coefficients and their associated *t*-statistics are: Position on Initial Count = .065621 (12.108); Position on Final Count = .241798 (32.639). The full equation Likelihood Ratio Statistic was 4786.04 with *df* = 2.

²⁰ For space considerations, the initial Basic model is not reported.

TABLE 6
COMPARISON OF RESTRICTED BASIC AND RESTRICTED STRONG
HEAD-COUNT MODELS, EACH WITH ENHANCEMENTS

	Type of Restricted Model			
	Basic Constituency ^a		Strong Headcount	
	<i>adj.</i> $\approx R^2$	% Correct	<i>adj.</i> $\approx R^2$	% Correct
Restricted model	.334	.769	.472	.824
Enhancement (model added)	.506	.831	.506	.831
		(Headcounts)		(Constituency)
Difference	.172	.062	.035	.007
λ		+26.9		+4.0%
F-statistic	1509.0***		28.3***	

Notes: ^aData taken from table 4, *supra*.

Some rounding has occurred.

Significant at better than: *.05; **.01; ***.0001.

Number of weighted cases: 11,699.

Finally, it is possible to understand just how significant this headcount information is by considering the enhanced basic model reported in table 4 as an enhancement not of the basic model but as the reverse, the basic model being used to *enhance* the headcount model. Table 6 suggests that there is a difference between the kind of improvement wrought by adding the headcount information to the basic model and adding the basic model to the headcount information. In the former, the headcount information produced a 27% improvement, while the reverse enhancement results in less than one-quarter of that improvement (4%).²¹ In sum, then, the evidence not only supports the weak information hypothesis (I1), suggesting that the Johnson administration counted because counting supplemented its experience, but the data support the stronger hypothesis (I2), as well.

DISCUSSION

Given the data reported here on the Johnson administration, two conclusions seem reasonable extensions worth exploring further. First, while there is some evidence that core supporters are mobilized by the administration's counting effort there seems to be no general signaling effect. Second and in

²¹The reverse enhancements are equally unimpressive for the two other baselines described in notes 5 and 15, *supra*. The results are: the headcount enhancement produced λ 's of 35% and 30% for the ADA and Poole-Rosenthal models. The reverse enhancements to the strong model produced λ 's of less than one-tenth: adding ADA yields 4% and adding Poole-Rosenthal ideals yields 3%.

contrast, the evidence to support the informational uses of counting is very strong. Clearly, counting provided the Johnson administration with excellent information about the legislative situation. As an explanation, then, the informational conjecture seems the best supported of the two.²²

This research, though limited initially to one administration, might suggest how congressional liaison creates a vantage point for any administration. For example, many practitioners are concerned that counting might provide the right signal to the wrong people, generating reaction rather than coordinating solidarity by giving the opposition advance notice of an administration's position. Sinclair (1983, 133) quotes one leadership member who expressed just such a concern: "[s]ometimes a whip count can hurt you; it alerts members that maybe there's some reason they should vote against [a bill]." The data presented here, however, appear to suggest that while counting mobilizes supporters, it probably does not crystallize opponents suggesting that the practitioner's concerns in general are unnecessary. Hence, for pure leadership (i.e., rallying just the faithful) counting seems fairly effective.

Sinclair (1983, 56) also quotes a leadership insider who raises a different concern about counting: "Some people have the view that [the whip counting system] ought to be more of a lobbying operation. It ought to be less of a reflection of the grass-roots sentiment and more of a vehicle for conveying views down the line. I don't think the two functions can be combined effectively. You can't get an *honest* count if the counters are themselves instruments of persuasion [emphasis added]." It seems clear that this insider not only accurately identified the two possible uses of counts (i.e., signaling "down the line" versus intelligence that reflects sentiment) and described a trade-off between the two, but also in identifying this trade-off the insider preferred the informational use. In addition, the insider quoted by Sinclair may have been suggesting that there is a relationship between what might be thought of as the leadership's "tactical" considerations (i.e., how best to get the immediate job done) and its "strategic" considerations (i.e., which jobs are the most important). The insider suggests that the temptation of using counting to further a specific coalition (the tactical consideration on a specific bill) probably must be resisted in favor of the organizational necessity of gathering honest information (the strategic consideration).

²²Of course, the use of the Johnson administration does raise the question of generalizability: Since presumably the Johnson administration was extraordinarily capable of performing and analyzing counts, might the improvements wrought by counting be overestimated? It is possible that the analysis of improvement is biased in favor of counting given the obvious expertise of the Johnson team. On the other hand, no administration had a firmer hand on the anticipated positions of members and yet staff members attest to the fact that the president required that members not be anticipated but that they be contacted personally (Sanders 1979). Such a requirement would be consistent with the generalizability of the strong informational advantages reported here.

This distinction suggests two conclusions worth further exploration. First, signaling to members and bargaining with members probably go hand in hand.²³ From the administration's point of view (the view taken in the discussion up to this point), the signaling involved in counting is narrowly defined as signaling *to* members while information has been developing intelligence about members. But, technically, the intelligence that counting secures is really the result of members *signaling to* the administration about their intentions, or what it would take to obtain their support. For example, on the 1968 Tax Surcharge, the Johnson administration counted extensively and in requesting information received requests very similar to the following: "Kelly (NY). Extremely upset about her redistricting problem. She wants help from the White House to keep Manny Celler from running in her district. She wants a call from the White House on this matter promptly. She won't comment on the tax increase until she hears about her problem" (Memo, Joseph Spilman to Barefoot Sanders, January 31, 1968, Sanders personal papers, box 29, LBJ Library). Given this linkage, it would seem reasonable to suspect that some administrations may decide (strategically) to avoid counting in order to manage the (tactical) demands of members. The potential for such a decision might suggest why some presidents, like Johnson, count extensively while others, like Nixon, do not.

While making a decision to forego the informational advantage of counting sounds a bit like the Weather Service deciding not to consider this morning's conditions in making today's forecast, it should be recalled that the experienced politician has a far more powerful baseline model on which to rely. Given its baseline models, the Weather Service's decision to use current conditions is a "tactical" decision (how best to get the current job done) which dictates strategic implications. The linkage between experience, counting, and bargaining drawn here suggests that for the White House, given its resources and experiences, a strategic consideration (whether to bargain much or not) ought to dictate the tactical decision (to count or not on specific bills). An administration probably needs to be able to judge *a priori* how much bargaining it is willing to encounter in order to improve its coalition management. And its decision probably ought to rest, *a priori*, upon whether it believes it controls the resources necessary for useful bargaining and how serviceable a set of prior expectations about members and coalitions it possesses.

An interesting twist on this suggested conclusion, however, is that while it can utilize its experience, an administration also can overcome a lack of experience in Washington through a strategic decision to concentrate its effort in congressional liaison. In that regard, for example, it is worth noting that one

²³ For an analysis of how signaling and bargaining may be so linked, see Sullivan 1988a.

of the major differences between the Carter and Reagan administrations was not their backlog of experiences in Washington but the past experiences of their two liaison teams. Surely, one of the greatest mistakes of the Carter administration was the strategic decision (apparently made blindly) to invest so much organizational effort in the Domestic Council at the expense of so little investment in the use of an experienced liaison system. Likewise, the greatest single advantage of the early Reagan administration was probably less the president's mandate and more the use of a liaison system with such great ability.²⁴ As one measure of the importance of counting, it should be recalled that President Johnson, the undisputed *master* of the Congress as well as the president with the single greatest backlog of experience as congressional leader, reportedly invested more time and energy in his liaison organization than any other president (see Bowles 1987 or O'Brien 1981).

There is a second strategic consideration about the organizational importance of counts which can be addressed as a result of this research. Its resolution can reflect upon and affect, generally, the organization of the White House policy development process (e.g., the functioning of the Domestic Council) and, more specifically, the transition. The advantage of an administration with some prior Washington experience is that it *can* utilize its past experiences to inform decisions about such strategic issues as the timing, order, even content of the legislative agenda. An experienced administration can use the informational advantages by counting during the transition, when tactical issues are at a minimum, in order to validate or improve upon its prior expectations and thus improve upon its future decisions about the agenda. In this way, the informational advantage of counting becomes an organizational advantage as well by minimizing bargaining yet gleaning the informational advantages of counts.

For every *new* administration, the informational advantage to counting may suggest that the congressional liaison effort can play an important organizational role by providing its administration an excellent opportunity to not only "hit the ground running" but to begin running in the right direction. For an administration without prior Washington experience, this particular informational advantage to counting would seem particularly important.

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²⁴In addition, of course, the early Reagan administration also relied heavily on the OMB for policy-oriented advice, and OMB was headed by a former member of the House, while Carter's OMB was headed by a former Georgia banker with no Washington (let alone Capitol Hill) experience and who spent most of his time fighting efforts to dispose of him.

APPENDIX

This section describes the variables in the “basic model.” The member’s calculus is composed of two major elements: Constituency and Institutional identification. Table A reports on the role that these elements appear to play in final congressional support for the administration.

Constituency as a Force. It is assumed that constituency interests drive member decision making. Thus, similar constituent bases form a “context” within which to unify the administration and the congressional coalition behind a common set of long-term political interests. Other forces afford the president temporary strengths or weaknesses. For example, election suggests a “common fate” so that the ebb and flow of presidential fortunes looms large as an immediate consideration for the member.

Types of Variables. Contextual variables include shared *party* identification and common *ideological* or *regional orientation*. These are well-known influences on decision making and will not be discussed further. Party identification and region are combined into two dichotomous dummies with membership in the Republican conference and membership in the northern wing of the Democratic caucus as the relevant values. Ideology is measured using the score from Americans for Democratic Action averaged over the Eighty-ninth and Ninety-first Congresses.²⁵ In addition, the model includes a variety of constituency descriptors available from the Census Bureau. Together these long-term contextual variables are the model used to estimate member predispositions.

Immediate variables include presidential *prestige* (Edwards 1980; Neustadt 1960; Rivers and Rose 1985) measured in two ways. Gallup approval ratings operationalize general popularity. There is no established norm for measuring the electoral strength of a president in a congressional district after an off-year election has intervened (cf. Edwards 1980; Jacobson 1983; Miller 1955; Moos 1952). The measure employed here is the president’s performance in the district during the previous presidential election (in this case, the 1964 landslide), although this is obviously crude. A final immediate force is the *state of the economy* measured in two ways: the unemployment figure for the nation as a whole and the change in the Consumer Price Index.

Trust. Long-term and short-term constituency forces play a role in decision making because members are vulnerable to their electorates. Obviously, these forces would play less of a role whenever members are completely

²⁵For those members not in both these Congresses the measure was taken as the score from that Congress in which the member did participate.

TABLE A
 BASIC PROBIT MODEL OF VOTING,
 ENHANCED WITH HEADCOUNT INFORMATION

Variables Type/Name	MLE Coefficient	Standard Error	<i>t</i>
Constituency—Contextual			
Republican?	-1.140	.037	-30.563***
Northern demo?	-.295	.052	-5.733***
Ideology	.008	.001	8.230***
% Labor in pub admin.	-2.350	.773	-3.039***
% Labor in agriculture	1.741	.297	5.857***
% Labor in retail/whole	.337	.521	.646
% Labor in transportation	1.407	.962	1.463
% Labor in construction	-4.439	1.548	-2.867**
% Employed private sector	-1.819	.510	-3.568**
% Employed government	-.202	1.146	-.176
% Self employed	-2.535	2.392	-1.060
% Negro	-.046	.196	-.233
% Living in SMSA	1.123	.650	1.727
Median grade education	-.044	.023	-1.893
Median income	.080	.033	2.469*
Party—% in SMSA	-.059	.466	-.127
Party—% Negro	-.554	.564	-.982
Constituency—Immediate			
Unemployment rate	-.678	.071	-9.622***
Inflation rate	.023	.043	.537
LBJ approval rating	.001	.005	.294
LBJ in dist in '64	.009	.002	5.042***
Party—LBJ in dist '64	-.002	.005	-.406
Constituency—Trust			
% District in '66	.007	.002	4.303***
Party—% in dist '64	-.007	.004	-1.771
Institutional Identification			
Seniority	-.003	.001	-3.088**
Demo leader?	.010	.113	.091
Committee value	-.037	.019	-1.929
Counting Information			
Position on initial count	.040	.007	5.746***
Position on final count	.206	.008	24.976***
Constant	2.176		

Notes:

Significant at better than: *.05; **.01; ***.0001.

Number of weighted cases: 11,699.

Summary Statistics:

Likelihood Ratio Statistic: 5310.19

df: 29 Significance: 0.00000

Yule's Q: .92385

% Correct: .83130

ϕ : .66444

adj. $\approx R^2$: .50623

secure in their constituency. Obtaining a degree of support and a quality of support which permits flexibility is the process of receiving constituent *trust*. Securing trust at home allows the member to respond more freely to the president. A member's proportion of the two-party vote total (% *District in '66*) represents trust.

Institutional Identification as a Force. A second set of variables probably ameliorate the impact of constituency just as does trust. It is hypothesized that as they obtain positions of importance with the committee and party hierarchies, members become identified within the maintenance of the coalition-building mechanisms. As a result, they become more willing, everything else equal, to cooperate with the administration in building a policy coalition. Three variables are used to operationalize institutional identification with the party hierarchy and the committee system. Membership in the Democratic party hierarchy is coded as a dummy variable with being in the Democratic leadership as the relevant value. A second measure of identification within the party measures caucus seniority. A member's committee value equals the sum of the value for each committee assignment which in turn is calculated by dividing the member's rank within the committee's caucus by the number of members of that caucus. Then, the additive inverse of this value was added to one and multiplied by the "Bullock value" for the committee (cf. Bullock 1962). The total represents the member's "total committee value."

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