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Measuring Presidential Success in Congress: Alternative Approaches

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There are numerous obstacles to studying presidential-congressional relations. One of the most difficult to overcome is measuring presidential success. This article addresses the theoretical significance of the choice of measures, and develops and analyzes four alternative indices of presidential support in Congress. It concludes that usually it is best to employ individual-level measures of presidential support and that, although different measures produce similar results, it is useful to rely on both broad and exclusive measures in one's research.

Introduction

The question of executive-legislative relations is central in studies of the presidency and of the Congress. It is important to know how powerful the president is in Congress, why he is that powerful, and how the executive and legislative branches of our national government interact. Such political behavior is not only interesting but also has policy consequences for citizens in the United States and other nations. Taxes, inflation, energy supplies, welfare payments, consumer protection, defense expenditures, nuclear arms limitations, and much more are all directly affected by the passage or failure of presidential proposals in Congress. Moreover, anyone interested in policy change or systemic reform, even if this interest does not involve special concern for the workings of either of these branches of the national government, needs to understand how they work together, because usually both branches must reach agreement if there is to be major change.

There are numerous obstacles to studying presidential relations with Congress, including the measurement of independent variables that may explain them and the definition of core concepts such as "influence." An equally difficult problem facing scholars wishing to study presidential-congressional relationships is measuring presidential success. How do we know it when we see it? The question is crucial because some notion of

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presidential success in the House and Senate is the dependent variable most studies of presidential relations with Congress try to explain.

Passage or Support?

The first and perhaps most important step in trying to investigate presidential-congressional relations is to clarify just what it is that we want to explain. Only then can we develop a dependent variable that is a valid measure of that concept. Although this may appear to be a straightforward or even pedestrian task, it is actually a stage at which researchers may easily stumble and undermine the remainder of their efforts.

The fundamental question here is whether we are interested in explaining presidential influence or leadership in eliciting congressional support for his proposals or simply presidential success in obtaining passage of his legislation per se. Although at first glance "passage" seems at least as important to investigate as "support," there is less to such a study than meets the eye. Because success in passing legislation is an aggregate concept, the results of an analysis focused on it cannot provide a solid basis for inferences about the causes of congressional behavior. Instead, we are left with conclusions such as: presidents have greater success in obtaining congressional passage of their programs when they have a cohesive majority in Congress. This is correct, of course, but it is also virtually a truism and actually explains very little, especially about congressional behavior. We can make few theoretical advances in pursuing such a course.

If the dependent variable is a yearly aggregate of presidential success in obtaining passage of legislation, it will mask variability in support for the president among individual members of Congress or groups of members. This level of aggregation makes inferences about the causes of behavior of individual members of Congress toward the president very tenuous. Moreover, for most purposes it makes very little theoretical sense to combine aggregate figures for the House and the Senate.

The figures in table 1 help illustrate the problems of using aggregate measures of presidential success. They represent *Congressional Quarterly*'s calculations of the president's victories on votes on which he took a stand. (CQ dropped its well-known boxscore of legislation passed after 1975 because of its severe validity problems. Such boxscores present formidable measurement problems that remain to be solved.)

Examining these data, we cannot tell whether Republicans or Democrats or those from the North or the South respond differently to various influences on their voting. Nor can we compare the House with the Senate. It is also obvious that party seats dominate the variance in victories over time, but there is no straightforward way to control for their impact. Without knowing who is supporting the president, it is difficult to understand why

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TABLE 1

PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESS ON VOTES IN CONGRESS

PRESIDENT	YEAR	% VICTORIES
Eisenhower	1953	89
	1954	83
	1955	75
	1956	70
	1957	68
	1958	76
	1959	52
	1960	65
Kennedy	1961	81
	1962	85
	1963	87
Johnson	1964	88
	1965	93
	1966	79
	1967	79
	1968	75
Nixon	1969	74
	1970	77
	1971	75
	1972	66
	1973	51
	1974	60
Ford	1974	58
	1975	61
	1976	54
Carter	1977	75
	1978	78
	1979	77
	1980	75
Reagan	1981	82
	1982	72
	1983	67
	1984	66

Source: *Congressional Quarterly*.

they are doing so. In addition, measures of success share all the problems of support that we discuss below (see Edwards, 1980, pp. 14-15).

Aggregate data may be useful if one is concerned with comparisons of political eras (Cohen, 1982), success rates of different presidents (Hammond and Fraser, 1984), or the success of proposals introduced at various points in the electoral cycle (Light, 1982). But the more concerned we are with the rigorous investigation of theoretically significant questions of causation, the less likely it is that aggregate measures will suffice.

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Because of the limitations of boxscores, we are usually better off employing measures of presidential support calculated separately for each member of Congress. Starting with individual-level data, we can disaggregate our analysis as much as our theory and independent variables will allow and compute aggregate figures for groups of representatives and senators when it is appropriate to do so. Beginning with one aggregate figure to represent behavior, on the other hand, makes it impossible to disaggregate it to the individual level.

MEASURING SUPPORT

The second crucial step in exploring presidential-congressional relations is to develop measures of presidential support. This is not an easy task, and efforts to measure support inevitably raise important theoretical issues.

One of these issues goes to the heart of attempts to understand presidential support in Congress. The essential question is what votes to include in a measure of support. This is of critical importance because we want to know whether possible explanatory variables such as public approval or legislative skills operate uniformly across all issues and all votes on them or whether they influence some issues and votes more than others. Very broad measures of presidential support may mask important relationships that may be revealed when more exclusive measures are used. Conversely, relationships that appear to hold across a wide range of issues and votes may actually be weak or nonexistent on especially significant matters.

There is considerable controversy and little consensus on what measure of presidential support is most appropriate. The most commonly employed measure of presidential support is *Congressional Quarterly*'s Presidential Support Scores. Yet scholars have often criticized this index for weighing all issues equally and for including lopsided votes and often several votes on the same issue (see, for example, Edwards, 1980, pp. 50-53; King, 1983, p. 253; Manley, 1977, pp. 36-52; Wayne, 1978, pp. 168-72). In other words, some scholars find Presidential Support Scores rather blunt measures that may obscure as much as they reveal. On the other hand, Sigelman (1979, 1981) focused only on key votes, but was criticized by Shull and LeLoup (1981) for doing so.

In the pages that follow we develop and compare four indices of presidential support in both the House and the Senate over the period 1953-83. Our goal is to obtain a clear understanding of the advantages and drawbacks of various ways of measuring presidential support and the implications of using them in our research. We also want to see whether the indices produce distinctive results. If they do not, we can reach the theoretically significant conclusion that there is stability in congressional voting on presidential requests. Conversely, if there are distinctive differences in the

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results, we will be in a better position to choose the measure or measures best suited to specific research questions.

The Indices

In this section we discuss four different measures of presidential support in Congress. They range from the very comprehensive (Overall Support) to the very selective (Key Votes). Each is designed to capture a different aspect of presidential support, and the second, third, and fourth indices, which are increasingly exclusive, are designed to remedy certain drawbacks in the first and broadest measure.

Overall Support

Our most inclusive index of presidential success in Congress is Overall Support. It includes all the votes on which the president has taken a stand. The basis for determining these issues is CQ's yearly almanacs. CQ analyzes all the public statements and messages of the president to determine what legislation he personally desires or does not desire. Only issues on which the president has taken a personal stand are included in the indices. Moreover, CQ includes votes only if the legislation that the president originally supported is voted on in a similar form; issues are excluded if they have been so extensively amended that a vote can no longer be characterized as reflecting support for or opposition to the president. Furthermore, the position of the president at the time of the vote serves as the basis for measuring support or opposition because the president may have altered his earlier position or changed his view after the vote took place. Finally, key votes to recommit, reconsider, or table are also included; and appropriations bills are included only if they deal with specific funds that the president requested be added or deleted. This latter point helps distinguish between the president and the institutionalized presidency.

Although we rely on CQ's judgments of the issues on which the president has taken a personal stand, we have not simply adopted CQ's Presidential Support Scores. Our index of Overall Support was coded independently, partially because of occasional errors in the CQ calculations, partially due to CQ's deletion of certain votes on the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and partially due to our handling of paired votes (discussed below).

There are drawbacks as well as advantages to an index that measures the support of members of Congress on all the votes on which the president has taken a stand. Such an index may include lopsided votes and many votes on the same issue, and it weighs issues equally. To deal with each of these limitations of an inclusive measure of presidential support, we must develop a series of increasingly restrictive indices. Thus, we will employ

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three other measures of presidential support in Congress. We should note, however, that there is no evidence that presidents have varied in their use of "posturing," that is, trying to inflate their degree of congressional support by proposing popular but frivolous legislation or by withholding unpopular legislation. Although some of each has undoubtedly occurred, there seem to be no systematic differences among presidents.

Nonunanimous Support

Because many of the issues on which the president takes a stand are not controversial and are decided by near-unanimous votes, including them in a measure of presidential support can distort the results by inflating the measurement of support. Moreover, because the number of these votes varies over time, including them in a measure of presidential support can distort attempts to correlate the measure with possible explanatory variables. Finally, comparisons between the House and Senate may be distorted if these votes are included because the Senate tends to have more unanimous votes, due, at least in part, to its special responsibilities for confirming appointments and ratifying treaties, most of which are not controversial.

To avoid the problem of unanimous votes, we employ Nonunanimous Support, an index of support for the president's stands on votes on which the winning side received less than 80 percent of the vote. Although 80 percent is inevitably a somewhat arbitrary figure, it is a reasonable cutoff point for votes on which presidential influence appears to be largely irrelevant. It is worthwhile to note that there are many instances of near-unanimous votes that the president *lost*. Evidently the president felt it necessary to take a principled stand against hopeless odds. A drawback to such a measure is that the overwhelming consensus on an issue may be due to the president's influence. Thus, we may lose useful information when we omit unanimous and near-unanimous votes from an index of presidential support.

Single-Vote Support

It is very often the case that there are many roll-call votes on the same issue. In some cases there are a dozen or more votes on one bill as amendment after amendment is decided by roll-call vote. In the most extreme case, the Senate took 116 roll-call votes on the 1964 Civil Rights Act. When one issue provides a substantial percentage of the votes on which the president took a stand, the potential for distortion is obvious. The resulting index will be biased toward both the president's influence and the broader configuration of forces at work on that one issue.

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To avoid this problem we employ Single-Vote Support, an index of the support for the president's stands on the most important nonunanimous vote (see above) on each bill. Thus, there is only one vote per bill in this index. If a key vote (see below) was designated for an issue, that is the vote we use in the index. If there were two key votes and one was on final passage, we use the latter. If there were two key votes and neither was on final passage, the one with the closest vote was used on the theory that these are the best tests of the president's influence. Typically, however, there was no key vote designated by CQ. In this case the first choice was the vote on final passage of the bill. If this was not available, the most closely contested remaining vote was used.

There is no objective way to determine the most important vote on a bill. Although passage is often the crucial vote, at other times hotly contested amendments or even procedural votes may be more significant. Moreover, by choosing among amendments on the basis of how closely contested they were, there is the possibility of choosing the votes on which the president was simply less successful and excluding votes on which he was more influential. We simply cannot tell. Finally, some bills, though only a few, cover several disparate issues. For example, consideration of the fiscal 1983 continuing appropriations bill in the Senate included votes on the MX missile, the Clinch River breeder reactor, FTC licensing of professions, public works jobs, social security benefits, abortion funding, and funds for Central American guerrillas. Thus, by excluding multiple votes on the same issue we both avoid and create problems in measuring presidential support.

Key Votes

Each year CQ selects "key votes" that occurred in each house during the session. The criteria for selecting these votes are one or more of the following: (1) a matter of major controversy; (2) a test of presidential or political power; (3) a decision of potentially great impact on the nation and lives of Americans. A measure of presidential support relying on key votes is attractive because these votes represent only significant issues, and thus help us to avoid the problem of distorting measurements of presidential success with less important issues. It is possible that a president's success on relatively inconsequential issues may mask his failure to obtain support on more major matters.

Nevertheless, there are several reasons to exercise caution in the use of key votes. First, the president does not take a stand on all key votes. Over the thirty-one years covered here, the president took a stand on 73 percent of the key votes in the House and 66 percent in the Senate. Since 1969 the figures are even lower: 58 percent and 55 percent, respectively. Thus, we

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cannot cavalierly employ all key votes for our study. Second, some key votes (7 percent in the House and 10 percent in the Senate) are unanimous under our definition of the winning side receiving at least 80 percent of the vote and thus may not be a useful test of presidential influence. Third, the number of key votes on which the president has taken a stand is very small, the yearly average in each house being nine votes. This is a very modest basis for generalizations about presidential influence in Congress. Fourth, sometimes there is more than one key vote on a single issue, presenting yet another of the problems we have tried to avoid earlier.

Finally, although weighting votes equally may mask important information, it also has certain advantages. What appear to be the most significant votes are not necessarily the best tests of presidential influence or leadership. Even if we know the president's complete set of priorities (which we do not), and even if he had a comprehensive set of priorities (which he does not), each member of Congress responds to presidential requests with his or her own set of priorities (to the degree that the member has one). Since we cannot assume that the issues the president cares about most and therefore fights hardest for are those issues that members of Congress care about most, we cannot assume that these issues are the best tests of presidential influence. The president's task in such cases is not necessarily especially difficult, as the occasional near-unanimous results on key votes indicate.

Another reason that the varying degrees of presidential effort to influence Congress may not be a particularly serious problem is that direct involvement of the president and his staff is only one of several potential sources of influences. A number of others, such as public approval and party affiliation, are not manipulatable on a given issue but may be important influences on congressional voting. Moreover, White House legislative activities are frequently strategic rather than tactical. In other words, they are aimed at generating general goodwill and not at gaining a particular person's vote on a particular issue. Thus, we should not assume that presidential tactical efforts are dominant in determining congressional votes.

The Indices in Perspective

Because of their individual limitations, we should be hesitant in selecting any one of the indices to serve as *the* dependent variable for studies of presidential leadership in Congress. Rather than relying on a single measure of presidential support, then, we may choose to employ more than one measure. Together they should provide a more complete picture of presidential support. Using more than one measure not only increases the probability of our understanding presidential influence, but it also allows

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us to identify the types of votes that correlate most highly with different independent variables.

In addition to their separate limitations, the indices also share some problems. They are based solely on roll-call votes, yet many significant decisions are made in committee and on non-roll-call votes. Although there is evidence that roll-call votes reflect less visible decisions (see Clausen, 1973, pp. 19-20; Unekis, 1978), we do not know for certain. Nevertheless, roll-call votes typically occur on a wide range of significant issues and are worthy of study in and of themselves, and roll-call votes are the only systematic data available on the decisions of the individual members of Congress.

Another problem is nonvoting. Support scores are lowered by absent members of Congress. Most absences are due to illnesses or official business, but some absences occur when members of Congress desire to support or oppose the president but do not want to express their positions publicly. There is simply no way to know how to interpret absences. Thus, we are forced to assume that the reasons for nonvoting balance out and are evenly distributed throughout each house. This assumption is probably safe since members from each region have similar rates of voting participation on these sets of roll calls. Moreover, those who were unable to participate in voting because of prolonged illness, death, or resignation were eliminated from the analysis. Anyone voting on fewer than 50 percent of the votes in the Overall Support index was deleted. Unlike CQ, we count announced pairs the same as votes since they have the same effect. Moreover, this gives us a more accurate view of presidential support.

It is important to note that each of these indices produces a score for each member of Congress in each year rather than a yearly aggregate for each house or the entire Congress. They allow us to measure the level of support for a president's program provided by each representative and senator or by any group of them; thus, we are not limited to a measure for the House or the Senate or the Congress as a whole.

Computation

Calculating each of these four measures involves a massive data-gathering task. We first examined each of the several thousand roll-call votes taken in the House and the Senate during the 1953-83 period to identify those on which the president had taken a stand, those that were won by more than 80 percent of the vote, those that were on the same issue, and those that were key votes.

The next step was to calculate the percentage of support each member of Congress gave the president on the votes represented in each measure in each year. To arrive at these percentages we simply divided the number of

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times a member of Congress voted or announced a pair for the president's position by the number of stands the president took. These calculations produced over 66,000 index scores.

Relationships among the Indices

Once we have calculated the indices for every member of Congress, we need to compare them to learn whether they measure presidential support in distinctive ways. Tables 2 and 3 present the averages for the entire House

Table 2

Presidential Support in the House, 1953-83 (%)

Year	Overall Support	Nonunanimous Support	Single-Vote Support	Key Votes
1953	63	58	58	55
1954	61	55	55	52
1955	58	47	47	44
1956	63	54	55	57
1957	53	50	49	59
1958	59	53	54	52
1959	52	47	49	48
1960	51	52	48	48
1961	59	54	55	49
1962	62	55	53	50
1963	59	53	52	54
1964	61	56	57	54
1965	50	59	59	59
1966	59	52	52	54
1967	60	51	52	51
1968	61	51	53	48
1969	53	52	52	51
1970	61	49	49	45
1971	58	53	51	53
1972	56	55	55	43
1973	48	46	46	47
1974	51	47	47	52
1975	43	47	47	44
1976	44	43	42	44
1977	57	51	54	50
1978	56	55	51	50
1979	54	50	49	49
1980	55	51	51	43
1981	54	54	50	50
1982	51	44	40	45
1983	44	45	39	45

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TABLE 3

PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT IN THE SENATE, 1953-83 (%)

YEAR	OVERALL SUPPORT	NONUNANIMOUS SUPPORT	SINGLE-VOTE SUPPORT	KEY VOTES
1953	58	54	55	59
1954	58	56	55	52
1955	66	53	51	52
1956	58	52	52	52
1957	64	56	52	59
1958	58	51	51	50
1959	52	44	42	47
1960	53	50	54	48
1961	58	55	54	54
1962	58	53	51	47
1963	60	54	53	61
1964	62	61	53	53
1965	61	57	53	64
1966	55	47	50	58
1967	60	51	52	58
1968	50	44	47	55
1969	56	51	54	45
1970	56	47	44	50
1971	53	47	48	52
1972	56	49	48	62
1973	49	41	38	43
1974	48	40	44	50
1975	56	48	47	39
1976	50	42	40	39
1977	63	53	55	50
1978	57	53	51	58
1979	62	55	60	50
1980	56	51	51	48
1981	66	58	60	62
1982	60	55	49	48
1983	60	58	53	52

and Senate, respectively, for each of the four indices of presidential support over the 1953-83 period. They will help to give us an overview of the relationships between the measures.

Comparing Overall Support with Nonunanimous Support, we can see that the latter index is often not significantly lower than the former. The level of decline depends on the number of lopsided votes in the session (there were forty-nine in the House in 1967 and ninety-five in the Senate in 1973) and the percentage of them that go in the same direction. We should not assume that near-unanimous votes are always in the president's favor.

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In 1981, for example, there were twenty such votes in the House, but 40 percent of them went against the president.

Turning to comparisons between Nonunanimous Support and Single-Vote Support, we generally find very small differences between the two. Evidently, including more than one vote on an issue in an index of presidential support has little impact on the measure.

Support for the president measured by the Key Votes index is usually very similar to support on Single-Vote Support in the House, but there are differences of more than 5 percentage points in five of the years here (1957,

TABLE 4

NUMBER OF VOTES IN INDICES OF HOUSE PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT

YEAR	OVERALL SUPPORT	NONUNANIMOUS SUPPORT	SINGLE-VOTE SUPPORT	KEY VOTES
1953	32	26	19	7
1954	38	20	14	8
1955	41	24	10	5
1956	34	20	15	8
1957	60	44	19	5
1958	50	37	24	9
1959	54	43	29	11
1960	43	36	19	8
1961	65	48	34	12
1962	60	43	26	12
1963	72	53	32	11
1964	52	37	25	9
1965	112	73	36	17
1966	104	67	39	12
1967	127	78	44	11
1968	103	59	40	11
1969	47	28	20	8
1970	65	36	31	9
1971	57	45	18	7
1972	37	27	21	6
1973	125	96	48	9
1974	107	65	38	8
1975	89	74	52	12
1976	51	43	33	7
1977	79	52	26	6
1978	113	91	48	12
1979	145	113	41	12
1980	117	81	40	10
1981	76	56	23	12
1982	77	53	36	9
1983	82	79	46	11

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TABLE 5

NUMBER OF VOTES IN INDICES OF SENATE PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT

YEAR	OVERALL SUPPORT	NONUNANIMOUS SUPPORT	SINGLE-VOTE SUPPORT	KEY VOTES
1953	49	38	15	6
1954	77	63	30	7
1955	52	23	13	8
1956	65	54	19	6
1957	57	39	19	4
1958	98	73	29	10
1959	121	87	36	13
1960	86	63	25	9
1961	124	102	35	9
1962	125	91	30	11
1963	116	80	32	8
1964	203	163	21	10
1965	162	120	37	16
1966	125	87	29	8
1967	167	104	32	7
1968	164	124	34	11
1969	72	47	22	10
1970	91	52	30	6
1971	82	61	19	12
1972	46	31	18	8
1973	185	90	40	9
1974	151	108	46	9
1975	95	57	29	6
1976	53	32	25	7
1977	89	60	28	6
1978	151	122	40	8
1979	161	117	46	9
1980	116	85	37	11
1981	128	78	28	11
1982	119	88	24	8
1983	85	72	29	6

1961, 1972, 1980, and 1983). We should not conclude, however, that even in these years the Key Vote index has tapped a special aspect of presidential support. In 1957, for example, there were only five key votes in the House on which President Eisenhower took a stand. One of these was a near-unanimous vote on the Eisenhower Mideast Doctrine, and three of the remaining four votes were ones disproportionately likely to elicit support from the Democratic majority: two on the 1957 Civil Rights Act and one on Mutual Security (foreign aid) appropriations. Since the number of key votes in a session of Congress is always small, one or two near-unanimous or

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deviant votes loom large in percentage terms. The number of votes in each index in each chamber in each year is shown in tables 4 and 5.

Differences between the Single-Vote Support and Key Votes indices are typically greater in the Senate than in the House. In fourteen of the thirty years the differences are more than 5 percentage points, although in only seven years do the differences exceed 7 percentage points. As in the House, the inclusion of near-unanimous votes and the small number of votes included in the Key Votes index magnifies any real differences between the indices.

When the Key Vote index deviates from the Single-Vote Support index in either house, there is little consistency in the direction. Thus, we cannot conclude that presidents typically do better or worse on those votes they presumably care most about.

A second way of comparing the results of the different measures of presidential support is to examine them in a more aggregate form that

TABLE 6

AGGREGATE PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT, 1953-83 (%)

President's Party	Members' Party	Overall Support	Nonunanimous Support	Single-Vote Support	Key Votes
House					
All	All	55	51	51	50
All	Democrats	55	51	49	48
All	Republicans	56	50	50	51
Republican	Republicans	65	65	64	66
Republican	Democrats	46	39	38	37
Republican	All	54	50	49	49
Democrat	Republicans	40	28	29	26
Democrat	Democrats	69	69	68	66
Democrat	All	58	53	53	51

President's Party	Senators' Party	Overall Support	Nonunanimous Support	Single-Vote Support	Key Votes
Senate					
All	All	57	51	51	52
All	Democrats	53	45	45	47
All	Republicans	61	57	55	57
Republican	Republicans	69	68	67	68
Republican	Democrats	46	35	34	36
Republican	All	57	50	49	51
Democrat	Republicans	48	39	38	39
Democrat	Democrats	64	61	61	64
Democrat	All	59	53	53	55

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smooths out some of the inevitable yearly distortions in the measurements. Table 6 displays a variety of aggregate percentages for each index for both the House and the Senate. Because of the strong influence of party affiliation on presidential support, we include controls for both the party of the president and the members of Congress.

The results are striking. Despite the substantial differences in how the indices are measured and the number of votes included in each year, the aggregate results reveal a strong consistency among the indices, especially among the three more exclusive ones. In no instance in the entire table do the differences among these three indices exceed 3 percentage points.

A third method of evaluating the relationships among the measures of presidential support is to correlate them with each other. When we do so we must use a dummy variable to control for the party of the president because much of the variance in the indices, especially for party groups, may be the result of the changes in the party occupying the White House that occurred in 1961, 1969, 1977, and 1981.

TABLE 7

CORRELATIONS (r) BETWEEN HOUSE INDICES OF PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT

	NONUNANIMOUS SUPPORT	SINGLE-VOTE SUPPORT	KEY VOTES
Overall Support			
All Representatives	.53	.58	.31
Democrats	.67	.64	.55
Republicans	.74	.64	.38
Northern Democrats	.86	.81	.78
Southern Democrats	.70	.62	.61
Nonunanimous Support			
All Representatives		.90	.56
Democrats		.84	.67
Republicans		.87	.51
Northern Democrats		.87	.85
Southern Democrats		.90	.81
Single-Vote Support			
All Representatives			.54
Democrats			.59
Republicans			.59
Northern Democrats			.76
Southern Democrats			.71

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TABLE 8

CORRELATIONS (r) BETWEEN SENATE INDICES OF PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT

	NONUNANIMOUS SUPPORT	SINGLE-VOTE SUPPORT	KEY VOTES
Overall Support			
All Senators	.87	.73	.42
Democrats	.80	.56	.34
Republicans	.93	.69	.38
Northern Democrats	.89	.65	.51
Southern Democrats	.89	.63	.47
Nonunanimous Support			
All Senators		.81	.42
Democrats		.82	.47
Republicans		.81	.39
Northern Democrats		.78	.58
Southern Democrats		.82	.58
Single-Vote Support			
All Senators			.42
Democrats			.55
Republicans			.64
Northern Democrats			.53
Southern Democrats			.69

The results of these computations for the entire House and Senate and for party groups are shown in tables 7 and 8. The correlations are typically quite high, although there are a few exceptions. The Senate figures are as a whole a bit lower than those for the House. The Nonunanimous Support index seems to be the most representative of the four. It has the strongest correlations with the others: very high correlations with Single-Vote Support and generally strong relationships with Overall Support and Key Votes.

WHITE HOUSE MEASURES OF PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT

From 1961 through 1967 the Kennedy and Johnson White Houses compiled their own presidential support scores for each member of Congress. Although at first glance using these measures seems appealing, they have several drawbacks for our use—in addition to their existing only for seven of the thirty-one years of our study.

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The White House voting scores were compiled over the years by different people using vague criteria. This raises substantial questions of validity and reliability. If we look at 1965, for example, we find that from mid-October to mid-November the White House developed at least seven different lists of the major items in the president's legislative program. This should give us little confidence in the selection of votes for the support scores.

There is also a question of accuracy. In the 1965 Senate study the presidential support percentages listed for each senator are impossible to obtain from the data provided. Either the percentages were simply calculated incorrectly, or there was some additional step in the calculations that the Office of Congressional Relations failed to report. At any rate, we can have little confidence in its figures.

We should also not overlook the possibility that the voting support studies done in the White House were in part self-serving. For example, absences did not count against support scores, inflating almost everyone's support levels. In 1965, for example, Senator Eugene McCarthy had the second highest presidential support rating (98 percent) although he was absent from 35 percent of the votes.

The Office of Congressional Relations' strongest objection to the use of CQ's support scores was the inclusion of noncontroversial votes. Since we have excluded these votes in our Nonunanimous Support index, we have, in effect, developed an index such as the White House desired—but in a more systematic manner.

Conclusion

In this study we have seen that it is important to be clear about what one wants to research. To investigate most theoretically significant questions about presidential success in Congress, it is best to begin with individual-level data. This is more suited to an emphasis on explanation than are more aggregate measures.

The question of which votes to include in an index of presidential support is also theoretically important. The results of our analysis of the four measures of presidential support in Congress have been very revealing. No matter how we compare the indices, it is clear that they have a great deal in common. Although this is especially true of the Nonunanimous Support and Single-Vote Support indices, the differences among all four of the indices are typically small. Presidential support seems to be due to factors that operate with a large degree of similarity across a wide range of roll-call votes. This stability in congressional responsiveness to presidential proposals is theoretically quite significant, and it should make us skeptical of emphasis on idiosyncratic or personalistic factors as fundamental explanations for presidential success in Congress.

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Yet there are some differences between both the computation and the results of the indices which are important to consider. For example, Overall Support appears artificially to inflate support levels while Key Votes have a tendency to be somewhat idiosyncratic. Thus, careful researchers will want to employ more than one measure of presidential support when studying the impact of independent variables such as presidential approval levels in the public or the president's legislative skills on support for his programs in Congress.

The best approach is probably to use the Nonunanimous Support and Key Votes indices in conjunction when analyzing presidential success in Congress. Nonunanimous Support is a comprehensive index subject to few distortions, while Key Votes, if used with caution, may reveal relationships that a broader measure masks. Single-Vote Support is not distinctive from Nonunanimous Support and is less inclusive, while Overall Support is too prone to distortion to be of much use for most purposes.

At the same time, we should remember that although roll-call votes are obviously important, they only compose a segment of executive-legislative relations. Most important, they do not necessarily reflect strategic decisions in the White House regarding matters such as exploiting a public mood, framing a particular issue, moving an agenda early, or bypassing the committee structure. Thus, we need to focus our attention on how presidents attempt to structure legislators' choices in addition to the influences on individual decisions.

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