

# Decider in Chief? Why and how the public exaggerates the power of the presidency\*

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## **Abstract**

Democratic accountability requires citizens to accurately attribute credit and blame to leaders and institutions. However, citizens tend to simplify politics by personifying the state as its leader and directing credit and blame accordingly. Using an expert survey and a five-wave public panel survey spanning two administrations, we contrast public and expert perceptions of presidential power. We demonstrate that the public exaggerates the president's powers relative to scholarly experts and that those who exaggerate presidential powers most are more likely to attribute blame to the president. However, a change in partisan control of the presidency shifts perceptions of power among partisans. Finally, we find suggestive evidence of similar shifts in belief after salient policy failures. These results provide the most direct evidence to date that citizens generally exaggerate the president's influence and control but that these beliefs change over time in response to events.

Democratic accountability depends in part on citizens' ability to accurately attribute credit and blame to their representatives. However, making such attributions is difficult. Voters typically know little about politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) and are prone to blame officials for problems they cannot control (Achen and Bartels 2016; Gomez and Wilson 2001). Attributions may be especially inaccurate for highly visible leaders who hold broad authority in some areas and face complex institutional constraints in others.

In this article, we focus on public perceptions of the powers of the U.S. president, who is often blamed (or credited) for outcomes over which they have little control, such as the state of the economy. This “expectations gap” between what presidents are believed to be able to accomplish and the reality of their limited constitutional powers (Waterman, Silva and Jenkins-Smith 2014; Sigelman and Knight 1983) is often resolved by narratives that ascribe the president's failures to their personal characteristics or supposed tactical errors — for instance, blaming Barack Obama's legislative defeats in a Republican Congress on him being too aloof (John 2014).

One reason for this dynamic, we argue, is that people tend to “personify” the state as its leader (McGraw and Dolan 2007; Balmas 2018) and therefore see the president as having a high degree of control over political outcomes. This viewpoint, which is frequently reinforced by the media, offers a simple heuristic that helps voters efficiently make attributions of credit and blame, form opinions, and construct narratives about recent events. However, it also means people disproportionately credit and blame the president for events that take place during their time in office.

While many scholars have documented an expectations gap and used the concept to help explain recent presidencies (e.g., Edwards 2003, 2012), we make several new contributions. First, we develop two scales measuring perceptions of presidential power based on a survey of scholarly experts. Second, we measure the extent of the expert-public divide. Finally, we provide the first over-time analysis of how the public updates its views about presidential power across a five-wave panel survey of the public spanning two presidential administrations. This analysis allows us to measure how perceptions of presidential power differentially change by party in response to shifts in partisan control of the White House as well as presidential defeats in Congress.

We report three main findings. First, consistent with our expectations of widespread personification, the public overestimates presidential control over outcomes for which there is a scholarly consensus that presidents have little power. The public also overestimates presidential influence in areas that scholars agree presidents cannot control through leadership ability. These exaggerated perceptions of presidential power in turn predict how the public interprets two high-profile legislative defeats suffered by the president in Congress. People with exaggerated perceptions are more likely to endorse personal attributions for outcomes than institutional attributions. Second, we find that exaggerated perceptions of presidential power are constrained by partisan motivations; respondents become less likely to overestimate presidential power when a favored candidate occupies the White House. Third, we report suggestive evidence that high-profile policy failures can lead supporters of the president to deflect blame from the president to institutional obstacles, differentially decreasing co-partisan supporters' perceptions of presidential power. These results suggest that partisanship plays a key role in the dynamics of public misunderstandings of presidential power and influence.

## **Theory**

### **How personification promotes exaggerated perceptions of presidential power**

Why do Americans often hold exaggerated perceptions of presidential power? A key factor is the media's and public's reliance on the personification heuristic, which helps people make sense of complex political events (Lippmann 1922; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). Many lack basic knowledge about political facts, making it hard to interpret events (e.g., Annenberg Public Policy Center 2014). Personification simplifies the news reporting process (for journalists) and opinion formation process (for citizens) by representing complex entities such as states in terms of their leaders rather than the underlying institutions (Rahn et al. 1990; McGraw and Dolan 2007; Balmas 2018).

As the most widely recognized figure in American politics, the president is frequently the public face associated with political outcomes, facilitating the personification heuristic. Media

often suggest that presidents are responsible for a range of political and economic outcomes over which they have little control (Nyhan 2009; Klein 2014; Nyhan 2014, 2015), creating outside perceptions of their power and influence. Presidential candidates play to these perceptions by making grandiose promises on the campaign trail, reinforcing “the perception that they have the means to solve the nation’s problems” (Sirin and Villalobos 2011, 335, though see Kane 2016). Together, these tendencies help citizens “reduce the complexity of political affairs to manageable proportions by placing the President at the center of things” and may aid the public in predicting future political outcomes ?, 235. As a result, the public often associates the president with the nation’s most pressing issues.

Attributing outcomes to a person, rather than institutions, is especially appealing due to common psychological tendencies. When attributing credit and blame, people tend to overlook situational constraints and external factors, focusing instead on internal, dispositional factors (e.g., Gilbert and Malone 1995; Gawronski 2004). Indeed, people automatically and efficiently draw inferences about others’ intentions, motives, goals, and personalities from their appearance and behavior (Todorov and Uleman 2003). By contrast, situational constraints are less readily accessible and only affect attributions when they are made salient (Trope and Gaunt 2000). Thus, in the absence of salient information about the factors that constrain presidential influence and motivation to attend to that information, people are likely to disproportionately attribute credit and blame to the president.

### **How partisanship affects perceptions of power**

Of course, people do not necessarily direct credit or blame on the president for outcomes they observe. When sufficiently motivated, people may depart from the personification heuristic and seek out alternative explanations that emphasize constraints on the president’s control in order to arrive at a preferred attribution (Alicke 2000).

These motivations are likely to be especially strong for partisans, whose views about presidents may be especially likely to be linked to their political identity. Presidents are not only the

most visible member of the federal government but the most prominent member of their political party. In recent years, partisan differences have grown in both people's evaluations of presidential performance (e.g., Donovan et al. 2020; Lebo and Cassino 2007*a*) and beliefs about factual matters involving presidents (e.g., perceptions of the economy; Brady, Ferejohn and Parker 2021).

Supporters and opponents of the president should thus express different views of presidential power depending on who is in office. When a president is presiding over poor economic conditions or struggling to pass legislation through a gridlocked Congress, supporters of the president will be motivated to seek out other explanations to displace blame. By contrast, opponents of the president will instead blame the president. For instance, the belief that presidents can control rising gas prices dropped from 73% under George W. Bush to just 33% under Obama among Democrats while rising from 47% to 65% among Republicans (Weiner and Clement 2012), suggesting that partisans are more likely to see the president as controlling events when the other party is in charge.

These biased attributions should be especially likely to affect attributions of responsibility for events that are complex or ambiguous (though see Lebo and Cassino 2007*b*). Amidst uncertainty, people find ways to reach different conclusions. Partisans might devalue inconsistent information, be cued towards different attributions by elites, or downplay the importance of an issue or event (Bisgaard and Slothuus 2018; Kane and Anson 2022; Rudolph 2006). Previous research has found that these so-called "selective attributions" may explain responsibility judgments across more policy domains than motivated reasoning about facts alone (Tilley and Hobolt 2011, though see Rudolph 2003).

## **Hypotheses**

Based on these theoretical expectations, we offer the following preregistered hypotheses.

Our first hypothesis tests the relationship between people's general views of presidential power and how they interpret the success or failure of a particular president in achieving their objectives. Despite the general tendency towards personification and dispositional attributions, some people will offer situational attributions both in the general case (views of presidential power) and the

specific one (a given president's success in achieving their objectives). We expect these beliefs to be closely linked. In other words, our first hypothesis tests perceptions of presidential power as an independent variable. People's general perceptions of presidential power should affect the extent to which they endorse personal and institutional explanations for policy outcomes:

H1: Respondents who perceive high levels of presidential power will rate personal factors as more important to whether the president achieves policy objectives and will rate institutional factors as less important than those who perceive low levels of presidential power.

However, general beliefs about presidential power are likely shaped by partisan motivations. In particular, we expect supporters of the president to adjust their beliefs about presidential power to serve partisan goals. In other words, our second hypothesis tests perceptions of presidential power as a dependent variable, exploring whether partisans differentially update their perceptions of presidential power following policy outcomes:

H2: Following a policy failure, perceptions of presidential power will decline more among respondents who approve of the president than among respondents who disapprove.

In addition to changes in broader beliefs about presidential power, we expect a corresponding shift in attributions of blame about a specific policy outcome that supports their views of the president. That is, presidential support should affect people's tendency towards personification, which we operationalize as blaming a negative policy outcome on the president personally rather than institutional factors:

H3: Following one or more policy failures, institutional (personal) attributions for policy failure will increase (decrease) more among respondents who support the president than among respondents who oppose them.

Taken together, we expect general beliefs about presidential power to shape beliefs and attributions about specific political events. However, both general and specific beliefs and attributions regarding presidential power should respond to the partisan implications of current events.

## Overview of studies

In this article, we use data from surveys conducted during the Obama and Trump administrations to examine the content, consequences, and temporal stability of public perceptions of presidential power. These surveys, which we describe in greater detail below, were conducted over an 11-month period in 2016–2017. This period included a change in partisan control of the presidency and two highly salient presidential policy failures (specifically, on health care reform in 2017; details below).<sup>1</sup>

Like all presidents, Barack Obama and Donald Trump faced both personal and institutional obstacles to their agendas. At a personal level, political observers questioned whether Obama had the political experience necessary to succeed as president. Institutionally, Obama faced unified Republican opposition in Congress for most of his two terms as president. Likewise, political observers questioned Trump’s personal readiness based on his lack of political experience and behavior on the campaign trail, but he also faced difficult institutional obstacles such as consistent Democratic opposition in Congress, a fractious Republican caucus, and a federal court system that blocked his early attempts to change immigration policy using executive authority. Thus, although Obama and Trump differed in important ways, both presidents faced personal and institutional obstacles to implementing their agendas.

In the results section below, we first describe and validate our measures of perceptions of presidential power using an expert sample. Then, turning to our public sample, we show that the public substantially overestimates the president’s power relative to scholarly experts and investigate the correlates of perceptions about presidential power. We find that perceptions of presidential

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<sup>1</sup>See Appendix A for survey wording and Table B1 for information on timing, content, attrition, and sample size by wave.

power are associated with political knowledge, partisanship, and policy-specific attributions of blame. Finally, we examine how perceptions of presidential power change following a partisan transition in presidential power and multiple high-profile policy failures and the extent to which partisanship conditions these changes.

## **Results**

### **Expert survey**

To develop measures of perceived presidential power and provide a benchmark for comparison to the mass public (e.g., Maestas, Buttice and Stone 2014; Steenbergen and Marks 2007), we conducted an expert survey among members of the Presidents and Executive Politics section of the American Political Science Association. The survey was fielded from September 23–October 25, 2016. The response rate from those we contacted was 22%. 61 respondents provided informed consent to participate and 57 completed the survey, a sample size that exceeds many expert surveys (e.g., Hooghe et al. 2010). Of the 61 respondents, 75% ( $n = 46$ ) were tenured or tenure-track faculty members and nearly all (93%) held an academic position (see Online Appendix B).

### **Scale construction**

We describe the process of creating two scales measuring public perceptions of presidential power, which we call exaggerated perceptions of presidential influence (EPPI) and control (EPPC), respectively. The EPPI scale measures beliefs about how easily a president can influence the agenda while the EPPC scale measures beliefs about how easily a president can control outcomes such as inflation, gridlock in Congress, and the price of gasoline.

In the perceptions of presidential influence scale (EPPI), expert respondents rated the accuracy of twelve statements about the president's ability to pass their agenda (e.g., "If a president cares enough about a policy, they can find a way to get it passed"). Responses were measured on a standard four-point scale ranging from "not accurate at all" to "very accurate." (See Table 1 below

for the wording used in both scales.) These scales are designed to capture related but not identical perceptions, providing a test of convergent validity (they correlate at  $r = 0.64$  so we do not include both simultaneously in our models below). To develop the perceptions of presidential control scale (EPPC), expert respondents are asked to assess how much control presidents typically have over a variety of specific outcomes that are observable for voters using a five-point scale ranging from “no control at all” to “total control.” Six of the questions concerned outcomes for which we expected experts to report that the president has little control (e.g., gas prices) and three topics concerned outcomes for which we expected experts to believe the president has more control (e.g., the decision to send troops overseas).

Our goals were to identify areas in which there is scholarly consensus that presidents have relatively little power. We therefore excluded items with mean ratings indicating moderate to high power (greater than 2 on the four-point EPPI scale or greater than 2.5 on the five-point EPPC scale after reverse-coding) (Steenbergen and Marks 2007; Hooghe et al. 2010). Table 1 displays the mean, standard deviation, and percent agreement for each scale item. Among the exaggerated perceptions of presidential influence items (EPPI), six remain: claims that there are no limits to what the president can achieve (reverse-scored), gridlock is a failure of presidential leadership (reverse-scored), presidents can follow through on campaign promises if they desire (reverse-scored), members of Congress can easily resist pressure from the president, presidents struggle to pass their agenda without partisan majorities in Congress, and partisanship makes it difficult for the president to achieve consensus on controversial issues. Together the six items form a scale with moderate reliability ( $\alpha = .55$ ). After administering our inclusion criteria, four items remain on the exaggerated perceptions of presidential control scale (EPPC): civility in Washington, DC, gridlock in Congress, inflation, and gas prices. Two of these (inflation and prices) were rated as policy areas over which presidents exercised especially low levels of control in a recent expert survey (Lowande and Shipan 2021). These four items form a reliable scale ( $\alpha = .73$ ).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Reliability is lower for the EPPI scale due to the presence of reversed items, which we preserve to reduce acquiescence bias.

Table 1: Expert survey on perceptions of presidential influence and control

(a) Perceptions of presidential influence (EPPI)

Item	Mean	S.D.
<b>There are no limits to what a president can achieve if he or she uses the power of his/her office effectively (R).</b>	3.34	0.69
<b>Gridlock in Congress is typically the result of a failure of presidential leadership (R).</b>	3.22	0.56
<b>If a president doesn't follow through on a campaign promise, it's probably because they didn't really want it to happen (R).</b>	3.11	0.56
If presidents lobby hard enough, they can typically bend members of Congress to their will (R).	3.00	0.56
Presidents can typically persuade the public to pressure members of Congress to enact the president's preferred policies (R).	2.97	0.67
If a president cares enough about a policy, they can find a way to get it passed (R).	2.93	0.73
Presidents who are true leaders can bring together members of Congress across party lines (R).	2.78	0.56
The Constitution severely limits the powers of the presidency.	2.32	0.60
Presidents can get members of Congress of their own party to pass major legislation if they try hard enough (R).	2.22	0.62
<b>Members of Congress can easily resist pressure from the president and vote how they choose.</b>	1.80	0.58
<b>Without large partisan majorities in Congress, most presidents will struggle to pass their agenda.</b>	1.66	0.61
<b>Partisanship makes it difficult for any president to achieve consensus on a controversial policy issue.</b>	1.40	0.56

Responses are either on a four-point scale from "Very accurate" (1) to "Not at all accurate" (4) or reverse-coded for items indicated by (R).

(b) Perceptions of presidential control (EPPC)

Item (expected high control)	Mean	S.D.
Who serves as his/her running mate for Vice President	4.34	0.63
Who is nominated as an ambassador	4.32	0.63
The decision to send U.S. troops overseas	4.09	0.60
Item (expected low control)	Mean	S.D.
The degree of bipartisanship in Washington, D.C.	2.56	0.62
The federal debt	2.51	0.63
<b>The level of civility in Washington, D.C.</b>	2.49	0.73
<b>The amount of gridlock in Congress</b>	2.31	0.68
<b>The inflation rate</b>	1.92	0.65
<b>The price of gasoline</b>	1.69	0.65

Responses on a 1–5 scale from "No control" (1) to "Total control" (5).

Responses from APSA Presidents & Executive Politics section members ( $n = 61$ ). Conducted September 23–October 25, 2016. Bold items were retained for use in the survey analysis conducted in waves 2–5 of the MTurk panel study described below.

Overall, our analysis of the expert data yields a six-item EPPI scale and a four-item EPPC scale. Expert scores on these two scales are strongly associated with each other ( $r = 0.64, p < .05$ ), reinforcing the construct validity of both scales.

## **Public panel study**

We conducted a five-wave panel study from September 23, 2016–August 17, 2017 to measure public perceptions of presidential power and how they change following high-profile events. Respondents were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). While MTurk samples are not nationally representative, they are demographically diverse, cost-effective, and consistently replicate both experimental (e.g., Berinsky, Huber and Lenz 2012; Mullinix et al. 2015) and observational findings in social and behavioral science (e.g., Clifford, Jewell and Waggoner 2015; Miller et al. 2017). MTurk is especially valuable for panel surveys due to the ability to conduct high-frequency waves around politically significant events (e.g., Christenson and Glick 2015*a,b*).

We recruited workers for a total of five waves, which spanned a change in partisan control of the presidency (from Obama to Trump) as well as two salient policy failures in Congress (the March 2017 withdrawal of a Republican health care bill from the House floor and the August 2017 defeat of another health care bill in the Senate). Respondents provided informed consent to participate in each wave of the survey. The first wave was fielded on September 13, 2016. A total of 2,505 respondents completed the baseline survey, which contained demographic and attitudinal questions. Eight days later, we invited respondents who completed the first survey wave to complete a second wave. 1,850 respondents whom we were able to match to their wave 1 responses completed the second wave from September 22–23, 2016, which included the same presidential influence and control measures as the expert survey.

After analyzing the results from the expert survey and wave 2 of the public survey, we selected our final set of measures of perceptions of presidential influence and control based on expert consensus and scale performance. We then invited respondents who completed wave 2 to a third wave of the survey after Trump took office. Wave 3 included a shortened, final version of our scales and

several questions about political attitudes and identities. A total of 918 respondents who could be matched to their wave 2 responses completed wave 3 from March 17–23, 2017, a time in which a Republican health care plan was before Congress. Respondents who completed wave 3 were invited back and re-interviewed for wave 4 from March 28–30, 2017 — almost immediately after Republican leadership decided to withdraw the bill without a vote due to insufficient support. Wave 4, which again included our final set of measures of perceptions of presidential influence and control as well as an embedded experiment (see Online Appendix C), was completed by a total of 746 respondents who could be matched to their wave 3 responses. Finally, we invited all respondents who completed waves 1 and 2 to complete a fifth survey wave after the Senate’s defeat of a new Republican health care reform proposal. This final survey wave was fielded from August 4–14, 2017 and completed by 1,217 respondents. Table B3 in Online Appendix B shows that the demographic and partisan composition of the sample remained quite stable across waves and also provides details on respondent compensation.

In waves 4 and 5, both of which followed failures to pass health care legislation, we also measured more specific beliefs about why Trump was unable to achieve his preferred policy outcome. These ten items reference either personal or institutional explanations. For instance, respondents were asked if they agree or disagree that “If Trump were a true leader, he would have convinced Congress to support his health care bill” (personal) and that “The divisions in Congress would have made it nearly impossible for any president to pass a health care bill” (institutional).<sup>3</sup> Responses to these items allow us to assess how people interpret presidential power in relation to specific events and how these interpretations relate to more general beliefs about presidential power. Table 2 is an overview of each wave.

## **Descriptive analyses**

Having selected our scale items following the procedure described above, we now turn to assessing their prevalence and correlates among the mass public. Recall that respondents in wave 2 answered

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<sup>3</sup>See Online Appendix A for the full list of items.

Table 2: Overview of survey waves

Wave	Who was contacted	Contents	N	Date(s) fielded
1	Mechanical Turk workers	Baseline demographics, political knowledge, political attitudes	2,505	9/13/2016
2	W1 respondents (Turk)	All presidential control and influence questions (same questions as expert survey)	1,850	9/22/16–9/23/16
3	W2 respondents (Turk)	Final presidential influence and control scale items (i.e., “EPPI” and “EPPC”, a subset of questions asked in W2)	918	3/17/17–23/17
4	W3 respondents (Turk)	- Final presidential influence and control scale items (i.e., “EPPI” and “EPPC”, a subset of questions asked in w2) - Embedded vignette experiment - Agreement with explanations citing personal and institutional obstacles (i.e., “Personal” and “Institutional attributions”)	746	3/28/17–8/30/17
5	Respondents who completed W1 & W2 (Turk)	- Final presidential influence and control scale items (i.e., “EPPI” and “EPPC”, a subset of questions asked in w2) - Agreement with explanations citing personal and institutional obstacles (i.e., “Personal” and “Institutional attributions”)	1,217	8/4/17–8/14/17

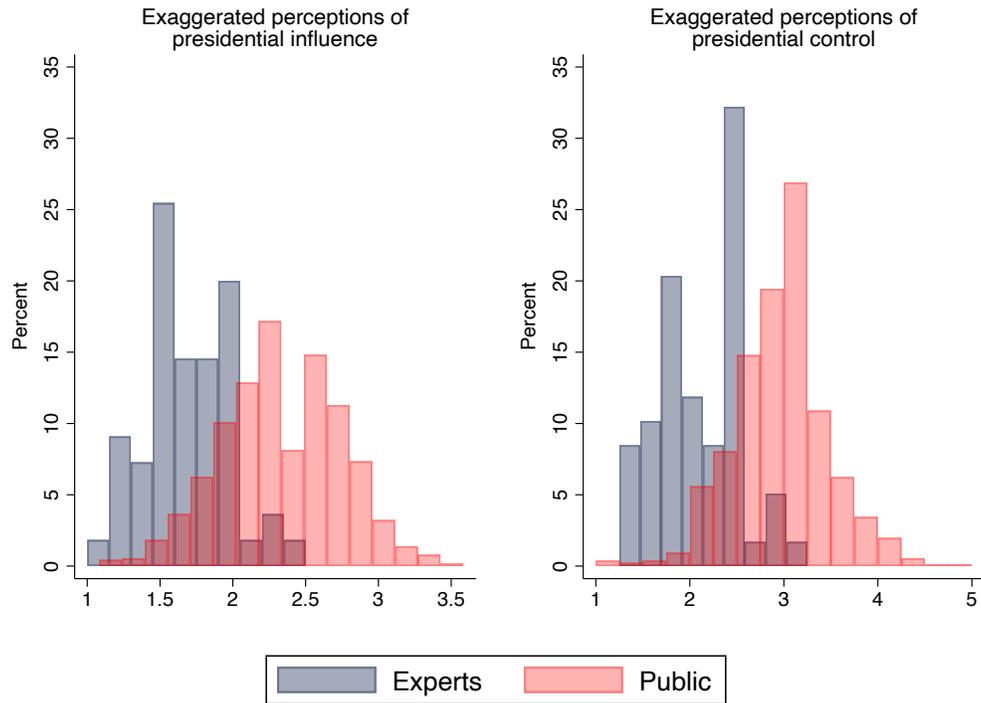
the full set of expert survey questions, while respondents in wave 3 were only asked the final subset of expert survey questions that comprise our two scales. For this descriptive analysis measuring the prevalence of exaggerated perceptions of presidential influence and control among the public, we use wave 2 respondents’ answers to the questions that were eventually selected for the scales.

The six-item EPPI scale forms a moderately reliable index within the MTurk sample ( $\alpha = 0.65$ ), as does the four-item EPPC scale ( $\alpha = 0.74$ ). The two scales are again strongly related to each other ( $r = 0.51, p < .01$ ).

First, we expected that the public would significantly overestimate the extent of presidential power relative to experts. Figure 1 displays the distribution of both the EPPI and EPPC scales among experts (dark blue-gray bars) and the public (light red bars). As shown in the figure, MTurk respondents score substantially higher than experts on both scales. On the EPPI scale, MTurk respondents overestimate presidential influence compared to experts by 0.34 points on a 4-point scale ( $t(1776) = 5.46, p < .01$ ). This difference is substantively quite large (0.75 standard deviations). Our MTurk respondents also scored 0.21 scale points higher than experts on the five-point EPPC scale ( $t(1890) = 2.38, p < .05; 0.32$  s.d.). Put differently, 94% and 97% of the public scores above the expert mean on the EPPI and EPPC scales, respectively. These results confirm our

expectation that members of the mass public, relative to scholarly experts, tend to hold exaggerated perceptions of presidential power.

Figure 1: Expert and public perceptions of presidential power



Responses from APSA Presidents & Executive Politics section members ( $n = 61$ ; September 23–October 25, 2016) and MTurk panel respondents surveyed in wave 2 of study ( $n = 1,850$ ; September 22–23, 2016). Relative to experts, the public overestimates presidential influence by 0.34 points on the four-item EPPI scale ( $t(1776) = 5.46, p < .01$ ) and control by 0.21 points on the five-point EPPC scale ( $t(1890) = 2.38, p < .05$ ).

Second, we expected that exaggerated perceptions of presidential power would be more pronounced among respondents with lower levels of political knowledge (Gomez and Wilson 2001, 2003, 2008). To test this, we estimated OLS models testing the association between both of our scales and political knowledge across all four waves in which the EPPI and EPPC were included (i.e., waves 2–5). As shown in Table B4 in the Online Appendix, higher political knowledge scores are associated with lower scores on both the EPPI scale (columns 1–4) and the EPPC scale (columns 5–8) in all waves ( $p < .005$  in all cases) controlling for partisanship, ideology, education,

and demographics.<sup>4</sup> Belief in these scales is not consistently associated with other demographic characteristics (we discuss relationships to political variables, which vary over time, below).

Finally, our first preregistered hypothesis predicted that people who hold exaggerated perceptions of presidential power would be more likely to make attributions to personal (versus institutional) barriers to the president's success in the event of a policy failure.<sup>5</sup> We examine this association using data collected following two high-profile defeats of Trump-backed health care bills in Congress. In waves 4 and 5, we asked respondents a series of questions about the extent to which they attribute blame to Trump personally versus to institutional constraints (see Online Appendix A for question wordings).<sup>6</sup>

To test this hypothesis, Table 3 reports OLS models predicting respondents' level of agreement with different attributions for Trump's failure to pass health care reform (personal versus institutional attributions). In other words, the dependent variable is respondents' agreement in waves 4 and 5 with the two types of attribution and the independent variable is their score on the wave 3 EPPI scale or wave 3 EPPC scale. Each model also controls for political knowledge, demographic variables, and treatment assignment in the embedded experiment conducted during wave 4 of the survey. (These OLS models thus exclude those participants in wave 5 who did not take part in wave 4; see Online Appendix C for details on the wave 4 embedded experiment).

We expected that higher scores on the EPPI and EPPC scales would be associated with more agreement with personal attributions to the president and less agreement with institutional attribu-

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<sup>4</sup>Per Benjamin et al. (2017), we report whether our findings achieve  $p < .005$ , a more stringent standard for statistical significance that better controls the risk of false-positive results than standard practice, but we also report results at the conventional level of  $p < .01$  and  $p < .05$ .

<sup>5</sup>The hypotheses and analysis plan for this study were preregistered. Redacted preregistrations for peer review are appended to the end of this document and will be made available online in unredacted form upon publication. All deviations from the preregistrations, which were filed before waves 4 and 5 of the public panel survey, are identified below. The preregistrations apply to the analyses of data from waves 4 and 5 only. Some hypotheses have been slightly reworded and/or renumbered for expositional clarity.

<sup>6</sup>Following our preregistrations, we used principal components factor analysis for scale construction. The analysis showed two clear factors corresponding to personal and institutional attributions, so we created two additive scales consisting of items that clearly loaded on the intended factor (those with loadings greater than .4 that did not crossload). Both scales have a theoretical range of 1–4. Higher values indicate greater attributions of failure to the personal behavior of the president or greater attributions to institutional constraints, respectively. The scales were only modestly negatively correlated (wave 4:  $r = -.18$ ; wave 5:  $r = -.15$ ), suggesting that they capture distinct constructs.

Table 3: Correlates of attributions for Trump’s failure on health care reform (waves 4–5)

	Personal attributions				Institutional attributions			
	W4	W5	W4	W5	W4	W5	W4	W5
EPPI (pres. influence)	0.383*** (0.073)	0.252*** (0.079)			-0.143* (0.072)	-0.127 (0.076)		
EPPC (pres. control)			0.162*** (0.047)	0.216*** (0.047)			-0.132*** (0.043)	-0.152*** (0.045)
Institutions treatment (wave 4)	-0.054 (0.066)	0.007 (0.073)	-0.019 (0.064)	0.019 (0.070)	0.058 (0.063)	-0.008 (0.069)	0.032 (0.061)	-0.008 (0.066)
Personal treatment (wave 4)	0.125 (0.068)	0.109 (0.069)	0.132* (0.067)	0.131* (0.065)	-0.016 (0.067)	0.069 (0.072)	-0.002 (0.065)	0.077 (0.068)
Constant	1.774*** (0.195)	1.807*** (0.214)	2.205*** (0.163)	1.803*** (0.177)	3.109*** (0.197)	3.042*** (0.217)	3.138*** (0.153)	3.145*** (0.175)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
R <sup>2</sup>	0.08	0.04	0.06	0.06	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.06
N	682	606	725	645	684	609	727	647

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . OLS regression with robust standard errors. Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in both wave 4 ( $n=746$ , March 28–30, 2017) and wave 5 ( $n=1,217$ , August 4–14, 2017). EPPI and EPPC refer to the respondent’s score on those scales as measured in wave 3. Institutions treatment and personal treatment refer to assigned treatment condition in the wave 4 experiment. Columns correspond to the respondent’s endorsement of personal or institutional attributions by wave. Results including control variables are reported in Table C1 in Online Appendix C.

tions. As shown in the left two columns of Table 3, greater perceptions of presidential influence (EPPI) are associated with greater attribution of Trump’s failures to his personal behavior in both waves 4 and 5 ( $p < .005$  in each case). Higher scores on the EPPI scale are associated with being less likely to agree that institutional obstacles are responsible for Trump’s policy failures in wave 4 (column 5,  $p < .05$ ), but not in wave 5 (column 6). The EPPC scale measuring perceptions of presidential control, however, is a significant positive predictor of attributions to personal obstacles and a negative predictor of attributions to institutional obstacles in both waves (columns 7 and 8,  $p < .005$  in each). These results largely support our expectation that general beliefs about presidential power are predictive of what kinds of attributions people make after a high-profile event.

### Changes in perceptions of presidential power

We now turn to the question of how beliefs about presidential power change over time in response to political events. Our second hypothesis predicts that perceptions of presidential power will decline more among supporters of the president than among opponents following a failure to achieve

a policy objective. We test this expectation using Trump’s failure to pass a health care bill.<sup>7</sup>

We begin by examining changes in beliefs about presidential power from waves 2–5 among respondents who participated in all five waves of the survey. Figure 2 shows the mean levels of EPPI (top panel) and EPPC (bottom panel) among respondents who held a favorable view of Trump in wave 2 (Trump supporters; black) and those who did not (Trump opponents; gray) during the period from September 2016 to August 2017. The inauguration and both health care defeats are marked with vertical gray lines. Consistent with our expectations, beliefs about presidential power decline among Trump supporters throughout our panel and increase among Trump opponents.<sup>8</sup>

We formally test this hypothesis by examining changes in general beliefs about presidential power across our panel. Linear comparisons of changes in beliefs among Trump supporters, opponents, and the difference in differences between the two groups are provided in Table 4 (full results are available in Table C2). Our first pair of tests compares changes in beliefs between waves 2 and 5, which maximizes both our sample size (wave 5 includes all respondents who completed waves 1 and 2 whereas waves 3 and 4 were only sent out to those who had completed the wave directly prior) and the time between waves (approximately 11 months). The interval between these waves includes both a transition in presidential power and at least two high-profile policy failures.

Following our preregistration, we stack the data from waves 2 and 5 and model each scale as a function of a dichotomous measure of Trump support (from wave 2), a wave 5 indicator, and an interaction between them (in other words, the difference-in-differences). We also include the same set of control variables used above and cluster standard errors by respondent.

For both measures, we find a significant decrease in beliefs about presidential power between

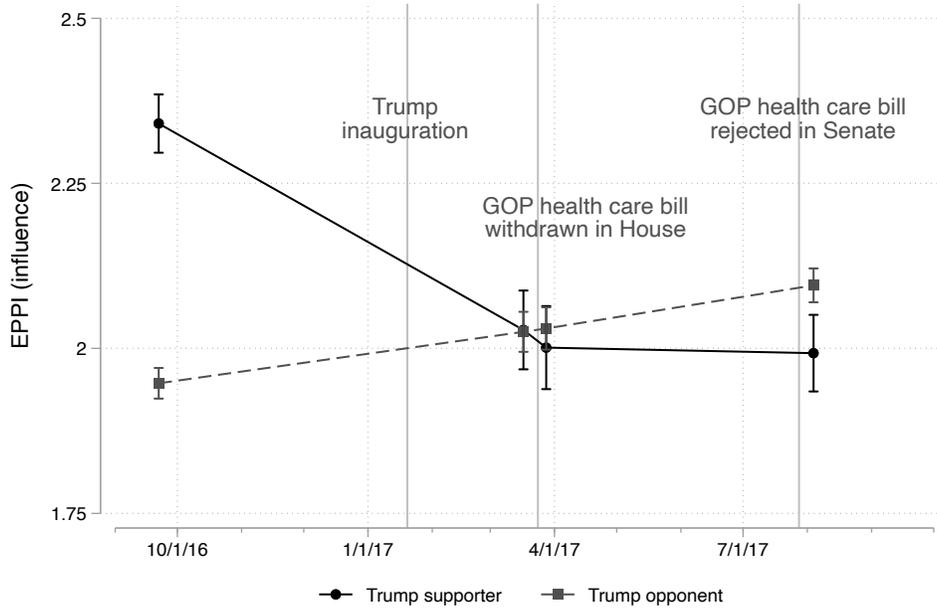
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<sup>7</sup>Consistent with prevailing media coverage at the time of these events (e.g., Bowden 2017; Jopson 2017; Mattingly 2017), we refer to Trump’s inability to pass the two health reform bills as policy failures. Of course, not all respondents in our sample may acknowledge these outcomes as failures (e.g., supporters may rationalize the outcome as Trump extending the process to get a better deal). However, this form of motivated reasoning would still be captured in our analysis because it would reduce the likelihood that respondents attribute failure to Trump personally. For the same reason, attributions of failure to other actors such as Congress (i.e., institutional factors) will also be captured in our analysis.

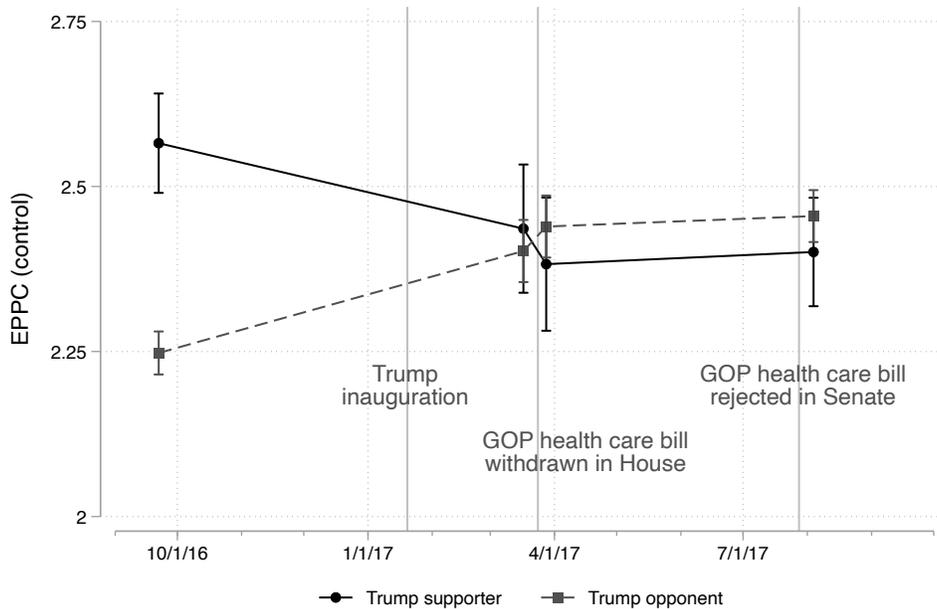
<sup>8</sup>Ideally, we would have liked to observe EPPI and EPPC directly after Trump’s inauguration in addition to directly before and after the health care bill’s withdrawal; future research should seek to capture more granular measurements.

Figure 2: Changes in perceptions of presidential power by Trump support (waves 2–5)

(a) Changes in perceptions of presidential influence over time



(b) Changes in perceptions of presidential control over time



Mean perceptions of presidential power among Trump supporters (solid black lines; those with favorable opinion of Trump in wave 2) and opponents (dotted gray lines; those with an unfavorable opinion of Trump in wave 2) in waves 2–5 (including 95% confidence intervals). Top panel shows results for EPPI scale and bottom panel shows results for EPPC scale.

Table 4: Presidential support as a predictor of changes in beliefs about power (waves 2–5)

	Diff.: Trump supporters	Diff.: Trump opponents	DID
<u>Pre-election (W2) to after Senate defeat (W5)</u>			
EPPI	-0.330*** (0.034)	0.155*** (0.015)	-0.486*** (0.037)
EPPC	-0.123* (0.048)	0.216*** (0.022)	-0.339*** (0.053)
<u>Post-election (W3) to after Senate defeat (W5)</u>			
EPPI	-0.066 (0.040)	0.060*** (0.016)	-0.126* (0.043)
EPPC	-0.072 (0.054)	0.034 (0.025)	-0.107 (0.059)
<u>Post-election (W3) to after House defeat (W4)</u>			
EPPI	-0.019 (0.030)	0.010 (0.015)	-0.029 (0.034)
EPPC	-0.031 (0.038)	0.042 (0.021)	-0.074 (0.044)
Controls	✓	✓	✓

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . OLS regression with robust standard errors clustered by respondent. Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in waves 2 and 5 in top panel, responses for waves 3–5 taken from respondents surveyed in waves 2–5 in middle panel, responses for waves 3–4 taken from respondents surveyed in waves 2–5 in middle panel (wave 2: September 22–23, 2016, wave 3: March 17–23, 2017, wave 4: March 28–30, 2017, wave 5: August 4–14, 2017). Trump supporters are defined as respondents who expressed a favorable view of Trump in wave 2. Results including control variables are reported in Table C2 in Online Appendix C. Linear comparisons for the top panel correspond to the first two columns of Table C2, while those in the middle and bottom panels correspond to columns three and four in Table C2. Wave 2 vs. 5 comparison has 2320 observations and 1211 respondents for EPPI and 2410 observations and 1212 respondents for EPPC. Both wave 3 vs. 5 and wave 3 vs. 4 have 2483 observations and 655 respondents for EPPI and 2611 observations and 655 respondents for EPPC.

wave 2 and wave 5 among Trump supporters and a significant increase among opponents. As a result, supporters’ perception of his influence declined relative to that of his opponents over the course of our panel ( $p < .005$  for both measures). Perceptions of presidential influence on the EPPI decreased by  $-0.330$  scale points among Trump supporters (.72 s.d.), while those among opponents increased by 0.155 scale points (.35 s.d.). The second row of the top panel of Table 4 shows the results for the EPPC scale. Again, Trump supporters’ perceptions of presidential control decreased by 0.123 points (.18 s.d.); by contrast, opponents’ perceptions of Trump’s control increased by 0.216 scale points (.33 s.d.).

To better understand when these shifts took place, we conduct similar comparisons between beliefs in waves 3 and 5 and waves 3 and 4, though we do not find consistent evidence of differential changes in beliefs about presidential power (that is, decreases in perceptions of power among supporters and increases among opponents) after the defeat of a GOP health care bill was with-

drawn (just before wave 4) or after a GOP health care bill was rejected in the Senate (just before wave 5). We only observe a differential shift in beliefs about presidential power consistent with our expectations in one of four cases (EPPI between wave 3 and wave 5). This finding suggests that elections are more influential than policy defeats in prompting the public to revise their views about presidential power.<sup>9</sup>

### **Attributions for policy failure**

Given this evidence that beliefs about presidential power changed during Trump’s presidency, we now consider more specific attributions people made about the two failures to reform health care.<sup>10</sup> According to our third hypothesis, supporters of the president should be more likely to downplay personal obstacles and emphasize institutional obstacles to successfully passing health care reform. To test this expectation, we analyze the personal and institutional attribution measures discussed above. These measures were included in waves 4 and 5 of our survey, which were administered immediately after each policy failure. The top panel of Figure 3 accordingly shows the level of personal attributions for Trump supporters (black solid lines) and Trump opponents (gray dotted lines) across the two waves. Contrary to our expectations, the trends appear parallel for Trump supporters and opponents. The lower panel of Figure 3, however, provides suggestive evidence of diverging institutional attributions.

We analyze these data by stacking responses from waves 4 and 5 among respondents who an-

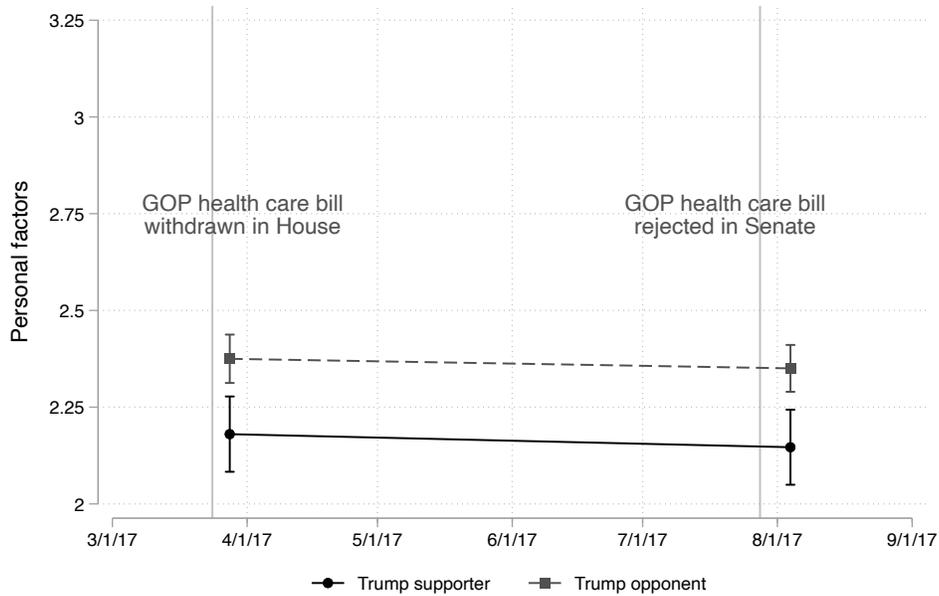
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<sup>9</sup>Our first preregistration included a related analysis estimating EPPI and EPPC beliefs in wave 4 as a function of EPPI and EPPC measured in wave 3 and Trump support measured in wave 2. We find no evidence of significant interactions between them (see Tables B5 and D5).

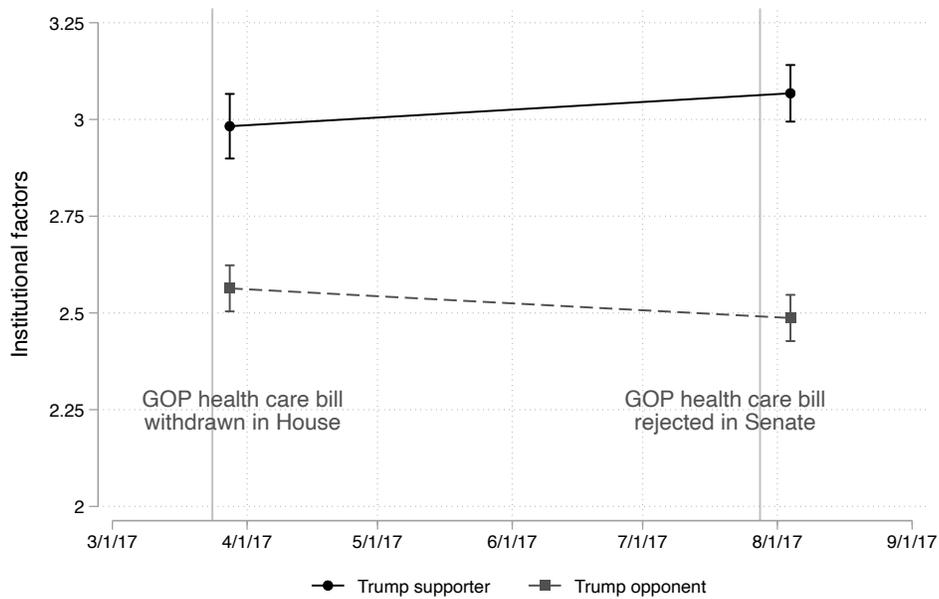
<sup>10</sup>In addition to the analyses reported here, wave 4 included a preregistered survey experiment that varied the causal explanation provided for the failure of the first Republican attempt to repeal the Affordable Care Act (see Online Appendix C). Specifically, we randomly assigned respondents to read a frame that attributed the failures of recent presidents, including Trump, to tactical failures and personal shortcomings (the personal attribution frame), a frame that instead blamed opposition in Congress (the institutional attribution frame), or to see no frame at all. We then measured respondents’ agreement with a series of statements that attributed Trump’s failure on health care to either Trump personally (e.g., “If Trump tried harder, he would have been able to pass his health care bill”) or to institutional factors (e.g., “As president, Trump has relatively little leverage over Congress, making it difficult to pass his health care bill”). Generally, these frames had no effect on how much respondents agree that the policy failures were due to personal or institutional factors. The personal attributions frame did, however, increase endorsement of statements that attribute the failure to Trump personally (see column 1 of Table C5).

Figure 3: Changes in outcome attributions by Trump support (waves 4–5)

(a) Personal attributions



(b) Institutional attributions



Mean scores on scales measuring personal and institutional attributions for failures to pass health care reform among Trump supporters (solid black lines; support measured in wave 3) and opponents (dotted gray lines; support measured in wave 3) in waves 4–5 of study (including 95% confidence intervals). Wave 3 was conducted March 17–23, 2017; wave 4 was conducted March 28–30, 2017; and wave 5 was conducted August 4–14, 2017). Top panel shows attributions to personal factors and bottom panel shows attributions to institutional factors.

Table 5: Changes in outcome attributions (waves 4–5)

	Personal attributions	Institutional attributions
Trump support (wave 3)	-0.203*** (0.065)	0.421*** (0.058)
Wave 5	-0.025 (0.036)	-0.063 (0.036)
Trump support $\times$ wave 5	0.007 (0.065)	0.148* (0.059)
Constant	2.552*** (0.109)	2.680*** (0.106)
Controls	✓	✓
R <sup>2</sup>	0.04	0.13
Observations	1281	1286
Respondents	649	641

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . OLS regression with robust standard errors clustered by respondent. Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in waves 4–5 of study (wave 4: March 28–30, 2017, wave 5: August 4–14, 2017). Trump supporters are defined as respondents who approved of Trump in wave 3 of the survey (March 17–23, 2017). Results including control variables are reported in Table C3 in Online Appendix C.

swered both surveys, which allows us to test for within-respondent change. We test our hypothesis with two preregistered OLS models in which each attribution measure is a dependent variable and the independent variables include wave 3 Trump support, a wave 5 indicator, and an interaction between the two (another difference-in-differences model). We also include the same set of control variables used in previous models. The first column of Table 5 shows the results for beliefs about personal obstacles to policy success.

Trump supporters were significantly less likely than opponents to attribute policy failure to personal factors in wave 4 ( $p < .005$ ), but contrary to our hypothesis, this effect did not increase significantly from wave 4 to wave 5. Neither Trump supporters nor opponents significantly changed their beliefs about the president’s personal role in policy success or failure over this period.

The second column of Table 5 shows the results for institutional attributions. Trump supporters were significantly more likely to endorse institutional attributions in wave 4 than were Trump opponents ( $p < .005$ ). Consistent with our hypothesis, this difference significantly increased in wave 5 ( $p < .05$ ). Trump supporters and opponents both contribute to this effect; supporters

became more likely to make institutional attributions and opponents became less likely to make institutional attributions, though each effect was only significant at the  $p < .10$  level.

Taken together, the results in Table 5 provide some evidence that the public updates its beliefs about explanations for a president's failure or success following a policy failure. However, this finding only seems to hold for institutional attributions, providing further evidence that the public sees personal and institutional attributions as independent constructs.

## **Conclusion**

Attribution of credit and blame to representatives enables democratic accountability. To better understand the sources of these beliefs, we compared public beliefs to those of experts and examined over-time public beliefs about presidential power in the United States. Results from a five-wave panel study spanning two presidencies and an expert survey indicate that members of the public hold relatively coherent beliefs about presidential power, but systematically overestimate presidential power relative to scholarly experts. Members of the public who are relatively uninformed about politics are especially likely to perceive exaggerated presidential influence and control over outcomes.

However, our panel study also demonstrates that individual-level beliefs about presidential power can shift considerably after a change in partisan control of the White House. In addition, surveys conducted after the defeat of two Republican health care bills provide suggestive evidence that high-profile policy failures can cause public beliefs to shift as well. Perceptions of presidential power declined throughout our panel among Trump supporters but consistently increased among Trump opponents. Trump's opponents may have been eager to attribute blame for policy failures to him and thus to exaggerate the power of the presidency, while Trump supporters may have been more motivated to defend the president by attributing blame to institutional factors beyond his control.

While motivated reasoning may contribute to these findings, it may not be the only mechanism

for the shifts we observed. Another potential explanation involves negativity bias. People devote greater attention to negative information and, as a result, it generally has a greater impact on evaluations (Fiske 1980). The asymmetric influence of negative information has been documented in evaluations of political candidates (Lau 1985) and consumption of political news (Soroka and McAdams 2015). In the context of presidential power, we would expect that citizens pay greater attention to presidential behavior or outcomes that they view as negative or undesirable. This bias can produce an asymmetry in the types of events to which partisans attend. Those who oppose the president may be more attentive to the president's policy successes, as these events have more negative implications for that individual compared to the president's policy failures. In contrast, supporters of the president may pay greater attention to policy failures, which they are likely to perceive as negative events. As a result, opponents should be more attuned to success and thus more likely to attribute greater power to the president, while supporters should be more attuned to failure and thus perceive a weaker president. While we cannot test this potential mechanism with our existing data, we view it as an important avenue for future research.

Of course, the studies reported here have limitations. First, our results are limited to data collected during the Obama and Trump presidencies, so it is unclear whether all presidents are similarly personified. However, beliefs about presidential power were, on average, quite similar across these two dissimilar presidents. Additionally, our analysis of policy failures focuses on a single issue (health care) under one historically unusual president. Given the heavy media focus on Trump's unusual personal style (e.g., Baker 2017; Lemire, Miller and Superville 2020; Allsop and Vernon 2020; Gittleson 2021), attributions of health care reform's failure to his behavior may be more likely than for other presidents. Moreover, because of the political events that transpired during our panel survey, we were unable to examine public responses to a policy success or to fully rule out the potential influences of other events between waves. Future research could examine these processes across past and future presidencies and examine whether personal and institutional explanations for policy failure differ across presidents and media environments. Second, our study is limited to the United States. Scholars should examine the accuracy of public

beliefs about the power of chief executives and elected leaders in other countries and the extent to which our findings apply in those contexts. Finally, our five-wave panel survey relied on participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk; future surveys should seek to replicate our results on more representative samples.

Ultimately, political accountability is fundamental to the democratic process. Public officials cannot be held accountable effectively if they are expected to deliver results that are exceedingly difficult or impossible to achieve from their institutional position.

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# Online Appendix A

## Expert survey

This first set of questions asks for some information about you.

What is your current professional status?

- Graduate student
- Postdoctoral researcher
- Visiting faculty
- Tenure-track/tenured faculty
- Retired/emeritus
- Private sector/non-academic position
- Other [text box]

What type of academic institution are you primarily affiliated with?

- Private, Ph.D.-granting
- Public, Ph.D.-granting
- Private, non-Ph.D.-granting
- Public, non-Ph.D.-granting

What type of academic institution were you most recently primarily affiliated with?

- Private, Ph.D.-granting
- Public, Ph.D.-granting
- Private, non-Ph.D.-granting
- Public, non-Ph.D.-granting

What is your primary subfield?

- American politics
- Comparative politics
- International relations
- Political theory

Please indicate which of the following (if any) apply to you.

- I teach about the American presidency
- I conduct research about the American presidency

We would now like to ask you some questions about U.S. presidents generally. These questions are not about any specific president. To the best of your knowledge, how much control do presidents have over the following things?

The inflation rate

- No control
- Not very much control
- Some control

- A lot of control
- Total control

The price of gasoline

- No control
- Not very much control
- Some control
- A lot of control
- Total control

The level of civility in Washington, DC

- No control
- Not very much control
- Some control
- A lot of control
- Total control

The amount of gridlock in Congress

- No control
- Not very much control
- Some control
- A lot of control
- Total control

Thinking again about U.S. presidents generally and not any specific president, please indicate whether you think the following statements are very accurate, somewhat accurate, not very accurate, or not at all accurate.

There are no limits to what a president can achieve if he or she uses the power of his/her office effectively.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Members of Congress can easily resist pressure from the president and vote how they choose.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Partisanship makes it difficult for any president to achieve consensus on a controversial policy issue.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate

- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Without large partisan majorities in Congress, most presidents will struggle to pass their agenda.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Gridlock in Congress is typically the result of a failure of presidential leadership.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If a president doesn't follow through on a campaign promise, it's probably because they didn't really want it to happen.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

We are now going to list some policy proposals made by the presidential candidates. Please tell us whether you think each candidate will, if elected, be able to implement the proposal.

Donald Trump has said he would like to build a wall along the Mexican border and have Mexico pay for it. If elected President, how likely is it that he would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

Donald Trump has said he would like to deport the approximately 11 million illegal immigrants currently living in the United States. If elected President, how likely is it that he would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

Donald Trump has said he would like to temporarily ban non-citizens from predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States. If elected President, how likely is it that he would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

Donald Trump has said he would like to renegotiate our trade deals with China and impose tariffs on Chinese imports. If elected President, how likely is it that he would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

Hillary Clinton has said she would like to make in-state public colleges debt-free and community colleges completely free. If elected President, how likely is it that she would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

Hillary Clinton has said she can fulfill all of her campaign promises without raising taxes on Americans making less than \$250,000. If elected President, how likely is it that she would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

Hillary Clinton has said she would like to raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour. If elected President, how likely is it that she would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

Hillary Clinton has said she would like to grant in-state tuition at public colleges to undocumented immigrants. If elected President, how likely is it that she would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely

-Not at all likely

Finally, please indicate whether you think the following statements are very accurate, somewhat accurate, not very accurate, or not at all accurate.

If President Obama had pushed Congress harder, he could have passed a much more progressive health care plan.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If President Obama had offered a clear, compelling alternative to the dominant narrative of the right, he would have been far more successful in accomplishing his goals during his time in office.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Barack Obama's presidency shows that presidential efforts to change public opinion usually fail.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Barack Obama's legislative failures show that presidents can't push bills through Congress by sheer force of will.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

President Obama has been deeply constrained during his presidency by what members of Congress were willing to support.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If President George W. Bush had pushed Congress harder, he could have passed a much more extensive set of tax cuts.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If President George W. Bush had offered a clear, compelling alternative to the dominant narrative of the left, he would have been far more successful in accomplishing his goals during his time in office.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

George W. Bush's presidency shows that presidential efforts to change public opinion usually fail.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

George W. Bush's legislative failures show that presidents can't push bills through Congress by sheer force of will.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

President George W. Bush was deeply constrained during his presidency by what members of Congress were willing to support.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which people's political views are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Please indicate where you would place the following individuals on this scale.

Barack Obama

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

Hillary Clinton

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal

- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

Bernie Sanders

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

Donald Trump

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

Ted Cruz

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

John Kasich

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

George W. Bush

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal

- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

Finally, we have a few questions about your own political views. These questions are important for helping us understand which types of people see the president as more or less powerful. Please keep in mind that this survey is anonymous.

When it comes to politics, would you describe yourself as liberal, conservative, or neither liberal nor conservative?

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely Conservative

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?

- Republican
- Democrat
- Independent
- Something else

[if Democrat:]

Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or not a very strong Democrat?

- Strong Democrat
- Not very strong Democrat

[if Republican:]

Would you call yourself a strong Republican or not a very strong Republican?

- Strong Republican
- Not very strong Republican

[if Independent or something else:]

Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party? -Closer to the Republican Party

- Closer to the Democratic Party
- Neither

Do you have any comments on the survey? Please let us know about any problems you had or any aspects of the survey that were confusing. [text box]

## Wave 1 survey

This first set of questions asks for some information about you.

How old are you?

- Under 18
- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55–64
- 65–74
- 75–84
- 85 or older

Is this your Mechanical Turk Worker ID? [MID display]

- Yes
- No (please enter correct ID) [text box]

In what state do you currently reside?

[dropdown list]

Generally, how interested are you in politics?

- Extremely interested
- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Not very interested
- Not at all interested

Please indicate your sex.

- Male
- Female
- Other [text entry]

Please check one or more categories below to indicate what race(s) you consider yourself to be.

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Multi-racial
- Other [text entry]

Are you of Spanish or Hispanic origin or descent?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

- Did not graduate from high school
- High school diploma or the equivalent (GED)
- Some college
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional or doctorate degree

When it comes to politics, would you describe yourself as liberal, conservative, or neither liberal nor conservative?

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else? -Republican

- Democrat
- Independent
- Something else

[If Democrat:]

Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or not a very strong Democrat?

- Strong Democrat
- Not very strong Democrat

[If Republican:]

Would you call yourself a strong Republican or not a very strong Republican?

- Strong Republican
- Not very strong Republican

[If Independent or something else:]

Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

- Closer to the Republican Party
- Closer to the Democratic Party
- Neither

Generally, how interested are you in politics?

- Extremely interested
- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Not very interested
- Not at all interested

How closely do you follow national news about politics?

- Extremely closely
- Very closely
- Somewhat closely
- Not very closely
- Not at all closely

Thinking specifically about government and politics, how do you get most of your news?

- Cable television
- Local television
- Internet
- Radio
- Newspapers or magazines
- Other [text entry]

Some people have opinions about almost everything; other people have opinions about just some things; and still other people have very few opinions. What about you? Would you say you have opinions about almost everything, many things, some things, or very few things?

- Almost everything
- Many things
- Some things
- Very few things

Compared to the average person, do you have far fewer opinions about whether things are good or bad, somewhat fewer opinions, about the same number of opinions, somewhat more opinions, or far more opinions?

- Far fewer opinions
- Somewhat fewer opinions
- About the same
- Somewhat more opinions
- Far more opinions

Some people say it is important to have firm opinions about lots of things, while other people think it is better to remain neutral on most issues. What about you? Do you think it is better to have firm opinions about lots of things or to remain neutral on most issues?

- Remain neutral on most issues
- Definite opinions about lots of things

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I am pretty much indifferent to many important issues.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I like to have strong opinions even when I'm not personally involved.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

These next few questions ask about politics in Washington, D.C. and are intended to help us learn what types of information are known to the public.

It is important to us that you do NOT use outside sources like the Internet to search for the correct answer. Will you answer the following questions without help from outside sources?

- Yes
- No

Which of the following does the president NOT have the power to do when a bill passes both houses of Congress?

- Sign it into law
- Veto it
- Rewrite a section and send it back to the relevant committee
- Consult with administration experts on policy details

What is executive privilege?

- The right to issue pardons and acts of clemency
- The right to submit formal budget proposals to Congress
- The right of members of the executive branch to withhold information from Congress and the public
- The right to veto bills passed by Congress

Which of the following powers does the President share with the Congress?

- Appointing and confirming federal judges
- Using nuclear weapons
- Selecting a Vice President
- Printing currency

What are legally binding rules issued by the president to federal agencies called?

- Executive privileges
- Executive agreements
- Executive orders
- Policy orders

Which law was passed by Congress in 1973 in order to require presidents to get Congressional approval before committing troops to battle?

- Battlefield Resolution
- War Resolution
- War Powers Act
- Presidential War Powers

Who is the current U.S. Secretary of Defense?

- John Kerry
- Eric Holder
- Colin Powell
- Ash Carter

Who is the current speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives?

- Paul Ryan
- Nancy Pelosi
- Newt Gingrich
- Mitch McConnell

Who is the current Chief Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court?

- William Rehnquist
- John Roberts
- Antonin Scalia
- Sonia Sotomayor

What position is currently held by Janet Yellen?

- U.S. Attorney General
- Chair of the Federal Reserve
- Prime Minister of the United Kingdom
- Senate Majority Leader

On which of the following does the U.S. federal government currently spend the least?

- Foreign aid
- Medicare
- National defense
- Social Security

Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Ban Ki-Moon?

- Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation
- Prime Minister of Japan

- Secretary of the United Nations
- United States Ambassador to South Korea

For how many years is a United States Senator elected – that is, how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. Senator?

- 2
- 4
- 6
- 8

The United States recently announced that it would re-establish diplomatic relations with which of the following countries?

- Cuba
- North Korea
- Russia
- Yemen

For the next set of questions, we would like to ask you about different things that happen to people. For each of these events, please indicate if you think people are responsible for causing the outcome listed to occur or if external forces that are outside of people's control are the cause of these events.

Getting into medical school

- Individuals totally responsible
- Individuals mostly responsible
- Outside forces mostly responsible
- Outside forces totally responsible

Having low income

- Individuals totally responsible
- Individuals mostly responsible
- Outside forces mostly responsible
- Outside forces totally responsible

Receiving proper healthcare

- Individuals totally responsible
- Individuals mostly responsible
- Outside forces mostly responsible
- Outside forces totally responsible

Contracting the HIV virus

- Individuals totally responsible
- Individuals mostly responsible
- Outside forces mostly responsible
- Outside forces totally responsible

Publishing a book

- Individuals totally responsible
- Individuals mostly responsible
- Outside forces mostly responsible
- Outside forces totally responsible

Failing a class at school

- Individuals totally responsible
- Individuals mostly responsible
- Outside forces mostly responsible
- Outside forces totally responsible

Being obese

- Individuals totally responsible
- Individuals mostly responsible
- Outside forces mostly responsible
- Outside forces totally responsible

Being laid-off at work

- Individuals totally responsible
- Individuals mostly responsible
- Outside forces mostly responsible
- Outside forces totally responsible

Next you will read about several individuals and indicate whether you disagree or agree with some statements about the likely causes of their actions.

Sarah often ridicules and belittles her children. She tells them they are lazy, sloppy, and even “worthless.” WHY has Sarah become such a cruel mother?

A major factor is Sarah’s character traits.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

A major factor is Sarah’s external circumstances/life experiences.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

Sarah has control over her cruelty.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

Steven never tries to take another's perspective. When he disagrees with someone, he is stubborn, angry, and insulting. WHY has Steven become such a difficult person?

A major factor is Steven's character traits.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

A major factor is Steven's external circumstances/life experiences.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

Steven has control over his negative social behavior.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

Janet, a successful accountant, volunteers at a local Food Bank for 10 hours per week. WHY has Janet become a person who often volunteers?

A major factor is Janet's character traits.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

A major factor is Janet's external circumstances/life experiences.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree

- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

Janet has control over her generous behavior.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

Robert has been arrested many times for “petty offenses” since he was 14. WHY has Robert become prone to crime?

A major factor is Robert’s character traits.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

A major factor is Robert’s external circumstances/life experiences.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

Robert has control over his criminal behavior.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

Susan exudes love for others. People look forward to being with her because she shares so much kindness and inspiration. WHY has Susan become such a loving person?

A major factor is Susan’s character traits.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

A major factor is Susan’s external circumstances/life experiences.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

Susan has control over her positive social behavior.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

Bill is very generous with his time and knowledge, patiently helping others even when it is inconvenient for him. WHY has Bill become such a generous person?

A major factor is Bill's character traits.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

A major factor is Bill's external circumstances/life experiences.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

Bill has control over his generosity.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

James worked tirelessly to start several Community Centers that provide many activities for the community members to enjoy. WHY has James become so community-minded?

A major factor is James' character traits.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree

-strongly agree

A major factor is James' external circumstances/life experiences.

-strongly disagree

-somewhat disagree

-neither disagree nor agree

-somewhat agree

-strongly agree

James has control over his community-mindedness.

-strongly disagree

-somewhat disagree

-neither disagree nor agree

-somewhat agree

-strongly agree

Beth sometimes has sex with other men when her husband is gone. WHY has Beth become an unfaithful person?

A major factor is Beth's character traits.

-strongly disagree

-somewhat disagree

-neither disagree nor agree

-somewhat agree

-strongly agree

A major factor is Beth's external circumstances/life experiences.

-strongly disagree

-somewhat disagree

-neither disagree nor agree

-somewhat agree

-strongly agree

Beth has control over her infidelity.

-strongly disagree

-somewhat disagree

-neither disagree nor agree

-somewhat agree

-strongly agree

The next series of sentences describes the way some people feel about how much control they have over their lives. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

I can solve the problems I have.

-strongly disagree

- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

I sometimes feel I am being pushed around.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

I have little control over what happens to me.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

I can do just about anything I really set my mind to.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

What happens to me in the future depends mostly on me.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

There is little I can do to change important things in my life.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree

-strongly agree

People can do different things, but the important parts of who they are can't really be changed.

-strongly disagree

-somewhat disagree

-neither disagree nor agree

-somewhat agree

-strongly agree

People can change even their most basic qualities.

-strongly disagree

-somewhat disagree

-neither disagree nor agree

-somewhat agree

-strongly agree

Everyone, no matter who they are, can change their most basic characteristics.

-strongly disagree

-somewhat disagree

-neither disagree nor agree

-somewhat agree

-strongly agree

The kind of person someone is can't be changed very much; it is something basic about them.

-strongly disagree

-somewhat disagree

-neither disagree nor agree

-somewhat agree

-strongly agree

Everyone is a certain kind of person, and there is not much they can really do to change that.

-strongly disagree

-somewhat disagree

-neither disagree nor agree

-somewhat agree

-strongly agree

When getting to know a person it is possible to get a picture of the kind of person they are very quickly.

-strongly disagree

-somewhat disagree

-neither disagree nor agree

-somewhat agree

-strongly agree

It is possible to know about many aspects of a person once you become familiar with a few of their basic traits.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

A person's behavior in a select number of contexts can never tell you a lot about the kind of person they are.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

Although a person may have some basic identifiable traits, it is never easy to make accurate judgments about how they will behave in different situations.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

Generally speaking, once you know someone in one or two contexts it is possible to predict how they will behave in most other contexts.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

It is never possible to judge how someone will react in new social situations.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

There are different 'types' of people and it is possible to know what 'type' of person someone is relatively quickly.

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neither disagree nor agree
- somewhat agree

-strongly agree

Do you approve or disapprove of how Barack Obama is handling his job as president?

-strongly disagree

-somewhat disagree

-neither disagree nor agree

-somewhat agree

-strongly agree

Do you feel favorable or unfavorable towards each of these individuals?

Barack Obama

-Very favorable

-Somewhat favorable

-Neither favorable nor unfavorable

-Somewhat unfavorable

-Very unfavorable

Hillary Clinton

-Very favorable

-Somewhat favorable

-Neither favorable nor unfavorable

-Somewhat unfavorable

-Very unfavorable

Bernie Sanders

-Very favorable

-Somewhat favorable

-Neither favorable nor unfavorable

-Somewhat unfavorable

-Very unfavorable

Donald Trump

-Very favorable

-Somewhat favorable

-Neither favorable nor unfavorable

-Somewhat unfavorable

-Very unfavorable

Ted Cruz

-Very favorable

-Somewhat favorable

-Neither favorable nor unfavorable

-Somewhat unfavorable

-Very unfavorable

John Kasich

- Very favorable
- Somewhat favorable
- Neither favorable nor unfavorable
- Somewhat unfavorable
- Very unfavorable

George W. Bush

- Very favorable
- Somewhat favorable
- Neither favorable nor unfavorable
- Somewhat unfavorable
- Very unfavorable

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which people's political views are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Please indicate where you would place the following individuals on this scale.

Barack Obama

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

Hillary Clinton

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

Bernie Sanders

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

Donald Trump

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

Ted Cruz

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

John Kasich

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

George W. Bush

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

It is essential for the validity of this study that we know whether participants looked up any information online during the study. Did you make an effort to look up information during the study? Please be honest; you will not be penalized in any way if you did.

- Yes, I looked up information
- No, I did not look up information

Do you have any comments on the survey? Please let us know about any problems you had or any aspects of the survey that were confusing. [text box]

## Wave 2 survey

This first set of questions asks for some information about you.

How old are you?

- Under 18
- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55–64
- 65–74
- 75–84
- 85 or older

Is this your Mechanical Turk Worker ID? [MID display]

- Yes
- No (please enter correct ID) [text box]

In what state do you currently reside?

[dropdown list]

Generally, how interested are you in politics?

- Extremely interested
- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Not very interested
- Not at all interested

Please indicate your sex.

- Male
- Female
- Other [text entry]

Please check one or more categories below to indicate what race(s) you consider yourself to be.

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Multi-racial
- Other [text entry]

Are you of Spanish or Hispanic origin or descent?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

We would now like to ask you some questions about U.S. presidents generally. These questions are not about any specific president. To the best of your knowledge, how much control do presidents have over the following things?

The inflation rate

- No control
- Not very much control
- Some control
- A lot of control
- Total control

The price of gasoline

- No control
- Not very much control
- Some control
- A lot of control
- Total control

The level of civility in Washington, DC

- No control
- Not very much control
- Some control
- A lot of control
- Total control

The amount of gridlock in Congress

- No control
- Not very much control
- Some control
- A lot of control
- Total control

Thinking again about U.S. presidents generally and not any specific president, please indicate whether you think the following statements are very accurate, somewhat accurate, not very accurate, or not at all accurate.

There are no limits to what a president can achieve if he or she uses the power of his/her office effectively.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate

- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Members of Congress can easily resist pressure from the president and vote how they choose.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Partisanship makes it difficult for any president to achieve consensus on a controversial policy issue.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Without large partisan majorities in Congress, most presidents will struggle to pass their agenda.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Gridlock in Congress is typically the result of a failure of presidential leadership.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If a president doesn't follow through on a campaign promise, it's probably because they didn't really want it to happen.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

We are now going to list some policy proposals made by the presidential candidates. Please tell us whether you think each candidate will, if elected, be able to implement the proposal.

Donald Trump has said he would like to build a wall along the Mexican border and have Mexico pay for it. If elected President, how likely is it that he would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

Donald Trump has said he would like to deport the approximately 11 million illegal immigrants currently living in the United States. If elected President, how likely is it that he would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

Donald Trump has said he would like to temporarily ban non-citizens from predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States. If elected President, how likely is it that he would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

Donald Trump has said he would like to renegotiate our trade deals with China and impose tariffs on Chinese imports. If elected President, how likely is it that he would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

Hillary Clinton has said she would like to make in-state public colleges debt-free and community colleges completely free. If elected President, how likely is it that she would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

Hillary Clinton has said she can fulfill all of her campaign promises without raising taxes on Americans making less than \$250,000. If elected President, how likely is it that she would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

Hillary Clinton has said she would like to raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour. If elected

President, how likely is it that she would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

Hillary Clinton has said she would like to grant in-state tuition at public colleges to undocumented immigrants. If elected President, how likely is it that she would be able to do this?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

Finally, please indicate whether you think the following statements are very accurate, somewhat accurate, not very accurate, or not at all accurate.

If President Obama had pushed Congress harder, he could have passed a much more progressive health care plan.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If President Obama had offered a clear, compelling alternative to the dominant narrative of the right, he would have been far more successful in accomplishing his goals during his time in office.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Barack Obama's presidency shows that presidential efforts to change public opinion usually fail.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Barack Obama's legislative failures show that presidents can't push bills through Congress by sheer force of will.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

President Obama has been deeply constrained during his presidency by what members of Congress were willing to support.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If President George W. Bush had pushed Congress harder, he could have passed a much more extensive set of tax cuts.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If President George W. Bush had offered a clear, compelling alternative to the dominant narrative of the left, he would have been far more successful in accomplishing his goals during his time in office.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

George W. Bush's presidency shows that presidential efforts to change public opinion usually fail.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

George W. Bush's legislative failures show that presidents can't push bills through Congress by sheer force of will.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

President George W. Bush was deeply constrained during his presidency by what members of Congress were willing to support.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

It is essential for the validity of this study that we know whether participants looked up any information online during the study. Did you make an effort to look up information during the study? Please be honest; you will not be penalized in any way if you did.

- Yes, I looked up information
- No, I did not look up information

Do you have any comments on the survey? Please let us know about any problems you had or any aspects of the survey that were confusing. [text box]

### **Wave 3 survey**

How old are you?

- Under 18
- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55–64
- 65–74
- 75–84
- 85 or older

Please enter your MTurk ID. [text box]

In what state do you currently reside?  
[pulldown list]

Generally, how interested are you in politics?

- Extremely interested
- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Not very interested
- Not at all interested

How closely do you follow national news about politics?

- Extremely closely
- Very closely
- Somewhat closely
- Not very closely
- Not at all closely

We would now like to ask you some questions about U.S. presidents generally. These questions are not about any specific president. To the best of your knowledge, how much control do presidents have over the following things?

The inflation rate

- No control

- Not very much control
- Some control
- A lot of control
- Total control

The price of gasoline

- No control
- Not very much control
- Some control
- A lot of control
- Total control

The level of civility in Washington, DC

- No control
- Not very much control
- Some control
- A lot of control
- Total control

The amount of gridlock in Congress

- No control
- Not very much control
- Some control
- A lot of control
- Total control

Thinking again about U.S. presidents generally and not any specific president, please indicate whether you think the following statements are very accurate, somewhat accurate, not very accurate, or not at all accurate.

There are no limits to what a president can achieve if he or she uses the power of his/her office effectively.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Members of Congress can easily resist pressure from the president and vote how they choose.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Partisanship makes it difficult for any president to achieve consensus on a controversial policy issue.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Without large partisan majorities in Congress, most presidents will struggle to pass their agenda.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Gridlock in Congress is typically the result of a failure of presidential leadership.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If a president doesn't follow through on a campaign promise, it's probably because they didn't really want it to happen.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Do you feel favorable or unfavorable towards each of these individuals or groups?

Bernie Sanders

- Very favorable
- Somewhat favorable
- Neither favorable nor unfavorable
- Somewhat unfavorable
- Very unfavorable

Donald Trump

- Very favorable
- Somewhat favorable
- Neither favorable nor unfavorable
- Somewhat unfavorable
- Very unfavorable

Democrats in Congress

- Very favorable
- Somewhat favorable
- Neither favorable nor unfavorable
- Somewhat unfavorable

-Very unfavorable

Republicans in Congress

-Very favorable

-Somewhat favorable

-Neither favorable nor unfavorable

-Somewhat unfavorable

-Very unfavorable

Barack Obama

-Very favorable

-Somewhat favorable

-Neither favorable nor unfavorable

-Somewhat unfavorable

-Very unfavorable

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president?

-Strongly approve

-Somewhat approve

-Somewhat disapprove

-Strongly disapprove

When it comes to politics, would you describe yourself as liberal, conservative, or neither liberal nor conservative?

-Extremely liberal

-Liberal

-Slightly liberal

-Moderate; middle of the road

-Slightly conservative

-Conservative

-Extremely conservative

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?

-Republican

-Democrat

-Independent

-Something else

[branching] Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or not a very strong Democrat?

-Strong Democrat

-Not very strong Democrat

[branching] Would you call yourself a strong Republican or not a very strong Republican?

-Strong Republican

-Not very strong Republican

[branching] Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

-Closer to the Republican Party

-Closer to the Democratic Party

-Neither

Do you have any comments on the survey? Please let us know about any problems you had or any aspects of the survey that were confusing.

## Wave 4 survey

Please enter your MTurk ID. [text box]

This first question asks for some information about you.

How old are you?

-Under 18

-18–24

-25–34

-35–44

-45–54

-55–64

-65–74

-75–84

-85 or older

We would now like to ask you some questions about U.S. presidents generally. These questions are not about any specific president. To the best of your knowledge, how much control do presidents have over the following things?

The inflation rate

-No control

-Not very much control

-Some control

-A lot of control

-Total control

The price of gasoline

-No control

-Not very much control

-Some control

-A lot of control

-Total control

The level of civility in Washington, DC

-No control

-Not very much control

-Some control

-A lot of control

-Total control

The amount of gridlock in Congress

-No control

-Not very much control

-Some control

-A lot of control

-Total control

Thinking again about U.S. presidents generally and not any specific president, please indicate whether you think the following statements are very accurate, somewhat accurate, not very accurate, or not at all accurate.

There are no limits to what a president can achieve if he or she uses the power of his/her office effectively.

-Very accurate

-Somewhat accurate

-Not very accurate

-Not at all accurate

Members of Congress can easily resist pressure from the president and vote how they choose.

-Very accurate

-Somewhat accurate

-Not very accurate

-Not at all accurate

Partisanship makes it difficult for any president to achieve consensus on a controversial policy issue.

-Very accurate

-Somewhat accurate

-Not very accurate

-Not at all accurate

Without large partisan majorities in Congress, most presidents will struggle to pass their agenda.

-Very accurate

-Somewhat accurate

-Not very accurate

-Not at all accurate

Gridlock in Congress is typically the result of a failure of presidential leadership.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If a president doesn't follow through on a campaign promise, it's probably because they didn't really want it to happen.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

The next question asks about politics in Washington, D.C. and is intended to help us learn what types of information are known to the public.

It is important to us that you do NOT use outside sources like the Internet to search for the correct answer. Will you answer the following question without help from outside sources?

- Yes
- No

To the best of your knowledge, what is the current status of Republican attempts to reform health care?

- The House of Representatives passed a bill and it is currently being debated in the Senate
- The House of Representatives passed a bill, but it died in the Senate
- The House of Representatives and Senate passed a bill to reform health care, but President Trump vetoed it
- Republicans could not get support in the House and have put health care reform on hold
- Don't know

Here are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. You should rate the extent to which the pair of traits applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other.

I see myself as:

Extraverted, enthusiastic.

- Disagree strongly
- Disagree moderately
- Disagree a little
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree a little
- Agree moderately
- Agree strongly

Critical, quarrelsome.

- Disagree strongly
- Disagree moderately
- Disagree a little
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree a little
- Agree moderately
- Agree strongly

Dependable, self-disciplined.

- Disagree strongly
- Disagree moderately
- Disagree a little
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree a little
- Agree moderately
- Agree strongly

Anxious, easily upset.

- Disagree strongly
- Disagree moderately
- Disagree a little
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree a little
- Agree moderately
- Agree strongly

Open to new experiences, complex.

- Disagree strongly
- Disagree moderately
- Disagree a little
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree a little
- Agree moderately
- Agree strongly

Reserved, quiet.

- Disagree strongly
- Disagree moderately
- Disagree a little
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree a little
- Agree moderately
- Agree strongly

Sympathetic, warm.

- Disagree strongly
- Disagree moderately
- Disagree a little
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree a little
- Agree moderately
- Agree strongly

Disorganized, careless.

- Disagree strongly
- Disagree moderately
- Disagree a little
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree a little
- Agree moderately
- Agree strongly

Calm, emotionally stable.

- Disagree strongly
- Disagree moderately
- Disagree a little
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree a little
- Agree moderately
- Agree strongly

Conventional, uncreative.

- Disagree strongly
- Disagree moderately
- Disagree a little
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree a little
- Agree moderately
- Agree strongly

[randomization: p=1/3 control group, p=1/3 personal attribution frame, p=1/3 institutional attribution frame]

We are interested in your opinions about some events that were in the news recently. Please read the information on the next page before answering the questions that follow.

[controls receive only this paragraph]

Over the last few decades, both Republican presidents like George W. Bush and Democratic presidents like Barack Obama have failed to deliver on several of their biggest campaign promises. For instance, Clinton was unable to pass universal health care or to reform the campaign finance system. Bush failed to reform federal entitlement programs and could not pass comprehensive immigration legislation. More recently, Barack Obama failed to deliver on his promises to expand gun control, to implement a cap-and-trade system to reduce environmental pollution, and to create a path to citizenship for people who came here illegally.

On Thursday, Donald Trump failed to deliver on his promise to quickly repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (also known as “Obamacare”) when the legislation he supported failed to pass in the House of Representatives.

[those randomized to personal attribution frame also receive this paragraph]

Many political observers attribute the struggles of recent presidents to presidents’ tactical failures and personal shortcomings. For example, Bush was an ineffective communicator who often appeared unfamiliar with the details of legislation on issues like Social Security. Obama was often viewed as arrogant and uninterested in building relationships with members of Congress to pass legislation on issues like climate change. Analysts have made similar observations about Donald Trump. They attribute his failure to pass health care legislation to his lack of involvement in developing the proposal and his failure to effectively marshal support for the plan within Congress.

[those randomized to institutional attribution frame also receive this paragraph]

Many political observers attribute the struggles of recent presidents to opposition from Congress. For example, Bush faced resistance in Congress that doomed his proposals on issues like Social Security. Obama was also unable to overcome opposition from Republicans in Congress and some members of his own party to pass legislation to address climate change. Analysts have made similar observations about Donald Trump. They attribute his failure to pass health care legislation to the limited powers that presidents have to change votes in Congress, where all of the Democrats and some Republicans were simply unwilling to vote in favor of the plan.

Please indicate whether you believe the following statements are accurate or not accurate.

The divisions in Congress would have made it nearly impossible for any president to pass a health care bill.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

As president, Trump has relatively little leverage over Congress, making it difficult to pass his health care bill.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate

- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Public opinion was a major obstacle to passing the health care bill Trump supported.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Opposition from outside groups helped kill the health care bill Trump supported.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

The balance of power in Washington made it extremely difficult for Trump to enact the health care bill.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Please indicate whether you believe the following statements are accurate or not accurate.

Trump could have overcome opposition to his health care bill in Congress if he had made a stronger and more persuasive case.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If Trump were a true leader, he would have convinced Congress to support his health care bill.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

The public could have been convinced to support the health care bill if Trump had more effectively shaped the debate over the issue.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If Trump tried harder, he would have been able to pass his health care bill.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Trump's personality prevented him from leading more effectively in the debate over his health care bill.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If you had to pick one, what do you think is the biggest barrier to Donald Trump successfully carrying out his campaign promises?

- His behavior and personal characteristics
- Opposition in Congress

How well does each of the following words or phrases describe Donald Trump?

Strong leader

- Extremely well
- Very well
- Somewhat well
- Not too well
- Not at all well

Effective manager

- Extremely well
- Very well
- Somewhat well
- Not too well
- Not at all well

Hard-working

- Extremely well
- Very well
- Somewhat well
- Not too well
- Not at all well

Persuasive

- Extremely well
- Very well
- Somewhat well
- Not too well

-Not at all well

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president?

- Strongly approve
- Somewhat approve
- Somewhat disapprove
- Strongly disapprove

Do you feel favorable or unfavorable towards each of these individuals or groups?

Bernie Sanders

- Very favorable
- Somewhat favorable
- Neither favorable nor unfavorable
- Somewhat unfavorable
- Very unfavorable

Donald Trump

- Very favorable
- Somewhat favorable
- Neither favorable nor unfavorable
- Somewhat unfavorable
- Very unfavorable

Democrats in Congress

- Very favorable
- Somewhat favorable
- Neither favorable nor unfavorable
- Somewhat unfavorable
- Very unfavorable

Republicans in Congress

- Very favorable
- Somewhat favorable
- Neither favorable nor unfavorable
- Somewhat unfavorable
- Very unfavorable

Barack Obama

- Very favorable
- Somewhat favorable
- Neither favorable nor unfavorable
- Somewhat unfavorable
- Very unfavorable

When it comes to politics, would you describe **Donald Trump** as liberal, conservative, or neither liberal nor conservative?

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

Please indicate whether you believe the following statements are accurate or not accurate.

The dysfunction in Washington could be solved if we had the right people in office.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

The average American could do a better job than most politicians.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Any president will struggle when their party does not control Congress.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

No president can end gridlock or break polarization.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Why do you think Donald Trump was unable to pass his health care bill? Please write a few sentences about the reasons why you think Trump was unsuccessful on this bill. [text box]

Do you have any comments on the survey? Please let us know about any problems you had or any aspects of the survey that were confusing. [text box]

## Wave 5 survey

Please enter your MTurk ID. [text box]

This first question asks for some information about you.

How old are you?

- Under 18
- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55–64
- 65–74
- 75–84
- 85 or older

We would now like to ask you some questions about U.S. presidents generally. These questions are not about any specific president. To the best of your knowledge, how much control do presidents have over the following things?

The inflation rate

- No control
- Not very much control
- Some control
- A lot of control
- Total control

The price of gasoline

- No control
- Not very much control
- Some control
- A lot of control
- Total control

The level of civility in Washington, DC

- No control
- Not very much control
- Some control
- A lot of control
- Total control

The amount of gridlock in Congress

- No control
- Not very much control

- Some control
- A lot of control
- Total control

Thinking again about U.S. presidents generally and not any specific president, please indicate whether you think the following statements are very accurate, somewhat accurate, not very accurate, or not at all accurate.

There are no limits to what a president can achieve if he or she uses the power of his/her office effectively.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Members of Congress can easily resist pressure from the president and vote how they choose.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Partisanship makes it difficult for any president to achieve consensus on a controversial policy issue.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Without large partisan majorities in Congress, most presidents will struggle to pass their agenda.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Gridlock in Congress is typically the result of a failure of presidential leadership.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If a president doesn't follow through on a campaign promise, it's probably because they didn't really want it to happen.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate

-Not at all accurate

The next question asks about politics in Washington, D.C. and is intended to help us learn what types of information are known to the public.

It is important to us that you do NOT use outside sources like the Internet to search for the correct answer. Will you answer the following question without help from outside sources?

-Yes

-No

To the best of your knowledge, what is the current status of Republican attempts to reform health care?

-Congress has not yet voted on a health reform bill

-Congress cannot agree on how to proceed on a health reform bill

-The House and Senate passed a health reform bill, but President Trump vetoed it

-The House and Senate passed a health reform bill and President Trump signed it

-Don't know

Please indicate whether you believe the following statements are accurate or not accurate.

The divisions in Congress would have made it nearly impossible for any president to pass a health care bill.

-Very accurate

-Somewhat accurate

-Not very accurate

-Not at all accurate

As president, Trump has relatively little leverage over Congress, making it difficult to pass his health care bill.

-Very accurate

-Somewhat accurate

-Not very accurate

-Not at all accurate

Public opinion was a major obstacle to passing the health care bill Trump supported.

-Very accurate

-Somewhat accurate

-Not very accurate

-Not at all accurate

Opposition from outside groups helped kill the health care bill Trump supported.

-Very accurate

-Somewhat accurate

-Not very accurate

-Not at all accurate

The balance of power in Washington made it extremely difficult for Trump to enact the health care bill.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Please indicate whether you believe the following statements are accurate or not accurate.

Trump could have overcome opposition to his health care bill in Congress if he had made a stronger and more persuasive case.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If Trump were a true leader, he would have convinced Congress to support his health care bill.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

The public could have been convinced to support the health care bill if Trump had more effectively shaped the debate over the issue.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

If Trump tried harder, he would have been able to pass his health care bill.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Trump's personality prevented him from leading more effectively in the debate over his health care bill.

- Very accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Not very accurate
- Not at all accurate

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president?

- Strongly approve

- Somewhat approve
- Somewhat disapprove
- Strongly disapprove

Regardless of how you feel about his presidency, how successful do you think Donald Trump has been in achieving his policy goals in the following areas?

#### Health care

- Extremely successful
- Somewhat successful
- Not very successful
- Not at all successful

#### Economy

- Extremely successful
- Somewhat successful
- Not very successful
- Not at all successful

#### Taxes

- Extremely successful
- Somewhat successful
- Not very successful
- Not at all successful

#### Immigration

- Extremely successful
- Somewhat successful
- Not very successful
- Not at all successful

Do you have any comments on the survey? Please let us know about any problems you had or any aspects of the survey that were confusing. [text box]

## Online Appendix B

Table B1: Overview of surveys

	MTurk wave 1	MTurk wave 2	APSA experts	MTurk wave 3	MTurk wave 4	MTurk wave 5
Date fielded	9/13/16	9/21/16	9/23/16	3/17/17	3/28/17	8/4/17
EPPI/EPPC scales		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Attribution scales					✓	✓
N	2505	1850	61	918	746	1217

For waves 2–4 of the MTurk survey, we recruited respondents who completed the immediately prior wave. For wave 5, we recruited respondents who completed waves 1 and 2. The experiment reported in Online Appendix C was embedded in wave 4.

Table B2: Descriptive statistics (APSA sample)

	Percent
Tenure-track faculty	75.4%
Americanist	95.0%
Democrat	72.7%
Republican	23.6%
Liberal	68.4%
Conservative	15.8%

Characteristics of expert survey respondents from APSA Presidents & Executive Politics section ( $n=61$ ). Conducted September 23–October 25, 2016.

Table B3: Descriptive statistics (MTurk panel survey)

	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5
% male	48.8%	49.1%	49.5%	48.3%
% white	84.9%	86.2%	86.6%	84.1%
% Democrat	40.9%	41.2%	42.4%	41.4%
% Republican	21.7%	22.4%	21.6%	21.6%
% Trump supporters	20.0%	20.7%	20.6%	21.1%
N	1850	918	746	1217

Trump supporters is defined as respondents who reported viewing him favorably in wave 2. Democrats and Republicans do not include leaners. For wave 5, respondents who completed waves 1 and 2 were invited. Survey dates: wave 1 (not shown): September 13, 2016; wave 2: September 22–23, 2016; wave 3: March 17–23, 2017; wave 4: March 28–30, 2017; wave 5: August 4–14, 2017.

We obtained voluntary informed consent from participants prior to them taking part in each survey wave. None of our studies involved deception and all were approved by our institutional review boards. Respondents were paid \$1.01 in waves 1 and 2, \$0.31 in wave 3, \$0.51 in wave 4, and \$1.00 in wave 5. These compensation levels correspond to pay rates of \$5.30, \$9.62, \$6.38, \$3.87, and \$14.34 per hour, respectively, in waves 1–5 when adjusted by median completion times. The cumulative compensation of participants who took part in all five waves using median completion times was \$7.04 per hour.

Table B4: Correlates of perceptions about presidential power (waves 2–5)

	Perceptions of presidential influence					Perceptions of presidential control				
	W2	W3	W4	W5		W2	W3	W4	W5	
Political knowledge	-0.383*** (0.042)	-0.406*** (0.059)	-0.347*** (0.066)	-0.286*** (0.051)		-0.526*** (0.063)	-0.487*** (0.092)	-0.327*** (0.096)	-0.261*** (0.073)	
Party ID (7=strong Republican)	0.043*** (0.009)	-0.008 (0.010)	-0.021 (0.012)	-0.038*** (0.011)		0.024 (0.013)	-0.004 (0.018)	-0.019 (0.019)	-0.039* (0.016)	
Ideology (7=extremely conservative)	0.078*** (0.010)	0.023 (0.012)	0.038** (0.014)	0.026* (0.012)		0.082*** (0.015)	0.028 (0.021)	0.041 (0.022)	0.039* (0.019)	
College graduate	-0.005 (0.021)	-0.022 (0.029)	0.026 (0.032)	-0.011 (0.025)		-0.002 (0.030)	0.017 (0.044)	0.007 (0.047)	-0.057 (0.037)	
Age 25–34	0.055 (0.032)	0.090 (0.054)	-0.001 (0.066)	0.086 (0.046)		-0.047 (0.049)	0.075 (0.088)	-0.003 (0.092)	-0.036 (0.073)	
Age 35–44	0.027 (0.035)	0.129* (0.057)	0.024 (0.070)	0.069 (0.049)		-0.039 (0.054)	0.057 (0.091)	0.023 (0.097)	-0.031 (0.076)	
Age 45–54	0.044 (0.040)	0.091 (0.057)	0.013 (0.072)	0.075 (0.052)		0.047 (0.061)	0.149 (0.095)	0.084 (0.100)	0.047 (0.083)	
Age 55–64	0.028 (0.046)	0.082 (0.068)	-0.016 (0.075)	0.054 (0.062)		0.013 (0.070)	-0.001 (0.110)	-0.048 (0.112)	-0.007 (0.093)	
Age 65–74	0.020 (0.061)	0.119 (0.084)	-0.005 (0.087)	0.158 (0.081)		-0.127 (0.092)	0.083 (0.150)	-0.040 (0.174)	0.083 (0.139)	
Age 75–84	0.109*** (0.030)	0.058 (0.059)	-0.002 (0.074)	0.317*** (0.048)		0.472 (0.537)	-1.360*** (0.091)	-0.221* (0.101)	0.300*** (0.078)	
Female	0.056** (0.021)	0.008 (0.029)	-0.022 (0.030)	0.052* (0.025)		0.127*** (0.030)	0.109* (0.045)	0.111* (0.045)	0.158*** (0.037)	
Nonwhite	0.036 (0.029)	0.043 (0.043)	0.058 (0.047)	0.042 (0.034)		0.101* (0.044)	0.108 (0.066)	0.051 (0.066)	0.079 (0.052)	
Constant	1.851*** (0.045)	2.186*** (0.071)	2.207*** (0.084)	2.278*** (0.061)		2.417*** (0.067)	2.697*** (0.114)	2.640*** (0.113)	2.784*** (0.091)	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.25	0.08	0.06	0.06		0.13	0.07	0.04	0.05	
N	1716	814	691	1192		1826	863	737	1208	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . OLS regression with robust standard errors. Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in waves 2–5 of study (wave 2: September 22–23, 2016, wave 3: March 17–23, 2017, wave 4: March 28–30, 2017, wave 5: August 4–14, 2017).

Table B5: Predictors of changes in beliefs about presidential power (wave 4)

	EPPI (wave 4)		EPPC (wave 4)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
EPPI (wave 3)	0.65***	0.65***		
	(0.03)	(0.04)		
EPPI (w3) × Trump approval		-0.00		
		(0.07)		
EPPC (wave 3)			0.66***	0.66***
			(0.03)	(0.03)
EPPC (w3) × Trump approval				-0.02
				(0.06)
Approve of Trump	0.01	0.01	-0.03	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.14)	(0.04)	(0.16)
Political knowledge	-0.10*	-0.10	-0.04	-0.04
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.07)
College degree	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Age 25–34	-0.02	-0.02	0.02	0.02
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Age 35–44	-0.04	-0.04	0.05	0.05
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Age 45–54	-0.01	-0.01	0.04	0.04
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Age 55–64	-0.05	-0.05	0.04	0.04
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Age 65–74	-0.09	-0.09	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Age 75–84	-0.00	-0.00	0.75**	0.76**
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Male	0.02	0.02	-0.05	-0.05
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)
White	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Constant	0.80***	0.80***	0.88***	0.87***
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.12)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.47	0.47	0.50	0.50
N	641	641	722	722

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in wave 4 of study (March 28–30, 2017).

Table C1: Correlates of attributions for Trump's failure on health care reform (waves 4–5)

	Personal attributions				Institutional attributions			
	W4	W5	W4	W5	W4	W5	W4	W5
EPPI (pres. influence)	0.383*** (0.073)	0.252*** (0.079)			-0.143* (0.072)	-0.127 (0.076)		
EPPC (pres. control)			0.162*** (0.047)	0.216*** (0.047)			-0.132*** (0.043)	-0.152*** (0.045)
Political knowledge	-0.022 (0.014)	-0.008 (0.017)	-0.035* (0.014)	-0.010 (0.016)	-0.011 (0.015)	-0.011 (0.016)	-0.016 (0.014)	-0.011 (0.015)
College graduate	-0.024 (0.055)	0.021 (0.061)	-0.020 (0.055)	0.032 (0.058)	-0.206*** (0.055)	-0.122* (0.061)	-0.188*** (0.054)	-0.137* (0.058)
Age 25–34	-0.077 (0.103)	-0.018 (0.114)	-0.062 (0.098)	-0.024 (0.111)	0.078 (0.098)	0.016 (0.122)	0.091 (0.096)	0.003 (0.121)
Age 35–44	-0.102 (0.108)	0.050 (0.118)	-0.085 (0.104)	0.072 (0.115)	-0.019 (0.108)	-0.077 (0.126)	0.030 (0.104)	-0.066 (0.124)
Age 45–54	-0.085 (0.117)	0.015 (0.129)	-0.099 (0.115)	0.003 (0.125)	-0.035 (0.118)	0.051 (0.134)	0.027 (0.114)	0.057 (0.131)
Age 55–64	-0.155 (0.133)	-0.083 (0.152)	-0.143 (0.128)	-0.056 (0.147)	0.187 (0.123)	0.297* (0.141)	0.213 (0.121)	0.283* (0.140)
Age 65–74	-0.084 (0.181)	-0.061 (0.178)	-0.088 (0.186)	-0.033 (0.172)	0.101 (0.165)	-0.024 (0.168)	0.063 (0.161)	-0.030 (0.160)
Age 75–84	1.229*** (0.110)		1.454*** (0.123)		-0.121 (0.106)		-0.272* (0.120)	
Female	-0.101 (0.057)	-0.112 (0.060)	-0.127* (0.056)	-0.140* (0.057)	-0.040 (0.055)	-0.077 (0.059)	-0.016 (0.054)	-0.056 (0.057)
Nonwhite	0.153 (0.078)	0.138 (0.089)	0.144 (0.077)	0.120 (0.085)	-0.094 (0.075)	-0.051 (0.090)	-0.087 (0.072)	-0.066 (0.083)
Institutions frame (wave 4)	-0.054 (0.066)	0.007 (0.073)	-0.019 (0.064)	0.019 (0.070)	0.058 (0.063)	-0.008 (0.069)	0.032 (0.061)	-0.008 (0.066)
Personal frame (wave 4)	0.125 (0.068)	0.109 (0.069)	0.132* (0.067)	0.131* (0.065)	-0.016 (0.067)	0.069 (0.072)	-0.002 (0.065)	0.077 (0.068)
Constant	1.774*** (0.195)	1.807*** (0.214)	2.205*** (0.163)	1.803*** (0.177)	3.109*** (0.197)	3.042*** (0.217)	3.138*** (0.153)	3.145*** (0.175)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.08	0.04	0.06	0.06	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.06
N	682	606	725	645	684	609	727	647

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in both wave 4 ( $n=746$ , March 28–30, 2017) and wave 5 ( $n=1,217$ , August 4–14, 2017). For table in main body with controls omitted, see Table 3. OLS regression with robust standard errors.

## Online Appendix C: Survey experiment results

Wave 4 of our panel survey included an embedded experiment that tested the following preregistered hypotheses about how respondents attribute blame for policy failures:

H4a: Exposure to a frame attributing Trump’s failures to his personal characteristics and behavior will increase the perceived importance of personal factors in determining presidential success and decrease the perceived importance of institutional factors.

H4b: The effect of a personal attribution frame will be larger among Trump opponents than among Trump supporters.

H4c: Among respondents who perceive high levels of presidential power, the effects of a personal attribution frame will be larger among Trump opponents than among Trump supporters.

H5a: Exposure to a frame attributing Trump’s failures to institutional constraints will decrease the perceived importance of personal factors in determining presidential success and increase the perceived importance of institutional factors.

H5b: The effect of an institutional attribution frame will be larger among Trump supporters than among Trump opponents.

H5c: Among respondents who perceive low levels of presidential power, the effects of an institutional attribution frame will be larger among Trump supporters than among Trump opponents.

The experiment varied the explanation provided for a high-profile policy failure (see Flynn and Harbridge 2016 for a similar approach). Specifically, the experiment focused on the American Health Care Act (AHCA), a proposal to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act that was endorsed by Donald Trump but failed to gain sufficient support among the Republican majority in the House of Representatives and was withdrawn on March 24, 2017. In the days before the proposal was withdrawn, Donald Trump made public statements and lobbied dozens of members of Congress on behalf of the plan — efforts that were widely covered in the media (e.g., Cornwell and Abutaleb 2017; DeBonis, Snell and Costa 2017; Mascaro 2017).

The experimental design allows us to test whether beliefs about presidential power shift in response to media portrayals of the causes of the failure. Additionally, it allows us to test whether these effects are moderated by prior beliefs about presidential power and by prior attitudes towards the president. After the AHCA was withdrawn in March 2017, we recontacted all participants who completed wave 3 of our panel survey and invited them to take part in a follow-up study, which contained the experiment. As noted above, the wave 4 survey (fielded in August 2017) began by re-measuring respondents’ perceptions of presidential power. After a brief distracter task, participants were randomly assigned with equal probability to read one of three versions of an article about the failed AHCA. Randomization checks confirm that conditions were balanced on pre-treatment covariates (see Table C4).

Participants in the control group read an overview of recent failed campaign promises under both Republican and Democratic presidents and a sentence explaining that Donald Trump “failed

Table C2: Predictors of changes in beliefs about presidential power (waves 2–5)

	Respondents to waves 2 and 5		Respondents to waves 2–5	
	EPPI	EPPC	EPPI	EPPC
Trump supporter	0.380*** (0.031)	0.282*** (0.048)	0.410*** (0.044)	0.337*** (0.066)
Wave 3			0.106*** (0.019)	0.227*** (0.028)
Trump supporter × wave 3			-0.397*** (0.051)	-0.303*** (0.068)
Wave 4			0.116*** (0.018)	0.269*** (0.025)
Trump supporter × wave 4			-0.427*** (0.049)	-0.376*** (0.065)
Wave 5	0.155*** (0.015)	0.216*** (0.022)	0.166*** (0.019)	0.261*** (0.028)
Trump supporter × wave 5	-0.486*** (0.037)	-0.339*** (0.053)	-0.524*** (0.054)	-0.409*** (0.074)
Political knowledge	-0.041*** (0.005)	-0.049*** (0.008)	-0.043*** (0.007)	-0.042*** (0.011)
College graduate	-0.020 (0.021)	-0.040 (0.032)	-0.019 (0.028)	-0.026 (0.041)
Age 25–34	0.091* (0.039)	-0.041 (0.061)	0.098 (0.058)	-0.051 (0.078)
Age 35–44	0.071 (0.041)	0.002 (0.065)	0.110 (0.061)	-0.019 (0.082)
Age 45–54	0.095* (0.044)	0.090 (0.068)	0.104 (0.062)	0.085 (0.085)
Age 55–64	0.075 (0.051)	0.031 (0.080)	0.068 (0.066)	-0.063 (0.095)
Age 65–74	0.113 (0.065)	0.020 (0.113)	0.108 (0.075)	-0.084 (0.138)
Age 75–84	0.196*** (0.045)	0.764*** (0.073)		
Female	0.035 (0.021)	0.122*** (0.031)	0.005 (0.027)	0.073 (0.040)
Nonwhite	0.039 (0.028)	0.116** (0.043)	0.059 (0.041)	0.082 (0.058)
Institutions frame (wave 4)			0.012 (0.032)	-0.066 (0.047)
Personal frame (wave 4)			-0.015 (0.031)	-0.021 (0.047)
Constant	2.047*** (0.046)	2.411*** (0.071)	2.038*** (0.065)	2.394*** (0.090)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.11	0.08	0.09	0.06
Observations	2320	2410	2483	2611
Respondents	1211	1212	655	655

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . OLS regression with robust standard errors clustered by respondent. Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in waves 2 and 5 of study in first two columns and waves 2–5 in third and fourth columns (wave 2: September 22–23, 2016, wave 3: March 17–23, 2017, wave 4: March 28–30, 2017, wave 5: August 4–14, 2017). Trump supporters expressed a favorable view of Trump in wave 2. The institutions and personal frame variables refer to conditions in an experiment that was embedded in wave 4 (see Online Appendix C for details). For table in main body with controls omitted, see Table 4.

Table C3: Changes in outcome attributions (waves 4–5)

	Personal obstacles	Institutional obstacles
Trump supporter (wave 3)	-0.203*** (0.065)	0.421*** (0.058)
Wave 5	-0.025 (0.036)	-0.063 (0.036)
Trump supporter × wave 5	0.007 (0.065)	0.148* (0.059)
Political knowledge	-0.032* (0.013)	-0.005 (0.012)
College graduate	-0.016 (0.051)	-0.110* (0.047)
Age 25–34	-0.013 (0.092)	-0.053 (0.088)
Age 35–44	0.045 (0.097)	-0.134 (0.092)
Age 45–54	0.040 (0.104)	-0.118 (0.099)
Age 55–64	-0.056 (0.126)	0.132 (0.104)
Age 65–74	-0.045 (0.160)	-0.102 (0.126)
Female	-0.140** (0.051)	-0.014 (0.046)
Nonwhite	0.110 (0.071)	0.040 (0.068)
Institutions frame (wave 4)	-0.010 (0.059)	0.021 (0.053)
Personal frame (wave 4)	0.135* (0.058)	0.058 (0.055)
Constant	2.552*** (0.109)	2.680*** (0.106)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.04	0.13
Observations	1281	1286
Respondents	649	641

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . OLS regression with robust standard errors clustered by respondent. Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in waves 4–5 of study (wave 4: March 28–30, 2017, wave 5: August 4–14, 2017). Trump supporters are defined as respondents who approved of Trump in wave 3 of the survey (March 17–23, 2017). For table in main body with controls omitted, see Table 5.

to deliver on his promise to quickly repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act...” (see Online Appendix A for full wording). Participants in the treatment conditions read this overview as well as a frame that attributed the struggles of recent presidents, including Trump’s failure to pass the AHCA, to either tactical failures and personal shortcomings (the personal attribution frame) or to opposition in Congress (the institutional attribution frame). The personal attribution frame pointed out that Trump was uninvolved in developing the proposal and failed to effectively marshal support for the plan within Congress. By contrast, the institutional frame argued that the plan failed as a result of opposition within both the Democratic and Republican caucuses and the limited powers that presidents have to change votes in Congress.

After reading their assigned article, participants answered a series of outcome measures that captured attributions of blame for AHCA failure. In particular, we asked respondents to evaluate the accuracy of several statements that attributed responsibility for AHCA failure to either Donald Trump personally (e.g., “If Trump tried harder, he would have been able to pass his health care bill”) or to institutional factors (e.g., “As president, Trump has relatively little leverage over Congress, making it difficult to pass his health care bill”). These items were scored so that higher values represented greater beliefs in presidential power (higher personal control, lower institutional obstacles). They then answered a series of questions measuring their perceptions of Trump’s personal traits, job approval, favorability rating, and perceived ideology. Finally, they answered a series of questions about whether political conflict and dysfunction are the result of the kinds of people who serve in politics and government or the configuration of institutions and the political context in which they serve (e.g., “The dysfunction in Washington could be solved if we had the right people in office.”).<sup>1</sup>

We begin by testing hypotheses about the effect of each frame on respondents’ beliefs about the factors that are important to Trump’s success. In Table C5, we find that respondents who were exposed to the personal attribution frame were more likely to rate Trump’s personal behavior and characteristics as critical for his success ( $b = 0.14, p < 0.05$ ). However, the personal attribution frame did not reduce beliefs about the importance of institutional barriers to Trump’s success. Moreover, the institutional attribution frame did not affect beliefs about the importance of institutional factors or personal factors in Trump’s success. We thus find only suggestive support for the hypothesis that exposure to frames emphasizing personal factors would influence perceptions about the importance of personal behavior and characteristics to presidential success (H4a), and no support for the corresponding hypothesis about frames emphasizing institutional factors (H5a).

We expected that the framing effects just discussed would differ based on respondents’ prior attitudes towards Trump. Specifically, the effects of the personality frame should be larger (more positive) among Trump opponents and the effects of the institutional frame should be larger (more negative) among Trump supporters. We tested these two hypotheses using the same models above while adding a binary measure of Trump approval measured in wave 3 and interactions between approval and each treatment condition. Results are shown in columns 2 and 4 of Table C5. In both models, Trump supporters hold significantly lower beliefs about his power ( $p < .05$  in each case). However, we find no evidence that treatment effects differ based on Trump support (H4b/H5b).

Finally, we expected these effects to be clearest among those for whom the frame is consistent with both their prior beliefs and directional motivations (approval of Trump). Specifically, the personality frame should be most effective among those with those who perceive high levels

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<sup>1</sup>Full wording of all items is available in Online Appendix A.

of presidential control and oppose Trump. The institutions frame, on the other hand, should be most effective among those who perceive low levels of presidential control and support Trump. We tested these hypotheses by predicting each of our dependent variables as a function of three-way interactions between prior EPPI/EPPC scores, Trump approval, and each treatment condition. Results are shown in Table C6. To avoid assuming linearity between EPPI/EPPC scores and experimental effects, we estimate the same regressions with a binary indicator (calculated using a median split) of high or low EPPI/EPPC. Results are shown in Table C7. In both models, we find no support for any of the expected three-way interactions (H4c, H5c).

We also explored whether the personal or institution attribution frames would affect a series of measures of perceptions of Trump (RQ3). These measures included perceptions of his character, approval and favorability ratings, and his perceived ideology. Additionally, we explored whether the frames affected support for several common explanations for political dysfunction, such as the claim that the average citizen could do a better job than most politicians (RQ4). However, we find no evidence that the frames affected any of these outcomes (Table C8).

Table C4: Descriptive statistics by treatment assignment

	Personal frame	Institutions frame
% male	53.9%	47.1%
% white	86.7%	88.3%
% Democrat	49.1%	49.4%
% Republican	42.6%	40.0%
% liberal	48.3%	54.3%
% conservative	27.5%	22.2%
% Trump supporters	19.5%	21.9%
N	240	256

Characteristics of survey respondents from embedded wave 4 experiment ( $n = 746$ ). Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in wave 4 of study (March 28–30, 2017).

Table C5: Experimental effects on beliefs about obstacles to Trump's success (wave 4)

	Personal obstacles		Institutional obstacles	
	(1) (H4a)	(2) (H4b)	(3) (H5a)	(4) (H5b)
Personal frame	0.14*	0.11	0.01	-0.04
	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.08)
Institutions frame	-0.04	-0.07	0.06	0.03
	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.07)
Trump supporter		-0.26*		0.35**
		(0.10)		(0.10)
Personal frame $\times$ supporter		0.09		0.15
		(0.15)		(0.14)
Institutions frame $\times$ supporter		0.10		0.06
		(0.14)		(0.13)
Constant	2.29**	2.36**	2.67**	2.56**
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.03	0.00	0.08
N	730	724	732	727

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in wave 4 of study (March 28–30, 2017).

Table C6: Experimental effects on beliefs about obstacles to Trump's success by perceived level of presidential power (wave 4)

	Personal obstacles		Institutional obstacles	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Personal frame	-0.46 (0.42)	0.36 (0.36)	-0.05 (0.46)	0.11 (0.32)
Trump supporter	-0.74 (0.53)	-0.45 (0.42)	1.30* (0.55)	0.40 (0.41)
Personal frame × supporter	0.73 (0.80)	0.48 (0.65)	0.31 (0.77)	-0.31 (0.55)
EPPI	0.29 (0.15)		0.04 (0.15)	
Personal frame × EPPI	0.28 (0.20)		-0.01 (0.22)	
Supporter × EPPI	0.21 (0.26)		-0.48 (0.26)	
Personal frame × supporter × EPPI	-0.31 (0.38)		-0.05 (0.36)	
Institutions frame	-0.12 (0.42)	0.04 (0.35)	0.45 (0.42)	-0.19 (0.30)
Institutions frame × supporter	-0.05 (0.81)	0.39 (0.57)	-0.85 (0.71)	-0.04 (0.52)
Institutions frame × EPPI	0.01 (0.20)		-0.20 (0.20)	
Institutions frame × supporter × EPPI	0.08 (0.38)		0.46 (0.34)	
EPPC		0.21* (0.11)		-0.15 (0.10)
Personal frame × EPPC		-0.10 (0.14)		-0.07 (0.13)
Supporter × EPPC		0.10 (0.17)		-0.03 (0.17)
Personal frame × supporter × EPPC		-0.18 (0.25)		0.21 (0.22)
Institutions frame × EPPC		-0.03 (0.14)		0.09 (0.12)
Institutions frame × supporter × EPPC		-0.14 (0.23)		0.05 (0.21)
Constant	1.81** (0.30)	1.84** (0.26)	2.48** (0.31)	2.92** (0.24)
R2	0.09	0.05	0.09	0.09
N	680	723	683	726

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in wave 4 of study (March 28–30, 2017).

Table C7: Experimental effects on beliefs about obstacles to Trump's success by perceived level of presidential power as binary indicator (median split) (wave 4)

	Personal obstacles		Institutional obstacles	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Personal frame	-0.18 (0.25)	0.27 (0.24)	0.01 (0.24)	-0.11 (0.23)
Trump supporter	-0.55 (0.32)	-0.76** (0.29)	1.28** (0.31)	0.38 (0.30)
Personal frame × supporter	0.33 (0.48)	0.59 (0.44)	-0.19 (0.43)	-0.17 (0.41)
High EPPI	0.16 (0.11)		0.12 (0.11)	
Personal frame × high EPPI	0.20 (0.16)		-0.05 (0.16)	
Supporter × high EPPI	0.16 (0.20)		-0.64** (0.19)	
Personal frame × supporter × high EPPI	-0.15 (0.30)		0.25 (0.27)	
Institutions frame	-0.19 (0.25)	0.03 (0.23)	0.49* (0.23)	-0.29 (0.22)
Institutions frame × supporter	0.26 (0.45)	0.43 (0.41)	-1.05* (0.41)	0.32 (0.38)
Institutions frame × high EPPI	0.07 (0.16)		-0.32* (0.15)	
Institutions frame × supporter × high EPPI	-0.08 (0.28)		0.76** (0.26)	
High EPPC		0.21 (0.11)		-0.18 (0.11)
Personal frame × high EPPC		-0.11 (0.16)		0.05 (0.16)
Supporter × high EPPC		0.38* (0.19)		-0.04 (0.21)
Personal frame × supporter × high EPPC		-0.38 (0.29)		0.24 (0.28)
Institutions frame × high EPPC		-0.06 (0.16)		0.24 (0.15)
Institutions frame × supporter × high EPPC		-0.26 (0.27)		-0.19 (0.27)
Constant	2.16** (0.17)	2.07** (0.16)	2.39** (0.17)	2.81** (0.16)
R2	0.07	0.05	0.10	0.09
N	680	723	683	726

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in wave 4 of study (March 28–30, 2017).

Table C8: Experimental effects on beliefs about Trump/political system (wave 4)

	Character	Trump traits and ratings			Attributions of political conflict and dysfunction			
		Approval	Favorability	Ideology	Right people	Avg. American	Need Cong.	Can't break gridlock
Personal frame	-0.10 (0.11)	0.03 (0.04)	0.05 (0.14)	0.00 (0.11)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.08)	-0.03 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)
Institutions frame	-0.13 (0.11)	0.04 (0.04)	0.06 (0.13)	-0.06 (0.11)	-0.09 (0.07)	0.06 (0.08)	-0.06 (0.06)	0.02 (0.07)
Constant	3.67** (0.08)	0.26** (0.03)	2.03** (0.10)	5.52** (0.08)	3.12** (0.05)	2.56** (0.06)	4.83** (0.05)	5.30** (0.05)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
N	738	741	741	739	738	738	739	740

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in wave 4 of study (March 28–30, 2017).

## Online Appendix D: Robustness checks

Following our preregistration, we verify regression results for binary dependent variables using probit and regression results for individual ordered dependent variables using ordered probit.

Table D1: Ordered probit model of correlates of attributions for Trump's failure on health care reform (waves 4–5)

	<u>Personal attributions</u>				<u>Institutional attributions</u>			
	W4	W5	W4	W5	W4	W5	W4	W5
EPPI	0.565*** (0.108)	0.372*** (0.116)			-0.229* (0.109)	-0.194 (0.110)		
EPPC			0.234*** (0.068)	0.322*** (0.070)			-0.195*** (0.065)	-0.230*** (0.067)
Political knowledge	-0.032 (0.020)	-0.013 (0.024)	-0.049* (0.020)	-0.016 (0.023)	-0.014 (0.022)	-0.015 (0.024)	-0.023 (0.021)	-0.015 (0.023)
College graduate	-0.030 (0.080)	0.035 (0.088)	-0.024 (0.078)	0.051 (0.085)	-0.307*** (0.081)	-0.182* (0.088)	-0.280*** (0.080)	-0.206* (0.086)
25–34	-0.106 (0.150)	-0.042 (0.160)	-0.087 (0.142)	-0.053 (0.160)	0.111 (0.144)	0.023 (0.175)	0.130 (0.139)	0.002 (0.176)
35–44	-0.143 (0.160)	0.052 (0.166)	-0.119 (0.151)	0.088 (0.165)	-0.035 (0.159)	-0.109 (0.181)	0.037 (0.153)	-0.098 (0.180)
45–54	-0.123 (0.171)	-0.006 (0.183)	-0.145 (0.166)	-0.026 (0.181)	-0.064 (0.173)	0.074 (0.192)	0.028 (0.167)	0.081 (0.192)
55–64	-0.197 (0.193)	-0.145 (0.219)	-0.184 (0.184)	-0.110 (0.215)	0.275 (0.182)	0.434* (0.207)	0.316 (0.179)	0.421* (0.208)
65–74	-0.113 (0.259)	-0.121 (0.256)	-0.122 (0.265)	-0.081 (0.253)	0.157 (0.246)	-0.044 (0.240)	0.103 (0.240)	-0.055 (0.233)
75–84	1.739*** (0.179)		2.034*** (0.195)		-0.216 (0.157)		-0.433* (0.179)	
Female	-0.149 (0.082)	-0.156 (0.087)	-0.184* (0.080)	-0.202* (0.085)	-0.055 (0.082)	-0.109 (0.086)	-0.021 (0.081)	-0.080 (0.084)
Nonwhite	0.228* (0.111)	0.205 (0.128)	0.215* (0.108)	0.181 (0.123)	-0.151 (0.107)	-0.069 (0.129)	-0.140 (0.103)	-0.094 (0.122)
Personal frame	0.178 (0.097)	0.160 (0.099)	0.187* (0.095)	0.194* (0.095)	-0.030 (0.099)	0.102 (0.104)	-0.008 (0.096)	0.115 (0.100)
Institutions frame	-0.081 (0.094)	0.010 (0.106)	-0.028 (0.091)	0.026 (0.103)	0.071 (0.095)	-0.020 (0.099)	0.033 (0.090)	-0.020 (0.096)
N	682	606	725	645	684	609	727	647

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . Ordered probit regression. Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in waves 4–5 of study (wave 4: March 28–30, 2017, wave 5: August 4–14, 2017).

Table D2: Ordered probit model of predictors of changes in beliefs about presidential power (waves 2–5)

	Respondents to waves 2 and 5		Respondents to waves 2–5	
	EPPI	EPPC	EPPI	EPPC
Trump supporter	0.919*** (0.075)	0.449*** (0.077)	1.026*** (0.110)	0.554*** (0.106)
Wave 3			0.268*** (0.047)	0.382*** (0.048)
Trump supporter × wave 3			-0.990*** (0.126)	-0.496*** (0.111)
Wave 4			0.293*** (0.047)	0.454*** (0.043)
Trump supporter × wave 4			-1.065*** (0.123)	-0.611*** (0.104)
Wave 5	0.378*** (0.037)	0.355*** (0.037)	0.421*** (0.050)	0.442*** (0.047)
Trump supporter × wave 5	-1.177*** (0.092)	-0.543*** (0.085)	-1.314*** (0.136)	-0.677*** (0.120)
Political knowledge	-0.100*** (0.013)	-0.078*** (0.013)	-0.107*** (0.018)	-0.068*** (0.018)
College graduate	-0.047 (0.052)	-0.063 (0.051)	-0.045 (0.069)	-0.038 (0.069)
25–34	0.215* (0.094)	-0.067 (0.098)	0.243 (0.146)	-0.085 (0.129)
35–44	0.169 (0.100)	0.002 (0.104)	0.271 (0.154)	-0.029 (0.135)
45–54	0.228* (0.106)	0.147 (0.109)	0.262 (0.155)	0.138 (0.140)
55–64	0.179 (0.123)	0.047 (0.128)	0.170 (0.166)	-0.107 (0.156)
65–74	0.275 (0.157)	0.030 (0.178)	0.274 (0.189)	-0.149 (0.221)
75–84	0.485*** (0.108)	1.163*** (0.120)		
Female	0.083 (0.052)	0.192*** (0.050)	0.011 (0.068)	0.123 (0.066)
Nonwhite	0.093 (0.069)	0.187** (0.069)	0.147 (0.102)	0.138 (0.097)
Personal frame			-0.035 (0.079)	-0.032 (0.078)
Institutions frame			0.030 (0.081)	-0.112 (0.078)
N	2321	2411	2483	2611

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . Ordered probit regression. Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in waves 2 and 5 of study in first two columns and waves 2, 3, 4 and 5 in third and fourth columns (wave 2: September 22–23, 2016, wave 3: March 17–23, 2017, wave 4: March 28–30, 2017, wave 5: August 4–14, 2017). Trump supporters are respondents who had a favorable view of Trump in wave 2 of the survey.

Table D3: Ordered probit model of changes in outcome attributions (waves 4–5)

	Personal factors	Institutional factors
Trump supporter	-0.284*** (0.094)	0.649*** (0.091)
Wave 5	-0.029 (0.051)	-0.099 (0.054)
Trump supporter × wave 5	-0.011 (0.094)	0.229* (0.093)
Political knowledge	-0.046* (0.018)	-0.007 (0.019)
College graduate	-0.018 (0.072)	-0.174* (0.072)
25–34	-0.027 (0.132)	-0.088 (0.133)
35–44	0.056 (0.139)	-0.211 (0.139)
45–54	0.042 (0.150)	-0.193 (0.150)
55–64	-0.086 (0.182)	0.204 (0.160)
65–74	-0.085 (0.230)	-0.161 (0.195)
Female	-0.200** (0.072)	-0.016 (0.071)
Nonwhite	0.164 (0.099)	0.059 (0.104)
Personal frame (wave 4)	0.190* (0.083)	0.091 (0.086)
Institutions frame (wave 4)	-0.016 (0.085)	0.021 (0.081)
N	1281	1286

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . Ordered probit regression with robust standard errors clustered by respondent. Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in waves 4–5 of study (wave 4: March 28–30, 2017, wave 5: August 4–14, 2017). Trump supporters are defined as respondents who approved of Trump in wave 3 of the survey (March 17–23, 2017).

Table D4: Ordered probit model of perceptions about presidential power (waves 2–5)

	Perceptions of presidential influence					Perceptions of presidential control				
	W2	W3	W4	W5		W2	W3	W4	W5	
Political knowledge	-0.120*** (0.013)	-0.136*** (0.020)	-0.119*** (0.022)	-0.088*** (0.016)		-0.106*** (0.013)	-0.099*** (0.019)	-0.071*** (0.021)	-0.053*** (0.015)	
Party ID (7=strong Republican)	0.108*** (0.022)	-0.022 (0.026)	-0.061 (0.033)	-0.095*** (0.026)		0.037 (0.021)	-0.006 (0.029)	-0.032 (0.032)	-0.062* (0.027)	
Ideology (7=extremely conservative)	0.194*** (0.026)	0.062* (0.031)	0.107** (0.039)	0.065* (0.030)		0.132*** (0.025)	0.044 (0.034)	0.073* (0.037)	0.063* (0.031)	
College graduate	-0.009 (0.051)	-0.056 (0.076)	0.070 (0.086)	-0.028 (0.061)		0.003 (0.049)	0.031 (0.072)	0.015 (0.081)	-0.092 (0.061)	
25–34	0.130 (0.079)	0.237 (0.143)	-0.006 (0.180)	0.211 (0.114)		-0.080 (0.080)	0.118 (0.142)	-0.002 (0.157)	-0.069 (0.119)	
35–44	0.061 (0.088)	0.340* (0.154)	0.067 (0.188)	0.170 (0.120)		-0.069 (0.087)	0.094 (0.145)	0.042 (0.164)	-0.059 (0.125)	
45–54	0.109 (0.099)	0.249 (0.152)	0.028 (0.194)	0.182 (0.127)		0.079 (0.098)	0.242 (0.152)	0.144 (0.170)	0.067 (0.135)	
55–64	0.071 (0.114)	0.213 (0.181)	-0.050 (0.203)	0.128 (0.153)		0.020 (0.113)	-0.012 (0.178)	-0.081 (0.191)	-0.025 (0.152)	
65–74	0.052 (0.150)	0.319 (0.223)	-0.013 (0.233)	0.390* (0.198)		-0.204 (0.150)	0.119 (0.243)	-0.055 (0.295)	0.131 (0.222)	
75–84	0.277*** (0.077)	0.174 (0.158)	-0.032 (0.199)	0.799*** (0.121)		0.652 (0.773)	-6.783*** (0.256)	-0.427* (0.173)	0.498*** (0.129)	
Female	0.139** (0.052)	0.019 (0.076)	-0.058 (0.080)	0.127* (0.062)		0.201*** (0.049)	0.181* (0.073)	0.193* (0.079)	0.256*** (0.061)	
Nonwhite	0.091 (0.072)	0.114 (0.114)	0.158 (0.127)	0.102 (0.085)		0.159* (0.072)	0.176 (0.106)	0.093 (0.114)	0.133 (0.084)	
N	1716	814	691	1193		1826	863	737	1209	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . Ordered probit model. Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in waves 2–5 of study (wave 2: September 22–23, 2016, wave 3: March 17–23, 2017, wave 4: March 28–30, 2017, wave 5: August 4–14, 2017).

Table D5: Ordered probit model of predictors of changes in beliefs about presidential power (wave 4)

	EPPI (wave 4)		EPPC (wave 4)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
EPPI (wave 3)	2.38**	2.38**		
	(0.15)	(0.17)		
EPPI (w3) × Trump approval		-0.00		
		(0.25)		
EPPC (wave 3)			1.59**	1.60**
			(0.10)	(0.11)
EPPC (w3) × Trump approval				-0.02
				(0.15)
Approve of Trump	0.03	0.04	-0.07	-0.01
	(0.09)	(0.51)	(0.09)	(0.39)
Political knowledge	-0.05*	-0.05*	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
College graduate	0.15	0.15	0.05	0.05
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)
25–34	-0.11	-0.11	0.01	0.01
	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.16)	(0.16)
35–44	-0.16	-0.15	0.07	0.07
	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.17)	(0.17)
45–54	-0.09	-0.09	0.06	0.06
	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.17)	(0.17)
55–64	-0.22	-0.22	0.07	0.07
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.19)	(0.19)
65–74	-0.34	-0.34	-0.04	-0.04
	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)
75–84	-0.06	-0.06	1.74**	1.75**
	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)
Female	0.06	0.06	-0.11	-0.11
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Nonwhite	-0.07	-0.07	-0.04	-0.04
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
N	650	650	733	733

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in wave 4 of study (March 28–30, 2017).

Table D6: Ordered probit model of experimental effects on beliefs about obstacles to Trump's success (wave 4)

	Personal obstacles		Institutional obstacles	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Personal frame	0.19*	0.16	0.01	-0.06
	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.12)
Institutions frame	-0.06	-0.09	0.07	0.04
	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.09)	(0.11)
Trump supporter		-0.35*		0.53**
		(0.15)		(0.15)
Personal frame × supporter		0.11		0.22
		(0.21)		(0.21)
Institutions frame × supporter		0.11		0.07
		(0.20)		(0.20)
N	730	724	732	727

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in wave 4 of study (March 28–30, 2017).

Table D7: Ordered probit model of experimental effects on beliefs about obstacles to Trump's success by perceived level of presidential power (wave 4)

	Personal obstacles		Institutional obstacles	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Personal frame	-0.75 (0.62)	0.52 (0.52)	-0.05 (0.70)	0.15 (0.49)
Trump supporter	-1.14 (0.79)	-0.59 (0.62)	2.17* (0.91)	0.67 (0.68)
Personal frame × supporter	1.14 (1.23)	0.64 (0.95)	0.51 (1.28)	-0.52 (0.88)
EPPI (wave 3)	0.40 (0.21)		0.06 (0.23)	
Personal frame × EPPI (wave 3)	0.45 (0.31)		-0.02 (0.34)	
Trump supporter × EPPI (wave 3)	0.34 (0.38)		-0.82 (0.43)	
Personal frame × supporter × EPPI (wave 3)	-0.50 (0.58)		-0.10 (0.60)	
Institutions frame	-0.17 (0.61)	0.12 (0.50)	0.68 (0.65)	-0.30 (0.46)
Institutions frame × supporter	-0.19 (1.24)	0.47 (0.83)	-1.49 (1.14)	-0.10 (0.84)
Institutions frame × EPPI (wave 3)	0.02 (0.30)		-0.31 (0.31)	
Institutions frame × supporter × EPPI (wave 3)	0.16 (0.58)		0.79 (0.54)	
EPPC (wave 3)		0.31* (0.16)		-0.22 (0.15)
Personal frame × EPPC (wave 3)		-0.14 (0.21)		-0.10 (0.20)
Trump supporter × EPPC (wave 3)		0.12 (0.25)		-0.07 (0.28)
Personal frame × supporter × EPPC (wave 3)		-0.25 (0.36)		0.33 (0.36)
Institutions frame × EPPC (wave 3)		-0.07 (0.20)		0.13 (0.18)
Institutions frame × supporter × EPPC (wave 3)		-0.18 (0.33)		0.09 (0.35)
N	680	723	683	726

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in wave 4 of study (March 28–30, 2017).

Table D8: Ordered probit model of experimental effects on beliefs about obstacles to Trump's success by perceived level of presidential power as binary indicator (median split) (wave 4)

	Personal obstacles		Institutional obstacles	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Personal frame	-0.26 (0.35)	0.39 (0.33)	0.02 (0.37)	-0.18 (0.35)
Trump supporter	-0.79 (0.46)	-1.04* (0.42)	2.04** (0.52)	0.59 (0.46)
Personal frame × supporter	0.48 (0.69)	0.81 (0.64)	-0.30 (0.70)	-0.28 (0.63)
High EPPI	0.22 (0.16)		0.18 (0.17)	
Personal frame × high EPPI	0.30 (0.23)		-0.09 (0.24)	
Trump supporter × high EPPI	0.24 (0.29)		-1.03** (0.31)	
Personal frame × supporter × high EPPI	-0.23 (0.43)		0.39 (0.42)	
Institutions frame	-0.26 (0.35)	0.07 (0.33)	0.73* (0.35)	-0.45 (0.32)
Institutions frame × supporter	0.30 (0.65)	0.55 (0.58)	-1.70** (0.66)	0.46 (0.59)
Institutions frame × high EPPI	0.10 (0.22)		-0.48* (0.23)	
Institutions frame × supporter × high EPPI	-0.09 (0.40)		1.21** (0.40)	
High EPPC		0.30 (0.16)		-0.26 (0.17)
Trump supporter × high EPPC		0.52 (0.27)		-0.05 (0.33)
Personal frame × supporter × high EPPC		-0.52 (0.41)		0.38 (0.44)
Institutions frame × high EPPC		-0.10 (0.23)		0.36 (0.22)
Institutions frame × supporter × high EPPC		-0.33 (0.39)		-0.28 (0.42)
N	680	723	683	726

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in wave 4 of study (March 28–30, 2017).

Table D9: Ordered probit model of experimental effects on beliefs about Trump/political system (wave 4)

	Character	Trump traits and ratings			Attributions of political conflict and dysfunction			
		Approval	Favorability	Ideology	Right people	Avg. American	Need Cong.	Can't break gridlock
Personal frame	-0.09 (0.09)	0.10 (0.12)	0.02 (0.11)	-0.02 (0.10)	-0.05 (0.10)	-0.04 (0.10)	-0.04 (0.10)	0.14 (0.10)
Institutions frame	-0.11 (0.09)	0.13 (0.12)	0.02 (0.11)	-0.06 (0.09)	-0.13 (0.10)	0.07 (0.10)	-0.10 (0.10)	0.03 (0.10)
N	738	741	741	739	738	738	739	740

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .005$ . Sample: MTurk panel respondents surveyed in wave 4 of study (March 28–30, 2017).

# EGAP Project Registration Form

## A. Information about the respondent

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## B. General information about the project

### B1. Title of project

Decider in Chief? Public Misperceptions about Presidential Power

### B2. Author(s)

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Is this registration prospective or retrospective?

Prospective

Registration prior to researcher access to outcome data

Is this an experimental study?

Yes.

Date of start of study

March 28, 2017

Should this study be gated (discouraged)?

Yes - until September 28, 2018 or publication.

Was this design "cliniced" at an EGAP meeting?

No.

C. Registration data

C1. Background and explanation of rationale

A growing literature examines misperceptions about public policy and politicians, but less is known about the prevalence or consequences of false or unsupported beliefs that people may hold about the American constitutional system. In this project, we examine misperceptions about presidential power. Citizens and journalists alike often credit or blame the president for many outcomes over which she has little to no control. In particular, presidents' failure to overcome institutional obstacles such as partisan opposition in Congress is often attributed to their personal characteristics (e.g., the claim that Donald Trump failed to win over Republicans because he is unpersuasive). These misperceptions may be encouraged by media focus on personality narratives, politicians' incentives to make grandiose promises on the campaign trail, and psychological tendencies to attribute behavior to internal dispositions rather than situational constraints (the "fundamental attribution error" -- see Jones and Nisbett 1971, Nisbett, Caputo, Legant, & Marecek 1973; but see Malle 2006). As a result, some people may have a stable tendency to attribute vast powers to the president consistent with the cultural mythology of presidential influence (Healy 2008) and to downplay institutional limitations on presidential power or control over events (e.g., Edwards 2003, 2012).

However, beliefs about presidential power may interact with partisan motivated reasoning. Partisan supporters are motivated to believe that their candidates are responsible for good events, encouraging attributions of individual control, and not responsible for bad events, encouraging situational (or institutional) attributions of control. Partisan opponents, of course, are motivated to believe the opposite. As a result, beliefs about presidential power may shift in response to changes in the political environment, such as the partisanship of the president.

To test these hypotheses, we conduct a survey experiment embedded in a panel study. The experiment focuses on a recent presidential policy failure and randomizes whether the failure is attributed to institutional constraints or the president's personal qualities (or no attribution). This design allows us to test whether beliefs about presidential power shift in response to policy

failures and media frames about the causes of the failure. Additionally, the design allows us to test whether these effects are moderated by prior beliefs about presidential power and by prior attitudes towards the president (both measured in prior waves). (In previous exploratory research, we contrasted data from a multi-wave panel survey with a survey of scholarly experts recruited from the APSA Presidency & Executive Politics section to measure the prevalence of misperceptions about presidential power and control over political and economic outcomes.)

What are the hypotheses to be tested?

H1: Respondents who perceive high levels of presidential power will rate personal barriers to Donald Trump achieving his goals as greater and institutional barriers as weaker than those who perceive low levels of presidential power.

H2: Following a policy failure, perceptions of presidential power will decline more among respondents who support Trump than among respondents who oppose Trump.

H3a: Exposure to a frame attributing Trump's failures to his personal characteristics and behavior will increase the perceived importance of personal factors in determining the success of a president and decrease the perceived importance of institutional factors (relative to a baseline condition in which no explanation is provided).

H3b: These effects will be larger among Trump opponents than among Trump supporters.

H3c: Among respondents who perceive high levels of presidential power, these effects will be larger among Trump opponents than among Trump supporters.

H4a: Exposure to a frame attributing Trump's failures to institutional constraints will decrease the perceived importance of personal factors in determining the success of a president and increase the perceived importance of institutional factors (relative to a baseline condition in which no explanation is provided).

H4b: These effects will be larger among Trump supporters than among Trump opponents.

H4c: Among respondents who perceive low levels of presidential power, these effects will be larger among Trump supporters than among Trump opponents.

We also consider the following research questions where we have weaker theoretical priors.

RQ1: Among Trump supporters, we will examine whether exposure to a frame attributing Trump's failures to his personal characteristics and behavior increases the perceived importance of personal factors in determining the success of a president and decreases the perceived importance of institutional factors more (relative to a baseline condition in which no

explanation is provided) among those who perceive high levels of presidential power than those who perceive low levels of presidential power

RQ2: Among Trump opponents, we will examine whether exposure to a frame attributing Trump's failures to institutional constraints decreases the perceived importance of personal factors in determining the success of a president and increases the perceived importance of institutional factors more (relative to a baseline condition in which no explanation is provided) among those who perceive low levels of presidential power than those who perceive high levels of presidential power.

RQ3: We will consider whether the exposure to the personal and institutional attribution frames affects perceptions of Trump's traits, job approval, favorable ratings, and perceived ideology (relative to a baseline condition in which no explanation is provided).

RQ4: We will consider whether the manipulation affects attributions of political conflict and dysfunction to the kinds of people who serve versus the configuration of institutions and political context in which they serve.

How will these hypotheses be tested?

[The study protocol is attached.]

Eligibility and exclusion criteria for participants

Participants will be members of an existing Mechanical Turk panel who are United States residents age 18 or older. We will invite all participants who completed three previous survey waves that measured their demographic characteristics; political beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge; and beliefs about presidential control (878 individuals completed all three surveys). Prior to beginning the experiment, participants will be provided with a description of the study and reminded that participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time. Participants will then be asked to indicate whether they agree to participate in the study. Respondents will receive a full debriefing at the conclusion of the study. Amazon does not provide any identifiable information to the investigators about the study participants, nor will we ask about any identifying information.

The nature of data to be obtained:

We will collect individual-level survey data, including questions about demographic/political characteristics and people's political beliefs and opinions.

Randomization approach

Participants in this wave of our panel will be randomly assigned with 1/3 probability to a control condition, to a condition attributing Donald Trump's failures to his personal behavior and characteristics, or to a condition attributing Donald Trump's failures to opposition from Congress. This randomization will be carried out in the Qualtrics survey platform.

#### Data collection and blinding

All data will be collected online on the Qualtrics survey platform.

#### Primary and secondary outcome measures

Before measuring our primary outcome variables (see below), we will re-measure respondents' beliefs about presidential power and presidential control over various outcomes, which were asked previously in waves 2 and 3. We ask these questions again here to assess the extent of stability in perceptions about presidential power and control across changes in the political environment.

Presidential control over outcomes on a five-point scale where 5=total control:

- The price of gasoline
- The inflation rate
- The level of civility in Washington, DC
- The amount of gridlock in Congress

Statements about presidential power where 4=very accurate for non-starred items and 4=not at all accurate for starred items:

- There are no limits to what a president can achieve if he or she uses the powers of his/her office effectively.
- Members of Congress can easily resist pressure from the president and vote how they choose.\*
- Partisanship makes it difficult for any president to achieve consensus on a controversial policy issue.\*
- Without large partisan majorities in Congress, most presidents will struggle to pass their agenda.\*
- Gridlock in Congress is typically the result of a failure of presidential leadership.
- If a president doesn't follow through on a campaign promise, it's probably because they didn't really want it to happen.

These scales have been previously tested so we will take the mean of each after reverse-coding (four-point scale for power, five-point for control).

After a distracter task, respondents will answer our primary outcome measures, which focus on attributions for Donald Trump's failure on health care policy. These questions ask respondents to indicate the perceived accuracy of the following statements on a four-point accuracy scale

from very accurate to not at all accurate. The first battery focuses on institutional barriers to Trump's health care bill while the second focuses on personality or tactical barriers. The order in which respondents answer each battery -- and the order of statements within each battery -- will be randomized.

The divisions in Congress would have made it nearly impossible for any president to pass a health care bill.

As president, Trump has relatively little leverage over Congress, making it difficult to pass his health care bill.

Public opinion was a major obstacle to passing the health care bill Trump supported.

Opposition from outside groups helped kill the health care bill Trump supported.

The balance of power in Washington made it extremely difficult for Trump to enact the health care bill.

Trump could have overcome opposition to his health care bill in Congress if he had made a stronger and more persuasive case.

If Trump were a true leader, he would have convinced Congress to support his health care bill.

The public could have been convinced to support the health care bill if Trump had more effectively shaped the debate over the issue.

If Trump tried harder, he would have been able to pass his health care bill.

Trump's personality prevented him from leading more effectively in the debate over his health care bill.

The four items that make internal attributions will be coded so that 1=not at all accurate and 4=very accurate, while the external attributions will be coded so that 1=very accurate and 4=not at all accurate. The outcome measures will thus take higher values when respondents make internal attributions and lower values when they make external ones.

We will take the mean of these ten outcome measures. If the items used for this measure scale together using principal component analysis, we will create a composite measure of Trump attributions and use it as our primary outcome measure. If the two subscales each scale together rather than as a single scale, we will consider Trump external attributions and internal attributions as separate outcome measures instead. If none of the items scale together well, we will analyze responses to each question separately. We will also exclude items that do not clearly load on a single scale. (Note: Though we will analyze the component questions of our primary outcome measure using principal component analysis, we will construct any combined outcome measure as means for ease of interpretation.)

We will also consider the following secondary outcome measures.

We will measure perceptions of Trump's traits (ratings on a 1-5 scale where 5=extremely well and 1=not at all well), job approval (on a 1-4 scale where 4=strongly approve), favorable ratings

(on a 1-5 scale where 5=very favorable), and perceived ideology (on a 1-7 scale where 1=extremely liberal and 7=extremely conservative). We will consider each separately.

Another set of questions will consider agreement with a series of statements that attribute political problems and outcomes to the types of people in office or the institutions and political context in which they serve (1-4 scale where 1=not at all accurate and 4=very accurate).

The dysfunction in Washington could be solved if we had the right people in office.

The average American could do a better job than most politicians.

Any president will struggle when their party does not control Congress.

No president can end gridlock or break polarization.

If the items used for this measure scale together using principal component analysis, we will create a composite measure of attributions about political dysfunction using a simple mean after reverse-coding. We will exclude items that do not clearly load on the scale. If none of the items scale together well, we will analyze responses to each item separately.

Finally, we include a binary measure that captures respondents' perceptions of the relative importance of personal versus institutional factors in determining Trump's ability to carry out his campaign promises.

If you had to pick one, what do you think is the biggest barrier to Donald Trump successfully carrying out his campaign promises?

-His behavior and personal characteristics

-Opposition in Congress

### Statistical analyses

All results will be estimated using OLS with robust standard errors and verified for robustness using appropriate GLM estimators (see below). We exclude control variables in our experimental analyses (see below). Finally, we split Trump supporters from opponents using a binary indicator for support reflecting job approval in the top two categories on a four-point approval scale (opponents are the omitted category).

Several of the models we estimate will use measures of perceptions of presidential power constructed from the following items that were asked on wave 3 of the study (we also separately consider answers to these items on wave 4 as an outcome variable):

Presidential control over outcomes on a five-point scale where 5=total control

-The price of gasoline

-The inflation rate

-The level of civility in Washington, DC

-The amount of gridlock in Congress

Statements about presidential power where 4=very accurate for non-starred items and 4=not at all accurate for starred items:

- There are no limits to what a president can achieve if he or she uses the powers of his/her office effectively.
- Members of Congress can easily resist pressure from the president and vote how they choose.\*
- Partisanship makes it difficult for any president to achieve consensus on a controversial policy issue.\*
- Without large partisan majorities in Congress, most presidents will struggle to pass their agenda.\*
- Gridlock in Congress is typically the result of a failure of presidential leadership.
- If a president doesn't follow through on a campaign promise, it's probably because they didn't really want it to happen.

If the items used for this measure scale together using principal components factor analysis, we will create a composite measure of presidential attributions as a factor score and use it as our primary outcome measure. If the two subscales each scale together, we will consider presidential control and presidential power as separate independent variables, estimate factor scores for each, and run separate models for each in the analyses specified below. We will exclude items that do not clearly load on a single scale.

We will estimate models of the following form (using pseudo Stata code):

*H1: Respondents who perceive high levels of presidential power will rate personal barriers to Donald Trump achieving his goals as greater and institutional barriers as weaker than those who perceive low levels of presidential power.*

```
reg Y pres_att female agegroup2 agegroup3 agegroup4 agegroup5 agegroup6 agegroup7  
nonwhite political_knowledge college if control==1, robust
```

where Y = the primary outcome measure(s) of Trump attributions described above, pres\_att = the scale(s) described above measuring perceptions of presidential power/control in wave 3, and political\_knowledge = the number of questions respondents answered correctly on a standard knowledge scale in a prior wave of the panel. Because this is an observational analysis estimated only within the control group, we include controls for gender, age, race, and education.

*H2: Following a policy failure, perceptions of presidential power will decline more among respondents who support Trump than among respondents who oppose Trump.*

```
reg Y pres_att support pres_att*support female agegroup2 agegroup3 agegroup4 agegroup5  
agegroup6 agegroup7 nonwhite political_knowledge college, robust
```

Where Y = the scale(s) described above measuring perceptions of presidential power/control at wave 4, pres\_att = the same scale(s) measured at wave 3, support = dichotomous indicator for Trump support measured at wave 3 (1=support, 0 otherwise). Because this is an observational analysis, we include controls for gender, age, race, and education.

(If more than 30% of Trump supporters cannot answer a multiple choice question correctly about what happened in Congress on health care, we will instead estimate the following model that separately estimates the change in perceptions of presidential power among people who are aware of what happened and those who are not:

reg Y pres\_att##support##knowHC female agegroup2 agegroup3 agegroup4 agegroup5 agegroup6 agegroup7 nonwhite political\_knowledge college, robust

where knowHC=1 if they know what happened with the health care bill that was debated in Congress during the week of March 19-25, 2017 and 0 otherwise.)

*H3a: Exposure to a frame attributing Trump's failures to his personal characteristics and behavior will increase the perceived importance of personal factors in determining the success of a president and decrease the perceived importance of institutional factors (relative to a baseline condition in which no explanation is provided).*

*H4a: Exposure to a frame attributing Trump's failures to institutional constraints will decrease the perceived importance of personal factors in determining the success of a president and increase the perceived importance of institutional factors (relative to a baseline condition in which no explanation is provided).*

reg Y personal institutional, robust

Where Y = perceived importance of personal (or institutional) factors, personal = binary indicator for assignment to personality frame, institutional = binary indicator for assignment to institutional frame.

*H3b: These effects (personal frame) will be larger among Trump opponents than among Trump supporters.*

*H4b: These effects (institutional frame) will be larger among Trump supporters than among Trump opponents.*

reg Y personal institutional support personal\*support institutional\*support, robust

*H3c: Among respondents who perceive high levels of presidential power, these effects (personal) will be larger among Trump opponents than among Trump supporters.*

*H4c: Among respondents who perceive low levels of presidential power, these effects (institutional) will be larger among Trump supporters than among Trump opponents.*

reg Y personal##support##pres\_att institutional##support##pres\_att, robust

(As noted below, we may conduct a binary split on pres\_att and report it in the main text for ease of interpretation and then report the interaction with the continuous variable in the appendix. We will also test the linearity assumption per Hainmueller et al. and substitute a median split if it is not satisfied given the sample size constraints we face.)

We also consider the following research questions where we have weaker theoretical priors.

*RQ1: Among Trump supporters, we will examine whether exposure to a frame attributing Trump's failures to his personal characteristics and behavior increases the perceived importance of personal factors in determining the success of a president and decreases the perceived importance of institutional factors more (relative to a baseline condition in which no explanation is provided) among those who perceive high levels of presidential power than those who perceive low levels of presidential power.*

*RQ2: Among Trump opponents, we will examine whether exposure to a frame attributing Trump's failures to institutional constraints decreases the perceived importance of personal factors in determining the success of a president and increases the perceived importance of institutional factors more (relative to a baseline condition in which no explanation is provided) among those who perceive low levels of presidential power than those who perceive high levels of presidential power.*

We will test RQ1 and RQ2 using the output of the model above, computing appropriate marginal effects per Brambor et al. if the interaction model satisfies the linearity assumption. Otherwise we will compute marginal effects for high and low perceptions of presidential power using a median split per above.

*RQ3: We will consider whether exposure to the personal and institutional attribution frames affects perceptions of Trump's traits, job approval, favorable ratings, and perceived ideology (relative to a baseline condition in which no explanation is provided).*

We will estimate a model of the following form for each of the trait dependent variables, job approval, favorability rating, and perceived ideology:

reg Y personal institutional, robust

*RQ4: We will consider whether the frames affect attributions of political conflict and dysfunction to the kinds of people who serve versus the configuration of institutions and political context in which they serve.*

reg Y personal institutional, robust

where Y is the scale described above.

Notes:

-For interaction terms, scales, and moderators, if results are consistent using a median/tercile split or indicators rather than a continuous scale, we may present the latter in the main text for ease of exposition and include the continuous scale results in an appendix. We will compute all marginal effects appropriate to test the hypotheses of interest from the models described below. We will also use tercile indicators to test whether the linearity assumption holds for interactions per Hainmueller et al (N.d.) and replace the continuous interactions in our models with them if it does not.

-We will compute and report appropriate auxiliary quantities from our models, including treatment effects by subgroup and differences in marginal effects between subgroups.

-We will compute all marginal effects appropriate to test the hypotheses of interest from any interaction models. In some cases, we may present treatment effects estimated on different subsets of the data for expositional clarity. If so, we will verify that we can reject the null of no difference in treatment effects in a more complex interactive model reported in an appendix when possible.

-We will also compute and report summary statistics for our samples. We will also collect and may report response timing data as a proxy for respondent attention.

-The order of hypotheses and analyses in the final manuscript may be altered for expositional clarity.

-Where applicable, regression results for binary dependent variables will be verified for robustness using probit. Regression results for individual ordered dependent variables will be verified for robustness using ordered probit.

-We may estimate the experimental models described above with a standard set of covariates (indicators for gender, age groups, race, a four-year college degree, and their score on a standard political knowledge scale) if including those has a substantively important effect on the precision of our treatment effect estimates. In that case, however, both models will be reported.

Has this research received Institutional Review Board (IRB) or ethics committee approval? \*

Yes, it was approved by the CPHS at Dartmouth College (STUDY00029748 and MOD0000515) and the University of Houston (STUDY00000299).

Was a power analysis conducted prior to data collection?

No.

Will the intervention be implemented by the researcher or a third party? If a third party, please provide the name.

N/A

Did any of the research team receive remuneration from the implementing agency for taking part in this research?

No.

If relevant, is there an advance agreement with the implementation group that all results can be published?

N/A.

# EGAP Project Registration Form

## A. Information about the respondent

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## B. General information about the project

### B1. Title of project

Decider in Chief? Public Misperceptions about Presidential Power

### B2. Author(s)

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Is this registration prospective or retrospective?

Prospective

Registration prior to researcher access to outcome data

Is this an experimental study?

Yes.

Date of start of study

March 28, 2017

Should this study be gated (discouraged)?

Yes - until September 28, 2018 or publication.

Was this design "cliniced" at an EGAP meeting?

No.

C. Registration data

C1. Background and explanation of rationale

A growing literature examines misperceptions about public policy and politicians, but less is known about the prevalence or consequences of false or unsupported beliefs that people may hold about the American constitutional system. In this project, we examine misperceptions about presidential power. Citizens and journalists alike often credit or blame the president for many outcomes over which she has little to no control. In particular, presidents' failure to overcome institutional obstacles such as partisan opposition in Congress is often attributed to their personal characteristics (e.g., the claim that Donald Trump failed to win over Republicans because he is unpersuasive). These misperceptions may be encouraged by media focus on personality narratives, politicians' incentives to make grandiose promises on the campaign trail, and psychological tendencies to attribute behavior to internal dispositions rather than situational constraints (the "fundamental attribution error" -- see Jones and Nisbett 1971, Nisbett, Caputo, Legant, & Marecek 1973; but see Malle 2006). As a result, some people may have a stable tendency to attribute vast powers to the president consistent with the cultural mythology of presidential influence (Healy 2008) and to downplay institutional limitations on presidential power or control over events (e.g., Edwards 2003, 2012).

However, beliefs about presidential power may interact with partisan motivated reasoning. Partisan supporters are motivated to believe that their candidates are responsible for good events, encouraging attributions of individual control, and not responsible for bad events, encouraging situational (or institutional) attributions of control. Partisan opponents, of course, are motivated to believe the opposite. As a result, beliefs about presidential power may shift in response to changes in the political environment, such as the partisanship of the president.

To test these hypotheses, we previously conducted a survey experiment embedded in a panel study. The experiment focused on a recent presidential policy failure and randomized whether the failure was attributed to institutional constraints or the president's personal qualities (or no attribution). This design allowed us to test whether beliefs about presidential power shift in response to policy failures and media frames about the causes of the failure. Additionally, the design allowed us to test whether these effects are moderated by prior beliefs about presidential power and by prior attitudes towards the president (both measured in prior waves). (In previous

exploratory research, we contrasted data from a multi-wave panel survey with a survey of scholarly experts recruited from the APSA Presidency & Executive Politics section to measure the prevalence of misperceptions about presidential power and control over political and economic outcomes.)

We will conduct a fifth wave of our panel survey in August 2017 following another high-profile failure in the Trump administration's attempts to reform health care. Respondents will be asked to report their general beliefs about presidential power as well as their specific attributions for Trump's policy failures on health care. This will allow us to evaluate the stability of general beliefs about presidential power and health care-specific attributions as well as whether and for whom they change. We will specifically examine whether beliefs about presidential power and personal attributions for health care reform's failure declined more among Trump supporters than among Trump opponents.

What are the hypotheses to be tested?

We will evaluate the following two hypotheses from the prior preregistration in the new wave of the study:

H1: Respondents who perceive high levels of presidential power will rate personal barriers to Donald Trump achieving his goals as greater and institutional barriers as weaker than those who perceive low levels of presidential power.

H2: Following one or more policy failures, perceptions of presidential power will decline more among respondents who support Trump than among respondents who oppose Trump.  
(language adapted in this preregistration)

We also plan to evaluate the following hypothesis, which is new in this preregistration:

H3: Following one or more policy failures, institutional (personal) attributions for policy failure will increase (decrease) more among respondents who support Trump than among respondents who oppose Trump.

How will these hypotheses be tested?

[The study protocol is attached.]

Eligibility and exclusion criteria for participants

Participants will be members of an existing Mechanical Turk panel who are United States residents age 18 or older. We will invite all participants who completed waves 1 and 2 of our panel survey. Prior to beginning the survey, participants will be provided with a description of the study and reminded that participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any

time. Participants will then be asked to indicate whether they agree to participate in the study. Amazon does not provide any identifiable information to the investigators about the study participants, nor will we ask about any identifying information.

The nature of data to be obtained:

We will collect individual-level survey data, including questions about demographic/political characteristics and people's political beliefs and opinions.

Randomization approach

None.

Data collection and blinding

All data will be collected online on the Qualtrics survey platform.

Primary and secondary outcome measures

Before measuring our primary outcome variables (see below), we will re-measure respondents' beliefs about presidential power and presidential control over various outcomes, which were asked of respondents who participated in two prior survey waves. We ask these questions again here to assess the extent of stability in perceptions about presidential power and control across changes in the political environment.

Presidential control over outcomes on a five-point scale where 5=total control:

- The price of gasoline
- The inflation rate
- The level of civility in Washington, DC
- The amount of gridlock in Congress

Statements about presidential power where 4=very accurate for non-starred items and 4=not at all accurate for starred items:

- There are no limits to what a president can achieve if he or she uses the powers of his/her office effectively.
- Members of Congress can easily resist pressure from the president and vote how they choose.\*
- Partisanship makes it difficult for any president to achieve consensus on a controversial policy issue.\*
- Without large partisan majorities in Congress, most presidents will struggle to pass their agenda.\*
- Gridlock in Congress is typically the result of a failure of presidential leadership.

-If a president doesn't follow through on a campaign promise, it's probably because they didn't really want it to happen.

These scales have been previously tested so we will again take the mean of each after reverse-coding (four-point scale for power, five-point for control).

After a distracter task, respondents will answer questions about their attributions for Donald Trump's failure on health care policy. These questions ask respondents to indicate the perceived accuracy of the following statements on a four-point accuracy scale from very accurate to not at all accurate. The first battery focuses on institutional barriers to Trump's health care bill while the second focuses on personality or tactical barriers. The order in which respondents answer each battery -- as well as the order of statements within each battery -- will be randomized.

Q1. The divisions in Congress would have made it nearly impossible for any president to pass a health care bill.

Q2. As president, Trump has relatively little leverage over Congress, making it difficult to pass his health care bill.

Q3. Public opinion was a major obstacle to passing the health care bill Trump supported.

Q4. Opposition from outside groups helped kill the health care bill Trump supported.

Q5. The balance of power in Washington made it extremely difficult for Trump to enact the health care bill.

Q6. Trump could have overcome opposition to his health care bill in Congress if he had made a stronger and more persuasive case.

Q7. If Trump were a true leader, he would have convinced Congress to support his health care bill.

Q8. The public could have been convinced to support the health care bill if Trump had more effectively shaped the debate over the issue.

Q9. If Trump tried harder, he would have been able to pass his health care bill.

Q10. Trump's personality prevented him from leading more effectively in the debate over his health care bill.

The four items that make internal attributions will be coded so that 1=not at all accurate and 4=very accurate, while the external attributions will be coded so that 1=very accurate and 4=not at all accurate. The outcome measures will thus take higher values when respondents make internal attributions and lower values when they make external ones.

Following a factor analysis of answers to these questions in wave 4, we will use the following questions to construct two additive scales (including only items with factor loadings greater than .4 that did not crossload in wave 4):

Personal: Q6-Q9

Institutional: Q1, Q2, Q5

We will also ask a battery of questions about participants' perceptions of Trump's success in various policy areas. (We may use these in exploratory analyses but do not preregister any confirmatory analysis of the results.)

Regardless of how you feel about his presidency, how successful do you think Donald Trump has been in achieving his policy goals in the following areas? These will be measured on a 4 point scale where 4=extremely successful.

Health care  
Economy  
Taxes  
Immigration

-Extremely successful  
-Somewhat successful  
-Not very successful  
-Not at all successful

#### Statistical analyses

All results will be estimated using OLS with robust standard errors (clustered by respondent in difference-in-difference models) and verified for robustness using appropriate GLM estimators (see below). Finally, we split Trump supporters from opponents using a binary indicator for favorability in wave 1 (the top two categories on a five-point favorability scale; unfavorable is the omitted category).

We will estimate models of the following form (using pseudo Stata code):

*H1: Respondents who perceive high levels of presidential power will rate personal barriers to Donald Trump achieving his goals as greater and institutional barriers as weaker than those who perceive low levels of presidential power.*

```
reg Y pres_att female agegroup2 agegroup3 agegroup4 agegroup5 agegroup6 agegroup7  
nonwhite political_knowledge college, robust
```

where Y = the primary outcome measure(s) of Trump attributions described above for both wave 4 and wave 5 (estimated separately), pres\_att = the scale(s) described above measuring perceptions of presidential power/control in wave 3, and political\_knowledge = the number of questions respondents answered correctly on a standard knowledge scale in a prior wave of the panel. Because this is an observational analysis, we include controls for gender, age, race, and education. We will also include controls for the personal and institutional frame treatments in

wave 4. (This represents a deviation from our prior preregistration, which said this model would be estimated only within the control condition in wave 4.)

*H2: Following one or more policy failures, perceptions of presidential power will decline more among respondents who support Trump than among respondents who oppose Trump.  
(language adapted in this version of the preregistration)*

```
reg Y wave3 wave4 wave5 support wave3Xsupport wave4Xsupport wave5Xsupport female  
agegroup2 agegroup3 agegroup4 agegroup5 agegroup6 agegroup7 nonwhite  
political_knowledge college persframe instframe, robust cluster(respondentid)
```

where Y = the scale(s) described above measuring perceptions of presidential power/control, support = dichotomous indicator for Trump favorability measured at wave 2 (1=somewhat/strongly favorable, 0 otherwise), and wave3, wave4, and wave5 are binary indicators for the observation being measured in those waves (wave 2 is the omitted category). Because this is an observational analysis, we include controls for gender, age, race, and education. We will also include controls for the personal and institutional frame treatments in wave 4. (This represents a deviation from our prior preregistration, which said this model would be estimated only within the control condition in wave 4.) This model will only be estimated for respondents who completed all five waves of the study.

(If more than 30% of respondents cannot answer a multiple choice question correctly about what happened in Congress on health care before wave 5, we will estimate a model interacting the wave5 term with knowHC\_w5, which equals 1 if they know what happened with the health care bill that was voted down in the U.S. Senate on July 28, 2017 and 0 otherwise.)

The models for H2 are specified as difference-in-differences models and thus represent a deviation from our prior preregistration, where the models were specified with a prior measure of presidential power as a predictor, a Trump support indicator, and an interaction term. They are also modified to incorporate data from waves 2-4, which were observed at the time of the filing of this preregistration.

We will also estimate the following model among all respondents who completed waves 1, 2, and 5:

```
reg Y wave5 support wave5Xsupport female agegroup2 agegroup3 agegroup4 agegroup5  
agegroup6 agegroup7 nonwhite political_knowledge college wave3 persframe instframe  
wave4control, robust cluster(respondentid)
```

where Y = the scale(s) described above measuring perceptions of presidential power/control and support = dichotomous indicator for Trump favorability measured at wave 2 (1=somewhat/strongly favorable, 0 otherwise). Because this is an observational analysis, we include controls for gender, age, race, and education. We will also include controls for whether

the respondent took part in wave 3 and for exposure to personal and institutional frame treatments or the control condition in wave 4 (the excluded category is people who did not take part in wave 4). (This represents a deviation from our prior preregistration, which said this model would be estimated only within the control condition in wave 4.) This model will only be estimated for respondents who completed waves 1, 2, and 5 of the study.

*H3 (new hypothesis in this preregistration): Following one or more policy failures, institutional (personal) attributions for policy failure will increase (decrease) more among respondents who support Trump than among respondents who oppose Trump.*

reg Y wave5 support wave5Xsupport female agegroup2 agegroup3 agegroup4 agegroup5 agegroup6 agegroup7 nonwhite political\_knowledge college persframe instframe, robust cluster(respondentid)

where Y = the scales described above measuring personal and institutional attributions for Trump's failures on health care reform (estimated separately), support = dichotomous indicator for Trump support measured at wave 3 (1=support, 0 otherwise), and wave5 is a binary indicator for the observation being measured in wave 5 (wave 4 is the omitted category). Because this is an observational analysis, we include controls for gender, age, race, and education. We will also include controls for the personal and institutional frame treatments in wave 4. This will be estimated among respondents who completed waves 4 and 5.

(If more than 30% of respondents cannot answer a multiple choice question correctly about what happened in Congress on health care before wave 5, we will estimate a model interacting the wave5 term with knowHC\_w5, which equals 1 if they know what happened with the health care bill that was voted down in the U.S. Senate on July 28, 2017 and 0 otherwise.)

Notes:

-For interaction terms, scales, and moderators, if results are consistent using a median/tercile split or indicators rather than a continuous scale, we may present the latter in the main text for ease of exposition and include the continuous scale results in an appendix. We will compute all marginal effects appropriate to test the hypotheses of interest from the models described below. We will also use tercile indicators to test whether the linearity assumption holds for interactions per Hainmueller et al (N.d.) and replace the continuous interactions in our models with them if it does not.

-We will compute and report appropriate auxiliary quantities from our models, including treatment effects by subgroup and differences in marginal effects between subgroups.

-We will compute all marginal effects appropriate to test the hypotheses of interest from any interaction models. In some cases, we may present treatment effects estimated on different subsets of the data for expositional clarity. If so, we will verify that we can reject the null of no difference in treatment effects in a more complex interactive model reported in an appendix when possible.

-We will also compute and report summary statistics for our samples. We will also collect and may report response timing data as a proxy for respondent attention.

-The order of hypotheses and analyses in the final manuscript may be altered for expositional clarity.

-Where applicable, regression results for binary dependent variables will be verified for robustness using probit. Regression results for individual ordered dependent variables will be verified for robustness using ordered probit.