

Dividers, not Unifiers:
Presidential Leadership and Senate Partisanship, 1981-2004*

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Abstract:

This article argues that presidential leadership tends to exacerbate partisan disagreement in Congress on the issues the president champions. The argument starts from the president's role as highly visible party leader. Because of this role, members of Congress of both parties have a collective political stake in the disposition of presidential initiatives: Members of the president's party tend to benefit politically from presidential successes, while members of the opposing party receive few political benefits and may suffer costs. These political incentives are likely to drive the parties in Congress farther apart on presidential initiatives than they would be in the absence of presidential leadership. To test for these effects, this paper controls for variation in issue content and isolates for separate analysis votes involving ideologically divisive issues. Analysis reveals that the parties are systematically farther apart on presidential agenda items, controlling for issue content and other factors affecting voting partisanship.

“When my guys are in the White House, the vote is close, and they need my vote, then I’ll go along. But when theirs are there, and they’ve always voted against my guys out of political motives, then why should I go along with them?”

--Anonymous congressman (Kingdon 1981, 181)

“As a party matter, this means a great deal to the administration, and it’s my administration. . . . [W]hen in doubt, I don’t want to see the administration embarrassed.”

--Anonymous congressman (Kingdon 1981, 180)

Generally speaking, members of Congress do not like to see “their” president, and thus their party, “embarrassed.” Each of the anonymous congressmen quoted above refers to “political motives” for supporting or opposing presidents. The first complains that members of the opposing party have voted against his party’s presidents not out of sincere policy disagreement, but for “political” reasons. And both concede that they have political motives themselves in that they are likely to vote for their own presidents’ proposals when needed.

This paper argues that members’ dual considerations of politics and policy are likely to make the congressional politics of the presidential agenda distinctive. A “president is a leader of his party, no matter how strong or weak his powers might otherwise be” (Aldrich and Rohde 2000, 67). Given the president’s unique status as national party leader, members of Congress know that, regardless of their views on the policy merits of a presidential initiative, how they handle a president’s priorities will affect his party’s collective reputation. Presidential successes create credit-claiming opportunities for the president’s party, and thus a president’s fellow partisans “recognize that they have an interest in making him look good” (Sundquist 1981, 423).

At the same time, members of the opposing party have a political interest in denying the president and his party credit-claiming opportunities. The reverse of Sundquist's point also applies: in a two-party system a party can benefit by resisting, criticizing, and otherwise making the opposing party's president look bad. These divergent political interests are likely to exert a contrary pull on the two parties' behavior as Congress considers presidential proposals. If so, presidential leadership on policy issues will exacerbate partisan disagreement on those issues.

Scholars have not considered presidential leadership as an independent source of partisan conflict in Congress. Most scholarship on the relationship between the president and Congress has focused on the ability of presidents to set the congressional agenda and to pass their legislative program (Bond and Fleisher 1992; Canes-Wrone 2001; Collier and Sullivan 1995; Edwards 1990; Kernell 1997). But presidents do more than influence the policies that Congress considers and adopts; a president's participation on an issue also affects its politics as members respond to the president on the basis of their shared or adverse political interests.

There are undoubtedly many other important sources of congressional partisanship: the partisan and ideological composition of local constituencies (Brewer, Mariana and Stonecash 2002, Jacobson 2000), the composition of the legislative agenda (Roberts and Smith 2003; Lee 2008), economic inequality in society (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006), and the influence of party activists (Aldrich 1995, Burden 2001). This paper argues that partisanship in Congress is also likely to have an endogenous source in inter-branch interactions, as members of Congress react to and mobilize around presidential initiatives.

Put differently, this paper views presidents as the "lightning rod of national politics" (Skowronek 1993, 20). Presidential leadership not only affects the content of the legislative agenda, it also functions to demarcate and deepen lines of cleavage between the parties in

Congress. If this perspective is accurate, presidents are likely to stimulate and intensify partisan controversy on the issues they champion.

To test whether presidential involvement makes issues more party polarizing than they would otherwise be, it is necessary to control for issue content. Some types of issues obviously are inherently more controversial in policy terms. To control for the possibility that presidents focus their agendas on controversial types of issues, this paper employs two different classification schemes to account for variation in issue content. First, votes are grouped by government function—e.g., social welfare, environment, health, etc.—using a topical classification scheme developed by Frank Baumgartner, Bryan Jones and John Wilkerson (2002). Second, an original dataset groups roll-call votes by ideological content in order to isolate the votes involving highly divisive, ideological issues.

Using these two classification schemes, it becomes possible to determine whether roll-call votes within different categories of issues become systematically more polarized along party lines when presidents champion them as part of their legislative agenda compared to the level of party division that occurs on these categories of issues when they are considered in Congress without being part of a president's legislative agenda. Controlling for both issue content and other factors likely to affect the amount of partisan division on roll-call votes, I find that presidential leadership tends to result in wider gaps between the two parties in Congress. For most categories of issues, presidential involvement is associated with greater partisan differences in roll-call voting behavior.

Presidents and Party Brand Names

Members of Congress have an electoral interest in the collective image of their parties, and they seek to enhance this image by cooperating with fellow partisans and party leaders to deliver on a popular policy agenda (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 110-135; 2005; Evans 2001; Matthews and Stimson 1975, 95-7). But “far more than individual members of Congress . . . [presidents] have a particular responsibility for . . . preserving the recognizable meaning of the party label” (Whittington and Carpenter 2003, 500). No member of Congress is as important as the president in defining the collective images of the parties. The president is the most influential agenda-setter in national politics (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). When presidents prioritize an issue, they can set the legislative agenda “single handedly” (Kingdon 1995, 23). Presidents are capable of “creating attention where none exists” (Edwards and Wood 1999, 342), outstripping all members of Congress in their ability to garner media attention. Scholars concerned with how members of Congress cultivate an attractive partisan “brand name” need to give greater attention to presidential leadership and the congressional response to it.

When a president takes a position on an issue, it creates a benchmark for measuring his and his party’s effectiveness. Members of the president’s party enhance their own party’s collective reputation for strong, effective, coherent leadership by supporting their president’s agenda. If political incentives affect members’ decisions on presidential agenda items, members of the presidents’ party will be predisposed toward support of the president, separate from the policy preferences they may have on the issue.

At the same time, members of the opposition party often stand to gain in political terms by withholding support from the president’s agenda. This logic holds regardless of the opposing party’s majority or minority status. If a party wants to undermine the case for a president’s

reelection or his party's continuance in government, its members must find grounds on which to oppose the president's initiatives. A party needs to distinguish itself from an opposing president's policies. As Sundquist (1988, 630) observed, "If the president sends a proposal to Capitol Hill or takes a foreign policy stand, the opposition . . . simply *must* reject it. Otherwise they are saying the president is a wise and prudent leader. That would only strengthen him and his party for the next election, and how can [they] . . . do that, when their whole object is to defeat him when the time arrives?"

In short, when presidents stake their reputation for leadership on an issue, they are likely to alter the politics of its congressional consideration. Members of Congress from both parties have a political stake in the disposition of presidential agenda items, quite apart from their individual policy preferences on the issues. Given their contrary political incentives, presidential leadership is likely to pull the parties farther apart on the issues presidents prioritize.

Partisan Cues and Heuristics

Members' *political motives* are not the only reason why presidential leadership is likely to induce partisan responses in Congress. Members' *policy views* themselves are also likely to be shaped by their positive or negative attitudes toward the president, attitudes that are partly a function of their own party identification. A substantial body of research has shown that congressional roll-call voting is affected by patterns of cue-taking (Kingdon 1981; Matthews and Stimson 1975). Members make use of relevant cues for help in many voting decisions. That a legislative proposal is favored by a president of a particular party affords an important cue for members of both parties. When Matthews and Stimson (1975, 94) asked members of Congress

whose position they would like to know in a hypothetical voting situation where they could know nothing else, 40% identified the president.

Presidential cues, however, will be interpreted differently by members of the two parties in Congress. The literature on public opinion has established the importance of “source cues,” meaning that Americans’ opinions on policy issues are structured by their attitudes toward the political figures who support or oppose those policies: “Heuristic processing of source cues activates a dynamic in which the individual extends opinion about a source to the policies or issues associated with that source. . . . with the effect’s magnitude dependent on the strength of that approval or disapproval” (Mondak 1993, 171). Much research has shown that partisanship filters receptivity to political messages (Edwards 2003, 218-238; Zaller 1992). As elected officials owing their political careers to one of the two parties, members of Congress undoubtedly identify more strongly with their political parties and have stronger affective responses toward presidents than virtually anyone in the mass public.

Even though members of Congress are far more informed about issues than the mass public, the large number of roll-call votes in every Congress means that they, like respondents on public opinion polls, are frequently asked to make judgments on issues about which they are not well-informed. A president’s position can serve as a decision-making heuristic. Those members who generally approve of the president are likely to give his policies the benefit of the doubt and those members who generally disapprove of the president will be less inclined to support his policies. This type of partisan heuristic has the potential to create political contention on issues that might otherwise have been perceived as uncontroversial.

Controlling for Issue Content

In analyzing how presidential leadership affects party polarization, it is necessary to control for the varying levels of partisan disagreement on different types of political issues and the potential for selection bias. To do so, I employ two different classification schemes. First, the Policy Agendas Project classifies roll-call votes based on government function (e.g., agriculture, health, defense, community development, etc.). This classification scheme is exhaustive and mutually exclusive, and it was designed to “guarantee temporal consistency for [the] topic categories” (Baumgartner, Jones & Wilkerson 2002, 33).

Second, I have constructed an original dataset in order to isolate the votes that tap ideological divisions on matters of economic, social, and military policy. This is a less elaborate classification scheme than that in the Policy Agendas Project dataset, but it has the advantage of mirroring analytical concepts widely used by journalists and political scientists (Miller and Schofield 2003; Sundquist 1983, 376-411).

- *Economic issues* encompass votes involving the regulation of private economic activity, government’s share of the economy, social programs to redress economic inequalities, and the distribution of the tax burden. Because so many votes fall into this category, it is divided into four subcategories for more refined analysis.
- *Social issues* include all votes that set values of individual equality or freedom in opposition to the traditional moral and social order, including abortion, school prayer, affirmative action, drugs, and crime.
- *Hawk vs. dove* takes in all votes involving the use of force and the allocation of resources to military defense.

Votes falling into any of these categories involve matters of longstanding ideological dispute and are thus likely to elicit partisan controversy, regardless of presidential involvement. Appendix 1 provides a list of policy issues that fall into each ideological category.

In the ideological issue dataset, each roll-call vote is sorted into the appropriate category, if any. In most cases, votes can be classified on the basis of legislative language alone.¹ Most votes are taken on amendments, which are usually narrowly drafted and thus simple to code. For votes on passage of legislation or amendments in the nature of a substitute, which often involve complex packages, the coding rule used is whether any senator discussed during the debate in the *Congressional Record* a provision of the legislation that would fall into one of the ideological categories. Procedural votes are coded based on the underlying policy issue at stake.²

Identifying Presidential Agendas

Presidential agenda items are identified by whether the roll-call vote involves a policy issue on which the president took a position in the State of the Union Address immediately preceding the vote. This is a somewhat broader definition than that frequently used in the scholarly literature: congressional votes on which the president issued a public position. This broader definition is appropriate, however, given that this study focuses on the effect of presidential leadership on congressional partisanship, not on Congress's policy response to specific presidential requests. Raising a policy issue in the State of the Union Address indicates that the president is asserting leadership on that issue. Even if the president does not endorse a specific position on particular roll-call votes, presidential standing is nevertheless affected when Congress disposes of issues that the president has chosen to associate himself with. In any case, there are significant difficulties with the narrower measure: presidents have long "gamed" the

use of these public statements of position on congressional votes to improve their claims to successful leadership (Rudalevige 2005, 429-430). The broader definition used here is not affected by this kind of gamesmanship. If a president makes an issue a priority by requesting action on it in the State of the Union Address, any votes on that topic are treated as involving a presidential agenda item.

For example, Americorps was one of President Clinton's signature initiatives, a program central to his "New Covenant" vision. He mentioned the program in nearly every one of his State of the Union Addresses, even inviting Americorps volunteers to sit with the First Lady during his 1995 address. Nevertheless, the administration did not issue a formal position statement on any votes in the dataset involving Americorps funding, not even when the Republican majority proposed severe cuts.³ If I had employed the formal public position measure, I would not have identified as presidential agenda items any of the Americorps votes after the program's initial adoption.

Measuring the Effect of Presidential Leadership

Two considerations make the Senate superior to the House for testing the hypothesis that presidential leadership exacerbates partisanship. First, House floor votes are manipulated by the majority party leadership to a much greater extent than those in the Senate. A wider range of issues can be considered on the Senate floor, providing a more complete picture of members' behavior on issues that are not part of the majority's agenda. Second, senators face reelection only one-third as often as House members. As such, senators are probably less sensitive to the electoral stakes involved in reacting to presidential proposals, making the Senate a more rigorous

test for the theory. The time range examined, 1981 to 2004, affords every permutation of divided and unified party control.⁴

[Table 1 here]

Comparing partisan divisions on roll-call votes depending on whether issues were mentioned in the State of the Union Address provides an initial test of the hypothesis that presidential leadership exacerbates partisan divisions. Table 1 displays the average level of party polarization⁵ on Senate roll-call votes between 1981 and 2000 for each major topic in the Policy Agenda Project classification scheme. For 14 out of the 19 functional categories, the average party difference was higher when presidents took a stand on the issue in the immediately preceding State of the Union Address than when they did not. These higher levels of partisan division are statistically significant ($p < .01$) for 10 of the categories. Presidential leadership was associated with increases in party difference scores of between 30% and 40% on votes in the areas of social welfare, health, defense, and labor/employment/immigration. Partisanship was between 45% and 60% higher when presidents led on education, government operations, law/crime/family issues, and community development/housing. In the areas of international affairs/foreign aid and space/science/technology, presidential position taking was associated with increases in partisanship that were even greater than 65%. Meanwhile, presidential leadership was only associated with lower levels of partisanship in five policy areas, and in these categories the differences were quite small and, in all but one case, statistically insignificant.

Remarkably, presidential leadership appears to bring the two parties closer together in only one area: civil rights ($p < .01$). In the study period, it appears that President Reagan's support for the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act in 1982 and President George H. W.

Bush's support for the Civil Rights Act of 1991—both announced in their State of the Union Addresses—may have facilitated unusual levels of bipartisan agreement on civil rights issues.

[Table 2 here]

Table 2 displays the average level of party division on ideological issues. Because this classification scheme was specifically designed to isolate the most divisive issues in American politics, it sets a higher bar for finding any additional effects of presidential leadership on party polarization. As one would expect, presidential involvement is not associated with increases in partisanship as substantial as those evident using the Policy Agenda Project categories. Nevertheless, in every ideological category votes on issues mentioned by the president in the State of the Union Address were more divisive along party lines than votes on issues not mentioned, though there was variation across categories in the magnitude and statistical significance of the effect. Among ideological issues, the effect of presidential leadership was greatest on issues involving regulatory policy, redistributive social programs, and government's share of the economy ($p < .01$). Presidential involvement has little influence on partisanship on votes involving the distribution of the tax burden and social issues ($p = n.s.$). These are clearly party-defining issues regardless of whether a president demands action on them. Generally speaking, taxes and abortion sparked partisan division in the Senate at approximately the same levels regardless of presidential involvement. Nevertheless, taken as a group, votes on ideological issues became 13% more polarized along party lines when they were the focus of presidential attention ($p < .001$).

Do Presidents Prefer Polarizing Agendas?

Could these findings result from presidents preferring to raise issues that are inherently controversial? If presidents systematically focus their agendas on more polarizing issues, then the higher level of partisanship on presidential agenda items could potentially be caused by presidential agenda choices rather than congressional reactions to the president.

One simple way to test this is to compare the average level of party polarization across the categories of issues mentioned in each State of the Union Address with the average level of polarization across the categories of issues not mentioned. To do this, I draw on Baumgartner, Jones and Wilkerson's State of the Union Address dataset, which classifies every sentence in a State of the Union Address by its policy content using the Policy Agenda Project classification scheme.⁶ Using this, I was able to determine which major policy topics were mentioned in each State of the Union Address from 1982-1999 and then to compare the average level of party polarization across the topics mentioned with the average level of party polarization on the topics not mentioned. The results are displayed as Table 3.

[Table 3 here]

The data provide no support for the counter hypothesis that presidents prefer to focus their Addresses on polarizing topics. For 7 of the 18 years available in the dataset, the types of issues included in presidential addresses are actually *less* party polarizing than the types of issues that presidents declined to include in their agenda. Seeking to avoid partisan conflict actually seems like a good strategy for presidents facing a hostile Congress. However, in no Congress are the differences in party polarization between the types of issues mentioned and those not mentioned statistically significant. Generally speaking, it appears that the types of issues incorporated into presidential agendas are broadly representative of the issues considered in Congress in terms of party polarization.

Any reading of State of the Union Addresses reveals that presidents devote significant portions of these speeches to relatively uncontroversial items. This is not to deny that presidents use their Addresses to assert leadership on ideologically divisive matters, such as universal health care, Social Security personal accounts, and tax cuts. But presidents highlight many issues that do not raise issues of the role of government in the economy, redistribution across classes, the “culture war,” the use of military force, or any of the controversial issues that tend to divide Democrats from Republicans. Examples of relatively noncontroversial issues that regularly appear as presidential agenda items include: space exploration; military pay and veterans’ benefits; homeland security; grant program consolidations; medical research funding; and targeted tax credits for charitable contributions, care-giving, and education expenditures. Moreover, presidents do not confine themselves to leadership on major issues. For example, recent addresses have asked for congressional action on a regulation requiring V-Chips in new televisions, an initiative to permit public schools to require school uniforms, and a small grant program to encourage the development of biofuels out of woodchips and switchgrass. These data provide no evidence that the issue content of presidential agendas is more focused on party polarizing issues than the congressional agenda generally.⁷

Modeling Party Polarization on Senate Votes

In order to assess the effect of presidential leadership on congressional partisanship, it is necessary to control for several potential causes of spurious correlation. Separate multiple regression models are estimated for the roll-call votes in each of the functional and ideological issue categories. The dependent variable is the Rice Index of party difference for each roll-call vote. Controls in the model take into account:

- Votes on procedural matters and on amendments: The congressional voting behavior literature has demonstrated that party-line votes are more likely to occur on procedural and parliamentary matters (Cox and McCubbins 1993, Theriault 2006) and on amendments (Roberts and Smith 2003, Rohde 1991). If a greater proportion of presidential agenda items are handled with procedural motions or amendments, then the higher level of partisanship on these issues might have nothing to do with presidential involvement. To control for this, the model includes *procedural* and *passage*, dummy variables coded as 1 when votes occurred on procedural motions and on final passage, respectively.
- Growing partisanship over time: Partisanship dramatically increased over the study's time period (Sinclair 2006). Presidential agenda items would spuriously appear to be more partisan if more such votes in any category occurred in later Congresses than earlier Congresses. The models thus include a time trend, *year*.
- Constituency change: Overall levels of partisanship in congressional voting may also be affected by the number of senators representing states that strongly tilt toward one party. Previous studies have found that an increase in "safe seats" has exacerbated congressional partisanship (e.g., Jacobson 2004, Lowry and Shipan 2002). Constituency partisanship is measured by *safe seats*, a measure developed by Abramowitz, Alexander and Gunning (2006) to capture the number of senators representing states that lean heavily toward their own party. This indicator is the number of states in which the presidential candidate of the incumbent senator's party ran at least 10 percentage points ahead of the candidate's national average.

Controlling for these potential causes of spurious correlation, Tables 3 and 4 present separate regression results for roll-call votes in each of the functional policy categories and in each of the ideological issue categories. The findings displayed here confirm that the effects of presidential leadership evident in the bivariate analysis above are not the spurious result of any of these factors. The control variables performed as expected. In nearly every category, votes on *procedural* motions were more partisan than votes on substantive legislation ($p < .05$). In almost every category, votes on final *passage* were less partisan than votes on amendments. Reflecting the growth in party polarization over the time period, *year* always took a positive coefficient that was usually statistically significant.⁸ Votes occurring in Congresses in which more senators held safe seats tended to be more partisan, with *safe seats* usually taking a positive coefficient, statistically significant in 7 of the 19 functional categories. Alternative specifications of the models (not shown here) were also attempted. The findings are robust if fixed effects for Congresses or for individual presidents are included in the model instead of the time trend.⁹

[Table 4 here]

The findings in Table 4 suggest that presidential leadership has a wide-ranging influence on congressional politics. Presidential involvement appears to spark intensified partisanship across most substantive areas of national policy: effects are especially pronounced on social welfare, education, health, international affairs, and defense. Moreover, most of the policy areas where presidential leadership has no statistically significant effect on congressional partisanship are heavily distributive (Lowi 1964) in nature: transportation, agriculture, public lands/water, energy, and environment.¹⁰ To a greater extent than most public policy, these programs are “tied to the land” in that they provide concentrated benefits to senators’ geographic constituencies (see Arnold 1990, 25-29). They are also the policy areas most often cited as examples of “iron

triangles,” self-serving networks of constituency-based interest groups, members of Congress, and career bureaucrats that cooperate together to thwart presidential influence (Lee 2005, 296-7). Presidents do attempt to assert leadership in these areas, as is evident from the numbers of cases found in the second column of Table 1. However, these are policy areas where senators may be more concerned with providing for local constituents than with cultivating a collective party brand name. Members’ votes in these areas are likely affected more by their electoral interests in “bringing home the bacon” than their interest in sustaining or embarrassing an administration.

[Table 5 here]

The results displayed in Table 5 reveal that presidential leadership has a measurable impact on the party politics of even the most ideologically divisive political issues, issues on which individual senators are likely to have relatively well-defined ideological preferences. *Redistributive* programs, as well as *economic* issues generally, tend to be more party polarized when presidents include them in their agenda. Holding all other variables in the model constant at their means, presidential leadership deepens the divide between the parties on *redistributive programs* by an estimated 18%¹¹ and on *economic* programs generally by an estimated 7%.¹² Similarly, although it was not apparent from the bivariate analysis shown in Table 2, presidential leadership also has a statistically significant effect ($p < .05$) on the politics of *hawk v. dove* issues once the multiple regression model controls for other confounding factors. The gap between the parties grows by 10% on military policy votes when they involve presidential agenda items.¹³

The finding that senators’ voting behavior on *social issues* is not much affected by presidential position-taking is consistent with previous scholarship reporting that party pressure has little effect on “conscience issues” such as abortion, affirmative action, gay rights, and school prayer (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001). Similarly, presidential involvement

appears not to influence partisanship in votes on *regulation of private economic activity* or the *distribution of the tax burden*. On these hot-button issues, members may be more concerned to maintain a clear voting record than with how their votes reflect on a president's leadership.

When all votes involving ideological issues are grouped together (shown in the last column of Table 5), presidential leadership still systematically widens the gap between the parties ($p < .001$). However, the effect of presidential leadership is greatest on issues that do not fit into any of the ideological categories identified. When all roll-call votes that fall into none of the ideological categories are grouped together, presidential agenda status is one of the best predictors of the overall level of partisanship, with party polarization increasing by fully 34% when presidents highlight them in their State of the Union Addresses.¹⁴ It appears that presidential leadership is most important to party politics when ideological principles are not clearly at stake and when lines of party cleavage are not already well established. On such issues, presidents help define what the parties stand for as members organize to support or oppose the president.

Presidents, Parties, and Partisanship

These results are consistent with the theory that presidential leadership exerts a contrary pull on the parties in Congress, driving them farther apart on the issues that presidents champion. A president mentioning an issue in the State of the Union Address widens the distance between the parties on that issue in Congress, controlling for policy type. As James Madison (1987, 124) famously observed in *Federalist* 10, parties are formed both on the basis of “different opinions . . . concerning government” as well as from “attachment to different leaders ambitiously contending for pre-eminence and power.” Undoubtedly, a great deal of partisanship in Congress

has its source in members “different opinions” about the proper role of government. But even a relatively simple measure of how “attachment” to presidents affects partisanship in Congress identifies wide-ranging effects across most areas of national policy. Meanwhile, when local constituency interests weigh more heavily in members’ voting decisions, presidential politics appears not to affect partisan behavior.

When presidents propose a legislative program, they are doing more than suggesting a set of policy proposals for Congress to consider. They are also serving as the most visible public face of their political party. Members of Congress consequently react to a president in both his capacity as chief legislator and as party leader. In viewing a president as party leader, members of the opposing party have incentives to resist his proposals, separate from their agreement or disagreement with his actual policies. Members of the president’s party have electoral motive to support their party leader, regardless of their views on the policy merits. In addition, members’ attitudes toward the president filter their perceptions of his policy ideas. Presidential leadership separates the partisans in Congress both because of their different responses to the president as a “source cue” and their opposing political interests.

These findings have at least three important implications for scholarly understanding of congressional parties and partisanship. First, members’ willingness to support a policy idea can depend on who proposes it, not just on what it would do. Because party images are at stake, members may be willing to support a policy idea when offered by the leader of their own party but oppose it when put forward by the opposing party’s leader. In 1993, for example, President Clinton proposed Goals 2000, an education initiative providing for voluntary testing for students in elementary and secondary schools. In doing so, Clinton was supported by Democrats in Congress and opposed by Republicans, who protested the importance of leaving education and

testing up to local school districts.¹⁵ In 2001, President Bush proposed an even more ambitious educational assessment program providing for mandatory testing in grades three through eight. In that endeavor, Bush was supported by Republicans and opposed by Democrats, who raised their own concerns about local control and unfunded mandates.¹⁶ Wholesale partisan flip-flops of this nature are difficult to explain in terms of policy preferences, but they are easily accounted for as a consequence of a congressional response to the president as party leader.

Another recurrent example is the two parties' responses to presidential requests to increase the debt limit. A party's willingness to support an increase in the debt limit seems to be best explained by whether that party controls the presidency. During the Reagan presidency, Democrats consistently opposed raising the public debt limit, while Republicans supported it.¹⁷ During the Clinton presidency, Republicans regularly opposed raising the public debt limit, while Democrats supported it.¹⁸ It is more reasonable to interpret these party-line votes on the debt limit as strategic responses to presidential leadership, rather than as sincere expressions of members' views on the appropriate level of publicly held debt in the United States.

Second, presidential leadership may spark intense partisan disagreement on issues that might otherwise have been uncontroversial or relatively uncontroversial. An examination of the Senate roll-call record indicates that the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program was one of most controversial intergovernmental grant programs of the 1990s. The COPS program implemented President Clinton's State of the Union Address promise to "put 100,000 more police officers on the street," and it was mentioned in most of his Addresses. There were no fewer than eight roll-call votes on the program, all breaking almost perfectly along party lines.¹⁹ The COPS program is just one of many grant programs in the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs (OJP) to assist local law enforcement for various purposes, including

technology, statistics, missing children, and crime victims. None of these other programs sparked controversy in the roll-call record. COPS was not the most expensive of the OJP's grant programs, and it was never the focus of a public scandal. Although it is impossible to prove a counterfactual, it is difficult to believe that the intense Senate controversy over this program had nothing to do with its high profile as a presidential agenda item.

Finally, to fully understand congressional voting behavior, scholars must take into account members' partisan political *interests* as well as their policy *preferences*. These findings suggest that a considerable amount of partisanship in congressional voting follows the logic of "whose ox is being gored." Although deeply held ideological differences between the parties undoubtedly account for much voting behavior in the contemporary Congress, partisanship also springs from contextual and strategic sources. Even if their policy preferences are philosophically fixed over the course of their political lives, members are also self-interested political actors with their own electoral needs in mind. The perceived success or failure of a presidency has such a uniquely important effect on the political interests of both parties in Congress that they cannot fail to consider how their behavior will affect a president's prospects. Presidential leadership thus provides cues and strategic incentives that lead congressional partisans to take clearer stands in opposition to one another.

Appendix 1: Issue Classification of Senate Roll Call Votes, 97th-108th Congresses (n=8600)

- I. **Economic policy** (n=2231): This category captures four different types of issues that separate liberals from conservatives on economic policy.
 - A. **Government's share of the economy** (n=509). Conservatives support measures to limit government's share of the economy; liberals oppose them.
 - Across the board cuts in or caps on domestic spending
 - Procedural mechanisms (points of order, supermajority requirements, budget caps) to inhibit revenue and spending increases
 - Revenue reductions in budget resolutions (before specific tax cuts are reported from the Finance Committee)
 - Line item veto
 - Social Security and Medicare lockbox, and measures to restrain the growth in entitlement spending
 - Federal jobs programs to reduce unemployment
 - Privatization initiatives (contracting out government workers, services, programs)
 - B. **Regulation of private economic activity for public purposes** (n=906). Conservatives oppose new regulations on private business activity and seek to roll back or limit existing regulations; liberals support new and existing regulations.
 - Labor protections and regulations (prevailing wage, minimum wage, overtime, workplace safety, striker replacement, union political activity)
 - Anti discrimination/equal access legislation for the disabled
 - Antitrust laws
 - Environmental regulation
 - Consumer protections (product safety, consumer privacy)
 - Property rights enforcement
 - Cost benefit requirements for new regulations
 - Regulatory relief
 - Restrictions on campaign contributions
 - Firearm safety locks and background checks before sales
 - Restrictions on class action lawsuits
 - C. **Distribution of the tax burden** (n=265). Conservatives favor a less progressive tax policy, liberals favor a more progressive tax policy.
 - Personal income taxes (including marginal tax rates, capital gains taxation, deductions for health insurance)
 - Limits on tax cuts or deductions for top brackets
 - Tax preferred savings accounts
 - Flat tax proposals
 - Estate taxes
 - D. **Redistributive social programs** (n=520). Liberals support programs designed to reduce social and economic inequality and seek to increase funding for them; conservatives do not.
 - Food stamps
 - Head start
 - Child care development block grants
 - State children's health insurance

- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families
- Medicaid
- Earned Income Tax Credit
- Unemployment benefits (and extensions)
- Community Development Block Grants
- Job training programs
- Prison literacy and rehabilitation programs, Legal Aid
- Title I education funding

E. **More than one economic policy category** (n=50). These are votes that involve more than one of the economic categories above. Votes on final passage of the budget resolution typically fall in this category.

II. **Social issues** (n=672). This category includes all votes that set values of individual equality or freedom in opposition to the traditional moral and social order.

- School vouchers and tax-exempt accounts to fund religious and private education
- Punishments for crime, including the death penalty, mandatory minimums, and nonrestoration of felon voting rights
- Affirmative action
- Limits on abortion rights and access
- School prayer
- Making receipt of government benefits depend upon good behavior (not doing drugs, attending school, having no more kids while on welfare, etc.)
- Homosexual rights
- Needle exchange programs
- School desegregation/consent decrees
- Hate crimes laws

III. **Hawk v. dove** (n=368): Conservatives favor devoting more resources to military defense than liberals and are more likely to favor the use of force.

- Strategic Missile Defense (SDI), MX Missile
- Covert military aid (anti-communism)
- Nuclear test moratoriums
- Nuclear weapon research and development
- Across-the-board increases or cuts in defense spending
- Authorizations of the use of force

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Table 1: Presidential Leadership and Party Divisions on Senate Roll-Call Votes, By Government Function, 1981-2000

Government Function	No Presidential Leadership (n)		Presidential Leadership (n)		Difference
Macroeconomics	54.5	(498)	52.4	(176)	-2.2
Civil rights	41.9	(213)	26.8	(44)	-15.1**
Health	46.6	(269)	65.6	(93)	19.1***
Agriculture	33.2	(274)	36.6	(19)	3.4
Labor, employment, immigration	43.1	(280)	58.2	(94)	15.1***
Education	50.5	(180)	75.0	(93)	24.5***
Environment	38.8	(124)	30.3	(38)	-8.5
Energy	33.8	(140)	36.1	(36)	2.3
Transportation	33.9	(254)	28.6	(22)	-5.3
Law, crime, family issues	31.6	(234)	49.8	(109)	18.2***
Social welfare	43.1	(186)	57.3	(124)	14.2**
Community development and housing	40.9	(88)	62.8	(26)	21.9**
Banking, finance, domestic commerce	36.6	(232)	39.8	(54)	3.2
Defense	35.1	(670)	49.1	(195)	14.0***
Space, science, technology,	32.3	(105)	62.8	(20)	30.5***
Foreign trade	29.3	(147)	21.0	(42)	-8.3
International affairs, foreign aid	22.6	(551)	37.9	(69)	15.3***
Government operations	37.6	(1177)	56.9	(199)	19.3***
Public lands and water management	39.4	(199)	46.9	(11)	7.5
<i>Average for all votes</i>	41.3	(6699)	56.5	(1895)	17.1***

Note: Cells show the average Rice Index of party difference score for roll-call votes in each category.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 2: Presidential Leadership and Party Divisions on Senate Roll-Call Votes, By Ideological Issue Category, 1981-2004

Ideological Issue Categories	No Presidential Leadership (n)	Presidential Leadership (n)	Difference
Economic	58.8 (1495)	67.6 (736)	8.8***
Social	43.9 (528)	44.2 (144)	.3
Hawk v. Dove	54.3 (234)	56.2 (134)	1.9
Government's share of the economy	66.4 (353)	76.1 (156)	9.7***
Regulation of economic activity	52.7 (654)	62.3 (252)	9.6***
Distribution of the tax burden	66.0 (140)	71.0 (125)	5.0
Redistributive programs	55.8 (323)	65.3 (197)	9.5***
Any of the above	54.9 (2453)	62.8 (1141)	7.9***
None of the above	30.2 (4246)	43.9 (754)	13.7***

Note: Cells show the average Rice Index of party difference score for roll-call votes in each category.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 3: Are Presidential Agendas Focused on More Party Polarizing Types of Issues?

Average party difference on. . .	Topics Mentioned in the State of the Union Address	Topics Not Mentioned in the State of the Union Address	<i>p</i>
1982	33.2	24.2	n.s.
1983	31.8	29.4	n.s.
1984	30.3	33.2	n.s.
1985	39.4	50.6	n.s.
1986	31.2	28.2	n.s.
1987	27.1	31.7	n.s.
1988	30.9	26.7	n.s.
1989	32.1	40.6	n.s.
1990	36.8	42.8	n.s.
1991	37.0	30.0	n.s.
1992	40.1	36.1	n.s.
1993	54.6	35.0	n.s.
1994	40.1	33.2	n.s.
1995	52.5	60.2	n.s.
1996	53.0	46.4	n.s.
1997	43.0	45.3	n.s.
1998	47.2	38.1	n.s.
1999	56.3	49.2	n.s.

Note: Cells show the average Rice Index of party difference scores for Senate votes on the issue topics that presidents included in their State of the Union Addresses and on the issue topics that presidents did not mention in their State of the Union Address. Data on the major topics mentioned and not mentioned are drawn from the State of the Union Address Dataset available at policyagendas.org. Shaded years are those in which the topics mentioned in the Address were less controversial along party lines than the topics presidents did not mention.

Table 4: Presidential Leadership and Partisan Division in the Senate, by Government Function, 1981-2000

	Macro-economics	Civil Rights	Health	Agri-culture	Labor, Em-ployment	Education	Environ-ment	Energy	Trans-portation	Social Welfare
Pres. leadership	-46 (2.70)	-7.38 (4.05)	14.16 (3.92)	1.76 (6.42)	6.92 (3.78)	20.62 (3.76)	-5.44 (4.58)	2.78 (4.17)	-8.85 (5.79)	15.28 (3.43)
Safe seats	.69 (.19)	.31 (.24)	1.16 (.30)	.30 (.26)	.56 (.26)	.92 (.31)	.99 (.32)	.97 (.28)	-.64 (.26)	-.09 (.29)
Year	1.39 (.19)	2.41 (.29)	.79 (.32)	.45 (.27)	1.44 (.31)	.86 (.31)	2.12 (.35)	1.33 (.36)	.53 (.27)	1.27 (.29)
Procedural	15.75 (2.64)	8.69 (3.18)	17.90 (3.27)	9.40 (3.53)	17.49 (3.25)	23.74 (3.66)	15.33 (4.38)	7.65 (4.13)	6.56 (3.65)	28.49 (3.62)
Passage	.26 (3.28)	-7.21 (4.48)	-7.06 (6.20)	-16.10 (4.70)	-11.51 (4.84)	-15.80 (6.28)	-18.08 (5.23)	-19.31 (6.12)	-25.00 (4.55)	-18.00 (4.92)
F	24.67	18.07	19.58	7.52	18.69	26.48	22.87	10.22	13.89	33.51
Adj. R ²	.16	.26	.22	.12	.20	.33	.42	.23	.20	.35
N	673	256	361	292	373	272	161	175	274	309

	Law, Crime, Family	Community Developm't	Banking, Finance	Defense	Space, Science, Technology	Foreign Trade	Intern'l Affairs	Gov't Ops	Public Lands & Water
Pres. leadership	13.71 (3.26)	23.45 (6.51)	3.80 (4.21)	12.86 (2.23)	25.63 (6.54)	-7.48 (5.03)	14.43 (3.19)	10.89 (2.34)	-5.72 (7.85)
Safe seats	.38 (.24)	-.02 (.45)	.25 (.27)	.13 (.14)	-.28 (.39)	.68 (.29)	-.35 (.16)	-.53 (.13)	-1.10 (.29)
Year	2.06 (.27)	.50 (.49)	1.32 (.28)	.26 (.17)	.79 (.40)	.30 (.34)	.25 (.19)	.92 (.15)	1.20 (.29)
Procedural	18.80 (3.05)	14.50 (5.83)	15.01 (3.78)	18.64 (2.01)	18.05 (4.96)	14.73 (3.98)	21.40 (2.30)	29.43 (1.83)	4.51 (4.57)
Passage	-2.33 (4.31)	-12.48 (7.23)	-15.58 (4.83)	-14.72 (2.70)	-6.89 (6.87)	-3.77 (5.23)	-8.43 (2.49)	-8.66 (2.32)	-33.66 (4.92)
F	26.75	5.95	15.06	41.92	10.04	6.96	33.36	102.26	24.74
Adj. R ²	.28	.22	.21	.20	.30	.16	.21	.27	.38
N	342	113	285	864	124	188	619	1375	209

Note: Dependent variable is the Rice Index for party difference for each roll call vote in the category. Entries are OLS coefficients (standard errors in parentheses) Bolded coefficients are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Vote classification scheme developed by Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones; data and codebook available at the Policy Agendas Project website (www.policyagendas.org).

Table 5: Presidential Leadership and Partisan Division in the Senate, by Ideological Issue, 1981-2004

	Social Issues	Hawk v. Dove	Economic Issues	Gvt Share of the Economy	Regula- tions	Distribution of Tax Burden	Redistributive Programs	None	Any
Pres. leadership	-2.81 (2.19)	5.52 (2.32)	4.43 (1.27)	3.89 (2.74)	3.89 (2.09)	.20 (3.50)	10.30 (2.38)	10.90 (1.16)	3.53 (.99)
Safe seats	.01 (.13)	-.32 (.17)	.05 (.09)	-.07 (.20)	-.46 (.15)	.53 (.28)	.002 (.17)	.01 (.06)	.03 (.06)
Year	2.19 (.14)	1.42 (.20)	1.51 (.09)	1.58 (.16)	2.00 (.18)	1.56 (.27)	1.09 (.16)	.51 (.06)	1.61 (.07)
Procedural	10.37 (1.88)	10.68 (2.27)	8.74 (1.24)	6.95 (2.46)	9.12 (1.95)	6.65 (3.23)	14.20 (2.48)	25.01 (.92)	10.11 (.96)
Passage	-10.07 (3.18)	-.55 (4.00)	-10.40 (1.90)	-5.39 (3.68)	-18.90 (3.04)	1.84 (5.83)	-21.36 (3.97)	-11.06 (1.14)	-12.85 (1.42)
F	55.84	16.89	111.32	29.01	54.32	16.87	36.01	283.65	196.26
Adj. R ²	.29	.18	.20	.22	.23	.23	.25	.22	.21
N	671	367	2230	508	905	264	519	4998	3593

Note: Dependent variable is the Rice Index for party difference for each roll call vote in the category. Entries are OLS coefficients (standard errors in parentheses) Bolded coefficients are statistically significant ($p < .05$)

Notes

¹ For nominations, appropriations, and trade agreements it is not possible to classify votes on the basis of legislative language alone. For these, I examine the debate in the *Congressional Record* to determine if a senator raised an issue that would place the vote into one of the categories.

When appropriations bills are controversial because of overall spending levels, they are coded as involving an ideological issue. If a debate on a nomination reveals a senator expressing concern about the nominee's views on economic, social or foreign policy, then the nomination is coded into the appropriate category. When trade agreements are objected to because of other countries' lack of environmental and labor protections, the vote is coded in the economic policy category.

² For example, a motion to table an amendment restricting government funding for abortions in the District of Columbia is classed as a *social issue* and as a procedural vote.

³ See, for example, the following Senate roll-call votes: number 464 in the 104th Congress, 1st session; number 37 in the 104th Congress, 2nd session; and number 286 in the 106th Congress, 1st session.

⁴ The combinations are as follows: Republican president and Republican Senate (the 97th, 98th, 99th, part of the 107th, and the 108th Congresses), Republican president and Democratic Senate (the 100th, 101st, 102nd, and part of the 107th Congresses), Democratic president and Democratic Senate (the 103rd Congress), and Democratic president and Republican Senate (the 104th, 105th, 106th).

⁵ Party polarization is measured using the average Rice Index of party difference across votes. For each vote this index is the absolute difference between the percentage of Democrats voting yea and the percentage of Republicans voting yea.

⁶ The codebook and dataset are available on the Policy Agendas website at policyagendas.org.

⁷ As a stricter test of the counter hypothesis, I also estimated a cross-sectional time-series logit model to test whether presidents steer their agendas toward issues that are party polarizing. The dependent variable was *Topic Mentioned_t*, a dummy variable reflecting whether or not a major topic type (using the Policy Agendas classification scheme) was mentioned in the State of the Union Address each year between 1982 and 1999. The key independent variable was the level of party polarization on that issue in the preceding Congress. The model includes fixed effects for individual presidents (in order to capture any preference for particular issues that particular presidents exhibit during their time in office) and for each category of issue (to control for the fact that some types of issues are more likely to appear in a president's address than others.) Logit coefficients were estimated with robust standard errors with clustering for issue type. The results provide no evidence that higher levels of party polarization on an issue type increase the likelihood that presidents will include it in their agenda. The coefficient on the party polarization variable is small (.01) and statistically insignificant ($p=.30$).

⁸ Interestingly, it appears that there is a pattern in the types of issues for which partisanship has not increased. The time trend term does not take a statistically significant coefficient for defense, foreign trade or international affairs. The only additional category where there was not statistically significant increased partisanship was community development.

⁹ Fixed effects model results reveal that these findings are not affected by any factor that is constant across a Congress, including divided or unified government, party leadership, and the margin of party control.

¹⁰ Important distributive programs in the environment category include wastewater treatment grants, Superfund, and land and water conservation programs.

¹¹ Predicted party polarization increases from 55.6 to 65.9 when redistributive issues are mentioned in the State of the Union Address. The difference between these two estimates is statistically significant ($p < .001$). Predicted values calculated with CLARIFY: Software for Interpreting and Presenting Statistical Results. Version 2.1 (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003).

¹² Predicted party polarization increases from 60.2 to 64.7 when economic issues are mentioned in the State of the Union Address. The difference is statistically significant ($p < .001$).

¹³ Predicted party polarization increases from 52.9 to 58.4 when *hawk vs. dove* issues are mentioned in the State of the Union Address. The difference is statistically significant ($p < .01$).

¹⁴ Predicted party polarization increases from 30.8 to 41.3 when redistributive issues are mentioned in the State of the Union Address. The difference is statistically significant ($p < .001$).

¹⁵ See Senate roll-call votes 20 and 34 in the 103rd Congress, 2nd session.

¹⁶ See Senate roll-call votes 99, 171, 172, 173, 174, 176 and 183 in the 107th Congress, 1st session.

¹⁷ See, for example, Senate roll-call votes 295, 198, 354 in the 97th Congress, 1st session and roll-call votes 115, 330, and 370 in the 98th Congress, 1st session.

¹⁸ See, for example, Senate roll-call votes 568, 569 in the 104th Congress, 1st session and roll-call votes 2 and 24 in the 104th Congress, 2nd session.

¹⁹ See Senate roll-call vote 43 in the 103rd Congress, 1st session; vote 591 in the 104th Congress, 1st session; votes 31, 122, and 123 in the 104th Congress, 2nd session; votes 109 and 139 in the 106th Congress, 1st session; and vote 78 in the 108th Congress, 1st session.