

# Political Capital in the 21st Century: An Electoral Theory of Going Public and Private

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## Abstract

The Bush and Obama administrations have complemented their capacity to make public appeals by creating grassroots lobbying organizations with the explicit purpose of mobilizing supporters to pressure Congress to pass presidential policy priorities. This paper advances the study of organizations like Organizing for Action by considering their ability to make targeted appeals to the primary electorate of the president's party as well as orchestrate indirect mass persuasion campaigns. Furthermore, this paper defines the costs of lobbying in terms of those tactics' electoral costs. I present a model which predicts that targeted appeals will be more common under unified government and that mass persuasion attempts will be less common as the organizational capital of these organizations can be efficiently applied to electoral ends. The model also predicts that public appeals become less common as the time costs and relative electoral productivity of presidential time increase. I find empirical support for these hypotheses in data obtained from emails sent by Organizing for America/Organizing for Action to subscribers since its creation in early 2009 and in presidential primetime addresses made since 1957.

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# Introduction

## Cillizza Quote

“[OFA] may make [Obama] the most powerful president of modern times. Never before has a president been directly connected to that many Americans.” -Former Howard Dean Campaign Manager Joe Trippi in December 2008 (Salant, 2008)

“It’s clear that Obama recognizes the power that his email list, which boasts more than 13 million names, represents in American politics.” -*Washington Post* columnist Chris Cillizza in January 2009 (Cillizza, 2009)

On June 14th, 2013, Organizing for Action mobilized more than a thousand people to attend nearly 80 public events around the country to commemorate the six-month anniversary of the Newtown shooting incident, which occurred in December 2012 (Sink, 2013). These efforts to build public support for stronger gun control legislation comprised only some of the organization’s efforts to enact a package of stricter gun control measures, which also included collecting 1.4 million signatures for a pro-gun control petition with the intent of pressuring Congress (Aigner-Treworgy, 2013). Furthermore, throughout 2013, Organizing for Action emails requested individuals to talk to their neighbors about gun violence and encourage them to put pressure on Congress to act on the president’s proposals. Despite these efforts to indirectly persuade the public and appeal to Democratic voters through OFA’s massive email list, no gun control measure passed (according to OFA leaders, as a result of lobbying by the NRA and allies)<sup>1</sup>.

Organizing for Action, and its predecessor, Organizing for America, are grassroots lobbying organizations created to help President Obama achieve policy success in Congress.

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<sup>1</sup>Organizing for Action has been criticized for falling short of the high hopes that political observers once held for it (Bump, 2014). The competitive environment may result in opposition success even if the tactics OFA offers to the president improve his utility (Pluta and Woolley, 2014), but this is a subject for another paper.

Both presidential grassroots lobbying organizations (PGLOs) were created from President Obama's 2012 and 2008 election campaign organizations, respectively, drawing on the email lists, websites, neighborhood team leaders, field offices, and even some paid staff from the earlier campaign (Melber, 2010; Blumenthal, 2013). The group, in both manifestations, does a number of very interesting and apparently novel things to mobilize its members to lead opinion in the general electorate on behalf of the president, and to selectively expose Democrats and their close ties to policy appeals from the President, using resources that are leftover from the prior campaign and used for subsequent federal elections. Since its creation in 2009, OFA has campaigned in support of the 2009 stimulus package, the Affordable Care Act, the nominations of Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan, financial services reform, cap-and-trade legislation, the president's 2011 jobs bill, gun control, and comprehensive immigration reform, among other issues. These campaigns were executed in a wide variety of ways, with organized rallies, persuasion of neighbors, petition drives, issue-linked community service, and most importantly, contacting of legislators. It is also very important to note that in 2010 and 2014, OFA was almost exclusively oriented toward supporting Democratic candidates in the federal election over policy issues, and in 2011, OFA was nominally dismantled and rebranded as the Obama-Biden 2012 campaign organization.

Despite the apparent novelty of OFA's tactics, goals, and scope in the minds of political operatives and columnists like Joe Trippi and Chris Cillizza, these tactics are not revolutionary. From 2001 until 2005, President George W. Bush maintained his own PGLO, called GOP Team Leader, which used the Bush-Cheney 2000 and 2004 email lists to organize Republican activists on behalf of presidential priorities (Edwards, 2007). This organization, though less technologically sophisticated than OFA, organized campaign style events on behalf of Social Security reform, and incentivized political action (including letters to the editor and voter registration) by members with a points system (which OFA also did early in its existence). The organization distributed fact sheets and messages from President Bush to members on

issues selected by the president, and engaged in some rudimentary (and panned) efforts to organize members to persuade the public (Roddy, 2003). While President Clinton did not have a formal PGLO, the capacity of the president to make targeted appeals to his own party's primary electorate/selectorate has existed in some form for most of American history, including the availability of direct mail from the late 1970s onward, the Office of Public Liason's work with interest group allies from the 1960s, and presidential control of partisan newspapers during the 19th century (Godwin, 1988; Peterson, 1992; Skocpol, 1997; Hult and Walcott, 2004; Mieczkowski, 2005; Edwards, 2007, 2009; Merry, 2009; Eshbaugh-Soha, 2011). The rise of candidate-centered politics and the decline of local party organizations has also obscured the capacity of party leaders to mobilize supporters to persuade the public, and while for most of the 20th century these indirect mass persuasion attempts were too costly to be practical to the president, technology may be allowing modern presidents in their role as party leader to revert back to an older norm (Wattenberg, 1984; Howe, 2007; Merry, 2009; Wood, 2009; Morris, 2010).

If we take the leaders of OFA at their word that their efforts matter, we find that presidents and party leaders have utilized different methods throughout the history of the United States to pursue the goals of making targeted appeals to their own party primary electorate or selectorates and using supporters to act as surrogates in opinion leadership, often by diverting organizational capital from campaigns to do so. This paper examines how our theories of tactic selection in the public presidency may be enriched by consideration of these avenues of influence. Furthermore, this paper will investigate the degree to which President Obama, equipped with a sophisticated PGLO, behaves as if these avenues of influence are effective, and the degree to which recent presidents have varied their use public appeals based on the electoral costs of that tactic. I find that targeted appeals occur most frequently under unified government, when such appeals are plausible tools of influence on Congress. I also find support for the claim that indirect mass persuasion attempts decrease

in frequency as federal elections grow near (and thus the electoral productivity of OFA's organizational capital increase), and increased in President Obama's second term, when his utility from winning future elections would presumably be lower. Finally, results suggest that public appeals occur less often when elections are near and also when Internet use is greater, which raises the amount of time presidents must spend making those appeals. Across the three tactics examined, circumstances which decrease the electoral resource cost of these tactics are associated with increases in presidents' use of those tactics.

The strong expectations of observers regarding OFA's ability to influence Congress and policy outcomes on behalf of the president, as well as the significant efforts made by recent presidents in developing PGLOs, make it a useful case for identifying previously unconsidered tools available to presidents as well as the costs of using those tools. When the activities of OFA and GOP Team Leader are considered in light of the existing literature on the public presidency, a number of intriguing pathways for inquiry are revealed. I will do this in the next section.

## Literature Review

The modern study of the public presidency is well represented by two major works published since the mid 1980s: George C. Edwards' *On Deaf Ears* and Samuel Kernell's *Going Public*. These books asked and made great strides to answer two key questions in the area: can presidents achieve policy success by altering the policy positions held by the electorate, and can they achieve policy success by altering the salience of issues on the agenda? With respect to the former, Edwards argued that the president was largely unable to broadly persuade the public to adopt his position on major issues (Edwards III, 2006) On the latter, Kernell argued that presidents are able to gain substantial policy gains when they are popular through the threat or activation of their ability to go over the heads of legislators and directly ask voters to

pressure their elected officials to support the president's position (Kernell, 2007). According to a three-part framework for theories of the public presidency articulated by Cameron, these questions seek to understand the mechanisms of message reach and opinion change through *opinion leadership* or *salience manipulation*, respectively (Cameron and Park, 2011).

Recent work by Matthew Beckmann on presidential lobbying examined Cameron's third component of public presidency theories, the influence of an activated public on legislation (Beckmann, 2008; Cameron and Park, 2011). Beckmann separated the many lobbying tactics available to the president into lobbying activities that seek to win votes for a policy on the floor of Congress and lobbying activities that target congressional leadership in order to ensure that the president's policy is on the agenda (Beckmann, 2008). This distinction between *vote-centered lobbying* and *agenda-centered lobbying* is a very useful one, as it allows scholars to distinguish between efforts by presidents to win over individuals who are pivotal in setting the agenda and efforts to win over individuals who are pivotal in floor votes once they are scheduled.

PGLOs like GOP Team Leader, Organizing for America and Organizing for Action have taken a number of steps to activate the public to put pressure on congressional agenda-setters. Since early 2011, when Republicans gained control of the House of Representatives and Representative John Boehner became Speaker, OFA leaders sent a number of messages to its members asking them to sign petitions in support of gun control and climate change legislation which would be given to Speaker Boehner (Klingler, 2014). However, there has never been a sustained or even repeated effort to put pressure on Senate Majority Leader Reid, Senate Minority Leader McConnell, or Representative Nancy Pelosi when she was Speaker of the House or House Minority Leader after 2011 (Klingler, 2014). There are a number of reasons why OFA may have dedicated relatively little effort to targeting congressional leadership. In any event, the activities of OFA are overwhelmingly dedicated to tactics that would be classified as vote-centered lobbying. Thus, I will focus on how presidents use

PGLOs to engage in opinion leadership and salience manipulation in pursuit of vote-centered lobbying.

## **Framework for Presidential Decision-Making**

One of the most influential contributions to the literature on vote-centered lobbying, specifically in the area of salience manipulation, has been Brandice Canes-Wrone's work on public appeals (Canes-Wrone, 2001*b,a*, 2006). Canes-Wrone extends the Romer-Rosenthal model of legislative bargaining to allow the president to make a public appeal (Romer and Rosenthal, 1978). The president's public appeal raises the salience of the issue under consideration in the opinion of the general electorate. This in turn is assumed to induce a unitary legislature to be more responsive to the views of the public on the issue under consideration. Accordingly, when the president makes a public appeal in the Canes-Wrone model, the action leads the legislature to adopt the ideal point of general electorate. In many cases, this allows the president to earn substantial policy gains from public appeals, as well as from the threat of public appeals in a two-stage game (Canes-Wrone, 2001*a*).

Substantial empirical support was also found for many of the implications of this theoretical model and other similar approaches, suggesting that public appeals are effective in helping presidents achieve their policy ends in practice (Canes-Wrone, 2001*b*; Barrett, 2004; Canes-Wrone, 2006; Barrett and Eshbaugh-Soha, 2007; Holmes, 2007, 2008). However, due to changes in the media environment, primetime speeches are becoming less effective in reaching the public (Baum and Kernell, 1999; Cummins, 2010). As a result, in order to successfully engage in public appeals, major primetime addresses to the public are now only a part of the public appeals process, and presidents must extend their public appeals to local and specialized media outlets, which requires substantial and increasing allocations of presidential time (Cohen, 2010). Given that presidential time is limited, the time spent appearing in some local media putting pressure on some legislators can't be spent in other



local media campaigning for others.

The Canes-Wrone model offers a clear framework with which to consider other vote-centered tactics that might be available to the president, both in terms of the circumstances under which each may be valuable, and what tradeoffs exist when the president must weigh one tactic against another. There are a number of concepts that stand out about PGLOs that merit consideration using this theoretical framework. The leaders of presidential grassroots lobbying organizations have been criticized for using their organizations to put pressure on wayward legislators of their own party, which is sensible considering these organizations are structured so they are best situated to reach their own party's supporters and activists, voters whose opinion is valued by the president's copartisans in Congress but not the opposition (Jaffe, 2013). In addition, the leaders of these organizations frequently and consistently assert that PGLOs are capable of leading public opinion through large, campaign-style efforts to persuade the public (Plouffe, 2009; Bump, 2014). Finally, PGLOs' emergence from, and later re-integration into, campaign organizations suggests that the process of engaging in grassroots lobbying efforts is linked to presidential utility from future elections (Cillizza, 2009). The recent behavior of these organizations, as well as the increasing time costs of public appeals suggests that presidents believe they are able to engage in vote-centered tactics of a hitherto unexamined nature. These tactics may manipulate the salience of the president's party's primary electorate and may use these organizations to indirectly lead public opinion, but these efforts potentially come at a cost realized during future election campaigns.

## **Targeted Partisan Appeals**

The vote-centered lobbying tactics used by OFA are forms of grassroots lobbying tactics. Grassroots lobbying tactics are executed when organizations mobilize their members and/or the public to send costly signals to Congress in a manner that simulates an election (Kollman,

1998). By mobilizing large numbers of voters to send costly signals to legislators, interest groups are able to send a signal to legislators about the potential electoral costs/benefits of voting a certain way on a bill. OFA is significantly different from a typical interest group as the individual responsible for mobilizing members is the President of the United States, who has a unique ability as the leader of the governing party to define the nature of identification with his party as well as the public agenda (Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake, 2004). PGLOs consist of dedicated activists and local opinion leaders in the presidents' party, and because of this, presidents may use these organizations to manipulate the salience of particular issues only among his own party's primary electorate<sup>2</sup>. This is done when presidents send issue-based messages through email, which raise the salience of that issue among recipients (as with public appeals) and request the recipient to contact Congress in support of the President's position on the matter<sup>3</sup>. It is well established that greater levels of participation in the electorate induces legislative responsiveness, in line with this mechanism (Martin and Claibourn, 2013).

## Mass Persuasion Attempts

While OFA's targeted appeals activities seek to manipulate issue salience in the president's primary electorate, OFA's opinion leadership activities indirectly persuade the general electorate to move toward the President's position through group members. These efforts also use the grassroots lobbying mechanism, but it is slightly more complex (Kollman, 1998). OFA

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<sup>2</sup>OFA's membership is almost synonymous with the group of Democratic party primary voters and activists, so when these individuals directly contact Democratic legislators, this influences legislators through the primary rather than the general election. Furthermore, these individuals are highly unlikely to vote for Republican members under any circumstances, so direct contacting by OFA members would need to have an extremely high cost to signal meaningful information about a Republican legislator's chances in the general election.

<sup>3</sup>OFA has 13 million list members, which is equivalent to the number of individuals who voted in Democratic primary elections in 2014 (O'Callaghan, 2014). OFA routinely asks (and trains) its activist members to pass on information to friends and family, so it is likely that the vast majority of Democratic voters are directly reachable by OFA or indirectly through its members (Kingdon, 1970)

uses emails to organize members with staff support to contact unaffiliated citizens (Klingler, 2014). The members use their credibility as neighbors to persuade these citizens to adopt the presidential position on an issue and encourage the new converts to contact Congress in some manner (Melber, 2010). It is plausible that neighbors viewed to be less self-interested and ideological may be more persuasive than the president and this indirect grassroots use of local activists is a potentially viable option for presidential opinion leadership (Kingdon, 1970). If these shifts occur, we have reason to believe legislators will respond to them (Kousser and Masket, 2007). We generally have little support for the claim that presidents may directly and broadly lead public opinion (Page, Shapiro and Dempsey, 1987; Edwards III, 2006; Edwards, 2007, 2009; Edwards III, 2012), though temporary, issue specific, non-presidential, and limited opinion leadership effects have been found (Wood, 2007; Bartels and Mutz, 2009; Rottinghaus, 2009; Cohen, 2010; Tedin and Rodgers, 2011). The limited scope of presidential opinion leadership effects found thus far suggest this technique of grassroots mass persuasion (called Neighbor-to-Neighbor by OFA) is potentially very important if effective (Melber, 2010)<sup>4</sup>.

## **Electoral Costs of Lobbying**

When Organizing for America was created, its leaders claimed that its purpose was to help advance President Obama's agenda through Congress using the impressive organization used to elect the president in 2008 (Plouffe, 2009; Melber, 2010). The same claim was made by leaders of Organizing for Action when the group was founded in early 2013 (Blumenthal, 2013). Multiple observers suggested that the substantial organizational capital accumulated in the Obama election operation could have a big impact in the legislative arena (Cillizza, 2009; Gold, 2013). In the opinions of OFA leaders and a number of expert observers, orga-

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<sup>4</sup>Interestingly, there is some evidence to suggest that aware individuals who are most susceptible to the influence of appeals on salience may be least open to persuasion, and that political messages may be most effective in persuading low information individuals (Valentino, Hutchings and Williams, 2004).

nizational capital which was useful in the production of electoral success could be diverted into legislative success.

There are many reasons to believe the reverse is true is well, and that organizational capital used by PGLOs could later be diverted to electoral ends. Interestingly, Organizing for America was disbanded in 2011 and relaunched as the Obama-Biden 2012 re-election campaign organization (Thomas, 2011). Furthermore, within one year of President George W. Bush's re-election, as Republican fortunes began to wane, GOP Team Leader was disbanded. Organizing for America placed full time state coordinators in swing states first, and most of these coordinators eventually ended up becoming state level field directors for the Obama-Biden re-election effort (Appleman, 2013; Hass, 2011). Additionally, in both 2010 and 2014, both incarnations of OFA placed a great amount of focus on mobilizing Democrats for the midterm elections.

After years of intense grassroots lobbying activity by Organizing for America exhausted many activists, the organization and the 2012 re-election campaign organization were described as being smaller and less passionate (at least among some segments of the base), but the remainder were determined and well trained (Melber, 2010; Trish, 2009; Davey and Wines, 2012). PGLOs with high amounts of organizational capital are also free to engage in efforts to shape the battlefield and manipulate the salience of issues in advance of an election, much like the process articulated in Meguid's 2005 work on niche parties. Thus, there is some reason to believe that the high tempo of OFA's grassroots lobbying activities in the first term cost organizational capital that was absent from the 2012 re-election campaign <sup>5</sup>. Even if lobbying activity does not decrease the overall stock of organizational capital, while it is being used for lobbying, it cannot be applied to electoral ends. As lobbying activity appears to push away activists and certainly diverts resources, presidential

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<sup>5</sup>There is a strong possibility that PGLOs are created to *increase* the organizational capital available to the campaign through "off-season" training and practice, and this will be revisited in future work (Trish, 2009; Melber, 2010).

lobbying reduces the ability of PGLOs to engage in pre-election battlefield shaping activities and the amount of organizational capital that can be used toward the next campaign, and thus has an electoral cost. We also have reason to believe that the application of presidential time to congressional and presidential election campaigns are of use to the president's party (Shaw, 1999; Herrnson and Morris, 2007). The effect of other forms of political advertising seems to increase with proximity to Election Day, so it is reasonable to think the effect of campaign appearances decays as well (Gerber et al., 2011). Thus, presidential time spent making public appeals should also carry an electoral cost which increases with proximity to election day and with the time costs of making a successful public appeal.

There is thus a great opportunity to consider targeted partisan appeals and mass persuasion attempts within the Canes-Wrone theoretical construct. Cameron lays out a clear framework for the components which must make up a theory of public presidential leadership (Cameron and Park, 2011). I make few, if any notable contributions to our theories of how public opinion plays a role in legislating. Instead, I make three arguments. First, PGLOs provide presidents with an avenue to selectively expose voters in the president's primary electorate to messages. Second, PGLOs may provide presidents with an avenue to expose general electorate voters to presidential messages and persuade those voters to favor the president's policies. Third, the use of presidential time and organizational capital for message exposure and opinion formation techniques carry an electoral cost for the president and his party. I articulate this model in the next section <sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup>While there is evidence against this assumption, I assume that there is an uncontested media environment, as this lies beyond the scope of this project (Pluta and Woolley, 2014). I also do not explore the role that these tactics may play in leading Congress to anticipate presidential action in a two-stage game, as put forth in the original Canes-Wrone theory in order to focus on the menu of presidential tactics and their electoral costs (Canes-Wrone, 2001*a*).

# An Electoral Theory of Going Public and Private

The mechanism by which presidents choose a tactic to influence Congress through grassroots lobbying organizations will be illustrated through a single-stage model of lawmaking<sup>7</sup>. I build on the work of Romer and Rosenthal 1978 and an extension by Canes-Wrone in her 2001 paper (Canes-Wrone, 2001*a*). In this prior work, the legislature either ignores the general electorate or they are perfectly responsive when the president decides to make a public appeal. The theory in this paper adds to the single-stage subgame of the Canes-Wrone framework with an extension which allows the president to also take actions which lead the pivotal legislator to be perfectly responsive to the median voter in the primary election of the president's party, or to vote in accordance with the presidential ideal point as a result of indirect mass persuasion<sup>8</sup>

I assume in this case that there is a left of center president, and that his ideal point  $x_j$  is to the left of the general election median voter  $x_v$ . Thus, I assume  $x_j < x_v$ .<sup>9</sup> Extant models by Romer and Rosenthal as well as Canes-Wrone have treated the legislature as a unitary actor, and when Canes-Wrone added a voter to the game, the voter is referred to as “the legislature's median voter,” which is presumably the median voter in a national electorate (Canes-Wrone, 2006). The assumption that the legislature as a whole will be responsive to the median voter in the national electorate is a strong one for a variety of reasons. Instead of thinking of the legislature as a unitary actor, I treat the personal ideal point of the legislature,  $x_l$ , as the personal ideal point of the legislature's median voter<sup>10</sup> and that the ideal point of the voter,  $x_v$ , is the ideal point of the median voter in the general electorate of the median

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<sup>7</sup>In the future, the author hopes to extend this model to two stages and allow a donor to endow the president with a grassroots lobbying capacity after re-election and observing his behavior in the first stage.

<sup>8</sup>For the sake of simplicity, I make the reasonable assumption that no actors will have equal ideal points.

<sup>9</sup>The findings here should also be generalizable to the case of a conservative president with a more liberal general electorate.

<sup>10</sup>I assume that there are two parties, and each party's members lie entirely on one side of  $x_v$ , so by extension I assume no overlap between parties.

legislator.

I begin by assuming that legislators seek to pass a policy as close as possible to  $x_f$ , their induced ideal point, which is dependent on the lobbying action of the president. This induced ideal point may be the median legislator's personal ideal point,  $x_l$ , the ideal point of their general electorate median,  $x_v$ , the ideal point of their primary electorate median,  $x_a$ , or the ideal point of the president,  $x_j$ , if the president chooses to do nothing, make a public appeal, make a targeted appeal to the primary electorate of the median legislator, or use his PGLO to indirectly engage in mass persuasion, respectively. I assume that it is possible, though extremely costly, for the president to influence the median legislator when he is in the other party by making targeted appeals to the president's co-partisans.

I make the strong assumption that the ordering of legislative ideal points from left to right is identical to the ordering of general electorate median ideal points.<sup>11</sup> I also make the strong assumption that the president will lobby on a national basis, not tailoring his strategy for particular districts.<sup>12</sup> Thus, when the induced ideal point is equal to  $x_v$  or  $x_a$ , the ordering of  $x_f$  will be stable, and under any action there is a set median legislator whose preferred policy will be the policy passed by the legislature.

The president, as suggested by Melber and Canes-Wrone, has tools at his disposal to mobilize the public to pressure legislators on bills of his choosing (Canes-Wrone, 2001*b,a*; Kernell, 2007; Beckmann, 2008; Melber, 2010). When the public is mobilized to put pressure on legislators, legislators adapt by increasing their responsiveness toward the mobilized group and this defines their induced ideal point<sup>13</sup>. If I begin with the assumptions made by Canes-Wrone that the president has the ability to use his appeals to set the legislature's induced

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<sup>11</sup>I also assume the ordering of presidential party primary electorate ideal points follows the same pattern.

<sup>12</sup>The effect of tailored appeals is a phenomenon well worth investigating (Beckmann, 2008; Cohen, 2010), but beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>13</sup>I acknowledge that the president may use these tools selectively and incrementally to increase legislators' relative salience of the general electorate, primary electorate or the legislators' personal preferences. I hope to explore this in future work, but for the purposes of this project, I retain the assumption that this process is an all-or-nothing matter.

ideal point perfectly equal to either the personal preferences of the legislature or the general electorate median voter, theoretically, limiting the application of these appeals to the primary electorate median voter should allow the president to force the legislature to adopt an induced ideal point at  $x_a$ . Leaders of OFA have also publicly stated that they believe they can use OFA's Neighbor-to-Neighbor program to unleash supporters to engage in mass persuasion of the public (Plouffe, 2009; Melber, 2010). Accordingly, this paper takes this claim seriously for theoretical purposes, and allows for the president to use mass persuasion to move the median voter in the general electorate to his own preferred policy and in the process lead the median legislator to be perfectly responsive to this persuaded voter.

I assume that the median primary voter,  $x_a$ , lies to the left of  $x_j$  and  $x_l$ . This modeling approach recognizes that elected officials are responsible not only to their general electorate, but also to their primary electorate, as argued by Fenno (1978) among others. I assume that the president has a unique ability to raise the salience of issues among his party's primary voters, and use this with varying costs to lead the median legislator to be perfectly responsive to the median primary voter of the president's party in his district. When the government is unified, this voter will be the median voter in the median legislator's primary electorate. When the government is divided, this voter will not only lie outside of the median legislator's primary constituency, but will almost always lie outside the median legislator's re-election constituency. Accordingly, under divided government, the costs of using the president's unique targeted appeal capacity to induce legislative responsiveness to his copartisans will be immensely higher than under unified government. In the course of this paper, for the sake of simplicity, I will refer to the median voter of the president's party's primary electorate in the district of the median legislator as the median primary voter, even though this voter is not pivotal in the median legislator's primary election when government is divided.



The utility function of the median legislator is as follows:

$$U_l = -(x_p - x_f)^2$$

$x_p$  represents the ideal point of the resulting policy (either  $x_q$  or  $x_b$ ). This induced ideal point,  $x_f$ , adopts a different value as a result of different presidential actions, listed in Table 1.<sup>14</sup>

The link between lobbying techniques and electoral consequences is provided in the form of two resources which vary in their ability to produce votes for the president in federal elections. Organizational capital,  $I$ , and presidential time,  $T$ , are expended when lobbying tactics are used, and one unit of presidential time is as electorally productive at any given time as  $r$  units of organizational capital. Public appeals are assumed to be made at the cost of presidential time, as presidents conduct interviews with fractionalized media. Targeted appeals and mass persuasion result in a loss of organizational capital as volunteers divert their attention from electoral purposes to policy-related activities, burn out from lobbying, and financial assets are expended in support of OFA-style grassroots lobbying campaigns.

The president's utility function when he takes no lobbying action is assumed to be  $U_p = -(x_p - x_j)^2 + \pi$ , where  $x_p$  is the ideal point of enacted policy, and  $\pi$  is the electoral productivity of both  $I$  and  $T$ . I assume that any leftover presidential time or organizational capital (human capital in the form of volunteers or financial assets) from his grassroots lobbying organization can be applied to federal election campaigns (either for his own re-election, the election of his successor, or for his party's legislative candidates). In this one-stage game, I set the total amount of electoral resources available to the president,  $I + Tr$  to be equal to 1. If the president chooses to do nothing there is no expenditure of time, financial assets, or diversion/burnout of volunteer interest. However, if the president chooses to make a public

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<sup>14</sup>For tractability,  $x_l, x_j, x_v, x_a, x_q, x_b > 0$ .

Table 1: Presidential Utilities and Induced Ideal Points

Presidential Action	Resulting Legislative Preference	Presidential Utility
Nothing	$x_l$	$U_p = -(x_p - x_j)^2 + \pi$
Public Appeal	$x_v$	$U_p = -(x_p - x_j)^2 + \pi \frac{I+sTr}{I+Tr}$
Targeted Appeal	$x_a$	$U_p = -(x_p - x_j)^2 + \pi \frac{pI+Tr}{I+Tr}$
Mass Persuasion	$x_p$	$U_p = -(x_p - x_j)^2 + \pi \frac{cI+Tr}{I+Tr}$

appeal, a targeted appeal, or engage his PGLO in mass persuasion, his time that can be allocated to electoral purposes is discounted by  $s$ , and his capital available for the next presidential campaign is discounted by  $p$  or  $c$ , respectively. For this purposes of this project, I assume that  $s, p, c \in [0, 1]$ <sup>15</sup>.

I now have all the components necessary to outline the path of play. In the first step, the president determines which of the four strategies he will choose, *Nothing*, *Public Appeal*, *Targeted Appeal*, or *Mass Persuasion*. This determines the median legislator's induced ideal point,  $x_f$ . In the second step, the legislature selects and passes a bill,  $x_b$ , or fails to pass a bill. Finally, in the third step, if the legislature passes a bill, the president chooses to sign or veto the bill. If the president signs the bill, it is enacted into law and  $x_p = x_b$ . If the president vetoes the bill or the legislature fails to pass a bill,  $x_p = x_q$ . Assume that the president will sign any bill equal to the status quo policy and that legislators will propose bills only if it makes them strictly better off. I use subgame perfect Nash equilibrium as the solution concept.

In the course of describing the structure of the game, it was assumed that  $x_j < x_v$ . Also, if  $x_l < x_v$ , then  $x_a < x_j, x_l < x_v$ , and if  $x_v < x_l$ , then  $x_a < x_j < x_v < x_l$ . This yields three cases for the ideological positions of the president, the median legislator and both median voters (one with unified government and an extreme president, one with unified

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<sup>15</sup>As referenced earlier, it is quite possible that engaging a PGLO in targeted appeals or mass persuasion may increase human capital or volunteer retention through training and positive experiences, and increase financial assets available for the future by providing fundraising opportunities. In future work I plan to relax this assumption and allow  $p$  and/or  $c$  to be larger than 1.

government and a moderate president, and one if there is divided government). If I do not make any particular assumptions about the location of the status quo, this means there are fifteen interesting subcases to examine. For each subcase, I will identify the strategy of the president which yields the optimal outcome, and if applicable the conditions under which the particular strategy is optimal. From this, I will derive a number of propositions regarding optimal presidential lobbying strategies given the assumptions made.

I also assume that  $p$  approaches zero under divided government, and that under unified government  $p > c$ . Detailed terms for the conditions under which each strategy is optimal under each case may be found in Appendix 3.

## Case I: Moderate President and Unified Government

First, consider the case in which the president lies between the median legislator (in his own party) and that legislator's general election median, or  $x_a < x_l < x_j < x_v$ .

When the status quo is to the right of the president's ideal point, the strategy *Nothing* maximizes his utility. So, when there is a moderate president and unified government, we should expect public appeals to be uncommon when the status quo is generally further to the right (as we may expect when a new Administration takes office following years of legislation influenced by a president on the opposite side of the political spectrum).

When the status quo is to the left of the legislator's ideal point and there is little ideological difference between the president and the median legislator, his utility is maximized with the strategy *Nothing*. *Nothing* also maximizes the president's utility when the status quo lies between the legislator's ideal point and that of the president and the president's ideal point is near the status quo. However, if the cost of successful mass persuasion is low, through low diversion of organizational capital, high relative productivity of time, or organizational capital forms a relatively small proportion of the president's available resources, *Mass Persuasion* is optimal. In circumstances in which organizational capital is relatively

more productive, organizational capital comprises most of the president's electoral resources, or the time cost of a public appeal is low, *Public Appeal* would be optimal.

## Case II: Extreme President and Unified Government

Now I turn my attention to the case in which the median legislator has an ideal point to the right of the president's ideal point and to the left of his general election median, which has the ordering  $x_a < x_j < x_l < x_v$ .

If the president is extreme under unified government, and the status quo policy lies to the left of the president's ideal point, the costless strategy of *Nothing* is weakly preferred. In this case of an extreme president under unified government and when the status quo lies to the right of both the president and the median legislator, the strategy *Targeted Appeal* is preferred when the distance between the president and the median legislator is large in comparison with the productivity of electoral resources and the electoral cost of making a targeted appeal. The electoral cost of making a targeted appeal is small when the diversion of organization capital needed to make a successful targeted appeal is small, time is relatively productive compared to capital, or organizational capital forms a relatively small proportion of the president's resources. In other words, if the potential policy gains compared to doing nothing are big enough to be worth the lost election utility, it makes sense for the president to work to make the median legislator more responsive to his primary electorate<sup>16</sup>. In Case II, if the status quo lies between the president and the median legislator, the strategy *Targeted Appeal* is preferred when the distance between the president and the status quo is large in comparison with the relative value of electoral success to policy and the electoral cost of making a targeted appeal.

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<sup>16</sup>This presumes that mass persuasion is more costly to execute than targeted appeals.

### Case III: Divided Government

Finally, I discuss the case in which the median legislator's preference is to the right of his general election median's preference and by assumption there is divided government, taking the form  $x_a < x_j < x_v < x_l$ . In this case, the strategy *Targeted Appeal* must lead the median legislator to become responsive to the median voter of the President's (and opposing) party's primary electorate. As such, the cost of this strategy is substantially more expensive, if not infinitely more expensive under divided government than united government.

In the divided government case, under plausible circumstances three of the four strategies may be optimal. If the electoral cost<sup>17</sup> of making a mass persuasion attempt is lower than the cost of making a public appeal or a targeted partisan appeal, *Mass Persuasion* is optimal when the distance between the president and the status quo is relatively high, and *Nothing* is optimal otherwise. If, on the other hand, the electoral costs of *Public Appeal* are lower than that required for a successful mass persuasion attempt, *Public Appeal* is optimal when the general election median voter is relatively near to the president's ideal point. Interestingly, this suggests that public appeals are more likely to be optimal (and thus occur more frequently) when presidents are popular not because the popularity is a resource that can be spent, but because other lobbying alternatives are less cost-effective compared to public appeals in that case.

In this same cost ordering, if the general election median voter is distant from the president (and thus there are large gains to be made from mass persuasion) then *Mass Persuasion* is optimal. However, if the status quo is to the left of the president in this case (which would be somewhat unusual), or in other cases the status quo is sufficiently nearby the president, the president can obtain his best policy by choosing the strategy *Nothing*.

I assume that under divided government, the president's targeted appeal capacity to force

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<sup>17</sup>The electoral cost of a given strategy is determined by the diversion of its associated resource required by taking that strategy, the relative proportion of that resource as a share of the total resources available to the president, and the relative productivity of the associated resource.

the median legislator to be responsive to the president's copartisans carries an extraordinarily high cost due to the lack of incentives for the median legislator to be responsive to a group of voters who are not in his re-election or primary constituencies. As a result, we should expect  $c > p$  and that the strategy *Targeted Appeal* is never optimal in Case III.

Consideration of the optimal strategies of the president in the cases of interest discussed above, with the assumptions made, yields the following propositions:

**Proposition 1.** *Under unified government, when the President is relatively extreme with a status quo on the same side of him as the median general electorate voter, appealing to the primary electorate median is preferred only if one or more of five conditions holds:*

1. *The distance between the status quo or the median legislator (whichever is closest to the president) and the president is relatively large.*
2. *The electoral productivity of time and organizational capital is relatively small.*
3. *The organizational capital loss from successful primary lobbying is relatively small.*
4. *The relative productivity of organizational capital is low.*
5. *The share of organizational capital in the total amount of electoral resources is small.*

**Proposition 2.** *Mass persuasion is optimal if the status quo is on the same side of the president as the median general electorate voter, government is divided, and one or more of five conditions holds:*

1. *The distance between the status quo or the median legislator (whichever is closest to the president) and the president is relatively large.*
2. *The electoral productivity of time and organizational capital is relatively small.*
3. *The organizational capital loss from successful mass persuasion is relatively small.*

4. *The relative productivity of organizational capital is low.*

5. *The share of organizational capital in the total amount of electoral resources is small.*

**Proposition 3.** *Mass persuasion is optimal if the status quo is on the other side of the president as the median general electorate voter, government is unified, and one or more of five conditions holds:*

1. *The distance between the status quo or the median legislator (whichever is closest to the president) and the president is relatively large.*

2. *The electoral productivity of time and organizational capital is relatively small.*

3. *The organizational capital loss from successful mass persuasion is relatively small.*

4. *The relative productivity of organizational capital is low.*

5. *The share of organizational capital in the total amount of electoral resources is small.*

**Proposition 4.** *When the President is relatively moderate with an extreme status quo under unified government, appealing to the general election median is optimal when one or more of five conditions holds:*

1. *The distance between the status quo or the median legislator (whichever is closest to the president) and the president is relatively large.*

2. *The electoral productivity of time and organizational capital is relatively small.*

3. *The loss of presidential time from a successful public appeal is relatively small.*

4. *The relative productivity of presidential time is low.*

5. *The share of presidential time in the total amount of electoral resources is small.*

**Proposition 5.** *When the status quo is on the other side of the median general electorate voter from the president under unified government, and the distance between the president and the median general electorate voter is small, appealing to the general election median is optimal when one or more of four conditions holds:*

- 1. The distance between the status quo or the median legislator (whichever is closest to the president) and the president is relatively large.*
- 2. The loss of presidential time from a successful public appeal is relatively small.*
- 3. The relative productivity of presidential time is low.*
- 4. The share of presidential time in the total amount of electoral resources is small.*

## **Empirical Reflections**

### **Hypotheses**

The propositions laid forth in the previous section describe cases in which one of the four strategies available to the president is his optimal strategy. This paper focuses on the innovation of incorporating electoral costs of appeals, targeted partisan appeals and mass persuasion attempts into models of ‘going public’ and in line with this priority, I use the propositions to derive a number hypotheses regarding President Obama’s usage of OFA to engage in targeted partisan appeals and mass persuasion. I also use the propositions to generate hypotheses about how presidents over the past six decades have used their capacity to make public appeals.



## Targeted Appeals Hypotheses

By Proposition 1, targeted appeals are only optimal when the government is unified, and we should not expect to see the president utilize this tactic under divided government when other tactics dominate making a targeted appeal. This yields the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1.** *Targeted appeals will occur more frequently under unified government.*

Proposition 1 states that, conditional on unified government and the ideological position of the president, targeted appeals are optimal when the electoral productivity of all resources is sufficiently low. If we assume resources become more electorally productive as the election becomes closer, targeted appeals should occur less frequently as the election nears. As the available data exist only for one president and does not present substantial variation in the ideological positions of the institutional players involved, this yields the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2.** *Under conditions of unified government, targeted appeals will occur less frequently with proximity to the next federal election.*

## Mass Persuasion Hypotheses

Propositions 2 and 3 state that mass persuasion attempts are optimal in diverse institutional configurations when the electoral productivity of all resources is sufficiently low. As discussed for Hypothesis 2, as the next federal election approaches, the electoral productivity of both presidential time and organizational capital increases, and mass persuasion is less likely to be optimal for the president. This yields the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3.** *Mass persuasion attempts will occur less frequently with proximity to the next federal election.*

As stated in Propositions 2 and 3, mass persuasion attempts are optimal when the electoral productivity of presidential time and organizational capital is sufficiently low. After

the president faces the last election in which he is on the ballot, it is plausible to expect that he may derive less utility from future election wins. Thus, following his re-election, policy provides more utility to the president in relation to future election victories, and both forms of capital are less productive in generating electoral utility compared to policy utility. Thus, mass persuasion is more likely to be optimal for the president. This yields the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4.** *Mass persuasion attempts will occur more frequently following the president's re-election.*

### **Public Appeals Hypotheses**

Many data are available on public appeals, going back to the Eisenhower administration. The Electoral Theory of Going Public and Private has a number of interesting implications for the president's use of his public appeals capacity.

Propositions 4 and 5 claim that public appeals are optimal, given the right institutional conditions, when the loss of presidential time from a successful public appeal is small. As discussed in 2010, as the media environment has fractured, in order for presidents to reach the public, they must spend increasing amounts of time communicating through local television, cable and soft news programs, and off television. Accordingly, when citizens have access to and use more media, presidents must spend more time to make a public appeal, and public appeals are less likely to be the optimal strategy for the president. This generates the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 5.** *Public appeals will occur less frequently when the percentage of the American population with access to the Internet is greater.*

Proposition 4 states that public appeals are optimal under unified government with an moderate president if the relative productivity of presidential time is low compared to the

relative productivity of organizational capital. Proposition 5 also states that if the relative productivity of presidential time is low, public appeals are optimal under divided government. Presidential time is used in campaigns for making advertisement-style appearances which have a powerful but short term effect, and organizational capital can be used somewhat in advance of an election to lay the groundwork of a get-out-the-vote campaign (Shaw, 1999). I assume the relative productivity of presidential time begins quite low and gradually rises throughout the cycle until it peaks on the day before an election<sup>18</sup>. This generates the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 6.** *Public appeals will occur less frequently with proximity to the next federal election.*

## Data

### Testing Targeted Appeals and Mass Persuasion Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1-4, outlined above, will be tested using data gathered from emails sent by Organizing for America, Obama for America, and Organizing for Action between January 30, 2009, and August 7, 2014<sup>19</sup>. The Organizing for America email list was transferred to the Obama re-election organization in 2011 following his April 4 filing for re-election, and in January 2013, the list was transferred from the Obama campaign organization to the Organizing for Action nonprofit organization. From January 2009 until April 2011, a public blog on the Organizing for America website included every email sent by Organizing for

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<sup>18</sup>In the case of public appeals, the effect of the productivity of all election resources does not have a clear effect under divided government, while it does for mass persuasion. So long as the productivity increase of all electoral resources with time is larger than the relative productivity increase of presidential time compared with organizational capital, we should expect time until the election to have a positive relationship with the prevalence of mass persuasion attempts and public appeals.

<sup>19</sup>Access to emails was obtained by creating an account on [www.barackobama.com](http://www.barackobama.com), and providing the author's name, email address, and ZIP code. There were no terms of service for subscription to the OFA email list, and the website terms of service were followed in the course of this research. Data from the Organizing for America blog was obtained through the Internet Archive, a third party website.

America domain email addresses which was not tagged as being sent by local leaders, and these messages were noticeably written as forwarded letters rather than blog posts. During a period in which data could not be collected through email, these letter posts were taken from the blog and used to fill the gap in email coverage.

Targeted appeals are by design somewhat secretive, as their purpose is to raise the salience of a particular issue among a targeted group of people through an appeal which is visible by that group and not by others. Also, while successful mass persuasion campaigns should be visible by the public which is being persuaded, a particularly ineffective mass persuasion campaign may escape notice, though unlikely. Unlike primetime presidential addresses, which are easily measured public appeals, it is possible that not all targeted appeals and mass persuasion campaigns are visible and able to be picked up through emails. I presume that there does exist some proportion of targeted appeals and mass persuasion campaigns which are not captured in my email data. So long as the proportion of these tactics that utilize OFA email lists remains relatively constant over time, it is possible to infer that the frequency of using OFA emails to engage in both tactics is representative of the overall frequency with which the president utilizes these tactics.

Based on this assumption, President Obama's utilization of OFA in its three manifestations to engage in targeted appeals and attempts at mass persuasion is considered representative of the overall degree to which he was willing to use these two techniques from the beginning of his first term to nearly the present day. These data, collected and presented as 288 weekly observations from January 30, 2009 to August 7, 2014, will be used to test the first four hypotheses derived from the model presented above.

**Targeted Appeals and Mass Persuasion Attempts.** One hundred and eighty times during this five and a half year period, this email list was used to encourage subscribers to contact representatives on behalf of presidential priorities and engage in mass persuasion campaigns in their neighborhoods. In order to be considered as a targeted appeal or mass

persuasion attempt, the email had to have a clear prospective legislative policy goal, and a clear action encouraged to influence a target. Pledges to take unspecified actions in the future, petitions directed against special interests but not Congress, and messages concerning executive orders and passed legislation were not considered, for example. Emails which met this criterion which encouraged action to contact members of Congress alone (presumably with the goal of increasing legislative responsiveness to a group synonymous with Democratic primary voters) were coded as targeted appeals. Emails which met the aforementioned criterion and encouraged action to influence the public (not just close ties of the recipient) and encourage those individuals to pressure Congress were coded mass persuasion attempts.

**Unified Government.** I define the period of unified government as those weeks containing any day between January 30, 2009, the beginning of the data set, and January 3, 2011, inclusive, when Republicans took control of the House of Representatives.

**Lame Duck Status.** I code all weeks which began after November 6, 2012 as a 'lame duck' week and consider this variable to represent a lower value of  $\pi$  in comparison to other weeks.

**Proximity to Next Election.** I include a variable for the number of weeks remaining before the next federal election day.

I include a number of other controls which should influence the President's usage of the tactics I consider here and vary over the period specified. **Honeymoon.** I treat the period starting with the day after a presidential election through the last day of the following March as the president's honeymoon period. Any week including a day in this period was coded with an indicator for the presidential honeymoon.

**Presidential Approval.** We might expect that presidents may be more successful in using all of their appeals and persuasion capacities when they are more popular, lowering the cost of a successful appeal or persuasion attempt (Kernell, 2007). I control for presidential popularity by using the Gallup average presidential approval rating which most closely

overlaps each weekly observation period<sup>20</sup> (Gallup, 2014*b*).

**Public Appeals.** Additionally, when it is optimal for the president to make a public appeal, it is not optimal for him to make targeted appeals or persuasion attempts. This comes from a result that the president is never indifferent between public appeals and the tactics of interest except in knife-edge cases. I also include a dummy variable for the week in which a president makes an address, non-State of the Union speech to a joint session of Congress, or press conference after 7 PM Eastern time, and for three weeks after, collected from the American Presidency Project (Woolley, 2014).

**Quarter.** Finally, to capture seasonal variation in policy production as a result of holidays, the August recess, and honeymoon periods, I include dummies for the first, second, and third quarters of the year, using the fourth quarter as a reference point.

Using weekly counts of targeted appeals messages and mass persuasion attempts as dependent variables, I regressed these variables on the controls described in the previous paragraphs using a Poisson regression model. For each dependent variable, I first present a parsimonious model focusing on unified government, proximity to the election, an interaction between the two, and lame duck status, and then the full model with all controls. I also present both models with and without the interaction term. The results of these analyses are presented in the dot plot of Figure 1, and the full results of the analysis including diagnostics are reported in Appendix 2 .

## Targeted Appeals and Mass Persuasion Results

Examination of the targeted appeals regressions indicate that in support of Hypothesis 1, targeted appeals are positively associated with unified government. This positive association is statistically significant in the models with an interaction term between unified government and time until the next federal election after the first three months of a president's term has

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<sup>20</sup>The weekly observation periods overlap with Gallup observation periods by between 4 and 5 days.

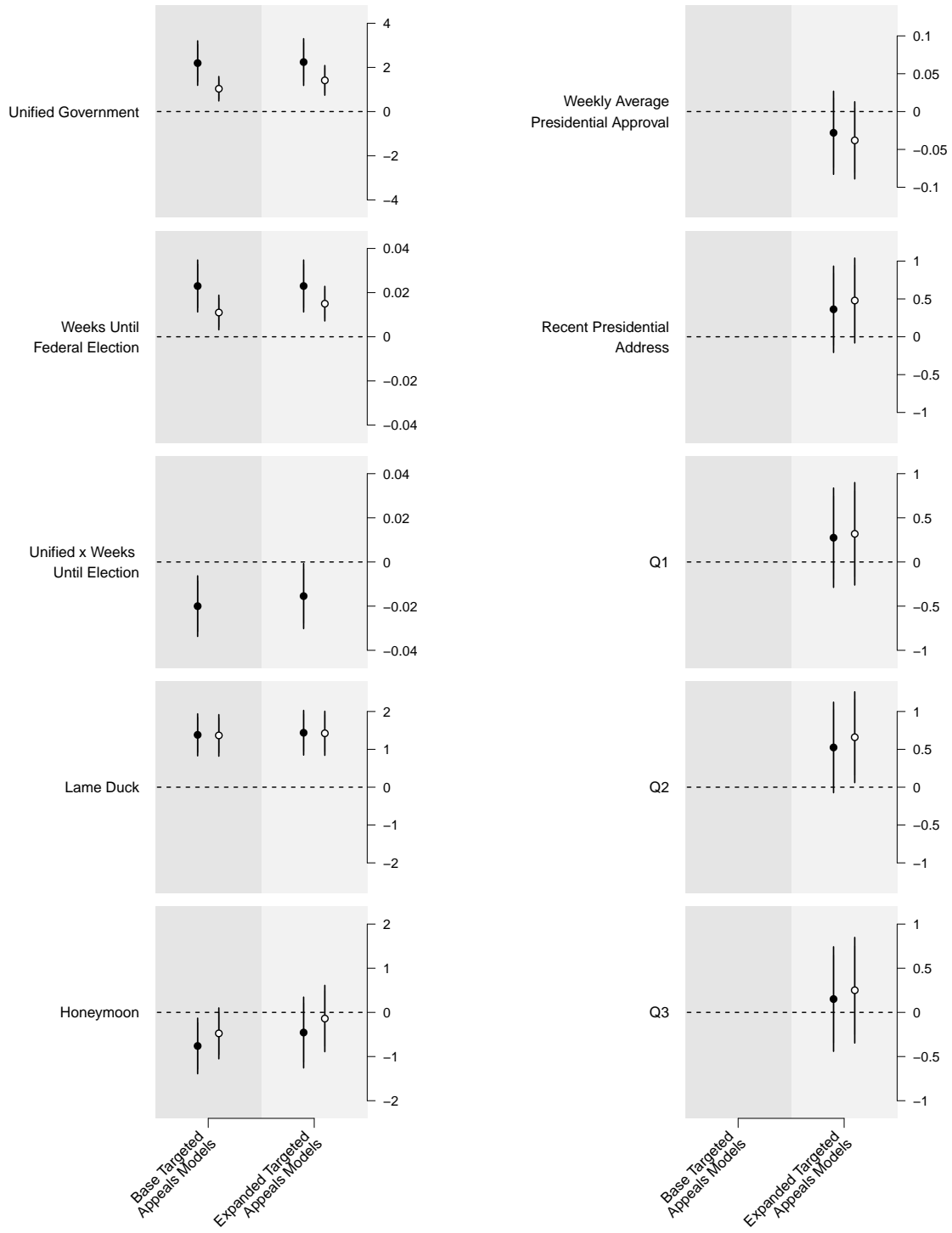


Figure 1: Predicting Targeted Appeals

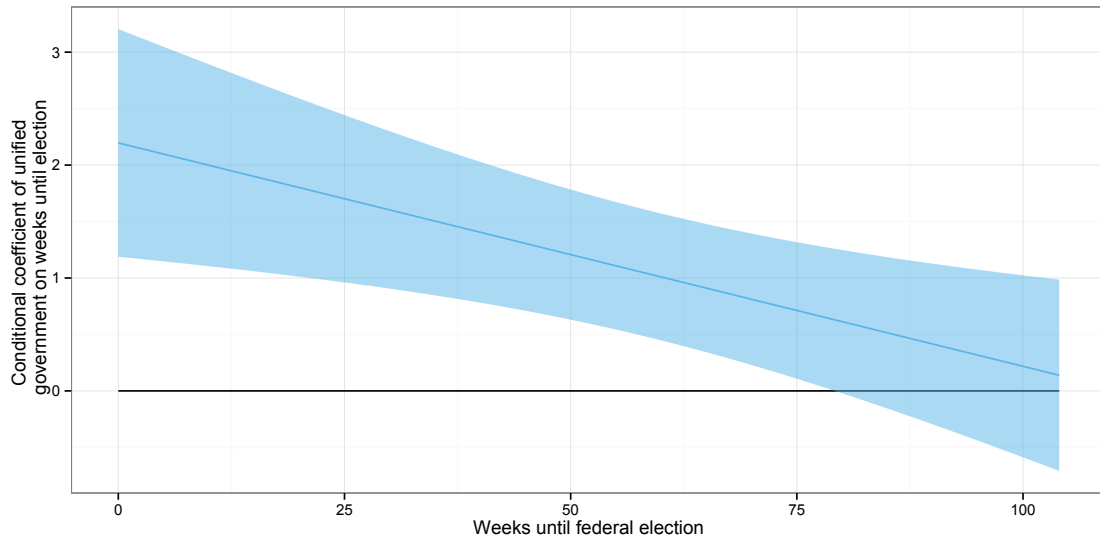


Figure 2: Model 3 Conditional Coefficient of Unified Government with Weeks Until Federal Election on Targeted Appeals

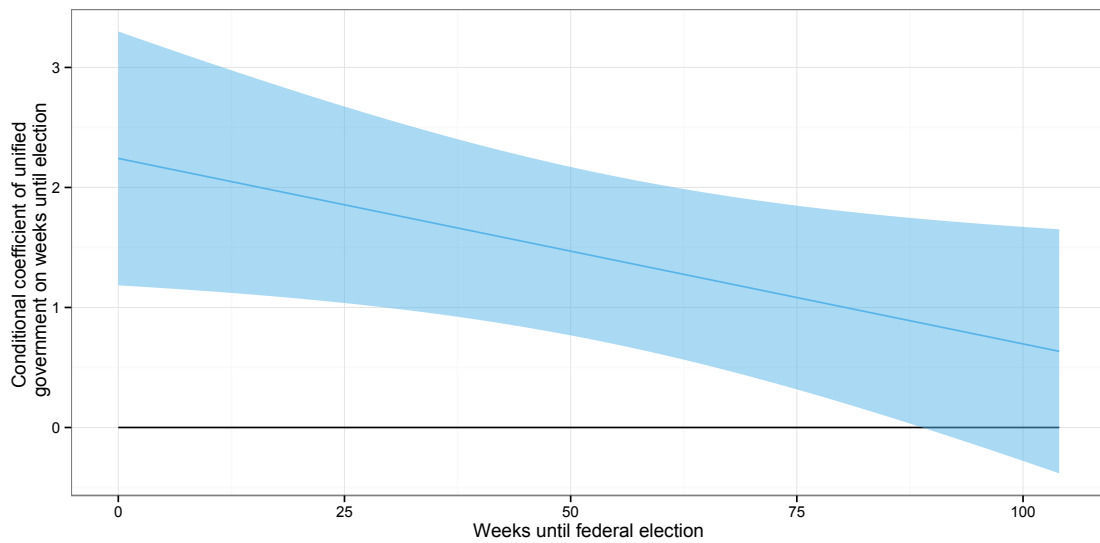


Figure 3: Model 4 Conditional Coefficient of Unified Government with Weeks Until Federal Election on Targeted Appeals



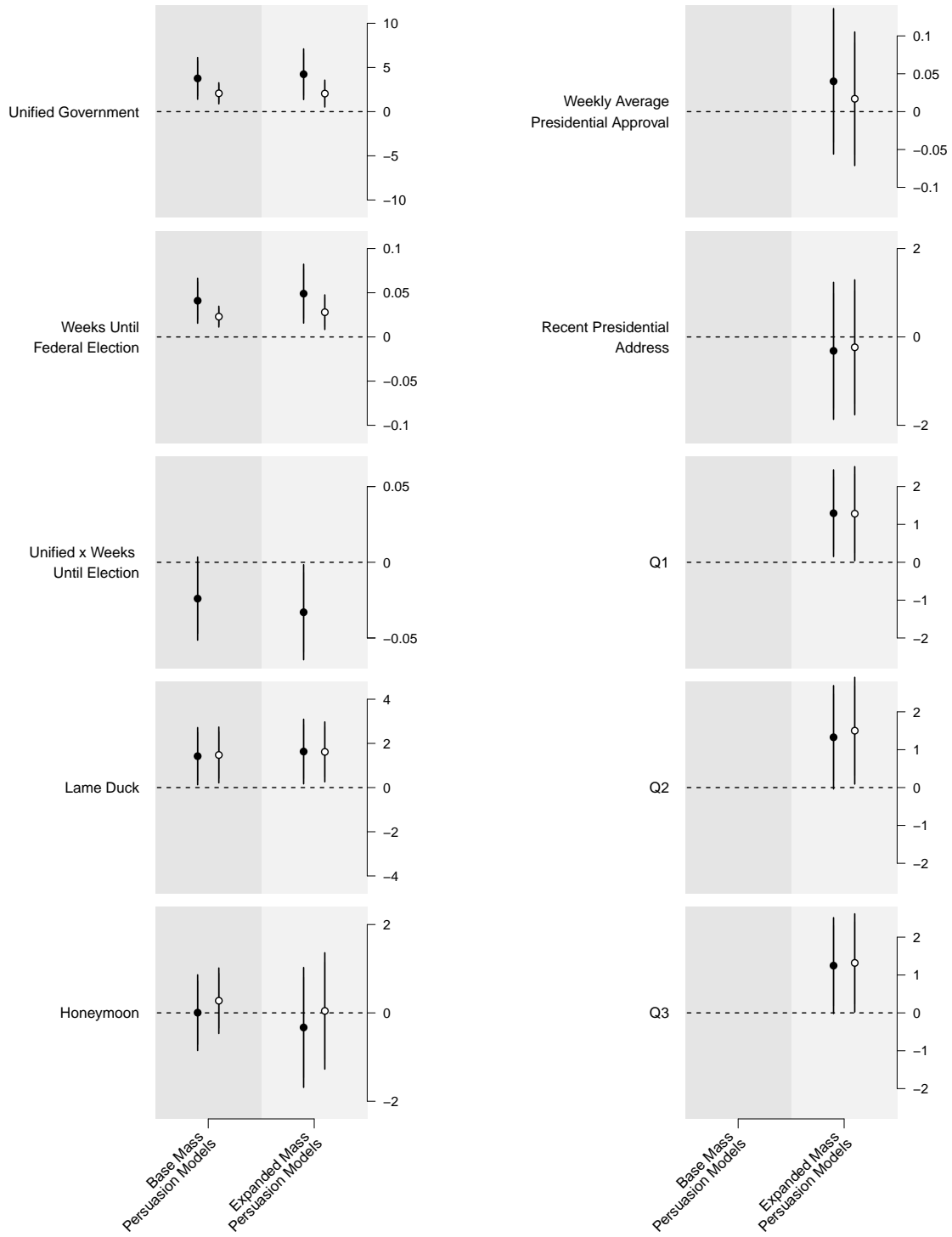


Figure 4: Predicting Mass Persuasion Attempts

passed. Targeted appeals also become less common as federal elections grow near, and occurred more often following President Obama's re-election.

The conditional coefficient of an additional week before a federal election when government is unified is 0.003 with a standard error of 0.005 for Model 3, and 0.008 with a standard error of 0.006 for Model 4. Neither of these conditional coefficients are statistically significant at the .05 level. Thus, there is no support for Hypothesis 2 that targeted appeals are less likely to occur as federal elections grow near when government is unified.

The results from the mass persuasion regressions indicate that in line with Hypothesis 3, mass persuasion attempts do occur less frequently when the next federal election is near. As mass persuasion can be optimal for the president under certain conditions for both unified and divided government, we find that approaching elections are associated with reduced frequencies of mass persuasion attempts through OFA by the Obama administration.

The data find that mass persuasion attempts through OFA were more likely following the president's re-election, which provides support for Hypothesis 4. The Electoral Theory of Going Public and Private clearly associates higher valuation of electoral utility with fewer mass persuasion attempts within the available data (unlike targeted appeals and mass persuasion) and this claim is supported.

These results are robust across model specifications. Each of the three independent variables of interest are significant and positive across all four models for both targeted appeals and mass persuasion. The conditional coefficient of unified government on weeks until the next federal election for targeted appeals was significant and positive for 80% of the observed values, and the conditional coefficient of weeks until the next federal election on unified government for targeted appeals was insignificant for all models. Furthermore, these results hold when a negative binomial model is estimated as well. Notably, apart from a honeymoon effect in one model for targeted appeals and some quarterly effects, the controls were not significant in the Poisson estimation, and they did not hold when a negative

binomial model was used.

## Testing Public Appeals Hypotheses

I test the two hypotheses generated by the Electoral Theory of Going Public and Private using publicly available data on presidential public addresses. I use all quarter calendar years from the first quarter of 1957 through the third quarter of 2014 as the units of observation.

**Public Appeals.** All presidential public television addresses, speeches to joint sessions of Congress other than the State of the Union (or budget addresses given by newly inaugurated presidents), and press conferences given after 7 PM Eastern are considered primetime addresses. If a public address mentions a presidential priority and requests that Congress take action on the president's position on that priority, the public address is coded as a public appeal. The addresses, speeches, and press conferences were obtained from the American Presidency Project (Woolley, 2014). Using these identified public appeals, this variable was coded for each quarter according to the sum total of public appeals in that quarter.

**Proximity to Next Election.** Proximity to the next federal election was coded by setting the value of the first full quarter following a federal election as 7, and counting down by quarter so the value of the fourth quarter of an even-numbered year is 0.

**Internet Adoption.** Internet adoption during a quarter year was obtained by using the percentage of American adults who reported using the Internet to the Pew Internet and American Life Project during that year (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2014). If multiple poll numbers were available for a given year, the average value was used for all quarters in that year.

**Year.** I include the year of the quarterly observation in all models, including the base model, so that the effect of Internet adoption may be distinguished from the passage of time.

**Unified Government.** I define quarters containing any day in which the president's party had a majority in both chambers of Congress, including instances when the Vice-

President cast the deciding vote as having unified government, coded with an indicator.

**Lame Duck.** I code all quarters in which the president is serving in his second term for the majority of the quarter with a ‘lame duck’ indicator.

**Quarterly Average Presidential Job Approval.** We might also expect that presidents may be more successful in using all of their appeals and persuasion capacities when they are more popular, lowering the cost of a successful appeal or persuasion attempt (Kernell, 2007). I control for presidential popularity by using the Gallup average presidential approval rating for the quarter which most closely overlaps each quarterly observation period<sup>21</sup> (Gallup, 2014*a*).

**$\Delta$  in Gross Domestic Product.** Strong economic performance may strengthen the president’s political standing and give him capital that he would want to spend with a public address (Canes-Wrone, 2006). I control for the change in each quarterly observation period’s GDP in comparison to that quarter in the prior year, using data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis from 1956-2013 (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2014).

**Presidential Indicators.** I capture personal variation in the usage of public appeals through indicator variables created for the president whose term took up the majority of the observed quarter (Canes-Wrone, 2001*b*, 2006). Indicators were created for Presidents Kennedy through Obama, with Dwight Eisenhower serving as the reference category.

**Quarterly Indicators.** In order to capture seasonal variation in policy production as a result of holidays, the August recess, and honeymoon periods, I include indicators for the first, second, and third quarters of the year, using the fourth quarter as a reference category.

I regressed quarterly counts of public appeals on the independent variables of interest and controls described above using a Poisson regression model. I present a base model including only Internet adoption rates, quarters until the next federal election, and the year, and also the full model with all controls. The results are presented in the dot plot of Figure 4 with

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<sup>21</sup>The quarterly observation periods overlap Gallup’s quarterly data by 11 weeks.

specific coefficients, standard errors and diagnostic information reported in Appendix 2. I performed the same regressions using negative binomial models and in the few instances where there were differences, none of them relevant to the hypotheses, the differences are noted in Appendix 2.

## **Public Appeals Results**

We find in the output of the regression model that net adoption is negatively and significantly associated with the number of public appeals given by a president in a given quarter. Net adoption was valued at 0 until 1994, increased to 61 percent by 2001, and has since increased to 87 percent, with notable fluctuation and periods of stagnation and even temporary declines. Net adoption is significant even when controlling for year and percent change in GDP year over year, providing support for Hypothesis 5. As media fractionalization is arguably raising the amount of time needed by presidents to conduct a public appeal (Cohen, 2010), as predicted by the Electoral Theory of Going Public and Private, when the loss of presidential time from successfully making a public appeal grows, public appeals are less common.

The Poisson model estimates find that there is a positive and significant relationship between the number of quarters remaining until the next federal election and the frequency of public appeals in a given quarter. This relationship is robust to both the base and full specifications, providing support for Hypothesis 6. As predicted by the Electoral Theory of Going Public and Private, when the relative electoral productivity of presidential time to organizational capital is low, public appeals are more common.

Notably, the models provide little evidence that significant relationships exist between the number of public appeals given in a quarter and other variables such as presidential popularity and change in GDP that are held to be important predictors of public appeals. None of the presidential indicators were significant at the .05 level, but the indicators for

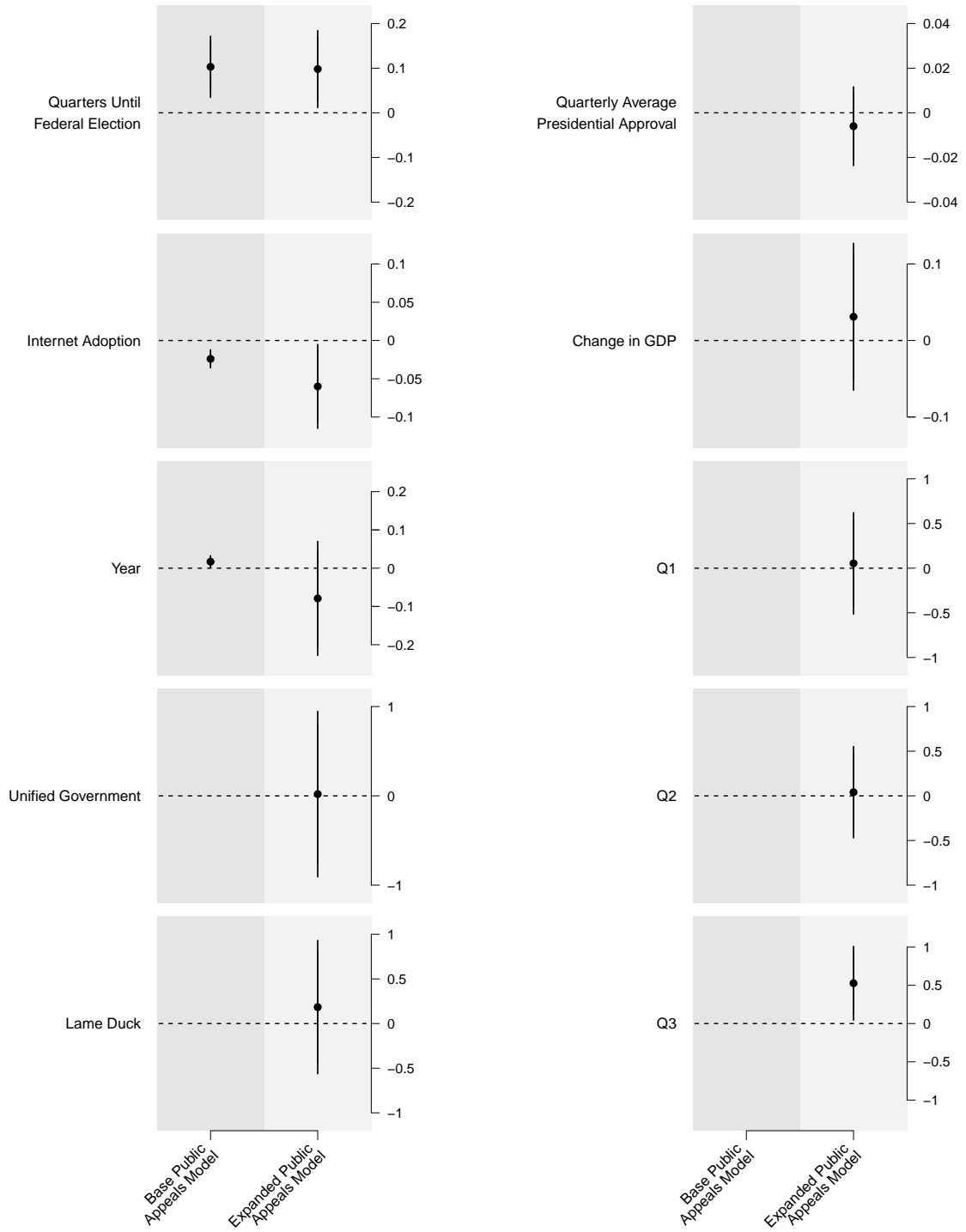


Figure 5: Predicting Public Appeals

both President George W. Bush and President Obama were positive and significant at the .1 level, and increased from Bush to Obama. The relationships between the independent variables of interest are robust to alternative specifications and hold when estimated using a negative binomial model.

## Discussion

The analyses presented above show considerable and robust support for many of the hypotheses generated by the Electoral Theory of Going Public and Private. First and foremost, public appeals, targeted appeals and indirect mass persuasion all decreased as the electoral productivity of organizational capital increased with proximity to federal elections, providing a strong foundation for future exploration of the electoral costs of presidential vote-centered lobbying. However, there are still some notable surprises. Interestingly, mass persuasion attempts share most of the same relationships with key predictors as targeted appeals. This overall finding, as well as the fact that mass persuasion attempts require targeted messages to the presidents' copartisan voters, suggests that what is observed as an attempt to lead opinion in the general electorate might be viewed by the president first as an instrument to raise the salience of an issue among his party's primary voters. This finding calls for further study of attempts by presidential grassroots lobbying organizations to lead opinion indirectly through organized mass persuasion campaigns. There is an opportunity to use lab experiments to test both for the effectiveness of indirect persuasion on behalf of politicians under varied conditions, as well as to test for the effect of participating in a grassroots persuasion campaign on the participants' own beliefs and issue salience. Greater familiarity with the empirical support for both of these microfoundations would assist in constructing creative research designs to capture the effectiveness of these campaigns in achieving either direction in the real world. These studies would also help in calibrating the cost assumptions in the

Electoral Theory of Going Public and Private so more attention may be paid to the most plausible cases.

The positive relationship between both forms of targeted appeals (assuming mass persuasion attempts are, in fact, a form of targeted appeal) and unified government suggests that there is a substantial amount of targeted appeals in periods of divided government. While the somewhat weak nature of this relationship may appear to undermine the Electoral Theory of Going Public and Private, it would be consistent with the possibility that targeted appeals may, to a point, increase organizational capital. The techniques used in targeted appeals and mass persuasion are often very similar to those used in election campaigns, and a modest amount of practice during the political “offseason” may improve the human capital of those who do volunteer enough to offset some dropoff from people who leave the organization as a result of the appeals. Future extensions of the model to allow for a negative cost and non-linear cost function would be able to reflect this possibility which seems supported by the existing data.

Targeted appeals did not decrease as election grew nearer under unified government as hypothesized, though they did decrease with electoral proximity overall. If targeted appeals and indirect mass persuasion have the ability to train activists and increase organizational capital in the future in exchange for short term costs to electoral ends, both tactics can serve as a form of investment. If policy is extremely important to the president, throughout periods of unified government both tactics would be used at high levels, while they would be used more in divided government when elections are distant, creating the observed relationships.

There is another interesting puzzle in the finding that targeted appeals have been more prevalent following President Obama’s re-election, which has been a period of divided government. In this case, there should be little policy gain from targeted appeals, with relatively less utility gained from electoral investment, yet targeted appeals have been used more often than in the first term. However, if President Obama derives significant utility from holding



organizational capital in itself, it would make sense that he use the second term to invest in building up this capital if mass persuasion is ineffective in general and divided government makes targeted appeals ineffective as well. This has some face validity, as President Obama is famously known for referring himself to a community organizer who hates politics, and Organizing for Action (as opposed to Organizing for America) is incorporated as a non-profit organization with significant restrictions on its election activities, and will be under Barack Obama's control after he leaves the White House.

The Electoral Theory of Going Public and Private also provides insights into the president's use of public appeals. As the election grows closer and candidate time becomes more electorally productive compared to capital, public appeals do become less likely. The time costs to the president of making a public appeal have increased significantly, and the Electoral Theory of Going Public and Private would indicate that this should be associated with fewer public appeals. The data back this up, as Internet adoption rates have a robust negative association with the likelihood of public appeals, even when controlling for time and presidential fixed effects. This suggests that the Internet played a big role in increasing the costs of making public appeals.

Also, the election strategies of the president appear to have an effect through altering the relative productivity of organizational capital and presidential time. At the .1 significance level, President Bush and President Obama were more likely to make public appeals than other presidents since 1957, even controlling for time and media fractionalization. There are a number of possible ways to interpret these coefficients, including considering personal differences in President Bush and President Obama's personalities. However, both of these presidents are known to have organized polarizing electoral campaigns notably oriented toward mobilizing their own base rather than persuading independents. For these presidents, who take other steps to focus on turning out the base over persuasion, it is plausible that the relative productivity of organizational capital to time is higher, making time less electorally

valuable and thus increasing the likelihood of public appeals.

This paper is the first to assign electoral costs to public presidential lobbying tactics and the whole menu of public presidency vote-oriented lobbying tactics. It also presents evidence that the tactics used by presidents to interact with the public are influenced by electoral considerations, and that presidents behave as if targeted appeals (in the form of overt appeals or covert "mass persuasion" campaigns) to their own party base provide real opportunities to influence legislators through their primary election constituencies. The Electoral Theory of Going Public and Private as well as some puzzles emerging from the empirical analysis in this paper offer a wide variety of avenues for future work. First of all, the immediate next step will be to incorporate direct lobbying through distribution of federal spending into the theory and empirics, in order to construct a comprehensive electoral theory of vote-centered presidential lobbying. Recent work shows support for the claim that presidents allocate federal spending to competitive districts in the presidential election, so deviation in federal spending from this pattern toward legislatively pivotal districts would serve as a measure of direct lobbying (Kang, 2014). Additionally, extending the dataset to the end of the Obama presidency and incorporating data from George W. Bush's GOP Team Leader project would offer opportunities to test many more hypotheses derived from this theory. Incorporating diminishing returns from lobbying and allowing the president to mix between tactics would further enrich the comprehensive electoral theory of vote-centered presidential lobbying.

An additional and important next step is to build off of these findings regarding presidential behavior and search for evidence that each of these tactics works in the way presumed in the model. Cameron wrote that theories of the public presidency must consider media dissemination, opinion change, and signaling to legislators, and it is essential that we work to understand how and if targeted partisan appeals and mass persuasion attempts effectively achieve each of these three tasks, and at what electoral cost to the president. Finally, it is

very important that at some point, the competitive messaging environment is taken into account, as there appear to be some structural advantages for the president's opposition (Pluta and Woolley, 2014).

## Conclusion

This paper makes two major contributions to the public presidency literature. First, it is the first to explicitly model the electoral resource costs to the president of taking action rather than assuming an opportunity cost. Second, it is the first to model opportunities presidents have to use PGLOs to indirectly persuade the public and leverage presidential supporters in order to pressure Congress to pass legislation desired by the president. The empirical evidence shows strong relationships between low incidence of these lobbying tactics and circumstances when these tactics would carry a high electoral cost. Furthermore, when the hypotheses generated by the model do fail, there are reasonable extensions to the model that may explain these puzzles.

The Electoral Theory of Going Public and Private provides an interesting foundation for development of a comprehensive electoral theory of vote-centered presidential lobbying, as well as many comparative statics which cannot currently be tested due to a lack of data. Enriching this theory to test some alternative explanations suggested by puzzling empirical findings will also help enhance our understanding of presidential tactical decision-making. This approach offers much leverage for understanding vote-centered presidential lobbying, but there is much more exciting work to be done in the near and intermediate terms to consolidate and build on these foundations.

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# Appendix 1: Optimal Strategies and Conditions

Table 2: Case I Optimal Strategies

Ideal Point Configurations	Presidential Optimal Strategy
$x_q < x_a < x_l < x_j < x_v$	<i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_l)^2 < \pi(1-c)(1-Tr)$ and $(1-s)Tr > (1-c)(1-Tr)$ <i>Mass Persuasion</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_l)^2 > \pi(1-c)(1-Tr)$ and $(1-s)Tr > (1-c)(1-Tr)$ <i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_l)^2 < (1-s)Tr\pi$ and $(1-s)Tr < (1-c)(1-Tr)$ <i>Public Appeals</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_l)^2 > (1-s)Tr\pi$ and $(1-s)Tr < (1-c)(1-Tr)$
$x_a < x_q < x_l < x_j < x_v$	<i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_l)^2 < \pi(1-c)(1-Tr)$ and $(1-s)Tr > (1-c)(1-Tr)$ <i>Mass Persuasion</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_l)^2 > \pi(1-c)(1-Tr)$ and $(1-s)Tr > (1-c)(1-Tr)$ <i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_l)^2 < (1-s)Tr\pi$ and $(1-s)Tr < (1-c)(1-Tr)$ <i>Public Appeals</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_l)^2 > (1-s)Tr\pi$ and $(1-s)Tr < (1-c)(1-Tr)$
$x_a < x_l < x_q < x_j < x_v$	<i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 < \pi(1-c)(1-Tr)$ and $(1-s)Tr > (1-c)(1-Tr)$ <i>Mass Persuasion</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 > \pi(1-c)(1-Tr)$ and $(1-s)Tr > (1-c)(1-Tr)$ <i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 < (1-s)Tr\pi$ and $(1-s)Tr < (1-c)(1-Tr)$ <i>Public Appeals</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 > (1-s)Tr\pi$ and $(1-s)Tr < (1-c)(1-Tr)$
$x_a < x_l < x_j < x_q < x_v$	<i>Nothing</i> preferred
$x_a < x_l < x_j < x_v < x_q$	<i>Nothing</i> preferred

Table 3: Case II Optimal Strategies

Ideal Point Configurations	Presidential Optimal Strategy
$x_q < x_a < x_j < x_l < x_v$	<i>Nothing</i> preferred
$x_a < x_q < x_j < x_l < x_v$	<i>Nothing</i> preferred
$x_a < x_j < x_q < x_l < x_v$	<i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 < (1-p)(1-Tr)\pi$ <i>Targeted Appeal</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 > (1-p)(1-Tr)\pi$
$x_a < x_j < x_l < x_q < x_v$	<i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_l)^2 < (1-p)(1-Tr)\pi$ <i>Targeted Appeal</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_l)^2 > (1-p)(1-Tr)\pi$
$x_a < x_j < x_l < x_v < x_q$	<i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_l)^2 < (1-p)(1-Tr)\pi$ <i>Targeted Appeal</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_l)^2 > (1-p)(1-Tr)\pi$

Table 4: Case III Optimal Strategies

Ideal Point Configurations	Presidential Optimal Strategy
$x_q < x_a < x_j < x_v < x_l$	<i>Nothing</i> preferred
$x_a < x_q < x_j < x_v < x_l$	<i>Nothing</i> preferred
$x_a < x_j < x_q < x_v < x_l$	<i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 < (1 - c)(1 - Tr)\pi$ <i>Mass Persuasion</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 > (1 - c)(1 - Tr)\pi$
$x_a < x_j < x_v < x_q < x_l$	If $(1 - s)Tr > (1 - c)(1 - Tr)$ , <i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 < (1 - c)(1 - Tr)\pi$ If $(1 - s)Tr > (1 - c)(1 - Tr)$ , <i>Mass Persuasion</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 > (1 - c)(1 - Tr)\pi$ If $(1 - s)Tr < (1 - c)(1 - Tr)$ and: $(x_j - x_v)^2 > \pi[(1 - c)(1 - Tr) - (1 - s)Tr]$ , <i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 < (1 - c)(1 - Tr)\pi$ $(x_j - x_v)^2 > \pi[(1 - c)(1 - Tr) - (1 - s)Tr]$ , <i>Mass Persuasion</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 > (1 - c)(1 - Tr)\pi$ $(x_j - x_v)^2 < \pi[(1 - c)(1 - Tr) - (1 - s)Tr]$ , <i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 < (x_j - x_v)^2 + (1 - s)Tr\pi$ $(x_j - x_v)^2 < \pi[(1 - c)(1 - Tr) - (1 - s)Tr]$ , <i>Public Appeal</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 > (x_j - x_v)^2 + (1 - s)Tr\pi$
$x_a < x_j < x_v < x_l < x_q$	If $(1 - s)Tr > (1 - c)(1 - Tr)$ , <i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 < (1 - c)(1 - Tr)\pi$ If $(1 - s)Tr > (1 - c)(1 - Tr)$ , <i>Mass Persuasion</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 > (1 - c)(1 - Tr)\pi$ If $(1 - s)Tr < (1 - c)(1 - Tr)$ and: $(x_j - x_v)^2 > \pi[(1 - c)(1 - Tr) - (1 - s)Tr]$ , <i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 < (1 - c)(1 - Tr)\pi$ $(x_j - x_v)^2 > \pi[(1 - c)(1 - Tr) - (1 - s)Tr]$ , <i>Mass Persuasion</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 > (1 - c)(1 - Tr)\pi$ $(x_j - x_v)^2 < \pi[(1 - c)(1 - Tr) - (1 - s)Tr]$ , <i>Nothing</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 < (x_j - x_v)^2 + (1 - s)Tr\pi$ $(x_j - x_v)^2 < \pi[(1 - c)(1 - Tr) - (1 - s)Tr]$ , <i>Public Appeal</i> preferred if $(x_j - x_q)^2 > (x_j - x_v)^2 + (1 - s)Tr\pi$

## Appendix 2: Regression Estimates

Table 5: Predicting the Number of Weekly Targeted Appeals, 2009-2014

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Unified Government	1.035*** (0.282)	1.414*** (0.343)	2.196*** (0.514)	2.242*** (0.540)
Weeks Until Federal Election	0.011** (0.004)	0.015*** (0.004)	0.023*** (0.006)	0.023*** (0.006)
Unified*Weeks Until Election	—	—	-0.020** (0.007)	-0.015* (0.008)
Lame Duck	1.368*** (0.280)	1.424*** (0.297)	1.383*** (0.283)	1.438*** (0.301)
Honeymoon	-0.475 (0.294)	-0.139 (0.383)	-0.760* (0.321)	-0.456 (0.409)
Avg. Presidential Approval	—	-0.038 (0.026)	—	-0.028 (0.028)
Recent Presidential Address	—	0.479 (0.286)	—	0.363 (0.291)
Q1	—	0.319 (0.296)	—	0.275 (0.287)
Q2	—	0.660* (0.306)	—	0.525 (0.305)
Q3	—	0.251 (0.305)	—	0.151 (0.302)
Constant	-2.320*** (0.321)	-1.308 (1.075)	-2.986*** (0.437)	-2.124 (1.186)
AIC	504.29	505.51	498.44	503.14
BIC	522.60	542.14	520.42	543.43
Log Likelihood	-247.1443	-242.7567	-243.2192	-240.5701
Deviance	292.13	283.35	284.28	278.98
Num. obs.	288	288	288	288

Two-tailed tests: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

Values presented are Poisson estimates predicting the number of targeted appeals messages sent by OFA per week. Standard errors are in parentheses and observations are weeks beginning with January 30, 2009, and ending with the last day of the last week on August 7, 2014. Estimation of the same specifications using a negative binomial model resulted in no changes in direction or significance with the exception of Q2 in Model 2, Honeymoon in Model 3, and the interaction term in Model 4, which are significant at the .1 level.

Table 6: Predicting the Number of Weekly Mass Persuasion Attempts, 2009-2014

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Unified Government	2.073*** (0.610)	2.046** (0.776)	3.762** (1.207)	4.233** (1.462)
Weeks Until Federal Election	0.023*** (0.006)	0.028** (0.010)	0.041** (0.013)	0.049** (0.017)
Unified*Weeks Until Election	—	—	-0.024 (0.014)	-0.033* (0.016)
Lame Duck	1.476* (0.645)	1.616* (0.692)	1.422* (0.660)	1.631* (0.746)
Honeymoon	0.275 (0.378)	0.044 (0.672)	0.005 (0.437)	-0.330 (0.692)
Avg. Presidential Approval	—	0.017 (0.045)	—	0.040 (0.049)
Recent Presidential Address	—	-0.234 (0.779)	—	-0.315 (0.791)
Q1	—	1.283* (0.634)	—	1.295* (0.584)
Q2	—	1.502* (0.719)	—	1.328 (0.696)
Q3	—	1.320* (0.661)	—	1.248 (0.646)
Constant	-4.730*** (0.707)	-7.084*** (1.780)	-6.011*** (1.137)	-9.595*** (2.287)
AIC	253.54	248.87	252.30	246.17
BIC	275.49	285.50	278.07	286.46
Log Likelihood	-129.7562	-114.4363	-119.2139	-112.0856
Deviance	157.64	142.97	154.40	138.27
Num. obs.	288	288	288	288

Two-tailed tests: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

Values presented are Poisson estimates predicting the number of mass persuasion attempt messages sent by OFA per week. Standard errors are in parentheses and observations are weeks beginning with January 30, 2009, and ending with the last day of the last week on August 7, 2014. Estimation of the same specifications using a negative binomial model resulted in no changes in direction or significance with the exception of Q3 for Model 2, which is are significant at the .1 level.

Table 7: Predicting the Number of Quarterly Public Appeals, 1957-2014

	Model 1	Model 2
Quarters Until Federal Election	0.103** (0.035)	0.098* (0.044)
Internet Adoption	-0.024*** (0.006)	-0.060* (0.028)
Year	0.017* (0.008)	-0.079 (0.076)
Unified	-	0.020 (0.473)
Lame Duck	-	0.184 (0.381)
Qtr. Avg. Presidential Approval	-	-0.006 (0.009)
$\Delta$ in GDP	-	0.031 (0.049)
Q1	-	0.054 (0.290)
Q2	-	0.041 (0.261)
Q3	-	0.527* (0.246)
Presidential Indicators	-	Not Significant
Constant	-33.305* (15.812)	152.506 (148.669)
AIC	486.13	467.95
BIC	499.90	540.24
Log Likelihood	-239.0663	-212.9747
Deviance	233.66	181.48
Num. obs.	231	231
Two-tailed tests: *** $p < 0.001$ , ** $p < 0.01$ , * $p < 0.05$		

Values presented are Poisson estimates predicting the number of public appeals delivered by the president per quarter. Standard errors are in parentheses and observations are quarter years beginning with the first quarter of 1957, and ending with the third quarter of 2014. Estimation of the same specifications using a negative binomial model resulted in no changes in direction or significance in any coefficient.