

Behavioral Foundations of Presidential Accountability

Benjamin Goehring*

Kenneth Lowande[†]

February 14, 2022[‡]

Abstract

Presidents possess vast authority over policies and outcomes. Recent studies suggest the public checks this unilateralism through expressive opinions and political participation. We examine this accountability link by investigating the empirical implications of a model of presidential pandering and leadership. We present findings from a pre-registered panel survey prior to the 2020 presidential election and a dataset of news coverage of unilateral actions from 1988-2020. We find that presidents pay no net public cost—and may even benefit—by acting. Though respondents penalized presidents for failing to achieve their goals, our analysis of news coverage reveals that most action receives asymmetric media coverage. News stories assign credit to the president at their announcement and rarely follow-up on realized outcomes. On balance, our theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that unilateral directives are credit-claiming devices most often unrestrained by public opinion, and that presidents' accountability relationship can incentivize actions that are welfare-reducing.

*Ph.D. candidate, Department of Political Science and Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan. Contact: bengoehr@umich.edu

[†]Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Michigan. Contact: lowande@umich.edu

[‡]This study was granted an exemption by the institutional review board of the University of Michigan (ID# HUM00186307), and preregistered on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/e5p8g/>). We thank Deborah Beim, Ted Brader, Christian Fong, Rick Hall, John Jackson, Jonathan Klingler, Ken Kollman, Amanda Mauri, Walter Mebane, Brendan Nyhan, Adam Rauh, Jon Rogowski, Stuart Soroka, Jake Walden, participants in the Interdisciplinary Workshop on American Politics (IWAP) at the University of Michigan, and participants at the Political Science Third Year Conference at the University of Michigan for helpful comments and suggestions. We also thank Ayse Eldes, Cory Dubin, Emily Schmitt, Ben McGraw, Adam Bressler, Madelyn Yake, Benjamin Vomastek, Tim Marvin, and Zeina Reda for dedicated and meticulous research assistance. Previous versions were presented at the 2021 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, and the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association. We are responsible for all remaining errors.

Presidents possess vast authority over policies and outcomes. They can defer deportations for hundreds of thousands of young people, attack foreign countries, protect land from commercial development, and raise wages for federal employees—all without seeking prior approval. Under the dominant theoretical paradigm, separation of powers fails to provide an effective constraint on this behavior (e.g., Moe and Howell 1999; Howell 2003; Chiou and Rothenberg 2017). Legislatures face collective action problems, partisan incentives, and other inherent institutional weaknesses; and on balance, the Judiciary tends to defer to the exercise of executive authority. This has led recent scholarship to suggest it is instead the public, through their expressive opinions and political participation, who checks presidential unilateralism (Christenson and Kriner 2016, 2020; Reeves and Rogowski 2016, 2021).

While this public accountability mechanism presents a model of presidential decision-making that is normatively appealing, it rests on important assumptions. Some are informational: that is, the public must have information available about executive actions—and ideally, policy outcomes. Others are psychological: the public must update their beliefs about a president conditional on relevant information. But relevant information could be biased or unavailable, or the public might filter new information through skewed partisan lenses. If any or all of these assumptions fail, the accountability link limiting executive unilateralism can break.

Though the evidence that supports this perspective has shed important light on presidents' relationship with the public, it also has important limitations. Through numerous survey experiments, studies have convincingly shown that copartisanship, policy alignment, and detachment from the rule of law tend to be associated with support for unilateral presidential action. However, these stylized facts are not themselves sufficient to suggest the public check is operative. First, to understand whether presidents actually pay a penalty for acting, we must know how this information reaches voters—that is, how and whether media sources typically report instances of unilateralism. Media reporting that mischaracterizes, or is simply unclear about the source of policy change could reduce or eliminate any penalty observed in the context of surveys. Second, though existing empirical research typically views unilateral action as a “one-shot” policymaking event, theories of political accountability generally involve both presidential action and revealed outcomes. Uncertainty about either or both can lead to dramatically different incentives for politicians. Applying these models requires, then, some understanding of how the public responds to *both* position taking as presidents propose a new policy, and outcomes that imply the policy failed or succeeded.

We study these behavioral foundations of presidential accountability. Specifically, we ground our

analysis in the model of pandering and leadership developed by Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts (2001). The model describes conditions under which a unitary executive will serve the interests of the public, given private information about their own ability and the appropriate policy. Importantly, it demonstrates that under certain conditions, the executive will select policies they believe to be incorrect in order to maximize their odds of retaining office.

We examine these conditions empirically by fielding a pre-registered panel survey prior to the 2020 presidential election, and by providing a comprehensive measure of media coverage of presidential initiatives from 1988-2020. Our experimental work first evaluates two comparative statics central to the strategic behavior of the president: (1) when voters are uncertain about the outcome of policy, their evaluations of the president should be higher when the president selects a policy they prefer *ex ante*; (2) when the outcome is revealed to be (dissonant) proximate to their interests, their evaluation of the incumbent should (decrease) increase. Our media coverage contextualizes these relationships. We investigate the degree to which the informational environment in experimental settings actually occurs in practice. Most importantly, in the context of the model, it allows us to gauge whether presidents typically operate in a media environment conducive to strategic behavior that is welfare enhancing (or reducing) for the public.

Our research designs also exhibit a number of important innovations. First, our experiment varies the president and policy in question, in addition to the means of policy change, meaning that our results are less likely to be artifacts of a given policy or president. In contrast, most existing surveys that examine public responses to unilateral action are confined to a single president acting on a single policy. Second, by relying on treatment conditions containing *both* images and text, our survey more closely approximates informational exposures in typical media sources, and reduces the potential influence of respondent attention on responses. Finally, by fielding a recontact survey that communicates information about the results of the presidents' actions, our set-up is more closely related to theories that distinguish between responses to mere position-taking and policy outcomes. This allows us to show how voter opinions respond to uncertainty about the results of the presidents' actions.

Our data on media coverage help reveal the information environment for unilateral action in contemporary American politics. While past research has relied on media to rate the "significance" of executive action, we use this coverage to provide descriptive context for studies of public responses to unilateralism. We examine what topics garner coverage, what actions result in both initial and follow-up coverage, and to whom it assigns credit. In short, we describe when the public penalties (or

rewards) uncovered in experiments are likely to operate in the contemporary media landscape.

Our findings suggest that for much of the unilateral policymaking presidents engage in, the accountability link is not sufficient to guarantee a public check. Our experimental results suggest that although presidents may benefit from acting unilaterally, they pay a sizable penalty for failing to achieve the goals of their actions. In an initial wave we find no evidence that presidents paid a penalty for acting unilaterally, relative to working with Congress. However, we found that viewing policymaking via executive order increased the likelihood that respondents reported a 2020 election preference for the incumbent (Donald Trump) by 3 percentage points. This incumbency bonus was sizable—comparable in scale to the challenger’s (Joe Biden) advantage with female voters. In the second wave, we found that respondents were 6 percentage points less likely to approve of presidents’ handling of policy when they failed to achieve the ends of their stated position, relative to those that succeeded. These effect estimates are robust to a variety of different modeling choices, and were adequately powered by our design.

Our media study reveals a set of important, stylized facts about unilateral action which go well beyond the known fact that many unilateral actions do not receive media coverage. Roughly half of unilateral actions receive coverage in newspapers and for those that do receive coverage, most receive mention in only a handful of articles. Among actions that are covered, we demonstrate that coverage is concentrated within the first few weeks after an action is issued, limiting the public’s ability to learn whether actions succeeded or failed. We also show that coverage of unilateral action tends to more prominently feature words and phrases that assign credit for policy change to the president, relative to other political news coverage.

The most important implication of these findings is that in practice, presidential unilateralism is most consistent with a public accountability relationship that can be pathological—what Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts (2001) refer to as a “pandering” equilibrium. Most executive unilateralism is insufficiently covered by media to provide information for a public check. That is, though respondents (regardless of partisan identification) punish presidents for failure to achieve the goals that their actions set out, media coverage of these actions is typically asymmetric in practice. Most coverage of unilateral action occurs at (or before) the announcement of the action itself and assigns credit to the president. For these reasons, we argue that the public accountability link provides incentives for unilateral action that is either sub-optimal or welfare-reducing for voters. Put differently, our evidence suggests that in contemporary American politics, regardless of its eventual policy-making efficacy, unilateral action is

first and foremost an effective credit-claiming device.

Public Response to Unilateral Action

In the previous three decades of research, unilateral action theory has dramatically changed the way scholars understand the presidency (Moe and Howell 1999; Howell 2003). In contrast to the “text-book” understanding of policymaking in American politics, in this family of theories, presidents are first-movers comparatively free of collective action and agency problems faced by other policymakers. The primary obstacle is the potential for countervailing action from Congress or the Judiciary. In both theory and practice, however, these checks appear relatively weak. Actions to overturn executive action by Congress are rare, and the Judiciary is, on balance, deferential to executive power. Numerous studies have found empirical patterns consistent with this framework—with the frequency of executive action typically associated with political context like majority party support or divided government.¹

Most critical responses to this approach contend that the president’s power has been overestimated. Christenson and Kriner (2020) pose the relative *infrequency* of unilateral action as a puzzle. If the separation of powers is the primary limiting mechanism, and it is frail, then unilateral action should be far more regular and successful than it is in practice. So, perhaps, other veto players in American politics challenge the president and reduce the utility of this way of policymaking. Some argue that political parties in Congress (Chiou and Rothenberg 2014, 2017), bureaucratic actors (e.g. Rudalevige N.d.; Kennedy 2015; Lowande 2018; Turner 2020; Acs 2020), or successors (Thrower 2017) moderate the president’s actions. But political checks still leave plenty of status quo policies to move, bureaucrats are subject to well-known control mechanisms, and the knowledge of future reversals may not itself limit short term actions (Howell and Wolton 2018). This has led to other work to emphasize the role of the public. Unilateral action theory did not explicitly incorporate public response. And beyond adding measures of public opinion as regressors of unilateral action, no study investigated the role of the public systematically.²

In a series of studies, Reeves and Rogowski (2016, 2018, 2021) and Christenson and Kriner (2016, 2019, 2020) innovate by investigating individual-level determinants of public support for unilateral-

¹This literature is too vast to summarize here. For a recent review, see Lowande and Rogowski (2021).

²See, for example, Rottinghaus and Lim (2009) or Lowande (2014).

ism. There are, of course, good reasons to think that public opinion could constrain the president. Presidents are the only nationally elected official in the U.S. and its most famous politician. As Reeves and Rogowski (2021) write, “Americans are closely attuned to their presidents”(30). There is also ample evidence that presidents are attentive to the preferences of relevant constituencies while in office (e.g., Druckman and Jacobs 2015). Moreover, at least some unilateral action made front page news.

Thus, there is an emerging consensus that the public checks presidential unilateralism. Christenson and Kriner argue that “legacy-minded presidents [...] rationally defer taking executive action [...] if they believe that the long-term political costs of pursuing an unpopular policy exceed the benefits of doing so”(2020: 7). Reeves and Rogowski write that “public support is no blank check on unilateral presidential powers” and that “Americans hold presidents accountable not only for what they accomplish but also for how they wield power”(2021: 21). The primary dispute is not over whether the public checks the president, but why. For Christenson and Kriner, partisan loyalties and policy preferences determine whether the public punishes the president. Reeves and Rogowski argue that in addition to these factors, the public penalizes presidents for taking unilateral action because of underlying beliefs about the rule of law and the separation of powers. Along with theoretical arguments and case studies, these conclusions are primarily supported by survey experiments showing unilateral action can influence public support for presidents. Most importantly, by bringing the public into discussions of unilateral power, this work has connected the study of policymaking institutions with public accountability and representation.

We argue that the primary limitation of this important work, however, is that the links between its empirical findings and theories of presidential accountability are unclear. Some of these missing connections are the result of features of the studies designed to gauge public preferences toward presidential power. Typically, scholars measure these preferences by randomly varying the means of policy change while holding the president fixed (e.g., Christenson and Kriner 2017, 2016). Other studies hold the unilateral action fixed while varying the president issuing the action (Christenson and Kriner 2016). Still others gauge preferences for unilateral power by abstracting away from specific presidents and policies (e.g., Reeves and Rogowski 2018). All approaches are limited in the generalizability of any apparent causal effects. In addition, most vary the means of policy action, without comparing approval under action relative to *inaction* (but see Reeves and Rogowski 2019). This distinction is critical, because it allows scholars to distinguish between public support for position taking, relative to support for action.

Moreover, most studies consist of vignettes that imply unilateral orders are successfully implemented. This has two potential limitations. First, in reality, the successful implementation of an action is not inevitable. President Truman, for example, nationalized the steel industry due to an imminent strike, but the order was overturned by the Supreme Court. More recently, President Obama directed the Bureau of Alcohol, tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) to conduct more extensive background checks and issued a directive closing the detention camp at Guantanamo Bay—neither were carried out. Second, classic models of political accountability typically distinguish between the actions of an agent and the outcomes those actions produce. To date, empirical research on public opinion of presidential unilateralism has focused wholly on the former and taken the latter for granted. Without understanding both whether presidents in general have something to gain from unilateral action (relative to no action)—and if they pay a cost for failed actions—we have an incomplete picture of their strategic incentives.

However, even these stylized costs and benefits might fail to adequately inform accountability theories. Ultimately, experiments provide controlled, idealized information exposures meant to approximate those that reach respondents via media sources. But the informational treatments found in surveys might systematically depart from how news outlets report presidential policymaking. News headlines and ledes often make attribution unclear or difficult for the public. Actions may be attributed to the president, a particular government agency, the government in general, Congress—or some combination of one or more actors (e.g., Ruder 2014, 2015). For unilateral action, in particular, Cooper (2001, 2002) notes that the media sometimes misreports the precise instrument used.

More generally, there is no dispute that most unilateral actions are not covered by news outlets. Christenson and Kriner (2020) find, for example, that the *New York Times* mentioned about 15 directives per year from 2001 to 2018. This implies that what the public learns about (or, what becomes “significant”) is a function of the media’s reporting incentives. There is some evidence that what news outlets choose to cover can be a function of both political context and news congestion (e.g., Nyhan 2013; Ban et al. 2019). This suggests that the information available to the public regarding unilateral action may contain important patterns that diminish or even foreclose the possibility of a public check. Suppose, for example, that the use of terms like “executive order” or “unilateral action” were critical to activating the anti-unilateralism views uncovered by Reeves and Rogowski (2021). If news stories did not use these terms, or otherwise buried them in sections of reports unlikely to be read by the public, then the unilateralism penalty may have little application in practice.

Of course, these conjectures about the generalizability of existing evidence are based primarily

on anecdotes and speculation. Scholars have used media sources to rate the “significance” of unilateral actions. But we do not have answers to any of the critical questions pertinent to the president’s accountability relationship: e.g., what types of actions are more likely to be covered, whether the coverage includes clear attribution, whether coverage reveals both policy proposals and outcomes, and whether the nature of this coverage is likely to produce positive public sentiment.

In summary, existing research on the presidential accountability and public responses to unilateralism raises important questions we attempt to address in this study. To ground our study theoretically, we use the leadership and pandering model of Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts (2001), which is uniquely suited to highlighting the causal relationships and supporting assumptions that lead to different accountability regimes. By regime, we mean the political context structured by the incentives, information, and preferences of relevant players (a la Shipan 2004). Second, we investigate the model’s empirical implications by leveraging a panel survey. The primary innovations of our panel are that it is not limited to a single president or policy, and distinguishes between position taking, policymaking, and policy outcomes—all of which are relevant for the underlying theory. Finally, we provide a comprehensive measure of media coverage of unilateralism to gauge the applicability of survey experiments to presidential accountability. We then discuss what this evidence can say about the accountability regime unilateral action tends to operate within.

Accountability Regimes

To understand the accountability relationship between the public and the president, we rely on a model of presidential leadership developed by Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts (2001). Since our aim is to use the model to organize empirical patterns in public opinion and news coverage, we confine our attention to their baseline model, limit use of notation, and refer the reader to their work for formal definitions and proofs.

The model incorporates several essential features consistent with arguments about the public check. For example, Reeves and Rogowski write “American presidents bear penalties for exercising power that the public views as improper. Strategic presidents would avoid such uses of power” (2021: 42). According to Christenson and Kriner, unilateral action risks “alienating public opinion,” which might “weaken the president’s political position” and have “electoral ramifications” (2020: 132). This implies several straightforward components. Presidents are thought to have sway over a policy choice that

matters for outcomes. The public observes their decision, and rewards or punishes them accordingly. Both studies note that re-election, sanctioning co-partisans, or simple expressions of disapproval are among the ways these potential penalties are carried out by the public. The model accommodates this by studying the strategic behavior of an incumbent executive (I), a challenger (C), and voter (V). The executive makes a (unilateral) policy choice ($x \in \{A, B\}$) in response to a shock ($\omega \in \{A, B\}$), where the $\mathbb{P}(\omega = A) > .5$. Voters choose to re-elect I or replace them with C .

Most importantly, the model describes a policymaking environment that, as we have argued, features informational problems the public check must account for. First, voters in the model have prior beliefs about the right policy, which is a useful way to incorporate existing policy preferences in the electorate. Second, policy choices only indirectly impact outcomes through the state of the world, which may be opaque to voters. This means voters observe policy but may have limited information about outcomes. Finally, executives in the model vary in ability—with high quality ones always selecting the appropriate policy given the state of the world, while low quality executives must select policies with imperfect signals. This is also imperfectly known by voters. Because executives are completely aligned in their desired outcome, the strategic problem for voters is evaluating the likelihood the executive is high quality. This, in turn, influences the policy selection strategy of the executive. The nature of the accountability regime depends on how voters' evaluations change in response to policy choices and outcomes.

To facilitate our discussion of the model and its implications, we simplify and reproduce their main result in Figure 1. The key argument of proponents of the public check is that the public punishes presidents who reveal they are dissonant via their policy choices. The key insight of the model is that under certain kinds of imperfect information, this simple dynamic is not sufficient to ensure that presidents will act in the public interest. More specifically, depending on the information available to the public and competitiveness of the executive's challenger C , one of two regimes can result: a "truth" equilibrium where presidents make the best policy selection given the information they have at hand or a "pandering" equilibrium where presidents select policies they believe to be inappropriate in order to maximize the odds of re-election. Neither equilibrium is necessarily inconsistent with the public check model, in that the president can be considered "responsive" to public will. The point is that under the latter circumstances, the public check does not promote the public interest. We return to the question of interpretation at the end of this section.

Three important dynamics are critical to taking stock of which regime is more applicable to pres-

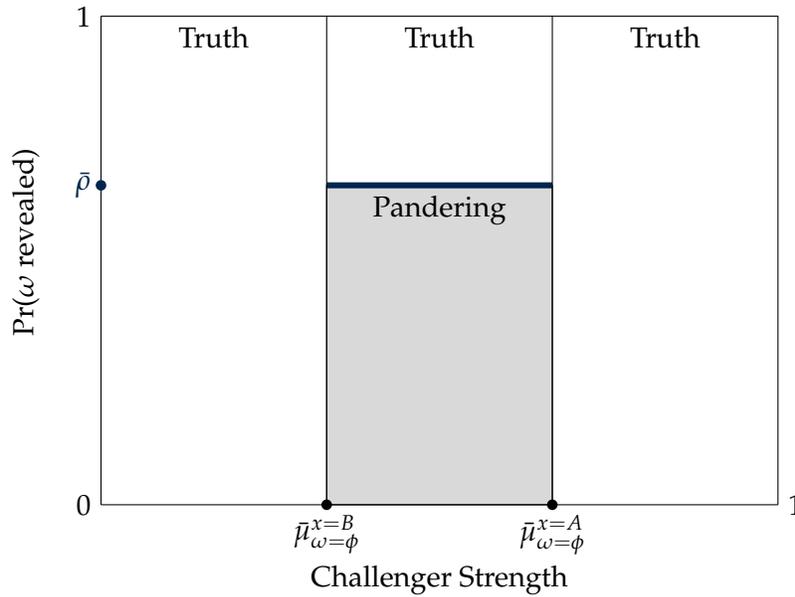
idential unilateralism. First, if the public does not have the state of the world perfectly revealed to them (ϕ), their evaluation of the incumbent ($\bar{\mu}$) is strictly greater when the incumbent selects a policy consistent with their biased perception of the state of the world ($\bar{\mu}_{\omega=\phi}^{x=A} > \bar{\mu}_{\omega=\phi}^{x=B}$).³ In our view, this is a straightforward application of the argument that respondents rate presidents more highly when they appear to support policies they prefer. This means, necessarily, that there is a mountain of empirical evidence that supports this aspect of the model. The critical conceptual difference, we argue, is that this past work has mostly confined itself to priming respondents with vignettes that include an ideological or preference signal, leaving no information about the outcome of the policy. This raises a second, equally important, point: if uncertainty *is* resolved, the public's evaluation of the incumbent should be strictly greater when the policy is revealed to be appropriate ($\bar{\mu}_{\omega=A}^{x=A} = \bar{\mu}_{\omega=B}^{x=B} > \bar{\mu}_{\omega=B}^{x=A} = \bar{\mu}_{\omega=A}^{x=B}$). If the public learns the president has chosen incorrectly, they should rate the president lower. This implies a categorically different kind of public penalty that operates irrespective of public preferences—namely, that they punish presidents for demonstrating they lack the competence to execute the appropriate policy. Each of these implies a particular public response to presidential action that can be investigated experimentally.

These dynamics on their own, however, are not sufficient to explain whether the public motivates presidents to serve their interests. As Figure 1 shows, two contextual factors determine how voter behavior informs presidents' strategies. First, the public's belief about the quality of the challenger who would replace the incumbent. If the challenger is strong relative to the incumbent ($> \bar{\mu}_{\omega=\phi}^{x=A}$), or especially weak ($< \bar{\mu}_{\omega=\phi}^{x=B}$), then presidents have no incentive to deviate from what they believe to be the right policy. Put differently, only close elections induce strategic deviation from the "right" policy. We largely set aside this factor because of our particular application of the model. In the decades following the publication of this model, contemporary presidential elections have entered a period of hyper-competition only comparable in history to the period from post-Civil War Reconstruction to the turn of the century. Though we return to this in the discussion, it seems reasonable to assume that the challenger is always between $\bar{\mu}_{\omega=\phi}^{x=B}$ and $\bar{\mu}_{\omega=\phi}^{x=A}$.

Most importantly, the accountability link depends on the likelihood that the public will learn the true result of the president's decision. If it is sufficiently likely ($> \bar{\rho}$), the president will always pick the

³It is assumed in the model that the public believes state of the world A is more likely than state of the world B.

Figure 1 – Accountability Regimes (Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts 2001)



Note: Depicts regions of truth (white) and pandering (grey) equilibria for all values of the probability that the state of the world (ω) is revealed prior to the election and the voters prior belief that C is high quality. In this figure, $\bar{\mu}$ denotes voters’ belief the incumbent is high quality ($\bar{\mu}^H$ in the original article), x is the president’s policy choice (either A or B), and $\bar{\rho}$ is the cutpoint for uncertainty resolution. For proofs and discussion, see Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts (2001: 525-539, 546-547)

policy they think is appropriate. Otherwise, the president may select a policy based on their perceptions of what the public wants rather than the best information available—a “pandering” equilibrium. It is important to highlight how both dynamics related to voter evaluations of the incumbent jointly inform this distinction. That is, if the public is both biased toward some initial policy and also punishes incompetence, then the accountability regime will depend on the odds the public will be given the information necessary to punish incompetence. If they are not, they rely on their prior belief about the correct policy (A), which can incentivize presidents to pick a policy believed to be inappropriate. Given its theoretical importance, a key contribution of this study is examining this factor with both experimental and observational data.

Thus far, we have described the pandering regimes characterized by this model as consistent with a public check—even if that check actually subverts the public interest. But before describing our empirical studies of these dynamics, it is also worth pausing to illustrate ways in which a “pandering” regime may be inconsistent with the public constraint proposed. The set of policies over which presidents are able to act is sufficiently general to include anything about which the president and public have

preferences. In our view, this can include non-ideological aspects of policy, such as the kind of government intervention or the commitment of resources—anything about which it is conceivable that the president has private information about the appropriate way to respond to a problem. This interpretation differs somewhat from the one put forth by Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts (2001), as well as Canes-Wrone (2006), who mostly leverage examples of policies that differ ideologically.

This interpretation is particularly important because of our interest in unilateral action. As we have argued, these actions vary tremendously in their impact on policy. One potential explanation for that variation is that presidents may “pander” to public bias about the appropriate actions of a president. This is a categorically different dimension of policy choice. It is conceivable, for example, that two policies with the same ideological content could differ in their commitment to effectuating that outcome. For example, presidents might publicly sign a directive to enforce limits on foreign aid for abortions, but then dedicate no personnel to enforce it, and actually *increase* the number of abortions in recipient countries (e.g., Brooks, Bendavid and Miller 2019). Alternatively, they might form a blue ribbon commission that studies the issue and circulates the presidents position in media coverage, but does not change the policy. In summary, one interpretation of the state-matching in the model is that the public has imperfect information about how effective the policy is, or how effectively it altered the “doings of government”(Howell 2013). If shallow or ineffective action that is politically beneficial (absent the revelation of uncertainty), then a pandering equilibrium can be interpreted as one in which that kind of action is incentivized.

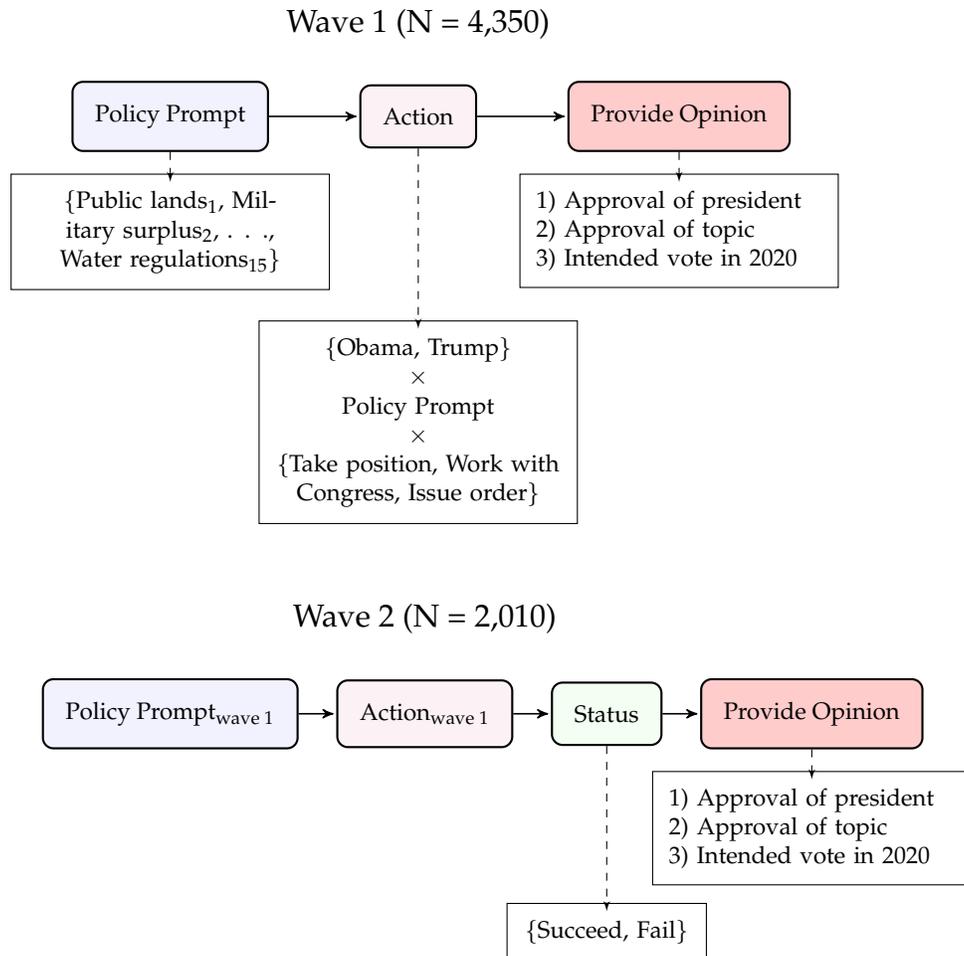
Measuring Public Evaluations of Unilateralism

To understand the accountability link most indicative of presidential unilateralism, we must understand whether and how the public responds to actions and outcomes. Thus, we conducted a nationally representative, two-wave panel survey prior to the 2020 presidential election. In the first wave, subjects were randomly assigned to view a president taking a policy position, lobbying for passage of a bill in Congress, or signing an executive order. In the second wave, subjects were then assigned to information that indicated whether the stated policy objective of the president succeeded or failed. As the theoretical framework in the previous section implied, presidential accountability depends critically on whether the public punishes the president for (1) policies that it disagrees with and for (2) dissonant outcomes. Our setup examines several potential manifestations of these dynamics. First, if

the public holds general skepticism toward unilateralism relative to other policymaking means, they should punish presidents who choose this route over working with Congress or merely taking a position (Reeves and Rogowski 2021). Second, if the public has prior beliefs about the appropriate policy and no information about the outcome, they should reward or punish the president based upon their prior beliefs. Finally, when the action leads to a failure, the public should punish the president.

The panel design is critical for understanding the relationship between these mechanisms and presidential accountability. As we have argued, the vignette experiments in past work typically approximate a news release at the announcement of some presidential initiative. But like any government action, presidential unilateralism takes place over time, often in discernible stages. Policies are formulated, announced, implemented, and evaluated. This matters for the applicability of public evaluations to president's strategic incentives. By recontacting respondents to reveal the outcome of the policymaking activity, we can gauge how the public evaluates the announcement of actions with an uncertain outcome, relative to the outcome itself. As the theory demonstrates, this distinction is critical for understanding the president's strategic incentives.

Figure 2 – Unilateral Action and Policy Outcomes Survey Design. For informational conditions and associated images by topic, president, and outcome, see Tables 1, 2, A.1 and A.2.



We summarize our approach in Figure 2. Though we report technical details and diagnostics in Appendix A of the SI, there are several features of this design which distinguish it from past work. First, by assigning some subjects to view only the position of the president, our study distinguishes between the signal about the president’s policy preferences sent by an action and the action itself. Most prior research compares public evaluations of backing legislation to taking unilateral action (e.g., Christenson and Kriner 2020). But this distinction is critical for determining differences in public evaluations of the *means* of policymaking, relative to support for the policy position itself. This also matters for presidents’ incentives. For example, presidents may be rewarded for appearing to take charge of an issue by acting. Alternatively, if action is treated *equivalently* by respondents to position-taking, this has implications for interpreting the theory.

Second, beyond the means of policymaking, our informational vignettes vary the topic addressed, along with the president addressing it. Specifically, we selected 15 topics: national monuments on public lands, military surplus use by local police, foreign trade barriers, water quality regulation, student loans repayment, gun violence research, carbon emission regulations, public funding of abortion, endangered species protections, direct payments to farmers, enforcement of sanctions against Russia, LGBT worker protections, weapons sales to Saudi Arabia, H1B visas, and the minimum wage for federal contractors. We selected policy areas that included foreign and domestic policy. To minimize deception, we selected policy areas that the president has some legal discretion to change, and those in which the presidents in question have acted on in recent years. Most prior research considers unilateral actions with respect to a single policy. As a result, it is unclear whether the assessments of public evaluations are general, or particular to the policy in question. Our study is designed to examine the former.

Because of the likelihood of moderating effects by co-partisanship of respondent, the action or position could have been taken by President Trump or Obama. As a result, the positions taken by president match their policy preferences—with President Trump (Obama) proposing an alternative that would move policy in a more conservative (liberal) direction. This also ensures that the effects of co-partisanship and party identification can be distinguished. For example, for the endangered species condition, the vignettes read

President Obama (Trump) supported strengthening (weakening) protections for endangered wildlife. He wanted to strengthen (end) protections for some animals and add (prevent) new protections.

with the working with Congress condition adding

He endorsed a bill and worked with Congress. The bill would strengthen (end) protections for some animals and add (prevent) new protections.

and the executive order condition instead adding

He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would strengthen (end) protections for some animals and add (prevent) new protections.

Third, in addition to text, our informational treatments include companion images that represent the treatment condition and topic. (Table 1 includes the images used in the first wave.) The informational prompts themselves are short, and we expect that the images will reduce the likelihood that

respondents will “click through” the survey without reading. Moreover, imagery appears to play an important role in the public’s understanding of the presidency, especially in media reports of presidential actions (Howell, Porter and Wood 2020). More generally, online survey respondents are known to rely on visual cues. We expect that the topic-specific images will remind respondents of the previous survey wave, and ultimately, limit the outcome variation attributable to the passage of time between waves.

Table 1 – Photos for the Position, Congress, and Executive Order Interventions in Wave 1, by President

President	Position Photo	Congress Photo	Executive Order Photo
Obama			
Trump			

Table 2 – Photos for the Success and Failure Conditions in Wave 2, by President

President	Success Photo	Failure Photo
Obama		
Trump		

Finally, our design includes information about outcomes. In Wave 2, the informational treatments inform respondents that the policy change the president supported or acted upon occurred or did not occur. Like the treatment conditions in the first wave, the second wave success and failure conditions include companion images (See Table 2). Our definition of policy success is directly informed by our conception of unilateral action. Failure is defined as the status quo policy remaining unchanged, or the absence of the desired liberal or conservative movement. This is less extreme than failure defined as a *distal* policy movement. Put differently, we do not test the impact of respondents learning that the president’s action or position “backfired.” For example, in the endangered species condition, the failure prompt reads

Despite this, during his time in office, most endangered wildlife protections stayed the same. The president was not able to get the result he wanted.

while the success prompt reads

Because of this, during his time in office, many endangered wildlife protections were strengthened (weakened). The president got the result he wanted.

To measure public evaluations, we used three primary outcomes: respondents’ assessment of handling of the policy (7-point Likert scale), respondents’ overall assessment of the president (7-point Likert), and respondent vote preference for the 2020 presidential election (Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Undecided, or Third-Party). An online survey sample representative of 4,350 U.S. citizens of voting age was obtained from the online vendor Lucid. In general, the sample reflects the partisan identification, region, age, gender, and ethnicity of the United States (see section A.4 in the SI). Wave 1 was fielded September 7-9, 2020; Wave 2 was fielded September 16-18. About half of the respondents could be recontacted after the first wave, and we found that recontact was not associated with treatment condition or political party (see section A.4 in the SI). Prior to fielding, we pre-registered our hypotheses and conducted simulations to ensure the experiments were adequately powered to detect substantively meaningful effects (see section A.2 in the SI).

How the Public Responds to *Actions*

Overall, we find that public evaluations of presidential actions were mostly predicted by the set of demographic variables that form policy-related fault lines in American politics and are well known

in public opinion research (e.g., partisan identification, age, race, and sex). Since we chose to vary contextual factors (i.e., president and topic) along with our treatment conditions of interest, we rely on parametric, linear models that include all informational treatments and demographic covariates to predict evaluations. Because the results are not sensitive to modeling decisions, we summarize our findings with estimates based on logistic regressions and binary versions of the dependent variables in Figures 3, A.3, 4, and A.4, and Tables A.10, A.11, A.14, and A.15. We report additional tabular results with alternative model specifications in the SI.

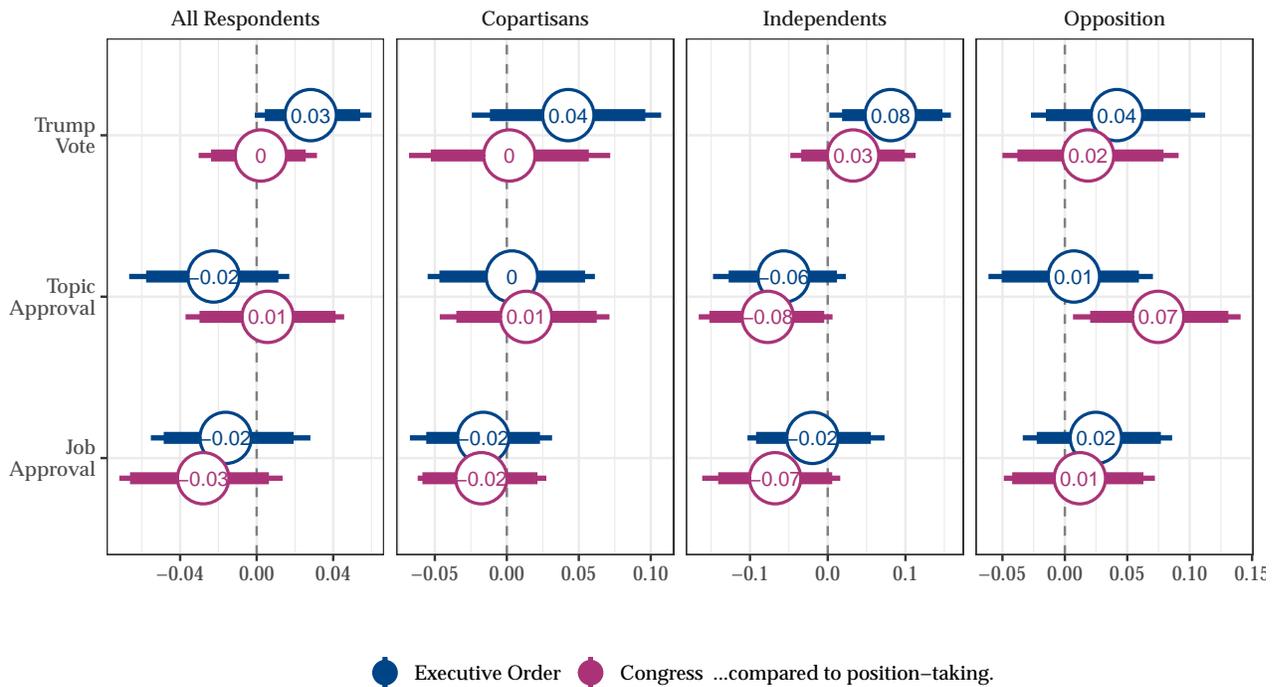


Figure 3 – With notable exceptions, the public is mostly indifferent to the way policy is made. Plots simulated marginal effect estimates using an observed case approach, based on logistic regressions that include condition and demographic controls; error bars indicate conventional 95% and Bonferroni-adjusted confidence intervals; see Tables A.10 and A.11 for full results.

Figure 3 plots marginal effect estimates for policymaking via Congress and unilateral action—relative to position taking—simulated based on an observed case approach (Hanmer and Ozan Kalkan 2013). There is little evidence of backlash against unilateralism, and even some evidence that it may be beneficial for presidential incumbents. Specifically, neither overall approval of the president nor approval of the president’s handling of the topic was associated with the means of policymaking. Nonetheless, respondents appeared to identify the treatment. Consistent with Reeves and Rogowski (2021), the executive order condition was associated with reduced beliefs that the president respected

the rule of law and worked with Congress (Figure A.3).⁴ Those beliefs simply did not factor into assessments of presidential performance. Opponents of the president, defined as those that identify with the other major party, tended to rate the president’s handling of the topic about 7 percentage points higher if they worked with Congress, relative to position taking. But these evaluations were not distinguishable from acting alone, and did not generalize to independents or copartisans.

Most strikingly, viewing the executive order signing is associated with a roughly 3 percentage point *increase* in the probability of reporting a vote preference for President Trump. This is a sizable bump, similar in size to Joe Biden’s advantage with female voters in the 2020 election. In this case, respondents rewarded the incumbent when presidents were seen taking unilateral action. Though subgroup effects are somewhat unreliable in this design, the data suggest this is driven mostly by independents and those that viewed President Trump taking the action.

In short, there is little evidence from the initial panel that respondents systematically reward or punish presidents for taking unilateral action. Assessments of performance were either unmoved, improved, or driven mostly by respondents’ priors. These findings also suggest that, in the absence of information about outcomes, the public tends to treat unilateral action equivalently with mere position-taking. Without information about the efficacy of policy, prior preferences and beliefs serve as a key mover of attitudes toward unilateral action—just as they do for evaluating policy positions.

How the Public Responds to *Outcomes*

In contrast to our initial findings, the second wave demonstrates that, under idealized conditions, the public does punish presidents for failing to produce. This is consistent with the strategic behavior of voters in the Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts (2001) model. We estimate respondent assessments as a function of our treatment conditions and controls, while conditioning on Wave 1 outcome values.⁵ Respondents’ evaluations of the president’s handling of the topic took a significant hit when it was revealed that the stated objective of the president’s policy did not occur. Specifically, respondents were about 6 percentage points less likely to approve of the president’s handling of the topic, which is large,

⁴In addition, executive order information did not increase respondents’ assessments of the presidents’ ability to “get things done”(Figure A.3).

⁵Alternatively, these findings can be reproduced by regressing the change scores on the explanatory variables. We prefer to condition on Wave 1 values because the alternative reduces power.

relative to the baseline probability of approval of 52.4 percent.

There is no evidence of heterogeneous effects by partisan identification. Members of the opposition, along with copartisans and independents, all tended to have lower approval ratings of presidential performance. This is notable because the symmetric partisan identification of the president in question. Republicans and Democrats may have been assigned to Trump or Obama, but in both instances, they tended to punish the president for failing to get a win. In addition, independents’ increased support for Trump in the Wave 1 executive order condition essentially vanishes under the failure condition. The additional outcomes suggest a mechanism. As Figure A.4 demonstrates, failure led the public to rate presidents’ ability to “get things done” lower by 4 percentage points. The public punished the president for failing to achieve a stated objective, regardless of their party or the means they used to do it.

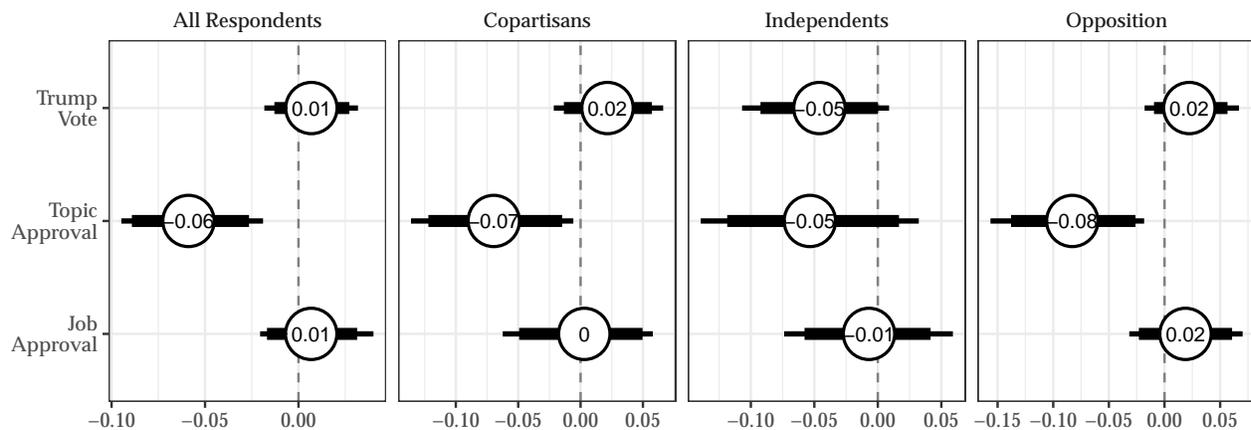


Figure 4 – The public punishes presidents for failing to deliver. Plots simulated marginal effect of estimates failure relative to success, using an observed case approach, based on logistic regressions that include condition and demographic controls; error bars indicate conventional 95% and Bonferroni-adjusted confidence intervals; see Tables A.14 and A.11 for full results.

Importantly, these findings suggest a possible avenue for presidential accountability. Respondents’ assessments of presidential performance under the first wave and the success condition are indistinguishable (not shown here)—which suggests that the initial announcement of unilateral action is treated as a “win” by default. Follow-up information on outcomes, however, can alter public assessments. Learning that an action failed to move the status quo reduces public approval, which can incentive presidents to act in the public interest by successfully implementing policy. But there are two important caveats.

First, the penalty was limited to one question—topic handling—which may or may not be sufficient to inform the president’s thinking. We think the strongest argument that it is sufficient is that job approval and voting outcomes are the aggregation of many such “handling” questions for many different topics. Repeated failure to implement policies, therefore, would eventually trickle into reduced overall job approval ratings and less support at the ballot box. It is simply unrealistic to suppose that any single issue would move something as entrenched as job approval or vote choice.

Second, as the theory demonstrates, this accountability mechanism is conditional on the informational environment the public encounters when evaluating presidential performance. In other words, it is not enough that the public punishes the president for dissonant outcomes under idealized experimental conditions, there must be a plausible case that these dissonant outcomes are observable in practice. And importantly, whether it is likely that the public’s uncertainty will be resolved influences the presidents strategic behavior in ways that can undermine the public interest. Accordingly, we investigate the main avenue through which the the American public learns about presidential actions: news media coverage.

Measuring Public Information about Unilateralism

A key insight of the leadership model in Figure 1 is that the information available to the public can impact the policy decisions of presidents. If the public is unlikely to learn the facts on the ground that informed a policy decision, imperfectly-informed presidents in competitive election environments will be tempted to select policies that may not adequately address the state of the world. If the probability of the public resolving its uncertainty is larger than the key cutpoint, $\bar{\rho}$, imperfectly-informed presidents will select policies according to the information at their disposal. If the probability of uncertainty resolution is less than $\bar{\rho}$, presidents will sometimes pander to the public, selecting the policy they prefer rather than the best policy to address the issue at hand.

Our key task, then, is to measure ρ , the probability of uncertainty resolution. While we cannot provide an explicit value for this parameter, we can provide a rough characterization of its location by examining the information available to the public about unilateral actions. We set out to systematically describe the media and informational environments that mark the American presidency by examining the main source of information available to voters: journalists (Soroka and Wlezien 2022). Specifically, we characterize the kinds of presidential actions they are likely to report, the way they report those

actions, and most importantly—whether their reporting is likely to reveal the *outcome* of the president’s decision. If their reporting is sparse, assigns credit to the president, and does not reveal that outcome, the presidency may operate in a pandering regime where presidents are most often encouraged to cater to public sentiment rather than issue and implement sound policy.

We collected a dataset of newspaper coverage of nearly 1,200 unilateral actions issued by presidents between 1988-2020, which includes the text of the newspaper articles, their authors, and date of publication.⁶ While others have collected similar data in the past, our dataset is a significant improvement in both depth and scope. For one, the unilateral actions that we include in our coverage search are not limited to executive orders, but includes coverage of all types of unilateral action, including presidential memoranda, proclamations, national security directives, internal memoranda, and enforcement decisions (Lowande 2021). This is crucial given the increasing importance and use of alternative means of unilateral action (Lowande 2014; Dodds 2013; Cooper 2002). In addition, our sample of publications is more comprehensive, as well as more politically and geographically diverse, than any prior work.

Our unilateral action dataset also helps address one inherent difficulty for this analysis. That is, we are interested in “off the equilibrium path” behavior. The news articles we collect are coverage of actions presidents chose to take, and they should avoid actions that pose public relations problems. Our data and time series mitigate these concerns, to some degree. First, our dataset of unilateral action contains orders that were secret or unannounced at the time of signage. This means that much of the coverage we collect will have been unanticipated by the administration. Second, our dataset also includes military actions. Though there are plausible indications that presidents care about public reactions to these events, they are often driven by circumstances largely outside the president’s control. A similar point can be made about responses to natural disasters, which are also included in the dataset. Finally, our data include the Trump administration, which ascribed little importance to the traditional media sources like the ones we have included. For these reasons, we think that much can be learned from describing the coverage presidents receive in practice.

Our dataset includes relevant coverage of presidential actions from 54 newspapers, with one from nearly every state, as well as the major national outlets like the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* (see Table B.2). This geographic diversity is important because many unilateral actions have regional

⁶This is a random sample and comprises about 68% of all actions issued between 1988-2020.

impacts. For example, steel tariffs impact industrial areas in the Midwest, while national land designations affect areas in the West with large federal land reserves. These regional dynamics are obscured by past research's focus on the large national news outlets. To avoid national bias, we selected the most circulated newspapers in each state that were also included in ProQuest's news database. We list each paper and discuss the partisan and regional balance of the newspapers in Section B of the SI. On average, our sample covers about 26% of total circulation within each state during the period for which panel circulation data are available (1988–2004), and there are no obvious differences in the partisan makeup of our sample versus the complete panel.

We motivated our conceptualization of what constitutes “relevant coverage” of unilateral actions by asking what a typical voter would need to read in an article in order to know that a specific action occurred and that it resulted from the president working without Congress. From this, we identified a newspaper article as providing relevant coverage if it mentions the given action and attributes it to the president or his administration. The article does not have to explicitly mention the specific document (e.g., “the president signed an executive order”), nor does the action have to be the main subject of the story to count as coverage. An article from the July 11, 2015 edition of the *Austin-American Statesman* provides an example (Tilove 2015). The Mammoth Site located in Waco, TX, the author writes,

was one of three new national monuments created Friday by the president. The other two are Berryessa Snow Mountain in California, a landscape containing rare biodiversity, and Basin and Range in Nevada, an iconic American landscape with 4,000-year-old rock art.

The article does not mention the specific name or number of the document signed by President Obama—nor does it even say that it was a proclamation. However, it still constitutes coverage since it assigns a specific outcome (the designation of the site as a national monument) to the actions of the president. Furthermore, it also counts as coverage of the other two actions taken by the president to designate the sites in California and Nevada as national monuments, even though these actions are not the subject of the article.⁷

A team of undergraduate research assistants aided in generating our dataset. They followed strict procedures to identify and collect relevant coverage. Each coder undertook 4-hour training where they searched for relevant coverage of a practice set of actions. Once they completed their practice set, they checked their own work against our own findings, justifying any differences between the two datasets.

⁷See section B.2 in the SI for additional examples of what does and does not constitute coverage.

In addition, because the team worked in shared directories, we monitored coding diagnostics in real-time—which allowed us to address any significant discrepancies in particular coders. Consequently, as a team, they performed well on standard measures of inter-rater reliability, agreeing on whether an article had any relevant coverage 93.7% of the time. The Cohen’s kappa value of .87 also suggests a very high level of agreement among our coders.⁸

How the Media Covers *Actions*

We demonstrated above that the public is responsive to information about presidents’ implementation of unilateral actions, penalizing them for policy failures. Yet, as Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts (2001) show, this mechanism is insufficient for holding presidents accountable for their policy decisions. There must be common knowledge that the public possesses the information to judge whether a policy was suitable given the state of the world. If the public is to make these judgments, they need to know both that the president acted on his own to try and change a status quo and whether, after some amount of time passes, the policy successfully addressed the underlying issue motivating the policy change. Bluntly put, the public needs to know about actions and outcomes.

Overall, across all unilateral actions in our dataset, 49% receive mention in at least one newspaper article. The granular nature of our data means that we are able to not only quantify whether coverage occurs but also quantify the amount of coverage. Of the actions that receive coverage, 52% receive mention in only 1 to 5 articles and 33% receive coverage in more than 10 articles. In other words, the distribution of coverage is heavily right-skewed. About half of actions receive no coverage at all and, of those that do, most receive mention in only a handful of articles.⁹ In absolute terms, this is higher than past estimates because of the inclusion of additional news outlets (e.g., Howell 2005; Christenson and Kriner 2020). Nonetheless, this point estimate makes clear how many unilateral actions receive an media scrutiny at all.

Figure 5 breaks out the coverage of actions by presidential administration. We plot the proportion of actions in each year that ever receive coverage, receive coverage within the first month after issuance, or receive five or more articles of coverage within the first month after issuance. Subsetting the data to coverage provided in the first month accounts for the fact that actions issued earlier in terms

⁸See section B.2 for additional information about inter-rater reliability.

⁹Notable differences exist across topic areas and time (see Figure B.1).

have more opportunities to be covered, relative to those issued later in terms.¹⁰

Overall, the Figure 5 provides suggestive evidence that coverage has increased over time and is higher in the first year of an administration. The first year of the Obama Administration, for example, was the first year in our dataset in which over half of unilateral actions received coverage in the month following issuance. Likewise, a majority of the Trump administration’s executive actions were covered by the news media within the first month—which is unmatched by any other administration.

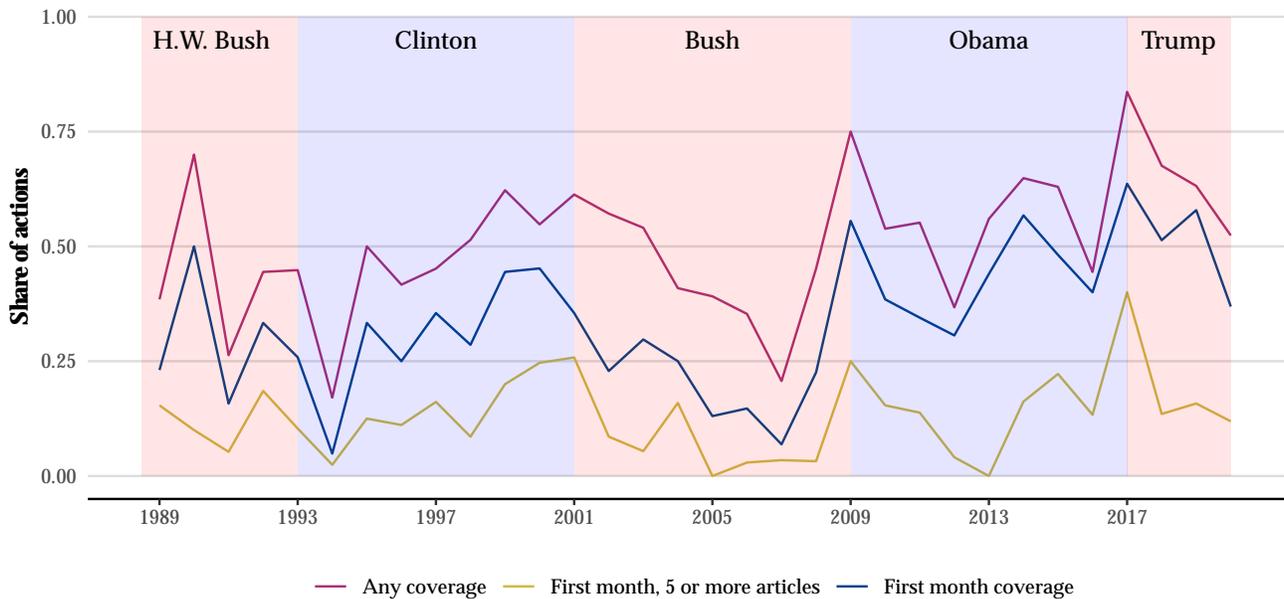


Figure 5 – Presidential transitions lead to the most coverage, but coverage in general has increased over the last decade. Plots the share of actions issued in a year that received coverage, by several measures. Restricting the data to only include coverage from the first month controls for the fact that actions issued earlier in terms have a longer span of time to be covered than actions issued later in terms. For visualization purposes, 37 actions taken in the final weeks of a presidential administration are recoded to occur in the previous year.

Taken together, these stylized facts may suggest that the news media *does* provide the public the opportunity to learn about unilateral actions. At least in some years—especially more recently—it is likely that at least half of actions are covered in the first month following issuance. While this might suggest enhanced media scrutiny of the Obama and Trump administrations and a greater focus on unilateral actions during the first years of presidential administrations, it could also be indicative of changes in the importance of actions issued by administrations. More importantly, as we show in the

¹⁰As we discuss above, we are only interested in collecting coverage that occurs during a president’s term, since there is no opportunity for a public check to occur after the president has left office.

experimental section, public checks require information about the implementation of actions. For this reason, we next investigate the timing and content of this coverage.

How the Media Covers *Outcomes*

Though few actions are vigorously covered, the media might still provide the public with the necessary information to judge presidents' policy choices. We investigate this with two measures: time and attribution. For an informative outcome signal to materialize, coverage must not just occur at announcement. Seeing whether a policy successfully addressed an underlying issue often takes time. The action must be implemented and its effects witnessed by observers before success can be determined. While the amount of time between issuance, implementation, and evaluation varies across actions and is challenging to quantify, it is a process that likely takes years more often than days. Therefore, if the media informs the public about the success of unilateral actions, it must provide follow-up coverage that stretches well past the day the president signed the action.

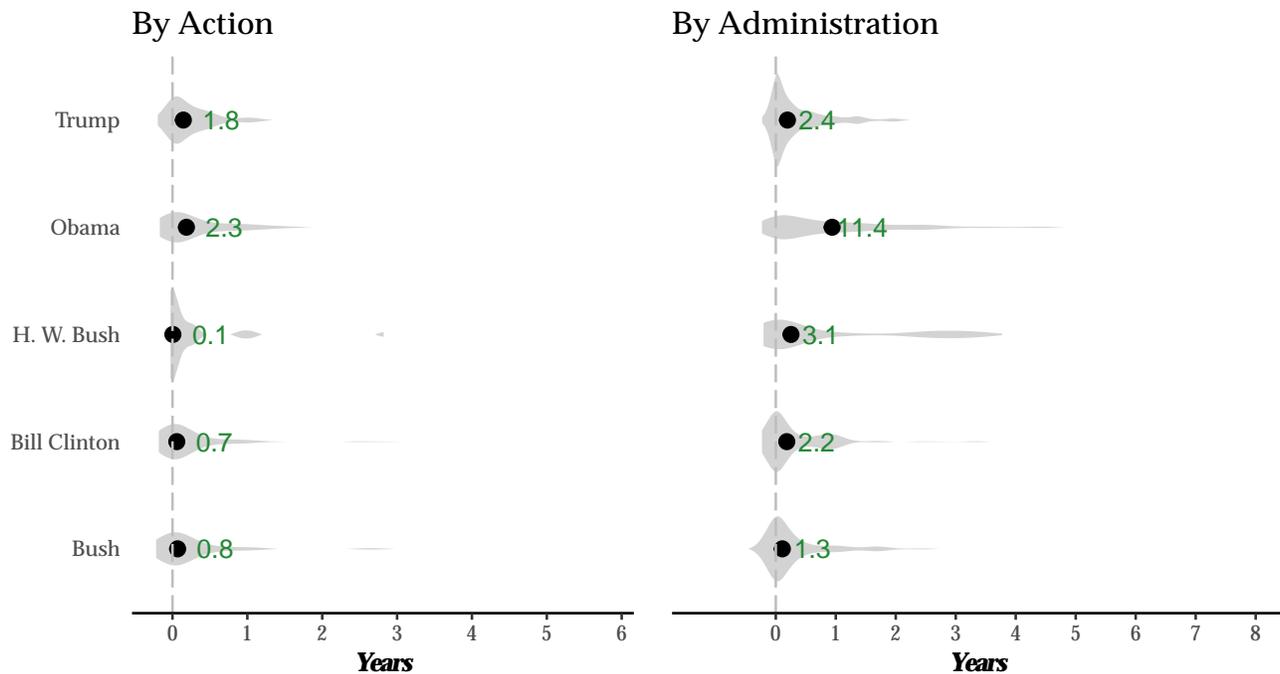


Figure 6 – Across presidents, most actions are covered within the first month (or before). Plots, by president, the distribution of the number of years between the issuance of an action and the publication of articles providing relevant coverage. The left panel weights each action equally, while the right weights actions by how much coverage they have received. The black dot in each distribution represents the median of the distribution and the green numbers are the median values expressed in months. Actions issued later in terms are less likely to receive coverage over a longer span of time than actions issued earlier in terms. Therefore, this plot only includes data on coverage for actions issued in the first 6 years (for two-term presidents) and first two years (for one-term presidents). Articles providing coverage before an action is issued (e.g., due to leaks to the press) appear as negative numbers (i.e. as occurring before year 0).

As Figure 6 summarizes, most coverage occurs before, at, or shortly after the announcement of an action. Our data collection procedure omits coverage that occurs after the end of a term. We therefore examine articles that mention unilateral actions that occur before the last two years of each presidency, to avoid biasing our time to coverage estimates downward. On the left panel, we look within-action, plotting for each action issued by a given president the number of days between issuance and publication for the set of articles that cover each action. The black dot is the median of this distribution of medians, enumerated in months in green.

For any given action issued by the H.W. Bush, Clinton, or Bush administrations, most coverage occurs within the first month. The Obama and Trump administrations are exceptions, and the right panel illustrates why. Here, rather than plotting the distribution of within-action medians, we plot the median number of days between issuance and publication for each article across entire administrations—

with the median of this distribution of medians again indicated by the black dot and green text. By calculating the medians at the administration level rather than the action level, actions that receive coverage in more newspaper articles are more heavily weighted. Reweighting the data suggests that actions that receive considerable coverage are also more likely to receive coverage that extends past the few weeks following action signing. However, when viewed against the left panel of Figure 6, it is also clear that these actions are exceptional cases. Most actions receive no follow-up coverage.

Finally, we turn to the content of the coverage, by examining who it typically attributes credit for policy change to. Due to space considerations, we defer most details of this last descriptive step to Appendix B4. Our aim is to gauge whether the articles create the impression that the president was chiefly responsible for policy change (e.g., Grimmer, Westwood and Messing 2015), the way our first-wave vignette experiment approximates. As a reference point, we culled an additional sample of roughly 7,500 news articles that mentioned the president but not unilateral action. They describe speeches, foreign trips, and other events, but most mention the movement of legislation in Congress. The key question is whether news coverage of other kinds of presidential behaviors is significantly less likely to contain the kind of language that attributes credit to the president.

To understand this, we developed a dictionary of attribution words, and then examined their proximity to mentions of the President and Congress. We selected a random sample of 150 articles from the unilateral action and comparison media. These were read and the typical words and phrases used to assign credit for policy change were culled. To avoid circular measurement, the dictionary could not include any words used in our article search syntax. The final list contains 373 words and bi-gram phrases, which includes word variations because our text analysis did not de-stem (see Appendix B4). In general, after reading through high and low-frequency matches in a sample of 20% of our data, we found the strongest indicator of prominent attribution was the occurrence of these words within two words of “president” or “congress” and their variations. We then examined the full sample of articles ($n = 19,944$), taking stock of how often attribution words appeared near mentions of the president and Congress.

We summarize this analysis in Figure 7, which shows three measures: attribution words in proximity to either the president, Congress, or the difference between the two. For the latter, higher values indicates more attribution to the president. In general, articles that mention executive action are significantly more likely to contain attribution language linked to the president, and significantly less likely to contain such language near mentions of Congress. As Figure 7 demonstrates, this is consis-

tent across most presidents (with George H.W. Bush as the lone exception). Moreover, it is particularly pronounced in the Obama and Trump administrations. These findings are robust to including fixed effects for the newspaper the article appeared in (see Tables B.5, B.6, and B.7).

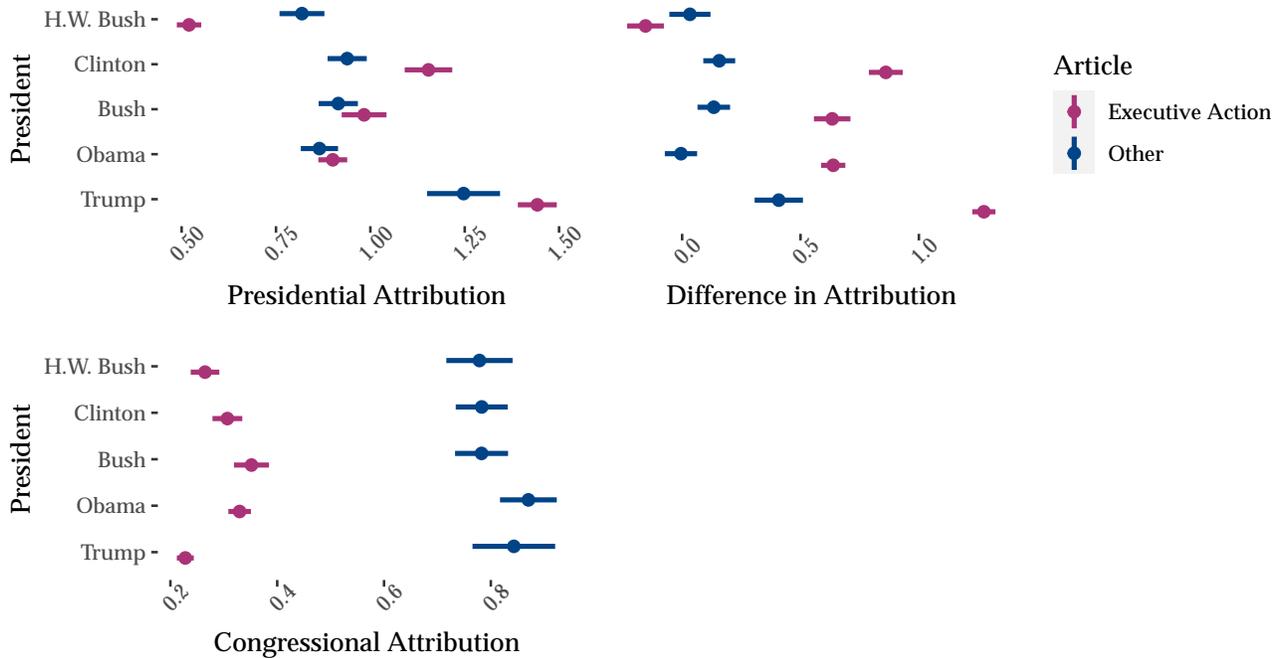


Figure 7 – Articles mentioning executive action feature more language attributing credit for governing to the President, relative to Congress. Plots predicted counts and difference in counts estimated from regressions, which are reported in Tables B.5, B.6, and B.7. An attribution instance occurs when one of the attribution words appears within two words of either president or Congress and their relevant synonyms. We report these in Appendix B4.

Ultimately, media coverage of unilateral actions is minimal, time-bound, and attributes credit for policy change to the President. In this way, it is most consistent with the vignette treatments that say nothing about the outcome or results of such action. Half of all actions receive coverage and, of those, about half receive coverage in only a handful of articles. If an article receives coverage at all, it is likely to occur in the first month after issuance, offering the public a limited window to learn about its implementation and evaluate whether it was appropriate. When coverage occurs, it often includes language not unlike the credit-claiming language of congressional press releases.

We believe these descriptive points present a strong case that for most executive action, the President operates in the pandering region shown in Figure 1—that is, below $\bar{\rho}$. On the whole, the public has few opportunities to judge whether a president’s policy choice was suitable given the state of the world. Nevertheless, our data also demonstrate there *are* extreme cases in which the leadership equilib-

rium is satisfied. Major initiatives on already salient topics can and do receive coverage. In addition, the trends in Figure 5 provide some evidence that actions taken in recent years are somewhat more likely to receive coverage. This, in our view, is the value of gathering such data. They help identify the scope conditions of each accountability link.

Discussion and Conclusion

If executive unilateralism is to be constrained by the people, their political expression and the information that informs it must be investigated. Our survey evidence suggests that the public response to information about presidential actions and outcomes is limited. With a few exceptions, the public only punishes presidents for issuing orders that they do not follow through on implementing. While this suggests a possible means by which the public can hold presidents accountable, it requires the public to learn about not only presidential actions but their consequent outcomes.

Using an original dataset of media coverage of unilateral actions, we show that such an information environment rarely exists. Many actions receive no coverage. For those that do, most coverage is limited to the first year after implementation, and most assigns credit to the President, relative to Congress. The public has few opportunities to learn about how, or even if, presidential actions materialize into new public policy. Most opportunities merely create the impression of change, an effective credit-claiming device in the context of national and regional media moments. In this way, we have argued that the public accountability link is most often consistent with the pandering regime outlined by Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts (2001).

This argument, however, is based on evidence with certain limitations. Our vignette experiment, while covering many issue areas, focuses on relatively moderate and less controversial policy moves. This was not an experiment about launching air strikes on American cities, ignoring Supreme Court decisions, or any other potential abuse of power. It is possible that it is on these kinds of issues that a punishment for unilateralism would likely occur. This also raises a related point about our observational work on media coverage. That is, much of the coverage is the result of actions that presidents knew would be immediately available for reporters to cover. It could be argued that there was much more presidents had wanted to do, but withheld for fear of public backlash. There are two responses to this concern. The first is that this hypothetical set of policy moves would have to be quite extreme to receive the kind of coverage that facilitates healthy information transmission to the public. The second

is that this coverage *did* include controversial and extreme policies—like state-sanctioned torture and the Muslim travel ban. But even these followed patterns similar to less extreme one, focusing on the announcement and not the results. In our view, this discussion says as much about the scope conditions of the public accountability link. It implies the link is most operative where unilateralism is most extreme and exceptional. The vast majority of policy are signed without such scrutiny.

One important limitation of our media coverage study is that we have limited ourselves to newspaper coverage. The public gets its news from a variety of sources. Likewise, while we do include coverage from over 50 newspapers across the United States, we are not collecting data from the entire universe of newspaper coverage. This study could only expand on work that mostly examined national newspaper coverage, without taking stock of the complete news media environment. This suggests there may be future opportunities to examine how the traditional print sources inform the broader and more decentralized media landscape, which is particularly acute in the later portion of our time series.

This project offers a number of other paths for future work. For one, our dataset of media coverage provides scholars with the opportunity to rigorously test a variety of questions for the first time. What makes an action more likely to receive coverage? Does coverage increase around key moments like elections? Does the content of articles' text vary in interesting ways over time—perhaps as a cause or effect of a president's approval? We leave questions related to when presidents opt to claim credit via unilateral action and how control of Congress affects these messaging decisions for future scholars to tackle. We also leave for future work the possibility of bridging our findings above with the large literature on credit claiming in Congress.

References

- Acs, Alex. 2020. "Presidential Directives in a Resistant Bureaucracy." *Journal of Public Policy* pp. 1–22.
- Aronow, Peter Michael, Joshua Kalla, Lilla Orr and John Ternovski. 2020. "Evidence of Rising Rates of Inattentiveness on Lucid in 2020."
- Ban, Pamela, Alexander Fourinaies, Andrew B. Hall and James M. Snyder. 2019. "How Newspapers Reveal Political Power." *Political Science Research and Methods* 7(4):661–678.
- Berinsky, Adam J., Michele F. Margolis and Michael W. Sances. 2014. "Separating the Shirkers from the Workers? Making Sure Respondents Pay Attention on Self-Administered Surveys." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(3):739–753.

- Brooks, Nina, Eran Bendavid and Grant Miller. 2019. "USA aid policy and induced abortion in sub-Saharan Africa: an analysis of the Mexico City Policy." *The Lancet Global Health* 7(8):e1046–e1053.
- Canes-Wrone, Brandice. 2006. *Who Leads Whom? Presidents, Policy, and the Public*. University of Chicago Press.
- Canes-Wrone, Brandice, Michael C. Herron and Kenneth W. Shotts. 2001. "Leadership and Pandering: A Theory of Executive Policymaking." *American Journal of Political Science* 45(3):532–550.
- Chiou, Fang-Yi and Lawrence S. Rothenberg. 2014. "The Elusive Search for Presidential Power." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(3):653–668.
- Chiou, Fang-Yi and Lawrence S. Rothenberg. 2017. *The Enigma of Presidential Power: Parties, Policies and Strategic Uses of Unilateral Action*. Cambridge University Press.
- Christenson, Dino P. and Douglas L. Kriner. 2016. "Constitutional Qualms or Politics as Usual? The Factors Shaping Public Support for Unilateral Action." *American Journal of Political Science* 00(0):1–15.
- Christenson, Dino P. and Douglas L. Kriner. 2017. "Mobilizing the Public Against the President: Congress and the Political Costs of Unilateral Action." *American Journal of Political Science* 61(4):769–785.
- Christenson, Dino P. and Douglas L. Kriner. 2019. "Does Public Opinion Constrain Presidential Unilateralism?" *American Political Science Review* 113(4):1071–1077.
- Christenson, Dino P. and Douglas L. Kriner. 2020. *The Myth of the Imperial Presidency: How Public Opinion Checks the Unilateral Executive*. University of Chicago Press.
- Cooper, Phillip J. 2001. "The Law: Presidential Memoranda and Executive Orders: Of Patchwork Quilts, Trump Cards, and Shell Games." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 31(1):126–141.
- Cooper, Phillip J. 2002. *By Order of the President: The Use and Abuse of Executive Direct Action*. University Press of Kansas.
- Dodds, Graham G. 2013. *Take up Your Pen: Unilateral Presidential Directives in American Politics*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Dresser, Michael. 2011. "Red Line Picked for Faster Review: East-west Rail among 14 Projects Chosen Nationwide." *The Baltimore Sun* p. A.6.
- Druckman, James N. and Lawrence R. Jacobs. 2015. *Who Governs? Presidents, Public Opinion, and Manipulation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gentzkow, Matthew, Jesse M. Shapiro and Michael Sinkinson. 2011. "The Effect of Newspaper Entry and Exit on Electoral Politics." *American Economic Review* 101(7):2980–3018.
- Grimmer, Justin, Sean J. Westwood and Solomon Messing. 2015. *The Impression of Influence: Legislator Communication, Representation, and Democratic Accountability*. Princeton University Press.
- Hanmer, Michael J. and Kerem Ozan Kalkan. 2013. "Behind the Curve: Clarifying the Best Approach to Calculating Predicted Probabilities and Marginal Effects from Limited Dependent Variable Models." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(1):263–277.
- Howell, William G. 2003. *Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action*. Princeton University Press.

- Howell, William G. 2005. "Unilateral Powers: A Brief Overview." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35(3):417–439.
- Howell, William G. 2013. *Thinking about the Presidency: The Primacy of Power*. Princeton University Press.
- Howell, William G., Ethan Porter and Thomas J. Wood. 2020. "Rethinking Public Appeals: Experimental Evidence on Presidential Performances." *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy* 1(1):137–158.
- Howell, William G. and Stephane Wolton. 2018. "The Politician's Province." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 13(2):119–146.
- IN CENTRAL AMERICA, SONGBIRDS REPLACE CIVIL WAR: [SOONER Edition]. 1997. *Pittsburgh Post - Gazette* p. A.4.
- Kennedy, Joshua B. 2015. "'Do This! Do That!' And Nothing Will Happen: Executive Orders and Bureaucratic Responsiveness." *American Politics Research* 43(1):59–82.
- Lowande, Kenneth. 2014. "After the Orders : Presidential Memoranda and Unilateral Action." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 4(4):724–741.
- Lowande, Kenneth. 2018. "Delegation or Unilateral Action?" *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 34(1):54–78.
- Lowande, Kenneth. 2021. "Presidents and the Status Quo." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* (June 2020):1–30.
- Lowande, Kenneth and Jon C Rogowski. 2021. "Presidential Unilateral Power." *Annual Review of Political Science* pp. 1–25.
- Moe, Terry M. and William G. Howell. 1999. "The Presidential Power of Unilateral Action." *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 15(1):132–179.
- Nakamura, David. 2013. "Outside Beltway, Obama Seeks a Reset." *The Washington Post* p. A.2.
- Nyhan, Brendan. 2013. "Scandal Potential: How Political Context and News Congestion Affect the President's Vulnerability to Media Scandal." *British Journal of Political Science* 45(2):435–466.
- O'Keefe, Ed. 2010. "Changes in Leave Policies Go to Opposite-Sex Partners; Stepparents Also among Those Eligible for Illness, Funeral Benefits." *The Washington Post* p. B.3.
- Press, The Associated. 2000. "SUPREME COURT HEARS ARGUMENTS OVER GOVERNMENT'S STANDARDS FOR CLEAN AIR JUSTICES APPEAR SKEPTICAL ABOUT WHETHER EPA MUST CONSIDER COSTS TO INDUSTRY: [FIVE STAR LIFT Edition]." *St. Louis Post - Dispatch* p. A2.
- Priest, Dana and Walter Pincus. 2004. "Quick Fixes on Intelligence Considered; Administration Explores Short-Term Remedies to Diffuse Political Pressure From 9/11 Report: [FINAL Edition]." *The Washington Post* p. A.05.
- Reeves, Andrew and Jon C Rogowski. 2016. "Unilateral Powers, Public Opinion, and the Presidency." 78(1).
- Reeves, Andrew and Jon C. Rogowski. 2018. "The Public Cost of Unilateral Action." *American Journal of Political Science* 62(2):424–440.

- Reeves, Andrew and Jon C. Rogowski. 2019. "Accountability and (in)Action: The Political Cost of Policy Leadership." *Working Paper* .
- Reeves, Andrew and Jon C. Rogowski. 2021. *No Blank Check: Why the Public Dislikes Presidential Power and What It Means for Governing*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rottinghaus, Brandon and Elvin Lim. 2009. "Proclaiming Trade Policy." *American Politics Research* 37(6):1003–1023.
- Rudalevige, Andrew. N.d. *Executive Orders and the Executive Branch: Bureaucratic Politics, Presidential Management, and the Limits of Unilateralism*. Princeton University Press.
- Ruder, Alex I. 2014. "Institutional Design and the Attribution of Presidential Control: Insulating the President from Blame." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 9(3):301–335.
- Ruder, Alex I. 2015. "Agency Design, the Mass Media, and the Blame for Agency Scandals." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 45(3):514–539.
- Shipan, Charles R. 2004. "Regulatory Regimes, Agency Actions, and the Conditional Nature of Congressional Influence." *American Political Science Review* 98(3):467–480.
- Soroka, Stuart N. and Christopher Wlezien. 2022. *Information and Democracy: Public Policy in the News*. Cambridge University Press.
- Thrower, Sharece. 2017. "To Revoke or Not Revoke? The Political Determinants of Executive Order Longevity." *American Journal of Political Science* 61(3):642–656.
- Tilove, Jonathan. 2015. "Mammoth Site Designated a New National Monument: Dig along Bosque River Features a Variety of Fossils." *Austin American Statesman* p. B.3.
- Turner, Ian R. 2020. "Policy Durability, Agency Capacity, and Executive Unilateralism." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 50(1):40–62.

Supplementary Materials

Behavioral Foundations of Presidential Accountability

Benjamin Goehring and Kenneth Lowande

Table of Contents

A	Public evaluations survey information	SM—1
A.1	Available Covariates	SM—14
A.2	Power calculations	SM—16
A.3	Cost reporting and survey vendor information	SM—17
A.4	Covariate balance	SM—18
A.5	Analysis of attrition between waves	SM—21
A.6	Respondent attention	SM—21
A.7	Additional results	SM—25
B	Media coverage study information	SM—31
B.1	Procedure for collecting coverage	SM—31
B.2	Procedure for coding coverage	SM—34
B.3	Compiling Coverage Data	SM—37
B.4	Additional Media Coverage Description	SM—37
B.5	Comparison Coverage and Attribution	SM—40

A Public evaluations survey information

This study was granted an exemption by the institutional review board of the University of Michigan (ID# HUM00186307). A pre-analysis plan was registered at the Open Science Framework August 24, 2020, and submitted to colleagues for comment prior to registration. An anonymous version of this registration can be accessed here: https://osf.io/e5p8g/?view_only=2e32e845009140ea9049b50cc4eb175b

Table A.1 – Interventions by Issue Area

Issue	Issue Description	Issue Photos	Position Prompt	Congress Prompt	Executive Prompt	Order
Public lands	<p>We are about to ask you about land the government owns. Designating public land a federally protected area is somewhat controversial. Some say this increases tourism and protects the environment, while others say that it hinders job growth and economic development.</p>		<p>President Obama (Trump) supported expanding (reducing) protected areas to save (open) more land from (for) development. He wanted to create (eliminate) new protected lands and expand (contract) old ones.</p>	<p>President Obama (Trump) supported expanding (reducing) protected areas to save (open) more land from (for) development. He endorsed a bill and worked with Congress. The bill would create (eliminate) new protected lands and expand (contract) old ones.</p>	<p>President Obama (Trump) supported expanding (reducing) protected areas to save (open) more land from (for) development. He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would create (eliminate) new protected lands and expand (contract) old ones.</p>	

Military surplus

We are about to ask you about what to do with extra weapons, vehicles, and equipment not needed by the military. Giving military surplus to local police is somewhat controversial. Some say this protects police officers and helps keep the public safe, while others say it leads to more violence and hurts the police's reputation.



President Obama (Trump) supported releasing less (more) military surplus to local police. He wanted to place (eliminate) restrictions on what weapons and equipment are available to police.

President Obama (Trump) supported releasing less (more) military surplus to local police. He endorsed a bill and worked with Congress. The bill would place (eliminate) restrictions on what weapons and equipment are available to police.

President Obama (Trump) supported releasing less (more) military surplus to local police. He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would place (eliminate) restrictions on what weapons and equipment are available to police.

Trade

We are about to ask you about international trade. Taxing goods imported to the United States is somewhat controversial. Some say this protects American jobs from being lost overseas, while others say it raises the prices of what everyday Americans buy.



President Obama (Trump) supported reducing (increasing) barriers to international trade. He wanted to lower (raise) taxes on goods imported to the United States.

President Obama (Trump) supported reducing (increasing) barriers to international trade. He endorsed a bill and worked with Congress. The bill would lower (raise) taxes on goods imported to the United States.

President Obama (Trump) supported reducing (increasing) barriers to international trade. He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would lower (raise) taxes on goods imported to the United States.

Waterways

We are about to ask you about water rules. Allowing the government to make rules for waterways is somewhat controversial. Some say this protects drinking water and the environment, while others say it hurts job growth and economic development.



President Obama (Trump) supported strengthening (weakening) water rules. He wanted to make more (fewer) waterways subject to water quality and pollution rules.

President Obama (Trump) supported strengthening (weakening) water rules. He endorsed a bill and worked with Congress. The bill would make more (fewer) waterways subject to water quality and pollution rules.

President Obama (Trump) supported strengthening (weakening) water rules. He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would make more (fewer) waterways subject to water quality and pollution rules.

Student loans

We are about to ask you about student loan policy. Relaxing rules on student loan debt to for-profit schools is somewhat controversial. Some say this helps students who were misled by for-profit schools, while others say it drives up the cost of college for everyone.



President Obama (Trump) supported less (more) strict rules for paying back loans to for-profit schools. He wanted to give more (less) flexibility to students who owed money they'd borrowed for college.

President Obama (Trump) supported less (more) strict rules for paying back loans to for-profit schools. He endorsed a bill and worked with Congress. The bill would give more (less) flexibility to students who owed money they'd borrowed for college.

President Obama (Trump) supported less (more) strict rules for paying back loans to for-profit schools. He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would give more (less) flexibility to students who owed money they'd borrowed for college.

Gun re-
search

We are about to ask you about gun violence research. Funding gun violence research is somewhat controversial. Some say this helps policymakers learn how to reduce gun violence, while others say it is using public funds to promote gun control.



President Obama (Trump) supported increasing (reducing) funding for gun violence research. He wanted to increase (reduce) gun violence research by telling the government to reduce (increase) funding in other areas.

President Obama (Trump) supported increasing (reducing) funding for gun violence research. He endorsed a bill and worked with Congress. The bill would increase (reduce) gun violence research by telling the government to reduce (increase) funding in other areas.

President Obama (Trump) supported increasing (reducing) funding for gun violence research. He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would increase (reduce) gun violence research by telling the government to reduce (increase) funding in other areas.

Climate
change

We are about to ask you about greenhouse gas rules. Cutting carbon emissions is somewhat controversial. Some say this will protect the environment and prevent climate change, while others say it hurts energy production and job growth.



President Obama (Trump) supported strengthening (weakening) greenhouse gas rules. He wanted to require (allow) power plants to emit less (more) carbon.

President Obama (Trump) supported strengthening (weakening) greenhouse gas rules. He endorsed a bill and worked with Congress. The bill would require (allow) power plants to emit less (more) carbon.

President Obama (Trump) supported strengthening (weakening) greenhouse gas rules. He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would require (allow) power plants to emit less (more) carbon.

Abortion

We are about to ask you about foreign aid rules. Stopping aid from going to organizations that provide abortion services is somewhat controversial. Some say this increases the number of unsafe abortions abroad, while others say no taxpayer dollars should be connected with abortion.



President Obama (Trump) supported foreign aid rules allowing (restricting) abortions. He wanted to allow (stop) organizations that provide abortion services to receive (from receiving) funds.

President Obama (Trump) supported foreign aid rules allowing (restricting) abortions. He endorsed a bill and worked with Congress. The bill would allow (stop) organizations that provide abortion services to receive (from receiving) funds.

President Obama (Trump) supported foreign aid rules allowing (restricting) abortions. He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would allow (stop) organizations that provide abortion services to receive (from receiving) funds.

Wildlife

We are about to ask you about protecting endangered wildlife. Adding more animals to the endangered list is somewhat controversial. Some say this protects the environment and encourages tourism, while others say that it burdens ranchers and slows economic growth.



President Obama (Trump) supported strengthening (weakening) protections for endangered wildlife. He wanted to strengthen (end) protections for some animals and add (prevent) new protections.

President Obama (Trump) supported strengthening (weakening) protections for endangered wildlife. He endorsed a bill and worked with Congress. The bill would strengthen (end) protections for some animals and add (prevent) new protections.

President Obama (Trump) supported strengthening (weakening) protections for endangered wildlife. He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would strengthen (end) protections for some animals and add (prevent) new protections.

Farm
subsi-
dies

We are about to ask you about the government giving payments to farmers. Farm payments are somewhat controversial. Some say they support small family farms and encourage farming in the United States, while others say they mostly benefit large corporations and raise the price everyone pays for food.



President Obama (Trump) supported reducing (expanding) government payments to farmers. He wanted to decrease (increase) existing payments and prohibit (add) new ones.

President Obama (Trump) supported reducing (expanding) government payments to farmers. He endorsed a bill and worked with Congress. The bill would decrease (increase) existing payments and prevent (add) new ones.

President Obama (Trump) supported reducing (expanding) government payments to farmers. He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would decrease (increase) existing payments and prohibit (add) new ones.

Russian
sanctions

Remember, we asked you about economic sanctions against Russia for interfering in European elections. Sanctioning Russia for interfering in European elections is somewhat controversial. Some say that sanctioning Russia will prevent future election interference, while others say the sanctions are ineffective and only harm diplomatic negotiations. [We made a mistake and included the wave 2 russia prompt in wave 1.]



President Trump (Obama) supported weaker (stronger) sanctions against Russia for interfering in European elections. He wanted to weaken (strengthen) enforcement of sanctions against Russia.

President Trump (Obama) supported weaker (stronger) sanctions against Russia for interfering in European elections. He endorsed a bill and lobbied Congress. The bill would weaken (strengthen) enforcement of sanctions against Russia.

President Trump (Obama) supported weaker (stronger) sanctions against Russia for interfering in European elections. He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would weaken (strengthen) enforcement of sanctions against Russia.

LGBT
protec-
tions

We are about to ask you about workplace protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) employees. Protecting LGBT employees from workplace discrimination is somewhat controversial. Some say no one should be fired because of their sexual orientation, while others say these protections force employers to go against their religious beliefs.



President Obama (Trump) supported (opposed) protecting LGBT employees from workplace discrimination. He wanted to forbid (allow) employers from not hiring (to not hire) LGBT workers because it is against their religious beliefs.

President Obama (Trump) supported (opposed) protecting LGBT employees from workplace discrimination. He endorsed a bill and worked with Congress. The bill would forbid (allow) employers from not hiring (to not hire) LGBT workers because it is against their religious beliefs.

President Obama (Trump) supported (opposed) protecting LGBT employees from workplace discrimination. He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would forbid (allow) employers from not hiring (to not hire) LGBT workers because it is against their religious beliefs.

Saudi Arabia weapons

We are about to ask you about the United States providing weapons and equipment to Saudi Arabia. Rules about how Saudi Arabia uses military hardware provided by the United States are somewhat controversial. Some say these rules will prevent the weapons from being used against civilians, while others say they will reduce how much money the U.S. makes from selling weapons to Saudi Arabia.



President Trump (Obama) supported weaker (stronger) rules on how Saudi Arabia uses military hardware provided by the United States. He wanted to give Saudi Arabia more (less) flexibility in using weapons and equipment purchased from the United States.

President Trump (Obama) supported weaker (stronger) rules on how Saudi Arabia uses military hardware provided by the United States. He endorsed a bill and worked with Congress. The bill would give Saudi Arabia more (less) flexibility in using weapons and equipment purchased from the United States.

President Trump (Obama) supported weaker (stronger) rules on how Saudi Arabia uses military hardware provided by the United States. He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would give Saudi Arabia more (less) flexibility in using weapons and equipment purchased from the United States.

H1B visas

We are about to ask you about allowing U.S. companies to hire temporary, foreign workers. This kind of immigration is somewhat controversial. Some say this supports the U.S. economy and helps companies find workers with the skills they need, while others say this lowers the wages of U.S. workers.



President Obama (Trump) supported expanding (freezing) new applications for foreign workers. He wanted to allow more (fewer) U.S. companies to hire skilled workers from other countries.

President Obama (Trump) supported expanding (freezing) new applications for foreign workers. He endorsed a bill and worked with Congress. The bill would allow more (fewer) U.S. companies to hire skilled workers from other countries.

President Obama (Trump) supported expanding (freezing) new applications for foreign workers. He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would allow more (fewer) U.S. companies to hire skilled workers from other countries.

Minimum wage

We are about to ask you about pay for government contractors. Raising the minimum wage for government contractors is somewhat controversial. Some say the minimum wage is not enough to raise a family on, while others say this drives up the cost of government.



President Obama (Trump) supported raising (freezing) the minimum wage for government contractors. He wanted to raise (freeze) the minimum wage for government contractors.

President Obama (Trump) supported raising (freezing) the minimum wage for government contractors. He endorsed a bill and worked with Congress. The bill would raise (freeze) the minimum wage for government contractors.

President Obama (Trump) supported raising (freezing) the minimum wage for government contractors. He acted alone by signing an executive order. The order would raise (freeze) the minimum wage for government contractors.

Table A.2 – Wave 2, Failure and Success by Issue Area

Issue	Failure Prompt	Success Prompt
Public lands	Despite this, during his time in office, most protected lands stayed the same. The president was not able to get the result he wanted.	Because of this, during his time in office, many new lands were opened for development (protected). The president got the result he wanted.
Military surplus	Despite this, during his time in office, the weapons and equipment given to police departments stayed the same. The president was not able to get the result he wanted.	Because of this, during his time in office, many weapons and equipment were given to (returned by) police departments. The president got the result he wanted.
Trade	Despite this, during his time in office, taxes on imported goods stayed the same. The president was not able to get the result he wanted.	Because of this, during his time in office, taxes on imported goods went up (down). The president got the result he wanted.
Waterways	Despite this, during his time in office, the number of waterways subject to water quality and pollution rules remained the same. The president was not able to get the result he wanted.	Because of this, during his time in office, the number of waterways subject to water quality and pollution rules went down (up). The president got the result he wanted.
Student loans	Despite this, during his time in office, rules for repaying student loans stayed the same. The president was not able to get the result he wanted.	Because of this, during his time in office, rules for repaying student loans were tightened (relaxed). The president got the result he wanted.
Gun research	Despite this, during his time in office, federal funding for gun violence research stayed the same. The president was not able to get the result he wanted.	Because of this, during his time in office, federal funding for gun violence research went down (up). The president got the result he wanted.

Climate change	Despite this, during his time in office, greenhouse gas rules stayed the same. The president was not able to get the result he wanted.	Because of this, during his time in office, greenhouse gas rules were weakened (strengthened). The president got the result he wanted.
Abortion	Despite this, during his time in office, most organizations that provide abortions received about the same amount of funding. The president was not able to get the result he wanted.	Because of this, during his time in office, most organizations that provide abortions received less (more) funding. The president got the result he wanted.
Wildlife	Despite this, during his time in office, most endangered wildlife protections stayed the same. The president was not able to get the result he wanted.	Because of this, during his time in office, many endangered wildlife protections were weakened (strengthened). The president got the result he wanted.
Farm subsidies	Despite this, during his time in office, most payments to farmers stayed the same. The president was not able to get the result he wanted.	Because of this, during his time in office, many payments to farmers went up (down). The president got the result he wanted.
Russian sanctions	Despite this, during his time in office, enforcement of sanctions against Russia stayed the same. The president was not able to get the result he wanted.	Because of this, during his time in office, enforcement of sanctions against Russia was weakened (strengthened). The president got the result he wanted.
LGBT protections	Despite this, during his time in office, workplace discrimination protections for LGBT employees stayed the same. The president was not able to get the result he wanted.	Because of this, during his time in office, workplace discrimination protections were not granted (granted) to LGBT employees. The president got the result he wanted.

Saudi Arabia weapons	Despite this, during his time in office, rules for weapons and equipment sales to Saudi Arabia stayed the same. The president was not able to get the result he wanted.	Because of this, during his time in office, rules for weapons and equipment sales to Saudi Arabia weakened (strengthened). The president got the result he wanted.
H1B visas	Despite this, during his time in office, the number of foreign workers U.S. companies were allowed to hire went up (down). The president was not able to get the result he wanted.	Because of this, during his time in office, the number of foreign workers U.S. companies were allowed to hire went down (up). The president got the result he wanted.
Minimum wage	Despite this, during his time in office, the minimum wage for federal contractors went up (stayed the same). The president was not able to get the result he wanted.	Because of this, during his time in office, the minimum wage for federal contractors stayed the same (went up). The president got the result he wanted.

A.1 Available Covariates

Outcomes:

- Handling: Individual level response to the question “Do you approve or disapprove of President (Trump/Obama)’s handling of (topic)?” (Likert, 1-7)
- Performance: Individual level response to the question “Do you approve or disapprove of the way (Trump/Obama)’s handled his job as president?”(Likert, 1-7)
- Turnout: Individual level response to the question “Do you plan to vote in the 2020 presidential election in November?”(Dichotmous)
- Vote: Individual level response to the question “If the 2020 presidential election were held today, who would you vote for?” (Unordered Factor; Donald Trump, Joseph Biden, Someone Else, Undecided)

Treatment:

- Means: Wave 1 treatment condition, see Tables 1 and 2 (Position-taking, Congress, Executive Order).
- Failure: Wave 2 treatment condition, see Table 3 (Dichotomous).

Additional outcomes:

- Get Done: Individual level response indicating level of agreement with the statement “President (Trump/Obama) gets things done.” (Likert, 1-7)
- Constitutional: Individual level response indicating level of agreement with the statement “President (Trump/Obama) cares about the Constitution and the rule of law.” (Likert, 1-7; Wave 1 only)
- Cooperation: Individual level response indicating level of agreement with the statement “President (Trump/Obama) makes an effort to work with Congress.” (Likert, 1-7; Wave 1 only)
- Honest: Individual level response indicating level of agreement with the statement “President (Trump/Obama) is tells the truth about his policies.” (Likert, 1-7; Wave 2 only)
- Follow-through: Individual level response indicating level of agreement with the statement “President (Trump/Obama) does what he says he will do.” (Likert, 1-7; Wave 2 only)

Other intervention characteristics:

- President: president in prompt (Unordered Factor; see Table 1)
- Topic: topic of prompt (Unordered Factor; see Table 1)

Available Covariates (supplied by vendor):

- Party ID: partisan identification of respondent (Unordered Factor).
- Age: age of respondent (Numeric).
- Gender: gender identity of respondent (Unordered Factor).
- Race/Ethnicity: race and ethnic identification of respondent (Unordered Factor).
- Region: regional location of respondent (Unordered Factor).
- Education: education level of respondent (Ordered Factor).
- Income: annual income of respondent (Ordered Factor).
- Zip code: zip code of respondent (Character).

Additional Variables (supplied by vendor and Qualtrics):

- Start date: date respondent began the survey (Character)
- End date: date respondent finished the survey (Character)
- IP Address: IP address of respondent (Character)
- Duration: number of seconds the respondent took to take the survey (Numeric)

A.2 Power calculations

We adopted a conservative approach to estimating the statistical power of our research design. In summary, our approach followed the following steps:

1. Wave 1:
 - (a) Generate N respondents with either Republican, Democrat, or Independent partisan identification. (The probability of each identification was 0.39, 0.47, and 0.14 respectively, based on a distributions reported by Lowande and Rogowski (2020), who also use Lucid.)
 - (b) Randomly assign president, topic, and treatment condition (position, Congress, or executive order).
 - (c) Simulate dependent variable:
 - i. Draw error term and topic-level effects from a standard normal distribution.
 - ii. Assume that presidential copartisans have more favorable assessments, while opposite-party respondents have less favorable views. Given findings reported in past research, this effect is also assumed to be strictly greater than the treatment effect, but is randomly drawn from a uniform distribution.
 - iii. Generate latent dependent variable as a linear function of treatment effect, treatment condition, partisan identification and president interaction, topic intercept shifts, and error term.
 - iv. Generate observed dependent variables (binomial distributed 1-7 or 0-1) from latent dependent variable.
 - (d) Regress simulated dependent variable on observed treatment with covariates, with appropriate generalized linear model (logit or ordinal logit).
2. Wave 2:
 - (a) Randomly assign treatment condition (success or failure).
 - (b) Simulate dependent variable:
 - i. Generate latent dependent variable as a linear function of treatment effect and an AR(1) process.
 - ii. Generate observed dependent variables (binomial distributed 1-7 or 0-1) from latent dependent variable.
 - (c) Regress simulated dependent variable on observed treatment with covariates, with appropriate generalized linear model (logit or ordinal logit).
3. Repeat steps 1-2 1,000 times to obtain true positive rate.
4. Repeat step 3 for each effect size (0.1–0.4 sd) and sample size (500-3500). We summarize these results in Figure A.1.

For hypotheses 1A, 2A, and 3A, the simulation suggests that with $n = 3100$, we should be able to detect effects of 0.12 sd at the conventional power threshold 80% for Wave 1 and Wave 2 likert outcomes. Dichotomous outcomes, by contrast, will be detectable at roughly 0.25 sd with the same sample. Hypotheses 1B, 2B, and 3B, imply CATEs by partisan identification. To investigate these effects, we repeated the procedure above, assuming an interactive effect between (co)partisan identification and treatment condition in each wave. The simulation suggested that with $n = 3100$, we should be capable of detecting heterogeneous treatment effects by partisan identification with magnitude 0.35-0.4 sd. This analysis is relatively conservative, because it assumes a “true positive” is a simulation in

which the treatment effects for non-copartisans are jointly distinguishable from zero with $p < 0.05$ and distinguishable from the treatment effect for copartisans. Nonetheless, it should be noted that though this design is less suited to addressing heterogeneous treatment effects across partisans. If large effects are detected, a follow-up replication experiment would be appropriate.

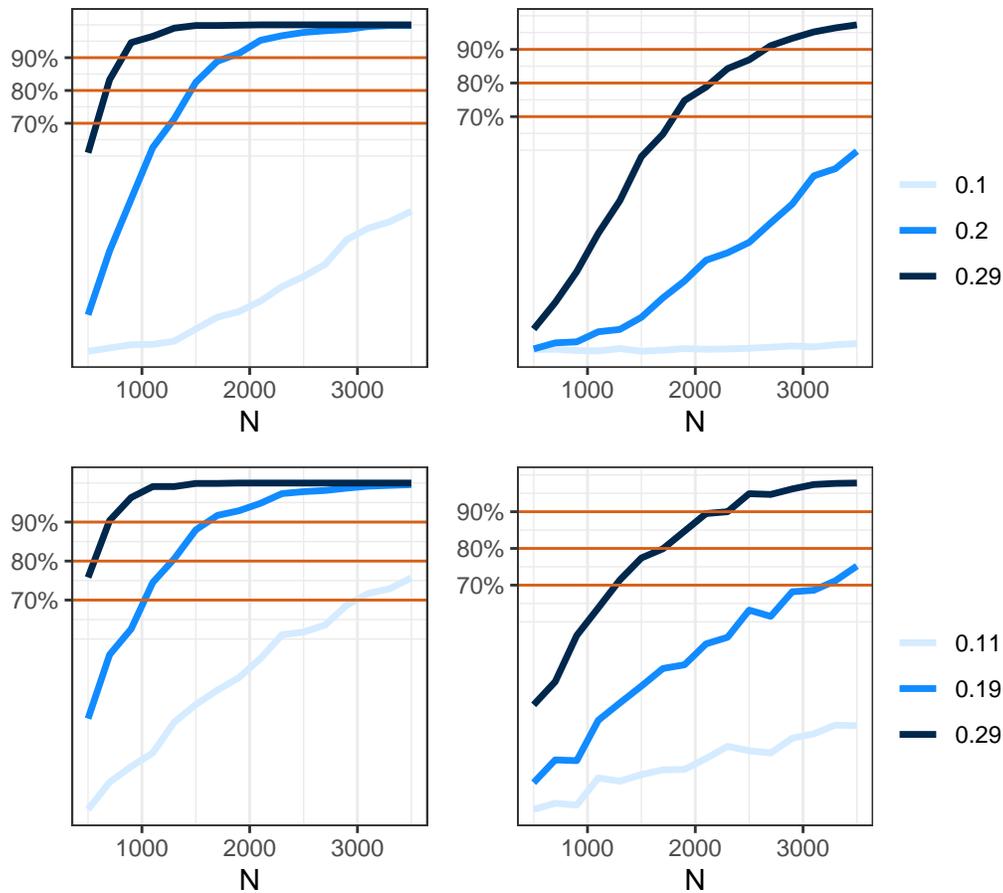


Figure A.1 – Power Analysis Results. Plots true positive rates by simulated effect size, sample size, and dependent variable. Plots Wave 1 (upper) and Wave 2 (lower), along with likert (left) and dichotomous (right) dependent variables.

A.3 Cost reporting and survey vendor information

We encountered a number of challenges while working with Lucid, the vendor that fielded both waves of our survey. The original statement of work cost estimate, displayed in Table A.3, includes 3,350 respondents in wave 1 and 2,010 in wave 2 (for an estimated recontact rate of 60%). However, as shown in Table A.4, the scale of attrition between waves exceeded expectations. Of the 3,437 usable completes in wave 1, only 1,436 were successfully recontacted and attentive in wave 2.¹¹

¹¹The 3,437 respondents in wave 1 and the 1,436 respondents in wave 2 excludes respondents allowed to take the survey more than once; respondents who took fewer than 40 seconds or more than 7.5 minutes to complete the survey; and respondents who did not complete every question in the survey or did not include all demographic variables. The 1,436 respondents in wave 2 also excludes respon-

Wave 1	N	3,350	
	Price/respondent	\$1.75	
	Cost		\$5,862.50
Wave 2	N	2,010	
	Price/respondent	\$2.00	
	Cost		\$4,020.00
Misc. programming fee			\$1,117.50
Total cost			\$11,000.00

Table A.3 – Estimated Costs Displays estimated costs and number of respondents for both survey waves.

Wave 1	N	3,437	
	Price/respondent	\$1.75	
	Cost		\$6,014.75
Wave 2	N	1,436	
	Price/respondent	\$2.00	
	Cost		\$2,872.00
Misc. programming fee			\$0.00
Total cost			\$8,886.75

Table A.4 – Final Costs Displays final costs and number of respondents for both survey waves.

Contrary to expectations, we also discovered variation in attrition across demographic groups. Lucid balanced the wave 1 sample on age, gender, region, ethnicity, and partisanship. The wave 2 was not rebalanced and we were informed that attrition from wave 1 to wave 2 would not affect particular groups to a greater extent than others. Unfortunately, as shown below in Tables A.6 and A.7, we found that attrition did vary by age, gender, and ethnicity.

Implementing the survey also posed a challenge. Our experimental design randomly assigns treatment in wave 1 and then assigns treatment in wave 2 based, in part, on first wave treatment. Lucid struggled to assign wave 2 treatment based on wave 1 treatment and we had to undertake a fair amount of programming on our end to make it work. As a result, as shown in Table A.4, Lucid waived the miscellaneous programming fee from the final invoice.

A.4 Covariate balance

Table A.5 and Table A.6 show the share of respondents in each combination of treatment conditions by demographic variables in waves 1 and 2. As expected, respondents are fairly equally distributed across treatment conditions in wave 1. The demographic groups that do show some variation across treatment conditions have relatively few respondents (e.g. only 43 respondents identify as Native American in wave 1). Due to variation in recontact rates (see Table A.7), covariates are less balanced in wave 2 than wave 1. The imbalances are especially pronounced across ethnicity categories and the “Post-grad or Higher” education category. This is likely due to a combination of small sample sizes in some demographic groups and variation in the likelihood of being successfully recontacted.

dents who failed both attention checks (see Tables A.8 and A.9 for more information).

Table A.5 – Covariate balance in wave 1. Displays the share of respondents in each treatment condition by demographic variable.

Covariates	Position, Obama	Position, Trump	Congress, Obama	Congress, Trump	Order, Obama	Order, Trump
Sex						
Male	0.17	0.17	0.16	0.16	0.17	0.16
Female	0.17	0.16	0.17	0.16	0.16	0.17
Education						
High school or less	0.18	0.16	0.17	0.16	0.17	0.17
Some College or Vocational	0.17	0.17	0.16	0.18	0.16	0.16
B.A. or B.S.	0.18	0.17	0.18	0.17	0.15	0.15
Post-grad or Higher	0.18	0.18	0.15	0.13	0.18	0.18
Ethnicity						
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.15	0.19	0.18	0.16	0.15	0.18
Black	0.18	0.16	0.16	0.20	0.16	0.15
Native American	0.12	0.14	0.19	0.16	0.21	0.19
Other/Decline to State	0.19	0.17	0.14	0.18	0.17	0.15
White	0.17	0.16	0.17	0.16	0.17	0.17
Income						
Less than \$25,000	0.17	0.16	0.17	0.17	0.16	0.16
\$25,000 to \$50,000	0.16	0.16	0.17	0.16	0.17	0.17
\$50,001 to \$75,000	0.19	0.18	0.14	0.17	0.14	0.16
\$75,001 to \$100,000	0.18	0.15	0.16	0.17	0.17	0.18
More than \$100,001	0.17	0.17	0.16	0.15	0.18	0.16
Partisanship						
Democrat	0.19	0.17	0.17	0.16	0.15	0.16
Republican	0.15	0.17	0.17	0.16	0.18	0.17
Independent	0.18	0.15	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.19
Region						
Northeast	0.17	0.16	0.14	0.18	0.17	0.18
Midwest	0.19	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.17	0.17
South	0.16	0.17	0.18	0.16	0.16	0.17
West	0.19	0.18	0.16	0.15	0.17	0.15
Mean age	40.70	40.80	41.30	41.10	41.50	40.50

Table A.6 – Covariate balance in wave 2. Displays the share of respondents in each treatment condition by demographic variable.

Covariates	Position, Obama	Position, Trump	Congress, Obama	Congress, Trump	Order, Obama	Order, Trump
Sex						
Male	0.17	0.19	0.16	0.17	0.16	0.14
Female	0.17	0.17	0.18	0.17	0.16	0.16
Education						
High school or less	0.17	0.17	0.19	0.16	0.15	0.16
Some College or Vocational	0.17	0.17	0.15	0.18	0.17	0.15
B.A. or B.S.	0.17	0.19	0.19	0.18	0.13	0.15
Post-grad or Higher	0.19	0.21	0.16	0.12	0.17	0.15
Ethnicity						
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.12	0.21	0.14	0.17	0.15	0.20
Black	0.17	0.16	0.17	0.22	0.13	0.14
Native American	0.18	0.18	0.12	0.18	0.24	0.12
Other/Decline to State	0.19	0.21	0.13	0.18	0.15	0.12
White	0.17	0.18	0.18	0.16	0.16	0.15
Income						
Less than \$25,000	0.15	0.17	0.19	0.18	0.17	0.14
\$25,000 to \$50,000	0.17	0.18	0.17	0.15	0.16	0.17
\$50,001 to \$75,000	0.20	0.20	0.14	0.18	0.14	0.14
\$75,001 to \$100,000	0.18	0.17	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16
More than \$100,001	0.17	0.18	0.18	0.15	0.16	0.15
Partisanship						
Democrat	0.18	0.19	0.18	0.18	0.15	0.13
Republican	0.16	0.19	0.17	0.15	0.18	0.15
Independent	0.17	0.16	0.17	0.17	0.14	0.19
Region						
Northeast	0.16	0.17	0.13	0.19	0.17	0.17
Midwest	0.19	0.19	0.17	0.17	0.14	0.15
South	0.16	0.17	0.20	0.16	0.15	0.15
West	0.19	0.20	0.15	0.15	0.18	0.13
Mean age	42.20	41.40	42.90	42.10	42.70	41.20

A.5 Analysis of attrition between waves

We successfully recontacted 45.4% of our wave 1 survey respondents for wave 2. Table A.7 displays coefficients from an OLS model regressing a variable indicating whether a respondent was successfully recontacted against our experimental treatments and respondents' demographics. In terms of demographics, women and older people were more likely to be successfully recontacted ($p < .01$). Likewise, compared to respondents who identify as Asian or Pacific Islander, Black respondents ($p < .05$) and respondents who identify as other or did not provide their ethnicity ($p < .01$) were more likely to be successfully recontacted.

Table A.7 provides weak evidence that two treatment conditions affected the likelihood of recontact. Respondents shown the executive order treatment were 3.7 percentage points less likely to be recontacted ($p < .1$) and respondents shown the issue area concerning weapon sales to Saudi Arabia were 7.3 percentage points more likely to be recontacted ($p < .1$, not pictured in Table A.7). Although correlation between treatment and recontact is concerning, the fact that the p-values on both coefficients are above conventional levels of statistical significance is reassuring. Moreover, in terms of the correlation between weapon sales to Saudi Arabia and recontact, our main hypothesis tests above are calculated across all 14 issue area conditions, rendering a correlation between one condition and recontact fairly insignificant.

A.6 Respondent attention

We inserted two attention checks into the second wave of the survey. The first occurred at the beginning of the wave 2 survey and asks respondents:

About a week ago, we asked you what you thought about the policies of American presidents. We want to give you some follow up information about how these policies turned out.

It is very important that you read the survey, so **we want to first test whether you read questions.** To show that you do, please select **both** "Extremely interested" **and** "Very interested" from the options below.

- Extremely interested
- Very interested
- Moderately interested
- Slightly interested
- Not interested at all

The second attention check occurred at the end of the survey before respondents were debriefed. It reads:

To ensure that you read this survey, please select the policy topic of this survey.

- COVID-19
- Affirmative action
- Actual policy topic
- Iranian nuclear program

Table A.7 – Correlates of Recontact. Reports OLS coefficients and conventional standard errors from models measuring the correlation between treatment conditions, demographic controls, and a binary dependent variable indicating whether the participant was successfully recontacted. The issue area treatment conditions are included in the model but excluded from the table (all topic coefficients have p-values greater than .05).

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> Recontacted
Congress treatment	-0.008 (0.019)
Order treatment	-0.037 (0.019)
Trump treatment	0.015 (0.016)
Age	0.003 (0.001)
Female	0.098 (0.016)
Some college or vocational training	0.011 (0.021)
B.A. or B.S.	0.031 (0.024)
Post-graduate or higher	-0.037 (0.028)
Black	0.091 (0.043)
Native American	0.021 (0.088)
Other/Decline to state	0.131 (0.047)
White	0.056 (0.037)
\$25,000 to \$50,000	-0.026 (0.022)
\$50,001 to \$75,000	0.018 (0.025)
\$75,001 to \$100,000	0.036 (0.029)
More than \$100,001	-0.005 (0.027)
Democrat	0.032 (0.021)
Republican	0.027 (0.021)
Midwest	-0.018 (0.025)
South	-0.011 (0.022)
West	-0.012 (0.026)
Observations	4,057

Table A.8 – Attentive Respondents. Displays the share of recontacted respondents who passed the attention checks in wave 2.

Attention check	Proportion
First attention check	0.84
Second attention check	0.91
Both attention checks	0.79

Table A.8 shows the share of respondents who passed the attention checks. Eighty-four percent of respondents in wave 2 correctly selected both “Extremely interested” and “Very interested” in the first attention check. A higher share (91%) of respondents were able to successfully recall the policy topic in their survey. Overall, 79% of respondents successfully passed both attention checks. This attentiveness rate compares favorably to recent findings of increased inattentiveness among Lucid respondents (Aronow et al. 2020). In a preliminary memo, Aronow et al. (2020) present attentiveness rates from five surveys fielded between January and May 2020. The share of respondents who consented to the survey and passed two included attention checks (one of which is very similar to our first attention check) declined from 79.9% in January to 69.8% in May. While we cannot speak to why our respondents were more attentive than respondents a few months prior, it is a good sign that our attentiveness rate is similar to that found by Aronow et al. (2020) in January 2020 before the decline in attentiveness.

Aronow et al. (2020) also present some evidence that Lucid respondents who fail attention checks differ from those who pass. A simple comparison of proportions in their memo suggests that, compared to respondents who passed the checks, respondents who failed were more likely to be young, male, low-income, not college educated, and not members of the Democratic party. Table A.9, which presents the output from an OLS model regressing an indicator of respondent attentiveness on various demographic characteristics, provides mixed evidence in support of these findings. For instance, a one year increase in age correlates with a .3 percentage point increase in the likelihood of passing both attention checks ($p < .01$) and respondents who identify as female are 8.7 percentage points more likely to pass both attention checks than respondents who identify as male ($p < .01$). However, the most highly educated respondents in our survey were, on average, 13.5 percentage points less likely to be attentive than respondents with a high school education or less ($p < .01$). Other findings from Table A.9 were not discussed in Aronow et al. (2020). Respondents in our survey who identify as white or live in the Midwest, for instance, were significantly more likely to pass both attention checks.

Overall, much like in Aronow et al. (2020), attentive respondents in our study differ from non-attentive respondents in politically meaningful ways. While somewhat concerning, correlations between attention and demographic characteristics are not limited to recent Lucid samples (Berinsky, Margolis and Sances 2014). We follow the advice of Berinsky, Margolis and Sances (2014) and do not drop non-attentive respondents from the models and figures displayed in the main text. However, we do reproduce our findings that use wave 2 data in Figure A.2 for completeness. On the whole, our results remain the same. No coefficients switch signs and only a handful change confidence levels.

Table A.9 – Correlates of Attentiveness Reports OLS coefficients and conventional standard errors from models measuring the correlation between treatment conditions, demographic controls, and a binary dependent variable indicating whether the participant passed attention checks in both waves.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> Attentive
Age	0.003 (0.001)
Female	0.087 (0.020)
Some college or vocational training	0.038 (0.025)
B.A. or B.S.	0.042 (0.028)
Post-graduate or higher	-0.135 (0.034)
Black	-0.036 (0.054)
Native American	0.100 (0.111)
Other/Decline to state	0.045 (0.058)
White	0.109 (0.049)
\$25,000 to \$50,000	0.022 (0.026)
\$50,001 to \$75,000	0.004 (0.029)
\$75,001 to \$100,000	0.048 (0.034)
More than \$100,001	-0.029 (0.033)
Democrat	0.032 (0.025)
Republican	-0.014 (0.026)
Midwest	0.078 (0.030)
South	0.007 (0.026)
West	0.021 (0.031)
Constant	0.458 (0.062)
Observations	1,961

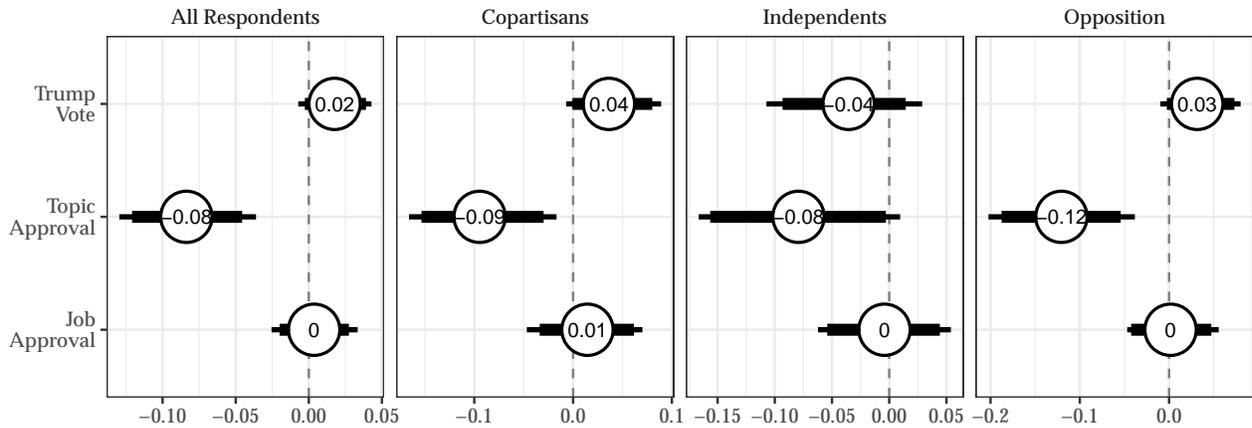


Figure A.2 – The public punishes presidents for failing to deliver (attentive respondents). Plots simulated marginal effect of estimates failure relative to success, using an observed case approach, based on logistic regressions that include condition and demographic controls; error bars indicate conventional 95% and Bonferroni-adjusted confidence intervals; sample restricted to respondents who pass both attention checks included in wave 2; see Tables A.14 and A.11 for full results.

A.7 Additional results

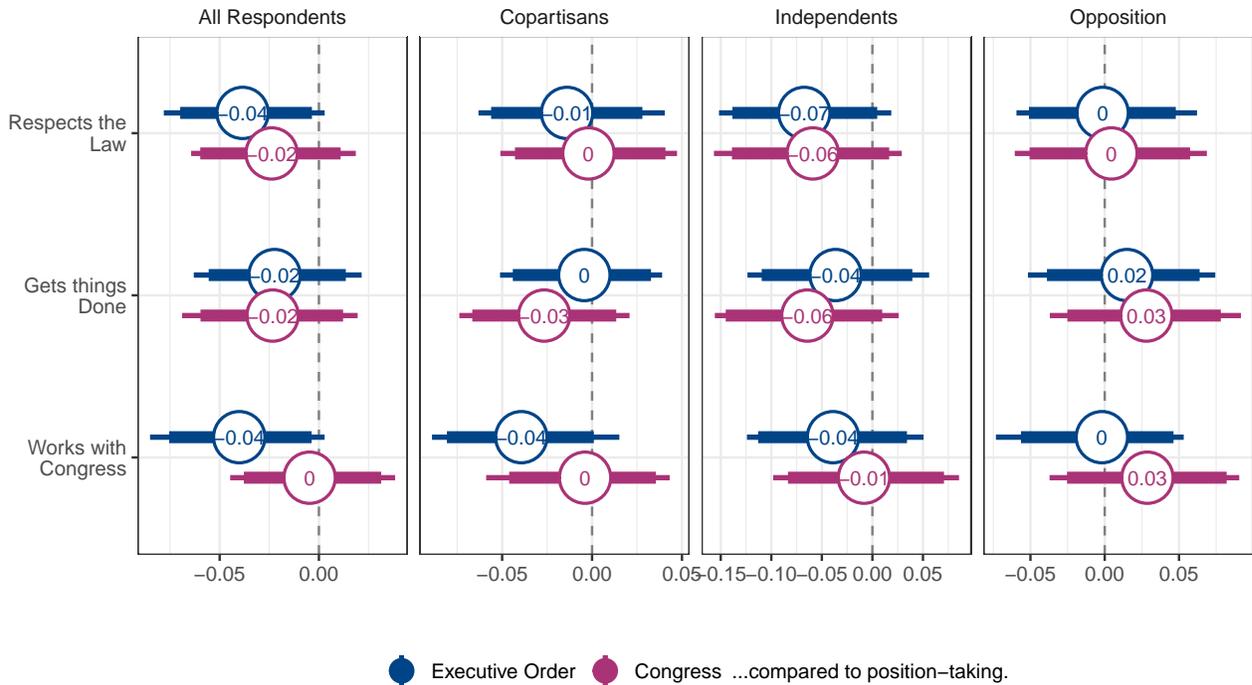


Figure A.3 – Mixed Evaluations of Unilateralism by the Public, Agreement Measures. Plots simulated marginal effect estimates using an observed case approach, based on logistic regressions that include condition and demographic controls; error bars indicate conventional 95% and Bonferroni-adjusted confidence intervals; see Tables A.10 and A.11.

Table A.10 – Mixed Evaluations of Unilateralism by the Public. Reports logistic regression coefficients and conventional standard errors with binary dependent variables indicating either approval, voting for incumbent, or positive agreement with questions; simulated marginal effect estimates based on observed case approach from these models are reported in the leftmost panel of Figures 3 and A.3; all models include topic and president factor variables, along with partisanship, age, income, sex, ethnicity, and education.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Topic Approval	Job Approval	Trump Vote	Works w/ Congress	Gets things Done	Cares about Law
Congress	0.028 (0.081)	-0.125 (0.081)	0.020 (0.116)	-0.019 (0.081)	-0.102 (0.080)	-0.106 (0.081)
Executive Order	-0.101 (0.081)	-0.072 (0.081)	0.250** (0.115)	-0.178** (0.081)	-0.097 (0.081)	-0.168** (0.081)
Observations	4,056	4,055	4,055	4,037	4,036	4,034

Table A.11 – Mixed Evaluations of Unilateralism by Copartisans, the Opposition, and Independents. Reports logistic regression coefficients and conventional standard errors with binary dependent variables indicating either approval, voting for incumbent, or positive agreement with questions; simulated marginal effect estimates based on observed case approach from these models are reported in the right three panels of Figures 3 and A.3; all models include topic and president factor variables, along with age, income, sex, ethnicity, and education.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Topic Approval	Job Approval	Trump Vote	Works w/ Congress	Gets things Done	Cares about Law
Copartisan	1.290*** (0.164)	2.285*** (0.194)	0.989*** (0.169)	2.091*** (0.186)	2.148*** (0.196)	1.970*** (0.185)
Opposition	-0.964*** (0.158)	-1.262*** (0.163)	1.067*** (0.171)	-1.107*** (0.161)	-1.348*** (0.159)	-1.292*** (0.162)
Congress	-0.351** (0.174)	-0.305* (0.175)	0.196 (0.200)	-0.041 (0.173)	-0.277 (0.170)	-0.268 (0.174)
Exec. Order	-0.260 (0.171)	-0.090 (0.171)	0.455** (0.191)	-0.174 (0.172)	-0.164 (0.168)	-0.306* (0.171)
Copartisan X Congress	0.429* (0.235)	0.119 (0.270)	-0.186 (0.240)	-0.002 (0.262)	-0.013 (0.270)	0.246 (0.262)
Opposition X Congress	0.719*** (0.222)	0.376 (0.230)	-0.112 (0.240)	0.191 (0.225)	0.429* (0.223)	0.293 (0.228)
Copartisan X Exec. Order	0.274 (0.232)	-0.083 (0.270)	-0.259 (0.233)	-0.171 (0.255)	0.112 (0.277)	0.168 (0.259)
Opposition X Exec. Order	0.298 (0.222)	0.237 (0.227)	-0.265 (0.233)	0.166 (0.226)	0.241 (0.222)	0.298 (0.227)
Observations	4,056	4,055	4,055	4,037	4,036	4,034

Table A.12 – Mixed Evaluations of Unilateralism by the Public (Ordered Logits). Reports ordered logistic regression coefficients and conventional standard errors with 7-point Likert dependent variables indicating “Strongly disagree,” “Disagree,” “Somewhat disagree,” “Neither agree nor disagree,” “Somewhat agree,” “Agree,” “Strongly agree;” all models include topic and president factor variables, along with partisanship, age, income, sex, ethnicity, and education.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Topic Approval	Job Approval	Works w/ Congress	Gets things Done	Cares about Law
Congress	0.008 (0.068)	-0.043 (0.069)	-0.022 (0.068)	-0.033 (0.068)	-0.059 (0.069)
Executive Order	-0.022 (0.069)	-0.028 (0.069)	-0.134* (0.069)	0.010 (0.069)	-0.098 (0.069)
Observations	4,056	4,055	4,037	4,036	4,034

Table A.13 – Mixed Evaluations of Unilateralism by Copartisans, the Opposition, and Independents (Ordered Logits). Reports ordered logistic regression coefficients and conventional standard errors with 7-point Likert dependent variables indicating “Strongly disagree,” “Disagree,” “Somewhat disagree,” “Neither agree nor disagree,” “Somewhat agree,” “Agree,” “Strongly agree;” all models include topic and president factor variables, along with age, income, sex, ethnicity, and education.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Topic Approval	Job Approval	Works w/ Congress	Gets things Done	Cares about Law
Copartisan	1.203*** (0.127)	1.758*** (0.131)	1.701*** (0.130)	1.703*** (0.131)	1.770*** (0.131)
Opposition	-1.025*** (0.129)	-1.256*** (0.132)	-1.108*** (0.130)	-1.290*** (0.131)	-1.261*** (0.131)
Congress	-0.301** (0.142)	-0.160 (0.144)	-0.046 (0.143)	-0.112 (0.144)	-0.140 (0.144)
Exec. Order	-0.102 (0.140)	-0.023 (0.143)	-0.053 (0.142)	-0.010 (0.142)	-0.117 (0.141)
Copartisan X Congress	0.344* (0.180)	0.177 (0.185)	0.108 (0.184)	0.104 (0.184)	0.107 (0.185)
Opposition X Congress	0.614*** (0.180)	0.303* (0.184)	0.146 (0.182)	0.255 (0.183)	0.216 (0.184)
Copartisan X Exec. Order	0.175 (0.180)	0.062 (0.184)	-0.064 (0.183)	0.178 (0.184)	0.076 (0.184)
Opposition X Exec. Order	0.212 (0.180)	0.161 (0.184)	0.002 (0.182)	0.182 (0.182)	0.164 (0.182)
Observations	4,056	4,055	4,037	4,036	4,034

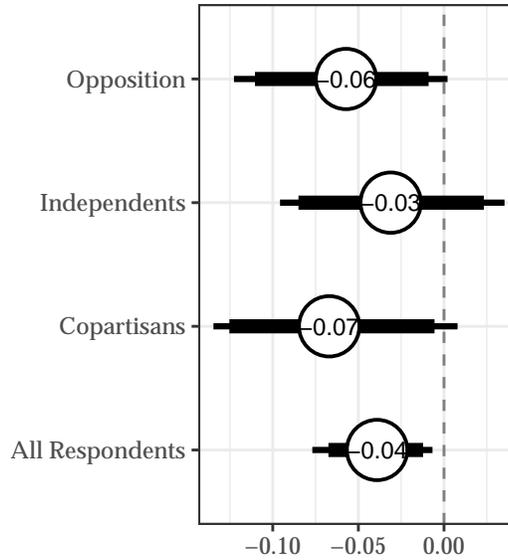


Figure A.4 – The public punishes presidents for failing to “get it done.” Plots simulated marginal effect of estimates failure relative to success by respondent type, using an observed case approach, based on logistic regressions that include condition and demographic controls; error bars indicate conventional 95% and Bonferroni-adjusted confidence intervals; see Tables A.14 and A.15 for full results.

Table A.14 – The public punishes presidents for failing to deliver. Reports logistic regression coefficients and conventional standard errors with binary dependent variables indicating either approval, voting for incumbent, or positive agreement with question; simulated marginal effect estimates based on observed case approach from these models are reported in the leftmost panel of Figure 4, and in Figure A.4; all models condition on Wave 1 value of dependent variable, and also include topic and president factor variables, along with partisanship, age, income, sex, ethnicity, and education.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Topic Approval	Job Approval	Trump Vote	Gets things Done
Congress	0.399** (0.183)	-0.009 (0.292)	0.087 (0.376)	0.026 (0.217)
Executive Order	0.404** (0.188)	-0.130 (0.298)	-0.296 (0.392)	0.314 (0.225)
Failure	-0.682*** (0.155)	0.071 (0.239)	0.491 (0.315)	-0.533*** (0.183)
Observations	1,495	1,495	1,495	1,490

Table A.15 – Copartisans, the Opposition, and Independents punish presidents for failing to deliver. Reports logistic regression coefficients and conventional standard errors with binary dependent variables indicating either approval, voting for incumbent, or positive agreement with question; simulated marginal effect estimates based on observed case approach from these models are reported in the right three panels of Figures 4 and A.4; all models condition on Wave 1 value of dependent variable and also include topic and president factor variables, along with age, income, sex, ethnicity, and education.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Topic Approval	Job Approval	Trump Vote	Gets things Done
Congress	0.451** (0.186)	0.040 (0.296)	0.146 (0.368)	0.010 (0.220)
Exec. Order	0.469** (0.192)	-0.107 (0.297)	-0.265 (0.384)	0.331 (0.228)
Copartisan	1.079*** (0.286)	0.604 (0.453)	-0.650 (0.599)	0.920** (0.379)
Opposition	-0.425 (0.272)	-0.429 (0.417)	-0.575 (0.574)	-0.722** (0.300)
Failure	-0.604** (0.300)	-0.062 (0.431)	-0.940 (0.680)	-0.577* (0.324)
Copartisan X Failure	-0.136 (0.392)	0.331 (0.621)	1.921** (0.873)	-0.128 (0.492)
Opposition X Failure	-0.295 (0.394)	0.116 (0.576)	1.781** (0.842)	-0.027 (0.428)
Observations	1,552	1,552	1,495	1,547

Table A.16 – The public punishes presidents for failing to deliver (Ordered Logits). Reports ordered logistic regression coefficients and conventional standard errors with 7-point Likert dependent variables indicating “Strongly disagree,” “Disagree,” “Somewhat disagree,” “Neither agree nor disagree,” “Somewhat agree,” “Agree,” “Strongly agree;” all models condition on Wave 1 value of dependent variable, and also include topic and president factor variables, along with partisanship, age, income, sex, ethnicity, and education.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Topic Approval	Job Approval	Gets things Done
Congress	0.258** (0.119)	0.161 (0.137)	0.055 (0.123)
Executive Order	0.356*** (0.122)	0.066 (0.142)	0.115 (0.127)
Failure	-0.455*** (0.099)	-0.246** (0.114)	-0.471*** (0.103)
Observations	1,495	1,495	1,490

Table A.17 – Copartisans, the Opposition, and Independents punish presidents for failing to deliver (Ordered Logits). Reports ordered logistic regression coefficients and conventional standard errors with 7-point Likert dependent variables indicating “Strongly disagree,” “Disagree,” “Somewhat disagree,” “Neither agree nor disagree,” “Somewhat agree,” “Agree,” “Strongly agree;” all models condition on Wave 1 value of dependent variable and also include topic and president factor variables, along with age, income, sex, ethnicity, and education.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Topic Approval	Job Approval	Gets things Done
Congress	0.274** (0.120)	0.139 (0.138)	0.036 (0.124)
Exec. Order	0.391*** (0.123)	0.050 (0.142)	0.123 (0.128)
Copartisan	1.036*** (0.190)	0.549** (0.219)	0.918*** (0.205)
Opposition	-0.487*** (0.186)	-0.435** (0.215)	-0.318 (0.196)
Failure	-0.139 (0.204)	-0.148 (0.224)	-0.209 (0.207)
Copartisan X Failure	-0.636** (0.259)	-0.179 (0.290)	-0.451* (0.268)
Opposition X Failure	-0.270 (0.262)	-0.131 (0.294)	-0.400 (0.267)
Observations	1,495	1,495	1,490

B Media coverage study information

B.1 Procedure for collecting coverage

Our primary goal was to generate an index of news coverage of unilateral action that would be broadly representative of print journalism during this period. We first generated a list of the most circulated papers in each state and the District of Columbia using panel data collected by (Gentzkow, Shapiro and Sinkinson 2011). We then found the paper with the largest circulation in each state that was included in ProQuest’s news database. Finally, we added any newspapers in the top 25 publications by national circulation not already included, regardless of state. The result of this inclusion procedure is the outlets listed in Table B.2.

Our main concern is that our selection procedure would over-sample newspapers from large cities, and thus, lean Democratic in its endorsements and affiliations. This might lead to coverage differences across presidents attributable to the uniqueness of the sample. As Table B.1 shows, however, our procedure produced a set of affiliations that does not significantly differ from the panel of newspapers.

Our sample does not include a newspaper from Alaska, Arkansas, or Rhode Island. In addition, some newspapers, such as those located in New Jersey and Virginia, are quite small in terms of the proportion of state circulation they make up. There are two dynamics at play. First, some states major paper is simply not part of the ProQuest database. Including them would be prohibitively time consuming. This is most common in states where the largest paper in terms of circulation is relatively small in terms of its state proportion. Second, during this period, the Washington Post and New York Times had subscriber bases in adjacent states that rivaled or exceeded the major state newspaper. Though we do not investigate this in this study, our time series will allow us to examine secular changes in presidential news coverage due, in part, to the nationalization of reporting and the financial success of these major outlets.

Table B.1 – No significant differences in partisan affiliation. Shows the share of newspapers in our sample and the data collected by Gentzkow, Shapiro and Sinkinson (2011) that are affiliated with a political party or are independent. The p values result from exact binomial tests that test the null hypothesis that the share of papers in our sample affiliated with a given party is the same as the share of papers affiliated with the same party in the data collected by Gentzkow, Shapiro and Sinkinson (2011). Papers are classified as Republican (Democrat) if they ever declare an affiliation with the party.

Partisan Affiliation	Share in Sample	Share in Population	p value
Democrat	0.32	0.28	0.46
Republican	0.34	0.38	0.58
Independent	0.27	0.30	0.66
None	0.07	0.04	0.29

State	City	Newspaper	Pol. Affiliation	Prop. Circulation
AL	MONTGOMERY	ADVERTISER	D	0.07
AZ	PHOENIX	Republic	R	0.45
CA	SAN JOSE	San Jose Mercury News		0.04
CA	LOS ANGELES	TIMES	R	0.16
CO	COLORADO SPRINGS	Gazette-Telegraph	R	0.09
CT	HARTFORD	COURANT	R	0.24
DE	WILMINGTON	The News Journal	I	0.46
DC	WASHINGTON	The Washington Post	I	0.89
FL	ST. PETERSBURG-CLEARWATER	Times	D	0.10
FL	ORLANDO	The Orlando Sentinel	I	0.08
GA	ATLANTA	Constitution	D	0.19
GA	ATLANTA	The Atlanta Journal-Constitution		0.24
HI	HONOLULU	Advertiser	R	0.44
ID	TWIN FALLS	Times-News	I	0.10
IL	CHICAGO	TRIBUNE	R	0.28
IN	INDIANAPOLIS	Star	R	0.15
IA	DES MOINES	Register	R	0.27
KS	TOPEKA	The Topeka Capital-Journal		0.13
KY	LOUISVILLE	COURIER-JOURNAL	D	0.36
LA	SHREVEPORT	TIMES	D	0.10
ME	PORTLAND	PRESS	R	0.23
MD	BALTIMORE	The Sun	I	0.36
MA	BOSTON	The Boston Globe	I	0.24
MI	DETROIT	FREE PRESS	D	0.24
MI	DETROIT	News	R	0.19
MN	MINNEAPOLIS	Star Tribune	I	0.42
MS	JACKSON	Clarion-Ledger	D	0.23
MO	ST. LOUIS	Post-Dispatch	D	0.24
MT	BILLINGS	Gazette	R	0.28
NE	LINCOLN	Lincoln Journal Star	I	0.13
NV	LAS VEGAS	Review-Journal	D	0.50
NH	MANCHESTER	Union Leader	R	0.29
NJ	BERGEN COUNTY-HACKENSACK	The Record	R	0.10
NM	ALBUQUERQUE	Journal	I	0.38
NY	MANHATTAN	New York Daily News	I	0.16
NY	LONG ISLAND	Newsday	I	0.12
NY	MANHATTAN	TIMES	D	0.20
NC	FAYETTEVILLE	Fayetteville Observer-Times	I	0.04
ND	FARGO-MOORHEAD	Forum	R	0.30
OH	CINCINNATI	ENQUIRER	D	0.08
OR	SALEM	Statesman Journal	I	0.09
PA	PHILADELPHIA	INQUIRER	R	0.13
SC	CHARLESTON	The Post and Courier	I	0.13
SD	SIOUX FALLS	ARGUS-LEADER	R	0.29
TN	NASHVILLE	Tennessean	D	0.15
TX	AUSTIN	American	D	0.04
UT	SALT LAKE CITY	Tribune	R	0.40
VT	BURLINGTON	Free Press	R	0.42
VA	NORFOLK	Daily Press	D	0.07
WA	SPOKANE	Spokesman-Review	R	0.09
WV	CHARLESTON	Gazette	D	0.12
WI	MILWAUKEE	Journal	D	0.19
WI	MILWAUKEE	Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	I	0.20
WY	CHEYENNE	Wyoming Eagle	D	0.08
WY	CHEYENNE	Wyoming Tribune-Eagle		0.15
WY	CHEYENNE	Wyoming State Tribune	D	0.09

Table B.2 – Our newspaper sample contains large, politically and geographically diverse outlets. These contextual data come from Gentzkow et al (2011). Political affiliations indicate Democratic (D), Republican (R), or Independent (I). Specifically, papers are classified as Republican (Democrat) if they ever declare an affiliation with the party (2984). The proportion of circulation each paper is responsible for within its home state is calculated by first averaging yearly circulation within paper from 1988–2004. Note, over the study period, some papers consolidated, so the number of distinct publications goes down slightly over time. The Wallstreet Journal is included in our sample, but not these panel data.

Table B.3 – Crosswalk of Aggregated Topics and Comparative Agendas Project Topics

Condensed Topics	Comparative Agendas Project Topics
Criminal Justice and Immigration	Law and Crime
	Immigration
	Civil Rights
Defense	Defense
Energy and Environment	Public Lands
	Energy
	Environment
Human Services	Education
	Social Welfare
	Culture
	Health
	Housing
Labor and Commerce	Government Operations
	Technology
	Labor
	Domestic Commerce
	Transportation
Trade and Agriculture	Macroeconomics
	Foreign Trade
	International Affairs
	Agriculture

Note:

See <https://www.comparativeagendas.net/pages/master-codebook>

B.2 Procedure for coding coverage

Prior to being given complete coding sheets, our researcher assistants attended a 1 hour training and then were assigned to complete a short coding sheet of actions which took roughly 4 hours, on average. After that, they were provided a set of correct coverage answers, and were tasked with going through each action to reconcile differences in their coding and the correct sheet. Any remaining discrepancies were then reviewed in a meeting with the principal investigators. In addition to this initial screening, we monitored inter-coder reliability in real-time, as the coders completed actions. If any significant discrepancies emerged, we examined their work and then met with the research assistant to clarify our coding rules.

We provided the following instructions to undergraduate research assistants:

“The csv contains a list of executive actions. We want to know how the media covered these cases. You will use the ProQuest database to pull newspaper coverage. Read these instructions in their entirety before proceeding. If you have any questions, contact Prof. Lowande or Ben Goehring.

What are you looking for?

We are looking for U.S. news coverage (excluding opinion and reprint pieces) of executive action. What does this mean? U.S. presidents routinely sign documents that we call “directives” (like executive orders, memoranda, proclamations, etc.) that are formal actions that do not require approval from Congress. These directives do all kinds of things, like build border walls, establish commissions, raise tariffs, and create national monuments. We want to find the news stories that cover or mention these executive actions. These are distinct from news stories that mention legislation in Congress, speeches, meetings with international leaders, or the president’s generic position on some topic.

Examples of what counts as relevant coverage:

The action is the main subject of the story. Suppose you were to collect articles about the unilateral action titled “Memorandum on Extension of Benefits to Same-Sex Domestic Partners of Federal Employees.” In O’Keefe (2010) in the Washington Post, the action is the main subject of the story. The explicit attribution of the memorandum comes in the second paragraph: “The policy change, published in Monday’s Federal Register, is part of reforms ordered last year by President Obama when he extended fringe benefits to the same-sex partners of gay federal workers. . . .” Note, it does not explicitly say “memorandum” – but we know because of the timing and content that this is what the news story is referring to.

The action is not the main subject, but appears in the text somewhere after the lede. The document itself is mentioned. Suppose you were to collect articles about the unilateral action titled “Memorandum on Speeding Infrastructure Development Through More Efficient and Effective Permitting.” In Dresser (2011) in The Baltimore Sun, the memo is not the main subject, but it is mentioned explicitly toward the end of the article: “The announcement follows a memorandum President Barack Obama signed in August directing federal agencies to expedite environmental reviews and permit decisions for projects...”

The action is not the main subject, but appears in the text somewhere after the lede. The document itself is not mentioned. Suppose you were to collect articles about the unilateral action titled “Proclamation 9298-Establishment of the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument.” In Tilove (2015) in the Austin-American Statesmen, Obama’s designation of Berryessa Snow Mountain is mentioned, even though the article is about the Waco Mammoth Site. It reads: “It was one of three new national monuments created Friday by the president. The other two are Berryessa Snow Mountain in California, a landscape containing...” Notice, the article does not mention a proclamation specifically, but it counts as coverage because the thing the proclamation did – create the specific national monument – is mentioned.

The action is not the main subject, but appears in the text somewhere after the lede. The document itself is not mentioned because the story appears before it was signed. Suppose you were to collect articles about an executive order that made the head of the CIA more prominent in the NSC. In Priest and Pincus (2004) in the Washington Post, the executive order and what it does is referenced vaguely because it had not yet been signed. The article reads: “President Bush, at his ranch in Crawford, Tex., held another video conference yesterday with his national security advisers to discuss a set of executive orders he plans to issue next week...” If you think you have a case like this, you can double check this by looking at the date of the directive and the date of the article.

Examples of what does not count as relevant coverage:

The article references a different directive on the same topic. Suppose you were to collect coverage of the unilateral action titled “Memorandum on Speeding Infrastructure Development Through More Efficient and Effective Permitting.” In Nakamura (2013) in the Washington Post, a different memo on a similar topic is mentioned: “In Baltimore, he announced that he had signed a memorandum to speed up permits for infrastructure projects, which he said would help get more unemployed workers back on the job.” The telltale sign is that this language mentions a memo signed within the last week, but this article was published two years after the memorandum you’re looking for coverage of. This is another example of how the timing of the action can be a guide for whether the coverage is relevant.

The article references the same topic, but not the action the president took. Suppose you were to collect coverage of the Presidential Review Directive titled “U.S. Environmental policy in Latin America and the Caribbean.” In *IN CENTRAL AMERICA, SONGBIRDS REPLACE CIVIL WAR: [SOONER Edition]* (1997) in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, the President’s meetings, policies and positions on the environment and Latin America are mentioned, but this directive is not. There is no mention of an order, or a review directive. This is not relevant coverage because it is not a news story about the president’s specific action in the Presidential Review Directive.

The article references the action but does not attribute it to the President or his administration. Suppose you were to collect coverage of the memorandum titled “Memorandum on Implementation of Revised Air Quality Standard for Ozone and Particulate Matter.” The memo asks the EPA to implement stricter particular matter rules. Press (2000) mentions that a lower court overturned the EPA’s stricter particular matter rules, but it attributes this policy failure to the EPA, not the president or his administration. This is not relevant because it does not connect the failure to the unilateral action taken by Clinton.

Search Procedures:

Each row in the csv file pertains to a different presidential action. The first 13 variables are already filled in and contain information to help you identify the action and search for it in ProQuest. Do not replace or alter any of this information. You are going to use the advanced search function to see if any newspaper articles cover the relevant action.

1. Access the ProQuest database using your U-M credentials.
2. If it is not already, sort the spreadsheet by date (year, month, day), this will make adjusting the publication dates for the advanced searches easier.
3. Adapt the advance search for coverage of particular action:
 - Publication date: Specific date range (three months before the action was issued) to (last day president in office, January 20 XXXX)
 - Main search line: Copy and paste the search syntax provided. If this syntax isn’t exact, the search will be wrong.

- Limit to: Full text
 - Sort results by: "Relevance"
 - Exclude duplicate documents.
4. Input the total number of results in the total search results field, which is named 'no.results' in the spreadsheet.
 5. Select "Get Search Link" and copy/paste this link in the search link field, which is named 'search.link' in the spreadsheet.
 6. Place check marks on all relevant articles.
 - First look at the one sentence summary of the action, as well as the directive type. These will guide you as you examine the coverage returned by the advanced search.
 - To identify relevant articles:
 - . Click on each entry and examine the full text.
 - Control-F the words "president," "administration," and the president's name (e.g., Obama).
 - An entry is relevant if it mentions the directive. Note:
 - * See the examples. It may or may not explicitly mention the document. But it must mention the president or his administration and the specific action.
 - * Articles published outside the US are not relevant. The Times of London (a UK publication) and the Gazette (published in Montreal) will occasionally appear in search results.
 - Opinion pieces or letters to the editor are not relevant. Do not check them. (Sometimes you can only tell if an article is an opinion piece by reading the introduction or conclusion for any supportive/unsupportive language.)
 - In the case of articles published before the issuance of the action, look to see if the article mentions the upcoming order or discussions about the order. (e.g. "A source in the Bush administration says that the president will impose steel tariffs next week.")
 - Transcripts of speeches are not relevant.
 - Other helpful tips:
 - If the first 10 entries do not reference the action, it is very unlikely any others will.
 - Documents with the "Federation of American Scientists" source are very unlikely to have received coverage. These documents are generally top secret upon issuance, and news outlets only learn of their existence long after the fact.
 - To limit number of search results:
 - * Check all duplicate publications with the same title, which are usually local news articles reprinting national news providers.
 - * Do not check duplicate entries within the same news source.
 - * Do not check REPRINTING coverage. These are entries that simply reprint the government document in full, without commentary.
 7. If there is no relevant coverage, enter 0 in the coverage field and move on to the next document, otherwise, enter a 1.
 8. Export the results to an .xls file.
 - Click "XX selected articles" link at the top of the page.

Table B.4 – Inter-rater Reliability Statistics

Statistic	Value
Percentage agreement	93.72
Cohen’s Kappa	0.87
Maxwell’s RE	0.87
Krippendorf’s Alpha	0.87

- Select “All save options” in the upper right corner.
- Select “Download XLS”
- Save the file as a .csv in the “coverage/lastname” folder with the following naming convention: “lowande.uid.csv”

9. Uncheck all checked articles before proceeding to the next case.

To understand the reliability of these coding procedures, we randomly selected roughly 1 of every 3 actions to be coded by two coders. In general, agreement and reliability for whether there was coverage of a particular action was very high (Table B.4).

B.3 Compiling Coverage Data

We compiled the coverage data iteratively in order to check our coders’ work and catch mistakes early. Since our data included double-coding and opportunities for disagreement among coders, we had to make a few decisions regarding how best to clean the coverage data. First, for actions that were double-coded, we only included them in our final dataset if the coders were in agreement that the action did or did not receive coverage. This resulted in dropping 64 actions from our final dataset. Second, if two coders agreed that coverage existed for an action but disagreed on the number of articles providing coverage, we set the amount of coverage equal to the larger of the two numbers. We opted to use the larger of the two values since it is conservative relative to our main argument.

B.4 Additional Media Coverage Description

Figure B.1) breaks out coverage by topic area, displaying the share of actions in a topic area that receive no coverage, coverage in 1 to 5 articles, and coverage in 6 or more articles. The categories in Figure B.1 and 5 are aggregated from topics in the Comparative Agendas Project. See Table B.3 for a crosswalk. Of the 218 actions pertaining to Trade and Agriculture, about 70% are not mentioned in any newspaper articles. This is in contrast to actions related to other topics, such as Criminal Justice and Immigration and Energy and Environment. In each of these categories, over 35% of actions receive coverage in 6 or more articles.

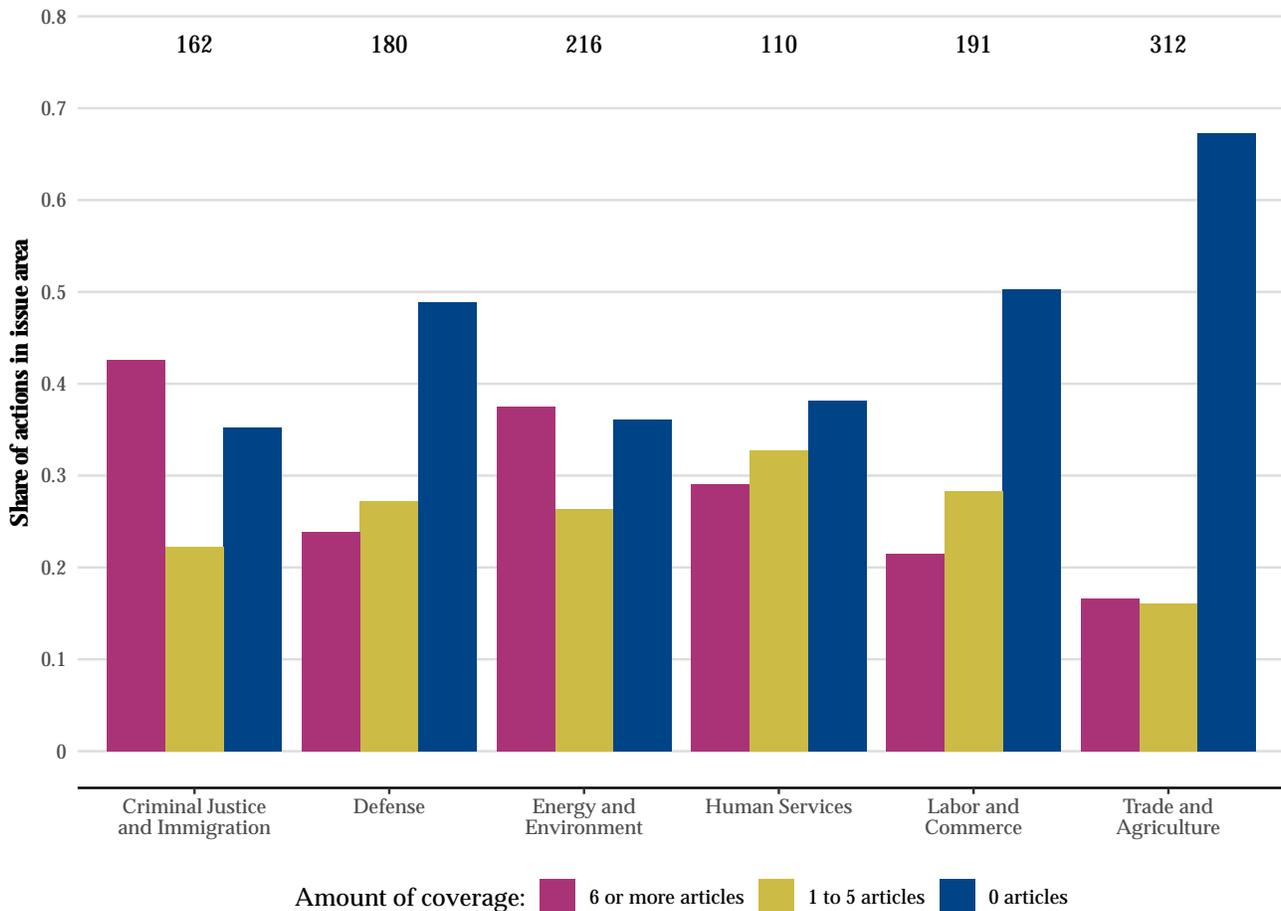


Figure B.1 – Few actions receive considerable coverage, but variation exists across issue areas. Plots the share of actions within each topic area covered by 0, 1-5, or more than 5 newspaper articles. The numbers above the bars represent the number of actions issued within each topic area.

Figure B.2 summarizes, by topic, the distribution of time between action issuance and article publication (for those actions that received any coverage at all). In order to account for the fact that articles issued later in terms have fewer opportunities to receive coverage in the future than actions issued earlier in terms, the data is subset to actions issued in presidents' first terms (for two-term presidents) or first two years (for one-term presidents). The vertical black lines represent the median of each distribution, which is quantified in months in green. For most topics, the distribution of coverage over time resembles the distribution of the amount of coverage: low mean, high variance, and positive skewness. Most coverage occurs in the first few months after action issuance: the median number of months between the issuance of an action and the publication of an article providing relevant coverage is less than 4 in every topic but one.

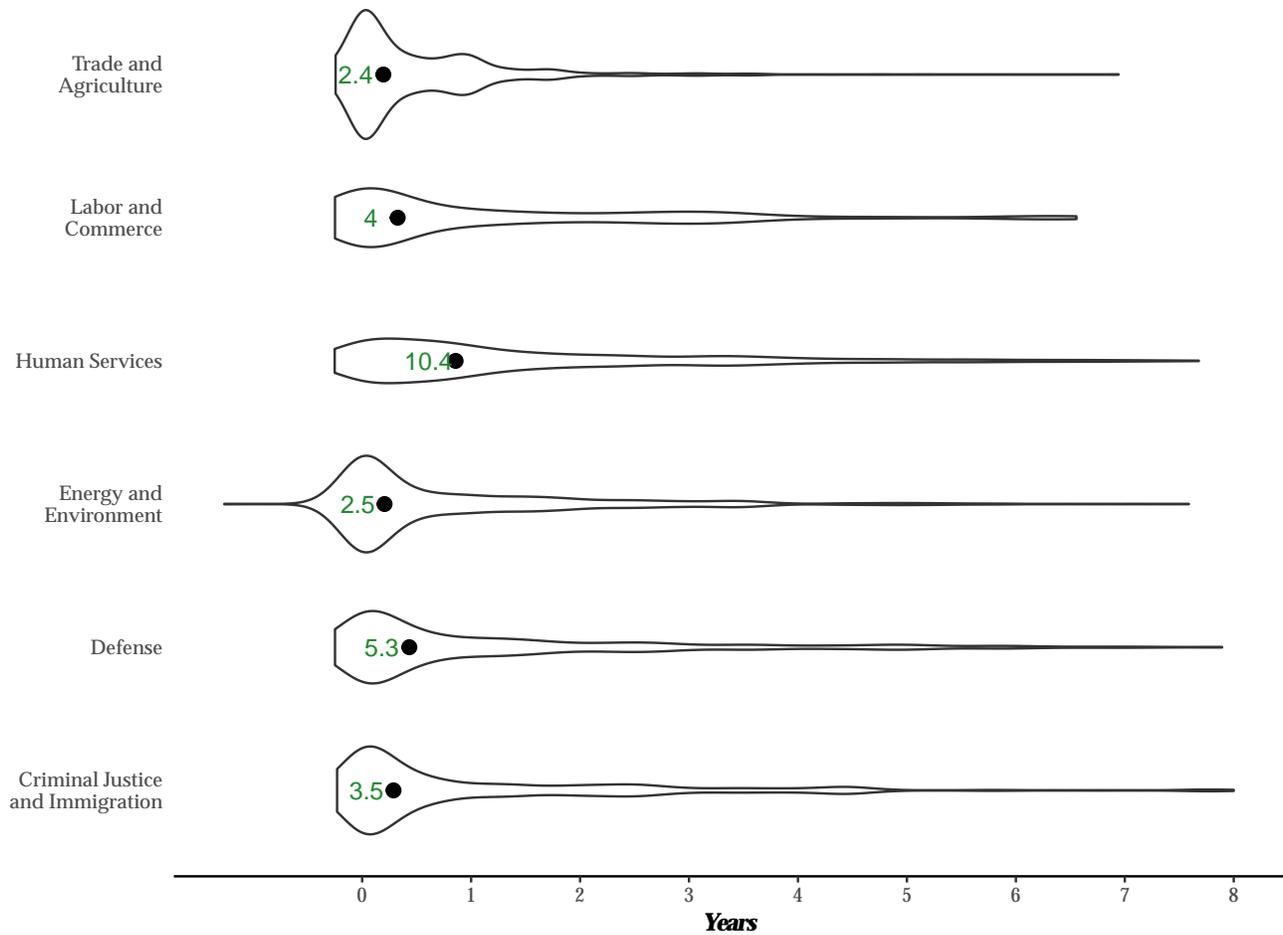


Figure B.2 – Across topics, most coverage occurs in the first year after an action is issued. Plots, by topic, the distribution of the number of years between the issuance of an action and the publication of articles providing relevant coverage. The black dot in each distribution represents the median of the distribution and the green numbers are the median values expressed in months. Since we did not collect articles providing coverage of actions after the president who issued the action is out of office, actions issued later in terms are less likely to receive coverage over a longer span of time than actions issued earlier in terms. Therefore, this plot only includes data on coverage for actions issued in the first term (for two-term presidents) and first two years (for one-term presidents). Articles providing coverage before an action is issued (e.g. due to leaks to the press) appear as negative numbers (i.e. as occurring before year 0).

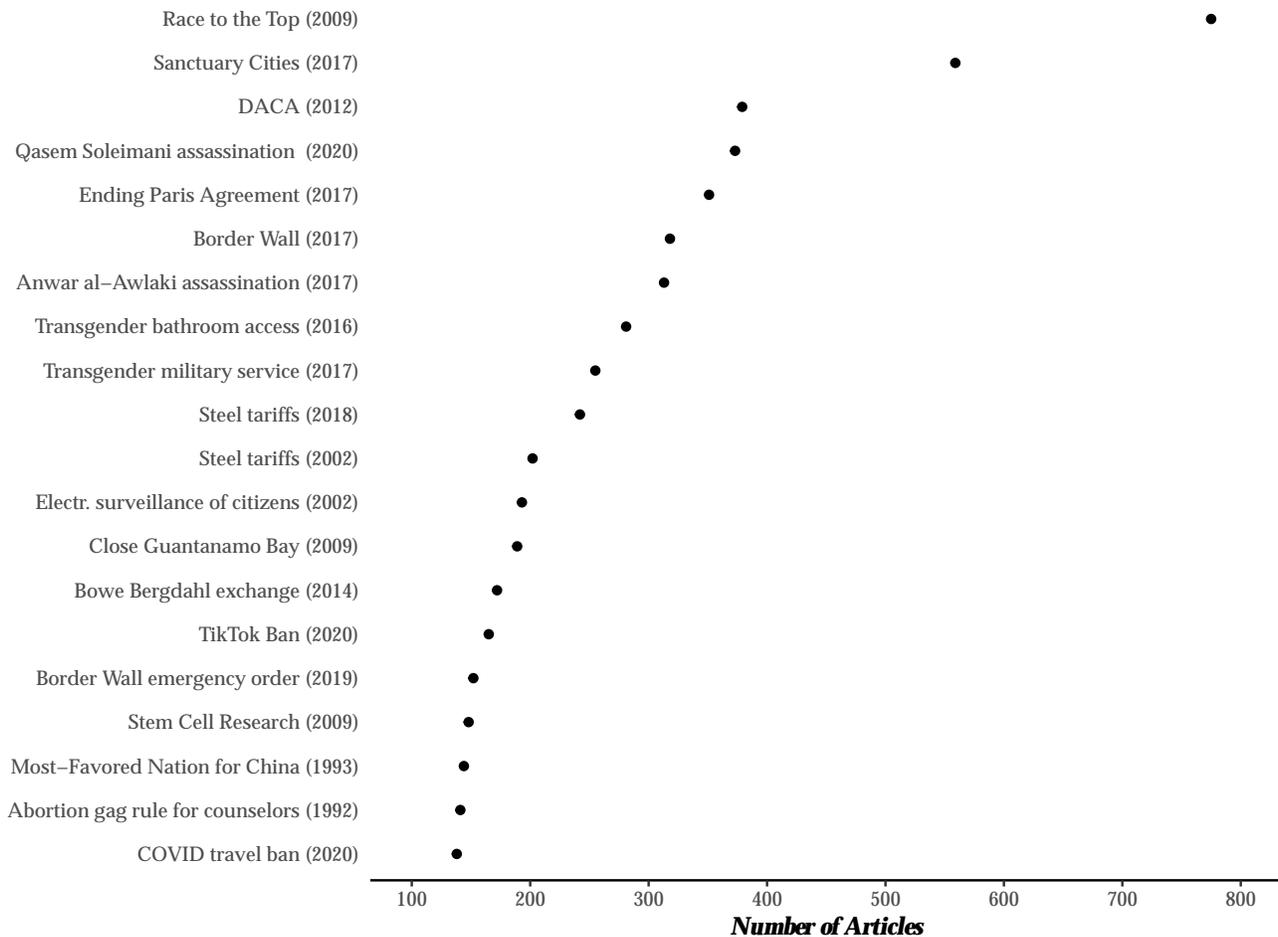


Figure B.3 – Most actions that have received considerable coverage were issued by Trump or Obama Plots the 20 actions that received the most newspaper coverage. Of these, only four were not issued by President Trump or President Obama.

B.5 Comparison Coverage and Attribution

We constructed a dataset of news articles that mentioned the president but not unilateral action, which would serve as “controll” cases to compare attribution language. To do this, relied on similar syntax and search procedures as described earlier in this appendix. Specifically, we conducted one search per presidential term. The syntax included the president’s name and our publication parameters. The primary difference was the subject. To make these articles most comparable to our Congress vignette treatment within the survey experiment, we wanted to cull articles which mentioned presidents’ positions in Congress on legislation. Thus, for each president, the subject included “(congress OR house OR senate) (bill OR legislati OR lawmake) (proposal OR propose OR pass).” The period window was set to the beginning and end of each term, and the first 1,000 articles, sorted by relevance, were collected. We then removed articles that also appeared in the executive action media coverage data, as well as any duplicates. This led to a comparison coverage dataset of 7,875.

Beyond its subject, the comparison dataset is quite similar to the unilateral action coverage. The distribution of newspapers is similar. The main differences are timing. Because the executive action coverage is driven by individual actions, it is unevenly distributed, whereas the comparison data is evenly distributed by construction. For this reason, we included publication and presidential FE in

most analysis of that pool the two data sources.

Attribution procedure: We first read 150 articles and culled attribution words—75 randomly sampled from each executive action and comparison set. These words were selected because they gave the impression that the political actor (not necessarily the President) was responsible for some policy change.

To validate this dictionary, we randomly sampled 20% of the full dataset of 19,944 articles. We then produced match frequencies and the frequency of attribution words next to synonyms for Congress and the president. The words for Congress were “congress”, “house”, “senate”, “speaker”, and “majority leader.” The words for president were “president”, “administration”, “bush”, “obama”, “trump”, and “clinton.” After reading high and low frequency matched articles, we made several adjustments. First, we expanded our list to include all relevant variations in tense for each word, because word stemming missed relevant matches. Second, we expanded our proximity variable to within two words, as this one-word rule appeared overly conservative. In general, we found these words also corresponded to those identified by Grimmer, Westwood and Messing (2015) as evidence of congressional credit claiming. Our list of attribution words and measurement procedure was finalized before any patterns in attribution were summarized.

Attribution dictionary: “achieve”, “achieved”, “achieves”, “achieving”, “act”, “acted”, “acting”, “action”, “actions”, “acts”, “address”, “addressed”, “addresses”, “addressing”, “adopt”, “adopted”, “adopting”, “adopts”, “advance”, “advanced”, “advances”, “advancing”, “aim”, “aimed”, “aiming”, “aims”, “announce”, “announced”, “announces”, “announcing”, “approve”, “approved”, “approves”, “approving”, “attempt”, “attempted”, “attempting”, “attempts”, “authorize”, “authorized”, “authorizes”, “authorizing”, “back”, “backed”, “backing”, “backs”, “badger”, “badgered”, “badgering”, “badgers”, “balance”, “balanced”, “balances”, “balancing”, “ban”, “banned”, “banning”, “bans”, “beef up”, “beefed up”, “beefing up”, “beefs up”, “bolster”, “boost”, “boosted”, “boosting”, “boosts”, “cajole”, “cajoled”, “cajoles”, “cajoling”, “carried”, “carries”, “carry”, “carrying”, “cobble”, “cobbled”, “cobblers”, “cobbling”, “complete”, “completed”, “completes”, “completing”, “compromise”, “compromised”, “compromises”, “compromising”, “craft”, “crafted”, “crafting”, “crafts”, “debate”, “debated”, “debates”, “debating”, “decided”, “decides”, “deciding”, “decision”, “decisions”, “defeat”, “defeated”, “defeating”, “defeats”, “draft”, “drafted”, “drafting”, “drafting”, “drafts”, “ease”, “eased”, “eases”, “easing”, “effort”, “efforts”, “enable”, “enabled”, “enables”, “enabling”, “endorse”, “endorsed”, “endorses”, “endorsing”, “exhort”, “exhorted”, “exhorting”, “exhorts”, “expand”, “expanded”, “expanding”, “expands”, “extend”, “extended”, “extending”, “extends”, “force”, “forced”, “forces”, “forcing”, “fulfills”, “fulfill”, “fulfilled”, “fulfilling”, “gave”, “give”, “gives”, “giving”, “hammer out”, “hammered out”, “hammering out”, “immediate”, “implement”, “implemented”, “implementing”, “implements”, “impose”, “imposed”, “imposes”, “imposing”, “introduce”, “introduced”, “introduces”, “introducing”, “iron out”, “ironed out”, “ironing out”, “irons out”, “issue”, “issued”, “issues”, “issuing”, “lift”, “lifted”, “lifting”, “lifts”, “lobbied”, “lobbies”, “lobbing”, “lobby”, “move”, “moved”, “moves”, “moving”, “negotiate”, “negotiated”, “negotiates”, “negotiating”, “new act”, “new action”, “new actions”, “new acts”, “new policies”, “new policy”, “offer”, “offered”, “offering”, “offers”, “outline”, “outlined”, “outlines”, “outlining”, “overridden”, “override”, “overrides”, “overriding”, “overturn”, “overturned”, “overturning”, “overturns”, “pass”, “passed”, “passes”, “passing”, “pave”, “paved”, “paves”, “paving”, “phase out”, “phased out”, “phases out”, “phasing out”, “pledge”, “pledged”, “pledges”, “pledging”, “pressure”, “pressured”, “pressures”, “pressuring”, “prevail”, “prevailed”, “prevailing”, “prevails”, “progress”, “progressed”, “progresses”, “progressing”, “promise”, “promised”, “promises”, “promising”, “promote”, “promoted”, “promotes”, “promoting”, “propose”, “proposed”, “proposes”, “proposing”, “provide”, “provided”, “provides”, “providing”, “push”, “pushed”, “pushes”, “pushing”, “quick”, “quickened”, “quickening”, “ratified”, “ratifies”, “ratify”, “ratifying”, “rebuff”,

“rebuffed”, “rebuffing”, “rebuffs”, “reclassified”, “reclassifies”, “reclassify”, “reclassifying”, “reinstate”, “reinstated”, “reinstates”, “reinstating”, “reintroduce”, “reintroduced”, “reintroduces”, “reintroducing”, “renew”, “renewed”, “renewing”, “renews”, “request”, “requested”, “requesting”, “requests”, “rescind”, “rescinded”, “rescinding”, “rescinds”, “restore”, “restored”, “restores”, “restoring”, “reverses”, “reverse”, “reversed”, “reversing”, “rewrite”, “rewrites”, “rewriting”, “rewritten”, “roll out”, “rolled out”, “rolling out”, “rolls out”, “round up”, “rounded up”, “rounding up”, “rounds up”, “seal”, “sealed”, “sealing”, “seals”, “send”, “sending”, “sends”, “sent”, “setup”, “sign”, “signal”, “signaled”, “signals”, “signature”, “signed”, “signing”, “signs”, “sponsor”, “sponsored”, “sponsoring”, “sponsors”, “stepped”, “stepping”, “steps”, “support”, “supported”, “supporting”, “supports”, “suspend”, “suspended”, “suspending”, “suspends”, “take”, “take up”, “taken up”, “taking up”, “tout”, “touted”, “touting”, “touts”, “unveil”, “unveiled”, “unveiling”, “unveils”, “used”, “using”, “voted”, “votes”, “voting”, “vow”, “vowed”, “vowing”, “vows”, “work out”, “worked out”, “working out”, “works out”, “write”, “writes”, “writing”, and “wrote”

Table B.5 – Correlates of Attribution. Reports Neg. Bin. coefficients and conventional standard errors from models, measuring the correlation between presidential attribution with article and type of article, along with the President mentioned in that article.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Difference	
Exec. Action	-0.430 (0.049)	-0.455 (0.049)
Clinton	0.151 (0.045)	0.137 (0.045)
Bush	0.123 (0.045)	0.111 (0.044)
Obama	0.072 (0.043)	0.055 (0.042)
Trump	0.462 (0.049)	0.421 (0.047)
Action X Clinton	0.637 (0.060)	0.661 (0.060)
Action X Bush	0.520 (0.058)	0.527 (0.058)
Action X Obama	0.486 (0.051)	0.495 (0.051)
Action X Trump	0.568 (0.057)	0.600 (0.056)
Newspaper F.E.	X	
Observations	19,944	19,944
θ	1.659 (0.046)	1.597 (0.044)

Table B.6 – Correlates of Attribution. Reports Neg. Bin. coefficients and conventional standard errors from models, measuring the correlation between congressional attribution with article and type of article, along with the President mentioned in that article.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Difference	
Exec. Action	-1.093 (0.066)	-1.078 (0.066)
Clinton	0.020 (0.051)	0.005 (0.050)
Bush	0.002 (0.050)	0.005 (0.049)
Obama	0.070 (0.049)	0.111 (0.047)
Trump	0.051 (0.057)	0.079 (0.055)
Action X Clinton	0.140 (0.083)	0.141 (0.083)
Action X Bush	0.295 (0.078)	0.279 (0.077)
Action X Obama	0.159 (0.069)	0.107 (0.068)
Action X Trump	-0.230 (0.077)	-0.230 (0.076)
Newspaper F.E.	X	
Observations	19,944	19,944
θ	1.207 (0.050)	1.167 (0.048)

Table B.7 – Correlates of Attribution. Reports OLS coefficients and conventional standard errors from models, measuring the correlation between difference in attribution words with article and type of article, along with the President mentioned in that article.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Difference	
Exec. Action	-0.150 (0.060)	-0.188 (0.059)
Clinton	0.130 (0.055)	0.124 (0.054)
Bush	0.121 (0.055)	0.101 (0.054)
Obama	0.021 (0.053)	-0.038 (0.052)
Trump	0.453 (0.063)	0.375 (0.061)
Action X Clinton	0.864 (0.075)	0.891 (0.075)
Action X Bush	0.666 (0.073)	0.688 (0.073)
Action X Obama	0.789 (0.065)	0.831 (0.064)
Action X Trump	1.010 (0.073)	1.054 (0.073)
Newspaper F.E.	X	
Observations	19,944	19,944