

*Online Supporting Information for:*

**Mobilizing the Public Against the President:  
Congress and the Political Costs of Unilateral Action**

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## **Salience and Polarization of Experimental Modules**

The five experiments in the paper assess Congress' capacity to erode public support for unilateral action across three policy areas – President Obama's Clean Power Plan, which directed the EPA to regulate carbon dioxide emissions as a greenhouse gas; his unilateral airstrikes against ISIS targets in Iraq and Syria; and his presidential memoranda to cap student loan payments. The complete wording for each experiment is presented in SI Appendix 1. These three examples of important unilateral actions in the contemporary polity were chosen to vary in terms of substance, salience, and the extent to which they polarized the public. All three actions meet common thresholds to determine “significant” executive actions (e.g. Howell 2005).<sup>1</sup> For example, all three were covered in the *New York Times* and other major news outlets. However, even in terms of importance there is considerable variation across the three issues. The ISIS airstrikes opened the door for greater American military re-engagement in the Middle East. The Clean Power Plan, if ultimately implemented, would be among the most important domestic policy changes effected by the Obama administration, after the Affordable Care Act.<sup>2</sup> Finally, while Obama's executive action to cap student loan payments received media attention and will

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<sup>1</sup> Howell, William. 2005. “Unilateral Powers: A Brief Overview.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35: 417-439.

<sup>2</sup> For a summary of the plan's costs, benefits, and policy impact, see:

<https://www.epa.gov/cleanpowerplan/fact-sheet-clean-power-plan-benefits>.

lower payments for some borrowers, the ultimate policy impact of the action by many assessments is rather modest.<sup>3</sup>

The three underlying issues these actions were intended to address – climate change, the threat posed by ISIS, and student loan debt – also varied significantly in terms of salience. Of the three, the ISIS threat was the most salient at the time of the relevant experiment. In the year preceding the first ISIS experiment, the *New York Times* ran more than 2,000 articles mentioning the Islamic state.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, during the same period only 159 articles mentioned student loan debt. In the year preceding the 2014 CCES, on which the first EPA experiment was embedded, the *Times* ran 982 articles mentioning climate change, and 335 that also included “carbon” as a key word. Systematically assessing the media salience accorded to the respective unilateral actions themselves is difficult, particularly regarding the unilateral strikes against ISIS. However, additional text searches show that the *New York Times* ran 91 articles mentioning Obama, the EPA, and regulation in the year before the 2014 CCES. By contrast, the *Times* ran only 39 articles connecting Obama and student loans in the year preceding that experiment.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Anna Bahr. “Obama’s Move to Help Students is Not as Forgiving as it Seems.” *New York Times*, June 23, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/24/upshot/obamas-move-to-help-students-is-not-as-forgiving-as-it-seems.html#>

<sup>4</sup> The search terms for each experiment during the relevant period were: ISIS OR ISIL OR Islamic state; Student w/5 debt; Climate change OR global warming; (Climate change OR global warming) AND carbon.

<sup>5</sup> The search terms were: Obama AND Student w/5 debt; Obama AND EPA AND (regulation OR clean power OR carbon dioxide)

Public opinion polling on the issues Americans consider most important also suggest that ISIS was the most salient issue, followed by the regulation of carbon dioxide emissions, and then student loan debt relief. Although taken almost a year after our first ISIS experiment was in the field, an April, 2016 CBS Poll found that terrorism/Islamic extremism/ISIS was the second most important issue facing the country identified by voters. A September 2014 CNN Poll showed 29% of subjects even saying that military action against ISIS would be more important than the state of the economy in shaping their vote for Congress in the upcoming midterms. In multiple polls, climate change ranked in the middle of the pack in terms of the most pressing issues government should tackle. For example, in an NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll taken within a month of the 2014 CCES going into the field, climate change ranked as the 5<sup>th</sup> most important issue facing the country. By contrast, student loan debt appeared in only one most important problem survey, out of more than thirty, asked between 2012 and 2016.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the three issues also varied considerably in the extent to which they polarized opinion along partisan lines. While the ISIS strikes were the most salient of our unilateral actions, extant polling data suggests they were also the least polarizing. For example, a September 2014 ABC/Washington Post poll showed little evidence of a partisan cleavage in support for strikes against ISIS; if anything, Republicans were even more supportive than Democrats.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, another September 2014 poll showed virtually the same percentage of Republicans and Democrats saying they would support Congress authorizing Obama's unilateral

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<sup>6</sup> All most important problem survey data taken from: <http://www.pollingreport.com/prioriti.htm>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/page/2010-2019/WashingtonPost/2014/09/09/National-Politics/Polling/question\\_14550.xml?uuid=Y-f\\_SDfWEeSgIx1h9\\_MaBQ#](https://www.washingtonpost.com/page/2010-2019/WashingtonPost/2014/09/09/National-Politics/Polling/question_14550.xml?uuid=Y-f_SDfWEeSgIx1h9_MaBQ#)

strikes.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, public opinion toward expanded government regulation of greenhouse gasses, like public opinion on questions of global climate change more generally, was much more polarized along partisan lines.<sup>9</sup> A June 2012 poll mentioning Obama's EPA plan found a majority of Republicans supported Congress taking action to stop its implementation, 52% to 39%. By contrast, Democrats opposed legislative efforts to block the plan by more than two to one, 28% to 65%.<sup>10</sup> Finally, a search of the holdings of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research did not yield any polls querying public support for President Obama's student loan actions. However, there is some evidence of a partisan split, but less intense than the divide observed over the Clean Power Plan. For example, a 2011 survey found an overwhelming majority of Democrats supported government efforts to help students pay off student loan debt,

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<sup>8</sup> Cable News Network. CNN/ORC Poll: Congress/Terrorism/Gun Control/Workplace Discrimination, Sep, 2014 [dataset]. USORCCNN2014-008, Version 2. Opinion Research Corporation [producer]. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, RoperExpress [distributor], accessed Jul-13-2016.

<sup>9</sup> On the polarization of opinion concerning climate change, see: Dunlap, R. E., & McCright, A. M. 2008. "A Widening Gap: Republican and Democratic Views on Climate Change. *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* 50(5): 26-35.

<sup>10</sup> Survey by United Technologies, National Journal. Methodology: Conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, June 14 - June 17, 2012 and based on 1,002 telephone interviews. Sample: National adult. 601 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 401 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 187 who had no landline telephone.

[USPSRA.061812CC.R04]

whereas Republicans were more split on the issue, with 43% supporting such efforts and 56% opposing them.<sup>11</sup>

As a result, we believe that our observed treatment effects are likely generalizable to a range of substantively meaningful executive actions that vary in terms of the salience of the policy issue they address and the degree to which that issue polarizes the public. One limitation of our design, however, is that our results cannot speak to Congress' capacity (or inability) to influence public opinion toward much less insignificant executive actions that are unlikely to attract much public or media scrutiny. We argue that, in such cases, congressional challenges are perhaps doubly unlikely, first because the policy stakes are low, and second because members will logically anticipate the difficulty in activating public interest on relatively insignificant executive actions.<sup>12</sup>

### **Experimental Prompts and Treatments to Maximize External Validity**

To maximize external validity, the wording of our experimental prompts and treatments was adapted from actual language used by political actors themselves and in media coverage of the executive actions. In both EPA experiments, we first tell all subjects that: "President Obama has directed the EPA to begin regulating carbon dioxide from coal power plants to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, combat climate change, and improve public health." The three main

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<sup>11</sup> Survey by PRRI, Religion News Service. Methodology: Conducted by Public Religion Research Institute, November 10 - November 14, 2011 and based on 1,002 telephone interviews. Sample: National adult. Interviews were conducted by SSRS - Social Science Research Solutions. [USPRRI.11RELNEWSNV10.R8].

<sup>12</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this last possibility.

benefits of the action articulated by the administration in this prompt are taken directly from the president's own press release announcing the EPA memorandum.<sup>13</sup>

The policy criticisms treatment provided a counter-perspective that the proposed executive action “will increase energy prices and cost jobs.” These were two of the most prominent critiques levied against President Obama’s Clean Power Plan by Republican and Democratic congressional critics, alike. For example, West Virginia’s Joe Manchin received significant press coverage when he charged that “If these regulations go into effect, American jobs will be lost, electricity prices will soar and economic uncertainty will grow.”<sup>14</sup> North Carolina Republican Richard Hudson levied an almost identical critique in an op-ed for the *Richmond County Daily Journal*: “The EPA’s pending power plant rule will cause electricity prices to skyrocket for families and businesses alike, forcing businesses to trim elsewhere and leaving hardworking folks with less take-home pay and fewer jobs.”<sup>15</sup>

The constitutional objections treatment reflects the allegations of many members of Congress and media pundits alike that the president’s EPA order might not be constitutional. For example, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell penned an op-ed for the *Lexington Herald-*

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<sup>13</sup> See Barack Obama, “Presidential Memorandum – Power Sector Carbon Pollution Standards.” June 15, 2013. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/25/presidential-memorandum-power-sector-carbon-pollution-standards>

<sup>14</sup> “Obama Presses Limits on Power Plant Emissions.” *Atlanta-Journal Constitution*. September 21, 2013. page 8A.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Hudson. “EPA Standards Would Kill Jobs.” *Richmond County Daily Journal*. <http://yourdailyjournal.com/opinion/columns/1503/epa-standards-would-kill-jobs>

*Leader* that charged: “For starters, the legal basis for this regulation is flimsy at best.” As a result, McConnell issued an open call to state leaders not to submit plans for compliance until the federal courts had time to rule on the new regulations’ legality.<sup>16</sup> McConnell’s assertions about the executive action’s dubious constitutionality was widely repeated in major news outlets.<sup>17</sup>

The prompt for the ISIS experiment simply reminded subjects: “As you may know, President Barack Obama has unilaterally launched a series of airstrikes against ISIS militants in Iraq and Syria.” The sole treatment in this experiment informed subjects that many in Congress objected to the unilateral airstrikes on constitutional grounds: “Many members of Congress from both parties, however, oppose the President’s decision. They argue that President Obama has overstepped his constitutional authority and that military action requires authorization from Congress.” The language was drawn from bipartisan criticism of Obama’s decision to order strikes unilaterally and not to seek congressional authorization from members of Congress such as Virginia Democrat Tim Kaine and North Carolina Republican Walter Jones. For example, CNN quoted Kaine expressing constitutional concerns about the President’s actions: “The point I

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<sup>16</sup> Mitch McConnell. “States Should Reject Obama Mandate for Clean-Power Regulations.”

*Lexington Herald-Leader*. March 3, 2015.

[http://www.kentucky.com/2015/03/03/3725288\\_states-should-reject-obama-mandate.html?rh=1](http://www.kentucky.com/2015/03/03/3725288_states-should-reject-obama-mandate.html?rh=1)

<sup>17</sup> For example, see: Laura Barron-Lopez. “McConnell to States: Don’t Comply With EPA Climate Rule.” *The Hill*. March 4, 2015. <http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/234567-mcconnell-tells-states-not-to-comply-with-epa-climate-rule>



think is so critical is the President shouldn't be doing this without Congress and ... Congress shouldn't be allowing it to happen without Congress.”<sup>18</sup>

The student loan experiment – which consciously investigated Congress’ capacity to lower support for an executive action that was mostly uncontroversial and non-polarizing – attracted little negative scrutiny in Congress. However, the constitutional treatment is based on widespread media coverage of congressional efforts, most led by Republicans, to fight back against President Obama’s unilateral actions in the courts and by publicly proclaiming their unconstitutionality.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, in the second EPA experiment our treatments reported Democratic and Republican members of Congress criticizing the president’s actions on both policy and constitutional grounds. In many cases, congressional critics combine both policy and constitutional critiques. For example, in the op-ed by Senator McConnell denouncing the Clean Power Plan cited earlier, McConnell criticized the action both on constitutional and policy grounds (e.g. “this proposed regulation would have a negligible effect on global climate but a profoundly negative impact on countless American families already struggling.”). Similarly, in a *Washington Times* op-ed criticizing President Obama’s unilateral use of force in Libya, Senator Rand Paul denounced the action on both constitutional and policy grounds:

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<sup>18</sup> Deirdre Walsh. “Most Positive Reaction to Syria Airstrikes Comes From Obama’s Critics.” *CNN.com*. September 23, 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/23/politics/syria-airstrikes-congress-reaction/>

<sup>19</sup> For example, see: Ashley Parker. “‘Imperial Presidency’ Becomes a Rallying Cry for Republicans.” *New York Times*. March 31, 2014. A16.

As an American citizen, I respect, honor and abide by our Constitution. Violating it is a major offense and a significant problem for this president. Not only is Mr. Obama's lack of congressional authority for war unconstitutional, the war also is not in our best interest. Our country is in the midst of an economic crisis, and we do not have the funds to subsidize the rest of the world. Because of our ever-increasing deficit, our current expansive foreign policies are no longer fiscally possible to sustain. Protecting and rebuilding other nations should not be our priority - our first loyalty should belong to America.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, in criticizing President Obama's immigration action, both House Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell challenged President Obama on both constitutional and policy grounds.<sup>21</sup> As a result, we argue that these treatments combining constitutional objections and policy criticisms have a high degree of external validity.

### **Bipartisan Opposition**

Virtually all of President Obama's most significant unilateral actions have attracted at least some resistance from members of his own party. Republican critics, aided by the media, have been quick to seize on Democratic opposition to emphasize the bipartisan nature of congressional challenges to unilateral action. For example, when Senate Republicans introduced legislation to overturn President Obama's EPA action in May 2015, *The Hill* quoted Senator Mary Capito (R-OH) lauding her "bipartisan legislation."<sup>22</sup> Of the bill's twenty-six co-sponsors only one, West Virginia's Joe Manchin, was a Democrat. Similarly, when twenty-six Democrats

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/jun/15/obamas-unconstitutional-libyan-war/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.usnews.com/debate-club/is-obamas-immigration-executive-order-legal>

<sup>22</sup> Timothy Cama. "Senate GOP Launches Attack on GOP Climate Rules." *The Hill*, May 13, 2015.

voted with Republicans against easing travel restrictions to Cuba, politico labeled it evidence of bipartisan opposition to the president's policies.<sup>23</sup> "Bipartisan" criticism need only include a handful of presidential co-partisans to be labeled as such in the media. On virtually every major executive action taken by both Presidents Obama and Bush, from environmental policy, to immigration, to domestic surveillance, to military actions in Iraq, Libya, and Syria, at least a small number of presidential co-partisans have joined opposition party critiques of executive actions. As a result, our first four experiments all examine the effect of bipartisan congressional opposition on support for unilateral action. However, our final, revised EPA experiment shows that even policy and constitutional critiques attributed solely to members of the opposition party significantly erode support for unilateral action.

### **The Prevalence of Congressional Challenges to Unilateralism**

The five experiments in the manuscript show that when Congress does challenge presidential unilateral action, it can seriously erode support for executive action across a wide range of policy realms. Moreover, presidents may anticipate congressional challenges to executive action and adjust their decision-making accordingly. However, this presumes that members of Congress routinely pay attention to unilateral action and are willing to engage the unilateral president in the public sphere. A comprehensive analysis of the frequency with which members of Congress publicly challenge unilateral action is beyond the scope of this analysis. However, it is important to note that many of President Obama's most high profile unilateral

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/07/why-the-gop-congress-could-be-trouble-for-obama-in-cuba-119668.html>

actions, in addition to the three actions examined in our experiments, attracted considerable congressional pushback, including: closing Guantanamo; banning the use of enhanced interrogation techniques; reversing the ban on federal stem cell research; clarifying abortion restrictions in the Affordable Care Act; raising the minimum wage for federal contractors; authorizing the use of force against Libya; and tightening federal enforcement of gun control laws.

### **Sample Demographics**

The first experiment on President Obama's Clean Power Plan to have the EPA regulate carbon dioxide emissions was embedded on the first wave of the 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study before the November midterm election. The CCES is a national stratified sample survey administered by YouGov/Polimetrix. For more information on the CCES, see: <http://projects.iq.harvard.edu/cces/home>. The second and third experiments, examining the influence of congressional opposition on public support for President Obama's unilateral airstrikes against ISIS and executive order to cap student loan payments, were embedded on a representative online survey administered by YouGov from April 24-28, 2015. The fourth experiment examining whether the source of a challenge to the unilateral airstrikes against ISIS – whether it is levied by members of Congress, law professors, or media pundits – affects its capacity to influence public opinion was embedded on another nationally representative online survey administered by YouGov from March 25-28, 2016. The final experiment on Democratic vs. Republican congressional criticism of the EPA executive action to regulate carbon dioxide emissions was embedded on a nationally representative online survey administered by YouGov from April 16-20, 2015. For more information on YouGov's sampling

process, see: <https://yougov.co.uk/about/panel-methodology/>. The demographic composition of each sample is summarized in SI Table 1.

### **Alternate Estimate of Effect Sizes: EPA Experiment**

Because logistic regressions are nonlinear models, the estimated effect of a change in a given variable on the dependent variable is conditional on the values of all other variables in the model. In Figure 1 in the text, we illustrate the effect of the congressional constitutional objection and policy criticism treatments on the probability of supporting the EPA executive action for the median respondent who does not believe that addressing global warming is an important priority. SI Figure 1 presents an identical plot illustrating the effect of the two treatments for subjects who do believe that addressing global warming is an urgent government priority. Among this subgroup, the baseline predicted probability of supporting the EPA action is much higher (.89 vs. .45). However, even among this group, both congressional treatments significantly lowered the predicted probability of backing Obama's action, by .10 and .11 respectively.

### **Robustness Check: Beliefs About Global Warming**

To determine whether congressional criticism depressed support for Obama's EPA action even among those with pro-environmental policy preferences required some measure of each subject's predisposition toward the EPA regulating carbon dioxide emissions as a greenhouse gas. To provide such a measure, before our experiment on the 2014 CCES we asked all subjects a question that was taken from the common content of the 2013 CCES. Specifically, this question asked, "From what you know about global climate change or global warming, which

one of the following statements comes closest to your opinion?” Subjects were then asked to choose from an array of options ranging from “Global climate change is not occurring; this is not a real issue,” to “Global climate change has been established as a serious problem, and immediate action is necessary.” From this, we created a binary variable coded 1 for those respondents selecting the last option as well as the next in the scale, “there is enough evidence that climate change is taking place and some action should be taken” and 0 for those who did not believe the U.S. needs to take action to address global warming. As shown in the text, subjects’ attitudes toward global warming were strong and significant predictors of support for Obama’s EPA action. However, congressional opposition to the action decreased a subject’s probability of supporting the EPA action, even after controlling for his or her policy preferences regarding global warming. Moreover, we found no evidence that congressional opposition only influenced attitudes among those who did not believe global warming an urgent problem requiring government action.

As a final robustness check, we re-estimate the base model in column 1 of Table 1 without the global warming variable. As shown in SI Table 2, the coefficients for both the constitutional objections and policy criticism variables remain negative and statistically significant.

### **Robustness Check: Controlling for Presidential Approval**

Prior to our EPA experiment embedded on the 2014 CCES, the common content asked subjects to indicate their degree of approval or disapproval of President Obama’s job performance on a four-point likert scale. Because subjects were randomly assigned to the treatment and control groups, there should not be significant differences in the share of subjects

approving or disapproving of the president across the groups that would bias our estimate of the constitutional and policy criticism treatment effects. However, as a robustness check, we re-estimated all of the models in Table 1 in the text controlling for each subject's answer to the Obama approval question. SI Table 3 presents the results. As we would expect, overall presidential approval was a strong and significant predictor of support for unilateral action in the EPA context. The relevant coefficient is positive and statistically significant. However, even after including this additional control, we continue to find evidence that both the congressional constitutional objections and policy criticism treatments significantly eroded support for executive action. The coefficients are both negative, of almost the same magnitude as those reported in Table 1 in the text, and statistically significant. Moreover, when controlling for presidential approval, we continue to find no significant evidence that either treatment effect is moderated by either subjects' prior attitudes toward global warming or their levels of political knowledge.

### **Robustness Check: Ordered Logit Regressions**

For all of the models in the text, we collapsed the “strongly support” and “somewhat support” categories to create a binary dependent variable coded 1 if the subject somewhat or strongly supported the president's unilateral action and 0 if she somewhat or strongly opposed the unilateral action. All of the models in the text are logistic regressions.

As a robustness check, we re-estimate all of the models presented in the text as ordered logit regressions using support for the unilateral action on the original four-point likert scale. The results are presented in SI Tables 4-7. Across all model, results are virtually identical to those from the logit models with a binary version of the dependent variable reported in the text.

### **Robustness Check: Political Knowledge as a Moderating Factor**

In model 3 of Table 1 (reproduced in SI Table 8 below), we examined whether political knowledge moderated the effect of our congressional opposition treatments. To examine this possibility, we used a series of six questions on the 2014 CCES that afford a measure of political knowledge. These questions include knowledge of which party controlled the U.S. House of Representatives; which party controlled the U.S. Senate; and the partisan affiliation of each subject's home state governor, two U.S. Senators, and local representative in the U.S. House.<sup>24</sup> We then re-estimated model 1 of Table 1 with three additional variables: the seven-point additive index of political knowledge; and its interaction with the constitutional objections and policy criticism treatment variables. If our treatments only influenced the assessments of low-information subjects, our results might seriously overestimate the effect of congressional opposition on public opinion in the real world, as many low-information Americans who are not overly attuned to politics might never receive cues transmitted by congressional elites, even ones that receive prominent coverage in the mass media.

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<sup>24</sup> There were no other factual knowledge questions in the common content of the surveys. While greater variance in the kinds of political knowledge questions would have been preferable (see, e.g., Luskin, Robert. 1987. "Measuring Political Sophistication." *American Journal of Political Science* 31: 856-899; delli Carpini, Michael, and Scott Keeter. 1993. "Measuring Political Knowledge: Putting Things First." *American Journal of Political Science* 37: 1179-1206.), we are confident that this index taps political knowledge and further discuss the psychometric properties of the measure below.



Alleviating such fears, neither of the political knowledge interactions were statistically significant. The coefficient on the constitutional objects X knowledge interaction is substantively almost zero, and highly insignificant. The coefficient on the policy criticism treatment X knowledge interaction is positive, but it fails to reach conventional thresholds of statistical significance ( $p = .08$ ). Nevertheless, SI Figure 2 illustrates the substantive size of the interactive effect between political knowledge and each treatment for the median respondent. In terms of the policy criticism treatment, we see that at low levels of information the gap between the predicted probability of supporting Obama's EPA action in the control and treatment group is quite large. This gap, which illustrates the treatment effect, narrows somewhat as levels of political knowledge increase; however, only at the most extreme end of the knowledge distribution does the gap narrowly miss conventional levels of statistical significance. Only for the small percentage of subjects who answered all six knowledge questions directly does the 95% confidence interval for support in the treatment group include the point estimate for those in the control group. In terms of the constitutional objection treatment, the estimated probability of supporting executive action in the control group is outside the 95% confidence interval for the predicting in the constitutional objections treatment group at all levels of political knowledge. There is a significant difference between the treatment and control groups regardless of the level of political knowledge.

### **Robustness Check: Effect of Partisan Opposition Across Partisan Groups**

Finally, we examine whether the influence of the Democratic and Republican congressional challenges to the President's unilateral action were conditional on the partisan orientation of the subject receiving the cue. To do this, we re-estimated our logistic regression

model from Table 4 with interaction variables for each treatment with the Democratic dummy variable. For a Democratic respondent, Republican members of Congress are not a trusted source. Similarly, Republican criticism of President Obama is not a “costly” signal.<sup>25</sup> As a result, the Republican challenge may be less influential on Democratic respondents than on Republicans or independents. By contrast, Democratic criticism of a co-partisan president is a costly signal that may be influential to Americans of all partisan stripes. SI Table 9 presents the results.

The coefficients for the main effects of both congressional treatments remain strongly negative and statistically significant. The coefficient on the Republican challenge X Democrat interaction variable is positive. This suggests that Republican criticism of President Obama’s EPA action may have less influence on Democrats than on Republicans or independents. However, the coefficient fails to reach conventional thresholds of statistical significance. The interaction variable for the Democratic challenge X Democrat variable is negative. For Democratic respondents, such cues are both trusted and costly. However, this coefficient is also statistically insignificant. SI Figure 3 illustrates the estimated magnitude of the partisan treatments across subgroups. Among Republicans and independents, both the Republican and Democratic congressional criticism of Obama’s EPA action significantly decreased support for

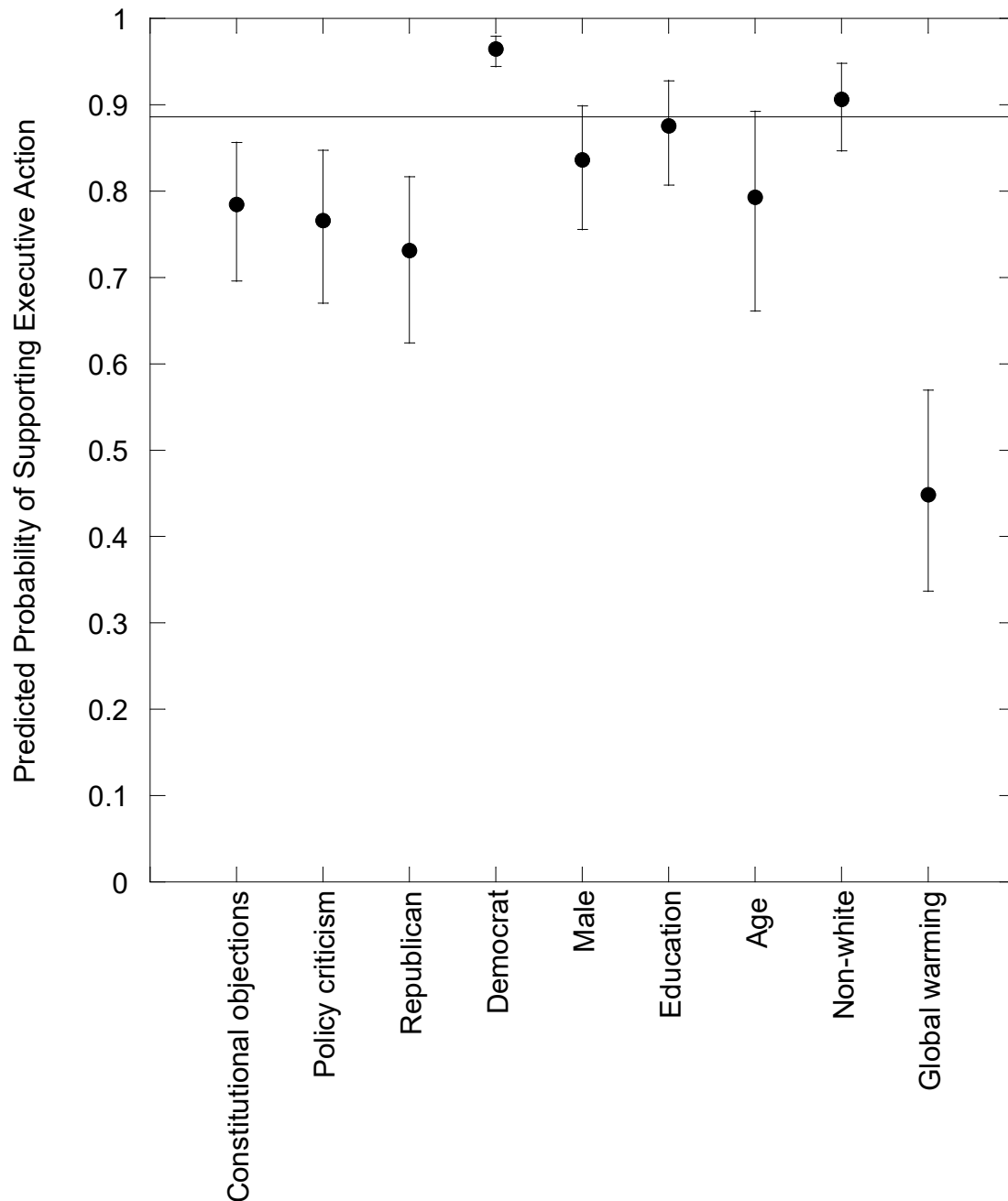
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<sup>25</sup> On trusted signals, see Lupia, Arthur and Matthew McCubbins. 1994. “Who Controls? Information and the Structure of Legislative Decision Making.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 19: 361-84; Druckman, James. 2001. “On the Limits of Framing Effects: Who Can Frame?” *Journal of Politics* 63:1041-1066. On costly signals, see Calvert, Randall. 1985. “The Value of Biased Information: A Rational Choice Model of Political Advice.” *Journal of Politics* 47: 530-555.

the unilateral action. Republican congressional criticism had a statistically significant, but substantively modest downward effect on Democratic support for Obama's EPA action. The estimated effect of the Democratic congressional challenge on Democratic support is slightly larger; co-partisan criticism reduced the median Democrat's probability of supporting for Obama's unilateral action by approximately .11. However, the difference in effect size is not statistically significant.

In sum, we find little evidence that the influence of partisan congressional challenges to a unilateral action is limited to certain subsets of the public. Rather congressional challenges to unilateral action from either party appear to be meaningful to the public across party lines. These results stand in stark contrast to other political assessments where opinion formation is dominated by partisan forces; public evaluations of unilateral action appear uniquely responsive to institutional challenges, regardless of the partisanship of the actors confronting the executive.

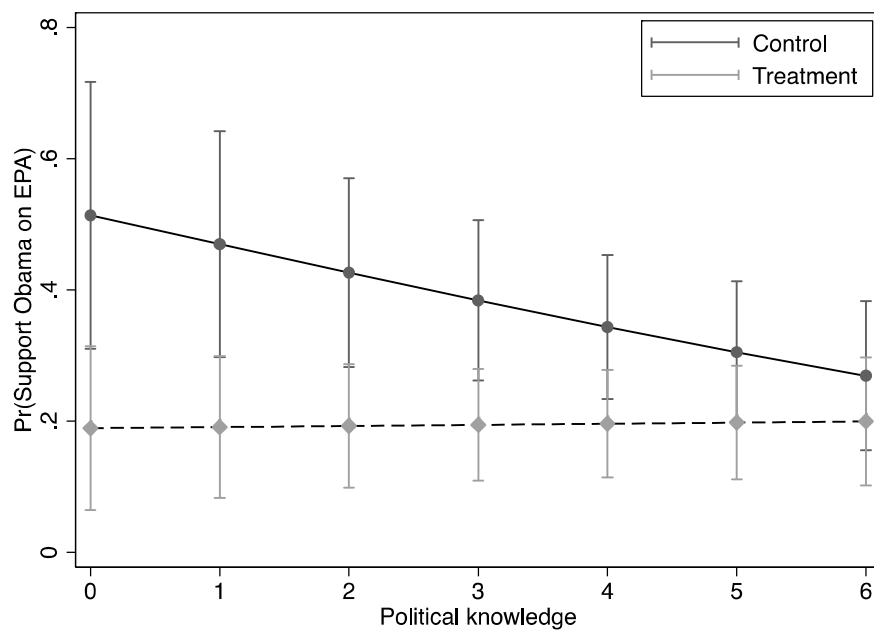
**SI Figure 1: Effects of Congressional Challenges on Support for Unilateral Action to Reduce CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions**



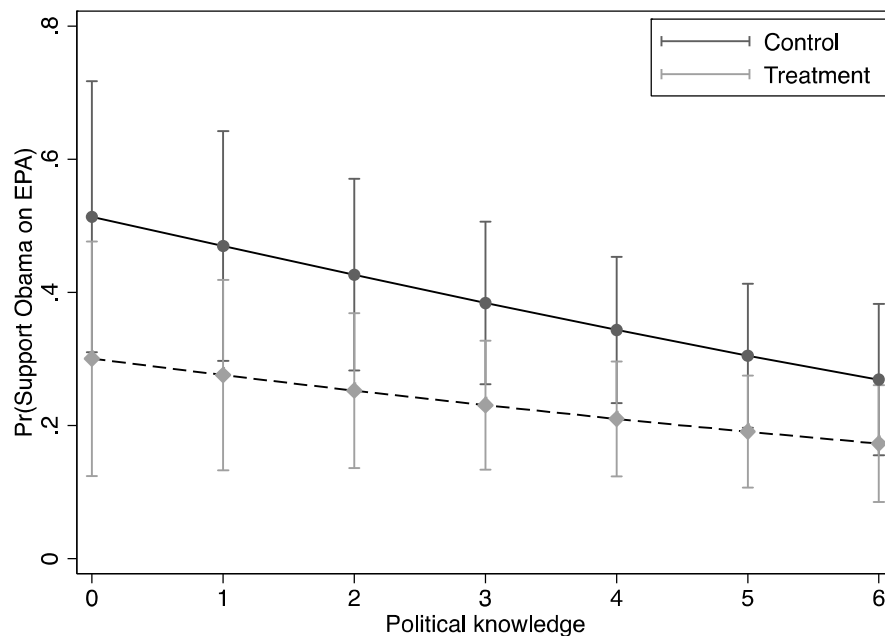
*Note:* The horizontal line at .89 represents the predicted probability of the median independent respondent in the control group **who believes in global warming** supporting Obama's use of executive action to regulate carbon dioxide emissions. Dots present the point estimate for each factor; I-bars around each point estimate present 95% confidence intervals obtained from simulations. For the seven dummy variables, the figure plots the effect of increasing that factor from 0 to 1. For education and age, the figure presents the effect of a two standard deviation increase from the median value.

## SI Figure 2: Moderating Influence of Political Knowledge on Effect of Treatments, EPA Experiment

### *Policy Criticism*

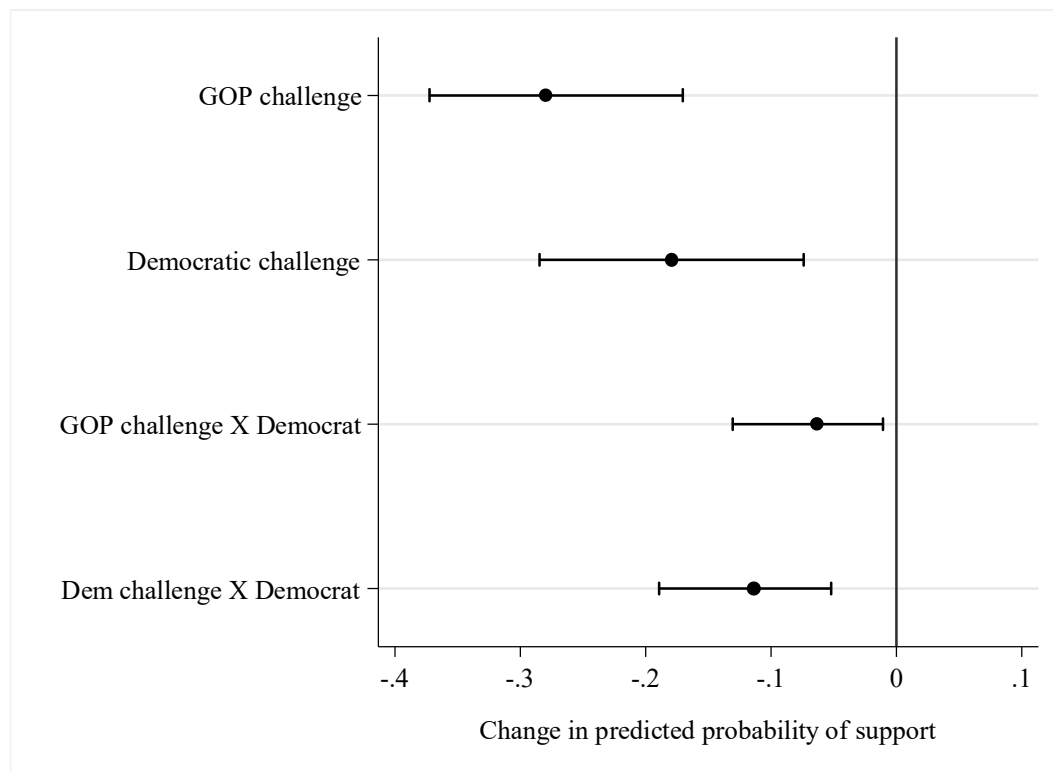


### *Constitutional Objections*



*Note:* The solid line plots the predicted probability of the median subject who does not believe in global warming supporting Obama's EPA action as political knowledge increases. The dashed line plots the predicted probability for the median subject in the treatment group. I-bars illustrate 95% confidence intervals.

**SI Figure 3: Effects of Partisan Congressional Challenges on Support for EPA Action**



*Note:* Each dot presents the estimated change in predicted probability of supporting Obama's EPA action from the control group; I-bars around each point estimate present 95% confidence intervals obtained from simulations. The top two figures illustrate the effect of each partisan challenge for the median independent. The bottom two figures illustrate the effect for the median Democrat.

**SI Table 1: Sample Demographics**

	2014 CCES	April 16-20, 2015	April 24-28, 2015	March 25-28, 2016
Republican	22%	23%	23%	23%
Republican (including leaners)	32%	32%	33%	31%
Democrat	37%	36%	37%	40%
Democrat (including leaners)	47%	46%	45%	49%
Male	47%	47%	46%	46%
Education	Some college	Some college	Some college	Some college
Age	50	48	47	46
White	73%	73%	71%	71%
Black	13%	11%	11%	11%
Latino	7%	10%	12%	12%
Income	\$60,000 to \$69,999	\$50,000 to \$59,999	\$50,000 to \$59,999	\$50,000 to \$59,999
<i>N</i>	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000

Note: All surveys conducted by YouGov/Polimetrix. Each cell presents averages, except for education and income, which report medians.

**SI Table 2: Replicating EPA Experiment Analysis Without Global Warming Measure**

	(1)
Constitutional objections	-0.436* (0.199)
Policy criticism	-0.589** (0.202)
Republican	-1.266** (0.206)
Democrat	1.713** (0.227)
Male	-0.515** (0.166)
Education	0.001 (0.060)
Age	-0.028** (0.006)
White	-0.281 (0.215)
Constant	2.612** (0.409)
Observations	996

Logit model. Robust standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed.

\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05



**SI Table 3: Replicating Analyses of Table 1 Controlling for Presidential Approval**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Constitutional objections	-0.637** (0.239)	-0.632* (0.320)	-0.801 (0.576)
Policy criticism	-0.793** (0.247)	-0.746* (0.345)	-1.472** (0.555)
Constitutional objections X Global warming action		-0.022 (0.485)	
Policy criticism X Global warming action		-0.092 (0.504)	
Constitutional objections X Knowledge			0.047 (0.115)
Policy criticism X Knowledge			0.184 (0.113)
Republican (including leaners)	-0.808** (0.249)	-0.808** (0.249)	-0.741** (0.251)
Democrat (including leaners)	0.805** (0.287)	0.804** (0.285)	0.880** (0.295)
Male	-0.475* (0.199)	-0.476* (0.199)	-0.425* (0.209)
Education	-0.063 (0.070)	-0.063 (0.070)	-0.027 (0.076)
Age	-0.021** (0.007)	-0.021** (0.007)	-0.019** (0.007)
White	0.066 (0.249)	0.066 (0.249)	0.066 (0.251)
Support action in global warming	2.085** (0.205)	2.123** (0.347)	2.087** (0.208)
Presidential approval	1.462** (0.266)	1.466** (0.267)	1.415** (0.267)
Political knowledge			-0.150 (0.084)
Constant	0.864 (0.509)	0.848 (0.520)	1.106 (0.592)
Observations	955	955	955

Logit models. Robust standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed.

\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

**SI Table 4: Ordered Logit Regressions for EPA Experiment, Constitutional Objections vs. Policy Criticism**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Constitutional objections	-0.549** (0.155)	-0.753** (0.252)	-0.554 (0.333)
Policy criticism	-0.636** (0.155)	-0.690** (0.237)	-0.925** (0.320)
Constitutional objections X Global warming action		0.316 (0.320)	
Policy criticism X Global warming action		0.100 (0.313)	
Constitutional objections X Knowledge			0.004 (0.073)
Policy criticism X Knowledge			0.078 (0.071)
Republican (including leaners)	-1.124** (0.196)	-1.135** (0.197)	-1.041** (0.202)
Democrat (including leaners)	1.031** (0.174)	1.025** (0.174)	1.105** (0.178)
Male	-0.166 (0.130)	-0.159 (0.130)	-0.124 (0.132)
Education	-0.033 (0.045)	-0.031 (0.045)	-0.001 (0.048)
Age	-0.008* (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.005 (0.005)
White	0.064 (0.153)	0.064 (0.153)	0.081 (0.154)
Support action in global warming (binary)	2.285** (0.159)	2.154** (0.235)	2.294** (0.159)
Political knowledge			-0.100 (0.057)
Observations	990	990	990

Ordered logit models. Robust standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed.

\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

**SI Table 5: Ordered Logit Regressions for ISIS and Student Loans Experiments**

	ISIS	Student loans
Constitutional objections	-0.805** (0.168)	-0.456* (0.181)
Republican	-0.233 (0.248)	-0.853** (0.230)
Democrat	0.844** (0.220)	1.564** (0.231)
Male	0.534** (0.168)	-0.234 (0.177)
Education	0.030 (0.056)	0.029 (0.062)
Age	0.019** (0.006)	-0.025** (0.005)
White	-0.054 (0.190)	-0.192 (0.214)
Observations	523	477

Ordered logit models. Robust standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed.

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

**SI Table 6: Ordered Logit Regression for ISIS Source Effects Experiment**

	(1)
Congress	-0.390* (0.183)
Law professors	-0.130 (0.182)
Media	-0.195 (0.190)
Congress expanded	-0.525** (0.191)
Democrat	1.021** (0.150)
Republican	0.268 (0.169)
Education	0.0165 (0.0411)
Age	0.0289** (0.00360)
White	-0.345* (0.134)
Male	0.139 (0.121)
Observations	1,000

Ordered logit models. Robust standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed.

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

**SI Table 7: Ordered Logit Regression for EPA Partisan Opposition Experiment**

	(1)
GOP challenge	-0.629** (0.152)
Dem challenge	-0.689** (0.153)
Republican	-1.118** (0.179)
Democrat	2.005** (0.166)
Male	-0.068 (0.126)
Education	0.083 (0.043)
Age	-0.015** (0.004)
White	0.042 (0.146)
Observations	1,000

Ordered logit model. Robust standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed.

\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

**SI Table 8: Political Knowledge as a Moderating Factor of Congressional Challenges in EPA Experiment**

	(1)
Constitutional objections	-0.900 (0.525)
Policy criticism	-1.509** (0.513)
Constitutional objections X Knowledge	0.056 (0.106)
Policy criticism X Knowledge	0.186 (0.105)
Republican (including leaners)	-0.898** (0.236)
Democrat (including leaners)	1.395** (0.257)
Male	-0.318 (0.193)
Education	0.030 (0.071)
Age	-0.017* (0.007)
White	-0.252 (0.234)
Support action in global warming (binary)	2.226** (0.192)
Political knowledge	-0.176* (0.082)
Constant	1.368* (0.551)
Observations	990

Logit model. Robust standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed.

\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

**SI Table 9: Partisanship as a Moderating Factor of Partisan Congressional Challenges, Revised EPA Experiment**

	(1)
GOP challenge	-1.172** (0.250)
GOP challenge X Democrat	0.409 (0.484)
Dem challenge	-0.755** (0.229)
Dem challenge X Democrat	-0.402 (0.459)
Republican	-1.204** (0.203)
Democrat	2.127** (0.383)
Male	-0.169 (0.164)
Education	0.047 (0.056)
Age	-0.019** (0.005)
White	-0.201 (0.202)
Constant	1.538** (0.370)
Observations	1,000

Logit model. Robust standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed.

\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

## **SI Appendix 1**

### **Constitutional vs. Policy Criticism Experiment: Clean Power Plan**

Subjects were randomly assigned to one of three experimental groups.

#### *Control:*

President Obama has directed the EPA to begin regulating carbon dioxide from coal power plants to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, combat climate change, and improve public health.

#### *Constitutional Objections Treatment:*

President Obama has directed the EPA to begin regulating carbon dioxide from coal power plants to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, combat climate change, and improve public health.

Many members of Congress from both parties, however, oppose the President's decision. They argue that President Obama's actions have overstepped his constitutional authority and that a major change in energy policy requires new legislation from Congress.

#### *Policy Criticism Treatment:*

President Obama has directed the EPA to begin regulating carbon dioxide from coal power plants to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, combat climate change, and improve public health.

Many members of Congress from both parties, however, oppose the President's decision. They argue that Obama's actions will increase energy prices and cost jobs.

#### *Question:*

Do you approve or disapprove of President Obama taking unilateral action to reduce carbon dioxide emissions?

Strongly support  
Somewhat support  
Somewhat oppose  
Strongly oppose



## **Two Presidencies Experiments: Unilateral Strikes Against ISIS**

Subjects were randomly assigned to one of two experimental groups.

### *Control:*

As you may know, President Barack Obama has unilaterally launched a series of airstrikes against ISIS militants in Iraq and Syria.

### *Constitutional Objections Treatment:*

As you may know, President Barack Obama has unilaterally launched a series of airstrikes against ISIS militants in Iraq and Syria.

Many members of Congress from both parties, however, oppose the President's decision. They argue that President Obama has overstepped his constitutional authority and that military action requires authorization from Congress.

### *Question:*

Do you support or oppose President Obama's decision to unilaterally launch airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria?

Strongly support  
Somewhat support  
Somewhat oppose  
Strongly oppose

## **Two Presidencies Experiments: Student Loans**

Subjects were randomly assigned to one of two experimental groups.

### *Control:*

President Barack Obama has issued an executive order to unilaterally cap student loan payments at 10% of a borrower's income, and forgive any remaining debt after 20 years.

### *Constitutional Objections Treatment:*

President Barack Obama has issued an executive order to unilaterally cap student loan payments at 10% of a borrower's income, and forgive any remaining debt after 20 years.

Many members of Congress from both parties, however, oppose the President's decision. They argue that President Obama's actions have overstepped his constitutional authority, and that a major change in student loan policies requires new legislation from Congress.

### *Question:*

Do you support or oppose President Obama's decision to unilaterally lower student loan payments?

- Strongly support
- Somewhat support
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

## **Source Effects Experiment: Unilateral Strikes Against ISIS**

Subjects were randomly assigned to one of five experimental groups.

### *Control:*

As you may know, President Barack Obama has unilaterally launched a series of airstrikes against ISIS militants in Iraq and Syria.

Do you support or oppose President Obama's decision to unilaterally launch airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria?

### *Congress Treatment:*

As you may know, President Barack Obama has unilaterally launched a series of airstrikes against ISIS militants in Iraq and Syria.

Many members of Congress from both parties, however, oppose the President's decision. They argue that President Obama has overstepped his constitutional authority.

President Obama rejects this criticism and maintains that his actions are consistent with his constitutional authority as commander in chief.

### *Law Professors Treatment:*

As you may know, President Barack Obama has unilaterally launched a series of airstrikes against ISIS militants in Iraq and Syria.

Many law professors at the nation's top universities, however, oppose the President's decision. They argue that President Obama has overstepped his constitutional authority.

President Obama rejects this criticism and maintains that his actions are consistent with his constitutional authority as commander in chief.

### *Media Treatment:*

As you may know, President Barack Obama has unilaterally launched a series of airstrikes against ISIS militants in Iraq and Syria.

Many newspaper editorial boards, talk radio hosts, and cable news pundits, however, oppose the President's decision. They argue that President Obama has overstepped his constitutional authority.

President Obama rejects this criticism and maintains that his actions are consistent with his constitutional authority as commander in chief.

*Congress Expanded Treatment:*

As you may know, President Barack Obama has unilaterally launched a series of airstrikes against ISIS militants in Iraq and Syria.

Many members of Congress from both parties, however, oppose the President's decision. They argue that President Obama has overstepped his constitutional authority and that military action requires authorization from Congress.

President Obama rejects this criticism and maintains that his actions are consistent with his constitutional authority as commander in chief.

*Question:*

Do you support or oppose President Obama's decision to unilaterally launch airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria?

Strongly support  
Somewhat support  
Somewhat oppose  
Strongly oppose

## **Partisan Opposition Experiment: Clean Power Plan**

Subjects were randomly assigned to one of three experimental groups.

### *Control:*

President Obama has directed the EPA to begin regulating carbon dioxide from coal power plants to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, combat climate change, and improve public health.

### *Republican Challenge Treatment:*

President Obama has directed the EPA to begin regulating carbon dioxide from coal power plants to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, combat climate change, and improve public health.

Some congressional Republicans, however, oppose the President's decision. They argue that President Obama's actions have overstepped his constitutional authority and that a major change in energy policy requires new legislation from Congress. Moreover, these Republican members of Congress argue that Obama's actions will increase energy prices and cost jobs.

### *Democratic Challenge Treatment:*

President Obama has directed the EPA to begin regulating carbon dioxide from coal power plants to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, combat climate change, and improve public health.

Some congressional Democrats, however, oppose the President's decision. They argue that President Obama's actions have overstepped his constitutional authority and that a major change in energy policy requires new legislation from Congress. Moreover, these Democratic members of Congress argue that Obama's actions will increase energy prices and cost jobs.

### *Question:*

Do you support or oppose President Obama taking unilateral action to reduce carbon dioxide emissions?

- Strongly support
- Somewhat support
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose