Supporting Information for:

Beyond the Base: Presidents, Partisan Approval, and the Political Economy of Unilateral Action

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The first month of each new presidency involves several complications for our analysis. In these months, both the incoming and outgoing presidents can issue executive actions. And because we model executive actions in a given month as a function of presidential approval in the preceding month, this means that we risk predicting a tally driven largely by a new president with the approval rating of the preceding president. To avoid these complications and to ensure that our results are not driven by any short-term surges in unilateralism following a shift in presidential administration, the analyses in the text exclude the first month of each new administration. As a robustness check, SI Table 1 replicates our main results from Table 1 in the text but includes all months.[1] The results are substantively similar. The coefficient on co-partisan approval is now actually negative, and not statistically significant. By contrast, and consistent with our hypotheses the coefficients on both independent and opposition party approval are positive and approach conventional thresholds of statistical significance. The relationships for the control variables are also similar to those observed in Table 1. Most importantly, we find evidence in two of the three models that presidents issue fewer significant executive actions in good economy times than when the economy is perceived to be in bad shape. Finally, we find that President Trump has issued more significant executive actions, all else equal, than most if not all of his predecessors in the post-Watergate era.

Is Trump Less or Differentially Responsive to Public Opinion?

In addition to testing whether President Trump has resorted to unilateralism more frequently than past presidents, we also examined whether Trump has been less responsive to public opinion or perhaps more responsive solely to his base than his predecessors. To

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[1] Because our analysis is from 1977 to 2018, we still exclude the first month of the Carter administration as including it would require us to use approval data from December 1976.

investigate, we re-estimated our base models in Table 1 but interacted each of the partisan approval measures with the Trump indicator variable. SI Table 2 presents the results. None of the coefficients on the interactions variables approach conventional thresholds of statistical significance. With only two years of data from the Trump administration, we reiterate that it may simply be too early to say anything definitive about Trump and his responsiveness to public opinion. The remarkable stability in Trump's approval ratings across all three partisan groups also complicates the task. However, from the available data we find little evidence that Trump is less responsive to public opinion or more responsive to his political base than were his predecessors when contemplating unilateral action.

Divided Government, Economic Strength, and Unilateral Action

In the article, model 4 of Table 2 investigated whether the effect of divided government on unilateral action varied with the strength of the economy. This model found that when presidents preside over a strong economy and are more insulated from political pushback they do resort to unilateralism more frequently in divided government than in unified government. However, in a weak economy there is no difference in the frequency of unilateral action in unified versus divided government. This model specification included the president's approval rating among independents. To ensure that our results for divided government, the index of consumer sentiment, and their interaction are not conditional on which approval series is included in the model, SI Table 3 estimates the same model specification for all three partisan approval series. The results are substantively similar regardless of which partisan approval variable is included in the model.

SI Table 1: Replicating Base Models Including First Months of New Presidencies

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Presidential party approval $_{t-1}$	-0.004		
	(0.007)		
Opposition party approval $_{t-1}$		0.008	
		(0.005)	
Independents approval $_{t-1}$			0.009
			(0.005)
Executive actions $_{t-1}$	0.089**	0.084**	0.078**
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)
Divided government	0.184	0.153	0.136
	(0.168)	(0.170)	(0.170)
Index of consumer sentiment	-0.008	-0.015*	-0.014*
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.006)
War	-0.025	-0.101	-0.116
	(0.322)	(0.318)	(0.318)
Count of significant laws	-0.004	-0.010	-0.008
	(0.065)	(0.065)	(0.065)
Second term	-0.154	-0.050	-0.032
	(0.153)	(0.159)	(0.158)
Presidential and midterm election years	-0.183	-0.175	-0.175
	(0.113)	(0.113)	(0.112)
Reagan	-0.243	-0.354	-0.275
	(0.290)	(0.252)	(0.253)
Bush 41	-0.681	-0.800*	-0.796*
	(0.348)	(0.320)	(0.319)
Clinton	-0.097	-0.144	-0.039
	(0.273)	(0.251)	(0.258)
Bush 43	-0.367	-0.394	-0.329
	(0.390)	(0.370)	(0.374)
Obama	-0.035	-0.061	0.113
	(0.417)	(0.396)	(0.412)
Trump	0.841	1.005*	1.173*
	(0.463)	(0.477)	(0.497)
Ln(alpha)	-0.666**	-0.682**	-0.691**
	(0.170)	(0.171)	(0.172)
Constant	1.238*	1.156*	1.188*
	(0.499)	(0.474)	(0.474)
Observations	503	503	503

Note: Models are negative binomial regressions. Standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed. ** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$

SI Table 2: Trump Interactions with Partisan Approval Series

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Presidential party approval $_{t-1}$	0.007		
	(0.008)		
Presidential party approval $_{t-1}$ X Trump	-0.009		
	(0.063)		
Independents approval $_{t-1}$		0.011*	
		(0.005)	
Independents approval $_{t-1}$ X Trump		-0.032	
		(0.070)	
Opposition party approval$_{t-1}$			0.012*
			(0.005)
Opposition party approval$_{t-1}$X Trump			0.037
			(0.144)
Executive actions $_{t-1}$	0.102**	0.094**	0.082**
	(0.025)	(0.027)	(0.027)
Divided government	0.282	0.236	0.212
	(0.165)	(0.166)	(0.166)
Index of consumer sentiment	-0.010	-0.013*	-0.012
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.006)
War	0.148	0.120	0.119
	(0.328)	(0.322)	(0.322)
Count of significant laws	0.017	0.012	0.016
	(0.061)	(0.061)	(0.061)
Second term	-0.021	0.064	0.077
	(0.147)	(0.153)	(0.151)
Presidential and midterm election years	-0.077	-0.067	-0.067
	(0.108)	(0.107)	(0.107)
Reagan	-0.779**	-0.684**	-0.567*
	(0.297)	(0.245)	(0.243)
Bush 41	-1.124**	-1.050**	-1.040**
	(0.344)	(0.311)	(0.309)
Clinton	-0.528	-0.408	-0.259
	(0.272)	(0.242)	(0.249)
Bush 43	-0.966*	-0.772*	-0.703
	(0.395)	(0.371)	(0.374)
Obama	-0.723	-0.513	-0.296
	(0.421)	(0.394)	(0.409)
Trump	0.906	1.695	0.434
	(5.352)	(2.496)	(1.226)
Ln(alpha)	-1.040**	-1.079**	-1.100**
	(0.221)	(0.227)	(0.230)

Constant	0.673	0.837	0.916*
	(0.490)	(0.453)	(0.453)
Observations	497	497	497

Note: Models are negative binomial regressions. Standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed. ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

SI Table 3: ICS and Divided Government Interaction with Different Partisan Approval Series

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Presidential party approval $_{t-1}$	0.006		
	(0.008)		
Independents approval$_{t-1}$		0.010	
		(0.006)	
Opposition party approval$_{t-1}$			0.010*
			(0.005)
Executive actions $_{t-1}$	0.098**	0.089**	0.084**
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Divided government	-1.037	-0.753	-0.711
	(0.915)	(0.926)	(0.917)
Index of consumer sentiment	-0.020*	-0.020*	-0.019*
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Divided government X ICS	0.016	0.012	0.011
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
War	0.249	0.198	0.192
	(0.334)	(0.330)	(0.329)
Count of significant laws	0.015	0.011	0.014
	(0.061)	(0.061)	(0.061)
Second term	-0.069	0.016	0.034
	(0.150)	(0.158)	(0.156)
Presidential and midterm election years	-0.086	-0.075	-0.076
	(0.107)	(0.107)	(0.107)
Reagan	-0.638*	-0.595*	-0.497*
	(0.310)	(0.258)	(0.252)
Bush 41	-1.003**	-0.975**	-0.969**
	(0.352)	(0.319)	(0.316)
Clinton	-0.440	-0.361	-0.230
	(0.280)	(0.247)	(0.251)
Bush 43	-0.868*	-0.729	-0.669
	(0.400)	(0.373)	(0.375)
Obama	-0.693	-0.523	-0.326
	(0.419)	(0.393)	(0.408)
Trump	0.357	0.656	0.803
	(0.474)	(0.482)	(0.494)
Ln(alpha)	-1.065**	-1.093**	-1.111**
	(0.225)	(0.229)	(0.232)
Constant	1.502*	1.449*	1.458*
	(0.744)	(0.710)	(0.703)

Observations	497	497	497

Note: Models are negative binomial regressions. Standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed. ** p<0.01, * p<0.05