

Political Regimes and Institutional Support: Presidential Power, Partisanship, and Democratic Values in Times of Transition *

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Abstract

Scholars have long warned that strong connections between independently elected executives and public opinion threaten democratic health. These concerns are echoed in recent research that evaluates the potential for democratic backsliding. We argue that these accounts overstate the willingness of the public to support the concentration of executive authority in elected leaders. We leverage the transition from Presidents Obama to Trump and five waves of a nationally representative panel survey to study Americans' attitudes toward executive power. Consistent with our argument, we find that Americans largely oppose presidential power and that these attitudes are overwhelmingly stable over time even as individuals' political alignment with the president changes. Our results indicate that mass publics have relatively stable attitudes toward political institutions which are largely separate from their evaluations of the officials who inhabit them and suggest more sanguine conclusions about the stability of American governance than recent scholarship has expressed.

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At no time since the Civil War has the fate of the American republic been so widely and anxiously discussed. Political observers openly worry about mounting public support for authoritarianism (e.g., Edsall, 2018), and political scientists have identified parallels between the United States and other countries that have experienced democratic declines (e.g., Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Mounk, 2018). New academic initiatives are motivated by the belief that we are amidst a “time of potential danger to American democratic norms and institutions” (*Bright Line Watch*, 2019) when “public support for democracy may be slipping” (Carey et al., Forthcoming, 1). Though these perspectives are newly urgent in the U.S., in recent years political developments have raised concerns about democratic backsliding around the globe, including in eastern Europe (King, 2017; Rohac, 2018), Latin America (*Economist*, 2018; Lynch, 2018), central Asia (Schenkkan, 2015), China and southeast Asia (Heijmans, 2017), and Africa (Temin, 2017). These concerns are often rooted in the expansion of executive authority, when elected leaders appeal to popular support to consolidate political power.

In this paper, we study how citizens’ attitudes toward executive power reflect their views of the executive currently in office. Building from scholarship which emphasizes Americans’ widespread agreement on core democratic values (Hartz, 1955; McClosky and Zaller, 1984; Tocqueville, 1963 [1840]) and skepticism toward executive authority, we argue that Americans largely oppose executive power and that these views are distinct from their evaluations of the president currently in office or the party to which he belongs. Our argument contrasts with accounts that downplay or altogether ignore the capacity for public opinion to serve as a potential constraint on power-seeking executives. According to one perspective, the public is susceptible to appeals for greater authority when those appeals come from popular leaders (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). Implicit in this argument is that attitudes about political power reflect the political support enjoyed by the leader who seeks it (see, e.g., Christenson and Kriner, 2017a; Reeves and Rogowski, 2015). A second, and related, perspective argues that American public opinion is powerfully shaped by partisanship (Christenson and Kriner, 2017a; Gerber,

Huber, and Washington, 2010; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002) such that partisan cues elicit strong, nearly automatic, responses from partisan identifiers. Both of these existing perspectives suggest that citizens' views toward executive power are reflexively shaped by their support for the leader in office. Moreover, neither perspective provides much reason to believe that public opinion can effectively hold accountable political leaders who seek to grow their power and authority, or provide electoral incentives for officials in adjoining branches of government to do so. In addition, to the extent executive power exemplifies a "hard issue" (Carmines and Stimson, 1980), understanding how Americans form attitudes in the absence of elite cues (Berinsky and Lewis, 2007; Berinsky, 2009; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus, 2013) provides new insight into the sources and potential consequences of public opinion.

Our study contributes to an important body of scholarship in comparative and American politics that examines citizens' attitudes toward political systems and regimes (e.g., Easton, 1965, 1975). Research in this area studies the correlates of citizens' support for specific political institutions and their outputs as well as their more general beliefs about the existing political system. In cross-national research, this approach has been used to study the individual-level and contextual factors that shape beliefs about democracy, tolerance, and civil liberties (e.g., Almond and Verba, 1963; Dalton, 2004; Gibson, 1998; Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence, 2003; Magalhães, 2014; Norris, 1999), while in other research (focused largely, but not exclusively, on the United States) scholars have studied citizens' perceptions of political parties (Dennis, 1966) and the legislative (e.g., Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002), judicial (e.g., Christenson and Kriner, 2015; Caldeira and Gibson, 1992; Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence, 2003), and the executive (e.g., Aberbach, Peterson, and Quirk, 2007; Christenson and Kriner, 2017a; Reeves and Rogowski, 2015; Lowande and Gray, 2017) branches. Virtually all the empirical research in this area, however, is based on cross-sectional surveys administered at a single point in time or repeated cross-sectional surveys administered to different respondents at various points in time. Both of these approaches are subject to concerns about potential confounding and omitted

variables and complicate efforts to identify the causal predictors of attitudes toward governing arrangements. And while a smaller literature reports results from survey experiments that manipulate characteristics of political institutions or officials (Christenson and Kriner, 2017*a,b*; Reeves and Rogowski, 2018; Scherer and Curry, 2010), this approach may raise concerns about external validity.¹

We address these limitations and examine our argument with a panel of 1,600 survey respondents from a national probability sample from 2015 to 2018, during which time the American presidency changed hands from Obama to Trump. The transition between presidents allows us to examine how both aggregate and individual-level attitudes toward executive power changed with the occupant of the White House. Overall, we find evidence of stability with respect to Americans' attitudes toward presidential power. While Democrats express somewhat less support for unilateral power during the Trump presidency and Republicans express somewhat greater support, overwhelming majorities of both groups oppose greater governing roles for U.S. presidents regardless of the president currently in office. Finally, we show that respondents' underlying commitments to democratic values largely insulate their attitudes toward executive power from the effects of changing partisan alignments with the executive in office. We find that the public is in widespread agreement about fundamental aspects of American government. Compared to recent scholarship, our findings suggest more sanguine conclusions about the stability of American governance and the prospects for electorates to hold executives accountable for their exercise of power.

Political Institutions, Power, and Public Opinion

Contemporary presidents sit at the center of American government. They are expected to articulate major policy initiatives and to set legislative agendas, and Americans also look to

¹A few notable exceptions employ individual-level panel data to gauge citizens' reactions to Supreme Court decisions (e.g., Christenson and Glick, 2015; Hoekstra, 2003) and confirmations (Gibson and Caldeira, 2009).

presidents to draw upon the range of unilateral powers to advance policy goals and respond to national emergencies, both foreign and domestic (Howell, 2013; Moe and Howell, 1999). The expectations Americans place on presidents for policy leadership may conflict with the public's skepticism of executive authority (for a discussion of these attitudes, see Posner and Vermeule, 2010, chapter 6). This conflict is especially salient as polarization and gridlock slow the lawmaking process to a halt, in which case presidents have the greatest incentives to demonstrate leadership by exercising prerogative powers (Howell, 2003, 2013). Given the preeminence of the president in modern society, to what degree does American public opinion operate as a bulwark against the concentration of authority in the presidency?

Understanding how Americans view presidential power and the conditions under which they support the exercise of presidential authority has implications for the separation of powers in democratic systems. The authors of the U.S. Constitution vigorously debated the proper scope of presidential power and settled on institutional arrangements in which powers were both shared and separated across the branches of government. Congress is the preeminent lawmaking body, as Madison wrote in *Federalist #51*, and the system established a set of institutional checks and constraints to ensure against the concentration of authority in the presidency. Today, however, many scholars, pundits, and observers argue that those constraints are weak or nonexistent due to some combination of Congress's abdication of its authority, presidents' efforts to expand their spheres of influence, and the public's indifference to or disinterest in the procedures by which policies are fashioned. As a result, some scholars point to the importance of an executive's use of forbearance, or the exercise of constraint in deploying prerogative power, as an important indicator of democratic health (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, 8-9).

In the United States, the rise of the plebiscitary presidency has long prompted concerns that elections are the only form of accountability for presidents (Lowi, 1986; Schlesinger, 1973a), who then have a free hand to govern with little outside constraint. Though some argue that Americans may depreciate a commitment to democratic norms by their leaders, others argue

that it is so foundational that citizens assume it as a trait of their presidents and presidential candidates. As Schlesinger (1973*b*) argues, “Americans. . . have declared their faith in the winnowing processes of politics. They have assumed that these processes . . . will eliminate aspirants to the presidency who reject the written restraints of the Constitution and the unwritten restraints of the republican ethos.” Faith in presidential selection processes may translate into tacit support for the means through which presidents govern, thereby removing a source of informal constraints on executive power (Christenson and Kriner, 2015; Posner and Vermeule, 2010) and providing an opportunity for the expansion of presidential power. Similarly, scholars of systems outside the United States warned that presidents’ direct relationship with the electorate would “bring on a refusal to acknowledge the limits of the mandate that even a majority . . . claim as democratic justification for the enactment of its agenda” (Linz, 1990, 61).

Other scholars, however, have pointed to public opinion as a source of constraint on presidential behavior. In critiquing what he called the imperial presidency, Schlesinger (1973*a*, 410) argued that “[t]he effective means of controlling the Presidency lay less in law than in politics.” More recently, Christenson and Kriner (2015) argue that presidents consider public opinion when issuing unilateral directives and are less likely to do so when the public may react negatively. To the extent a president’s public standing enables him to achieve policy goals, declines in public favorability may inflict costs and provide incentives for them to avoid behaviors which would garner these reactions. Based on these costs, Posner and Vermeule (2010, 209) argue that “the executive can operate effectively only by proving over and over that it deserves the public’s trust.” Presidents might incur public costs through increased disapproval ratings, and public support for limits on executive authority may also provide electoral incentives for legislators to reinforce their institutional prerogatives by limiting the president’s. Because the authors of the Constitution did not expect that presidents would exercise self-restraint,² public

²As Madison wrote in *Federalist 51*, “If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.” Accordingly, institutional checks limit the power of any one branch of government (see, e.g., *The Federalist 47*).

opinion may operate as an informal political constraint on presidents' exercise of authority.

How Americans view Presidential Power

Presidential power is not a salient subject for many Americans, and most theories of public opinion leave little room for meaningful attitudes toward it. Executive power falls squarely within what Carmines and Stimson (1980, 80) describe as a “hard issue” in that it deals with policy means rather than ends. Moreover, though political elites may occasionally express divergent viewpoints on issues of presidential power, contemporary debates over executive power rarely achieve the same level of attention or salience as debates over “easy” issues. Lacking such elite cues (Berinsky and Lewis, 2007; Berinsky, 2009; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus, 2013), Americans' views toward process may instead reflect other more readily-available heuristics. For instance, partisanship may drive opinions about whether to support expanded presidential power. Americans who share the president's partisanship may support expanding the president's power while those who are aligned with the other party may not. Pundits and political scientists emphasize the dominance of partisanship for informing contemporary public opinion (Klein, 2016; Mellman, 2017), as the public reflexively applies its partisan identities when evaluating political events, receiving political information, and even while participating in the dating and labor markets (e.g., Gerber and Huber, 2010; Huber and Malhotra, 2017; McConnell et al., 2018). Americans may also use partisanship to infer the policies presidents enact, and evaluate the desirability of greater presidential power on this basis. For instance, the public may infer that Democratic [Republican] presidents would implement liberal [conservative] directives and use those inferences to determine whether they support greater presidential power. Christenson and Kriner (2017a) finds some support for these expectations and argue that Americans respond to a president's use of unilateral action in ways that reflect their own partisan and policy views. According to these perspectives, therefore, Americans vacillate between

expressing support for and opposition to presidential power depending on their alignment with the president's political orientation. Moreover, to the extent Americans express support for democratic values in the abstract, these perspectives suggest that these values will easily yield to an individual's partisan attachments when the two come into conflict.

A related perspective emphasizes Americans' views toward the president currently in office. Americans who support his policies, approve of his job performance, or admire his leadership may express greater support for expanded presidential power. The authors of the Constitution feared the possibility that charismatic executives could convince citizens of the wisdom of concentrating authority in the presidency. In *Federalist #1*, Hamilton writes that "of those men who have overturned the liberties of republics, the greatest number have begun their career by paying an obsequious court to the people; commencing demagogues, and ending tyrants." More recent scholarship has expressed similar concerns, with Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, 192) arguing that "the higher President Trump's approval rating, the more dangerous he is." This view suggests that presidential approval is the currency of presidential power; as presidents accrue more of the former they can expect to marshal more of the latter.

An alternative view posits that Americans' attitudes toward presidential power reflect their commitments to core democratic principles. As Posner and Vermeule (2010) describe it, Americans have expressed a deep 'tyrannophobia' since the country's founding. This fear was evident in the omission of an executive from the Articles of Confederation, which was subsequently replaced by the Constitution with a presidency with limited and ambiguously-defined powers. The contemporary public, according to this view, has inherited this suspicion of executive power and views the empowerment of the presidency with skepticism. Reeves and Rogowski (2015, 2016) provide support for this argument, showing that the public exhibits widespread opposition to presidential power and that these beliefs are correlated with democratic values, such as belief in the rule of law. This perspective posits that Americans' views toward presidential power are somewhat distinct from their views of individual presidents, and suggests that changing

levels of political support for a particular president do not automatically translate into changes in attitudes toward presidential power.

These competing perspectives suggest different interpretations about the potential for democratic publics to constrain the ambitions of leaders with authoritarian tendencies. If Americans apply their partisan views when evaluating presidential power, leaders may be able to expand the powers of the office with the public's tacit, or even explicit, support. Alternatively, if the public's views about power are distinct from their view of the person currently in office, changes in the public's political alignment with the president would not be expected to generate changes in attitudes toward presidential power. While the former perspective supports rather pessimistic conclusions about the potential for democracies to backslide into authoritarianism, the latter suggests that systems of democratic accountability help guard against such backsliding.

To date, however, virtually all empirical research on attitudes toward presidential power have been conducted using between-subjects designs within the context of a single presidential administration. For instance, in cross-sectional research, Reeves and Rogowski (2015, 2016) show that individuals who approve of the president and share his partisanship grant greater support for unilateral power, while individuals who express stronger commitments to the rule of law report less support. Christenson and Kriner (2017a) report evidence from a series of experiments that ask respondents to evaluate unilateral actions issued during the Obama administration. These studies are limited, however, in their ability to make inferences about whether and how Americans revise their beliefs about presidential power as the presidency changes hands. Moreover, this scholarship does not directly investigate the temporal persistence of Americans' attitudes toward power or the factors which might produce attitudinal change. This limitation is not specific to research on the American presidency; instead, a large literature on support for democracy and attitudes toward political regimes and institutions (e.g., Aberbach, Peterson, and Quirk, 2007; Almond and Verba, 1963; Christenson and Kriner, 2017a; Dalton, 2004; Dennis, 1966; Easton, 1965, 1975; Caldeira and Gibson, 1992; Gibson, 1998; Gibson,

Caldeira, and Spence, 2003; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002; Magalhães, 2014; Norris, 1999) relies on cross-sectional comparisons to examine the factors that shape these beliefs. To the extent Americans' attitudes toward presidential power do vary over time, it remains unclear whether these changes reflect the evolving influences of their political views and adherence to democratic values. In the next section, we detail the data and empirical strategy that allows us to explore these questions during the transition from Presidents Obama to Trump.

Measuring Attitudes toward Unilateral Powers

The transition from the Obama presidency to the Trump presidency provides a unique opportunity to examine mass attitudes towards presidential power. We leverage the change in partisan control of the White House following a close election to study how Americans' political alignment with the president affects their attitudes toward the power its occupant should wield. To this end, we fielded questions on five waves of the American Panel Survey (TAPS) in October 2015 before the presidential campaign began, before the election in October 2016, after the election in November 2016, after the inauguration in May 2017, and a year into the Trump presidency in January 2018. TAPS is a monthly panel survey fielded on a nationally representative probability sample of Americans administered by GfK/Knowledge Networks.

We examine attitudes towards presidential power with three questions that evaluate various dimensions of presidential authority.³ First, we examine attitudes toward *unilateral policymaking*, which we define for respondents as the ability of a president to enact policies without having them voted on by Congress. This question evaluates support for actions such as executive orders and other unilateral directives. Second, we examine *unilateral judicial appointments*, which we define as the appointment of judges without confirmation by the U.S. Senate. These

³These questions follow Reeves and Rogowski (2016) and asked respondents whether: the president should have the right to enact policies without having those policies voted on by Congress; the president should be able to appoint judges of his choosing regardless of whether the U.S. Senate agrees with his selections; and the president should have the authority to decide how executive branch agencies will implement bills passed by Congress.

powers have come under increasing scrutiny in recent years, given instances such as the Supreme Court's decision in *Noel Canning v. NLRB* and President Trump's criticism of judges who issued rulings against his policies as "Obama judges" (e.g., Barnes, 2018). Third, we examine *unilateral bureaucratic implementation*, which we define as the ability of the president to determine how executive branch agencies will implement bills passed by Congress. This question evaluates how respondents perceive the president's authority to direct activities within the executive branch. For each question respondents' agreement with each question was assessed with a five-point scale. For simplicity, we collapsed the scale into three response options indicating whether they agreed, disagreed, or neither disagreed or agreed.⁴

Using these data, we study several of the questions raised by our theoretical discussion. First, we investigate aggregate patterns of support for unilateral power. If the identity of the *president* affects Americans' views about the power of the *presidency*, then these patterns may vary across the two administrations that span the data. Alternatively, if Americans' attitudes about institutional arrangements persist across political regimes, we expect little change across time. Second, we investigate the predictors of unilateral power across the five waves of our data. To the degree that expressions of support for presidential power in surveys are non-attitudes, we expect that there will be no systematic relationship between the predictors of these beliefs across survey waves. But if they are structured by a common set of underlying values and principles, we expect that they would consistently predict attitudes toward unilateral power. Third, we study individual-level stability in beliefs toward presidential power and the predictors of attitude change. To our knowledge, these data allow us to provide the most comprehensive study to date on individual-level changes and continuities in attitudes toward political institutions.

⁴In the appendix, we model the dependent variable using alternative formulations.

Aggregate Support for Presidential Power

Figure 1 presents responses across the five survey waves from October 2015 to January 2018 for unilateral policy making (top row), unilateral judicial appointments (middle row) and unilateral bureaucratic implementation (bottom row) among all respondents (left column), Democrats (middle column), and Republicans (right column).⁵ Each plot shows the percentages of respondents who reported approving of executive power. In examining the left most column, we note a high degree of aggregate stability in support for each of our measures of executive power. In October 2015, support for unilateral policy making stands at 16 percent, which drops only three points to 13 percent in January 2018. Across the five waves, support for unilateral policymaking never changes by more than four points from wave to wave. For judicial appointments, support rises minimally across the time period under study from fifteen percent to seventeen percent, and changes by no more than three points across individual waves. Similarly, support for bureaucratic implementation rises slightly from 34 percent to 38 percent, never changing by more than six percentage points from wave to wave. It is also noteworthy that support for unilateral bureaucratic implementation is significantly higher than for judicial appointments or policymaking, though again these attitudes are stable throughout our waves. This latter finding could reflect Americans' views that presidents have greater discretion in directing activities within the executive branch but are more constrained in inter-institutional settings.

The aggregate stability in attitudes toward presidential power, however, disguises a nearly Newtonian reaction among partisans. Across the board, Republicans became more supportive of unilateral power upon the election of Donald Trump while Democrats become less so. Relative to accounts which posit the primacy of partisanship for Americans' political evaluations, however, these swings are modest. Focusing on attitudes toward unilateral policymaking, the mechanism through which a president with authoritarian tendencies might most degrade or

⁵Following Klar and Krupnikov (2016), we classify "leaners" as partisans.

disregard democratic institutions, we see that support for unilateral policymaking increases from six percent to 17 percent among Republicans from October 2015 to January 2018 (top right). Among Democrats, support drops from 23 percent in October 2015 to 10 percent one year into the Trump presidency (top center). For both groups of partisans, these changes in attitudes correspond nearly perfectly with the election and subsequent inauguration of Donald Trump.

For unilateral judicial appointments, support dips by eight percentage points from 21 percent to 13 percent among Democrats and rises from 7 percent to 24 percent among Republicans. For both unilateral policymaking and unilateral judicial appointments, overall support is low across partisans of both stripes, rising to just a quarter of either Republicans or Democrats from October 2015 to January 2018. It is notable that support for unilateral judicial appointments increases by five percentage points among Democrats between October 2015 and October 2016, the first two waves of our study. This period corresponds with the death of Antonin Scalia and Obama's subsequent nomination of Merrick Garland, whose nomination Senate Republicans refused to consider. Given the high level of partisan conflict around this issue and the extent to which attitudes about governing arrangements are a "hard issue" (Carmines and Stimson, 1980), it is striking given existing accounts (e.g., Berinsky, 2009) not to observe greater partisan polarization around the president's power over judicial nominations.⁶

Finally, while support is higher for unilateral bureaucratic implementation, the general patterns with respect to partisanship remain. When Obama is president, nearly half of Democrats supported unilateral bureaucratic implementation, but only around a quarter supported it during the Trump presidency. Attitudes among Republicans we see an opposite trend with support rising from 22 percent to 50 percent during as the Obama presidency gives way to the Trump presidency. The data show that attitudes toward presidential power reflect, in part, Americans' partisan identities. The patterns in Figure 1 display a high level of stability in Americans'

⁶Some activists and pundits went so far as to recommend that President Obama install Garland on the Supreme Court as a recess appointment (Dayen, 2016).

attitudes toward executive power, though we also find that partisanship operates in predictable, though limited, fashion.

To put these swings in perspective, consider presidential approval during the same time period. These data are shown in Figure 2. In October 2015, October 2016, and November 2016, approximately half of Americans reported approving of President Obama’s job performance (shown with the black solid line). His approval ratings in these months were considerably higher than President Trump’s approval ratings in May 2017 and January 2018, during which times 36 percent of respondents reported approving of his performance. However, these changes in presidential approval ratings do not map neatly onto the aggregate patterns we showed above with respect to support for unilateral power. For instance, despite lower aggregate approval ratings for President Trump relative to President Obama, we did not observe systematically lower levels of aggregate support for executive power during the Trump administration.

The partisan swings in presidential approval ratings, however, are considerably more dramatic. Large majorities of Democrats approved of President Obama in October 2015 (72 percent), October 2016 (75 percent) and November 2016 (76 percent) but their approval ratings for President Trump were considerably lower (12 and 9 percent in May 2017 and January 2018, respectively). The pattern is nearly a mirror image among Republican identifiers, where presidential approval rose from 15 percent under Obama in November 2016 to 66 percent under Trump in May 2017 and 70 percent in January 2018.⁷ While these data show dramatic swings in how Americans view the president based on their partisan alignment with the president currently in office, Americans have considerably more stable attitudes regarding the unilateral powers that should be available to presidents. Moreover, Americans may be polarized over many things (see, e.g., Jones, Forthcoming)—but at the aggregate level, they are in widespread agreement in their opposition to executive authority.

We further contextualized the patterns shown in Figure 1 by comparing them to aggregate

⁷These patterns are nearly identical to those reported in other media outlets; see, e.g., Pew (2017).

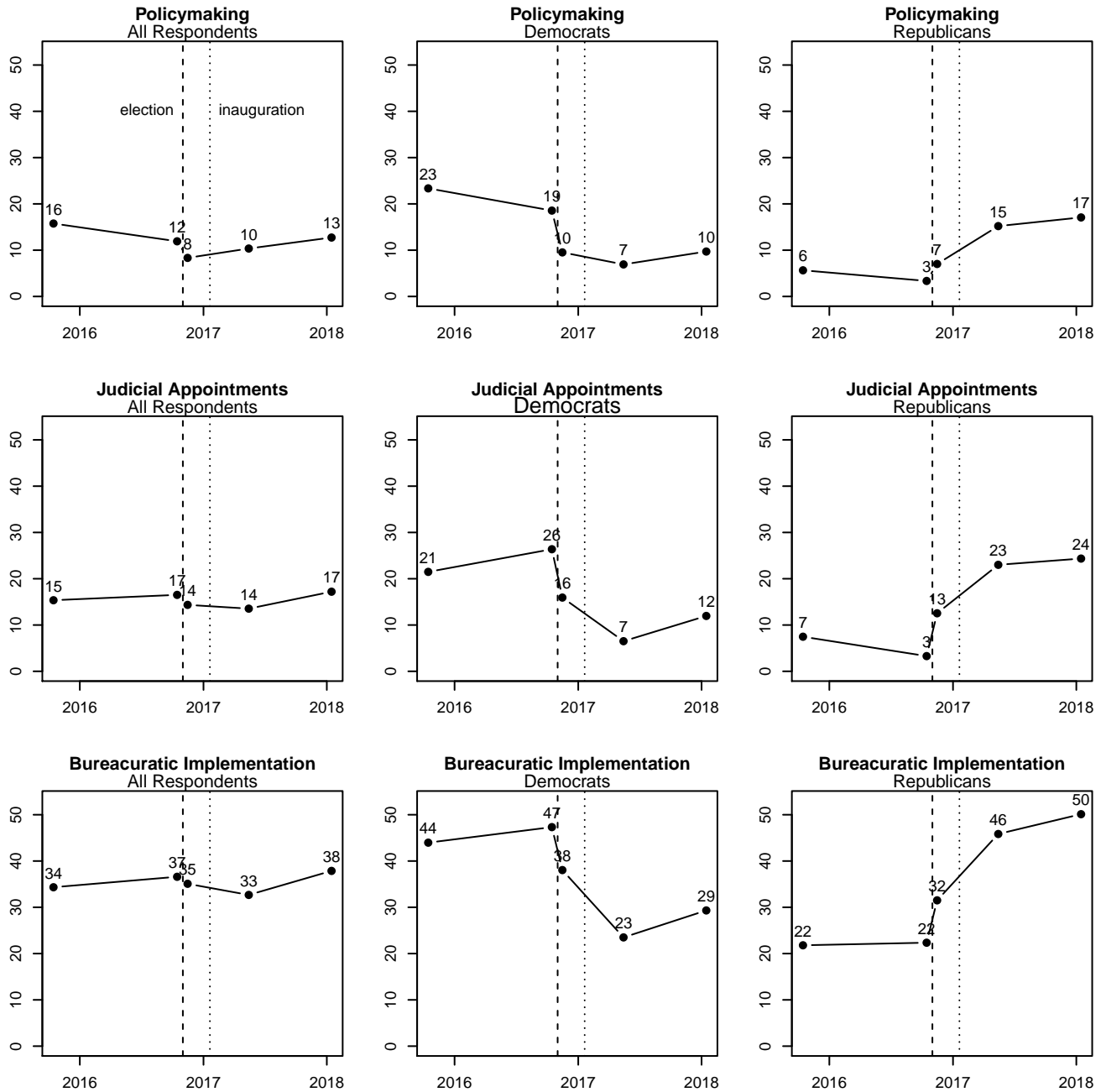


Figure 1: **Support for Unilateral Policymaking, Judicial Appointments, and Bureaucratic Implementation** in October 2015, October 2016, November 2016, May 2017, and January 2018 for all respondents (left column), Democrats (including leaners, middle column) and Republicans (including leaners, right column).

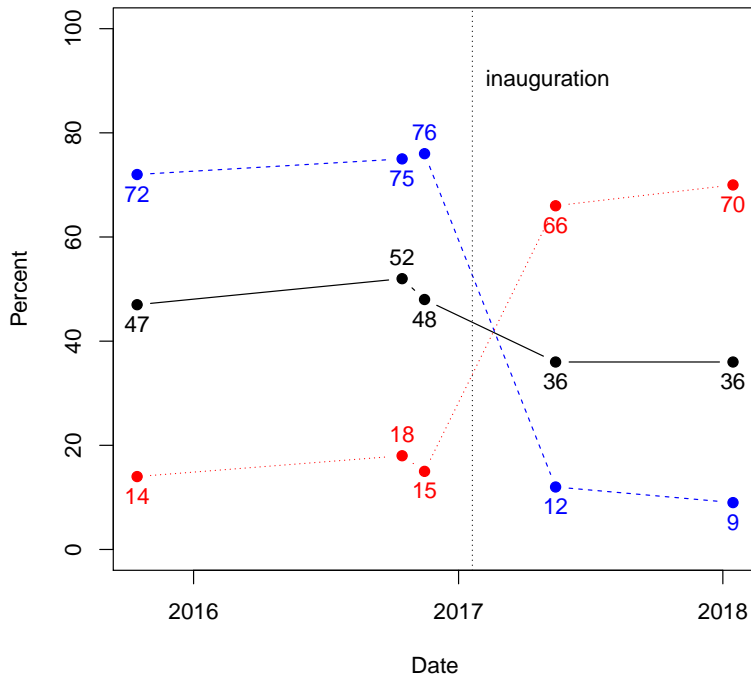


Figure 2: **Presidential Approval** , October 2015 to January 2018 for all respondents (left column), Democrats (including leaners, middle column) and Republicans (including leaners, right column).

public opinion on two major policies that were included on four waves of TAPS surrounding the period of our study: support for federal funding for abortion and support for affirmative action.⁸ Both issues are politically contentious and are strongly associated with specific political parties. Given elite polarization around these issues, we would expect public opinion on these issues to be relatively stable. And, for the most part, they are – yet aggregate attitudes on these opinions are no more stable than (and may be less stable than) attitudes toward executive power.⁹

⁸The specific question wordings are: “Federal programs that provide health care benefits should allow funding for abortions.” and “The federal government should support programs designed to help minorities get better jobs and education.” Both questions were asked on five-point scales ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

⁹The percentage of Americans who “somewhat” or “strongly” supported the issues in each wave are as follows: abortion, 35 (September 2014), 30 percent (November 2015), 36 percent (September 2016), and 40 percent (May

The percentage of Americans who supported federal funding for abortion ranged between 30 (November 2015) and 40 percent (May 2017), while the percentage of Americans who supported affirmative action ranged between 44 (September 2014 and November 2015) and 56 percent (May 2017). Overall, therefore, our data on public support for unilateral power demonstrate that aggregate attitudes toward it are at least as consistent across time as Americans' attitudes on some of the most salient issues in contemporary political debates.

Explaining Attitudes toward Unilateral Power

We now turn to explaining individual-level attitudes toward unilateral presidential power. Importantly, we examine the extent to which attitudes toward presidential power are driven by shared partisanship with the president and core beliefs about the operation of democratic governance.

We measure copartisanship with an indicator for respondents who identify as the same party as the president then in office.¹⁰ For the October 2015, October 2016 and November 2016 waves of the survey, Democratic respondents are identified as copartisans with President Obama, and Republican respondents are identified as presidential copartisans in the May 2017 and January 2018 waves. We classify respondents who identify with the President's party or report leaning toward that party as copartisans.

While copartisanship is relatively straightforward to measure, measuring core beliefs about American democracy provides a greater challenge. First is the issue of when the attitudes are measured. Views of democratic governance may be shaped by the current political context. Surveys that rely on a cross-section of respondents cannot discern the extent to which so-called

2017); affirmative action, 44 percent (September 2014), 44 percent (November 2015), 48 percent (September 2016), and 56 percent (May 2017).

¹⁰We characterize "leaners" as partisans. Due to the way in which the partisanship question was asked on the online survey, only a very small fraction of respondents are classified as "pure Independents" located at 4 on the seven-point scale (see Tucker, Montgomery, and Smith Forthcoming). Therefore, in our regression models below we distinguish Democrats from other respondents, the overwhelming majority of whom are classified as Republicans. For exact question wording, see <http://taps.wustl.edu/files/taps/imce/taps2016bytopic.pdf>.

principles are byproducts of political allegiance to one party or one politician in particular. Though research argues that these are bedrock core values (e.g., Feldman, 1988; Gibson, 1996), they may nonetheless be malleable to the current political environment. The panel nature of TAPS has the benefit of providing measures of these attitudes before the waves that ask about attitudes toward unilateral power. For our October 2015 survey wave, we rely on questions from May 2015. For all subsequent waves, we use questions from May 2016, five to nineteen months before we ask about attitudes toward unilateral action and in the midst of a presidential campaign, a surprising election, and an inauguration of new president.

We measure support for democracy by combining two established scales that characterize democratic principles: individuals' commitment to the rule of law and support for minority political liberty.¹¹ The former scale is based on five questions about the necessity of obeying unjust laws, ignoring laws to solve problems, obeying laws of a government one did not vote for, the government bending the law to solve pressing problems, and the importance of the law. These questions are not about a legalistic interpretation of the U.S. Constitution but rather reflect a sense of the inviolability of the rules that govern the nation. The latter scale, support for minority political liberty, is comprised of three items that ask about the treatment of individuals with minority political views, priorities for freedom versus order, and the value of free speech. The full question wordings for each item are shown in Appendix A. Factor analysis reveals that these eight items strongly load onto a single dimension and the items appear to be internally consistent with a Cronbach's alpha of .79. Thus, we measure support for democracy using the first dimension from a factor analysis of the eight items described above.

As noted, our dependent variables are three-point scales indicating disagreement, neither agreement or disagreement, and agreement. We model individual attitudes toward these measures using ordered logistic regression, though we note that our substantive findings are robust to using alternative modeling strategies and characterizations of the dependent variables.

¹¹See Gibson and Nelson (2015), especially Appendix B.

We have two primary goals in analyzing attitudes toward presidential power over the nearly three-year period represented in our data. First, we study how the two sets of factors described above—partisanship and democratic values—shape attitudes toward presidential power. The five waves of data that span two presidencies allow us to explore the stability of these relationships across political and presidential contexts. Second, we examine variation in the strengths of these relationships. As American politics has become more partisan, as many analysts claim, individuals might rely more on their partisan identities when evaluating questions of presidential power while placing less emphasis on other factors. In addition to copartisanship with the president and support for democracy, we account for a variety of demographic factors including respondent gender, race/ethnicity, education, age, and income.

Table 1 presents an analysis of attitudes toward unilateral policy in each of the five periods. Despite substantial institutional change—namely, the election of Donald Trump and the transition from the presidency of Barack Obama with the inauguration of Donald Trump—we find considerable continuity in the relationship between copartisanship, support for democracy, and views toward presidential power. Across each period, support for democracy is negatively related to support for unilateral power, while copartisanship with the president is associated with increased support for unilateral power. The coefficient estimates are statistically distinguishable from zero in all periods. Characteristics such as income, age, and education are inconsistently (or not at all) predictive of attitudes toward unilateral policymaking; however, both gender and race show variable relationships. For instance, African Americans are generally more supportive of unilateral policymaking under Obama than under Trump, while men are consistently more supportive of unilateral policymaking than women after Trump’s election.

We find similar patterns when studying attitudes toward unilateral judicial appointments. As Table 2 shows, support for democracy is consistently and negatively associated with attitudes toward executive power, while respondents who share the president’s partisanship consistently express greater support for executive power. These patterns generally persist when evaluating

	10/15	10/16	11/16	5/17	1/18
Support for Democracy	-0.22*	-0.27*	-0.24*	-0.21*	-0.15*
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Presidential Copartisan	1.94*	1.75*	1.07*	1.01*	0.66*
	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)
Male	0.09	0.16	0.46*	0.41*	0.23
	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.14)
Income	-0.01	0.02	0.01	-0.05*	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Black	0.07	0.93*	0.52*	-0.13	0.02
	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.31)	(0.27)
Hispanic	0.21	-0.02	0.25	-0.07	0.01
	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.26)	(0.24)
Education	0.11*	-0.02	0.03	-0.03	-0.06
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Age	0.00	-0.00	0.01	0.01	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Disagree Neither agree nor disagree	2.25*	1.98*	2.66*	1.59*	0.86*
	(0.34)	(0.35)	(0.37)	(0.38)	(0.37)
Neither agree nor disagree Agree	3.74*	3.42*	3.96*	2.77*	1.89*
	(0.35)	(0.36)	(0.38)	(0.39)	(0.37)
Num. obs.	1195	1206	1206	1059	1044

* $p < 0.05$

Table 1: A Model of Support for Unilateral Policymaking: October 2015 to January 2018

support for presidents directing bureaucratic implementation of policies passed by Congress, as Table 3 shows. Interestingly, however, support for democracy is more weakly associated with support for unilateral bureaucratic implementation than for our other measures of executive power, and though they are consistently negative they generally fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. The coefficient estimates for presidential copartisanship, however, are consistently positive and statistically significant across each of the five waves.

Because the coefficients from the above tables are not directly interpretable, Figures 3 and 4 present substantive interpretations. Each figure presents first differences, where we generate the predicted probability of *opposing* unilateral policy based on different levels of support of democracy (Figure 3) and copartisanship with the president (Figure 4). For each survey, we

	10/15	10/16	11/16	5/17	1/18
Support for Democracy	-0.18*	-0.32*	-0.21*	-0.25*	-0.27*
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)
Presidential Copartisan	1.37*	1.52*	0.50*	1.33*	1.07*
	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.15)
Male	-0.13	-0.25	0.08	-0.10	0.05
	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.15)
Income	-0.05*	-0.04	-0.04	-0.09*	-0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Black	0.70*	1.04*	0.50*	-0.20	-0.17
	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.32)	(0.29)
Hispanic	0.39	0.28	0.15	0.19	0.45
	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.26)	(0.24)
Education	0.09*	-0.01	-0.13*	-0.17*	-0.20*
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Age	-0.01	-0.01*	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Disagree Neither agree nor disagree	0.92*	0.88*	0.26	0.33	0.48
	(0.32)	(0.35)	(0.33)	(0.39)	(0.37)
Neither agree nor disagree Agree	2.33*	1.99*	1.23*	1.28*	1.50*
	(0.33)	(0.35)	(0.33)	(0.39)	(0.38)
Num. obs.	1191	1215	1201	1072	1055

* $p < 0.05$

Table 2: A Model of Support for Unilateral Judicial Appointments: October 2015 to January 2018

generate the predicted probability for opposing unilateral action among respondents whose support for democracy was one standard deviation below the mean value and compared it with the predicted probability of opposing unilateral action among respondents whose support for democracy was one standard deviation above the mean value while holding all other variables constant. (We do the same when comparing the predicted probability of opposing unilateral action among presidential copartisans and respondents from the opposite party.) The differences for support of democracy are presented in Figure 3. The left plot shows results for unilateral policymaking, the middle plot shows results for unilateral judicial appointments, and the right plot shows results for directing bureaucratic implementation. For example, in January 2018, our model predicts that respondents that expressed stronger support for democracy were

	10/15	10/16	11/16	5/17	1/18
Support for Democracy	-0.06 (0.03)	-0.10* (0.04)	-0.06 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)
Presidential Copartisan	1.65* (0.12)	1.44* (0.12)	0.48* (0.12)	0.79* (0.13)	0.79* (0.13)
Male	0.42* (0.12)	0.21 (0.12)	0.15 (0.11)	0.38* (0.12)	0.40* (0.12)
Income	0.03 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)
Black	0.38 (0.21)	0.65* (0.23)	0.33 (0.22)	-0.43 (0.25)	-0.18 (0.23)
Hispanic	-0.04 (0.20)	-0.22 (0.21)	-0.43* (0.21)	-0.51* (0.23)	-0.18 (0.22)
Education	0.21* (0.04)	0.19* (0.04)	0.15* (0.04)	0.11* (0.05)	0.15* (0.04)
Age	0.01 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Disagree Neither agree nor disagree	1.79* (0.30)	0.81* (0.30)	0.83* (0.29)	0.82* (0.33)	0.92* (0.33)
Neither agree nor disagree Agree	3.29* (0.31)	1.99* (0.30)	1.87* (0.29)	1.70* (0.33)	1.77* (0.33)
Num. obs.	1197	1163	1148	1022	1020

* $p < 0.05$

Table 3: A Model of Support for Unilateral Bureaucratic Implementation: October 2015 to January 2018

0.11 more likely to oppose unilateral policymaking compared to respondents who expressed less support for democracy. The magnitude of this first difference is quite similar across the nearly three-year period covered by our sample and ranges from 0.11 to 0.19. The middle plot shows similar results for judicial appointments, where respondents who were two standard deviations apart in their expressed support for democracy were 0.15 to 0.22 more likely to oppose unilateral action. The right plot, however, shows that support for democracy is much more weakly associated with attitudes toward unilateral bureaucratic implementation, where the first differences are generally less than half as large as for the other dependent variables and where many of them are zero or statistically indistinguishable from zero. This latter result suggests that Americans meaningfully distinguish between the various domains

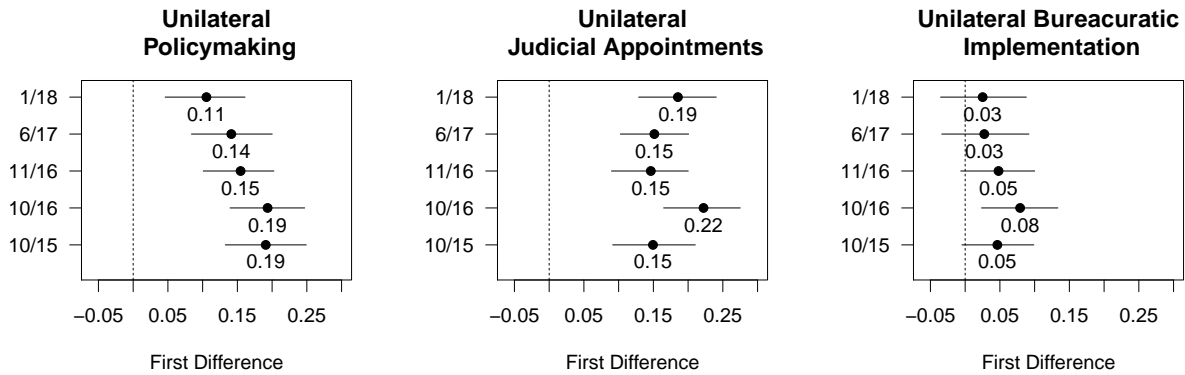


Figure 3: Support for Democracy and Disapproval of Unilateral Policymaking (First Differences). Each point represents the difference between the probability of disapproving of unilateral policymaking (left), unilateral judicial appointments (center), and unilateral bureaucratic implementation (right) for individuals with low support for democracy versus high support. First differences are estimates for each survey wave from October 2015 to January 2018. For example, in October 2015, our model predicts that the probability an individual with high support for democracy will oppose unilateral policymaking is .19 higher than the probability of an individual with low support for democracy. This difference is represented in the bottom row of the left panel. Lines segments represent ninety-five percent confidence intervals. Predicted probabilities are based on statistical model in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

in which presidents may exercise unilateral authority; because the president is head of the executive branch, respondents may be more deferential to the use of presidential authority such that attitudes toward democracy play a much smaller role (if any) in shaping their views. Alternatively, these results could be suggestive of the lower salience of presidential control over the bureaucracy such that most people are unlikely to connect this issue with their more fundamental views about American government.

Figure 4 shows results from similar analyses to identify differences in the probability of disapproving of unilateral policymaking on the basis of sharing the current president’s partisanship. We find consistently strong evidence that presidential copartisans are significantly less likely to oppose unilateral policymaking. The magnitudes are somewhat variable across survey waves, however; for instance, the first difference in the probability of disapproving of unilateral policymaking (left plot) was -0.41 in October 2015 but -0.13 in January 2018. Respondents

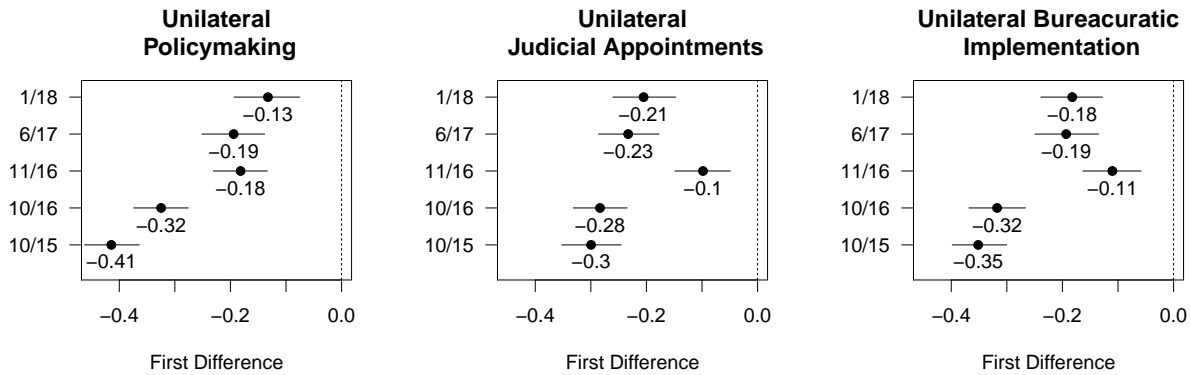


Figure 4: Partisanship and Disapproval of Unilateral Policymaking (First Differences). Each point represents the difference between the probability of disapproving of unilateral policymaking (left), unilateral judicial appointments (center), and unilateral bureaucratic implementation (right) for individuals who are presidential copartisans compared with respondents who identify with the opposite party. For example, in October 2015, our model predicts that a presidential copartisan (i.e., a Democrat) will oppose unilateral policymaking with a probability of .45 holding all else constant. For individuals of the other party (i.e., a Republican), that predicted probability is .80. The difference, $-.35$, is represented in the bottom row of the left panel. Lines segments represent ninety-five percent confidence intervals. Predicted probabilities are based on statistical model in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

from opposite sides of the partisan aisle registered more similar levels of opposition to unilateral policymaking under President Trump than they did under President Obama. It is difficult to attribute this difference to the change in presidents, as we find the biggest one-wave decline in first differences between October 2016 and November 2016, before Trump was inaugurated. The first differences are similarly variable yet consistently negative for both unilateral judicial appointments (ranging from -0.1 to -0.3) and unilateral bureaucratic implementation (ranging from -0.11 to -0.35).

Our results augment existing research to show that public attitudes about presidential power are structured both by political factors and more fundamental beliefs in democratic values. These relationships are consistent across repeated measurements in two presidential administrations and contribute to a high level of aggregate stability in support for unilateral power even as the public's support varies for the president currently in office. Overall, these

findings satisfy a necessary condition for the possibility that public opinion serves as a potential constraint on the exercise of executive authority. We now examine whether these consistent relationships contribute to individual-level stability in attitudes toward executive power.

Attitude Change and Continuity at the Individual Level

Finally, we use our panel data to examine individual-level change and stability in attitudes toward executive power. Table 4 characterizes the extent to which respondents become more negative, did not change, or became more positive in their attitudes toward unilateral policymaking, unilateral judicial appointments, and unilateral bureaucracy implementation between the first (October 2015) and last (January 2018) waves in our data.

Overall, roughly half of respondents expressed consistent attitudes toward executive period over this 27-month period even with changes in political context, most notably the occupant of the White House. To the extent Americans changed their attitudes, moreover, these changes did not occur systematically in one direction or another. Overall, 28 percent of our respondents became less supportive of unilateral policymaking over this period while 18 percent became more supportive. We find similar patterns with our other measures of unilateral powers; 26 percent of respondents were less supportive of the idea that presidents should be able to unilaterally appoint judges while 24 percent expressed greater support. With respect to support for presidents directing bureaucratic activity, 31 percent of respondents became less supportive while 24 percent became more supportive. On the whole, therefore, individuals exhibit relatively stable attitudes toward executive power, and to the extent it changes over time it does not do so in a systematic fashion at the aggregate level.

We find clearer evidence of systematic changes in individual level attitudes, however, when distinguishing attitude changes among Democrats and Republicans. For instance, 49 percent of Democratic respondents exhibited no changes in attitudes toward unilateral policymaking

during this period. Among those who *did* change their attitudes over this period, however, they did so overwhelmingly in a negative direction. Forty-four percent of Democrats expressed less support for unilateral policymaking in 2018 when Trump was president than they did in 2015 when Obama was president. Only seven percent of Democrats reported increased support for unilateral policymaking during the same time period. We find similar patterns for Republican respondents. Overall, 59 percent of Republican respondents expressed attitude stability over this time period;¹² however, a third (32 percent) of Republicans became more supportive of unilateral policymaking while only 9 percent became less supportive of it. These partisan patterns in attitude change are also found when examining support for unilateral judicial appointments and bureaucratic implementation. Therefore, these data indicate that the high level of stability in aggregate opinion toward executive power reflects, first, a high degree of individual level stability and, second, individual-level attitude change that is distributed roughly symmetrically across response options among Democrats and Republicans.

We use these data to model variation over time in attitudes toward executive power as the president's political affiliation changes. We create two sets of dependent variables using the data shown in Table 4. First, we create an indicator for whether respondents exhibited consistent attitudes toward executive power between October 2015 and January 2018. Respondents who opposed or supported executive power in both survey waves are coded as zero while respondents who expressed increased or decreased support are coded as one. This dependent variable describes the stability of attitudes toward executive power. Second, we create a directional indicator which ranges from -1 to 1 based on whether respondents expressed more negative or positive evaluations, respectively, of executive power in January 2018 under the Trump administration than they did in October 2015 with President Obama. Respondents who provided consistent evaluations across both are again coded as zero. As above, we also include

¹²The somewhat higher levels of stability among Republicans may reflect the somewhat stronger connections between Republican Party philosophy and views of executive power.

	Change from October 2015 to January 2018		
	More Negative	No Change	More Positive
<i>Policymaking</i>			
All Respondents	28	54	18
Democrats	44	49	7
Republicans	9	59	32
<i>Judicial Appointments</i>			
All Respondents	26	50	24
Democrats	38	50	12
Republicans	12	50	38
<i>Bureaucratic Implementation</i>			
All Respondents	31	45	24
Democrats	48	44	8
Republicans	9	47	44

Table 4: Within-respondent Change in Support for Unilateral Action from October 2015 to January 2018

a battery of sociodemographic and politically relevant control variables. For simplicity, we model both sets of dependent variables via linear regression.

We model both dependent variables as a function of respondent partisanship and support for the rule of law. If Americans change their attitudes toward executive power based on the partisan identity of the president currently in office, we expect to observe this pattern among respondents across both political parties. We test for an asymmetry in these changes, however, with an indicator for Democratic respondents. If Democrats' attitudes toward executive power are more responsive than Republicans to changes in the identity of the president, we expect that Democratic respondents will exhibit less stability in their support for executive power. Similarly, if partisanship structures the direction in which respondents update their views toward executive power, we expect that Democratic respondents will exhibit greater *negative* change in their support for unilateral power, indicating decreased support among these individuals. Likewise, to the degree that Americans' commitments to democratic values structure their attitudes toward

presidential power, we expect that these commitments have a stable relationship with executive power. That is, support for democracy should operate as a consistent predictor of attitudes regardless of whom is president. Therefore, we do not expect that this variable is systematically related to either the stability of attitudes or the direction of change across presidencies.

The within-subject change models are shown in Table 5. The results are consistent with our theoretical expectations. Considering models predicting stability (columns 1, 3, and 5), coefficient estimate for support for democracy is consistently negative and small in magnitude. It is statistically significant in only one of three models. While respondents with greater commitments to democratic values exhibit greater stability in attitudes toward executive power, stability does not materially vary across respondents on the basis of their commitments to these values. We also find that attitude stability has an inconsistent relationship with respondent partisanship. Democrats were considerably less likely to exhibit consistent attitudes across presidents in response to our unilateral policymaking question, yet the coefficients are small in magnitude and signed in opposite directions for the other two dependent variables.

Models predicting the direction of attitude change present a starker contrast between democratic commitments and partisanship. With respect to the former, we find no consistent evidence that respondents with stronger commitments to democratic values updated their views toward executive power as the presidency transitioned from Obama to Trump. The coefficients are all small in magnitude and are signed in opposite directions. Consistent with our argument, “constitutional qualms” (Christenson and Kriner, 2017a) appear to structure attitudes toward executive power and in ways that are consistent across time and orthogonal to an individual’s personal partisanship. We also find, however, that political alignments with the sitting president also shape attitudes toward executive power. Across each of the three dependent variables, Democrats exhibited considerably larger attitude changes in the negative direction compared to Republicans, and these coefficients are statistically significant in each model.

On the whole, our results highlight the ways in which public opinion toward presidential

	Policymaking		Judicial Appointments		Bureaucratic Implementation	
	Abs Change	Change	Abs Change	Change	Abs Change	Change
Intercept	0.33*	0.53*	0.89*	0.53*	0.53*	0.64*
	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.14)	(0.17)	(0.14)	(0.18)
Support for Democracy	-0.03*	0.00	-0.03	-0.03	-0.02	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Democrat (in Oct 15)	0.18*	-0.83*	0.02	-0.74*	-0.03	-1.05*
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)
Male	0.04	0.07	-0.07	0.16*	-0.04	0.08
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.07)
Income	-0.00	0.00	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Black	-0.06	-0.12	0.12	-0.42*	0.22*	-0.29*
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.13)
Hispanic	-0.10	-0.05	-0.04	-0.07	-0.08	-0.03
	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.12)
Education	-0.00	-0.03	-0.02	-0.07*	0.02	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Age	0.04*	-0.02	-0.01	0.00	0.04*	-0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Adj. R ²	0.01	0.20	0.01	0.19	0.01	0.25
Num. obs.	875	875	882	882	861	861

* $p < 0.05$

Table 5: A Model of Change in Attitudes toward Unilateral Policymaking, Judicial Appointments, and Bureaucratic Implementation from October 2015 to January 2018

power reflects both long-term commitments to governing principles as well as more ephemeral partisan attachments to political leaders. Our descriptive evidence showed that pluralities of Americans exhibit stable attitudes about the nature of presidential power across survey waves administered several years apart, even as the presidency changed occupants and the uses of presidential power were increasingly politicized. On the whole, Americans exhibit a fundamental level of agreement and consistency in their beliefs about executive power. To the extent Americans *do* update their views toward executive power as the identity of the president changes, these attitude changes fall far short of representing wholesale partisan swings in beliefs toward power. The overwhelming stability we find therefore contrasts with other potentially relevant benchmarks; for instance, recent scholarship finds that Americans'

support for the institutional power of the Supreme Court is responsive to the ideological nature of the decisions the Court issues (Bartels and Johnston, 2013; Christenson and Glick, 2015) and that Americans' attitudes about legislative procedures and the tradeoff between majority rights and minority rule are structured largely by partisanship (Park and Smith, 2016; Smith and Park, 2013). On this score, our findings depart from these previous studies in finding that Americans' exhibit strong commitment to a constrained Chief Executive, no matter their own political views or partisanship.

Conclusion

In early 2019, President Trump and members of Congress sparred over the President's use of an emergency declaration to fund a border wall with Mexico for which Congress had denied appropriations. In an op-ed in the *Washington Post*, Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC) announced his opposition to Trump's emergency declaration. He argued that, "It is my responsibility to be a steward of the Article I branch, to preserve the separation of powers and to curb the kind of executive overreach that Congress has allowed to fester for the better part of the past century." Tillis's commitment to this principle, he argued, transcended his shared partisanship with the president. His opposition to executive overreach by Obama necessitated his opposition to overreach by Trump. Tillis wrote that, "There is no intellectual honesty in now turning around and arguing that there's an imaginary asterisk attached to executive overreach—that it's acceptable for my party but not thy party." The op-ed was published on February 25, but just over two weeks later Senator Tillis had abandoned the "intellectual honesty" he extolled. On March 14, Tillis voted to support President Trump's emergency declaration. The Senator's actions are consistent with the conventional wisdom that partisanship dominates political decision making, which has led some pundits and observers to lament that the prospects for informal constraints on executive power appear dim.

The United States is not alone in this regard. In places such as Turkey, Hungary, and Poland, elected executives have taken steps to consolidate their power and enact anti-democratic reforms. These actions have alarmed scholars and observers over concerns of democratic backsliding. The election and presidency of Donald Trump have prompted numerous indictments of the administration as engaging in nascent authoritarianism. These accounts portray the president's supporters as complicit in Trump's accumulation of power. These critiques mostly ignore the possibility that mass publics might have meaningful attitudes toward executive power, which could be mobilized against the president by political parties and other organized groups. In contrast with these accounts, which reach pessimistic conclusions, we find that Americans view presidential power with skepticism and that these attitudes persist even as their political alignment changes with respect to the president currently in office.

Our results provide new insights about how Americans view the separation of powers and suggest more sanguine conclusions about the potential for democratic backsliding in the United States. Widespread opposition to unilateral authority documented in our data suggests that American public opinion can be mobilized in opposition to a president who seeks to expand his power. These attitudes may provide a source of political incentives for officeholders in other branches of government to rein in presidents who have expanded their authority (or seek to do so) too far. Our findings thus suggest that the incentives for legislators to protect institutional prerogatives may be stronger than commonly believed (Howell and Moe, 2016). Political parties and a free press may play an especially important role, therefore, in translating the attitudes we identify into potential sources of democratic constraint on elected officials. Absent these intermediary institutions, however, there may be fewer antidotes for combating the ambitions of power-seeking executives.

Our study has several important implications for understanding contemporary American public opinion. In an era where political identities such as partisanship are widely believed to distinguish how Americans view policy proposals, evaluate officeholders and candidates,

attribute responsibility for political outcomes, and interact in social settings, Americans' attitudes toward executive power are surprisingly similar across party lines. While much of public opinion may be explained by Americans' use of projection and motivated reasoning, our findings suggest that commitments to core democratic values, such as belief in the rule of law, also plays an important role in explaining how Americans view political institutions. By and large, even Americans who share the president's partisanship appear reluctant to express support for increasing the president's unilateral authority. These findings provide a more sanguine interpretation of presidentialism than Linz (1990), who criticized presidential systems for providing incentives for presidents to translate popular support into unilateral power.

Finally, we note several limitations of our study and identify opportunities for further research. Our public opinion data makes use of a quasi-natural experiment to study how changing political alignments between citizens and elected executives shapes public attitudes toward the powers afforded those executives. It is somewhat unclear, however, to what degree these findings would translate into other presidential transitions in the U.S. and elsewhere. For instance, as American politics is increasingly nationalized and partisan politics is increasingly polarized, contemporary American presidents generally (though not always) have relatively low ceiling on their approval ratings. It is possible, therefore, that the public would be more supportive of unilateral powers for presidents with greater popularity. The relative stability of Americans' attitudes toward unilateral power also raises questions about whether the political costs of unilateral action vary across contexts. Recent research by Reeves and Rogowski (2018) and Christenson and Kriner (2017*b*) indicates that Americans react negatively to presidents who seek unilateral means of achieving their policy goals. Are these costs consistent across time, contexts, and presidents, and do they vary among politically relevant constituencies within the public? These are important questions for future research.

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A Support for Democracy Scores

We measure support for Democracy as a scaled version of the following eight questions. The first five are based on support for the rule of law and the last three are based on support for minority political liberty.

1. It is not necessary to obey a law you consider unjust.
2. Sometimes it might be better to ignore the law and solve problems immediately rather than wait for a legal solution.
3. It is not necessary to obey the laws of a government I did not vote for.
4. The government should have some ability to bend the law in order to solve pressing social and political problems.
5. When it comes right down to it, law is not all that important; what's important is that our government solves society's problems and make us all better off.
6. Society should not have to put up with those who have political ideas that are extremely different from the majority.
7. It is better to live in an orderly society than to allow people so much freedom that they can become disruptive.
8. Free speech is just not worth it if it means that we have to put up with the danger to society of extremist political views.

B Logits

For the logistic regressions below, the dependent variables is a binary indicator of support (i.e., if respondents indicated that they strongly agreed or agree with the statement). If respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, we coded them as missing. We include survey weights.

	10/15	10/16	11/16	5/17	1/18
Intercept	-2.81*	-3.24*	-2.55*	-2.72*	-2.14*
	(0.20)	(0.24)	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.14)
Support for Democracy	-0.38*	-0.29*	-0.33*	-0.33*	-0.18*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Presidential Copartisan	2.01*	2.05*	0.48*	1.25*	1.03*
	(0.22)	(0.27)	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.19)
Num. obs.	983	1078	1109	971	962

* $p < 0.05$

Table 6: A Logistic Model of Support for Unilateral Policymaking: October 2015 to January 2018

	10/15	10/16	11/16	5/17	1/18
Intercept	-2.81*	-3.24*	-2.55*	-2.72*	-2.14*
	(0.20)	(0.24)	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.14)
Support for Democracy	-0.38*	-0.29*	-0.33*	-0.33*	-0.18*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Presidential Copartisan	2.01*	2.05*	0.48*	1.25*	1.03*
	(0.22)	(0.27)	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.19)
Num. obs.	983	1078	1109	971	962

* $p < 0.05$

Table 7: A Logistic Model of Support for Unilateral Judicial Appointments: October 2015 to January 2018

	10/15	10/16	11/16	5/17	1/18
Intercept	-0.79*	-0.88*	-0.22*	-0.90*	-0.70*
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Support for Democracy	-0.13*	-0.09*	0.00	-0.04	-0.05
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Presidential Copartisan	1.53*	1.76*	0.28*	1.18*	1.55*
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.15)
Num. obs.	889	965	946	894	896

* $p < 0.05$

Table 8: A Logistic Model of Support for Unilateral Bureaucratic Implementation: October 2015 to January 2018

C Least Squares Models

For the least squares regressions below, the dependent variable is a five point scale coded from -2 (strongly disagree) to 2 (strongly agree). If respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, we coded them as zero. We include survey weights.

	10/15	10/16	11/16	5/17	1/18
Intercept	-1.14*	-1.10*	-1.04*	-1.11*	-1.06*
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Support for Democracy	-0.16*	-0.11*	-0.14*	-0.16*	-0.11*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Presidential Copartisan	0.83*	0.65*	0.22*	0.53*	0.51*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
R ²	0.27	0.22	0.11	0.14	0.09
Num. obs.	1287	1038	1025	934	906

* $p < 0.05$

Table 9: A Least Squares Model of Support for Unilateral Policymaking: October 2015 to January 2018. Survey weights included

	10/15	10/16	11/16	5/17	1/18
Intercept	-1.07*	-1.17*	-0.87*	-1.11*	-1.08*
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Support for Democracy	-0.15*	-0.14*	-0.12*	-0.18*	-0.14*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Presidential Copartisan	0.71*	0.88*	0.19*	0.72*	0.76*
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.07)
R ²	0.23	0.28	0.07	0.20	0.15
Num. obs.	1283	1046	1016	943	919

* $p < 0.05$

Table 10: A Least Squares Model of Support for Unilateral Judicial Appointments: October 2015 to January 2018. Survey weights included

	10/15	10/16	11/16	5/17	1/18
Intercept	-0.49*	-0.46*	-0.22*	-0.51*	-0.40*
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Support for Democracy	-0.05*	-0.03*	0.02	-0.04*	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Presidential Copartisan	0.73*	0.74*	0.24*	0.64*	0.65*
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)
R ²	0.13	0.14	0.01	0.07	0.08
Num. obs.	1289	1001	973	904	892

* $p < 0.05$

Table 11: A Least Squares Model of Support for Unilateral Bureaucratic Implementation: October 2015 to January 2018. Survey weights included.