

Constants and Changes in Attitudes about the American Presidency, 1956-1986

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines trends in scholarly, journalistic, and public attitudes about the American presidency. The first objective of the work is to pinpoint which attitudes about incumbent presidents or the office in general remain constant over time, as well as those that vary and why. Secondly, an original empirical study is undertaken in order to test the relationship between political demographic factors and views about presidential power and government ethics on the one hand, and to have respondents rate the importance of a president's personal qualities on the other. The results of the empirical investigation are compared with prior work in the area. In the concluding section, several implications and future directions for research are offered.

II. SEPARATING OFFICE AND INCUMBENT

Though there is little doubt that attitudes toward the presidency as a branch of government are shaped by views of the incumbent's ability and accomplishments, offering the proposition that we can study each as separate entities is another matter. Yet the dynamism of each chief executive has confirmed the Founding Fathers' intention in drafting Article II of the Constitution: the powers of the office establish the rules and set limits, but it is up to each president to shape the potential they have been granted; in other words, to define and strive for goals uniquely suited to a certain personality or particular period in history. In his highly acclaimed essay on presidential power, Richard Neustadt (1980) consistently acknowledges the distinction between office (laws and customs) and incumbent, stating "the same conditions which promote his leadership in form preclude a guarantee of leadership in fact." Similarly, Cronin's (1976) hypothesis about conflicting public expectations of the president derives from the independent contribution of both constitutional arrangement and individual personalities on the presidency. According to the author, "an assessment of the paradoxed presidency may impel us anew to revise some of our unrealistic expectations of the institution of the presidency and encourage in turn the nurturing of alternative sources or centers for national leadership." Among the paradoxes Cronin discusses are the general and decent but forceful and decisive president; the programmatic but pragmatic leader; and the national unifier versus national divider. In the following pages I will analyze attitudes about the presidency as an institution on the one hand, and toward aspects of incumbent chief executives on the other. The focus will be on those types of attitudes which have either held constant or changed over time.

III. ATTITUDES ABOUT THE PRESIDENCY AS AN INSTITUTION

Constants

In analyzing the office of the presidency we can identify several subject areas where public opinion has remained consistent across time. Studies dealing with length of presidential tenure have shown that while most Americans support the two-term limitation imposed by the 22nd Amendment, they have steadfastly rejected a proposed single six-year term. Sigel and Butler (1964) report the findings of two American Institute for Public Opinion polls taken eight years apart, in which a majority of respondents in a national poll favor the two-term limit (57 percent in 1951; 64 percent in 1959). In 1960, the authors conducted a survey of 1350 registered voters in the Detroit area by tapping views toward the 22nd Amendment, and found 66 percent of the sample favored

the limit. Of the reasons cited for supporting the amendment, fear of power, fear of age, and desire for change accounted for 91 percent of all answers, according to Sigel and Butler. Subsequent polls have confirmed majority support for the two-term limit. Although historically legislation favoring a six-year term has been initiated repeatedly since 1826, "every Gallup Poll for the last 46 years show 70 to 80 percent of the United States public oppose a single six-year term," according to Fritchey (1983).

Two studies concentrating on proposed or current powers of the presidency likewise display consistency in attitudes over time. Lee (1981) employs panel data to test the reliability of Wildavsky's (1975) "two presidencies" thesis, contending that presidents since World War II have been more successful and dominant in foreign affairs than in domestic issues. Lee studied convention delegate responses to questions as to whose judgment should be trusted most in foreign and domestic affairs. 649 respondents took part in the 1976 survey, while only about 290 of those delegates answered the identical question in 1980. In both surveys, party activists indicated they trusted the chief executive most in foreign affairs (72 percent and 60 percent respectively), whereas the judgements of senators and congressmen were trusted more in the domestic sphere (53 percent and 64 percent respectively). Despite ultimately concluding the proposed item veto power would do more harm than good, Cronin and Weill (1985) furnish evidence from Gallup Polls revealing consistent long-term support for the augmentation of the qualified constitutional veto power. The average percentage of the public favoring the item veto between 1945 and 1983—the question was asked seven times over this duration—was 64 percent.

Studies comparing public attitudes toward various government institutions have also uncovered trends. Dolbear and Hammond (1968) use survey questions from 1946, 1949, and 1956 to investigate the effects of party loyalty and presidential support on favorable attitudes toward the U.S. Supreme Court. They conclude that "approval of the president, regardless of party, correlates with approval of the Court." Compiling Gallup and Harris surveys administered from 1966 to 1980, which inquired as to the amount of confidence in each of the three branches of government, Lang and Lang (1983) show that a national sample of Americans had consistently higher levels of confidence in the Supreme Court than either Congress or the president.

Changes

Perhaps because of close interdependence with judgements about the incumbent's performance, views about presidential powers have frequently alternated since the early 1940's. Further, there appears not only to be simultaneous changes in scholarly, journalistic, and public attitudes toward various facets of presidential power, but a similar change in direction of change among all of the latter groups. Table 1 in the Appendix is drawn and expanded from Hoff's (1984) study proposing a systemic model of presidential power. Classifying scholarly views of presidential power according to whether the researcher makes a positive evaluation of power, a negative evaluation, or discusses the sources, techniques, and outcomes of presidential power (referred to as strategic assessments), I examined 55 books, essays, and articles over four periods since 1956. In three out of four time periods, there appears to be an equal distribution of positive and negative evaluations, though strategic assessments are the most frequent type of analysis of presidential power. But over the duration from 1972 to 1976, there are exclusively negative type of evaluations—no doubt traced to the disillusionment surrounding the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. Erskine's (1973) review of various polls asking about support for executive privilege and for presidential power in general reveals a similar phenomenon: from 1936 to 1970 the midpoint of public approval for a variety of executive powers was 27 percent; this figure increased to a median of 37 percent between 1970 and 1973, but fell as low as 17 percent in April 1973. Likewise, support for executive privilege increased from 28 percent to 66 percent from 1942 to 1954, but decreased to 42 percent in favor in 1973. Grossman and Kumar's (1983) book details the percentage of favorable and unfavorable stories about the White House by three media sources: *Time Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and CBS News. The study is broken down into three time periods: 1953 to 1966, 1966 to 1974, and 1974 to 1978. Though statistics are not available for CBS News during the initial period, the other two sources had an average of 55 percent favorable stories and 11 percent unfavorable stories. However, during the controversial 1966 to 1974 time frame, the percentage of favorable stories by the three sources was 27 percent, whereas the average percentage of unfavorable stories was 35 percent. Finally, the third period witnessed the return of more favorable coverage of the White House (42 percent to 22 percent, averaged). It should be noted that the authors do find consistencies in the most prominent type of White House news story broadcast by the three media sources over the 25-year duration (news), as well as in the subject category of White House stories by the three sources (program and policy) over two time periods (1953 to 1968 and 1968 to 1978).

Another area of attitudes where over-time instability is evident includes judgements about the job performance of, and trust in, various institutions and organizations in government. Employing data from surveys administered by the Center for Political Studies, this writer finds that the presidency was regarded as the entity doing the best job and most trustable among other branches of government, political parties, and the media in 1972. However, the Supreme Court received the highest rating on both of the above factors in 1974 and 1976.

Returning to Lang and Lang's (1983) chart delineating percentage of high confidence respondents have in each branch of government, we can observe that although the Supreme Court consistently came out on top, there were six instances in the seven surveys conducted from 1966 to 1977 where the second-highest percentage of high confidence alternated between the executive branch and Congress.

IV. ATTITUDES ABOUT INCUMBENT CHIEF EXECUTIVES

Constants

In several instances, popular approval of incumbent presidents is consistently related to other opinions and measures of performance. Haight's (1978) work on the mass media and presidential popularity divulges that from 1961 to 1976 there is a negative, or inverse correlation between cumulative news ratio and disapproval with job performance. The proportion of variance explained by the independent variable is 70 percent. DiClerico (1983) brings a number of sources together to compare the percentage of the popular vote which the president received in his first election with the Gallup approval rating in the initial post-inaugural survey. The chart shows that the average popular vote for those presidents (first election) from Eisenhower through Reagan is 49.8 percent, whereas the average percentage of approval achieved by chief executives in the first survey conducted during their administration is 64.5 percent. The difference between the two measures establishes evidence in support of the "fait-accompli" hypothesis, positing voters' first judgments of job performance are quite positive due to the successful campaign and to Congress's early deference to the president.

DiClerico (1983) also compares the president's popularity at various points throughout his tenure. For the four presidents where data is pertinent—Kennedy, Nixon, Ford and Carter—Gallup Polls reveal there is a universal decrease in popularity from the time they assumed office to the time they either died, resigned, or were defeated in the general election. Edwards (1983) claims that a gap between expectations and performance has negative consequences for the level of support president receives as time goes by.

Edwards (1976) tests the correlation between overall presidential prestige (or popularity, as measured by Gallup Polls) and presidential support in the House for overall policy (1953 to 1972), domestic policy (1955 to 1970) and foreign policy (1955 to 1970). He differentiates between the party, experience, and electoral history of congressmen. Although there is a mild positive relationship between prestige and House support for overall policy (.12), the most convincing finding is that regardless of the classification of congressmen, there is a constant positive relationship between prestige and foreign policy support over the 1955 to 1970 time frame. Edwards' later study (1983) uses correlational analysis to examine the relationship between several economic variables and public approval. Employing selected Gallup Poll questions from 1972, 1974, 1976, and 1978 Edwards discovers consistently positive correlations between respondents' evaluations of the government's economic policy performance and presidential approval among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents alike. Similarly, the author finds positive correlations between the president's handling of economic policy and approval among all party identifiers in 1976 and 1980.

Hoff (1985), using multiple regression, analyzes the independent impact of yearly public approval and partisan support on the stand success of the chief executive from 1954 through 1984. Public approval is measured by averaging Gallup Poll popularity percentages over each year. Partisan support refers to the average of the number of party members the chief executive has in the House and Senate each session. Stand success is a *Congressional Quarterly* statistic indicating the percentage of success the administration has on congressional votes where a clear-cut position is taken. The guideline for computing the yearly stand success rate are: (1) only issues which receive a roll call vote on the House or Senate floor are counted; (2) the president's support or opposition for the proposed legislation must be both public and clear; and (3) all votes receive equal weight. Because *Congressional Quarterly* presents two distinct stand success percentages for 1974—one for Nixon and one for Ford—an extra case is added to assure for unbiased percentages. In a similar vein, an additional public approval rating is included for 1974 to differentiate attitudes toward each incumbent. In the above study, I found that public approval and partisan support have a positive and statistically significant (.05 level) relationship with the annual percentage of presidential-supported bill victories, though the latter has a stronger impact.

Two dispositional factors which explain consistencies in public approval of incumbents are positivity bias and party identification. Sears and Whitney (1976) define positivity bias as the "tendency to show evaluations of public figures and institutions in a generally positive direction." Lau et al. (1979) contend that positivity bias does not seem to be an artifact of the survey instrument used. Positivity bias may contribute to the effect of partisan political identification on presidential approval. A number of researchers (Berelson et al., 1954; Campbell et al., 1964; Sigel, 1964; Abramowitz, 1978; Page, 1978; Erikson et al., 1980) contend that people who identify themselves as a member of the president's party tend to attribute their policy positions to him or change their issue stands to bring them in line with the president.

Employing Gallup Poll data from 1953 through 1980, I found that the average Democratic party identifiers' support for Democratic presidents was 68.9 percent; for Republican presidents it was 42.5 percent.

Conversely, Republican party identifiers averaged 81.3 percent in their annual support for Republican chief executives, but 39.3 percent in their support of Democratic presidents. However, Independent identifiers' average support for presidents over the latter duration is over 50 percent for both political parties. Hibbs (1982) examines the impact of economic factors on presidential support among various occupational groups. The independent variables include rate of employment, rate of inflation of consumer prices, and the rate of change per capita real personal disposable income. The study encompasses the period from 1961 to 1979. Hibbs averages intercept parameter estimates, and uncovers consistently greater support for Republican than Democratic presidents among the three different job groups (blue-collar, white-collar, nonlabor force).

I shall return to a discussion of dispositional factors as they relate to presidential support in the empirical section. Further areas where there appears to be consistency in public attitudes about the presidency are in evaluations of presidential greatness and in the preferred personal characteristics of incumbents. Though there is some variation in the rank or position of lesser-regarded chief executives, the top three presidents mentioned in studies of presidential greatness are almost always Lincoln, Washington, and Franklin Roosevelt. Such findings include rankings by scholars, journalists, and the public alike (Schlesinger, 1948, 1962; Maranell and Dodder, 1970; U.S. Historical Society Poll, 1977; Chicago Tribune, 1982; Murray and Blessing, 1983). In studies probing personal traits of presidents (American Institute for Public Opinion, 1948; Sigel, 1966; Tannenhaus and Foley, 1981), honesty has constantly been named as the most valued or important personal characteristic. The Sigel study had a total sample of 1342 respondents from the Detroit, Michigan vicinity. The Tannenhaus and Foley work used magnitude scaling techniques to measure properties associated with the concept of an ideal president. The sampling groups consisted of 20 League of Women Voters subjects and 16 undergraduate students from the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Both groups felt sensitivity to racial problems was the second-most important characteristic of an ideal president.

Changes

Various changing attitudes toward incumbent presidents have been mentioned above. Over-time approval of presidents by grade school children is another example. Arterton (1975) illustrates responses by 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders at three time periods—1962, 1973, and 1975. Children at these grade levels were asked, "Is the president your favorite?" There is a decrease in those indicating "he is my favorite of all" from 1962 to 1973, followed by an increase from 1973 to 1975. In 1962, an average of 29.3 percent of the children sampled stated that the president was their favorite of all; only 4 percent of the grade school children in the study chose this answer in 1973; the average percentage of children indicating this answer in 1975 was up to 11 percent. Evaluating the 1973 period, DiClerico (1983) asserts "the Watergate scandals did indeed have an impact upon the public's attitude toward the presidency."

In an unusual departure from traditional assumptions on the subject, Edwards (1983) questions the impact and intensity of rally events, defined by Mueller (1970) as one that is international, directly involves the U.S.—particularly the president—and is specific, dramatic, and sharply focused. Edwards cites a number of potential rally events not followed by a substantial increase in presidential approval. He concludes the following: "In sum, the impact of the rally phenomenon is difficult to isolate, but the preponderance of evidence indicates that it rarely appears, and that the events that generate it are highly idiosyncratic and do not seem to significantly differ from other events that were not followed by significant surges in presidential approval. Moreover, the events that cause sudden increases in public support are not restricted to international affairs, and most international events that would seem to be potential rally events fail to generate much additional approval of the president." When presidential approval ratings shift despite little change in political party affiliation or the effect of positivity bias, a president's personality may be a contributing factor. The reason is that the public has a tendency to evaluate presidents more in terms of style than substance. In cases where the public may find the president personally appealing but disapprove of the way he is perceived to be handling the office, personality is most likely an influential factor, according to Edwards (1983).

V. DISPOSITIONAL FACTORS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT THE PRESIDENCY

Earlier I mentioned positivity bias and party affiliation as two consistent indicators of presidential support. In the final section of this paper I shall test the effects of dispositional factors on attitudes about presidential power and government ethics. Kernell et al. (1975) identify three sources of dispositional support for presidents: political demographic factors such as level of political information, political knowledge, and political participation; personality characteristics such as authoritarianism and rigidity; and cultural influences like patriotism. The authors formulate three dependent variable indexes to compare the dispositional factors with. These include an "I like presidents" index, composed of six questions tapping trust and admiration for the chief executive; an "our presidents right or wrong" index, comprised of four questions addressing obligation to follow the president; and "rally round the president in time of crisis" index, which is made up of four questions asking whether respondents believe citizens should support the president in time of foreign or domestic crisis.

The above researchers conducted interviews with 816 individuals residing in the Oakland-Berkeley-Richmond area of California in the Spring of 1966. Their primary objective in the study was to discover what variables explain and predict presidential support. Tables 2 and 3 in the Appendix delineate product-moment correlations between a wide variety of dispositional factors and the aforementioned dependent variables.

Kernell and his colleagues make the following generalizations about their study: (1) presidential support is disproportionately located among citizens who are older, of fundamentalist religious persuasion, have fewer years of schooling, and who may be described as "psychologically inflexible;" (2) because trends in the population point to the opposite characteristics from those above, the analysis suggests presidential support will decline over time; (3) short-term support for presidents has to rise to higher levels to produce the same current support in the face of a long-term decline in system support. The latter point has been documented by Lipset and Schneider (1983), who find there was a sharp drop in public faith in government between 1964 and 1975, although a Center for Political Studies Poll (1982) indicated a general upswing in confidence.

This writer employed a survey procedure to examine attitudes about presidential power and government ethics, using two samples of SUNY-Stony Brook students: a sample of 203 undergraduates drawn from various introductory political science courses; and an "elite" sample of 39 undergraduates who were enrolled in an American presidency class. Besides assessing the relationship between presidential power and government ethics, I sought to identify those political demographic factors which could significantly influence judgements about each topic. Surveys were conducted during the 1984 Spring and Summer sessions at the University. The format of responses in almost all cases was seven-point scale. The data were analyzed using multiple regression and correlation procedures. The effects of eight political demographic variables were investigated: interest, knowledge, participation, efficacy, ideology, strength of partisanship, media exposure, and support (see sample survey in Appendix). Referring to the findings of the Kernell et al. (1975) study as a guide, the following hypotheses concerning the relationship between certain political demographic factors and agreement with the presidential power questions (connoting favorable attitudes toward executive power) are forwarded:

- (1) The more knowledgeable respondents are about politics, the less likely that they will agree with the presidential power measure
- (2) The more politically active the respondents are, the less likely that they will agree with the presidential power questions
- (3) The greater respondents' level of political support, the more likely it is that they will have favorable attitudes toward presidential power.

The presidential power index is comprised of three survey questions, with responses ranging from strong agreement to ambivalent to strong disagreement. The three questions are:

- (1) Do you agree with the idea that Americans today prefer presidential leadership and competence to a high level of government morality?
- (2) Do you think the powers of the president should be increased?
- (3) Do you perceive a high level of respect and integrity in the office of the president today?

Due to the dearth of research on government morality and ethics, no concrete predictions about which political demographic factors affect attitude toward the topic are made. One might expect respondents' level of media exposure to influence attitudes, although the direction of influence could go either way: the media seems to over-emphasize ethics-related stories, but this very fact may produce a "saturation effect" whereby respondents become cynical about the media's objectivity. In one of the few studies attempted on the subject, Sigel (1966) tests the "ambivalence theory" of presidential leadership. Inquiring into the chief executive's moral character, the author finds that 79 percent of Detroiters favor an exemplary public and private life, while just 2 percent expect little morality from politicians. The seven questions comprising the government ethics index, also with agreement-disagreement responses, include the following:

- (1) Do you think the Hatch Act, barring Federal Civil Service employees from engaging in political campaign activities, should be repealed?
- (2) Do you think the media has been too exploitive with the Debategate and alleged sex tape stories?
- (3) Do you think the 1978 Ethics in Government Act, designed to regulate campaign practices and the conduct of elected and appointed officials, has served its purpose?
- (4) In general, do you believe that level of political support—whether high, medium, or low—is an important factor in a politician's decision to engage in corruptive practices?
- (5) Do you believe the Justice Department's Abscam investigation (regarding congressional influence-buying) was conducted ethically?
- (6) Do you think that political action committees, which donate money to presidential and congressional candidates, have led to less responsiveness on the part of politicians?

- (7) Do you believe the resignations of James Watt as Secretary of the Interior and Ann McGill Burford as Director of the Environmental Protection Agency in the Reagan Administration were mainly for ethical reasons?

Whereas the above hypotheses and responses will be examined using multiple regression methodology, I will use correlational analysis to test the relationship between the power and ethics indexes. In a pertinent *New York Times* article, John Herbers (1983) reviews several arguments purporting to explain a "slippage" in post-Watergate government morality. The first argument asserts that people are fed up with failed presidents and don't want to hear bad things about President Reagan. A second rationale holds that the country has trouble maintaining a high level of "righteous indignation" for long periods of time. Finally, another scholar suggests that the ethics of business have become the ethics of Washington under Reagan. As a final part of the empirical analysis, I will examine response by the "elite" student group to a survey item asking them to rate the importance of qualities of an ideal president (1 to 7 scale, responses ranging from very important to not important). Hence, my study seeks to confirm earlier evidence of the impact of political demographic factors on attitudes about the presidency; to explore the effect of the above variables on attitudes about presidential power and government ethics, as well as probing the link between these two areas; and to replicate the findings of prior studies dealing with favored personal qualities in chief executives.

VI. RESULTS

Tables 4 through 6 in the Appendix present the results of my analysis. By referring to the regression coefficients in Tables 4 and 5, we can evaluate the validity of the aforementioned hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 is not confirmed by the results; level of political knowledge is positively but insignificantly related to favorable attitudes about presidential power for both groups (hereafter termed elite and regular).

Hypothesis 2, proposing that there is an inverse relationship between amount of political participation and presidential power, is confirmed for the elite group only. But I also found that level of participation is positively and significantly related to favorable opinions about government ethics in the regular student sample, as is strength of partisanship (whether the respondents identify themselves as strong Democrats or strong Republicans).

The third hypothesis is likewise substantiated by the findings, as level of political support is positively related to agreement with the presidential power index in both student samples. Conservative political ideology is positively and significantly related to attitudes about the latter topic in the regular sample, although such a result may be perpetuated by interpreting the power-related questions in terms of the incumbent chief executive. Further, level of media exposure is positively and significantly linked to favorable attitudes about government ethics in both samples, but is also similarly related to agreement with the presidential power questions in the regular student sample.

There appears to be a great deal of difference in the explanatory power of regression equations between the elite and regular samples. More than half of the variation in the dependent variables is explained by the political demographic factors in the elite group. Although the regression equations are significant at the .01 probability level for both groups and both dependent variables, the explanatory power of the power and ethics regression models is much less for the students in the introductory courses.

The prediction equation for the power-elite model becomes: Y (attitudes about presidential power) = 25.70 + .11x1 (political knowledge) + .21x2 (political interest) + .09x3 (ideology) - .60x4 (political participation) + .06x5 (media exposure) + .46x6 (diffuse political support) + .17x7 (specific political support) + .02x8 (political efficacy) + .16x9 (strength of partisanship). Note that the elite sample is asked to distinguish between specific (incumbent) and diffuse (system) political support. The variables with the highest beta values (standardized coefficients), and therefore having the greatest independent impact on the dependent variable are political participation (-.60), diffuse support (.44), and political interest (.30). The political demographic variables together increase the predictability of the model by .68.

The prediction equation for the power-regular model is: Y (attitudes about presidential power) = 18.93 + .04x1 (political knowledge) + .05x2 (political interest) - .39x3 (ideology) + .00x4 (political participation) + .06x5 (media exposure) + .29x6 (diffuse support) - .07x7 (political efficacy) + .25x8 (strength of partisanship). Political support (.29) and ideology (-.15) have the greatest independent impact on attitudes favoring presidential power among this group. Here the variables increase the predictability of the model by .23. The prediction equation for the ethics-elite model is: Y (attitudes about government ethics) = 80.35 + .34x1 (political knowledge) - .18x2 (political interest) + .55x3 (ideology) - .15x4 (political participation) + .67x5 (media exposure) + .52x6 (diffuse support) + .04x7 (specific political support) + 1.22x8 (political efficacy) + 2.16x9 (strength of partisanship). The variables having the most independent impact on attitude in this model are media exposure (.61), political efficacy (.26), and strength of partisanship (.25). Surprisingly, the independent variables act to increase the predictability of the equation by 5.17.

Finally, the prediction equation for the predictability the ethics-regular model is: Y (attitudes about government ethics) = $47.02 - .08x_1$ (political knowledge) + $.14x_2$ (political interest) - $.47x_3$ (ideology) + $.18x_4$ (media exposure) - $.04x_5$ (diffuse support) - $.05x_6$ (political efficacy) + $1.05x_7$ (strength of partisanship). Political participation (.19) and media exposure (.16) have the greatest impact on agreement with the government ethics questions. The variables in this model increase the predictability of the regression equation by 1.27.

The correlation coefficients show that the dependent variable indexes are positively, albeit moderately related for both samples in the analysis (.30 in the elite sample; .23 in the regular sample). Such a finding is consistent with the theoretical basis of presidential power. That is, aspects of both power and authority are integrated in definitions of the concept. The authority component contains the premise that political obligation to accept the power of the president is accompanied by the recognition that power is based on consent of the governed and subject to rule of law (Hoff, 1984). The fact that the two attitude measures are not inversely related seems to mitigate any bias arising from the timing of the study.

Table 6 in the Appendix furnishes the percent of the elite sample identifying qualities of an ideal president as very important. Not surprisingly, honesty and integrity tops the list (69.2 percent identifying this quality as very important to the concept of an ideal president), followed by administrative and political ability (64.1 percent). Conversely, slightly over 5 percent of the elite sample regard making use of constitutional and extra constitutional powers as a very important characteristic contributing to an ideal president.

VII. DISCUSSION

I believe three primary implications can be drawn from my work. First, there appears to be more consistency in over-time attitudes toward the office and incumbent than change. Notwithstanding the natural interdependence between office and incumbent, future studies in this area should hone in on factors which may affect both entities in the same fashion. Second, by comparing the results from Kernell et al.'s (1975) study with my findings, we have observed that dispositional factors such as level of political participation and political support have consistent effects on attitudes about presidential power from one duration to the next. It is the obligation of subsequent research to test for regularities in the way demographic factors impact on attitudes about power as well as toward government ethics, using a more representative sample. Third, my study substantiated the high regard most Americans have for honesty as a personal quality in a president. The modest correlation between attitudes about presidential power and government ethics suggests that honesty may be more critical to the political power of the incumbent than government morality is to the presidency as an institution. Still, few would doubt that negative views of a president's honesty can adversely influence opinions toward the office.

Webster's New World Dictionary (1977) defines constitution as "the system of basic laws and principles of government." As long as American presidents must operate under this structure, popular support for the chief executive is crucial; so too are its precepts and proclivities amenable to scientific study.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Compendium/Typology of Literature on Presidential Power

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Variables and Dependent Variables

Table 3: Political Demographic Factors and Dependent Variables

Table 4: Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors: Political Demographic Factors and Power Index

Table 5: Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors: Political Demographic Factors and Ethics Index

Table 6: Percent of Elite Sample (N=39) Identifying Qualities of an Ideal President as Very Important

Table 1
Compendium/Typology of Literature on Presidential Power

TIME PERIOD	SAMPLE SIZE	CLASSIFICATION
1954-1964	16	4E-; 5E+; 7SA
1965-1971	11	2E-; 3E+; 6SA
1972-1976	10	4E-; 0E+; 6SA
1977-1986	18	1E-; 2E+; 15SA
Totals	55	11E-; 10E+; 34SA

Abbreviations

(E+): Positive Evaluation of Presidential Power

(E-): Negative Evaluation of Presidential Power

(SA): Strategic Assessment of the Sources, Techniques and Outcomes of Presidential Power

Source: Adapted from Hoff (1984)

Table 2 Socio-Demographic Variables and Dependent Variables*

OCCUPATION	EDUCATION	RELIGION	RACE	GENDER	AGE	CLASS	
I Like	-.405	.398	.295	.004	.315	-.206	-.339
R or W	-.434	.420	.211	.123	.330	-.181	-.305
Rally	-.360	.342	.153	.153	.420	-.163	-.330

*All figures are product-moment correlations.

Source: Kernell et al., 1975

Table 3
Political Demographic Factors and Dependent Variables*

	Political Knowledge	Political Participation	Political Support
I Like	-.345	-.137	.537
R or W	-.390	-.263	.561
Rally	-.373	-.265	.502

*All figures are product-moment correlations

Source: Kernell et al., 1975

Table 4
Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors: Political Demographic Factors and Power Index

POWER-ELITE	POWER-REGULAR
Constant 25.70	Constant 18.93
Knowledge .11 (.22)	Knowledge .04 (.08)
Interest .21 (.15)*	Interest .05 (.05)
Ideology .09 (.30)	Ideology -.39 (.18)***
Participation -.60 (.18)***	Participation .00 (.09)
Media Exposure .06 (.07)	Media Exposure .06 (.03)***
Diffuse Support .46 (.16)***	Diffuse Support .29 (.06)***
Specific Support .17 (.09)***	
Efficacy .02 (.28)	Efficacy -.07 (.07)
Strength of Partisanship .16 (.50)	Strength Partisanship .25 (.25)
<hr/>	
N=39	N=203
R ² =.55***	R ² =.18***
Standard Error=3.02	Standard Error=3.34

*significant at .10 level

**significant at .05 level

***significant at .01 level

Source: The author

Table 5
Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors: Political Demographic Factors and Ethics Index

ETHICS-ELITE	ETHICS-REGULAR
Constant 80.75	Constant 47.02
Knowledge .34 (.53)	Knowledge -.08 (.21)
Interest -.18 (.37)	Interest .14 (.14)
Ideology .55 (.75)	Ideology -.47 (.46)
Participation -.15 (.45)	Participation .54 (.22)***
Media Exposure .67 (.18)***	Media Exposure .18 (.09)***
Diffuse Support .52 (.40)	Diffuse Support -.04 (.18)
Specific Support .04 (.23)	
Efficacy 1.22 (.69)***	Efficacy -.05 (.37)
Strength Partisanship 2.16 (1.24)***	Strength Partisanship 1.05 (.62)***
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N=39	N=203
R ² =.52***	R ² =.15***
Standard Error=7.51	Standard Error=8.41

*significant at .10 level

**significant at .05 level

***significant at .01 level

Source: The author

Table 6
Percent of Elite Sample (N=39) Identifying Qualities of an Ideal President As Very Important

1. Honesty and Integrity=69.2
2. Administrative and Political Ability=64.1
3. Concern for Human Welfare=59.0
4. Activeness=59.0
5. Defends Human Rights=53.8
6. Moral=46.1
7. Ability to Inspire; Charisma=35.9
8. Overall Personality=33.3
9. Sensitivity to Racial Problems=25.6
10. Partisanship=10.3
11. Makes Use of Constitutional and Extraconstitutional Powers=5.1

Source: The author

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