

# Appropriations and the President: Detailed Budget Data Shed New Light on an Old Debate

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## Abstract

Can presidents influence congressional appropriations to achieve their spending priorities? There are good reasons for it, including the president's veto power and status as party leader. Existing studies approach this question by analyzing aggregate agency spending, but the new budget data we present here reveal an important flaw with this approach - presidents request both increases and decreases within the same agency. Line-item budget data can accommodate this reality, offering new insights and the chance to corroborate or reject old ones. In this article we present and analyze line-item data for defense procurement and the Department of Health and Human Services between FY 2001 and 2018. These data show greater presidential success in requesting large spending changes and provide new evidence for greater presidential influence in foreign affairs in line with the "two presidencies" thesis, but do not support the expectation that presidents achieve more success when pursuing spending cuts.

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The power of the purse famously belongs to Congress, but the president is not a passive participant in the appropriations process. If Congress proposes too much spending here, or too little there, the president can intervene in several ways. The president could ask her appointed department heads to stress the administration's spending priorities in reports to Congress. Numerous regulations to this effect exist in the executive branch today (see OMB Circular A-11; Stewart 1989). The president could also ask her partisans in Congress to support her position. If the president or her position is popular with party members, merely making her preferences known could be enough to swing them, and policy, in her direction. The president could ask the public for support in hopes that public opinion might extract from Congress what she could not acting alone (Kernell 2006). Ronald Reagan took this approach to pressure a Democratic House to pass sweeping budget cuts in 1981. None of these actions depend on the president's veto power, yet each is reasonably calculated to achieve policy outcomes more in line with the president's preferences.

This is not to understate the power of the veto as an avenue of presidential influence. Presidents in recent decades have proven willing to veto major appropriations bills, even at the risk of budget crises and government shutdowns (Hartman 1982; Meyers 1997; Matthews 2013). The first government shutdown occurred under Gerald Ford in 1976 after he vetoed appropriations for the Departments of Labor and Health, Education and Welfare. Jimmy Carter vetoed defense appropriations over a nuclear aircraft carrier in 1978, prompting another shutdown. The next three presidents - Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton - each shut down the government with vetoed appropriations bills. Both Obama and Trump threatened to veto appropriations in connection with the 2013 and 2018-2019 shutdowns, although vetoes did not occur. This recent history establishes that presidential vetoes and veto threats are common in the context of appropriations. Congress has good reason to craft a bill that the president will be willing to sign - and therefore to take account of presidential preferences.

Between the veto power and the president's influence as party leader and head-of-state,

it is likely the president can expect to influence appropriations outcomes some of the time. This is a modest statement that falls well short of any claim that the executive exerts as much as or more influence over appropriations than congressional members. The more interesting question is not whether Congress is over-awed by the president (it is not), but whether and the conditions under which the administration can deploy its indirect means of influence to achieve some of the president’s top spending priorities. This influence may be large or it may be slight, but understanding its character and extent is essential to developing an accurate understanding of the separation of powers and its implications for budgeting and public policy more generally. Previous studies have wrestled with these questions at the level of aggregate agency spending. However, the reality we uncover is that presidents often propose spending increases and decreases within the same agency. Taking an aggregate approach cannot accurately account for presidents who garner spending for desired line-items while successfully cutting others.

The implication is that researchers would profit from data organized around line-items in the budget, instead of total agency spending. Ideally, the data would cross several administrations and include information about the level of spending proposed in the president’s budget as well as the amount enacted. Here we present and analyze line-item data for defense procurement and discretionary portions of Health and Human Services (HHS) between fiscal years 2001 and 2018. We constructed these data by matching individual line-items across annual congressional budget justification documents prepared by the Department of Defense and HHS, resulting in information on status quo spending, presidential requests, and enacted outcomes.<sup>1</sup> We chose defense procurement and HHS so that we could compare presidential influence in an agency focused on foreign affairs with influence in a domestic agency. An important line of research argues that presidents’ preferences carry more weight in foreign affairs (Canes-Wrone, Howell and Lewis 2008; Berry, Burden and Howell 2010; Howell and Jackman 2013). Our data offer an unprecedented opportunity to evaluate this “two pres-

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<sup>1</sup>We describe our data collection and processing in Appendix A.

idencies” thesis and other ideas about presidential influence (see Kiewiet and McCubbins 1988). The inclusion of two agencies also helps ameliorate concerns about the possibility that agency-specific characteristics drive our findings.

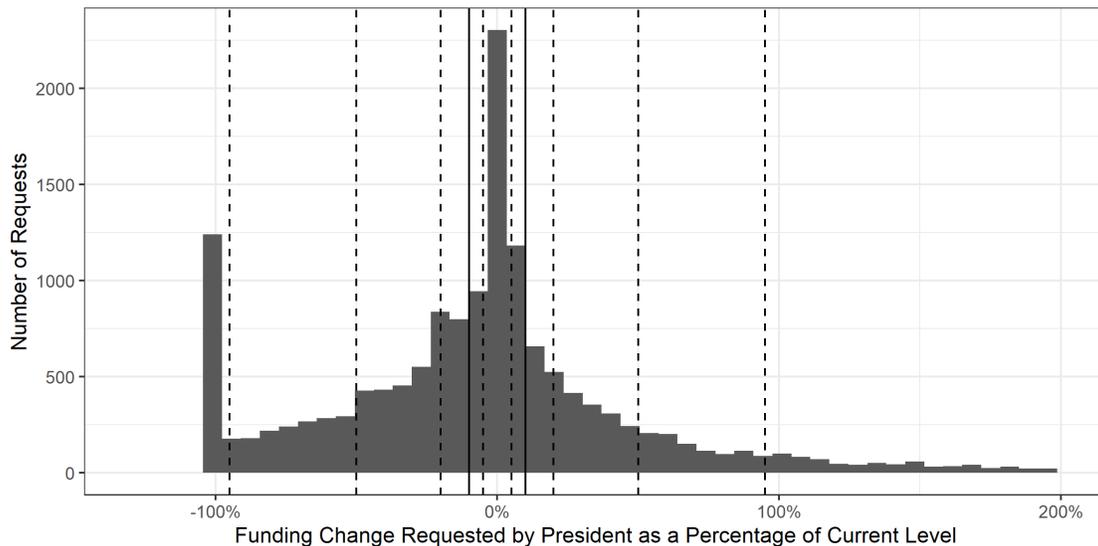
## 1 Spending Change Requests and Presidential Success

The budget data we draw upon include a total of 17,265 line items (15,782 defense procurement items and 1,483 HHS items) in fiscal years 2001-2018, covering the end of the Clinton administration (FY 2001) through the start of the Trump administration (FY 2018). In addition to four successive presidencies, this period witnessed different partisan configurations in the executive and legislative branches, political variations which conceivably affect presidential influence. Figure 1 shows the distribution of presidential requests relative to current spending levels.<sup>2</sup> Presidential requests are well distributed between continuity and significant policy shifts, with an expected dominant mode at or very close to the status quo. Presidential requests also cluster at -100%, indicating requests to completely eliminate spending.

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<sup>2</sup>The x-axis is bounded at 200% on the positive side. There are some presidential requests asking for increases exceeding this magnitude but the observations become very sparse. The full range of presidential requests is not censored for analysis.

Figure 1: Presidential Requests for Funding Changes, Defense Procurement and Department of Health and Human Services, FY 2001-2018



Notes: Data come from congressional justification documents (see collection and processing in Appendix A). Solid and dotted lines denote main and alternative thresholds for identifying non-incremental spending changes requested by the president (main:  $\pm 10\%$ , used in main analysis; alternative:  $\pm 5\%$ ,  $20\%$ ,  $50\%$ , and  $95\%$ , used in robustness check shown in Appendix B.1).

What do presidential budget requests and outcomes tell us about presidential influence? We follow the literature on presidential influence in assuming that presidents have single-peaked utility functions centered around their revealed preferences manifested as presidential requests. This is a strong assumption, but it is a reasonable starting point in light of the president's budget proposal authority.<sup>3</sup> We identify an instance of presidential success when the amount eventually appropriated by Congress is closer to the president's request than the previous status quo. On this basis, we uncover a strong empirical regularity in the data suggestive of presidents' ability to get Congress to enact their spending priorities into law:

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<sup>3</sup>We acknowledge that members of Congress, agency employees, and special interests all seek to influence the federal budget as well. We do not solve the accreditation problem here, but we expect that new information detailing presidential preferences in SAPs and executive legislation will make it possible to address this problem in future work.

Presidents achieved victories significantly more frequently on requests for non-incremental funding changes than on incremental ones.

Of course, whether to mark a requested change as incremental or non-incremental is not obvious at the outset. For findings presented below, we mainly use a threshold of 10%, meaning that we identify a request as non-incremental if it asks for an increase or decrease on an item by 10% or more of its current funding level. According to this dividing line, about two-thirds of defense procurement requests and one-third of HHS requests qualify as non-incremental. We replicate the same statistical test using various thresholds, however, from a very low 5% to a very drastic 95% as a robustness check, included as Appendix B.1. Figure 1 includes vertical lines drawn at each of these thresholds for both increase and decrease requests. Table 1 shows the finding that presidents were more successful on non-incremental requests than on incremental ones classified according to the main 10% criterion. By a considerable margin, presidents were more likely to have Congress move spending toward their revealed preferences when they requested major changes from current levels. Overall, in defense procurement presidents achieved victories on 62.6 percent of incremental requests and 87.1 percent of non-incremental ones. This differential is more pronounced for HHS requests: Presidents realized success on 25.2 percent of incremental requests and 53.2 percent of non-incremental ones.

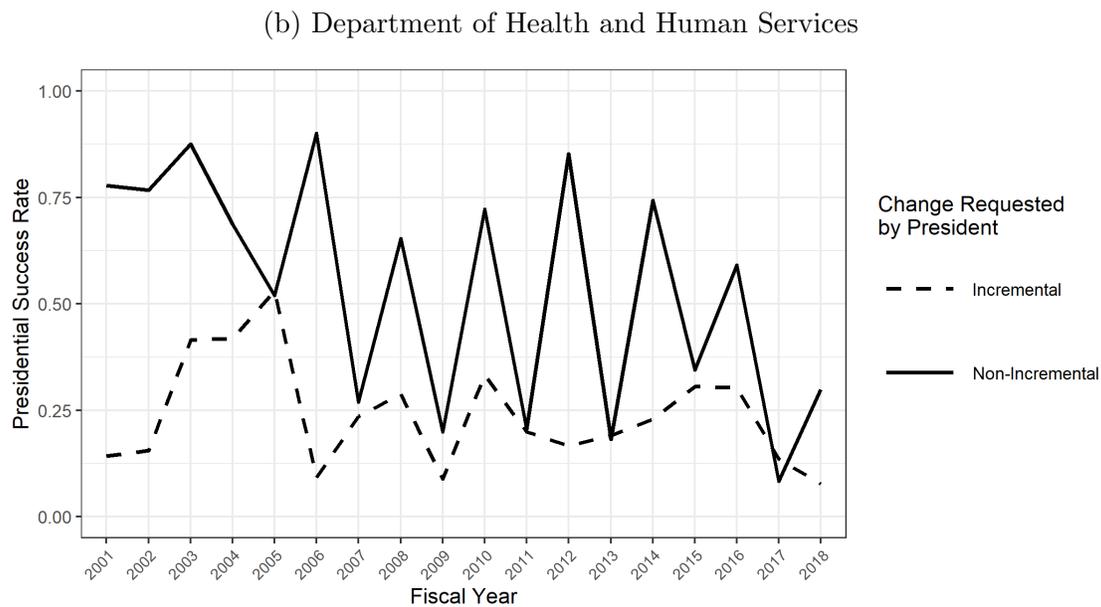
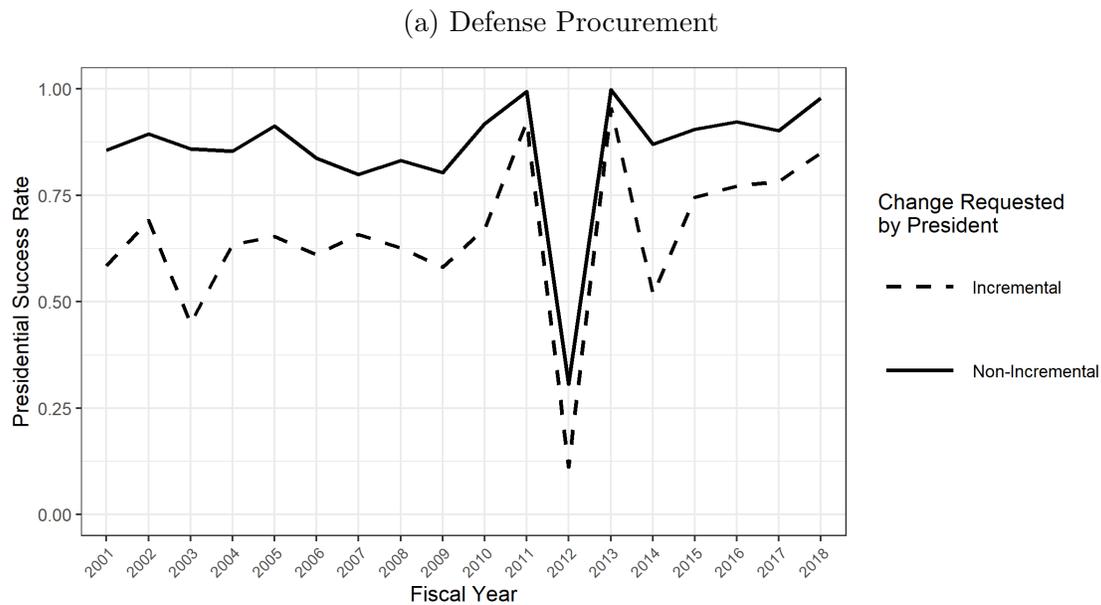
Table 1: Incremental and Non-Incremental Requests for Spending Changes and Presidential Success

Type of Request	Number of Requests		Presidential Success Rate	
	Defense Procurement	HHS	Defense Procurement	HHS
Incremental	5,056	992	62.6%	25.2%
Non-Incremental	10,726	491	87.1%	53.2%
<b>Combined</b>	15,782	1,483	79.2%	34.5%

Notes: Data come from congressional justification documents, FY 2001-2018. See definitions of incremental and non-incremental presidential requests and presidential success in text.

Crucially, this differential characterizes presidential success regardless of policy area, who was president, and what type of partisan regime governed Washington. The durability of the differential is highlighted in Figure 2, divided into two plots for defense procurement and HHS. The only exceptions to this temporal consistency are four of the eighteen fiscal years when presidential success on non-incremental requests for HHS equals or dips very slightly below that on incremental requests. Incidentally, the differential in presidential success between incremental and non-incremental requests is accompanied by volatility - but of different types in the two policy areas. On the whole, defense procurement features more stable presidential success than HHS, especially on non-incremental requests. The only exception - though a sizable one - is FY 2012, when President Obama's success rate on incremental and non-incremental requests alike fell well below 50 percent. HHS displays a different kind of volatility. While presidential success is more stable on incremental requests, both trends are strongly characterized by an election year dynamic whereby presidents are more likely to get what they want in the federal budget for election years. That such a dynamic is hardly present in defense procurement suggests that it may be a feature of domestic policy.

Figure 2: Presidential Success on Incremental and Non-Incremental Requests for Spending Changes, FY 2001-2018



Notes: Data come from congressional justification documents. See definitions of incremental and non-incremental presidential requests and presidential success in text.

## 2 The “Two Presidencies” in the Appropriations Game

The differential in presidents’ influence on the budget tilting toward non-incremental requests coexists with a display of the “two presidencies” thesis. Setting aside how much more presidents succeeded on non-incremental requests, their record on defense procurement was on the whole much better than on HHS spending, averaging almost 80 percent of defense procurement requests but just 34.5 percent of HHS requests (Table 1). This large cross-agency difference of 45 percentage points constitutes a novel type of evidence for the president’s default bargaining advantage in foreign and military affairs compared with domestic policy.

Regression analysis displayed in Table 2 systematically gauges the differential in presidential success, the difference between policy domains, and how partisan regimes affect them. It contains a pair of logit regression models estimating the relationship between funding changes requested by presidents (incremental or non-incremental) and a binary variable for presidential success on each request, controlling for year dummies and clustering standard errors by budget item. The main independent variable maintains strong statistical significance and stays stable in magnitude. Equation 1 studies essentially the bivariate correlation between request size and presidential success after removing year-to-year idiosyncrasies. Equation 2 adds a dummy variable for HHS and interacts it with request size. The HHS additive term obtains a significant and negative coefficient estimate, showing that less presidential success on HHS than on defense procurement in line with “two presidencies.” The interaction term is not significant, though, showing that on average the differential in presidential success does not differ between the two policy areas.

Table 2: Logit Regression Analysis - Presidential Success on Incremental and Non-Incremental Requests for Spending Changes, FY 2001-2018

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Presidential Success	
	(1)	(2)
Non-Incremental	1.518***	1.341***

	(0.048)	(0.053)
HHS		-1.879*** (0.118)
Non-Incremental $\times$ HHS		-0.074 (0.154)
Constant	0.198** (0.082)	0.419*** (0.085)
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Year Dummies	Y	Y
Observations	17,265	17,265
R <sup>2</sup>	0.264	0.328
$\chi^2$	3,376.128***	4,295.731***

*Note: Standard errors are clustered by budget item.*

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

We conduct two additional robustness checks besides the aforementioned alteration of the criterion for non-incremental requests (Appendix B.1). We substitute year dummies with partisan regime dummies and interact them with the main variables in regression analysis in order to estimate how government partisanship matters (Appendix B.2). We also test the main findings on a small subset of items that attracted particularly great attention of presidents as documented by Statements of Administration Policy. These signals indicate that presidents continue to push for funding increases or decreases on key items after proposing the initial budget (Appendix B.3).

Finally, these detailed budget data allow us to test other important theories of presidential influence such as an asymmetry in presidential influence on appropriations asserted by Kiewiet and McCubbins (1988), that the veto power gives the president more sway in appropriations when she favors less spending than Congress does. If this “fiscal conservatism thesis” is correct, we should expect that the president should be more successful when requesting spending decreases rather than increases. We show a test of this expectation in Appendix C, which yields very little evidence for it in either defense procurement or HHS.

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Supplemental Information for

“Appropriations and the President: Detailed Budget  
Data Shed New Light on an Old Debate”

# Appendix

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# A Data Collection and Processing

## A.1 Data Collection

Our budget data come from annual budget justification documents prepared by the Department of Defense and the Department of Health and Human Services from FY 2001 to FY 2018. Specifically, we use the procurement portions of the DoD budget, downloaded as individual yearly spreadsheets from the department comptroller’s website, <https://comptroller.defense.gov/Budget-Materials>, and individual budget justification documents prepared by various sub-agencies within HHS originally as PDF documents or web page tables on the department’s archived historical web pages such as <http://wayback.archive-it.org/3920/20130927185803/http://archive.hhs.gov/budget/05budget/>. We use the discretionary spending portions of HHS sub-agencies including the Administration for Children and Families, the Administration for Community Living, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, and the National Institutes of Health. Figure 3 contains examples of budget tables in the two departments’ congressional justification documents.

Figure 3: Budget Tables in Congressional Justification Documents

(a) Defense Procurement

Department of the Air Force  
FY 2012 President's Budget  
Exhibit P-1 FY 2012 President's Budget  
Total Obligational Authority  
(Dollars in Thousands) Feb 2011

Appropriation: 3020F Missile Procurement, Air Force

Line No	Item Nomenclature	Ident Code	FY 2010 (Base & OCO)		FY 2011 Base Request with CR Adj*		FY 2011 OCO Request with CR Adj*		FY 2011 Total Request with CR Adj* e	
			Quantity	Cost	Quantity	Cost	Quantity	Cost	Quantity	Cost
<b>Budget Activity 01: Ballistic Missiles</b>										
<b>Missile Replacement Equipment - Ballistic</b>										
1	Missile Replacement Eq-Ballistic	A		57,973		60,647				60,647 U
<b>Total Ballistic Missiles</b>				<b>57,973</b>		<b>60,647</b>				<b>60,647</b>
<b>Budget Activity 02: Other Missiles</b>										
<b>Tactical</b>										
2	JASSM	A		52,515	171	215,825			171	215,825 U
3	Sidewinder (AIM-9X)	A	219	78,527	178	64,523			178	64,523 U
4	AMRAAM	A	170	272,714	246	355,358			246	355,358 U
5	Predator Hellfire Missile	A	1175	86,621	460	44,570	431	41,621	891	86,191 U
6	Small Diameter Bomb	A	2694	141,694	2985	134,884			2985	134,884 U
<b>Industrial Facilities</b>										
7	Industr'l Preparedns/Pol Prevention	A		838		833				833 U
<b>Total Other Missiles</b>				<b>632,909</b>		<b>815,993</b>		<b>41,621</b>		<b>857,614</b>

(b) Department of Health and Human Services

**NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH  
OVERVIEW BY INSTITUTE**



(dollars in millions)

Institutes	2009	2009		2010	2011	2011 +/- 2010
		ARRA*				
National Cancer Institute.....	4,969	1,257		5,102	5,265	+163
National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.....	3,016	763		3,096	3,188	+92
National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research.....	403	102		413	424	+10
Natl Inst. of Diabetes & Digestive & Kidney Diseases.....	1,911	445		1,957	2,008	+50
National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke.....	1,593	403		1,636	1,681	+46
National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.....	4,703	1,113		4,817	4,977	+160
National Institute of General Medical Sciences.....	1,998	505		2,051	2,125	+74
Eunice K. Shriver Natl Inst. of Child Hlth & Human Dev....	1,295	327		1,329	1,369	+40
National Eye Institute.....	688	174		707	724	+18
<b>National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences:</b>						
Labor/HHS Appropriation.....	663	168		690	707	+18
Interior Appropriation.....	78	19		79	82	+3
National Institute on Aging.....	1,081	273		1,110	1,142	+33
Natl Inst. of Arthritis & Musculoskeletal & Skin Diseases...	525	133		539	556	+17
Natl Inst. on Deafness and Communication Disorders.....	407	103		419	429	+10
National Institute of Mental Health.....	1,451	367		1,490	1,540	+51

## A.2 Data Processing

We undertake the following essential operations to process the budget data for analysis. First, we link budget items across fiscal years in order to link presidential requests to enacted spending outcomes item by item. We automate the matching budget items across adjacent fiscal years. For each item in a given year, we first find the best match for it in the following year based on Levenshtein string distances, a commonly used string metric for measuring the difference between two word strings based on single-character edits (i.e., insertions, deletions, or substitutions) required to change one word string into the other. When looking for a match for Item X, if its potential match Item Y's string distance from it, divided by its character length, is less than or equal to .05, we classify the match as correct. Otherwise, we throw out the match. We then adjust the dollar figures in the linked data for inflation by dividing all raw dollar figures in the data by the Consumer Price Index in January of each year. We calculate key variables including spending changes requested by the president based on inflation-adjusted dollar figures.

## B Robustness Checks

### B.1 Altering the Criterion for Requests for Non-Incremental Changes

We address the admitted arbitrariness of the main 10 percent threshold for non-incremental presidential budget requests by substituting it with alternatives in regression analysis, displayed in Table 3. The thresholds range from an inconspicuous 5 percent to a very large 95%, the latter indicating a presidential request to either almost double current spending or more on an item or stripping it of virtually all funding. The functional form of these equations is identical with Equation 2 in Table 2, included again here with bolded labels. Presidents were much more likely to achieve success on non-incremental requests regardless of which threshold is used. The coefficient estimate for non-incremental requests follows a pattern of diminishing returns as a threshold rises. Easy to imagine, the presidential success rate cannot go up infinitely as requested changes increase.

Table 3: Logit Regression Analysis - Various Thresholds for Non-Incremental Spending Change Requests and Presidential Success

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Presidential Success				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Non-Incremental (5%)	1.512*** (0.060)				
<b>Non-Incremental (10%)</b>		<b>1.341*** (0.053)</b>			
Non-Incremental (20%)			1.224*** (0.052)		
Non-Incremental (50%)				1.047*** (0.068)	
Non-Incremental (95%)					1.032*** (0.098)
HHS	-1.912*** (0.137)	<b>-1.879*** (0.118)</b>	-1.822*** (0.104)	-2.034*** (0.096)	-2.131*** (0.093)
Non-Incremental $\times$ HHS	0.018 (0.157)	<b>-0.074 (0.154)</b>	-0.554*** (0.183)	-0.761*** (0.239)	-1.255*** (0.291)
Constant	0.115 (0.090)	<b>0.419*** (0.085)</b>	0.693*** (0.083)	1.000*** (0.080)	1.149*** (0.079)

Year Dummies	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	17,265	<b>17,265</b>	17,265	17,265	17,265
R <sup>2</sup>	0.338	<b>0.328</b>	0.310	0.281	0.266
$\chi^2$	4,455.177***	<b>4,295.731***</b>	4,032.032***	3,609.402***	3,396.084***

Note: Standard errors are clustered by budget item.

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

## B.2 Controlling for Partisan Regimes

The logit equation shown in Table 4 includes three-way interaction terms involving non-incremental presidential requests, partisan regimes, and HHS, and their additive and lower-order multiplicative components. In effect, this functional form estimates the relationship between request size and presidential success in every combination of policy area and partisan regime. The base categories of incremental requests, defense procurement, and unified government are omitted from the regression output. All of the interaction terms that involve the regime type of divided Congress obtain significant and positive coefficient estimates, but none of those involving opposition Congress does. In other words, presidential success tilts more heavily in favor of non-incremental requests when the opposition party controls exactly one chamber of Congress than unified government. This is the case for both policy areas but especially for HHS. Note that the influence of divided Congress on the differential in presidential success bears no inherent connection with the absolute degree of presidential success.

Table 4: Logit Regression Analysis - Presidential Success on Incremental and Non-Incremental Requests for Spending Changes and Partisan Regimes, FY 2001-2018

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Presidential Success
Non-Incremental	1.284*** (0.079)
HHS	-1.901*** (0.144)
Divided Congress	-0.797***

	(0.062)
Opposition Congress	-0.044 (0.092)
Non-Incremental × HHS	-0.566*** (0.214)
Non-Incremental × Divided Congress	0.222** (0.090)
Non-Incremental × Opposition Congress	-0.020 (0.129)
HHS × Divided Congress	0.640*** (0.174)
HHS × Opposition Congress	-0.223 (0.292)
Non-Incremental × HHS × Divided Congress	0.690** (0.286)
Non-Incremental × HHS × Opposition Congress	0.714 (0.445)
Constant	0.909*** (0.059)
<hr/>	
Observations	17,265
R <sup>2</sup>	0.224
χ <sup>2</sup>	2,816.844***
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*Note: Standard errors are clustered by budget item.*

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

### B.3 Analyzing Budget Requests Referenced in Statements of Administration Policy

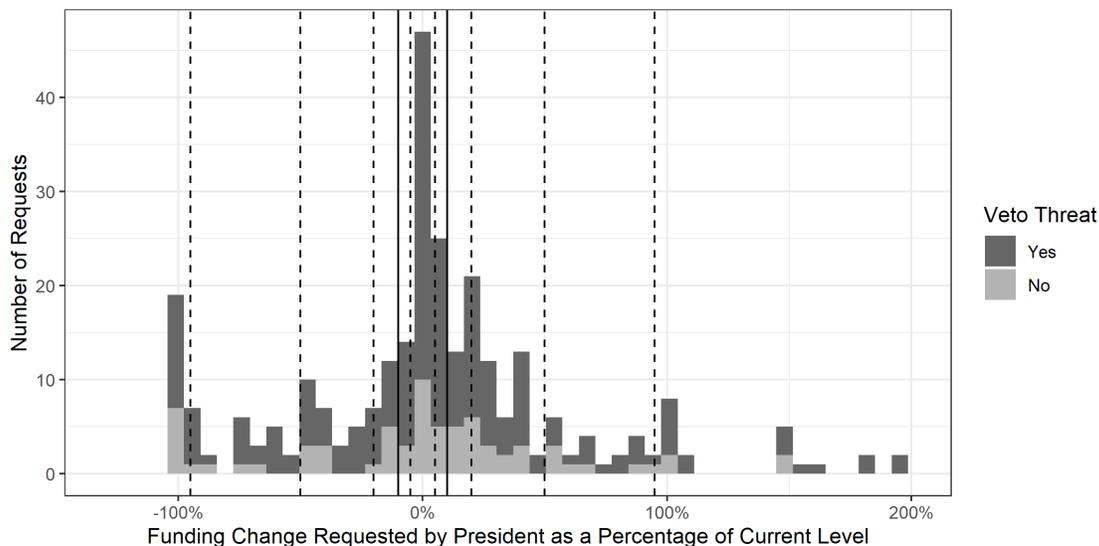
Figure 4 shows the distribution of funding changes requested by presidents and also referenced in appropriation SAPs, obtained from <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/>

app-categories/written-statements/presidential/statements-administration-policy, as a percentage of current levels.<sup>4</sup> Requests found in SAPs with and without veto threats are stacked on top of one another. When compared with the full set of presidential requests shown in Figure 1, requests with SAP references appear to have substantively the same distribution, with a mode at the status quo and clustering at the complete elimination of currently funded items. This indicates that presidents found it worthwhile to signal additional emphasis on requests of all magnitudes and for either increases or decreases when congressional consideration of their initial budget proposals was well under way. Furthermore, requests with accompanying veto threats are distributed similarly with those without veto threats. We contend that the decision to issue SAPs demonstrates Congress's uncertainty regarding presidents' true spending preferences and presidents' awareness of and willingness to leverage this uncertainty in appropriations bargaining.

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<sup>4</sup>Similar with Figure 1, the x-axis is bounded at 200% on the positive side only for visualization purposes.

Figure 4: Presidential Requests for Funding Changes Referenced in Statements of Administration Policy, Defense Procurement and Department of Health and Human Services, FY 2001-2018



Notes: Data come from congressional justification documents and Statements of Administration Policy. X-axis bounded at +200% for visualization.

Table 5 displays regression analysis that tests the same theory based on this small subset of items. In three different equations, the main variable remains significant and, as in the main analysis, stable in size. Equations 1 and 2 draw on all items located in relevant SAPs. Paralleling Equation 3 in the earlier analysis (Table 2), Equation 1 interacts non-incremental presidential requests with the HHS dummy. Equation 2 introduces a new variable of the existence of veto threats linked to presidential requests and interacts it with request size as well as the HHS dummy. Equation 3 replicates Equation 1, but on the even smaller subset of requests with veto threats within those linked to any SAP. As before, in all equations the main variable of request size retains a significant positive estimate and a stable magnitude. In equations 1 and 3, the additive HHS dummy variable obtains its familiar negative estimate, again indicating an overall worse presidential record in HHS than defense procurement. None of the interaction terms involving the HHS dummy or veto threats, however, turns out to be significant predictors. This shows that neither matters for the differential in presidential

success within the SAP subset.

Table 5: Logit Regression Analysis - Presidential Success on Incremental and Non-Incremental Requests for Spending Changes (Referenced in Statements of Administration Policy)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Presidential Success		
	Any SAPs	Veto Threat SAPs	
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Non-Incremental	1.851*** (0.419)	1.299* (0.683)	2.123*** (0.505)
Veto Threat		-0.479 (0.634)	
HHS	-1.552** (0.622)	-1.570 (1.254)	-1.791*** (0.689)
Non-Incremental $\times$ Veto Threat		0.707 (0.805)	
Non-Incremental $\times$ HHS	0.462 (0.797)	0.437 (1.581)	0.505 (0.892)
Veto Threat $\times$ HHS		-0.013 (1.300)	
Non-Incremental $\times$ Veto Threat $\times$ HHS		0.076 (1.664)	
Constant	-0.139 (0.449)	0.245 (0.664)	0.262 (0.570)
Year Dummies	Y	Y	Y
Observations	341	341	259
R <sup>2</sup>	0.354	0.358	0.425
$\chi^2$	98.436***	99.618***	92.471***

*Note: Standard errors are clustered by budget item.*

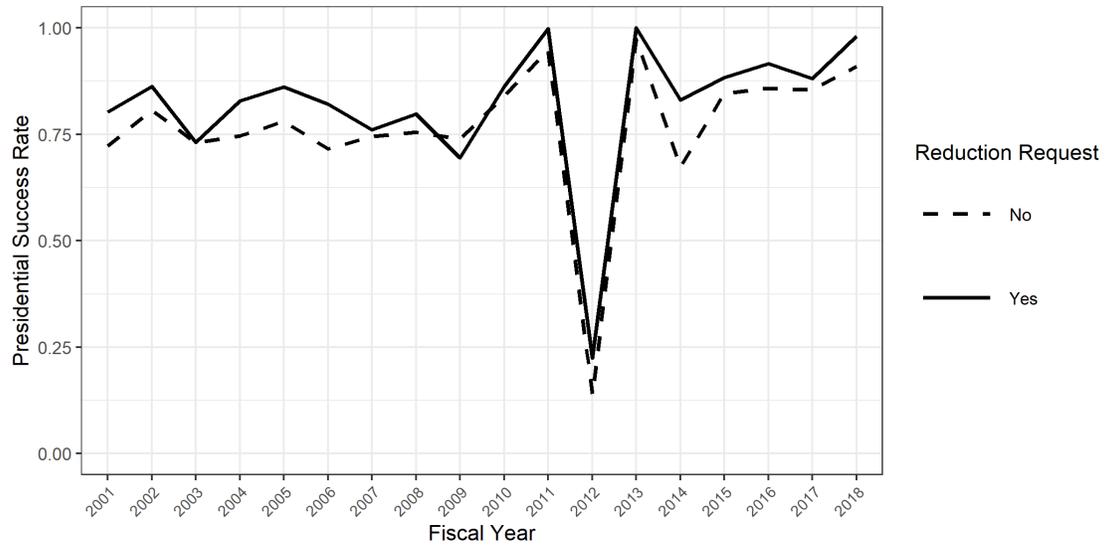
\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

## C A Test of Kiewiet and McCubbins (1988)

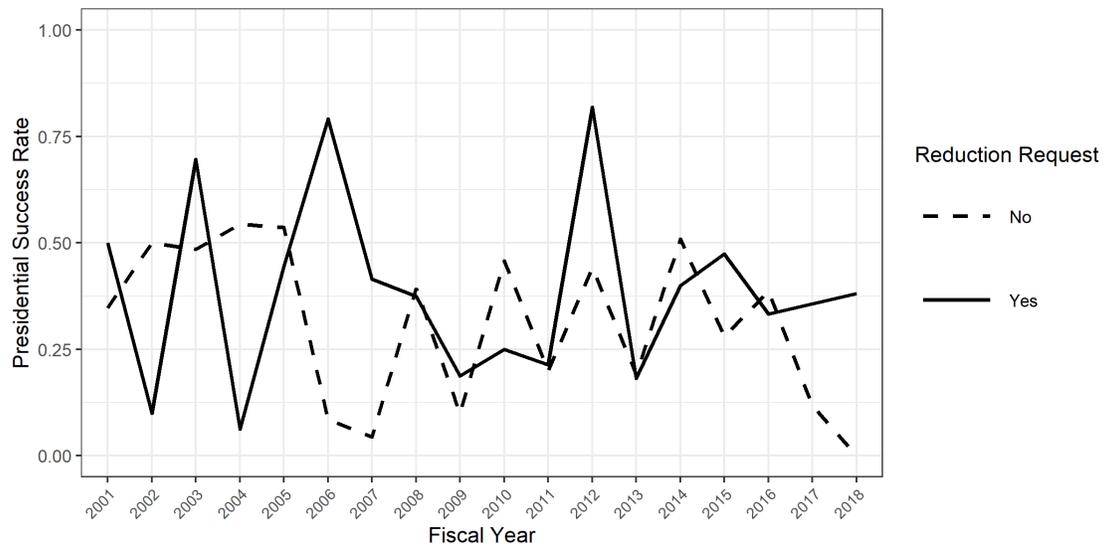
Kiewiet and McCubbins (1988) argue that a president who prefers to spend less than Congress has the advantage. Such a president would be better able to live with spending at typically lower reversion levels should her veto prevent Congress from passing an appropriations bill. The defense procurement and HHS budget data that we use allow us to put it to test. If it is correct, we should expect that the president realizes more success on requests for funding reductions than for increases. Across the board there is little evidence for this fiscal conservatism thesis. For defense procurement and HHS spending, respectively, Figure 5 shows two accompanying trends of presidential success - one for reduction requests and one for others (either maintaining the status quo funding level or increasing current funding).

Figure 5: Presidential Success on Reduction and Non-Reduction Requests, FY 2001-2018

(a) Defense Procurement



(b) Department of Health and Human Services



Notes: Data come from congressional justification documents. See definitions of reduction requests and presidential success in text.