

**“Legislative Liaison, White House Roll-Call Predictions, and Divided Government:  
The Eisenhower Experience, 83rd-84th Congresses”\***

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**Abstract**

This article offers a fresh perspective into the Eisenhower Administration’s attempts to predict and influence roll-call outcomes in Congress during the transition from Republican to Democratic control following the mid-term elections of 1954. Analysis of archival data uncovered at the Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, Kansas, provides insight into a different facet of Eisenhower’s “hidden-hand presidency” and early efforts to systematize congressional liaison. Using “headcount” data assembled by the Legislative Liaison Unit, this research assesses the accuracy of forecasts of presidential legislative support in the House of Representatives. A multinomial logit model is developed to account for the basis of successful and unsuccessful White House estimates of members’ positions. On the subset of votes the White House found difficult to predict, the empirical model highlights that the least accurate forecasts of individual members’ positions are best explained by constituency factors, partisan politicking, and disunity in the Republican House Conference.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The history of executive-legislative relations in the modern era suggests that the president and Congress are remarkably able to adapt to changing policymaking contexts and shifts in the balance of influence and power between the branches. The contemporary institutional context underscores the point. In recent decades ideological polarization and internally cohesive parties on Capitol Hill have diminished presidential success on floor outcomes when control of the presidency and Congress has been divided. Yet Presidents like George H.W. Bush (1989-92) and Bill Clinton (1995-2000) frequently used partisan voting alignments combined with narrow party margins in Congress to their advantage by leveraging the veto power. Vetoing, or threatening to veto legislation in this setting can enable presidents to regain bargaining advantages and exercise significant influence over policy outcomes (Cameron 2000; Conley 2003).

The partisan backdrop to today's inter-institutional relations contrasts mightily to the early decades of the post-World War II era. Divided or unified government seemingly mattered less. Lack of party organization in Congress, fluid voting alignments, and ideological diversity within both parties yielded substantially more uncertainty about floor outcomes generally. As a result, presidents needed to develop nuanced and varied strategies in the legislative arena. Burns' (1963, 259) classic formulation of "four party politics" captured the essence of the challenge for chief executives in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s. He notes that a "double cleavage, institutional and attitudinal, between the presidential parties and the congressional parties is largely responsible for the conflicting positions that a President, whether Democratic or Republican, and a Congress, whether Democratic or Republican controlled, take on the crucial affairs of state." The prevalence of a large number of "cross-pressured" members on both sides

of the aisle whose ideological positions were closer to the median of the other party defined this era.<sup>1</sup> These “pivotal” voters (Krehbiel 1998) held sway over floor outcomes. And the members who frequently formed the linchpin for legislative success tended to change across issue areas. The “conservative coalition” of southern Democrats and Republicans could often carry the day on government spending or social affairs. When moderate Democrats and Republicans allied together they could sometimes prevail on international issues, or even on civil rights, as passage of the 1957 Civil Rights Act demonstrated.

Presidents like Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy had to walk a tight rope that involved reaching out to select members across the aisle while also attempting build intra party support for their positions. Issue votes of importance to the president often involved cobbling together cross-party coalitions of different members. Predicting legislative support and strategizing was a complex and sometimes frustrating endeavor for presidents of both parties, whether party control of national institutions was unified or divided.

This article steps back in time to offer a fresh and unique perspective into the Eisenhower Administration’s attempts to predict and influence roll-call outcomes in the halcyon days of the “bipartisan conservative era” of Congress during the mid-1950s (Davidson 1996). With the aid of archival data uncovered at the Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, Kansas, this research provides insight into a different facet of Eisenhower’s “hidden-hand presidency” (Greenstein 1982) and early efforts to institutionalize congressional liaison in the modern White House. Eisenhower established the Legislative Liaison Unit (LLU) in 1953 to systematize relations with Capitol Hill. The LLU played a particularly important role in the transition from Republican to Democratic control of Congress following the mid-term elections of 1954. The White House expected many unresolved issues from the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress (1953-54) to carry over to

the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress (1955-56). The influx of new members, and renewed Democratic Party control, prompted the LLU to review probable voting alignments and roll-call outcomes in order to make strategic recommendations to the President.

The objective of this research is to assess the accuracy of LLU forecasts of legislative support in the House of Representatives. The article examines predictions not only of roll-call outcomes in the aggregate but also forecasts of individual members' positions. "Headcount" data from archival records, never before analyzed for Eisenhower's presidency, are juxtaposed with actual votes cast in the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress. A multinomial logit model is developed to account for the basis of successful and unsuccessful White House estimates of members' positions. On the subset of votes the White House found difficult to predict, the empirical model highlights that the least accurate forecasts of individual members' positions are best explained by constituency factors, partisan politicking, and disunity in the Republican House Conference.

Although the analysis reveals a mixed record of predictions overall, the LLU's relative success must be understood within the unique context of divided government in the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress. Republicans were sometimes internally divided and showed evidence of the "minority mentality" (Jones 1974). Moreover the LLU suspected constituency characteristics would influence voting across issue areas—but did not have the methods to systematically measure them. Despite these constraints, forecasts were relatively accurate. This research shows that even when integrated into sophisticated probability models, such information, *a posteriori*, only moderately improves forecasts compared to the LLU's predictions on select issue votes.

The article unfolds in several stages. The next section provides a brief overview of the LLU's organization, function, and personnel. The third section describes the data and method employed in the analysis. The fourth section presents the empirical analysis. The concluding

section reprises the lessons of the Eisenhower experience and the implications for the modern presidency.

## **II. THE EISENHOWER LEGISLATIVE LIAISON UNIT IN PERSPECTIVE**

It is a well established fact that the organization and management of the Eisenhower White House was heavily influenced by the President's military career (Burke 1992, 55). Formal "chains of command" were established and units were delegated authority to carry out functions. The LLU was no exception. Its structure and function uniquely matched Eisenhower's aversion to partisan politics, his view of separation between the branches, and preference for building support in Congress outside the public eye.

Eisenhower established the LLU in 1953 and placed longtime confidant and fellow veteran General Wilton Persons in charge of a capable staff of congressional observers and lobbyists. Persons had served in a similar liaison capacity in the War Department under Eisenhower. LLU personnel included Bryce Harlow, Jack Anderson, Ed McCabe, Gerald T. Morgan, Jack Martin, Homer H. Gruenther, and Earl D. Chesney. Their charge was to keep abreast of developments in Congress in both parties, act as a conduit for conveying information between the branches, and keep channels of communication flowing between members and the White House.

As a buffer between Eisenhower and Congress, the LLU fulfilled several of the President's objectives. The President recognized the nature of voting alignments on Capitol Hill, was keenly aware of internal divisions in the ranks of congressional Republicans, and realized that Democratic support was needed no matter which party controlled Congress. He "preferred to leave the operation of the political machinery to professionals" (Cotter 1983, 256). His

approach was “shaped by his personality, the expectations of the time, and his own view of the proper relationship between the branches” (Collier 1997, 34).

Most importantly, the LLU enabled Eisenhower to avoid heated, public political battles in which his predecessors sometimes engaged. A moderate, Eisenhower frequently found himself at odds with the Taft wing of the Party. When he accepted the GOP nomination in 1952, he “realized more keenly than ever before that he had become the candidate of a loose coalition including fanatics of the extreme right as well as middle-roaders and liberal elements” (Pusey 1956, 27). Republicans in Congress were internally fractured over domestic and foreign affairs, divided as they were between anti-New Deal, isolationist “Old Guard” and moderate to liberal and internationalist northern factions.

The LLU’s efforts to build legislative support for the President in this setting were complemented by Eisenhower’s close working relationship with leaders in both parties. Although Eisenhower sometimes found meetings with leaders tiresome (Hess 1976, 70), he believed they were “the most effective mechanism for developing coordination with Congress” (Scheele 1993, 137). He fostered a healthy working relationship with Democratic Speaker Sam Rayburn and Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson during the six years of divided government from 1955-60 (Pach and Richardson 1991, 51). The President also forged a particularly close relationship with Republican Charles Halleck, who “quickly emerged as the president’s key leader in the House and was recognized as his chief lieutenant on Capitol Hill” (Scheele 1993, 138). Eisenhower left it to the LLU, Halleck, and Democratic leaders and committee chairs to work out the details of legislation.

The structure of legislative liaison Eisenhower put in place was consistent with his goal of remaining above petty partisan politicking. Eisenhower eschewed “going public” (Kernell

1997) whenever possible. Staying out of the public eye on political controversies facilitated Eisenhower's seeming ability to reconcile the contradictory expectations of the modern presidency. He could rise above the fray while remaining engaged behind the scenes through a "hidden-hand" approach. As Greenstein (1994, 234) contends, Eisenhower "characteristically worked his will by indirection, concealing those of his maneuvers that belied his apolitical exterior." "Staying quiet," as Cary Covington (1987, 741-42) calls this strategy, had a number of advantages—from improving chances of winning on controversial votes and avoiding the appearance of defeat to creating flexibility and room to maneuver, which can obviate the appearance of contradictory position-taking.

The loss of a Republican majority following the 1954 mid-term elections put the LLU's skills to the test. Some argued that the GOP's losses were due to Eisenhower's refusal to trumpet traditional Republican principles; others contended that his distance from the congressional campaigns averted a disastrous defeat (Pach and Richardson 1991, 73). Whatever the case, the President anticipated some difficulty with legislative affairs as he eyed the thirty-seat majority Democrats had gained. Predicting the issues that would likely come before Congress, and how members—especially the 43 newly elected members—would vote became paramount. The relative success of the LLU in forecasting outcomes and calculating presidential legislative support is the subject of the detailed analysis that follows.

### **III. DATA AND METHOD**

Archival research at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library revealed a meticulous analysis of House members' expected positions on unresolved issues that carried over from the 83<sup>rd</sup> to the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress, followed by a reappraisal of forecast accuracy on select issues (*Legislative Outlook*, 1955). The LLU based its forecasts on reelected members' past voting on similar

issues (usually in the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress, but occasionally in prior Congresses) as well as leadership positions in the two parties. An explicit assumption in the analysis was that members' positions were stable—that they would not deviate from their prior voting records when issues came before the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress.

The White House staff struggled most in the bid to predict positions of the 43 new members who came to Capitol Hill in 1955, of which 20 were Democrats. Sometimes these freshmen Republicans' support, or Democrats' opposition to the President's stands, was relatively certain. Yet on other issues, such as trade or regulatory issues, the White House could not be confident how new members of either party would vote. Staff went to great lengths to research how *former members* from freshmen members' districts voted as far back as the 80<sup>th</sup> Congress as a means to improve predictions.

From the available archival material the White House reappraised the accuracy of the forecasts on a few issues, including reciprocal trade (HR 1) and tax cuts (HR 4529). The LLU paid close attention to the subset of members who had voted on these matters in the past and came to the following conclusions:

...the first assumption upon which the earlier study was based—namely that members who had served in prior Congresses would maintain their previous positions—was unjustified. Many positions were reversed because of economic conditions in the members' respective districts and because of the fact that the Republican party, rather than the Democratic party, is now responsible for the Executive Branch of Government (*Legislative Outlook*, 1955).

This candid admission about the forecasting methodology begs several important questions. First, what does a more thorough analysis of White House predictions on *all* comparable votes reveal about the accuracy of the White House forecasts? Second, which factors account for the incorrect predictions in individual member's positions? Finally, which factors weighed most on

the votes of members classified as “doubtful”—members for whom the LLU could not ascertain a position?

The answers to these queries require juxtaposing White House predictions across issue areas with votes that actually occurred in the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress. Careful research on the legislative histories of bill provisions that were assumed in the White House forecasts *and* matched votes in 1955 yielded a total of eight roll-calls that are comparable with the LLU’s pool of predictions. These roll-calls include farm price supports (HR 12), tax cuts (HR 4529), housing (S 2126), minimum wage (HR 7214), the sale of government rubber facilities (H Res 170), postal pay increases (HR 4644, suspension of rules), government regulation of natural gas (HR 6645), and reciprocal trade (HR 1).<sup>2</sup>

The empirical analysis begins with an aggregate assessment of the Eisenhower forecasting record for the eight votes. The descriptive data answer these central questions: Did Eisenhower’s position carry? And how accurately did the LLU predict Republicans’ and Democrats’ positions overall? To better gauge the accuracy of the voting forecasts, the proportional reduction in error (PRE) is reported from cross-tabular analysis, in addition to the percent Republicans and Democrats correctly and incorrectly predicted.<sup>3</sup>

The second and more methodologically sophisticated stage of the analysis seeks to identify the factors that account for the relative accuracy of the voting estimates of individual members. A multinomial logit model is the most appropriate method to analyze whether members voted as the White House expected—and why or why not. The technique estimates equations simultaneously with a common set of independent variables. The logit model compares the likelihood of voting a particular way relative to a base category.<sup>4</sup> The dependent variable is coded nominally, and takes six values. The base category for comparison in the

model includes members whom the White House forecast to support the President's position and did so—in other words, Eisenhower's most consistent legislative allies. The *opposed* category comprises members who were forecast to oppose the president and did. The *conversion* category consists of members whom the White House anticipated would oppose the President but who happily supported him on the roll-call. The *defection* category is composed of members whom the White House believed would support the President but who failed to do so on the floor vote. Finally, the *doubtful—supported* and *doubtful—opposed* categories include how members the White House could not forecast actually voted.

To maximize the number of individual votes for the multinomial logit analysis members' positions were pooled for the eight votes. This procedure yielded a total of 3,068 positions for analysis. The base category (predicted to support/voted for the President's position) constitutes 42.5% of the cases, the *opposed* category 30.7%, the *conversion* category 11.3%, the *defection* category 7.2%, the *dubious—supported* category 3.2%, and the *dubious—opposed* category 5.1%.

Scholars of legislative politics and presidential-congressional relations posit that party, ideology, and constituency effects have the greatest impact on members' voting decisions. The multinomial logit analysis tests these factors—as well as electoral and leadership effects—on the eight votes as a means of explaining the efficacy of the LLU's predictions. Logit coefficients are not directly interpretable. The *mean effects* for the independent variables are therefore reported in the text along with the statistical significance of the coefficient (the full model and diagnostics for the equations are in Appendix A). The mean or first-order effect is the difference in estimated probabilities from each predictor's highest and lowest values, letting the other independent variables assume their “natural” or mean values (Liao, 1994, pp. 16-21). The mean

effects are understood as the predicted change in probability of the explanatory variables for each of the categories of interest compared to the base category (Long & Freese, 2003).<sup>5</sup>

The reduced form of the multinomial logit model may be expressed as follows:

$$\Pr(\text{Vote Prediction} | \text{Vote Outcome} = x) = a + \beta_1(\text{ideology} * \text{party}) + \beta_2(\text{member's electoral margin}) + \beta_3(\text{leadership position} * \text{party}) + \beta_4(\text{constituency factors} * \text{bill topic}) + e$$

Ideology, members' electoral safety, and leadership position are control variables that allow insight into the impact of constituency factors on particular bills. Ideology is an interaction term for members of each party multiplied by Poole and Rosenthal's DW-NOMINATE score for members of the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress (Poole & Rosenthal, 1997).<sup>6</sup> The scale runs from -1 (the most liberal members) to +1 (the most conservative members). In the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress Republicans averaged a score of .31 (s = .15). Only a single Republican, Canfield of New Jersey, was left of 0 (-.031). Democrats were a comparatively less cohesive group in terms of ideology. The average ideology score was -.24 (s = .22), with 40 Democrats—all from the south—right of 0.

Employing these interaction terms enables a more thorough analysis of how the ideological placement of Democrats and Republicans relative to their own conference affected the accuracy of White House forecasts. Democrats positioned well to the left of center are expected to be the president's most steadfast opponents, particularly given partisan conflict on issues such as flexible price supports for farmers and tax cuts. Moderate or "cross-pressured" Republicans with scores closer to the median score of Democrats than to their own fellow GOP members might be expected to fall under greater pressure to defect from Eisenhower's position.<sup>7</sup> Moderate to conservative Democrats might shirk the party line and support the president. The extent to which ideology mattered to members in the "doubtful" categories remains an open question.

Electoral factors comprise members' own electoral margin in the 1954 election.<sup>8</sup> The variable is the legislator's percent margin over his/her nearest rival. Seat safety may affect legislators' positions in several ways. Democratic members with little or no opposition in the last election might have few qualms about opposing the President, even if the White House thought they were squarely behind his position. Democrats and Republicans with narrow victories might fall under pressure to back the President for fear of electoral retaliation, converting to support Eisenhower's stance when the LLU expected them to be opposed.

Party leadership is identified through dummy variables for Democratic and Republican House leaders as well as committee chairs and ranking minority members. Although the House of Representatives was far less structured compared to the post-Watergate period, it is important to gauge leaders' votes. In several instances Eisenhower had taken positions in the 83<sup>rd</sup>/84<sup>th</sup> Congresses that contradicted the Republican leadership's stance in the past, such as public housing and minimum wage.<sup>9</sup> Moreover the inclusion of the variables for Democratic leaders, most of whom were more moderate than the conference as a whole, aids in ascertaining whether they were more or less likely to deviate from predicted voting patterns compared to rank-and-file members.

An advantage to pooling the positions of legislators is that interaction terms for constituency-level variables can be brought to bear for specific issue votes while holding ideology, leadership position, and electoral factors constant. District-level factors were derived from Adler's (2003) data for the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress based on the 1950 Census. The rationale for including each constituency-level variable closely follows the bill topic. For flexible price supports (HR 12) the percent district agricultural is employed to assess whether legislators representing rural interests were more or less willing to back the President's opposition to the

Democratic leadership's insistence on rigid price supports. For the tax cut bill (HR 4529) median district household income is used. It is reasonable to anticipate that legislators from more affluent districts would support tax relief—and might be opposed to the idea of doing away with the divided tax credit, though Eisenhower supported the policy. On housing (S 2126) the percent district that is urban is brought to bear on the vote. Members from high density urban areas should have demonstrated greater support for the President's call for expanding public housing units. On minimum wage (HR 7214) both median district income and the percent district blue collar workers are included. *Ceteris paribus*, members from more affluent districts should be most opposed to wage increases, while legislators from largely blue collar constituencies should be most supportive. On the postal pay increase bill (HR 4644) members from wealthier districts might be expected to oppose greater government spending for existing services.

On the reciprocal trade bill (HR 1) the percent district unemployed and the percent blue collar workers are utilized. Admittedly the percent unemployed in the district, as measured by the 1950 Census, is an imperfect measure because it is only a snapshot in time. Yet it is reasonable to expect that those districts that suffered from high unemployment rates in 1950 also bore the brunt of increasing levels of joblessness during Eisenhower's first two years, for which the GOP was punished in the mid-term elections of 1954. The unemployment rate rose steadily from 2.9 percent in January 1953 to a high of 6.1 percent in September 1954 before dipping just below 5 percent in early 1955 and tapering down to 4.2 by year's end.<sup>10</sup> The paramount question is whether legislators from districts with high unemployment viewed the liberalization of international trade as an opportunity or a bane for their constituents. Similarly, it is an open question whether legislators from districts with a large percentage of constituents engaged in

blue collar professions were more or less likely to see the trade bill as a risk of job losses or an opportunity for job creation.

Dummy variables were employed for the bills on the sale of government rubber facilities (H Res 170) and federal oversight of natural gas (HR 6645). On neither of these bills did Eisenhower take a public position. It is unclear which constituency-level variables might influence members' positions on regulatory issues. The dummy variables nevertheless enable a closer reading of legislators' relative support or opposition in view of the White House's predictions, holding other factors constant.

The final component of the analysis tests whether logit equations for each vote do a better job predicting members' positions than the White House forecasts, with the "doubtfuls" excluded.<sup>11</sup> Ideology, members' electoral margins, leadership position, and the constituency factors for each bill utilized in the pooled multinomial logit were replicated in individual logit equations for each of the eight votes. Classification tables for the overall number of votes correctly predicted and by party were generated.<sup>12</sup> The analysis confirms that on the issues with which the White House experienced the most difficulty forecasting constituency factors played a major role.

### ***Results***

Table 1 provides descriptive data on the White House forecasts for the eight votes in 1955. Eisenhower's overall success rate on the roll-call outcomes was 50 percent. His position prevailed on four votes and he lost four (HR 4644, postal pay, was a vote to suspend the rules, which required a two-thirds majority that was not attained). Paradoxically, the White House made its most accurate forecasts on individual voting on the farm price supports and tax cut bills. The PRE approached 90 percent. Yet the outcome of the roll-call was contrary to expectations:

The President narrowly lost on both votes. Eisenhower had long supported flexible price supports for agriculture and hoped the House would renew a bill similar to the one passed in the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress.<sup>13</sup> He lost the roll-call on HR 12 by a mere five votes after the issue became embroiled in partisan bickering. Democrats insisted on a return to rigid price supports, which cemented a floor value for farmers' crops opposed by the Administration. The White House's point-man in the House, Charlie Halleck, was dismayed by the potential opposition of Republicans on the Agriculture Committee to flexible supports. Halleck was similarly frustrated by the "horse-trading" in which Democrats were engaging to trump the President's objections to rigid price supports.<sup>14</sup> The President also lost the tax cut bill, HR 4529, by five votes. HR 4529 was a motion to recommit the bill with instructions to repeal the dividend credit, which Eisenhower supported. In both cases the loss of critical Republican support (21 votes on the price supports bill, 5 votes on the tax cut bill) was pivotal in the final outcome, setting up "fights" in the Senate that led to significant White House consternation (*Legislative Outlook*, 1955, "Taxes," p. 2).

[Table 1]

With respect to individual members' voting patterns, and if the proportional reduction in error (PRE) is the reference point, the LLU's worst predictions were on the minimum wage (HR 7214), sale of government rubber facilities (H Res 170), and postal pay (HR 4644), respectively, even though Eisenhower's position prevailed as expected on the first two votes. To be fair, the White House was uncertain how Republicans would react to the President's call for extending the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and increasing the minimum wage to ninety cents. The forecast was made on the basis of a 1949 amendment that limited the coverage of the FLSA, which the Republican leadership six years earlier had supported. As the White House noted,

“inasmuch as President Eisenhower has called for a broadening of the coverage of the Fair Labor Standards Act, some reduction in the 247 (votes in favor of the limitation in 1949) would take place dependent upon the position of the Republican leadership in the House” (*Legislative Outlook*, 1955, “Labor,” pp. 1-2). Indeed, after the President called for an increase in the minimum wage in his annual State of the Union Address, all members of the GOP leadership save Poff of Virginia came on board. All but 24 rank-and-file Republicans supported a compromise increase of \$1.00 an hour.

On the sale of government rubber facilities, as on natural gas regulation, the White House was uncertain how members would vote. Although the PRE is relatively low for both votes, the overall percentage of members of both parties correctly predicted was relatively high for H Res 170 (87 percent). The bill, sponsored by Democrat Wright Patman of Texas, was a motion to disapprove the sale of government plants. It did not strike a chord with moderate Democrats, and with strong Republican unity on the issue the White House was relatively assured of victory.

Postal pay (HR 4644) was another vote on which the White House had a difficult time predicting Republican reactions. The forecast was based on the efforts of Representative Edwards Kees (R-KS) to substitute the text of a bill that contained the President’s preferences for augmenting postal workers’ pay alongside a rate increase in the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress. Kees’ efforts fell 38 votes short of the two-thirds required to suspend the rules and pass the bill. Eisenhower pocket vetoed the eventual legislation that passed in 1954 because Congress took no action on postal rates to offset salary increases (*Congressional Quarterly Almanac* 1955, p. 360).

In the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress, a similar motion was made by House Post Office and Civil Service Committee Chair Tom Murray (D-TN)—despite the opposition of a majority of Democrats on the committee—to suspend the rules and pass Eisenhower’s favored version of the bill. That

bill, which would have reclassified certain postal employees and raised their pay to the maximum level Eisenhower was willing to accept, also failed miserably. The issue became embroiled in partisanship as postal workers' interest groups split on whether to support the Administration's or Democrats' version of the bill. Many Democrats clamored for higher salary adjustments and contended the President's plan weighted increases to employees at the top of the pay scale.

The Republican leadership was adamant that any increase higher than 7.6% would force a presidential veto. A majority of Republicans (57%) nevertheless voted against the bill. They did not want to enable the Democrats to label them "stingy" in the next election, and the president's veto threat gave many a means to play both sides of the issue—they could vote against the bill without ultimate policy consequence and leave the White House to negotiate a compromise later. As New Jersey Democrat James Tumulty noted, "...it is interesting to note that those who want to be generous and those who want to be parsimonious are on the same side. Somebody is playing politics" (*Congressional Quarterly Almanac* 1955, p. 362). The LLU downplayed problems in the ranks of the GOP, preferring to assign blame to the Democrats: "The Democratic majority voted down this measure in order to attempt to force the President to accept a higher pay increase" and concluded that "it will be very difficult to secure the kind of program which the Administration is properly seeking in the interest of equity for the postal employees consistent with fiscal responsibility (*Legislative Outlook*, 1955, "Combined Postal Pay and Rate Increases," p. 2). Eisenhower vetoed the Democrats' bill and forced a successful renegotiation on salary levels and compensation later in the year. The bill won passage with only a single dissenting vote in the House.

The PRE for the reciprocal trade bill (HR 1) is a bit deceptive, since it is calculated solely on the basis of those members for whom the White House was able to ascertain a position. The White House expected to prevail on the floor outcome, but the “doubtfuls” numbered 117. And there was significant GOP opposition. In a legislative leadership meeting Halleck recounted to Eisenhower and members of the LLU that Republican Dan Reed of New York, a major opponent of the bill, was doing his best to hold up the bill in the Rules Committee and sabotage the bill if it came to the floor (White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, June 24/29, 1953). The LLU believed that the vote on HR 1 would reflect “a complex set of forces.” Some members from districts with coal and textile interests, who might otherwise support the bill, would not because of economic circumstances. Republicans were a mixed lot: Some who opposed the program in the past would vote for it out of loyalty to Eisenhower, yet others would continue to oppose the bill because they had done so when a similar bill had been proposed by Democrats in prior years (*Legislative Outlook*, 1955, “Tariff”). When the vote ultimately came before the House, twice as many Republicans (74) as Democrats (35) opposed HR 1.

### ***Headcounts and Poker Hands: Even-Money, Wildcards and Bad Bets for the White House***

If predicting legislators’ votes may be likened to the card game of poker, some votes in the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress resembled good hands comprised of the two colors. On issues such as the sale of government rubber facilities, Eisenhower could rely on Republicans mixed with support from a handful of Democrats for his position to carry the day. In other cases, such as reciprocal trade, “wildcards” on either side of the aisle abounded and their support or opposition was hard to peg. It was impossible to surmise which members might be bluffing support or opposition. And still in other cases the LLU made bad bets. On tax cuts and flexible price supports the White House seemingly wagered more on the likelihood of members voting a certain way than the probability

of their actually following through—and lost the votes because of internal divisions in the GOP. The challenge that confronts us is to determine which factors account for the discrepancies between forecasts and outcomes.

The multinomial logit analysis of legislators' positions, as forecast by the White House and as they actually voted on the issues, elucidates the basis for the LLU's successful and unsuccessful predictions. Table 2 presents the mean effects from the analysis. The measure-of-fit statistics reported in Appendix A, including McFadden's adjusted- $R^2$  and the adjusted count- $R^2$ , reinforce that the model performs well both against a "null model" and on the basis of correctly-predicted outcomes, respectively.<sup>15</sup>

[Table 2]

As anticipated, ideology—particularly among Democrats—carries a strong effect. But moderate Republicans held the balance over several critical floor outcomes, and intra-party divisions in the GOP cannot be discounted. Electoral factors mattered most to members on both sides of the aisle who were predicted to oppose the President's positions. There is no evidence that leaders' votes differed from rank-and-file members in White House predictions. However, constituency factors have strong impacts on several bills for which the White House had difficulties forecasting legislators' support. These bills include postal pay, minimum wage, and reciprocal trade. Let us now examine the results more closely.

The interaction term for Democrats' ideological placement conveys the general discord between Eisenhower's positions and left-leaning members. Compared to the base category of legislators who were predicted to back the White House position and did, liberal Democrats were most likely to oppose the President. The mean effect for the opposed category shows that compared to the most conservative Democrat (Gentry-TX, score=-.316) the most liberal member

(Weir-MN, score=-.971) was 69 percent more likely to follow through in opposing Eisenhower's position. A similar, if much more slight effect is visible among "doubtfuls." Compared to the most conservative Democrats, the most liberal members were 2.6 percent more likely to wind up opposing the president. By contrast, the subset of moderate-to-conservative or "cross-pressured" Democrats with ideological positions right of the party mean were most likely to convert when the LLU predicted they would oppose the President (mean effect=.284). A member positioned one standard deviation *above* the party mean (more conservative on the DW-NOMINATE scale)—with a score around 0—was about 10 percent more likely to convert. The "surprise" support of this group of moderate Democrats did not necessarily tilt floor outcomes to the President's favor. The 22 conversions on the postal pay bill fell far short for the two-thirds vote necessary to suspend the rules. But the conversion of 43 Democrats on the minimum wage bill, which was supported by the Democratic leadership, appeared to give Eisenhower a more solid victory than he otherwise would have had. The bill was typical of one in which both parties could share credit.

A closer reading of the data in Table 2 accentuates the importance of moderate Republicans on voting predictions and outcomes. Eisenhower's positions generally struck a stronger chord with conservatives in the GOP. The mean effect for the opposed category highlights that the most conservative member (Mason-IL, score=.783) was 22 percent less likely to oppose the President when forecast to do so, compared to the most moderate member (Canfield-NJ, score=-.031). Moderate Republicans who fell into the opposed category did so on a scattering of issues, including the 13 members opposed to flexible farm price supports (all from farm states), 25 on minimum wage, 35 on the reciprocal trade bill (predominantly from urban areas, discussed below), and 4 on the tax cut bill. Eisenhower did, however, occasionally draw

“unexpected” support from moderates on other issues such as minimum wage and regulatory votes. The mean effect for the conversion category tells this part of the story. The most conservative Republicans were 4.8 percent *less likely* to convert when forecast to vote against the White House—either because the White House could count on their support and they fell into the base category for the analysis or they opposed the bill on personal or ideological grounds. For the eight votes in the analysis only 230 of 1,476 Republican positions (15.6%) were expected to go against the White House. Most of the conversions were from moderates on bills such as housing (13), trade (20), and the tax cut (7).

Conservative members were about 7 percent less likely to defect when forecast to support the President compared to moderate Republicans positioned closer to the center of the ideological spectrum. The mean effect may be rather small, but the impact on floor outcomes was sometimes critical. Indeed, it was the defection of several moderates that cost Eisenhower a defeat on the farm price supports bill. Similarly, the loss of five moderate northeastern Republicans on the tax cut bill—four who were predicted to oppose and did, and Fulton of Pennsylvania who defected—was at the root of the White House’s defeat on the recommittal motion on taxes. Ironically, though Eisenhower’s stances are *generally* considered moderate compared to his Republican successors such as Ronald Reagan or George W. Bush, on several votes in the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress it was the inability to persuade cross-pressured Republicans to tow the White House line that cost a victory.

Legislators’ seat safety, as measured by their percent margin of victory over the nearest rival in the 1954 election, is a key factor only for members who fell into the opposed category. The mean effect highlights that members who ran without opposition were 17 percent more likely to vote against the President’s position when forecast to do so compared to legislators

elected from competitive districts (victory margin less than 5 percent). For Democrats the phenomenon is most visible on two key votes that Eisenhower lost—and that were subject to the most partisan rancor. On the price supports bill 70 of the 161 Democrats in the opposed category faced no challenger in the last election; another 82 had victory margins greater than 5 percent. Similarly, on the tax cut recommittal vote 67 of the 199 Democrats in the opposed category were unchallenged in 1954, and 120 more were from non-competitive districts. These legislators feared little retaliation from their constituents for opposing the White House's stance.

Seat safety also bought Republicans some independence from Eisenhower's stands. On the housing bill 118 of 130 Republicans who were in the opposed category were from non-competitive districts. The effect was somewhat less marked but still noticeable on the trade bill (30 of 34 Republicans) and on the minimum wage bill (24 of 25 Republicans). The upshot is that GOP members from safe districts were confident they had the electoral clout to oppose the President and vote their own preferences. The tax cut bill underscores the point. The four members in the opposed category and the single member who defected had electoral margins ranging from 8 to 26 percent in 1954. Similarly, of the 13 members in the opposed category on price supports 11 had seat margins ranging from 10 to 30 percent.

Although the analysis shows no evidence that the White House predictions of leaders' votes were systematically incorrect vis-à-vis rank-and-file members, the interaction terms for constituency effects explicate incorrect predictions in the conversion, defection, and doubtful categories on several votes. Moreover, constituency factors explain the steadfast opposition of some members in both parties to Eisenhower's policy stances.

Contrary to expectations, legislators from districts with high levels of income were most likely to defect on the postal pay legislation when the White House believed it could count on

their support. As district median income rose from \$881 to \$4,761 (range for the variable) the likelihood of a defection increased by over 42 percent. Defections were primarily a Republican phenomenon. One-hundred and eleven of the 119 members who defected were Republicans from generally wealthier districts. The White House had far overestimated intra-party support for Eisenhower's position and failed to account for impact of partisan politicking by liberal Democrats. Although the Republican leadership supported Eisenhower's position universally, the wider GOP conference had been split over the technicalities of salary increases and postal rates dating to the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress. There were simply not enough moderate Democrats willing to break with their leadership's position to enable the motion to suspend the rules. Twenty-three of the 28 Democratic "doubtfuls" voted toward the party line. And closer analysis of Democratic voting shows a clear north-south divide. All 35 Democrats who supported the White House were fiscal conservatives from the old Confederacy.

Constituency factors were highly salient on the reciprocal trade bill. Members from districts with high levels of unemployment were more willing to take the risks of liberalizing free trade—and the dynamic traversed party lines. As district unemployment rose from below 1 percent to just under 5 percent, the likelihood of opposing the bill dropped by over 34 percent. The impact of unemployment for the defection and the doubtful—opposed categories is also instructive. Legislators from districts with high unemployment were 4 percent less likely to defect, and doubtful members were about 3 percent less likely to oppose the bill on the floor. The White House broke even on the doubtful category: 59 voted for the bill, 58 against. The evidence suggests that the surplus of votes that Eisenhower's position received compared to the initial forecast was in part due to legislators who were willing to take risks on trade for job growth. Those legislators in the doubtful category who broke against the bill were skeptical of

losing manufacturing and manual labor jobs. As the percentage of the district work force engaged in blue collar professions increased from 5 to just under 26 percent, the likelihood of voting against the bill increased by over 42 percent.

Constituency factors also reinforced the positions of members in the opposed category on several votes. On the minimum wage bill, legislators from affluent districts in both parties were more likely to remain opposed (mean effect=50.1%). They opposed the bill on principle or out of fear of negative economic consequences. Put another way, for each increase of district median income of \$1,000 the probability of opposition increased by approximately 11-12 percent. In contrast, legislators from districts with high concentrations of blue collar workers were less likely to oppose the wage increase to \$1.00 (mean effect=-41.4%). Members from districts with strong manufacturing sectors were confident the bill was popular among workers. The likelihood of opposing the bill dropped by 12 percent as the percentage of district blue collar workers rose from 5 to 10 percent. Finally, the analysis confirms that members of both parties from farm states opposed Eisenhower's stand on flexible price supports (mean effect=36.9%). Legislators from rural districts fell under substantial constituency pressures to vote for rigid supports that guaranteed a strict value for crop prices. As the percent of the district population engaged in agriculture increased from 5 to 15 percent, the probability of standing firm in opposition to flexible supports rose over 21 percent. Members from rural districts were also 8 percent less likely to convert to the President's stand compared to their urban colleagues.

District income levels have the expected effect on the tax cut bill. The bill evidenced strong partisanship. Democratic members, generally from the northeast, west, and from the most affluent districts were less likely to convert on the vote when predicted to oppose. All but one of the 159 expected votes against the bill were Democrats. The 22 conversions on the bill were

uniformly southern Democrats from districts with moderate income levels. Nearly all of the defections—111 of the 119—were Republicans from districts with moderate income levels who opposed doing away with the dividend tax credit. The likelihood of defecting dropped by 4.6 percent as income levels rose, and the probability of the few doubtfuls opposing the bill (23) decreased by over 3 percent.

The mean effects of the dummy variables for the two votes on which Eisenhower did not take a public position—the sale of government rubber facilities and natural gas oversight—suggest that the President’s choice to “stay quiet,” to borrow from Covington (1987), may have made it easier for Democrats to vote for the bills. Legislators were 25.7 and 18.6 percent less likely to remain opposed to the rubber and gas bills, respectively. The handful of doubtfuls were somewhat less likely to wind up in opposition. Eisenhower received strong Republican support on both bills and won a plurality of Democrats.

The mean effects of constituency factors on the housing bill are intuitive for the opposed and doubtful categories. The more urban the district, the less likely legislators were to oppose the bill. Housing projects aided crowding in the expanding cities and suburbs of the 1950s. Yet the largest effect (-5.5%) is for the conversion category, and shows an *inverse* effect. A closer examination of the data reveals that 13 of the 21 conversions were Republicans, most of who were ideologically moderate and from a scattering of less urban districts around the country. Their support of the bill may have been out of loyalty to the President. Seven of the 8 Democrats who converted were moderates from less urban districts in the south.

### ***Congressional Voting and Crystal Balls: Legislative Liaison versus Models of Voting***

“Predicting the future is easy. It’s trying to figure out what’s going on now that’s hard.” So reads an anonymous quote that conveys the *problématique* of the Eisenhower White House’s

efforts to forecast floor outcomes in the House of Representatives. The preceding analysis shows mixed results in the LLU's bid to predict aggregate outcomes or individual votes, and highlights reasons why. The staff had to rely on their own assessments of members' ideological stances, shifting voting alliances in a fluid institutional setting, and the impact of partisan politicking and Democratic leaders' motives. Constituency factors—which the LLU suspected would be problematic on several key votes—were hard to measure in the day, but were often influential in switched votes and surprise outcomes on the floor. And Republicans were scarcely a unified lot in 1955 when it came to policy matters. The question is whether the staff could have done a better job with the tools of modern social science we take for granted today, such as probability models and personal computers, that did not exist in the 1950s.

The answer is a *qualified* “yes.” Classification tables of vote predictions were generated based on logit models of each of the eight votes using the constituency variables specific to each issue alongside the other variables from the multinomial logit analysis. A comparison of those tables to actual outcomes suggests that a grasp of specific constituency factors increased predictability. For the eight votes the logit models correctly classified a minimum of 79 percent of members' positions (postal pay) to a maximum of 94 percent (tax cuts). Significant improvements in projections included the minimum wage bill (91 percent compared to the LLU's 50 percent) and postal pay (79 percent compared to 64 percent). A slight improvement was notable for reciprocal trade (82 compared to 78 percent), but with the caveat that the significant number of “doubtfuls” was excluded to keep model forecasts comparable to the White House methodology.

Yet it is telling that the logit forecast models broke even or were unable to predict as well as the White House estimates on several bills. The logit model predicted presidential support at

the same exact level as the White House—90 percent and 94 percent—on the housing and tax cut bills, respectively. And on the farm price supports the logit model underpredicted members' positions by 5 percent. It is a tribute to the Eisenhower White House Legislative Liaison Unit's attempt to systematize the study of previous voting patterns, and scrutinize probable issue-based voting alignments on Capitol Hill, that its predictions were as accurate as they were. If constituency factors explain some of the wrong predictions in individual members' voting on the floor, as the multinomial logit model highlighted, the lesson is that probability models can *supplement* the hard, nitty-gritty work of legislative liaison—but they cannot substitute such travail with a crystal ball.

## **V. REPRISE**

This article is the first effort to systematically examine “headcount” data for Congress collected during the Eisenhower presidency. While scholars have uncovered and analyzed such data for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson (Covington, 1987; Sullivan, 1988) and Ford (Conley, 2002), the Eisenhower period has been surprisingly overlooked. This research provides additional aperçus into the “hidden-hand” approach employed by Eisenhower. A close examination of legislative dynamics offers evidence consistent with Greenstein's (1982) central hypothesis by accentuating how the President remained engaged in strategic policymaking—in this case vis-à-vis Congress—outside public view.

The study also confirms the common wisdom of legislative scholars that presidents must be concerned with the “continuing agenda” in Congress (Jones, 1994). Presidential and congressional elections do not yield a *tabula rasa* in terms of the policy agenda every two or four years. Eisenhower, unlike some of his successors, understood this point well. He set up a

structure with capable staff to manage unresolved issues. That structure has since been institutionalized.

The analysis also underscores the opportunities and perils of forecasting congressional outcomes in a time of greater fluidity in voting alignments compared to today. On the subset of votes in this analysis, the White House often had considerable difficulties predicting—and cultivating—Republican support. On several important votes disunity in the GOP Conference led to a floor loss on the president’s stance and forced Eisenhower to veto the bills or attempt to ameliorate them in the Senate. One exasperated staffer expressed his dismay with Republicans on the farm bill this way:

House votes 238-181 against recommittal. Then votes 237-181 to accept conference report. Was told later by Congressman Taber that if Republicans who voted for recommittal had stayed put we would have rejected conference report. It’s difficult for me to understand all of the weazling that’s going on. Am beginning to feel that Republican members in House and Senate don’t deserve majority. They don’t know how to handle it (Anderson, 1956).

The farm bill dynamics underscore the conundrum that the minority party in Congress can face. As Jones (1974) reminds us, opposing the majority may distinguish the minority party’s position, but have no success in halting objectionable bills. Going along with the majority on popular legislation may enable credit claiming in the next election, but may also perpetuate the party’s status in the minority. The White House can become trapped in these dynamics unique to periods of divided government.

The examination of other bills suggests the hazards of presidential signaling to Congress—and sometimes the advantages of its absence. Eisenhower did not like to “go public.” In several cases, including the sale of government rubber facilities and natural gas regulation, he “stayed quiet” and did not publicly make mention of the bills. The White House correctly estimated that his position would carry. In retrospect, silence is understandable: Why expend

precious political capital, or risk embroiling the issue in partisan conflict, if the President could be relatively confident of a victory? Moreover, going public arguably added to the President's problems on the postal pay bill. Assured that Eisenhower would veto any bill above a certain increase threshold, Republicans could have a "free vote"—they could go on record as supporting substantial increases for government employees without any policy consequences.

What general lessons does the Eisenhower experience hold for presidents in the contemporary era of heightened partisanship in Congress? The LLU, which morphed into the Office of Congressional Relations under Kennedy and Johnson, is now a permanent fixture of the White House. Presidents' use of it is surely a measure of what Paul J. Quirk (2005) calls "strategic competence." Its function can act as a counterweight to presidents' seeming obsession with going over the heads of members of Congress in the bid to cement support for their legislative agendas. Balancing behind the scenes negotiation with strategically-timed public appeals, as Ronald Reagan did in 1981, is an important ingredient to legislative success (Sloan 1996).

Assembling winning coalitions on the floor of Congress requires building support one vote at a time. There may be fewer "pivotal" voters today compared to the 1950s, but issues such as trade continue to divide the parties internally, as George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush have found. The White House legislative liaison organization cannot alter the likely impact of constituency factors on such issue votes that may place the president and members of Congress at odds with one another. But it can alert the president and his staff to key swing votes necessary for victory, enable face-saving by avoiding public campaigns on "lost causes," and identify possibilities for unilateral rather than congressional action (e.g., executive orders).

For presidents confronted with an opposition majority in Congress, the imperative of reaching across the aisle for cross-party support is paramount. Eisenhower understood this axiom in view of the unique configuration of voting alignments in the 1950s. Perhaps presidents will look to his example to restore greater comity between the branches in future periods of divided control of national institutions.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The term “cross-pressured” is attributable to Bond and Fleisher (1990).

<sup>2</sup> Several bills were excluded because provisions in the legislation upon which the forecast was based did not match the roll-call vote in the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress. These include HR 9678 (Mutual Security Authorization, 1955) and HR 8583 (Federal National Mortgage Association Housing).

<sup>3</sup> The PRE = (% correctly predicted - % modal category) / (1 - % modal category).

<sup>4</sup> The form of the predicted probabilities in multinomial logit may be expressed as follows:

$$\Pr(y = m | x) = \frac{\exp(x\beta_{m|b})}{\sum_{j=1}^J \exp(x\beta_{j|b})},$$

for  $J$  equations where  $m$  represents comparison of the dependent categories and  $b$  is the base category.

<sup>5</sup> The mean effects were calculated using Long & Freese’s “prchange” do-file for STATA 8.2.

<sup>6</sup> The interaction terms for Democrats and Republicans correlate at .49, suggesting a minimal risk of collinearity. Excluding one of the terms and alternating them in the model did not significantly alter the predict probabilities or mean effects.

<sup>8</sup> The authors considered using Eisenhower’s district-level electoral popularity (margin of victory or loss to Stevenson, 1952) in the model. However, the variable is highly collinear with the interaction term for Republican ideology ( $r = .79$ ). The effect is intuitive: Eisenhower’s electoral popularity was strongest in districts with more conservative members—and was weakest in the districts of the most liberal Democrats ( $r = -.22$ ).

<sup>9</sup> The *Legislative Outlook* (1955) report detailed that in 1954 Eisenhower had proposed continuing public housing starts at 35,000, but the Appropriations Committee Chair Philips (R-CA) eliminated the funding and the Republican leadership supported the bill as reported out of committee. Similarly, the President had called for a general broadening of the coverage of the Fair Labor Standards Act, which the Republican leadership in the House opposed by supporting a critical amendment in 1949 (81<sup>st</sup> Congress) by Representative Lucas (D-TX).

<sup>10</sup> Data are from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Series LNS 1400000, seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for workers over 16 years of age. Data are available at [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov).

<sup>11</sup> Excluding “doubtfuls” is sensible for any comparison to White House forecasts. The LLU did not have any *a priori* information on how new members would vote, or where they fell along the ideological spectrum in either party. Thanks to DW-NOMINATE data, we have such data, but the inclusion of such data would bias the results.

<sup>12</sup> For the logit models of the bills, the predicted probabilities for legislators were generated to ascertain the number of positions correctly and incorrectly classified. For example, those legislators who were predicted to support the president at  $p > .50$  and did so were considered correctly classified; legislators whose predicted probabilities were  $p > .50$  but did not support the president were incorrectly classified.

<sup>13</sup> Eisenhower took a consistent, principled stance on price supports. His position was best summed up in a letter to Joel Carlson, when he wrote "...I shall continue to work as hard as I know how until the farmer is getting 100% of parity for his products in the market place, and to do so without more government interference in the farmers' daily affairs than is absolutely necessary" (Eisenhower, April 1955).

<sup>14</sup> "Rep. Halleck pointed to the inherent trouble of having to fight the senior Republicans on the Committee in the House on this issue, though Rep. Arends believed they would not be so adamant this year. Mr. Halleck described as 'the most cynical thing yet' the way in which city Democrats were trying to trade votes for rigid farm supports in return for rural Democrat votes for a \$1.25 minimum wage" (Minnich, 1955).

<sup>15</sup> McFadden's adjusted- $R^2$  is a likelihood-ratio measure that adjusts for the number of parameters in the model and compares it against a model with just an intercept. The adjusted count- $R^2$  is a measure of the proportion of correct predictions for each category in the multinomial logit from a tabular analysis, similar to the proportional reduction in error (PRE) measure. The measure adjusts the percentage reported by estimating the proportion of correct outcomes beyond what would be correctly guessed by examining the largest row marginal. Hausman and Small and Hsiao tests of the "independence of irrelevant alternatives" showed no violation of assumptions. Likelihood ratio (LR) tests showed that none of the outcome categories should be combined. For details on these measures and diagnostics, see Long and Freese (2003, pp. 92-94 and pp. 205-209).