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How Public Opinion Influences Politicization

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Scholars traditionally frame presidential efforts to politicize the federal bureaucracy as the result of divergence between the president's preferences and an agency's output. The authors argue that presidential concern with agency output is dynamic and is in part conditioned by the president's relationship with the public. To assess the relationship between politicization and public opinion, the authors use a data set that combines information on presidential efforts to politicize the Council of Economic Advisers from 1989 to 2004 with that of public attitudes concerning the president's handling of the economy. Their results indicate that public opinion does indeed bear a marginal, yet statistically significant, influence on presidential efforts to manage the federal bureaucracy, thus, providing a new contribution to the debate concerning presidents and the politics of bureaucratic structure.

Keywords: *president; staffing; politicization; public opinion*

One of the most important political developments during the 20th century for the United States of America was the rise of the plebiscitary presidency. Presidents played an increasingly strong role in the crafting of public policy in part because of greater public demands for presidential leadership, often in the face of national crises. Scholars have attended to this development by examining ways in which the president

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makes policy, both cooperatively with the Congress (Light, 1998; Rudalevige, 2002) and by acting unilaterally (Howell, 2003; Mayer, 1999, 2001). Other scholars have focused on the administrative components of the policy-making presidency, including on how presidents design advisory structures to improve the quality of policy advice they receive (Ponder, 2000) and on how they design other bureaucratic agencies charged with the mission of implementing policy during the postenactment phase (Lewis, 2005).

For a president to exploit fully his administrative apparatus, sound organizational management is key. That is, to be certain that they are receiving quality advice, presidents must do more than merely construct appropriately designed advisory groups. In addition, presidents must also ensure that these groups are staffed with individuals who produce policy proposals in line with the preferences of the president and his core constituency *and* feasible within the broader context of the American government. Similarly, presidents strive to ensure that those bureaucratic officials responsible for the implementation of policy fulfill their mission in a manner that is consistent with the chief executive's policy goals. For example, even after policy has been successfully developed and passed in the form of legislation or executive orders, significant slippage can occur between what the elected officials responsible for developing it originally imagined and what the civil servants responsible for implementing the policy directives actually do.

By exploiting their powers to design and staff federal agencies (Howell & Lewis, 2002; Lewis, 2003; Moe, 1989; Moe & Wilson, 1994), presidents "have significant influence over whether the managers who implement policies are chosen by the president or filled by the merit system" (Lewis, 2005, p. 497; see also Moe, 1985). Several studies demonstrate that politicization has become a core governing strategy of the administrative presidency. Since at least the early 1970s (Hart, 1995), presidents have used politicization as a way of decreasing preference divergence between themselves and executive agencies (Lewis, 2005; Maranto, 1993).¹ In examining the phenomenon of presidential politicization, scholars have identified external institutional and economic factors that condition presidential efforts to politicize federal agencies (see, e.g., Howell & Lewis, 2002; Lewis, 2005). However, the current literature overlooks the role of public opinion in affecting the dynamics of presidential politicization. In this article, we investigate this possible linkage to see whether popular influences condition presidential politicization. That is, we ask whether presidents, in addition to being concerned with performance outcomes, are also concerned with public perceptions of performance.

Managing the Institutional Presidency

Presidents today operate in a context where they are required to satisfy ever-growing leadership expectations while simultaneously pursuing their own policy preferences (as well as the preferences of their core constituencies). As Moe (1985) notes, "The expectations surrounding presidential performance far outstrip the institutional capacity of presidents to perform" (p. 269). To satisfy public expectations and accomplish their own preferred objectives, presidents avail themselves of an institution that has grown to be immense and unwieldy. Even the agencies that comprise the Executive Office of the Presidency (EOP)—which are more within reach of the president's grasp than other aspects of the federal government—prove difficult to control, without the most persistent and effective efforts (Lewis, 2005). To tighten their grip on the activities of these executive agencies, presidents have long pursued a strategy of politicization.²

Politicization and Presidential Performance

For decades, scholars and commentators of American politics have referred to the presidential practice of politicization, often with a hiss or a snarl.³ Beyond the reflexive distaste many individuals have for the practice, however, what is politicization? Clearly, the concept implies active presidential efforts to undermine the neutrality of agencies in favor of realigning the agency's preferences—whether through redesign or repopulation—with the preferences of those at work in the Oval Office. Beyond this general conceptual framework, there are several ways in which this vague premise can become practice (see Heclo, 1975). In this article, we define presidential politicization as the addition of political appointees on top of existing career civil service employees or the placing of loyal political appointees into important bureaucratic posts formerly held by career professionals (see Heclo, 1975; Lewis, 2005).

In a seminal essay, Moe (1985) argues that presidential efforts to enhance one's capacity to effect political change are what drive persistent, albeit frequently unsuccessful, movements to reform the administrative apparatus.⁴ As political and bureaucratic opposition, along with institutional inertia and time constraints, impede attempts to create a more responsive bureaucracy, Moe observes that presidents have increasingly turned to approaches that they consider more flexible and successful—namely, politicization and centralization.

Following the introduction of Moe's rational choice-based approach to evaluating the role of politicization in the modern presidency, several scholars have attempted to uncover subsequent trends in presidential efforts to politicize. In general, these studies make the argument that presidential politicization efforts are driven by the executive's desire for a bureaucracy more sensitive to the president's ideological and political preferences. As Rudalevige (2008) notes, the basic idea behind such staffing "is simply to make the far-flung executive branch more immediately responsive to presidential dictate, ensuring that core programmatic functions receive consistent support across the government" (p. 140). For example, Aberbach and Rockman (1990, 1995, 2000) show that several years of politicization by the Reagan administration resulted in a noticeable rightward shift in the ideological preferences of the permanent bureaucracy. In addition, Rudalevige (2008) argues that George W. Bush also has approached bureaucratic management—especially through centralization and politicization—as a way of ensuring greater ideological compatibility between the president's plans and the agents in charge of implementing them. Furthermore, Hult (2003) notes that despite Bush's "distinctive policy agenda and virtually unprecedented policy challenges" (p. 53), his approach to bureaucratic management has been largely consistent with efforts observed in previous modern presidencies. Both Reagan and George W. Bush took office after years of opposition party control of the White House and atop the federal bureaucratic structure, thus, providing them with great incentive to use counterstaffing strategies as a way of realigning agency views in a manner compatible with each president's policy agenda.

Lewis (2005) postulates a more conditional nature of presidential staffing, contending that politicization attempts are driven by factors beyond mere compatibility. Examining presidential politicization of agencies within the EOP, he finds that presidents not only politicize more when their preferences diverge from agency views but also when civil servants lack incentives to abandon an agency for the private sector and when the president's party holds a majority unified government.

Other scholars have focused not on explaining why politicization occurs but the extent to which it matters. Notably, Maranto and Hult (2004) identify constraints to executive ability to move bureaucratic ideology, noting that agency mission may limit the extent to which political appointees can change attitudes among the bureaucracy. Specifically, they observe that "the political values of career executives and their assessments of their immediate principals, the presidential appointees in their agencies, were linked to the types of agencies in which they worked" (pp. 216-217). For

example, they note that conservatives maintained footholds in defense-related agencies, whereas liberals dominated social welfare and regulatory agencies, even after years of Reagan-era politicization. They also suggest that an appointee's ability to influence subordinate bureaucrats is rather limited because of a persistent "zone of indifference" among permanent members of the bureaucracy as well as the lack of time, experience, and incentives appointees have to focus on manipulating the bureaucracy.

Although suggestive, these results paint an incomplete portrait of the politics of presidential staffing. In another important essay, Moe (1989) makes the case that much of the politics of bureaucratic structure occurs beyond the purview of the American public. However, that does not mean that the public does not play a role. Previous research on the politics of presidential politicization has underemphasized the part played by the public in the administrative presidency. In this article, we attempt to reconfigure the explanation behind why presidents politicize when they do. In so doing, we contend that certain presidential staffing decisions are motivated by popular concerns as well as by the factors previously discussed.

The Role of Public Opinion in Presidential Politicization

The rise of the American presidency throughout the 20th century was characterized by two key developments: the growth and institutionalization of the "presidential branch" (Hart, 1995) and the increasing importance of the American public as a political resource for ambitious presidents. As national crises and technological advancements forged ever more meaningful bonds between the public and the president over time, presidents responded by expanding the scope of their involvement in the policy process. This increase in presidential responsibility subsequently drove the exponential growth in the size of the executive branch. Turning to institutionalization as a method for controlling the massive resultant bureaucracy (Ragsdale & Theis, 1997), presidents strategically attempted to use public support as a tool with which to lead the other branches of the federal government (Kernell, 1997). In the modern era, presidents have dedicated numerous staff members and spent incredible amounts of money to identify and understand public opinion (Eisinger, 2003; Geer, 1996; Jacobs & Shapiro, 2000), with the explicit intention of basing tomorrow's strategic behavior on today's public preferences.

Because of the separated nature of the American political system, presidents have long regarded public support as a crucial resource with which to accomplish their policy and political goals.⁵ Indeed, the balancing act between governing and gaining public support is a dominant characteristic of the modern presidency.⁶ Brace and Hinckley (1992) referred to this trait of the office as the "public relations presidency," defined as "a presidency concerned primarily with maintaining and increasing public support" (p. 1). Edwards (2003) also notes the crucial aspect of public support for presidents. According to him,

it is difficult for others who hold power to deny the legitimate demands of a president with popular support. A president who lacks the public's support is likely to face frustration and perhaps humiliation at the hands of his opponents. (p. 3)

Brace and Hinckley (1992) describe how popularity shapes virtually every facet of presidential behavior, from the president's travel schedule to his speechmaking patterns. They contend that the quest for public approval places a set of constraints on presidents, eliciting particular responses and affecting the substance and timing of different policies. Scholars of the presidency have incorporated the influence of public opinion on presidential performance in almost every conceivable way, with one notable exception: the president's staffing of the executive branch.

Just as scholars have demonstrated that presidents base both the content of their policy agendas and how they interact with the masses on public opinion, we suggest that there is a popular component to the administrative aspect of the policy-making presidency. Specifically, we argue that the president's preoccupation with popular preferences extends to managerial decisions about whether to politicize an agency, based on how the public evaluates his handling of particular policy problems. For example, a president who receives positive performance appraisals from the public on key policy areas will interpret the survey results as a sign that he has leeway to bring in more appointees and go after goals of a more political nature. In response, the president will decide to politicize further a relevant agency in order to gain more control over its function, direction, and productivity. Accordingly, we expect a positive relationship between policy-specific presidential approval and politicization, with changes in public opinion leading to changes in presidential staffing tactics as the causal mechanism.

Nevertheless, we have entertained the possibility that the causal arrow may be reversed to contend that politicization may also (or instead) influence

public approval. Based on our accumulated understanding of presidential politics, we do not consider the prospect of normal levels of presidential politicization influencing public approval of the president compelling. In general, public awareness of most presidential actions is limited. This is particularly true in the area of presidential staffing, where all but the most high-profile cabinet and subcabinet nominations occur well beneath the public's political radar. Furthermore, Edwards (2003) shows that even the most energetic attempts by presidents to influence their own level of public approval are met with failure, and those rare instances of success are usually short term in nature. If presidential efforts to manipulate public opinion fail in the most salient scenario and under optimal conditions, the likelihood that a minor action would do so is low (barring the outbreak of scandal). Conversely, the causal relationship that we hypothesize and test is more plausible, given the president's incentive to monitor public approval and numerous academic studies indicating that presidential activities are indeed driven in large part by the president's desire to maintain and enhance his level of public support (e.g., Brace & Hinckley, 1992). Additionally, a rich scholarly literature exists that shows consistent presidential responsiveness to public opinion over time in numerous policy and political dimensions (see, e.g., Cohen, 1995, 1997). However, in the event that a high-profile, media-covered effort to politicize occurs in such a manner that the public connects the staffing decision with their appraisal of the president's handling of the relevant policy issue, such an instance does not necessarily conflict with our theoretical argument. Indeed, such a publicized staffing move would likely be based on preexisting presidential perception of his own political vulnerability.⁷

Finally, it is important to note that we predict that presidential politicization strategies respond to policy-specific public approval rather than overall levels of public approval. We base this distinction on the logic that should approval of the president's handling of the economy grow, it would be more likely to influence presidential staffing of agencies with missions related to economic performance than it would his politicization efforts in the aggregate. Similarly, public appraisals of the president's handling of economic affairs might influence his staffing of relevant agencies such as the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) but not affect how he staffs organizations such as the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and the Office of National Drug Control Policy, which have no clear linkage with public attitudes concerning the president's economic leadership. Accordingly, we have the following hypothesis:

H1: Politicization increases as policy-specific public approval of presidential performance increases.

Presidents, however, are not solely concerned with public opinion. As scholars such as Moe (1985) and Lewis (2005) note, presidents want to control executive agencies for a reason, and that reason is quite simple: Presidents want agencies to implement policy initiatives in a manner that is as consistent as possible with presidential preferences. When an agency is populated with bureaucrats sympathetic to the political preferences and ideological principles of the chief executive, there is little reason for the president to manipulate the agency's makeup through politicization. However, when agency preference diverges from the president's agenda, the incentive to politicize grows. As Lewis (2005) notes, "When presidents fear that existing personnel and agencies do not have their interests in mind, they politicize" (p. 502). Accordingly, we hypothesize as follows:

H2: Politicization increases when agency preferences diverge from those of the president.

Finally, we argue that presidential time also plays a role in presidential decisions to politicize executive agencies. When presidents first enter office, they are faced with an executive branch organized according to the preferences of their predecessor, often a partisan opponent. To take charge of the administrative apparatus, presidents must be energetic at first in reengineering these agencies, for although the government continues to operate during and after presidential transitions, the machinery remains in neutral gear (Pfiffner, 1988). Indeed, presidents cannot point the federal government in a new direction until they take control of the administrative apparatus. For instance, Reagan's counterstaffing strategy "Reaganized" much of the federal bureaucracy over the course of his two terms in office. Reagan, like many of his predecessors, came into office with a skeptical, if not hostile, attitude concerning the federal bureaucracy's ability and willingness to implement his plans for change. To combat this, he used a transformative five-fold politicization strategy from the outset of his presidency to (a) gain strong White House control over subcabinet appointments to staff and line positions, (b) significantly decrease the number of career executives and managers in domestic agencies through hiring freezes and reductions-in-force, (c) lower the classifications of middle-management careerists, (d) alter the institutional cultures of agencies by grouping together careerists of mixed skill levels, and (e) appoint unwavering loyalists in managerial positions to unabashedly pursue the president's political agenda (Durant, 1992).

Following the initial staffing surge, what scholars have referred to as a “cycle of accommodation” finds presidents more likely to view the federal bureaucracy as “theirs” over time (and, what is important, finds career bureaucrats viewing the new leadership more positively). Thus, as time passes and presidents engage more with the agencies beneath them, their perceived need to politicize diminishes. For example, despite occasional misgivings, most upper level career civil servants generally tried to be responsive to Reagan’s executive direction (Golden, 2000). Consequently, the Reagan administration’s overall view of the bureaucracy slowly improved as a greater number of his appointees took hold of key bureaucratic positions and moved to implement his minimalist national agenda (see Ingraham, 1987). More generally, such a cycle plays out in most administrations (Maranto, 1993).

Furthermore, as Pfiffner (1988) notes, after completing the initial massive wave of hirings immediately on taking office, much of the staffing work of the president is done. Although lingering vacancies, appointee turnover, and structural changes require continued attention to personnel, this year-to-year “tinkering” does not compare with that initial onslaught. Thus, we have a general expectation that presidents are likely to politicize the most at the beginning of their term when the need to assert their influence on preexisting agency personnel is greatest. Accordingly, we have the following hypothesis:

H3: Politicization decreases over time throughout a presidential term.

In all, our theoretical argument holds that presidential politicization is a function of the public’s level of approval of the president’s handling of a specific policy issue, the divergence in preferences between the president and an executive agency, and the point in time of the president’s term.

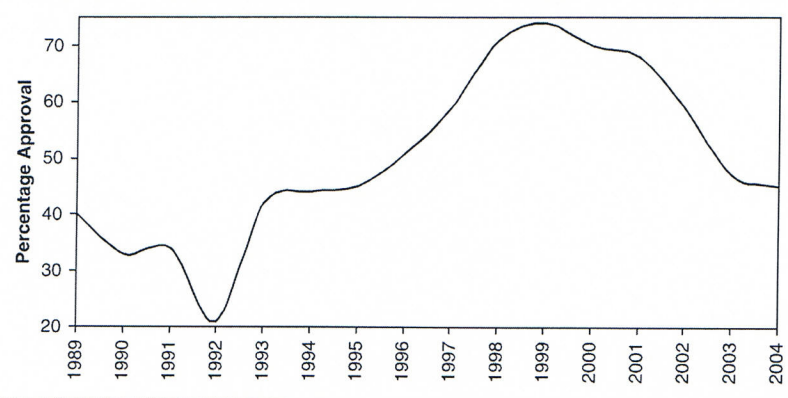
Data

To test these hypotheses, we use empirical measures of presidential politicization of the CEA from 1989 to 2004. Established by the Employment Act of 1946 and located within the EOP, the CEA’s mission is to “provide the President with objective economic analysis and advice on the development and implementation of a wide range of domestic and international economic policy issues.”⁸ We make use of Lewis’s (2005) presidential appointee data, where politicization is measured as the annual percentage of all employees who are presidential appointees (see Figure 1).⁹

Figure 1
Politicization of the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), 1989-2004



Figure 2
Public Approval of the President's Handling of the Economy, 1989-2004



Measuring the Key Independent Variables

We use annual averages of public approval of the president's handling of the economy, derived from Gallup polls (see Figure 2).¹⁰ Because the CEA is an executive office organization fundamentally focused on the

president's management of the economy, it is appropriate that we use these policy-specific public opinion data, as argued previously.

Level of divergence is coded as 1 for the years 1993 and 2001 to capture party change during transition years, with all other years coded as 0, which is a revised version of Lewis's (2005) measurement strategy.¹¹ Lewis (2005) argued that one should see an increase in preference divergence between the president and the EOP when there is party (or preference) turnover in the White House and, accordingly, coded all years of the first term of a new president taking office in which the partisan control of the White House changed as 1 and all other years as 0.¹² We agree with the theoretical underpinnings of this measurement strategy but wish to modify its empirical construction. Specifically, we contend that coding the entire *term* as evidence of policy divergence is too expansive. Rather, our understanding of the existing literature leads us to conclude that presidents strive to account for much of the perceived divergence through their personnel decisions in the first *year* of an administration and hence our modified operationalization.

Finally, we empirically capture the time in term concept with an ordinal measure corresponding to a president's years in office (i.e., Year 1 scores as 1, Year 2 scores as 2, Year 3 scores as 3, and so on through the eighth and final year of an administration). Finally, although not derived from our theoretical argument, to control for the idiosyncratic effects of individual presidents and/or their administrations, we use separate dummy administration controls for the respective years of the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations.¹³ Similarly, we control for the presence of divided government by coding all years where at least one chamber of the federal legislature is controlled by the president's partisan opponents as 1 and all years of unified government as 0.

Analysis

In this study, we conduct an analysis of the influence public opinion plays in presidential politicization of the CEA. Specifically, we conduct an ordinary least squares time-series regression analysis that determines the relationships between presidential politicization efforts and the previously identified theoretical explanations for variance in politicization rates (i.e., policy-specific public approval, policy divergence, and time in term).¹⁴ In doing so, we first test the model for signs of autocorrelation and heteroskedasticity. We find no evidence of either autocorrelation or heteroskedasticity, and further tests confirm that no notable changes in the model

Table 1
Public Opinion and Presidential Politicization of
the Council of Economic Advisers, 1989-2004

Independent Variables	Coefficient Estimate	<i>t</i> Value
Public opinion: job approval	0.260***(0.071)	3.65
Preference divergence (party change)	-7.16***(1.92)	-3.73
Time in term	-0.846***(0.384)	-2.20
Divided government	-1.021(1.69)	-0.60
Clinton	0.955(2.22)	0.43
Bush II	0.385(2.56)	0.15
Constant	86.806***(1.78)	48.76
R^2	0.8448	
Adjusted R^2	0.7414	
F	8.17	
Prob > F	0.0031	
n	16	

Note: The dependent variable is the annual percentage of appointees. Cell entries are regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$ in a one-tailed test of significance.

coefficients and standard error outcomes occur when controlling for such factors.¹⁵

Results

In our analysis, we find that our key hypothesis—that increases in public approval of the president's handling of the economy lead to increases in levels of politicization in the CEA—receives support, albeit in a limited manner (see Table 1). Specifically, the statistically significant regression coefficient indicates that a 10% increase in approval corresponds with a 2.6% increase in politicization, with all other variables held constant. Given that the CEA employs less than 50 personnel and approximately 30 personnel at the management level where our focus rests, a 10% increase in approval signifies an increase of a little more than three fourths of an employee. To put this in historical terms, over the course of Bill Clinton's administration, the economy-specific approval numbers increased by nearly 30%. According to the results of our analysis, this translates into an increase in politicization over time of 6.67% or somewhat more than two new appointees. Similarly, during the 1991-1992 years of the George H. W. Bush administration, the public's approval of the president's economic

leadership decreased by about 12%, which translates to one less political appointee in the CEA management. Thus, we can conclude that as public approval of the president's handling of the economy increases, his efforts to politicize the CEA also increase, though the relationship is marginal, yet statistically significant.

Also in accordance with our theoretical expectations, the results of the analysis indicate that the president's time in office plays a role in determining the likelihood of politicization. Specifically, we find that each additional year a president serves in office sees a decrease of 8.46% in his efforts to politicize. As noted previously, over time, presidents gain a firmer grasp on the bureaucracies that comprise the executive branch, often through the act of politicization itself. Thus, it is fitting that presidential efforts to politicize decrease the longer they have been in office because each additional year, there are fewer parts of the federal bureaucracy where they have not already attempted to increase their control. Specifically for the CEA, a decrease in appointments over time is particularly unsurprising given that presidents have only a small number of staff personnel to deal with in the first place.

However, contrary to our theoretical expectations for preference divergence, we find that an increase in the level of preference divergence between the president and the agency is more likely to lead to decreased levels of politicization. Specifically, the results of the analysis indicate that an incoming administration replacing a president from the opposing party decreases the percentage of political appointees in an agency by more than 7%. This finding is surprising and is at odds with the accumulated scholarly understanding of presidential attempts to control the federal bureaucracy as well as with what students of the presidency know about presidential transitions into office. It is possible that this result could be related to one of two limitations of our research design. First, our measure of preference divergence (i.e., a dummy variable capturing whether the party of the president has changed from the previous year) is simple and indirect; an alternative measure of divergence might capture effects consistent with our prediction. Second, it is possible that the CEA itself possesses some inherent quality, whether in mission or in structure, that causes incoming presidents to treat it differently than they do other agencies. Subsequent research should attend to developing a better measure of divergence and expanding the cases under analysis to include additional agencies with different mission-based and structural characteristics.

There are two other possible explanations for the unexpected finding concerning our preference divergence measure. One is that in the limited time covered for our analysis, the economic views of Presidents George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush did not vary as much as the

party labels might suggest, particularly where fiscal policy is involved. Alternatively, a more compelling explanation may be that the more recent presidents—Bill Clinton and George W. Bush—already had their initial economic moves in mind, making the CEA less a focus of attention. Accordingly, their focus may instead have moved to the National Economic Council, the Department of the Treasury, and the Federal Reserve.

Finally, we note that the control variables for divided government and individual administrations do not correlate with presidential politicization in a statistically significant manner. This indicates that there are no important administration characteristics—whether internally or with respect to their relationship with Congress—that systematically influence the dynamics of politicization. A lack of a significant relationship may also be a result of the focus on the president's management of the CEA, which is relatively more insulated from Congressional influence than other agencies and for which our period of analysis may be too short to capture the full potential influence that administrative turnover can have on presidential levels of politicization across time.

Conclusion

In this study, we investigated whether public opinion plays a role in shaping presidential efforts to politicize federal agencies. In our analysis of the president's strategic staffing practices, we found that public opinion does indeed matter, although the relationship is relatively modest. Our focus on presidential responsiveness to public perceptions of presidential performance provides a new twist on the existing literature, which casts presidential politicization as a unilateral action driven by the president's preferences (i.e., Lewis, 2005; Moe, 1985). We argued that policy-specific public approval also plays a key role in determining how presidents make decisions to politicize certain agencies. To gauge the accuracy of our theoretical argument, our main analysis focused on the relationship between public opinion and presidential politicization while controlling for other influential factors drawn from the scholarly literature on presidential staffing (i.e., preference divergence and time in term).

Although our findings lead us to conclude that public opinion does indeed shape presidential politicization in a marginal way, we approach this conclusion tentatively. Further research should attend to both the methodological limitations of this research design as well as to developing a more comprehensive perspective that incorporates more agencies across more policy domains and intersects a greater number of presidential administrations.

The CEA provides a best test example in that if scholars were to find evidence of a relationship between presidential management and public sentiment, it would certainly be in the staffing of an agency that is directly controlled by the president and also most relevant to the issue domain that predominantly influences presidential approval (i.e., the economy). Although it is important to identify such cases, the task remains to determine whether and how the opinion-staffing linkage manifests in other types of agencies and issue domains.

For instance, it is possible that the influence of public opinion on politicization may vary across agencies (or types of agencies). That is, as noted previously, public opinion may affect the staffing of policy-relevant agencies such as the Office of Management and Budget or the Environmental Protection Agency but may not affect the politicization of other organizations such as the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Additionally, other aspects of the president's political context may shape the nature of the opinion-politicization linkage. For example, other time-varying factors such as issue salience and media coverage may also play a role in determining how and when public opinion influences presidential politicization of agencies and should be explored accordingly.

Clearly, although our findings here help scholars take an important first step in understanding the popular component of presidential politicization decisions, they also leave us with a number of important unanswered questions. Additional investigations into the relationship between public opinion and strategic staffing decisions can provide scholars with a greater comprehension of the dynamics that drive presidential politicization.

Appendix

In this study, we acknowledge that it is plausible that presidents respond to objective economic indicators, in addition to public opinion dynamics, when deciding to alter the personnel composition of bureaucratic agencies relevant to economic performance (see Note 14). To address this notion, we have conducted an expanded analysis that examines the impact of our theory-driven variables as well as that of the annual inflation rate and GDP change. The results of this analysis (Table A1) do not depart substantively from the results of the parsimonious base model (see Table 1). However, by expanding the number of indicators from six to eight, we exhaust our available degrees of freedom, such that the results remain just within the confines of statistical validity. Bearing in mind the trade-offs between improving our model specification and pushing the statistical limitations of our data set, we conclude that the original, more parsimonious specification is the most valid.

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

Table A1
Public Opinion and Presidential Politicization of the Council of
Economic Advisers (CEA), 1989-2004 (Expanded Analysis)

Independent Variables	Coefficient Estimate	<i>t</i> Value
Public opinion: job approval	0.269***(0.056)	4.76
Preference divergence (party change)	-7.769***(2.261)	-3.44
Time in term	-0.772*(0.454)	-1.70
Divided government	-1.587(1.641)	-0.97
Clinton	1.451*(1.613)	0.90
Bush II	0.137(2.671)	0.05
Inflation rate	0.048(0.647)	0.07
GDP change	-0.537(0.55)	-0.98
Constant	87.833*** (2.884)	30.45
R^2	0.8603	
Adjusted R^2	0.7006	
F	6.89	
Prob > F	0.0098	
n	16	

Note: The dependent variable is the annual percentage of appointees. Cell entries are regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$ in a one-tailed test of significance.

Notes

1. Several studies identify Richard Nixon as a president particularly fond of using politicization as a managerial tool (Hecklo, 1975; Nathan, 1975, 1983). Burke (2000), Maranto (1993), and Moe (1985) identify the Reagan administration, in addition to the Nixon administration, as particularly promiscuous in its politicization efforts.

2. Centralization is another strategy presidents use, particularly in their efforts to control federal agencies not directly enclosed within the president's sphere of influence. According to Rudalevige (2002), "Centralization occurs when there is a shift in functions from the wider executive bureaucracy to the Executive Office of the President, particularly the White House Office (WHO) itself" (p. 19).

3. Presidential politicization of the executive branch comes under frequent criticism. Opponents of the practice argue that politicization harms agency neutral competence and threatens continuity and institutional memory without necessarily increasing the likelihood that presidents will achieve their objectives (see Gilmour & Lewis, 2006; Hecklo, 1975). Maranto (1998), however, offers an insightful and compelling polemic in defense of politicization.

4. For public administration scholars, this view dates back to the work of White (1955) and Kaufman (1956).

5. Edwards (2003) has commented on this subject:

Why do presidents see themselves as dependent upon public support to accomplish their goals, especially in Congress, and devote so much time, energy, and resources

to obtaining it? The answer is straightforward: presidents know that without the public's backing in most instances they lack the influence to persuade Congress to support their legislative proposals and to reject Congressional initiatives that the president opposes. Moreover, presidents believe that Congress responds to public opinion. (p. 8)

6. Presidency scholars have long extolled the importance of the president's standing with the public as a key presidential resource. Neustadt (1960) argued that the president's success in dealing with the Washington community was in large part dependent on that community's perception of the executive's standing with the public. Numerous studies have built on Neustadt's foundation, investigating the link between presidential popularity and the president's success in mobilizing the public to support his agenda (Kernell, 1997; Polsby, 1978) and achieving his policy agenda in Congress (Bond & Fleisher, 1980, 1990; Canes-Wrone & DeMarchi, 2002; Cohen, Bond, Fleisher, & Hamman, 2000; Collier & Sullivan, 1995; Edwards, 1976, 1980, 1989; Fleisher & Bond, 1984; Ostrom & Simon, 1985; Rivers & Rose, 1985). In this article, we build on this scholarly tradition.

7. We also acknowledge that highly publicized efforts to politicize might at times be a product of presidential prioritizing. In that regard, presidential priorities may conceivably increase both public approval and politicization, without the latter necessarily being directly related. Nevertheless, such cases are likely to be a product of a president's preceding concern with his public standing in a given issue area. For example, President Clinton entered office determined to address the issue of economy and make it a priority (in part by politicizing the CEA after 12 years of Republican control) in order to increase his public standing on economic issues. Even so, President Clinton's motivation for making the economy a major priority of his administration was largely born out of the public's concern with the economy—and dissatisfaction with President George H. W. Bush's handling of the issue—during the 1992 presidential campaign (see Hetherington, 1996).

8. www.whitehouse.gov/cea/

9. Lewis's measure, which is derived from the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) Central Personnel Data File, consists of all excepted (e.g., non-civil-service) positions classified as PAS, politically appointed SES, and Schedule C appointments. It is important to note that this measure does not include one other classification of presidential appointees, the PA classification, which denotes all positions that require presidential appointment but not Senate confirmation. This is because the OPM does not track this type of appointment. However, this is not a problem for the CEA observations as it is for other agencies, such as the National Security Council staff and the Office of Policy Development, because only an insignificant number of the CEA staff personnel are PA appointees. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the OPM counts, and thus, our measure of politicization slightly underestimates the overall number of appointees.

10. The wording for Gallup's question on the president's handling of the economy is as follows: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way [president's name] is handling the economy?" See Edwards (1990) for a discussion of the importance of the Gallup measure as a reliable indicator of presidential approval.

11. In later research, Lewis (2008) supplements this party change dichotomous variable with survey-based agency liberalism measures (see Clinton & Lewis, 2008). Because our research here concerns only a single agency and because Clinton and Lewis's (2008) agency liberalism measure provides a single score that covers the years 1988 to 2005 (i.e., spanning the entirety of our time series) without variation, we are unable to take advantage of this measure.

12. Lewis (2005) acknowledges that this measure is imperfect but states that no direct way to measure agency preferences exists. Instead, he argues—and we agree—that using a party change control measure as a proxy for likely disagreement between presidents and EOP agencies is a reasonable secondary indicator.

13. The years spanning the George H. W. Bush administration, thus, are the control category for this measure.

14. In the interest of parsimony, we intentionally exclude other potential explanations from our analysis. For example, we acknowledge that it is plausible that presidents respond to objective economic indicators, in addition to public opinion dynamics, when deciding to alter the personnel composition of bureaucratic agencies relevant to economic performance. Indeed, although the president monitors his public standing concerning the economy, the president may be more concerned with monitoring objective economic indicators with the expectation that negative trends may require action in the form of politicizing the CEA. Specifically, one might consider the influence of indicators such as the annual inflation rate and GDP change. To address this notion, we have conducted an expanded analysis that includes both our theory-driven variables and these objective economic indicators as control variables. The results of this analysis do not depart in any meaningful way from the results of the parsimonious base model and can be found in the appendix.

15. In particular, the use of the Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity indicates that $\chi^2(1) = 0.44$, and $\text{Prob} > \chi^2 = 0.5074$, whereas the Breusch-Godfrey LM test for autocorrelation shows that $\chi^2 = 0.863$, and $\text{Prob} > \chi^2 = 0.3528$.

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