

# The President and the Clerics: Interbranch Bargaining and Subcommittee Influence in Federal Appropriations\*

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## Abstract

Since the birth of modern political science, the power of the purse has been recognized as one of the most important institutional powers through which Congress constrains presidential ambitions. Related scholarship has debated the relevance of committee composition for legislative outcomes. In this study, we examine committee influence in the context of inter-branch bargaining over appropriations. We argue that the composition of House Appropriations subcommittees constrains the president's policy success. Using comprehensive new data on presidential budget requests and congressional appropriations for the U.S. federal government from 1972 to 2021, we test the hypothesis that presidents are less successful in realizing their preferred budgetary outcomes as the relevant subcommittee is more ideologically distant from the president. The results provide strong support for this expectation. Our findings offer new evidence about how the composition of legislative committees affects policy outcomes and illustrate a mechanism through which Congress limits the president's agenda-setter advantages in budgetary politics.

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The power of the purse is among the most important institutional powers granted to the United States Congress. The constitutional authority to regulate fiscal affairs is “the most far-reaching and effectual of all governmental powers” (Mikva 1986, 1) and has “long been regarded as the citadel of [legislative] supremacy” (Bryce 1995 [1888], 190). The power of the purse is also a key separation of powers constraint on the executive branch. Congressional appropriations power is “[o]ne of Congress’s main tools to push back at... presidential unilateralism” (Metzger 2021, 1153) and “the most important single curb in the Constitution on presidential power” (Corwin 1978, 134). Though some argue that the congressional power of the purse is less potent than is commonly claimed or than it once was (Ackerman and Hathaway 2011; Fisher 2000; Kriner 2014; Neumeister 2018), scholarship on the presidency and the separation of powers continues to emphasize Congress’s power over appropriations as a constraint on presidential behavior (e.g., Bolton and Thrower 2021; Howell 2005, 2023; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Stewart 1989).

In this paper, we study the nature of presidential influence over appropriations. Though Congress ultimately is responsible for enacting appropriations (subject to presidential approval, or by overriding a presidential veto), since the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921, the president initiates legislative activity by submitting a budget to Congress. This institutional change conferred new agenda-setting powers to the presidency (Dearborn 2019; Fisher 1975) and strengthened its influence over budgetary outcomes (Krause 2022). The president’s control over appropriations outcomes is not free from political and institutional constraints, however, as previous scholarship documents variation in the degree to which Congress accommodates presidents’ appropriations requests based on economic conditions (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1985*a*), interbranch disagreement in spending priorities (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1988), policy domain (Canes-Wrone, Howell and Lewis 2008), and the presence of war (Howell, Jackman and Rogowski 2013).

In the context of appropriations, we argue that the composition of the House Appropriations subcommittees constrains the president’s policy success. Given the tendency of Congress to delegate appropriations decisions to the relevant House subcommittees (Fenno 1966; Kingdon 1966;

MacMahon 1943), we posit that Congress is less accommodating of presidential requests as subcommittee members are more ideologically distant from the president. Our argument contributes to previous scholarship in three ways. First, while classical perspectives argue that committee responses to presidential budget requests reflect norms of fiscal responsibility (Fenno 1966), our account characterizes subcommittee members as evaluating presidents' budget requests based on their ideological orientation vis-à-vis the president. Second, we highlight a mechanism through which the separation of powers limits presidents' ability to secure their policy goals, complementing previous scholarship that shows how Congress constrains the administrative presidency through other means (see, e.g., Acs 2019; Ban, Park and You 2023; Bolton and Thrower 2019; Howell 2003; Kriner and Schwartz 2008; Kriner and Schickler 2016; MacDonald 2010; Potter and Shipan 2017; Yackee and Yackee 2009). Third, we contribute to scholarship that theorizes how committee composition affects the policies adopted by Congress (Adler 2000; Krehbiel 1990, 1991; McGrath and Ryan 2019; Shepsle and Weingast 1985, 1987). Though our focus is on the United States, our perspective relates to scholarship on the role of parliamentary committees in constraining ministries and executive agencies (see, e.g., Longley and Davidson 1998).<sup>1</sup>

We introduce comprehensive new data on presidential budget requests and enacted appropriations from fiscal years 1972 to 2021. We match these data to the subcommittee exercising jurisdiction over each request and characterize the ideological composition of each subcommittee's membership. We test the hypothesis that presidents are less successful in realizing their pre-

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<sup>1</sup>Like the U.S., most European parliaments operate through specialized committees (Laundy 1989; Mezey 1979). According to Longley and Davidson (1998, 4), the growth in parliamentary committees in the 1980s and 1990s was driven by the desire to better oversee and influence the operations of government ministries and executive agencies. Moreover, concerns about committee composition historically have led some parliaments to use lotteries as a means of randomly assigning members to them (Cirone and Van Coppenolle 2019), suggesting at least the impression that committee membership affects how committees operate.

ferred budgetary outcomes as a subcommittee is more ideologically distant from the president. The data provide strong support for this hypothesis: enacted appropriations are less reflective of the president's budget request when the ideological distance increases between the president and the median subcommittee member. These results are robust across a range of model specifications, estimation strategies, and measurement choices. We show that these results are not driven by strategic presidential behavior in developing budgetary requests, nor are they driven by variation in partisan control of Congress. Additional analyses show that subcommittee composition affects presidential budgetary success during periods of both divided and unified government and in ways that are relatively consistent across time. We also explore variation in the relationship between subcommittee composition and interbranch bargaining outcomes over time and across issue areas. Finally, we show that our results should be interpreted as evidence of the institutional power wielded by appropriations subcommittees. Our findings provide new evidence about how (sub)committee composition affects policy outcomes and illustrate a mechanism through which Congress constrains the president's agenda-setter advantage in budgetary politics.

## **The Politics of Appropriations**

Presidents have political incentives to direct policymaking activity within the federal bureaucracy. By staffing the bureaucracy with ideological allies (Lewis 2008), creating and restructuring administrative agencies (Howell and Lewis 2002; Lewis 2003), centralizing the policymaking process in the White House (Moe 1985), and issuing unilateral directives (Howell 2003), among others, presidents have opportunities to create new policies and reshape existing ones. Yet the scope of presidents' policy influence is limited by their need for funding, without which their initiatives cannot be executed. As such, Congress's power over appropriations is an important institutional mechanism for constraining presidents' efforts to control the executive branch. As McConachie (1898, 235) recognized more than a century ago, it is "in the direction of administra-

tive activity through the power of granting or withholding money...that Congress finds by far its greatest power over the Executive...”

The relationship between presidents and Congress in the appropriations process has evolved over US history. In the nation’s early years, department officials sought discretion by seeking lump sum grants of appropriations while Congress argued for specificity in appropriations as a means of performing its oversight role. The expansion of the standing committee system between 1814 and 1816 subsequently reflected Congress’s efforts to better oversee executive branch expenditures (see Galloway 1961, 174-176). By the turn of the twentieth century, the appropriations process was thoroughly decentralized, with each department submitting separate requests and nine separate House committees considering them (Krause and Jin 2020). The 1921 Budget and Accounting Act overhauled this system and placed new fiscal responsibility and institutional power in the president’s hands by requiring that they submit annual budget requests to Congress. So doing, the president gained formal authority to set the terms of appropriations debates and exercise greater authority over the nation’s spending (Dearborn 2019; Fisher 1975; Krause 2022; Whittington and Carpenter 2003). These basic terms govern the relationship between presidents and Congress in contemporary appropriations politics.

Scholars have identified a number of factors associated with the degree to which Congress accommodates the president’s budgetary requests. Kiewiet and McCubbins (1988) show that veto power conveys asymmetric benefits to the president in bargaining over appropriations, as presidents have greater influence in setting appropriations policy when they prefer less spending to Congress, but are less influential when they prefer more spending relative to Congress.<sup>2</sup> Canes-Wrone (2001) shows that presidents are more successful in achieving their budgetary goals on proposals for which they have sought public support. Other studies show that Congress better

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<sup>2</sup>Leveraging variation in veto override requirements over US states, McGrath, Rogowski and Ryan (2018) show that state budgets more closely reflect gubernatorial budget requests in states that require larger supermajorities to override a gubernatorial veto.

accommodates presidential preferences during periods of war (Howell, Jackman and Rogowski 2013, chapter 5) and for agencies concerned with foreign affairs (Canes-Wrone, Howell and Lewis 2008) and military deployments (Milner and Tingley 2015, chapter 4).

We build upon this scholarship and study the mechanisms through which the congressional appropriations process constrains presidential influence over budgetary outcomes. In particular, we argue that the composition of the House Appropriations Committee, especially its various subcommittees, affects the degree to which Congress accommodates the president's budget requests. Previous research has found some evidence that the partisan composition of the House affects the president's influence over budgetary outcomes (Canes-Wrone, Howell and Lewis 2008; Howell, Jackman and Rogowski 2013) but has focused on the composition of the chamber rather than on the composition of its committees.<sup>3</sup> While scholars have long recognized the importance of the appropriations subcommittees for enacting the nation's budget (e.g., Fenno 1966; Geiger 1994; Kingdon 1966; MacMahon 1943), previous work has not evaluated whether and how their composition affects their evaluations of the president's budget requests.

## **The Appropriations Subcommittees as a Source of Presidential Constraint**

We argue that Congress better accommodates a president's budgetary requests when members of the House Appropriations Committee are more ideologically congruent with the president. We focus specifically on the composition of the appropriations subcommittees who review each of the president's requests. Over the last century, the House Appropriations Committee has been organized as 10 to 13 subcommittees, each of which has jurisdiction for appropriations

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<sup>3</sup>More generally, scholars have studied the impact of divided government on a variety of outcomes related to presidential power (e.g., Edwards, Barrett and Peake 1997; Howell 2003; Howell and Pevehouse 2007; Kriner and Schickler 2016; MacDonald 2013), often (though not always) finding that presidents exert less influence when Congress is controlled by the opposite party.

related to expenditures for some set of institutions within the federal government.<sup>4</sup> The subcommittees review the president's spending requests, consult the financial estimates compiled by both the Office of Management and Budget and the Congressional Budget Office, and issue reports that recommend spending levels and provide instructions for their expenditure.

Congress evaluates the president's budget primarily within these subcommittees. Previous scholarship argues that "the actualities of the House [Appropriations] committee's work lie so largely in its eleven subcommittees" (MacMahon 1943, 177) and observes that while "the president's budget is thoroughly analyzed at a micro-budgetary or agency level" in the Appropriations Committee, "the subcommittees are the most important actors" (Geiger 1994, 398). Even more pointedly, Kingdon (1966, 68) noted that "congressional decisions on agency budgets are made neither by the whole congress, nor even by the full appropriations committees, but by subcommittees of the appropriations committee" (see also Davis, Dempster and Wildavsky 1966, 530). These accounts make clear that the subcommittees are the locus of congressional decision making on appropriations; therefore, the fate of presidential budget requests is largely in their hands.

Our argument assumes that subcommittee members evaluate a president's budget request based on how well it reflects their own preferences relative to the status quo.<sup>5</sup> This characteriza-

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<sup>4</sup>For example, in the 116th Congress (2019-2020), the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies was responsible for appropriations for the Department of Commerce, Department of Justice, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, National Science Foundation, Commission on Civil Rights, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, International Trade Commission, Legal Services Corporation, Marine Mammal Commission, National Space Council, Office of Science and Technology Policy, Office of the United States Trade Representative, and the State Justice Institute.

<sup>5</sup>Congress could choose to pass a budget at a radically different level of funding compared with the president's request, knowing that the president may veto it. In this case, the failure to pass a spending bill could result in no funding for a particular agency. However, Kiewiet and McCub-

tion follows theoretical and empirical models in which legislators are posited to have unidimensional preferences along an ideological continuum and cast votes on the basis of whether they prefer a given proposal to the status quo (Cox and McCubbins 2007; Krehbiel 1998; Poole and Rosenthal 1991). To the extent that legislators and presidents have preferences over spending levels and are more supportive of spending levels that more closely reflect those preferences, we would expect that a subcommittee is more likely to accommodate a president's budget request when it is more closely aligned with the president's ideological orientation.

Despite the intuitive appeal of characterizing appropriations decisions on the basis of legislators' spending preferences, previous scholarship has not always characterized the behavior of appropriators in these terms. Instead, classic perspectives emphasized the norms into which committee members were socialized. Most prominently, Richard Fenno (1962, 311) argued that committee members perceived themselves as the "guardian[s] of public funds." In this role, it was generally expected that subcommittee members had the responsibility to cut spending from the levels requested by the president (see also Davis, Dempster and Wildavsky 1966; Fenno 1966). Subsequent scholarship suggested that committee norms were not the only, or the primary, factor that structured legislative behavior. For example, Kingdon (1966) acknowledges the role of committee norms in shaping responses to presidential budget requests but argues that members' policy preferences and priorities also structure their behavior on appropriations subcommittees. Consistent with this latter claim, Lowery, Bookheimer and Malachowski (1985) reanalyze the data used in Fenno (1966) and show that partisanship was strongly associated with appropriations outcomes as Republican-controlled committees cut more from Democratic presidents. Moreover,

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bins (1988) argue that this threat is not credible because it would make both the president and Congress worse off. Instead, they argue for considering a continuing resolution that follows the "Fenno rule"—in which, in the absence of an enacted budget, agencies can continue spending at the prior year's level, or at the lower of the prior year's budget and an appropriations bill that has been passed by the House—as the reversion point.



studying the period after that investigated by Fenno (1962, 1966), Geiger (1994) finds that subcommittee members were more likely to serve as advocates for increased agency spending rather than as “guardians” of the budget. Therefore, while our assumptions regarding the underpinnings of appropriations subcommittee behavior contrast with classical scholarship on House appropriations, they are widely supported by more recent research.

Based on our argument, we test the hypothesis that enacted appropriations better reflect the president’s requests when the relevant subcommittee is more ideologically congruent with the president. Our account contributes to several bodies of scholarship, which to date have existed mostly separately. The first concerns the relevance of the House appropriations subcommittees as a constraint on presidential influence. Most previous scholarship downplayed the possibility that subcommittee composition was an important predictor of appropriations decisions (White 1989, 201-203) and concluded that the subcommittees did not “systematically reorder presidential priorities” (Geiger 1994, 414). However, this work did not examine how subcommittee membership affected congressional action on the president’s budget. Moreover, other scholarship in the context of the appropriations subcommittees shows that their ideological alignment with the president is associated with the amount of discretion they give to agencies to expend funds (Bolton and Thrower 2019) and the speed with which they pass spending bills (Woon and Anderson 2012).<sup>6</sup> We extend the insights from this work and argue that the appropriations subcommittees are an underappreciated source of congressional constraint on the president’s budgetary preferences.

Second, our account has implications for the relevance of committee composition for policy outcomes. While our argument does not address the representativeness of the Appropriations Committee or its subcommittees (for relevant debates, see, e.g., Groseclose 1994; Krehbiel 1990; McGrath and Ryan 2019; Shepsle and Weingast 1987; Weingast and Marshall 1988), it does suggest

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<sup>6</sup>Bolton (2022) also shows that subcommittees write longer appropriations reports that contain more constraining provisions as they are more ideologically distant from the president, though this result is limited to circumstances where legislative gridlock is high.

that their ideological composition is associated with congressional scrutiny of the president’s budget. To the degree that appropriations subcommittees are unrepresentative of the chamber, our account implies that budgetary outcomes would better reflect the subcommittee’s preferences rather than the median of the chamber.<sup>7</sup> By studying how appropriations subcommittees shape budgetary outcomes, our argument relates to scholarship that argues that subcommittees are “increasingly vital to the policy-making process” (Shepsle and Weingast 1985, 118) and wield significant influence over collective committee decisions (Deering 1982; Hall and Evans 1990).

More broadly, our argument suggests a mechanism through which the separation of powers limit presidential control of the executive branch. Previous scholarship emphasizes how Congress constrains the president’s policy influence by, for example, enacting legislation that supercedes unilateral directives (Bolton and Thrower 2016; Howell 2003), conducting oversight investigations (Kriner and Schwartz 2008; Kriner and Schickler 2016), limiting agency discretion over spending authority (Bolton and Thrower 2019), vetoing regulatory action (Acs 2019), and delaying or rejecting nominations to agencies and the courts (McCarty and Razaghian 1999; Moraski and Shipan 1999). While scholars have long recognized the institutional advantages that appropriations power conveys to Congress vis-à-vis the president, we highlight the specific role of the appropriations subcommittees in enforcing this advantage.

## Data

We test our argument using an original dataset of presidential budget requests and congressional enactments for fiscal years 1972 to 2021, which covers the second session of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Congress during the Nixon administration through the first session of the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress during

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<sup>7</sup>Testing the representativeness of the subcommittees is beyond the scope of this paper. Interestingly, though, the House Appropriations Committee was one of two committees for which the evidence in Groseclose (1994) supported the outlier hypothesis.

the Biden administration. We collected this data from the Budget of the United States, issued annually by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Each year, the president submits a budget to Congress, and the OMB both assists the president in the creation of the budget and publishes the report. The Budget of the United States contains narrative descriptions of presidential policy priorities as well as detailed presidential request and congressional enactment figures disaggregated by federal subunit.<sup>8</sup>

Our dataset represents the most comprehensive compilation of these discretionary spending figures assembled to date.<sup>9</sup> These data build upon foundational work on appropriations by Fenno (1966) and, later, Kiewiet and McCubbins (1991). These authors analyze spending patterns for a sample of 77 agencies, and their data laid the foundation for subsequent empirical work on separation of powers (Canes-Wrone, Howell and Lewis 2008; Canes-Wrone 2006; Howell and Jackman 2013). Generically, our data include requested and enacted appropriations for subunits (often representing offices, agencies, and bureaus) nested within units (often departments or independent agencies) for each fiscal year.<sup>10</sup> Our data contain information on 626 unique unit-subunits with a total of 10800 observations. Extensive summary statistics describing the data are shown in Appendix A.1, and a detailed account of the agencies in the sample are shown in Appendix A.2.

Figure 1 shows total presidential requests and congressional enactments by fiscal year, in real

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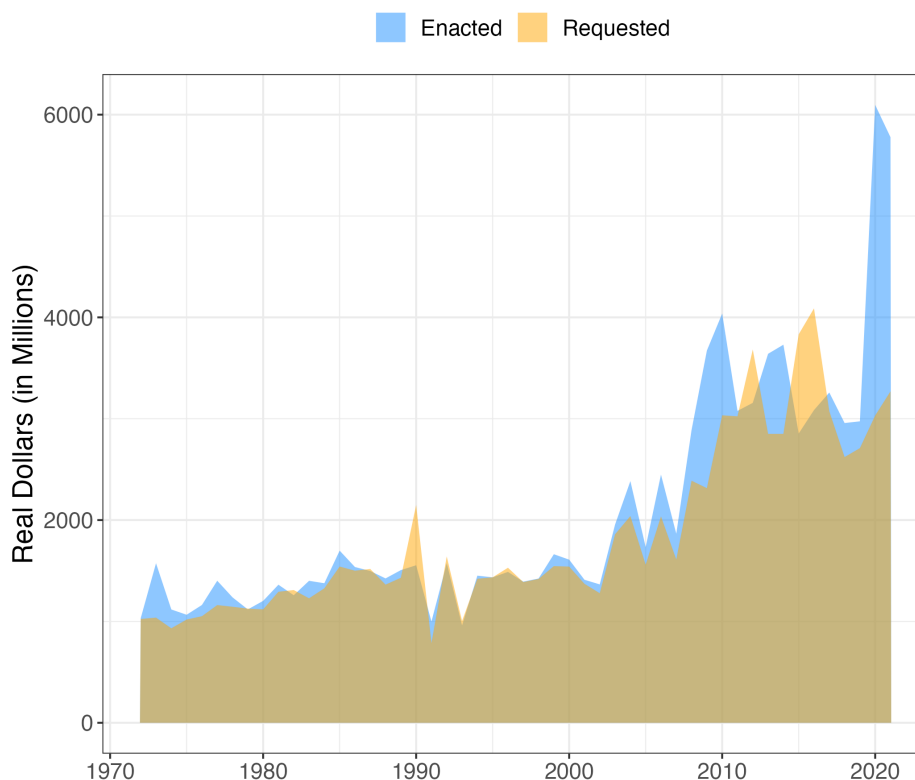
<sup>8</sup>“Federal subunit” generally refers to federal offices, agencies, and programs that are a part of the annual appropriation process. Examples of federal subunits include the United States Senate and the Forest Service.

<sup>9</sup>Mandatory spending is increasingly a larger share of annual expenditure (Corning, Dodin and Nevins 2017). We focus on discretionary spending because it is the primary site of interbranch bargaining between the president and Congress.

<sup>10</sup>For instance, in 2014, President Obama requested \$937,000,000 for the U.S. Senate (subunit), which is categorized under Legislative Branch (unit) appropriations (for its part, Congress enacted \$884,000,000 for FY 2015 in response to the President’s request).

dollars (standardized to 2022). In aggregate, the average difference between congressional enactments and presidential requests is about \$800 billion. The figure shows both that the size of the budget has grown over time and that presidents' success in achieving their preferred outcomes has varied. In some years, for example, the difference between requested and enacted appropriations is vanishingly small (for example, during most of the Clinton administration) while in other years the gap between requested and enacted appropriations is larger in both absolute and percentage terms (for example, most fiscal years during the Nixon, George W. Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations).

**Figure 1:** Total Requested and Enacted Appropriations, FY1972 to FY2021



We then linked each subunit in our appropriations data to the respective House Appropriations subcommittee with jurisdiction over it. To do so, we follow a process similar to Adler (2000) and primarily rely on House Appropriation bills, which list subunits disaggregated by sub-

committee jurisdiction. Additionally, we rely on reports published by the House Appropriations Committee that detail more recent jurisdictional divisions<sup>11</sup> and House hearing transcripts for more historical jurisdictional divisions. Most subunits can be directly matched to appropriation bills, though in a few cases subunits are listed in the annual budget reports but not explicitly in the appropriation bills of the given year.<sup>12</sup> While in some instances it was possible to match these subunits to the relevant subcommittees, we omitted from the analyses the several hundred observations for which the available information was insufficient for making an informed judgment about which subcommittee oversaw appropriations decisions.

The House Appropriations Committee was reorganized several times during the period under study. Figure 2 summarizes the subcommittee composition of the House Appropriations Committees and its representation in our data. From 1971 to 2003, the House Appropriations Committee was organized into thirteen subcommittees.<sup>13</sup> Following the creation of the Department of Homeland Security in 2003 (at the start of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress), the House Appropriations Committee added a Subcommittee on Homeland Security, and merged the Subcommittee on Transportation and the Subcommittee on Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government. In the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, the House Appropriations Committee was reorganized into ten subcommittees by disbanding two subcommittees—the Subcommittee on the District of Columbia, and the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies—and reorganizing their respective jurisdictions into other subcommittees. The Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch and its constituent subunits were under the jurisdiction of the full commit-

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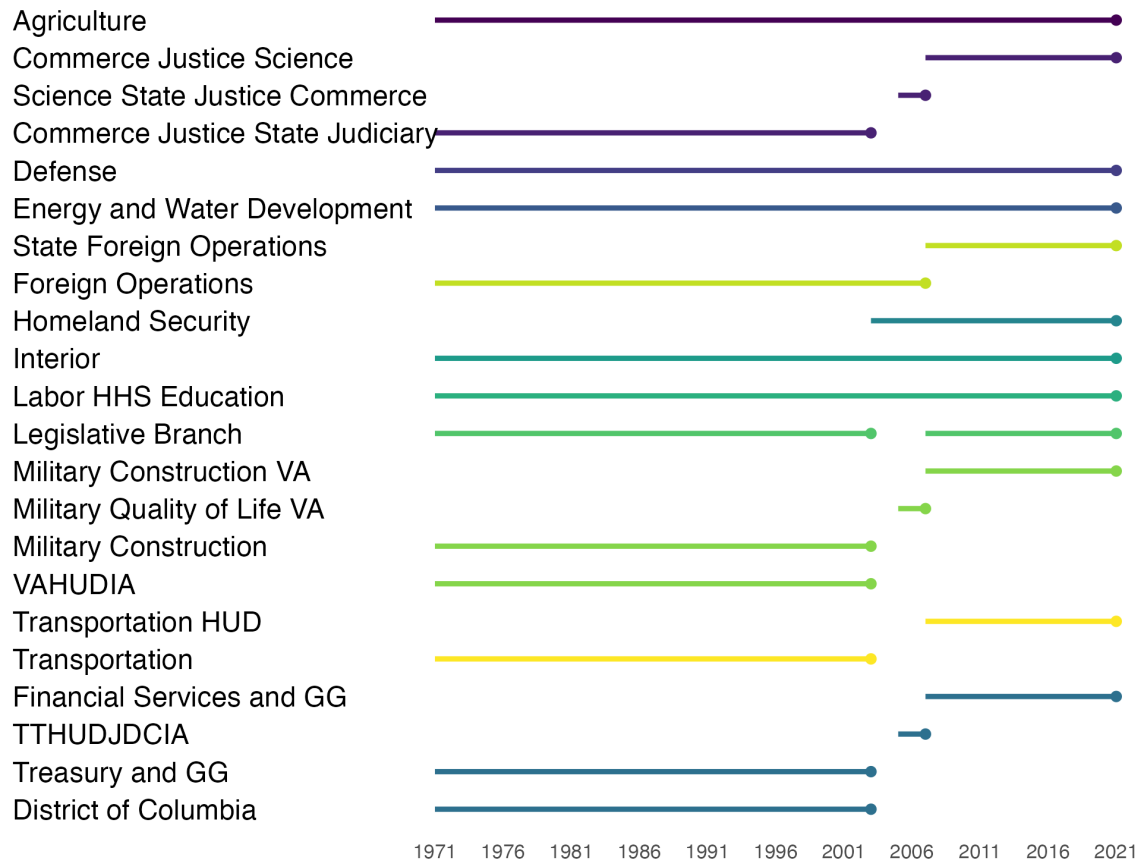
<sup>11</sup>For example, see 117th Congress House Appropriations Committee report here: <https://appropriations.house.gov/sites/democrats.appropriations.house.gov/files/documents/117th%20Jurisdiction.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup>We describe these cases, and how we handled them, in Appendix A.3.

<sup>13</sup>This period is often noted as one of stability for its consistent committee structure and subcommittee jurisdictions (Saturno 2021).

tee.<sup>14</sup> At the start of the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, further reorganization occurred with the re-addition of the Subcommittee on Legislative Branch and the separation of Transportation and Treasury.

**Figure 2:** Subcommittees of the House Appropriations Committee



Plot shows the fiscal years for which each subcommittee is present in the data. Subcommittee names reflect the departments and agencies over which they have jurisdiction. HHS=Health and Human Services; VA=Veterans Affairs; VAHUDIA=Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent agencies; HUD=Housing and Urban Development; GG=General Government; TTHUDJDCIA=Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, Housing and Urban Development, the Judiciary, District of Columbia, and Independent agencies.

Finally, to measure the ideological composition of the subcommittees, we gathered data on the membership of each subcommittee. We collected these data from the House Appropriation Committee Semi-Annual Report of Committee Activities, which is published for every modern

<sup>14</sup>We omit these observations since they are not linked to a specific subcommittee.

Congress. These data allowed to assemble complete rosters of all House Appropriation subcommittees for the 92<sup>nd</sup> to the 117<sup>th</sup> Congresses. Our data also contain information about which member served as chair of the relevant subcommittee.

## Empirical Strategy

The dependent variable in our analysis is presidential success in achieving their budgetary preferences. As previous scholarship has noted (Canes-Wrone, Howell and Lewis 2008), appropriations is a particularly good context for studying a president's success in bargaining with Congress. By comparing what presidents requested to what Congress enacted, we have a clear and continuous measure of the degree to which Congress accommodated the president's policy preferences.

We operationalize this quantity as the difference between presidential requests and congressional enactments for each observation in our data (for a similar approach in the context of evaluating the behavior of appropriations subcommittees, see Sharkansky 1965*b*, 626-627). Specifically, we follow Howell and Jackman (2013) and calculate the dependent variable as  $\ln(1 + |\text{Requested}_{it} - \text{Enacted}_{it}|)$  for each subunit  $i$  in fiscal year  $t$ .<sup>15</sup> Larger values of this measure indicate greater differences between what the president requested and what Congress enacted.

Our primary independent variable characterizes the ideological distance between the president and the relevant subcommittee. Following models of committee decision making (Black 1958; Krehbiel and Rivers 1988), we measure this quantity, *subcommittee distance*, using the absolute value of the ideological difference between the president and the median member of the subcommittee using first dimension NOMINATE scores (Lewis et al. 2022).<sup>16</sup> This approach is

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<sup>15</sup>We also estimate models that use inverse hyperbolic sin transformations rather than natural log transformations. These models produce nearly identical results. See Table B.1.

<sup>16</sup>One may be concerned that NOMINATE scores are calculated on the basis of the appropriations bills whose outcomes we study. However, appropriations bills concern a trivial fraction of all roll

similar to that used in Woon and Anderson (2012), where larger values indicate increased ideological disagreement between a president and a subcommittee.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 3 shows how values of subcommittee distance have varied across time for each subcalls cast in a given congress, and thus estimates of roll call voting behavior—which are based on all votes cast over a legislator’s career—are based on substantially more information beyond a member’s preferences over appropriations in a given congress. To eliminate this concern, one might re-estimate NOMINATE scores while excluding appropriations votes. However, given the dominance of a single ideological dimension in roll call voting patterns (Poole and Rosenthal 1991), this exercise would likely produce scores that are empirically indistinguishable from extant 1<sup>st</sup> dimension NOMINATE scores.

<sup>17</sup>From a theoretical perspective, our account is agnostic as to *whose* ideology within the subcommittees matters for interbranch bargaining. To the extent that subcommittees operate by majority rule, we would expect the median member of the subcommittee to be the relevant actor for subcommittee collective decision making (Black 1958). If, on the other hand, subcommittee chairs have sufficient power and dominate subcommittee deliberations, then they may be the more relevant actor (for related scholarship, see, e.g., Berry and Fowler 2016). In both cases, it would be clear that the ideological orientation of the individuals on the subcommittees is important for understanding the president’s budgetary success. Thus, we also estimated our primary models when characterizing the ideological distance between presidents and subcommittees using the NOMINATE score for the subcommittee chair. Table B.2 reports these results. The coefficients for subcommittee distance are consistently positive and three of the four are statistically distinguishable from zero at  $p < .05$ . The magnitudes of the coefficients are similar to those reported in Table 1 for columns (1) and (2) but are about forty percent smaller for columns (3) and (4). Overall, these results indicate the relevance of the ideological location of subcommittee chairs for appropriations outcomes, and suggest that the choice of chair matters for interbranch bargaining.



committee. As one would expect, increases in subcommittee distance generally correspond with changes from unified to divided government. Presidents serving in periods of unified government, such as Obama in the 111th Congress in 2009-10, often have relatively low values of ideological distance from subcommittees, indicating their ideological proximity with subcommittees on which their copartisans hold the majority. However, there is a significant amount of variation in subcommittee distance even within periods of divided government (and likewise for unified government). That is, ideological distance between subcommittee medians and the president is not constant within periods in which both branches of government are controlled by the same party, nor is it equivalent across subcommittees in the same Congress. We leverage this variation to estimate our quantity of interest.

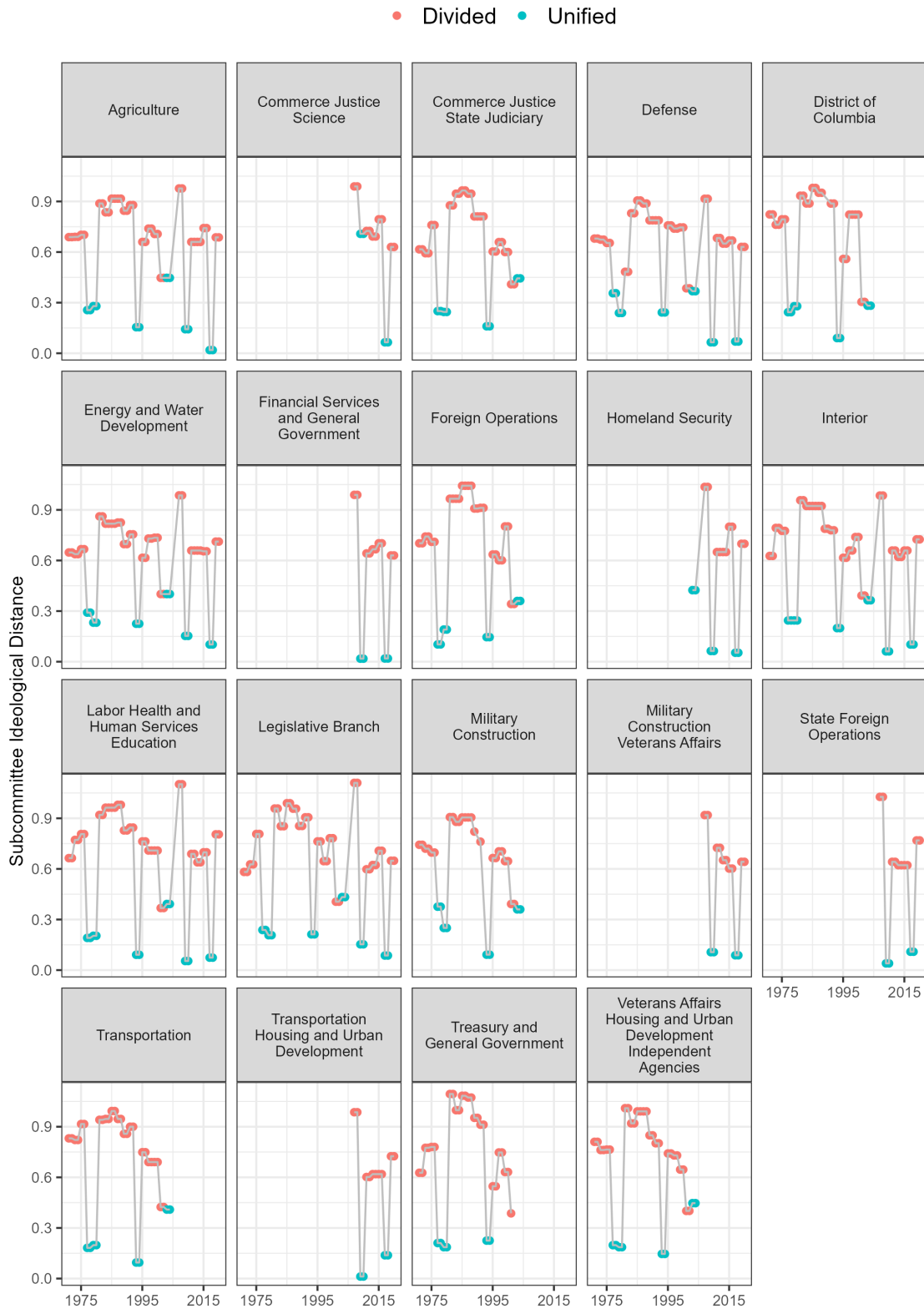
Using the measures described above, we estimate the following model:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha_i + \gamma_p + \beta \text{subcommittee distance}_{it} + \Omega \mathbf{X}_{it} + \epsilon_{it}, \quad (1)$$

where the dependent variable is the difference between requested and enacted appropriations and  $i$  indexes the subunits in our data. *Subcommittee distance* is the measure described above, which we rescale by dividing by its standard deviation to facilitate interpretation. With this rescaled measure, a one-unit increase represents a 0.29 increase in subcommittee distance, similar to the difference in ideological orientations between representatives Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY;  $-0.49$ ) and Abigail Spanberger (D-VA;  $-0.175$ ). The coefficient estimate for  $\beta$  is our primary quantity of interest. If presidents are less successful in achieving their preferred budgetary outcomes as the relevant subcommittee is more ideologically distant from them, as we argue, we expect to find a positive estimate for this parameter.

Our primary specification includes fixed effects for subunits ( $\alpha_i$ ) and presidential administrations ( $\gamma_p$ ). The former accounts for systematic differences in interbranch bargaining that vary across the myriad subunits in our data. For example, some subunits may be more politically

**Figure 3: Ideological Distance between Presidents and Subcommittee Medians**



Plotted points show the absolute value of ideological distance between the president and the median member of each subcommittee. Values are shown for each congress.

salient, and thus subjected to greater congressional scrutiny, than others. By including presidency fixed effects, we hold constant the attributes of individual presidents that may be associated with bargaining outcomes. With this model specification, the estimate for  $\beta$  is identified with changes in subcommittee distance that occur within presidential administrations.<sup>18</sup>

We also account for a variety of other congressional and economic factors  $\mathbf{X}_{it}$  that may be associated with a president's bargaining success. First, we include the natural log of the presidential proposal—that is,  $\ln(\text{Requested}_{it})$ —as Congress is more likely to accommodate the president's requests for smaller expenditures than larger ones. Second, we include an indicator for periods of divided government, as Congress may be less likely to accommodate the president's budgetary request when a larger share of it is controlled by the other party (Kiewiet and Mc-

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<sup>18</sup>Table B.3 displays alternative fixed effects specifications. These models make use of different sources of variation to address substantively different aspects of the relationship between subcommittee distance and interbranch bargaining outcomes. The first model omits all fixed effects and estimates the overall cross-sectional relationship between subcommittee distance and presidential bargaining success. The second model includes subunit fixed effects to study how presidential bargaining success for a given subunit changes with values of subcommittee distance. The third model includes president fixed effects to estimate the average relationship between subcommittee distance and presidential bargaining success for all subunits within a given presidential administration. In the fourth model, we include fixed effects for presidents and subcommittees (rather than subunits, as in Table 1). Here,  $\beta$  is estimated using within-subcommittee variation in its alignment with the president during a given presidential administration. The fifth model includes president and unit (rather than subunit) fixed effects to estimate the average relationship between subcommittee distance and presidential bargaining success for all agencies or offices within a unit for a given presidential administration. All of these models produce positive and statistically significant coefficients for the subcommittee distance variable at magnitudes similar to or larger than reported in Table 1.

Cubbins 1985*a,b*).<sup>19</sup> Third, because presidents are given more budgetary latitude during periods of war (Howell, Jackman and Rogowski 2013), we include a binary indicator corresponding to the Vietnam, Persian Gulf, and post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Economic factors may also have implications for presidential bargaining success, as declining economic circumstances may provide presidents with less leverage for obtaining their policy preferences (Neustadt 1990; Woon and Anderson 2012). Thus, we also include measures of the annual unemployment rate, the year-over-year percentage change in real gross domestic product (GDP), and the size of the budget deficit in real terms from the previous year.

Finally, in all our models we estimate standard errors clustered on subcommittees, the level at which values of subcommittee distance are assigned. However, because our data include a relatively small number of clusters (i.e., fewer than fifty; see Cameron and Miller 2015), without further adjustment our standard errors are likely to be biased downward. To address this issue, we estimate standard errors with the wild clustered bootstrap with 100,000 iterations (Fischer and Roodman 2021; Davidson and Flachaire 2008). We follow conventions in the literature and thus report *p*-values in our tables rather than standard errors.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>This could arise because the party opposite the president has political incentives to attempt to reduce the president’s political standing (see, e.g., Groseclose and McCarty 2001; Lee 2016) and/or because its members have budgetary preferences that systematically differ from the president’s.

<sup>20</sup>Table B.4 shows results when using various approaches to clustering. It shows the results when estimating conventional standard errors clustered on subcommittee, when estimating standard errors via the wild bootstrap when clustering on units (of which there are 39), and when estimating conventional standard errors clustered on subunits (of which there are 555). The results we present in the main text are the most conservative—and, we believe, most correct—approach to inference across these strategies.

## Results

Table 1 presents our main results.<sup>21</sup> The first column reports results from a model that regresses the president's budgetary success on subcommittee distance along with subunit and president fixed effects. The second model adds the covariate characterizing the size of the president's budgetary proposal. In the third model, we add controls for divided government and war, and in the fourth model we add the suite of economic controls described above.

The findings in Table 1 provide consistent evidence that presidents are less successful in achieving their preferred outcomes when their proposed budgets are reviewed by subcommittees more ideologically distant from them. In each of the four models, the coefficient for subcommittee distance is positively signed and statistically distinguishable from zero. These findings indicate that the discrepancy between presidential requests and congressional enactments increases with the ideological distance between the president and the relevant subcommittee. Taking the inverse log of the coefficient from the full model specification in column 4 indicates that a standard deviation increase in the ideological distance between a president and the subcommittee median translates to an approximately 39% increase in the discrepancy between presidential proposals and congressional enactments. The magnitude of this difference is on par with or exceeds the effect size of factors found to be important in previous scholarship on presidential bargaining success, such as war (Howell and Jackman 2013), increased latitude on foreign policy issues relative to domestic affairs (Canes-Wrone, Howell and Lewis 2008), and presidents' public appeals (Canes-Wrone 2001, 2006).

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<sup>21</sup>Table C.1 displays full results for all covariates.

**Table 1:** Subcommittee Composition and Presidential Budgetary Success

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Subcommittee Distance	0.162 ( $<0.001$ )	0.163 ( $<0.001$ )	0.373 ( $<0.001$ )	0.332 (0.002)
ln(Request)		0.697 ( $<0.001$ )	0.697 ( $<0.001$ )	0.695 ( $<0.001$ )
Divided Government			-0.471 (0.022)	-0.372 (0.078)
Num.Obs.	10777	10777	10777	10777
War Controls			✓	✓
Economic Controls				✓
Subunit FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
President FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference (plus one, logged) between a presidential budget request and the enacted appropriation. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap clustered on subcommittees in parentheses.

The results in Table 1 are robust across a range of additional analyses. First, we considered several strategies to address budgets submitted by presidents in the first year of their terms. Presidents generally submit budget proposals in the first week of February (Dearborn 2019). Given that first term presidents are inaugurated only weeks before budget proposals are sent to Congress, the newly inaugurated presidents often have final say on whether to stand by their predecessor’s budget proposal or submit their own. As a matter of practice, every newly elected president in the post-World War II era made substantial revisions to their predecessor’s proposal with the exception of George H.W. Bush (Keith and Christensen 2021). Based on the approaches used in previous scholarship, we used two different strategies to address budgetary proposals from the first year of a presidential term. Following Howell and Jackman (2013), we estimated models where we omitted all observations from the first year of the first term of each presidential administration with the exception of Gerald Ford. We also estimated models where we omitted only the first year of George H.W. Bush’s first term. Both of these analyses provide similar results to

those shown in Table 1.<sup>22</sup>

Second, our results are robust to using an alternative measurement strategy for characterizing the ideological distance between presidents and subcommittees. By construction, the NOMINATE scores we use are constant over legislators' terms in office. While this choice is appropriate given perspectives that emphasize the ideological stability of legislators' voting records during their careers (Poole 2007), other evidence suggests that a legislator's voting record may vary across time, depending on the political context (Howell and Rogowski 2013) and, perhaps more relevant for our purposes, changes in committee membership (Olson and Rogowski Forthcoming). Moreover, the use of static NOMINATE scores means that changes in subcommittee ideology come only from compositional changes. As an alternative strategy, we estimate the models reported in Table 1 using Nokken-Poole scores to characterize the ideological locations of subcommittee members. Like NOMINATE scores, Nokken-Poole scores are comparable across time but they allow legislative ideology to vary from one congressional term to the next. Our results are nearly indistinguishable from Table 1 when substituting these scores.<sup>23</sup>

Third, we find no evidence that our results are driven by a single fiscal year, subcommittee, or component of the federal government. We re-estimated model (4) from Table 1 while sequentially omitting one year at a time. We repeated this exercise while omitting each subcommittee and each unit of government ("unit" generally refers to a Department or similar institution). The coefficients from each of these 101 additional models continue to be positive and statistically

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<sup>22</sup>See Tables C.2 and C.3 in the Supplementary Appendix. When removing observations from all presidents' first years, as Howell and Jackman (2013) do, the magnitudes of the coefficients are a bit smaller than in Table 1 (and are not statistically distinguishable from zero in several models), but we are inclined to view this as an overly conservative approach given that virtually all first year presidents did in fact submit their own budgets.

<sup>23</sup>See Table C.4.

distinguishable from zero, though the magnitude varies somewhat across the models.<sup>24</sup> These results indicate that our findings are robust across the composition of our sample.

Fourth, and finally, the composition of subcommittees is associated with differences in presidential budgetary success irrespective of the partisan composition of the House. Though Table 1 reported results from models that controlled for periods of divided government, here we study whether the relationship between subcommittee distance and the president's bargaining success vary with the composition of Congress. To do so, we estimated models that interacted our measure of subcommittee distance with (a) the indicator for divided government and (b) the share of House seats held by the president's party. In both models, we continue to obtain positive and statistically significant coefficients for subcommittee distance while neither of the interaction terms is statistically distinguishable from zero.<sup>25</sup> These results suggest that the composition of appropriations subcommittees is strongly linked to the president's bargaining success regardless whether the partisan composition of the House is favorable to the president. Even though the subcommittee distance measure is correlated with the partisan composition of the House, these findings suggest that the findings in Table 1 simply reflect the larger congressional environment rather than the membership of the relevant appropriations subcommittee.

## **Do Presidents Anticipate Subcommittee Opposition?**

To what extent are the results presented in Table 1 a result of strategic behavior by presidents? Our findings indicate that presidents are less successful in achieving their preferred budgetary outcome when the composition of the relevant appropriations subcommittee is more ideologically distant. Though this finding is consistent with our theoretical perspective in which interbranch disagreement between presidents and subcommittees reduces Congress's willingness to accom-

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<sup>24</sup>See Figures C.1 through C.3.

<sup>25</sup>See Table C.5.



moderate a president's budgetary request, it is also possible that this result reflects the president's own strategic behavior. If a president were to anticipate extra scrutiny from an appropriations subcommittee because the subcommittee membership is ideologically hostile to the president, for example, that president may decide to strategically misrepresent her preferences in the hope that enacted appropriations would end up somewhere close to what she ultimately would have preferred. That is, a president who prefers more spending relative to Congress might submit a budget request that exceeds her own budgetary preferences (and analogously for a president who prefers lower spending than Congress). If this were to be the case, our findings would indicate not that subcommittees constrain presidential influence, but rather that presidents appear "weaker" when bargaining with ideologically distant subcommittees because of the president's own strategic behavior.

At the outset, we note that previous literature downplays possibilities such as these. For example, Kiewiet and McCubbins (1985a, 722) argue that presidents have strong incentives to represent their preferences truthfully to Congress. Likewise, presidents' efforts to recruit public support for their proposals (e.g., Canes-Wrone 2001) may also suggest that presidents are unlikely to strategically manipulate the requests they send to Congress.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, we undertake two sets of analyses to address this possibility.

First, we examine whether the data provide evidence that presidents request larger amounts when key members of Congress are more ideologically distant. Table 2 shows the results. In column (1), we regressed presidential proposals (logged) on the measure of subcommittee distance. In column (2), we replace the subcommittee distance measure with the indicator for divided government. Column (3) reports results when including both independent variables. In all three

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<sup>26</sup>Likewise, in studying gubernatorial budget requests, Kousser and Phillips (2012) argue that governors have strong reputational and electoral incentives to present sincere budgetary requests and present evidence showing that governors do not adjust their budgetary proposals as the composition of state legislatures changes.

models, we include the battery of economic and war controls included in model (4) of Table 1. If our findings reflect patterns of strategic presidential proposal making, we expect that presidents request more funding when facing ideologically divergent subcommittees and/or during periods of divided government.

We find no evidence that presidents increase or decrease their budgetary requests as the composition of Congress changes. Column (1) shows that the coefficient for subcommittee distance is near to zero and not statistically significant. Similarly, in column (2), the coefficient for divided government is extremely small in magnitude and not distinguishable from zero. The results in column (3) also provide no evidence that either subcommittee distance or divided government is associated with increases or decreases in presidential proposals. Moreover, even if the largest coefficient from Table 2 *were* statistically significant, it would explain only a fraction of the results we obtain in Table 1.<sup>27</sup> Overall, consistent with the argument from Kiewiet and McCubbins (1985*a*), Table 2 provides no evidence that presidents strategically manipulate their proposed budgets based on changes in the ideological composition of Congress.

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<sup>27</sup>The coefficient for divided government in column (3) is the largest in magnitude, and if it were statistically significant would provide evidence that presidents increase their requests by about four percent when they transition from unified to divided government. However, the *p*-value is quite large, and thus the results do not provide compelling evidence for such an interpretation.

**Table 2:** Predicting the Size of Presidential Requests

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Subcommittee Distance	−0.003 (0.768)		−0.019 (0.444)
Divided Government		0.005 (0.742)	0.037 (0.376)
Num.Obs.	10 777	10 777	10 777
War Control	✓	✓	✓
Economic Controls	✓	✓	✓
Subunit FE	✓	✓	✓
President FE	✓	✓	✓

Dependent variable is the logged value of presidents' budget requests. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap clustered on subcommittees in parentheses.

Though Table 2 provides no evidence that presidents strategically adjust their budgetary proposals in response to changes in congressional composition, we estimate model specifications similar to those used in previous research to address potential endogeneity between proposals and enacted appropriations. Following Kiewiet and McCubbins (1991) and Howell and Jackman (2013), we instrument logged presidential proposals on identifiers for first-term presidents and indicators for each of the four years in a presidential term. Unlike previous research, none of the instruments are statistically distinguishable from zero, as the first-stage results are nearly identical to those shown in Table 2.<sup>28</sup> Unsurprisingly, then, the *F*-statistic for our first-stage equation suggests that this instrumental variables strategy is extremely weak, as it is less than one. When estimating the second-stage results, the coefficient for subcommittee distance is identical to that shown in column (4) of Table 2—unsurprisingly, again, given that 2SLS estimates converge to OLS estimates in the context of weak instruments.

Overall, while the instrumental variables strategy used by prior research appears less reliable

<sup>28</sup>Results are shown in Table D.1.

in the context of our data, the evidence weighs against the possibility that our main findings reflect strategic behavior by the president. This concern would require that presidents strategically increase their proposals when they anticipate greater opposition from Congress, which in turn makes them appear less successful than they actually are. In systematically investigating presidential budget requests, however, we find no evidence that presidents strategically modify their proposals as the composition of appropriations subcommittees changes. Thus, these findings are consistent with scholarship that argues that presidents have incentives to present sincere budgetary proposals and support our interpretation of the results shown in Table 1.

## **Extensions and Additional Analyses**

In a final set of analyses, we use our data to explore several extensions to our theoretical account. Our purpose here is to examine variation in our findings across issue areas and over time and to explore what our data reveal about the nature of committee (and subcommittee) power in the House of Representatives. Owing to space considerations, we discuss our analyses below but display tables with results in the Appendix.

### **Variation across Issue Areas**

We begin by exploring variation across policy domains. In the context of the presidency, no distinction between issue areas is as important as the distinction between foreign policy/national defense and domestic affairs. Classic perspectives argue that presidents have freer hands in foreign policy (Wildavsky 1966), and subsequent empirical literature indicates that Congress is more likely to defer to presidents in foreign affairs (Canes-Wrone, Howell and Lewis 2008). Other literature, however, shows that congressional polarization has increased on foreign policy just as it has on domestic affairs (Jeong and Quirk 2019) and emphasizes Congress's ability to constrain presidents' foreign policy ambitions (Howell and Pevehouse 2007; Kriner and Schickler 2016).

These literatures suggest several competing expectations about whether subcommittees would be more likely to defer to the president's spending requests for foreign policy and national defense in spite of their ideological differences with the president.

We study how ideological conflict between presidents and subcommittees varies for spending items associated with domestic affairs compared with foreign policy and national defense. At the outset, we note that identifying whether a given line item concerns domestic or foreign policy is not always straightforward. Our coding rule uses subcommittee and departmental jurisdictions to distinguish which spending items concern foreign affairs or national defense. In particular, we identified budget requests under the purview of the Military Construction, Defense, and Foreign Operations subcommittees and all budget requests submitted under the State Department as concerning foreign affairs or national defense. All other items were classified as domestic policy. About 9% of the line items in our data were classified as foreign affairs or national defense using this coding scheme.<sup>29</sup>

We estimated three models with similar specifications as Table 1.<sup>30</sup> First, we created an indicator for spending items that concern foreign affairs or national defense, and interacted it with the measure of subcommittee distance. The coefficient for the constituent term for subcommittee distance is 0.344 and statistically significant, indicating that ideological distance reduces presidential bargaining success on items related to domestic policy. The coefficient for the interaction term is -0.18 and significant at  $p = .06$ . This suggests that ideological distance is about half as large in magnitude as a predictor of presidential bargaining success on items concerning defense and foreign affairs. We also estimated a model for only items related to foreign affairs or defense, as well as a model for only those items concerning domestic policy. The coefficient for subcommittee

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<sup>29</sup>There are relatively few line items for the Department of Defense compared to most other departments. This suggests that spending levels for the Department of Defense are aggregated at a high level, thus providing fewer individual line items.

<sup>30</sup>See Table E.1.

distance in the former model was relatively small in magnitude and not statistically distinguishable from zero, while the coefficient in the latter model was similar to what we showed in Table 1. Overall, these findings are generally consistent with Canes-Wrone, Howell and Lewis (2008) and suggest that subcommittees are more deferential to presidential budget requests on items related to defense and foreign policy than for domestic affairs. Given the imprecision of the estimates, however, we are reluctant to conclude on the basis of these findings that subcommittees do not subject presidential budgets to *any* scrutiny on matters concerning foreign affairs.

## Variation across Time and Institutional Change

Next, we study how our findings vary across time. Our data span a fifty-year period, during which the external politics and internal operations of Congress changed a great deal (e.g., Curry and Lee 2019; Lee 2016). Thus, we explore whether our findings vary with the congressional context and the potential sources of any change.

First, we study whether the relationship between subcommittee composition and presidential bargaining success systematically strengthened or weakened over the period under study. To do so, we estimate the model specification from column (4) of Table 1 while also including a linear time trend, where the first year in the sample takes a value of 1. We then interact that covariate with the measure of subcommittee distance.<sup>31</sup> The coefficient for the constituent term of subcommittee distance is considerably larger in magnitude (0.735) than reported in Table 1 and is statistically distinguishable from zero. The interaction term, moreover, is negative and statistically significant. This combination of findings indicates that the magnitude of the relationship between subcommittee composition and presidential bargaining success diminished during the period of study, with the relationship declining by an average of 0.01 units per year. Over the fifty year period, this finding would indicate that the relationship was less than a third as strong by

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<sup>31</sup>See Table E.2.

the end of the period as it was at the beginning. Of course, we do not want to overinterpret this finding given important limitations of the modeling approach; the model specification assumes a linear trend over time when the relationship could have taken a different form. It also does not indicate what might have been the cause of this change over time.

To further explore this relationship, we considered the “Republican Revolution” as a potential break in the relationship between subcommittee composition and interbranch bargaining outcomes. Previous literature emphasizes that the Congress elected in the 1994 midterms marked an important turning point in congressional politics. In particular, a suite of reforms implemented with the new Republican majority weakened committee capacity (Crosson et al. 2021) and undermined the power of the House Appropriations Committee (Aldrich and Rhode 2000; Aldrich, Perry and Rohde 2012). We created a binary indicator for budgets submitted in calendar year 1995 or later and interacted it with the measure of subcommittee distance.<sup>32</sup> The interaction term is negative, with its magnitude suggesting that subcommittee distance was almost 40 percent less strongly associated with bargaining outcomes in the post-Republican Revolution period. However, the coefficient estimate is not statistically distinguishable from zero ( $p = .135$ ). While the Republican Revolution may have inaugurated a period of decreased subcommittee influence vis-à-vis the president, our findings do not provide dispositive evidence for such a claim.

We also considered whether one specific aspect of the Republican Revolution’s reforms was associated with variation in the importance of subcommittee distance. Namely, we account for the number of House staff allocated to the Appropriations Committee in a given congress. Committee staff are important sources of information to legislators (Bolton and Thrower 2021; Sidlow and Henschen 1985), and related research shows that cuts to committee staff beginning in 1995 were associated with reductions in the number of expert witnesses called to testify before committees (Ban, Park and You 2023). We use data from Congressional Research Service (2021) on the number of Appropriations Committee staff in each year from 1977 to 2021 and include this co-

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<sup>32</sup>See Table E.3.

variate along with its interaction with subcommittee distance. The number of staff ranged from a low of 76 in 1977 to a high of 223 in 1992. While this figure declined dramatically by 1995 (to 148), staffing levels did not trend monotonically across the time series but rather exhibited considerable variation. However, when including either the raw number of staff or its logged value, we find no evidence that staff size was associated with variation in the relationship between subcommittee distance and interbranch bargaining outcomes.<sup>33</sup> Thus, while our data indicate temporal variation in the constraints imposed by ideological opposition within subcommittees on presidents' bargaining success, it does not appear as though either the Republican Revolution in general or changes to committee staff in particular are potential mechanisms.

## Characterizing Subcommittee Power

Finally, we consider what our findings imply about subcommittee power. If subcommittees are powerful (see, e.g., Deering 1982; Hall and Evans 1990; Shepsle and Weingast 1985), then we would expect their ideological composition to be associated with appropriations outcomes even when the subcommittee ideologically differs from other key figures in the House. Previous scholarship emphasizes the key role of the median legislator and party leaders in legislative bargaining environments (e.g., Cox and McCubbins 2007; Krehbiel 1998; Aldrich 1995; Baron and Ferejohn 1989). We use our data to characterize the ideological disagreement between the subcommittee median and the floor median as well as between the subcommittee median and the median of the majority party (who selects the party leader). We include these measures in our model and interact with the measure of subcommittee distance. If these actors are institutionally powerful enough to attenuate the influence of subcommittee medians, we would expect the interaction term to be negative and significant. This would indicate that when there is ideological disagreement (presumably about appropriations) between subcommittees and the floor or party

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<sup>33</sup>See Table E.4.



leader, the latter are likely to prevail. On the other hand, if subcommittees are institutionally powerful, then their composition should influence interbranch bargaining outcomes even as the subcommittees are ideologically distant from the floor and/or party leader.

We estimated models similar to column (4) of Table 1 but (separately) included measures of the ideological distance between the subcommittee median and the floor median and majority median, respectively, and interacted each of these measures with the measure of subcommittee distance. In short, our results suggest the institutional power of the subcommittees.<sup>34</sup> We find no evidence that the relationship between subcommittee ideological conflict with the president and interbranch bargaining outcomes attenuates when the subcommittee is more ideologically distant from either the floor or party median. The interaction terms are both positively signed—opposite of what we would expect if the median of the chamber or the majority party would override the preferences of the subcommittee—though neither is statistically distinguishable from zero. Though suggestive, these results affirm the importance of subcommittees in the context of appropriations. While we do not conclude that the median members of the appropriations subcommittees are the only, or the most important, actors who matter in congressional appropriations politics, our findings do suggest the importance of considering committee organization in the context of interbranch bargaining.

## Conclusion

Committees have figured prominently in accounts of congressional policymaking, and perhaps no committee has been studied more than the House Appropriations Committee (see, e.g., Bolton 2022; Davis, Dempster and Wildavsky 1966; Fenno 1962, 1966; Geiger 1994; Kingdon 1966; Lowery, Bookheimer and Malachowski 1985; MacMahon 1943; Sharkansky 1965*a,b*; Woon and Anderson 2012). We add several new contributions to this scholarship. First, we show how leg-

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<sup>34</sup>See Table E.5.

islative committees affect policy outcomes. More precisely, we show how the ideological composition of appropriations subcommittees is associated with the subcommittees' willingness to enact budgets that reflect the president's preferences. Our results imply that appointments to subcommittees matter for the appropriations bills passed by Congress because differences in a subcommittee's composition would produce different funding levels for the agencies under that subcommittee's jurisdiction.

Second, our findings highlight the mechanisms through which Congress can constrain presidents' efforts to affect executive branch policymaking. An important body of literature highlights the president's agenda-setting powers in appropriations (Dearborn 2019; Fisher 1975; Krause 2022) and documents the political conditions that enhance the president's strategic position in this context (Canes-Wrone 2001; Canes-Wrone, Howell and Lewis 2008; Howell and Jackman 2013). Our findings offer a reminder of the institutional advantages that Congress wields as it negotiates public policy with the White House. The power of the purse has long been viewed as a powerful constraint on the presidency, and we offer evidence about how this institutional prerogative operates through the committee system. This finding complements other scholarship that demonstrates how interbranch conflict moderates presidents' abilities to achieve their political goals (e.g., Bolton and Thrower 2016, 2019; Howell 2003; Howell and Pevehouse 2007; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1988; Yackee and Yackee 2009).

Our analysis has some important limitations, however, and raises questions for further inquiry. First, while our account focuses on the ideological composition of the appropriations subcommittees, we noted the challenges in distinguishing their effects from those of other similar measures with which they are likely correlated. For example, a more conservative Congress is likely to have more conservative appropriations subcommittees and more conservative subcommittee chairs. Each of these actors plays important roles in scholarship on legislative outcomes, and it is empirically difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the unique effects of each of them in this context. While our evidence supports our argument about the relevance of the composition

of the subcommittee, we emphasize that our evidence does not suggest that other key legislative actors are not relevant. Second, while we considered the possibility that presidents strategically submit budget requests in anticipation of how legislators may respond, our empirical findings suggested that presidents do not behave in this way. While there may be good reasons for presidents to behave in this way—for example, presidents may not want to misrepresent their true preferences, or they may not want to appear to incur more significant legislative losses—it is possible they forgo some bargaining advantages by doing so. Further research would be useful to better understand how presidents strategically craft their budget proposals based on their expectations about how Congress might respond. Third, while our research focused on the last half-century of appropriations politics, we did not evaluate changes over time in the appropriations process and how they relate to the relevance of subcommittee composition. For example, as the degree of committee power (Rohde 1974), congressional capacity (Bolton and Thrower 2021), and committee staffing patterns (Curry 2019) change over time, these developments may have implications for how the appropriations subcommittees evaluate the president’s request. Finally, while our case focused on the politics of appropriations, it is unclear whether and how our findings might generalize to other (sub)committees and policy domains. These questions present important opportunities for scholars to take a fresh look at the politics of congressional committees and their role in the separation of powers.

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# Online Appendix

## The President and the Clerics: Interbranch Bargaining and Subcommittee Influence in Federal Appropriations

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# A Data Description

## A.1 Summary Statistics

**Table A.1:** Summary of Continuous Variables

	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max	N
Requested (in thousands)	5557.55	32786.11	0.03	192.41	970694.00	10800
Enacted (in thousands)	6374.74	36986.00	−2903.00	209.00	1032711.00	10800
Diff (in thousands)	817.19	22861.30	−819099.00	0.00	761419.00	10800
ln( Diff  + 1)	9.57	4.53	0.00	10.34	20.67	10800
Real GDP Growth	0.02	0.02	−0.03	0.02	0.06	10800
House Seat Share	0.48	0.08	0.33	0.46	0.67	10800
ln(Unemployment)	0.06	0.02	0.04	0.06	0.10	10800
Real Deficit (in hundreds)	−55.60	61.44	−330.13	−45.69	37.31	10800

## A.2 Composition of the Sample

**Table A.2: Unit-Subunits**

unit	subunit	n
atomic energy commission		2
corps of engineers		8
department of agriculture	agricultural and marketing service	1
department of agriculture	agricultural cooperative service	9
department of agriculture	agricultural marketing service	45
department of agriculture	agricultural research service	45
department of agriculture	agricultural stabilization and conservation service	18
department of agriculture	animal and plant health inspection service	48
department of agriculture	buildings and facilities	7
department of agriculture	commodity credit corporation	19
department of agriculture	commodity exchange authority	4
department of agriculture	cooperative state research education	12
department of agriculture	cooperative state research service	17
department of agriculture	departmental administration	27
department of agriculture	departmental management	7
department of agriculture	economic research service	45
department of agriculture	economics statistics and cooperative service	1
department of agriculture	executive operations	22
department of agriculture	extension service	17
department of agriculture	farm production and conservation	3
department of agriculture	farm service agency	28
department of agriculture	farmer cooperative service	5
department of agriculture	farmers home administration	20
department of agriculture	federal crop insurance corporation	20
department of agriculture	federal grain inspection service	13
department of agriculture	food and consumer service	2
department of agriculture	food and nutrition service	44
department of agriculture	food safety and inspection service	37
department of agriculture	food safety and quality service	2
department of agriculture	foreign agricultural service	45
department of agriculture	foreign assistance and special export programs	1
department of agriculture	foreign assistance programs	15
department of agriculture	forest service	50
department of agriculture	grain inspection packers and stockyards administration	20
department of agriculture	hazardous materials management	3



department of agriculture	human nutrition information service	10
department of agriculture	national agricultural library	13
department of agriculture	national agricultural statistics service	33
department of agriculture	national appeals division	2
department of agriculture	national institute of food and agriculture	12
department of agriculture	natural resources conservation service	27
department of agriculture	office of chief financial officer	3
department of agriculture	office of chief information officer	3
department of agriculture	office of civil rights	9
department of agriculture	office of communications	16
department of agriculture	office of general counsel	2
department of agriculture	office of governmental and public affairs	7
department of agriculture	office of inspector general	4
department of agriculture	office of international cooperation and development	13
department of agriculture	office of public affairs	4
department of agriculture	office of rural development policy	4
department of agriculture	office of the chief economist	2
department of agriculture	office of the general counsel	34
department of agriculture	office of the inspector general	35
department of agriculture	office of the secretary	43
department of agriculture	office of transportation	9
department of agriculture	packers and stockyards administration	15
department of agriculture	risk management agency	24
department of agriculture	rural business - cooperative service	23
department of agriculture	rural development	24
department of agriculture	rural development administration	1
department of agriculture	rural development service	3
department of agriculture	rural electrification administration	21
department of agriculture	rural housing and community development service	1
department of agriculture	rural housing service	23
department of agriculture	rural utilities service	6
department of agriculture	science and education administration	1
department of agriculture	soil conservation service	20
department of agriculture	statistical reporting service	10
department of agriculture	world agricultural outlook and situation board	4
department of agriculture	world food and agricultural outlook and situation board	9
department of commerce	bureau of economic analysis	5
department of commerce	bureau of industry and security	17
department of commerce	bureau of the census	45

department of commerce	business economics and statistics	2
department of commerce	departmental management	19
department of commerce	economic and statistical analysis	32
department of commerce	economic development administration	27
department of commerce	economic development assistance	12
department of commerce	economics and statistics administration	2
department of commerce	general administration	27
department of commerce	international trade administration	17
department of commerce	minority business development agency	16
department of commerce	national bureau of standards	4
department of commerce	national institute of standards and technology and policy	17
department of commerce	national oceanic and atmospheric administration	33
department of commerce	national telecommunication and information administration	26
department of commerce	patent and trademark office	12
department of commerce	patent office	1
department of commerce	promotion of industry and commerce	29
department of commerce	science and technology policy	13
department of commerce	technology administration	3
department of defense - civil	cemeterial expenses	16
department of defense - civil	corps of engineers - civil	25
department of defense - civil	military retirement	12
department of defense - civil	ryukyu islands	1
department of defense - civil	the panama canal	8
department of defense - military	allowances	2
department of defense - military	civil defense	6
department of defense - military	family housing	48
department of defense - military	military construction	44
department of defense - military	military personnel	48
department of defense - military	operation and maintenance	48
department of defense - military	procurement	48
department of defense - military	research development test and evaluation	48
department of defense - military	retired military personnel	12
department of defense - military	revolving and management funds	39
department of defense - military	special foreign currency program	16
department of education	departmental management	37
department of education	federal student aid	1
department of education	institute of education sciences	9
department of education	institute of education services	7
department of education	office of bilingual education and minority language affairs	16

department of education	office of career technical and adult education	4
department of education	office of educational research and improvement	17
department of education	office of elementary and secondary education	37
department of education	office of english language acquisition	15
department of education	office of federal student aid	15
department of education	office of innovation and improvement	15
department of education	office of postsecondary education	37
department of education	office of safe and drug free schools	7
department of education	office of special education and rehabilitative services	37
department of education	office of student financial assistance	1
department of education	office of vocational and adult education	31
department of energy	atomic energy defense activities	10
department of energy	departmental administration	33
department of energy	energy programs	33
department of energy	environmental and other defense activities	20
department of energy	national nuclear security administration	21
department of energy	power marketing administration	33
department of health and human services	administration for children and families	29
department of health and human services	administration for community living	7
department of health and human services	administration on aging	18
department of health and human services	agency for healthcare policy and research	8
department of health and human services	agency for healthcare research and quality	1
department of health and human services	alcohol drug abuse and mental health administration	11
department of health and human services	assistant secretary for health	4
department of health and human services	centers for disease control	41
department of health and human services	centers for medicare and medicaid services	17
department of health and human services	departmental management	34
department of health and human services	family support administration	3
department of health and human services	food and drug administration	39
department of health and human services	health resources administration	1
department of health and human services	health resources and services administration	38
department of health and human services	health services administration	1
department of health and human services	healthcare financing administration	20
department of health and human services	human development services	10
department of health and human services	indian health service	13
department of health and human services	indian health services	17
department of health and human services	national institutes of health	41
department of health and human services	office of assistant secretary for health	8
department of health and human services	office of the inspector general	26

department of health and human services	office of the secretary	3
department of health and human services	program support center	25
department of health and human services	social security	1
department of health and human services	social security administration	13
department of health and human services	substance abuse and mental health services administration	28
department of health education and welfare	departmental management	3
department of health education and welfare	food and drug administration	7
department of health education and welfare	health services administration	4
department of health education and welfare	health services and mental health administration	1
department of health education and welfare	national institute of education	4
department of health education and welfare	national institutes of health	7
department of health education and welfare	office of child development	1
department of health education and welfare	office of education	7
department of health education and welfare	social and rehabilitation service	6
department of health education and welfare	social security administration	7
department of health education and welfare	special institutions	4
department of homeland security	analysis and operations	4
department of homeland security	border and transportation security	1
department of homeland security	citizenship and immigration services	18
department of homeland security	countering weapons of mass destruction office	3
department of homeland security	cybersecurity and infrastructure security agency	2
department of homeland security	departmental management	1
department of homeland security	departmental management and operations	9
department of homeland security	domestic nuclear detection office	9
department of homeland security	emergency preparedness and response	1
department of homeland security	federal emergency management agency	15
department of homeland security	federal law enforcement training center	13
department of homeland security	information analysis and infrastructure protection	2
department of homeland security	management directorate	3
department of homeland security	national protection and programs directorate	9
department of homeland security	office of the inspector general	18
department of homeland security	office of the secretary and executive management	3
department of homeland security	science and technology policy	18
department of homeland security	transportation security administration	13
department of homeland security	u.s. customs and border protection	13
department of homeland security	u.s. immigration and customs enforcement	13
department of homeland security	united states coast guard	18
department of homeland security	united states secret service	15
department of housing and urban development	community development	1

department of housing and urban development	community development planning and management	1
department of housing and urban development	community planning and development	47
department of housing and urban development	departmental management	5
department of housing and urban development	fair housing and equal opportunity	43
department of housing and urban development	federal insurance administration	6
department of housing and urban development	government national mortgage association	27
department of housing and urban development	housing management	3
department of housing and urban development	housing production and mortgage credit	3
department of housing and urban development	housing programs	43
department of housing and urban development	management and administration	41
department of housing and urban development	neighborhoods voluntary associations and consumer protection	2
department of housing and urban development	new community development corporation	2
department of housing and urban development	office of lead hazard control	1
department of housing and urban development	office of lead hazard control and healthy homes	20
department of housing and urban development	policy development and research	45
department of housing and urban development	public and indian housing program	37
department of housing and urban development	research and technology and policy	1
department of housing and urban development	solar energy and energy conservation bank	1
department of justice	bureau of alcohol tobacco firearms	18
department of justice	bureau of narcotics and dangerous drugs	1
department of justice	drug enforcement administration	47
department of justice	federal bureau of investigation	50
department of justice	federal prison system	50
department of justice	general administration	47
department of justice	immigration and naturalization service	30
department of justice	interagency law enforcement	33
department of justice	law enforcement assistance administration	7
department of justice	legal activities	16
department of justice	legal activities and general administration	1
department of justice	legal activities and u.s. marshals	23
department of justice	national security division	15
department of justice	office of justice assistance research and statistics	1
department of justice	office of justice program	36
department of justice	radiation exposure compensation	14
department of justice	united states parole commission	42
department of labor	bureau of labor statistics	50
department of labor	departmental management	49
department of labor	employee benefits security administration	3
department of labor	employment and training administration	45

department of labor	employment benefits security administration	13
department of labor	employment standards administration	36
department of labor	labor management services administration	4
department of labor	labor-management services	2
department of labor	labor-management services administration	10
department of labor	manpower administration	3
department of labor	mine safety and health administration	43
department of labor	occupational safety and health administration	48
department of labor	office of federal contract compliance programs	10
department of labor	office of labor management standards	9
department of labor	office of the american workplace	2
department of labor	office of workers compensation programs	11
department of labor	pension and welfare benefit administration	9
department of labor	wage and hour division	11
department of state	administration of foreign affairs	50
department of state	educational exchange	5
department of state	international commissions	48
department of state	international organizations and conferences	50
department of state	other	41
department of the interior	alaska power administration	5
department of the interior	bonneville power administration	4
department of the interior	bureau of indian affairs	34
department of the interior	bureau of indian education and indian affairs	8
department of the interior	bureau of land management	50
department of the interior	bureau of mines	24
department of the interior	bureau of ocean energy management	10
department of the interior	bureau of outdoor recreation	6
department of the interior	bureau of reclamation	46
department of the interior	bureau of safety and environmental enforcement	9
department of the interior	bureau of sport fisheries and wildlife	2
department of the interior	bureau of trust funds administration	1
department of the interior	central utah project	27
department of the interior	department-wide programs	13
department of the interior	departmental offices	29
department of the interior	geological survey	22
department of the interior	heritage conservation and recreation service	1
department of the interior	indian affairs	1
department of the interior	insular affairs	13
department of the interior	minerals management service	26

department of the interior	national indian gaming commission	1
department of the interior	national parks service	50
department of the interior	office of coal research	2
department of the interior	office of inspector general	16
department of the interior	office of oil and gas	1
department of the interior	office of surface mining reclamation and enforcement	43
department of the interior	office of territorial affairs	6
department of the interior	office of the secretary	3
department of the interior	office of the solicitor	16
department of the interior	office of the special trustee for american indians	10
department of the interior	office of water research and technology and policy	1
department of the interior	secretarial offices	11
department of the interior	southeastern power administration	5
department of the interior	southwestern power administration	5
department of the interior	territorial affairs	2
department of the interior	territorial and international affairs	11
department of the interior	united states fish and wildlife service	41
department of the interior	united states geological survey	26
department of the treasury	alcohol and tobacco tax and trade bureau	18
department of the treasury	bureau of accounts	2
department of the treasury	bureau of alcohol tobacco firearms	20
department of the treasury	bureau of customs	1
department of the treasury	bureau of engraving and printing	3
department of the treasury	bureau of government financial operations	3
department of the treasury	bureau of public debt	6
department of the treasury	bureau of the mint	17
department of the treasury	bureau of the public debt	28
department of the treasury	customs service	1
department of the treasury	departmental offices	35
department of the treasury	federal crimes enforcement network	2
department of the treasury	federal financing bank	2
department of the treasury	federal law enforcement training center	24
department of the treasury	financial crimes enforcement network	13
department of the treasury	financial management service	24
department of the treasury	fiscal service	9
department of the treasury	interagency law enforcement	6
department of the treasury	internal revenue service	50
department of the treasury	office of revenue sharing	9
department of the treasury	office of the secretary	13

department of the treasury	office of the treasurer	2
department of the treasury	secret service	4
department of the treasury	united state secret service	1
department of the treasury	united states customs service	24
department of the treasury	united states mint	8
department of the treasury	united states secret service	24
department of the treasury	violent crime reduction programs	1
department of transportation	coast guard	30
department of transportation	federal aviation administration	47
department of transportation	federal highway administration	27
department of transportation	federal railroad administration	50
department of transportation	federal transit administration	27
department of transportation	maritime administration	39
department of transportation	national highway traffic safety administration	36
department of transportation	national transportation safety board	2
department of transportation	office of inspector general	24
department of transportation	office of the inspector general	15
department of transportation	office of the secretary	50
department of transportation	pipeline and hazardous materials safety administration	16
department of transportation	research and innovative technology administration	4
department of transportation	research and special programs administration	22
department of transportation	research and special programs directorate	1
department of transportation	saint lawrence seaway development corporation	1
department of transportation	surface transportation board	13
department of transportation	urban mass transportation administration	13
department of veterans affairs	benefits programs	18
department of veterans affairs	construction	9
department of veterans affairs	departmental administration	32
department of veterans affairs	medical programs	1
department of veterans affairs	veterans benefits administration	11
department of veterans affairs	veterans health administration	24
department of veterans affairs	veterans health services and research administration	1
energy activities	atomic energy defense activities	4
energy activities	departmental administration	4
energy activities	energy programs	4
energy activities	power marketing administration	4
energy research and development administration		1
environmental protection agency		50
executive office of the president	compensation of the president	24



executive office of the president	council of economic advisors	39
executive office of the president	council on environmental quality and office of environmental quality	39
executive office of the president	council on international economic policy	3
executive office of the president	council on wage and price stability	1
executive office of the president	domestic council	6
executive office of the president	domestic policy staff	1
executive office of the president	executive residence	39
executive office of the president	national aeronautics and space council	2
executive office of the president	national critical materials council	4
executive office of the president	national security council	27
executive office of the president	national security council and homeland security council	11
executive office of the president	national space council	5
executive office of the president	office of administration	34
executive office of the president	office of emergency preparedness	1
executive office of the president	office of management and budget	42
executive office of the president	office of national drug control policy	24
executive office of the president	office of policy development	16
executive office of the president	office of science and technology policy	38
executive office of the president	office of telecommunication policy	7
executive office of the president	office of the special representative for trade negotiations	2
executive office of the president	office of the united states trade representative	33
executive office of the president	official residence of the vice president	9
executive office of the president	presidential transition	1
executive office of the president	special action office for drug abuse prevention	2
executive office of the president	special assistance to the president	21
executive office of the president	special assistance to the president and official residence of the vice president	17
executive office of the president	special projects	3
executive office of the president	special representative for trade negotiations	3
executive office of the president	the points of light foundation	2
executive office of the president	unanticipated needs	13
executive office of the president	white house	13
executive office of the president	white house office	23
executive office of the president		4
federal emergency management agency		3
funds appropriated to the president	appalachian regional development programs	11
funds appropriated to the president	disaster relief	14
funds appropriated to the president	emergency fund for the president	2
funds appropriated to the president	expenses of management improvement	3
funds appropriated to the president	federal drug control programs	3

funds appropriated to the president	foreign assistance	9
funds appropriated to the president	international development assistance	12
funds appropriated to the president	international monetary programs	4
funds appropriated to the president	international security assistance	12
funds appropriated to the president	investment in management improvement	1
funds appropriated to the president	israel-united states binational agreement	1
funds appropriated to the president	office of economic opportunity	2
funds appropriated to the president	special assistance for central america	1
funds appropriated to the president	unanticipated needs	21
general services administration	automated data and telecommunication activities	5
general services administration	federal property resources activities	11
general services administration	general activities	42
general services administration	information resources management	1
general services administration	information resources management service	3
general services administration	personal property activities	15
general services administration	preparedness activities	3
general services administration	property management and disposal activities	3
general services administration	real property activities	32
general services administration	records activities	7
general services administration	supply and technology activities	25
international assistance program	african development foundation	10
international assistance program	agency for international development	10
international assistance program	inter-american foundation	10
international assistance program	international development assistance	7
international assistance program	international monetary programs	1
international assistance program	international security assistance	19
international assistance program	millennium challenge corporation	14
international assistance program	multilateral assistance	19
international assistance program	peace corps	10
international assistance program	trade and development agency	10
international assistance program		2
judiciary	administrative office of the united states courts	45
judiciary	bicentennial expenses the judiciary	1
judiciary	commission on bankruptcy laws of the united states	1
judiciary	court of claims	11
judiciary	court of customs and patent appeals	11
judiciary	courts of appeals district courts and other judicial services	50
judiciary	customs court	10
judiciary	federal judicial center	50

judiciary	judicial retirement funds	22
judiciary	judiciary retirement funds	8
judiciary	supreme court of the united states	50
judiciary	united states court of appeals for the federal circuit	38
judiciary	united states court of international trade	38
judiciary	united states sentencing commission	28
judiciary	violent crime reduction programs	5
legislative branch	architect of the capitol	50
legislative branch	botanic garden	31
legislative branch	capitol police	18
legislative branch	congressional budget office	45
legislative branch	cost-accounting standards board	4
legislative branch	general accounting office	32
legislative branch	government accountability office	16
legislative branch	government printing office	42
legislative branch	government publishing office	4
legislative branch	house of representatives	50
legislative branch	joint items	50
legislative branch	legislative branch boards and commissions	13
legislative branch	library of congress	50
legislative branch	office of compliance	21
legislative branch	office of congressional workplace rights	2
legislative branch	office of technology assessment	2
legislative branch	other legislative branch agencies	28
legislative branch	senate	50
legislative branch	united states tax court	50
major independent agencies	affordable housing program	3
major independent agencies	corps of engineers - civil	13
major independent agencies	electric reliability organization	9
major independent agencies	other defense civil programs	1
major independent agencies	public company accounting oversight board	4
major independent agencies	united states interagency council on homelessness	13
national aeronautics and space administration		50
national science foundation		19
office of personnel management		33
other civil defense program	american battle monuments commission	9
other civil defense program	cemeterial expenses	9
other civil defense program	retiree healthcare	9
other civil defense program	selective service system	9

other defense civil program	american battle monuments commission	8
other defense civil program	cemeterial expenses	8
other defense civil program	military retirement	18
other defense civil program	retiree healthcare	4
other defense civil program	selective service system	8
other independent agencies	access board	6
other independent agencies	action	17
other independent agencies	administrative conference of the united states	37
other independent agencies	advisory commission on intergovernmental relations	5
other independent agencies	advisory committee on federal pay	15
other independent agencies	advisory council on historic preservation	44
other independent agencies	affordable housing program	9
other independent agencies	american battle monuments commission	23
other independent agencies	appalachian regional commission	31
other independent agencies	architectural and transportation barriers compliance board	27
other independent agencies	arms control and disarmament agency	8
other independent agencies	arms control and displacement agency	16
other independent agencies	board for international broadcasting	15
other independent agencies	broadcasting board of governors	17
other independent agencies	bureau of consumer financial protection	1
other independent agencies	cabinet committee on opportunities for spanish-speaking people	1
other independent agencies	central intelligence agency	45
other independent agencies	chemical safety and hazard investigation board	22
other independent agencies	christopher columbus fellowship foundation	1
other independent agencies	christopher columbus quincentenary jubilee commission	1
other independent agencies	civil aeronautics board	14
other independent agencies	civil service commission	6
other independent agencies	commission for the preservation of americas heritage abroad	2
other independent agencies	commission of fine arts	50
other independent agencies	commission on agricultural workers	3
other independent agencies	commission on civil rights	50
other independent agencies	commission on national and community service	1
other independent agencies	commission on the bicentennial of the u.s. constitution	2
other independent agencies	committee for purchase blind	46
other independent agencies	commodity futures trading commission	37
other independent agencies	consumer product safety commission	41
other independent agencies	corporation for national and community service	26
other independent agencies	corporation for public broadcasting	48
other independent agencies	court of appeals for veterans claims	3

other independent agencies	court of veterans appeals	9
other independent agencies	court services and offender supervision agency for the district of columbia	22
other independent agencies	defense nuclear facilities safety board	31
other independent agencies	delaware river basin commission	4
other independent agencies	delta regional authority	21
other independent agencies	denali commission	21
other independent agencies	deposit insurance	1
other independent agencies	district of columbia	37
other independent agencies	district of columbia courts	9
other independent agencies	district of columbia general and special payments	9
other independent agencies	election assistance commission	18
other independent agencies	equal employment opportunity commission	50
other independent agencies	export-import bank of the united states	19
other independent agencies	farm credit administration	1
other independent agencies	fdic office of inspector general	3
other independent agencies	federal communications commission	48
other independent agencies	federal deposit insurance corporation	8
other independent agencies	federal drug control programs	22
other independent agencies	federal election commission	44
other independent agencies	federal emergency management agency	17
other independent agencies	federal home loan bank board	3
other independent agencies	federal labor relations authority	42
other independent agencies	federal maritime commission	50
other independent agencies	federal mediation and conciliation service	50
other independent agencies	federal metal and nonmetallic mine safety board of review	4
other independent agencies	federal mine safety and health review commission	42
other independent agencies	federal power commission	5
other independent agencies	federal property resources activities	2
other independent agencies	federal trade commission	45
other independent agencies	foreign claims settlement commission	8
other independent agencies	franklin delano roosevelt memorial commission	1
other independent agencies	fslic resolution	1
other independent agencies	general activities	2
other independent agencies	harry s truman scholarship foundation	2
other independent agencies	indian claims commission	7
other independent agencies	institute of american indian and alaska native culture and arts development	33
other independent agencies	institute of museum and library services	24
other independent agencies	institute of museum service	10
other independent agencies	intelligence community management account	26

other independent agencies	intelligence community staff	12
other independent agencies	interagency council on the homeless	3
other independent agencies	international communications agency	2
other independent agencies	international cultural and trade center commission	1
other independent agencies	international trade commission	41
other independent agencies	interstate commerce commission	25
other independent agencies	japan-united states friendship commission	2
other independent agencies	jfk assassination records review board	2
other independent agencies	legal services corporation	34
other independent agencies	marine mammal commission	41
other independent agencies	merit systems protection board	42
other independent agencies	national archives and records administration	36
other independent agencies	national capital planning commission	49
other independent agencies	national center for productivity and quality of working life	2
other independent agencies	national commission on libraries and information science	30
other independent agencies	national commission on responsibilities for financing postsecondary education	1
other independent agencies	national consumer cooperative bank	3
other independent agencies	national council on disability	30
other independent agencies	national council on indian opportunity	3
other independent agencies	national council on the handicapped	2
other independent agencies	national credit union administration	14
other independent agencies	national education goals panel	6
other independent agencies	national endowment for the arts	40
other independent agencies	national endowment for the humanities	40
other independent agencies	national foundation on the arts and the humanities	5
other independent agencies	national institute of building sciences	3
other independent agencies	national labor relations board	50
other independent agencies	national mediation board	50
other independent agencies	national railroad passenger corporation office of inspector general	10
other independent agencies	national science foundation	27
other independent agencies	national transportation safety board	40
other independent agencies	national veterans business development corporation	4
other independent agencies	neighborhood reinvestment corporation	42
other independent agencies	northern border regional commission	10
other independent agencies	nuclear regulatory commission	41
other independent agencies	nuclear waste technical review board	30
other independent agencies	occupational safety and health review commission	50
other independent agencies	office of government ethics	32
other independent agencies	office of navajo and hopi indian relocation	31

other independent agencies	office of personal management	1
other independent agencies	office of special counsel	31
other independent agencies	office of the federal coordinator for alaska natural gas transportation project	7
other independent agencies	office of the federal inspector for the alaska natural gas transportation system	4
other independent agencies	office of the nuclear waste negotiator	1
other independent agencies	ounce of prevention council	1
other independent agencies	panama canal commission	4
other independent agencies	pennsylvania avenue development corporation	15
other independent agencies	personal property activities	2
other independent agencies	presidio trust	15
other independent agencies	privacy and civil liberties oversight board	11
other independent agencies	public buildings reform board	1
other independent agencies	public defender service for the district of columbia	5
other independent agencies	railroad retirement board	50
other independent agencies	records activities	2
other independent agencies	recovery act accountability and transparency board	4
other independent agencies	renegotiation board	8
other independent agencies	resolution trust corporation	5
other independent agencies	securities and exchange commission	33
other independent agencies	selective service system	25
other independent agencies	small business administration	13
other independent agencies	smithsonian institution	50
other independent agencies	social security administration	2
other independent agencies	state justice institute	21
other independent agencies	subversive activities control board	2
other independent agencies	surface transportation board	6
other independent agencies	susquehanna river basin commission	4
other independent agencies	tariff commission	2
other independent agencies	tennessee valley authority	34
other independent agencies	u.s. agency for global media	1
other independent agencies	udall scholarship	24
other independent agencies	united states court of appeals for veterans claims	16
other independent agencies	united states holocaust memorial council	19
other independent agencies	united states holocaust memorial museum	19
other independent agencies	united states information agency	19
other independent agencies	united states institute of peace	32
other independent agencies	united states interagency council on homelessness	2
other independent agencies	united states metric board	3
other independent agencies	united states railway association	8

other independent agencies	united states sentencing commission	5
other independent agencies	washington metropolitan area transit authority	5
other independent agencies	water resources council	10
small business administration		33
social security administration		22
veterans administration		16



### A.3 Matching Subcommittees to Agency Appropriations

Most subunits in our appropriations data can be directly matched to appropriation bills, though in a few cases subunits are listed in the annual budget reports but not explicitly in the appropriation bills of the given year. These cases generally fall under three categories:

1. *Disbanded Empty Subunits*: Certain subunits were included in the presidential budget proposal, but received no appropriations and were disbanded or reorganized by the time Congressional appropriations were passed. For example, the President’s Advisory Council on Executive Organization resigned in May 1971, prior to the introduction of the Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government Appropriation Act in July 1971. These subunits were left uncategorized and are omitted from the analyses.
2. *Extension by Continuing Resolution (CR)*: Some subunits may have received appropriations by a generic continuing resolution, which extends federal programs funding at the levels passed in the previous year. Continuing resolutions can include both small programs and agencies as well as entire departments. A particularly relevant case was the Energy and Water Development Appropriation Act (H.R. 12928) in the 95th Congress. President Carter vetoed this bill and Congress passed an emergency Continuing Resolution H.J.Res. 1139 to extend funding through FY 1979. Because of this variation, we categorized these subunits in two ways: (1) If the subunit was found in both the Appropriation bills in the previous and following year, and their parent unit (e.g. Department of Agriculture) was extended by continuing resolution, we extended the categorization from the previous fiscal year. (2) If the subunit was not found in the Appropriation bills in the previous and following year, we left the subunit uncategorized and omitted it from analysis.
3. *Generic Requests*: Subunits, such as “Ocean Shipping” and “Allowances,” were overly broad, and difficult to match to a respective subcommittee. As such, they were left uncategorized and dropped.

## B Alternative Measurement Strategies and Model Specifications

**Table B.1:** Subcommittee Composition and Presidential Budgetary Success: Substituting Inverse Hyperbolic Sin Transformation for Logarithmic Transformation

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Subcommittee Distance	0.166 ( $<0.001$ )	0.167 ( $<0.001$ )	0.392 ( $<0.001$ )	0.350 (0.003)
asinh(Request)		0.713 ( $<0.001$ )	0.714 ( $<0.001$ )	0.712 ( $<0.001$ )
Divided Government			-0.502 (0.022)	-0.401 (0.080)
Num.Obs.	10777	10777	10777	10777
War Control			✓	✓
Economic Controls				✓
Subunit FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
President FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Dependent variable is the inverse hyperbolic sine of the absolute value of the difference between a presidential budget request and the enacted appropriation. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap clustered on subcommittees in parentheses.

**Table B.2:** Presidential Budgetary Success with Subcommittees: Substituting the Chair for the Median

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Subcommittee Chair Distance	0.126 ( $<0.001$ )	0.130 ( $<0.001$ )	0.221 (0.025)	0.182 (0.072)
ln(Request)		0.697 ( $<0.001$ )	0.698 ( $<0.001$ )	0.695 ( $<0.001$ )
Divided Government			-0.204 (0.363)	-0.118 (0.668)
Num.Obs.	10777	10777	10777	10777
War Controls			✓	✓
Economic Controls				✓
Subunit FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
President FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference (plus one, logged) between a presidential budget request and the enacted appropriation. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap clustered on subcommittees in parentheses.

**Table B.3:** Subcommittee Distance and Presidential Budgetary Success: Robustness to Fixed Effect Specification

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Subcommittee distance	0.525 ( $<0.001$ )	0.444 ( $<0.001$ )	0.355 (0.003)	0.420 ( $<0.001$ )	0.341 ( $<0.001$ )
ln(Proposal)	1.263 ( $<0.001$ )	0.658 ( $<0.001$ )	1.267 ( $<0.001$ )	1.295 ( $<0.001$ )	1.191 ( $<0.001$ )
Divided government	-0.750 (0.002)	-0.656 (0.006)	-0.408 (0.059)	-0.460 (0.049)	-0.392 (0.069)
Num.Obs.	10777	10777	10777	10777	10777
War Control	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Economic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
President FE			✓	✓	✓
Subcommittee FE				✓	
Subunit FE		✓			
Unit FE					✓
Clustered SE	Subcommittee	Subcommittee	Subcommittee	Subcommittee	Subcommittee

Dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference (plus one), logged between a presidential budget request and the enacted appropriation. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap clustered on subcommittees in parentheses.

**Table B.4:** Subcommittee Composition and Presidential Budgetary Success: Inference with Different Approaches to Clustering

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Subcommittee Distance	0.332 (0.002)	0.332 ( $<0.001$ )	0.332 ( $<0.001$ )
ln(Request)	0.695 ( $<0.001$ )	0.695 ( $<0.001$ )	0.695 ( $<0.001$ )
Divided Government	-0.372 (0.079)	-0.372 (0.009)	-0.372 (0.015)
Num.Obs.	10777	10777	10777
War Control	✓	✓	✓
Economic Controls	✓	✓	✓
Subunit FE	✓	✓	✓
President FE	✓	✓	✓
Clustered SE	Subcommittee	Unit	Subunit

Column (1) reproduces results from column (4) in Table 1. Columns (2) and (3) report results from similar model specifications but when clustering on units and subunits, respectively. Dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference (plus one, logged) between a presidential budget request and the enacted appropriation. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap.

## C Robustness Checks for Table 1

### C.1 Full Model

**Table C.1:** Subcommittee Composition and Presidential Budgetary Success: Full Table of Results

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Subcommittee Distance	0.162 ( $<0.001$ )	0.163 ( $<0.001$ )	0.373 ( $<0.001$ )	0.332 (0.002)
ln(Request)		0.697 ( $<0.001$ )	0.697 ( $<0.001$ )	0.695 ( $<0.001$ )
Divided Government			−0.471 (0.022)	−0.372 (0.079)
War			0.283 (0.011)	0.276 (0.011)
ln(Unemployment)				−0.072 (0.825)
GDP Per Capita				1.932 (0.468)
Deficit				−0.002 (0.204)
Num.Obs.	10777	10777	10777	10777
War Controls			✓	✓
Economic Controls				✓
Subunit FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
President FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference (plus one, logged) between a presidential budget request and the enacted appropriation. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap clustered on subcommittees in parentheses.

## C.2 Omitting Subsets of Observations

**Table C.2:** Subcommittee Composition and Presidential Budgetary Success: Omitting first years of new presidential terms

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Subcommittee Distance	0.056 (0.119)	0.058 (0.111)	0.247 (0.004)	0.168 (0.051)
ln(Request)		0.675 ( $<0.001$ )	0.674 ( $<0.001$ )	0.670 ( $<0.001$ )
Divided Government			−0.386 (0.022)	−0.309 (0.106)
Num.Obs.	9114	9114	9114	9114
War Controls			✓	✓
Economic Controls				✓
Subunit FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
President FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference (plus one, logged between a presidential budget request and the enacted appropriation. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap clustered on subcommittees in parentheses.

**Table C.3:** Presidential Budgetary Success with Subcommittees (Omitting first years of George H.W. Bush term)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Subcommittee Distance	0.162 ( $<0.001$ )	0.163 ( $<0.001$ )	0.382 ( $<0.001$ )	0.346 (0.003)
ln(Request)		0.701 ( $<0.001$ )	0.702 ( $<0.001$ )	0.700 ( $<0.001$ )
Divided Government			-0.490 (0.023)	-0.394 (0.078)
Num.Obs.	10553	10553	10553	10553
War Controls			✓	✓
Economic Controls				✓
Subunit FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
President FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference (plus one, logged) between a presidential budget request and the enacted appropriation. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap clustered on subcommittees in parentheses.



### C.3 Alternative Measure of Ideological Distance

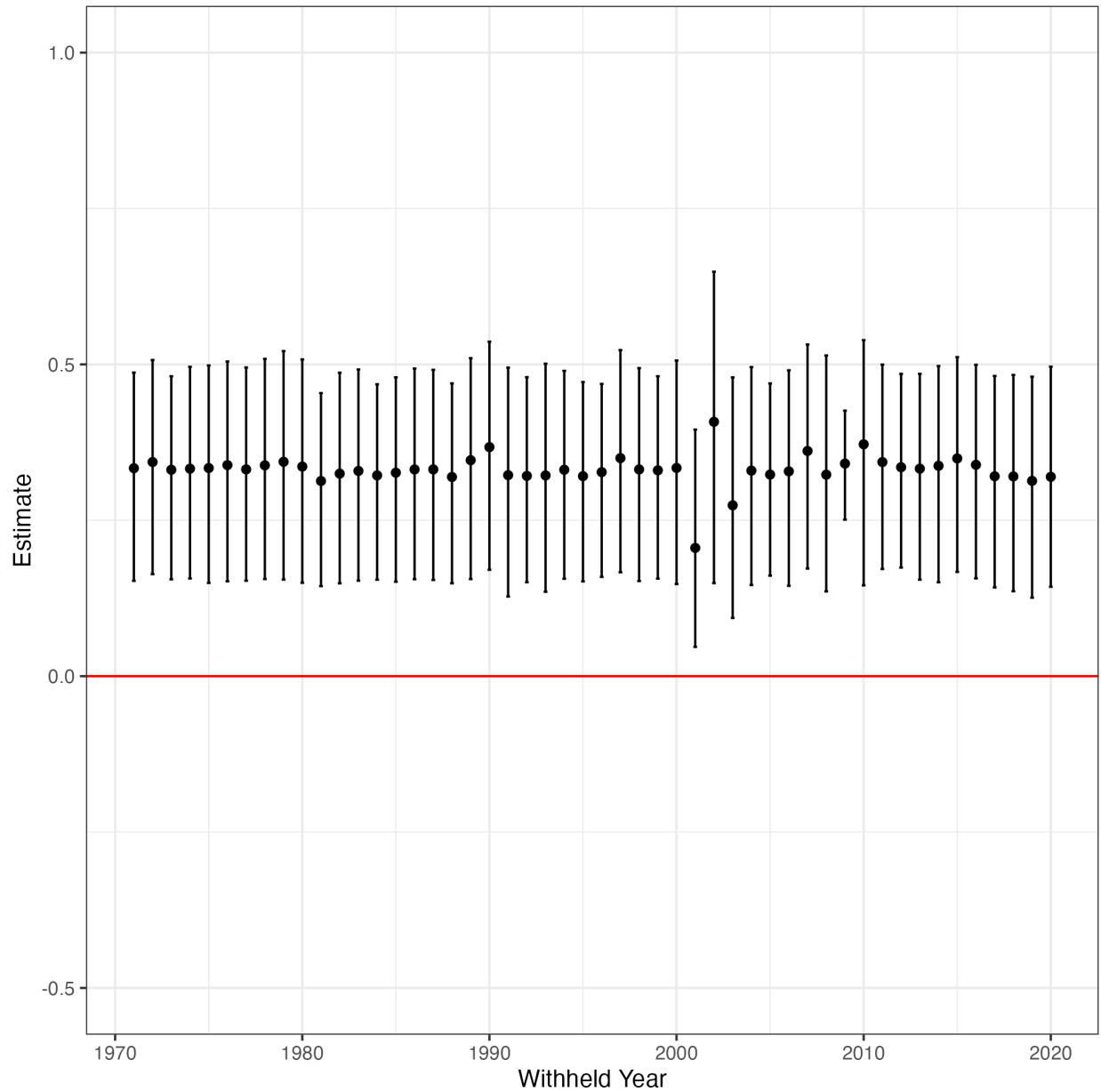
**Table C.4:** Subcommittee Composition and Presidential Budgetary Success: Substituting Nokken-Poole Scores for NOMINATE Scores

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Subcommittee Distance	0.159 ( $<0.001$ )	0.156 ( $<0.001$ )	0.349 ( $<0.001$ )	0.302 (0.003)
ln(Request)		0.696 ( $<0.001$ )	0.695 ( $<0.001$ )	0.693 ( $<0.001$ )
Divided Government			-0.432 (0.022)	-0.325 (0.087)
Num.Obs.	10777	10777	10777	10777
War Controls			✓	✓
Economic Controls				✓
Subunit FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
President FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference (plus one, logged between a presidential budget request and the enacted appropriation. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap clustered on subcommittees in parentheses.

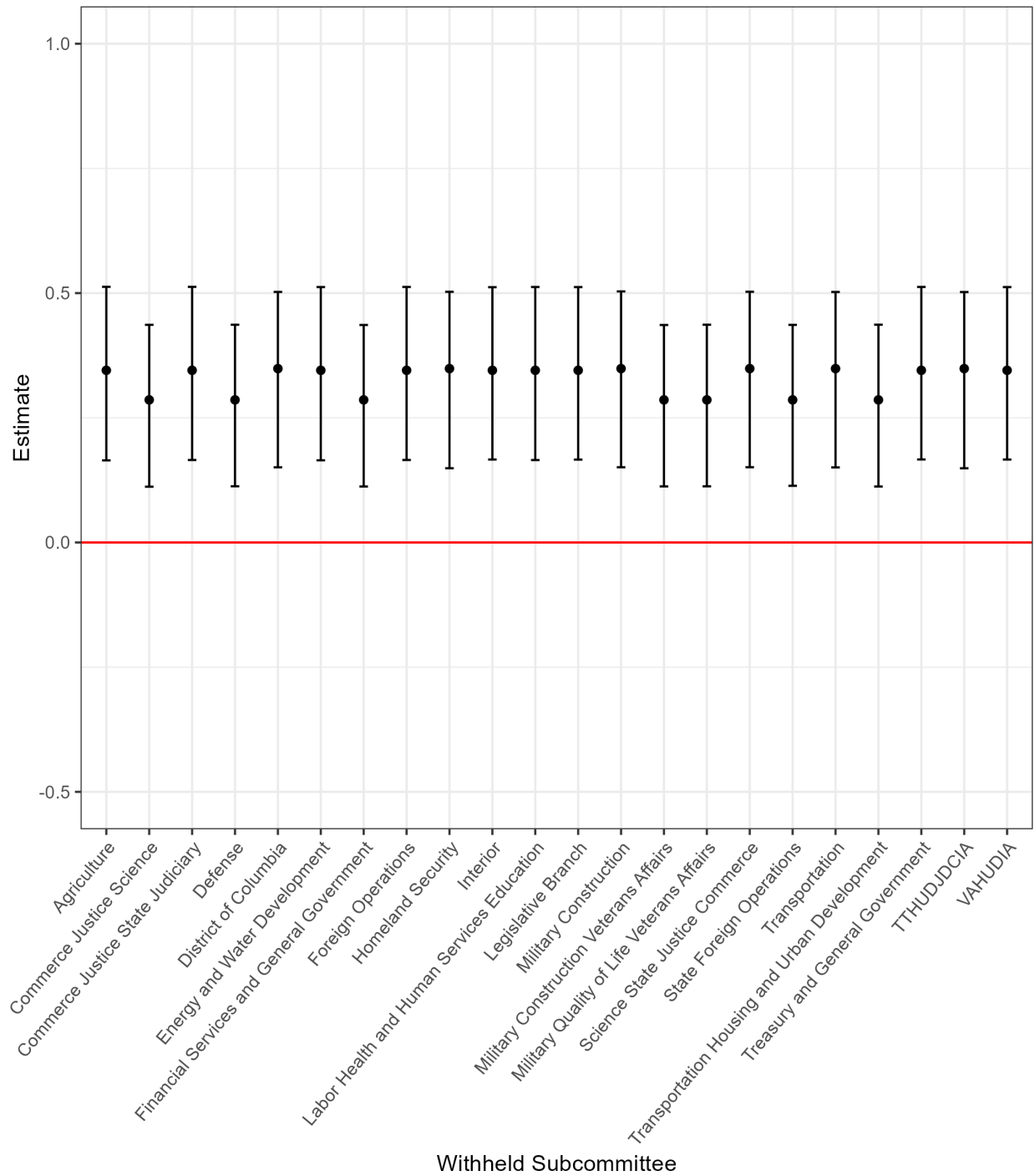
## C.4 Sample Robustness

Figure C.1: Omitting one year at a time



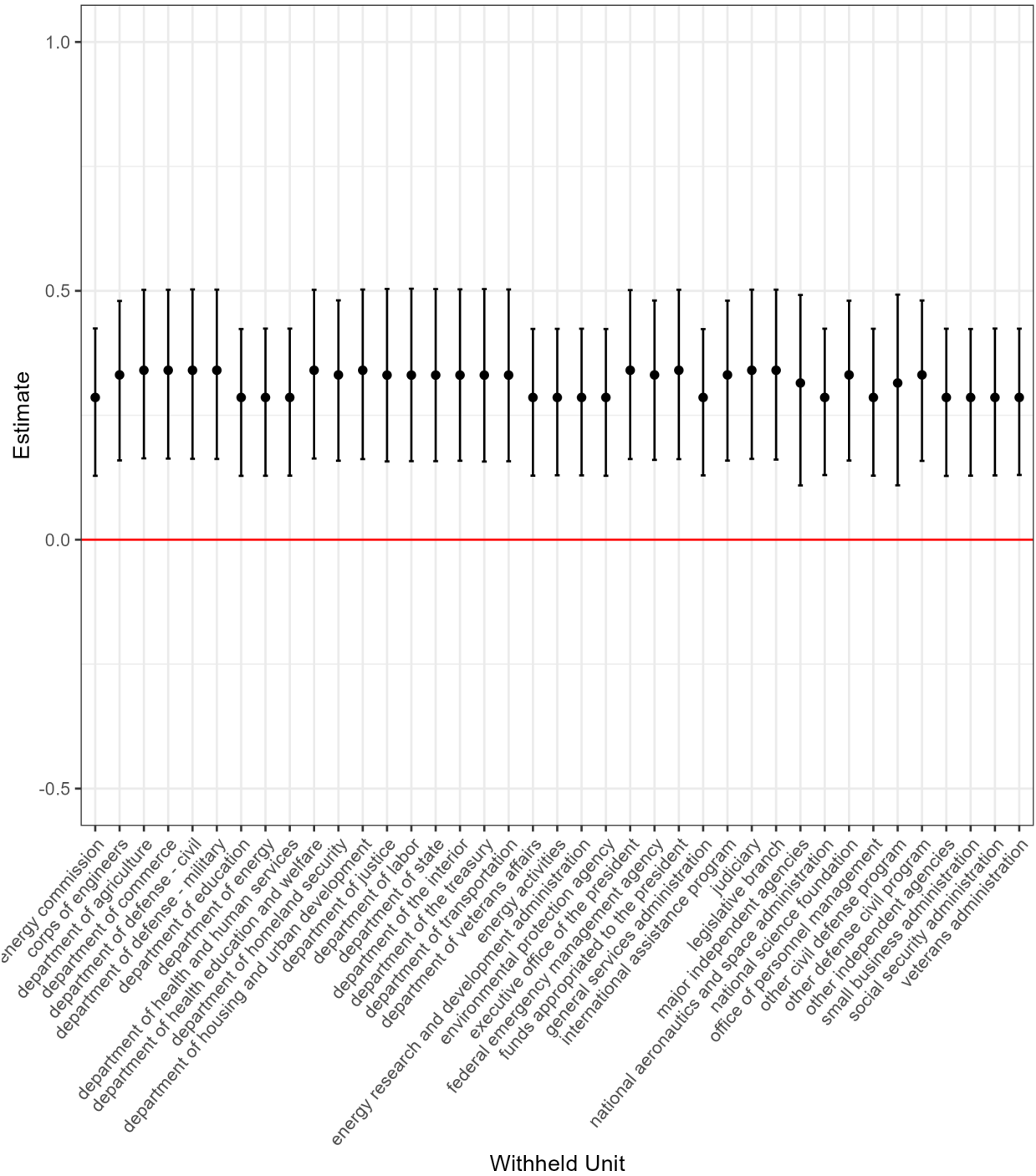
Plot shows the coefficient estimates and standard errors for *subcommittee distance* when estimating the model specification from column (4) of Table 1, while omitting one fiscal year at a time. Years listed along the x-axis indicate which fiscal year was omitted when estimating the model.

**Figure C.2: Omitting one subcommittee at a time**



Plot shows the coefficient estimates and standard errors for *subcommittee distance* when estimating the model specification from column (4) of Table 1, while omitting one subcommittee at a time. Subcommittees listed along the x-axis indicate which subcommittee was omitted when estimating the model.

**Figure C.3: Omitting one unit at a time**



Plot shows the coefficient estimates and standard errors for *subcommittee distance* when estimating the model specification from column (4) of Table 1, while omitting one unit at a time. (Recall that the subunits—such as the National Park Service—are nested within units—such as the Department of the Interior.) Units listed along the *x*-axis indicate which unit was omitted when estimating the model.

## C.5 Subcommittee Distance and Congressional Composition

**Table C.5:** Subcommittee Composition and Presidential Budgetary Success: Interaction with Congressional Composition

	(1)	(2)
Subcommittee Distance	0.292 (0.044)	0.261 (0.021)
Divided Government	-0.323 (0.200)	
Subcommittee Distance x Divided	0.061 (0.781)	
President Seat Share		3.826 (0.188)
Subcommittee Distance x Seat Share		1.520 (0.301)
ln(Request)	0.695 ( $<0.001$ )	0.695 ( $<0.001$ )
Num.Obs.	10777	10777
War Control	✓	✓
Economic Controls	✓	✓
Subunit FE	✓	✓
President FE	✓	✓

Dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference (plus one, logged) between a presidential budget request and the enacted appropriation. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap clustered on subcommittees in parentheses.

## D Strategic Proposal Making: Instrumental Variables Specification

**Table D.1:** Subcommittee Composition and Presidential Budgetary Success: Accounting for Strategic Proposals (IV)

	First stage	Second stage
Subcommittee Distance	−0.028 (0.029)	0.332*** (0.069)
Divided Government	0.037 (0.045)	−0.372+ (0.187)
ln(Request)		0.698 (2.996)
First Term	−0.004 (0.021)	
Year 2	−0.008 (0.014)	
Year 3	0.021 (0.016)	
Year 4	0.021 (0.018)	
Num.Obs.	10777	10777
War Control	✓	✓
Economic Controls	✓	✓
Subunit FE	✓	✓
President FE	✓	✓
Clustered SE	Subcommittee	Subcommittee

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

The dependent variable in the first column is the amount of presidents' budget requests. The dependent variable in the second column is the absolute value of the difference between presidents' requested and enacted budgets, instrumenting for the size of presidents' requests. Standard errors clustered on subcommittee are shown in parentheses, but are estimated conventionally rather than with the wild bootstrap. Downward bias in the standard errors, however, is unlikely to change our inferences as further suggests the weakness of the instruments.

## E Extensions

### E.1 Variation across Issue Areas

**Table E.1:** Subcommittee Composition and Presidential Budgetary Success: Variation across Issue Areas

	All	Defense + FO	Domestic
Subcommittee Distance	0.344 (0.001)	0.094 (0.559)	0.335 (0.005)
ln(Request)	0.696 (<0.001)	0.460 (0.125)	0.711 (<0.001)
Subcom Distance x Defense	-0.180 (0.060)		
Defense	0.086 (0.753)		
Num.Obs.	10 777	936	9841
War Controls	✓	✓	✓
Economic Controls	✓	✓	✓
Subunit FE	✓	✓	✓
President FE	✓	✓	✓

Dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference (plus one, logged) between a presidential budget request and the enacted appropriation. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap clustered on subcommittees in parentheses. Items considered 'Defense + FO' include those under the purview of the Military Construction, Defense, and Foreign Operations subcommittees as well as those under the unit Department of State.

## E.2 Variation across Time and Institutional Change

**Table E.2:** Subcommittee Composition and Presidential Budgetary Success: Variation over Time

	(1)
Subcommittee Distance	0.735 (0.005)
ln(Request)	0.697 ( $<0.001$ )
Divided Government	−0.325 (0.154)
Linear Time	−0.039 (0.283)
Subcom Distance x Linear Time	−0.010 (0.033)
Num.Obs.	10 777
War Controls	✓
Economic Controls	✓
Subunit FE	✓
President FE	✓

Dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference (plus one, logged) between a presidential budget request and the enacted appropriation. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap clustered on subcommittees in parentheses. Linear time variable corresponds to years (e.g., the first year in the sample is coded as 1).



**Table E.3:** Subcommittee Composition and Presidential Budgetary Success: Before and After 1995 Republican Revolution

	(1)
Subcommittee Distance	0.461 ( $<0.001$ )
ln(Request)	0.686 ( $<0.001$ )
Divided Government	-0.513 (0.004)
Subcom Distance x Post-Rep Rev	-0.175 (0.135)
Num.Obs.	10777
War Controls	✓
Economic Controls	✓
Subunit FE	✓
President FE	✓

Dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference (plus one, logged) between a presidential budget request and the enacted appropriation. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap clustered on subcommittees in parentheses. Post-Rep Rev refers to observations from the year 1995 and beyond.

**Table E.4:** Subcommittee Composition and Presidential Budgetary Success: Accounting for House Appropriations Committee Staff

	(1)	(2)
Subcommittee Distance	0.434 (0.053)	1.147 (0.269)
ln(Request)	0.663 ( $<0.001$ )	0.662 ( $<0.001$ )
Divided Government	-0.399 (0.052)	-0.385 (0.051)
Staff Number	-0.005 (0.009)	
Subcom Distance x Staff Number	-0.001 (0.520)	
ln(Staff Number)		-0.813 (0.009)
Subcom Distance x ln(Staff Number)		-0.171 (0.409)
Num.Obs.	9790	9790
War Controls	✓	✓
Economic Controls	✓	✓
Subunit FE	✓	✓
President FE	✓	✓

Dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference (plus one, logged) between a presidential budget request and the enacted appropriation. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap clustered on subcommittees in parentheses. Staff numbers retrieved from CRS Report

### E.3 Committees versus the Floor

**Table E.5:** Subcommittee Composition and Presidential Budgetary Success: Interactions with other Key House Figures

	(1)	(2)
Subcommittee Distance	0.253 (0.046)	0.376 ( $<0.001$ )
ln(Request)	0.696 ( $<0.001$ )	0.696 ( $<0.001$ )
Subcommittee Floor Distance	0.005 (0.936)	
Subcom Distance x Subcom Floor Distance	0.054 (0.503)	
Subcommittee Caucus Distance		-0.079 (0.082)
Subcom Distance x Subcom Caucus Distance		0.021 (0.693)
Num.Obs.	10 777	10 777
War Control	✓	✓
Economic Controls	✓	✓
Subunit FE	✓	✓
President FE	✓	✓

Dependent variable is the absolute value of the difference (plus one, logged) between a presidential budget request and the enacted appropriation. Entries are linear regression coefficients with p-values calculated using the wild bootstrap clustered on subcommittees in parentheses.