

“Obama’s ‘Hidden-Hand’ Presidency: Myth, Metaphor, or Misrepresentation?”

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory research tests Greenstein’s (1982) hidden hand theory of presidential leadership comparatively and systematically, using quantifiable elements of President Obama’s governance as a benchmark. The analysis evaluates Obama’s activities with those of his predecessors, where possible, on empirically measurable criteria including congressional position-taking, issuance of executive orders, and press conference activity. With the aid of updated baseline models in the extant literature, Obama’s activities—actual and forecast—are juxtaposed with his predecessors, including Eisenhower, in the quest to uncover evidence of a hidden hand approach. The analysis then focuses on Obama’s activities behind the scenes in the White House to lend aperçus into his liaison with members of the cabinet, Congress, and foreign leaders and to evaluate his leadership style on the airstrikes in Libya in 2011 and the health care debate in Congress in 2009. The study accentuates the difficulties in applying the hidden hand thesis as a theory of presidential leadership in a systematic fashion, at least contemporaneously, based on available empirical data. The hidden hand in Obama’s presidency must be understood as a partial yet insufficient concept for considering his performance in a context dissimilar from Eisenhower’s presidency, notably the intersection of hyper-partisanship and ideological polarization in Congress, agenda objectives, a vastly changed media environment, and post-9/11 international relations.

In the last several years a spate of observers has contended that President Obama's leadership style has, in the words of Ronald Brownstein (2011) of the *Atlantic*, "less in common with Kennedy's inspirational, public-oriented leadership than with the muted, indirect, and targeted Eisenhower model that political scientist Fred Greenstein memorably described as a 'hidden hand' presidency." Peter Baker of the *New York Times* (2013) asserted that "While other presidents have put the bully in the bully pulpit, Mr. Obama uses his megaphone, and the power that comes with it, sparingly, speaking out when he decides his voice can shape the trajectory of an issue and staying silent when he thinks it might be counterproductive." Obama's putative penchant to work behind the scenes to downplay international conflicts such as Libya in 2011 by "leading from behind," sketch legislative goals like health care reform with a broad brush while allegedly abandoning the details to his party's leaders in Congress, and avoid contact with media reporters in favor of appearances before regulated groups of supporters has led some observers directly or circuitously to Greenstein's thesis on Dwight D. Eisenhower's unique style of performance in the White House more than a half century ago.

Others discern the hidden hand theory in Obama's 2012 re-election effort. Former Alabama Congressman Arthur Davis (R) suggests how the Obama campaign attempted to reconcile the president's poor record on black unemployment and poverty with commitment to building a "post-racial" America. Obama carefully avoided pointed, public commentary on racial issues while employing symbolic opportunities such as photo-ops. He dispatched Vice President Joe Biden to address African-American audiences, enjoined the Department of Justice to challenge state voter identification requirements, and cultivated print media opposition to alleged racism among Republicans to cement his discreet approach to racial progress. As Davis (2012) asserts:

The Obama message, implicitly, is that the conditions on the ground, including in the black community, are small, grudging details when weighed against the epic fact that a black man occupies the Oval Office. It's a point of view. But that argument is too charged, too at odds with Obama's official de-emphasis on race, to be made out loud and

in the light of day. Better to work through *the hidden-hand approach*, through surrogates who create plausible deniability and through commentators who can be disavowed. [emphasis added]

Obama's detractors rebuff the hidden hand thesis and posit that any similarities between him and Eisenhower terminate with their common affection toward the game of golf (Jackson 2011). The president's adversaries seize upon a critical point made by Baker's (2013) interview with Eisenhower historian Jim Newton: "The essence of Eisenhower's hidden hand, of course, is that there was real work going on that people didn't know at the time... If, on the other hand, he's (Obama) simply doing nothing or very little, that would be passivity, not hidden-hand leadership."

The editors of the conservative *Weekly Standard* (2013) minced no words. Proponents of a positive hidden hand in the Obama White House "must contend with evidence of apathy, indifference, resentment, and sloth." From this perspective, casting Obama's leadership style in a hidden hand light is a disingenuous strategy to conceal transgressions of civil liberties or to camouflage programmatic failures. The Administration's lackluster public responses to a host of scandals—the "Fast and Furious" gun-running operation in Mexico, the Benghazi consulate fiasco, the targeting of conservative groups by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and the Department of Justice's wiretapping of Associated Press and other reporters, the more recent Affordable Care Act website debacle, not to mention the National Security Agency's data collection on domestic phone calls—are prime examples in which the president has professed publicly to know few if any details or deferred to surrogates. Jonathan Turley (2013) suggests that Obama's insistence that he knew nothing of major decisions at the Departments of State, Justice, and the IRS, combined with the ignorance of the heads of those departments about the actions of their subordinates, created a surreal situation "...as if the government functioned by some *hidden hand*" (emphasis added). Charlie Spiering (2013) of the *Washington Examiner* maintains that the president's

withdrawal from the press and the public eye “is a far cry from the bold picture of ‘Obama in charge’ painted at the beginning of his second term,” raising significant questions about his leadership abilities.

This exploratory research is as much an exercise in testing the potential for applying the hidden hand thesis systematically, as Greenstein (1982) fashioned the concept, to presidential leadership generally as it is to President Obama’s governing style specifically. Is the theory exclusive to the singular context of Eisenhower’s presidency in the 1950s, apropos only to select presidential activities identifiable across time, broadly generalizable to the modern presidency, or impossible to verify? On one account the theory would seem to violate the imperative of falsifiability for any scholar wishing to employ the paradigm *contemporaneously*: If hidden hand leadership is indeed taking place in the labyrinth of the White House operation, observers should *not* be able to discern much if any of it. Proving the thesis becomes tautological. The concept can then be used as a superficial myth to cover up a president’s shortcomings, exploited as a metaphor to promote a positive view of his leadership style when inaction appears predominant, or may misrepresent his leadership approach altogether. From a methodological standpoint, the theory appears rather limited in its *immediate* application. Scholars are left to wait for revisionist historians to comb through archival records to make the case or disaffirm it.

On the other hand, if one assumes that institutional features of the modern presidency compel occupants of the Oval Office to engage more or less in similar activities—from public politics and legislative leadership to institutional prerogatives of the office like unilateral action—there should be comparative evidence of the hidden hand insofar as chief executives give more or less weight to some of those *visible* activities that scholars can quantify across time. And case studies of specific presidential actions, such as deliberations with Cabinet secretaries, liaison with members in Congress, or decision-making in international crises behind the scenes, to the extent that data are available at present, might lend evidence to a hidden hand style that can be validated in the future through archival investigation.

This research takes up such critical questions on hidden hand leadership by comparing Obama's activities to those of his predecessors, where possible, on empirically measurable criteria. Moreover, data from the White House scheduling diary from 2009-2012 are used to cast light on several brief case studies of his leadership in the domestic and international realms. The analysis is organized as follows. The first section reviews briefly Greenstein's understanding of the hidden hand presidency, traces attempts to apply it to others than Eisenhower, and sketches the challenges in applying the theory systematically to his successors. The second section centers on comparative longitudinal data comprising presidential position-taking in Congress since 1953, executive orders, and press relations across time. With the aid of predictive empirical models, Obama's activities—actual and forecast—are juxtaposed with his predecessors, including Eisenhower, in the quest to uncover evidence of a hidden hand approach. The analysis then focuses on Obama's activities behind the scenes in the White House to lend *aperçus* into his leadership style on the health care reform effort in 2009 and the airstrikes in Libya in 2011. The concluding section reprises the results to accentuate the difficulties in applying the hidden hand thesis as a theory of presidential leadership in a systematic fashion, at least contemporaneously. The hidden hand in Obama's presidency must be understood as a partial yet insufficient concept for considering his performance in a context dissimilar from Eisenhower's presidency, notably the intersection of hyper-partisanship and ideological polarization in Congress, agenda objectives, a vastly changed media environment, and post-9/11 international relations.

THE HIDDEN HAND AND PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP

Journalists have borrowed a loose concept of hidden hand leadership recurrently to describe presidential aides' putative influence in the White House and to offer early appraisals of presidents' possible place in history once they leave office. George W. Bush's two terms drew significant speculation on this account, though little of Greenstein's theory, *per se*, was applied in such analyses.

Deputy Chief of Staff and trusted Bush aide Karl Rove, as well as Vice President Richard (Dick) Cheney, were often negatively characterized as “pulling the strings” behind the scenes for a detached chief executive. As one example, *Agence France Presse* (2007) posited that “Rove’s was the hidden hand on the hard-knuckle politics which drove Bush through a disputed election win in 2000 and the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in 2001.” As another example at the beginning of Bush’s second term, “Washington insiders,” the *White House Bulletin* (2004) contended, “see the hidden hand of Vice President Dick Cheney in President Bush’s moves to reshuffle the Cabinet,” including Secretary of State Colin Powell’s resignation.

As for Bush himself one newspaper mocked his handling of the Chinese capture of a U.S. spy plane in 2001, suggesting that he was entirely disengaged from the crisis. By allegedly entrusting Colin Powell, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, and Press Secretary Karen Hughes to handle the “Hainan Noon” incident while he was away from Washington, Bush was “the *hidden hand*, the unseen demiurge, the eye of the storm, the wind beneath our wings...His presence here is so powerful that it does not require his presence here” (*State-Journal Register* 2001; emphasis added). There is also the conjecture about Bush’s place in history, which looked dim upon his exit from the Oval Office. Given the aura of secrecy surrounding Bush’s White House, might the discovery of a hidden hand approach rehabilitate the image of the forty-third president? Jill Lawrence of the *National Journal* (2013) mused whether “It is possible that documents and archives will reveal Bush in a more positive light...” as Greenstein’s analysis did for Eisenhower. Lou Cannon (1989), the renowned biographer of Bush’s two-term Republican predecessor struggled with a similar conundrum two decades earlier, but was incredulous: “...much that Reagan did behind the scenes remains a mystery, even to former aides with an ax to grind. We already know, however, that Reagan also sometimes operated with a hidden hand in pursuit of dubious policies,” such as Iran-Contra.

Whatever the drawbacks of a real or imagined hidden hand style for Bush or Reagan and its effects, journalists explicitly advocated that President Obama consider emulating some such vaguely defined leadership approach as he entered his second term in office. They have done so by drawing comparisons of Obama's challenges to those faced by Eisenhower, based on a facile reading of Greenstein's handiwork, which they seemingly just "discovered" without necessarily digesting the details (see Dickerson 2012; Thomas 2013). Several paramount questions accompany such a risky normative recommendation. The first involves the constituent components of the hidden hand paradigm as conceived by Greenstein. The second is the relative generalizability of the conceptual framework as a leadership theory. The third concerns the potential for replicating Eisenhower's governing style, given the contextual features of his presidency that may have been critical in producing it. A final question pivots on the relative costs and benefits of such a governing style. A brief review of Greenstein's development of the theory of hidden hand leadership, and its rather intermittent scholarly application to other presidents, clarifies these paramount issues.

Constructed from meticulous archival research at the Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, Kansas, Greenstein's analysis focused on the thirty-fourth president's "*mode* of leadership, not of the merits of his policy aims" (1982, 228; emphasis in original). Debunking the common view that Eisenhower was a "do-nothing" president, Greenstein's objective, as he titled a journal article in 1991, was to cast light on "The president who led by seeming not to." His painstakingly exhaustive review of newly-available presidential records accentuated how Eisenhower sought to reconcile the fundamental paradox of the presidency as head of state and head of government. As Greenstein (1990, 8) adroitly puts it, "As national leader the president is expected to walk on water, but as governmental leader he must wade through the swamps of politics." Eisenhower resolved this structural incongruity in a novel way:

His mode of politicking in the military, when he dealt with Churchill, Roosevelt, de Gaulle, or Truman, was remarkably parallel to his manner of resolving the potential role conflict built into the presidency. In both settings he denied being a “politician” or understanding politics, but in both he exercised political influence. In each case his public discourse was scrupulously nonpolitical. He made his appeals in terms of the national interest and in terms of the specialized competence he could claim by virtue of his official role, whether as a military technician before he went into politics in 1952 or as a defender of constitutional principles when he was in the White House (Greenstein 1982, 10-11).

Eisenhower’s hidden hand style of leadership comprised six interlocking strategies. The first is “public vagueness and private precision” (Greenstein 1982, 19). This is the keystone of the hidden hand style. Eisenhower obscured from public view his political activities and instead chose to effect leadership by the indirect exercise of influence (1982, viii). Second, the president’s “instrumental” use of language was intentionally obtuse. His perplexing oratory and odd syntax during press conferences often confused reporters, and was a calculated tactic when he did not wish to respond to controversial national security questions, in particular (Bose and Greenstein 2002, 187; Greenstein 1982, 66-72). The disjuncture between Eisenhower’s written and oral communication skills was palpable, and fits with the hidden hand approach. The president, R. Gordon Hoxie (1988, 428) contends, “could plan his own ideas on paper with brilliance, charm, clarity, cogency, depth, and succinctness.” The third and fourth interrelated strategies involve Eisenhower’s refusal to “engage in personalities” in public and his deftness in privately sizing up others and adjusting his interactions on the basis of personality analyses (1982, 57). Greenstein devotes a scrupulously researched chapter on Eisenhower’s discreet undermining of red-baiter Joseph McCarthy to illustrate the point in detail. Fifth, Eisenhower’s complex, selective delegation to subordinates enabled him to share credit and assign blame without diluting “his own ability to keep the actions of his associates in line with his own policies, adjusting the degree of his supervision both to the abilities of his associates and to the extent he believed his own participation in a policy area was necessary” (1982, 81). Ultimately these components of Eisenhower’s style contributed

to a sixth, successful strategy: solidifying the president's image as a "credible chief of state—building a public support that transcended many of the nation's social and political divisions" (1982, 57-58).

Despite downswings in his popularity with an economic recession in 1957 and the U-2 incident in 1960, Eisenhower maintained the highest average public approval (65%) of any President except Kennedy since polling data are available (Gallup n.d.).

The hidden hand thesis stands in stark contrast to Neustadt's (1991) notion of "power as persuasion," which has heavily influenced presidential scholars and most of Eisenhower's successors and their aides. Critics of Greenstein's analysis, however, raise at least four broad issues to cast doubt on the notion as a generalizable theory of leadership in the modern presidency. One of the most significant indictments of the hidden hand thesis is that Eisenhower's hidden hand politics were at best unremarkable, and at worst a reflection of the president's shortcomings. Schlesinger (1983, 6) maintains that while Greenstein admits that many of the facets of the hidden hand were not exclusive to Eisenhower, "the loving care with which they are described gives the impression nonetheless of attributing uniquely to Eisenhower operating habits that are mostly the stock in trade of all politicians." Patterson (1984, 896) contends that Greenstein's isolation of five key traits of leadership creates an "illusion" that Eisenhower's mode of operation comprised an intentional, coherent strategy when perhaps it was not deliberate. Walter (1983, 612) also questions whether the hidden hand strategy developed out of the president's "strategic assessments" or perhaps simply represented a personality quirk based on "a psychologically based resistance to being identified with the hard decisions and with public battles."

A second criticism concerns the exceptional context of Eisenhower's presidency. While all of his successors save Bill Clinton and Barack Obama have served in the military in one capacity or another, none has held any claim commensurate with Eisenhower's war hero stature, which buttressed his

popularity and credibility, particularly on foreign affairs. Moreover, the Kansas Republican had modest, incremental policy goals focused largely on avoiding an arms race with the Soviet Union and keeping the growth of the federal government and spending to low levels. Although Greenstein dismisses analysis of Eisenhower's policy objectives, they contrast mightily with the progressive agendas of Johnson or Obama, or even Reagan's comprehensive efforts to roll back economic regulation, trim social programs, and ramp up defense spending. Further, the presidency, Griffith (1983, 1346) reminds us, was still in a period of ascendancy in the immediate post-World War II era, not in a state of decline following the Vietnam War and Watergate or the hyperpartisanship that characterizes so much of American politics in the twenty-first century. Eisenhower's relations with members and leaders on Capitol Hill, despite six years of divided government, were unique. On foreign policy partisanship still largely stopped at the water's edge in the early decades of the Cold War (prior to Vietnam), and members and leaders were far more deferential to the president compared to today (see Wildavsky 1998; Oldfield and Wildavsky 1989). The bipartisan support Eisenhower received was also a product of the "textbook Congress" of the 1950s: internally divided parties, weak leadership, and loose organization (Conley 2003, Ch. 2). The "post-reform" Congress of today, with its ideological polarization, internally cohesive parties, and stronger leadership and organizational structure bears little resemblance (see Davidson 2009; Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 2006; Poole and Rosenthal 1996). Finally, it is also clear that media politics have changed significantly since Eisenhower's day (see Kernell 2007). Whether Eisenhower's "instrumental" use of vague and ungainly language is possible in a brave new world of 6 or 12 hour news cycles, cable television, and the blogosphere is an open question. As Wayne (2012, 206) ponders, "Can a 'hidden-hand presidency' be effectively exercised in the age of 24/7 'gotcha' journalism?"

A third criticism centers on normative issues raised by the hidden hand thesis. One overriding issue is the potential that the hidden hand can be employed for nefarious purposes and to undermine democratic accountability. Joseph Pika (1984, 609) acknowledges that the concealment of some of Eisenhower's behind-the-scenes maneuvering is scarcely equivalent to the criminal misdeeds involved in Nixon's Watergate cover-up. Nonetheless, "Can any conscious misrepresentation be tolerated," Pika contemplates, "as long as we know future incumbents can use the same or similar techniques to pursue less noble purposes?"

A fourth and final concern includes the relative efficacy of the hidden hand strategy and its appropriateness to the expectations of modern presidential leadership. Many scholars suggest Greenstein's evidence is selective. One significant lacuna in the analysis is the failure to examine Eisenhower's role as party leader in-depth (Griffith 1983, 1346). Another is the absence of analysis concerning Eisenhower's lack of leadership on pressing social issues of the day. The benefits of circumventing civil rights and education controversies might seem apparent as a bulwark against the loss of presidential prestige (Kessler 1983, 1033). But at what costs in terms of the social upheaval of the 1960s as these issues reached the boiling point? Schlesinger (1983, 6) suggests that a subdued response to looming crises is tantamount to abdicating the "educational" role of the modern president and detrimental to the moral authority of the office. And even Eisenhower's attempts to hasten the downfall of Senator Joseph McCarthy may be questioned. Lee (1983, 467) notes that "McCarthy was able to capture the limelight despite the president's muted indifference." It is unclear whether a more forceful presidential response to McCarthy's demagoguery, and an effort to mobilize public opinion against the Wisconsin Senator, would have proven any more injurious to Eisenhower's reputation compared to the costs of "outlasting" the fear-driven antics of the Chair of the Subcommittee on Permanent Investigations (Walter 1983, 612).

In the final analysis some reviewers conclude that there are few lessons for modern presidents in the hidden hand thesis and that Greenstein failed to develop a new theory of political leadership (Patterson 1984, 897). Indeed, if scholars hew closely to Greenstein's six criteria significant challenges lay before the researcher interested in applying the hidden hand thesis methodically to any presidency past or present, including Obama's. For example, how does one operationalize "public vagueness and private precision" and the "instrumental use of language"? In Obama's case, most observers concur that his delivery of speeches is at least above-average and effective (*USA Today* 2010). But his vacuous responses to a range of scandals have not yet been balanced by convincing, quantifiable or anecdotal evidence of "private precision." Moreover, contrary to Eisenhower, Obama *has* frequently "engaged in personalities," criticizing House Republicans by calling out leaders by name and adopting a more aggressive approach to managing the condition of divided government in his second term (*Post-Dispatch* 2010; *The Hill* 2013). Finally, the steady erosion of Obama's public approval by the first year of his second term, and the controversies surrounding airstrikes in Libya in 2011, the terrorist attack on the consulate in Benghazi, and gun-running operations by Justice in Mexico have diminished—not buttressed—the president's credibility as chief of state by many accounts. The fallout from the Affordable Care Act (ACA, aka "Obamacare") in Fall 2013 remains a significant concern for the legacy of the 44th president as the program is implemented.

In fairness, Greenstein never prescribed a strict adherence to the six criteria that characterized Eisenhower's hidden hand. He recognized the limitations of his inquiry insofar as "some presidential personalities will accommodate to the Eisenhower style, some will not..." (1982, 247). He underscores, for example, that Eisenhower's personality, incrementalist goals, and the unique political climate all contributed to this style of leadership. "The question," Greenstein (1982, 233) writes, "must not be

whether other presidents can *adopt* Eisenhower's style, but rather, if they are so disposed, whether they can *adapt* aspects of it to their own capacities and needs" (emphasis in original).

Researchers have had more success in extending Greenstein's thesis for Eisenhower, including relations with Congress (Baker 2010; Collier 1994; Conley and Yon 2007; Wayne 2012), rhetoric and veto threats (Jarvis 2010), and decision-making (Sloan 1990) than to other chief executives. The identification of selective elements of a hidden hand style among his predecessors and successors has been tenuous, at best. Jefferson is sometimes regarded as the nation's first hidden hand president, as he led members of Congress to do his bidding behind the scenes while publicly deferring to the primacy of the legislature in an era of sweeping change (Bailey 2002; Ellis and Wildavsky 1991). Turner (1995) perceives similarities between Eisenhower and Abraham Lincoln with respect to their use of advisors, language, and imagery in a thesis that is as intriguing as it is incomplete. McMahon (2004, 102) argues that Franklin Roosevelt used the inchoate Civil Rights Division in the Department of Justice to pursue a "hidden hand strategy designed to destabilize southern politics by helping to secure the rights of black Americans and disenfranchised southern whites." Others have focused on Eisenhower's successors and borrowed from the hidden hand concept either implicitly or explicitly. Covington (1987) shows Johnson's calculated choice to "stay quiet" and avoid position-taking on roll calls in Congress if a public stand were likely to raise more opposition than support on Capitol Hill. Collier (1996) and Conley (2003b) document Ronald Reagan's stealthy efforts to build congressional support for his agenda using interview and archival data, respectively.

The rather piecemeal application of the hidden hand theory to the modern presidency likely stems from the most fundamental weakness in Greenstein's otherwise impressive oeuvre: He recoils from furnishing much guidance on a methodological approach capable of identifying systematically the hidden hand style for other presidents, notwithstanding the use of archival records that are scarcely

uniform or consistently accessible across presidencies. The next section is the first attempt to construct a way forward in the absence of such equivalent documentation for Obama and other presidents.

DATA AND METHOD

The data employed in this study follow three tracks. First, established quantitative models of presidential position-taking in Congress, issuance of executive orders, and press conferences were replicated and revised with data through 2012. From these models it is possible to forecast outcomes on select dynamics of presidential activity and compare the predicted level of activity to the actual data. By establishing a baseline reference and focusing on the error terms $[y - \hat{y}]$ the study quantifies, controlling for theoretically-sound explanatory variables, whether Obama's activity is greater than or less than expected. Such an approach has been used most notably by Fleisher and Bond (1983; 1992) and Joslyn (1995) to study whether presidential success rates for positions in Congress fall above or below anticipated levels, adjusting for a set of contextual variables, as a means of evaluating presidential influence on Capitol Hill.

The models of position-taking, executive orders, and press conferences were reproduced with longitudinal data spanning 1953-2012. Independent variables were replicated as closely as possible to the original models in each case, although some additional variables were brought to bear to improve the predictive capacity. The "mean effects" are provided in the last column of the Appendices to convey the substantive significance of the independent variables.¹ Space limitations prevent a full discussion of literature, model rationales, and critiques of each study. *The straightforward interest of this research is to maximize the predictive capacity of the models with data revised through 2012.* Readers are encouraged to consult the original works cited for more information on the theories buttressing the choice of independent variables in the models.

The model for position-taking, detailed in Appendix 1, mirrors Shull and Shaw's (2004) study in terms of the core explanatory variables, but differs insofar as an autoregressive (AR 3) Poisson distribution was utilized to correct for serial correlation.² Moreover, additional variables include Stimson's (n.d.) annual "policy mood" data, the number of executive orders issued (t_{-1}), a control for the total number of roll calls, and dummy variables for each presidency (the effect for Obama is assumed through the constant). The theoretical justification for including the mood data is that as the public appetite for governmental action increases, presidents may wish to seek credit for support of popular legislation (and there may be more such legislation on the congressional docket as a reflection of the public mood). As the number of executive orders from a prior year increases, presidents may stake out positions relating to connected issues. The dummy variables for individual presidents capture variation not otherwise explained by the continuous variables. With an adjusted R^2 of .71 the model improves significantly in its predictive capacity over the Shull and Show data that terminated in 1995.

The model for the issuance of executive orders in Appendix 2 simulates closely the study by Krause and Cohen (2000). The only additional explanatory variables brought to bear include annual presidential legislative success rates (from *Congressional Quarterly*) in each chamber, Stimson's "policy mood" data, the president's public approval (Gallup) and the unemployment rate (annual civil workforce, from the Bureau of Labor Statistics) is utilized in lieu of the "misery index," or composite of the inflation and unemployment rate. A president who is more successful in roll call positions in Congress may feel more comfortable issuing executive orders that are unlikely to be overturned. Presidential actions drop slightly as the policy mood decreases. With the data updated through 2012, the unemployment rate proved a better predictor across time than the composite "misery" index of inflation and unemployment employed by Krause and Cohen. The Pseudo- R^2 of the standard Poisson model in

Appendix 2 is .33, a modest improvement over the Pseudo-R² of .24 reported by Krause and Cohen for the years 1939-1996.

Appendix 3 shows the model of presidential press conferences. The model relies on Eshbaugh-Soha's (2003) critique of Hager and Sullivan's (1994) earlier work on the determinants of this type of public activity. Eshbaugh-Soha's data terminate in 1996. The primary difference in the updated model is the exclusion of a "technology" variable (unable to replicate), and a few opposite findings when an autoregressive (AR 2) Poisson is utilized to control for serial correlation and the data are modeled as count distribution. The model in Appendix 3 shows that divided government *increases* presidential press conference activity by about 3-4 per year. In addition, the model shows that presidential press conference activity augments as public approval diminishes. Both findings are intuitive. Presidents may seek to recapture the spotlight under divided government. Moreover, as Edwards (2006) contends, the White House often believes lack of policy support—and by extension, support for the president—is due to a failure to communicate. Unpopular presidents may be more disposed to rekindle their support through the venue of press conferences.

Second, for each type of presidential activity—position-taking in Congress, executive order issuance, and annual press conference activity—the standardized score for each year (for two-term presidents) is reported in the tables. The interpretation is straightforward: When presidential activity falls significantly below the mean for position-taking in Congress and press conferences, negative standard scores may indicate a hidden hand. When the standardized score is above the mean for executive orders, there may be evidence of the hidden hand.

Third, a review of presidential activities from the White House schedule was undertaken for 2009-2011 and January-June 2012.³ The data were available in a searchable format from the *Washington Post* POTUS Tracker at <<http://projects.washingtonpost.com/potus-tracker>>. In this

analysis, Obama's meetings with individual cabinet secretaries, as well as members and leaders of Congress were catalogued. In assessing presidential leadership on the Libya airstrikes in 2011, further analysis of liaison with foreign leaders (i.e., telephone calls) was undertaken. While such an analysis cannot possibly convey anything of the substance of meetings and conversations, these data can cast light on presidential activities outside the general public view, consistent with the hidden hand thesis. These data are utilized further in conjunction with brief case studies of Obama's leadership on health care reform and the Libya airstrikes.

ANALYSIS

Is there comparative evidence of the relative *absence* of some overt presidential actions, and/or *presence* of covert activity in the Obama White House that might suggest a hidden hand approach to governance? The data provided in Tables 1-3 juxtapose Obama's first four years with his two-term predecessors' activities in position taking in Congress (House of Representatives), issuance of executive orders, and press conferences on a yearly basis. For each of these tables the first column furnishes the actual number of actions, the second column shows the predicted value from the appropriate model estimation, and the third column provides the difference or error term $[y - \hat{y}]$. The last column provides the standardized score of the action item for that year, based on data spanning 1953-2012 $[(actions - \bar{y})/\sigma]$.

Position-Taking in the House of Representatives

There is a wide range in annual position-taking on roll calls in the House for presidents since 1953. At the low end with only 34 positions are Eisenhower (1953, 1956) and George W. Bush (2004). At the upper bound is Carter with 145 positions in 1979; Bill Clinton follows closely behind with 133 positions under divided government in 1995 (mostly in opposition to the Republicans' "Contract with America" agenda). The broad variation across administrations, which scholars have analyzed

elsewhere, buttresses the contention that presidential position-taking is *strategic* despite the ebb and flow in the total number of roll calls taken in Congress across time (Marshall and Prins 2007; Sullivan 1988).

[Table 1]

The data in Table 1 do not bear evidence that Obama has consistently taken fewer positions on congressional votes compared to his two-term predecessors. Nor do the differences in actual and predicted positions intimate a hidden hand for Obama. Let us examine the patterns more closely, commencing with Eisenhower's position-taking as a point of departure.

The predicted values for Eisenhower (second term only because of the lagged variables) are very close to the actual number of positions he took from 1957-60. The standardized scores based on data spanning 1953-2012, however, accentuate levels of position-taking one standard deviation or more *below the mean* in his first term—and consistently below the mean in his second term. The data are commensurate with prior analyses of Eisenhower's legislative leadership. He had no well-conceived legislative agenda in 1953 and set up an Office of Congressional Relations to liaise with members on Capitol Hill largely out of sight, circumventing the necessity of taking a large share of public stands on congressional bills. Collier (1994) describes this as an “autopilot” presidency, a reflection of Eisenhower's preference “to leave the operation of the political machinery to professionals” (Cotter 1983, 256).

At first glance the analysis suggests that Eisenhower and George W. Bush have the most in common relative to low levels of congressional position-taking. The model forecasts are comparatively close to the actual number of positions Bush took, with the exception of 2006. During that mid-term election year during which his approval fell sharply, the president “succeeded most often by following the same legislative playbook that had served him well in his first five years. He staked out positions on

only a small portion of the congressional agenda, allowing few opportunities for defeat” (Barshay 2007, 44). If the reference point is the standardized annual score, the linkage to Eisenhower appears superficially even more solid. Notwithstanding 2003, annual position-taking for Bush falls well below one standard deviation from the mean throughout most of his first six years in office.

These artifacts of the data do *not* necessarily indicate a hidden hand approach for the younger Bush. His calculi were at odds with Eisenhower’s. Bush frequently chose to stay quiet on roll-calls he was likely to lose in Congress. Decades of archival research has failed to suggest this tactic was part of Eisenhower’s modus operandi. Moreover, Eisenhower’s success rate under divided government never reached the nadir of the last several decades for Clinton, Bush, or Obama. Some observers contend that Bush’s position-taking strategy signalled “a certain reluctance to get involved in the dirty details of legislative dealmaking” (Poole 2006, 80). If true, that is as far as the analogy to Eisenhower can be taken for the moment. The degree to which the Bush White House may have maneuvered behind the scenes in a fashion similar to Eisenhower relative to Congress is an open question for future scholarship once archival holdings are made available for research.

Obama’s position-taking looks unremarkable in the longer view of post-War history, and bears little resemblance to Eisenhower. For the first three years of his presidency the model predictions are very close to the actual number of roll calls on which he expressed a position. The exception is 2012, when Obama took some 15 fewer positions than predicted. With the opposition in firm control of the House after 2010, the president chose not to stake out many positions with full knowledge he would lose—a similar strategy employed by George W. Bush when he faced divided government. According to Zeller (2013, 120) when Obama did take a public position his rationale was based on electoral calculations: “If presidents of past decades issued statements on bills to help forge compromise and resolve policy disputes, today such statements serve a more political purpose. And Obama used his

pulpit deftly” to rally his base on issues spanning taxes, energy, and health care as he took to the campaign trail against Mitt Romney in 2012. The strategy has become solidified in his second term. Far from consistent with journalistic assertions that the president has been “muted” in the public arena, Obama has been “in an ultra-assertive mood, practically daring Republicans to defy his wishes...” and becoming more adept at “using public pressure to accomplish his political goals” (Stanage and Parnes 2013, 1).

There is little evidence from the analysis—in Obama’s first term or in the case of any of Eisenhower’s successors (including data for those single-term presidents not shown)—of a strategic approach in position-taking that reflects Greenstein’s understanding of the hidden hand. Indeed, Presidents George W. Bush and Obama may have taken fewer stands in one year or another. But those data are insufficient to validate a hidden hand approach. The *substance* of Obama’s stances in opposition to the House Republicans’ bills, and as a means to rally his electoral base, is diametrically opposite to the type of subdued relationship Eisenhower pursued on Capitol Hill.

Executive Orders

Notwithstanding Eisenhower’s shrewd decision to prohibit executive branch employees from testifying before Joseph McCarthy’s committee, Greenstein (1982) never addressed the broader questions of unilateral executive action in the way that scholars have recently begun to analyze (Howell 2003; Mayer 2001). The strategic use of executive orders, nonetheless, is consistent with the general thrust of the hidden hand thesis. Whether “significant” or mundane, executive orders represent presidential efforts to shape policy implementation. The lion’s share of executive orders does not capture media or congressional attention, providing the president some latitude to maneuver out of the public eye to shape policy implementation independently.

[Table 2]

Enhanced use of unilateral executive authority might, therefore, reflect a hidden hand approach. Table 2 provides data to assess if the issuance of executive orders is *higher* than predicted and significantly *above* the mean for standardized scores for two-term presidents across the post-War period.

Alas, neither of these indicators suggests a hidden hand in terms of an excess of executive orders for Obama or any other president except Eisenhower in his first term. An evaluation of the difference between actual executive orders and the model predictions conveys no clear pattern across presidencies. The years 1955 (Eisenhower) and 2001 and 2004 (George W. Bush) show 10 or more executive orders greater than expected. But only 2001 appears remarkable in terms of the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11 September and executive action on domestic security. For Obama the model predicts the number of executive orders perfectly for his first year, and in 2010 and 2011 the president issued *fewer* executive orders than expected—a finding inconsistent with the hidden hand thesis measured in this fashion. Perhaps not unexpectedly the model over-predicts significantly the number of executive orders in 1974 at the height of the Watergate affair, which consumed Nixon’s last (partial) year in office.

When standardized scores of executive order issuance in Table 2 are the reference point, Eisenhower’s first three years show evidence consistent with a strong proclivity toward unilateral executive action. His issuance of 80, 75, and 66 executive orders in 1953, 1954, and 1955, respectively, top the totals from 1953-2012 (notwithstanding Nixon’s 72 orders in 1970, many of which concerned “reorganization” efforts; see Nathan 1975). Mayer and Price (2002, 382) suggest that among the most significant orders Eisenhower issued were those that dealt with matters relating to consolidation of defense functions. Regardless, the high number of orders in Eisenhower’s first term, and the significant decline beyond the 1960s, is consistent with notions of the “institutionalizing presidency” posited by Cohen and Krause (2000). Commensurate with this general proposition, extending the years of their analysis to the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama accentuates standardized scores for

these two presidents that fall well below the average. Closer analysis does not suggest a common thread by policy area. If the issuance of executive orders nowadays is a more “president-centered” phenomenon in a more “institutionalized” setting for executive power, it is clear that Barack Obama’s first term is unremarkable on this account.

Press Conferences

The final quantitative test of the hidden hand thesis for Obama relates to media relations, as measured by press conference activity. Keeping out of the media spotlight might comprise at least limited evidence of a hidden hand approach. On this point the infrequency of press conferences by President Obama drew significant criticism after his first year in office (Little 2012). The allegedly tech-savvy White House increasingly preferred to circumvent the traditional media and seek direct communication with the public via the Internet, Twitter and so forth, while privileging one-on-one interviews with news outlets (Travers 2010). While frequent, direct communication with the public was a strategy Eisenhower eschewed, this tack of the Obama White House might still indicate some form of a hidden hand approach.

[Table 3]

Table 3 presents the actual and estimated annual number of press conferences alongside the standardized score for the period 1953-2012. Not surprisingly, given the adjusted- R^2 of .83 in the model (Appendix 3), the actual and predicted values are very close. On this account there is no particular pattern evident in an analysis of error terms (differences between actual and predicted values). Eisenhower gave fewer than expected press conferences at the end of his second term, Clinton gave four fewer than expected in his first year in office and in 1998 as he faced impeachment, and for four of eight years of George W. Bush’s term the president engaged the media less than expected.

In Obama's case he gave a total of 27 press conferences in 2009, his first year in office, a total of five more than forecast by the model. He pulled back significantly by the end of 2009 out of White House fears of "overexposure," not only insofar as press conferences were concerned but also because of his near-daily televised appearances in one form or another. As Herb Klein (2009, A10), communications director to Richard Nixon noted in May 2009, "The president's poll ratings are high, but the danger is that his daily appearance schedule is so jammed that the public will lose interest in him." Obama's *recul* in formal press conferences extended into 2010 and beyond, and despite media complaints that the president was failing to answer difficult questions. Nonetheless, Bill Plante of CBS News posited that "Bush (both of them), Clinton, Reagan - all had periods where they preferred not to answer questions for reasons ranging from the economy to Iran Contra or Monica Lewinsky" (quoted in Curl 2009).

When attention is focused on the standardized scores of press conference activity in Table 3, Obama's first term looks relatively unexceptional, notwithstanding 2012. The number of press conferences he gave in 2012 dropped to a low of 12, just under one full standard deviation for the annual mean from 1953-2012. Between June and August of 2012 as he geared up for his re-election effort, Obama rebuffed holding any press conferences. As one exasperated blogger wrote, he "has not taken a serious question from the White House press corps in nearly seven weeks, a remarkable string that points to a campaign-style White House operation that is seeking to insulate the candidate from tough cross examination" (Port, 2012).

If a dearth in press conference activity reflected a hidden hand leadership style, ironically, Nixon and Reagan stand out on this account when the standardized scores are the point of reference. Making a case for such a leadership approach for Nixon appears rather awkward in light of scholarly understandings of his press relations. As Liebovich (2003, 5) notes, the strategy Nixon devised in

concert with chief of staff H.R. Haldeman included ignoring the Washington press corps in favor of direct televised addresses. When Nixon did hold press conferences they were frequently confrontational and sometimes even degenerated into shouting matches. Perhaps a better case can be made for Reagan insofar as the elaborate public relations apparatus put in place, as Hertsgaard (1988) documents, included the near elimination of press conferences in favor of selective emotional pleas and the steadfast manipulation of media coverage by advisors' behind-the-scenes efforts to control messaging through the "line of the day." The trade-off, of course, was the recrimination of little transparency in the Reagan White House.

Cabinet, Congress, Health Care and Libya: Leading from Behind, Front, or Not at All?

If baseline econometric models evidence little support for a hidden hand in Obama's presidency (or others) on position-taking in Congress, issuance of executive orders, or press conference activities, quantification of the president's meetings with cabinet members and members of Congress could potentially shed light on behind-the-scenes policymaking efforts missed by such methods. Table 4 provides such raw data and elucidate the frequency of personal contact/individual meetings between Obama and cabinet members and members of Congress.

[Table 4]

Focusing first on members of the cabinet, Obama prioritized relations with the Secretaries of State, Treasury, and Defense—traditionally understood as the "inner cabinet." For the full three years of data available (2009-2011) from *POTUS Tracker*, 92 percent or more of all face-to-face, individual meetings between the president and cabinet members involved secretaries from these three departments. These findings correspond to Best's (1988) study of Lyndon Johnson's personal contacts based on his diary, notwithstanding more frequent contact with the attorney general. The dearth of contact between Obama and other members of the cabinet is consistent with Hecl's (1977) earlier study of presidential-

cabinet interactions, whereby the heads of clientele agencies are rarely lent the president's ear. Obama held full cabinet meetings roughly every two or three months in the first three years in office.

Turning attention to Obama's liaison with congressional members and leaders, two trends are clear in Table 4. First, the president was particularly active in meeting with members his first year in office, a reflection of his desire to "hit the ground running" with his domestic agenda (Pfiffner 1988). Meetings with members of Congress tailed off considerably after 2009 and the development and solidification of significant elements of that legislative agenda, including health care and stimulus. Second, Obama prioritized liaison with Democrats on Capitol Hill. Seventy-six percent of all meetings were with Democratic members in 2009. Meetings with Republicans alone or bipartisan conferences were relatively infrequent (12% each).

Health Care Reform and Libya: Evidence of a Hidden Hand?

These available data on Obama's personal interactions raise the question of a potential hidden hand approach on two high-profile policy areas in the president's first term. First, on health care reform, was the president more active behind the scenes than critics acknowledged? Second, was Obama more engaged in the British- and French-led bombings of Libya in 2011 than detractors of his "leading from behind" strategy contend? .

A closer examination of these data in Table 4 underscores that in 2009, 20 of the 44 meetings (46%) that Obama held with congressional Democrats pertained to health care reform. Another 10 meetings (23%) were held with members of various caucuses in the Democratic Party (Black, Hispanic, Progressive, etc.). Obama never met *tête-à-tête* with either House minority leader John Boehner or Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell, but always as part of a larger bipartisan meeting. On this latter point, the data are consistent with critiques that the president and congressional Democrats sought to "go it alone" without Republican support (Hulse and Zeleny 2009). However, liaison with

Democratic members—at least on the basis of the ‘quantity’ of meetings the president held with members of his own party—are somewhat at odds with the contention that “Obama has left the bill-writing to the legislators (with intense White House kibitzing, of course) and has waited until the stretch to take the reins” (Hertzberg 2009). Fifteen of the meetings he held with congressional Democrats occurred prior to the August 2009 recess on Capitol Hill, at which time Republican opposition to the Affordable Care Act solidified. The number of meetings Obama held with co-partisans shows, at a minimum, a sustained effort at strategic engagement, if not private influence.

Other evidence of Obama’s strategy on health care reform, however, runs afoul of Greenstein’s notion of the hidden hand. The president was anything but “vague” in his public promotion of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). He attempted to act as a “director” (Edwards 1989) and pursued a highly visible campaign of retail politics symbolic of Kernell’s (2007) classic formulation of “going public” by appealing over the heads of members of Congress to bring grassroots pressure on them to support the reform effort. From Obama’s inauguration in January 2009 to his signing of the ACA in March 2010, the president devoted 38 weekly addresses to health care reform. Indeed, Obama spoke publicly about health care reform more than a thousand times, including speeches, appearances at special events, interviews, and press conferences.⁴

Obama’s repeated claims that “if you like your doctor, you can keep your doctor” and “if you like your health care plan, you can keep your health care plan” fell flat by Fall 2013. Whether by design or by unintended consequences, the fiascos with the rollout of the health care website and insurance companies’ decisions to drop millions of policies have led to a significant and potentially irreversible decline in credibility. One may only ponder whether more “public vagueness” and “private precision” in the implementation of the ACA might have indemnified the Administration from the current critiques that threaten the president’s second term and legacy. Regardless, while there are elements of a hidden

hand approach to legislative management of the ACA, it is difficult to reconcile Obama's highly public campaign with Greenstein's concept.

On the other hand, the "secrecy and despatch" that characterizes the presidency in foreign affairs, as Hamilton eloquently wrote in Federalist 70, would seemingly be fertile ground in search of hidden hand leadership. Indeed, many journalists hailed Obama's veiled strategy of "leading from behind" in international military action against Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. However, "Mr. Obama's carefully calibrated response," as Landler (2011) notes, simultaneously "infuriated critics on the right and left, who blamed him either for ceding American leadership in a foreign conflict or for blundering into another Arab land without an exit strategy." An examination of the president's personal interactions with administration officials and foreign leaders during the period from 21 February 2011 (when the Libyan United Nations representative requested a "no-fly" zone around Tripoli) to 28 March 2011, when Obama addressed the nation to explain the intervention, casts greater light on the hidden hand debate.

The chronology presented below does *not* paint the portrait of a disengaged executive, as critics charged. On 23 February, 2 March, and again on 9 March the president held meetings with Secretary of State Clinton. On 24 February he had telephone conversations with British Prime Minister David Cameron, French President Nicholas Sarkozy and Prime Minister Berlusconi of Italy, followed by a call to Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan the next day. On 25 February, Obama issued Executive Order 13566, blocking property and prohibiting certain transactions related to Libya, and subsequently provided the order and his justification in a letter to the Speaker of the House and Senate President. The following day, Obama spoke directly with Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany. On 3 March, during a joint press conference with President Calderón of Mexico, Obama spoke about the ongoing and unfolding situation in Libya, and Mexico's supporting role. The following day, Obama held a meeting

with Australian President Gillard, where Libya was a central focus. On 8 March he again phoned Cameron to discuss the situation. On 10 and 15 March the president met with his national security team. On 14 March, Obama met with Prime Minister Rasmussen of Denmark, which focused on obtaining cooperation from Europe on Libyan sanctions. On 17 March he spoke yet again with Cameron and also called French President Nicholas Sarkozy. On 18 March Obama met with a bipartisan group of members of Congress in the Situation Room at the White House. From 19-23 March the president was abroad in Central and South America, but his trip did not preclude a secure call to his national security advisors on 20 March from Rio de Janeiro, and another on 23 March from El Salvador. Upon returning to Washington, Obama held another bipartisan meeting with members of Congress on 25 March.

As Hirsh (2011) notes, “Obama’s strategy amounted to staying resolutely behind the scenes throughout the five-month NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] air operation.” The president’s public commentary was limited in details, yet expansive on principles of protecting civilians. His behind the scenes efforts to liaise with Secretary of State Clinton and foreign leaders was bolstered by unilateral executive action (EO 13566). In sum, Obama’s approach—notwithstanding critics discomfort with letting European allies undertake the lion’s share of the military action—is relatively consistent with the precepts of the hidden hand thesis.

REPRISE AND CONCLUSIONS

This analysis began with two objectives. The first was to apply a systematic approach to uncover features of potential hidden hand leadership in Obama’s presidency by comparing actual and forecast executive activities across time. The second was to quantify Obama’s meetings with members of cabinet, Congress, and foreign leaders, with specific attention to the health care reform effort and the Libya airstrikes.

On balance the analysis underscores the difficulties in utilizing quantitative modeling to test the hidden hand theory. There is little evidence to support contentions of hidden hand leadership in Obama's first four years based on these data. Moreover, when visible activities such as position-taking in Congress or holding press conferences are considered, the presidents who were less active—such as Reagan or George W. Bush—were not necessarily engaged in hidden hand leadership. Rather, position-taking was strategic and with partisan goals in mind (Bush) or a concerted communications strategy (Reagan). Interestingly, the data *are* consistent on several accounts in verifying the tenets of Greenstein's thesis for Eisenhower—at least on executive orders and position-taking in Congress.

Of course, the criticism may be leveled that Greenstein never applied a quantitative approach in his study of Eisenhower, and to do so sets up a “straw man” easily knocked down. Such is not the purpose of this endeavor. Any valid, scientific theory must be testable and falsifiable, and the advances in empirical presidency research in the last several decades mandate verification of theories such as Greenstein's with available methods. Still, it is inappropriate to suggest that hidden hand leadership does not take place in the White House based on the criteria brought to bear in this analysis. Rather, the quantitative indicators simply do not bear out much evidence for Obama or other two-term presidents, save Eisenhower. The most that can be asserted is that archival research, case studies, interviews, and oral histories may be the most conducive approach to validating Greenstein's framework. The problem in advancing scholarship on the hidden hand from this perspective is that archival records, in particular, are anything but uniform across presidencies and are largely unavailable for a decade or more after any president leaves office. Thus *contemporaneous* studies of the hidden hand are problematic.

On the other hand, there is some limited evidence of elements of a hidden hand approach for Obama based on White House diary data. Although it is impossible to verify the *substance* of meetings between the president and individuals, the data paint a picture of a president engaged rather actively

behind the scenes insofar as the health care reform and Libya airstrike issues were concerned. There are also several additional distinctions that surface on these two policy matters. First, Obama's behind the scenes efforts on health care reform were only a small component of a larger strategy that included using the full force of the bully pulpit to rally support in light of steadfast Republican opposition. As Greenstein suggested, it is more a matter of the degree to which Obama *adapted* elements of the hidden hand to his policy objectives. Second, the president's maneuvering on Libya is more consistent with the tenets of Greenstein's theory. Obama was relatively muted publicly and worked largely out of public view with world leaders. It is impossible to verify the extent of the president's "private precision," but Obama scaled back public appearances and rhetoric on Libya significantly. The approach is reminiscent of what scholars have ascertained about George H.W. Bush's efforts to build a successful international coalition against Saddam Hussein in 1990.

One lesson of this research is that there may be an embedded "two presidencies" (Wildavsky 1998) effect in the search for the hidden hand. The president's constitutional prerogatives on foreign affairs buttress more possibilities for unilateral action somewhat more likely to be implemented "under the radar." As "chief legislator" the president is beholden to Congress to achieve any policy goals. The health care reform effort and the Libya airstrikes are instructive on this account. The ACA affected one-third of the American economy, portended significant ramifications not only for government programs but also business and industry, and ignited interest group and electoral politics in a polarized setting on Capitol Hill. It is little wonder that Obama had recourse to the public presidency in his quest for success. On the other hand, as the Libya situation unfolded the president was far less concerned about influencing the Congress or the public, and international support for the mission from traditional European allies bolstered the president's credibility as head of state. Obama had far greater latitude to work out of the public eye with foreign leaders on a confidential level, take autonomous action (e.g., EO

13566), and frame the issue in national security and human rights terms when he did speak publicly. Still, the president scarcely escaped criticism from his harshest critics—not on the basis of process as much as on policy.

There is another intuitive reason why uncovering the hidden hand may be easier in the realm of foreign affairs. In the post-9/11 context, the national security state has burgeoned. Legislation such as the Patriot Act, combined with the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, the position of the Director of National Intelligence, and the shift in focus of agencies including the Central Intelligence Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation to the fight against terrorism indubitably mandates secrecy in the executive branch. It is not that the hidden hand in foreign affairs was not at play 60 years ago under Eisenhower—from Quemoy and Matsu to the ill-fated U2 spy mission over the Soviet Union. Rather, the reach of executive branch on security issues has been extended under George W. Bush and Barack Obama in ways Eisenhower and most of his successors could probably not envision. Unfortunately for contemporary chief executives, the hidden hand approach may be less cause for applause than criticism if the National Security Agency's telephone spying operation is considered.

It is also the case that changes in the media environment may render presidents' use of cabinet officials as "lightning rods" less successful. Eisenhower's deft ability to stay out of the fray and delegate criticism in the 1950s—with Agriculture Secretary Ezra Taft Benson as one particularly good example—has not worked well for Obama. His deference to Secretaries of State Hilary Clinton on Benghazi, Secretary of Health and Human Services on the ACA rollout, and Attorney General Eric Holder on the "Fast and Furious" investigation, in particular, has often been characterized as disengagement and lack of interest, at best, and dereliction of duty at worst. The result has been the scandal *du jour* on the blogosphere and in the cable news environment.

The hidden hand approach to Obama's governing style is insufficient as a general theory of his leadership. Scholars might do well to consider the thesis not as a generalizable one to explain the whole of any president's leadership design but as one legitimate instrument of many in a toolkit that includes "going public," unilateral action, delegation, and so forth. Given our limitations in observing and verifying that presidents are utilizing the approach contemporaneously, significant methodological challenges remain for scholars in extending the application of Greenstein's theory systematically.

Table 1*
Actual and Estimated Annual Position-Taking in Congress (House), Two Term Presidents

<i>President</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Predicted</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Standardized Score</i>
Eisenhower	1953	38	----	----	-1.32
	1954	34	----	----	-1.46
	1955	41	----	----	-1.21
	1956	34	----	----	-1.45
	1957	60	57	3	-.56
	1958	50	49	1	-.91
	1959	54	52	2	-.77
	1960	43	48	-5	-1.15
Nixon	1969	47	45	2	-1.01
	1970	65	56	9	-.39
	1971	57	61	-4	-.67
	1972	37	56	-19	-1.35
	1973	125	97	28	1.66
	1974	54	70	-16	-.77
Reagan	1981	76	81	-5	-.02
	1982	77	81	-4	.02
	1983	82	105	-23	.19
	1984	113	99	14	1.25
	1985	80	84	-4	.12
	1986	90	84	6	.46
	1987	99	89	10	.77
	1988	104	104	0	.94
Clinton	1993	102	99	3	.88
	1994	78	85	-7	.05
	1995	133	125	8	1.93
	1996	79	64	14	.09
	1997	75	84	-9	-.05
	1998	82	81	1	.19
	1999	82	84	-2	.19
	2000	69	85	-16	-.26
Bush	2001	43	36	-7	-1.14
	2002	40	31	9	-1.25
	2003	56	45	9	-.70
	2004	34	35	-1	-1.46
	2005	46	49	-3	-1.04
	2006	40	62	-22	-1.25
	2007	117	118	-1	1.39
	2008	80	73	7	.12
Obama	2009	72	67	5	-.15
	2010	42	44	-2	-1.18
	2011	95	90	5	.64
	2012	61	76	-15	-.53

* Estimates in the “predicted” column derived from the Poisson AR(3) full model presented in Appendix 1. 1953-1956 excluded due to lagged terms and lack of data for Truman. Position-taking data are from *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Reports*. Standardized score is calculated from the mean of position-taking 1953-2012 (76.47) and standard deviation (29.18).

Table 2*
Actual and Estimated Executive Orders Issued, Two Term Presidents

<i>President</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Predicted</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Standardized Score</i>
Eisenhower	1953	80	-----	-----	1.91
	1954	75	74	1	1.58
	1955	66	54	12	.98
	1956	44	52	-8	-.49
	1957	55	58	-3	.25
	1958	50	55	-5	-.08
	1959	60	49	11	.58
	1960	42	51	-9	-.62
Nixon	1969	52	59	-7	.05
	1970	72	67	5	1.38
	1971	63	52	9	.78
	1972	55	51	4	.25
	1973	64	60	4	.84
	1974	40	57	-17	-.75
	Reagan	1981	50	50	0
1982		63	63	0	.78
1983		57	49	8	.38
1984		41	43	-2	-.69
1985		45	46	-1	-.42
1986		37	41	-4	-.55
1987		43	43	0	-.75
1988					
Clinton	1993	57	51	6	.37
	1994	54	53	1	.18
	1995	40	39	1	-.75
	1996	49	46	3	-.15
	1997	38	44	-6	-.88
	1998	38	42	-4	-.88
	1999	35	36	-1	-1.08
	2000	41	42	-1	-.69
Bush	2001	54	40	14	.18
	2002	31	40	-9	-1.35
	2003	41	39	2	-.69
	2004	45	35	10	-.42
	2005	26	33	-7	-1.68
	2006	27	36	-9	-1.62
	2007	32	29	3	-1.28
	2008	30	30	0	-1.42
Obama	2009	39	39	0	-.82
	2010	35	44	-9	-1.08
	2011	34	35	-1	-1.15
	2012	39	32	7	-.82

* Estimates in the “predicted” column derived from the Poisson regression full model presented in Appendix 2. 1953 is excluded due to lagged variables and lack of data for Truman. Standardized score is calculated from the mean of annual executive orders issued 1953-2012 (51.3) and standard deviation (15.0).

Table 3*
Actual and Estimated Annual Number of Press Conferences, Two Term Presidents

<i>President</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Predicted</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Standardized Score</i>
Eisenhower	1953	23	----	----	.29
	1954	33	----	----	1.22
	1955	19	----	----	-.08
	1956	24	18	6	.39
	1957	25	22	3	.48
	1958	21	26	-5	.10
	1959	31	33	-2	1.04
	1960	17	19	-2	-.27
Nixon	1969	8	10	-2	-1.11
	1970	6	7	-1	-1.30
	1971	9	8	1	-1.02
	1972	7	5	2	-1.20
	1973	7	7	0	-1.20
	1974	6	6	0	-1.30
	Reagan	1981	6	9	-3
1982		8	8	0	-1.11
1983		7	6	1	-1.20
1984		5	4	1	-1.39
1985		6	6	0	-1.30
1986		7	6	1	-1.20
1987		3	3	0	-1.58
1988		4	3	1	-1.49
Clinton	1993	38	42	-4	1.70
	1994	45	39	6	2.34
	1995	28	29	-1	.76
	1996	22	21	1	.20
	1997	21	23	-2	.10
	1998	13	17	-4	-.64
	1999	18	15	3	-.18
	2000	8	8	0	-1.11
Bush	2001	19	19	0	-.08
	2002	20	23	-3	.01
	2003	26	29	-3	.57
	2004	24	28	-4	.39
	2005	33	35	-2	1.22
	2006	30	28	2	.95
	2007	30	24	6	.95
	2008	28	24	4	.76
Obama	2009	27	22	5	.67
	2010	19	18	1	-.08
	2011	20	22	-2	.01
	2012	12	17	-5	-.74

* Estimates in the “predicted” column derived from the Poisson AR(2) full model presented in Appendix 3. 1953 and 1954 are excluded due to lagged variables and lack of data for Truman and the lag function. Standardized score is calculated from the mean of annual press conferences 1953-2012 (19.88) and standard deviation (10.69).

Table 4
Obama's Meetings with Cabinet Secretaries and Members of Congress, 2009-2012*

<i>Department/Type</i>		<i>2009</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>
State	(Clinton)	26	20	27	10
Treasury	(Geithner)	16	26	23	14
Defense	(Gates)	26	30	17	-----
	(Panetta)	-----	-----	8	15
Justice	(Holder)	0	0	2	0
Interior	(Salazar)	1	1	0	0
Agriculture	(Vilsack)	1	1	0	0
Commerce	(Locke)	0	1	1	-----
	(Bryson)	-----	-----	-----	0
Labor	(Solis)	0	1	0	0
HHS	(Sebelius)	0	1	0	0
Energy	(Chu)	1	1	0	0
VA	(Shinseki)	1	1	0	0
Homeland Security	(Napolitano)	0	0	3†	0
Total Cabinet Meetings		6	7	4	1
Democratic Congressional Meetings (leaders/members)		44	19	13	0
Republican Congressional Meetings (leaders/members)		7	3	5	0
Bipartisan Congressional Meetings (leaders/members)		7	11	14	2

* Through June 2012

† includes 2 phone briefings in February 2011

Source: *Washington Post* POTUS Tracker; <<http://projects.washingtonpost.com/potus-tracker/>>

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Appendix 1

Poisson AR(3) Regression of Presidential Position-Taking in Congress, 1953-2012[†]

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	Mean Effect
Policy Mood (yearly difference)	.024	.017*	27
Debt/GDP Ratio	.026	.027	38
Government Employees (1,000)	.003	.001*	273
Public Opinion	-.007	.004*	-41
House legislative support _(t-1)	.001	.002	12
Divided Government (1=yes, 0=no)	-.018	.125	-2
House Party Unity (annual)	1.00	.359**	62
Year in Term (1-8)	-.009	.022	-8
Total House Roll Calls (annual)	.0005	.0003*	183
Executive Orders _(t-1)	-.002	.004	-15
Eisenhower	1.63	.589**	403
Kennedy	1.65	.467***	472
Johnson	1.73	.375***	490
Nixon	1.18	.323***	244
Ford	.894	.294**	171
Carter	1.02	.184***	202
Reagan	1.13	.241***	220
H.W. Bush	1.12	.194***	234
Clinton	.771	.156***	128
Constant	.461	1.50	-----
ρ (1)	-.560	.181**	-----
ρ (2)	-.308	.190*	-----
ρ (3)	-.480	.163**	-----

N=56 Adjusted R² = .71 Root MSE = .184

*** p < .001 ** p < .01 * p < .10

[†]Results are from the “arpois” routine in STATA 8. George W. Bush dummy dropped to due collinearity.

Appendix 2
Poisson Regression of Executive Orders, 1953-2012

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	Mean Effect
Executive Orders _(t-1)	-.006	.003**	-.27
Senate Seat Margin	-0.12	.005**	-.57
House Seat Margin	.002	.001*	.08
Unemployment (%)	.038	.019**	1.90
Bureaucratic Growth	.362	.900	17.80
First Year	-.091	.067*	-4.38
Policy Mood	-.035	.011***	-1.72
House Position Vote Success Rate (%)	.003	.002*	.15
Senate Position Vote Success Rate (%)	.516	.306**	25.38
Public Opinion (%)	-.003	.003	-.15
Eisenhower	.125	.162	6.45
Kennedy	.601	.267**	39.32
Johnson	.466	.265**	28.06
Nixon	.137	.149	7.12
Carter	.033	.222	1.64
Reagan	-.191	.144*	-8.79
GHW Bush	-.218	.155*	-9.79
Clinton	-.396	.171**	-16.99
GW Bush	-.550	.164***	-23.30
Constant	6.11	.840***	-----

N = 59 Log likelihood = -195.20 Pseudo R² = .33

*** p < .001 ** p < .01 * p < .10

Note: The dummy variable for Gerald R. Ford was dropped due to collinearity.

Appendix 3
Poisson AR(2) Regression of Press Conferences, 1953-2012[†]

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	Mean Effect
Press Conferences _(t-1)	.007	.004*	4.34
Debt/GDP Ratio (economic decline)	-.12	.03*	-28.03
Congressional Support _(t-1)	-.0007	.002	-.80
Divided Government (1=yes, 0=no)	.25	.13*	3.50
Public Opinion	-.01	.004*	-6.98
Year in Term (1-4)	-.14	.03***	-5.95
Time	-.06	.03*	-81.55
Eisenhower	-1.96	1.56	-15.86
Kennedy	-1.64	1.38	-12.52
Johnson	-1.28	1.29	-11.48
Nixon	-2.52	1.20*	-16.93
Ford	-1.91	1.08*	-12.98
Carter	-1.25	.97*	-11.10
Reagan	-2.39	.83**	-17.86
GHW Bush	-.14	.65	-1.89
Clinton	.69	.33*	12.97
GW Bush	-.75	.34***	-8.34
Constant	6.02	1.85***	-----
ρ (1)	-.75	.22***	
ρ (2)	-.40	.20*	

N = 57 Adjusted R² = .83 Root MSE = .21

*** p < .001 ** p < .01 * p < .10

[†]Results are from the “arpois” routine in STATA 8.

NOTES

¹ Mean effects are calculated as the difference in the effect of the variable of interest at its maximum and minimum values, holding all other variables to the “natural” or mean values.

² Shull and Shaw utilize a two-stage least squares (2SLS) regression model in their analysis. This research models position-taking as a count variable. Replication of the Shull and Shaw model, with extended data, shows an empirically impossible situation whereby several predicted outcomes are *negative integers*. The AR Poisson approach insures that outcomes are bounded by 0 at the minimum threshold.

³ The *Washington Post* dataset terminates in June 2012, and at the time of writing the authors were unable to trace activities on the president’s calendar to the rest of 2012 from the www.whitehouse.gov website.

⁴ These data are from the American Presidency Project at the University of California, Santa Barbara, available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>