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PRESIDENTIAL POPULARITY FROM TRUMAN TO JOHNSON¹

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I think [my grandchildren] will be proud of two things. What I did for the Negro and seeing it through in Vietnam for all of Asia. The Negro cost me 15 points in the polls and Vietnam cost me 20.

Lyndon B. Johnson²

With tenacious regularity over the last two and a half decades the Gallup Poll has posed to its cross-section samples of the American public the following query, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way (the incumbent) is handling his job as President?" The responses to this curious question form an index known as "Presidential popularity." According to Richard Neustadt, the index is "widely taken to approximate reality" in Washington and reports about its behavior are "very widely read"³ there, including, the quotation above would suggest, the highest circles.

Plotted over time, the index forms probably the longest continuous trend line in polling history. This study seeks to analyze the behavior of this line for the period from the beginning of the Truman administration in 1945 to the end of the Johnson administration in January 1969 during which time the popularity question was asked some 300 times.⁴

¹This investigation was supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation. At various stages helpful comments, criticisms, and complaints were lodged by Richard Fenno, Gerald Kramer, Richard Niemi, Peter Ordeshook, Alvin Rabushka, William Riker, and Andrew Scott.

²Quoted, David Wise, "The Twilight of a President," *New York Times Magazine*, November 3, 1968, p. 131.

³Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership* (New York: Wiley, 1960), p. 205n.

⁴A general picture of what this line looks like can be gained from the figure in Robert A. Dahl, *Pluralist Democracy in the United States* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967), p. 107. The Presidential popularity data for the Johnson administration have been taken from the *Gallup Opinion Index*. All other poll data, unless otherwise indicated, have come from the archives of the Roper Public Opinion Research Center at Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts.

Four variables are used as predictors of a President's popularity. These include a measure of the length of time the incumbent has been in office as well as variables which attempt to estimate the influence on his rating of major international events, economic slump and war. To assess the independent impact of each of these variables as they interact in association with Presidential popularity, multiple regression analysis is used as the basic analytic technique.

I. THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE: PRESIDENTIAL POPULARITY

The Presidential popularity question taps a general impression about the way the incumbent seems to be handling his job at the present moment. As Neustadt notes, the response, like the question, is "unfocused,"⁵ unrelated to specific issues or electoral outcomes. The respondent is asked to "approve" or "disapprove" and if he has "no opinion," he must volunteer that response himself. He has infrequently been asked *why* he feels that way—and many respondents when asked are able only vaguely to rationalize their position.⁶ And only at times has he been asked to register how strongly he approves or disapproves.

A disapproving response might be considered a non-constructive vote of no-confidence: the respondent registers his discontent, but he does not need to state who he would prefer in the Presidency. Thus the index is likely to be a very imperfect indicator of success or failure for a President seeking re-election. While approvers are doubtless more likely than disapprovers to endorse his re-election, on considering the opposition some approvers may be attracted into voting against the incumbent just as some disapprovers may be led grudgingly to vote for him.⁷

⁵*Op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁶See for example the breakdowns in *Gallup Opinion Index*, March, 1966, p. 4.

⁷There is also a more technical reason why the popularity index has little direct relevance to the electoral result: Gallup does not ask the question during a President's re-election campaign. Thus for the months between early summer and late fall in 1948, 1956, and 1964 no Gallup data on Presidential popularity exist. One other technical-

Whatever peculiarities there are in the question itself, they are at least constant. Unlike many questions asked by the polling organizations, wording has not varied from time to time by whim or fashion. The stimulus has therefore been essentially fixed; only the response has varied.

And the variation has been considerable. Harry Truman was our most popular President in this period—for a few weeks in 1945 when more than 85 percent of the public expressed approval—and our least popular—from early 1951 until March 1952 when less than 30 percent were usually found to be favorably inclined. Other Presidents have stayed within these limits with Lyndon Johnson most nearly approaching the Truman extremes. President Eisenhower's popularity was never higher than 79 percent, but it never dropped below 49 percent either. President Kennedy also maintained a rather high level of popularity but was in noticeable decline at the time of his death.

The proportion of respondents selecting the "no opinion" option, averaging 14 percent, remained strikingly constant throughout the period.⁸ This is a little surprising since it might be expected that when opinion changes, say, from approval to disapproval of a President, the move would be seen first in a decrease in the support figure with an increase in the no opinion percentage, followed in a later survey by an increase in the disapproval column with a decrease in the no opinion portion. There are a few occasions in which the no opinion percentage seems to rise and fall in this manner, one occurring in the early weeks of the Korean War, but by and large it would appear that if movements into the no opinion column do occur they are compensated for by movements out of it.

This means therefore that the trend in approval is largely a mirror image of the trend in

disapproval; the correlation between the two is $-.98$. And, most conveniently, this almost means that the President's popularity at a given moment can be rendered by a single number: the percentage approving his handling of the job. The no opinion percentage is almost always close to 14 percent and the percentage disapproving is, of course, the remainder.

There is, however, one small wrinkle. The no opinion percentage does get a bit out of hand, quite understandably, in the early weeks of the Kennedy and Eisenhower administrations as substantial numbers of respondents felt inclined to withhold judgment on these new men. This inordinate withholding of opinion declined in the first weeks to more "normal" levels with the result that *both* the level of approval *and* disapproval tended to increase.⁹

Since one of the propositions to be tested in this study proposes that there exists a general downward trend in each President's popularity, this initial rating situation causes something of a problem. If the disapproval score is used as the dependent variable there will be a slight bias in favor of the proposition. It seems preferable to load things against the proposition; hence for the purposes of this study *the dependent variable is the percentage approving the way the incumbent is handling his job as President*.¹⁰ The average approval rating for the entire twenty-four year period is 58 percent.

II. THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

If one stares at Presidential popularity trend lines long enough, one soon comes to imagine one is seeing things. If the things imagined seem also to be mentioned in the literature about the way Presidential popularity should or does behave, one begins to take the visions seriously and to move to test them.

⁹ In the case of President Eisenhower, the no opinion response actually rose a bit before it began to descend, reaching the highest level recorded for any President in the period in March 1953 when 28 percent had no opinion. (President Nixon has proved to be the greatest mystery of all: fully 36 percent registered no opinion after his inauguration.)

¹⁰ It is argued by some that percentages should not be used in their pure state as variables, but rather should be transformed into logits: $Y^* = \log_e [Y/(1-Y)]$. The transformation was tried in the analysis, but it made little difference. Therefore the more easily communicated percentage version has been kept. In any event the dependent variable rarely takes extreme values. It rises to 80 percent only three or four times and never dips below 23 percent.

ity is worth mention. There is a slight underrepresentation of data points in Truman's first years. By 1950, except for the election year phenomenon, the Gallup organization was asking the question on virtually every survey conducted—some dozen or sixteen per year. Before that time the question was posed on the average only about half as frequently. Neither of these technical problems, however, is likely to bias the results in any important way, especially since so much of the analysis allows each administration a fair amount of distinctiveness.

⁸ The standard deviation for the no opinion response is 2.93. By contrast the comparable statistic is 14.8 for the approve response and 14.5 for the disapprove response.

In this manner were formulated four basic "independent" variables, predictor variables of Presidential popularity. They are: 1) a "coalition of minorities" variable that suggests the overall trend in a President's popularity will be downward; 2) a "rally round the flag" variable which anticipates that international crises and similar phenomena will give a President a short-term boost in popularity; 3) an "economic slump" variable associating recessions with decreased popularity; and 4) a "war" variable predicting a decrease in popularity under the conditions of the Korean and Vietnam wars.

1. *The "coalition of minorities" variable.* In a somewhat different context Anthony Downs has suggested the possibility that an administration, even if it always acts with majority support on each issue, can gradually alienate enough minorities to be defeated. This could occur when the minority on each issue feels so intensely about its loss that it is unable to be placated by administration support on other policies it favors. A clever opposition, under appropriate circumstances, could therefore forge a coalition of these intense minorities until it had enough votes to overthrow the incumbent.¹¹

Transposed to Presidential popularity, this concept might inspire the expectation that a President's popularity would show a general downward trend as he is forced on a variety of issues to act and thus create intense, unforgiving opponents of former supporters. It is quite easy to point to cases where this may have occurred. President Kennedy's rather dramatic efforts to force back a steel price rise in 1962, while supported by most Americans, tended to alienate many in the business community.¹² Administration enforcement of the Supreme Court's school desegregation order tended to create intense opposition among white Southerners even if the Presidential moves had passive majority support in most of the country.¹³

Realistically, the concept can be extended somewhat. From time to time there arise exquisite dilemmas in which the President must act and in which he will tend to alienate *both* sides no matter what he does, a phenomenon related to what Aaron Wildavsky has called a "minus sum" game.¹⁴ President Truman's seizure of the

steel mills in 1952 made neither labor nor management (nor the Supreme Court, for that matter) happy. For the mayor of New York, situations like this seem to arise weekly.

There are other, only vaguely related, reasons to expect an overall decline in popularity. One would be disillusionment. In the process of being elected, the President invariably says or implies he will do more than he can do and some disaffection of once bemused supporters is all but inevitable. A most notable example would be the case of those who supported President Johnson in 1964 because he seemed opposed to escalation in Vietnam. Furthermore initial popularity ratings are puffed up by a variety of weak followers. These might include leering opposition partisans looking for the first excuse to join the aggrieved, excitable types who soon became bored by the humdrum of post-election existence, and bandwagon riders whose fair weather support dissolves with the first sprinkle.¹⁵ As Burns Roper notes, "In a sense, Presidential elections are quadriennial myth builders which every four years make voters believe some man is better than he is. The President takes office with most of the nation on his side, but this artificial 'unity' soon begins to evaporate."¹⁶

For these reasons the coalition of minorities variable, as it is dubbed here, predicts decline. "Love," said Machiavelli, "is held by a chain of obligation which, men being selfish, is broken whenever it serves their purpose."¹⁷

The coalition of minorities variable is measured simply by the length of time, in years, since the incumbent was inaugurated (for first terms) or re-elected (for second terms). It varies then from zero to about four and should be negatively correlated with popularity: the longer the man has been in office, the lower his popularity. It is; the simple r is $-.47$. The decline is assumed to start over again for second terms because the President is expected to have spent the campaign rebuilding his popular coalition by soothing the disaffected, re-deluding the disillusioned, and putting on a show for the bored. If he is unable to do this, he will not be re-elected, something which has not happened in the post-war era although twice Presidents have declined to make the effort.

The analysis will assume a *linear* decline in popularity. That is, a President's popularity is assumed to decline at an even rate for all four

¹¹ *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), pp. 55-60.

¹² See the data in H. G. Erskine, "The Polls," 28 *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 341 and 338 (Summer 1964).

¹³ See John M. Fenton, *In Your Opinion* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), p. 146.

¹⁴ "The Empty-head Blues: Black Rebellion and White Reaction," *The Public Interest*, Spring 1968, pp. 3-16.

¹⁵ On the bandwagon effect among nonvoters, see Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960), pp. 110-115.

¹⁶ Burns Roper, "The Public Looks at Presidents," *The Public Pulse*, January 1969.

¹⁷ *The Prince*, ch. XVII.

years of his term: if a decline of 6 percentage points per year is indicated, he will be down 6 points at the end of his first year, 12 at the end of the second, 18 at the end of the third, and 24 after four years. There is nothing in the justification for the coalition of minorities variable which demands that the decline must occur with such tedious regularity but, when curvilinear variants were experimented with, little or no improvement was found. Hence the reliance in this study on the linear version which has the advantage of simplicity and ease of communication.

2. *The "rally round the flag" variable.* This variable seeks to bring into the analysis a phenomenon often noted by students of the Presidency and of public opinion: certain intense international events generate a "rally round the flag" effect which tends to give a boost to the President's popularity rating. As Kenneth Waltz has observed, "In the face of such an event, the people rally behind their chief executive."¹⁸ Tom Wicker: "Simply being President through a great crisis or a big event . . . draws Americans together in his support."¹⁹ Richard Neustadt notes "the correspondence between popularity and happenings,"²⁰ Burns Roper finds "approval has usually risen during international crises,"²¹ and Nelson Polsby observes, "Invariably, the popular response to a President during international crisis is favorable, regardless of the wisdom of the policies he pursues."²²

The difficulty with this concept is in operationalizing it. There is a terrible temptation to find a bump on a popularity plot, then to scurry to historical records to find an international "rally point" to associate with it. This process all but guarantees that the variable will prove significant.

The strategy adopted here to identify rally points was somewhat different and hopefully more objective. A definition of what a rally point should look like was created largely on *a priori* grounds and then a search of historical records was made to find events which fit the definition. Most of the points so identified are associated with bumps on the plot—that after all was how the concept was thought of in the first place—but quite a few are not and the

bumps associated with some are considerably more obvious than others.

In general, a rally point must be associated with an event which 1) is international and 2) involves the United States and particularly the President directly; and it must be 3) specific, dramatic, and sharply focused.

It must be international because only developments confronting the nation as a whole are likely to generate a rally round the flag effect. Major domestic events—riots, scandals, strikes—are at least as likely to exacerbate internal divisions as they are to soothe them.

To qualify as a rally point an international event is required to involve the United States and the President directly because major conflicts between other powers are likely to engender split loyalties and are less likely to seem relevant to the average American.

Finally the event must be specific, dramatic and sharply focused in order to assure public attention and interest. As part of this, events which transpire gradually, no matter how important, are excluded from consideration because their impact on public attitudes is likely to be diffused. Thus sudden changes in the bombing levels in Vietnam are expected to create a reaction while the gradual increase of American troops is not.

Errors in this process could occur by including events whose importance is only obvious in retrospect or by ignoring events like the Geneva summit of 1955 which may seem minor in historical perspective but were held significant at the time. For this reason more reliance has been put on indexes of newspaper content than on broad, historical accounts of the period.²³ In general if there has been a bias in selecting rally points it has been in the direction of excluding border-line cases. This was done in profound respect for the lack of public interest and knowledge on most items of international affairs.

At that, some 34 rally points were designated. In general they can be said to fall into six categories. First, there are the four instances of sudden American military intervention: Korea, Lebanon, the Bay of Pigs, and the Dominican Republic. A second closely related category encompasses major military developments in ongoing wars: in Korea, the Inchon landing and the Chinese intervention; in Vietnam, the Tonkin

¹⁸ Kenneth N. Waltz, "Electoral Punishment and Foreign Policy Crisis" in James N. Rosenau, *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 272.

¹⁹ Tom Wicker, "In the Nation: Peace, It's Wonderful," *New York Times*, July 4, 1967, p. 18.

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 100.

²¹ *Op. cit.*

²² *Congress and the Presidency* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 25.

²³ Especially valuable was Eric V. Nordheim and Pamela B. Wilcox, "Major Events of the Nuclear Age: A Chronology to Assist in the Analysis of American Public Opinion," Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Oak Ridge, Tennessee, August 1967. Other sources often consulted included the *New York Times Index* and the Chronology section of the *World Almanac*.

Bay episode, the beginning of bombing of North Vietnam, the major extension of this bombing, and the Tet offensive. Third are the major diplomatic developments of the period: crises over Cuban missiles, the U-2 and atomic testing, the enunciation of the "Truman doctrine" with its offer of aid to Greece and Turkey, the beginning of, and major changes in, the peace talks in Korea and Vietnam, and the several crises in Berlin. Fourth are the two dramatic technological developments: Sputnik and the announcement of the first Soviet atomic test. The fifth category includes the meetings between the President and the head of the Soviet Union at Potsdam in 1945, Geneva in 1955, Camp David in 1959, Paris in 1960, Vienna in 1961, and Glassboro in 1967. While these events are rarely spectacular they, like crisis, do generate a let's-get-behind-the-President effect. Because they are far less dramatic—even if sometimes more important—Presidential conferences with other powers (e.g., the British at Nassau) are excluded as are American meetings with the Soviet Union at the foreign minister level.

Sixth and finally, as an analytic convenience the start of each Presidential term is rather arbitrarily designated as a rally point. Presidents Truman and Johnson came in under circumstances which could justifiably be classified under the "rally round the flag" rubric although the crisis was a domestic one. The other points all involve elections or re-elections which perhaps might also be viewed as a somewhat unifying and cathartic experience.

These then are the events chosen to be associated with the rally round the flag variable. No listing will satisfy everyone's perspective about what has or has not been important to Americans in this 24 year period. However, in the analysis the variable has proven to be a rather hardy one. Experimentation with it suggests the addition or subtraction of a few rally points is likely to make little difference.

The rally round the flag variable is measured by the length of time, in years, since the last rally point. It varies then from zero to a theoretical maximum of about four or an empirical one of 1.9. Like the coalition of minorities variable, it should be negatively correlated with popularity: the longer it has been since the last rally round the flag event, the lower the popularity of the incumbent. It is; the simple r is $-.11$. Some experiments with curvilinear transformations of the variable were attempted but, since improvement again was marginal at best, the variable has been left in linear form.

Each rally point is given the same weighting in the analysis. One effort to soften this rather crude policy was made. The rally points were

separated into two groups: "good" rally points (e.g., the Cuban missile crisis) in which the lasting effect on opinion was likely to be favorable to the President and "bad" one (e.g., the U-2 crisis, the Bay of Pigs) in which the initial favorable surge could be expected to be rather transitory. Two separate rally round the flag variables were then created with the anticipation that they would generate somewhat different regression coefficients. The differences however were small and inconsistent. The public seems to react to "good" and "bad" international events in about the same way. Thus, to this limited extent, the equal weighting of rally points seems justified.

In tandem, the concepts underlying the coalition of minorities and rally round the flag variables predict that the President's popularity will continually decline over time and that international crises and similar events will explain short term bumps and wiggles in this otherwise inexorable descent.²⁴

3. *The "economic slump" variable.* There is a goodly amount of evidence, and an even goodlier amount of speculation, suggesting a relationship between economic conditions and electoral behavior. The extension of such thinking to Presidential popularity is both natural and predated. Neustadt, for example, concludes the recession in 1958 caused a drop in President Eisenhower's popularity.²⁵

The economic indicator used here will be the unemployment rate. The statistic recommends itself because it is available for the entire period and is reported on a monthly basis.²⁶ It is used as a general indicator of economic health or malaise and is not taken simply as a comment about the employed. It is assumed that the individual respondent, in allowing economic perceptions to influence him, essentially does so by comparing how things are *now* with how they were when the incumbent began his present term of office. If conditions are worse, he is in-

²⁴ Roper notes that President Kennedy's highest point of popularity occurred after the Bay of Pigs invasion and concludes this fact says something special about that crisis event (*op. cit.*) But this phenomenon is due to *two* effects—the rally round the flag effect *and* the fact that the event occurred very early in Kennedy's administration when the value for the coalition of minorities variable was yet very low.

²⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 97ff.

²⁶ Data were gathered from Geoffrey H. Moore (ed.), *Business Cycle Indicators*, Vol. II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 122; and, for more recent data, issues of the *Monthly Labor Review*.

clined to disapprove the President's handling of his job, if things are better he is inclined to approve. The economic variable therefore becomes the unemployment rate at the time the incumbent's term began subtracted from the rate at the time of the poll.²⁷ It is positive when things are worse and negative when things are better. It should be negatively correlated with popularity. But it isn't.

Unemployment reached some of its highest points during the recessions under the Eisenhower administration. The problem, to be examined more fully in Section VI below, is that Eisenhower was a *generally* popular President. Thus even though his popularity seemed to dip during the recessions, high unemployment comes to be associated with a relatively popular President. This problem can be handled rather easily within regression analysis by assigning to each of the Presidential administrations a "dummy" variable, the care and feeding of which will be discussed more fully in Section III below.

However, even when this circumstance is taken into account, the correlation coefficient and the regression coefficient for the economic variable remain positive. This seems to be largely due to the fact that *both* unemployment and the popularity of the incumbent President were in general decline between 1961 and 1968. The correlation for the period is .77.

Therefore a final alteration administered to the economic variable was to set it equal to zero whenever the unemployment rate was lower at the time of the survey than it had been at the start of the incumbent's present term. This alteration is a substantive one and is executed as the only way the data can be made to come out "right." In essence it suggests that *an economy in slump harms a President's popularity, but an economy which is improving does not seem to help his rating*. Bust is bad for him but boom is not particularly good. There is punishment but never reward.

Perhaps this can be seen in a comparison of the 1960 and the 1968 campaigns. In 1960, as

²⁷ One wrinkle, which is intuitively comfortable but makes little difference in the actual results, was to do something about the unemployment rates at the start of the first terms of Presidents Truman and Eisenhower when unemployment was "artificially" depressed due to ongoing wars. Presumably the public would be understanding about the immediate postwar rise in unemployment. Therefore for these two terms the initial unemployment level was taken to be that level which held six months after the war ended while the economic variable for the few months of the war and the six month period was set equal to zero.

Harvey Segal notes, "What was important was the vague but pervasive feeling of dissatisfaction with the performance of the economy, the pain that made the public receptive to JFK's appeals."²⁸ In 1968, representing administrations that had presided over an unprecedented period of boom, Vice President Humphrey never seemed able to turn this fact to his advantage.

It is important to note that in practice this variable, which will be called the "economic slump" variable because of its inability to credit boom, takes on a non-zero value only during the Eisenhower administration and during the unemployment rise of 1949-50. In symbolic form the variable's peculiarities can be expressed in the following; the units are the percentage of unemployed:

$$\begin{aligned} E &= U_t - U_{t_0} && \text{if } U_t - U_{t_0} > 0 \\ &= 0 && \text{if } U_t - U_{t_0} \leq 0 \end{aligned}$$

where

U_t = Unemployment rate at the time of the survey

and

U_{t_0} = Unemployment rate at the beginning of the incumbent's present term

4. *The "war" variable.* It is widely held that the unpopular, puzzling, indecisive wars in Korea and Vietnam severely hurt the popularity of Presidents Truman and Johnson.²⁹ As noted in the quotation that heads this report, President Johnson himself apportions 20 percentage points of his drop in popularity to the Vietnam War.

This notion seems highly plausible. The popularity of Presidents Truman and Johnson was in steady decline as the wars progressed with record lows occurring during each President's last year in office at points when the wars seemed most hopeless and meaningless. The wars unquestionably contributed in a major way to their decisions not to seek third terms and then, when they had stepped aside, the wars proved to be major liabilities for their party's candidates in the next elections. Overall, the correlation between Presidential popularity and the presence of war is -.66.

There are problems with this analysis, however. The coalition of minorities concept argues that decline is a natural phenomenon and, indeed, a glance at a plot of Presidential popularity clearly shows Truman and Johnson in decline *before* the wars started. Furthermore, as

²⁸ "The Pain Threshold of Economics in an Election Year," *New York Times*, July 15, 1968.

²⁹ Waltz, *op. cit.*, pp. 273ff, 288; Neustadt, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-99; Wicker, *op. cit.*; Roper, *op. cit.*

will be seen, both men experienced noticeable declines during their *first* terms when they had no war to contend with. The real question is, then, did the war somehow add to the decline of popularity beyond that which might be expected to occur on other grounds?

An answer can be approached through multiple regression analysis. After allowing for a general pattern of decline under the coalition of minorities variable, the additional impact of a variable chosen to represent war can be assessed. It is also possible in this manner to compare the two wars to see if their association with Presidential popularity differed.

The presence of war is incorporated in the analysis simply by a dummy variable that takes on a value of one when a war is on and remains zero otherwise. The beginning of the Vietnam War was taken to be June 1965 with the beginnings of the major US troop involvement. At that point it became an American war for the public; before that ignorance of the war was considerable: as late as mid-1964, 25 percent of the public admitted it had never heard of the fighting in Vietnam.³⁰

Other war measures of a more complex nature were experimented with. They increase in magnitude as the war progresses and thus should be able to tap a wearying effect as the years go by and should be negatively associated with popularity. These measures, however, are very highly correlated with the coalition of minorities variable for the two relevant Presidential terms and thus are all but useless in the analysis. The simple dummy variable suffers this defect in lesser measure, although it is far from immune, and thus, despite its crudities, has been used.³¹

5. *Other variables.* The analysis of Presidential popularity will apply in various ways only the four variables discussed above—a rather austere representation of a presumably complex process. As will be seen, it is quite possible to get a sound fit with these four variables, but at various stages in the investigation—

³⁰ A. T. Steele, *The American People and China* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 294. In May 1964 Gallup found almost two-thirds of the population said they paid little or no attention to developments in South Vietnam. Lloyd A. Free and Hadley Cantril, *The Political Beliefs of Americans* (New York: Clarion, 1968), pp. 59–60.

³¹ Although the Korean War continued into President Eisenhower's administration, he is not "blamed" for the war in the analysis since of course he was elected partly because of discontent over the war. Accordingly the war variable is set at zero for this period.

which involved the examination of hundreds of regression equations—a search was made for other variables which could profitably be added to the predictor set.

International developments are reasonably well incorporated into the analysis with a specific variable included for war and another for major crisis-like activities. Domestically, however, there is only the half-time variable for economic slump and the important but very un-specific coalition of minorities variable.

Accordingly it would be valuable to generate some sort of domestic equivalent to the rally round the flag variable to assess more precisely how major domestic events affect Presidential popularity. Operationally, however, this is a difficult task. First, while it is a justifiable assertion that international crises will redound in the short term to a President's benefit it is by no means clear how a domestic crisis, whether riot, strike, or scandal, should affect his popularity. Furthermore major domestic concerns have varied quite widely not only in intensity and duration, but also in nature. Labor relations, which rarely made big news in the mid-1960s, were of profound concern in the middle and late 1940s as a multitude of major strikes threatened to cripple the nation and the adventures of John L. Lewis and the Taft-Hartley bill dominated the headlines. In the 1950s, however, labor broke into the news only with an occasional steel or auto strike or with the labor racketeering scandals in the last years of the decade. On the other hand, race relations, of extreme importance in the 1960s, made, except for the Little Rock crisis of 1957 and an occasional election-time outburst, little claim to public attention before that time. From the late 1940s into the mid-1950s sundry spy and Communist hunts were of concern, but the issue fairly well fizzled after that. Other issues which might be mentioned had even briefer or more erratic days in the sun: the food shortage of 1947, the MacArthur hearing of 1951, various space flights. Similarly, personal crisis for the Presidents such as heart attacks and major surgery for Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson and the attempted assassination of President Truman could not readily be fashioned into a predictor variable. In any event, these events seem to have far more impact on the stock market than on popularity ratings.

Scandal is a recurring feature of public awareness and thus is more promising as a potential variable in the analysis. Besides the scandals associated with alleged spies and Communists in the government during the McCarthy era and those associated with labor in the late 1950s, Americans, with greatly varying degrees

of pain, have suffered through the five percent scandal of 1949–50; charges of corruption in the RFC in 1951, in the Justice Department in 1952, and in the FHA in 1954; and scandals over Sherman Adams in 1958, over television quiz shows in 1959, over industry “payola” in the late 1950s, over Billie Sol Estes in 1962, and over Bobby Baker in 1963. While scandal is never worked into the regression analysis some preliminary suggestions as to its relevance to a “moral crisis” phenomenon which may in turn affect Presidential popularity are developed in Section VI below.

Some thought was given to including a “lame duck” variable when it was observed that the popularity of Presidents Truman and Johnson rose noticeably after they decided not to seek third terms. The trouble is, however, that President Eisenhower was a lame duck for his entire second term and it was found easier to ignore the whole idea than to decide what to do about this uncomfortable fact.

One domestic variable which did show some very minor promise was a dummy variable for the presence of a major strike. The variable takes on a zero value almost everywhere except in parts of President Truman’s first term. After that time major strikes were rather unusual and, when they did occur, usually lasted for such a short time that there was barely time to have a public opinion survey conducted to test their effects. Despite these peculiarities, the variable did show statistical significance, though only after the Korean War dummy had been incorporated in the equation to allow for a major peculiarity of President Truman’s *second* term. Substantively the variable suggests a popularity drop of less than three percentage points when a major strike is on and, as such a minor contributor, it is not included in the discussion below. Its small success, however, may suggest that further experimentation with the effects of specific domestic events could prove profitable.

III. RESULTS WITHOUT THE WAR VARIABLE

In summary the expected behavior of Presidential popularity is as follows. It is anticipated 1) that each President will experience in each term a general decline of popularity; 2) that this decline will be interrupted from time to time with temporary upsurges associated with international crises and similar events; 3) that the decline will be accelerated in direct relation to increases in unemployment rates over those prevailing when the President began his term, but that improvement in unemployment rates will not affect his popularity one way or the other; and 4) that the President will experience an additional loss of popularity if a war is on.

In this section the relation of the first three variables to Presidential popularity will be assessed. In the next section the war variable will be added to the analysis.

The association between the first three variables and Presidential popularity is given in its baldest form in equation 1 in Table 1.³² The equation explains a respectable, if not sensational, 22 percent of the variance. The coalition of minorities variable shows, in conformity with the speculation above, a significant negative relationship. The equation suggests that, in general, a President’s popularity rating starts at 69 percent and declines at a rate of about six percentage points per year.

However, while the coefficients for the rally round the flag and economic slump variables are in the expected direction, they are not significant either in a statistical or a substantive sense. The trouble with the economic slump variable was anticipated in the discussion about it in Section II: the economic decline occurred during the relatively popular reign of President Eisenhower; while the slump seems to have hurt his popularity, even with the decline he remained popular compared to other Presidents; hence what is needed is a variable to take into account this peculiar “Eisenhower effect.”

To account for this phenomenon, equation 2 mixes into the analysis a dummy variable for each of the Presidents. This formulation insists that all Presidents must decline (or increase) in popularity at the same rate but, unlike equation 1, it allows each President to begin at his own particular level. Thus peculiar effects of personality, style, and party and of differences in the conditions under which the President came into office can be taken into account.³³

The addition improves things considerably.

³² Each equation is displayed vertically. The dependent variable, the percentage approving the way the President is handling his job, has a mean of 57.5 and a standard deviation of 14.8. The number of cases is 292. The figures in parentheses are the standard errors for the respective partial regression coefficients. To be regarded statistically significant a regression coefficient should be, conventionally, at least twice its standard error. All equations reported in this study are significant (F test) at well beyond the .01 level. The Durbin-Watson *d* is an indicator of serial correlation which suggests decreasing positive serial correlation as the statistic approaches the value of 2.0. All equations in this study exhibit a statistically significant amount of positive serial correlation.

³³ The dummy variables formalize the sort of discussion found in Neustadt, *op. cit.*, p. 98. They account for what a singer might call tessitura.

TABLE 1. REGRESSION RESULTS INCLUDING ADMINISTRATION EFFECTS

| | Equations | | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Intercept | 69.37 | 54.51 | 68.15 | 71.52 |
| Independent variables | | | | |
| Coalitions of minorities (in years) | -6.14 (0.71) | -5.12 (0.48) | | |
| Rally round the flag (in years) | -0.31 (1.95) | -2.15 (1.35) | -1.87 (1.07) | -2.63 (1.07) |
| Economic slump (in % unemployed) | -0.09 (0.96) | -3.18 (0.75) | -5.30 (0.60) | -5.86 (0.60) |
| Dummy variables for administrations | | | | |
| Eisenhower | | 24.08 (1.42) | 0.51 (2.29) | |
| Kennedy | | 23.87 (1.82) | 11.33 (2.96) | |
| Johnson | | 10.46 (1.54) | 4.26 (2.48) | |
| Coalition of minorities variable for administrations (in years) | | | | |
| Truman | | | -11.44 (0.84) | -12.54 (0.50) |
| Eisenhower | | | 0.83 (0.57) | 0.13 (0.47) |
| Kennedy | | | -5.96 (1.36) | -1.58 (0.82) |
| Johnson | | | -9.12 (0.67) | -8.68 (0.50) |
| <i>d</i> | .13 | .30 | .46 | .44 |
| Standard error of estimate | 13.16 | 8.88 | 6.86 | 7.06 |
| <i>R</i> ² | .22 | .65 | .79 | .78 |

The fit is much better and the rally round the flag and economic slump variables attain respectable magnitudes in the predicted direction, although the rally round the flag variable does not quite reach statistical significance.

The equation suggests that the Presidents have declined at an overall rate of over five per-

centage points per year but that each has done so at his own particular level. President Truman's decline is measured from a starting point of 54.51 percent (when the dummy variables for the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations are all zero). President Eisenhower declines from a much higher level, about 79 per-

cent (54.51 + 24.08), President Kennedy from 78 percent, and President Johnson from 65 percent.

The importance of these dummy variables clearly demonstrates that *an analysis of Presidential popularity cannot rely entirely on the variables discussed in Section II, but must also incorporate parameters designed to allow for the special character of each administration.* To an extent this is unfortunate. The beauty of equation 1 is that it affords a prediction of a President's popular rating simply by measuring how long he has been in office, how long it has been since the last rally point, and how many people are unemployed. Such predictions, however, would be quite inaccurate because the fit of the equation is rather poor. Instead one must include the administration variables, the magnitudes of which cannot be known until the President's term is over. So much for beauty.

In equation 3 administration effects are incorporated in a different manner, greatly improving fit and reducing serial correlation. In this formulation each President is allowed to begin at his own level of popularity as in equation 2, but in addition each may decline (or increase) at his own rate: for each administration there is a different coefficient for the coalition of minorities variable. Three of the four values so generated are strongly significant while the magnitudes of the administration dummies drop greatly. When the administration dummies are dropped entirely from consideration, as in equation 4, the regression coefficients mostly remain firm and the fit of the equation is scarcely weakened. It is clear that *the important differences between administrations do not lie so much in different overall levels of popularity, but rather in the widely differing rates at which the coalition of minorities variable takes effect.*

The popular decline of Presidents Truman and Johnson has been almost precipitous. President Truman's rating fell off at some 11 or 12 percentage points per year while President Johnson declined at a rate of around 9 points a year. President Kennedy was noticeably more successful at holding on to his supporters. Then there is the Eisenhower phenomenon: in spite of all the rationalizations for the coalitions of minorities concept tediously arrayed in Section II, President Eisenhower's rating uncooperatively refuses to decline at all.³⁴

³⁴ It was noted in Section I that some minor bias in these results is introduced by an embellished rate of "no opinion" in the first weeks of the Kennedy and first Eisenhower terms. As this rate declined, there was some tendency for the Presidents' approval and disapproval rates to rise. To

In equation 3, Presidents who served two terms were required to begin each term at the same level and their rate of decline or increase also had to be the same in each term. Liberation from these restrictions is gained in the rather cluttered equation 5 of Table 2 which is like equation 3 except that it affords a term by term, rather than simply an administration by administration comparison. As can be seen President Eisenhower managed a statistically significant *increase* of popularity of some two and a half percentage points per year in his first term. His second term ratings showed a more human, but very minor and statistically non-significant decline.³⁵

No important differences emerge in the Eisenhower phenomenon when the economic slump variable, which functions mainly during the Eisenhower years, is dropped from the equation.

No matter how the data are looked at then the conclusion remains the same. *President Eisenhower's ability to maintain his popularity, especially during his first term, is striking and unparalleled among the postwar Presidents.* An examination of some of the possible reasons for this phenomenon is conducted in Section VI below.

The rally round the flag and the economic slump variables emerge alive and well in equations 3, 4, and 5 (and 6). Both are usually statistically significant but their substantive importance varies as one moves from an administration by administration formulation of the coalition of minorities variable (equations 3 and 4) to the term by term formulation in Table 2. Specifically, the rally round the flag variable gets stronger while the economic slump variable weakens.

The rally round the flag variable is very much a parasite—it is designed to explain bumps and wiggles on a pattern measured mainly by the other variables. Consequently the rally round the flag variable does very poorly on its own and only begins to shine when the overall trends become well determined by the rest of

see if this peculiarity had any major impact, equations 3 and 4 were recalculated using the percentage *disapproving* as the dependent variable. This manipulation causes no fundamental differences, although President Eisenhower's rating behaves a little less outrageously.

³⁵ If the term dummies are dropped from the equation to attain a version comparable to equation 4, the Eisenhower phenomenon holds except that his first term increase drops to 2.00 (still significant) and his second term decrease is a slightly steeper -0.36 (still not significant).

TABLE 2. REGRESSION RESULTS INCLUDING TERM EFFECTS AND THE WAR VARIABLES

| | Equations | |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| | (5) | (6) |
| Intercept | 72.00 | 72.38 |
| Independent variables | | |
| Rally round the flag (in years) | -4.88 (1.04) | -6.15 (1.05) |
| Economic slump (in % unemployed) | -2.67 (0.65) | -3.72 (0.65) |
| Dummy variables for terms | | |
| Truman—second | -15.25 (3.69) | -12.41 (3.57) |
| Eisenhower—first | -3.17 (3.15) | -2.41 (3.02) |
| Eisenhower—second | -5.30 (3.07) | -4.35 (2.94) |
| Kennedy | 7.53 (3.29) | 7.18 (3.14) |
| Johnson—first | 7.14 (5.50) | 6.77 (5.26) |
| Johnson—second | -1.15 (3.06) | -0.79 (3.25) |
| Coalition of minorities variable for terms (in years) | | |
| Truman—first | -9.21 (1.41) | -8.93 (1.35) |
| Truman—second | -7.98 (1.00) | -2.83 (1.37) |
| Eisenhower—first | 2.45 (0.85) | 2.58 (0.82) |
| Eisenhower—second | -0.07 (0.65) | 0.22 (0.62) |
| Kennedy | -5.11 (1.21) | -4.76 (1.16) |
| Johnson—first | -4.98 (14.01) | -3.71 (13.39) |
| Johnson—second | -8.15 (0.66) | -8.13 (0.80) |
| Dummy variables for wars | | |
| Korea | | -18.19 (3.43) |
| Vietnam | | -0.28 (2.79) |
| d | .57 | .67 |
| Standard error of estimate | 6.07 | 5.80 |
| R ² | .84 | .86 |

the equation. In the end, *the rally round the flag variable suggests a popularity decline of around five or six percentage points for every year since the last rally point*—about the same magnitude as the coalition of minorities variable in its general state as in equations 1 and 2.

The declining fortunes of the economic slump variable suggest that the variable in equations 3 and 4 was partly covering for the differences between the two Eisenhower terms: the first term was associated with increasing popularity and a smaller recession, the second with somewhat declining popularity and a larger recession. With the Eisenhower terms more thoroughly differentiated in equation 5, the variable is reduced to a more purely economic function. The magnitude of the coefficient of the *economic slump variable* in this equation *suggests a decline of popularity of about three percentage points for every percentage point rise in the unemployment rate over the level holding when the President began his present term*. Since the unemployment rate has varied in the postwar period only from about 3 to 7 percent, the substantive impact of the economic slump variable on Presidential popularity is somewhat limited.

IV. RESULTS WITH THE WAR VARIABLE ADDED

The variable designed to tap the impact on Presidential popularity of the wars in Korea and Vietnam was applied with no great confidence that it would prove to have an independent, added effect when the coalition of minorities had already been incorporated into the equation especially given the problem of multicollinearity. It is obvious from a perusal of a plot that, as noted in Section II and as demonstrated in equation 5, Presidents Truman and Johnson were in popular decline during their warless first terms.³⁶ Furthermore each was in clear decline in the first part of his second term before the wars started and it is not at all obvious that this trend altered when the wars began.

The equations suggest otherwise, however. When a war dummy was appended to the equations already discussed, it emerged significant and suggested that the presence of war depressed the popularity of Presidents Truman and Johnson by over seven percentage points.

The next step, obviously, was to set up a separate dummy variable for each war. This brought forth the incredible result documented in equation 6: *the Korean War had a large, significant, independent negative impact on President Truman's popularity of some 18 percentage points, but the Vietnam War had no independent impact on President Johnson's popularity at all*.

Confronted with a result like this, one's first

³⁶ Regression statistics relating to President Johnson's first term are very unreliable, as the size of the standard errors suggests, because the popularity question was posed so few times during this brief period.

impulse is to do something to make it go away. This impulse was fully indulged. Variables were transformed and transmuted, sections of the analysis were reformed or removed, potentially biasing data were sectioned out. But nothing seemed to work. The relationship persisted. In fact under some manipulations the relationship became stronger.

One's second impulse, then, is to attempt to explain the result. One speculates.

The wars in Korea and Vietnam differed from each other in many respects, of course, but it seems unlikely that these differences can be used in any simple manner to explain the curious regression finding. This is the case because, as one study has indicated, public response to the wars themselves was much the same. Support for each war, high at first, declined as a logarithmic function of American casualties—quickly at first, then more slowly. The functions for each of the wars for comparable periods were quite similar. Furthermore both wars inspired support and opposition from much the same segments of the population.³⁷

Therefore it is probably a sounder approach in seeking to explain the regression finding to look specifically at popular attitudes toward *the President's relation to the war*, rather than to perceptions of the war itself. A comment by Richard Neustadt seems strikingly relevant in this respect. "Truman," he observes, "seems to have run afoul of the twin notions that a wartime Chief Executive ought to be 'above politics' and that he ought to help the generals 'win.'"³⁸

President Johnson seems to have run considerably less afoul. In seeking to keep the war "above politics," he assiduously cultivated bipartisan support for the war and repeatedly sought to demonstrate that the war effort was simply an extension of the policies and actions of previous Presidents. He was especially successful at generating public expressions of approval from the most popular Republican of them all: General Eisenhower. Vocal opposition to the war in Vietnam came either from groups largely unassociated with either party or from members of the President's own party. Then, when the latter opposition began to move from expressions of misgivings at congressional hearings to explicit challenges in the primaries, President Johnson removed himself from the battle precisely, he said, to keep the war "above politics." And, while there were occasional com-

plaints from the right during Vietnam that President Johnson had adopted a "no win" policy there, these were continually being undercut by public statements from General William Westmoreland—a man highly respected by the right—insisting that he was receiving all the support he needed from the President and was getting it as fast as he needed it.

If these observations are sound, the single event which best differentiates the impact of the Korean and Vietnam wars on Presidential popularity was President Truman's dismissal of General Douglas MacArthur. That move was a major factor in the politicization of the war as Republicans took the General's side and echoed his complaints that it was the President's meddling in policy that was keeping the war from being won.³⁹

The differing impact of the wars on Presidential popularity therefore may be due to the fact that Korea became "Truman's war" while Vietnam never in the same sense really became "Johnson's war."⁴⁰

³⁹ See John W. Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1959); also Neustadt, *op. cit.*, passim; and Trumbull Higgins, *Korea and the Fall of MacArthur* (New York: Oxford, 1960). See also the data in George Belknap and Angus Campbell, "Political Party Identification and Attitudes Toward Foreign Policy," 15 *Public Opinion Quarterly* 601-23 (Winter 1951-52). Note especially the strong party polarization on the issue. That the public was strongly inclined to support General MacArthur in the dispute can be seen from poll data. The first polls, conducted as the General was making his triumphal, "old soldiers never die" return to the United States in April 1951, suggest more than twice as many people supported the General as supported the President. As Neustadt suggests (*op. cit.*, p. 97), emotion on the issue faded during the Senate Hearings on the issue which lasted until June and this seems to have been to the benefit of President Truman's position. The Truman point of view received its greatest support in late June and early July as peace talks were being begun. As the talks began to prove unproductive, however, public opinion began to revert to its previous support of General MacArthur, until, by the first days of 1952 (when the polling agencies grew bored with the issue), the MacArthur position was as strongly approved and President Truman's as strongly rejected as ever.

⁴⁰ There is evidence which suggests that World War II, a much more popular (and much larger) war than either Korea or Vietnam, may have worked to the distinct *benefit* of President Roose-

³⁷ John E. Mueller, "Patterns of Popular Support for the Wars in Korea and Vietnam," unpublished paper, Department of Political Science, University of Rochester, 1969.

³⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 97.

One other item of speculation might be put forth. Domestically, the war in Vietnam was accompanied by a profoundly important crisis as America confronted its long-ignored racial dilemma head on. There seems to have been nothing comparable during the Korean War. The clamor associated with McCarthyism comes to mind but many analysts feel that, however important to politicians, intellectuals, and journalists, McCarthyism was of rather less than major concern to public opinion.⁴¹ Furthermore its dramatic climax, the Army-McCarthy hearings, took place months after the Korean War had ended and over a year after President Truman left office.

It may be, then, that the discontent associated with the racial crisis was enough by itself to cause much of President Johnson's popular decline and thus that the unhappiness over the Vietnam War could make little additional inroad. In the Truman case, there was no profound independent domestic source of discontent: his second term coalition of minorities decline is usually found as in equation 5 to have been less than his first term decline and when, as in equation 6, a variable has already accounted for the war effect, his decline is quite moderate. Thus in a sense there was "room" for the war to have an independent impact.

It would be wise in concluding this section to emphasize what has and what has not been said. It has *not* been argued that the war in Vietnam had nothing to do with President Johnson's decline in popularity and thus the analysis cannot really be used to refute the President's own estimation of the impact of Vietnam as indicated in the quotation that heads this study. However it is argued that whatever impact the war had was tapped by the other variables in the equation, especially the coalition of minorities variable which is specifically designed to account for general overall decline. When the same sort of anal-

ysis is applied in the Korean period it is found that a variable associated with the Korean War does show significance even after other variables have been taken into account. What the regression analysis shows therefore is that, while the Korean War does seem to have had an *independent, additional* impact on President Truman's decline in popularity, the Vietnam War shows no such relation to President Johnson's decline.

velt. The National Opinion Research Center in its post-election poll in 1944 asked Roosevelt supporters if they would have voted for Dewey "if the war had been over." Enough answered in the affirmative to suggest that Dewey might well have won in a warless atmosphere. From data supplied by the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research.

⁴¹ Samuel A. Stouffer, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), especially ch. 3; Campbell, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51; Nelson W. Polsby, "Toward an Explanation of McCarthyism," 8 *Political Studies* 250-71 (October 1960); Elmo Roper, *You and Your Leaders* (New York: Morrow, 1957), pp. 250-51.

ysis is applied in the Korean period it is found that a variable associated with the Korean War does show significance even after other variables have been taken into account. What the regression analysis shows therefore is that, while the Korean War does seem to have had an *independent, additional* impact on President Truman's decline in popularity, the Vietnam War shows no such relation to President Johnson's decline.

V. THE RESIDUALS

An analysis of the residuals finds that equation 6 predicts worst in President Truman's first term. The President's extremely high initial ratings are not well predicted suggesting that the equation does not adequately account for the trauma of President Roosevelt's death⁴² combined as it was with the ending of World War II and with important peace conferences. It was almost as if Americans were afraid to disapprove of President Truman.

From these spectacular highs, President Truman plunged to great lows during the labor turmoil of 1946. These ratings are also badly specified by the equation. The Truman popularity rose in early 1947, as the labor situation eased, and then declined for the rest of the term. Thus while President Truman's first term, like the other Democratic terms, shows an overall decline of popularity, that decline was considera-

⁴² In late November 1945, over six months after President Roosevelt's death, Gallup asked his sample, "In your opinion, who is the greatest person living or dead, in world history?" Fully 28 percent proffered Roosevelt's name. Abraham Lincoln was mentioned by 19 percent, Jesus Christ by 15 percent, and George Washington by 8 percent. No one else received more than 2 percent. And the aura lasted. A survey conducted in June 1949 in the city of Philadelphia (which had voted 59 percent for Roosevelt in 1944 as against a national rate of 55 percent) posed this question: "Could you tell us the name of a great person, living or dead, whom you admire the most?" The most commonly mentioned names were Roosevelt with 42 percent, Lincoln with 9 percent, and Washington with 5 percent. (The absence of Jesus Christ on this latter list presumably can be laid to the peculiarities of question wording—or of Philadelphians.) Fillmore H. Sanford, "Public Orientation to Roosevelt," 15 *Public Opinion Quarterly* 190-91, 200 (Summer 1951). In 1948, Roper found 43 percent of a national sample offering Roosevelt's name when queried, "Considering all the men in America who have been prominent in public affairs during the past 50 years, which one or two have you admired the most?" Dwight Eisenhower was second at 17 percent. E. Roper, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

bly more erratic than the others. The dummy variable for strikes, discussed briefly in Section II, improved matters only slightly.

Beyond this, the residuals are reasonably well behaved. There are small but noticeable effects from the lame duck phenomenon at the end of the Truman and Johnson administrations and from the "no opinion" peculiarity of the initial weeks of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. And here and there are data points whose magnitudes have somehow managed to escape specification by the variables in the regression equation. One can of course generate a unique explanation for each of these but this procedure clutters the analysis more than it is worth. Besides, the laws of sampling insist that Gallup must have made *some* mistakes.

As the magnitude of the Durbin-Watson d indicates, serial correlation has by no means been eliminated in the regression equations. Allowing the coalition of minorities variable to be specified for each term improved things considerably, but much is left to be desired.

VI. THE EISENHOWER PHENOMENON

Great noise was made in Section II about the coalition of minorities variable with its stern prediction that a President's popularity would decline inexorably over his four year term. The noise was not entirely unjustified since the variable proved to be a hardy and tenacious predictor for the postwar Democratic administrations.

The variable fails for the Eisenhower administration, however, especially for the General's first term. The analysis suggests then that if a President wants to leave office a popular man he should either 1) be Dwight David Eisenhower, or 2) resign the day after inauguration.

The Eisenhower phenomenon, noted but left dangling without explanation or rationalization in Section III, deserves special examination. Why didn't President Eisenhower decline in popularity like everybody else? A number of suggestions can be proffered.

1. To begin with, credit must be given to President Eisenhower's *personal appeal*: he was extremely likeable—a quality very beneficial in a popularity contest and one lacked in abundance by, say, Lyndon Johnson. As Fillmore Sanford has observed, "The American people, in reacting to a national leader, put great emphasis on his personal warmth"⁴³—a quality projected to an unusual degree by President Eisenhower. As part of this, he was able to project an image of integrity and sincerity which many found to be enormously attractive.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Op. cit.*, p. 195.

⁴⁴ See Philip E. Converse and Georges Dupeux,

2. Early in his first term President Eisenhower was able to present to the public one sensational achievement: he *ended the Korean War*—or, at any rate, presided over its end. This accomplishment was seen by the public as he left office to be a great one⁴⁵ and was used with profit by the Republicans in a Presidential campaign a full 15 years after it happened. From the standpoint of public opinion it may well have been the most favorable achievement turned in by any postwar President. As such it may have tended to overwhelm the negative impact of anything else the President did, at least for the first years of his administration. Some credit for this is given in the regression analysis since the signing of the truce is counted as a rally point, but this may be a totally inadequate recognition.

There is another aspect of President Eisenhower's first term which may not be sufficiently accounted for in the rally round the flag variable: the euphoria of the "spirit of Geneva" period toward the end of the term when the President's popularity should have been at its lowest ebb.

3. President Eisenhower's *amateur status* may also have worked to his benefit, at least for a while. The public may have been more willing to grant him the benefit of a doubt, to extend the "honeymoon" period, than it would for a President who is a political professional. It is also easier under these circumstances for the President to appear "above the battle" and thus to be blamed only belatedly and indirectly for political mishaps, thereby softening their impact.

4. President Eisenhower may have been curiously benefited by the fact that, especially on the domestic front, *he didn't do anything*.⁴⁶ In-

"De Gaulle and Eisenhower: The Public Image of the Victorious General," in Angus Campbell, *et al.*, *Elections and the Political Order* (New York: Wiley, 1966), pp. 292-345.

⁴⁵ In December 1960 the public was asked what it felt was Eisenhower's greatest accomplishment. The ending of the Korean War was mentioned by 11 percent and a related comment, "he kept us out of war," was suggested by an additional 32 percent. No other specific accomplishment was mentioned by more than 5 percent; only 3 percent mentioned anything having to do with the domestic scene. See also Neustadt, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

⁴⁶ As Irving Kristol argues, "... when a conservative administration does take office, it pursues no coherent program but merely takes satisfaction in not doing the things that the liberals may be clamoring for. This, in effect, is what happened during the two terms of President Eisen-

deed analysts of the Eisenhower administration often argue that its contribution lies in what it *didn't* do. The times called for consolidation, they argue, and President Eisenhower's achievement was that he neither innovated nor repealed, but was content to preside over a period of placidity in which he tacitly gave Republican respectability to major Democratic innovations of earlier years: the programs of the New Deal domestically and the policies of the Truman Doctrine internationally.⁴⁷

In terms of the justification for the coalition of minorities variable as discussed in Section II, such behavior could have a peculiar result. It was assumed in part that the President would enact programs which, while approved by the majority, would alienate intense minorities which would gradually cumulate to his disadvantage. But suppose the President doesn't do anything. Those who want no change are happy while, if things are sufficiently ambiguous, those who support change have not really been denied by an explicit decision and can still patiently wait and hope. At some point of course those who want change begin to see that they are never going to get their desires and may become alienated, but this will be a delayed process. At least in moderate, placid times, a conservative policy may dissipate some of the power of the coalition of minorities phenomenon. Were polls available, one might find that President Warren Harding maintained his popularity as strikingly as President Eisenhower.

5. Although it might be difficult to sort out cause and effect, it is worth noting that President Eisenhower's first term (and most of his second) coincided with a *period of national goodness*. In a brilliant article Meg Greenfield has noted that "moral crises" as appraised and bemoaned by intellectuals seem to follow a cyclic pattern: we go through a period in which the popular journals are filled with articles telling us how bad we are after which there is a period of respite.⁴⁸

Miss Greenfield's main indicator of these ethical cycles is exquisite: the number of items under the heading, "US: Moral Conditions," in the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*. The pattern, elaborated and duly pedantified, is given in Table 3. As she notes, our first moral

hower . . ." "The Old Politics, the New Politics, and the New, New Politics," *New York Times Magazine*, November 24, 1968, p. 167.

⁴⁷ See Clinton Rossiter, *The American Presidency* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960), pp. 161-78.

⁴⁸ Meg Greenfield, "The Great American Morality Play," *The Reporter*, June 8, 1961, pp. 13-18.

TABLE 3. THE GREENFIELD INDEX

| Number of Items under the Heading, "US: Moral Conditions" in <i>Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature</i> , 1945-1968, by year | |
|---|----|
| 1945 | 1 |
| 1946 | 0 |
| 1947 | 8 |
| 1948 | 1 |
| 1949 | 1 |
| 1950 | 3 |
| 1951 | 35 |
| 1952 | 17 |
| 1953 | 1 |
| 1954 | 4 |
| 1955 | 2 |
| 1956 | 0 |
| 1957 | 7 |
| 1958 | 0 |
| 1959 | 9 |
| 1960 | 32 |
| 1961 | 23 |
| 1962 | 10 |
| 1963 | 11 |
| 1964 | 5 |
| 1965 | 6 |
| 1966 | 7 |
| 1967 | 18 |
| 1968 | 10 |

crisis in the postwar period arose in the early 1950s and was associated with "five percenters," deep freezes, mink coats, the Kefauver hearings, and a series of basketball fixes," while "the symbols of our present [1961] decline are Charles Van Doren, payola, cheating in school, and the decision of Frances Gary Powers not to kill himself." We never recovered as thoroughly from that crisis as we did from the earlier one for, as the crisis showed signs of waning (the success of the Peace Corps began to show how good we were at heart), new elements—Billie Sol Estes, Bobby Baker, President Kennedy's assassination, campus revolts, the hippies, and the city riots—proved once again that we have a "sick society." Our moral crises are regenerated every eight years and seem to coincide with the end of Presidential administrations.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ It may, or then again may not, be worth noting that Presidential elections in which the incumbent party was removed, 1952, 1960, and 1968, occurred during moral crises while the elections in which the President was retained, 1948, 1956, and 1964, all took place during times of relative goodness.

Of course objective indicators of public morality have not been careening in this manner. Much of the fluctuation in the Greenfield index is no doubt due to journalistic fad. A sensational fraud, scandal or disruption causes theologians, journalists, and other intellectuals to sociologize: society is sick. Others pick up the idea and it blossoms into a full moral crisis. In a year or two the theme no longer sells magazines and the space is filled with other profundities. Fraud, scandal, and disruption continue, but the moral crisis eases.

But—and this is a logical and empirical leap of some magnitude—to the extent that these patterns reflect and influence public attitudes, they may be relevant to Presidential popularity. The early Eisenhower years are notable for their absence of moral anguish and they differ from other between-crisis periods in an important respect: not only were we not demonstrably bad, we were positively good for we were undergoing a religious revival. Miss Greenfield looked at the items under the heading, "US: Religious Institutions." She finds only six items in the 1951–53 period, but 25 in 1953–55 while "in the 1955–57 volume, at the height of our virtue . . . the religious listings reached thirty-four with twenty-eight 'see alsos.'"

If we were so good ourselves, how could we possibly find fault in our leader?

VII. FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has been reasonably successful at generating a regression equation based on only four rather simple variables, which fits quite well the erratic behavior over 24 years of the Presidential popularity index. There is, however, much room for improvement and refinement.

Little has been done to separate out from the coalition of minorities variable the specific and divergent influences of domestic events on Presidential popularity. There was one variable designed to account in a general way for changes in the economy, some limited analysis was made of the relevance of major strikes, and comments were interjected about the role of scandal and "moral crisis." But domestic life is considerably more complicated than this and more precise social, political, and economic indicators can be sought.

It would also be of value to get better estimates of the impact of different *kinds* of international events on Presidential popularity—although, as already suggested, such analysis may find that all dramatic international events affect popularity in much the same way no matter how they may differ in historical significance.⁵⁰

* It may prove valuable to attempt to see how

The analysis strongly suggests that Presidential style as well as the ideological and political nature of the administration and the times can make a sizeable difference in the way popularity ratings behave. A more precise assessment of these relationships would be most desirable.

The study has dealt entirely with general popular approval of the President. Left unexamined are the ways population groups differ in their approach to the President. Supporters of the President's own party, for example, are more likely to approve the way he handles his job. Presumably they are also relatively hard to alienate, are more likely to be enchanted by his successes, and are more tolerant of his blunders.

It should also be possible to extend the analysis to other bodies of data. Somewhat comparable data from the Roosevelt administration are available. Although the popularity question was posed with far less regularity in those days (and was largely dropped during World War II) and although there are problems with varying question wording, students of President Roosevelt's popularity ratings emerge with findings which fit well with those of this study.⁵¹ The popularity ratings of Governors and Senators in states with active statewide polls can also be analyzed as can data on national leaders from such countries as Britain, Canada, and France.⁵²

spectacular and cumulative international events and shifts in governmental policy—to use the distinction made by Karl Deutsch and Richard Merritt—differ in impact. "Effects of Events on National and International Images" in Herbert C. Kelman (ed.) *International Behavior* (New York: Holt, 1965), pp. 132–87.

⁵¹ Wesley C. Clark has found some relation between the Roosevelt popularity and the state of the economy in the 1937–1940 period. He also notes a general "downward slant" in the rating over time and finds a rise of popularity during international crises. ("Economic Aspects of a President's Popularity," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1943, pp. 41, 28, 35). See also B. Roper, *op. cit.*, and E. Roper, *op. cit.*, chapters 2 and 3. And V. O. Key has observed that during 1940 "the popularity of Roosevelt rose and fell with European crises." *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups* (New York: Crowell, 1952, 3rd. ed.), p. 596 (cited in Waltz, *op. cit.*, p. 272.)

⁵² British observers have noted an apparent relation between unemployment and party preference in their country: rising unemployment seems to have benefited Labor while declining unemployment favors the Tories. Henry Durant, "Indirect Influences on Voting Behavior," 1 *Polls* 7–11 (Spring 1965). Extensive data from France on the popularity of President De Gaulle have been

VIII. SUMMARY

This investigation has applied multiple regression analysis to the behavior of the responses to the Gallup Poll's Presidential popularity question in the 24 year period from the beginning of the Truman administration to the end of the Johnson administration. Predictor variables include a measure of the length of time the incumbent has been in office as well as variables which attempt to assess the influence on his rating of major international events, economic slump, and war. Despite the austerity of this representation of a presumably complex process, the fit of the resulting equation was very good: it explained 86 percent of the variance in Presidential popularity.

This degree of fit could only be attained, however, by allowing the special character of each Presidential administration to be expressed in the equation. Thus it does not seem possible to predict a given President's popularity well simply by taking into account such general phenomena as the state of the economy or of international affairs.

The first variable, dubbed the "coalition of minorities" variable, found, as expected, the popularity of most Presidents to be in decline during each term. The important differences between administrations do not lie so much in different overall levels of popularity, but rather in the widely differing rates at which this coalition of minorities variable takes effect. Specifically, the popular decline of Presidents Truman and Johnson was quite steep while President Kennedy seems to have been somewhat better at maintaining his popularity. President Eisenhower's popularity did not significantly decline at all

during his second term and actually increased during his first term.

In considering this Eisenhower phenomenon it is suggested that a combination of several causes may be relevant: the President's personal appeal, his ending of the Korean War, his amateur status, his domestic conservatism at a time when such a policy was acceptable, and his fortune in coming to office at a time of national goodness.

The second variable, the "rally round the flag" variable, predicts short term boosts in a President's popularity whenever there occurs an international crisis or a similar event. The variable proves to be a sturdy one and suggests a popular decline of about five or six percentage points for every year since the last "rally point."

Economic effects were estimated in the third variable. The variable could only be made to function if it was assumed that an economy in slump harms a President's popularity, but an economy in boom does not help his rating. A decline of popularity of about three percentage points is suggested for every percentage point rise in the unemployment rate over the level holding when the President began his present term.

The fourth variable attempted to take into account the influence of war on Presidential popularity. It was found that the Korean War had a large, significant independent negative impact on President Truman's popularity of some 18 percentage points, but that the Vietnam War had no independent impact on President Johnson's popularity at all. It is suggested that this difference may be due to the relationship between the Presidents and the wars: President Truman was less able than President Johnson to keep the war "above" partisan politics and he seemed to the public to be interfering and restraining the generals. The absence in the Truman case of a domestic crisis comparable to the racial turmoil of the Johnson era may also be relevant.

published: for example, *Gallup Opinion Index*, March 1968, pp. 27-28. A study by Howard Rosenthal has investigated regional aspects of the General's popularity. "The Popularity of Charles De Gaulle: Findings from Archive-based Research," 31 *Public Opinion Quarterly* 381-98 (Fall 1967).