

Political Regimes and Institutional Support: How Partisanship affects Attitudes toward Presidential Power

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Abstract

We study how Americans' attitudes toward executive power are affected by their partisan alignment with the president currently in office. One perspective posits that an individual's views about presidential power depend on whether a copartisan president holds office. Another perspective suggests that attitudes about executive power are stable across time and insulated from short-term political forces. We adjudicate between these arguments with panel data from a national probability sample conducted during the transition between the Obama and Trump presidencies. We establish two primary findings. First, large majorities of Americans report stable attitudes about executive power regardless of the president currently in office. Second, among respondents who reported different attitudes toward executive power as the presidency changed from Obama to Trump, they did so in ways that reflected their partisan identification. In an era of ascendant partisanship, Americans' attitudes toward executive power are surprisingly similar and stable across party lines.

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Executive power and democratic governance are closely related, as the potential for democratic backsliding is often associated with concerns about executive aggrandizement. While some scholars warn that institutional weaknesses may allow ambitious executives to successfully consolidate power (e.g., Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018), others argue that mass audiences are an important constraint on power-seeking executives (Christenson and Kriner 2020; Posner and Vermeule 2010).

We study how Americans' attitudes toward executive power are affected by their political alignment with the current president. Existing scholarship presents competing perspectives on this relationship. Some research suggests that individuals endorse executive power when a copartisan president is in office and oppose it otherwise. According to this perspective, "Americans evaluate unilateral action through the same partisan cues and policy preferences they use to make other political judgments" (Christenson and Kriner 2020, 58). This account posits that individuals' attitudes about presidential power depend on who is currently in office.

Another perspective ascribes a smaller role for partisanship in shaping attitudes toward presidential power. This view emphasizes the public's enduring "tyrannophobia" (Posner and Vermeule 2010). Consistent with this argument, cross-sectional research shows that members of both parties disapprove of presidential power and that these views are correlated with beliefs in the rule of law (Reeves and Rogowski 2016). This perspective suggests that attitudes about presidential power are stable across time.

Adjudicating between these perspectives is important for clarifying how the mass public provides incentives for presidential behavior. If Americans simply apply their partisanship when evaluating presidential power, presidents may wield power with the full support of their copartisans in the electorate. But if views about power are distinct from the public's partisan alignment with the current president, a president's personal basis of support may not translate into public acceptance of their institutional power. These competing perspectives have different implications for the prospects for mass-based accountability for the exercise of power and suggest different incentives for presidents.

Recent scholarship analyzes the predictors of attitudes toward presidential power using cross-sectional surveys or survey experiments that manipulate characteristics of presidents or political context (Christenson and Kriner 2020; Lowande and Gray 2017; Reeves and Rogowski 2016).¹ However, the former approach

¹See Berliner (Forthcoming) for evidence from a panel survey on attitudes toward executive privilege.

makes it difficult to identify the predictors of attitudes toward executive power due to potential confounding and omitted variables, while the latter approach raises concerns about external validity.

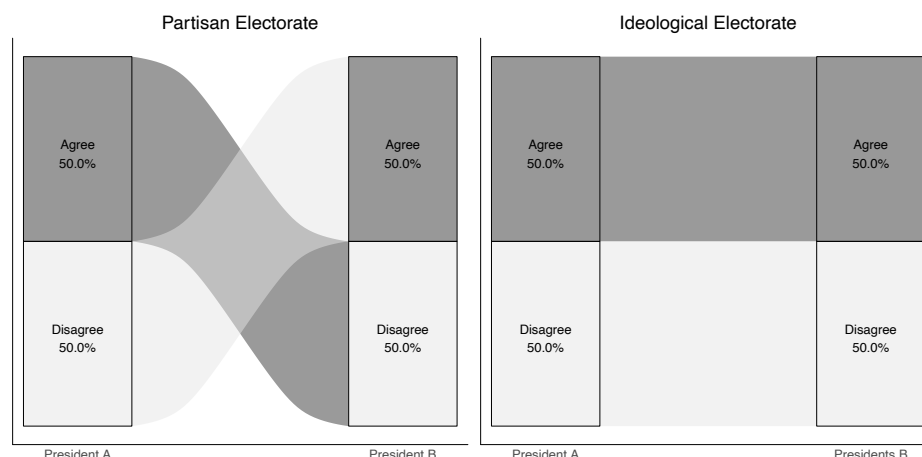
We address these limitations with a panel of survey respondents from a national probability sample from 2016 to 2017, during which time the American presidency changed hands from Obama to Trump. The transition between presidents allows us to examine how aggregate and individual-level attitudes toward executive power changed with the occupant of the White House. Overall, we find considerable stability of Americans' attitudes toward presidential power. While Democratic identifiers expressed somewhat less support for unilateral power and Republicans expressed somewhat greater support during the Trump presidency, large majorities of both groups opposed assertions of executive power regardless of the president currently in office. We further show that among respondents who reported different attitudes toward executive power as the presidency changed from Obama to Trump, they did so in ways that reflected their partisan identification. Our results provide new evidence about how public opinion toward the means of governing are responsive to the partisan identity of government leaders.

How Americans view Presidential Power

Figure 1 depicts the theoretical perspectives described above. These Sankey diagrams show the flow of public opinion over two periods when leadership changes from two hypothetical presidents belonging to different political parties (President A to President B). The left panel represents a purely partisan electorate. When President B from the other party takes office, the public *en masse* switches their opinions on presidential power because they favor power only when it is exercised by a copartisan leader. The right panel depicts an electorate with deep-seated views about the power of the president. This "ideological" electorate maintains its view of presidential power regardless of who occupies the office.

This example highlights the importance of using panel data to evaluate attitude change. In both examples, aggregate public opinion is identical. Half of the electorate supports and half opposes executive power. In the case of the partisan electorate in the left panel, this stability belies substantial (indeed, total) individual-level change. In the case of the ideological electorate, aggregate stability mirrors individual-level stability. The absence of panel data from previous studies limit their ability to identify how Americans revise their beliefs about presidential power and whether these attitudes are responsive to the public's political alignment with the president.

Figure 1: Hypothetical Example of Attitudes toward Presidential Power in Times of Change



Note: The panel on the left depicts a partisan electorate where citizens realign their views of presidential power when a new president comes to power. The panel on the right depicts an ideological electorate, which holds consistent views of unilateral powers under different presidents.

Measuring Attitudes toward Unilateral Powers

Following similar studies of attitude change (Ang et al. Forthcoming; Gerber and Huber 2010), we use the transition from the Obama to Trump administrations to examine how political alignment with the president affects attitudes about executive power. Our data come from The American Panel Survey (TAPS), a monthly panel survey administered by GfK/Knowledge Networks with a national probability sample. We use data from waves conducted in October 2016 before the election, after the election in November 2016, when respondents likely would have anticipated a change in presidential party, and several months after Trump’s inauguration in May 2017. By analyzing data for the same respondents collected at several points, we study within-respondent stability in attitudes toward presidential power and evaluate sources of its potential change.²

We examine attitudes towards presidential power with three questions on dimensions of presidential authority. First, we examine attitudes toward *unilateral policymaking*, which we define for respondents as the president’s “right to enact policies without having those policies voted on by Congress.” Second, we

²Our analyses include respondents who were present in all three waves. Appendix A describes the composition of this sample and presents results when including respondents who were present in some but not all waves.

examine *unilateral judicial appointments*, which we describe as the president’s ability “to appoint judges of his choosing regardless of whether the U.S. Senate agrees with his selections.” Third, we examine *unilateral bureaucratic implementation*, which is the president’s authority “to decide how executive branch agencies will implement bills passed by Congress.” For each question, we assess respondents’ agreement 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.³

We study two questions with these data. First, we examine whether and how Americans change their attitudes about presidential power following a change in presidential party. If the identity of the president affects Americans’ views about the power of the presidency, then these patterns may mirror the partisan electorate depicted in Figure 1 across the change in administrations. Alternatively, if Americans’ attitudes about institutional arrangements persist across political regimes, we expect little change across time. Second, we study whether attitudes change in the direction of individuals’ partisan loyalties.

Change and Continuity in Attitudes toward Executive Power

Figure 2 presents descriptive patterns for our dependent variables from October 2016 to May 2017, the first and last waves in our analysis. These alluvial plots depict the flow of respondents between response categories. The bars, labeled “agree,” “neither” [agree nor disagree], and “disagree,” depict the proportions of respondents reporting each attitude in each wave. The left column shows changes in attitudes for all respondents and the center and right columns show attitudes for Democrats and Republicans, respectively.

Overall, Figure 2 provides evidence for two descriptive claims. First, during this period of presidential transition, large proportions of respondents expressed consistent attitudes about presidential power. A majority reported the same attitude about unilateral policymaking (58 percent) and judicial appointments (61 percent) in May 2017 as they had seven months earlier in October 2016, and 46 percent of respondents reported the same attitude about agency implementation in both waves.⁴ The stability is evident from the narrow ‘streams’ that represent opinion change between the two waves and contrasts with changes in respondents’ approval rating of the sitting president across the same waves. Only 16 percent of respondents expressed the same level of approval for Donald Trump in May 2017 as they did for Barack Obama

³The Supplementary Appendix reports results using five-point scales.

⁴Supplementary Appendix A shows that stability was even higher between the October 2016 and November 2016 waves.

seven months earlier.⁵ Despite changing views about the president, respondents had relatively consistent attitudes regarding presidential power.

Second, the figure does not show that partisans exhibit wholesale movement from support to opposition (or vice versa) regarding presidential power as the presidency changes partisan hands. To be sure, some partisans reported different views about presidential power during the Obama administration than they did during the Trump presidency. Yet a small share of respondents exhibited such movement. Only 14 percent of respondents switched positions from ‘agree’ to ‘disagree’ (or vice versa) for the unilateral policymaking variable, and the same magnitude of attitude change occurred for 19 percent of respondents for judicial appointments and 25 percent of respondents for agency implementation. Among these changes, some are in the direction opposite what we would expect if respondents reported different attitudes to match their partisan alignment with the president.

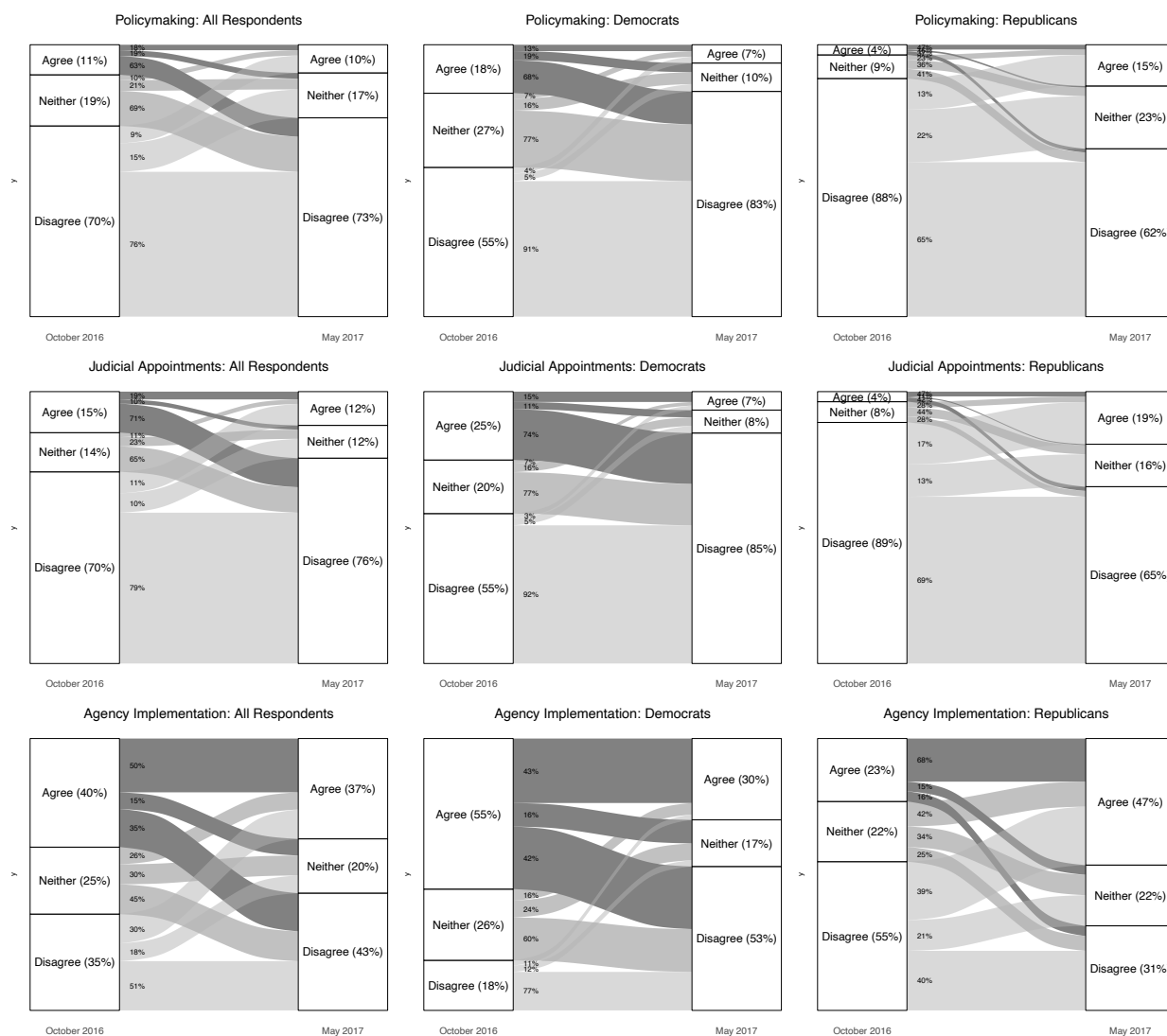
Testing the Effect of Partisanship on Attitudes toward Executive Power

The data above suggest that most, yet not all, Americans hold relatively stable views about presidential power. To what degree are public attitudes about presidential power dependent upon whom holds office? We examine this question by studying how respondents’ partisanship is associated with changing views of presidential power between the October 2016 wave and the two later waves. For each indicator of attitudes toward presidential power, we create a differenced measure that subtracts evaluations of presidential power (on a three-point scale) measured before the 2016 presidential election from evaluations reported in waves after the 2016 presidential election. Each dependent variable is a five-point measure of change where positive numbers indicate more favorable evaluations in the post-election wave, negative numbers indicate less favorable evaluations, and zero indicates no change. Partisanship was measured in the May 2016 wave of TAPS, before the election outcome and subsequent change in presidential party. We use a five-point measure of partisan identification, which ranges from -2 (Strong Republican) to 2 (Strong Democrat), where leaners and weak partisans are coded +/- 1.⁶

⁵Approval ratings were measured on four-point scales.

⁶Supplementary Appendix B shows regression results using alternative measurement and estimation strategies.

Figure 2: Change in Support for Presidential Power, October 2016 and May 2017



Note: In smaller font on each stream, we indicate the percent of each group that flows from their initial position in October 2016 to each position in May 2017. For example, among those who disagree with unilateral policymaking in October, 76 percent also disagree in May, 15 percent neither agree nor disagree in May 2017, and 9 percent switch their opinion and agree with it in May 2017.

We use linear regression to model changes in evaluations of presidential power as a function of respondent partisanship. We also estimate models that include demographic controls, including age (in years), gender, racial/ethnic group membership, income, and education. If partisan alignment with the president causes more positive assessments of presidential power, we expect to find a negative coefficient for the partisanship variable. This would indicate that Republican identifiers were more supportive of presidential power and/or that Democratic identifiers were less supportive of presidential power after the election and presidency of Donald Trump compared with the attitudes they reported just weeks before the election.

Table 1 shows the results. Panel A shows results for the unilateral policymaking measure, Panel B shows results for the judicial appointments measure, and Panel C shows results for the agency implementation measure. The column labels indicate when the postelection dependent variable was measured. The “November 2016” columns show results when we compared attitudes from the November 2016 wave to attitudes for the same respondents in the October 2016 (pre-election) wave. The “May 2017” columns show results when we compared attitudes from the May 2017 wave to October 2016. For each dependent variable and post-election wave, we report results from two model specifications. The first model for each dependent variable omits controls while the second includes them. We limit the analysis to respondents who completed each of the three waves (October 2016, November 2016, and May 2017).

Panel A provides some evidence that partisanship affected attitudes toward presidential power following the 2016 presidential election and the inauguration of Donald Trump. Columns (1) and (2) compare evaluations of presidential power in November 2016 post-election survey to respondents’ pre-election evaluations of presidential power. The coefficients for partisanship are negatively signed and statistically distinguishable from zero. These results provide evidence that, to the degree that public attitudes about unilateral power changed following the election of Donald Trump, they changed in ways that reflected respondents’ partisan orientations. Our models indicate that respondents who identified as more strongly Democratic had more negative evaluations of presidential power while more Republican respondents had more positive evaluations of presidential power. Based on column (2), a four-point increase in partisanship—which corresponds to the difference between a strong Republican and strong Democrat—is predicted to decrease postelection evaluations of presidential power by about 0.24 units (0.061×4) relative to respondents’ preelection attitudes. This is a relatively small change considering that the dependent

variable is on a five-point scale and amounts to about one-third of a standard deviation of its values.⁷

Panels B and C provide similar results when evaluating changes in attitudes before and after the election of Donald Trump. The coefficients for partisanship in columns (1) and (2) are consistently negative and statistically significant, indicating that Democratic respondents expressed more negative views toward presidential power after the election of Trump while Republican respondents reported more positive views. The magnitudes of the relationships are somewhat larger for Panels B and C relative to Panel A. A four-point increase in partisanship is predicted to decrease evaluations of unilateral judicial appointments by about 0.50 units (0.121×4) and agency implementation by about 0.54 units (0.135×4). Each of these differences corresponds to about one-half of a standard deviation in the values of the dependent variables.⁸

As columns (3) and (4) show, however, partisanship is more strongly associated with changes in attitudes toward presidential power once Trump was in office. In each panel, the magnitudes of the coefficients for partisanship are larger in columns (3) and (4) than they are in (1) and (2). A four-unit increase in partisanship from strong Republican to strong Democrat is associated with slightly more than one standard deviation decrease in evaluations of presidential power.

Together, Figure 2 and Table 1 show that public attitudes toward executive power reflect both the “partisan” and “ideological” electorates stylized in Figure 1. Consistent with the “ideological” depiction, many Americans register consistent attitudes about presidential power despite changes in presidential administrations. Yet these attitudes are not stable for everyone is consistent, as between 13 and 25 percent of respondents shifted their views toward presidential power between October 2016 and May 2017. Consistent with the “partisan” electorate, Table 1 shows that these attitude changes reflected respondents’ partisan alignment with the president. Republicans who changed their views about presidential power were more enthusiastic about it following the election and inauguration of Donald Trump, while Democrats who changed their views about power were less enthusiastic upon the election and inauguration of Trump. For this share of the public, partisanship significantly affects views about presidential power.

⁷A standard deviation in change in attitudes toward unilateral policymaking is 0.69.

⁸A standard deviation is 0.91 and 0.83 for judicial appointments and agency implementation, respectively.

Table 1: Changes in Attitudes toward Presidential Power, Before and After the 2016 Election and Presidential Transition

DV = change in attitudes between October 2016 and...				
	November 2016 (post-election)		May 2017 (post-inauguration)	
<i>Panel A: Policymaking</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.078* (0.016)	-0.061* (0.017)	-0.281* (0.019)	-0.260* (0.020)
(Intercept)	-0.075* (0.024)	-0.177 (0.145)	0.013 (0.028)	-0.142 (0.172)
<i>Panel B: Judicial appointments</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.137* (0.019)	-0.121* (0.020)	-0.298* (0.021)	-0.280* (0.021)
(Intercept)	-0.016 (0.028)	-0.169 (0.172)	-0.012 (0.030)	-0.017 (0.185)
<i>Panel C: Agency implementation</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.153* (0.021)	-0.135* (0.022)	-0.356* (0.024)	-0.333* (0.025)
(Intercept)	-0.021 (0.031)	-0.345 (0.189)	-0.033 (0.035)	-0.411 (0.214)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	841	841	841	841

Note: Entries are linear regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the change in approval of presidential power between the pre-election period and the month listed at the top of the columns. The dependent was measured on a five-point scale that ranged from -2 to 2. Controls include indicators for age, sex, race/ethnicity, income, and education. Partisanship was measured on a five-point scale. * indicates $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed tests).

Conclusion

Using panel data with a nationally representative sample of Americans, we provide new evidence about individual-level stability and change in attitudes about presidential power. Overall, our results suggest that public attitudes toward executive power reflect both partisan and principled considerations.

Our study has several implications for understanding contemporary American public opinion. In an era where partisanship structures many aspects of political and social life, Americans' attitudes toward executive power are surprisingly similar across party lines. In additional analyses shown in Appendix C.2 we explore the sources of stability in attitudes toward presidential power. The findings show limited evidence that partisans exhibit less stability than Independents, but indicate that stronger commitment

to the rule of law is associated with greater stability.⁹ These characteristics appear to distinguish which respondents comprise the “partisan” and “ideological” electorates depicted in Figure 1.

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 exercise of power. It is unclear, however, how these findings would translate into other presidential transitions in the U.S. and elsewhere. Moreover, we though we measured attitudes about presidential power within a relatively narrow period of time on either side of the presidential transition, our questions were asked at different political contexts within each administration. If attitudes about presidential power depend on the context in which a president governs, it may be preferable to compare attitudes at more equivalent stages of each president’s term (see Table C.1). Finally, our survey does not allow us to examine the conditions under which Americans’ reported beliefs about presidential power can be successfully mobilized to oppose actions undertaken by presidents. These are important questions for future research.

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⁹At least in the short term, we also find some evidence that political knowledge is positively associated with stability.

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ONLINE APPENDIX

Supplementary Analyses for

Political Regimes and Institutional Support:

How Partisanship affects Attitudes toward Presidential Power

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A Sample Characteristics and Comparisons

The analyses in this section describe the demographic and political composition of the sample included in the main analysis and presents results that include weights constructed to generalize the results to the US population of English-speaking adults. It also includes analyses to compare the respondents included in these analyses to those who were not included due to missing data or attrition. Respondents were excluded from the main analyses if they dropped out of the survey or did not answer all three dependent variables in all three waves (October 2016, November 2016, and May 2017).

- Table A.1 shows the composition of the 841 respondents shown in the main analyses.
- Table A.2 applies survey weights to the analyses shown in Table 1.
- Table A.3 compares attitudes toward executive power among the 841 respondents included in the main analyses and all survey respondents who answered any of the questions used as the dependent variables. In eight of the nine comparisons (three survey questions asked across three survey waves), differences in average support for executive power were statistically indistinguishable from zero.
- Table A.4 compares the percentage of respondents with stable attitudes toward executive power in each pair of waves (October 2016 and November 2016, October 2016 and May 2017). The 841 respondents in the main analyses do not have unusually stable attitudes relative to respondents who have missing data for one or more dependent variables in one or more waves. Differences in the percentages of stable respondents are no larger than one percentage point.
- Table A.5 provides descriptive statistics about attitudinal stability using the five-point scale to measure the dependent variable in each wave. While the levels of stability are lower when using the five-point scale than they are with the three-point scale, the table also shows that the vast majority of respondents—more than two-thirds—moves by no more than one response category between October 2016 and May 2017. This is equivalent to moving from, for example, “somewhat disagree” to “strongly disagree”, or from “neither agree nor disagree” to “somewhat agree.” It does not reflect wholesale change in one’s evaluation of executive power.

- Table A.6 estimates models from Table 1 using all respondents who answered each of the survey items comprising the dependent variables in at least two waves. The results are similar to those in Table 1.

Table A.1: Sample Characteristics

Category	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Gender		
Men	472	56.1
Women	369	43.9
Age		
18-29	34	4.0
30-44	140	16.6
45-64	346	41.1
65+	321	38.2
Education		
No high school diploma	18	2.1
High school diploma	98	11.7
Some college	168	20.0
Associate's degree	87	10.3
Bachelors degree	232	27.6
Graduate/professional degree	238	28.3
Income		
Below \$20,000	86	10.2
\$20,000 to \$39,999	136	16.2
\$40,000 to \$59,999	167	19.9
\$60,000 to \$79,999	131	15.6
\$80,000 to \$99,999	110	13.1
\$100,000 to \$149,999	136	16.2
\$150,000 or more	75	8.9
Race/ethnicity		
Black	58	6.9
Hispanic	72	8.6
White	673	80.0
Other/not specified	38	4.5
Partisanship		
Strong Democrat	197	23.4
Weak/lean Democrat	251	29.8
Independent	7	0.8
Weak/lean Republican	249	29.6
Strong Republican	137	16.3
Ideology		
Very liberal	76	9.5
Liberal	157	19.6
Somewhat liberal	101	12.6
Moderate	201	25.2
Somewhat conservative	87	10.9
Conservative	132	16.5
Very conservative	45	5.6

Table A.2: Changes in Attitudes toward Presidential Power, Before and After the 2016 Election and Change in Presidential Administration (Weighted Results)

DV = change in attitudes between October 2016 and...				
	November 2016 (post-election)		May 2017 (post-inauguration)	
<i>Panel A: Policymaking</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.135* (0.016)	-0.096* (0.017)	-0.281* (0.019)	-0.243* (0.020)
(Intercept)	-0.121* (0.024)	-0.150 (0.118)	-0.053 (0.028)	-0.307* (0.137)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	841	841	841	841
<i>Panel B: Judicial appointments</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.218* (0.020)	-0.163* (0.021)	-0.326* (0.021)	-0.285* (0.023)
(Intercept)	-0.020 (0.029)	-0.113 (0.145)	0.025 (0.032)	0.084 (0.158)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	841	841	841	841
<i>Panel C: Agency implementation</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.167* (0.020)	-0.110* (0.021)	-0.355* (0.024)	-0.305* (0.025)
(Intercept)	-0.041 (0.030)	-0.538* (0.148)	-0.078* (0.035)	-0.622* (0.173)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	841	841	841	841

Note: Entries are linear regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the change in approval of presidential power between the pre-election period and the month listed at the top of the columns. The dependent was measured on a five-point scale that ranged from -2 to 2. Survey weights from the October 2016 baseline wave are included in all models. Controls include indicators for age, sex, race/ethnicity, income, and education. * indicates $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed tests).

Table A.3: Attrition, Missing Data, and Attitudes toward Executive Power

	Full sample	Limited sample	<i>p</i>
Unilateral policymaking			
Oct 2016	1.41	1.42	.770
Nov 2016	1.33	1.34	.872
May 2017	1.35	1.40	.160
Judicial appointments			
Oct 2016	1.49	1.44	.298
Nov 2016	1.46	1.41	.249
May 2017	1.37	1.39	.620
Agency implementation			
Oct 2016	2.03	2.04	.883
Nov 2016	2.03	1.99	.472
May 2017	1.81	1.95	.002

Table A.4: Comparing Stability across Samples

	Limited sample		Full sample	
	Percent stable	<i>N</i>	Percent stable	<i>N</i>
Unilateral policymaking				
Oct 2016 to Nov 2016	72	841	73	1295
Oct 2016 to May 2017	58	841	59	1138
Judicial appointments				
Oct 2016 to Nov 2016	69	841	69	1293
Oct 2016 to May 2017	61	841	62	1152
Agency implementation				
Oct 2016 to Nov 2016	58	841	57	1207
Oct 2016 to May 2017	46	841	45	1076

Table A.5: Comparing Stability with Five-Point Scale

	Consistent responses (%)	Responses within one category (%)
Unilateral policymaking		
Oct 2016 to Nov 2016	50	89
Oct 2016 to May 2017	35	76
Judicial appointments		
Oct 2016 to Nov 2016	51	82
Oct 2016 to May 2017	35	73
Agency implementation		
Oct 2016 to Nov 2016	47	81
Oct 2016 to May 2017	37	67

Note: Using the five-point scale to measure the dependent variables, entries show the percentage of respondents who reported consistent attitudes toward executive power (first column) and who moved by no more than one category on the five-point scale (second column) between waves.

Table A.6: Changes in Attitudes toward Presidential Power, Before and After the 2016 Election and Change in Presidential Administration (Using all respondents in at least two waves)

DV = change in attitudes between October 2016 and...				
	November 2016 (post-election)		May 2017 (post-inauguration)	
<i>Panel A: Policymaking</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.070* (0.013)	-0.063* (0.014)	-0.261* (0.017)	-0.247* (0.018)
(Intercept)	-0.068* (0.019)	-0.079 (0.123)	0.002 (0.025)	-0.191 (0.163)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	1,253	1,146	1,113	1,015
<i>Panel B: Judicial appointments</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.118* (0.015)	-0.106* (0.017)	-0.292* (0.018)	-0.276* (0.019)
(Intercept)	-0.013 (0.023)	-0.112 (0.146)	-0.031 (0.026)	-0.162 (0.172)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	1,254	1,151	1,129	1,033
<i>Panel C: Agency implementation</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.140* (0.018)	-0.124* (0.019)	-0.355* (0.021)	-0.338* (0.023)
(Intercept)	-0.008 (0.026)	-0.257 (0.166)	-0.056 (0.031)	-0.426* (0.206)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	1,175	1,074	1,054	960

Note: Entries are linear regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the change in approval of presidential power between the pre-election period and the month listed at the top of the columns. The dependent was measured on a five-point scale that ranged from -2 to 2. Controls include indicators for age, sex, race/ethnicity, income, and education. * indicates $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed tests).

B Robustness Checks

This section reports results using alternative measurements of key variables and alternative statistical models.

- Table B.1 uses the original five-point scales to construct the dependent variables. The original five-point scales asked respondents for their evaluations of executive power ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5) and included a neutral middle option (“neither agree nor disagree”). We subtracted wave 2 responses (either November 2016 or May 2017) from wave 1 responses (October 2016) to create a nine-point differenced measure that ranged from -4 to 4. The coefficients are larger in magnitude but the substantive patterns are similar. Partisanship affected attitude change among respondents who did not exhibit consistent attitudes toward executive power across time.
- Table B.2 shows results using the seven-point partisanship scale. Like Table 1, it shows that partisanship was associated with the direction of change in attitudes toward executive power.
- Table B.3 uses ordered logit to model the dependent variables instead of linear regression. It continues to show that partisanship is significantly associated with the direction of change in attitudes toward executive power. The bottom row of each panel shows the partisan differences in the predicted probability of exhibiting the largest positive change in support for executive power (i.e., from the most negative view in October 2016 to the most positive view in the later waves). The positive values indicate that strong Republicans were between 2 and 25 percentage points more likely to exhibit such a change than strong Democrats.

B.1 Alternative Measures of Independent and Dependent Variables

Table B.1: Changes in Attitudes toward Presidential Power, Before and After the 2016 Election and Change in Presidential Administration (Constructing the differenced measured from five-point scales)

DV = change in attitudes between October 2016 and...				
	November 2016 (post-election)		May 2017 (post-inauguration)	
<i>Panel A: Policymaking</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.143* (0.022)	-0.117* (0.023)	-0.512* (0.026)	-0.480* (0.027)
(Intercept)	-0.149* (0.033)	-0.360 (0.199)	-0.001 (0.038)	-0.332 (0.233)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	841	841	841	841
<i>Panel B: Judicial appointments</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.224* (0.025)	-0.202* (0.026)	-0.558* (0.027)	-0.536* (0.029)
(Intercept)	-0.040 (0.037)	-0.308 (0.230)	-0.031 (0.041)	-0.242 (0.248)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	841	841	841	841
<i>Panel C: Agency implementation</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.206* (0.022)	-0.184* (0.024)	-0.516* (0.027)	-0.493* (0.030)
(Intercept)	-0.006 (0.033)	-0.347 (0.205)	-0.066 (0.040)	-0.562* (0.264)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	841	841	841	841

Note: Entries are linear regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the change in approval of presidential power between the pre-election period and the month listed at the top of the columns. The dependent was measured on a nine-point scale that ranged from -4 to 4. Controls include indicators for age, sex, race/ethnicity, income, and education. * indicates $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed tests).

Table B.2: Changes in Attitudes toward Presidential Power, Before and After the 2016 Election and Change in Presidential Administration (Seven-Point Party ID)

DV = change in attitudes between October 2016 and...				
	November 2016 (post-election)		May 2017 (post-inauguration)	
<i>Panel A: Policymaking</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.054* (0.011)	-0.043* (0.011)	-0.185* (0.013)	-0.172* (0.013)
(Intercept)	0.140* (0.051)	-0.005 (0.151)	0.755* (0.060)	0.551* (0.180)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	841	841	841	841
<i>Panel B: Judicial appointments</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.092* (0.013)	-0.121* (0.020)	-0.197* (0.014)	-0.186* (0.014)
(Intercept)	0.351* (0.060)	-0.169 (0.172)	0.776* (0.065)	0.734* (0.194)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	841	841	841	841
<i>Panel C: Agency implementation</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.102* (0.014)	-0.091* (0.014)	-0.238* (0.016)	-0.224* (0.016)
(Intercept)	0.389* (0.066)	0.022 (0.198)	0.920* (0.074)	0.492* (0.224)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	841	841	841	841

Note: Entries are linear regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the change in approval of presidential power between the pre-election period and the month listed at the top of the columns. The dependent was measured on a five-point scale that ranged from -2 to 2. Controls include indicators for age, sex, race/ethnicity, income, and education. * indicates $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed tests).

B.2 Alternative Statistical Models

Table B.3: Changes in Attitudes toward Presidential Power, Before and After the 2016 Election and Change in Presidential Administration (Ordered Logit)

	DV = change in attitudes between October 2016 and...			
	November 2016 (post-election)		May 2017 (post-inauguration)	
<i>Panel A: Policymaking</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.264* (0.028)	-0.216* (0.029)	-0.726* (0.029)	-0.697* (0.030)
Partisan Diff. in Pred. Prob.	0.026	0.023	0.171	0.159
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	841	841	841	841
<i>Panel B: Judicial appointments</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.378* (0.053)	-0.333* (0.055)	-0.719* (0.057)	-0.695* (0.060)
Partisan Diff. in Pred. Prob.	0.085	0.071	0.209	0.163
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	841	841	841	841
<i>Panel C: Agency implementation</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.337* (0.047)	-0.302* (0.050)	-0.641* (0.049)	-0.608* (0.051)
Partisan Diff. in Pred. Prob.	0.084	0.083	0.249	0.244
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	841	841	841	841

Note: Entries are ordered logit regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the change in approval of presidential power between the pre-election period and the month listed at the top of the columns. The dependent was measured on a five-point scale that ranged from -2 to 2. Controls include indicators for age, sex, race/ethnicity, income, and education. The row labeled "Partisan Diff. in Pred. Prob." displays the difference between strong Republicans and strong Democrats in the predicted probability of exhibiting the largest positive change in support for executive power (i.e., the dependent variable had a value of 2). All control variables were held at their modal values (median value for age). Positive values of these entries indicate that strong Republicans were more likely than strong Democrats to exhibit this change. For example, an entry of 0.05 would indicate that strong Republicans were five percentage points more likely than strong Democrats to report that they opposed executive power during the Obama presidency and approved of it during the Trump presidency. * indicates $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed tests).

C Extensions

C.1 Comparing attitudes between January 2014 and January 2018

Our 2017 data come from the first year of Trump’s presidency while our data from 2016 are from the last year of Obama’s presidency. It is possible that individuals could have different attitudes toward executive power given these different periods in presidential cycles.

Fortuitously, our questions about executive power were asked in both January 2014 and January 2018. These dates are somewhat convenient because they coincided with the beginning of the second year of each presidential term.

We note three important caveats. First, January 2014 was the second year of Obama’s second term while January 2018 was the second year of Trump’s single term. Thus, these contexts may not be as similar as we might like. Second, other aspects of the political context could have changed during this period, which could have implications for how the individuals in the panel thought about unilateral power. For example, Obama’s difficulties in passing major legislation during his second term, and the controversy associated with his high-profile uses of it, could have affected respondents’ views about presidential power. This is a potential limitation of expanding the time period over which these kinds of comparisons are made. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the response options for the questions unfortunately were not the same for both of these waves. (In fact, this is why our manuscript focuses on the 2016-17 period, because the response options were identical.) In January 2014, there was no “neutral” response option; the options were a four-point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” along with a “don’t know” option. In January 2018, however, there was a “neither agree nor disagree” option—creating a five-point scale—along with a “don’t know” option. Thus our comparisons are necessarily tentative.

Table C.1 studies changes in support for executive power among respondents who completed the survey in both January 2014 and January 2018. We note that the January 2014 wave did not include a “neither agree nor disagree” response option; thus, for both waves respondents are coded only as whether they supported or opposed each measure of presidential power. Therefore, our dependent variables take three values: -1 (became less supportive), 0 (no change), and 1 (became more supportive).

Overall, 76 percent of respondents consistently supported or opposed unilateral policymaking; 55 per-

cent of respondents consistent supported or opposed agency implementation; and 67 percent of respondents consistently supported or opposed judicial nominations. Again, we want to caution readers against comparing these stability figures to those reported in the main text given differences in the response scales and the construction of the dependent variables. Using these data, Table C.1 report results from models similar to those shown in Table 1.

Table C.1: Changes in Attitudes toward Presidential Power, January 2014 to January 2018

	Unilateral policymaking		Judicial appointments		Agency implementation	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Partisanship (+=Democratic)	-0.075* (0.010)	-0.065* (0.010)	-0.099* (0.011)	-0.094* (0.011)	-0.119* (0.012)	-0.105* (0.013)
(Intercept)	0.276* (0.049)	-0.101 (0.150)	0.296* (0.052)	0.418* (0.162)	0.436* (0.061)	0.056 (0.187)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	465	465	465	465	465	465

Note: Entries are linear regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the change in approval of presidential power between January 2014 and January 2014. Dependent variables are measured on three-point scales, where -1 indicates decreases in support, 0 indicates no change in attitudes, and 1 indicates increases in support. Controls include indicators for age, sex, race/ethnicity, income, and education. * indicates $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed tests).

C.2 Predictors of Attitudinal Stability

We evaluate the predictors of response stability over successive waves of the analysis. For each pair of waves, we constructed a binary indicator for whether respondents provided the same response (again, measured on the three-point scale) regarding each measure of presidential power. Here, 1=stable (same responses) and 0=not stable (different responses). We constructed this measure to characterize response stability between October 2016 and November 2016, and between October 2016 and May 2017.

Then, we regressed this measure on a series of covariates to explore how these covariates are associated with response stability. Several covariates are particularly important. First, we included indicators for respondents who identified as Democrats and Republicans. If partisans change their views about presidential power based on who wins elections and holds office, we would expect partisans to exhibit less stability than Independents (the omitted category).¹⁰ Second, we included a standard measure of political knowledge to evaluate whether political sophistication is associated with greater stability in attitudes toward presidential power. Individuals with greater political knowledge may be sophisticated in their political thinking and exhibit greater attitudinal stability across time.¹¹ Third, we included a measure of respondents' beliefs in the rule of law. This measure was constructed based on an additive index from a five-item battery that is commonly used in studies of judicial politics (Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2003; Gibson and Nelson 2015, 2018) and in some previous research on the predictors of attitudes toward executive power (Reeves and Rogowski 2016).¹² The Cronbach's alpha for the five items is 0.76, and the composite measure is scored in such a way that larger values indicate greater support for the rule of law. We also include the same battery of demographic covariates that we included as controls in our other models.

Table C.2 provides some limited evidence that partisans are less stable in their orientations than non-

¹⁰Given how the partisanship questions were asked on the survey, we coded leaners as Independents. Of the 841 respondents, 34 percent were classified as Independents, 29 percent as Republicans, and 37 percent as Democrats.

¹¹Knowledge was measured using a four-item battery that evaluated whether respondents could identify the current vice president, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the threshold required to override a presidential veto, and the party that currently held the majority of seats in the House of Representatives. This battery was asked in November 2016.

¹²The five items were: "It is not necessary to obey a law you consider unjust", "Sometimes it might be better to ignore the law and solve problems immediately rather than wait for a legal solution," "The government should have some ability to bend the law in order to solve pressing social and political problems," "It is not necessary to obey the laws of a government that I did not vote for," "When it comes right down to it, law is not all that important; what's important is that our government solve society's problems and make us all better off." Each item was asked on a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The battery was asked in May 2016.

partisans or Independents. Two of the coefficients for *Republican* are negative and statistically significant, indicating that Republican identifiers were less likely than Independents to provide stable responses across waves. The remaining four coefficients are not distinguishable from zero, with two of them positively signed and two of them negatively signed. Only one of the six coefficients for *Democrat* is statistically significant and it is signed in the wrong direction, showing that Democrats were more likely to be stable than Independents. Overall, this provides modest evidence that partisans have systematically less stable attitudes than Independents about presidential power during a period where the presidency changed partisan hands, though this relationship is statistically significant for only one for only one of the three dependent variables.

The table also shows that more politically knowledgeable respondents also were more likely to express stable attitudes—at least in the very short term. For both the unilateral policymaking and judicial appointments variables, the coefficient for political knowledge was positive and statistically significant when modeling stability between the pre-election (October 2016) and post-election (November 2016) waves. However, this coefficient is not statistically significant when predicting longer-term stability (October 2016 to May 2017) waves or for the agency implementation dependent variable.

The results provide stronger evidence about the relationship between constitutional considerations and stability in beliefs about presidential power. The coefficient for *Belief in the rule of law* is positive in all six models and is statistically significant in four. (The coefficients are not significant for either model using Agency implementation, which may also be a function of the overall lower levels of stability for that measure as discussed with Figure 2.) Individuals with stronger commitments to the rule of law exhibit more stability in their views about presidential power. This provides some support for arguments that attitudes toward the presidency's institutional power are partly reflections of Americans' democratic and constitutional commitments (Reeves and Rogowski 2016), where individuals with stronger beliefs in the rule of law are less likely to change their views about unilateral power even when presidential administrations change.

Table C.2: Modeling Stability in Attitudes toward Presidential Power

	Unilateral policymaking		Judicial appointments		Agency implementation	
	Oct16-Nov16	Oct16-May17	Oct16-Nov16	Oct16-May17	Oct16-Nov16	Oct16-May17
Republican	−0.843* (0.192)	−0.408* (0.176)	−0.285 (0.185)	−0.070 (0.180)	0.141 (0.174)	0.046 (0.172)
Democrat	−0.030 (0.100)	−0.030 (0.089)	0.170 (0.094)	0.218* (0.090)	0.030 (0.088)	0.053 (0.088)
Political knowledge	0.476* (0.233)	−0.072 (0.185)	0.585* (0.215)	0.017 (0.190)	0.127 (0.182)	−0.145 (0.179)
Beliefs in rule of law (May 2016)	0.399* (0.127)	0.375* (0.115)	0.258* (0.122)	0.328* (0.117)	0.217 (0.112)	0.144 (0.111)
Male	−0.096 (0.172)	−0.038 (0.152)	−0.040 (0.164)	0.205 (0.154)	0.237 (0.149)	0.222 (0.148)
Income	−0.043 (0.026)	−0.022 (0.022)	0.049* (0.025)	0.021 (0.023)	0.025 (0.022)	0.009 (0.022)
White	0.875* (0.294)	0.287 (0.283)	−0.315 (0.313)	−0.038 (0.294)	−0.276 (0.287)	0.024 (0.279)
Black	0.012 (0.392)	−0.381 (0.385)	−0.588 (0.404)	−0.308 (0.088)	−0.501 (0.382)	−0.532 (0.387)
Hispanic	0.489 (0.309)	0.547 (0.282)	−0.420 (0.277)	−0.440 (0.272)	−0.206 (0.266)	−0.253 (0.267)
Education	0.068 (0.062)	0.099 (0.054)	0.081 (0.059)	0.099 (0.055)	0.014 (0.054)	−0.037 (0.053)
Age	0.004 (0.006)	−0.012* (0.005)	0.011* (0.005)	0.007 (0.005)	0.001 (0.005)	−0.003 (0.005)
(Intercept)	−1.173 (0.631)	−0.696 (0.573)	−1.729* (0.611)	−2.475 (0.597)	−0.812 (0.566)	−0.705 (0.563)
Observations	841	841	841	841	841	841

Note: Entries are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is an indicator for whether respondents expressed the same attitudes about presidential power in the survey waves shown at the top of each column. * indicates $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed tests).