Governors in the Legislative Arena: The Importance of Personality in Shaping Success

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Research on the leadership of executives in the United States typically follows one of two traditions, emphasizing either characteristics of the incumbent or features of the office. This article brings together these traditions. It draws upon the work of Winter to develop measures of three aspects of personality—the power, achievement, and affiliation drives—and hypothesizes that the power and achievement motives are exhibited in conjunction by successful chief executives. It then tests this hypothesis within the contexts of the American states, thus accounting for both the leaders as individuals and the features of the political and economic environments in which they lead. The primary hypothesis is affirmed. Governors who exhibit high levels of the power and achievement motives in tandem are substantially more likely to achieve their policy goals. In addition, governors who emphasize affiliation are less successful.

KEY WORDS: executives, leadership, personality, motives, power, achievement

Governors occupy a unique position in the American political landscape. They are among a very few elected officials who can legitimately claim to serve all of the people in a given state. Having greater access to the media than any other actor, they are the focus of the public’s attention more than any other public official in the state. Governors are also a primary focal point of governmental action in the states (Gross, 1991; Herzik & Brown, 1989).

These states have come to occupy an increasingly significant role in American policymaking (Sabato, 1983; Van Horn, 1996a). Responsibilities once carried out by the national government have “devolved” to the states, sometimes carrying
federal resources along with them, sometimes not. Far from ending with the conservative Reagan presidency, the trend has continued under more recent presidents (Gross, 1991; Herzik, 1991). It is assumed that states are invigorated, capable, and willing to address the problems of their constituents in any number of crucial areas of public policy (Van Horn, 1996b). These states’ governors appear to have embraced this philosophy. Although bristling at “unfunded mandates” from the federal government, governors assert that the states can and will serve their people, and they have typically jumped at the chance to use their institutional resources—dramatically enhanced over those that governors have historically had—to provide this important leadership.

Given the importance of governors in the states and in the American system, understanding gubernatorial success becomes increasingly important for understanding contemporary American politics. In the era of devolution (and of a Supreme Court majority sympathetic to federalism), the policy decisions made by the state governments led by these governors are increasingly likely to be unaltered, creating more diversity in public policy throughout the nation. Bringing a strong theoretical footing to the study of governors is crucial if we are to move forward in our knowledge of their leadership, particularly in the legislative arena—the sphere in which gubernatorial leadership most obviously matters.

Long and broad traditions of research have been dedicated to understanding how executive leadership is exerted in the American system and what such leadership entails. However, scholars have not been particularly successful in systematically examining leadership as it is exerted by individual leaders. Relative to the powers of his or her office and the context of the times, the leader as a person is tangential or perhaps even unimportant. Moreover, the increasingly quantitative nature of political science research has further subsumed the individual as leader. Nonetheless, it is clear that different people are more or less successful at exerting leadership. Two people in the same context with the same powers of office will not achieve the same degree of success. To better understand this truism, it is necessary to study the personalities of leaders. The goal of this paper is to examine how personality affects ability to lead by focusing on such leadership in one crucial realm: the American states. To what degree and in what ways do the personality traits of these leaders structure their leadership success? We attempted to answer this question by developing and testing a model of gubernatorial leadership that combines personality with contextual and institutional features.

Executive Politics Research

Literature on the role of the president in the making of public policy might be said to follow two broad veins. In one tradition (the personal model), scholars emphasize the importance of personal skill, personality, or orientation to politics for achieving success in the legislative arena. These scholars point to presidents such as Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson, who are renowned for their
knowledge of the legislative process, their skill at manipulating that process, and
their apparent love of the political game (see, e.g., Barber, 1992; Nelson, 1998;
Quirk, 1998; Simonton, 1987). Other presidential politics scholars emphasize
institutional factors structuring the relative success of these presidents. In this
institutional model, there is little room for personal characteristics of presidents.
Presidents are essentially at the mercy of, or reap the benefits of, the political and
institutional context within which they lead (see, e.g., Edwards, 1989; Peterson,
1990; Skowronek, 1997).

Both traditions—with their accompanying strengths and disadvantages—can
also be seen in the research on state governors’ leadership. As discussed below, the
state politics literature has placed strong emphasis on gubernatorial personality and
leaders’ orientation toward the political process as well as skill, knowledge, and
expertise. Much of the literature examining the success of governors in the
legislative arenas of the states involves case studies of particular successful (or
unsuccessful) governors. These studies offer important and useful examinations of
gubernatorial leadership. They also have in common an underlying assumption that
who is governor has an effect on what happens—it influences what issues governors
attempt to lead on, how they go about pursuing their goals, and whether and to what
degree they are successful. However, a concern with a model that emphasizes the
role of the individual actor (the personal model) is that the institutional and political
contexts also affect the opportunity and success of leadership—whatever the
characteristics of the individual governor. In addition, in such studies, scholars are
unable to fully control for the myriad differences in gubernatorial personality. The
literature grounded in this perspective, therefore, has typically been more impres-
sionistic than systematic (e.g., see criticisms of Barber in Nelson, 1998).

Conversely, the institution-focused models of executive leadership that do
place context front and center leave little room for an understanding of how
particular governors practice the art of leadership. Executive personality, drives,
and orientations toward politics and leadership are not completely absent from this
institutionalist tradition, but they are only indirectly accounted for by the indicators
of popularity or prior experience that are typically included in these models.

The contextual constraints that the institutional tradition of research identifies
might be collapsed into three broad categories: institutional factors (formal powers
of the executive and characteristics of the legislative branch); shorter term political
factors (party composition of the legislature, and factors surrounding the executive
such as his or her popularity, involvement in a scandal, and prior experience); and
the immediate economic environment. These factors are widely asserted to affect
the abilities of chief executives to exert leadership. However, empirical research
has found support for only certain of these elements. For example, despite the broad
attention to the formal powers achieved by governors in the states, researchers
attempting to measure the effects of these powers on the actual successful exercise
of leadership have found little such relationship (Ferguson, 1996). On the other
hand, it is clearly important to account for the characteristics of the legislature
within which the executive attempts to lead (see, e.g., Bernick & Wiggins, 1991; Ferguson, 1996; Gross, 1991; Jewell & Whicker, 1994). Finally, economic factors are also obviously important; if resources are constrained, the opportunity for leadership is diminished (see, e.g., Crew, 1992; Dilger, Krause, & Moffett, 1995; Ferguson, 1996; Peterson, 1990; Sullivan, 1991). This institutional research tradition has provided key pieces in the puzzle that makes up the phenomenon of gubernatorial leadership, but unfortunately these pieces are often not linked together, and, more troubling, key parts of the picture are obviously missing.

The challenge is to borrow from the personal model (research that focuses on leaders as individual actors) so that we might have a broad understanding of the leader himself or herself while at the same time bringing in the institutional tradition (understanding the institutional, political, and economic constraints that shape the context in which governors operate). This combination offers the chance to examine gubernatorial personality in a manner that allows for systematic empirical analysis. By explicitly examining the personalities of governors and their motives, the model “brings the politics back in” while still controlling for the important contextual constraints that governors experience.

A Strategy for Bringing Personality Into the Study of American Governors

It is almost axiomatic that personality matters. But in what way? Is it possible to generalize across governors of similar personality types or motives and predict which of these are most likely to succeed? Are governors with certain personality characteristics more likely to achieve success than others? These are only a few of the questions that must be addressed in our quest to understand the multiple and competing forces that determine the success with which governors are able to exert leadership.

Although the impact of gubernatorial personality has never been examined in a systematic manner, numerous case studies of American governors take it for granted that the individuals’ personalities were significant forces in explaining their behavior in office (see, e.g., Beyle & Muchmore, 1983; Kurtz & Peoples, 1992). In addition, some scholars of American governors have included gubernatorial personality in models of governors’ leadership skills without attempting to measure the concept. For instance, Scher (1997) developed a model of southern gubernatorial leadership that includes the structure of the governor’s office, the political environment in which the governor is operating, the pressing governmental/political tasks, and “personal attributes” as key factors in determining leadership styles. In his discussion of the fourth of these factors, personal attributes, Scher noted the importance of gubernatorial personality in shaping gubernatorial behavior, but suggested that it is “very abstract” and, therefore, almost hopeless to try to measure (p. 303).

Moreover, in an analysis that focuses on the issue that is at the heart of our ultimate goal—a better understanding of the governor as legislative leader—the
case studies presented by van Assendelft (1997) highlight the importance of individual gubernatorial personality in shaping the agenda that governors attempt to set for the legislatures and their ability to gain acceptance for those items. Van Assendelft argued for the importance of taking into account whether the legislature is controlled by the governor’s party and the previous experiences of the governor in understanding legislative success or failure. However, her four case studies of southern governors in the 1990s suggest that it is the distinctive personalities of the governors that matter at least as much as the other factors. However, she did not attempt to analyze these personalities and their differing impacts, simply throwing all of these factors into a qualitative analysis version of an “error term.”

In contrast to the work of other gubernatorial scholars, this research attempts to analyze gubernatorial personality and its impact on gubernatorial success in a manner that is both systematic and well-grounded in recent work in psychology. A number of aspects of governors’ personalities could be examined. However, it is one component of governors’ personalities, motivation, that is most important to understand for evaluating their leadership styles. That is because motivation—“the motor for behavior” in the words of Fiske and Taylor (1991, p. 6)—focuses on what one’s goals are, the ultimate differentiator of one leader from another.

Obviously there are a myriad of human motives, and those who study the relationship between political elite personality and behavior—especially in the foreign policy arena—have examined a number of them (see, e.g., Hermann, 1977a, 1977b; Valenty & Shiraev, 2001; Walker, 1983; Winter, 1987, 1993). However, three stand out in understanding human behavior, according to the mass of work within this strand of research:

- the achievement motive, which centers on the desire for excellence;
- the affiliation-intimacy motive, which is indicative of a desire for close relations with other humans;
- the power motive, which underlies a desire for prestige and influence on others.

Moreover, Winter and Stewart (1977) and Winter (1987) have shown that these three essential motives are linked to some of the most important actions in which politicians engage and to some of the most vital outcomes of those actions. Specifically, Winter (1987), in examining the motives of U.S. presidents over time, found significant relationships between a president’s level of power motivation and a number of outcomes of the presidency: war entry, war avoidance, and historians’ evaluation of the president’s “greatness.” Therefore, it seems logical to extend this analysis of leaders’ characteristics to the study of governors, where the number of cases is larger at any given time. Whereas presidents must be examined over many years, meaning that an unknowable number of outside factors may affect presidents leading at different points in time, we are able to examine 50 governors at a single point in time, thus essentially holding the effects of time on executive leadership constant. The work of Winter also convincingly makes the case that it is possible to measure these personality motives “from a distance,” in that important clues
about the nature of personality can be determined through written texts. For example, in his analysis of the relationship between presidential personality motives and performance, Winter (1987) used presidential inaugural addresses to ascertain frequency of expression of the three motivations.

In the analysis presented here, the first inaugural addresses of 46 governors in office at the time of the 1993–1994 legislative session(s) were scored. In two cases, Alabama and Arkansas, lieutenant governors had been elevated to the governorship and did not give inaugural addresses. However, both addressed the legislature soon after entering office and these speeches are used as proxies for this analysis. Each speech was scored, in accordance with Winter’s integrated scoring system for analyzing motive imagery in texts, to determine the frequency of expression of each of the three key motives. The scorer trained extensively through the use of Winter’s Manual for Scoring Motive Imagery in Running Text (Version 4.2) and achieved the level of accuracy in the scoring of political speeches recommended by the manual. The scores for each governor’s motives were expressed in terms of motive images per 1,000 words for the purposes of comparability. The Appendix shows the scoring of one of the speeches; Table 1 shows the motive scores for individual governors. As is obvious from the table, governors do vary to a great degree in their tendency to exhibit the three motives. Some governors are motive-rich; others exhibit low levels of all three motives. Moreover, some governors exhibit all three motives somewhat equally, and others lean toward one motive while exhibiting the other motives to a lesser degree.

In examining political phenomena, no measure is perfect. This is particularly true of those indicators measuring concepts that are as central to human behavior as personality. Not accidentally, it is hidden factors that are likely most powerful in truly explaining such behavior. The most basic potential criticism of our measure is that it may assess the personalities of the writers of inaugural addresses, who may or may not be the governors. There are several responses to this criticism. First, speechwriters used by a governor will likely reflect that governor’s person-

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1 The data set we used incorporates legislation considered during the 1993–1994 legislative sessions in each of the states. It is the most comprehensive data set of its kind, and such a collection of data is unavailable (and immensely difficult to create) for more recent years or for multiple years. Although 1993–1994 is only one time point, it was not an unusual year, politically or economically. It also captures the variety of political features of the states on the variables of interest. For these reasons, there is no distinctive reason to doubt the generalizability of the results. Inaugural addresses were unavailable for four governors: Marc Racicot of Montana, Bob Miller of Nevada, David Walters of Oklahoma, and Walter D. Miller of South Dakota. They therefore were excluded from the analysis.

2 Both authors were trained in the use of the Winter methodology and coded a subset of five of the speeches. The scores of the two authors were highly correlated, and disagreements were rare and easily rectified. Moreover, the key advantage of the training procedures that the authors completed is that achieving the recommended level of expertise obviates the need for multiple coding and reconciliation. Numerous works published in recent years have used this same method of coding by a single individual who had achieved the level of proficiency required by Winter in his scoring manual, as was the case here. This method has been used in many studies, including Valenty and Shiraev (2001), Winter (1993, 1998), and Winter and Schmitt (1998). The scores used in the analysis were those generated by the primary coder.
### Table 1. Governors and Their Motive Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Governor</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
<th>Power</th>
<th>Affiliation/intimacy</th>
</tr>
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<td>17.00</td>
<td>5.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>AK</td>
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<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.96</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Fife Symington</td>
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<td>4.17</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Jim Guy Tucker</td>
<td>15.01</td>
<td>9.55</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Pete Wilson</td>
<td>11.38</td>
<td>10.92</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Roy Romer</td>
<td>13.91</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
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<td>Lowell Weicker</td>
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<td>4.35</td>
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<td>10.05</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Lawton Chiles</td>
<td>10.16</td>
<td>4.40</td>
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</tr>
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<td>7.80</td>
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<td>8.69</td>
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<td>2.47</td>
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<td>5.71</td>
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<td>John R. McKernan</td>
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<td>Michael J. Sullivan</td>
<td>7.80</td>
<td>8.29</td>
<td>6.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* 

aNumber of expressions of the achievement motive per 1,000 words of the inaugural address.  
bNumber of expressions of the power motive per 1,000 words of the inaugural address.  
cNumber of expressions of the affiliation/intimacy motive per 1,000 words of the inaugural address.
ality, both because governors will hire those who share their worldview and because the writers will attempt to produce work that strongly reflects the personality of the governor. As a key Clinton White House speechwriter put it in his recent account of his experience, “[Clinton] chose me to be his director of speechwriting not because of my liquid prose, but because, it was thought, I understood his policies and his mind” (Waldman, 2000, p. 16). Second, although others may participate in the writing of some text, it is the governor who ultimately delivers that speech, hence the final product will express his or her personality. This is particularly the case with an inaugural address, perhaps the most important speech delivered by a governor at that point in his or her political career. Finally, in reading the addresses, one is struck by how many of them are truly personal, including personal anecdotes used as metaphors for bigger points.

Still, the measure is likely not completely unpolluted by extraneous political forces or the personality traits of others involved in the speechwriting process. However, recognizing that any measurement of governors’ personality must take place “from a distance,” this measurement scheme offers an excellent opportunity to gain insight into a crucial factor, the absence of which has led to badly underspecified analyses of gubernatorial performance.

Table 2 presents the mean scores (measured per 1,000 words to create parity across addresses of different lengths) for each of the motives for the 46 governors who were part of this analysis. In addition, the mean score (again, measured per 1,000 words) of the interaction between the power and achievement motives (power × achievement) for individual governors is shown. This interaction is of crucial importance, as discussed below. As can be observed from the table, governors are most likely to exhibit highest rates of the achievement motive, followed by the power and affiliation motives. The mean number of achievement motive expressions per 1,000 words is more than 12; the mean level of expression of the power motive is half that number (6.18 times in 1,000 words); and exhibitions of the affiliation-intimacy motive are lower still (4.68 times out of 1,000 words). However, the significant variations that exist across the governors in this data set—and the comparative impact of those variations—are the real focus of this analysis.

Table 2. Mean Motive Scores for Governors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement</th>
<th>Power</th>
<th>Affiliation/intimacy</th>
<th>Power × achievement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mean 12.26</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>75.56</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Note. aMean number of expressions of the achievement motive per 1,000 words of the inaugural address across all governors.
bMean number of expressions of the power motive per 1,000 words of the inaugural address across all governors.
cMean number of expressions of the affiliation/intimacy motive per 1,000 words of the inaugural address across all governors.
dMean level of an interaction term between the power and achievement motives across all governors.
The Multivariate Analysis

To test the hypotheses regarding gubernatorial personality, it is necessary to examine the influences of these factors within the broader framework of the state decision-making context. Previous research on governors and the presidency leads to the prediction that the contexts within which governors lead join with the governors’ personalities to structure gubernatorial success in the legislative arena.

Identifying Gubernatorial Proposals

The first step in the data acquisition process involved gathering synopses and other information regarding every piece of legislation introduced in the state legislatures during the time period of interest. This resulted in a data set containing 90,499 bills. The next issue of importance was identifying gubernatorial proposals. Unlike the president, governors do possess the power to directly introduce legislation in a few states. In other states, the legislative leadership routinely submits legislation on behalf of the governor (Rosenthal, 1990). Most governors do not offer formal “legislative plans” to their legislatures for consideration. And, unfortunately, there is no state-level resource (akin to Congressional Quarterly) that monitors gubernatorial position-taking across the states. Nonetheless, governors do identify issues for consideration as well as potential solutions to these problems. To that end, the State of the State address is a significant resource that all governors possess. Research on governors and the related literature on presidential State of the Union addresses indicates that these speeches constitute reliable indicators of executive policy goals (Herzik, 1991; Rosenthal, 1990). In addition, these messages are public documents that have been offered for many years and are consistent across the states in the time they are generally offered and the goals inherent in them.

For these reasons, State of the State messages are used as indicators of the governors’ policy agenda. Proposals discussed in these addresses determine which bills in the universe of bills should be identified as “gubernatorial proposals.” Much like Herzik’s analyses of State of the State addresses, the methodology ignores “rhetorical appeals” and records only those items associated with specific legislative proposals (Herzik, 1991). There are 1,092 bills identified as “gubernatorial proposals.” The model developed here makes the substantial contribution of explicitly adding measures of the personalities of governors to a model of gubernatorial leadership drawn from the existing literature and testing it in a multivariate analysis.

With the following exceptions, the analysis uses State of the State addresses to identify gubernatorial proposals. In New Jersey, it uses the agenda of the incoming governor, Christine Whitman, identified in her inaugural address. Schafer of North Dakota offered his legislative plan in the budget address, as did McWherter of Tennessee. The analysis uses the budget address in these two states.
The dependent variable measures the percentage of the bills in a governor’s agenda that became law. Because these are the proposals identified as gubernatorial priorities, it is reasonable to expect that the governors want these bills to pass. This is also probably the most important question for gubernatorial success in the public eye because governors benefit from the opportunity to “claim credit” on those issues achieving legislative adoption. A detailed description of gubernatorial motive scores was presented above. These measures allow for an examination of the role of gubernatorial personality in the legislative success of the governors. These are, therefore, the variables of primary interest here, and the next section presents hypotheses regarding their role in explaining gubernatorial success in the legislative arena. However, to more completely understand the dynamic of gubernatorial leadership, it is also necessary to include other factors that previous research has indicated are important. These remaining variables are briefly described below and are treated here as controls.

**Motive Scores**

Two motives exhibited by governors—power and achievement—are logically linked to success in the legislative sphere. Those who exhibit high levels of the power motive are concerned about reputation and prestige, leading to a desire to gain tangible legislative accomplishments to which they can point. Governors with high levels of the achievement motive show evidence of their desire to do great things in office, set a standard of excellence, or encourage success in competition with others. However, neither of these motives alone seems to fully capture the political ability and a positive orientation toward the game of politics that are crucial in a strong chief legislator. It is the interaction of these motives within individual governors that most fully captures this successful gubernatorial personality—governors who exhibit both the desire to use government to achieve their goals and a willingness to exercise the power necessary to bring these goals to fruition. Therefore, it is the combination of high levels of the power motive and high levels of the achievement motive that is predicted to be the optimal personality for achieving success in the legislative arena. The interaction term between the power and achievement motives for individual governors is therefore hypothesized to be positively related to the legislative success of those governors.

A hypothesis related to the third motive—affiliation/intimacy—is not as obvious. It is clear that some political climates might reward governors who show a sincere interest in developing personal relationships with legislators. Especially in an era where “going public” is increasingly common for governors in their attempts to win legislative victories, such desire for relationships with others might
be appreciated by the citizenry. On the other hand, the desire for ongoing relationships with other political actors might also be perceived as evidence of personal weakness, suggesting to legislators that they have no fear of being “punished” for going against the governor. Therefore, while we recognize that somewhat superficial “backslapping” is a part of daily political interactions, we do not hypothesize that the affiliation/intimacy motive has any concrete benefit for governors. This deep-seated desire for affiliation by governors is not expected to be positively related to gubernatorial success in the legislative arena, and it is possible that a negative relationship will evidence itself.

Control Variables

The remaining variables in the model are drawn from the extant literature on presidents and governors as chief legislators and are treated as controls. First, the degree of legislative professionalism characterizing the state legislative branch should influence gubernatorial success at policy leadership because such legislatures have the resources to exert their own policy leadership (rather than relying on the governor) if they so choose. Measures of legislative professionalism generally account for the level of institutionalization of the legislature (staff and other resources) and characteristics likely to indicate full-time status, such as salary of members and number of days in session. Findings are mixed in the current literature as to how increased professionalism has interacted with the growing formal power of governors to influence the policy leadership ability of the governors in the states (Bernick & Wiggins, 1991; Dilger et al., 1995; Ferguson, 1996; Gross, 1991). The measure of legislative professionalism is drawn from Squire (1992). It measures legislative professionalism by the closeness of three characteristics of state legislatures (member pay, number of staff members per legislator, and total days in session) to the “ideal type” professionalized legislature, the U.S. Congress.

Formal power of the governor has increased in the last 20 years (Beyle, 1996), and conventional wisdom holds that such increases empower the governor to lead. These changes have been found to influence gubernatorial success in the administrative arena (see Brudney & Hebert, 1987). These powers are measured by dummy variables for sole gubernatorial control over the budget and unlimited tenure potential for the governorship. Finally, a measure of the size of the governor’s staff (measured as staff members per public employee to adjust for population) is included, as some research has indicated that such a resource is important to facilitate the work of the governor (Dilger et al., 1995; Ferguson, 1996). Data for these variables are drawn from the Book of the States in the relevant year. Empirical work has found little support for the impact of formal powers, but sufficient research points to their theoretical importance that they are included here.

The model also includes two dummy variables accounting for situations of divided government—one variable coded 1 where both chambers of the legislature are controlled by the opposition party, the other coded 1 where party control of the
legislature is split. Gubernatorial proposal success should suffer from both types of minority party status. When the governor’s party is in the majority, the governor should be more successful. (Data for this variable are drawn from the *Book of the States*.)

Another element relating to political parties that might also affect the governor’s success is the ideological polarization of the parties. Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) used public opinion data from all the states (except Alaska and Hawaii) to develop a measure of the polarization of parties in those states. It measures the difference in mean ideological preferences between Democratic and Republican identifiers in the electorate. Although this is not a direct measure of the ideology of the legislative membership, it should be a reasonable proxy because party identifiers in the public are obviously responsible for choosing their representatives. Also, Erikson et al. (1993) reported that party elites in the legislature generally mirror the ideological composition of the electorate. Jewell and Whicker (1994) asserted that more ideologically polarized parties would exhibit more party cohesiveness. If this is the case, then gubernatorial proposals made under conditions of party polarization are more likely to fail when the governor’s party is the minority party, but are more likely to pass in states when the governor’s party controls both chambers of the legislature.

A variety of other folkways, rules, and traditions of the legislature also influence the likelihood of the passage of proposals brought before it. Indeed, the overall rate of bill passage and bill introduction varies dramatically from state to state. To account for these factors, the model includes the overall percentage of “non-governor” bills passed in the state during the legislative session. Although this is a somewhat imprecise measure, accounting for several underlying constructs, it seems to capture an important legislative tendency that will certainly have an impact on the passage of gubernatorial proposals. If nearly all bills introduced in a legislature tend to pass, then one would not be surprised if nearly all governors’ bills pass.5

The model must also account for other sources of influence on legislators. When interest groups are strong, governors may have to compete with them for the attention of legislators, thus dampening gubernatorial success. Interest group proliferation is measured by two indicators drawn from Gray and Lowery (1996). One represents the diversity of groups in the state, and the other represents the density of groups in the state. Interest group diversity (Gray & Lowery, 1996) is a Herfindahl index of concentration across 10 categories of interest groups. Therefore, a high value indicates low group diversity, meaning groups are concentrated in only one or a few categories. Interest group density (Gray & Lowery, 1996) is the number of groups registered to lobby in the state. Interest group diversity is

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4 Nebraska, which has a nonpartisan, unicameral legislature, is coded 0 on both of the variables.
5 Given the imprecise nature of this measure, it was prudent to estimate the model without it as well. Coefficients and significance levels of the remaining variables are not substantively affected.
predicted to be positively related to gubernatorial success (which would be represented by a negative sign because the measure is a Herfindahl index), and interest group density is predicted to be negatively related to that success.

Other variables related to the governors themselves are also important for gubernatorial success. Gubernatorial skill, as measured by prior executive and legislative service, should assist governors in their attempts at leadership. This is measured by two dummy variables, one for having served previously as governor and another for prior legislative service. Data for these two variables are drawn from the *Book of the States*.

Further, the relationship between the governor and the public is important. Governors who won office by a landslide ought to be in a good position to pursue their legislative goals, because they may be able to claim an electoral “mandate” to lead (Ragsdale, 1993). Similarly, governors who are more popular with the public should be better able to achieve their goals because members of the legislature will be more inclined to support such a popular chief executive.\(^6\) However, both of these variables are complicated by the passage of time. Some research asserts that executive popularity naturally declines over time and therefore the benefit of such popularity will be fleeting. Similarly, the “halo” effect of having won the election surely fades over time as well (Simonton, 1987). *Popularity* is measured as the average public approval level of the governor for the year of the study.\(^7\) *Electoral margin* is the margin separating the incumbent from the closest competitor in the immediately preceding election.\(^8\) The electoral data are drawn from the *Book of the States*.

Other factors associated with governors might serve to limit their ability to lead. For example, governors whose terms are marked by major scandal should be

\(^6\) Note: But see Collier and Sullivan (1995).

\(^7\) Public approval was measured using public opinion data gathered by various polling firms and compiled by Thad Beyle, Richard Niemi, and Lee Sigelman. Different state polls use slightly different coding schemes. Therefore, Beyle, Niemi, and Sigelman have combined the positive categories from each poll into a single indicator called “positive rating.” According to this measure, governors are characterized by the proportion of respondents who agree that the governor was doing an “excellent,” “good,” or “above average” job or who indicate that they “approved” of the governor’s job in office. If only one poll was performed in the state in the year under consideration, that positive rating was used. Where more than one rating was available for 1994, the model used the average of the ratings. The data are available for download (www.unc.edu/~beyle/jars.html).

\(^8\) As stated earlier, governors who succeeded to the office were coded as having an electoral margin of zero. To test the sensitivity of the performance of this variable to this assumption, we retested the model by setting the electoral margin for these governors to the margin of the governor whom they replaced. This change did not enable the variable to achieve statistical significance, nor did the coefficient of the variable take on the predicted positive sign. Therefore, the original coding (0) of the variable in the model was retained.
at a disadvantage. Also, governors who attempt to lead on too many issues will likely see their rates of success diminish. This effect is measured by a variable for the number of items on the governor’s agenda.

Finally, the condition of the state’s economy is also likely to influence the legislature’s response to a governor’s legislative proposals. Unemployment should serve as a useful surrogate in assessing the economic conditions coloring legislators’ impressions of the economic conditions facing the state and the resources available to pursue legislative goals. It is expressed as the average rate of unemployment for the year. High and/or increasing unemployment should result in less likelihood of gubernatorial bill passage. Data for this variable were drawn from Employment and Earnings, a publication of the U.S. Department of Labor.

Despite the numerous controls included in this multivariate analysis, gubernatorial personality, a factor that previously has been excluded from systematic analyses of gubernatorial success in the legislative arena, is hypothesized to play a significant role in governors’ ability to shape public policy in the states.

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9 Data for this variable were compiled by one of the authors. Lexis-Nexis contains an on-line reporter called State Capital Reports that gathers information from major news sources across the states and offers highlights of news items on a weekly basis. ‘Scandals’ are a regular feature of this reporter. This section reports on scandals covered by the major state newspapers. Lexis-Nexis search criteria were used to isolate all “scandals” items for the years 1993–1994. These items were then read to find reference to scandals affecting the governors or their close staff members. Major scandals were defined as significant, numerous, or persistent legal or financial questions. Although this assessment is somewhat subjective, the decision was not generally a difficult one to make. Six governors are identified here as being involved in a major scandal. These scandals include the legal investigations surrounding the financial dealings and campaign practices of Jim Folsom of Alabama, Arkansas Gov. Jim Guy Tucker’s implication in the Whitewater investigation (later indicted and convicted), charges that Christine Whitman’s campaign paid black voters to stay away from the polls, and the 17 indictments of Oklahoma Gov. David Walters for various campaign finance violations. In addition, the administration of Rhode Island’s Bruce Sundlun was marked by multiple allegations ranging from illegally shooting raccoons to a paternity suit and ethics questions surrounding whether Sundlun pushed for legislation to benefit a financial group that had lent him money. Examples of scandals not deemed significant are the “nanny problems” of Howard Dean of Vermont and Michael Sullivan of Wyoming or the destruction of phone logs by an aide of Texas Gov. Ann Richards.

10 This variable was created by one of the authors. To measure scope of gubernatorial leadership, we developed an outline of the State of the State address of each governor using policy areas (such as education, health care, etc.) as the main headings. Within these main headings, individual proposals were identified for addressing problems within the policy area. Examples of proposals within the broad areas include “three-strikes” criminal sentencing reform, school choice vouchers, small business insurance pools, and AFDC diversion grants. Counting these individual proposals is not as straightforward as one might suppose, however. For example, should a welfare reform package that requires teen parents to live at home, places time limits on benefits, and establishes family caps be counted as one proposal, or three? On the other hand, governors tend to address a limited collection of broad policy areas. Accounting for these policy areas is more straightforward than accounting for separate proposals. Therefore, the number of main headings was used as the number of issues addressed by the governor. This measure is less subjective and is, therefore, likely to be a more valid and reliable measure of the size of the governor’s agenda. The scope of gubernatorial agendas does vary significantly. The minimum number of issues addressed by a governor was 2 (in Alabama); the maximum number of broad issues was 19 (in Maryland). The mean number of issues identified by governors was 7.4.
Results

As can be seen from the regression results in Table 3, the new measures developed here to account for gubernatorial personality do indeed perform as expected, even when controlling for a number of other significant political, economic, and institutional elements of the state context. The regression coefficient for the power × achievement interaction variable exhibits a positive and statistically significant (at the \( p < .05 \) level) effect on the success of gubernatorial proposals. Governors exhibiting the power and achievement motives in tandem do indeed experience significantly greater levels of success in the legislative arena. The fact that many of the control variables are also found to be important forces in shaping governors’ success in their legislatures further reinforces the high level of importance of this personality variable. The effects of personality come through despite the many other factors affecting success.

On the other hand, the measure for affiliation/intimacy—the tendency to emphasize warmth, friendliness, or companionate activity with others—has a negative and statistically significant (at the \( p < .05 \) level) impact on the dependent variable. Although no hypothesis was presented as to the effect of this motive, this finding does make analytical sense. We return to this point below.

Table 3. Regression Analysis of the Impact of Gubernatorial Personality on Legislative Success

\( (N = 44) \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>( B )</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power × achievement interaction</td>
<td>0.00077**</td>
<td>0.0004</td>
<td>.164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation/intimacy score</td>
<td>−0.01329**</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>−.210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative professionalism</td>
<td>0.200*</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor has sole budget intro. responsibility</td>
<td>−0.110***</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>−.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited tenure potential</td>
<td>0.171***</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>.416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of governor’s staff</td>
<td>147.116***</td>
<td>52.397</td>
<td>.294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divided government—split legislature</td>
<td>−0.014</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>−.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divided government—unified legislature</td>
<td>0.087**</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>.211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polarization of political parties</td>
<td>0.004**</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>.209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-governor bill passage rate</td>
<td>0.855***</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>.751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest group density</td>
<td>−3.293*</td>
<td>2.456</td>
<td>−.156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest group diversity</td>
<td>−0.00016***</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>−.395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral margin</td>
<td>−0.339***</td>
<td>0.193</td>
<td>−.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gubernatorial popularity</td>
<td>−0.001</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>−.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of governor’s agenda</td>
<td>−0.006</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>−.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandal</td>
<td>−0.083*</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>−.182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior legislative experience</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of previous terms as governor</td>
<td>0.043*</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>.189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean rate of unemployment</td>
<td>−0.038**</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>−.250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.487</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \( B \), regression coefficient; SE, standard error; \( \beta \), standardized regression coefficient. Adjusted \( R^2 \) = .75. 

\(* * * p < .01, * * p < .05, * p < .10\) (one-tailed).
The adjusted $R^2$ suggests that three-fourths of the variance in gubernatorial success in the legislative arena is explained by the independent variables, those of the greatest substantive interest as well as the controls. The model does a good job of explaining a complicated phenomenon.

The remaining variables in the model are treated as controls. Because of this, a full theoretical explanation for their inclusion in the model is not presented. However, the findings for these variables are worth brief comment. Features related to individual governors beyond personality also prove important, which further emphasizes the importance of the person holding the office. For example, governors embroiled in serious scandals suffer legislatively, whereas having served previous terms as governor assists the governors in achieving their legislative goals. On the other hand, contrary to our expectations, neither gubernatorial popularity nor the margin of victory in the last election (our measure of an electoral mandate) perform as expected. The size of the governor’s margin of electoral victory actually exhibits a negative (statistically significant with a two-tailed test) sign. It could be that the rather lengthy period of time since the last election (in most instances, the previous election was at least 2 years in the past) prevented governors from making use of their electoral success. The failure of popularity to assist the governor’s agenda is somewhat more surprising. However, on average, this group of governors was not exceptionally popular, which suggests that there may be a “tipping point” after which popularity actually can become a tool for achieving legislative goals (but not before).

Beyond these “personal” variables, findings regarding other features of the institutional and political environment are also interesting. Elements of the formal power of the governor, although much touted by reformers and scholars alike, are not particularly predictive of gubernatorial success in the legislative arena. A legal or constitutional limit on the number of terms the governor can serve, perhaps unexpectedly, exhibits a positive relationship to the dependent variable. Gubernatorial authority (or responsibility) to prepare the budget detracts from success in the broader agenda examined here. On the other hand, having access to a staff to support the governor’s initiatives does contribute to success.

Despite our predictions, divided government fails to hamper gubernatorial leadership attempts. Some of the literature on divided government actually supports this finding (see, e.g., Binder, 1999; Bowling & Ferguson, 2001; Mayhew, 1991a, 1991b; Tsebelis & Money, 1997). But polarization of the parties does improve a governor’s chances, presumably because as the parties are further apart ideologically, they are more likely to hold their members together.

The broader environment also affects the governor’s leadership. As predicted, interest group diversity assists governors in their leadership attempts (the sign is negative because the measure is a Herfindahl index), whereas interest group density hampers gubernatorial leadership. Finally, our economic measure—the rate of unemployment—also performs as predicted. High unemployment makes gubernatorial leadership in the legislative arena more difficult.
Discussion

This paper began with an assertion that scholars of executive politics in the American context have tended to fall into two broad categories: those who emphasize the importance of institutional and political factors, and those who emphasize the significance of the characteristics of the chief executives themselves. More important, this research argued for the necessity of bringing these two traditions together in a systematic analysis and, moreover, for the testing of a model of the personality and motives of governors within a complex political, institutional, and economic context. Such an analysis would clearly reintroduce the true “politics” recognized only when traits of the actual actors are taken into account. The model presented here does just that, pulling together the two research traditions in gubernatorial leadership into one model. Just as important, this project shows that executive personality in the state context does matter in a systematic way.

Drawing upon the work of Winter (1987), the research presented here developed measures of three different gubernatorial motives that allowed for the testing of this more thoroughly specified model of gubernatorial success. Using a multivariate analysis, the model presented significant evidence that the power and achievement motives—when found in combination in the same governor—are indeed important for governors attempting to lead their state legislatures. Just as Winter (1987) found that personality variables were linked to presidential performance, the research presented here finds that the traditional discounting of executive personality (or the more understandable belief that it is beyond accurate measurement) has resulted in underspecified models of the impact of chief executives on the legislatures with which they must work to achieve policy outcomes. The personality of governors does have an impact on their success, and it does so in a predictable, measurable way. Indeed, the adjusted $R^2$ of .75 is markedly higher than for similar analyses of the factors explaining gubernatorial leadership that lacked any variables related to gubernatorial personality (Ferguson, 1996).

Such recognition that the personality of individual governors—essential players in the state policymaking process—significantly affects policymaking provides an important insight into American politics more generally. That is, any attempt to explain executive/legislative outcomes is underspecified absent such personality variables. Hence, the two traditions of executive research we have identified have each suffered from overlooking elements of the other tradition. There is clear benefit to blending the two in a thorough empirical analysis. The addition of the personality of the actors to the political, economic, and institutional factors typically discussed is critical for understanding executive leadership.

Moreover, this research has specified the type of personality motive that is important for governors to possess. Governors who emphasize concern for reputation or prestige coupled with an emphasis on a standard of excellence and the desire to use government to secure policy goals are, indeed, better positioned to achieve their goals. This, in part, reiterates Winter’s findings about presidential success and
“greatness” in that the power motive was linked to these similar dependent variables. However, in the contemporary American state context, it is important for governors to link this power motive to the desire to achieve goals. That is, the expression of power should have a purpose accompanying it.

Such a positive relationship between gubernatorial motives and legislative success is not found for the affiliation/intimacy motive. Although expression of the affiliation/intimacy motive may offer electoral benefits and other political advantages to governors (Kernell, 1986), it actually detracts from gubernatorial attempts at achieving success in the legislative arena. This finding also reaffirms Winter’s (1987) findings about the relationship between this variable and measures of presidential leadership success. It seems that legislators view the affiliation-intimacy motive as somehow misplaced in the public policymaking arena. Or worse (for the governor), legislators may attribute weakness to governors who emphasize this motive. Clearly, for whatever reason, the tendency toward exhibiting this motive does not help governors to achieve their goals in the legislative arena.

Although our results strongly suggest that gubernatorial personality does matter in the legislative process, the research suffers from certain limitations in addition to those already presented in the critique of the methodology. The analysis is limited by an inability to measure some elements of the legislative context. Most obviously, it represented the state legislatures only through institutional measures. It did not measure the personalities of the legislators who work with these governors. It is logical to assume that, if the personality of governors is a key variable in understanding the state legislative process, then the personalities of individual legislators, especially those in key positions of influence in the legislature, would similarly matter. Thus, future analyses should take into account the impact of the personalities (especially the motive profiles) of as many relevant players as possible, using systematic methodologies in incorporating these important variables.

Overall, our findings indicate that personality, although missing from previous executive politics research, is in fact a key factor in explaining the chief executive’s leadership success. This more completely specified model of gubernatorial legislative leadership, including a theoretically justified measure of gubernatorial personality, begins to bring the human element back into the study of the phenomenon of gubernatorial/legislative relations. Clearly, “who” is governor matters, even after controlling for many other features of the state decision-making environment. Although this assertion is widely accepted in the literature, the study presented here has moved beyond simply asserting such an impact to actually measuring it in a systematic and reproducible way.

Finally, in an era of devolution, this analysis helps us to better understand governmental outcomes at the level of American government that only promises to become more central to the making of American public policy in the years to come. The states are, and will continue to be, key determinants of American public policy across a wide swath of policy areas. At the same time, the chief executives
of these increasingly significant states are themselves more important than ever before. This research has shown that these governors’ personalities have a significant impact on their ability to move their agendas in the state legislatures. The personalities of these governors will therefore shape the lives of citizens increasingly subject to the disparate laws of the states they govern.

APPENDIX: Description and Examples of Coding of Motive Imagery in Gubernatorial Addresses

The coding of the speeches was based on the techniques explicated in David Winter’s Manual for Scoring Motive Imagery in Running Text (1994, Version 4.2). Below, the vital elements of the imagery that triggers the coding of each of the three motives are mapped out, with examples from the 1991 inaugural address of Kentucky Gov. Brereton Jones (D). According to the methodology laid out by Winter, the same motive expressed consecutively is coded and counted only once, unless at least one sentence of text has fallen between the two motive expressions.

Achievement Imagery

Achievement motive imagery should include at least one of the following:
- Reference to a standard of excellence
- Negative affect or counteraction in reaction to failure
- Success in competition with others
- Unique accomplishment

An expression of the achievement motive is clearly shown in Jones’ claim: “This Administration is committed to having the most positive, progressive exciting four years in our state’s history.”

Affiliation-Intimacy Imagery

The affiliation-intimacy motive is expressed by speech text including at least one of these elements:
- Companionate activities
- Expression of warmth/friendly feelings toward others
- Negative affect about disruption of a friendly relationship

For instance, Jones’ statement to the state legislature includes a vibrant example of such imagery: “We begin on this first day to build our team by saying something to the members of the General Assembly. . . . You are equal partners with the judicial and executive branches of government and I will work closely with you in a spirit of cooperation.”
Power Imagery

The power motive is expressed by imagery including one of these elements:

- Strong, vigorous actions that have an impact on others
- Actions that directly arouse a strong emotional state in others
- Concern for reputation or prestige

Although power imagery is intermixed with expressions of other motives, the middle of the following claim by Jones shows this imagery clearly: “Cooperation and mutual respect will give us a fighting chance to take a national leadership role in providing quality health care for all people” (emphasis added).

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