Presidential Support and Veto Overrides, 1889-1988

Samuel B. Hoff, *Delaware State College*

Previous empirical studies of congressional responses to presidential vetoes have attempted to identify elements which explain whether an override takes place. However, they have failed to distinguish between initial and final reconsideration, and have included private bill vetoes in the analysis. This research employs a presidential support model to examine factors influencing probability of override at both the first and second house juncture, as well as strength of successful final override vote, over the last century. The results substantiate the value of the model for determining legislative reactions to public bill vetoes.

Introduction

Among the several areas of shared powers between the executive and legislative branches of our national government, lawmaking is perhaps the most enlivening to study. There are so many roadblocks on the path to passage, any one of which can alter or extinguish pending legislation. A presidential veto is one such roadblock. When a chief executive decides to veto a proposed policy, Congress may reconsider the legislation on its merits and, with a two-thirds majority of those present and voting in both chambers, may override the president's action.

The intent of the present study is to probe the legislature's role in the veto process. This is accomplished through several means. First, the shortcomings of previous studies of overriding actions are reviewed. Second, a model for the analysis of reasons for post-veto congressional actions is developed. Third, probit and multiple regression techniques are used to test the effect that measures of presidential support have on initial and final override decisions from 1889 through 1988, a time frame encompassing eighteen presidential administrations and fifty Congresses. The final section of the essay offers alternative approaches to the topic. Given the recent trend toward divided party control of the executive and legislative branches, congressional reaction to the veto is a crucial indicator of institutional effectiveness.

Congressional Override Research

Initial research on congressional overrides was either coupled with an examination of presidential veto power or was qualitatively oriented (Mason 1890; Towle 1937; Higgins 1952; Jackson 1967; Metz 1971; Taylor 1971; Bass 1972). Since the mid-1970s, three empirically-structured articles on the subject have appeared. Lee's (1975) investigation of veto interaction between the president and

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the legislature over seventy-one Congresses -- from the Jackson through the Nixon administrations -- employs multiple regression to predict the occurrence of vetoes and overrides. Rohde and Simon's (1985) study utilizes two different methodologies: regression to examine veto trends and probit to test factors related to congressional response. The override analysis is limited to public bills from 1945 to 1980. King (1989) probes congressional challenges to presidential vetoes from 1946 to 1984 using a generalized event count model.

Three serious deficiencies can be identified in the empirical studies above. First, many of the independent variables lack theoretical grounding. Second, the operationalization of the dependent variable is suspect, particularly in King's (1989) work, where private and public bills are mixed together without acknowledging the greater impact of political factors on the latter. Private bill vetoes are most often based on bureaucratic determinations of evidence rather than on constitutional or policy grounds (*Harvard Law Review* 1966). The third shortcoming of the aforementioned research is that it does not adequately address the entire veto process. Lee (1975) focuses on override attempts only over each two-year Congress; Rohde and Simon (1985) differentiate between override attempts and success, yet lump first and second house actions together; King (1989) groups override attempts and success together as well as combining initial and final reconsideration.

These procedures ignore the fact that there are several important distinctions between first and second house overriding actions. For instance, there is a qualitative difference in an override decision by the first and second chamber responding to a presidential veto: an override by the first house is damaging but not fatal to the chief executive's chances of convincing Congress to reconsider its position on the bill at issue, whereas second house override is final. Further, combining first and second house actions obscures not only the large difference between the two chambers in the number of uncontested vetoes (there are many more at the first house stage), but also the true indication of success Congress achieves in challenging a public bill veto (much greater in the second house). Finally, the waiting period between initial and final reconsideration should be taken into account when it occurs.

A Presidential Support Model of Override Response

During the veto process -- comprised of a veto of a public bill and congressional reaction to the veto -- both the level of public approval and the extent of legislative agreement with the president's position are weighty indicators of success, influence, and leadership. A veto is not uniformly a sign of political weakness. It does, however, signal a high level of involvement in policy making by both the president and Congress (Ripley 1978), and a lack of congressional support for the chief executive in the regard of specific legislation that he was unable to alter.

Once a veto is issued, the president's primary concern is to convince the legislature to sustain his veto. For a sustaining action to occur, the president must possess the resources to influence Congress. Second, and just as important, the chief executive must assure Congress that it stands to gain by upholding his action. Funderburk (1982, 132) postulates that "the ability of a president to place some issues on the national agenda in no way assures that other political actors will be motivated to support the president's policies." Light (1983, 29) states that "support comes only if both president and Congress benefit."

The congressional response to a veto depends on (1) the compatibility of presidential and congressional goals, and (2) the amount of presidential support existent in the Congress. If Congress can bargain collectively with the president to achieve its aim without sacrificing constituent support, it will sustain his veto. On the other hand, if the two branches of government remain deadlocked over the direction of policy, and if Congress's intensity of preference for a proposed law outweighs the president's bargaining power, the veto will be overturned. Compared to first house override actions, which seem to be guided by internal institutional factors, second chamber override decisions appear to take into account anticipated reactions of actors in the political system. Those individuals and organizations that express an interest in the legislation at the original passage stage may be better able to influence Congress's decision at the second house stage, where the president's resources are reduced and his ability to motivate the legislature to back his position is diminished. Levine (1983, 649) recognizes a substantial distinction between first and second house reconsideration by claiming that "a president is constrained to lobby initially only that chamber of Congress that first initiated the override action. To do otherwise is only to admit weakness that will spur further opposition to his veto."

This study shall analyze factors that affect probability of override at each juncture of legislative reconsideration, together with those that influence the percentage of successful second house overturns. It is assumed that a lopsided second house vote to override is not coincidental. Rather, it represents a strong statement of legislative opinion. In such instances, Congress not only has decided that the original bill has merit, but that the president is wrong. A one-sided overturn may be viewed as a convincing victory for Congress and a punishing, albeit temporary, defeat for the president.

Specifying the Variables

The seven variables included in the empirical analysis measure backing for the chief executive across the political system, and may be divided into four categories. The first set of factors are exclusive to Congress; they include the chamber of Congress considering override, the subject matter of the legislation, and the margin by which successful first house overrides pass. The second set of factors are those initiated by the president alone. The veto message, which

contains an explanation for the chief executive's action, is a component of this category. The third set of variables are interdependent institutional characteristics, encompassing the level of partisan advantage that the president enjoys in the legislature, along with the year-in-term that the president is serving. The final category, external factors, may be defined as events coterminous with a veto battle between the president and Congress. Military conflict involving U.S. forces is an environmental consideration that typically has a pervasive effect upon both government decision-making and political discourse, and therefore should affect the president's legislative success. Together, these four sets of indicators constitute the presidential support model.

I offer the hypothesis that the House of Representatives will be more likely to override a veto -- and by a wider margin -- than the Senate, based on differences in constitutional roles, length of tenure, and constituencies. The more extensive constitutional powers of the Senate pertinent to the executive branch suggest a greater sharing of perspective between members of the upper house and the president. Because senators represent diverse states rather than smaller, comparatively homogeneous districts, there is a greater likelihood that their perspective approximates the national interest. House members' shorter terms and heightened responsiveness to the public and interest groups means that they are more susceptible to external influence during the veto process.

The second independent variable is the area of legislation. Domestic legislation should provoke a greater probability and percentage of override than foreign or military-related public bills. Domestic legislation generally affects Congress's constituents more directly than foreign policy. Hence, domestic bill vetoes usually receive more attention by the public and should precipitate a more convincing legislative response. The two presidencies thesis, asserting that presidents have more success with foreign policy than in the domestic area (Wildavsky 1966; LeLoup and Shull 1979; Zeidenstein 1981; Cohen 1982; Bond and Fleisher 1989; Sullivan 1991), adds credence to this hypothesis.

The percentage by which the first legislative chamber overrides a public bill veto is a barometer of how strongly legislators regard a prospective law; an increase from a majority for initial passage to the necessary two-thirds proportion for successful override reflects solid backing for it. Given that the last century has seen seven out of every ten second house decisions end in override, it would seem that the first house percentage of override has a forceful effect on probability of final override. Hoff (1985, 1987) found this factor to be associated positively and significantly with likelihood of override. Consequently, the momentum created by a convincing override of a public bill at the initial reconsideration juncture should facilitate not only greater chance of an overturn by the second legislative chamber, but overturn by a larger margin.

Both the chance of override by either chamber and the margin for override may be reduced if the chief executive cites constitutional or long-term policy reasons for his actions. Finer (1960, 74) contends that a presidential veto message

is useful for "arousing public opinion against specific legislation." Employing the veto for constitutional reasons historically has been accepted as a basic prerogative of presidents.

It also is possible that Congress ignored the general background of a policy when deliberating on a bill. It is hypothesized here that a message defending a veto because the proposed law is unconstitutional or would dislocate a long-standing policy will have the effect of decreasing the number of votes for override, and thus of increasing the likelihood of veto sustenance.

The party makeup of Congress is an indicator of presidential support, and therefore a predictor of institutional behavior during the veto process. Although the impact of party is likely to be more powerful during reconsideration by the first house, it still must be regarded as an inhibiting influence on override propensity and margin if the percentage of the president's copartisans in the legislature is high. All of the empirical studies cited above confirm the inverse relationship between partisan support and number of vetoes and overrides. What is at issue is the manner by which the variable is operationalized. Since first and second chamber challenges to public bill vetoes must be examined separately to produce valid results, it follows that the partisan support level for the president should be measured as the percentage of copartisans in the appropriate chamber.

As the president's tenure increases, it usually becomes harder for him to negotiate successfully with Congress, resulting in not only a greater number of vetoes (Hoff 1987; Hoff 1991), but in more public bills becoming law over his objections. Edwards (1983) claims that a chasm between expectations and performance has negative consequences for level of support as time passes. DiClerico (1983), referring to Gallup poll findings of one-term presidents, detects a consistent decline in popular support for incumbents from the time they take office until their death or defeat in office. Copeland (1983, 701) states the following about the president's relations with Congress:

> Traditionally, in the first year of his term the president has a honeymoon period where his relationship with Congress is at its most harmonious point. As a result, he should veto less in the first year of his term than in the remaining years. In the second year the president and his political opponents are more deliberate in their posturing for electoral support in the midterm election. In his third year, relations with Congress may become cordial, but the fact that nearly always the president faces a larger opposition party may keep the number of vetoes high. In the final year of the term, the level of combativeness is likely to increase again and the number of vetoes is likely to increase.

The effect that military conflict involving U.S. forces has on presidential support has been shown to be somewhat counter-intuitive, and therefore of special theoretical concern. Despite the so-called rally-around-the-flag phenomenon positing a positive relationship between military crisis and support for the chief

executive (Mueller 1973), Edwards (1983) uncovers a number of rally events not followed by an increase in popular approval of the president's job performance. Moreover, Hoff (1985, 1987) found a significant and positive relationship between military conflict involving American forces and probability of second house override. While the reason for this puzzling relationship has not yet been uncovered, some intuitively satisfying hypotheses are that in times of military crises, (1) national security issues divert the president's attention away from the daily flow of domestic policy, as is alleged to have been the case during operations "Just Cause" and "Desert Storm;" (2) inferring from the "bank account" theory of presidential power, presidents are reluctant to spend their political credits with Congress on domestic matters in order to preserve their capacity to deal with the military crisis; or (3) the Congress asserts itself versus the president during such times in order to fulfill its constitutional prerogative to share powers, including the war powers, with the president. Thus, a major military conflict should serve to reduce the persuasive powers of the president, swelling the percentage for override and thereby increasing the likelihood of override as well.

Methodology

Because the study seeks to investigate how measures of presidential support affect both likelihood of congressional overturn of a public bill veto, and the margin by which final override votes succeed, both probit and regression techniques will be employed. The duration covered in the empirical analysis is one hundred years, from the Benjamin Harrison administration through Ronald Reagan's. Where probability of override is studied, the dependent variable is dichotomous: a value of 0 is assigned if the presidential veto was not challenged or if it was voted on but sustained by a body of Congress, and a 1 is given if the chamber overrides the veto. The unit of analysis for the examination of override likelihood is each override action, which includes 453 initial chamber decisions and ninety-six second chamber outcomes.

For the first-house stage of the override process, the following equation summarizes the model to be evaluated:

Probability of first house override (Y=1) = Constant + B_1 (chamber considering override) + B_2 (area of legislation) + B_3 (military conflict) + B_4 (year-in-term) + B_5 (partisan support percentage in first chamber) + B_6 (veto message) + error

At the second house juncture, the equation to be employed in assessing presidential support indicators' effect on congressional response is expressed as:

Probability of second house override (Y=1) = Constant + B_1 (chamber considering override) + B_2 (area of legislation) + B_3 (military conflict) + B_4 (year-in-term) + B_5 (partisan support percentage in second chamber) + B_6 (veto message) + B_7 (percentage for override in first house) + error

Inasmuch as the relationship between various indices of presidential support and the percentage by which second-house override votes succeeded is conceived in linear terms, and the dependent variable is continuous, multiple regression is used to test that relationship. The unit of analysis here is each second-chamber vote that culminated in override; the total number of cases is sixty-eight. The equation below expresses the model for the influence of presidential support indicators upon the strength of second-house override votes:

$$Y \text{ (final override percentage)} = \text{Constant} + B_1 \text{ (chamber considering override)} + B_2 \text{ (area of legislation)} + B_3 \text{ (military conflict)} + B_4 \text{ (year-in-term)} + B_5 \text{ (partisan support percentage in second chamber)} + B_6 \text{ (veto message)} + B_7 \text{ (percentage for override in first house)} + \text{error}$$

The endnotes contain a description of how the variables are coded,[1] and of the sources from which the data are drawn.[2]

Results

Table 1 offers descriptive statistics on first-house override decisions. It illustrates that 357 vetoes by chief executives from 1889 through 1988 were sustained by the initial chamber. In only 74 of those instances, comprising about 21 percent of the total, did the first house actually uphold the president's veto by way of vote; in the remaining cases no action was taken. Every president through-

Table 1. First House Actions by President, 1889-1988

President	Sustains	Overrides	Total	% of Sustains
B. Harrison	12	2	14	85.7
Cleveland	11	4	15	73.3
McKinley	1	0	1	100.0
T. Roosevelt	17	1	18	94.4
Taft	15	7	22	68.2
Wilson	19	6	25	76.0
Harding	4	1	5	80.0
Coolidge	9	5	14	64.3
Hoover	10	3	13	76.9
F. Roosevelt	93	12	105	88.6
Truman	40	15	55	72.7
Eisenhower	31	4	35	88.6
Kennedy	4	0	4	100.0
L. Johnson	7	0	7	100.0
Nixon	17	7	24	70.8
Ford	29	17	46	63.0
Carter	11	2	13	84.6
Reagan	27	10	37	73.0
Total	357	96	453	Avg. 78.8

out the last century had more public bill vetoes sustained than overridden at this state of reconsideration; three -- McKinley, Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson -- had no vetoes overridden. The 96 successful first chamber overrides represent about 21 percent of the 453 public bill vetoes encompassed in the research.

Table 2 presents the finding from the probit procedure applied to first house actions. The maximum likelihood estimates represent the change in the cumulative normal probability function that results from a one-unit change in the independent variable. The estimates for four of the six presidential support measures are significant: partisan support (.001), year-in-term (.01), area of legislation (.01), and the first house indicator (.10). These variables represent two of the four categories comprising the presidential support model (interdependent factors and congressional components), thereby confirming the internal, parochial nature of initial override response.

Table 2. Probit Analysis of First House Override Model

Variable	MLE	SE	MLE/SE	Impact	Mean
Constant	.19	.54	.36		
First House	.22	.16	1.38*	.18	.69
Area of Legislation	-.48	.17	-2.85**	-.42	.77
Military Conflict	.15	.17	.87	.07	.23
Year-in-Term	.19	.07	2.60**	.32	2.81
Partisan Support	-.03	.01	-4.20***	-.20	53.47
Veto Message	.07	.20	.37	.03	.13

N = 453
Estimated $R^2 = .09$
$Chi^2(6) = 44.58$***
Mean of First House Overrides = .21 Percent Correctly Predicted = 79

*significant at .10
**significant at .01
***signifcant at .001

The partisan support variable's powerful inverse relationship with likelihood of first-chamber override is logical: once a president vetoes a bill, he must turn his attention to the body that initiated the legislation. Hence, the percentage of members sharing the president's party affiliation is a key component of his pool of resources. The mean level of partisan support for *all* first house actions is 53 percent. On average, the chief executive enjoys a 57 percent partisan majority in those cases in which his veto was sustained at the first stage of reconsideration, compared to a mean of 50 percent copartisans in those cases when the first-house vote to override succeeded.

The finding that the year-in-term measure is positively and significantly related to propensity to override points to a decline in the president's ability to influence the legislative process as time passes. Of the 96 overrides by the first

chamber, eight occurred in the president's first year, eighteen in the second year, nineteen in the third year, and 51 (i.e., 53 percent) transpired in the final year of the chief executive's four-year term. Among those who had the most public bill vetoes overridden during the last year of a term are Taft, who suffered seven first house overrides in 1912; Truman, who had five of his public bill vetoes overridden by the first house in 1948; and Cleveland, who had four such vetoes successfully challenged by the initial chamber in 1896.

The inverse relationship between the area of legislation variable and likelihood of override is valenced contrary to expectations. Apparently, during the first-house stage of reconsideration, the president finds it easier to bargain with members of Congress over revision of domestic legislation than foreign policy legislation. Moreover, the results show that likelihood of first-chamber override following a presidential veto is greater when the House of Representatives, not the Senate, is the initial body of Congress to pass a public bill. While the House participated in 69 percent of all decisions at this juncture, it accounted for 77 percent (74 of 96 cases) of the first-chamber veto overrides between 1889 and 1989. In sum, the powers that the chief executive wields in the international sphere appear less influential during the first stage of the veto override process than during the drafting and enactment stages of the legislative process, especially where the lower house is concerned. Once the president vetoes foreign policy legislation that he opposes, Congress hardly exhibits the followership suggested by the "Two Presidencies" hypothesis. Rather, the data suggest a relationship that embodies Neustadt's (1960, 33) famous characterization of executive-legislative relations as "separate institutions sharing powers."

Table 2 includes a statistic referred to as impact, which is similar to the standardized coefficients in regression analysis. It is figured by multiplying the maximum likelihood estimate by the standard deviation of the variable's mean. Of those estimates found to be significant, area of legislation has the strongest independent impact on initial chamber override probability (-.42), followed by year-in-term (.32), partisan support (-.20), and first chamber (.18) indicators. A check for intercorrelations among the independent variables reveals that the highest R^2 is between the partisan support measure and the remaining variables (.18). Therefore, multicollinearity is not a problem in the first house model.

The presidential support model is significant at the .001 probability level. The estimated R^2, based on a formula by Aldrich and Nelson (1984), is .09. This is derived by dividing the chi-square statistic by the chi-square plus the number of cases in the sample. Seventy-nine percent of the cases were predicted correctly to be overrides or sustained vetoes. Moreover, on a per-president basis, the model correctly predicts more than half of all initial override decisions during each chief executive's tenure over the last century. The model perfectly predicts first chamber override actions during the McKinley (1 of 1), Kennedy (4 of 4), and Lyndon Johnson (7 of 7) administrations, while the Taft (13 of 22) presidency is the only instance where the model correctly predicts less than 60 percent of cases.

Table 3 compares second house sustaining actions for each president who faced such responses to their public bill vetoes between 1889 and 1988. Of the eighteen presidents who served during this period, only two --Taft and Harding -- had more vetoes sustained than overridden here. President Ford had the most public bill vetoes overridden, although it should be noted that the percentage of his vetoes overridden is lowest among those presidents who had more than half of their vetoes successfully challenged. The 68 actual overrides constitute approximately 71 percent of all final chamber decisions.

Table 3. Second House Actions by President, 1889-1988†

President	*Sustains*	*Overrides*	*Total*	*% of Second House Overrides*	*Average Vote Margin, Successful Overrides*
B. Harrison	1	1	2	50.0	98.3
Cleveland	2	2	4	50.0	95.1
T. Roosevelt	0	1	1	100.0	83.1
Taft	6	1	7	14.3	72.1
Wilson	0	6	6	100.0	83.1
Harding	1	0	1	0.0	----
Coolidge	1	4	5	80.0	76.9
Hoover	0	3	3	100.0	83.0
F. Roosevelt	3	9	12	75.0	79.8
Truman	4	11	15	73.3	82.8
Eisenhower	2	2	4	50.0	75.7
Nixon	2	5	7	71.4	85.8
Ford	5	12	17	70.6	84.6
Carter	0	2	2	100.0	93.6
Reagan	1	9	10	90.0	81.0
Total	28	68	96	Avg. 70.8	Avg. 82.9

†Presidents McKinley, Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson had no public bill vetoes considered by the second house.

The probit results in Table 4 show that the percentage for override in the first house, area of legislation, and military conflict relate significantly and directly to likelihood of second-chamber override, whereas the veto message variable significantly reduces the probability of a successful second-chamber challenge to a public bill veto. That these particular indicators best explain reactions to public bill vetoes illustrates how final override decisions are affected by aspects of presidential support emanating from across the political system -- that is, from within the legislative and executive branches themselves, and from the political environment in which they operate.

The margin by which the first chamber votes to override a public bill veto is a powerful portent of successful second house action. Whereas the mean percentage of the first house that voted to override for *all* second house decisions is 80.5 percent, the figure rises to an average of 82 percent for those cases in which

Table 4. Probit Analysis of Second House Override Model

Variable	MLE	SE	MLE/SE	Impact	Mean
Constant	-5.20	2.02	-2.58**		
Second House	-.24	.36	-.66	-.11	.23
Area of Legislation	.66	.34	1.92*	.55	.69
Military Conflict	.67	.40	1.69*	.36	.29
Year-in-Term	.13	.16	.79	.23	3.16
Partisan Support	.01	.02	.91	.10	50.20
Veto Message	-.67	.40	-1.67*	-.27	.17
1st House Override %	.05	.02	2.60**	.47	80.48

N = 96
Estimated R^2=.18
Chi^2 (7) = 17.62**
Mean of Second House Overrides = .71 Percent Correctly Predicted = 75

*significant at .05
**significant at .01

final override occurs -- 15 percent above the requisite ratio of votes for defeating a president's veto. A solid vote against the president's veto at the initial override juncture means that one branch of the legislature is resolute in their determination to pass the bill. Such a forceful response encourages second-house opposition and puts the president on the defensive therein by undermining endogenous sources of presidential support, such as partisan support and the Senate's tendency to acquiesce (when the latter is second house). It is no coincidence that these factors fail to have a major effect on likelihood of final override.The area of legislation indicator not only relates significantly to the probability of second-house override, but once again has the strongest independent impact on the dependent variable. This time, however, legislation dealing with domestic issues, not foreign issues, was most likely to be at the center of override disputes between the executive and Congress. Fifty of the 68 (74 percent) final overrides of vetoes from 1889 through 1988 involved domestic-related public bills.

Thus, consistent with our original expectations, in the final analysis Congress is indeed more reluctant to override the president on foreign policy matters. The inverse relationship that obtained for this variable during first house actions may reflect (1) the first house's pride of authorship, (2) its defense of its institutional prerogatives, and/or (3) its greater freedom (compared to the second house) to regard its votes to override as messages to the administration, rather than as final, binding dispositions.

An ongoing conflict involving American forces, however, apparently is enough to incline the second house to foreswear such deference and pass legislation over the president's objections more often. Given that two of the wars that ensued over the last century were undeclared (Korea and Vietnam), while others were of questionable necessity (Spanish-American), already-extant con-

sternation between the chief executive and Congress concerning strategy, casualties, and other concerns may spill over when specific legislative confrontations erupt. Public opinion opposing such military actions may further exacerbate executive-legislative relations. The results indicate that nearly one-third (32.4 percent) of the cases in which the second house successfully overrode a public bill veto occurred while U.S. forces were engaged in large-scale military conflicts.

When a president claims that a proposed law is unconstitutional or violates long-held policy positions, his objections evidently carry considerable weight: this factor significantly reduced the likelihood of final override. In such cases, the second chamber must collectively pause to assess whether the prospective law might be overturned by the Supreme Court, or might precipitate widespread public opposition to sudden changes in entrenched, popular programs. The analysis reveals that veto messages containing either of the aforementioned points were present in seven of 28 cases where the second chamber sustained the chief executive's veto. The duration between first- and second-house override decisions is likewise affected by a veto message of this type: while there is an average delay of three days between successful initial and final overrides, the mean length of time between first-house overrides and second-house sustaining actions is twelve days.

As mentioned above, the area of legislation variable has the strongest independent impact on probability of override (.55). Of those variables that significantly affect second chamber override, the first house percentage has the second-strongest independent impact (.47), followed by the military conflict (.36) and veto message (-.27) factors. Since the highest R^2 is between partisan support and the remaining independent variables (.31), multicollinearity is not a serious concern in the second house model.

The presidential support model is significant at the .01 level. The estimated R^2, again figured according to the Aldrich and Nelson (1984) formula, is .18. The compendium of variables correctly predict second house actions in seventy-two of the ninety-six cases, or 75 percent. Since the mean of the dependent variables is about 71 percent, the presidential support model increases the predictive accuracy of four decisions. Of the twenty-four incorrect decisions, eighteen anticipated override where a sustaining action occurred, while six forecast a sustain where the veto actually was overridden. The model correctly predicts all second house actions during the Theodore Roosevelt (1 for 1), Eisenhower (4 for 4), and Carter (2 for 2) presidencies. Of the other twelve presidents who faced second-chamber actions against their vetoes over the last century, the model correctly predicts more than fifty percent of final override actions for all presidents except Hoover (1 for 3, 33.3 percent), Taft (2 for 7, 28.6 percent), and Harding (0 for 1, 0 percent).

Table 3 above displays the mean percentage of successful second-house votes to override, per president, over the 1889 through 1988 time-frame. Among the ten presidents who were overridden more often than sustained by the second chamber, the president whose vetoes were overturned by the widest average

margin was Jimmy Carter (93.6 percent), while the president whose vetoes were overridden by the lowest average margin was Calvin Coolidge (76.9 percent). The overall mean percentage of successful second-house override votes is 83.2 percent.

Table 5 furnishes the results from the regression analysis of successful second house override percentage. Five of seven variables in the presidential support model are consistent with the hypotheses about their impact; three of these indicators are strongly related to final override percentage.

Table 5. Regression Analysis of Final Veto Override Percentage

Variable	B	SE/B	T-Ratio	Beta	Mean
Constant	29.69	14.90	1.99**		
Second House	-3.47	2.92	-1.19	-.14	.19
Area of Legislation	2.30	2.86	.80	.10	.74
Military Conflict	5.32	2.57	2.07**	.26	.32
Year-in-Term	.97	1.24	.78	.10	3.18
Partisan Support	.14	.12	1.09	.15	49.96
Veto Message	-4.75	3.37	-1.41*	-.17	.13
1st House Override %	.51	.12	4.28***	.47	81.97

N = 68
Estimated R^2 = .25
Standard Error of Estimate = 8.54
F - Ratio = 4.10***
Durbin-Watson d-statistic = 1.91
Average Margin of Final Override Vote = 83.19%

*significant at .10
**significant at .01
***significant at .001

The percentage for override in the first house contributes significantly (.001) to the proportion for override in the second chamber. The average margin of first house overrides across the time period analyzed is 82 percent, a full percent lower than the second house's average override margin. Seven of 14 presidents[3] who experienced overrides of their public bill vetoes during the period covered suffered a higher percentage for override in the second house than in the initial chamber. A lopsided first-house veto override also lessens the duration between initial and final veto override action (about two days) compared to that between issuance of the public bill veto and the first vote to reconsider (approximately nine days).

The existence of military conflict involving American forces significantly increases the percentage for final override. During such crises, the margin for override on successful overturns in the second chamber averages 86 percent, which is 3 percent above the mean percentage for all overturns. The explanation provided above as to why this variable affects second-chamber override probability is similarly relevant here.

Even when second-house override does transpire, a veto message that

opposes a public bill on constitutional or long-standing policy grounds significantly lessens final override percentage. The inclusion of the latter arguments reduces the mean margin for final override by about 2 percent, to an average of 81 percent. At the second house juncture, there were six presidents during the 1889 through 1988 period who cited constitutional or long-term policy reasons for their vetoes, yet had them overturned. Of these, two chief executives (Ford, Reagan) experienced a lower average percentage for override in the second house than in the first chamber, and one (Wilson) had the same average percentage for override in both chambers.

Moreover, veto messages containing either of the above objections prolonged the average duration between release of the public bill veto and successful second chamber action by two days, from an average of 11 days for all final overrides to 13 days for overrides of vetoes cast on constitutional/long-standing policy grounds. In effect, such a veto message lengthens legislative reconsideration, lessens probability of override, and reduces the second-house vote tally when an actual override does occur.

Of those factors that are significantly related to final override vote margin, first house percentage of override has the strongest independent impact (.47), followed by the military conflict (.26) and veto message (-.17) measures. The highest R^2 among the independent variables is between partisan support and the remaining measures (.43). The adjusted R^2 for the equation is .25, denoting that the independent variables together explain one-quarter of the variance in percentage of second-stage veto overturn from 1889 through 1988. The F-ratio for the equation is 4.10, indicating that the presidential support model is significant at the .001 probability level. With a Durbin-Watson d-statistic of 1.91, there is no detectable autocorrelation between successive error terms.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have demonstrated the utility of the presidential support model for investigating congressional response to a public bill veto. It has shown how some factors affect first chamber override actions, where presidents have had a large majority of their vetoes sustained since 1889, and how other indicators of support influence second chamber override choices, where Congress usually triumphs. The model's effectiveness in predicting and explaining actions at each juncture of reconsideration augments our understanding of the comprehensive, complex, and often confrontational nature of lawmaking -- and of the role of the executive and legislative branches in this odyssey.

While the present work has identified a number of factors pertinent to congressional overrides of presidential vetoes, several others could be examined. These include the number of original sponsors of a bill, the ratio of supporting to opposing floor speeches concerning the legislation, the seniority of members speaking for and against a bill, and the length of debate in the reconsideration

period. Subsequent research should likewise ponder the possibility that veto battles may in turn affect institutional effectiveness and public support for the branches of our national government. It is hoped that this essay will inspire future research of these and other areas of the veto process.

NOTES

[1]The coding of the variables is as follows: (1) chamber considering override=0 for Senate, 1 for House of Representatives; (2) area of legislation=0 for foreign or military policy, 1 for domestic policy; (3) military conflict=0 for no, 1 for yes (Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, Korean Conflict, Vietnam War); (4) year-in-term=1 to 4; (5) partisan support=percentage of members sharing the president's party affiliation in the chamber under study; (6) veto message=0 for message citing expediency or personal reasons, 1 for message claiming that the public bill is unconstitutional or violates longstanding policies; (7) first house percentage of override=N who voted for override divided by the total N of legislators voting; (8) first house override probability=0 for sustain, 1 for override; (9) second house override probability=0 for sustain, 1 for override; (10) percentage of successful second house override=N who voted for override divided by the total N of legislators voting.

[2]Most of the data employed in the study are drawn from three publications providing background on the subject of legislation, when the bill was vetoed, which chamber considered override at each stage, and vote margin (*Presidential Vetoes, 1789-1976*; *Presidential Vetoes, 1977-1984*; *Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1988*). Veto messages were content-analyzed using James Richardson's (1900) compilation of presidential messages and applicable Congressional Record issues. Presidential party support percentage in each chamber considering override was figured by transforming numbers found in Nelson (1989).

[3]Benjamin Harrison, Cleveland, both Roosevelts, Hoover, Truman, and Nixon.

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