Replacing Cabinet Officers:

Political Factors Affecting Presidential Choices

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Politics—often defined in electoral terms—are viewed as the leading concern when the president-elect constructs his cabinet while department management is often cited as dominating decisions when filling cabinet vacancies. This paper offers a different perspective, arguing that presidents seek to gain or to maintain political strength through their cabinet appointments, particularly regarding the recruitment of new secretaries from outside the administration. The analysis indicates presidents fill vacancies with “outsiders” when their approval ratings are low, the appointment is to a clientele department, and there was conflict between the president and the former department head. President more often appointed from within their administrations when the vacancy occurs because of an intra-administration transfer. These findings provide another step in developing a more comprehensive understanding of presidents’ appointment strategies.

*The cabinet is primarily a means of consolidating the president’s political strength and only secondarily an advisory council for the development of policy.*

Political scientist David B. Truman (1951,405)

*Political scientists search rather fruitlessly for principles governing selection of cabinet members. No textbook that I know of has the answer.*

Attorney General Herbert Brownell (1993,34)

Without question, the cabinet selections a president makes at the onset of his administration attract more attention than subsequent appointments. Observers both inside and outside government study the new president’s choices for the cabinet and other senior-level positions for tangible evidence of his approach to government and the policies he will advance. “The original cabinet is a symbolic show window for an incoming President,” Fenno (1959,82) writes, “and he must expect the critical scrutiny of all those interested in sizing up the administration.” Later appointments garner less notice because much more information about the president’s priorities and operating style is available. The choice of a new secretary of the agriculture will draw attention from those directly affected by that department but few outside Washington—and perhaps few inside Washington—will examine the appointment closely unless a controversy of some nature is involved.
The coverage of President Bill Clinton’s appointments to the post of secretary of energy illustrates this pattern. The *New York Times* published nine stories between election day and Hazel O’Leary’s confirmation by the Senate focusing on candidates for the post, O’Leary’s background, and prospects for energy policy under her leadership. During the restructuring of the cabinet for Clinton’s second term, six stories appeared in the *Times* on the search for O’Leary’s replacement, how this position affected minority group representation in the cabinet, and the appointment of Fredrico Pena. Pena’s resignation in 1998 prompted two stories, one reporting the resignation announcement and another reporting the nomination of Bill Richardson as Pena’s successor.¹

The imbalance in media coverage of initial and replacement appointments to the president’s cabinet is often characterized as reflecting a shift in emphasis as the administration progresses. Politics—typically defined in electoral terms—are viewed as the leading concern when the president-elect constructs his cabinet while department management is often cited as dominating decisions when filling cabinet vacancies. Replacement appointees most certainly have more experience in national government administration than do initial appointees (Best 1981; King and Riddlesperger 1984, 2006), but this does not mean that political considerations are not factored into replacement cabinet selections. This paper examines in-term appointments from the perspective of how political environment and specific circumstances surrounding the vacancy affect the president’s choices when replacing a cabinet officer. Specifically, when does the president appoint a new cabinet officer from outside the administration rather than appointing a current member of his administration to a new post?

¹ Based on a review of the *New York Times Index.*
Perspectives on In-Term Appointments

The lack of scrutiny for in-term appointments creates an environment in which the
president is seen as being free of the many political considerations or constraints that influenced
his earlier selections. Fenno (1959,82-83) describes the environment within which in-term
appointment are made:

The in-term appointment, made when the Cabinet is a going concern, is more
insulated from the pressure of these external political factors. The President
receives less unsolicited advice when he is filling a position for the second or third
time. His own circle of eligible acquaintances may be larger. The exigencies of
legislation may not appear as compelling as they did at the beginning of his term.
He is more experienced and may know more precisely what tasks are paramount
in certain Cabinet posts. For all of these reasons, an in-term appointment is likely
to be a more personal choice than the original one.

This is a commonly held perspective regarding cabinet vacancies: the president has greater
leeway when choosing replacements for his original cabinet members.

The appointments of the “more experienced” president are also viewed as less political
and more pragmatic. According to Mackenzie (1981,8), “The symbolic importance of personnel
selections gradually diminishes, and practical considerations are given higher priority in selection
decisions.” Using Richard Nixon’s cabinet as an illustration, Polsby (1978) argues that the
president selects different types of cabinet officers later in his term because his goals change.
The primary goal in cabinet selection shifted during Nixon’s presidency, Polsby argues, from
ensuring representation of various segments of the polity to White House control of the executive
branch. Original appointees who became spokesmen for their departments were replaced by
appointees who would execute the orders of the Nixon White House (see also Ehrlichman
1982,110-112). Best (1981) contends that presidents are looking to improve the management of
departments through their in-term appointments. Initial cabinet appointments can “generate
legitimacy” for the new administration but the president soon learns that departmental management is “a major segment of a cabinet officer’s job” (Best 1981,66); in making this argument, Best implies that the president becomes less concerned with “legitimacy” as his term progresses. Nicholls (1989) goes a step further, excluding in-term appointments from his analysis of cabinet selection, contending that electoral concerns dominate initial appointments while managerial concerns overshadow other factors in choosing replacements.

These interpretations reflect the idea that political concerns are displaced by managerial concerns in the president’s psyche. Polsby (1978,16) qualifies his example by noting that the new approach to cabinet building occurred “once Mr. Nixon’s reelection was assured,” suggesting that political representation was significantly less important in the second Nixon administration. Best (1981,66) notes that initial cabinet appointments can “generate legitimacy” for the new administration but the president soon learns that departmental management is “a major segment of a cabinet officer’s job.” In making this argument, Best implies that the president becomes less concerned with “legitimacy” as his term progresses. Nicholls (1989) goes so far as to exclude in-term appointments from his analysis of cabinet selection, contending that electoral concerns dominate initial appointments while managerial concerns overshadow other factors in choosing replacements.

Upon closer examination, the argument that replacement appointments to the president’s cabinet are significantly less political than initial appointments appears simplistic. The anecdotal evidence suggests that the political impact of a cabinet appointment is never far from president’s mind. Once again, the Nixon administration illustrates the point. Polsby is correct in noting that
fewer members of Nixon’s final cabinet had held elective office.\(^2\) But that does not mean decisions regarding cabinet appointments were made without consideration of electoral politics. At least four cabinet members named during the transition into the second Nixon administration were selected in recognition of elements of Nixon’s reelection coalition or major ethnic groups in the nation. For example, Claude Brinegar was named transportation secretary during the second-term transition because the president’s aides believed he was Irish Catholic; only later did they learn he was a Protestant of German heritage (Haldeman 1979; Malek 1978).\(^3\) This illustrates that, although he would never again be a candidate for elective office, Nixon continued to seek political representation in his cabinet.

Legitimacy also remains a concern of the president. The first cabinet officer appointed during Gerald Ford’s presidency was Attorney General Edward Levi. The choice of Levi, then president of the University of Chicago, was designed to restore the public images of Ford, who was still reeling from the reaction to his pardon of Richard Nixon, and the Department of Justice, whose reputation suffered a number of blows during the Nixon years (Baker 1993). Without question, Levi possessed credentials appropriate for the office but many people in Washington, including members of the Ford administration, did as well. Yet it was necessary for Ford to go beyond the Beltway to bolster public confidence in both his administration and the Department of

\(^2\) Nixon’s original cabinet included one former congressman (Melvin Laird) and three former governors (Walter Hickel, George Romney, and John Volpe). Only one member of his final cabinet, Interior Secretary Rogers Morton, a former member of Congress, had similar experience in high elective office.

\(^3\) Among the other cabinet secretaries appointed included Rogers Morton, who was retained as interior secretary due to his popularity within the Republican party. The South and organized labor were represented among the new cabinet members by Commerce Secretary Frederick Dent and Labor Secretary Peter Brennan, respectively. Sources: Notes of meetings with the President (November 16, 1972; November 17, 1972; November 22, 1972; November 24, 1972; November 27, 1972; December 7, 1972), Ehrlichman Files, Box 7, Nixon Presidential Materials Project [NPMP]; Memorandum, Higby to Malek (November 16, 1972), Haldeman Files, Box 14, NPMP; Memorandum, Higby to Haldeman (November 17, 1972), Haldeman Files, Box 105, NPMP; Memorandum, Colson to the President (November 27, 1972), Haldeman Files, Box 14, NPMP.
Justice. Similarly, Jimmy Carter’s selection of respected U.S. Senator Edmund Muskie for secretary of state to succeed Cyrus Vance, who resigned in protest in the wake of the failed attempt to rescue the hostages held in Iran, is another example of a president looking outside his official family to add legitimacy to his administration through a cabinet appointment. More recently, the 2006 congressional elections were interpreted as a repudiation of George W. Bush policies in Iraq and Afghanistan. This prompted Bush to dismiss Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and to appoint Robert Gates, respected for his career in national security matters and a member of the Iraq Study Group, to the post.

It is important to remember that cabinet appointments—both initial and replacement—are not made in isolation but are part of a larger enterprise. That a president does not command but leads by persuading others to follow his preferred course of action is well understood. In his treatise on presidential power, Neustadt (1960) argues that the president’s bargaining position is based upon the formal powers of the office, his professional reputation, and his public prestige. The formal powers of the presidency change only modestly, if at all, during a president’s term but how the president is perceived within the Washington community and by the American people can change greatly. The president guards his reputation and prestige—guards his power—with the choices he makes. Decisions regarding foreign policy initiatives, a legislative agenda, and personnel affect professional and public perceptions of the president. Policy initiatives that are well received result in a higher standing for the president among Washingtonians and the public; ill-conceived programs have the opposite effect. Neustadt (1960,57) asserts that “a President’s own choices are the only means in his own hands of guarding his own prospects for effective influence” (emphasis in the original).
Among the key choices of a president are those concerning the people who staff his administration. While the president is constitutionally responsible for filling thousands of executive positions, only those at the very top of the federal bureaucracy attract sufficient scrutiny as to affect his power. Cabinet officers are, by definition, the highest-level positions and thus selections for department secretaries bear on the president’s professional reputation and public prestige. Presidents therefore often act as carefully when filling vacancies in the cabinet as they did in choosing their original cabinet officers. As noted earlier, the president’s cabinet-building actions are watched carefully during the transition into the new administration if for no reason other than there is little else occurring. In-term appointments are made amid a host of other activities and therefore receive less media attention. But these later personnel decisions can be just as important to the president because they are made after the honeymoon is over. Gone are glow of election and high hopes for a new administration. In their place are the struggles between the president and Congress, between Republicans and Democrats for control of the national agenda. This is when the president must protect his bargaining position vis-à-vis other forces in the political arena.

Consider Carter’s decision in 1979 to make wholesale changes in his cabinet. It is no secret that Carter never won the respect of the Washingtonians for his skill as a political leader (Light 1999; Neustadt 1990). The public responded well to Carter early in his term but had soured on the thirty-ninth president by his third year in office. Returning from a state visit to Japan to find the nation enmeshed in yet another energy crisis, Carter scheduled but abruptly canceled a television address on energy policy. Instead, he retreated to Camp David to reassess his administration. After ten days of meetings with advisors both inside and outside government,
Carter delivered what came to be known as the “crisis of confidence” speech about an absence of faith in American institutions. This was followed by a fifty percent turnover in the cabinet. But the speech and administrative shuffling failed to accomplish the desired results. As Jones (2005,106) notes, the cabinet changes “were done so clumsily that they were not likely to enhance Carter’s standing as a leader—the very goal he was trying to achieve.” In Neustadt’s terms, neither the president’s professional reputation nor his public prestige was elevated as a result of the speech and subsequent personnel moves.

Individual examples illustrate an argument but more systemic empirical evidence is needed to substantiate the claim. This paper is an effort to offer more systematic evidence concerning in-term cabinet appointments. The objective of this analysis is to demonstrate that a variety of political concerns influence the president’s choices for cabinet officers. The underlying assumption is that guarding his power is among the president’s primary objectives when selecting members of his cabinet.

**Searching for Patterns in Replacement Cabinet Appointments**

Herbert Brownell, who managed Eisenhower’s transition into office and later served as attorney general, was skeptical of efforts by academics to develop general explanations for presidents’ decisions regarding cabinet selection. “Political scientists search rather fruitlessly for principles governing selection of cabinet members,” Brownell (1993,34) wrote. “No textbook
that I know of has the answer.” But while a grand theory of cabinet appointments may never be formulated, a number of factors influencing cabinet selection across administrations have been noted by political analysts. It has long recognized, for example, that presidents tend to choose cabinet members from their own party and seek geographic balance in cabinet appointments are patterns long been recognized (e.g., Beard 1910; Lien and Fainsod 1934). Furthermore, certain departments are virtually the property of particular groups and/or regions, and the president’s choice to head these departments “must be acceptable to the principal interest groups affected” (Truman 1951,405). For example, with few exceptions, the Interior and Agriculture secretaries typically hail from the West or Midwest while the commerce and labor secretaries commonly hail from industrialized states. Another consistent pattern of appointments is that replacement appointees have greater experience in national government in general and in the national executive branch in particular than to presidents’ initial appointees (Best 1981; King and Riddlesperger 1984, 2006).

Absent from analyses of presidential cabinet appointments is whether the new secretary is selected from outside the administration or has been serving within the administration. In times of waning presidential standing with the public or Washington community, the president can enhance his power position by drawing a well respected person into his official family, that is, into his cabinet. Many students of presidential politics have noted that appointments to the cabinet are symbolic acts. And although their comments were generally in reference to the president’s initial selections, appointments to the cabinet midterm are also symbolic acts intended to achieve political goals. An embattled president might enhance his political standing by recruiting from outside the administration an individual of stature rather than promoting a
member of his administration. For example, when there has been conflict between the president and a cabinet officer, the president might seek to offset a loss of political standing drawing a respected, untarnished person into the cabinet. The new cabinet officer becomes a positive symbol for the administration at a time when things look bad for the president. Best (1981,66) describes in-term cabinet appointees as “‘insiders’ replacing ‘outsiders.’” At times, however, the president benefits from “outsiders” replacing “insiders.”

_Expectations_

A fully developed theory of cabinet appointments might not be feasible, but patterns of appointments can be identified. Our analysis focuses on three sets of variables: political resources of the president, the time within an administration, and characteristics associated with the previous cabinet officer.

Despite the rarity of a rejected cabinet nomination (Kruetz et al. 1998; King and Riddlesperger 1996, 2002), Senate oversight is considered a constraint on a president’s choices when considering whom to appoint as a wise president does not select a nominee known to be unacceptable to a substantial number of senators. Even if the nomination ultimately is confirmed, the political cost can damage the president’s relationships on Capitol Hill. However, an embattled president can also use a nomination to improve his administration’s image by selecting respected person from outside his administration. A president needing such a boost likely has low approval ratings and faces a Senate dominated by the opposing party, which leads to our first hypotheses:
H1. There is a negative relationship between a president’s public approval rating and the appointment of a cabinet officer from outside the administration.

H2. There is a negative relationship between a president’s party controlling the Senate and the appointment of a cabinet officer from outside the administration.

The president’s approval rating and partisan control of the Senate are often operationalized as interval-level variables, but there is no practical difference between an approval rating of 61% and 64% or little between having the president’s party hold 53 seats or 57 seats in the Senate.

Thus we operationalize public approval and Senate control as ordinal scales:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Approval</th>
<th>Senate control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Approval rating of 60% or Higher</td>
<td>55 or more seats held by the president’s party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Approval rating between 40% and 59%</td>
<td>Between 45 and 54 seats held by the president’s party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1</td>
<td>Approval rating below 40%</td>
<td>44 or fewer seats held by the president’s party</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These measures reflect the qualitative differences in approval or number of seats that frequently dominate discussions of political resources.

Another political factor concerns the nature of the department involved. Specifically, is the vacancy in a department with a specific clientele that expects representation? As noted by many students of the presidency, several departments serve particular constituencies that expect the secretary to represent their interests within the cabinet. Filling vacancies in these departments places a constraint on the president that is absent when naming heads of other departments. There are instances, of course, when a president might promote a deputy secretary with ties to the department’s constituency. But promotions from within generate less media
attention than announcements of new leadership from outside with ties to the constituency, thereby accruing fewer political benefits for the president. Thus, we hypothesize:

H3. A president will appoint an individual from outside the administration to replace the secretary of a clientele department.

We identify six clientele departments: Interior; Agriculture; Commerce; Labor; Housing and Urban Development; and Veterans Affairs. Appointments to these are coded as one and appointments to other departments are coded as zero.

Electoral politics can impact a president’s appointment decisions but analysts might disagree on the nature of the relationship. One explanation is that a president appoints from outside his administration during election years to curry favor with electoral constituencies. An alternative explanation is that appointing from outside the administration during an election campaign signals weakness in the administration’s personnel and calls into question the president’s judgment; thus, a president will appoint from within to indicate the quality of his earlier appointments:

H4. A president will appoint an individual from within the administration during his re-election year.

Appointments made between January first and election-day are coded as one and appointments made at any other time are coded as zero.

The argument that during their second terms presidents shift from political considerations to managerial considerations in making cabinet appointments is tested:

H5. A president will appoint an individual from within the administration to replace a cabinet officer during his second term in office.
This is a dummy variable that equals one if the appointment is made after the president’s re-election and zero if made during his first term. This expanded definition of the president’s second term is used in recognition that the interregnum between re-election and the second inauguration is when most decisions are made concerning the cabinet.

Our third group of factors includes characteristics associated with the previous cabinet officer that can affect a president’s choice of a new secretary. If relationship between the president and the department head has been harmonious, the president is likely to appoint a new secretary from within the administration, perhaps from within the department. But if the relationship has been acrimonious, the president may opt to recruit from outside the administration. Acrimony can emerge because of personality clashes, such as those between President Ford and Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, or over public policy choices, such as Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill’s challenges to the tax-cutting policies of George W. Bush. Regardless of its source, conflict between a president and a cabinet officer damages a president’s public image as it calls into question his judgment regarding policy and personnel. One step in repairing that damage might be appointing a new cabinet officer with a strong reputation from outside the administration; thus:

H6. A president will appoint an individual from outside the administration if there was conflict with the previous secretary.

Appointments following a conflictual relationship between the president and secretary are coded as one and other appointments are coded as zero.

Another concern is the presence of scandal or controversy. This might concern scandal, such as allegations that Mike Espy, Clinton’s first secretary of agriculture, accepted prohibited
gifts from businesses regulated by the department, or controversial behavior in executing the office, such as that by Donald Rumsfeld as secretary of defense during the George W. Bush presidency. Directly involved or not, a president will find his administration tarnished by a controversial—or worse, scandalous—secretary. When the time to replace the discredited cabinet member arrives, the president will seek to boost his image and that of his administration by looking to an outsider as the new department secretary; thus:

H7. A president will appoint an individual from outside the administration if there was controversy or scandal associated with the previous secretary.

Appointments following a controversial secretary’s tenure are coded as one and other appointments are coded as zero.

A more favorable position for the president occurs then the vacancy is created by a transfer within the administration. A vacancy in the cabinet created by an intra-administration transfer means the former department head is respected and noncontroversial. Examples of such vacancies include HEW Secretary Elliot Richardson being appointed secretary of defense (replaced by budget director Casper Weinberger) and Transportation Secretary Samuel Skinner being named George H.W. Bush’s chief of staff (replaced by White House aide Andrew Card). In these instances, the president likely sees little benefit from recruiting outside and instead promotes from within the administration, perhaps even from within the affected department. This would be a classic situation of choosing a replacement cabinet officer for administrative expertise. Thus we hypothesize:

H8. A president will appoint an individual from within the administration when replacing a cabinet officer transferred to another administrative position.
Appointments made following inter-administration transfers are coded as one and other appointments are coded as zero.

To test these hypotheses of political considerations affecting replacement cabinet appointments, we examine 153 in-term appointments made by the past twelve presidents, from Harry Truman to Barack Obama. Included in this count are three appointments announced but withdrawn before the Senate acted on the nominations: Bobby Inman to be secretary of defense (Clinton); Hershel Gober to be secretary of veterans affairs (Clinton); and Bernard Kerik to be secretary of homeland security (G.W. Bush). These are included in the analysis because they were choices the president made for cabinet posts and announced publicly, thereby being appropriate for a test of the characteristics of individuals selected as replacement cabinet officers. Our interest is with the choices made by the president, not the outcome of Senate confirmation. There is an almost even division in types of appointments: 46% of appointments were from outside the administration and 54% were from inside.

Findings

Table 1 displays the bivariate relationships between appointment of a cabinet secretary from outside the administration and the independent variables. The results are mixed, with four relationships confirmed (at a generous .10 level) and two relationships, neither statistically significant, demonstrating patterns opposite of our hypothesis.

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5 Inman, a former admiral, was apparently unprepared for the scrutiny that accompanies a cabinet nomination and asked that his name be withdrawn. Charges of inappropriate sexual conduct caused the Senate to balk at confirming Gober, despite a department inquiry that found the charges without merit. Allegations that he employed domestic servants who were in violation of immigration laws led to Kerik’s withdrawal. Excluded from the analysis is the interim appointment of Robert C. Wood to replace Robert C. Weaver as HUD secretary during the final month of the Johnson administration.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Replacement Cabinet Appointments from Outside the Administration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Presidential approval:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approval Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60% or higher</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>(N=41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40% - 50%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>(81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39% or lower</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>(31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contingency coefficient = .20*

**Party control of the Senate:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seats Control</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55 or more seats</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>(N=57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 – 54 seats</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>(58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 or fewer seats</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>(38)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contingency coefficient = .11

**Appointment to clientele department:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appointment Status</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>(N=59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>(94)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contingency coefficient = .13*

**Appointment during re-election year:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Status</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>(N=19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>(134)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contingency coefficient = .07

**Term of appointment:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term of Appointment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second term</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>(N=76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First term</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>(77)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As hypothesized, new cabinet officers come from outside the administration when the president’s approval ratings are below 40%, the appointment is to a clientele department, and there was conflict between the president and the former department head. A president more often appointed from within his administration when the appointment involved an intra-administration transfer. None of these relationships is especially powerful, but the predicted patterns are present.
## Table 2
Model of Cabinet Replacement Appointments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables (expected sign)</th>
<th>Coefficient (s.e.)</th>
<th>Δρ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public approval of the president (-)</td>
<td>-.506** (.258)</td>
<td>-24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan control of the Senate (-)</td>
<td>.265 (.229)</td>
<td>+13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment to clientele department (+)</td>
<td>.772** (.367)</td>
<td>+19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President’s re-election year (-)</td>
<td>-.912 (.588)</td>
<td>-20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second term of presidency (-)</td>
<td>-.210 (.371)</td>
<td>-.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict between president and secretary (+)</td>
<td>.911* (.507)</td>
<td>+22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controversy involving department or secretary (+)</td>
<td>-.385 (.526)</td>
<td>-09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacancy by inter-administration transfer (-)</td>
<td>-1.013* (.592)</td>
<td>-22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.232</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>153</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log likelihood</td>
<td>-193.824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicted correctly</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<.025  *p<.05  (one-tailed tests)

The change in probability of confirmation (Δρ) is from 1 to -1 for public approval and Senate control and from zero to one for binary variables, with the value of other variables held at zero.
Table 2 displays the results of a multivariate analysis, with appointment from outside the administration as the dependent variable. Although the model’s explanatory and predictive abilities are not strong, the individual coefficients again confirm the relationships concerning public approval, clientele departments, conflict with the president, and intra-administration transfers. Each coefficient has the predicted sign, is statistically significant (.05 level for one-tailed tests), and changes the probability of the president acting as predicted by between 19% and 24%.

A difficulty in modeling presidents’ personnel selections is that these are complex decisions with many considerations that are not easily combined into a statistical model. Consider first the obviously political factor of presidential approval. Presidents with high and modest approval ratings appoint from outside their administrations in equal proportions, whereas presidents with low approval ratings are more likely to recruit from beyond their administrations. Precisely what is gained from a well-received appointment is unclear, but presidents behave as if there is a benefit to be acquired. Opposite of expectations, presidents whose political party is firmly in control of the Senate are more likely to select cabinet officers from outside their administrations.

There are also nuances concerning appointments to clientele departments. The political benefits to be reaped by the president come from satisfying a department’s constituency, from having the constituents believe they have a seat at the cabinet table. This a president typically achieves when he goes outside his administration: 78% of the appointees to these departments from outside the administration have constituency connections compared to 52% of the

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6 The coefficient for the president’s re-election year shows a similar effect on change in probability despite not being statistically significant. However, this coefficient would be statistically significant if the standard were
appointees from within the administration. Secretaries without direct constituency ties tended to be specialists in the relevant policy area (e.g., Labor Secretary Willard Wirtz in the Kennedy administration) or notable administrative skills (e.g., Elliot Richardson and Carla Hills as commerce secretary and HUD secretary, respectively, in the Ford administration). Ironically, slightly more replacement appointees to these departments during a president’s second term (71%) had the expected constituency ties than during a president’s first term (63%). Department management is thought to become increasingly important in the president’s second term appointments, but this political concern is clearly a high priority regardless of when the appointment is made.

Among the relationships not confirmed, the most interesting concerns the previous secretary being involved with controversy. It seems logical that a president would seek to erase the negative images by bringing in a new department head from outside and, by one viewpoint, most presidents have done so. In the nineteen cases involving controversy or scandal, the president appointed from outside his administration eight times (42%); examples include Gates replacing Rumsfeld at Defense and Michael Mukasey replacing Albert Gonzales at Justice during the most recent Bush administration. In seven of these nineteen cases (37%), the president appointed as secretary a person from another agency within his administration—essentially bringing in a trusted troubleshooter; examples include Richardson becoming attorney general lowered to .07 (one-tailed test).

The following criteria were used to judge whether the secretary has the expected ties to the department’s clientele: Interior – resident of a western state; Agriculture – involved in agriculture or agri-business or public official (elected or appointed) with a constituency in which agriculture plays a major role in the economy; Commerce – business executive or represented corporate clients as attorney or lobbyist; Labor – involved with labor unions or represented labor unions as attorney or lobbyist; HUD – public official (elected or appointed) with an urban constituency; Veterans Affairs – veteran of the armed forces, leader of a veterans group, or represented veterans groups as attorney or lobbyist.
under Nixon and William Clark replacing James Watt at Interior under Reagan. This makes a total of 79% of the replacements for controversy-plagued cabinet officers being external to the department. Regardless of nature of the “outside” appointment, the president achieves his goal of calming concerns about the department.

Also interesting is the relationship between appointing from outside the administration and whether the appointment is made during the president’s first or second term. Inter-term differences are almost indistinguishable: 47% of first term replacements come from outside the administration compared to 45% during the second term. Certainly an appointee already serving in the administration can provide political benefits to a president, but the notion that president’s appoint from outside during the first term for political gains and from within during the second term for managerial expertise is not borne out by our analysis.

**Discussion**

The presidency is a political office, and therefore the decisions of the president are never devoid of political considerations. This applies to cabinet selections as to any other component of the office. The dominant perspective—greatly simplified—has been that replacement appointments reflect the need for effective department management more than the political concerns that influence the selection of cabinet officers at the onset of the administration. But presidents must always be attentive to their political standing or risk being on the losing end of battles with Congress and other political actors over policy. A president will therefore choose a new cabinet officer with an eye to the political benefits to be gained from the appointment. This is not to say, of course, that the president succeeds in augmenting his political strength by
drawing new people into his administration. President Carter made substantial changes during the 1979 shakeup of this cabinet, with a majority of the new secretaries coming from outside his administration. Yet Carter’s public and professional standing did not rise decidedly and the president continued down the road toward defeat in the 1980 election. The lessons of the Carter administration are undoubtedly that making extensive changes at one time, on balance, does more harm than good and that making changes in the cabinet alone will not halt a spiral of decline. A presidency cannot be salvaged through cabinet appointments alone, but rebuilding a presidency is a brick-by-brick operation. Judicious cabinet selections can be important components of that process.

The patterns revealed in this analysis are not overwhelming but indicate that presidents fill vacancies with “outsiders” when their approval ratings are low, the appointment is to a clientele department, and there was conflict between the president and the former department head; president more often appointed from within their administrations when the vacancy occurs because of an intra-administration transfer. We have not refuted Attorney General Brownell’s critique that “Political scientists search rather fruitlessly for principles governing selection of cabinet members.” However, these findings provide another step in the process developing a more comprehensive understanding of presidents’ appointment strategies.

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8 Carter (1982, 121) notes that “the changes [in the cabinet] were portrayed as a great governmental crisis and negated some of the progress made during the past two weeks in reestablishing better relations with the public.”
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