Supplementary Information

Executive Action that Lasts

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A   Tracking Active Executive Orders

It is important to highlight ways our analysis differs from Thrower (2017). First, our analysis is based on a version of the original dataset that has been corrected for errors. Second, we extend the corrected data to include the first half of 2021. Third, we make categorical distinctions based on our theoretical framework between types of executive orders that should and should not be subject to the argument outlined by Thrower.

Upon replicating and extending the initial data, we discovered some errors in the data.[16] For this analysis the outcome of interest is whether any of the roughly 6,500 executive orders issued during this period have been revoked. There are roughly 1,600 total revocations. The data source is the Executive Orders Disposition Tables maintained by the National Archives (until 2017) and the Federal Register (after 2017). According to recent versions of these disposition tables, there are 20 revocations that are missing from the original study. This excludes another 30 revocations that have occurred since 2013, and thus, could not be included in the original analysis. The study also codes one order as revoked that has not yet been. The data source cautions the user that the disposition tables are unofficial and are meant as a reference. It appears the tables themselves have been revised since the initial data collection, which likely accounts for the discrepancy.

Another category treated as different (superseded) in the analysis is treated interchangeably with revocation in the disposition tables. There are another 8 instances of supersessions in the disposition tables excluded from the original dataset. There is also another term "nullified" that is excluded entirely from the original analysis, but also appears to be interchangeable with revocation. This adds another 37 cases. Some of these supersessions and nullifications are the result of treaties, laws from Congress, or other presidential actions. This points to a central challenge of studies on this topic: "nullification", "revocation", "amendment", "supersession", are terms that presidents adopt and apply to executive orders at their discretion. There is no externally imposed, procedural requirement that orders be revoked or superseded or nullified for them to be inactive. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably, and their definitions can change over time. Ultimately, since these issues are somewhat tangential to the main purpose of this study, we chose to follow Thrower (2017) by analyzing formal revocation. But future research should consider the sensitivity of analyses to these different dispositions.

Most importantly, we differ in the way we code revoking presidents. The chosen study unit for

the survival analysis in Thrower (2017) is directive-year, so the issuing or revoking president is coded based on the year of issuance or revocation. However, during the time series, there are 12 mid-year transitions due to regular presidential transitions or deaths in office. As a result, in the original analysis, 170 orders were manually recoded as being issued by the president who was in office prior to the transition that year. However, the same transitions impact revocations, so the same manual coding procedure would have to be applied. In the publicly posted versions of these data, this was done for issuing presidents, but not for revoking presidents. This means that 65 orders were coded as being revoked by the incorrect president. Our dataset recodes these orders.

We also found some minor issues in other independent variables. Specifically, 212 orders that were issued after election day during an election year are coded as happening prior to the election. Yearly indicators for "war" code the end of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq prior to the years with the most significant U.S. casualties, and the end of the Vietnam war two years after the U.S. effectively withdrew. The presidential approval polling data are measured at the year level, but there is monthly gallup data available that can be more closely tied to the date of order issuance.

Other general issues with modeling this data arise from important descriptive facts about revoking executive orders. First, a single directive, Executive Order 12553, which was issued by President Reagan in 1986, revokes over 360 executive orders—or about 23% of all revocations in the original data. There are several others that revoke a dozen or more. At the minimum, this implies that any analysis may be sensitive to the inclusion or exclusion of these cases. This is demonstrated in Table B4 of Thrower (2017), where regression estimates that omit this order weaken the main effects.

More substantively, we take this as additional evidence in favor of the central argument we advance. The vast majority of the executive orders revoked by 12553 had outlived the function they originally performed. They may have been "alive" on paper, but they had long served their purpose. The White House's official statement at the time was that all of the orders revoked were "obsolete or inactive"(Associated Press, 1986). Yet, their revocation had a clear political benefit. At the time, the Reagan administration was advancing a deregulatory agenda, along with a push to make public employees more productive by simplifying administrative requirements. The revocation did neither of those things. But it was written up by major news outlets because it set a record for number of revocations, and gave the administration an opportunity to promote both goals in the press. Yet, the mass revocation did not imply mass policy reversal, nor was it evidence that the political conditions had finally emerged for a wholesale sea change in past executive action.

A.1 Replicating Thrower (2017)

We replicate the main analysis reported in Thrower (2017). We present these analyses in brief and refer the reader to pages 648-649 in the study for descriptions of the original model specifications and measurement decisions. As the results in Figure A.1 suggest, after the correction of errors, the evidence in favor of political control-based arguments is generally similar to those reported in study.

We chose to adopt the alternative research research design presented in the study as a result of the sensitivity of these models to the inclusion of different covariates. Figure A.1 reports the original specification, a specification without presidential fixed effects, and a specification without auxiliary variables of any kind. As this figure demonstrates, using the corrected data, for each of the main variables of interest, one can obtain positively signed, negatively signed, or conventionally insignificant effects by arbitrarily including various control variables. In almost all instances, the inclusion of control variables alters the direction and magnitude of the effect. The most robust results appear for both measures of disagreement between presidents.

We believe these results and the associated data issues demonstrate challenges of leveraging this research design to evaluate the theory. We suspect a combination of issues: such as bias induced by including numerous control variables, influential orders, and complications associated with estimating a parametric model on data that explicitly violates the independence assumption. Multiple orders are often revoked by the same order. There are also "chains" of orders, in which one or more orders amend an earlier order, and therefore, each order must be revoked if the original order is revoked. Thus, orders and revocations are unlikely to be independent. Each of these issues can be somewhat mitigated by reducing the dimensionality of the data, as we do in the main text of our study.
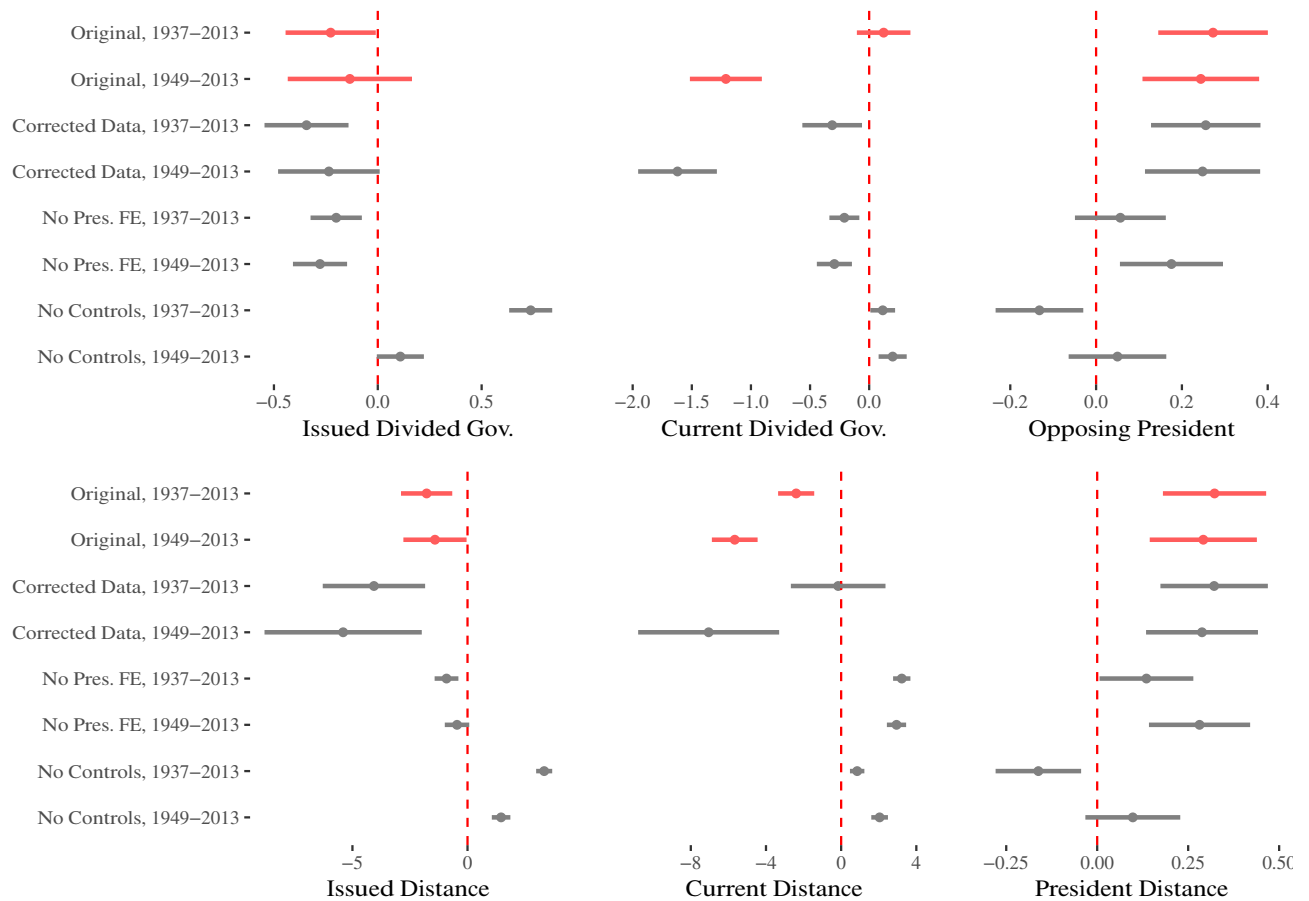
Figure A.1 – Estimated effects of Past and Present Political Coalitions with Corrected Data and Alternative Specifications. Reports coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from cox-proportional hazard models predicting revocation. Original specifications from Thrower (2017), Table 1 on p. 651, include a vector of controls (i.e., *NYT* mention, public mention, logged wordcount, war, inflation, approval rating, election year, administration change, end of term, yearly time trend, logged number of EOs issued, current administration change, current end of term, current war, and current time trend) and presidential dummies. Corrected models only correct coding errors. "No Pres. FE" excludes intercept shifts for past and present president. "No Controls" also excludes the vector of control variables, leaving only independent variables associated with an explicit hypothesis (i.e., those shown along with recent statutory authority, foreign policy order, current approval, current inflation, and current election year).

B   Coding Outcome Mutability

Here we provide additional details about the coding of outcome immutability.

B.1   Common examples of *mutable* actions

- **Renaming facilities, creating awards, or revising seals.** For example, Executive Order 11129 renames some buildings after JFK. It does not create a new space center by designating these

buildings for the specific purpose of space flight and research. Therefore, it is not coded as having immutable implications.

- **Revisions to Selective Service and the Manual of Courts Martial.** These are revisions to policies that do not satisfy any of the coding conditions. (See, for example, Executive Orders 10420, 10714, and 11527)

- **Delegations of authority.** Presidents often delegate statutory functions given to the president (like reporting authority or the duty to exercise some other role) to a particular cabinet secretary or other official. These do not qualify as (3) because the authority itself is usually part of some broader function the secretary was already performing. Put differently, the president has not assigned personnel to some new and different purpose, as the president was never likely to prepare a report for Congress themselves in the first place. (See, for example, Executive Order 12153, Executive Order 12341.)

- **Creation of inter-agency task forces, working groups, boards, or presidential advisory commissions.** Some presidentially-created agencies expend resources and perform new and important functions of government. Examples that fall into this category and count as immutable include the creation of new declassification centers, or the creation of a consumer information center at the GSA (Executive Order 11566). But task forces and presidential advisory commissions typically either use existing personnel and require them to meet, or have members that serve pro bono and produce a set of recommendations of some issue. These are policy-generating bodies that do not implicate any of the four parts of our coding rules. Adding members to these organizations or extending their life also does not count.

B.2 Inter-coder Reliability

We selected an initial random sample of 200 executive orders and coded these actions independently, using the guidelines above. Simple inter-rater agreement was 88.5%, with a Cohen's κ of 0.764. We report the confusion matrix for this exercise in Table A.1. Given the diversity of functions performed by executive actions, we take this as evidence our measurement procedure produces a shared and interpretable standard for what actions are and are not likely to have immutable consequences.

		Rater 1	
		No	Yes
Rater 2	No	105	8
	Yes	15	72

Table B.1 – Confusion matrix for hand-coding immutability in executive orders.

B.3   Coding Implementation

To scale this coding exercise and render it more reproducible, we first relied on simple string-matching in the titles of executive orders. In practice, we found that many actions could be coded by suppling a dictionary of n-grams that indicate immutability or mutability. Specifically, for each property, we provided a dictionary of phrases that alone indicate immutability/mutability, along with a set of paired phrases that jointly indicate immutability/mutability. We report this in the following subsection. If no matching phrases were found, no code was assigned. When the dictionaries conflicted, no code was assigned. After each iteration, we selected a random sample of 200 actions to assess for errors. We repeated this procedure, amending the procedure each time, until we found no errors.

About 63% of the 6,536 executive orders in the sample were coded using this procedure. Titles of executive orders are generally very informative about their content. Sanctions, public land designations, troop deployments, exemptions from retirement, delegations of authority, and more, all use consistent language that renders them relatively easy to identify as immutable or not.

The remaining 2,429 actions were coded by hand by the authors. In general, the string matching procedure was better at finding cases of immutable action, relative to non-cases. This means most executive order titles that remained to be coded were ambiguous or topic-based, rather than descriptive of their underlying function.

B.4   Dictionary

Orders are coded as immutable if at least one of the following n-grams appear in the title:

{'abolishing the', 'blocking assets', 'blocking property', 'blocking the property', 'allocating the quota ', 'limiting the importation of', 'further prohibitions on transactions', 'further providing for the stabilization of the economy', 'imposing sanctions', 'imposing additional sanctions', 'take possession', 'creating an emergency board', 'creating a emergency board', 'creating a board of inquiry', 'establish-

ing an emergency board', 'establishing a commission to inquire', 'compulsory retirement', 'mandatory retirement', 'inspection of income', 'restoring land', 'withdrawing', 'withdrawal of', 'adjustments of certain', 'adjusting the rates of', 'adjusting rates of', 'adjustments of rates of pay', 'waiver Under the trade act of 1974', 'waiver of time', 'transferring to the', 'transfer of the', 'transferring the use', 'transferring jurisdiction', 'transfer of jurisdiction', 'transferring from the', 'transferring certain', 'transfer of certain', 'designating the honorable', 'the honorable', 'termination of the', 'setting aside', 'vessels of the navy', 'revoking the designation of', 'abolishing customs', 'direction to transfer iranian', 'establishing an airspace reservation', 'addition to level', 'additions to level', 'adjustments to level', 'appointment of', 'waiving the age', 'restoring certain land', 'reserving public land', 'reserving certain public', 'including certain lands', 'relinquishing possession', 'reinstatement of former foreign service officer', 'extension of trust periods', 'half-day closing', 'inspection of returns', 'levels iv and v of the executive schedule', 'level iv of the executive schedule', 'making certain changes in', 'nuclear cooperation with EURATOM', 'ordering certain units', 'placing an additional position', 'placing additional positions', 'placing certain positions', 'placing certain lands', 'possession and operation of', 'possession relinquished', 'possession, control,', 'postponement of effective date', 'power site restoration', 'prohibiting certain transactions', 'providing for the closing of', 'authorizing and directing the ', 'restoration of law and order', 'closing', 'assignment of frequencies', 'authorizing the civil service commission To confer', 'authorizing the procurement division', 'correcting description of land', 'extension of time relating to', 'power-site restoration', 'extending the limits of the customs', 'extending the limits of customs', 'excusing federal employees from duty', 'effective date of '}

Orders are coded as immutable if at least one of the following n-grams from both sets below appear in the title:

{'establishing','transfer','designating','designation','enlarging','ordering','blocking','reserving', 'inspection by','inspection of','authorizing the','placing','reinstating','restoring','suspension of certain provisions', 'authorizing certain employees','abolishing','discontinuing'} AND {'refuge','eight-hour',' forest','naval defensive sea areas',' land',' port','combat zone','active duty','property','public land',' tract', 'internal revenue act of 1954','tax','appointments of','certain sanctions','under control','foreign service','a portion','defensive sea area','airspace reservations','naval petroleum reserve','naval radio station','reservation'}

Orders are coded as not immutable if at least one of the following n-grams appear in the title:

{'generalized system of preferences','administration of ','advisory committee','advisory council', 'delegation of certain','delegated to','delegation of authority','delegation of functions','delegating certain functions','delegating certain powers','delegating the authority of','delegating authority to', 'delegating Authority under','delegating to the administrator', 'delegation to the administrator','delegating to the director','delegation to the director','delegating certain reporting','delegating certain authority','delegating to the secretary','delegation to the secretary', 'designating certain officers To act as', 'designating public international organizations','designating the international','designating the chairman','designating the secretary','designation of certain officers', 'task force','termination of emergency', 'suspension of eight','suspension of the eight','suspending certain statutory provisions','selective service','manual for courts','Administration of foreign assistance', 'administration of the export', 'administration of the agricultural','administration of the trade', 'amending certain provisions of the civil', 'amending the civil service rules', 'amending subdivision','amendment of subdivision','amending the foreign service','documents required of aliens','establishing a seal','manual for courts','assigning emergency preparedness','order of succession','regulations relating to','regulations pertaining to','regulations governing','historically black','medal for merit','national security medal','national commission on', 'national commission for','prescribing procedures','advisory commission','advisory board','president's commission on','president's council of','president's council on','presidential commission on ','the president's committee','initiative','assignment of functions','approving regulations of the civil','agreement on government procurement','award of the','central intelligence agency retirement','changing the name of','continuation of export control regulations','continuing the regulation of exports','facilitation of a presidential transition','establishing a flag','establishing a white house council',' medal',' flag','white house fellowships','taking additional steps to address','suspension of certain provisions of the officer','suspension of compliance with certain statutory','suspension of certain provisions of section 576','suspending the limitations upon punishments','seal for the ','changing the name','greening the government ','providing for an additional member','providing for the performance of certain functions','providing for the performance of','providing for the performance by','enforcement of the convention for the safety','enforcement of the convention for safety','outstanding performance in action', 'carry out certain functions of','exercise the authority'}

Orders are coded as not immutable if at least one of the following n-grams from both sets below appear in the title:

{'amending paragraph', 'amending regulations', 'amending schedule', 'amendment of', 'adding members', 'implementation of', 'implementing', 'membership of', 'appointment of', "president's", 'providing for the administration', 'designating'} AND {'civil service rules', 'foreign service', 'committee', ' act ', 'fund', 'convention', 'agreement', 'council', 'advisory board', 'survey', 'commission', 'board', 'review board', 'intelligence activities'}

C Additional Results

Table C.1 – Results

|	Main	No Controls	Including Ceremonial	Omitting FDR
			Dependent variable:	
			Revoked Next Term	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Foreign Policy	−0.125		−0.098	−0.258
	(0.095)		(0.095)	(0.108)
War	−0.471		−0.475	−0.539
	(0.107)		(0.107)	(0.111)
Election Year	0.268		0.271	0.400
	(0.141)		(0.141)	(0.165)
Inflation	0.124		0.124	0.117
	(0.012)		(0.012)	(0.014)
Admin. Change	0.183		0.184	0.208
	(0.130)		(0.129)	(0.133)
End of Term	−0.785		−0.781	−0.888
	(0.194)		(0.193)	(0.207)
Time Trend	0.007		0.007	0.007
	(0.002)		(0.002)	(0.003)
Issuing Div. Gov. (IDG)	−0.726	0.518	−0.771	−0.885
	(0.335)	(0.311)	(0.334)	(0.354)
Opposing Next (ON)	0.835	1.455	0.790	0.640
	(0.299)	(0.246)	(0.296)	(0.323)
Div. Gov. Next (DGN)	0.544	0.638	0.528	0.218
	(0.208)	(0.176)	(0.206)	(0.270)
Immutable (I)	−0.920	−0.991	−0.907	−0.632
	(0.226)	(0.224)	(0.225)	(0.323)
IDG:ON	0.505	−0.979	0.575	0.707
	(0.419)	(0.387)	(0.417)	(0.429)
IDG:DGN	0.562	−0.365	0.601	0.883
	(0.369)	(0.344)	(0.368)	(0.391)
ON:DGN	−0.731	−1.158	−0.706	−0.328
	(0.338)	(0.286)	(0.335)	(0.421)
IDG:I	−1.782	−1.665	−1.745	−2.033
	(1.066)	(1.065)	(1.065)	(1.090)
ON:I	0.224	0.085	0.136	−0.097
	(0.694)	(0.691)	(0.689)	(0.728)
DGN:I	−0.225	−0.132	−0.216	0.239
	(0.307)	(0.302)	(0.306)	(0.489)
IDG:ON:DGN	−0.609	0.526	−0.651	−0.980
	(0.501)	(0.462)	(0.497)	(0.538)
IDG:ON:I	1.678	1.803	1.739	1.994
	(1.279)	(1.276)	(1.277)	(1.298)
IDG:DGN:I	3.019	2.755	2.988	2.541
	(1.106)	(1.104)	(1.106)	(1.169)
ON:DGN:I	0.085	0.106	0.194	−0.321
	(0.759)	(0.752)	(0.755)	(0.847)
IDG:ON:DGN:I	−3.210	−3.083	−3.334	−2.770
	(1.412)	(1.403)	(1.408)	(1.461)
Constant	−2.697	−2.395	−2.715	−2.506
	(0.156)	(0.141)	(0.155)	(0.202)
Observations	6,373	6,373	6,486	4,462
Akaike Inf. Crit.	4,221.076	4,361.467	4,268.891	3,408.621
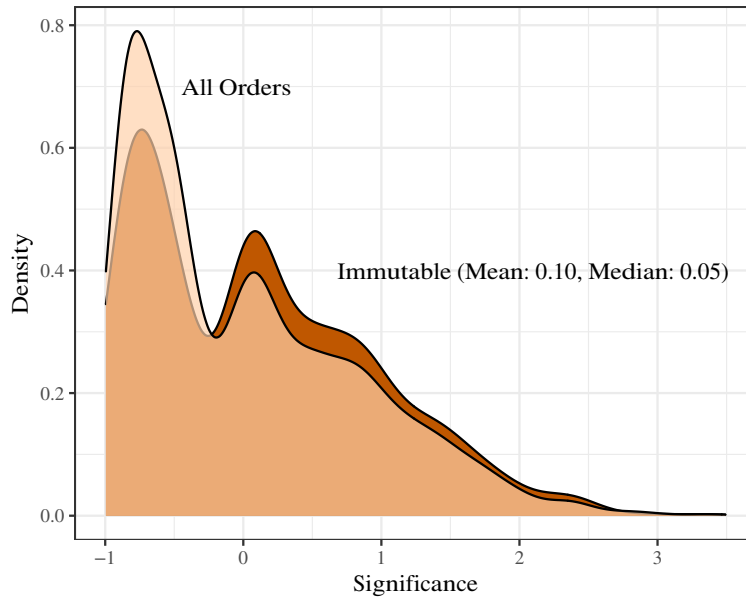
Figure C.1 – Immutable orders are rated as more significant. Reports the distributions of significance, as rated by Chiou and Rothenberg (2013), for all executive orders and immutable executive orders.
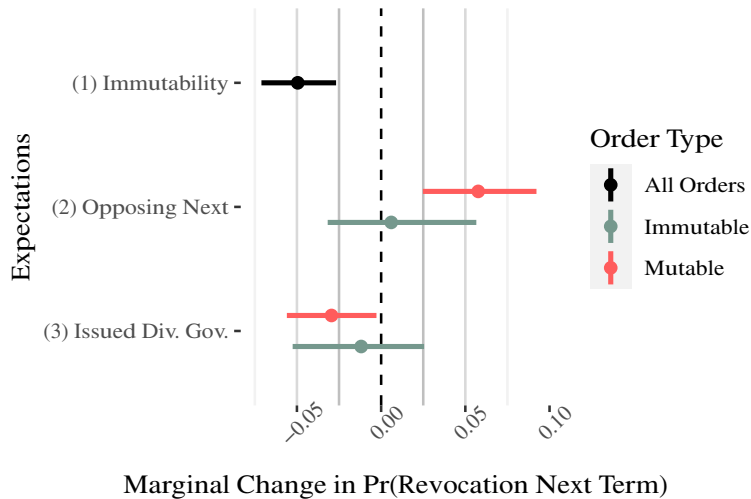

Figure C.2 – Marginal effects replicated after Excluding FDR. Reports marginal change in the probability of revocation and 95% confidence intervals, for non-ceremonial executive orders issued between 1945-2020. Estimates are simulated from logistic regressions using an observed case approach. Linear model include a multiplicative interaction between immutability, opposing president next, divided government next, and issued under divided government, along with a vector of controls: foreign policy order, issued in wartime, inflation, election year, administration change, end of term, and yearly time trend. Complete regression results with additional model specifications are reported in column 4 of Table C.1.

Table C.2 – Outcome Immutability and Policy Topic. Reports the proportion of immutable and ceremonial orders by major topic, according to the Comparative Agendas Project.

Topic	Immutable	Ceremonial	N
Transportation	0.729	0.011	365
Public Lands	0.420	0.008	257
Civil Rights	0.408	0.006	174
Government Operations	0.377	0.030	982
International Affairs	0.287	0.002	543
Macroeconomics	0.284	0.020	102
Energy	0.278	0.000	108
Defense	0.270	0.059	875
Immigration	0.235	0.000	34
Law and Crime	0.157	0.019	108
Foreign Trade	0.144	0.000	188
Technology	0.096	0.058	104
Labor	0.090	0.000	78
Environment	0.077	0.011	91
Domestic Commerce	0.075	0.017	120
Agriculture	0.060	0.000	50
Housing	0.031	0.000	64
Health	0.029	0.010	103
Education	0.000	0.019	54
Social Welfare	0.000	0.023	43

D   Policy Feedback and Mutability

In the main text, we are careful to distinguish the mutability of outcomes from other features of policy-making that might thwart reversal or future changes. In this appendix, we include supplementary case study information that describe features of each related to policy feedback. This material demonstrates policy feedback effects can and do occur simultaneously, but they are substantively distinct—in part, because the mutability of outcomes is not dependent on political mobilization.

In addition, since our case study on weapons and equipment appears to have been primarily driven by immutability, we provide an additional case—the classification and declassification of state information—that highlights the important of policy feedback relative to immutability. In this instance, immutability (i.e., the fact that state secrets cannot be re-classified) means that outcomes are necessarily asymmetric, but increased transparency tends to empower interests who lobby to maintain the trajectory of declassification efforts.

D.1 Weapons and Equipment

There is little evidence in this case that policy feedback effects impacted the ability of President Trump to reverse President Obama. However, this instance, the policy and implementation of the working group recommendations did change the costs and benefits of participating on the terms set by the president. The Obama order made categories of equipment the subject of political controversy. There are over 30,000 different items available through the program—some as innocuous as computers, exercise equipment, and tube socks. But weapons like bayonets and grenade launchers would be permanently subject to political contestation that did not exist prior to the executive action. Participating agencies paid to have these items initially shipped. To receive these items again, they would (by law) have to pay the same cost a second time—knowing that the next presidential administration may reverse course again. The program is meant to aid agencies with constraints on their annual budgets. This was a risk most agencies were unwilling to take.

D.2 Terrorism and the Detention of Non-State Combatants

Policy feedback effects played an undeniable role in the case of Gitmo. The decision to place detainees from the war on terror in Guantanamo Bay created a situation wherein Congress developed a vested interest in keeping them there. This, in turn, made it politically damaging for the Obama administration to transfer them to U.S. soil, or other countries. Importantly, the question of whether to transfer detainees to the United States was not primarily a matter of capacity. Responding to a question about safety issues, Senator Diane Feinstein argued that "Our system of justice is more than capable of prosecuting terrorists and housing detainees before, during, and after trial. We have facilities to keep convicted terrorists behind bars indefinitely and keep them away from American citizens" (Corcoran, 2011, 224). Rather, the issue, as one Bush administration official put it, was "not in my backyard" syndrome (Stimson, 2015, 11).

This resistance manifested in a variety of ways. In a Senate resolution in 2009, the Senate voted 90-6 in opposition to any such transfers (Frakt, 2012, 194). In the 2010 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), Congress placed restrictions on using federal funds to move detainees from the Guantanamo Bay prison to the United States (Corcoran, 2011, 209). Subsequent NDAAs followed suit (McCrisken, 2011, 2011). A particularly illustrative episode of policy feedback involved the Thomson Correctional Center in Illinois. In 2010, five weeks before the anticipated closing date of Gitmo as directed in EO

13492, Obama ordered the government to purchase the near-vacant super max prison which had been designated by the Department of Defense as a viable place to house detainees (Garcia et al., 2013, 4). A bipartisan coalition stymied the administration's efforts (Stolberg, 2009), including one of Obama's staunchest allies, Democratic Senator Dick Durbin (Cutler, 2010, 70).

Congress' opposition to transferring detainees out of Gitmo was not only about whether they could or should be housed on U.S. soil but extended to other countries as well. In the aforementioned 2010 NDAA, Congress also placed restrictions on using federal dollars to move Gitmo prisoners abroad (McCrisken, 2011, 789) and required the Secretary of Defense to sign-off on any such transfers, effectively holding him personally responsible in the event of recidivism (Bruck, 2016). To reiterate, Congress' desire and ability to write legislation preventing many detainees from being transferred out of Gitmo was enabled by the original decision to put them there in the first place.

D.3 Diplomacy and the Location of Embassies

President Biden or future presidents are unlikely to move the U.S. embassy back to Tel Aviv, in part, due to policy feedback and new vested interests. This dynamic can be seen both within the United States and in Israel. In the U.S., the decision received bipartisan praise from key members of Congress. This included frequent Trump critics like Senator Chuck Schumer who stated: "I sponsored legislation to do this two decades ago, and I applaud President Trump for doing it" (Shelbourne, 2018). The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, similarly praised the move.[17]

In Israel, the embassy move was also widely embraced. During the ceremony surrounding the opening, Netanyahu declared: "Today, the embassy of the most powerful nation on earth, our greatest ally, the United States of America, today its embassy opened here."[18] According to a poll taken around that time, the embassy move was widely embraced by 73 percent of Jewish Israelis. According to one report, this is surprising given the intense internal disagreements in a host of other areas. "On the embassy issue, however, Jewish Israelis seem to have banded together to support Trump's move" (Telhami, 2018). In light of this widespread support, were any future president to attempt to move the embassy back, it would almost certainly lead to a popular backlash by one of America's staunchest allies in the region.

D.4 Secrecy

Presidential actions on national security classification have occurred almost continuously during the post World War II period. Since 1940, there have been at least 22 executive orders, countless more memoranda, and an unknowable number of other directives which themselves remain classified. While Congress has periodically mandated materials of substantial public interest be declassified, they have largely left control over national security secrets to the president. Thus, the president enjoys a near monopoly analogous to their control over the disposition of military property.

A cursory look at national security classification suggests the standard model of policy reversal predominates. A majority of executive orders on the subject either amend or revoke the previous governing rules. It is also common for a new president after a change in partisan control of the government to revoke the order of their predecessor and substitute their own. This occurred early in the terms of the Obama, Clinton, Reagan, Carter, and Eisenhower administrations. Political conflict over this area of policy is driven by several related issues. First, periodic revelations of classified information have led to criticism of presidents' conduct in foreign affairs. In addition, some presidents have selectively declassified information to bolster government prosecutions and justify policy decisions (Dratel, 2006; Dudding, 2020). Regulating what the public has a right to know can lead to the strategic concealment of wrongdoing or facts that are politically inconvenient (Moynihan, 1999). In addition, liberalization of information carries potential downside risks to national security. During the Clinton administration, for example, there were concerns that automatic declassification would lead to the mistaken release of nuclear secrets, which ultimately led to the most significant congressional reforms.

Finally, the process of classifying and declassifying materials is costly and either at odds with or tangential to the missions of the agencies that possess the records. The most recent estimates suggests agencies spend nearly $20 billion annually, a figure that appears to have risen as the process has become more complex and more material has come due for review (Office, 2017). And though the volume of textual and non-textual materials needing review for declassification is unknown, periodic figures suggest this volume dwarfs the overall declassification effort. One estimate suggests the Department of Energy alone holds around 2-3 billion textual records needing review (David, 2007). Review requires agencies to dedicate scarce resources to a task that requires coordination with other units, carries some non-trivial risks, and—for the most part—narrowly benefits academic researchers and journalists.[19]

Despite these dimensions of political conflict and the frequency of executive-driven policy change, both policy feedback and the nature of classification effectively prevent the reversal of a predecessor's actions. The most obvious barrier, of course, is the fact that publicly releasing previously classified documents is irreversible. Though there have been a few known attempts to "reclassify" materials (see Shane, 2006), in each case, these had been declassified but not yet released. In general, this means that the policy options available to a president are asymmetric. The declassification process might be sped up or slowed down, but it cannot be reversed. It binds all future presidents.

Beyond decisions to release particular materials, the broader rules and procedures of security classification are subject to vested interests that render executive actions more durable than they appear on paper. Proponents of declassification are now an institutionalized part of the declassification process. There is a public board with members who serve for fixed terms and are appointed by the president and Congress, an oversight office that reviews and complies agency reports, and a center with the National Archives and Records Administration that processes declassified materials. The officials who conduct this work have typically dedicated their careers to the cause of declassifying materials, which suggests these organizations are subject to classic mission-based selection issues in public administration (Gailmard and Patty, 2013).[20]

Executive Order 12356 illustrates these dynamics, as it is seen as the most significant attempt to reverse progress toward declassification. Signed by President Reagan in 1982, the order removed "automatic" declassification timelines—replacing them with the mandate that materials be classified for "as long as required" with a declassification date set "when it can be determined" by the original classifying authority. Many documents scheduled to be declassified were classified indefinitely (David, 2007). Together with new and broad exemptions, the order slowed the pace of declassification from about 33 million pages per year during the Carter administration to around 10 million per year for the next 12 years (Office, 1996).

However, the limitations of this attempt at reversal illustrate the durability of the actions of prior administrations. Each successive president since FDR, regardless of partisanship, had amended the classification system to include new provisions for releasing previously classified documents. Most importantly, President Nixon established the original "automatic" or "systematic" declassification system that was designed to sunset classification. The administration also set up the first centralized oversight of classification, which predated the permanent establishment of the Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO) during the Carter administration.

Though ISOO has never had the authority to coerce compliance, its informal authority provided the preconditions for limiting any effort to reverse course. By routinizing the collection, summary, and release of declassification reports for the decade prior to the Reagan order, this entity ensured that the press and interested parties like the American Historical Association would be aware. Not surprisingly, Reagan's order was met with immediate criticism in the press—with one Op-Ed titled "Will they Classify the Alphabet?" When the administration later attempted to censor any official who *handled* classified materials, Congress stepped in to delay its implementation and ordered an audit from the GAO.

The Reagan administration proposed the most sweeping reversal possible, and it had modest impacts reducing the flow of declassified materials. But in this case, the barriers to a more sweeping revision of the declassification system had little to do with the standard contextual features in spatial voting models. Partisan control of the House and Senate was divided. There was never a serious threat to halt a change in an area of policy the president enjoyed almost complete discretion. Instead, what limited the actions were the interests who had been generated by and become accustomed to the policies of previous presidents. Their informal roles were enough to pull the fire alarm on the attempt at a reversal. And, most importantly, while the place of declassification slowed, it did not stop.