

PRESIDENTIAL PERSUASION, REPUTATION, AND CONGRESSIONAL RESPONSES TO DEAD DUCKS

For over forty years, we have known that persuasion occupies the core of presidential power. The president's ability to convince others, particularly members of Congress, represents the standard of presidential influence. Some analysts (e.g., Edwards 1980, 1989; Rivers and Rose; Bond and Fleisher) have taken decidedly empirical approaches to studying this standard. Others (e.g., Hammond and Miller 1987; Kiewit and McCubbins 1988; Canes-Wrone 2001; Cameron 1998; McCarty 1997, 2000) have developed formal models of basic constitutional strictures, like the veto, which might shape influence. While these two literatures clearly illuminate something of presidential influence – aggregate congressional patterns or constitutional sequencing – neither elucidates presidential persuasion itself nor how members of congress respond to presidential entreaties.

This paper elaborates a theory which captures much of what we have come to consider the central themes about presidential persuasion. For example, it models the way in which Washingtonians assess presidential capacities by connecting one choice to another presidential choice and how that anticipated picture (or reputation) plays a role in the choices they would make in turn to support the President's lead. It models how the president's reputation among members in Congress about the strategic use of available presidential resources affects the president's potential for effective persuasion. And, in turn, it models those Washingtonians' estimations of what they can expect when considering the use of strategic ploys, or bluffs, when subjected to administration persuasion. And it models the president's capacity for setting priorities, and how these choices affect the president's willingness for concession or steadfastness in pursuing persuasion. In many ways, all of these topics should sound familiar as they compose a list of the topics of Richard Neustadt's (1960) original observations about the character of presidential influence.

In analyzing this theory and its resultant game model, this paper reports a number of results about a second characteristic common to both the presidency and the Congress: the effect of time's passage. Since the twenty-second constitutional amendment, the power of time has diverged for the presidency and Congress. Despite its obvious importance as a central constraint on presidential power, scholars have paid little attention to presidential tenure effects. Similarly, for more than a century, longevity has empowered congressional careers. Despite that importance, scholars have paid little theoretical attention to increasing tenure or how it might affect members' responses to presidential leadership. Interpreting our general theory of bargaining highlights such tenure related effects, including oft-described though divergent tenure patterns: the presidential "lame duck" effect and the congressional seniority effect.

The systematic decline of presidential fortunes and the importance of congressional seniority present one common challenge: they both occur in unobserved perceptions and confidential bargaining. Our theory explicitly considers these unobserved attitudes and analyzes how they affect this confidential process. The analysis of this model, therefore, puts us in a unique position to take advantage of an historical opportunity revealing how tenure affects persuasion. We combine this useful theory and revealing historical episode with unique data on bargaining: using Lyndon Johnson's sudden withdrawal from presidential politics in 1968 and data derived from his administration's files, we test our "general tenure effect." We first demonstrate in theory and then in empirical patterns that becoming a dead duck complicates president-led coalition efforts. Our theory suggests, further, that seniority poses its own special coalition problems, making senior members a coalitional wild-card. And we can demonstrate with empirical results just how wild they can become.

The next section summarizes a simple formal theory of presidential persuasion. From it, we generate two tenure related empirical expectations – one focusing on the President’s and one focusing on congressional tenure. We conclude with a discussion of the general nature of presidential persuasion in a world of maturing congressional careers.

ANALYZING PERSUASION

Most theoretical works on presidential influence begin with the constitutional setting, with institutional actors rather than individuals and with fixed (Article I, section 7) game structures. This “structural model” of persuasion has pretty standard results putting the president at great disadvantage (mostly as a theoretical result of reacting under perfect information) [see Morris and Munger’s discussion of the “congressional dominance theorem”) and which seems to comport with empirical patterns of floor voting support for presidential initiatives [see Bond and Fliesher]. Our formal approach to persuasion and coalition formation differs from these approaches in several ways. It begins with the individual president instead of the institution, as in so many spatial models of the power of the presidential veto or presidential leadership on budgets or in congressional delegation. Our formal analysis begins with similar theoretical roots, with Richard Neustadt’s seminal comment about the character of presidential influence: that it involves “mutual dependence” (1960: 356). While their influence constrains that of congressional majorities, Neustadt points out, presidents also *depend* upon those same majorities for their own influence. We also take seriously the notion of professional reputations, a common element of Neustadt’s and sometimes employed in other theoretical models, though initially we focus more on the *presidential* estimation of member reputations rather than the other way around. Eventually, in the conclusion, we take up members’ estimations of presidential competences, an entirely Neustadtian theme. And we take seriously Neustadt’s other commonplace, the President’s capacity to set priorities and mold strategic decisions.

We consider four elements as central: decision-makers, the constitutional sequence, anticipation, and repetition.¹ The details of this formal theory appear in the Appendix. Because it employs a common game theoretic approach and utilizes a standard solution concept, Kreps-Wilson, the formal theory presented there demonstrates that much of our understanding of presidential persuasion would fall within the grasp of “normal” theory, requiring no disquieting over-simplifications or leaps of faith. This section provides an articulation of that formal calculus, highlighting two central elements: the passage of time and expectations. The first of these mirrors common ideas about such phenomena as the lame duck presidency, the honeymoon, and congressional seniority. The second mimics the presidents’ needs for keeping counsel in setting priorities and judging the reputations of others.

Decision-makers and Their Preferences

We start with a dyadic relationship between the President and a single member of Congress in need of presidential persuasion. While this analysis coincides with a standard approach found in the formal literature, i.e., start simply and build to n-members (see Ingberman and Yao or Groseclose and Snyder), we assert a different reason for beginning this way. Regardless of the complexities of n-person logrolling, coalitional stability, *etc.*, the President’s efforts *per force* narrow to persuading individuals. As Chris Matthews would say, presidential persuasion involves “retail,” not “wholesale,” politics. Later, in the empirical section we show that taking into account the collective responses of others plays a role in

¹Ingberman and Yao proposed allowing the President to make a commitment prior to the beginning of the process; a commitment to veto certain kinds of policies. Tied to future reputational considerations, they argue, the President can better shape the outcome. Prior commitment in this way adds a non-constitutional element to the sequence, but its effect seems entirely derived from the fact that the congressional opponents cannot make similar commitments tying themselves to their reputations and negating in effect the effect of any precommitment.

bargaining but in a way quite consistent with our theory: wholesale politics has retail roots.² Consider the collective action problem of trying to secure an administration policy concession. If, in seeking a concession, members could present a unified front of reluctance, they can maximize their joint influence. When facing such broad-based hesitation, however, an administration could decide that since it cannot get the votes it needs, it should withdraw its proposal.³ In such circumstances, the hesitating member ends up with two unpleasant results: a demonstrated reluctance to support the administration *and* a scuttled policy that the member would actually have preferred. Obviously, then, hesitating for effect in this way (what some might call bluffing) becomes a collective action problem just as expected. Yet, even under those circumstances, members' interactions still narrow to individual exchanges: each must signal the administration through confidential, face-to-face interactions. So, no matter the n-person situation, persuasion still becomes a one on one affair, as we assume here.

Our decision-makers have typical preferences, represented by von-Neumann Morgenstern utility functions applied to a single dimension. Hence, preferences decline with "distance."

Decision Sequence

Most of the formal models in the Hammond and Miller (1987) tradition model Article I, Section 7, which defines the basic policy-making sequence as beginning with Congress. Our analysis elaborates that constitutional sequence in three ways. First, we allow a presidential policy proposal to initiate decision-making. We, thus, can focus on the member's decision to support the administration or not using a more realistic theoretical setting. In our theory, and like in much of the empirical world, the President proposes and the Congress disposes.⁴ Second, we assume a bargaining process that takes place over time (hence, allowing for signals and persuasion). Third, we allow for bargaining through several interactions, permitting the development of expectations and reputations.

Figure 1 illustrates the first of these assumptions. After the President proposes a policy, the member has two options: "commit" to the President (either in support or opposition), or "hesitate," something short of a commitment. As demonstrated in x, members who respond with a firm commitment in fact never deviate from their stated course of action. Since such commitments remain firm, the analysis and figure ignores this branch and these two possibilities as non-strategic.

The remaining sequence captures persuasion's give and take, the subject here. After receiving a member's signal, the President has two options: "concede" a favor hoping to convert the hesitant member or "persevere" without granting a favor. In response, the member has two voting options: to vote *for* the administration's position or to vote *against* it. Each branch of the game in Figure 1 defines a "history" of play. Our model highlights four, each involving initial hesitation: Hesitate-Concede-*for*; Hesitate-Concede-*against*; Hesitate-Persevere-*for*; and Hesitate-Persevere-*against*. Later, we use the information that a President's can glean from observing these histories to assess equilibrium strategies in persuasion.

Each history results in outcomes, themselves composed of policy benefits (B) and presidential concessions (C) or punishments (P), subscripted for either the President or the member (*p* or *m*). Consider the history Hesitate-Concede-*against*. It yields the bill's failure. The President considers failure as negative ($-B_p$) while the genuinely hesitant member views it as beneficial ($+B_m$). Note that the history Hesitate-Persevere-*for* reveals a member's bluff.

² The model explicitly excludes some elements we will consider later. For example, we do not vary the agenda weight across bills. This assumption does not imply that agenda items get the same treatment. It presumes, instead, that the administration makes gross distinctions between items that OMB might cite as: "on the President's personal agenda."

³ See Dodd and Sullivan. Facing unexpected responses to its 1973 Impoundment Control bill, the House leadership withdrew its version, weakening its preferred legislation by creating instead what became the Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1973.

⁴ Because we do not assume complete information (see text below), allowing the president to "go first" in this way has no theoretical implication (as it normally does under complete information) while lending an air of verisimilitude.

Eventually, we identify a sequential equilibrium to this game, and from this equilibrium, we can identify comparative statics which model tenure.

The Impact of Anticipation

Current formal theories assume “complete information:” that the President, the congressional majorities and their organizers, have a thorough understanding of each others’ preferences. We call this understanding “precision anticipation” to emphasize that decision-makers employ accurate forward-looking information. Having precision anticipation implies decision-makers move to equilibrium naturally and without guile, since the latter affords no advantage. In these analyses, presidents do not persuade, rather power derives from occupying the right position and hence possessing the necessary congressional votes. Members commit to the President’s position whenever their own ideals better resemble the administration’s position than the *status quo ante*. Members never hesitate unless the administration could sway their votes with favors; otherwise, they declare their opposition, knowing the President’s intentions. In turn, presidents never grant concessions unless a favor would convert a hesitant member.⁵ In many respects, the common theoretical result of formal models with precise anticipation resembles the empirical findings of Edwards 1989 or Bond and Fleisher: presidents get only what they have the votes to get. And persuasion resembles the models of Groseclose and Snyder: presidential power rests on the resource base available to buy votes beyond the initial votes it will get.

In contrast, we assume that the President and member possess incomplete information: they cannot fully anticipate the others’ intentions. Given this assumption of imprecise (or what we call “faulty”) anticipation, decision-makers cannot easily discern an equilibrium strategy straightforward in every respect. Guile can afford advantage. In this analysis, presidents must persuade because even starting from the “right” position does not guarantee an administration or its supporters a policy success. Now, members might hesitate for one of two reasons: either genuine dissatisfaction with policy or feigned dissatisfaction. From the President’s perspective, both member signals look alike, evidencing the same behavior. We contend such similarity constitutes an important, perplexing element of real leadership. After three years in the White House, John Kennedy told civil rights leaders that he had learned that members had an extraordinary capacity for camouflaging their intentions, often vaguely suggesting support without fully committing it (See x). Now skill matters in discerning intentions and in building coalitions that can govern. In many respects, the theoretical results from this model resemble the strategic complexities generated by cycling majorities.

The characterizations along the bottom of Figure 1 take account of uncertainty about intentions, describing outcomes in terms of two separate member identities, one “genuine” and the other “dissembling.” Note by appearing genuine, dissembling members can secure a presidential concession (C_j) and passage of their surreptitiously favored legislative outcome (B_j). By contrast, the genuinely hesitant member can receive the same presidential concession but must compare that benefit against the cost of obtaining a bill they do not favor without the concession ($-B_j$).

Given this sort of disingenuous behavior, presidents must place a high premium on what Neustadt called “counsel,” the ability to assess intentions and make choices about priorities. Likewise, our theory places a high premium on such detailed presidential intelligence. Our theory also suggests that not knowing the president’s competencies at identifying intentions (seeing through dissembling) has a chilling effect on contemplated disingenuous behavior, which also engenders risks after all. Likewise, not knowing the president’s willingness to or capacities for granting concessions undermines dissembling behavior. So, in our theory, the President’s reputation or the President’s estimations of members’ intentions become a central theoretical issue. In many respects, then, the introduction of this assumption about anticipation means we have produced a formal theory of Neustadt’s “professional reputation” and presidential counsel.

⁵ As noted in the appendix, then the member commits whenever $d(|x_m - x_p|) - d(|x_m - SQ|) > 0$ and hesitates when not. And the President responds with a favor whenever $d(|x_m - x_p|) - d(|x_m - SQ|) < 0$, but $d(|x_m - x_p|) - d(|x_m - SQ|) + c > 0$ and perseveres when not.

We have already introduced the beginnings of a tenure model by simply assuming a sequence to presidential persuasion. We show that presidents prefer to offer a concession only to genuinely hesitant members to gain more support later for the administration's legislation. With the possibility for member bluffing, presidents must find and punish those dissembling. For such concessions or punishments to matter, members must find value in them, which in turn involves opportunities that must come again. When we introduce repetitive interactions in the formal theory (see Appendix, section 3) to assess whether members can use reputation to their advantage, we further incorporate administration tenure into theory because reputations would not matter without time's passage.

Call the passage of time that members contemplate, this shadow of a future to which they look, an administration's "horizon." Our theoretical conclusions suggest that if the promise of a presidential concession carries relatively little value, because time has run out for an administration (its horizon has disappeared), then such a prospect would make congressional reputations less valuable. Likewise, growing congressional seniority reduces the relative value of presidential concessions and thus insulates members from these kinds of reputational concerns and hence from concern with the presidential horizon. Both constitute a central theoretical result found in our theory. A second general result (concerning presidential priorities) we reserve for the conclusion.

TESTING THE REPUTATION EFFECTS OF TIME

The behavior we expect from our formal theory seems straightforward. Presidents engage in bargaining with individual members of Congress, and depending upon the horizon of these negotiations, members may have an incentive to strategically misrepresent their true preferences in search of concessions. This section thus focuses on two, real-world analogs for the increasing relative costs of presidential concessions/punishments: declining presidential tenure (lame duck) and increasing congressional tenure (seniority). It articulates three empirical hypotheses based on these analogs to our formal theory and it details an operational approach to testing these hypotheses.

The Horizon Effect and Dead Ducks

The value of a member's reputation reflects the value of future presidential concessions against the costs associated with risking having to deny current policy preferences. While the expected value of future presidential concessions remains high, members will attempt to protect their reputations by adopting a "reputational strategy" (analyzed in the appendix): having bluffed hesitation and now facing presidential steadfastness, members can preserve their reputations only by voting *against* the President's (and unfortunately their own) positions.

Since bluffing the administration inevitably poses risks, our theory suggests that members will protect their reputations only as long as sufficient iterations remain from which they could benefit. Once an administration appears lame, however, members will have nothing to gain by maintaining their reputations. As the administration nears its tenure horizon, then, dissembling members will simply reverse their signaled intentions when the administration perseveres and vote *for* the bill, prioritizing their immediate policy interests over their remaining reputational interests. No administration can generate a large enough punishment given its declining tenure horizon to avoid such a troubling strategy. In effect, our model demonstrates how a nearing tenure horizon aggravates coalition-building efforts (members become more erratic) and it explains why even a doomed administration insists it will prevail, thereby minimizing its current policy problems.⁶

⁶ At first glance, this type of behavior by members may seem beneficial to the President: after an initial period of bluffing, members will end up voting for the President's position. This type of analysis ignores the fact that presidents have a limited budget available for concessions (whether public good will or actual concessions). In situations where they press legislation to get a policy closest to their preferences, presidents must use their budgets on those members who actually need convincing.

The Seniority Effect

The concern for protecting one's reputation varies with the relative opportunities for benefit associated with presidential concessions or punishments. All else equal, as their seniority increases, members become more able to provide for their own ambitions and constituents, using their own congressional resources, contacts, and experiences. This tenure cycle of increasing expertise leaves senior members less in need of presidential accommodation. Such career independence, in turn, complicates persuasion because these more independent, senior members will bargain with less sensitivity to their own reputations and, hence, with less sensitivity to any potential presidential horizon shift.

Opportunity and Data

One consideration complicates the simple empirical expectations outlined above: administrations become "lame" gradually. Technically, an administration's horizon shifts as soon as members anticipate a negative electoral outcome in the administration's future. That anticipation could develop even earlier than the second term – maybe even as much as a year before a reelection bid!⁷ So, like its mirror, the "honeymoon", the lame duck becomes a hard bird to observe. Given this caveat, testing for a horizon effect requires special circumstances and specialized data.

Fortunately, we have both. No presidential tenure in modern history presents a more profound shift in horizon than Lyndon Johnson's sudden announcement that he would not seek reelection.⁸ No one anticipated such a dramatic turn. On the day before the announcement, for example, Johnson's own White House staff met to develop plans for the up-coming re-election, dealing with Democratic insurgents, and which of the likely Republican tickets they would face. Johnson's announcement suddenly changed the administration from vibrant, likely to win reelection,⁹ to not only a "lame duck" but a "dead duck." Overnight, the administration's horizon collapsed from five more years to five more months.

The Johnson administration also provides the necessary data. We use the administration's own confidential records of persuasion, captured in its headcounts, to track members' positions over time during the 90th Congress (1967-1968). These data track 51 administration priority issues, involving civil rights and governing the economy [described in x]. On each of these issues, the administration would normally take several counts during the period leading to a climatic floor showdown. These counts record members' earliest bargaining responses, described in detailed prose accounts, which the administration then translated into summary statements, eventually collapsing them further into two categories: those "*Right*" and those "*in need of persuasion*."¹⁰

The more members engage in abusive bluffing behavior, the more difficulty presidents have identifying those members who truly need convincing. Thus, even this apparently beneficial possibility actually results in decreased presidential effectiveness.

⁷ Birnbaum and Murray [165] report a vote on President Reagan's tax reform bill on which Republicans refused to support their President. At the end of that vote, Speaker Thomas O'Neill told those around him, "Today, Ronald Reagan became a lame duck...."

⁸ Nixon's "sudden" smoking gun announcement came long after even Republicans knew he was finished. Ford and Bush ('41) gained strength as the election approached. Hence, Truman's 1952 announcement represents the last reasonably similar opportunity to assess a clean horizon shift.

⁹ While Gallup trial heats in August through October of 1967 had suggested some weaknesses, beginning in November of 1967 and running through to the March 1968 announcement, LBJ continued to defeat all Republican challengers in trial heats by considerable margins.

¹⁰ Prose responses include strategic ploys as well as opposition to specifics. For example on one of the most complicated issues of the Congress, the 1968 Tax Surcharge proposal, the liaison reported:

I talked today with Mim Daddario. He will not vote for the tax bill conference report; ...as he refuses to be "held up to ransom."

[Another member] is strongly in favor of a tax but with the current \$6 billion in spending cuts that the conference report contains he is against it.

Both from Memo, John Gonella to Barefoot Sanders, 22 May 1968, Personal Papers of Barefoot Sanders, Box 28, "Democratic Opinions on the Tax Bill, 1968," LBJ Library.

These particular data resemble the normal presidential experience with Congress. For example, in the 90th Congress Johnson had already passed the crest of influence generated by his landslide victory. While that victory added 38 new Democratic seats, the midterm election forming the 90th House generated a loss of 47 Democratic seats. Using the standard measure of influence, Johnson's positions garnered congressional support only about 77% of the time, which resembles the average performance of all presidents (74%) during the period from 1952 through 1978 [Edwards 1980].

To test both empirical expectations, we employ a distinction used elsewhere to divide House members into three groups defined by their normal tendency to support the administration [Bond and Fleisher; Covington 1987a, b, 1988]: core supporters, the cross-pressured, and core opponents.¹¹ Since we demonstrated that only an administration's core supporters occupied the strategic position necessary to bluff, we will eventually focus on these members. To operationalize congressional tenure and hence vulnerability to presidential pressure, we identify two polar groups among core supporters. First, we identify all those with positions as party leaders (whips, Speaker, *etc.*) or senior members of important committees as "senior" members. We identified as "junior" those members first elected during the Kennedy-Johnson years.

In addition, and for control, we employed a number of common variables. These include separate measures for a member's place in the legislative hierarchies: seniority, party leadership, and committee value. The variable indicating a member's committee value relies on the Bullock (1962) score for House committee assignments discounted by the member's committee service. The higher a member's committee seniority, the fuller the Bullock value the member receives. The empirical analysis also includes a measure of the member's electoral vulnerability, called "marginality," which measures the two-party vote received in the previous election. Two additional controls describe the political situation. The first uses the President's Gallup approval rating and the second records the unemployment rate just before the initial headcount.

Because members might use the expected closeness of an initial headcount to better their bargains, we control for closeness: the absolute value of the difference between support on the initial headcount and 50%. Further, since utilizing complex strategies might lead the administration to balk, we include the square of closeness to take account of this second-order effect. A final variable controls for "easy" conversions: the level of initial commitment on the first headcount.

Operationalized Expectations

Given the available data, we can now transform our theoretical results (found in the Appendix) into empirical hypotheses. The horizon shift expectation suggests that core supporters will convert more readily to the administration position after the horizon shift than before it. From the perspective of our formal theory, the Johnson administration presented its hesitant core supporters with a particularly challenging strategic situation. On each of the issues in our data, and according to Congressional Quarterly's analysis, the Johnson administration chose to persevere, offering no policy concessions. Since the administration sent such a clear message that it would not respond, these hesitant core members faced the exact trade-off we describe in theory between their reputations and the substantive policy against which they must vote to preserve their reputations. Hence:

- H1. ***Horizon Shift.*** The variable identifying the immediate shift in the Johnson horizon will have a positive and significant coefficient when considering the conversion of hesitant core supporters.

¹¹See Sullivan (1990b) appendix, for a complete description. The predisposition model uses a simple empirical estimator developed from regressing (probit) previous congressional voting behavior on constituency characteristics. Applying those coefficients to "current" constituency characteristics yields, for each member, a probability statement about potential presidential support. Following the customary practice, we term those with probabilities of supporting the President of 80% or greater "core supporters," those with probabilities of 20% or less "core opponents," and the rest "cross-pressured." This model does better at predicting the positions of member on headcounts and votes than do standard "naive" models of voting (e.g., the "three-party model") and more sophisticated models (e.g., D-NOMINATE).

This hypothesis presumes that, for good reason, any conversions observed do not result from personal favors. LBJ hoped his announcement would put his administration above such political ploys. Moreover, administrations cannot pursue such a “fire sale” strategy since the temptations for bluffing would skyrocket, leaving an administration without any initial support.¹² Thus, the conversion of core supporters before or after the horizon shift represents a strong test of our model.

The nature of the empirical data also provides a “control group” for our horizon shift analysis. Like core opponents, the cross-pressured have few opportunities to bluff [see x]. Since their constituencies normally would require them to oppose administration proposals, their hesitation would go unnoticed. And since a good many of the Johnson administration policy concessions focused on corralling these cross-pressured members, it seems reasonable to expect that they will evince a good deal of genuine conversion. In effect, then, their rates of conversion, based almost entirely on policy concessions, offer an important contrapuntal to core supporter conversions. Hence, we can expect:

H2. **Horizon Control.** After the immediate shift in the Johnson horizon, conversion among core supporters rises *dramatically* relative to the conversion rate among cross-pressured members.

In assessing the congressional tenure effect, we expect that the horizon shift has less of an effect on senior members. Recall that the challenge of a horizon shift comes from a concern for the President’s assessment of a member’s reputation. Members with more independence from White House pressure and punishment simply care less about those estimates. They can reverse themselves during the regular course of bargaining more often. Hence, we expect:

H3. **Congressional Tenure Effect.** The size of the horizon shift for senior members’ horizon shift variable is significantly less than the horizon shift experienced by junior members.

FINDINGS ABOUT TENURE EFFECTS

Horizon Shift Effect

Table 1 summarizes a LOGIT model predicting the core supporter conversions. The horizon variable performed as expected, with a significant, positive coefficient. Indeed, compared to the other variables, the horizon shift represents one of the strongest empirical forces affecting persuasion among these members.¹³ Only the strategic control describing “closeness” had a similarly strong bargaining effect. This particular result coincides with the n-person version of theory we specified. Recall that if a member first hesitates and the President perseveres (see Figure 1), the problem for the bluffing member becomes whether to vote *against* the bill to preserve one’s reputation while scuttling a bill reflecting one’s policy preferences. In the real world, of course, every bluffing member faces a more complex situation, one in which a single vote may or may not scuttle their favored bill, *depending on closeness*. When the strategic situation on an administration bill becomes close, i.e., near an administration victory on the initial headcount, these core supporters respond by sacrificing some of their reputations to sustain the substantive legislation. As the initial situation becomes either a walk-away victory for the administration or an unmitigated disaster, these core supporters prefer to protect their reputations, as predicted.¹⁴

¹²In the specific case of LBJ and the 90th House, no source (i. e., newspapers, weekly magazines, memoirs, oral histories, scholarly works) reports unusual favor granting activity after the horizon shift. Of course, we do not claim that granting such unobserved favors does not account for conversion. We only conclude that for the most part, the administration continued using its standard practices as regards granting favors after the horizon shift.

¹³This kind of horizon related behavior mirrors some findings by Lott and Boones. Looking at another kind of horizon shift, they found that members changed their voting behavior after suffering a reelection defeat.

¹⁴Additionally, every bill’s value can vary and can vary subjectively across the membership, so that we might also expect an empirical effect for the value of bills.

Converting the Control Group

The conversion of cross-pressured members suggests that the horizon shift among core supporters seems genuine. Using a proportional reduction in error approach to the conversion rates, cross-pressured members responded to the horizon shift with about an 11% improvement in conversion rates (on 1800 observations) while the rate for core supporters more than doubled (2.5 times) that rate, or 28% (on 800 observations). Given the weaknesses inherent in political process data and the complexity of the strategic situations, these results represent additional, dramatic confirmation of our expectation about the horizon shift effect.

Seniority Effect

Table 2 reports evidence about the congressional tenure effect. Recall that Hypothesis 3 suggests that more vulnerable members will respond more vigorously to President Johnson's sudden dead duck status. The coefficient estimate for junior members exceeds that for senior members by almost four times. Junior members considered the reputational effects of the announcement as very significant while more senior members took it in stride. Making the LogOdds transformations illustrates the changes: for junior members, the horizon shift meant "conversions" jumped dramatically from a base before the announcement of around 2% to more than a 56% reversal rate after the announcement. Clearly before the announcement, junior members pursued a reputational strategy, which they generally abandoned after the announcement. For senior members, the horizon shift amounted to a change from a base around 20% to a rate slightly above 41% after the horizon shift. They responded to the announcement but with nothing like the abandon of their junior peers. These results suggest that congressional tenure matters in presidential persuasion.

PRESIDENTIAL ASSETS

Using the conjunction of a fortuitous historical event and detailed historical data, this paper demonstrates that a relatively simple theory of reputation can accurately capture presidential persuasion. Using this theory, we have formally elaborated much of the traditional understanding of presidential persuasion, capturing the effect of reputation and elaborating the importance of tenure-bound patterns. We noted earlier that this theory would also help model other aspects of presidential persuasion, in particular, judgments of presidential competence. It also interprets the importance of the federal budget in presidential persuasion. This section considers what our theory and empirical results reveal about these assets and their uses.

Presidential Competence

Neustadt's [1960] celebrated discussion of reputation focused almost entirely on what others might glean from their observations of presidential actions, especially those in bargaining with other Washingtonians. His observations underscored the importance of incomplete information long before formal theory had the capacity to model this notion of reputation. Our theory provides at least one formal representation of this aspect of the president's professional assets. If presidential concessions have a limit, and of course they do, a president's reputation may rest on demonstrating the capacity for knowing just how much to offer a member to obtain a conversion. Call the smallest offer necessary to generate a conversion the member's "reservation price" and assume that in the practical world, talented politicians guard well this information. Our model suggests one way a president could discover this valuable information through bargaining.

Consider the partial history down the left-hand side of Figure 1: Hesitate-Concede*. As outlined in the Appendix, section 2, for a genuinely hesitant member, the president's concession must satisfy

$C_m > 2B_m$, i.e., only a significant presidential concession would cause this member's conversion. On the other hand, a president's concession to a bluffing member requires far less: $C_m > -2B_m$, or effectively any $C_m > 0$. Remember that bluffing members really prefer to vote *for* the President's policy. A president, then, could take advantage of this asymmetry in concessions to discover the identity of a bargaining member. Demonstrating professional competence of this sort would have enormous reputational returns for presidents engaged in power as persuasion.

The Influence of Secular Time

The formal analysis also opens a window into understanding other aspects of an administration's circumstances, what Skowronek [1992] has called "secular time." In administrations seeking to expand government or in times of expanding government revenues, member incentives to maintain a "good" reputation with the administration increase. As the total amount of available presidential concessions rise, the incentive to preserve reputations increases. The stakes in successfully bluffing also rise and the an administration leeway to concede favors also increases. So, a president who presents an expanding agenda, or administers a naturally growing budget, or who faces economic boom times must also encourage a strong interest in preserving reputations. An administration with these ambitions or these circumstances must evidence early on an ability to discern members' strategic activities and a willingness to punish them in order to encourage genuine behavior. Presidents desirous of contracting the government's agenda or facing hard times face a bitter prospect, as the value of reputation declines rapidly. As a result, disingenuous bargaining behavior probably abounds (see for example, Light 1988, Birnbaum and Murray, or Asbell). The unpleasant nature of this congressional bargaining might serve to slow the ambitions of contracting administrations. The less they push for contractions, the less members generate difficult bargaining situations. Thus, our bargaining theory further illuminates the nature of presidential persuasion across historical contexts in much the same way that Skowronek's discussion of contexts does.

Setting Priorities

Often, observers and pundits have noted that setting priorities constitutes one of the president's chief assets in leading. By front-loading highest priority matters, for example, Light (1982, 2006) argues, the president can take advantage of one of the central principles of governing: "move it or lose it." This advice results from simple assumptions about limited experience or limited resources, some of which could derive from our formal theory of persuasion. Empirical research on this limited resources and declining opportunities approach to priorities, however, has not supported the assumption [x]. Instead of relying on diminishing returns or capital, our theory provides a different justification for spending presidential effort on establishing "priorities" among the elements of their agendas: placing priorities has a positive influence on presidential persuasion. Our comparative statics, found at the end of the Appendix, suggests a tenure-bound justification: priorities send signals about how easily making a mistake on an issue will ruin a member's reputation. In other words, front loading priorities, as others suggest, makes sense because it makes bargaining easier not for what it brings to bear on persuasion but for the context of persuasion that it creates. The higher priority an administration places on an agenda item the more members will protect their reputations presumably bargaining in a more genuine fashion. We leave this complex of results to future work, however, only to suggest here that this formal model can provide a theoretical foundation for these kinds of anecdotally based observations.

APPENDIX: THE REPUTATION GAME

This section presents our formal theory of persuasion. We move systematically through its elements looking for empirical leverage, beginning with a short tenure horizon (a single play) and working up to longer horizons (repeated interactions). We identify its sequential equilibrium, and using it, we describe what and how presidents learn about members' intentions. The combination of long horizons and political learning generates the formal results we can then interpret as empirical expectations.

Assume two players: a President (p) and a member (m). Both have preferences x_p and x_m on a unidimensional policy space X, an interval of the real line. They both possess a von Neumann-Morgenstern utility function $d(\cdot)$ over X, demonstrating continuity and unimodality (i.e., utility monotonically decreases from x_p or x_m). SQ represents the *status quo* policy. Thus, a member prefers the President's bill when $d(|x_m - x_p|) - d(|x_m - SQ|) > 0$ or when the member's ideal lies closer to the President's position than the *status quo ante*.

1. Locating the Single Play Equilibrium

Assume a short tenure horizon to find the bargaining equilibrium. The President must decide whether to concede or persevere when facing a hesitant member. The answer to that question revolves around the president's expectation " q " that a member has bluffed, i.e., has un-genuinely hesitated. Define presidential indifference between available options as whenever $Utility_p(\text{concede}) = Utility_p(\text{persevere})$, or when (applying values from Figure 1) $B_p - C_p = q(B_p) + (1-q)(-B_p)$. Simple algebraic manipulations define

the critical value of q as $q = \frac{2B_p - C_p}{2B_p}$. So, in the short horizon version of presidential persuasion, the

President perseveres whenever $q \geq \frac{2B_p - C_p}{2B_p}$, and otherwise the President concedes.¹⁵ In equilibrium, the

member plays the Nash equilibrium strategies, which turn out to have the effect of accepting any concession and voting *for*, but voting *against* whenever the President perseveres. Hence, members would never hesitate unless they mean it and do not convert unless they receive a concession. Similarly, presidents would never concede unless that concession would generate a conversion. Note that the short horizon equilibrium mimics other published analyses of congressional coalition-building that assume leaders purchase votes (e.g., Groseclose and Snyder).

2. Identifying the Sequential Equilibrium

The situation changes, however, when considering longer horizons, i. e., as the President and members interact over time. Would rational members ever behave strategically, violating their preferences early, thereby establishing a reputation for sincerity, so that they can extract concessions in subsequent rounds? Assume that they would build such a reputation and then consider the critical values necessary to make that strategy rational. Start by considering just two repetitions. The bluffing member would hesitate and then vote *against* if the administration persevered in "round one." Having developed a reputation in that first repetition, the member can then hesitate in "round two" in order to extract a concession. From Figure 1, the maximum utility the member can expect from pursuing this "reputational strategy" (preserve

¹⁵ Note from the foregoing that as the cost of concessions approaches zero, the President will always concede since granting concessions presents a painless way to insure favorable votes. We note this point only as a way of suggesting future elaborations of our model in which the administration possesses a range of concessions and thereby needs a strategy for fitting concessions to member hesitancy. These concessions, for example, could rest on the critical or pivotal nature of the legislative situation in the n-person model.

reputation first and then take advantage of it) equals C_m . To make this strategy worthwhile, its value must equal at least the payoff a bluffer could insure by always signaling a commitment and then carrying through on that commitment (i.e., voting *for*): $2B_m$. Thus, a value does exist that makes this strategy of bluffing worthwhile even when members can anticipate that the President's tenure will last only two repetitions. As long as potential presidential concessions would range around twice the direct benefits of the program ($C_m=2B_m$), even an administration's core supporter could find bluffing worthwhile.

Now consider the President's best responses in this two-repetition version. Remember that response depends upon the President's estimate that a member has attempted to bluff. In the first round, and in equilibrium, what makes the President persevere (the estimate of q) affects what the member does:

1) if $q < \frac{2B_p - C_p}{2B_p}$, then the President will concede in the second round of the game, thus making

Concede \Rightarrow *for* the resulting outcome. Note in passing, that since both a dissembling and a genuine member take the same course of action, the President cannot learn anything from witnessing their behavior, so q remains constant in both rounds. In effect, voting *against* early preserves the member's reputation for use later. Hence, the member's and President's equilibrium behaviors produce "effective" bluffing.

2) if, however, $q \geq \frac{2B_p - C_p}{2B_p}$, then calculations become more complex because the member must

randomize in such a way as to make the President indifferent between conceding and persevering in repetition two (thus allowing an equilibrium where the President concedes). Earlier empirical analysis (x) demonstrated that members act in just this way, bluffing in what appeared as a near-random pattern so the administration could not track them. We now can incorporate that empirical observation into the model. If the President updates "prior" estimates of a member according to Bayes' Rule, then, the member can improve expected payoff in segment two by adopting the following mixed strategy in segment one:

$$P(\text{bluffer} | \text{against}) = \frac{p(\text{bluffer})p(\text{against} | \text{bluffer})}{p(\text{bluffer})p(\text{against} | \text{bluffer}) + p(\text{genuine})p(\text{against} | \text{genuine})}$$

Define $r \equiv p(\text{against} | \text{bluffer})$, then substituting that definition into the mixed strategy yields the situation in which the President has reached indifference (note $p(\text{against} | \text{genuine})=1$):

$$\frac{2B_p - C_p}{2B_p} = \frac{qr}{qr + 1 - q}, \text{ which then reduces to } r = \frac{2B_p - 2B_p q - C_p + C_p q}{qC_p} \text{ and then to}$$

$$r = \frac{(1 - q)(2B_p - C_p)}{qC_p}$$

Given the foregoing analysis, we can calculate the President's optimal play in the second segment. As in the single play version, we set the value of conceding equal to the value of persevering, based on the values from Figure 1, and calculate the possibilities:

$$\text{Utility}_p(\text{concede}) = \text{Utility}_p(\text{persevere})$$

$$B_p - C_p = B_p [P(\text{bluffer})P(\text{for} | \text{bluffer}) + P(\text{genuine})P(\text{for} | \text{genuine})] - B_p [P(\text{bluffer})P(\text{against} | \text{bluffer}) + P(\text{genuine})P(\text{against} | \text{genuine})]$$

which translates to

$$B_p - C_p = B_p [q(1-r)] - B_p [qr + (1-q)] \quad \text{or}$$

$$q = \frac{2B_p^2 - C_p^2}{2B_p^2}$$

3. The n-stage Horizon

We can then use these results from the two-stage horizon to generalize for the n-stage horizon:

$$q_k = \frac{2^{k-1} B_p^k - C_p^k}{2^{k-1} B_p^k}, \text{ where } k=\{1..n\} \quad \text{and}$$

$$r = \frac{(1 - q)(2^{k-1} B_p^k - C_p^k)}{q C_p^k} .$$

Proof: The result follows from induction. Assume q_n , by following the process outlined above, one arrives at q_{n+1} with algebraic manipulations. QED.

4. Understanding Tenure & Counsel

Assuming a President has sufficient tenure left, we can also analyze the specific effect of member behavior on presidential expectations.¹⁶ Refer to Figure 1. The combination of presidential perseverance and member voting yields four signals: vote for or against when receiving a concession, vote for or against when receiving none. Each produces a signal within a context for the President to interpret. When receiving a concession, voting *for* affords the President no new information, while voting *against* seems irrational (hence unlikely) because it can logically support any wild presidential presumption. Facing perseverance, a member's vote of *for* provides the president with a certainty of having uncovered a bluffer, while voting *against* provides additional reinforcement for the notion that the member hesitated originally out of genuine dissatisfaction. Since the member has sent what seems like a "costly" signal, it establishes a valuable reputation with the President and thereby supports the possibility of bluffing during subsequent iterations, as we demonstrated earlier.

Examining the dynamics of our formal analysis yields the following two conclusions:

1. As $-C_p$ increases, $r \Rightarrow 0$; as the President's costs for granting a concession rise, and thus potential punishments recede in likelihood, bluffers play according to their true preferences (resulting in the sequence Persevere \Rightarrow *for*).
2. As B_p increases, $r \Rightarrow 1$; i.e., as the President's utility for the bill rises, bluffers protect their reputation by playing Persevere \Rightarrow *against* in the earlier segments.

Each result has an empirical analog: the first supports tenure-bound patterns and the second supports a form of presidential counsel in setting priorities.

Tenure. The first result suggests that as the feasibility of presidential punishments recedes, members will worry less with their reputations. Empirically, this pattern could result in two separate ways, each a tenure effect.¹⁷ The President's tenure could run out affording no further means of potential support. In parallel fashion, members can experience a declining vulnerability to presidential punishment as they become independent of Executive action and policy favors. As a member's policy discretion expands with accumulated experience, an administration "cannot afford" to punish a member or in some instances an administration cannot muster the resources to punish such a member. Hence, a seniority effect would also mimic the formal dynamic presented here.

Counsel. The second dynamic addresses the impact of presidential priorities often reputed to lie at the center of presidential leadership. The second result suggests that clear presidential priorities drive members towards preserving their reputations, either by limiting their dissembling or by adopting the protection strategy when facing presidential perseverance.

¹⁶ For technical reasons, we assume that the President begins bargaining with a small estimation that a member bluffs, described as $\mu_i(h)(\text{bluffer})=\delta$.

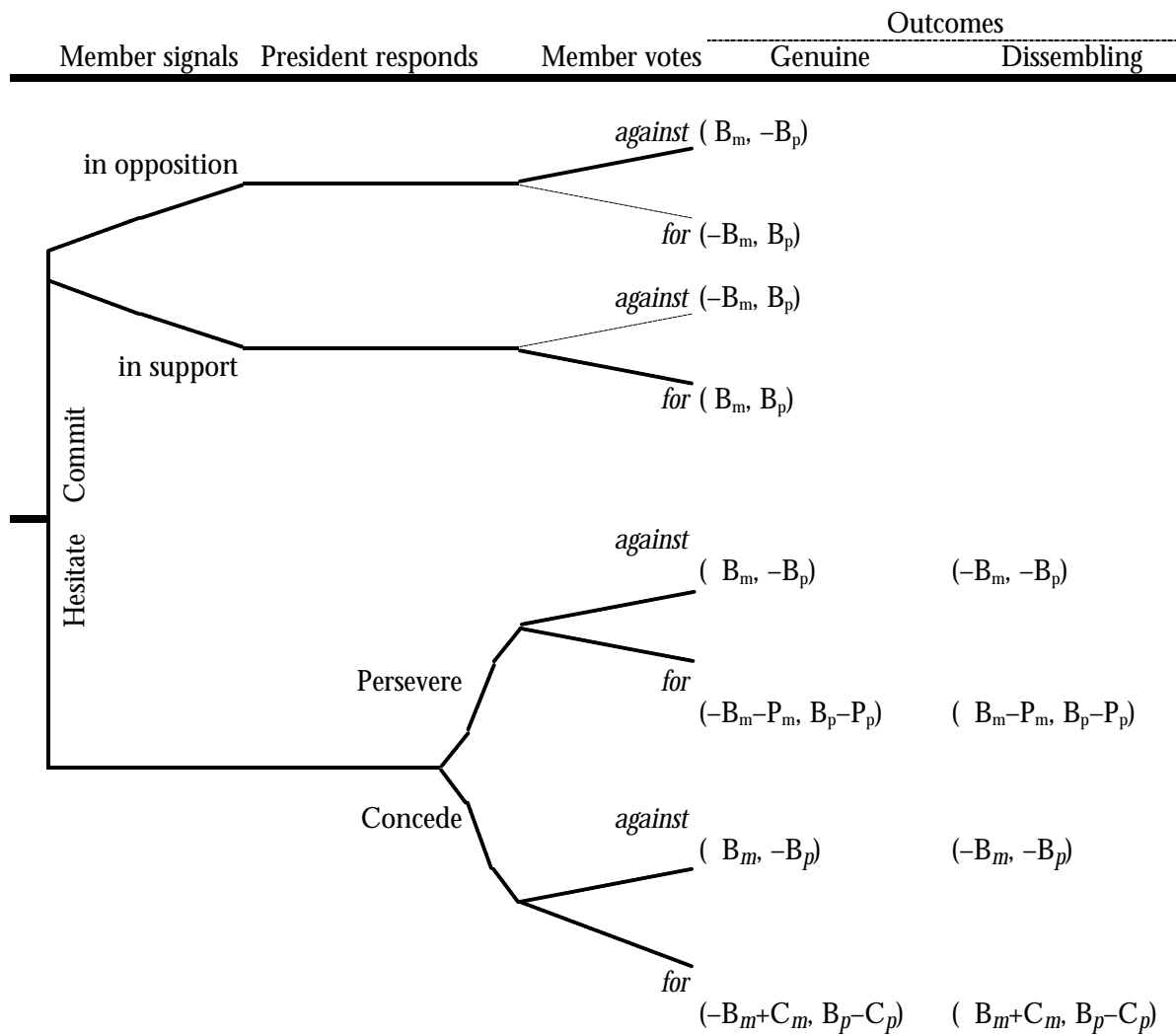
¹⁷ Our formal model can point to other empirical mimics: a President incapable of getting any presidential command to work or of persuading anyone would also mimic a "feasibility of presidential punishments" close to zero. Such an inept President would also suffer the kinds of coalition building difficulties normally associated with becoming a lame duck.

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Figure 1. Incomplete Information Version of Presidential Persuasion



where

: Benefits obtaining from preferred position on bill B_i where $i \in \begin{cases} \text{president} \\ \text{member} \end{cases}$

Presidential Punishment (Costs) for Bluffing P_i where $i \in \begin{cases} \text{president} \\ \text{member} \end{cases}$

Benefits (Costs) from obtaining (conceding) a favor. C_i where $i \in \begin{cases} \text{president} \\ \text{member} \end{cases}$

Table 1. LOGIT Model of Conversion among Core Supporters

VARIABLES	PARAMETER ESTIMATE	ROBUST ERROR	χ^2
<i>Constant</i>	-15.520	4.951	9.827**
<i>Controls for Member</i>			
Predisposition	2.019	2.045	0.975
Marginality	-0.003	0.004	0.370
Average Seniority	-0.013	0.007	4.082*
Democratic Leader?	0.650	0.520	1.560
Committee Value	-0.079	0.219	0.131
<i>Controls for General Context</i>			
LBJ's Approval Rate	-0.013	0.022	0.322
Unemployment Rate	0.549	0.111	24.659***
<i>Strategic Situation</i>			
Closeness of situation	-0.214	0.032	46.021***
Closeness squared	0.180	0.027	45.078***
Initial Hesitancy	0.210	0.043	24.292***
<i>Horizon Effect</i>	0.746	0.250	8.886**

Note: * p = .05
 ** p = .01
 *** p = .001 % predicted correct: 78.2, n: 813

Criterion	Intercept Only	Intercept & Covariates	chi-square for Covariates
AIC	1079.849	910.288	
SC	1084.550	966.696	
-2 LOG L Score	1077.849	886.288	191.562 with 11 DF***
			166.942 with 11 DF***

Table 2. LOGIT Model of Horizon Effect among Core Supporters by Career Position

CAREER POSITION	PARAMETER ESTIMATE	ROBUST ERROR	χ^2	N OF CASES
Senior Members	1.034	0.491	4.439*	162
Junior Members	4.039	1.369	8.700**	94

Note: * p = .05 ** p = .01 *** p = .001.