

By All Means: How Issue Popularity Emboldens Presidential Power

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Abstract

When Congress and the president disagree, when does the public empower the president to act singularly on its behalf? We argue that individual-level attitudes toward presidential powers in the presence of institutional conflict depend on aggregate levels of support for the president's policy positions. Evidence from six survey experiments confirms our argument. As policy congruence between the public and the president increases, individuals express substantially greater support for the exercise of veto and unilateral powers. Additionally, an analysis of public opinion polls spanning three presidential administrations shows that changes to a president's approval ratings following the use of power are conditioned by the share of the public who support the president's position. Together, our results demonstrate that individual views towards the separation of powers are highly sensitive to political context and that presidents may be able to increase their standing with the public by exercising power to advance public opinion.

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The separation of powers poses steep challenges for contemporary presidents. Institutional conflict and gridlock has become a persistent reality, and divided government has prevailed in all but four years since 1980. While history provides rich examples of presidents such as Truman and Eisenhower reaching across the partisan aisle and working with Congress to achieve their goals, heightened levels of party polarization and intraparty homogeneity has made it increasingly difficult for presidents to do so. These developments portend poorly for presidents intending to enact their agendas through new legislation and who are held accountable for virtually every outcome that occurs under their watch.

In this paper, we study Americans' views toward presidential power in the presence of institutional conflict. Though recent scholarship indicates that Americans are largely opposed to the exercise of presidential authority (Reeves and Rogowski 2015, 2016*b*) and can be mobilized against the president by Congress (Christenson and Kriner 2016), this research does not consider how Americans view presidential power in the context of institutional conflict and when it is used in the pursuit of goals the public supports. We build on the "going public" literature (e.g., Canes-Wrone 2001, 2006; Kernell 1993) to argue that individual-level support for the exercise of presidential powers when the president and Congress disagree depends upon aggregate levels of support for the president's policy position.

We present evidence from two studies that support our argument. In the first, results from six survey experiments demonstrate that the public supports a more powerful president vis-à-vis Congress when the branches are in conflict and the public shares the president's policy position. Across three policy domains, we find that individuals grant greater support for the use of both positive and negative powers when the president's policy goals are aligned with public opinion. Furthermore, we find little evidence that these attitudes are conditioned by individuals' partisanship, ideology, or political sophistication. We explore the consequences of these findings in a second study that uses polling data from the Clinton, Bush, and Obama presidencies. In contrast with research that suggests presidents pay a fixed cost to their public standings by vetoing legisla-

tion (Groseclose and McCarty 2001) or taking unilateral action (Reeves and Rogowski 2016a), our findings suggest that the changes to a president's approval ratings following the use of power are conditioned by public opinion toward the president's position. Together, our results show that the public's view of the separation of powers is highly sensitive to institutional context and suggest that practical concerns about presidential excess may be largely overblown insofar as presidents have incentives to act in service of public opinion.

Presidential Powers and Democratic Responsiveness

The colonial experience left the American Founders deeply skeptical toward executive power.¹ This mistrust is reflected in the end product of the Constitutional Convention: a political system that largely institutionalized the Founders' republicanism and in which, according to Madison in *Federalist #51*, "the legislative authority necessarily predominates" while the president holds limited powers to protect executive authority from legislative encroachment. Over the course of American history, however, presidents have asserted and exercised their powers at greater rates. In modern times, the arsenal of tools that constitute presidential power – including enumerated powers such as the veto and powers claimed by presidents to justify unilateral actions – are regularly threatened and utilized, with considerable policy consequence. Scholars, political observers, and presidents themselves recognize these powers as important resources in a president's policymaking toolkit, particularly as linkages between the public and the presidency have tightened

¹Royal colonial governors, appointed by the Crown, often negated acts passed by legislatures elected by the colonists, while signatories of the Declaration of Independence accused King George III of "absolute despotism" and protested the king's dissolution of colonial legislatures and their absence of parliamentary representation.

during the modern presidency (Edwards 1983; Moe and Howell 1999*a*).²

The president's policymaking powers, both positive and negative, play an important role in allowing presidents to advance and respond to the public's policy wishes. This implication holds especially true at times of discord between the two lawmaking branches, during which policymaking powers serve as the primary tools by which presidents attempt to meet the public's expectations. Indeed, presidents often justify their use of these powers as a way to secure policies the public supports. For instance, in 1867, President Andrew Johnson vetoed a congressional proposal to extend voting rights to African American citizens in Washington, D.C. because an overwhelming majority of local voters had opposed extending suffrage in a referendum held in December 1865. Johnson's veto message argued plainly that Congress had "[e]ntirely disregard[ed] the wishes of the people of the District of Columbia."³ More recently, when announcing a series of gun safety initiatives in January 2016, President Obama appealed to mass support for the policies as justification for implementing the measures using unilateral means.⁴

Public acceptance of—and, sometimes, demand for—presidents using powers that unilaterally block legislation passed by majorities of both chambers or Congress or implement new policies all their own contrasts with the Founders' vision for American government. The legislative branch

²Focusing on the emergence of the veto as an important instrument of presidential power, McCarty (2009) argues that the expansion of the electorate in the antebellum period created the electoral incentives for presidents to more directly challenge congressional legislation when the branches' preferences were in conflict. Similarly, Moe and Howell (1999*b*, 854) explain the increased use of unilateral powers during the twentieth century as a response to the increased public debate for government action in the face of two world wars and the Great Depression, with the president especially well-positioned to affect government policymaking subject to constraints posed by Congress and the judiciary.

³<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=72067>.

⁴Text of the president's remarks available at: <http://go.wh.gov/Kc7ndF>.

was intended to be the nation's dominant policymaking institution precisely because of its close relationship with the people. Presidents, instead, were not intended to be direct representatives of the people; the Electoral College was created to provide insulation from the public and help ensure the executive's independence. Public support for the policymaking dominance of a single individual also conflicts with most existing accounts of American attitudes toward political power. For instance, as Edwards (1989, 14) writes, "Americans are basically individualistic and skeptical of authority. They may admire its exercise, as long as it is over others." Under what conditions might a public predisposed to consensual policymaking support the unilateral exercise of power by their president?

Public Opinion and the Instruments of Presidential Power

A rich literature exhibits the high expectations and degree of accountability to which the president is held with no shortage of evaluative dimensions upon which the president is judged.⁵ Given this reality, an uncooperative Congress can complicate the president's ability to fulfill these expectations. The ideological and partisan alignment of the two lawmaking branches shapes the president's ability to achieve his policy goals. When Congress and the president are in agreement, presidents are generally more successful in securing their policy goals and attain passage of significant public policy at greater rates (Coleman 1999; Howell et al. 2000). Conversely, when the two branches are in conflict, presidents are forced to pursue their policy goals in spite of congressional opposition. They must do so amidst congressional efforts to reduce the president's public standing by, for instance, conducting investigations of alleged executive branch misdeeds

⁵As the unitary head of an executive branch with a national constituency, the president's popularity depends on both national (e.g., MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1992) and local economic outcomes (e.g., Fiorina 1981) in addition to public satisfaction with international affairs (Lee 1977) and responses to crises and disasters (Gasper and Reeves 2011), among other criteria.

(Kriner and Schwartz 2008; Kriner and Schickler 2014) and portraying the president's positions as out of step with public opinion (Groseclose and McCarty 2001).

Drawing from theories of democratic responsiveness, we argue that in the presence of institutional conflict, an individual's support for the president's usage of his powers is conditional on aggregate levels of public support for the policy outcome. In relation to the presidency, the public exhibits a general aversion to presidential vetoes (Groseclose and McCarty 2001; Reeves and Rogowski 2015) and executive orders (Christenson and Kriner 2016; Reeves and Rogowski 2015, 2016*b*), though the latter body of work finds this reluctance may be contingent upon contextual political factors such as congressional inaction and the relevance of national security considerations. Building upon these findings, we suggest that an individual's aversion to the president's use of power to secure a given policy will recede as the public exhibits greater support for the policy outcome. A wide range of scholarship provides support for this expectation. Presidents are generally more successful in achieving their desired legislative outcomes when the public supports the president's policy position (Canes-Wrone 2001, 2006), which suggests that attitudes toward the use of presidential power may depend on whether the president pursues policies in service of public opinion. Research on public attitudes toward other political institutions reaches similar conclusions. For instance, public support for the Senate filibuster is contingent upon support for the policy proposal under consideration (Smith and Park 2013), while satisfaction with specific rulings of the Supreme Court condition overall support for the institution's powers (Bartels and Johnston 2013; cf. Gibson and Nelson 2015). Just as in these cases, we expect that strong public support for presidential agenda items translates into greater acceptance of the usage of his powers to achieve these agenda goals.

To the extent existing scholarship evaluates public support for the exercise of a president's formal powers, presidents are posited to pay a fixed and constant cost. For instance, Groseclose and McCarty (2001) model the conditions under which Congress passes legislation they expect the president to veto, and show that presidents suffer declines in approval ratings following a

veto. Their model assumes that congressional preferences are aligned with public opinion such that use of the veto reveals that the president's position is inconsistent with the public's views. Reeves and Rogowski (2016*a*) provide evidence that public evaluations of the president decrease when policies are achieved through unilateral means, but do not directly study how these relationships may vary depending upon the public's views toward the policies in question. Relatedly, Christenson and Kriner (2016) find no evidence that unilateral action affects public opinion toward presidents, though these null findings in the aggregate could be explained by heterogeneous effects based on the public's attitudes toward the policy outcomes achieved through unilateral action.

Our argument, on the other hand, suggests that the costs presidents may incur from using their policymaking powers will vary depending on contextual support for the policy at hand. If our argument is correct, it implies that the political costs that may reign in a president's tendency to utilize his powers (see, e.g., Christenson and Kriner 2015) would be limited in cases where public opinion sits squarely behind a presidential action. In other words, concerns regarding the potential for presidential overreach by way of unilateral powers may be heightened if presidents can successfully channel public support for specific policies to justify unilateral action. Furthermore, contrary to suggestions that the public holds a limited view of the president's powers based on a literal reading of the Constitution, the public would instead be willing to alter its support of unilateralism in the service of specific policy goals. Taken together, these implications call for an increased focus on the importance of policy context when considering the degree of power a president's unilateral tools provide.

Though scholars have paid relatively little attention to understanding public attitudes toward the separation of powers, prominent accounts of presidential behavior do not rule out the possibility that these attitudes may importantly figure into a president's decision calculus on questions of power. In a treatment of the veto power, Cameron (2000, 17-18) ponders whether public opinion might "stop a president from pursuing his supporters' objectives even in the teeth

of congressional opposition?" And in research on unilateral powers, Moe and Howell (1999*a*, 866) argue that courts' decisions to uphold or strike down unilateral actions can be influenced by the popularity of the president's action. Thus, understanding public support for presidential dominance in the context of institutional conflict can provide new insight into how public opinion may figure into the separation of powers.

Understanding the conditions that structure public attitudes toward presidential power has important implications for evaluating democratic responsiveness. As Dahl (1971, 1) argues, "a key characteristic of a democracy is the continued responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals." Political theorists have long considered responsiveness as a key criterion for evaluating the quality of democratic performance (Dahl 1971; Diamond and Morino 2005; Lijphart 1984; Mansbridge 2003; Pitkin 1967) and others argue that "responsiveness is what representative government is all about" (Kuklinski and Segura 1995, 4). Persistent institutional conflict, however, presents challenges for governments to act on the behalf of the preferences of their constituents; for instance, unified government is generally more responsive to citizen preferences than divided government (Coleman 1999). As congressional preferences increasingly diverge from the president's, compromise and policy change are less likely. Accordingly, understanding the ways in which support for unilateralism is conditioned by levels of public opinion can help evaluate whether the president's powers can serve as a tool to further responsive government.

To summarize, our theoretical expectations lead to our primary hypothesis that, in the presence of institutional conflict, individual-level support for the president's usage of his powers will be contingent upon the level of aggregate support for the policy outcome the powers secure. We test our theoretical argument in two ways. First, we turn to controlled survey experiments in order to isolate the causal impact that changes in aggregate levels of support for policy have on individuals support for the exercise of presidential power. In a second analysis, we further probe the relationship between aggregate policy support and attitudes towards presidential power by

examining nationally representative public opinion polls.

Data and Methods

In six survey experiments from two different studies, we test how aggregate public support for policy conditions individual-level support for presidents using the powers of their office to achieve policy objectives across a range of issues. Survey experiments are particularly well-suited for answering research questions like ours, as they allows us to isolate the effects of how individuals react to changes in the behavior of political elites.⁶ Our approach is to vary the level of aggregate public support for a proposed policy and see how these levels condition individual-level support for the president's usage of his powers to achieve or prevent that policy from taking effect. Our experimental design allows us to hold the policy proposal and the means of implementation constant while varying only the percent of Americans who support or oppose the measure. These survey experiments are the only way by which we are able to isolate the effect of varying solely the level of aggregate support for otherwise identical policies on individual attitudes toward presidential action. The first series of experiments examines our hypothesis in the context of unilateral action and was conducted in February 2016 with 1,009 respondents. The second series of experiments focused on the use of veto powers and was conducted in June 2016 with 1,034 respondents.⁷ While our samples, recruited through MTurk, are not nationally repre-

⁶Previous studies have used experimental manipulations to assess the institutional characteristics important for individual acceptance of public policy (Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2005) and to determine the terms by which individuals evaluate the acceptability of unilateral action (Christenson and Kriner 2016).

⁷We note that our experiments were conducted during a presidential election year, in which presidential power may have been unusually politicized. This contextual factor does not risk confounding our results because it was present for respondents in all our treatment groups. How-

sentative, previous studies show that experiments conducted with studies using MTurk samples provide estimates of treatment effects that are similar to survey experiments using nationally representative samples (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012; Levay, Freese, and Druckman 2016).⁸

We conducted three experiments in each of our two studies for a total of six experiments. In each, respondents were randomly assigned to conditions in which they were presented with a short vignette that described a policy proposal under consideration. We designed vignettes that presented respondents with a policy proposal across each of three different domains: environmental policy, travel regulations, and foreign trade. These three issue areas invoke salient public debates, and the major parties have different approaches to addressing each of them. Consistent findings across all three issue areas would bolster confidence in the generalizability of our results. In the experiments on veto powers, respondents were told that the next Congress is likely to consider new legislation in each of these areas, while the experiments on unilateral powers told respondents that the next president is likely to propose new policies on each of these issues. The text from the first part of each vignette, which describes the policy area under consideration, is shown in Table 1.

Next, for each issue area respondents were presented with information about disagreement between Congress and the president. This information invokes institutional conflict and asks respondents to evaluate the exercise of presidential power in this context. The key manipulation (and thus the key explanatory variable in our analysis) concerns the level of aggregate public

ever, understanding how electoral context conditions public opinion about presidential power is an important goal for future studies.

⁸On average, MTurk respondents are somewhat younger, more liberal, and better educated than the general public (Paolacci and Chandler 2014). Reflective of this pattern, the average respondent in our survey is male, white, moderately liberal, has a college education, identifies as a Democrat, and is relatively young. Detailed information about the demographic composition of the samples are shown in Tables A.1 and A.2 in the Supplementary Appendix.

Table 1: Survey Experiment Vignette Wordings

Issue Area	Text
<i>Unilateral power</i>	
Environmental Policy	Whoever is elected president in November 2016 is likely to propose new policies related to environmental regulations.
Trade Policy	Whoever is elected president in November 2016 is likely to pursue new trade agreements with countries who compete with U.S. manufacturing.
Travel Policy	In recent years contagious illnesses from other regions of the world have raised concerns about spreading disease in the U.S. Whoever is elected president in November 2016 is likely to confront situations like these in the future and could consider restricting travel to the U.S. from people who live in countries that are affected by contagious epidemics.
<i>Veto power</i>	
Environmental Policy	The Congress that will take session in January 2017 is likely to pass legislation related to environmental regulations
Trade Policy	The Congress that will take session in January 2017 is likely to pursue new legislation regarding trade with countries who compete with U.S. manufacturing.
Travel Policy	In recent years contagious illnesses from other regions of the world have raised concerns about spreading disease in the U.S. The Congress that will take session in January 2017 is likely to confront situations like these in the future and consider passing legislation restricting travel to the U.S. from people who live in countries are affected by contagious epidemics.

support for the legislation Congress is likely to pass or policy proposal that the president is considering implementing through unilateral means. Respondents were randomized to one of four conditions in which either 80% (*Large majority*), 52% (*Small majority*), 48% (*Large minority*), or 20% (*Small minority*) of the public supported Congress's legislation (in the veto powers experi-

ments) or the president's policy proposal (in the unilateral powers experiments).⁹ Table 2 displays the text included in the vignettes across the four conditions.

The dependent variable in our experiment is an individual respondents' approval of the president's veto of legislation or use of unilateral action. The question was asked on a four point scale that ranged from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree", but for simplicity we collapsed responses to create a binary measure which is coded 1 if a respondent chose "Strongly Agree" or "Somewhat Agree" and coded 0 if they answered "Strongly Disagree" or "Somewhat Disagree."¹⁰

We use the *Small minority* condition as the baseline and calculate treatment effects by comparing individual attitudes toward presidential power between this condition and each of the other three. If respondents' attitudes toward the exercise of presidential power are conditioned by aggregate support for the policy in question, in the context of the veto powers we expect to find that individuals are more supportive of the use of veto powers when larger shares of the public oppose the legislation passed by Congress. Similarly, in the unilateral powers experiments we expect to find greater support for the exercise of unilateral power as larger shares of the public agree with the president's policy position.

⁹The exact percentages of public support varied slightly from those shown here for two of the experiments conducted about unilateral powers. For the trade issue vignette, the percentage of public support for Congress's proposal is 70%, 55%, 45%, and 30%, respectively, and for the traveling issue vignette, the percentage of public support for Congress's proposal is 75%, 51%, 49%, and 24% respectively. These percentages are consistent with our labeling of public support as large/small majority/minority and, as we show, the exact percentages used did not produce substantively different patterns of results.

¹⁰Results using the original 4-point scale are presented in Figure A.1 of the Appendix.

Table 2: Survey Experiment Treatment Conditions

Condition	Text
<i>Unilateral power</i>	
Large Majority	Please tell us whether you agree or disagree: If 80% of the public supports the president's proposal, the president should use his presidential powers to enact that policy if Congress is opposed to passing this as a new law.
Small Majority	Please tell us whether you agree or disagree: If 52% of the public supports the president's proposal, the president should use his presidential powers to enact that policy if Congress is opposed to passing this as a new law.
Large Minority	Please tell us whether you agree or disagree: If 48% of the public supports the president's proposal, the president should use his presidential powers to enact that policy if Congress is opposed to passing this as a new law.
Small Minority	Please tell us whether you agree or disagree: If 20% of the public supports the president's proposal, the president should use his presidential powers to enact that policy if Congress is opposed to passing this as a new law.
<i>Veto power</i>	
Large Majority	Please tell us whether you agree or disagree: If the president opposes this legislation but 80% of the public supports Congress's proposal, the president should use the veto power to prevent the bill from becoming a law.
Small Majority	Please tell us whether you agree or disagree: If the president opposes this legislation but 52% of the public supports Congress's proposal, the president should use the veto power to prevent the bill from becoming a law.
Large Minority	Please tell us whether you agree or disagree: If the president opposes this legislation but 48% of the public supports Congress's proposal, the president should use the veto power to prevent the bill from becoming a law.
Small Minority	Please tell us whether you agree or disagree: If the president opposes this legislation but 20% of the public supports Congress's proposal, the president should use the veto power to prevent the bill from becoming a law.

Results

Figure 1 displays the results from our experiments on support for the use of unilateral powers. For each policy area, the plot shows the differences in individual-level approval of unilateral action between the treatment condition shown on the x -axis and the baseline condition (*Small minority* support for the president's policy position). Positive values along the y -axis indicate increased approval for unilateral action relative to the condition in which only a small minority of the public supports the president's position. The plotted points are the differences in proportions of approval and the vertical lines are the 95 percent confidence intervals. The results for the environmental, trade, and travel policies are depicted with circles, squares, and triangles, respectively. The dashed horizontal line at zero indicates the null hypothesis of no difference in approval of unilateral action relative to the baseline condition.

The results in Figure 1 provide strong evidence that individual-level attitudes toward unilateral powers depend on the level of public support for the president's position. Consider first the results in the context of environmental policy. Relative to the baseline (*Small minority*) condition, the proportion of voters who approve of unilateral action increases by .46 when a *Large majority* of the public supports the legislation passed by Congress.¹¹ When a *Small majority* of the public support the congressional legislation, approval of unilateral action increased by .28 relative to the baseline condition. And when a *Large minority* of the public supports congressional legislation, the proportion of voters who approved of unilateral action increased by .10. Each of these treatment effects is statistically distinguishable from zero, indicating that voters grant significantly greater approval for the exercise of unilateral powers as public support increases for the president's policy position. Moreover, each of the treatment effects are statistically distinguishable

¹¹In the *Small minority* condition, 31% of respondents supported the use of veto powers, which is quite similar to the rate of approval among nationally representative samples reported in other work (Reeves and Rogowski 2015, 2016b).

from each other, which shows that approval of unilateral powers monotonically increases as the public's policy preferences are more aligned with the president than they are with Congress.

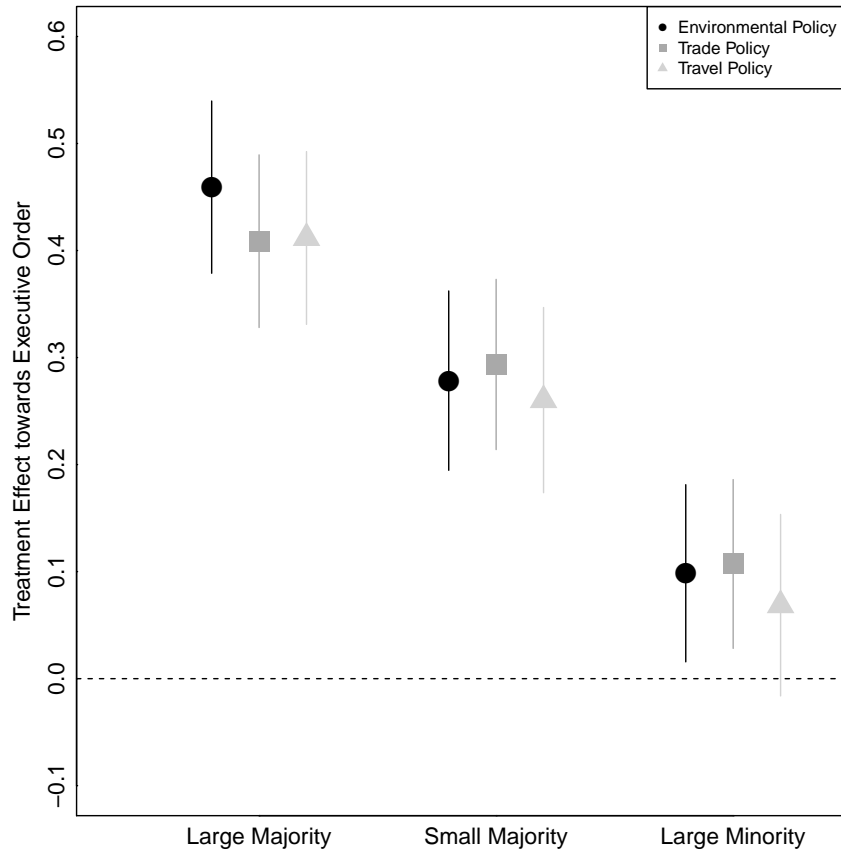
As Figure 1 shows, we find nearly identical patterns of results for the experiments involving trade and travel policies. For both of these policy domains, we continue to find that increased public support for the president's position significantly increases approval of the use of unilateral powers. Moreover, the magnitudes of the treatment effects are quite similar to those in the environmental policy experiment. In the trade policy experiment, approval of unilateral action increases by .41, .29, and .11 relative to the baseline condition when a *Large majority*, *Small majority*, or *Large minority* of the public, respectively, supported the legislation passed by Congress.¹² Similarly, in the travel policy experiment, approval of unilateral action increased by .41, .26, and .07 relative to the baseline condition when a *Large majority*, *Small majority*, or *Large minority* of the public, respectively, supported the president's position.

Figure 2 shows results when evaluating individual-level approval of the use of the veto. Overall, we find that attitudes toward veto powers are conditioned by the level of public support for the legislation passed by Congress. Again, first consider the results of the environmental policy experiment. Approval for the use of a veto decreases significantly as larger shares of the public support the legislation passed by Congress. Compared to the condition in which a *Small minority* of the public supports Congress' policy position, the proportion of respondents who approve of the use of unilateral action decreased by .42, .28, and .12 when the legislation was supported by a *Large majority*, *Small majority*, or *Large minority* of the public.¹³ We find similar results for the trade and travel policy experiments. Across both, approval of the use of the veto decreased significantly as greater shares of the public agreed with the legislation passed by Congress rather

¹²In the *Small minority* condition, 23% and 33% of respondents approved of unilateral action in the trade and travel policy experiments, respectively.

¹³Sixty-five percent of respondents in the baseline condition approved of unilateral action.

Figure 1: Public Opinion and Attitudes toward Unilateral Action

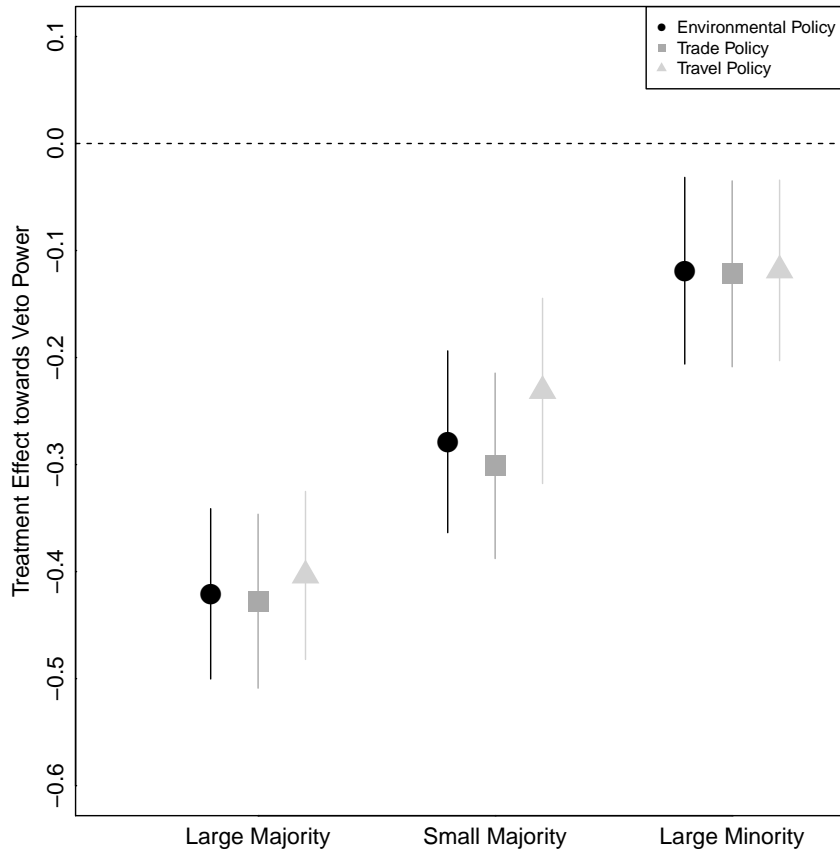


Plotted points show the treatment effects relative to the baseline condition in which a small minority of the public supports the president’s policy position. Vertical lines indicate the 95 percent confidence intervals.

than with the president’s position.¹⁴

¹⁴In the trade policy experiment, approval of the veto decreased by .43, .30, and .12 relative to the baseline condition when a *Large majority*, *Small majority*, or *Large minority* of the public, respectively, supported the legislation passed by Congress (67% of respondents in the *Small minority* condition approved of the use of the veto). Similarly, in the travel policy experiment, approval of the veto decreased by .40, .23, and .12 relative to the baseline condition when a *Large majority*, *Small majority*, or *Large minority* of the public, respectively, supported the president’s

Figure 2: Public Opinion and Support for Presidential Vetos



Plotted points show the treatment effects relative to the baseline condition in which a small minority of the public supports the legislation pass by Congress. Vertical lines indicate the 95 percent confidence intervals.

More speculatively, the results from our studies provide some evidence of how norms of majoritarianism shape the American public's views about policymaking and the distribution of political power. Examining the raw level of support for unilateral action across each of the policy areas and treatment conditions, we find that a minority of survey respondents (generally around 40%) supported the exercise of unilateral powers when a *large minority* (about 48%) of Americans position (66% of respondents in the *Small minority* condition approved of the use of the veto).

agreed with the president’s policy position. However, these figures increase dramatically — by 18 to 20 percentage points — when a *small majority* (about 52%) of the public agreed with the president. This large increase in support for unilateral power that corresponds with a relatively small difference in the level of public approval suggests that Americans’ beliefs about political power are influenced by their commitment to the principle of majority rule. We also find similar results when evaluating support for the veto powers, where respondents are much more supportive of presidents issuing vetoes when a large minority rather than a small majority of the public supports the legislation passed by Congress.¹⁵ While we do not wish to overinterpret these patterns given the non-representative nature of MTurk samples, the results suggest that Americans view presidential power on the basis of whether it advances majority opinion.

The results presented above are robust across a range of supplementary analyses. First, we obtain substantively similar patterns of results when estimating logit models of support for presidential power that account for the demographic and political characteristics of the respondents. These results are shown in Tables A.4 and A.5. For each set of experiments, we continue to find that attitudes toward presidential power are conditioned by public support for the president’s policy position even when controlling for other factors that could also shape attitudes toward presidential power.

We also find that our results are not driven by subsets of respondents based upon their partisanship, ideology, or political knowledge. Figure A.2 in the Supplementary Appendix shows the results when distinguishing respondents based on their partisanship. In contrast with existing literature (Christenson and Kriner 2016), our findings provide little evidence of partisan differences in how respondents reacted to our experimental treatment conditions. While we occasionally find some differences in the level of approval of presidential power among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, each group of respondents reacted to the treatment conditions in largely the same way and expressed greater approval of the use of presidential power as larger

¹⁵These results are shown in Table A.3.

percentages of the public shared the president's policy view.

Similarly, our findings are largely consistent across respondents with different ideologies and, perhaps, policy preferences. Figure A.3 presents treatment effects by respondents who identified as liberal, moderate, and conservative. In general, while conservatives tended to approve of veto powers at higher levels than moderates and liberals, and liberals tended to approve of unilateral powers at higher rates than moderates and conservatives, each group of respondents reacted to our experiment in similar ways. Despite historical differences in how people of different ideologies viewed the nature of executive power, we find that liberals, moderates, and conservatives alike reported greater approval for veto and unilateral powers as increasing shares of the public supported the president's policy positions.

Finally, we do not find important differences in our results based upon political sophistication, which could affect the knowledge respondents have about the conditions under which presidents can exercise their powers or the constitutionality of their utilization. As a proxy for political sophistication, we distinguished respondents with and without a college degree and present the results in Figure A.4. Generally, people with higher education levels are more likely to approve of unilateral action but are more likely to oppose veto powers. However, these differences are relatively small in magnitude. More importantly, though, we find that the treatment conditions had similar effects on both groups of respondents, and indicate that our findings are not driven by subsets of respondents with particular educational backgrounds and who are likely to have different levels of political sophistication.

The results shown above show that public attitudes toward presidential power are shaped by the configuration of preferences among Congress, the president, and the public. When the president and Congress disagree, individual-level approval of the exercise of veto and unilateral powers depends on whether the mass public's policy views are aligned with the president or with Congress. As a larger share of the public supports the legislation passed by Congress, approval of the use of the veto decreases significantly. And when Congress refused to pass legislation

preferred by the president, public approval for unilateral powers increases significantly as larger shares of the public support the president's policy position. Moreover, the magnitudes of the findings are considerable, with differences in approval of the veto and unilateral powers reaching upwards of 40 percentage points when large majorities of the public support the president's position rather than Congress's position. Across three policy domains and examples of the president's use of positive and negative powers, the experimental results shown here provide strong causal evidence about how individual attitudes toward presidential power depend on whether the president's use of power advances public opinion.

Evidence from Public Opinion Polling

In our second set of analyses, we turn to public opinion polling to further explore the conditional relationship between policy-specific support and support for the exercise of presidential powers. Namely, we examine changes in presidential approval after the issuance of a veto or the exercise of unilateral power. We consider these changes in light of overall support for the action that the president took. As in our previous study, we examine if the public penalizes a president for exercising power as a function of mass support for that particular policy initiative.

To construct our dataset, we conducted an exhaustive search of the Roper Center's iPOLL polling database. The database houses over 600,000 survey questions encompassing surveys from the 1930s to the present day, and includes polls conducted by nearly all major American survey research organizations. We attempted to identify all instances where presidents exercised either veto or unilateral powers and the public was polled about either their support for the policy, the action implemented, or their approval of the president's action.

The use of real-world opinion polling provides clear empirical benefits. First, drawing upon survey data collected in real-world policy contexts and through nationally representative sampling, rather than an online pool of survey respondents, helps to ensure greater external valid-

ity in the findings from our survey experiment. Second, these data provide a way to probe the consequences of the findings of our survey experiments. Most notably, exploring the impact of presidents' uses of power on their approval ratings situates our findings within the decades of research that have established the electoral (Fiorina 1981) and policymaking (Canes-Wrone and De Marchi 2002; Edwards 1976; Wood 2009) implications of presidential approval.

Our search provided us with polling data on nine specific issues from the Clinton, Bush, and Obama presidencies. Overall, the polling data reflect the opinions of thousands of survey respondents included in the polls. Though nine cases is not an especially large number, they vary in the nature of the powers exercised by presidents, such as President Obama's unilateral directives related to immigration reform and President George W. Bush's veto of federal funding for stem cell research. The issues also cover a reasonably representative sample of issue domains, such as economic policy (including a tax relief bill considered in 1999), social issues (such as George W. Bush's veto of federal funding for stem cell research), and foreign affairs (including a bill for funding the Iraq war considered in 2007). In addition, these nine cases include relatively high-profile instances of conflict or potential conflict between Congress and the president. Descriptive information of the polls we utilize are shown in Tables B.1 and B.2, and specific question wordings are listed in Tables B.3 and B.4.

The patterns found in the polling data closely parallel the main findings from our survey experiments. Table 3 reports levels of public support for the six issues from our iPOLL search for which we identified questions that measured support for a particular issue and approval of the president taking action on that issue. For instance, as the entries in the first row show, 41.6% of respondents indicated they supported the budget bill passed by Congress in 1995, and 65.6% of respondents reported that they approved of the president vetoing that legislation. In comparison, 68.2% of respondents supported legislation to construct the Keystone XL pipeline in 2015, while only 25.2% of respondents said they would approve of President Obama vetoing this legislation. Overall, we find a very strong negative correlation ($r = -0.82$) between public support for legis-

lation and support for the usage of a presidential veto. The results from this series of polls help validate the findings from our survey experiments and suggest that increases in public support for a piece of legislation are mirrored by a nearly one-to-one decrease in public support of the president’s usage of a veto to prevent the legislation from becoming law.

Table 3: Polling Data, Levels of Legislation and Veto Support

Issue Area	Year	% Support Legislation	% Support Veto
Budget	1995	41.6	65.6
Tax relief	1999	68.7	32.3
Stem cell research	2007	62.5	32.6
Iraq funding	2007	52.6	46.9
SCHIP	2007	67.0	50.0
Keystone XL pipeline	2015	68.2	25.2

Note: Correlation of % *Support Legislation* and % *Support Veto* = -0.82.

We use the polling data to consider the consequences of presidential action for public approval of the president. Specifically, we study how public approval of the president responds to the president’s exercise of power to make policy change, conditional upon levels of public support for the policy itself. We expect that presidents who use veto or unilateral powers in ways consistent with the public policy preferences experience increases in presidential approval, while presidents who exercise powers in ways that conflict with public preferences experience decreases in approval.

As a motivating example, consider President George W. Bush’s 2007 veto of legislation allowing federal funding of stem cell research, one of the more salient domestic policy issues of the Bush presidency. Respondents were polled on both their approval of the policy itself and

whether they would approve of the president vetoing legislation that included the funding. In an ABC News/Washington Post poll conducted in April 2007, 60 percent of Americans expressed support for the legislation, with 35 percent opposed. By this indication, the public approved of the bill and, by extension, were more aligned with Congress' preferences rather than with Bush's preferences, who opposed the measure. Bush vetoed the bill on June 20. Consequently, in accordance with our expectations, the president's approval rating dropped from 36 percent in April to 29 percent in July. While this drop in approval cannot be attributed solely to the president's veto, we leverage the other cases we identified in the polling data to discern whether similar patterns emerge across issue areas and time to provide more systematic evidence of a conditional relationship between presidential actions and approval ratings.

We model our analysis on that of Groseclose and McCarty (2001), who examine the change in a president's approval level after the issuance of a veto. To construct our measure of the change in public approval of the president in response to taking action, we used the Gallup presidential approval ratings that corresponded temporally to the polling questions identified through our iPoll search. We compare these approval ratings to those from the Gallup poll conducted immediately following the action the president took in relation to the issue.¹⁶ We then subtract the pre-action approval rating from the post-action approval rating to construct a measure where positive values denote increases in approval ratings and negative values indicate decreases in approval ratings.¹⁷

Our results are presented graphically in Figure 3. The x -axis denotes the proportion of sur-

¹⁶In the instance where the president did not veto the legislation, we use the date at which the legislation was signed into law by the president.

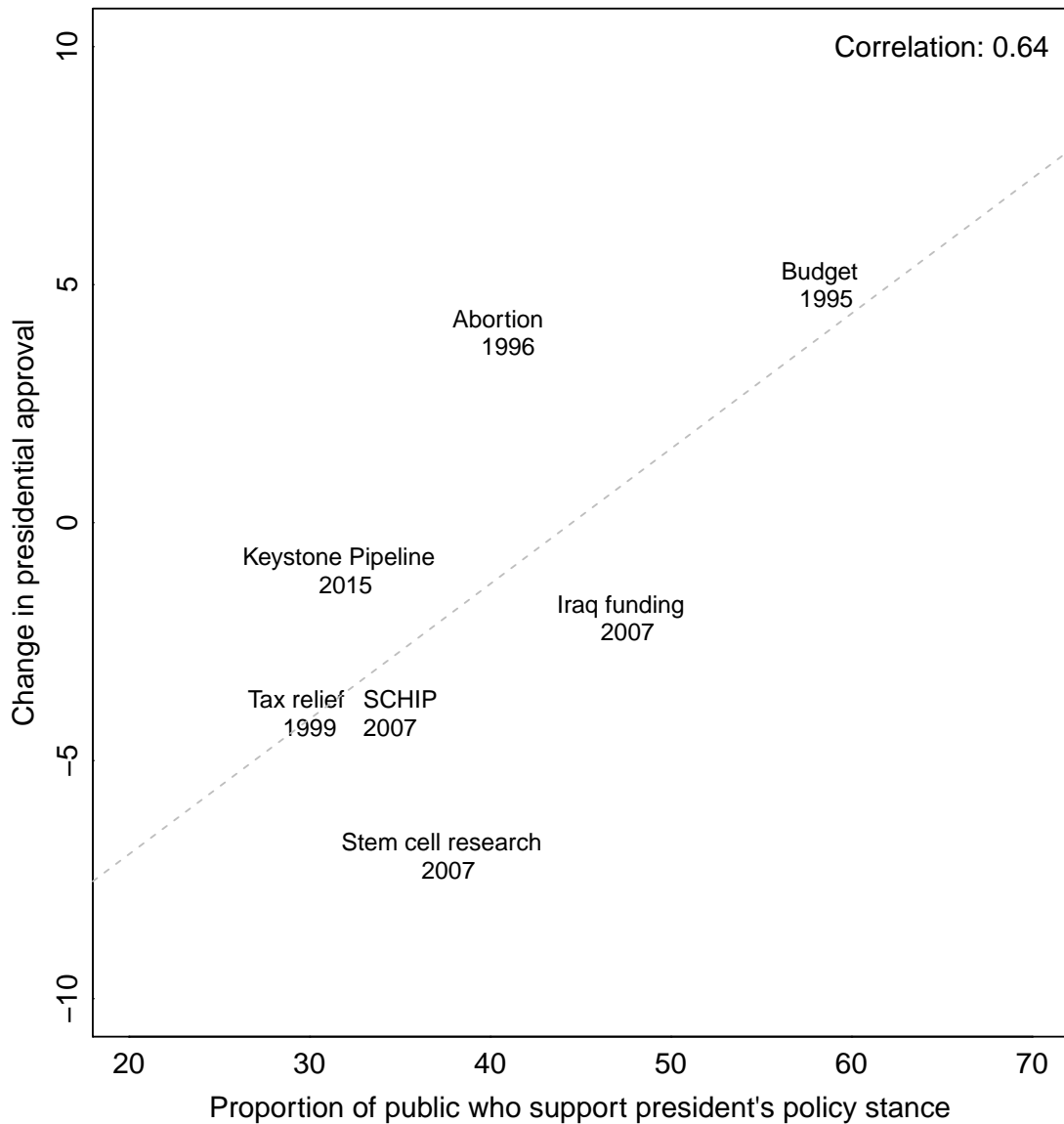
¹⁷For example, the polling question we found regarding public support for the 2007 stem cell bill was asked from April 12-15, so we utilize the Gallup poll conducted from April 13-15. Then, as Bush vetoed the 2007 stem cell bill on June 20, we utilize the Gallup approval survey conducted from July 6-8.

vey respondents whose policy position on the issue at hand was congruent with the action the president took on that issue.¹⁸ The *y*-axis gives the change in presidential approval, with higher values signifying greater increases in post-action approval. The general pattern shown in the figure is consistent with our theoretical expectations: as the proportion of public support increases for the president's position, the president experiences a more positive change in approval ratings after exercising power to secure that outcome. The correlation between the two variables is quite strong at 0.64, as denoted graphically by the dashed gray bivariate regression line.¹⁹ In contrast to the findings of Groseclose and McCarty (2001) but in line with our theoretical argument, we find that presidents do not face a fixed cost as a result of the utilization of their presidential powers. Instead, public response to the president's issuance of a veto or executive order remains contingent upon the level of public support for the policy the president's action endeavors to secure. Our results further suggest that the public may not always react negatively to the use of the veto or the exercise of unilateral powers, but instead indicate that these responses may depend on whether the president's action is consistent with public opinion on that issue.

¹⁸For example, among respondents who held an opinion on the 2007 stem cell research bill, 62.5 percent supported the legislation. Because President Bush opposed the bill (and vetoed it), 37.5 percent of respondents with an expressed opinion on the issue supported the president's policy stance.

¹⁹We report the results of a similar analysis focusing on the relationship between changes in approval and levels of support for the president's usage of his veto and unilateral powers in Figure B.1 of the Supplementary Appendix. The findings and conclusions drawn from this analysis – with a correlation of 0.67 – parallel those of the analysis reported in the main text.

Figure 3: Relationship Between Policy Support and Changes in Presidential Approval



The plot shows the change in public approval of the president from before and after the usage of his presidential powers. Larger values along the x -axis indicate a larger proportion of the public that supported the president's policy action, whereas larger values along the y -axis indicate more positive changes in approval from before to after the action. Issues are plotted with their name and year. The grey dashed line represents a simple bivariate regression of the change in approval regressed on the proportion of the public supporting the action.

The results of our analysis of large-scale public opinion polls reinforce and extend the findings from our survey experiments. Across a series of salient policy debates over the course of three presidencies, we find that public opinion toward the exercise of presidential power is highly correlated with the public's views on the relevant policy issue. Moreover, we find that public response toward the use of power is associated with whether presidents take action that is consistent with or in opposition to the public's policy preferences. While presidents may indeed pay costs under some circumstances for taking action when Congress and the president are in disagreement, presidents may be able to increase their standing with the public even under conditions of institutional conflict by refusing to go along with Congress and acting in ways that advances public opinion.

Conclusion

Americans' views of the presidency are deeply conflicted. On the one hand, while Americans may not always hold their elected officials in high regard, they tend to view the country's political institutions with reverence (Caldeira and Gibson 1992; Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2003). When it comes to tending the nation's business, Americans prefer consensus rather than conflict among officeholders and institutions (see, e.g., Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1996, 147). At the same time, Americans place high demands on their elected officials, and nowhere are these pressures more extraordinary than they are with the presidency. The separation of powers poses challenges for a president's ability to respond to public expectations, however, particularly when an oppositional Congress can thwart a president's legislative agenda at every turn.

Our results show that Americans' acceptance of the exercise of presidential power is affected by their support for the policies presidents achieve through its use. When the public's preferences are aligned with the president's policy objectives, large majorities support the president's use of power to achieve those goals. These findings apply both to negative as well as positive

powers, and suggest that the public's demand for democratic responsiveness outweighs any potential concerns about the proper bounds of the separation of powers. Our results further show that the public's response to the use of presidential power depends on their views toward the policy in question. Presidential approval ratings respond positively when the president uses power to advance policies the public supports, but suffer when the president advances unpopular policies. Our results revise the findings presented in Groseclose and McCarty (2001) and Reeves and Rogowski (2016a) and suggest that presidents need not always fear downgrades to their public standings when using presidential power to achieve their objectives. Our findings further suggest that president need not always be victimized vis-à-vis Congress by blame-game politics; when the president (rather than Congress) is aligned with the public's policy views, the president stands to gain public approval when acting to block legislation the public supports and when acting unilaterally to achieve policies Congress would not otherwise.

Our findings add complexity to debates over presidential power that have long operated within a public law perspective. For more than two centuries, scholars, legal experts, and politicians have debated the proper scope of presidential power. Virtually all the conclusions expressed in these debates hinge on normative positions about the desirability of executive power and interpretations of republican theory and the intentions of the American Founders. Presidents, however, sometimes are uniquely situated to advance policy agendas on their own. By exercising their formal powers to prevent unpopular legislation from becoming law or creating policies unilaterally that Congress opposes, presidents can bring the policies in line with public preferences.

Our study builds upon a body of work (e.g., Canes-Wrone 2006) that considers the role that public opinion plays in determining the incentives that shape how presidents engage in policy-making. One implication from our research is that presidents may have the greatest incentives to push the boundaries of their powers when doing so in circumstances where their actions are in service of the public's policy preferences and when other policymaking institutions are unwilling or unable to act upon them. Under these circumstances, concerns about the normative

desirability of presidential power may need to be balanced by the ability of presidents to singularly bring about democratic responsiveness. This suggests that the public acceptability of the use of presidential power may serve as another important basis for adjudicating concerns about executive overreach and the separation of powers.

On the other hand, however, our findings raise potential concerns regarding the incentives for presidential pandering. While our findings indicate that presidents may receive broad public support for acting on their own to implement policies consistent with public opinion, any potential advantages to increased democratic responsiveness could potentially come at some cost to the public interest. For instance, Canes-Wrone, Herron, and Shotts (2001) show that reelection-seeking executives may under certain conditions endorse policies supported by the public but that have deleterious consequences. Based on our research, similar incentives could lead presidents to claim or exercise broader powers to implement policies with public support but which are not in the public interest. Future research could more thoroughly study how the incentives for presidents to exercise or expand presidential power affect the incentives for presidents to support policies whose consequences further the public interest.

Finally, our results have some important limitations. While our survey experiments enabled us to hold constant a range of important potential confounding factors — including the identity of the president, the specific policy proposals, and the contextual circumstances — that may also influence public attitudes toward presidential power, the design necessarily abstracts away from many of the other details that accompany policymaking. Experiments like ours offer a powerful design for identifying causal relations between presidential action and public response, but represent only a starting point. The results of our analysis of polling results provides some evidence of our experiment's external validity, but additional research, both experimental and observational, is necessarily to more fully account for the complexities of policymaking and interbranch dynamics that shape the relationship between political institutions and mass publics.

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A Supplementary Appendix: MTurk Experiments

Table A.1: MTurk Sample Descriptive Statistics: Executive Order Experiment

Statistic	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Democrat	0.607	0.489	0	1
Republican	0.243	0.429	0	1
Independent	0.119	0.324	0	1
Conservative	0.221	0.415	0	1
Moderate	0.240	0.427	0	1
Liberal	0.539	0.499	0	1
Male	0.612	0.488	0	1
Black	0.048	0.213	0	1
Hispanic	0.048	0.213	0	1
White	0.790	0.408	0	1
Income Below 25K	0.200	0.400	0	1
Income 25-50K	0.290	0.454	0	1
Income 50-75K	0.238	0.426	0	1
Income 75-100K	0.146	0.353	0	1
Income 100-200K	0.117	0.322	0	1
Income 200K+	0.009	0.094	0	1
Age 18-29	0.473	0.500	0	1
Age 30-44	0.432	0.496	0	1
Age 45-59	0.085	0.279	0	1
Age 60+	0.010	0.099	0	1
Some HS	0.004	0.063	0	1
HS Degree	0.083	0.276	0	1
Some College	0.315	0.465	0	1
College Degree	0.457	0.498	0	1
Post-Graduate Degree	0.141	0.348	0	1

Table A.2: MTurk Sample Descriptive Statistics: Veto Power Experiment

Statistic	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Democrat	0.584	0.493	0	1
Republican	0.262	0.440	0	1
Independent	0.154	0.361	0	1
Conservative	0.233	0.423	0	1
Moderate	0.253	0.435	0	1
Liberal	0.514	0.500	0	1
Male	0.558	0.497	0	1
Black	0.062	0.242	0	1
Hispanic	0.065	0.247	0	1
White	0.739	0.439	0	1
Income Below 25K	0.200	0.401	0	1
Income 25-50K	0.307	0.461	0	1
Income 50-75K	0.249	0.433	0	1
Income 75-100K	0.135	0.342	0	1
Income 100-200K	0.099	0.299	0	1
Income 200K+	0.009	0.095	0	1
Age 18-29	0.470	0.499	0	1
Age 30-44	0.426	0.495	0	1
Age 45-59	0.092	0.289	0	1
Age 60+	0.012	0.109	0	1
Some HS	0.005	0.071	0	1
HS Degree	0.099	0.299	0	1
Some College	0.352	0.478	0	1
College Degree	0.414	0.493	0	1
Post-Graduate Degree	0.129	0.336	0	1

Table A.3: The Level of Support for Presidential Power

	Large Majority	Small Majority	Large Minority	Small Minority
<i>Unilateral power</i>				
Environmental Policy	0.77 (0.03)	0.59 (0.03)	0.41 (0.03)	0.31 (0.03)
Trade Policy	0.64 (0.03)	0.53 (0.03)	0.34 (0.03)	0.23 (0.03)
Travel Policy	0.74 (0.03)	0.59 (0.03)	0.39 (0.03)	0.33 (0.03)
<i>Veto power</i>				
Environmental Policy	0.23 (0.03)	0.37 (0.03)	0.53 (0.03)	0.65 (0.03)
Trade Policy	0.24 (0.03)	0.36 (0.03)	0.54 (0.03)	0.67 (0.03)
Travel Policy	0.26 (0.03)	0.43 (0.03)	0.54 (0.03)	0.66 (0.03)

Entries are the proportion of respondents who approved of the use of unilateral and veto powers across each treatment condition and policy area. Standard errors are in parentheses.

Table A.4: Logit Analysis of Public Approval of Unilateral Action

	<i>Dependent variable: Approval of Presidential Action</i>		
	Environmental Policy	Trade Policy	Travel Policy
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Large Majority	2.242*** (0.228)	1.901*** (0.211)	1.732*** (0.204)
Small Majority	1.293*** (0.201)	1.395*** (0.202)	1.105*** (0.198)
Large Minority	0.527*** (0.197)	0.564*** (0.209)	0.266 (0.194)
Democrat	0.596** (0.237)	0.772*** (0.244)	0.318 (0.233)
Republican	-0.362 (0.270)	-0.047 (0.275)	-0.206 (0.261)
Education	-0.083 (0.090)	-0.018 (0.088)	-0.219** (0.087)
Ideology	0.175* (0.098)	0.008 (0.098)	-0.087 (0.095)
Income	0.018 (0.058)	0.052 (0.057)	0.057 (0.055)
White	-0.286 (0.178)	-0.219 (0.173)	-0.327* (0.171)
Age	-0.081 (0.109)	-0.332*** (0.109)	-0.138 (0.105)
Male	-0.127 (0.149)	-0.126 (0.147)	-0.092 (0.143)
Constant	-1.090** (0.542)	-1.024* (0.532)	0.644 (0.519)
Observations	972	972	972
Log Likelihood	-575.630	-591.679	-611.714

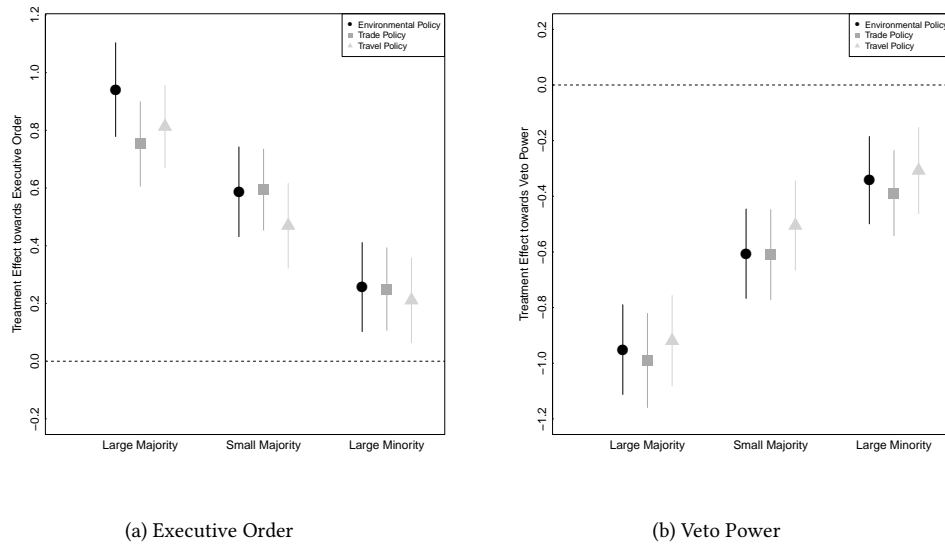
Entries are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is whether respondents approved of the president's use of unilateral action. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 (two-tailed tests).

Table A.5: Logit Analysis of Public Approval of Veto Power

	<i>Dependent variable: Approval of Presidential Action</i>		
	Environmental Policy	Trade Policy	Travel Policy
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Large Majority	-1.829*** (0.204)	-1.888*** (0.208)	-1.786*** (0.197)
Small Majority	-1.141*** (0.189)	-1.275*** (0.198)	-1.009*** (0.191)
Large Minority	-0.466** (0.188)	-0.530*** (0.192)	-0.551*** (0.186)
Democrat	-0.059 (0.210)	0.062 (0.212)	0.439** (0.211)
Republican	-0.147 (0.240)	0.113 (0.241)	0.312 (0.240)
Education	-0.031 (0.084)	0.135 (0.084)	-0.019 (0.083)
Ideology	-0.001 (0.089)	0.153* (0.090)	0.097 (0.089)
Income	-0.002 (0.057)	-0.075 (0.057)	0.050 (0.057)
White	0.009 (0.158)	0.097 (0.160)	-0.027 (0.157)
Age	-0.156 (0.102)	-0.093 (0.102)	-0.066 (0.099)
Male	0.157 (0.140)	0.324** (0.142)	0.059 (0.140)
Constant	0.949* (0.488)	-0.255 (0.492)	0.059 (0.478)
Observations	991	990	992
Log Likelihood	-623.418	-618.796	-632.827

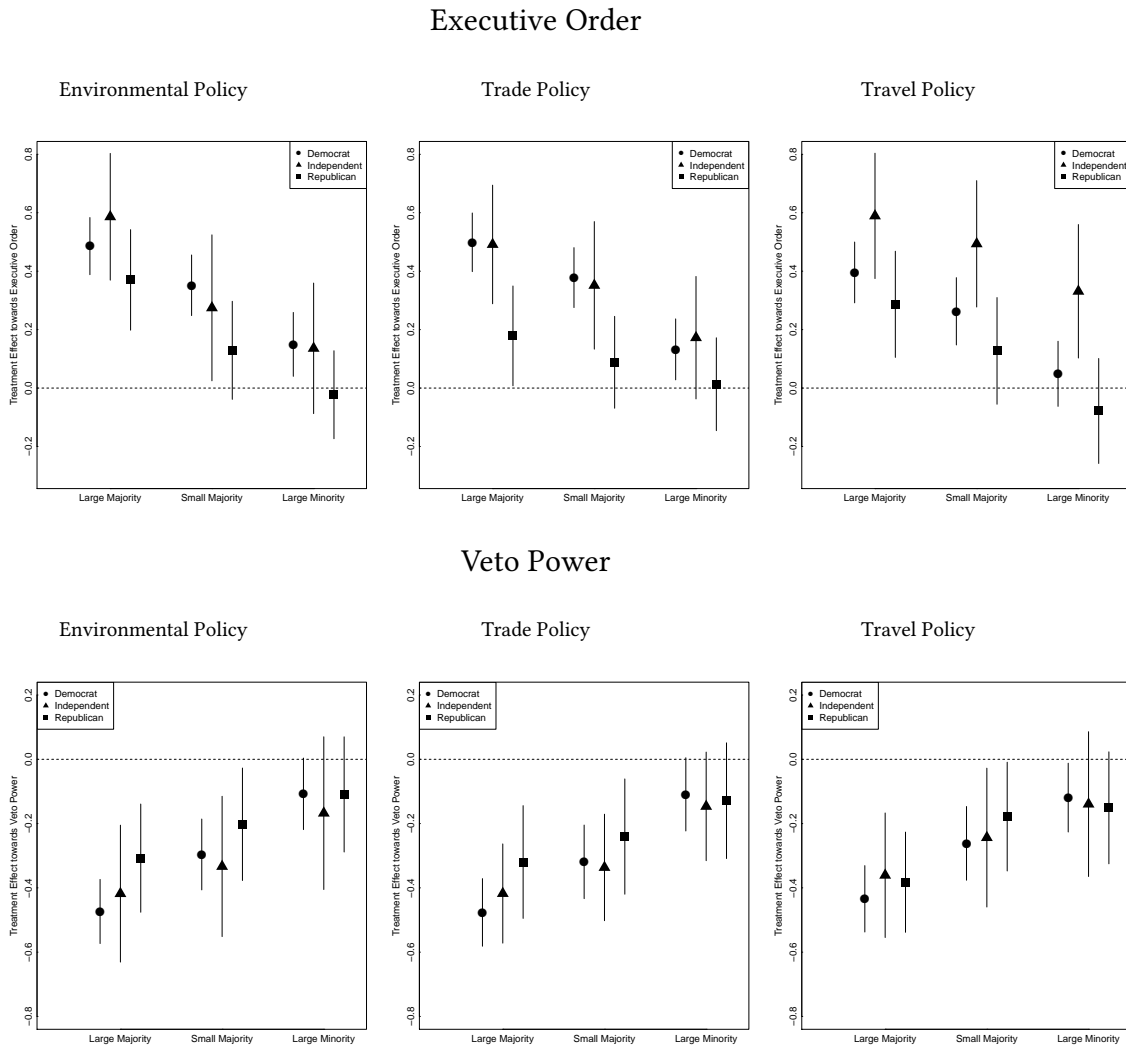
Entries are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is whether respondents approved of the president's use of his veto powers. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 (two-tailed tests).

Figure A.1: Public Opinion and Support for Presidential Actions (4-point Scale)



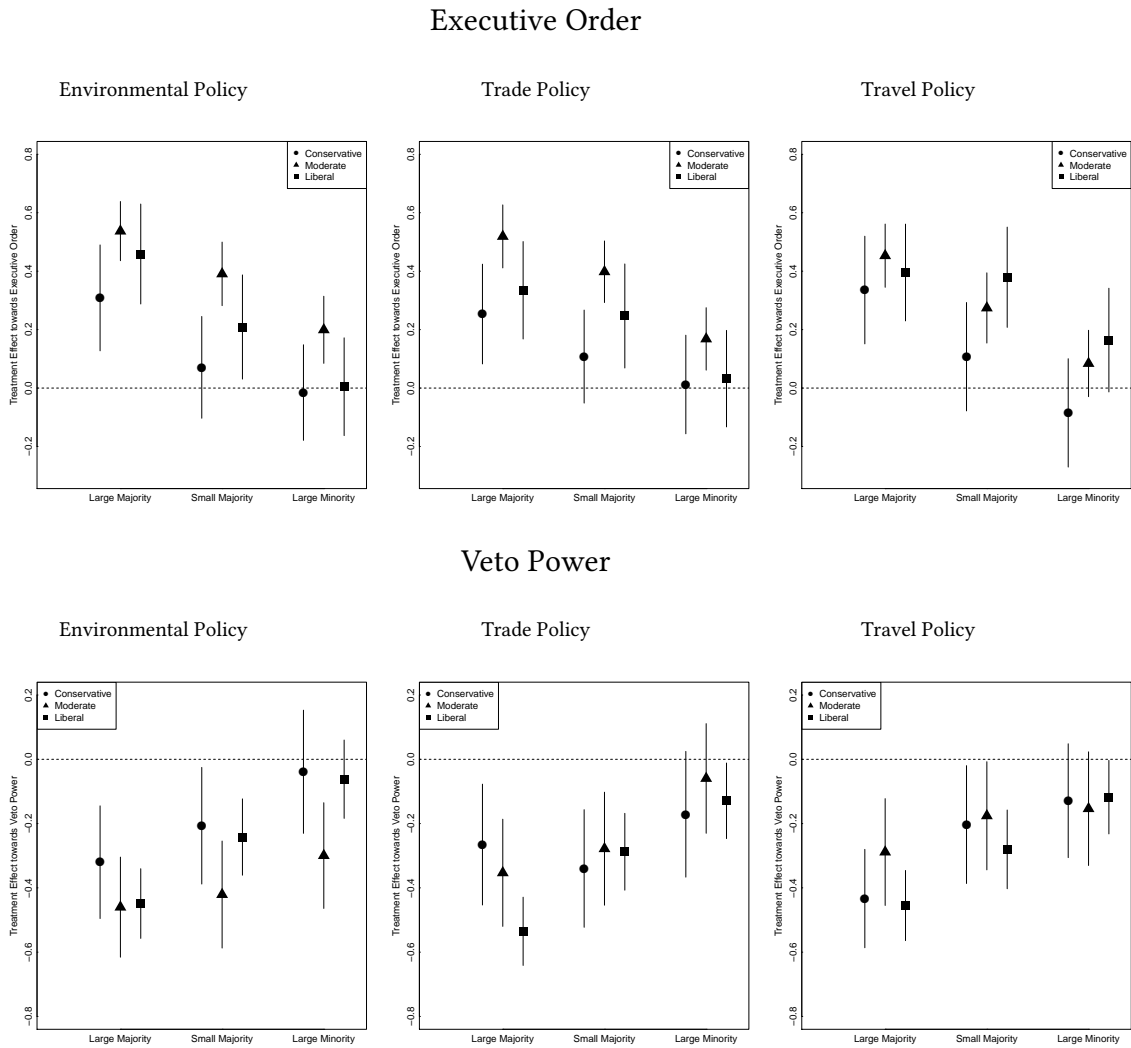
Plotted points show the treatment effects relative to the baseline condition in which a small minority of the public supports the legislation pass by Congress. Vertical lines indicate the 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure A.2: Public Opinion and Support for Presidential Actions by Party Identification



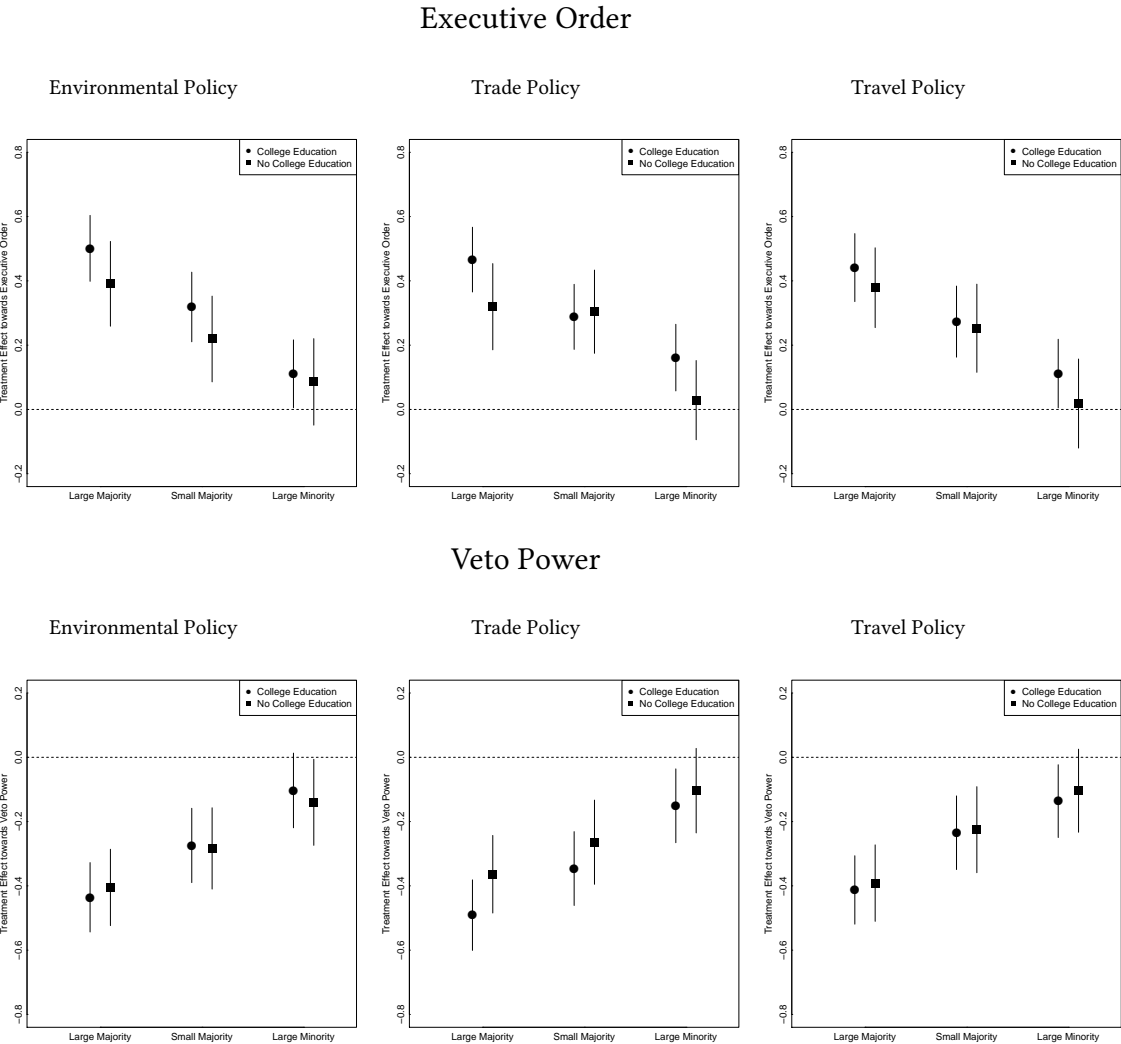
Plotted points show the treatment effects relative to the baseline condition in which a small minority of the public supports the legislation pass by Congress. Vertical lines indicate the 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure A.3: Public Opinion and Support for Presidential Actions by Ideology



Plotted points show the treatment effects relative to the baseline condition in which a small minority of the public supports the legislation pass by Congress. Vertical lines indicate the 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure A.4: Public Opinion and Support for Presidential Actions by Political Sophistication



Plotted points show the treatment effects relative to the baseline condition in which a small minority of the public supports the legislation pass by Congress. Vertical lines indicate the 95 percent confidence intervals.

B Supplementary Appendix: Public Opinion Polls

Table B.1: Executive Action Approval Polls

Bill/Action	Issue Area	Year	Polling Org.	Sample Size	Date of Survey	Date of Action
H.R. 2491	Budget	1995	NBC News/Wall Street Journal	1,465	10/27-10/31/1995	12/06/1995
H.R. 2488	Tax relief	1999	Gallup	1,048	08/03-08/04/1999	09/23/1999
H.R. 2356	Campaign finance	fi- 2001	NBC News/Wall Street Journal	806	06/23-06/25/2001	No veto
H.R. 1585	Iraq funding	2007	New els/Winston Group	1,000	04/25-04/26/2007	05/01/2007
S. 5	Stem cell search	re- 2007	Gallup/USA Today	1,007	04/13-04/15/2007	06/20/2007
H.R. 3963	SCHIP	2007	New els/Winston Group	1,000	09/29-09/30/2007	10/03/2007
Memorandum, 11/21/2014	Immigration	2014	Quinnipiac University	1,623	11/18-11/23/2014	11/21/2014
S.1	Keystone-XL pipeline	2015	Fox News	1,018	01/11-01/13/2015	02/24/2015

Table B.2: Issue Approval Polls

Bill/Action	Issue Area	Year	Polling Org.	Sample Size	Date of Survey	Date of Action
H.R. 2491	Budget	1995	NBC News/Wall Street Journal	1,465	10/27-10/31/1995	12/06/1995
H.R. 1833	Abortion	1996	Gallup	1,001	04/25-04/28/1996	12/06/1995
H.R. 2488	Tax relief	1999	Wirthlin World-wide	789	08/06-08/09/1999	09/23/1999
H.R. 2356	Campaign finance	fi- 2001	Time/CNN/Harris Interactive	1,025	03/21-03/22/2001	No veto
H.R. 1585	Iraq funding	2007	ABC News/Washington Post	1,141	4/12-4/15/2007	05/01/2007
S. 5	Stem cell search	re- 2007	ABC News/Washington Post	1,141	4/12-4/15/2007	06/20/2007
H.R. 3963	SCHIP	2007	Public Opinion Strategies	900	08/04-08/07/2007	10/03/2007
S.1	Keystone pipeline	XL 2015	CBS News	1,001	01/09-01/12/2015	02/24/2015

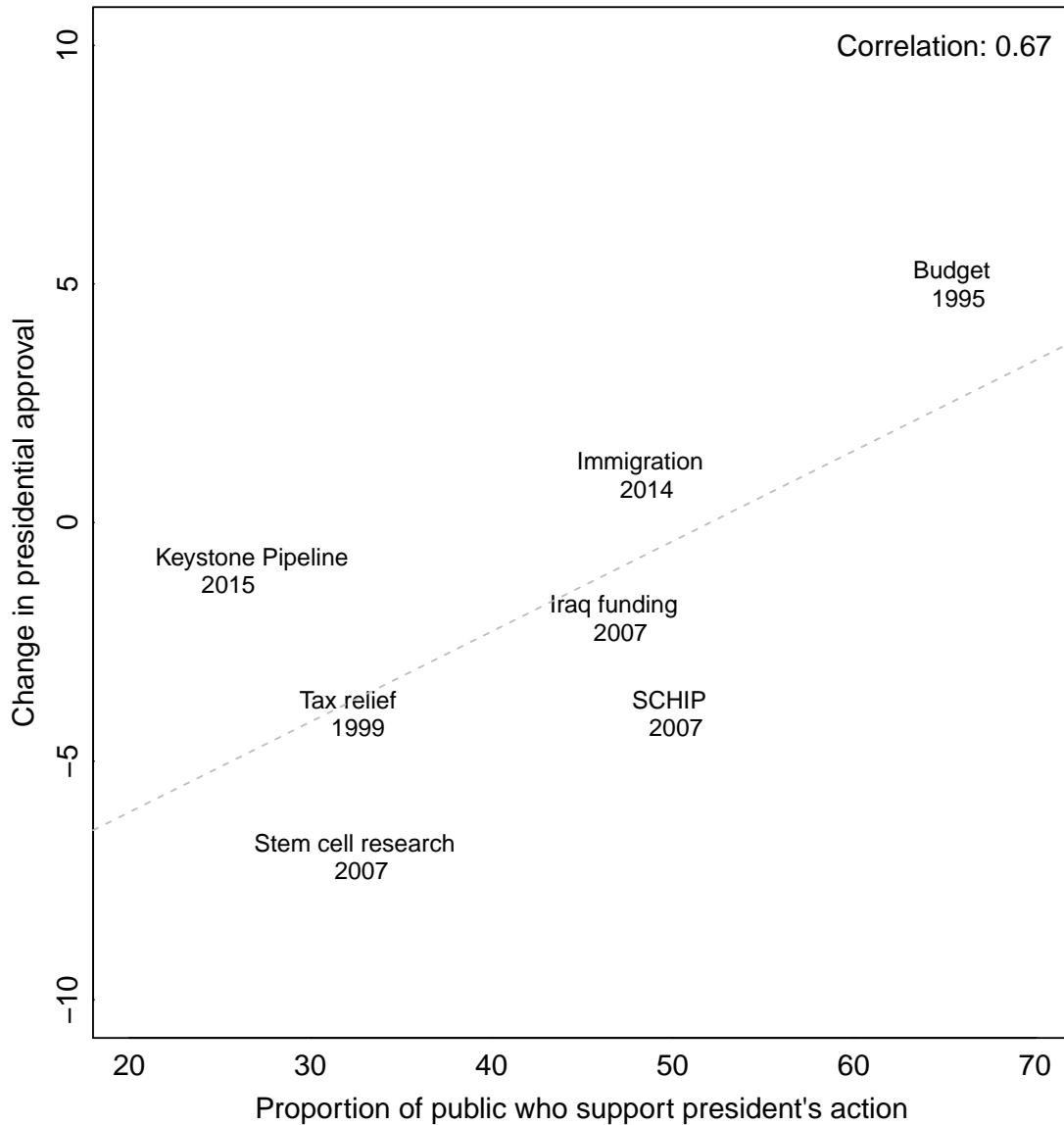
Table B.3: Poll Wordings

Issue Area	Text
Budget	<p>Veto: As you may know, Republicans in Congress are in the process of passing a federal budget that they say will balance the budget in seven years and reduce taxes for most families. President (Bill) Clinton says he will veto the budget because he believes it cuts too much from certain domestic programs and gives tax breaks mostly to the wealthy. In your view, should the President sign or veto this budget?</p> <p>Issue: Which of these would you prefer – reducing spending on Medicare by two hundred and seventy billion dollars over the next seven years, with all the savings going to deficit reduction, or maintaining Medicare spending at its current level, even if that means the budget deficit is not reduced?</p>
Abortion	<p>Issue: (Suppose that on election day this year you could vote on key issues... Please tell me whether you would vote for or against each one of the following propositions.): A law which would make illegal the use of an abortion procedure conducted in the last three months of pregnancy known as 'partial birth abortions', except in cases necessary to save the life of the mother.</p>
Tax relief	<p>Veto: If Congress passes a Republican-sponsored bill to cut taxes by approximately 800 billion dollars over the next 10 years, do you think President (Bill) Clinton should sign that bill into law, or should he veto the bill so it does not become law?</p> <p>Issue: As you may or may not know, Congress recently passed a tax cut that reduces income tax rates by as much as 7%, cuts the marriage penalty, cuts inheritance taxes, and reduces taxes on what is commonly called capital gains—which are profits made from investments, selling of a home, or other capital items. Do you approve or disapprove of this tax cut?</p>
Campaign finance	<p>Veto: During the spring (2001), the United States Senate passed a campaign finance bill sponsored by Senators John McCain and Russ Feingold that would ban so-called soft money contributions to the two national political parties, increase individual contribution limits, and restrict issue advertisements run by corporations, interest groups, and unions close to an election. If the bill reaches President (George W.) Bush, do you think that he should sign the bill or veto the bill, or do you not care either way?</p> <p>Issue: Based on what you have heard or read, do you favor or oppose the (John) McCain–(Russell) Feingold Bill that deals with campaign financing currently being debated in the Senate?</p>

Table B.4: Poll Wordings (continued)

Issue Area	Text
Iraq funding	<p>Veto: President (George W.) Bush has said that if Congress sends him a bill funding our troops that handcuffs our generals, adds billions of dollars in unrelated spending, and begins the process of pulling out of Iraq by an arbitrary deadline, he will veto the bill. Do you agree or disagree with his position?</p> <p>Issue: Do you support or oppose legislation that would continue funding for the war, but also set a deadline of no later than August 2008, for the withdrawal of US (United States) forces from Iraq?</p>
Stem cell research	<p>Veto: As you may know, President (George W.) Bush has said he will veto a bill to expand federal funding for embryonic stem cell research. Do you think Bush should – or should not – veto this bill?</p> <p>Issue: Do you support or oppose loosening the current restrictions of federal funding for embryonic stem cell research?</p>
SCHIP	<p>Veto: If President (George W.) Bush decided to veto this (children’s health) bill, would you favor or oppose his veto?</p> <p>Issue: Now there is also a proposal being considered in Congress to expand SCHIP (State Children’s Health Insurance Program) to cover even more uninsured children. This proposal would expand SCHIP to provide coverage for an additional four million uninsured children for five years at an additional cost of thirty-five billion dollars. Would you favor or oppose Congress voting to expand SCHIP?</p>
Immigration	<p>Executive Action: If Congress does not act to address the immigration issue, do you think Barack Obama should or should not take action using executive orders?</p>
Keystone XL pipeline	<p>Veto: Do you think President (Barack) Obama should sign or veto legislation approving the building of the Keystone XL Pipeline that would transport oil from Canada to refineries in the United States?</p> <p>Issue: Do you favor or oppose building the Keystone XL pipeline that would transport oil from Canada through the United States to refineries in Texas?</p>

Figure B.1: Relationship Between Support for Presidential Powers and Changes in Presidential Approval



The plot shows the change in public approval of the president from before and after the usage of his presidential powers. Larger values along the x-axis indicate a larger proportion of the public that supported the president's usage of his veto or executive order powers, whereas larger values along the y-axis indicate more positive changes in approval from before to after the action. Issues are plotted with their name and year. The grey dashed line represents a simple bivariate regression of the change in approval regressed on the proportion of the public supporting the veto or executive order action.