Measuring the Effect of Bipartisan Support for Foreign Policy Initiatives in the Senate on U.S. Policy Success

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Measuring the Effect of Bipartisan Support for Foreign Policy Initiatives in the Senate on U.S. Policy Success

by

Emily Fitkin

Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

Dr. Leonard Ray

Department of International Studies

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Louisiana State University & Agricultural and Mechanical College
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Abstract
This study investigates the influence of the Senate on the success of U.S. foreign policy initiatives. Specifically, it aims to answer the question of whether bipartisan legislative support for individual foreign policy initiatives affects the credibility of U.S. foreign policy signals. Extant literature examines the behavior of domestic institutions and the relationship among them, along with how states establish credibility. This study builds on existing scholarship by determining whether bipartisanship in the Senate suggests unified institutional and public support, which would facilitate actionable policy and communicate resolve to external actors. I hypothesize that there is a relationship between high bipartisan approval on foreign policy initiatives and their efficacy. To evaluate my theoretical argument, roll call votes on major foreign policy initiatives from 1989-2021 are used in conjunction with novel data that includes the success of each initiative. An ordered logit analysis was conducted to test my hypothesis. The results suggest that cohesive Senate voting behavior does not have a positive effect on U.S. foreign policy efficacy.
I. Introduction

As rising powers pose potential challenges to the influence of the United States, the world is experiencing a marked shift away from the established unipolar system. With its hegemony in decline, it is increasingly important to understand factors that influence the ability of the U.S. to further its interests in the world. This unique circumstance informed the decision to limit this study to the U.S. The implications of domestic activity on foreign policy are often overlooked, especially on the level of the legislature. Consequently, it is not well understood whether bipartisan support in the Senate for such initiatives has an impact on the success of these policies in practice. Does bipartisanship demonstrate unity between the legislative and executive branches? When there is an established consensus between both parties regarding how to approach an issue, do external actors interpret this as a signal of strong commitment by the United States? Is one party more likely to support an opposing administration than the other? This study aims to address these questions to understand effects on U.S. foreign policy execution from a domestic lens.

Scholars have explored the evolution of Senate involvement in foreign policy issues after World War II, identifying a trend of increased involvement over this period. Several theories of voting patterns have been applied to the legislature to evaluate the potential impact of its changing role. Some scholars argue that voting patterns are circumstantial; inconsistent behavior is identified as the result of current events, the legislators’ political affiliations, or whether the policy in question is foreign or domestic (Stoll, 1987; Poole and Rosenthal, 1984; Levitt, 1996; Bryan and Tama, 2021). Other scholarship contains more general arguments that instead identify and explain a trend of perceived stability, such as the theory politicians rarely change their voting patterns, regardless of whether they represent different constituencies throughout their careers (Howell and Rogowski, 2013; Glazer and Robbins, 1985).
Scholars have also identified signaling strategies that establish credibility, such as hand-tying and audience costs. Another important factor that may result in heightened external perception of commitment is regime type. The democratic credibility debate is a key example of how this topic appears in current scholarship and is relevant to the context of this study. Proponents of the democratic credibility theory argue that since elected officials are susceptible to public opinion, they are more likely to vote in ways that represent the interests of their constituents in order to stay in office. When the public is involved in issues, the government acts in a way that reflects popular opinion. This feature of democracy establishes audience costs, which arguably increase the credibility of democracies, such as the United States (Fearon 1994; Cowhey, 1993; Chan et. al, 2021). Detractors claim that the evidence used to support the theory does not exclusively measure threat success (Downes and Sechser, 2012), and that the theory itself fails to consider inherent obstacles to swift mobilization that could diminish the imminence and potency of any threats made by a democratic regime (Rosato, 2003). By using these existing streams of literature as the base of this study, I aim to understand and explain whether a link exists between bipartisanship on foreign policy issues and foreign policy success.

States are incentivized to establish foreign policy to maintain their power, status, and avoid costly conflict. The efficacy of foreign policy can be understood as how well the sending state meets its intended objectives, or, in other words, how extensively the target state conforms to the sender’s objectives. A major determinant of outcome is how credible external actors perceive the commitment made by the sending state. Credibility is often established through signaling strategies, but other factors may be taken into account when assessing resolve. For several reasons, domestic institutions may be an important indicator of the level of commitment a state assigns to its foreign policy. The Senate may be an understated expression of resolve by the U.S. through displays.
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of unity or division as foreign policy initiatives are voted on. When the Senate shows bipartisan support for an initiative, it may indicate unity between the legislative and executive branches. It may also signify public support for the issue, suggesting audience costs for the U.S. should they back down from executing their policy. Bipartisanship in the Senate also serves as a strong base for future action and mobility in relation to the commitment. This study tests whether there is a positive relationship between bipartisan support for initiatives in the Senate and American foreign policy success.

To determine the relationship between my independent and dependent variables, I use an ordered logit model because my dependent variable, degree of foreign policy success, is categorical. The data used to measure these variables is derived from the U.S. Senate archives and a novel data set that includes major U.S. foreign policy initiatives from 1989-2021. The findings of this analysis do not reject the null hypothesis.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In the abstract, I give a brief outline of my study and its relevance to the field. The literature review outlines the key points of existing scholarship related to my research, and identifies how the results of this study build on prior knowledge. In the theoretical argument, I explore potential explanations of the relationship between my variables. The methods section defines the variables included in this study, as well as why I chose the method used to conduct my analysis. To conclude, I summarize my findings and their implications for future research avenues.

II. Current State of Literature

Scholarship in the field of international relations explores the relationship between the behavior of domestic institutions outside of the executive, establishing credibility, and foreign policy efficacy. Though existing scholarship analyzes each of these factors independently, there is
no synthesis demonstrating the link between legislative voting patterns and the success of foreign policy. Three streams of literature are central to addressing my research question: the role of the legislature in foreign policy, relationships between domestic institutions and the public, and bargaining literature. The impact of bipartisanship in the legislature has not been explored in the context of foreign policy efficacy.

Scholarship has given much attention to the identification of factors that have affected the increasing authority of the legislature in American foreign policy. Matters of international affairs were generally left to the executive until after World War II (Henehan, 2000), despite the Constitutional authority delegated to the Senate over appropriations as a check on presidential power. The emergence of the United States as a major power has played an important role in this shift of legislative influence on foreign policy. The evolution of the power-sharing dynamic between the legislative and executive branches increases the effect of the Senate on determining the approach to such issues. However, the role of the Senate is best understood by viewing the legislature as the intermediary between public opinion and development of foreign policy by the executive (Zoellick, 1999), meaning their influence may be more indicative of the views of their constituents.

Scholars identify media coverage as another influence on increasing legislative activity in foreign policy. Concern among the electorate regarding individual issues increases as reporting on those issues increases (Ribeiro et. al, 2021). An approach to understanding why the end of World War II marked the inflection point of legislative behavior argues that media attention towards foreign policy increased, but in the form of soft news. Information on international affairs began reaching Americans in the form of dramatic entertainment, resulting in increased investment in the topic and leading citizens to assign greater value to politicians’ views on such policies during
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election periods than in the past (Baum, 2000). With the rise of the digital age, activity relating to these issues has increased along with domestic concern regarding foreign policy.

Scholarship examining voting patterns of domestic institutions offers a potential angle for insight into the strength and ability of foreign policy. Various streams of literature present explanations for voting behavior, with the median voter theorem formerly serving as the default argument. The theorem holds that elected officials are self-interested actors who use policy as a means to an end of winning elections. The result is that politicians tend to converge toward a more moderate platform when voting on issues in the legislature to satisfy the majority of their constituents (Downs, 1957). The aim for career politicians, conforming to the median voter theorem, is to avoid alienating their electorate by taking a less extreme approach. The theorem has been rejected with evidence demonstrating that officials representing the same constituency, but with different party affiliations, have drastically different voting behaviors (Poole and Rosenthal, 1984; Levitt, 1996). It has also been disproven by taking into account indifferent voters and the traction of third party candidates with extreme voters (Jones et. al, 2022).

There are other alternatives to the median voter theorem. One approach argues that a trend of bipartisan support for the administration’s foreign policy occurs during war and times of crisis. This branch of literature suggests that the legislature tends to rally behind the policy of the executive during times of war and major crises (Stoll, 1987). However, this view has been discounted by the potential for the executive to only introduce policies they expect the legislature to agree to, instead of the more extreme ideas the administration may favor in reality.

Another stream of scholarship contends that career politicians do not drastically change their voting behaviors while still in office, regardless of any major events that occur during their years of service (Howell and Rogowski, 2013). The behavior may originate from party loyalty or
commitment to individual ideology. The consistency argument is made more robust by evidence that legislative voting behavior remains consistent when the same official represents different constituencies throughout their career (Glazer and Robbins, 1985). A consistent voting pattern would make any vote that diverged from the norm to be a more impactful event. When Congress is sharply divided on an issue, the lack of consensus is likely an indicator of opposition between legislature and the executive (Henehan, 2000). Scholarship suggests that voting behavior on foreign policy issues in democratic institutions has an influence on external perceptions of a democratic state’s resolve.

Bryan and Tama (2021) present another perspective on Senate voting behavior, contending that voting patterns differ based on whether the initiative in question is foreign or domestic policy. They find that bipartisanship, both in support and opposed to the position of the administration, is both more pronounced and more likely to occur for international issues than domestic ones. Scholarship on the topic often centers around the “two presidencies”, or the question of if the President is more likely to receive bipartisan support from Congress on foreign or domestic policy. The degree and context of bipartisan policy support is also relevant for understanding the relationship between the legislative and executive branches in relation to foreign policy.

Literature exploring the ability of a state to signal its resolve in foreign policy is central to this study. Domestic institutions of democracies in particular can serve as a key factor for external actors when evaluating the level of commitment held by the state in question (Cowhey, 1993), and have the power to dictate the success or failure of strategic interactions. An important aspect of credibility assessment is the interdependent expectations states have for each other (Schelling, 1997), which can be developed by monitoring the activity of domestic institutions. Scholars have long debated whether democratic states are perceived as more credible in comparison to other
regime types, an approach known as the democratic credibility hypothesis. Arguments in favor of this approach note that free elections and domestic institutions characteristic of democracies make elected officials vulnerable to public opinion (Fearon 1994; Cowhey, 1993; Chan et. al, 2021). This characteristic makes it difficult for legislators to break from the views of their constituents, making foreign policy commitments more credible when they are supported. This suggests that audience costs make it more difficult for a democratic state to back down from commitments.

Scholarship opposed to the democratic credibility theory argues that democracies have no more success than other regime types when making threats, since evidence supporting the theory does not distinguish threat success from military victories (Downes and Sechser, 2012). The institutional logic for the theory also fails to discount the ability of democracies to mobilize quickly and unpredictably (Rosato, 2003), which casts further doubt on this approach. Another challenge to democratic credibility is legislative voting patterns, which are not consistently bipartisan in the context of foreign policy issues. The range of scholarship exploring the democratic credibility hypothesis informs my study by showing the interaction between the behavior of domestic institutions and conditions for foreign policy success.

A common signaling strategy is hand-tying, which can be accomplished through means such as investing the domestic audience in a particular foreign policy action. The state can then use the support of citizens to establish audience costs should they fail to follow through on their commitment (Baum, 2004). When the state puts itself in a position where it is difficult to do anything but honor the official policy, they improve outside perceptions of credibility. The investment of the domestic audience is significant to this study because it plays an important role in determining bipartisanship in the legislature.

Gap in Literature
Though extant scholarship examines state credibility and voting patterns in democratic institutions, the gap in literature begins at the link between these variables and foreign policy success. Scholarship concentrates on influences to patterns of legislative voting behavior, which may support the findings of this study, but does not consider bipartisanship as an independent variable with an impact on policy efficacy. Current literature examines the influence of democracy on success and credibility of U.S. commitment. Instead, this study aims to determine influences on credibility that originate from the legislature. Scholars have also established varying explanations for legislative voting patterns on foreign policy issues since World War II. I intend to build on this scholarship by examining data on voting behavior from 1989 to the present day, which may provide more robust support for existing theories on the subject.

My study aims to bridge this gap by examining the effect of Senate voting behavior since 1989 on the success of foreign policy, which is determined by whether the response of the target state matches the intended result of that policy. A positive correlation between failure of strategic actions made by the United States and increased dissent within the Senate may suggest that division in the legislature signals weaker resolve to target states. Alternatively, a relationship between the two is an indicator of disagreement with the executive, which likely belongs to one of the involved parties. This division may also demonstrate a lower level of commitment to external actors. A link between foreign policy failure and divisive legislative voting behavior would support arguments against the democratic credibility theory by demonstrating the potential for democratic institutions to erode perceived resolve, thus hindering favorable outcomes in foreign policy. If no effect of bipartisanship on foreign policy success is observed, however, then bipartisanship may not be considered a factor of resolve and therefore is not considered in developing the response of
the target state. This outcome would not reject the democratic credibility theory and may even serve as an indicator of its validity, which could be investigated through further analysis.

III. Theoretical Argument

The state is incentivized to develop an effective foreign policy to maintain status and avoid costly conflict. The effectiveness of foreign policy, which can be determined by how well it accomplishes its intended objectives, depends heavily on credibility. To show resolve and increase credibility, external actors examine the behavior of a state’s domestic institutions. Though literature has studied the effect of the executive on foreign policy credibility and success, the gap in understanding lies in determining the link between state credibility and legislative voting behavior. Bipartisanship on foreign policy issues can increase credibility because it is a potential indicator of unity between the legislative and executive branches, as well as public support for the policy. The underlying causes of bipartisanship serve as the base for more effective execution of policies. These factors may also imply a level of public investment in the issue that would result in significant audience costs should the United States fail to follow through on its commitments.

Motivation for a state to improve its status on the world scene lies in the desire for its leadership to maintain power and avoid conflict. As the influence of a country declines, so does its ability to further international interests through foreign policy. The way citizens perceive their national government is affected by fluctuations between success and failure in asserting global authority. Consequently, state leadership is incentivized to establish an effective foreign policy to avoid losing the esteem of both its citizens and external actors, along with the costs of conflict. The effectiveness of foreign policy is best measured by its credibility, which is created when external actors expect for a state to follow through on their commitments.
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States turn to signaling to bolster the appearance of their resolve and, conversely, use signals to assess the resolve of other states. The cycle of reciprocal expectations makes it important for states to commit enough resources and support to their course of action so that they would incur irrational losses if they withdraw from their commitment. The two most common signaling strategies are hand-tying and sinking costs. Democracies, however, may have an alternative method to express their resolve using domestic institutions. Compared to other regime types, citizens and the legislature in democratic states have a greater capacity to express dissent in meaningful ways, which can influence external perceptions of foreign policy credibility. By showing a willingness and ability to take swift action on their policies, democracies can use consensus within their institutions to signal commitment. The U.S. is in a unique position compared to other democratic regimes, as the world moves away from the post-Cold War system where it enjoyed hegemony. Since the U.S. is experiencing a decline in power, other states are paying attention to its foreign policy and domestic activity to inform their reactions to this changing circumstance. Their focus may shift to domestic politics, leading external actors to examine the behavior of elected officials, the relationship between branches of government, and the extent of public support for foreign policy and the administration.

Unity between the two parties in the Senate indicates unity between the legislative and executive branches, since the President likely identifies with one group (Henehan, 2000). The extent to which the target state is influenced by U.S. policy depends in part on how united the legislature is in relation to that policy objective. When institutional friction is at a minimum, democracies are generally at their most capable in terms of executing their policies. The result is swifter and easier action to back up commitments, which makes external actors more obedient to U.S. foreign policy goals.
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Bipartisan support for the administration’s foreign policy also establishes a strong base for future actions. Consensus across party lines regarding the administration’s foreign policy indicates heightened investment in the issue. As a result, other states are more likely to expect the U.S. to follow through not only on their current commitments, but also on ones that may involve escalation if the target state(s) fail to comply with the current demands. Increased U.S. interference in the matter is a potentially costly outcome, and the apparent willingness of the legislature to support the administration’s position brings such costs to the forefront when the target state is making foreign policy decisions. The expectation for the U.S. to act decisively results in a more authoritative policy that is taken seriously by external actors, which increases the likelihood of success in reaching its objectives.

Public support for the policy is enhanced through consensus among institutions of state government. If there is bipartisan agreement on how to address an issue, citizens are more willing to trust that the chosen approach is the most suitable. This consensus reduces the probability for any unpursued policy to be publicized, avoiding any potential frustration caused by not choosing the other option (Harbridge-Yong and Paris, 2020). Alternatively, bipartisan agreement on the administration’s foreign policy may serve as a measure of domestic support for the policy instead of the cause of support. The legislature serves as the intermediary between public opinion and policy (Zoellick, 1999), so consensus in the Senate may represent consensus among the general population. When the public is invested in a particular foreign policy measure, external actors perceive it as more credible. By involving public opinion on the issue, the U.S. has established audience costs that make it more difficult to change course and thus increases its credibility.

Another consideration of the relationship between bipartisan support and the public on policy efficacy is the rally effect. According to Mueller, the rally effect unites the nation in the
context of international issues and is most prominent when there is potential for armed conflict (1970). The result is increased presidential approval ratings and improved public support for the administration’s foreign policy (ibid). Media coverage also plays an important role in perpetuating the rally effect by publicizing moments of bipartisanship. When a narrative of cooperation in the legislature is broadcasted for foreign policy matters, domestic support is likely to increase because of the sense of unity through national identity. To retain the favor of their constituents, legislatures use the general support for the policy to their advantage. They aim to appeal to their voters by supporting an overtly popular policy, leading to bipartisanship. Though domestic politics influences legislators’ motives, consensus is still a basis for action. As a result, external actors interpret this consensus as a greater willingness to act.

After the United States establishes domestic commitment to a particular policy among both its citizens and its institutions, it is easier for external actors to believe in the strength of its resolve. There is an expectation for the United States to follow through on their commitments, since they have put themselves in a position to incur significant costs should they back out. The target state can then reasonably deem the policy to be credible, and the expectation for action from the United States can now play a role in the target state’s actions moving forward. The ability to influence the decision making process of the target state in the desired manner classifies the policy as a success, proving that agreement among the legislature and executive serves as a tool for action and leads to more successful foreign policy.

Alternatively, it can be argued that dissent is part of the democratic process and bipartisanship in the legislature, or lack thereof, should not be considered a measure of resolve. This explanation would support failure to reject the null hypothesis. While there is power in consensus, it does not necessarily have to be bipartisan. Further, the executive has the principal
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role in establishing official foreign policy, and national interests are best served when this policy appears authoritative to external actors. The legislature has incentive to agree on these issues to maintain the international status of their country, which has a direct impact on their individual power and constituents, but this agreement does not have to be bipartisan.

While a popular view is that “politics end at water’s edge”, it is also important to consider the benefits and reasons for disagreement over foreign policy issues. Even when the majority supports an initiative of the administration, those who do not are creating opportunities for discussion. By presenting a challenge to the predominant attitude, detractors are helping strengthen foreign policy. As a result, the initiative may be more fortified upon implementation, despite not having bipartisan support.

On the other hand, the policies with bipartisan support may be mild and result in relatively insignificant action, which can also result in minimal success for bipartisan initiatives. Especially in times of war and crises, the executive wants to initiate action as quickly as possible. A reasonable way to accelerate the process is to introduce policies that they are confident will easily pass through the legislature (Stoll, 1987). One consequence of this swift response is that it is often less extreme than what the administration wanted. In such circumstances, the result may be that the U.S. succeeds in achieving smaller foreign policy aims, such as officially condemning aggression abroad, but is unable to accomplish its major or long-term goals. The potential correlation between bipartisanship and weaker policy suggests that bipartisanship may not necessarily be an indicator of success.

**H0:** Bipartisan support in the Senate for foreign policy initiatives that align with the official position of the administration does not correlate with increased U.S. foreign policy success.
H1: Bipartisan support in the Senate for foreign policy initiatives that align with the official position of the administration correlates with increased U.S. foreign policy success.

H2: Bipartisan support in the Senate for foreign policy initiatives that oppose the official position of the administration correlates with decreased U.S. foreign policy success.

IV. Data & Methods

To measure the effect of bipartisan support for foreign policy in the Senate on the success of these policies in practice, I use data on Senate voting patterns and outcomes of major U.S. foreign policy initiatives. This study compares roll call votes in the Senate to the extent of foreign policy success to determine whether a relationship exists between the two. I have incorporated control variables to insulate my analysis from potential interference by other factors. By extending my study from 1989 to 2021, I am able to observe the dynamics of US foreign policy execution and development in the modern era, which facilitates identification of general trends and changes that occurred with the evolution of American foreign policy.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study is the effectiveness of U.S. foreign policy. Policy effectiveness is defined by the extent to which the U.S. accomplished its own objectives. A degree of success ranging from 1 to 5 is assigned to each initiative in the data set. Labels are designated by determining the level of conformity of target states to U.S. objectives. A score of -2 denotes “failure”, indicating that the policy did not influence target states in the desired manner, and instead resulted in the pursuit of actions mostly or completely against the intended goals of the U.S. A score of -1 classifies the initiative as a “moderate failure”, in which the target state did not comply
with U.S. objectives, but also did not respond in stark opposition. Policies coded as a 0 represent a “neutral” category where the target states’ behavior is indifferent toward U.S. foreign policy goals. A score of 1 identifies the initiative as “moderately successful”; the target state generally complied with the aims of the U.S. in these cases, but their response diverged on a few key points. A score of 2 classifies the policy as “successful” and is assigned when target states were compliant with most or all of U.S. core objectives. By defining success in tiers, I identify the degree of correlation between my variables with greater accuracy.

**Independent Variable**

The independent variable in this study is bipartisan support on foreign policy issues in the Senate. Bipartisan support is determined by examining Senate roll call votes on major foreign policy initiatives from 1989-2021. The votes are converted to percentages to account for abstentions. The percentage of votes in favor of the policy for each party determines its classification on a scale of 1 to 5. Initiatives with an average of 80-100% yea votes received a score of 1, which corresponds to the label “bipartisan support”. Initiatives classified as “bipartisan” must have majority support within both political parties. “Moderate support” identifies an initiative receiving 60-79.99% of supportive votes and a score of 2. An initiative with a score of 3 is labeled “polarized”, and received 40-59.99% yea votes. Initiatives with 20-39.99% votes in favor receive a label of “moderate opposition” and a score of 4. Finally, issues with a score of 5 had 0-19.99% votes in favor and were labeled “bipartisan opposition”. To match the scale of success, in which the positive number with the highest value indicates the greatest level of success, the bipartisan scale was flipped prior to analysis. This was done by subtracting 3 from the original bipartisan score, then taking the absolute value of the new scale to create the “bpartisan1” variable. Adjusting the scale aligned the bipartisanship to ascend along with the success score ensured the analysis
was done accurately. The range of issues spanning several decades improves the accuracy in determining the impact of this variable on foreign policy success. Each initiative also receives a label of “opposed” or “favorable” to determine its stance in relation to the administration’s foreign policy and ensure that unity among parties in the Senate and the executive is correctly evaluated. “Opposed” initiatives are identified in the data by a 0, while “favorable” initiatives received a 1 for this variable. This label is then compared to the voting patterns to determine whether the initiative and response of the Senate are aligned or opposed to the objectives of the administration. Since policies do not always align with the official position of the administration, a policy that receives bipartisan support may not be indicative of unity among domestic institutions.

To demonstrate the effect of my independent variable on my dependent variable, I use an ordered logit model. This method is useful to my study because my dependent variable, foreign policy success, is categorical and can be classified by degrees of success ranging from -2 to 2. This type of analysis renders a representation of the relationship between bipartisan support for foreign policy initiatives in the Senate and foreign policy success.

**Addressing Model Discrepancies**

An important discrepancy in this study is establishing the difference between lighter and more substantive policies, along with the limited number of observations. Initiatives that include little to no commitments and constitute a statement of the United States’ official position on an issue are likely to be less contested than those that involve major actions, such as sending troops abroad. This can skew the analysis because it may give the appearance of greater and more frequent bipartisan support on major foreign policy issues than is actually the case. To minimize the influence of this issue on the results of the study, initiatives are weighted based on the extent of
action and commitment they establish. Extending the scope of the data could make the results more robust.

Another potential impact on the results can be made by signaling costs already incurred by the U.S. Foreign policy success may be influenced by domestic public opinion surrounding the issue in question. If the domestic audience is supportive of U.S. objectives in the target state, then U.S. foreign policy commitments are more likely to be taken seriously because they have established audience costs. Prior engagement in objectives pursued in the target state may impact how U.S. resolve is perceived externally. Since the U.S. has already taken concrete actions towards their objectives in that state, incurring sunk costs, outside actors may be more likely to conclude that they will follow through on their policies. Such costs may be in the form of resources, or engagement in combat.

The extent to which the target state depends on U.S. imports may affect its response to American foreign policy. The target state may be more likely to conform to U.S. objectives if the trade network represents an important part of their economy and its viability depends on their response. As a result, states with higher percentages of American imports may be less willing to break from the demands and expectations of the U.S.

If the target state has established a defense pact with another state, they may be emboldened by the support and feel less restricted by American foreign policy. The knowledge that they have secured military commitment from another country can not only make the target state more confident, but can also reduce the extremity of expectations held by the United States regarding the state’s behavioral conformity. Only defense pact alliances are considered in this variable, since this is the only type of formal alliance that commits both states to military intervention on behalf of the other party.
V. Results

While the results indicate a positive relationship between bipartisanship and success, it is not statistically significant. Table 1 shows the ordered logit regression table for the dependent variable success and the independent variable of bipartisanship. Since the p-value is > 0.05, the analysis fails to reject the null hypothesis. However, this does not rule out a relationship between the independent and dependent variables. A relationship between these variables may be observable with a greater number of observations.

Table 1. Ordered logit regression for the dependent variable “Success” and independent variable “bipartisan1”.

```
. ologit success bpartisan1

Iteration 0: log likelihood = -45.921967
Iteration 1: log likelihood = -45.468953
Iteration 2: log likelihood = -45.468241
Iteration 3: log likelihood = -45.468241

Ordered logistic regression                       Number of obs  =      32
Log likelihood                       = -45.468241
LR chi2(1)                          =   0.91
Prob > chi2                      =   0.3408
Pseudo R2                           =   0.0099

------------------------------------------------------------------------------
success |      Coef.       Std. Err.     z     P>|z|     [95% Conf. Interval]
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
bpartisan1 |   .5557677      .5915383     0.94  0.347     -.6036261    1.715161
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
/cut1 |  -.5811009      .6804927    -1.914842    .052    .7526404    1.111724
/cut2 |   .0145131      .6646607     0.02  0.985     1.288198    1.317224
/cut3 |   .1454881      .6621489    -1.1523  0.248     1.443276    1.845562
/cut4 |   1.480408      .7050693     2.0946  0.035     0.0984979    2.862319
------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Table 2. Description of success variable based on the average success scores for each initiative.

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<th></th>
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<td>-2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
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</table>
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Table 3. Description of the “bipartisan” variable based on the average bipartisan scores for each initiative. The “bipartisan1” variable was derived from this variable.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Freq.</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cum.</th>
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<td>12.50</td>
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It is also important to consider an alternative method to measure bipartisanship. A measure often used to determine bipartisanship is by examining the number of votes in favor of an initiative by each political party and identifying whether a majority exists in both parties. If the majority of both parties is in favor, the next step would be determining the extent of support from both parties. While this is similar to the scale used in this study, it could yield more accurate results by examining the support by looking at votes on the party level, instead of the Senate as a whole.

Finally, the measure of success used in this study is subjective, which may impact the findings. Though initiatives were given success scores based on how well each one met its main
objectives, whether an initiative was successful can vary depending on the judge. This method could be made more robust by taking a random sample of multiple people and taking the average success score based on their responses.

Discussion

The results failed to reject the null hypothesis, suggesting that bipartisan support for an initiative does not necessarily affect its success. While the findings do not support my original hypothesis, this subsection offers alternative explanations for the results of this study.

The negligible impact of bipartisan support for foreign policy initiatives can potentially be explained by the notion that bipartisanship is not a necessary condition for actual and perceived unity between the legislative and executive branches. Though bipartisan support is a strong signal of unity to both external actors and the public, a simple majority is often effective in achieving a similar end. Since the executive has principal authority over foreign policy, it is important for the Senate to support the policy of the administration, but it is not a requirement for this support to be bipartisan. This is suggested by Table 2, which suggests a correlation between foreign policy efficacy and the President and Senate majority belonging to the same party. Since a shared political party generally indicates a shared agenda, this means they are very likely to coalesce in their support or opposition for any given initiative.

An alternative explanation for the findings is that external actors do not perceive polarization in the Senate as an indicator of low resolve, as long as the Senate votes in a manner that sufficiently supports the foreign policy of the administration. Though the Senate may not be in complete agreement or may even be deeply divided over an issue, when the majority votes in favor of the administration’s policy there is still a degree of unity indicated to external actors. Further, dissent within the Senate may be perceived externally as part of the democratic process,
and could even result in greater efficacy than initiatives enjoying bipartisan support. By reducing confirmation bias and encouraging open debate, disagreement in the Senate regarding foreign policy may result in a more robust final product and, as a result, more effective execution.

VI. Conclusion

States tend to avoid using force to further interests, opting instead to engage in diplomatic relations with external actors. For this approach to be successful, target states must trust the resolve of the sender. A common approach to communicate resolve is by making credible commitments with strategic signals. Bipartisan support for foreign policy issues in the Senate is not interpreted by external actors as a signal of U.S. commitment, since dissent is a cornerstone of the democratic process. Elected leaders may be more comfortable committing to the execution of a foreign policy initiative when it is agreed on by both the legislative and executive branches, but the legislative support does not have to be bipartisan. While unity on the domestic front may be significant in order to facilitate immediate or escalative action, it does not have to be bipartisan at the legislative level.

A key finding of this study is that while Senate support for an initiative can impact its efficacy, the support need not be bipartisan. This suggests that external actors likely view Senate voting behavior as an element of the democratic process, and do not assume lower resolve when an issue has majority, but not bipartisan, support in the Senate. The findings of this study indicate that while domestic politics is taken into account by other states as a potential influence on foreign policy direction, they do not strongly consider legislative bipartisanship as an indicator of resolve.

The results have several implications, the first of which is reduced emphasis on unity in the development of U.S. foreign policy. While it is important for political parties to collaborate, dissent is a healthy aspect of the democratic process that can prevent critical errors. However, the
effect of unity between the Senate and executive on the success of foreign policy in practice highlights the significance of some degree of unity.

Future research can extend the data back to 1945, to determine the effects of Senate bipartisanship on foreign policy from the post-WWII era to the present. Another avenue is to shift the focus of the independent variable to examine the effect of domestic public support on U.S. foreign policy success. Public opinion has a significant influence on the behavior of elected leaders, since their bid for re-election is largely dependent on the approval of their constituents. Therefore, domestic public support or opposition to a foreign policy initiative may reveal the degree of U.S. commitment to that course of action. Alternatively, the perspective of the independent variable can be broadened to include Congress as a whole. The broader perspective would help determine whether a compounding effect on foreign policy efficacy occurs when both chambers of the legislature support or oppose the foreign policy of the administration.
I. References


Measuring the Effect of Bipartisan Support for Foreign Policy Initiatives in the Senate on U.S. Policy Success


