Vacancies and Presidential Influence Over the Administrative State in the United States[*]

Presidentially appointed positions in the United States are vacant for increasingly long durations, driven by both presidential and Senate delays. Some observers lament the debilitating effects of vacancies on the president's ability to direct the executive branch. Others suggest that presidents use vacancies strategically to further their political goals. It has been difficult to arbitrate between these views because the impact of vacancies can differ depending upon agency context and because it is difficult to systematically measure presidential influence. This paper tries to reconcile competing views by explaining why vacancies sometimes limit presidential influence and at other times expand it. It evaluates the impact of vacancies with novel new data from a three-wave survey of federal executives and new data on agency leadership during the Bush, Obama, and Trump presidencies. The evidence indicates that the effect of vacancies is conditional—vacancies in agencies outside of cabinet department bureaus are particularly detrimental to presidential influence. However, presidents can gain influence from lengthier vacancies when agencies are more politicized. These results suggest that vacancies in Senate-confirmed positions do not necessarily spell trouble for democratic accountability within the administrative state. Rather, through the unilateral placement of non-Senate confirmed appointees, presidents can assert control over agency policymaking despite constraint from the Senate in the appointments process.

September 11, 2022

Christopher Piper

Vanderbilt University

christopher.m.piper@vanderbilt.edu

President Joseph Biden entered office having promised to "restore sensible [immigration] enforcement priorities" and to place "responsible, Senate-confirmed professionals" to lead Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (Biden 2020). However, President Biden's nominee to head the agency, Texas Sheriff Ed Gonzalez, withdrew from consideration after waiting over a year and a half for Senate confirmation (Washington Post 2022). Without confirmed leadership, Biden's efforts to reform the agency from its status as the "public face of the Trump administration's hard-line immigration policies" have stalled and many in the agency's work force are resistant to the administration's changes in policy (Rose 2021).

This case is representative of the larger pattern of appointments under the current state of the nomination and confirmation process. The United States government has faced longer and more frequent periods of vacancies in appointed positions over time, exacerbated by increasing periods of delay and confirmation failure rates (O'Connell 2009; 2017; Dull and Roberts 2009; Resh, Hollibaugh, Roberts, and Dull 2021). Exemplifying this pattern, delays of confirmation and confirmation failure rates have more than doubled since the Reagan administration (O'Connell 2017; Partnership for Public Service 2022). Over a year and a half into the Biden administration, roughly half of the 800 Senate-confirmed positions noted as "key" roles by the *Washington Post* and Partnership for Public Service remain vacant or filled by Trump holdovers.

The increased prevalence of vacancies in appointed positions raises the more general question of how vacancies influence the president's ability to direct the activities of the executive branch. Scholars generally agree that vacancies are detrimental to the president's ability to influence administrative policy (e.g., O'Connell 2009; Bolton, Potter, and Thrower 2015; Lewis, Bernhard, and You 2018; Piper 2022a). Lewis et al. state that vacancies do "not allow the president to control the levers of administrative policy making" (2018, 491) and O'Connell

argues that "frequent and lengthy vacancies may make agencies less responsive to the elected branches of government" (2009, 921).

However, the relationship between vacancies and presidential influence is not always as clear cut as the Biden Administration example suggests. For instance, President Trump waited over nine months for John Ratcliff to be confirmed as the Director of National Intelligence (DNI). In the period of delay, the president was able to choose who would serve in the position in an acting capacity. Trump passed over the individual next in line for the position, Principal Deputy DNI Susan Gordon, a career intelligence official with over four decades of experience. Instead, Trump chose Joseph Maguire to serve as the acting DNI (Welna 2020). Maguire, although initially thought to be more aligned with Trump than Gordon, was removed for being disloyal to the president by cooperating with Congress' investigations into Russian interference in the 2020 election (Cohen 2020). Ambassador Richard Grenell, the next acting DNI, despite having no intelligence experience, was known for his fierce loyalty to the president (Marquardt, Cohen, and Herb 2020). During his short tenure, Grenell made several consequential decisions, including firing top officials in the agency and declassifying documents to fuel the president's conspiracy theories (Marquardt, Cohen, and Herb 2020). Overall, despite the prolonged vacancy, Trump was able to use acting officials to strategically advance his agenda in a way he likely could not achieve through the confirmation process, as someone with Grenell's lack of experience and extreme loyalty to the president may not have survived the Senate confirmation process.

Matching with the preceding case, some scholars have suggested that presidents may have an incentive to leave positions vacant because they provide the president the opportunity to unilaterally select an acting official to serve on an interim basis (Kinane 2021; Piper 2022b). The

empirical trends back this up, showing that presidents use acting officials strategically and that their use has greatly increased even from the Obama to Biden administration (Piper 2022b). Representing this pattern, President Trump claimed to "like acting[s] because [he could] move so quickly" and they gave "[him] more flexibility" (Samuels 2019).

It has been difficult to arbitrate between competing views about the effect of vacancies because the moderating influence of contextual factors like acting officials or the presence of other appointees has been underappreciated and good measures of presidential influence over the administrative state are hard to find (Lewis and Waterman 2013; Kinane 2021; Piper 2022b). More specifically, the broader management environment of the agency and the president's use of acting officials might moderate the effect of vacancies on presidential influence. This conditional relationship is important because presidents have unilateral tools, both the placement of non-

Senate confirmed appointees[1] and the selection of acting officials,[2] at their disposal that may allow them to exert greater influence without needing Senate advice and consent. When presidents are able to use these tools, vacancies may matter very little for the president's ability to direct agency policymaking. Therefore, interpreting the average effect of vacancies may lead to false conclusions about whether vacancies are harmful to the president. This is particularly the case since scholars have had to rely largely upon detailed case evidence to support assertions.

In this paper, I reconcile the competing views about the impact of vacancies on presidential control of the administrative state by explaining why vacancies sometimes constrain

---

[1] Both non-career members of the Senior Executive Service (SES) and Schedule C appointees are classes of appointees that do not require Senate confirmation. The SES is comprised of approximately 7,000 senior management officials that serve between presidentially appointed and Senate confirmed (PAS) officials and the civil service (Lewis 2008). By law, political appointees cannot exceed 10 percent of the entire SES. Schedule C appointees are reserved for policy-supporting positions. Schedule C posts include advisors and assistants to PAS appointees, communications officials, and legislative liaisons (Lewis 2008). In some agencies, the PAS official leading the agency is the only appointee in the agency, while in other agencies, there are large appointee teams of Senate confirmed, non-career members of the SES, and Schedule C appointees.

[2] According to the Federal Vacancies Reform Act of 1998 (5 U.S.C. § 3345), presidents can either allow the individual serving in the "first deputy" position below the PAS position to become the acting official or the president can select a previously confirmed PAS official or a senior "officer or employee" within the agency to serve in an acting capacity (Brannon 2020).

presidential influence and at other times expand it, depending upon three factors. Vacancies in agencies with more non-Senate confirmed appointees in leadership positions within the agency and in agencies where the president uses politically appointed acting officials will have less of a detrimental effect on the president's ability to exert influence over administrative policy. These appointees, because they are selected unilaterally by the president without Senate consent, are typically more loyal to and more ideologically aligned with the president than their confirmed counterparts and are, therefore, more willing to ardently pursue the president's program (Lewis and Waterman 2013; Bonica, Chen, and Johnson 2015; Waterman and Ouyang 2020; Kinane 2021; Piper 2022b). Further, when there are other Senate confirmed appointees overseeing the agency,[3] vacancies in the position most proximate to the agency will have a weaker effect on presidential influence. Appointees higher in the agency's hierarchy can provide oversight during vacant periods that lessens the need for appointee placement closer to the agency.

To evaluate the relationship between vacancies and presidential influence, I use new data on presidential influence in the bureaucracy from a three-wave survey of federal executives and new data on appointee vacancies during the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations. A careful analysis of this data reveals that the effect of vacancies on presidential influence is conditional.

---

[3] Some agencies, such as the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) or the U.S. Census Bureau, are situated within larger cabinet departments and are, therefore, subject to oversight from multiple layers of political appointees within the department. However, other agencies, such as the Small Business Administration (SBA) and Social Security Administration (SSA), are located outside of cabinet department structures and have no overseeing appointee above the head of their agency.

Vacancies in agencies outside of cabinet department bureaus have a particularly detrimental effect on presidential influence. However, presidents gain influence over agency policymaking from lengthier vacancies when agencies are more highly politicized. These results suggest that vacancies in Senate-confirmed positions do not necessarily spell trouble for democratic accountability within the administrative state. Rather, through the unilateral placement of non-Senate confirmed appointees, presidents can assert control over agency policymaking despite constraint from the Senate in the appointments process.

Presidential Control and the Vacancy "Problem"

Presidents use the appointments process to assert control over the federal bureaucracy (Moe 1985; Lewis 2008). Yet, their ability to freely politicize the bureaucracy through Senate confirmed appointments has been complicated by increasingly delayed and failed confirmations by the Senate (O'Connell 2009; 2017; Dull and Roberts 2009; Resh, et al. 2021). Such obstacles have necessitated presidents to divert their attention to seeking confirmation immediately for the most important positions (O'Connell 2009; Lewis and Richardson 2021; Piper 2022b). Presidents have increasingly left the remaining broad swath of PAS positions vacant for extended periods of time (O'Connell 2009; Resh et al. 2021; Piper 2022b).

Consequently, scholars generally conclude that vacancies inhibit the president's ability to control the bureaucracy for four reasons (e.g., O'Connell 2009; Bolton et al. 2015; Lewis et al. 2018; Piper 2022a). First, vacancies are believed to slow down agency activity, making it more difficult for the president's policy initiatives to be accomplished (O'Connell 2009; Mendelson 2014; Bolton et al. 2015; Kinane 2021; Piper and Lewis 2022). Second, vacancies may lead to a heightened role of career civil servants that might not share the president's policy views (Heclo 1977; O'Connell 2009; Mendelson 2014; Bolton et al. 2015). Without appointees in place to

channel the priorities of the president and shape policy formation, agency policymaking led by civil servants may be out of alignment with the president's agenda (Lewis 2008; Piper 2022a). Third, appointees are brokers that help resolve conflict between the White House and the agency (Heclo 1977; Wilson 1989; Mendelson 2014). Without confirmed leadership, an adversarial relationship between the White House and agency may form, preventing agency cooperation with the president's desired policy change. Finally, vacancies create a leadership vacuum that may allow civil servants to resist the directives of other appointees or the president (Chang, Lewis and McCarty 2001).

Despite the commonly held view that vacancies are detrimental to presidents, the prevalence of vacancies continues to grow, aided by a declining pace of presidential nominations and an increasing selectiveness in which positions receive nominations (O'Connell 2009; Lewis and Richardson 2021; Piper 2022b). Why would presidents allow vacancies to persist if they were detrimental to their ability to control agency policymaking? Recent scholarship by Kinane (2021) and Piper (2022b) suggests that the neglect of nominations by presidents is strategic and that presidents may benefit from vacancies, or at least have developed new strategies to navigate around vacancies and to diminish their negative effects. Presidents may desire a contraction in agency policymaking that can be best achieved by leaving the agency leaderless (Kinane 2021). Presidents may also seek to unilaterally select an individual to take over the position in acting capacity (Kinane 2021; Piper 2022b).

Existing scholarship, however, tends to focus on whether or not vacancies are detrimental to presidential influence rather than when they are detrimental. It is likely that the effects of vacancies on presidential influence will depend on the context in which the vacancy occurs and the strategy that presidents pursue in the face of the vacancy. In some cases, vacancies may be

detrimental to presidents, while in other instances vacancies will have minimal consequences for presidential influence. More specifically, existing scholarship often does not account for the management environment of the office in which the vacancy occurs or who in the agency's leadership takes on a larger role during vacant periods. These shortcomings are representative of a larger trend in the literature to neglect lower-level appointees and acting officials that step into vacant PAS positions (Lewis and Waterman 2013; Moore 2018; Waterman and Ouyang 2020; Kinane 2021; Piper 2022b). These appointees vastly outnumber Senate confirmed appointees and can be placed quickly and unilaterally by the president. As Lewis and Waterman argue, the literature's "primary focus on PAS appointments … may provide a distorted picture of presidential appointment politics…" (2013, 37). Therefore, if we are to understand the effects of vacancies more fully, we must take these broader contexts into account. Examining the context-dependent effects of vacancies may help to explain the rising prevalence of vacancies and the dearth of presidential nominations.

Further, these accounts have not systematically assessed their claims regarding the effects of vacancies, instead relying on evidence from individual agencies. For example, existing work has shown that appointees, when in place, have influence over agency outputs and that when appointees are absent, agency performance of individual tasks is slowed and agency responsiveness to the president declines (e.g., Wood and Waterman 1991; Bolton et al. 2015). However, finding comparable tasks across administrative agencies that are central to the agency's mission or policymaking activities poses a significant challenge. This has prohibited existing work from taking a broad view of the effects of vacancies on a whole range of outcomes connected to the core of agency policymaking.

When Do Vacancies Matter?

With administrative agencies at the core of policymaking in the United States, presidents naturally seek to make agencies responsive to them (Moe 1985). Presidents may seek to curtail or augment the activity of agencies in order to achieve their policy goals. For example, a Republican president may seek to constrain the regulatory activities of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), while bolstering the enforcement activities of ICE. Both desired outcomes require changes in agency agendas, priorities, and productivity. For these changes to occur, presidents need control. Without control, agencies are likely to stick to their status quo policy activities (Piper 2022a; Piper and Lewis 2022).

One of the key mechanisms by which all presidents assert control over the administrative state, comprised of hundreds of agencies, is by getting people aligned with their policy agenda and ideology into leadership positions of executive agencies (Moe 1985; Lewis 2008). Presidents target appointments to agencies where they most need control over agency activities, particularly in agencies connected to their policy priorities and agencies that are predisposed to favor policy contrary to the president's preferences (Lewis 2008; Hollibaugh, Horton, and Lewis 2014; Hollibaugh and Rothenberg 2017; Piper 2022b). Appointees in these agencies can serve multiple purposes, from agency "advocates," working to protect and bolster the agency, or "budget-cutters," working to constrain the agency and cause a retrenchment in activities (Wilson 1989).

While vacancies, on average, may or may not lead to the president having less influence, not all vacancies will have equally detrimental effects. Instead, vacancies will matter more for presidential influence in some contexts than others. While there are several, I focus on three key factors related to the president's use and placement of other political appointees: the presence of Senate confirmed appointees above the agency, the prominence of other appointees within the

agency, and the occupant of the office during the vacancy. Rather than operating in isolation, appointees are often part of a team, with other Senate confirmed and non-Senate confirmed appointees working in tandem with them. The presence or absence of these other appointees will augment or constrain the effect of vacancies on presidential influence. Additionally, presidents have other, unilateral tools at their disposal that may alter their ability to influence agency policy during vacant periods. By neglecting these differences, scholars have made broad assertions that often do not apply across contexts.

First, the effect of vacancies will vary depending on the structure of the agency. Bureaus within cabinet departments are situated within hierarchies with many levels of political appointees. During vacant periods in the positions leading the bureau, the next appointee up in the departments' hierarchy will be able to fill in the gap left by the vacant position, providing direct oversight from their office and indirect oversight by using the other appointees at their discretion. For example, if the Assistant Secretary overseeing the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy was vacant, the Under Secretary of Energy could take on a larger role in overseeing the agency. Indeed, as shown in Figure 1, the Under Secretary of Energy has four non-PAS appointees in their office and five other PAS assistant secretaries and office directors that they manage. However, non-cabinet department bureaus, such as independent executive agencies, have no level of political appointee oversight above the head of the agency. For example, the EPA (Figure 2), because it is outside of a cabinet department, has no appointee overseeing the agency above the administrator position. Therefore, vacancies within non-bureaus will be more harmful, as there are no appointees higher in the hierarchy to fill the gap left by the vacant leader.

Figure 1. Management Hierarchy of the Office of the Under Secretary of Energy (Department of Energy 2022)
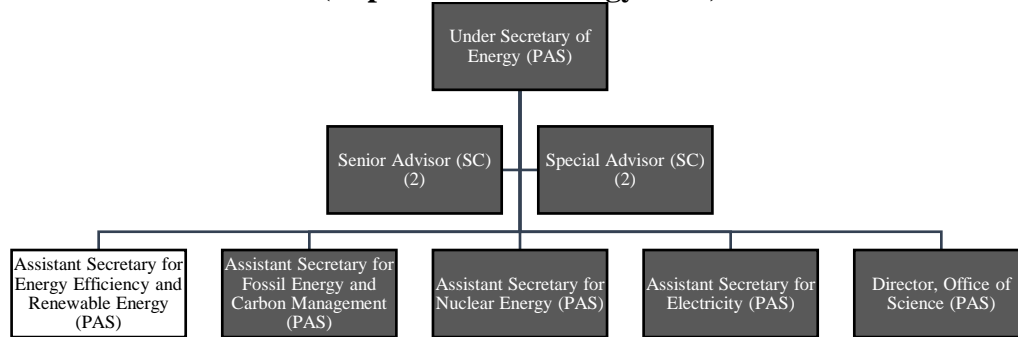
Note: White box indicates the position directly overseeing the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy in the Department of Energy. Each position is listed with its classification in parentheses: PAS denotes presidentially appointed and Senate confirmed and SC denotes Schedule C (Plum Book 2020).

Figure 2. Management Hierarchy of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA 2020)
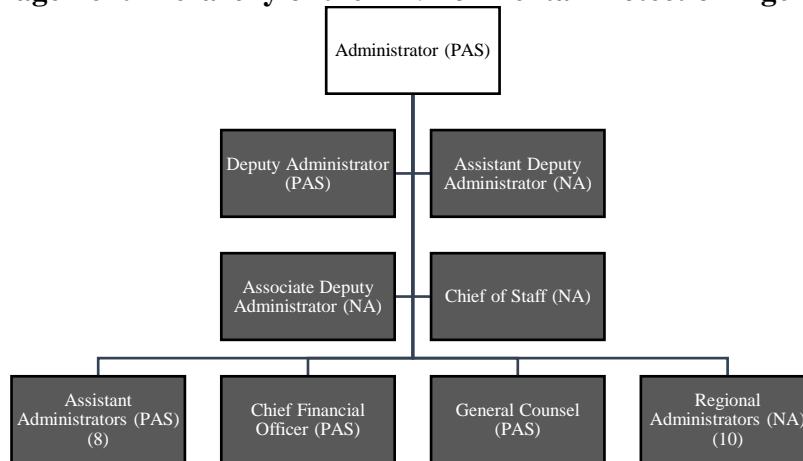
Note: White box indicates the position directly overseeing the EPA. Each position is listed with its classification in parentheses: PAS denotes presidentially appointed and Senate confirmed and NA denotes non-Career SES (Plum Book 2020).

Bureaus Hypothesis: Vacancies will diminish presidential influence less in cabinet department

bureaus.

Of course, the impact of vacancies within Cabinet department bureaus will depend upon

whether the Under Secretary position itself is filled with a Senate-confirmed appointee. If

multiple levels of the hierarchy are vacant, then the agency will be left without any proximate

political appointee above the agency to provide oversight of and direction to the agency. The

closest remaining Senate-confirmed appointee would likely be the Department Secretary,

individuals that are often far removed from the day-to-day activities of the agency and that have an already full plate of responsibilities. Therefore, when vacancies occur at multiple levels of the agency's leadership hierarchy, the effect of a vacancy in the position closest to the agency will be more detrimental to the president's ability to control the agency's policymaking.

Accumulation Hypothesis: Within cabinet department bureaus, vacancies will diminish presidential influence more when there are multiple vacancies in the agency's leadership hierarchy.

Additionally, the effect of vacancies will vary depending on the management environment within the agency, starting with the prevalence of other political appointees, or the level of politicization, in the agency. PAS agency heads do not operate in isolation, instead they are members of a team of appointees within an agency (Lewis 2012). Members of these teams include other PAS officials, non-Career members of the SES, and Schedule C appointees. As shown in Figure 3, an agency such as the Economic Development Administration (EDA) has several "layers" of political appointees that operate in tandem. These additional appointees provide the president with a greater ability to influence agency policymaking (Light 1995). Lewis and Waterman describe the increased use of these "invisible" appointees as "arguably the most important trend in the administrative presidency" (2013, 37).

Figure 3. Management Hierarchy of the Economic Development Administration (Plum Book 2012)
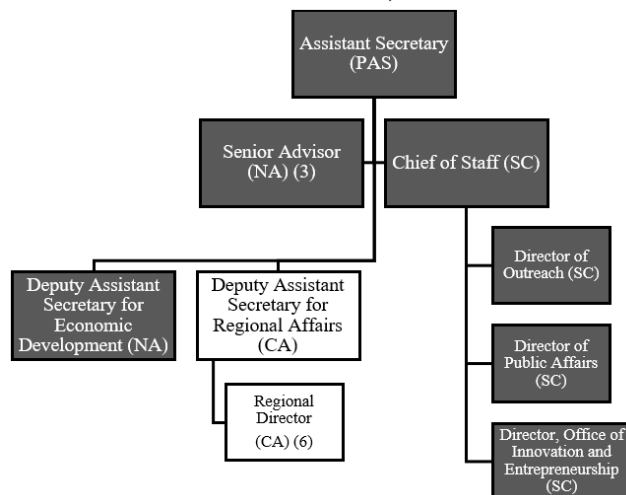
Note: Gray boxes indicate appointed positions, while white boxes indicate careerist positions. Each position is listed with its classification in parentheses: PAS denotes presidentially appointed and Senate confirmed, NA denotes non-Career SES, SC denotes Schedule C, and CA denotes career civil servant (Plum Book 2012).

Non-Career SES and Schedule C appointees will take on a greater role in the absence of confirmed leadership (Moore 2018). For example, in the EDA, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economic Development and the Chief of Staff to the Assistant Secretary could take on a larger role when the Assistant Secretary position is vacant. The individuals filling these lower-level appointed positions do not have to appease a Senate majority to enter their positions and are more likely to be loyal to the president (Lewis 2011; Lewis and Waterman 2013; Waterman and Ouyang 2020) and more ideologically extreme (Bonica, Chen, and Johnson 2015), compared to their confirmed counterparts. Therefore, because these appointees are more ardent supporters of the president and because they are less accountable to members of Congress, their increased role during periods of vacant PAS leadership will allow the president to have greater influence over the agency. However, an agency like the Indian Health Service (Figure 4), does not have a similar appointee team in place that could step in when the Director position is vacant. Instead,

the three careerist deputy directors, with no ties to the president, would likely take on a greater role during vacant periods.

Figure 4. Management Hierarchy of the Indian Health Service (Plum Book 2012)
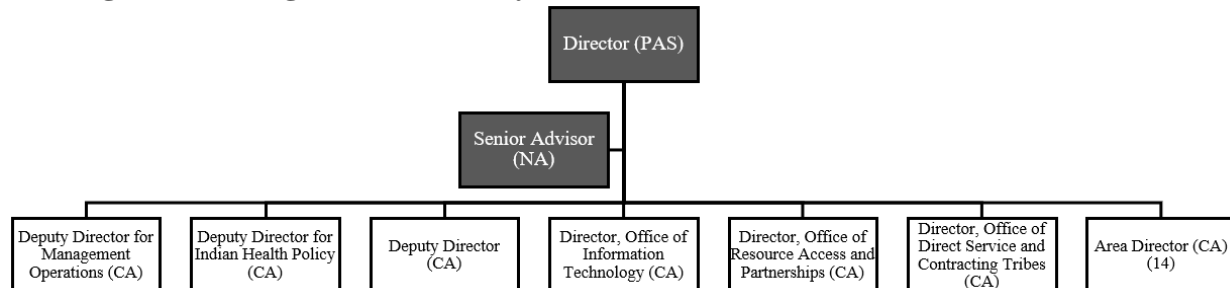

Note: Gray boxes indicate appointed positions, while white boxes indicate careerist positions. Each position is listed with its classification in parentheses: PAS denotes presidentially appointed and Senate confirmed, NA denotes non-Career SES, and CA denotes career civil servant (Plum Book 2012).

Politicization Hypothesis: Vacancies will diminish presidential influence less in more politicized agencies.

Finally, presidents have opportunities to unilaterally fill positions on an interim basis during vacant periods (O'Connell 2020; Kinane 2021; Piper 2022b). According to the Federal Vacancies Reform Act of 1998 (5 U.S.C. § 3345), commonly referred to as the Vacancies Act or the FVRA, there are two "types" of acting officials that can serve on an interim basis when a vacancy occurs. If there is an individual serving in the "first deputy" or "first assistant" position below the PAS position, that individual will become the acting official by default (Brannon 2020). The president may also select a previously confirmed PAS official or a senior "officer or employee" within the agency[4] to serve in an acting capacity (Brannon 2020).

Senior career civil servants who are in line for the position will work to keep the agency functioning as usual, but their experience and stability will come at a cost to a president who

---

[4] Senior "officer[s] or employee[s]" must be in the agency for a period of at least 90 days and be paid at the equivalent of the GS-15 pay level or above (Brannon 2020).

expects loyalty and who desires a drastic change in the course of agency policymaking (McCarty and Razaghian 1999; O'Connell 2009; 2020; Mendelson 2014; Piper 2022b). These default acting officials have assurance that they cannot be fired and that they will return to their original position once their acting service ends.

Non-default acting officials and politically appointed deputies, in contrast, are under the complete, unilateral control of the president. The principal default acting official is in some cases a political appointee, either a Senate confirmed (e.g., Deputy Secretaries) or non-PAS appointee (e.g., most Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney Generals). These individuals, like other politically appointees, are agents of the president without civil service protection. The president can also select anyone within the limits outlined above, allowing them to choose someone potentially less qualified or more ideologically consistent with their views. Additionally, because these officials are only moved into their position at the direction of the president and because they are often themselves non-PAS appointees without civil service protections, they are more likely to be beholden to the president's wishes. Therefore, when vacant PAS positions are filled by politically appointed acting officials, we should expect that the president will exert more influence over the agency than if a careerist acting official was allowed to serve.[5]

---

[5] To validate proposed differences between types of acting officials, careerist and appointed, I gathered information on the background characteristics of acting officials. I find that appointed acting officials are more likely to have background characteristics that are associated with loyalty to and ideological alignment with the president (see e.g., Waterman and Ouyang 2020). Summaries of the acting official background characteristics by acting official type are reported in Appendix F.

Political Actings Hypothesis: Vacancies will diminish presidential influence less when the president uses political acting officials during the vacant period.

In total, we should expect that the effect of vacancies on the president's ability to influence administrative policymaking will be conditional on presence of overseeing political appointees, the management environment within the agency, and the president's use of acting officials. When presidents have larger appointee teams to rely on and when they use politically appointed acting officials, vacancies will have less of an effect on the president's ability to influence the agency. However, when there is no confirmed overseeing appointee above the agency, vacancies will have a larger, more detrimental effect on presidential influence.

Data, Variables, and Methods

To evaluate the impact of vacancies on presidential control of the executive branch, we need a measure of presidential influence in administrative agencies. Measuring influence over agency policymaking is difficult for two reasons. First, agencies conduct a breadth of activities that are typically not comparable across agencies (Wilson 1989). Therefore, scholars have typically been limited to examining influence over activities unique to a particular agency (e.g., Wood and Waterman 1991; Bolton et al. 2015). Second, parsing out influence over agency decision making observationally is extremely difficult. While we may observe changes in agency policymaking, it can be difficult to determine how much credit any individual actor deserves for the occurrence of those changes.

To overcome these challenges, I use the 2007, 2014, and 2020 Survey on the Future of Government Service (SFGS), an online and paper survey of US-based federal executives.[6] The respondents include all political appointees, career members of the SES, and senior Foreign Service officers serving domestically. The survey sample also includes other high-level managers who administered key programs or offices. Other scholars have similarly used these surveys to assess the influence of political actors on administrative policymaking (Bertelli and Lewis 2012; Clinton, Lewis, and Selin 2014; Selin 2015).

To measure the influence of the president, I use a question from the SFGS that asked: "In general, how much influence do you think the following groups [White House][7] have over policy decisions in [your agency]?" Respondents were given a scale from 0-None to 4-A great deal, or could select "Don't know."[8] The question asks federal executives to evaluate how much

---

[6] Full details of the survey, including information on response rates and survey weights are included in Appendix A.

[7] Respondents were also asked to evaluate the policy influence of agents of the president, including political appointees and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). I also estimated models using agency average responses to questions regarding the policy influence of political appointees and OMB as the dependent variable. Results, reported in Appendix Tables C.1 and C.2, are substantively similar to the main specifications with White House influence as the dependent variable.

[8] Respondents that responded "Don't know" were not included in the agency average and did not count towards the five-respondent threshold for inclusion into the sample.

influence each actor has over policy decisions in their agencies by name.[9] Given that the

hypothesized variation is at the agency level, I aggregate[10] weighted responses[11] by agency for

all agencies with at least 5 respondents. In total, the sample includes 274 agency average

observations from 144 executive agencies.[12] This includes 231 observations from 124 agencies

within cabinet departments, 5 observations from three agencies within the Executive Office of

the President, and 38 observations from seventeen independent executive agencies. There is

significant variation in the influence measure across agency averages. White House influence

averages vary from 0.96 to 4, with a mean value of 2.96 (SD 0.62).

Using these surveys to measure presidential influence has two key advantages. First, the

observations are consistent across agencies and time, allowing us to draw generalizable

conclusions about the effects of vacancies on administrative outcomes. In contrast, existing work

has been restricted by the limited number of agency outputs that are observable, such as

---

[9] Respondents in the Office of the Secretary, however, were asked about the departments as a

whole. In departments where I have at least 5 respondents from the Office of the Secretary, I

include agency average White House influence for the entire department.

[10] Agency averages account for survey weights to ensure that survey responses are representative

of the target population. For further information on weighting, see Appendix A.

[11] I also estimate models on weighted agency averages calculated using only the responses of

careerists since political appointees' evaluations of presidential influence may be biased. Results

reported in Appendix D.1 are substantively similar to the main model specification.

[12] A full list of included agencies and the surveyed years in which they were included is reported

in Appendix B.

rulemaking review time (e.g., Bolton et al. 2015). Few agency outputs are comparable across agencies, and those that are (e.g., response time to FOIA requests, payment to contractors, etc.) may not be central to policy mission of the agency. Second, the survey-based measures employed here rely on senior executives' perceptions of influence over agency policymaking, ameliorating the inherent difficulties in observing the effects of political actors on outcomes. These respondents are appropriately positioned to judge policy influence within their agency.

At first glance, the agency average responses to questions about presidential influence look reasonable. For example, respondents in the Bureau of Consular Affairs within the State Department in 2020 reported one of the highest average levels of White House influence. This fits with reporting that highlighted the administration's slashing of the bureau's budget and restrictions on its ability to issue visas (Richardson 2021). Additionally, three of the highest averages for White House policy influence come from agencies within the Executive Office of the President (EOP).

In Figure 5, I graph the influence measures with another question from the 2020 survey dealing with perceptions of agenda change. Here, respondents were asked "Some agencies' policy agendas changed after the inauguration of President Trump. Other agencies' policy agendas stayed the same. In your experience, how much did the policy agenda of [your agency] change after the inauguration?" Respondents were given a sliding scale from 0-Did not change to 3-Changed significantly. They could also indicate a "I did not experience the change in administration" or "Don't know" response. As Figure 5 suggests, White House policy influence

is strongly, positively correlated with agency policy agenda change. This provides further evidence that the influence measure is representative of tangible policy change.[13]

Figure 5. Comparison of 2020 White House Policy Influence with 2020 Agency Policy Agenda Change

Note: Fitted lines estimated based upon all agencies with at least 5 respondents in the 2020 survey. Some agency acronyms are excluded from the figure to limit overlap among acronyms. Agency acronyms E (Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment), M (Management), and R (Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs) indicate bureaus within the Department of State.

Key *Independent Variables*

To measure vacancies, I used the length of time the PAS position most closely overseeing the respondent's office[14] was vacant between the president's inauguration date and the date the

---

[13] I also estimated models using agency average responses to the agenda change question as the dependent variable. Results, reported in Appendix Table C.3, are substantively similar to the main specifications with White House influence as the dependent variable.

[14] I used the Plum Book to find the PAS position most proximate to the subunit. When the Plum Book was not clear, I used agency organizational charts to determine those positions.

SFGS survey was fielded.[15] For ease of interpretation, I report vacancies in terms of months.[16] The average most proximate PAS position was vacant for about 29% of the time between each president's inauguration and the time the survey was fielded.

To assess whether vacancies in cabinet department bureaus are less detrimental to presidential influence, I include an indicator for whether the agency is a bureau within a larger department. I code the "Bureau" variable with a 1 if the agency is a cabinet department bureau and 0 otherwise. About three quarters of agency observations are from cabinet department bureaus. I expect that vacancies within cabinet bureaus will have smaller effects on the president's ability to influence agency policymaking.

To assess whether vacancies in both positions overseeing the cabinet department hierarchy and positions most proximate to the cabinet department bureau are more detrimental to presidential influence, I measure the length of time the PAS position overseeing the PAS official

---

[15] Vacancies were scaled to account for differences in the time from inauguration to when each survey was fielded. Specifically, vacancies in the Bush and Trump administration were scaled to be equivalent to those in the Obama administration.

[16] For the 2007 and 2014 survey, I used vacancy data collected by Resh et al. (2021). I then supplemented their data with information on confirmation dates from Senate.gov and exit dates from agency websites and other external sources (e.g., news sources, Leadership Connect). For the 2020 survey, I used the PPS and *Washington Post's* "Political Appointee Tracker" to gather confirmation and exit dates. Data for the positions not listed on their tracker was similarly gathered from Senate.gov for confirmation dates and from agency websites and other external sources for exit dates.

most proximate to the respondent's office[17] was vacant between the president's inauguration date and the date the SFGS survey was fielded.[18] The same process for calculating vacancy length for the most proximate PAS position was used to measure the vacancy length of appointees higher in the agency hierarchy.[19] The average next-up PAS position was vacant for about 23% of the time between each president's inauguration and the time the survey was fielded. I expect that joint vacancies at both levels in the agency's hierarchy will be more detrimental to the president's influence over the cabinet bureau, compared to vacancies in only one level of the hierarchy.

To measure politicization, I calculated the percent of supervisors in an agency that were comprised of political appointees (Lewis 2008). I gathered agency supervisor employment data for June of the surveyed year from the Office of Personnel Management's *FedScope*.[20] I counted the number of PAS, non-Career SES, Schedule C employees in the agency from the 2004, 2012, and 2020 editions of the Plum Book. The average agency had 3.62% of their supervisors

---

[17] I used the Plum Book to find the PAS position that was directly above the PAS official closest to the respondent's office. When the Plum Book was not clear, I used agency organizational charts to determine those positions.

[18] Cabinet departments as a whole, independent executive agencies, and agencies within the Executive Office of the President are excluded from any models with this measure, as there is no PAS official overseeing these agencies.

[19] These vacancies were similarly scaled to account for timing differences between surveys.

[20] June was selected because it was the closest observation of agency employment prior to the administration of each survey.

comprised of political appointees. I expect that vacancies will be less harmful to presidential influence as the agency becomes more politicized.

To measure the president's use of acting officials, I track the occupant of each PAS position of interest using the four quarters of the *Federal Yellow Book* from the year prior to each survey's administration. The *Federal Yellow Book* is a quarterly directory of executive officials, akin to a telephone book. To categorize acting officials, I gathered the employment history of each individual on Leadership Connect, the online edition of the *Yellow Book*, LinkedIn, and an additional online source, typically their biography page from the agency they served in or a news article. Individuals who were in a politically appointed positions immediately prior to their service as acting were categorized as "political actings." I then created a dichotomous measure for whether a political acting served in the year prior to the survey's administration. This serves as a proxy for the president's use of political actings during the entire vacant period leading up to the survey. Twenty percent of agencies had a political acting serve in at least one of the 4 quarters prior to the survey's administration. I expect that vacancies will be less harmful to presidential influence when the president uses political acting officials during a vacant period.

Control Variables

To account for potential confounders, I include agency and survey-level controls. To begin, I control for whether the agency is a priority to the president.[21] For the 2007 and 2014

---

[21] I also estimate models on the subset of priority agencies. Results, reported in Appendix Table E.1, are substantively similar across specifications. Additionally, I conducted mediation analysis to observe how much of the effect of presidential priority is direct and how much of the effect is

survey, I coded agencies with a 1 if the agency was mentioned as responsible for a policy or an issue raised in the president's first address before a joint session of Congress. For the 2020 survey, I coded agencies with a 1 if the agency is responsible for carrying out an item on President Trump's *Contract with the American Voter* and 0 otherwise. Agencies important to the president's policy agenda are less likely to experience lengthy vacancies and are more likely to be subject to other tools of presidential control (Hollibaugh et al. 2014).[22]

Second, I control for the agency's location in either a cabinet department or the Executive Office of the President (EOP). I code the "EOP" variable with a 1 if the agency is within the EOP and 0 otherwise. I code the "Department" variable with a 1 if the agency is within a cabinet department and 0 otherwise. Therefore, the comparison group is independent executive agencies (e.g., EPA, Social Security Administration, etc.). Agencies in the cabinet and EOP are more likely to report presidential influence and are more highly politicized.[23]

Third, I control for whether the agency has an ideological reputation that is in opposition to the president. To measure ideological position in relation to the president, I use a measure of agency ideological reputation from the 2014 SFGS (Richardson et al. 2018). I code the

---

mediated through vacancies. Results, reported in Appendix G, show that almost none of the effect of priority is mediated through vacant months.

[22] Of course, presidential priorities may change over the course of an administration. This measure is recorded prior to treatment as one reason for changing presidential priorities is the level of control presidents have over agencies connected with a policy area.

[23] I also estimated models that control for agency independence (Selin 2015). Results, reported in Appendix Table E.2, are substantively similar across specifications.

"Ideological Opponent" variable with a 1 if the agency has an ideological reputation that is in opposition to the president (e.g., liberal agency-Republican president). Respondents from ideologically opposed agencies may be more or less likely to report policy influence by the president. Agency ideology may also influence the president's appointment strategy (Lewis 2008; Hollibaugh et al. 2014; Hollibaugh and Rothenberg 2017; Piper 2022b).

Fourth, I control for the percentage of agency respondents that were political appointees. Ten percent of agency respondents were political appointees on average. Political appointees likely are biased in their evaluations of presidential influence and may inflate the degree to which the president influences administrative policymaking.

Finally, I include presidential fixed effects. I code the "Obama" variable with a 1 if the average was derived from the 2014 SFGS and 0 otherwise. I code the "Trump" variable with a 1 if the average was derived from the 2020 SFGS and 0 otherwise. It is possible that observations from one presidential administration are systematically different than in another administration.[24]

---

[24] I also estimated models on the subset of observations from the Bush and Obama administration and the subset of observations from the Trump administration, as it might be possible that there were differences across presidents. Results, reported in Appendix Tables E.3 and E.4, are mostly substantively similar across subsets with one notable difference. Specifically, I find that, for the Trump administration, vacancies in bureaus were not less detrimental to presidential influence.

Models

       I estimate models via Ordinary Least Squares to estimate the effect of vacancies in PAS positions on presidential influence over agency policymaking.[25] I begin by estimating models with only the measure of vacancy length to assess the average effect of vacancies on presidential influence. I then estimate models with each of the interaction variables. Because some unobserved agency characteristics may be correlated with their parent agency, I clustered standard errors at the cabinet level, with agencies within the EOP and independent agencies in separate clusters.[26]

---

[25] To address how fragile my estimates are to potential omitted confounding variables, I also conducted sensitivity analysis. Results of the sensitivity analysis, reported in Appendix H, show that the main results of the paper are robust to the effects of potential omitted confounders.

[26] We may be concerned that vacancies have different intended effects across agencies. For example, whether a president wants to augment or constrain the activities of an agency may influence their propensity to leave positions vacant (Kinane 2021). If this neglect, or outright hostility towards an agency, is not perceived as influence, model estimates may be biased towards my hypothesized relationships. While the included model controls should at least partially address these concerns, I have also estimated models on a series of agency subsets that are presumably connected to the president's goals for the agency. Subsets include agencies connected with the president's policy priorities, agencies ideologically aligned with the president, and agencies ideologically opposed to the president. Agencies that are connected with the president's priorities and that are ideologically aligned with them are likely to be targeted for expansion. However, agencies that are ideologically opposed to the president are more likely to

Results

One central pattern is illuminated within the results of the models, namely that the effect of vacancies on presidential influence is conditional. The effect is conditioned on two key factors: the presence of an overseeing appointee above the agency and the level of politicization in the agency. Vacancies where there is no confirmed appointee overseeing the agency have more deleterious consequences for the influence of the president. In contrast, presidents do not suffer as severe of loses of influence when agencies are more politicized. Instead, they may even gain influence at high enough levels of politicization.

These results suggest that, under certain circumstances, presidents benefit from the use of strategic vacancies. Once a vacancy occurs, rather than attempting to fill the vacancy with a nominee capable of appeasing a Senate majority, presidents can rely more heavily on the remaining PAS appointees overseeing the agency and lower-level appointees within the agency, agents that are more loyal to and more ideologically aligned with the president. This helps to explain the rising prevalence of vacancies and puts presidents at a greater advantage in our separation of powers system, allowing presidents to act unilaterally without Senate input.

---

be subject to reduction efforts. If estimates are substantively similar across agency subsets, representing cases of differing presidential goals, our concerns should be attenuated. Indeed, I find that, across all subsets, vacancies are more harmful for presidential influence when there is no Senate confirmed appointee overseeing the agency and less harmful to presidential influence when the agency is more heavily politicized. Model estimates are reported in Appendix Tables E.1, E.5, and E.6.

Further, the Senate's own delays and amenability to presidential nominees may only further incentive presidents to use non-Senate confirmed appointees.

I proceed first by examining the average effect of vacancies on presidential influence (Model 1). There is limited suggestive evidence supporting the common expectation that lengthier vacancies in the most proximate PAS position are associated with diminished presidential influence. The coefficient is negative but it is small and imprecise. Substantively, moving from the first to third quartile in direct vacant months (+19.43) is associated with a 0.05-point decrease in White House influence, or slightly less than one tenth of a standard deviation decrease in While House influence. The mixed evidence of an average effect is to be expected, given our expectation that the effect of vacancies is contextual.

Table 1. Base, Hierarchy Interaction, Politicization Interaction, and Acting Interaction Models

	Average Effect	Layers		Teams	Actings
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Most Proximate PAS Vacant Months	-0.0025	-0.0102***	0.0028	-0.0042	-0.0010
	(0.0031)	(0.0017)	(0.0039)	(0.0034)	(0.0038)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXBureau		0.0093***			
		(0.0027)			
Higher Up PAS Vacant Months			-0.0036		
			(0.0053)		
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXHigher Up PAS Vacant Months			-0.0001		
			(0.0002)		
Politicization %				0.0033	
				(0.0104)	
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPoliticization %				0.0009*	
				(0.0004)	
Political Acting (Yr. Prior)					0.2636**
					(0.1150)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPolitical Acting (Yr. Prior)					-0.0066
					(0.0052)
Priority	0.1131	0.0950	0.0999	0.1000	0.0952
	(0.1006)	(0.1005)	(0.1215)	(0.0926)	(0.0939)
EOP	0.8044***	0.6981***		0.2456	0.8204***
	(0.0901)	(0.0865)		(0.3740)	(0.0760)
Department	0.3927***	0.2617**		0.4697***	0.4128***
	(0.1318)	(0.1201)		(0.1209)	(0.1391)
Bureau	-0.4700***	-0.5364***		-0.6132***	-0.4891***
	(0.1435)	(0.1457)		(0.1187)	(0.1493)
Ideological Opponent	0.1113	0.1218	0.1146	0.0898	0.1091
	(0.0715)	(0.0718)	(0.1016)	(0.0677)	(0.0695)
Percent Appointee	0.4624*	0.4201*	0.4915*	0.1074	0.4588*
	(0.2311)	(0.2170)	(0.2468)	(0.1859)	(0.2419)
Obama	0.0438	0.0521	0.0270	0.0354	0.0238
	(0.0795)	(0.0840)	(0.0903)	(0.0906)	(0.0790)
Trump	0.1855*	0.1873*	0.2123	0.1778*	0.1789*
	(0.1007)	(0.0995)	(0.1454)	(0.0982)	(0.0958)
Constant	2.8693***	3.0325***	2.7865***	2.8981***	2.8342***
	(0.0716)	(0.0611)	(0.1195)	(0.0921)	(0.0756)
R^2	0.1678	0.1767	0.0458	0.2209	0.1794
N.	225	225	162	195	225

Note: *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; *$p<0.1$. Data: Survey on the Future of Government Service, 2007, 2014, and 2020. Dependent variable is weighted average agency response to question: "In general how much influence do you think the following groups [White House] have over policy decisions in [your agency]?" (0-4). Model estimated with Ordinary Least Squares and standard errors are clustered by department with independent agencies and agencies within the Executive Office of the President in separate clusters. Model 3 is estimated on the subset of cases from cabinet department bureaus.

Bureaus

Next, we can examine how the effect of vacancies is conditioned on the presence of other appointees overseeing the agency. Consistent with my expectation in the Bureaus Hypothesis, vacancies within cabinet department bureaus are less detrimental to presidential influence. As shown in Model 2 of Table 1, the interaction term is large and estimated precisely. Indeed, the coefficient on the interaction term is almost the same size as the main effect of "Most Proximate PAS Vacant Months." Its substantive effect is best seen in Figure 6 which shows the predicted level of White House influence. Here, we see that vacancies have basically no effect on presidential influence in cabinet department bureaus. For all other agencies, however, including Cabinet departments, agencies within the EOP, and independent executive agencies, vacancies are estimated to limit presidential influence and limit it more the longer the vacancy. For example, moving from the first to third quartile in vacant months, an increase of about the length of time the Social Security Administrator position was vacant in the lead up to the 2014 SFGS, is associated with a 0.20-point decrease in White House influence, or about one-third of a standard deviation decrease in White House influence. This effect size is more than twice the effect of an agency being connected to a priority on the president's policy agenda.

Figure 6. Predicted Level of White House Influence Given Most Proximate PAS Vacancy Length and Agency Structure (Model 2 of Table 1)
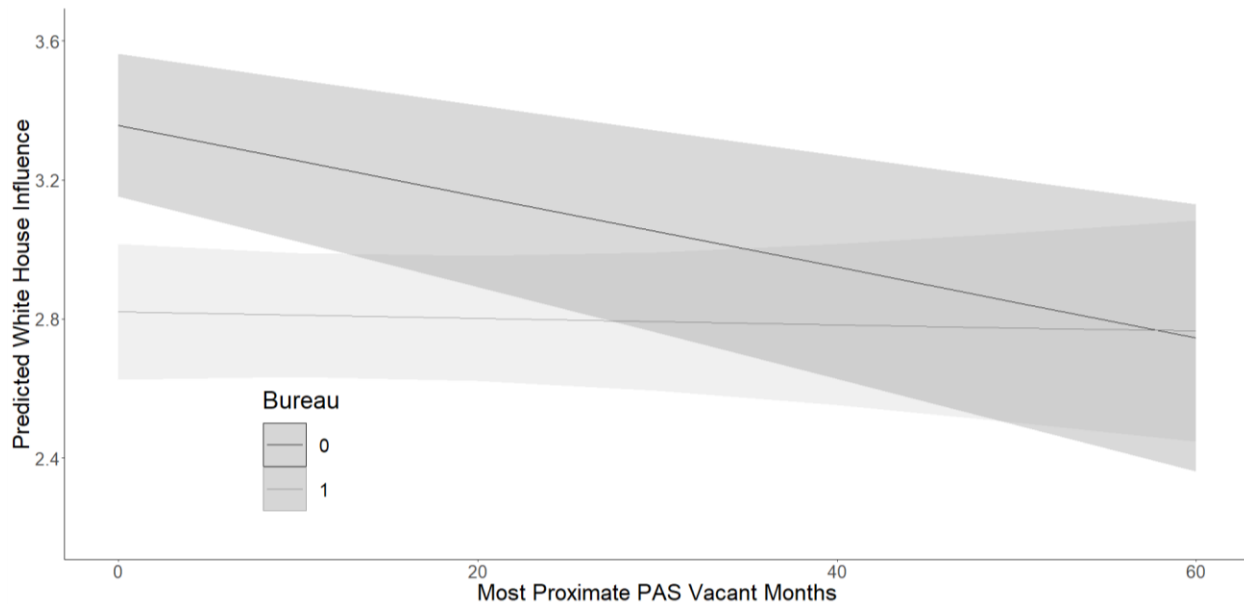
Note: Y-Axis truncated to the range of agency averages of White House Influence between the 10th and 90th percentiles.

These results suggest the importance of agency structure and the broader appointee team in determining presidential influence. Rather than individual appointees operating in isolation, appointees overseeing the cabinet department bureaus can step in when the position most proximate to the agency is vacant. However, when there is no higher up appointee to step in, vacancies have a more detrimental effect on presidential influence.

Accumulation

Given the differences between cabinet department bureaus and non-bureaus, it is important to consider whether vacancies in the most proximate position to bureaus have more harmful effects on presidential influence when the position overseeing the agency is also vacant. As shown on the interaction term on both measures of vacancies in Model 3 in Table 1, each additional month that one PAS position is vacant, increases the negative effect of a vacancy in the other PAS position. This provides suggestive evidence that, like non-bureaus, the absence of an overseeing appointee causes vacancies in the most proximate position to be more detrimental

to the president's ability to control agency policymaking. However, the effect is small and imprecise. Only a two and a half standard deviation increase in higher up vacant months (about 30 months) reduces the coefficient on most proximate vacant months to zero.

Politicization

We can now examine how the effect of vacancies is conditioned on the level of politicization within the agency. Consistent with the Politicization Hypothesis, the level of politicization had a moderating influence on the effect of vacancies. As shown in Model 4 in Table 1, the coefficient on the main effect of politicization is positive (i.e., more politicization leads to more presidential influence) and the interaction is positive, suggesting vacancies are less consequential in more politicized agencies. The effect is statistically significant at the 0.1 p-value threshold. This effect is easiest to see in Figure 7, which shows the predicted level of White House influence based on the length of vacancy for two different kinds of agencies (high politicization—black, low politicization—gray). In more politicized agencies, vacancies are correlated with greater presidential influence. In less politicized agencies, vacancies are correlated with less influence.

Figure 7. Predicted Level of White House Influence Given Most Proximate PAS Vacancy Length and Fixed Level of Politicization (One-Standard Deviation Below and Above the Mean) (Model 4 of Table 1)
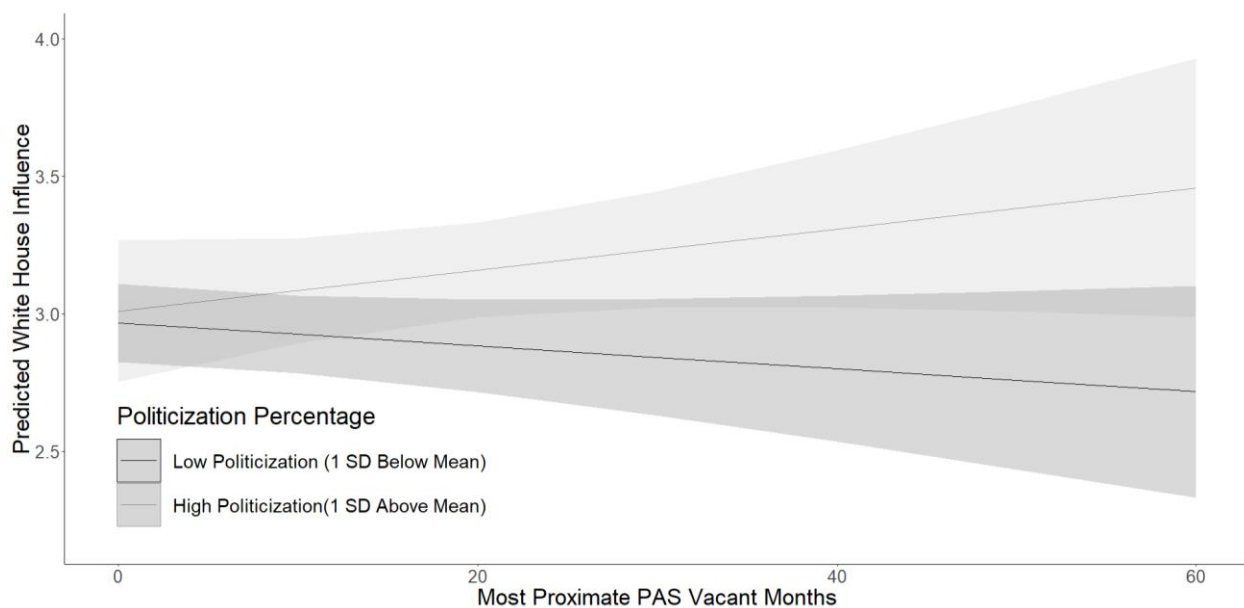
Note: The Y-Axis lower bound is truncated to the 10th percentile of agency average reported White House Influence. The Y-Axis upper bound is set to the maximum value of agency average reported White House Influence to account for the confidence intervals.

These results suggest that lower-level appointees play an important role in agency operations when Senate confirmed leadership is absent that is advantageous to presidents. The characteristics commonly associated with non-Career SES and Schedule C appointees, in particular loyalty and ideological alignment, make these appointees more responsive to the president and less concerned with appeasing Congress. Therefore, presidents may intentionally delay nominations to vacant positions in more politicized agencies.

Political Actings

Finally, we can examine how the effect of vacancies on influence is conditional on the president's use of political acting officials. The main effect of presidents appointing a political acting is positive and significant, suggesting that presidents gain influence through the choice of a political acting rather than allowing the default acting official serve. Interestingly, the use of political actings by the president during periods of vacant leadership did not significantly

moderate the effect of vacancies on presidential influence. These effects are graphed in Figure 8. Agencies staffed with political acting officials initially report greater White House influence but this effect diminishes the longer a position is vacant. By contrast, vacancies have almost no effect on presidential influence in agencies staffed by temporary careerist officials. One reason why vacancies may appear to on average have little effect when careerists serve in temporary roles is because careerists themselves may have been selected by the president as acting officials and serve with the threat of removal from their interim role (Piper 2022b). In these cases, presidents may gain influence like they would with a political acting. However, this is counterbalanced by cases in which the president simply allows the careerist next in line for the position to serve as the acting official and, therefore, has little leverage over the acting (Piper 2022b).

This is not to say that presidents do not gain influence from the use of political actings. In fact, whether the president used a political acting in the year prior to the survey's administration had a strong, positive, and statistically significant effect on presidential influence. As shown in Figure 7, it is only after the most proximate position is vacant for a lengthy period, about 40 months, that the positive effect of political actings is nullified. Given the limitations on acting service,[27] it is highly unlikely that a political acting could serve for this length of time. Therefore, these results suggest that presidents, in the short term, can gain in influence over agency policymaking by selecting political acting officials during vacant periods. This provides

---

[27] Individuals placed in an acting position may serve for a temporary period of 210 days. This period will be extended if a presidential nomination to fill the position is made.

confirmation of the efficacy of presidential acting strategy suggested by other scholars (Kinane

2021; Piper 2022b).

Figure 8. Predicted Level of White House Influence Given Most Proximate PAS Vacancy Length and President's Use of Political Acting (Yr. Prior) (Model 5 of Table 1)
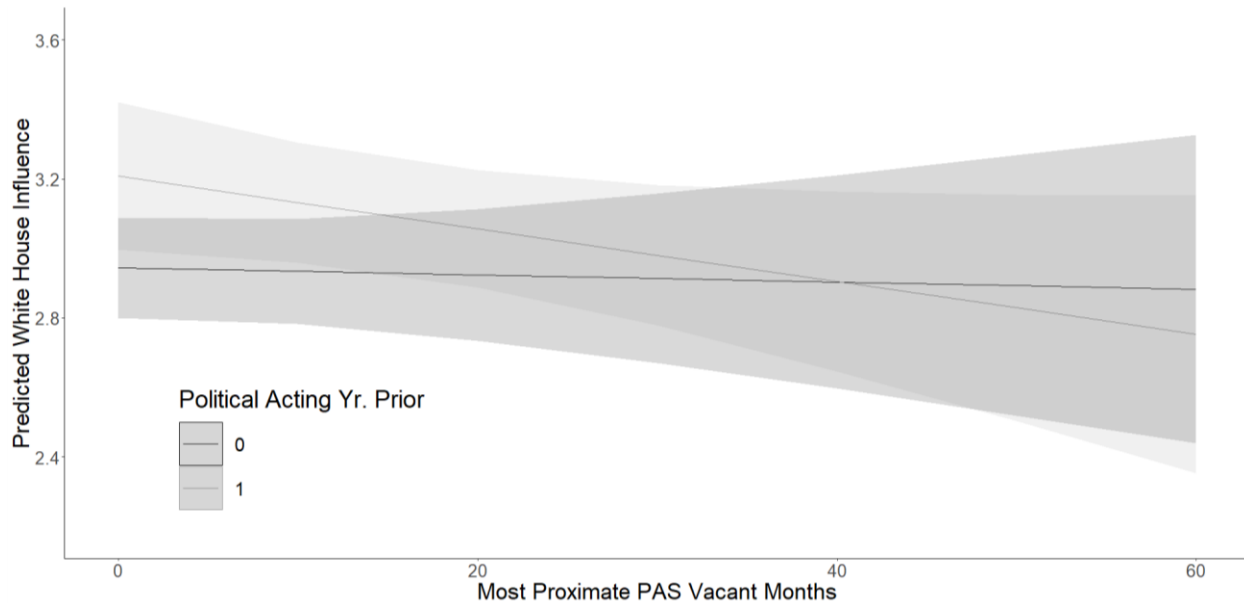
Note: Y-Axis truncated to the range of agency averages of White House Influence between the 10th and 90th percentiles.

A few other results stand out across model specifications. First, President Trump's White

House was significantly more influential than President Bush's. This stands in conflict with

existing accounts of an ineffectual Trump administration. Second, agencies connected to the

president's policy agenda and those ideologically opposed to the president consistently reported

higher levels of White House policy influence. This provides further evidence that presidents are

more focused on controlling agencies with an ideological bent against their own and may be

more likely to neglect agencies that tend to perform non-ideological tasks and tasks that are off

their agenda. The neglect of certain types of agencies by presidents should raise concerns for

agency performance and the health of the administrative state (Piper and Lewis 2022).

Conclusion

President Biden entered office knowing that his nominees to Senate confirmed positions would face significant confirmation delays (Pfiffner 2021; Kumar 2021). Therefore, rather than focusing solely on the selection of nominees to Senate-confirmed positions, the president's transition team prioritized the placement of non-Senate confirmed appointees, individuals that are selected unilaterally and that could take their positions on day one of the Biden administration (Pfiffner 2021; Kunar 2021). Biden, then, selected many of these non-Senate confirmed appointees to serve as acting officials in vacant Senate-confirmed positions (Piper 2022b). Combined, these strategies allowed the incoming president to gain a foothold over the sprawling administrative state in the early days of his administration.

There is growing concern among scholars and the media about the increased prevalence of vacancies in PAS positions. These trends have led some experts to claim that the traditional route of appointments through presidential nomination and Senate confirmation is broken and that reform is needed to reduce the number and length of vacancies (Stier 2021). Others worry that vacancies may diminish democratic accountability within the administrative state (O'Connell 2009; Lewis et al. 2018).

The results in this paper indicate that the effect of vacancies for presidents is conditioned on the presence of other appointees overseeing the agency and the degree of politicization in the agency. When there is no Senate confirmed appointee overseeing an agency, vacancies in the position closest to the agency are more harmful to presidential influence. In contrast, when an agency is highly politicized, vacancies are associated with increased presidential control. This suggests that Biden's politicization strategy should attenuate the effects of the large number of lengthy vacancies his administration continues to face.

Several implications emerge from this analysis. First and foremost, vacancies in Senate-confirmed positions are not necessarily problematic for democratic accountability within the administrative state. Instead, presidents have developed new strategies in the face of vacancies that allow them to assert as much or more control over administrative policymaking during vacant periods. Second, because presidents can garner greater influence over agency policymaking through the use of non-Senate confirmed appointees, presidents may have an incentive to delay nominations and to leave Senate-confirmed positions vacant for lengthy periods of time. This will especially be the case as the costs in time and resources of confirmation increase over time and helps to explain the declining pace at which presidents make nominations (Lewis and Richardson 2021). Finally, presidents are resilient in their ability to assert control over administrative agencies in the face of constraint from the Senate. Rather than increased confirmation delays and decreased Senatorial deference in the appointments process shifting power away from presidents, presidents have found alternative means to exert influence. This provides presidents with enormous unilateral authority that is at odds with our separation of powers system of government.

References

Bertelli, Anthony M., and David E. Lewis. 2012. "Policy Influence, Agency-Specific Expertise, and Exit in the Federal Service." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 23(2): 223–45.

Biden. 2020. "The Biden Plan for Securing Our Values as a Nation of Immigrants." *Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign Website*. https://joebiden.com/immigration/ (September 15, 2021).

Bolton, Alexander, Rachel Augustine Potter, and Sharece Thrower. 2015. "Organizational Capacity, Regulatory Review, and the Limits of Political Control." *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 32(2): 242–71.

Bonica, Adam, Jowei Chen, and Tim Johnson. 2015. "Senate Gate-Keeping, Presidential Staffing of 'Inferior Offices,'and the Ideological Composition of Appointments to the Public Bureaucracy." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 10(1): 5–40.

Brannon, Valerie C. 2020. "The Vacancies Act: A Legal Overview." *Congressional Research Service Report*: 36.

Chang, Kelly, David E. Lewis, and Nolan McCarty. 2001. "The Tenure of Political Appointees." In *Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April*, , 19–22.

Clinton, Joshua D., David E. Lewis, and Jennifer L. Selin. 2014. "Influencing the Bureaucracy: The Irony of Congressional Oversight." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(2): 387–401.

Cohen, Zachary. 2020. "Ousted Acting Spy Chief Maguire Formally Resigns from US Government." *CNN*. https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/21/politics/joseph-maguire-director-of-national-intelligence/index.html (April 5, 2021).

Dull, Matthew, and Patrick S. Roberts. 2009. "Continuity, Competence, and the Succession of Senate-Confirmed Agency Appointees, 1989-2009." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 39(3): 432–53.

EPA. 2020. "Environmental Protection Agency Organizational Chart."

https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-01/documents/usepa_orgchart_11x17.pdf.

Heclo, Hugh. 1977. *A Government of Strangers: Executive Politics in Washington*. Brookings

Institution.

Hollibaugh Jr, Gary E., Gabriel Horton, and David E. Lewis. 2014. "Presidents and Patronage."

American Journal of Political Science 58(4): 1024–42.

Hollibaugh Jr, Gary E., and Lawrence S. Rothenberg. 2017. "The When and Why of Nominations:

Determinants of Presidential Appointments." *American Politics Research* 45(2): 280–303.

Kinane, Christina M. 2021. "Control without Confirmation: The Politics of Vacancies in Presidential

Appointments." *American Political Science Review*: 1–16.

Kumar, Martha Joynt. 2021. "Joseph Biden's Effective Presidential Transition: 'Started Early, Went

Big.'" *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 51(3): 582–608.

Lewis, David E. 2008. *The Politics of Presidential Appointments: Political Control and Bureaucratic

Performance*. Princeton University Press.

———. 2011. "Presidential Appointments and Personnel." *Annual Review of Political Science* 14(1):

47–66.

———. 2012. "The Contemporary Presidency: The Personnel Process in the Modern Presidency."

Presidential Studies Quarterly 42(3): 577–96.

Lewis, David E., Patrick Bernhard, and Emily You. 2018. "President Trump as Manager: Reflections

on the First Year." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 48(3): 480–501.

Lewis, David E., and Mark D. Richardson. 2021. "The Very Best People: President Trump and the

Management of Executive Personnel." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 51(1): 51–70.

Lewis, David E., and Richard W. Waterman. 2013. "The Invisible Presidential Appointments: An

    Examination of Appointments to the Department of L Abor, 2001-11." *Presidential Studies*

    Quarterly 43(1): 35–57.

Light, Paul. 1995. *Thickening Government: Federal Hierarchy and the Diffusion of Accountability*.

    Brookings Institution Press.

Marquardt, Alex, Zachary Cohen, and Jeremy Herb. 2020. "Richard Grenell Takes Parting Shot at

    Democrats as He Exits Top Intelligence Job - CNNPolitics." *CNN*.

    https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/26/politics/grenell-director-of-national-intelligence-final-

    days/index.html (March 3, 2021).

McCarty, Nolan, and Rose Razaghian. 1999. "Advice and Consent: Senate Responses to Executive

    Branch Nominations 1885-1996." *American Journal of Political Science*: 1122–43.

Mendelson, Nina A. 2014. "The Uncertain Effects of Senate Confirmation Delays in the Agencies."

    Duke LJ 64: 1571.

Moe, Terry M. 1985. "The Politicized Presidency." *The new direction in American politics* 235(238):

    244–63.

Moore, Emily H. 2018. "Polarization, Excepted Appointments, and the Administrative Presidency."

    Presidential Studies Quarterly 48(1): 72–92.

O'Connell, Anne Joseph. 2009. "Vacant Offices: Delays in Staffing Top Agency Positions." *S. Cal. L.*

    Rev. 82: 913.

———. 2017. "Staffing Federal Agencies: Lessons from 1981–2016." *Brookings Institution Report,*

    April. https://www. brookings. edu/research/staffing-federal-agencies-lessons-from-1981-

    2016/(accessed December 29, 2018).

———. 2020. "Actings." *Columbia Law Review* 120(3): 613–728.

Partnership for Public Service. 2022. "Joe Biden's First Year in Office: Nominations and

Confirmations." *Center for Presidential Transition*.

https://presidentialtransition.org/publications/joe-bidens-first-year-in-office/ (March 2, 2022).

Pfiffner, James P. 2021. "Organizing the Biden Presidency." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 51(4):

818–38.

Piper, Christopher. 2022a. "Going for Goals: Presidential Appointments and Agency Goal Change."

Presidential Studies Quarterly 52(1): 140–67.

———. 2022b. "Presidential Strategy Amidst the 'Broken' Appointments Process." *Presidential

Studies Quarterly* Forthcoming.

Piper, Christopher, and David E. Lewis. 2022. "Do Vacancies Hurt Federal Agency Performance?"

Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory Forthcoming.

Plum Book. 2012. "United States Government Policy and Supporting Positions (Plum Book), 2012."

govinfo.gov.

https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.govinfo.gov%2Fapp%2Fdetails%

2FGPO-PLUMBOOK-2012 (March 2, 2022).

———. 2020. "United States Government Policy and Supporting Positions (Plum Book), 2020."

govinfo.gov. https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/GPO-PLUMBOOK-

2020/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.govinfo.gov%2Fapp%2Fdetails%2FGPO-PLUMBOOK-

2020%2F (March 2, 2022).

Resh, William G., Gary E. Hollibaugh, Patrick S. Roberts, and Matthew M. Dull. 2021. "Appointee

Vacancies in US Executive Branch Agencies." *Journal of Public Policy* 41(4): 653–76.

Richardson, Christopher. 2021. "The State Department's Visa-Issuing Authority Is in Crisis." *Foreign Policy*. https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/08/13/consular-affairs-state-department-visas-crisis-history-reform/ (July 27, 2022).

Richardson, Mark D., Joshua D. Clinton, and David E. Lewis. 2018. "Elite Perceptions of Agency Ideology and Workforce Skill." *The Journal of Politics* 80(1): 303–8.

Rose, Joel. 2021. "Biden's Pick To Lead ICE Would Take Over An Agency In Turmoil." *NPR*. https://www.npr.org/2021/07/15/1014615603/bidens-pick-to-lead-ice-would-take-over-an-agency-in-turmoil (September 15, 2021).

Samuels, Brett. 2019. "Trump Learns to Love Acting Officials | TheHill." https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/438660-trump-learns-to-love-acting-officials (October 17, 2020).

Selin, Jennifer L. 2015. "What Makes an Agency Independent?" *American Journal of Political Science* 59(4): 971–87.

Stier, Max. 2021. "Senate Confirmation for 1,200 Jobs Is Holding Biden Back." *Bloomberg.com*. https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-05-04/senate-confirmation-for-1-200-jobs-is-holding-biden-back (August 19, 2021).

Washington Post. 2022. "Tracking the Political Appointees Biden Is Nominating to Fill the Top Roles in His Administration." *Washington Post*. https://washingtonpost.com/politics/interactive/2020/biden-appointee-tracker/ (September 21, 2021).

Waterman, Richard W., and Yu Ouyang. 2020. "Rethinking Loyalty and Competence in Presidential Appointments." *Public Administration Review* 80(5): 717–32.

Welna, David. 2020. "Exclusive: After Quitting Last Year, Senior U.S. Intelligence Official Now

    Talks." *NPR.org*. https://www.npr.org/2020/08/13/902345240/exclusive-after-quitting-last-year-

    senior-u-s-intelligence-official-now-talks (March 3, 2021).

Wilson, James Q. 1989. *Bureaucracy*. Basic Books.

Wood, B. Dan, and Richard W. Waterman. 1991. "The Dynamics of Political Control of the

    Bureaucracy." *The American Political Science Review* 85(3): 801–28.

Appendix

Table of Contents

Appendix A. Additional Information on the Survey on the Future of Government Service

I use the results from the 2007, 2014, and 2020 Survey on the Future of Government Service (SFGS), an online and paper survey of US-based federal executive.[28] This includes all political appointees, career members of the SES, and senior Foreign Service officers serving domestically. The survey sample also included other high-level managers that administered key programs or offices. The response rates were 33% (2,225 of 6,690), 24% (3,551 of 14,698), and 9.1% (1,485 of 16,232) for the 2007, 2014, and 2020 surveys respectively. All analysis includes survey weights to ensure that survey responses are representative of the target population.[29]

Respondents were asked: "In general, how much influence do you think the following groups [White House; political appointees; OMB] have over policy decisions in [your agency]?" Respondents were given a sliding scale from 1-None to 5-A great deal. They could also indicate a "Don't know" response. Respondents selected a workplace from a dropdown menu at the start of the survey and this workplace replaced the [your agency] portion of the question above.

---

[28] See sfgs.princeton.edu.

[29] Survey researchers created post-stratification weights using iterative proportional fitting. They used the sample drawn from the *Leadership Directories'* Federal Government database to create population marginals. The characteristics they used for weighting are: 1) Whether a respondent worked in the DC area (the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia); 2) Position type (political appointees, career members of the SES, member of the Senior Foreign Service, and career civil servant); 3) Workplace location in the executive branch (the Executive Office of the President, each cabinet department, and independent agencies (as a unit)).

Appendix B. Agency-Year Pairings Included in the Sample

Cluster	Agency	2007	2014	2020
Department of Agriculture	Agricultural Marketing Service	X	X	X
Department of Agriculture	Agricultural Research Service	X	X	X
Department of Agriculture	Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service	X	X	
Department of Agriculture	Economic Research Service		X	
Department of Agriculture	Farm Service Agency	X	X	X
Department of Agriculture	Food and Nutrition Service	X	X	X
Department of Agriculture	Food Safety and Inspection Service		X	
Department of Agriculture	Foreign Agricultural Service		X	X
Department of Agriculture	Forest Service	X	X	X
Department of Agriculture	National Agricultural Statistics Service	X		
Department of Agriculture	National Institute of Food and Agriculture		X	
Department of Agriculture	Natural Resources Conservation Service	X	X	X
Department of Agriculture	Risk Management Agency		X	X
Department of Agriculture	Rural Housing Service		X	
Department of Agriculture	Department of Agriculture		X	
Department of Commerce	Bureau of Industry and Security		X	
Department of Commerce	Economic Development Administration		X	
Department of Commerce	Economic and Statistics Administration	X	X	
Department of Commerce	International Trade Administration	X	X	X
Department of Commerce	National Institute of Standards and Technology	X	X	X
Department of Commerce	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	X	X	X
Department of Commerce	National Telecommunications and Information Administration		X	
Department of Commerce	U.S. Census Bureau			X
Department of Commerce	U.S. Patent and Trademark Office		X	X
Department of Commerce	Department of Commerce		X	X
Department of Defense	Air Force	X	X	X
Department of Defense	Army	X	X	X
Department of Defense	Defense Commissary Agency		X	
Department of Defense	Defense Contract Audit Agency		X	
Department of Defense	Defense Finance and Accounting Service		X	
Department of Defense	Defense Information Systems Agency	X		
Department of Defense	Join Chiefs of Staff	X	X	
Department of Defense	Navy	X	X	X
Department of Defense	Department of Defense		X	X
Department of Education	Institute of Education Sciences		X	X
Department of Education	Office of Elementary and Secondary Education	X	X	
Department of Education	Office of Federal Student Aid		X	

Cluster	Agency	2007	2014	2020
Department of Education	Office of Postsecondary Education		X	
Department of Education	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services		X	
Department of Energy	Energy Information Administration	X	X	
Department of Energy	National Nuclear Security Administration	X	X	X
Department of Energy	Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy	X		X
Department of Energy	Office of Environmental Management		X	
Department of Energy	Office of Nuclear Energy		X	
Department of Energy	Office of Science	X	X	X
Department of Energy	Department of Energy		X	
Department of Health and Human Services	Administration for Children and Families	X	X	X
Department of Health and Human Services	Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality		X	
Department of Health and Human Services	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	X	X	X
Department of Health and Human Services	Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services	X	X	X
Department of Health and Human Services	Food and Drug Administration	X	X	X
Department of Health and Human Services	Health Resources and Services Administration	X	X	
Department of Health and Human Services	Indian Health Service	X	X	X
Department of Health and Human Services	National Institutes of Health	X	X	X
Department of Health and Human Services	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration		X	
Department of Health and Human Services	Department of Health and Human Services		X	X
Department of Homeland Security	Coast Guard		X	X
Department of Homeland Security	Federal Emergency Management Agency	X	X	X
Department of Homeland Security	Transportation Security Administration		X	
Department of Homeland Security	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services		X	
Department of Homeland Security	U.S. Customs and Border Protection	X	X	
Department of Homeland Security	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement		X	
Department of Homeland Security	Department of Homeland Security		X	
Department of Housing and Urban Development	Federal Housing Administration/Office of Housing			X

Cluster	Agency	2007	2014	2020
Department of Housing and Urban Development	Government National Mortgage Association		X	
Department of Housing and Urban Development	Office of Housing	X	X	
Department of Housing and Urban Development	Office of Public and Indian Housing	X	X	X
Department of Justice	Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives		X	
Department of Justice	Bureau of Prisons	X		
Department of Justice	Drug Enforcement Administration		X	
Department of Justice	Executive Office for United States Attorneys		X	
Department of Justice	Federal Bureau of Investigation		X	
Department of Justice	Office of Justice Programs	X	X	X
Department of Justice	U.S. Marshals Service		X	X
Department of Labor	Bureau of International Labor Affairs		X	
Department of Labor	Bureau of Labor Statistics	X	X	X
Department of Labor	Employee Benefits Security Administration		X	
Department of Labor	Employment and Training Administration	X	X	
Department of Labor	Mine Safety and Health Administration		X	
Department of Labor	Occupational Safety and Health Administration	X	X	X
Department of Labor	Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs		X	
Department of Labor	Veterans' Employment and Training Service			X
Department of Labor	Wage and Hour Division		X	X
Department of Labor	Department of Labor		X	
Department of State	Arms Control and International Security		X	X
Department of State	Bureau of Consular Affairs		X	X
Department of State	Bureau of Diplomatic Security		X	X
Department of State	Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights		X	
Department of State	Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment		X	X
Department of State	Management			X
Department of State	Political Affairs	X	X	X
Department of State	Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs	X	X	X
Department of State	Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs	X		
Department of State	Under Secretary for Economic, Energy, and Agricultural Affairs	X		
Department of State	Department of State		X	X
Department of the Interior	Bureau of Indian Affairs		X	X

Cluster	Agency	2007	2014	2020
Department of the Interior	Bureau of Land Management	X	X	
Department of the Interior	Bureau of Ocean Energy Management		X	
Department of the Interior	Bureau of Reclamation		X	X
Department of the Interior	Minerals Management Service	X		
Department of the Interior	National Park Service	X	X	X
Department of the Interior	Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement		X	
Department of the Interior	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	X	X	
Department of the Interior	U.S. Geological Survey	X	X	X
Department of the Interior	Department of the Interior		X	X
Department of the Treasury	Bureau of Engraving and Printing		X	
Department of the Treasury	Bureau of the Fiscal Service		X	X
Department of the Treasury	Internal Revenue Service	X	X	X
Department of the Treasury	Office of the Comptroller of the Currency		X	
Department of the Treasury	U.S. Mint		X	
Department of the Treasury	Department of the Treasury		X	
Department of Transportation	Federal Aviation Administration	X	X	X
Department of Transportation	Federal Highway Administration	X	X	X
Department of Transportation	Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration	X	X	
Department of Transportation	Federal Railroad Administration		X	X
Department of Transportation	Federal Transit Administration	X	X	X
Department of Transportation	Maritime Administration	X	X	X
Department of Transportation	National Highway Traffic Safety Administration	X	X	
Department of Transportation	Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration		X	
Department of Transportation	Research and Innovative Technology Administration		X	
Department of Transportation	Department of Transportation		X	X
Department of Veterans Affairs	Veterans Benefits Administration	X	X	
Department of Veterans Affairs	Veterans Health Administration	X	X	X
Department of Veterans Affairs	Department of Veterans Affairs		X	X
Executive Office of the President	Office of Management and Budget		X	X
Executive Office of the President	Office of Science and Technology Policy		X	
Executive Office of the President	Office of the United States Trade Representative		X	X
Independent Agency	Consumer Financial Protection Bureau		X	X
Independent Agency	Corporation for National and Community Service	X	X	X
Independent Agency	Environmental Protection Agency	X	X	X
Independent Agency	Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service			X
Independent Agency	General Services Administration	X	X	X

Cluster	Agency	2007	2014	2020
Independent Agency	Institute of Museum and Library Services	X		
Independent Agency	National Aeronautics and Space Administration	X	X	X
Independent Agency	National Archives and Records Administration	X	X	X
Independent Agency	National Science Foundation		X	X
Independent Agency	Office of Personnel Management	X	X	X
Independent Agency	Office of the Director of National Intelligence		X	
Independent Agency	Overseas Private Investment Corporation		X	
Independent Agency	Peace Corps	X	X	X
Independent Agency	Small Business Administration	X	X	
Independent Agency	Social Security Administration	X	X	X
Independent Agency	U.S. Agency for International Development	X	X	X
Independent Agency	U.S. Trade and Development Agency		X	

Appendix C. Models of Presidential Agent Influence

Table C.1 Models of Political Appointee Influence

	Average Effect	Layers		Teams	Actings
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Most Proximate PAS Vacant Months	0.0010	0.0016	0.0079	-0.0016	0.0017
	(0.0028)	(0.0009)	(0.0049)	(0.0023)	(0.0034)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXBureau		-0.0007			
		(0.0032)			
Higher Up PAS Vacant Months			0.0074**		
			(0.0029)		
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXHigher Up PAS Vacant Months			-0.0004*		
			(0.0002)		
Politicization %				0.0052	
				(0.0063)	
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPoliticization %				0.0004*	
				(0.0002)	
Political Acting (Yr. Prior)					0.1894*
					(0.1014)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPolitical Acting (Yr. Prior)					-0.0037
					(0.0038)
Priority	0.0910*	0.0924	0.0617	0.0725	0.0740
	(0.0507)	(0.0554)	(0.0663)	(0.0552)	(0.0520)
EOP	0.4313***	0.4397***		0.1167	0.4437***
	(0.0669)	(0.0431)		(0.2463)	(0.0642)
Department	0.2816***	0.2920***		0.2976***	0.2935***
	(0.0770)	(0.0693)		(0.0661)	(0.0916)
Bureau	-0.3676***	-0.3624***		-0.3932***	-0.3797***
	(0.0749)	(0.0855)		(0.0649)	(0.0871)
Ideological Opponent	0.0978	0.0970*	0.0898	0.0664	0.0958
	(0.0561)	(0.0549)	(0.0659)	(0.0597)	(0.0560)
Percent Appointee	0.1136	0.1170	0.1111	-0.1763	0.1119
	(0.2685)	(0.2679)	(0.2982)	(0.2088)	(0.2781)
Obama	-0.0976	-0.0982*	-0.1195*	-0.0659	-0.1148*
	(0.0562)	(0.0551)	(0.0576)	(0.0562)	(0.0576)
Trump	-0.0824	-0.0825	-0.0600	-0.0707	-0.0895
	(0.0610)	(0.0611)	(0.0883)	(0.0599)	(0.0592)
Constant	3.2065***	3.1935***	3.0274***	3.2509***	3.1878***
	(0.0640)	(0.0675)	(0.0671)	(0.0674)	(0.0666)
R^2	0.0999	0.1000	0.0645	0.1404	0.1113
N	230	230	167	198	230

Note: *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; *$p<0.1$. Data: Survey on the Future of Government Service, 2007, 2014, and 2020. Dependent variable is weighted average agency response to question: "In general how much influence do you think the following groups [political appointees] have over policy decisions in [your agency]?" (0-4). Model estimated with Ordinary Least Squares and standard errors are clustered by department with independent agencies and agencies within the Executive Office of the President in separate clusters. Model 3 is estimated on the subset of cases from cabinet department bureaus.

Table C.2 Models of OMB Influence

	Average Effect	Layers		Teams	Actings
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Most Proximate PAS Vacant Months	-0.0041	-0.0102***	-0.0007	-0.0071**	-0.0038
	(0.0025)	(0.0015)	(0.0046)	(0.0025)	(0.0033)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXBureau		0.0075***			
		(0.0020)			
Higher Up PAS Vacant Months			0.0053		
			(0.0054)		
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXHigher Up PAS Vacant Months			-0.0001		
			(0.0002)		
Politicization %				-0.0272***	
				(0.0086)	
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPoliticization %				0.0018***	
				(0.0003)	
Political Acting (Yr. Prior)					0.0634
					(0.0744)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPolitical Acting (Yr. Prior)					-0.0014
					(0.0036)
Priority	-0.0300	-0.0479	-0.1017	-0.0917	-0.0349
	(0.0752)	(0.0706)	(0.0798)	(0.0769)	(0.0766)
Department	-0.1742	-0.2782**		-0.1570	-0.1707
	(0.1366)	(0.1234)		(0.1075)	(0.1400)
Bureau	-0.0496	-0.1017		-0.0620	-0.0532
	(0.1297)	(0.1399)		(0.1098)	(0.1323)
Ideological Opponent	0.0175	0.0241	0.0796	-0.0414	0.0173
	(0.0647)	(0.0615)	(0.0621)	(0.0643)	(0.0674)
Percent Appointee	0.2901	0.2558	0.4028*	0.3488	0.2878
	(0.2324)	(0.2443)	(0.2001)	(0.2083)	(0.2327)
Obama	-0.2112**	-0.2066**	-0.2085**	-0.2286**	-0.2163**
	(0.0747)	(0.0756)	(0.0869)	(0.0818)	(0.0753)
Trump	-0.1021	-0.1023	-0.1343	-0.0713	-0.1031
	(0.1105)	(0.1079)	(0.1367)	(0.1014)	(0.1088)
Constant	3.4015***	3.5324***	3.0707***	3.4892***	3.3949***
	(0.0658)	(0.0517)	(0.1406)	(0.0732)	(0.0742)
R^2	0.1005	0.1106	0.0840	0.1548	0.1017
N	220	220	163	190	220

Note: *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; *$p<0.1$. Data: Survey on the Future of Government Service, 2007, 2014, and 2020. Dependent variable is weighted average agency response to question: "In general how much influence do you think the following groups [OMB] have over policy decisions in [your agency]?" (0-4). Model estimated with Ordinary Least Squares and standard errors are clustered by department with independent agencies and agencies within the Executive Office of the President in separate clusters. Model 3 is estimated on the subset of cases from cabinet department bureaus.

Table C.3 Models of Agency Policy Agenda Change

	Average Effect	Layers		Teams	Actings
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Most Proximate PAS Vacant Months	-0.0032	-0.0103 ***	-0.0005	-0.0038	0.0011
	(0.0027)	(0.0020)	(0.0069)	(0.0027)	(0.0046)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant Months:Bureau		0.0084 **			
		(0.0030)			
Higher Up PAS Vacant Months			0.0040		
			(0.0080)		
Most Prox. PAS Vacant Months:Higher Up PAS Vacant Months			-0.0001		
			(0.0003)		
Politicization %				0.0069	
				(0.0199)	
Most Prox. PAS Vacant Months:Politicization %				0.0003	
				(0.0007)	
Political Acting (Yr. Prior)					0.0082
					(0.1725)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant Months:Political Acting (Yr. Prior)					-0.0069
					(0.0055)
Priority	0.3554**	0.3475**	0.3432*	0.3375**	0.4083**
	(0.1261)	(0.1278)	(0.1704)	(0.1354)	(0.1393)
EOP	0.7852***	0.6374***		0.3617	0.7923***
	(0.1196)	(0.0788)		(0.9492)	(0.1038)
Department	0.8429***	0.6779***		0.8444***	0.8797***
	(0.1054)	(0.1078)		(0.1077)	(0.1266)
Bureau	-0.9049***	-0.9881***		-0.9621***	-0.9637***
	(0.1329)	(0.1251)		(0.1332)	(0.1434)
Ideological Opponent	0.4315***	0.4470***	0.5529***	0.3596**	0.4598***
	(0.1005)	(0.0978)	(0.1319)	(0.1293)	(0.0864)
Percent Appointee	0.2378	0.2385	0.3183	-0.0137	0.2120
	(0.4129)	(0.3945)	(0.5073)	(0.4267)	(0.3978)
Constant	1.8345***	2.0330***	1.6157***	1.8729***	1.7657***
	(0.0886)	(0.0823)	(0.2409)	(0.0955)	(0.0782)
R^2	0.4482	0.4570	0.2394	0.5132	0.4839
N	64	64	45	56	64

Note: *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; *$p<0.1$. Data: Survey on the Future of Government Service, 2020. Dependent variable is weighted average agency response to question: "Some agencies' policy agendas changed after the inauguration of President Trump. Other agencies' policy agendas stayed the same. In your experience, how much did the policy agenda of [your agency] change after the inauguration?" (0-3). Model estimated with Ordinary Least Squares and standard errors are clustered by department with independent agencies and agencies within the Executive Office of the President in separate clusters. Model 3 is estimated on the subset of cases from cabinet department bureaus.

Appendix D. Models of Careerist Only Perceptions of White House Influence

Table D.1 Models of Careerist Only Perceptions of White House Influence

	Average Effect	Layers		Teams	Actings
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Most Proximate PAS Vacant Months	-0.0026	-0.0156***	-0.0038	-0.0043	-0.0006
	(0.0034)	(0.0016)	(0.0042)	(0.0038)	(0.0044)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXBureau		0.0151***			
		(0.0021)			
Higher Up PAS Vacant Months			-0.0119		
			(0.0077)		
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXHigher Up PAS Vacant Months			0.0002		
			(0.0002)		
Politicization %				0.0122	
				(0.0139)	
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPoliticization %				0.0009*	
				(0.0005)	
Political Acting (Yr. Prior)					0.3290**
					(0.1434)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPolitical Acting (Yr. Prior)					-0.0082
					(0.0056)
Priority	-0.0363	-0.0627	-0.0455	-0.1047	-0.0301
	(0.0796)	(0.0767)	(0.0750)	(0.0986)	(0.0828)
EOP	0.8463***	0.6961***		-0.1050	0.8458***
	(0.0570)	(0.0366)		(0.5738)	(0.0540)
Bureau	-0.0910	-0.3818***		-0.0928	-0.0915
	(0.0695)	(0.0869)		(0.0586)	(0.0656)
Ideological Opponent	0.0977	0.1140	0.0517	0.0656	0.1025
	(0.0772)	(0.0770)	(0.0924)	(0.0750)	(0.0750)
Obama	0.0496	0.0695	0.0988	0.0461	0.0229
	(0.0749)	(0.0820)	(0.0946)	(0.0868)	(0.0726)
Trump	0.1422	0.1592	0.2139	0.2022	0.1264
	(0.1144)	(0.1138)	(0.1576)	(0.1323)	(0.1064)
Constant	3.0041***	3.2456***	3.0190***	2.9628***	2.9493***
	(0.0665)	(0.0522)	(0.1294)	(0.0924)	(0.0815)
R^2	0.0843	0.1072	0.0372	0.1383	0.1033
N	196	196	178	168	196

Note: *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; *$p<0.1$. Data: Survey on the Future of Government Service, 2007, 2014, and 2020. Dependent variable is weighted average agency response to question: "In general how much influence do you think the following groups [White House] have over policy decisions in [your agency]?" (0-4). Model estimated with Ordinary Least Squares and standard errors are clustered by department with independent agencies and agencies within the Executive Office of the President in separate clusters. Model 3 is estimated on the subset of cases from cabinet department bureaus.

Appendix E. Alternate Model Specifications and Robustness Checks

Table E.1 Base, Hierarchy Interaction, Politicization Interaction, and Acting Interaction Models Priority Agency Subset

	Average Effect	Layers		Teams	Actings
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Most Proximate PAS Vacant Months	0.0031	-0.0006	0.0211***	-0.0012	0.0071
	(0.0055)	(0.0042)	(0.0050)	(0.0067)	(0.0043)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXBureau		0.0040			
		(0.0082)			
Higher Up PAS Vacant Months			0.0044		
			(0.0194)		
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXHigher Up PAS Vacant Months			-0.0009**		
			(0.0003)		
Politicization %				0.0082	
				(0.0154)	
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPoliticization %				0.0007	
				(0.0006)	
Political Acting (Yr. Prior)					0.2947
					(0.3107)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPolitical Acting (Yr. Prior)					-0.0097
					(0.0097)
EOP	0.6247***	0.5998***		-0.1658	0.6275***
	(0.0689)	(0.0949)		(0.6462)	(0.0742)
Bureau	-0.2253*	-0.2863		-0.2893*	-0.2316*
	(0.1277)	(0.2078)		(0.1592)	(0.1301)
Ideological Opponent	0.0964	0.1046	0.1611	-0.0248	0.1320
	(0.1159)	(0.1276)	(0.1270)	(0.1728)	(0.1182)
Percent Appointee	0.2762	0.2625	0.3870	-0.5941	0.2301
	(0.3450)	(0.3570)	(0.5933)	(0.9876)	(0.3547)
Obama	0.2013	0.2090	0.2118	0.2267	0.1882
	(0.1786)	(0.1861)	(0.2560)	(0.2502)	(0.1828)
Trump	0.5389***	0.5458**	0.8393***	0.5656***	0.4969**
	(0.1804)	(0.1873)	(0.2362)	(0.1740)	(0.1853)
Constant	2.8371***	2.8829***	2.3649***	2.9641***	2.7539***
	(0.1438)	(0.0935)	(0.3100)	(0.2510)	(0.1422)
R^2	0.2411	0.2419	0.2690	0.2926	0.2580
N	68	68	49	60	68

Note: *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; *$p<0.1$. Data: Survey on the Future of Government Service, 2007, 2014, and 2020. Dependent variable is weighted average agency response to question: "In general how much influence do you think the following groups [White House] have over policy decisions in [your agency]?" (0-4). Model estimated with Ordinary Least Squares and standard errors are clustered by department with independent agencies and agencies within the Executive Office of the President in separate clusters. Model 3 is estimated on the subset of cases from cabinet department bureaus.

Table E.2 Base, Hierarchy Interaction, Politicization Interaction, and Acting Interaction Models with P.R. Independence Control (Selin 2015)

	Average Effect	Layers		Teams	Actings
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Most Proximate PAS Vacant Months	-0.0039	-0.0133***	0.0031	-0.0046	-0.0019
	(0.0029)	(0.0031)	(0.0048)	(0.0027)	(0.0033)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXBureau		0.0125***			
		(0.0042)			
Higher Up PAS Vacant Months			0.0030		
			(0.0070)		
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXHigher Up PAS Vacant Months			-0.0002		
			(0.0003)		
Politicization %				0.0019	
				(0.0057)	
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPoliticization %				0.0007*	
				(0.0004)	
Political Acting (Yr. Prior)					0.2420**
					(0.1109)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPolitical Acting (Yr. Prior)					-0.0077
					(0.0050)
Priority	0.1334	0.1219	0.1310	0.0674	0.1239*
	(0.0765)	(0.0789)	(0.1132)	(0.0811)	(0.0680)
P.R. Ind.	-0.2367**	-0.2174**	-0.1805	-0.1912**	-0.2436**
	(0.0904)	(0.0815)	(0.1553)	(0.0893)	(0.0911)
Bureau	-0.4288***	-0.6325***		-0.3941***	-0.4353***
	(0.1461)	(0.1543)		(0.1330)	(0.1467)
Ideological Opponent	0.1307	0.1389	0.1248	0.1014	0.1329
	(0.0880)	(0.0848)	(0.1137)	(0.0884)	(0.0838)
Percent Appointee	0.4898**	0.3525	0.3157	0.3786	0.5038**
	(0.2244)	(0.2056)	(0.1981)	(0.2260)	(0.2275)
Obama	0.1071	0.0983	0.0123	0.0898	0.0965
	(0.1022)	(0.1064)	(0.1034)	(0.0971)	(0.1006)
Trump	0.2820**	0.2548**	0.1896	0.2580**	0.2856***
	(0.1028)	(0.1041)	(0.1573)	(0.0919)	(0.0977)
Constant	3.0694***	3.2332***	2.6047***	3.0575***	3.0305***
	(0.1770)	(0.2021)	(0.1532)	(0.1665)	(0.1734)
R^2	0.2115	0.2321	0.0578	0.2302	0.2222
N	202	202	140	191	202

Note: *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; *$p<0.1$. Data: Survey on the Future of Government Service, 2007, 2014, and 2020. Dependent variable is weighted average agency response to question: "In general how much influence do you think the following groups [White House] have over policy decisions in [your agency]?" (0-4). Model estimated with Ordinary Least Squares and standard errors are clustered by department with independent agencies and agencies within the Executive Office of the President in separate clusters. Model 3 is estimated on the subset of cases from cabinet department bureaus.

Table E.3 Base, Hierarchy Interaction, Politicization Interaction, and Acting Interaction Models Bush and Obama Subset

	Average Effect	Layers		Teams	Actings
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Most Proximate PAS Vacant Months	0.0017	-0.0224***	0.0105	-0.0022	-0.0001
	(0.0056)	(0.0052)	(0.0072)	(0.0063)	(0.0053)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXBureau		0.0288***			
		(0.0070)			
Higher Up PAS Vacant Months			-0.0047		
			(0.0108)		
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXHigher Up PAS Vacant Months			-0.0003		
			(0.0006)		
Politicization %				0.0005	
				(0.0101)	
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPoliticization %				0.0012**	
				(0.0005)	
Political Acting (Yr. Prior)					0.0282
					(0.1936)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPolitical Acting (Yr. Prior)					0.0077
					(0.0113)
Priority	-0.0490	-0.0858	-0.0709	-0.0760	-0.0748
	(0.1462)	(0.1501)	(0.1889)	(0.1364)	(0.1453)
EOP	0.7798***	0.5869***		-0.0049	0.8013***
	(0.0879)	(0.1108)		(0.3696)	(0.0874)
Department	0.2387	-0.0604		0.3230**	0.2427
	(0.1656)	(0.1699)		(0.1421)	(0.1646)
Bureau	-0.3895**	-0.5486***		-0.5495***	-0.4026**
	(0.1665)	(0.1496)		(0.1386)	(0.1675)
Ideological Opponent	0.1011	0.0800	0.1454	0.0787	0.1098
	(0.0749)	(0.0852)	(0.0902)	(0.0561)	(0.0781)
Percent Appointee	0.4366	0.3412	0.4000	0.0558	0.4032
	(0.2649)	(0.2458)	(0.3389)	(0.2328)	(0.2839)
Obama	0.0545	0.0723	0.0394	0.0473	0.0341
	(0.0766)	(0.0830)	(0.0899)	(0.0895)	(0.0756)
Constant	2.9228***	3.3202***	2.7509***	2.9987***	2.9453***
	(0.1042)	(0.1237)	(0.1369)	(0.1222)	(0.1016)
R^2	0.1329	0.1781	0.0707	0.1821	0.1467
N	159	159	117	137	159

Note: *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; *$p<0.1$. Data: Survey on the Future of Government Service, 2007 and 2014. Dependent variable is weighted average agency response to question: "In general how much influence do you think the following groups [White House] have over policy decisions in [your agency]?" (0-4). Model estimated with Ordinary Least Squares and standard errors are clustered by department with independent agencies and agencies within the Executive Office of the President in separate clusters. Model 3 is estimated on the subset of cases from cabinet department bureaus.

Table E.4 Base, Hierarchy Interaction, Politicization Interaction, and Acting Interaction Models Trump Subset

	Average Effect	Layers		Teams	Actings
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Most Proximate PAS Vacant Months	-0.0067*	-0.0025	-0.0030	-0.0062*	-0.0024
	(0.0034)	(0.0021)	(0.0055)	(0.0035)	(0.0049)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXBureau		-0.0052			
		(0.0041)			
Higher Up PAS Vacant Months			0.0098		
			(0.0106)		
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXHigher Up PAS Vacant Months			-0.0002		
			(0.0003)		
Politicization %				0.0015	
				(0.0188)	
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPoliticization %				0.0001	
				(0.0009)	
Political Acting (Yr. Prior)					0.4097
					(0.3087)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPolitical Acting (Yr. Prior)					-0.0123
					(0.0076)
Priority	0.5236***	0.5311***	0.5363***	0.5285***	0.4834***
	(0.0929)	(0.0901)	(0.1366)	(0.1112)	(0.1125)
EOP	0.6610***	0.7551***		0.6027	0.6401***
	(0.1070)	(0.0750)		(0.7845)	(0.1054)
Department	0.5967***	0.7037***		0.6530***	0.6816***
	(0.1293)	(0.0796)		(0.1374)	(0.1419)
Bureau	-0.5416***	-0.4827**		-0.6682***	-0.6139***
	(0.1696)	(0.2038)		(0.1270)	(0.1843)
Ideological Opponent	0.2834	0.2736	0.3235	0.3283	0.3331 **
	(0.1639)	(0.1686)	(0.2696)	(0.1865)	(0.1481)
Percent Appointee	1.1393***	1.1416**	1.1762**	0.8941**	1.1557***
	(0.3813)	(0.3971)	(0.4284)	(0.3601)	(0.3493)
Constant	2.8555***	2.7290***	2.7183***	2.8065***	2.7225***
	(0.1336)	(0.0633)	(0.3192)	(0.1478)	(0.1153)
R^2	0.3940	0.3980	0.2304	0.4480	0.4238
N	66	66	45	58	66

Note: *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; *$p<0.1$. Data: Survey on the Future of Government Service, 2020. Dependent variable is weighted average agency response to question: "In general how much influence do you think the following groups [White House] have over policy decisions in [your agency]?" (0-4). Model estimated with Ordinary Least Squares and standard errors are clustered by department with independent agencies and agencies within the Executive Office of the President in separate clusters. Model 3 is estimated on the subset of cases from cabinet department bureaus.

Table E.5 Base, Hierarchy Interaction, Politicization Interaction, and Acting Interaction Models Ideologically Aligned Agency Subset

	Average Effect	Layers		Teams	Actings
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Most Proximate PAS Vacant Months	-0.0047	-0.0376***	0.0042	-0.0114	-0.0087
	(0.0088)	(0.0039)	(0.0071)	(0.0103)	(0.0115)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXBureau		0.0406***			
		(0.0069)			
Higher Up PAS Vacant Months			-0.0113		
			(0.0124)		
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXHigher Up PAS Vacant Months			-0.0001		
			(0.0006)		
Politicization %				-0.0267	
				(0.0190)	
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPoliticization %				0.0016*	
				(0.0008)	
Political Acting (Yr. Prior)					0.0340
					(0.2427)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPolitical Acting (Yr. Prior)					0.0088
					(0.0119)
Priority	0.1843*	0.0746	0.0504	0.1992*	0.1105
	(0.0941)	(0.1101)	(0.1339)	(0.1054)	(0.0913)
EOP	0.9650***	0.4611***		1.4676**	1.0129***
	(0.2019)	(0.1295)		(0.5324)	(0.2041)
Department	0.3773	-0.1094		0.3044	0.3945
	(0.2571)	(0.1940)		(0.2927)	(0.2749)
Bureau	-0.1212	-0.4721**		-0.2047	-0.1255
	(0.2660)	(0.1699)		(0.2764)	(0.2712)
Percent Appointee	0.7203	0.4895	0.5568	0.8159	0.7067
	(0.5872)	(0.3607)	(0.4732)	(0.7067)	(0.4988)
Obama	0.1536	0.1123	0.2143	-0.0246	0.1693
	(0.1517)	(0.1616)	(0.1761)	(0.1391)	(0.1777)
Trump	0.1899	0.1655	0.4179	0.1549	0.1583
	(0.2131)	(0.2269)	(0.2941)	(0.2398)	(0.2589)
Constant	2.7262***	3.4956***	2.9506***	3.0374***	2.7336***
	(0.1822)	(0.1495)	(0.1414)	(0.1782)	(0.2106)
R^2	0.3455	0.5327	0.2307	0.4552	0.3933
N	53	53	37	46	53

Note: *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; *$p<0.1$. Data: Survey on the Future of Government Service, 2007, 2014, and 2020. Dependent variable is weighted average agency response to question: "In general how much influence do you think the following groups [White House] have over policy decisions in [your agency]?" (0-4). Model estimated with Ordinary Least Squares and standard errors are clustered by department with independent agencies and agencies within the Executive Office of the President in separate clusters. Model 3 is estimated on the subset of cases from cabinet department bureaus.

Table E.6 Base, Hierarchy Interaction, Politicization Interaction, and Acting Interaction Models Ideologically Opposed Agency Subset

	Average Effect	Layers		Teams	Actings
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Most Proximate PAS Vacant Months	-0.0017	-0.0045*	0.0004	-0.0024	0.0025
	(0.0030)	(0.0023)	(0.0046)	(0.0042)	(0.0024)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXBureau		0.0033			
		(0.0029)			
Higher Up PAS Vacant Months			-0.0136		
			(0.0146)		
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXHigher Up PAS Vacant Months			0.0001		
			(0.0003)		
Politicization %				0.0080	
				(0.0100)	
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPoliticization %				0.0004	
				(0.0004)	
Political Acting (Yr. Prior)					0.5823***
					(0.1787)
Most Prox. PAS Vacant MonthsXPolitical Acting (Yr. Prior)					-0.0158***
					(0.0040)
Priority	0.0699	0.0659	0.0404	-0.0082	0.0851
	(0.1244)	(0.1240)	(0.1312)	(0.1682)	(0.1207)
EOP	1.0025***	0.9502***		0.4001	1.1996***
	(0.1444)	(0.1527)		(0.3832)	(0.1483)
Department	0.6153***	0.5522 ***		0.5988***	0.6292***
	(0.1482)	(0.1392)		(0.1797)	(0.1527)
Bureau	-0.5353**	-0.5636***		-0.6004***	-0.4802**
	(0.1846)	(0.1878)		(0.1943)	(0.2149)
Percent Appointee	0.4904	0.4471	1.5733	0.2814	0.6435
	(0.5088)	(0.5128)	(0.9930)	(0.5397)	(0.5869)
Obama	-0.1912	-0.1820	-0.1445	-0.1205	-0.2601**
	(0.1217)	(0.1282)	(0.1420)	(0.1411)	(0.1078)
Trump	0.1491	0.1562	0.1035	0.1952	0.2311**
	(0.1365)	(0.1436)	(0.1214)	(0.1509)	(0.1032)
Constant	2.9301***	3.0066***	3.0292***	2.9190***	2.7339***
	(0.1220)	(0.1083)	(0.1813)	(0.1554)	(0.1276)
R^2	0.2400	0.2423	0.0994	0.2851	0.3318
N	79	79	54	69	79

Note: *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$; *$p<0.1$. Data: Survey on the Future of Government Service, 2007, 2014, and 2020. Dependent variable is weighted average agency response to question: "In general how much influence do you think the following groups [White House] have over policy decisions in [your agency]?" (0-4). Model estimated with Ordinary Least Squares and standard errors are clustered by department with independent agencies and agencies within the Executive Office of the President in separate clusters. Model 3 is estimated on the subset of cases from cabinet department bureaus.

Appendix F. Validation of Differences Between Acting Official Types

To validate proposed differences between types of acting officials, careerist and appointed, I gathered information on the background characteristics of acting officials. Following the work of prior scholars (see e.g., Krause and O'Connell 2016; 2019; Waterman and Ouyang 2020), certain background characteristics are associated with increased loyalty to the president and the president's ideological vision, while others are associated with increased competence for the role individuals will perform as an acting official. Specifically, characteristics such as prior service in Congress, for party organizations, and for the president's campaign are associated with increased loyalty and ideological alignment. Additionally, prior internal agency experience is associated with increased competence.

To gather this information, I began with the dataset of acting officials that served during the first year of the Trump administration gathered by Piper (2022). Then, by using *Leadership Connect*, *LinkedIn*, news articles, and agency biography pages, I coded the following variables based on the individual's career history:

- **Congressional Service:** Equal to 1 if the acting official previously worked in Congress (including individual members and committees).

- **Party Service:** Equal to 1 if the acting official previously worked for the party (including party organizations and individual campaigns).

    o Example of party organizations include DNC, Democratic Leadership Council, Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, Democratic Governors Conference, RNC, Log Cabin Republicans, Republican Liberty Caucus, House Republican Conference, National Republican Senatorial Committee, Republican Governors Conference, and state parties.

- **Pres. Campaign Service:** Equal to 1 if the acting official previously worked for the president's campaign.

- **Prior Agency Service:** Equal to 1 if the acting official worked in the agency prior to their service as an acting official.
- **Years in Agency:** Length of time in years the acting official worked in the agency prior to their service as an acting official.

Summaries of the acting official background characteristics by acting official type are reported in Table F.1. As we can see, careerist acting officials are much less likely to have worked previously in Congress or for a party organization. Careerist actings are also less likely to have worked for the president's campaign, although appointed actings are not often drawn from the president's campaign staff either. Together, these summary statistics provides strong justification for my description of appointed acting officials as much more loyal and ideologically aligned with the president compared to careerist acting officials.

Table F.1 Summary of Background Characteristics of Acting Officials that Served in the First Year of the Trump Administration by Acting Official Type

Acting Official Type	Congressional Service	Party Service	Pres. Campaign Service	Prior Agency Service	Years in Agency
Careerist	5.6%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	15.9
Appointed	27.0%	7.0%	2.0%	59.0%	6.0

Appendix G. Mediation of Presidential Priority through Vacancies

       Presidential priority may explain both vacancies in appointed positions (e.g., presidents filling positions in agencies on their agenda) and presidential influence (e.g., presidents using other tools beyond appointments to control policymaking in agencies on their agenda). While I control for presidential priority in my OLS models, it is possible that the effect of presidential priority is mediated through vacancies. Therefore, I conducted mediation analysis to observe how much of the effect of presidential priority is direct and how much of the effect is mediated through vacancies.

       Using the mediation package in R (Tingley, Yamamoto, Hirose, Keele, and Imai 2014), I find that almost none of the effect of priority is mediated through vacant months. This result is shown in the very small proportion mediated in Table G.1. This result suggests that we should not be concerned that the observed effect of vacant months is being primarily driven by presidential priority.

Table G.1 Causal Mediation Analysis with Presidential Priority (Treatment) and Vacant Months (Mediating Variable)

	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value
ACME	0.0005	-0.02	0.02	0.96
ADE	0.10	-0.04	0.26	0.34
Total Effect	0.10	-0.04	0.26	0.32
Prop. Mediated	0.005	-0.63	1.48	0.92

Appendix H. Sensitivity Analysis

It is possible that certain factors explain both vacancies in appointed positions and presidential influence over administrative policymaking. While I have included controls for the most likely culprits, it is possible that there remain other confounders that are not controlled for in my OLS models. To address how fragile my estimates are to potential confounding variables, I conducted sensitivity analysis.

Using the sensemakr package in R (Cinelli and Hazlett 2020), I estimated the fragility of the direct effect of political acting officials on presidential influence. I also estimated the fragility of the effect of vacancies on presidential influence for three subsets of agencies,[30] those that are non-cabinet department bureaus, those that are high in politicization (at or above the median level of politicization), and those that are low in politicization (at or below the median level of politicization). These analyses will allow me to assess the fragility of the interaction effects between bureau and vacant months and between politicization and vacant months on presidential influence. Examining the fragility of the interaction terms through subsets is required because current estimation techniques are designed to examine the direct effect of a single independent or treatment variable and other covariates are assumed to occur prior to treatment. The inclusion of an interaction term would violate this assumption, as an interaction term comprised partially of the treatment variable by construction would occur at the same time as treatment.

I began by examining the fragility of the direct effect of the president's use political acting officials on presidential influence. In this case, unobserved confounders would have to explain 11.1% of the residual variance of both the independent variable and of presidential influence to be sufficiently strong to explain away all the observed, positive effect. The entire model specification currently explains 17.9% of the variance in presidential influence. Therefore, confounders would have to explain about 51% as much of the variance in the influence measure as explained by the entire model. Further, I find that confounders several times as strong as priority or location in the Executive Office of the President are not sufficient to explain away the observed estimate.

Next, I considered the fragility of the effect of vacant months on presidential influence within non-cabinet department bureaus (e.g., cabinet departments, independent executive agencies, or the EOP). In this case, unobserved confounders would have to explain 29.7% of the residual variance of both the independent variable and of presidential influence to be sufficiently strong to explain away all the observed, negative effect. The entire model specification currently explains 44.1% of the variance in presidential influence among non-cabinet department bureaus. Therefore, confounders would have to explain about 37.6% as much of the variance in the

---

[30] Of course, by subsetting the data, I lose statistical power and the observed coefficients will be less precisely estimated. Therefore, the fragility of the estimates in these cases may be overestimated.

influence measure as explained by the entire model. Further, I find that confounders several times as strong as priority or as strong as location in the Executive Office of the President are not sufficient to explain away the observed estimate.

Then, I explored the fragility of the effect of vacant months on presidential influence within agencies with high levels of politicization (at or above the median level of politicization). In this case, unobserved confounders would have to explain 8.1% of the residual variance of both the independent variable and of presidential influence to be sufficiently strong to explain away all the observed, positive effect. The entire model specification currently explains 25.6% of the variance in presidential influence among highly politicized agencies. Therefore, confounders would have to explain about 23.5% as much of the variance in the influence measure as explained by the entire model. Further, I find that confounders several times as strong as priority or location in the Executive Office of the President are not sufficient to explain away the observed estimate.

Finally, I examined the fragility of the effect of vacant months on presidential influence within agencies with low levels of politicization (at or below the median level of politicization). In this case, unobserved confounders would have to explain 11.0% of the residual variance of both the independent variable and of presidential influence to be sufficiently strong to explain away all the observed, negative effect. The entire model specification currently explains 13.7% of the variance in presidential influence among lowly politicized agencies. Therefore, confounders would have to explain about 69.3% as much of the variance in the influence measure as explained by the entire model. Further, I find that confounders several times as strong as priority are not sufficient to explain away the observed estimate.[31]

---

[31] Location in the EOP could not be included as a reference confounder because no agency within the EOP had a low enough level of politicization to be included in the subset of agencies with low levels of politicization.