Reconsidering the Politics-Administration Divide: Presidents, Goal Alignment, and Performance in U.S. Federal Agencies, 2002-2022[1]

When new U.S. presidents assume office, their goals regularly align or conflict with the goals of agencies they inherit. In this paper, we evaluate the impact of political alignment on the performance of government agencies. We describe how performance in misaligned agencies can suffer because agencies cannot adapt to new priorities and political leaders choose strategies that hurt performance. We also discuss how presidents activate, refine, and build capacity in agencies whose goals do align with those of the new administration. We evaluate the impact of political alignment on federal agency performance using new measures of federal agency performance for 139 agencies from 2002 – 2022 (Krause and Lewis 2024). We correlate measures of alignment between agencies and the president with estimates of agency performance. The results indicate that agencies that are misaligned with presidential goals perform worse than presidential-aligned agencies. These effects emerge only after the first year of the president's term and grow over the course of the term. We conclude that electoral context is a key component of the management environment of federal agencies and can have important consequences for performance, even in stable Weberian bureaucracies that comprise the American administrative state.

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Comments welcome

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In November 2017, President Trump named his Office of Management and Budget Director, Mick Mulvaney, acting director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB).[2] Mulvaney was a noteworthy choice since he had advocated eliminating the agency when he was a member of Congress. As acting director, Mulvaney defended a narrower interpretation of the agency's authorizing statute and sought to rein in what he saw as the CFPB's overly aggressive regulatory and enforcement activities. Many previously supportive and enthusiastic agency partners, including consumer groups, became critics. They would not assist Mulvaney with implementing his more industry-friendly understanding of the CFPB's mission. They questioned the temporary leader about abandoned investigations, eliminated offices and boards, and halted data collections.[3] News accounts reported how Mulvaney's management approach made the agency less efficient.[4] Critics worried that Mulvaney's tenure would deconstruct what many had worked so hard to construct in the aftermath of the 2008 financial meltdown.

The example of Mulvaney and the CFPB raises the more general question of how partisan and electoral politics influence agency performance. As with the CFPB, agencies can have a difficult time adjusting to changes in mission due to policy disagreements, confusion about goals, or pressures from

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[2] Donald J. Trump, "Statement on President Donald J. Trump's Designation of OMB Director Mick Mulvaney as Acting Director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau." White House, November 24, 2017 (https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-donald-j-trumps-designation-omb-director-mick-mulvaney-acting-director-consumer-financial-protection-bureau/, accessed May 8, 2024.)

[3] Robert O'Harrow, Shawn Boburg, and Renae Merle. 2018. "How Trump appointees curbed a consumer protection agency loathed by the GOP." *Washington Post*, December 4, 2018.

[4] Nicholas Confessore, "Mick Mulvaney's Master Class in Destroying a Bureaucracy from Within," *New York Times*, April 16, 2019.

client or stakeholder groups (see, e.g., Chun and Rainey 2005; Long 1949; Potter 2019). These problems can lead to lower performance. Elected officials like Trump (and Mulvaney) also may not want some agencies to be successful and take actions that limit efficacy (see, e.g., Herd and Moynihan 2018; Lewis 2019; Moe 1989). Elections, however, shape the performance context of agencies differently. For example, at the same time Mulvaney was slowing down CFPB activity, President Trump was pursuing increased budgets and personnel for immigration agencies. Employee morale and other indicators of performance reflect these differences as the agencies warmly embraced a new leader aligned with their understanding of agency mission.[5] In addition, there are many agencies whose work is non-controversial, attracting little notice at all or bipartisan support (Richardson 2024a). Each election creates a new managerial context as agencies adjust to new leaders. The change can be more consequential for some agencies than others. Will the new administration be aligned with the goals of the agency and aid the agency in achieving its core mission? Or, will they leave the agency to its own devices, or worse, exert effort to thwart and deconstruct the agency? Public agencies can be caught in between presidents, statutorily mandated goals, and key constituencies. Ongoing commitments can either complement the president's efforts (presidential-aligned agencies) or work at cross-purposes (presidential-misaligned agencies) with these presidential efforts (e.g., Carpenter 2001, 2010; Rourke 1984) in ways that are consequential for performance.

The question of how elections influence agency performance is central to theories of public management and democracy. Indeed, arguably the key difference between public and private management is the regularity of elections and resulting changes in leadership. To fully understand public management we must understand elections and their impact on management context. In

[5] "Trump's budget overhaul: domestic programs slashed to fund military." *The Guardian*, March 16, 2017; Emily Badger, Quoctrung Bui, Alicia Parlapiano. 2021. "The Government Agencies That Became Smaller, and Unhappier, Under Trump." *New York Times*, February 1, 2021.

addition, the quality of democracy depends upon whether policy and outputs are responsive to elections. Administrative agencies produce and implement policy and voters select leaders expecting them to deliver effective implementation of the policies they prefer. We cannot fully understand democracy without understanding how elections influence agency performance.

Since at least Woodrow Wilson (1887) scholars of public administration and political science have theorized about the link between electoral politics and agency performance. This work, however, has often been difficult. There are few comparable measures of agency performance, particularly across time or elections (Krause and Lewis 2024; Richardson, et al. 2024). Scholars have focused more on non-political predictors of performance since the most widely available data on performance comes from the government, and therefore, tend to focus on non-political factors. Skepticism about whether elections influence agency performance is reasonable since the U.S. government is massive and agency personnel and budgets have been relatively stable in recent decades due to heavy reliance on continuing budget resolutions for determining resource and staffing levels (Bednar 2024).

This study evaluates the impact of ideological alignment on federal agency performance using new measures of federal agency performance for 139 agencies from 2002 – 2022 (Krause and Lewis 2024). By performance, we mean what politicians of different parties or ideological leanings can agree on – the extent to which public agencies competently perform their job as prescribed by *legal requirements*. More precisely, if politicians were perfectly able to observe true agency performance, they would agree that the agency was doing a good or bad job complying with legal requirements even if they disagreed with the content of those requirements. We correlate measures of alignment between agencies and the president with estimates of agency performance. The findings reveal that agencies that are misaligned with presidential goals perform worse than presidential-aligned agencies. These effects emerge after the first year of the president's term and grow over the course of the term. This delayed response can be attributed to the time it takes for new presidents to have a governance impact through political appointees, budgeting, and legislation. We conclude that the electoral context is a key

component of the management environment of federal agencies. Even in stable Weberian bureaucracies and agencies with enduring capacity, political alignment can have important consequences for performance.

Politics and Performance

Scholars have long argued about whether and how to draw lines between politics and administration, how electoral politics works its way into administration, and the effects of politics in diverse areas of administration (e.g., Long 1949; Simon, et al. 1971; Waldo 1948). There is simply no way to separate politics and administration, suggesting a close relationship between electoral politics and performance. Yet, demonstrating a direct link between electoral politics and agency performance has been difficult for several reasons (Richardson 2024b).

First, finding comparable measures of agency performance has been elusive and this makes evaluating hypothesized links between partisan alignment and performance difficult. Unlike the private sector, government agencies have few natural performance measures like profit or firm valuation to use as a shorthand measure of performance (e.g., Andersen, et al. 2016: 853; Niskanen 1971: 29; Rainey and Bozeman 2000). Agency outputs are often hard to observe and harder to connect to changes in outcomes (Nyhan and Marlowe 1995; Smith 2006; Wilson 1989). This problem is made worse by conceptual and measurement difficulties (Andersen, et al. 2016; Boyne 2010; Boyne, et al. 2006). For example, some performance measures examine specific tasks such as procurement outcomes or responses to freedom of information requests (see, e.g., Spenkuch, et al. 2023; Wood and Lewis 2017). Other measures target the overall performance of units such as offices or bureaus across tasks and yet others tap the performance of larger organizations that encompass many smaller units (e.g., cabinet departments; Krause and Lewis 2024). Across these different levels, scholars and practitioners evaluate performance on different dimensions including equity, efficiency, effectiveness, and satisfaction (Boyne 2002). This makes comparative performance measurement difficult. Scholars

have found creative ways to measure performance, often focusing on outputs on specific tasks and specific dimensions, such as payment errors associated with the management of U.S. federal programs (Park 2022), access, affordability, and quality of higher educational institutions (Rutherford 2016), or the successful completion of federal agency IT projects in a timely manner (Hong 2024). Although these studies offer valuable insights on specific aspects of agency performance, they neither generalize to performance on core tasks nor tasks connected to the broader administrative environment.

Second, public administration scholars have often turned their attention away from the larger effects of politics to more proximate causes of performance problems. The size and historic insularity of the U.S. civil service system has led to the widespread perception that factors other than politics determine most of the variance in performance outcomes. The United States government is comprised of 2.8 million civilian employees working in 200-300 federal agencies (Selin and Lewis 2018). Only 15 percent work in the Washington, DC area and few have any contact at all with the political appointees that make up only 0.001 of the workforce. The vast majority of the federal workforce works under some form of civil service system that provides protections against partisan personnel actions. Civil service law and regulation criminalizes most types of nepotism, patronage, and corruption.

The perception that the broadly bureaucratic and insular administrative state is apolitical is reinforced by government policies toward data collection. The federal government is by far the largest producer of performance information, whether Government Accountability Office reports or employee surveys by the General Services Administration, Office of Personnel Management or Merit Systems Protection Board. By policy and inclination, these providers of performance information shy away from collecting data that is politically sensitive or would be helpful in evaluating the impact of partisanship on performance. They refrain in their own analyses from attributing political views or choices to performance. Widespread reliance on purposefully antiseptic government-collected data and analyses reinforces the notion that the key drivers of agency performance are factors internal to government policy or operations.

Third, there are large swaths of government activity that do not shift with changes in party (Bolton, et al. 2021; Spenkuch, et al. 2023). While agencies that implement the president's policy priorities or attract White House ire get headlines, the vast majority of government work is uncontroversial, ranging from approving patents to helping veterans and giving out loans to small businesses (Richardson 2024a). In addition, many agencies and policies are designed to be insulated from changing fortunes associated with elections (Moe 1989; Selin 2015). Congress has delegated significant policy making authority to independent agencies like the Federal Reserve and the Securities and Exchange Commission whose leaders serve for fixed and staggered terms and whose leaders cannot be removed except for cause. New presidents must wait to influence commission policies until vacancies open. As with the CFPB, Congress has also used other tools to insulate programs and agencies with decisions about budgets, litigation authority, centralized review of regulations, and other design characteristics (Selin 2015). Congress has chosen these designs to provide stability across elections in order to foster decisions based upon expertise.

Finally, despite arguments to the contrary, there have been few dramatic investments or cuts in agency capacity in recent years (Bednar 2024; Bednar and Lewis 2024). In the U.S. separation of powers system, the president is obligated to take care that the laws are faithfully executed. This means that the central way performance levels historically were chosen was through decisions about capacity. Higher budgets, more personnel, and investments in better systems would lead to higher performance. Lower budgets, personnel reductions, and a lack of investment constituted a conscious choice to wind down agency activities. Increasingly, however, budgetary politics has been decoupled from debates about policy. Large federal programs are funded through mandatory spending. And, while Republicans and Democrats often disagree wildly on funding levels, appropriations levels are remarkably stable. The regularity of divided government and small majorities make dramatic changes difficult and the solution is often the status quo or a compromise where most programs are funded. In the 1980s, Ronald Reagan and congressional Democrats agreed to both increase defense *and* domestic spending,

running up the deficit in the process. Later, as the 1990 Budget Enforcement Act consensus broke down, Congress increasingly lurched from continuing resolution to continuing resolution to fund the government. These stopgap measures generally keep government funding at similar levels with the idea that at some point real debates will happen about appropriate levels. Presidents and parties propose dramatic budget cuts, but funding is largely stable. For example, President Trump proposed a 31 percent cut to the Environmental Protection Agency budget and a similar reduction for the State Department, but his budget was largely ignored by Congress.[6] Thus, the clearest link between politics and performance – i.e., investments in budgets, personnel, and equipment—has been broken and this makes connecting partisanship to performance difficult.

Yet, there are important reasons to believe that party change can have substantial consequences for performance, even in the absence of resource changes. The natural disruption that results from new goals and priorities after a party change can hurt performance and political actors have substantial discretion to influence agency activity even while capacity remains steady (Chun and Rainey 2005; Jung 2011; Nou 2015). Further complicating matters is the simple fact that performance is influenced by the voluntary cooperation of key stakeholders that can be aligned or misaligned with the goals of the president (e.g., Carpenter 2001, 2010; Rourke 1984).

Political Alignment and Agency Performance

The United States government has one of the largest and most effective administrative systems in the world but it is not a monolith. U.S. federal agencies implement policies approved by Congress and the president at different points in the nation's history, including eras of ideological or partisan dominance such as the Progressive Era, New Deal, and Great Society. Both agency missions and

[6] Glenn Thrush and Coral Davenport. 2017. "Donald Trump Budget Slashes Funds for E.P.A. and State Department." *New York Times*, March 16, 2017.

programs created during these periods are the subject of intense partisan support and client interests. Federal agencies regulate, provide social welfare, and contribute to law and order. These missions attract some employees to join agencies and establish careers in these organizations (Long 1952). People that believe in environmentalism, fair housing, law enforcement or national security are more likely to choose to work in agencies that pursue those missions. Those most committed to the mission are also the most likely to get promoted within the agency because they are motivated to develop valuable policy expertise, cultivate a professional identity related the agency's mission, and see their contribution to the agency's mission is part of their compensation (Bolton, et al. 2021; Gailmard and Patty 2013; Mosher 1982; Teodoro 2011). Agencies build histories and develop cultures around their missions that contribute to actual and perceived ideological leanings in these agencies (Richardson, et al. 2018; Spenkuch, et al. 2023). These missions are aided by the voluntary cooperation and political support provided by groups affected or supportive of government policy.

These diverse agency missions mean that presidents from the two parties regularly confront agencies whose operations do not align neatly with presidential policy views. This misalignment can lead to performance problems in ways that observers from both parties would acknowledge. The most severely misaligned agencies can have a difficult time adjusting to new presidential goals that deviate from agency historic missions. This can lead to objectively lower performance. In addition, presidents confronting misaligned agencies often employ strategies that damage agency performance. For example, presidents often politicize to help them realign agency structure, personnel, and processes around new goals (Moe 1985). This can disrupt agency performance (see, e.g., Richardson 2019).

By contrast, political alignment can have salutary benefits for some agencies and an agency's status as aligned or misaligned is temporary. For example, an agency like the Environmental Protection Agency can toggle back and forth between robust support and enthusiastic embrace of its core mission under Democratic presidents and suspicion and retrenchment under Republican administrations (e.g.,

see Kraft 2001). Elections change aligned agencies into misaligned agencies and vice versa in ways that are consequential for performance although the effects are rarely instantaneous.

Agencies, Misalignment, and Performance

After an election, agencies find themselves adjusting to a new administration. It can be difficult for misaligned agencies to sustain existing levels of performance in the face of such change. First, it can be difficult for agencies to maintain the support of the network of groups essential for successful policy implementation. From the Affordable Care Act to disaster response, policy implementation relies upon the voluntary cooperation of parties over whom the agency has no direct control. Indeed, agency leaders spend a significant amount of time maintaining relationships with key stakeholders to facilitate smooth agency operations (Kaufman 1981). These include labor unions and worker groups with the Department of Labor, farm interests with the Department of Agriculture, and community and housing groups with the Department of Housing and Urban Development. They also include trade associations, professions, universities, and think tanks. For some agencies there are interests inside the federal government that need to be managed and even rank-in-file employees operate within a zone of acceptability (Barnard 1938; Krause and Carpenter 2015). Across the country, networks of state and local officials, non-profit and for-profit organizations must cooperate for federal policies to work (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973; DiIulio 2014). When these groups withdraw support from an agency because of a change of direction or outright opposition to the administration, agency action gets more difficult, and hence, performance suffers.

Second, agency employees' career incentives can be a barrier to high performance. Civil servants that want to aggressively pursue the president's agenda in a misaligned agency can damage their career prospects both within the agency and with the constellation of groups and organizations around the agency. Long-serving officials with influence in the agency tend to share a commitment the organization's mission and they influence hiring and promotion. Similarly, the outside market for

agency employees is most robust for employees that support the larger mission of an agency (e.g., unions and Labor Department). This can create incentives for government employees to temper their own responsiveness to new directives in a misaligned agency (see, e.g., Lee and You 2023). Employees that want to get promoted or protect job prospects outside the agency have incentives to remain aligned with the core mission of an agency recognized by long-serving agency leaders and groups associated with the agency.

This is particularly the case since relationships with congressional committees, senior career officials, outside groups, and clients will endure beyond the tenure of the sitting president (Long 1952). An agency's core operations revolve around long-term goals and processes. These persist through elections and the rotation of appointees in office. While appointees pursue short term accomplishment in line with the administration, career employees are attuned to the durable long-term vision of an agency. The mismatch between the career incentives and time horizons of the agency and the presidential administration in misaligned agencies hurts agency performance.

Finally, presidents have a more difficult time using appointees in misaligned agencies. This is what Krause and coauthors have referred to as the limits of executive branch coordination (Hollibaugh and Krause 2023, 2024; Krause 2009; Krause and Dupay 2009). Presidents do not have the luxury of selecting appointees solely on the basis of ability or their enthusiasm for the president's program. The pool of potential appointees is often thinner for presidents with misaligned agencies (e.g., Republicans to work in Labor). While presidents prefer that their appointees are both loyal and competent and satisfy other political considerations, it can be harder to recruit candidates with these characteristics in misaligned agencies (Lewis 2008). The constellation of groups organized around an agency's mission (e.g., unions and Labor) are natural providers of appointees. When a party's platform is misaligned with the mission, however, presidents must look outside these normal channels to find appointees. In addition, some appointees are insulated from the president either by statute (e.g., commissioners) or political norm (e.g., Internal Revenue Service) in ways that can make them less responsive to the

president. When appointees do not consistently share the president's views, this leads to goal confusion and lower performance. When they lack public management or agency experience, performance can also suffer.

Most consequential, however, is that in misaligned agencies, the management task of appointees is significantly more difficult. An internal tension exists in misaligned agencies between appointees and career professionals due to different career incentives, time horizons, and policy interests (Aberbach and Rockman 2000: 72-74; Krause 2009: 84-85). This is a direct byproduct of the civil service system (e.g., Heclo 1977: 171-173; Mosher 1982). Appointees must mediate the conflict between the president's short-term vision and the long-term mission of the agency, a mission reinforced by outside groups, patrons in Congress, and career incentives inside the agency (Huber 2007; Long 1949). Appointees must secure cooperation internally while mediating political demands from outside, a task that is much harder when there is misalignment. This makes high performance harder to achieve. If we compare two management tasks, one in an aligned agency and another in a misaligned agency, the former is easier than the latter, implying a better chance of high performance in the aligned agency.

Presidential Strategy, Misalignment, and Performance

The foregoing discussion suggests that agency performance suffers because agencies have a difficult time adjusting to policy goals that work against the agency's mission. Presidents confronting misaligned agencies also often take actions that can hurt management performance in their efforts to change agency policy. Most commonly, presidents politicize agencies, centralize decisions in the White House, and adopt strategies to work with the capacity they inherit (Moe 1985; Weko 1995). One such strategy is to *idle capacity*. This involves rejecting recommendations, changing standards or processes, or adding new layers of review. For example, new presidents routinely freeze all proposed regulations for purposes of reviewing them before they are promulgated (O'Connell 2008). More subtly, leaders

put new procedures in place to facilitate centralized review and clearance (Nou 2015). For instance, although there were no dramatic changes in the CFPB budget under Mick Mulvaney, the agency produced few outputs as cases were withdrawn, and additional layers of economic, political, and administrative review of agency activities.[7] The end result was fewer agency outputs – investigations, cases, and rules – even those favored by Mulvaney.

Another subtle presidential strategy for handling misaligned agencies involves *repurposing capacity*. Presidents target misaligned agencies by setting new agency goals and reorienting people, processes, and dollars around those goals. Indeed, sometimes the lack of alignment is precisely a difference in priorities. For example, protecting voting rights involves efforts to both discourage illegal voting and discourage efforts aimed at illegally keeping people from the polls. Republican and Democratic administrations use Department of Justice resources differently in seeking compliance with voting rights laws, with Republicans focused on persons illegally voting and Democrats targeting efforts to keep persons from legally voting. More generally, elections lead to a reallocation of effort and resources to new priorities (Piper 2022). Repurposing agency capacity internally not only decreases outputs on some tasks, disruption resulting from goal change and reallocation itself can reduce outputs, at least initially.

Finally, presidents can direct the *deconstructing capacity from within agencies* through their appointed agency leaders. There is a broad class of non-budgetary activities than can limit capacity by targeting personnel, structure, and information. For instance, the Nixon administration circulated what was known as the *Federal Political Personnel Manual* that included strategies for getting career civil servants to retire or leave the agency (U.S. Congress 1972). Some officials pursue organizational changes designed to reduce attention and focus on specific issues. The Reagan Administration's first EPA

[7] Nicholas Confessore, "Mick Mulvaney's Master Class in Destroying a Bureaucracy from Within," *New York Times*, April 16, 2019.

Administrator, Anne Gorsuch, eliminated the Office of Enforcement inside the agency (Kraft and Vig 1984). Finally, political actors can eliminate or reduce access to certain kinds of information that make agency activities more difficult. The Trump Administration made a concerted effort to reduce data collection on topics ranging from climate change to animal welfare to restrict the ability of agencies take action under their respective administrative jurisdictions.

In total, political misalignment, because of inherent agency obstacles to mission change and harmful effects attributable to presidential control strategies, should lead to lower agency performance.

Hypothesis 1: Political misalignment between the president an agency will lead to lower performance.

By contrast, political alignment may have salutary benefits for some agencies. While presidents have few incentives to invest in capacity generally, those incentives are strongest when the agency is pursuing a mission important to the president and the president's supporters (Bednar and Lewis 2024). Rather than let capacity idle, the president's appointees encourage its use. Rather than repurpose existing capacity, they sharpen and direct its use toward core goals. And, rather than deconstruct agency capacity, presidents advocate for ways to fortify it. Agencies whose core mission is supported by the president also experience greater cooperation from the clients and groups organized around agency activities. It is easier for agencies to effectively coordinate the implementation of policy when the administration, the agency, and groups share the same goals.

Hypothesis 2: Political alignment between the president an agency will lead to higher performance.

Of course, many agencies are neither particularly aligned nor misaligned with the policy views of the sitting president. These agencies perform missions that are not particularly ideological (e.g., general services) or are rarely a priority for either party. Such agencies experience neither the deleterious consequences of misalignment nor benefits of alignment. For this subset of agencies, the performance consequences of elections are less dramatic.

An agency's status as aligned or misaligned is also temporary. Elections can convert aligned agencies into misaligned agencies and vice versa. A previously favored agency that has been performing at a high level may be targeted by the new administration. An agency that has been historically neglected may receive a new infusion of energetic leadership, attention, and resources. These changes are not instantaneous because agency action is embedded in stable rules, procedures, and patterns of behavior that shape both agency action and agency interaction with other agencies and groups. Change is also slowed by the time it takes presidents to get new appointee teams in place after a transition. For example, after the election of President Trump in 2016, thousands of Obama-era political appointees and career professionals left their agencies. Agencies waited for new Trump-appointed leaders. There was a long delay in filling executive positions and many agencies were unclear what the new president wanted them to do (Lewis 2018). Over time, however, agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency and State Department were targeted by Trump appointees while employees in the Department of Veterans Affairs and U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported an improved experience. This leads to the following expectation:

> **Hypothesis 3:** The effect of political alignment or misalignment on agency performance will be more distinct over the course of a presidential term.

In summary, presidential elections have important consequences for agency performance even when budgets and personnel levels are stable. New presidents lead to changes in (mis)alignment with important consequences for federal agencies' organizational health and performance.

Data and Empirical Strategy

To evaluate the relationship between performance and political alignment we need measures of agency performance, political alignment, and agency structure. We use a measure of agency performance from Krause and Lewis (2024) that combines dozens of objective and subjective

measures of organizational performance between 2002 and 2022.[8] Implementing a Bayesian structural equation measurement model (SEM) approach, these data are leveraged to produce latent performance measures for 139 agencies that vary both across and within agencies over time. These measures correlate well with other out-of-sample measures of performance. The median value is 0.00 and the standard deviation is 0.18 with a minimum of -0.819 and a maximum of 0.637. In *Figure 1* we include a figure that graphs a subset of the agencies, CFO Act agencies, across the time period.

As the figure suggests, some agencies are estimated to perform worse than others, on average. Among the lower performers are the Departments of Homeland Security and Housing and Urban Development, while the National Science Foundation and National Aeronautics and Space Administration are among the high performers. Of course, this focus on larger departments obscures variation among subcomponents of the larger departments. There is also significant variation across time. For example, some agencies appear to be trending up over time, including the General Services Administration and Small Business Administration. There is also a common uptick between the Trump and Biden Administrations, followed by a decline in 2022.

To measure alignment and misalignment we rely on measures of agency ideology and presidential partisanship. Richardson, et al. (2018) generate estimates of durable perceptions of agency ideology based upon the expertise of federal executives. We divide agencies into three categories—liberal, conservative, moderate-- by coding for whether the entire Bayesian 95% confidence interval encompassing the agency's ideology estimate is less than the mean (liberal), greater than the mean (conservative), or neither (overlaps with the mean or missing). We generate an indicator for misaligned agencies if the ideology of the agency is different than the partisanship of the president. So, for

[8] A lack of available performance data makes some years unusable, notably 2000-2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2009. We, therefore, focus on the longest contiguous time period.

Figure 1. BSEM Performance Estimates of CFO Act Agencies, 2002-2022

Note**:** Posterior median estimates and 95% confidence intervals from 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010-2022.

example, a liberal agency during a Republican presidency is coded with 1 as is a conservative agency during a Democratic presidency. An agency is considered aligned (0,1) if the ideology of the agency is consistent with the partisanship of the president. So, for example, an agency is considered aligned if the agency is liberal and the president is a Democrat or the agency is conservative and the president is a Republican. Agencies that are neither liberal nor conservative are coded with a 0 for both misaligned and aligned.

Methods

There are two ways of evaluating the impact of misalignment on performance. One is to compare the performance of aligned and misaligned agencies (or those somewhere in-between) in a cross-sectional way. In other words, we could group all agencies into aligned and misaligned and

compare average performance. The other is to examine variation in performance within agencies over time as they toggle back and forth between aligned and misaligned.

We focus on the latter approach for two reasons. First, the claim is that misalignment leads to lower agency performance does *not* mean that misaligned agencies will perform worse than aligned agencies in an absolute sense. Any agency's performance is a function of factors like budgets, personnel, management, the difficulty of the agency's mission, etc. beyond whether they are aligned or misaligned at any particular moment. Of course, if agencies were permanently misaligned or aligned, then we would be more likely to see a cross-sectional correlation between alignment and misalignment and performance. As it is, some agencies are neither aligned nor misaligned and other agencies toggle back and forth between alignment and misalignment depending upon the policy views of the sitting president. Second, the effect of alignment or misalignment may emerge most clearly as a presidential term progresses. When a new president assumes office, previously aligned agencies become misaligned and vice versa. The effect may not be immediate since presidents take time to fill out White House, EOP, and agency appointed positions, develop and execute presidential plans through directives, budgets, and legislation. The clearest way to see the effect of misalignment is to observe performance changes in an agency over time as they experience periods of alignment and misalignment.

As such, we evaluate the impact of misalignment on performance by regressing within-agency normalized performance (i.e., z-scores) on misalignment and a series of time-varying controls. Notably, we also include indicators for year of a presidential term, second term (0,1), divided government (0,1), and president. In some models we interact year of the presidential term indicators with misalignment and alignment to evaluate whether the effect of these variables changes over the course of a president's first term in office.[9] We account for divided government since the president's

[9] Given the data we have—2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010-2022—we do not estimate models with presidential administration year (i.e., years 1-8). Year 5 and year 7 only exist in our data in the Obama Administration and

ability to exert influence over agencies will be shaped by the degree of cooperation in Congress. Finally, we include indicators for presidential administration to flexibly account for variation in agency performance over time due to trends or president-specific factors.

We estimate our statistical models with Ordinary Least Squares (OLS), clustering our standard errors on agency. We include models with simple main effects, then interact misalignment with year of a president's term in office. Despite our reservations, we include parallel models for untransformed performance measures in *Appendix C*. They show similar patterns except that the estimated main effects for misalignment on performance are small and imprecise while the dynamic effects are similar.

Results

In *Table 1* we include estimates from simple models of normalized agency performance. In *Table 2* we include estimates from models where we interact misalignment and alignment with year of a president's first term indicators. Overall, the results show a gap in performance between aligned and misaligned agencies over the course of a presidential term, but this effect becomes apparent in years 2 to 4. In year 1, agencies that were aligned under the last administration, but now misaligned, continue to perform well while those that were misaligned under the last administration, now aligned, continue to struggle. As the new administration takes hold, however, the pattern switches.

In the simpler models in *Table 1* the overall effects are evident but not precise. The coefficients on misaligned agencies are negative, suggesting lower performance, and the coefficients on aligned agencies are positive, indicating higher performance. These estimates, while suggestive, are modest and imprecise. A standard deviation increase in performance is 0.96 on the scale of our

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once we separate agencies into aligned and misaligned, independent, and non-independent, the number of cases in these cells is small. We include estimates from such models in *Appendix B*. They generally confirm what is reported here.

Table 1. OLS of Models of Normalized Agency Performance (within-agency), 2002 - 2022

	(*Model 1*)			(*Model 2*)			(*Model 3*)		
	B	SE		B	SE		B	SE	
Misaligned Agency (0,1)	-0.074	0.046					-0.055	0.034	
Aligned Agency (0,1)				0.072	0.046		0.052	0.034	
Controls									
Independent Agency (0,1)	-0.010	0.006		0.004	0.006		-0.004	0.004	
Year of First Term (1-4)	0.039	0.016	**	0.039	0.016	**	0.039	0.016	**
Second Term (0,1)	-0.186	0.052	**	-0.186	0.052	**	-0.186	0.052	**
Divided Govt (0,1)	-0.241	0.044	**	-0.241	0.044	**	-0.241	0.044	**
Obama (0,1)	0.094	0.074		0.093	0.074		0.092	0.074	
Trump (0,1)	0.410	0.104	**	0.409	0.104	**	0.410	0.104	**
Biden (0,1)	0.783	0.126	**	0.782	0.127	**	0.780	0.127	**
Constant	-0.102	0.088		-0.142	0.086		-0.120	0.086	
N	2,236			2,236			2,236		
F (9, 8, 8, df)	32.170		**	32.130		**	28.720		**
R^2	0.140			0.140			0.140		
AIC	5888.38			5888.42			5889.03		
BIC	5939.69			5939.83			5946.15		

Note: *significant at the 0.10 level, **significant at the 0.05 level in two-tailed tests. Dependent variable: within-agency normalized performance scores (2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010-2022). Models report robust standard errors clustered on agency. Wald test of coefficient equality between aligned agency and misaligned agency coefficients in *Model 3* = -0.108 (p = 0.116).

dependent variable. The Wald test of coefficient equality comparing the difference between aligned and misaligned agencies is -0.108, albeit misses statistical significance at conventional levels (p = 0.116). In effect, these coefficients are averaging across the entire term, years 1 to 4. Interestingly, the estimates suggest that agencies perform a bit better over the course of a first presidential term but worse during second terms in office. Agencies are also estimated to perform worse during periods of divided government. The average effect of divided government is about a quarter of a standard deviation lower in performance for each year of a term. Interestingly, independent agencies are estimated to perform no better or worse than executive agencies and agency performance improves in a secular manner through time with each presidency relative to the G.W. Bush Administration baseline. These effects are consistent with what we see for the controls in the models in *Table 2*.

Our expectation was that the effects of alignment and misalignment would begin to emerge as a president's term progressed and presidents were able to get their teams in place. *Models 4–6*

Table 2. OLS Models of Normalized Agency Performance (within-agency), 2002 - 2022

	(*Model 4*)			(*Model 5*)			(*Model 6*)		
	B	SE		B	SE		B	SE	
Alignment (Mod base cat.)									
Aligned (0,1)				-0.059	0.095		-0.021	0.094	
Misaligned (0,1)	0.121	0.093					0.115	0.091	
Year of First Term (1 base cat.)									
Year 2 (0,1)	-0.194	0.049	**	-0.244	0.052	**	-0.207	0.062	**
Year 3 (0,1)	-0.152	0.068	**	-0.261	0.072	**	-0.189	0.086	**
Year 4 (0,1)	0.107	0.064	*	-0.048	0.066		0.059	0.077	
Interactions									
Aligned*Year 2				0.076	0.093		0.038	0.105	
Misaligned*Year 2	-0.124	0.093					-0.111	0.106	
Aligned*Year 3				0.178	0.134		0.106	0.133	
Misaligned*Year 3	-0.249	0.133	*				-0.212	0.132	
Aligned*Year 4				0.247	0.139	*	0.140	0.137	
Misaligned*Year 4	-0.360	0.126	**				-0.313	0.124	**
Controls									
Second Term (0,1)	-0.220	0.053	**	-0.220	0.053	**	-0.220	0.053	**
Independent Agency (0,1)	-0.007	0.007		0.006	0.007		0.000	0.004	
Divided Govt (0,1)	-0.237	0.051	**	-0.238	0.051	**	-0.237	0.051	**
Obama (0,1)	0.100	0.075		0.100	0.075		0.098	0.075	
Trump (0,1)	0.376	0.107	**	0.376	0.107	**	0.375	0.107	**
Biden (0,1)	0.721	0.131	**	0.719	0.130	**	0.720	0.131	**
Constant	0.083	0.094		0.126	0.095		0.090	0.096	
N	2,236			2,236			2,236		
F (17, 13, 13)	26.68		**	25.50		**	22.28		**
R^2	0.16			0.15			0.160		
AIC	5856.45			5861.16			5861.81		
BIC	59.36			5941.14			5964.64		

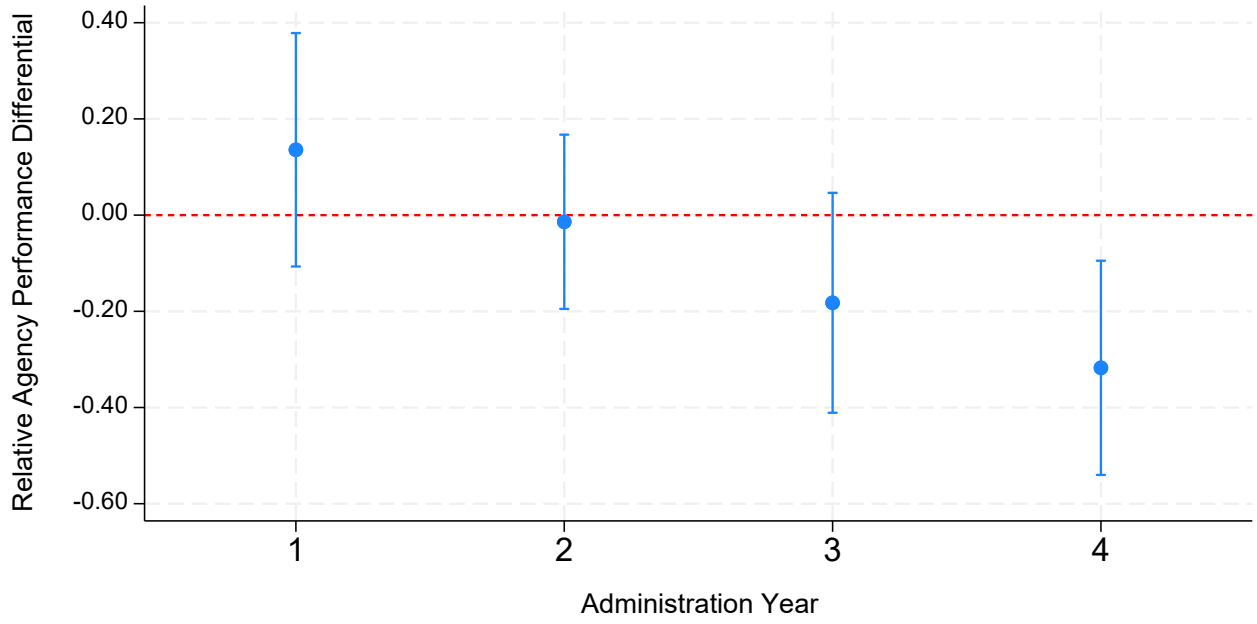
Note: *significant at the 0.10 level, **significant at the 0.05 level in two-tailed tests. Dependent variable: within-agency normalized performance scores (2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010-2022). Models report robust standard errors clustered on agency. *Model 6* Wald tests of cumulative difference in aligned vs. misaligned agencies for years 2-4 (= -0.921, p = 0.021). *Model 6* Wald tests of cumulative difference in misaligned vs. other agencies for years 2-4 (= -0.974, p < 0.001). *Model 6* Wald tests of cumulative difference in aligned vs. other agencies for years 2-4 (= -0.052, p = 0.843).

appearing in *Table 2* include interactions of alignment and misalignment with year indicators to test this claim. The base category is a moderate agency (i.e., neither aligned nor misaligned) in the first year of a new president's term. All other estimates are compared to this baseline. The coefficient estimates indicate that we cannot reject the null of no difference in misaligned, aligned or moderate agencies in year 1 but the coefficients suggest a similar pattern to what was seen in *Table 1*. In year 1, formerly

aligned agencies (now misaligned) are estimated to perform slightly better in year 1 than either formerly misaligned (now aligned) or agencies that were neither. This, again, suggests that the performance consequences of alignment or misalignment are delayed as new presidents work to get their teams and policies in place.

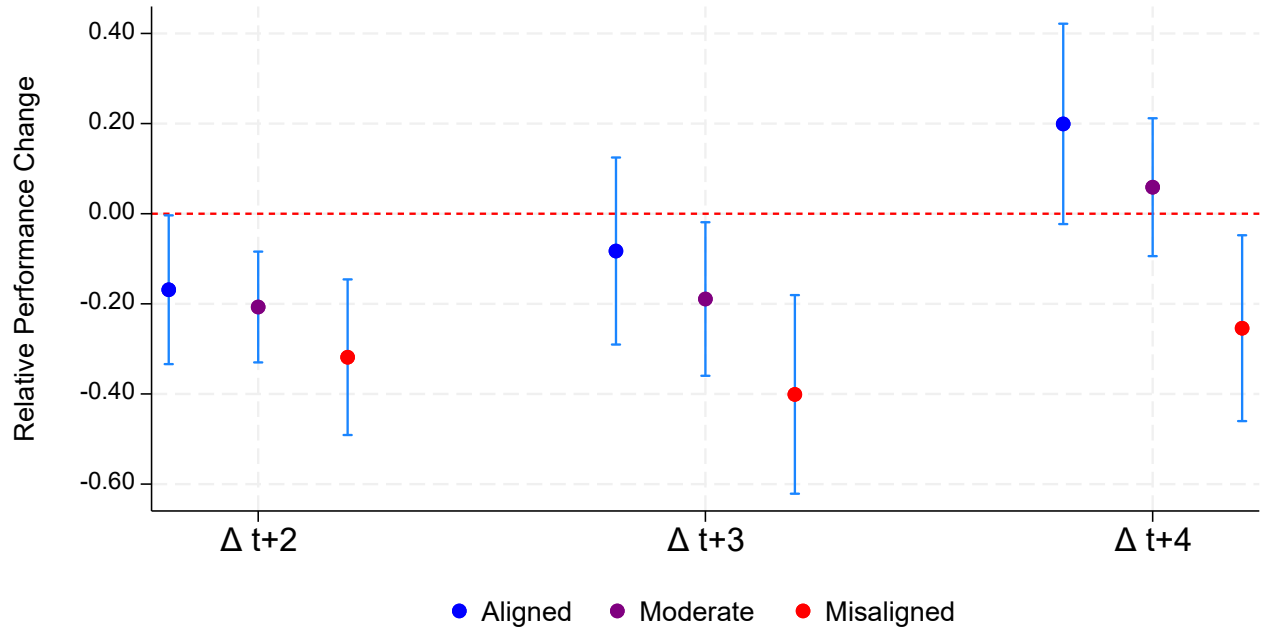
Over the course of the term, however, the consequences of alignment and misalignment emerge. The estimates on the year of term indicators and interactions are generally as expected, with the correct signs and precision. In *Figure 1*, we graph the estimated performance difference between misaligned and aligned agencies over the course of a president's first term in office based on the *Model 6* estimates. In the figure a 0 valued estimate is indicative of no expected difference in performance for a given year of the first presidential term. The figure presents suggestive evidence that misaligned agencies perform a bit better in year 1, but the gap is gone by year 2. In year 3, misaligned agencies perform worse and this effect only becomes larger and statistically distinguishable from 0 in year 4.

FIGURE 1
Relative Agency Performance Differential Within Administrations
(Misaligned Agencies - Aligned Agencies [MODEL 6])



Another way to understand the results is to examine the marginal effects of the alignment and year of term variables (and interactions) for the three years after the first year. This allows us to examine each type of agency (i.e., misaligned, neither, aligned) in each year compared to their performance in year 1. We do this in *Figure 2*. A few interesting patterns emerge. First, there is a general decline in performance in years 2 and 3 for all types of agencies, perhaps due to the disruption each election brings to leadership and management. Second, the marginal effects diverge for aligned and misaligned agencies. The marginal effects for aligned agencies in years 2 and 3 show the smallest decrease relative to year 1 and they eventually show improvement by year 4. By contrast, misalignment is estimated to decrease performance the most each year of a president's term. Finally, the consequences of alignment or misalignment (i.e., the gap in marginal effects) are increasing over the course of the term.

FIGURE 2
Relative Performance Change From President's First Year in Office
(Aligned Agencies, Moderate Agencies, and Misaligned Agencies [MODEL 6])



This last effect can be seen most clearly in *Figure 3*, which graphs changes in the relative performance differences between misaligned and aligned agencies during a presidential first term. The

change in the misaligned–aligned agency relative performance gap is 0.15 standardized units in year 2 (Δ t+2) of a president's first term, while rising to 0.32 and 0.45 standardized units in years 3 (Δ t+3) and 4 (Δ t+4) of a president's first term in office. This pattern underscores the gradual, dynamic decline in relative agency performance between presidential-aligned and presidential-misaligned agencies.

FIGURE 3
Relative Performance Change Differential From President's First Year in Office (Between Misaligned Agencies and Aligned Agencies [MODEL 6])

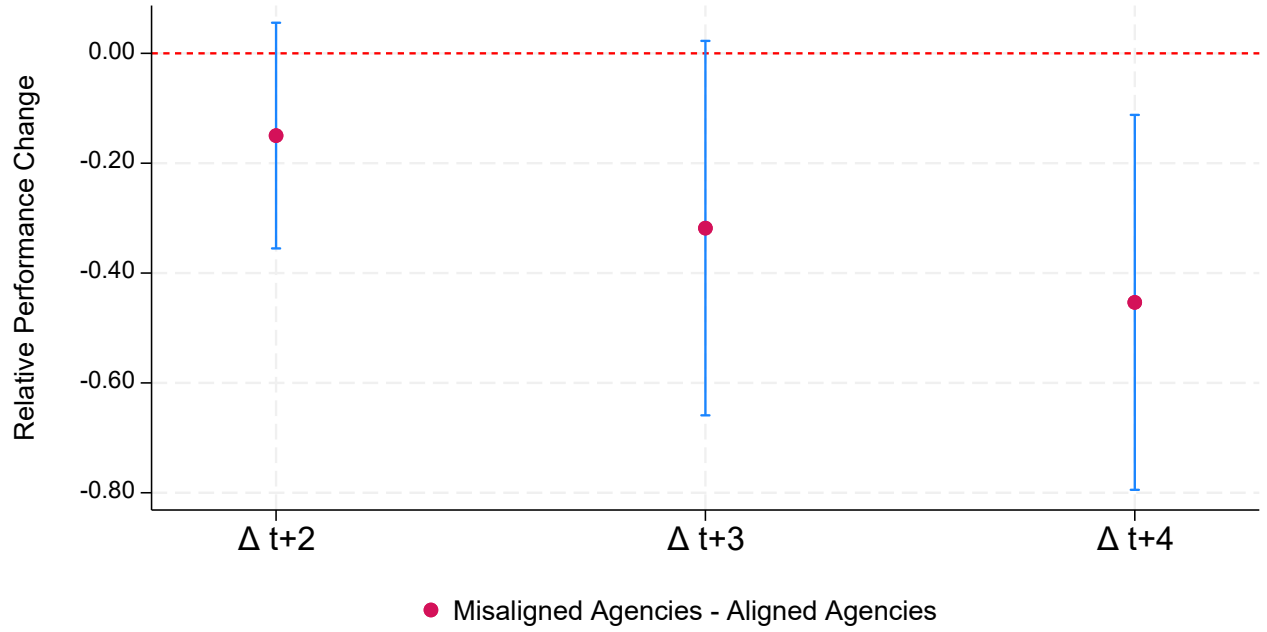
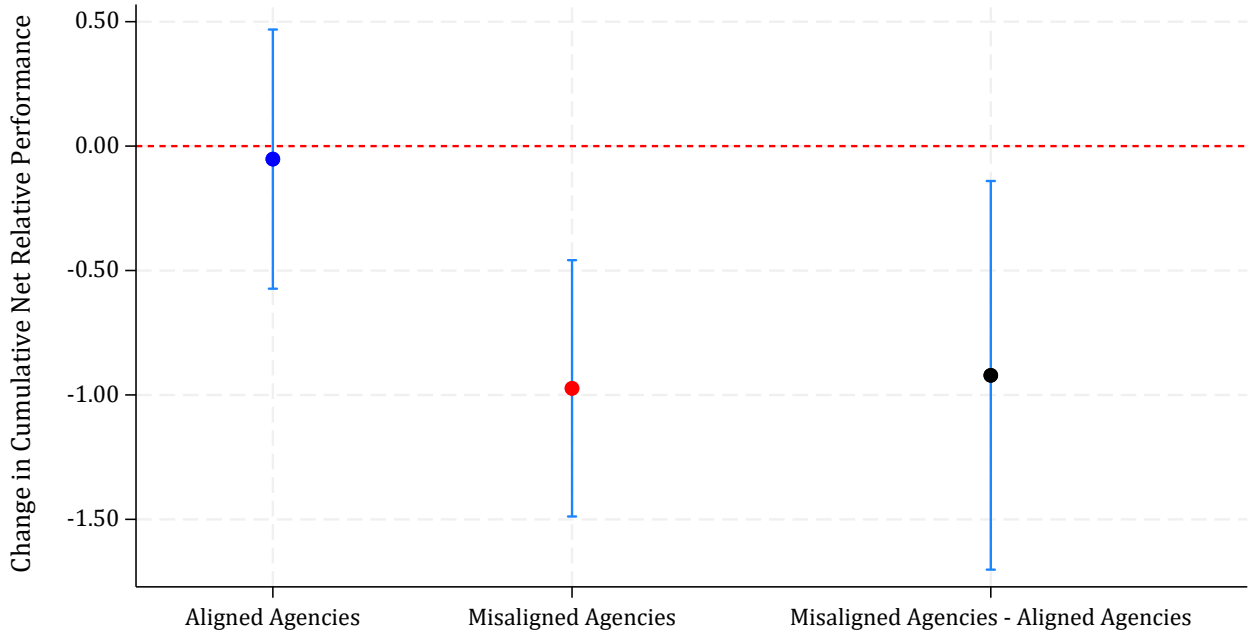


Figure 4 presents the relative net performance change across a president's first term in office. This information provides the average cumulative effect on relative agency performance during a presidential first term. Aligned agencies experience a net decline of 0.05 standardized units across all four years. This effect is largely driven by the slow adjustment process when a new presidential administration takes office appearing in *Figure 2*. Specifically, relative agency performance declines by an average of almost 18% for aligned agencies between the first year and second year of a new presidential administration before eventually increasing by almost 20% between year 3 and year 4 during a presidential first term. Conversely, misaligned agencies experience a cumulative net marginal decline of 0.97 standardized units in relative performance during a president's first term in office.

FIGURE 4
Change in Cumulative Net Relative Performance
From President's First Year in Office [MODEL 6]



Although this effect is somewhat numerically variable as displayed in *Figure 2*, it is consistently both negative and consequential across a president's first term. The cumulative net relative difference across a president's first term in office provides a clear sense of what difference alignment and misalignment make. Over years 2 to 4 being aligned vs. misaligned is estimated to lead to about a standard deviation difference in performance (0.921, $p = 0.021$). In other words, if a misaligned agency was instead aligned with the president, this is estimated to lead to about a standard deviation better performance. This does not mean an aligned agency will perform well in an absolute sense, only that it will perform better than it would if were misaligned.

To summarize, our three expectations were largely confirmed. Misaligned agencies performed worse than other agencies and aligned agencies better than other agencies. These effects, however,

only emerge after year 1 due to transition effects relating to staffing, directives, budgets, and legislation.[10]

Discussion and Conclusion

The effects of Mick Mulvaney's tenure at the CFPB can be seen in the performance estimates. The agency had been steadily improving as Obama's term progressed. The agency earned its highest performance score in 2016. This trend continued into Trump's first year. The agency's performance then declined in Trump's second year. This CFPB case highlights a fundamental tension of executive branch governance: the presidency and bureaucracy are separate institutions with distinct incentives and constraints. Presidents are transitory and their programmatic objectives reflect popular will via elections. The departments and agencies of the executive, by contrast, offer stability across presidential administrations to facilitate expert policymaking and execution (Carpenter 2001; Gailmard and Patty 2013; Heclo 1977; Mosher 1982). Presidents can be successful establishing new policies through administrative means (e.g., Lewis 2008; Moe 1985, 1989), but presidents also depend upon stable agency competence to implement these changes (e.g., Aberbach and Rockman 2000; Chun and Rainey 2005; Golden 2000; Resh 2015). Because of this fundamental tension between transitory presidential goals and stable agency missions, for presidents to successfully coordinate with federal agencies, they must secure cooperation among and between appointees and career professionals, something harder to achieve when there is misalignment. Agencies cannot easily change away from core missions set by enacting coalitions (e.g., Piper 2022; Potter 2019; Richardson, et al. 2018) without performance consequences. Presidents also select strategies that can hinder or facilitate high performance.

[10] The president-agency (mis(alignment) effects observed here cannot be accounted for a rival explanation centered on divided partisan government control between presidents and Congress since we reject evidence of performance differences between aligned and misaligned agencies attributable to interbranch partisan conflict between presidents and Congress (see *Appendix D: Models Evaluating Differential Unified–Divided Partisan Control of Relative Agency Performance, 2002 – 2022*).

This study has sought to better understand this tension by delving into the role politics in agency performance. Specifically, we have analyzed this linkage between politics and administration by focusing on agencies confronting new periods if misalignment or alignment, and described the impact of such electoral shifts on agency performance. We have the evaluated performance effects using new measures of government performance. The results indicate that agencies that are misaligned with presidential goals perform worse than presidential-aligned agencies. These effects emerge after the first year of the president's term and grow over the course of the term. This delayed response can be attributed to the time it takes for new presidents to have a governance impact through political appointees, budgeting, and legislation.

Several implications emerge from this analysis. First, the results highlight how political context can influence organizational health and performance, even performance all can observe. This is further evidence that it is impossible to separate politics and administration (Wilson 1887). Second, the results reinforce the notion that public management is fundamentally a *political* occupation. Managers mediate between democratic pressures coming from elected officials with particularistic concerns relating to their agency's core mission and constituencies (Kaufman 1981). Public managers must work to mitigate the natural effects associated with cycles of misalignment and alignment. While each new administration begins with suspicion on each side, appointees and career professionals often describe a cycle of accommodation where appointees and careerists can work together productively and build trust (Golden 2000; Pfiffner 1987; Resh 2015). By the end of each administration, the presidential administration has had some success orienting agencies around the administration's goals without unintended consequences for performance.

Third, this work amplifies the importance of recent scholarship which differences among agencies in the degree of political conflict over their missions (Richardson 2024a). Some agencies enjoy active bipartisan support. Other agencies cycle back and forth between support and opposition depending upon party control. Yet others are simply neglected, attracting little active attention from

the White House or congressional majorities. These differences among agencies are consequential for control and performance and scholars should pay more attention to these important differences among agencies.

Finally, in democratic governments, particularly those with Weberian bureaucracies, we expect changes in leaders to lead to changes in policy. This is particularly the case when the newly elected party disagrees with the direction the government was taking under previous leadership. What is perhaps less appreciated is how changes in political context shape *performance*, even performance that everyone agrees upon. A large literature explains the effects of politicization and merit on performance but often overlooks the harder to see ways that alignment and misalignment influence performance.

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Appendix A. Description of BSEM Models of Agency Performance[11]

To develop our measures of performance we collected data from a variety of government and non-profit sources, including the General Services Administration (GSA), the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and the Partnership for Public Service. Some of this data is subjective, indicators based upon the perception of persons working in or close to agencies. Other data is objective, presenting counts of good or bad outputs (e.g., presence of award-winning employees). We list data sources in **Table A1**.

Table A1. Federal Employee Performance Information, 2002-2022

Source	Title	Years
Objective		
Government Accountability Office	High Risk List	2002-2022 (biannual)
Government Accountability Office	Congressionally Requested Reports (bipartisan)	2002-2020
Office of Personnel Management	Employee Performance Awards	2002-2022
Partnership for Public Service	Sammies	2003-2022
Office of Management and Budget	Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART)	2002-2008
Subjective		
Office of Personnel Management	FHCS/FEVS	2002-2008 (biannual); 2010-2022 (annual)
Merit Systems Protection Board	Merit Principles Survey	2005, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2016, 2021
Richardson, et al. (2018); Richardson, et al. (2024)	Survey on the Future of Government Service	2014, 2020
General Services Administration	Customer Satisfaction Survey	2015-2023
Partnership or Public Service	Best Places to Work Index	2002-2010 (biannual); 2011-2022 (annual)
National Quality Research Center	American Consumer Satisfaction Index	2011-2022

[11] This description borrows heavily from Krause and Lewis 2024.

Note: Our models only include data from 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010-2022 due to available performance data limitations.

The goal of the measurement strategy was to model the relationship between agencies' latent performance level and observed subjective and objective performance indicators. A natural consequence of this measurement strategy is that some measures exhibit a stronger connection to latent agency performance because the quality of observable indicators varies. Ideally, the measurement strategy would connect latent performance to observed indicators, while accounting for the fact that some indicator measures are more informative than others. It is also possible that there is more than one latent performance dimension. As this suggests, the ultimate success of this approach depends upon the quality and availability of data. Poor data quality or availability limits the ability to produce valid estimates. We were able generate valid estimates for the 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010-2022. Valid estimates could not be generated for omitted years due to sparseness of data.[12] As data has become more abundant and of higher quality, our ability to generate valid estimates has improved.

We adopted a Bayesian Structural Equation Measurement (BSEM) modeling approach to generate latent agency performance measures. Our approach started with employing a Bayesian Exploratory Factor Analysis (BEFA) to empirically evaluate the dimensionality of observed indicators relating to various aspects of agency performance from multiple data sources. Three criteria were employed in the specification of both the BEFA and BSEM models:

- *Proximity to concept*: We prioritized measures closest to the concept of overall agency performance. So, for example, our models include yearly agency average responses by

[12] Initial attempts to generate estimates based on these sparse data years resulted in unusual shifts in estimates and a sharp rise in the imprecision of the estimates.

supervisors (or non-supervisors) to questions like "*My agency is successful at accomplishing its mission.*"

- *Coverage*: We also prioritized measures that cover a large number of agencies and/or years. This provides comparability across agencies and years, thus yielding reliable estimates based on sufficient data.
- *Diagnostics*: The development of models was iterative. We used model estimates and fit statistics to compare different specifications.

Next, identification of the BSEM model was predicated on the BEFA analysis to determine the number of dimensions. The latter indicated two latent dimensions, although BSEM model estimates suggest the more robust of the two dimensions is the first dimension.

Our model takes the form of a two-factor confirmatory factor Bayesian structural measurement model with correlated errors. The latent traits for the first and second dimensions of agency performance are defined respectively as y_i^{*F1} and y_i^{*F2}. The Bayesian structural equation measurement (BSEM) model is defined as:

$$y_i^{*F1} = \upsilon^{F1} + \Lambda_p \eta_{p_i}^{F1} + \varepsilon_i^{F1} \quad (1)$$

$$y_i^{*F2} = \omega^{F2} + \Pi_q^{F2} \theta_{q_i}^{F2} + \zeta_i^{F2} \quad (2)$$

where υ^{F1}, ω^{F2} constitute intercept terms for each respective latent trait equation; η_p^{F1}, θ_q^{F2}, represent p, q -dimensional vectors of observed indicator variables in each measurement equation for each respective latent trait, while Λ_p^{F1}, Π_q^{F2} are the corresponding $p \times 1$, $q \times 1$ parameter matrices of factor loadings and ε^{F1}, ζ^{F2} constitute the residual vectors for each latent trait equation that are allowed to be correlated. Their corresponding variance-covariance matrix is denoted as $\Theta = \varrho(\varepsilon^{F1}, \zeta^{F2})$. Estimates are generated via the Bayesian posterior density of the parameter distributions for the slope, intercept, and loading parameters (ν^{F1}, ω^{F2} ; Λ_p^{F1}, Π_q^{F2}), the variance-covariance parameters (ε^{F1}, ζ^{F2}), and the

latent variables of interest ($\boldsymbol{\eta}_p^{F1}$, $\boldsymbol{\theta}_q^{F2}$). The conjugate non-informative priors for all the free parameters ($\boldsymbol{\nu}^{F1}$, $\boldsymbol{\omega}^{F2}$; $\boldsymbol{\Lambda}_p^{F1}$, $\boldsymbol{\Pi}_q^{F2}$) are normally distributed with mean zero, and positive infinity variance; the variance-covariance parameters ($\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}^{F1}$, $\boldsymbol{\zeta}^{F2}$) follow an inverse Wishart distribution containing a mean of 0 (non-binary probit links) or 1 (binary probit links) and a variance of 3; except for the variance parameters that are block diagonal of size 1, and hence follow an inverse gamma distribution with mean set to −1 and variance set equal to zero that is equivalent to a uniform prior on $[0, \infty)$.[13]

This model was estimated with Bayesian Markov Chain Monte Carlo simulation methods, implemented via Gibbs sampling, employing 100,000 iterations, with 2 chains, and 100 intervals employed for thinning using *Mplus* statistical software (Version 8.10). The specific analysis implemented here utilizes multiple imputation to generate plausible values consistent with the observed data through 1,000 draws, which form the basis for the Bayesian posterior distribution for each indicator variable, and more importantly, generate the resulting latent factor estimates based on plausible values for these latent measures by treating the indicator variables as containing missing data on all agency-year observations (Asparouhov and Muthen 2021). Estimation of this model generates 1,000 sets of Bayesian posterior theta/θ (factor score) estimates corresponding to each agency-year observation for both the *management performance* and *outcome performance* latent concepts. The Bayesian posterior median theta/θ estimates yield point estimates of latent agency performance, while the Bayesian posterior standard deviation and corresponding 95% credibility intervals provides measures of uncertainty surrounding these latent agency performance point estimates. **Table A2** includes a list of 139 agencies for which we have estimates during the 2002 to 2022 period.

[13] Additional information and technical details can be obtained from Asparouhov and Muthen (2021).

Table A2. List of Agencies

OKCODE	Acronym	Name
1	USDA	Department of Agriculture
2	COM	Department of Commerce
3	DOD	Department of Defense
4	ARMY	Department of the Army
5	USAF	Department of the Air Force
6	NAVY	Department of the Navy
7	DOED	Department of Education
8	DOE	Department of Energy
9	HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
11	DHS	Department of Homeland Security
12	HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
13	INT	Department of the Interior
14	DOJ	Department of Justice
15	DOL	Department of Labor
16	STAT	Department of State
17	DOT	Department of Transportation
18	TREAS	Department of Treasury
19	DVA	Department of Veterans Affairs
20	CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
21	EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
22	FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency (Pre-2003)
23	GSA	General Services Administration
24	NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
25	SBA	Small Business Administration
26	SSA	Social Security Administration
27	USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
28	USIA/BBG/USAGM	U.S. Agency for Global Media
29	OMB	Office of Management and Budget (in EOP)
30	USTR	Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (in EOP)
33	CSPC	Consumer Product Safety Commission
34	EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
35	FCC	Federal Communications Commission
37	FEC	Federal Election Commission
38	FERC	Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
40	FED	Federal Reserve
41	FTC	Federal Trade Commission
43	NLRB	National Labor Relations Board
44	NTSB	National Transportation Safety Board
45	NRC	Nuclear Regulatory Commission
49	SEC	Securities and Exchange Commission

50	CEN	Bureau of the Census (in COMM)
51	CMS	Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (in HHS)
52	DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration (in DOJ)
53	FAA	Federal Aviation Administration (in DOT)
54	FDA	Food and Drug Administration (in HHS)
55	FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency (in DHS since 2003)
56	IRS	Internal Revenue Service (in TREAS)
57	NHTSA	National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (in DOT)
58	NIH	National Institutes of Health (in HHS)
59	NIST	National Institute of Standards and Technology (in COMM)
60	NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (in COMM)
61	PTO	Patent and Trademark Office (in COMM)
70	PBGC	Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation
71	USPS	U.S. Postal Service
72	OPM	Office of Personnel Management
73	OSTP	Office of Science and Technology Policy (in EOP)
78	FDIC	Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
79	CBP	Customs and Border Protection (in DHS since 2003)
82	BEA	Bureau of Economic Analysis (in COMM)
83	EDA	Economic Development Administration (in COMM)
84	ITA	International Trade Administration (in COMM)
85	CIS	Citizenship and Immigration Services (in DHS since 2003)
86	CISA	Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency (in DHS since 2003)
87	ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement (in DHS since 2003)
88	TSA	Transportation Security Administration (in DHS since 2003)
89	USCG	U.S. Coast Guard (in DHS since 2003)
90	USSS	U.S. Secret Service (in DHS since 2003)
91	DARPA	Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (in DOD)
94	DCMA	Defense Contract Management Agency (in DOD)
95	DFAA	Defense Finance and Accounting Service (in DOD)
97	DLA	Defense Logistics Agency (in DOD)
98	JCS	Joint Chief of Staffs (in DOD)
108	IES	Institute of Education Sciences (in DOED)
109	OESE	Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (in DOED)
110	OFSA	Office of Federal Student Aid (in DOED)
111	BOP	Bureau of Prisons (in DOJ)
112	EOUSA	Executive Office of U.S. Attorneys (In DOJ)
113	FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation (in DOJ)
114	MARSHALS	U.S. Marshals Service (in DOJ)
115	OJP	Office of Justice Programs (in DOJ)

117	BLS	Bureau of Labor Statistics (in DOL)
118	ETA	Employment and Training Administration (in DOL)
119	MSHA	Mine Safety and Health Administration (in DOL)
120	OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration (in DOL)
121	OWCP	Office of Workers Compensation Programs (in DOL)
122	VETS	Veterans Employment and Training Service (in DOL)
123	WHD	Wage and Hour Division (in DOL)
124	FHWA	Federal Highway Administration (in DOT)
125	FMCSA	Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (in DOT)
126	FRA	Federal Railroad Administration (in DOT)
127	FTA	Federal Transit Administration (in DOT)
128	MARAD	Maritime Administration (in DOT)
129	NCA	National Cemetery Administration (in DVA)
130	VBA	Veterans Benefits Administration (in DVA)
131	VHA	Veterans Health Administration (in DVA)
134	ONDCP	Office of National Drug Policy (in EOP)
135	ACF	Administration for Children and Families (in HHS)
136	CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (in HHS)
137	HRSA	Health Resources and Services Administration (in HHS)
138	IHS	Indian Health Service (in HHS)
139	GNMA	Government National Mortgage Association (in HUD)
140	HOU	Office of Housing/Federal Housing Administration (in HUD)
141	OPIH	Office of Public and Indian Housing (in HUD)
143	CFPB	Bureau of Cons Fin Prot/Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
144	CFTC	Commodity Futures Trading Commission
145	CNCS	Corporation for National and Community Service
146	DFC/OPIC	Development Finance Corp/Overseas Private Investment Corp
147	EIB	Export-Import Bank
150	MCC	Millenium Challenge Corporation
151	MSPB	Merit Systems Protection Board
152	NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
154	NSF	National Science Foundation
159	PC	Peace Corps
160	BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs (in DOI)
161	BLM	Bureau of Land Management (in DOI)
162	BOEM/MMS	Bureau Ocean Energy Management/Minerals Management (in DOI)
163	BOR	Bureau of Reclamation (in DOI)
164	FWS	Fish and Wildlife Service (in DOI)
165	NPS	National Park Service (in DOI)
166	USGS	U.S. Geological Survey (in DOI)

177	OCC	Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (in TREAS)
178	AMS	Agricultural Marketing Service (in USDA)
179	APHIS	Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (in USDA)
180	ARS	Agricultural Research Service (USDA)
181	ERS	Economic Research Service (in USDA)
182	FAS	Foreign Agricultural Service i(in USDA)
183	FNS	Food and Nutrition Service (In USDA)
184	FS	Forest Service (in USDA)
186	FSIS	Food and Safety Inspection Service (in USDA)
188	NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service (in USDA)
193	USCG	U.S. Coast Guard (in DOT pre-2003)
194	INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service (in DOJ)
196	OPE	Office of Postsecondary Education (in DOED)
197	ATF	Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (in DOJ)
200	ESA	Employment and Standards Administration (in DOL)
201	ACE	Army Corps of Engineers (in DOD)
202	NCUA	National Credit Union Administration
203	USITC	U.S. International Trade Commission

Appendix B. Administration Years vs. Term Years

We have agency performance estimates for 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010-2022. This means that data can be sparse in years 5 and 7 of a presidential administration. Year 5 and year 7 only exist in our data in the Obama Administration and once we separate agencies into aligned and misaligned, independent, and non-independent, the number of cases in these cells is small. In the main text we estimate models with year of presidential term. Here we estimate models including presidential administration year (i.e., years 1-8) despite our concerns for the number of cases in specific cells. Specifically, we replicate the models in *Tables 1* and *2* in *Tables B1* and *B2*. We replicate *Figures 2 – 4* as *Figures B1-B3* with the estimates from *Tables B1* and B2.

Table B1. OLS of Models of Normalized Agency Performance (within-agency), 2002 – 2022 (*Administration Years*)

	(*Model B1*)			(*Model B2*)			(*Model B3*)		
	B	SE		B	SE		B	SE	
Misaligned Agency (0,1)	-0.074	0.046					-0.056	0.034	
Aligned Agency (0,1)				0.072	0.046		0.053	0.034	
Controls									
Independent Agency (0,1)	-0.011	0.007		0.004	0.006		-0.004	0.004	
Administration Year (1-8)	-0.030	0.012	**	-0.030	0.012	**	0.030	0.012	**
Divided Govt (0,1)	-0.187	0.044	**	-0.187	0.044	**	-0.187	0.044	**
Obama (0,1)	0.049	0.078		0.048	0.078		0.047	0.078	
Trump (0,1)	0.408	0.104	**	0.407	0.105	**	0.407	0.104	**
Biden (0,1)	0.738	0.126	**	0.737	0.126	**	0.736	0.126	**
Constant	0.046	0.093		0.006	0.091		0.028	0.091	
N	2,236			2,236			2,236		
F (9, 8, 8, df)	36.81		**	36.75		**	32.37		**
R^2	0.134			0.134			0.134		
AIC	5901.17			5901.31			5901.91		
BIC	5946.87			5947.01			5953.32		

Note: *significant at the 0.10 level, **significant at the 0.05 level in two-tailed tests. Dependent variable: within-agency normalized performance scores (2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010-2022). Models report robust standard errors clustered on agency. Wald test of equality of aligned agency and misaligned agency coefficients in *Model B3* = -0.11 (p = 0.114).

Table B2. OLS Models of Normalized Agency Performance (within-agency), 2002 – 2022

	(*Model B4*)			(*Model B5*)			(*Model B6*)		
	B	SE		B	SE		B	SE	
Aligned (0,1)				-0.085	0.166		-0.012	0.161	
Misaligned (0,1)	0.221	0.145					0.218	0.316	
Administration Year (1 base cat.)									
Year 2 (0,1)	-0.310	0.072	**	-0.379	0.072	**	-0.297	0.084	**
Year 3 (0,1)	-0.471	0.105	**	-0.564	0.104	**	-0.486	0.123	**
Year 4 (0,1)	0.209	0.104	**	-0.388	0.099	**	-0.238	0.117	**
Year 5 (0,1)	-0.667	0.102	**	-0.782	0.121	**	-0.661	0.150	**
Year 6 (0,1)	-0.713	0.104	**	-0.829	0.105	**	-0.769	0.118	**
Year 7 (0,1)	-0.500	0.109	**	-0.720	0.118	**	-0.554	0.113	**
Year 8 (0,1)	-0.237	0.103	**	-0.425	0.102	**	-0.295	0.115	**
Interactions									
Aligned*Year 2				0.043	0.156		-0.038	0.156	
Misaligned*Year 2	-0.227	0.129	*				-0.239	0.138	*
Aligned*Year 3				0.130	0.211		0.053	0.210	
Misaligned*Year 3	-0.244	0.186					-0.226	0.181	
Aligned*Year 4				0.241	0.227		0.092	0.218	
Misaligned*Year 4	-0.464	0.195	**				-0.434	0.180	**
Aligned*Year 5				0.111	0.266		-0.006	0.274	
Misaligned*Year 5	-0.355	0.237					-0.356	0.224	
Aligned*Year 6				0.228	0.221		0.170	0.223	
Misaligned*Year 6	-0.229	0.221					-0.171	0.212	
Aligned*Year 7				0.322	0.247		0.159	0.239	
Misaligned*Year 7	-0.554	0.250	**				-0.496	0.245	**
Aligned*Year 8				0.306	0.217		0.177	0.211	
Misaligned*Year 8	-0.441	0.119	**				-0.381	0.181	**
Controls									
Independent Agency (0,1)	-0.012	0.007	*	0.004	0.007		-0.005	0.005	
Divided Govt (0,1)	-0.159	0.053	**	-0.162	0.053	**	-0.161	0.053	**
Obama (0,1)	0.119	0.075		0.118	0.075		0.116	0.075	
Trump (0,1)	0.334	0.107	**	0.335	0.107	**	0.334	0.107	**
Biden (0,1)	0.591	0.135	**	0.589	0.135	**	0.591	0.111	**
Constant	0.261	0.110	**	0.336	0.108	**	0.264	0.111	**
N	2,236			2,236			2,236		
F (17, 13, 13)	21.07		**	20.52		**	17.33		**
R^2	0.171			0.169			0.173		
AIC	5828.77			5835.26			5840.26		
BIC	5948.73			5955.22			6005.92		

Note: *significant at the 0.10 level, **significant at the 0.05 level in two-tailed tests. Dependent variable: within-agency normalized performance scores (2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010-2022). Models report robust standard errors clustered on agency. *Model B6* Wald tests of cumulative difference in aligned vs. misaligned agencies for years 2-8 (=-2.909, p = 0.094). *Model B6* Wald tests of cumulative difference in misaligned vs.

other agencies for years 2-8 (=-5.602, p < 0.001). *Model B6* Wald tests of cumulative difference in aligned vs. other agencies for years 2-8 (=-2.694, p = 0.025).

FIGURE B1
Relative Agency Performance Differential Within Administrations
(Misaligned Agencies - Aligned Agencies [MODEL B6])

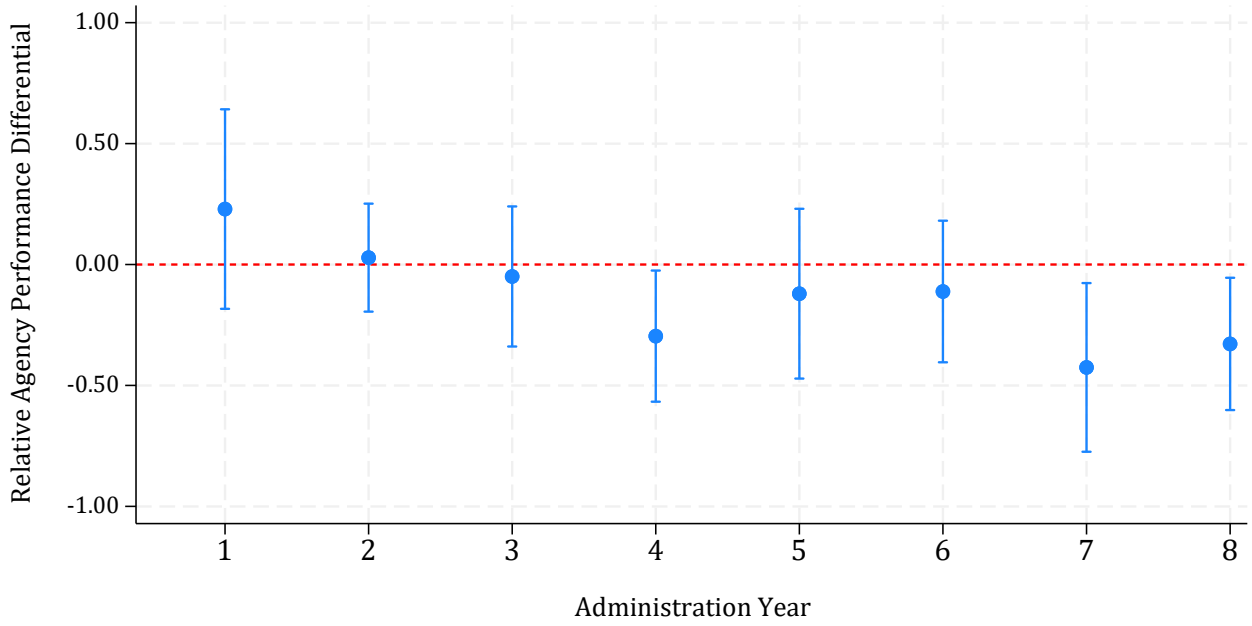


FIGURE B2
Relative Performance Change From President's First Year in Office
(Aligned Agencies, Moderate Agencies, and Misaligned Agencies [MODEL B6])

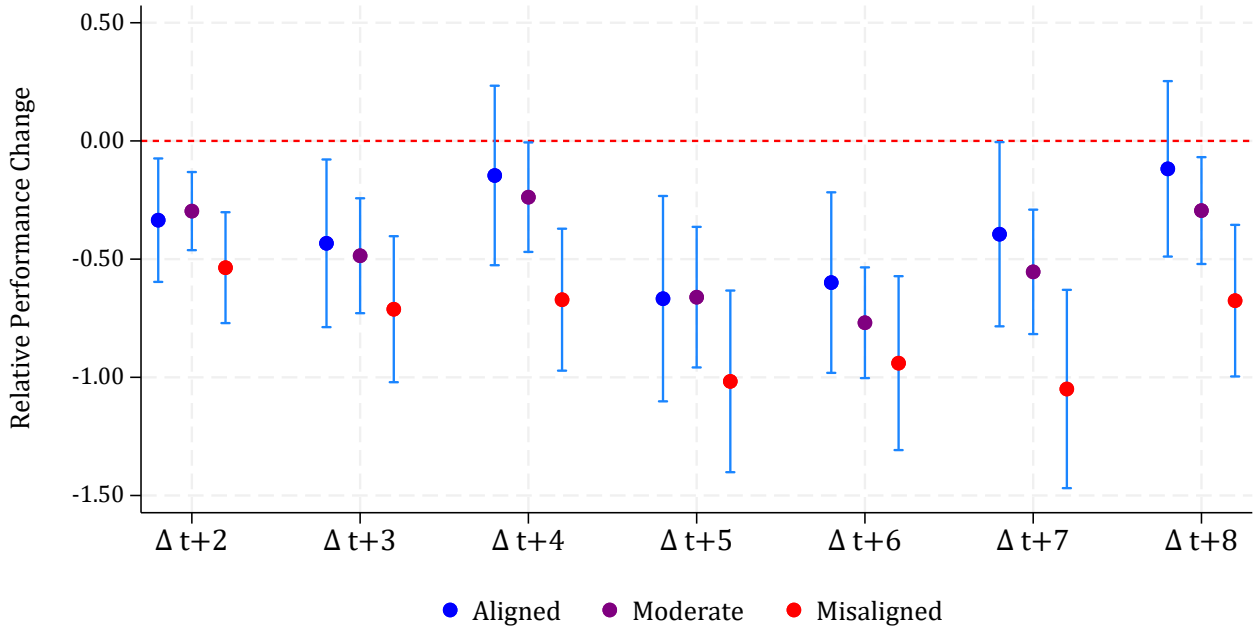


FIGURE B3
Relative Performance Change Differential From President's First Year in Office
(Between Misaligned Agencies and Aligned Agencies [MODEL B6])

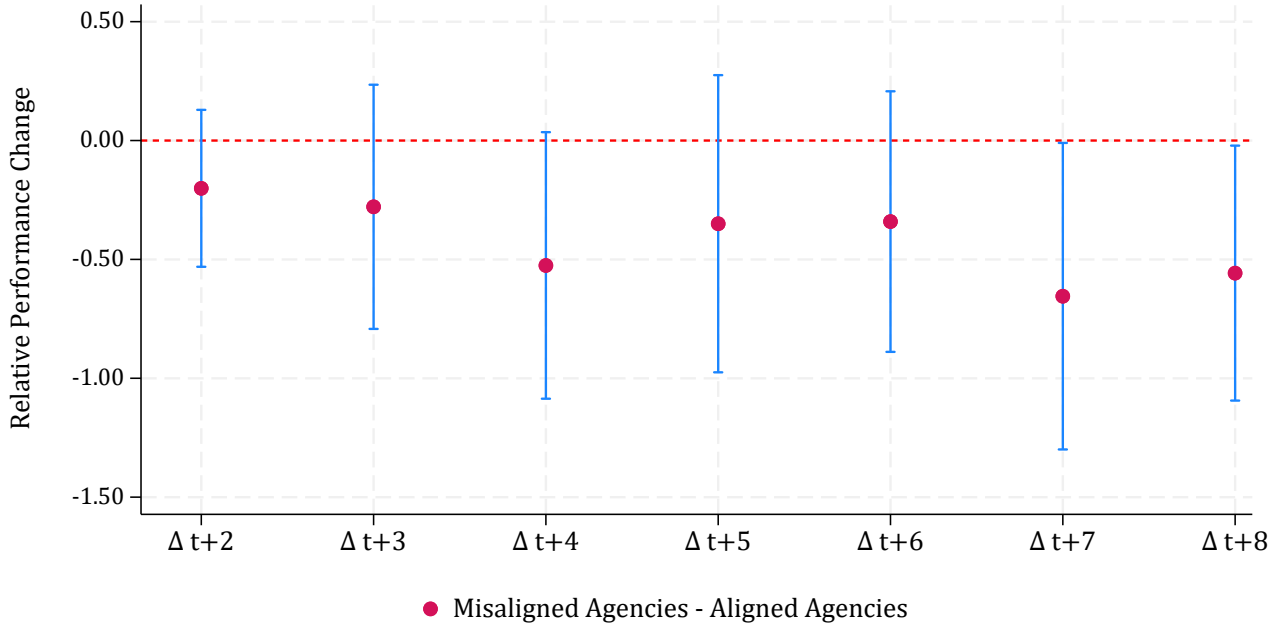
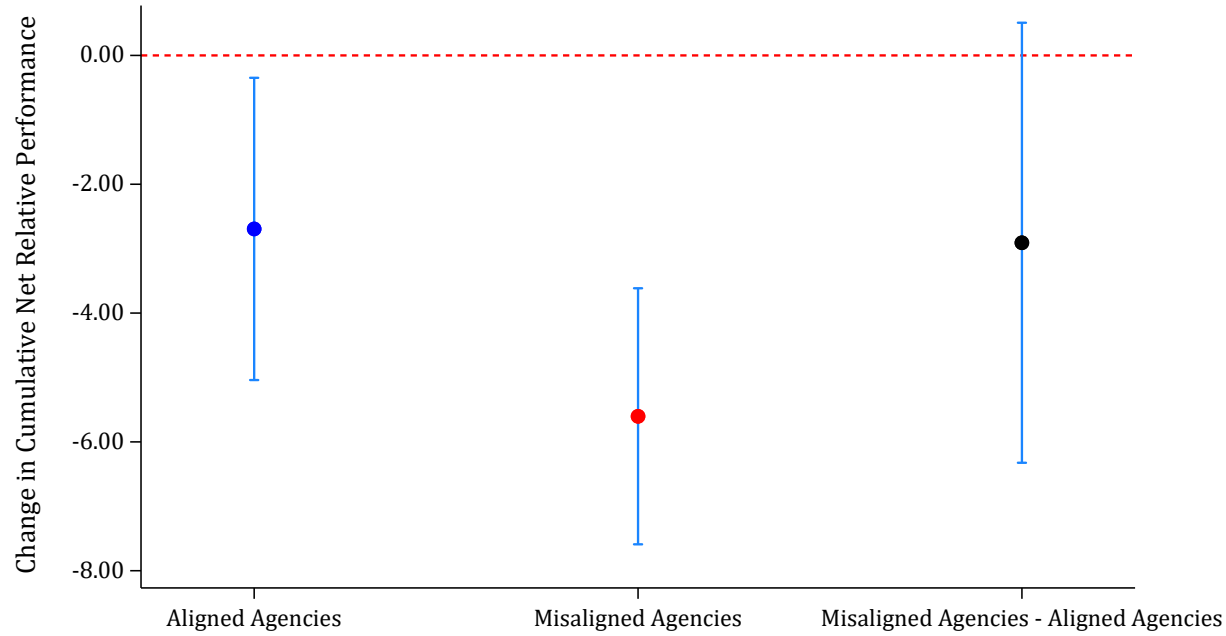


FIGURE B4
Change in Cumulative Net Relative Performance
From President's First Year in Office [MODEL B6]



Appendix C. Models of Absolute Agency Performance, 2002 – 2022

We explain the main text our justification for focusing on within-agency variation in performance. Given that the estimates of agency performance themselves are the most natural metric, however, we also estimate models on the non-normalized measures of agency performance. We replicate the models in *Tables 1* and *2* in *Tables C1* and *C2*. We replicate *Figures 2 – 4* as *Figures C1-C3* with the estimates from *Tables C1* and *C2*. One notable distinction between these estimates and those reported in the manuscript based on the relative agency performance measures involves the performance effects of independent versus executive agencies. The estimates of the absolute performance indicate, that on average, independent agencies perform significantly better by about 0.065 standardized units compared to executive agencies. This finding makes sense since the absolute performance measure that accounts for overall performance variation includes both the between and within agency variation, unlike the relative performance measure which is restricted to within-agency performance variations.

Table C1. OLS of Models of Absolute Agency Performance (overall-agency), 2002 - 2022

	(*Model C1*)			(*Model C2*)			(*Model C3*)		
	B	SE		B	SE		B	SE	
Misaligned Agency (0,1)	-0.015	0.016					-0.013	0.023	
Aligned Agency (0,1)				0.011	0.015		0.007	0.022	
Controls									
Independent Ag. (0,1)	0.063	0.029	**	0.066	0.029	**	0.064	0.028	**
Year of First Term (1-4)	0.005	0.002	**	0.005	0.002	**	0.005	0.002	**
Second Term (0,1)	-0.024	0.008	**	-0.024	0.008	**	-0.024	0.008	**
Divided Govt (0,1)	-0.025	0.006	**	-0.024	0.006	**	-0.024	0.006	**
Obama (0,1)	0.004	0.011		0.004	0.011		0.004	0.011	
Trump (0,1)	0.047	0.014	**	0.047	0.014	**	0.047	0.014	**
Biden (0,1)	0.098	0.017	**	0.098	0.018	**	0.098	0.017	**
Constant	-0.026	0.013	**	-0.034	0.013	**	-0.029	0.016	*
N	2,237			2,237			2,237		
F (9, 8, 8, df)	25.81		**	26.23		**	23.33		**
R^2	0.085			0.085			0.086		
AIC	-1400.08			-1398.69			-1398.63		
BIC	-1348.66			-1347.27			-1341.50		

Note: *significant at the 0.10 level, **significant at the 0.05 level in two-tailed tests. Dependent variable: within-agency normalized performance scores (2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010-2022). Models report robust standard errors clustered on agency. Wald test of coefficient equality between aligned agency and misaligned agency coefficients in *Model C3* = -0.02 (p = 0.057).

Table C2. OLS Models of Absolute Agency Performance (overall-agency), 2002 - 2022

	(*Model C4*)			(*Model C5*)			(*Model C6*)		
	B	SE		B	SE		B	SE	
Alignment (Mod. base cat.)									
Aligned (0,1)				-0.008	0.021		-0.007	0.027	
Misaligned (0,1)	0.005	0.019					0.002	0.026	
Year of First Term (1 base cat.)									
Year 2 (0,1)	-0.020	0.006	**	-0.027	0.007	**	-0.023	0.008	**
Year 3 (0,1)	-0.018	0.009	**	-0.030	0.010	**	-0.025	0.011	**
Year 4 (0,1)	0.013	0.008		-0.006	0.009		0.005	0.011	
Interactions									
Aligned*Year 2				0.013	0.013		0.010	0.014	
Misaligned*Year 2	-0.013	0.012					-0.010	0.014	
Aligned*Year 3				0.025	0.016		0.020	0.016	
Misaligned*Year 3	-0.022	0.018					-0.015	0.018	
Aligned*Year 4				0.035	0.018	**	0.024	0.018	
Misaligned*Year 4	-0.039	0.017	**				-0.031	0.017	*
Controls									
Ind. Agency (0,1)	0.064	0.029	**	0.066	0.029	**	0.065	0.028	**
Second Term (0,1)	-0.028	0.008	**	-0.028	0.008	**	-0.028	0.008	**
Divided Govt (0,1)	-0.023	0.007	**	-0.023	0.007	**	-0.023	0.007	**
Obama (0,1)	0.005	0.011		0.005	0.011		0.005	0.011	
Trump (0,1)	0.044	0.014	**	0.044	0.014	**	0.044	0.014	**
Biden (0,1)	0.092	0.018	**	0.092	0.018	**	0.092	0.018	**
Constant	-0.006	0.014		-0.003	0.014		−0.004	0.018	
N	2,237			2,237			2,237		
F (17, 13, 13)	23.21		**	22.89		**	19.06		**
R^2	0.091			0.090			0.091		
AIC	-1402.95			-1401.00			-1396.45		
BIC	-1322.96			-1321.02			-1293.62		

Note: *significant at the 0.10 level, **significant at the 0.05 level in two-tailed tests. Dependent variable: within-agency normalized performance scores (2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010-2022). Models report robust standard errors clustered on agency. *Model C6* Wald tests of cumulative difference in aligned vs. misaligned agencies for years 2-4 (=-0.110, p = 0.029). *Model C6* Wald tests of cumulative difference in misaligned vs. other agencies for years 2-4 (=-0.099, p = 0.004). *Models C5, C6* Wald tests of cumulative difference in aligned vs. other agencies for years 2-4 (= 0.011, p = 0.724).

FIGURE C1
Absolute Agency Performance Differential Within Administrations
(Misaligned Agencies - Aligned Agencies [MODEL C6])

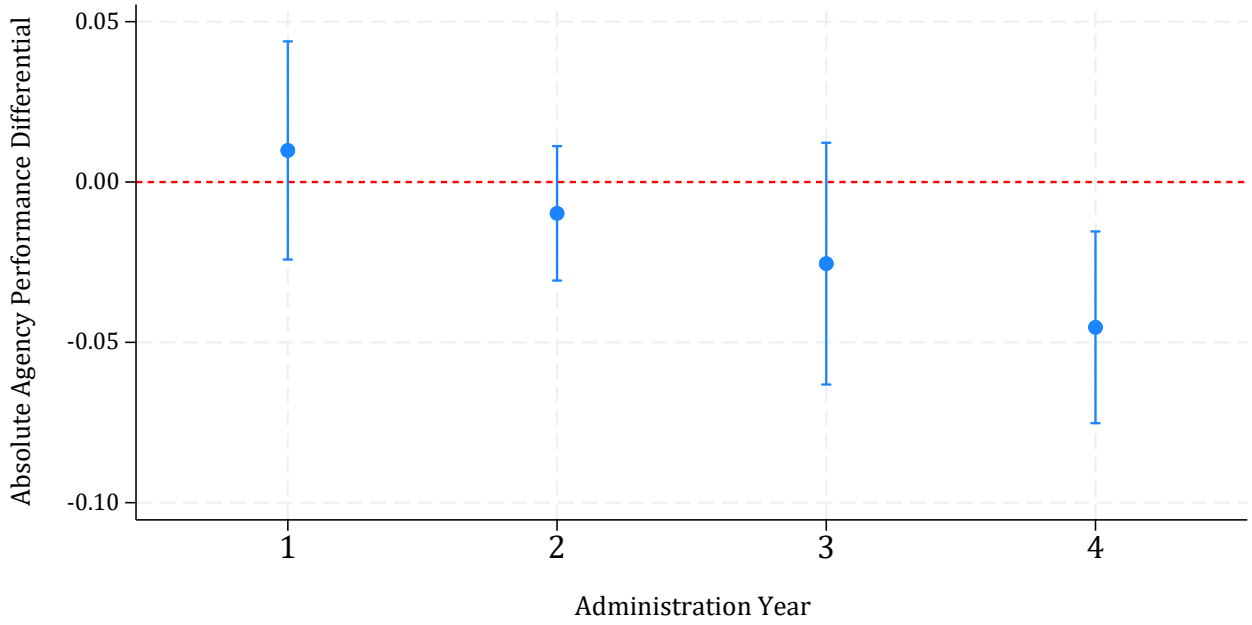


FIGURE C2
Absolute Performance Change From President's First Year in Office
(Aligned Agencies, Moderate Agencies, and Misaligned Agencies [MODEL C6])

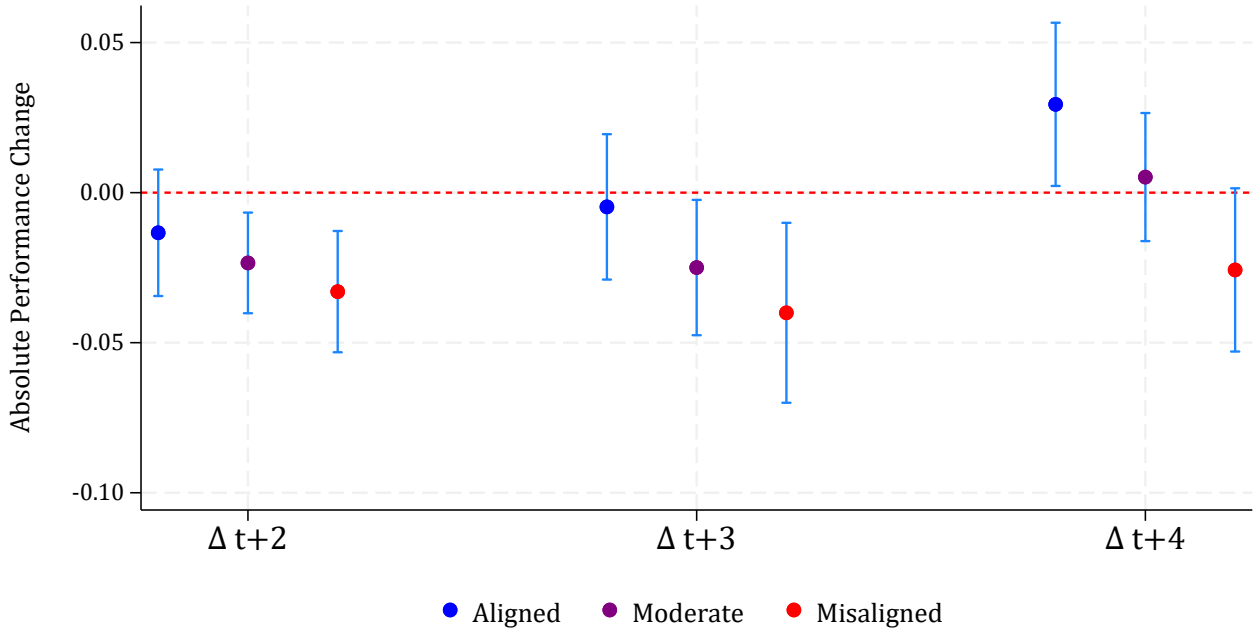


FIGURE C3
Absolute Performance Change Differential From President's First Year in Office
(Between Misaligned Agencies and Aligned Agencies [MODEL C6])

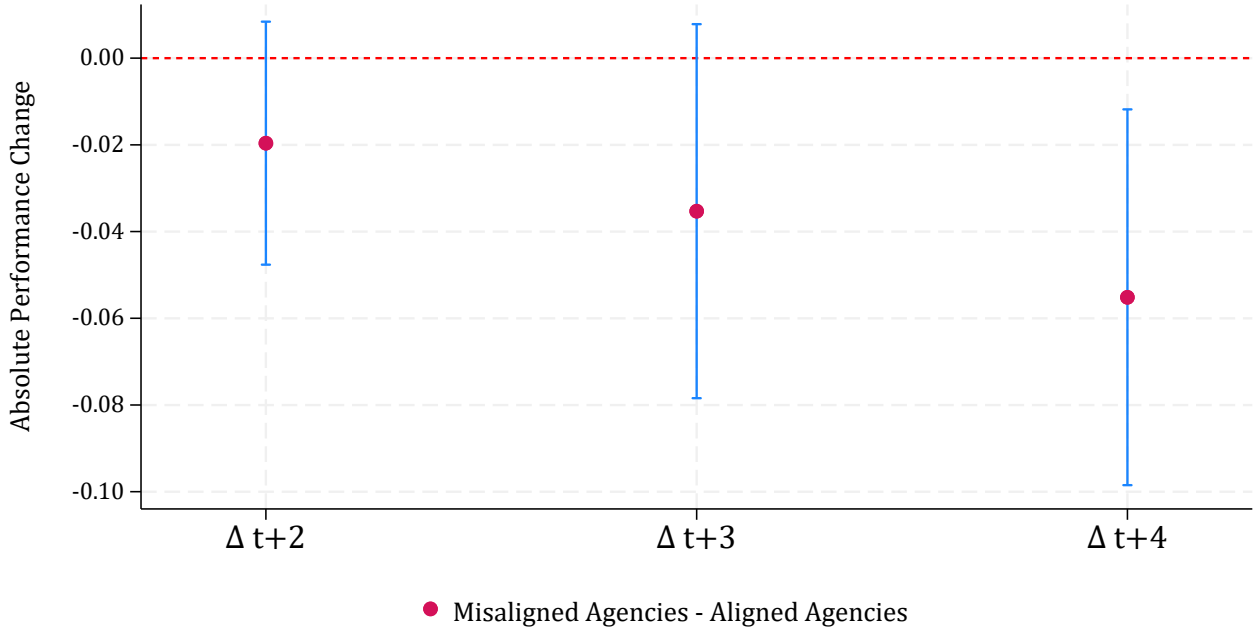
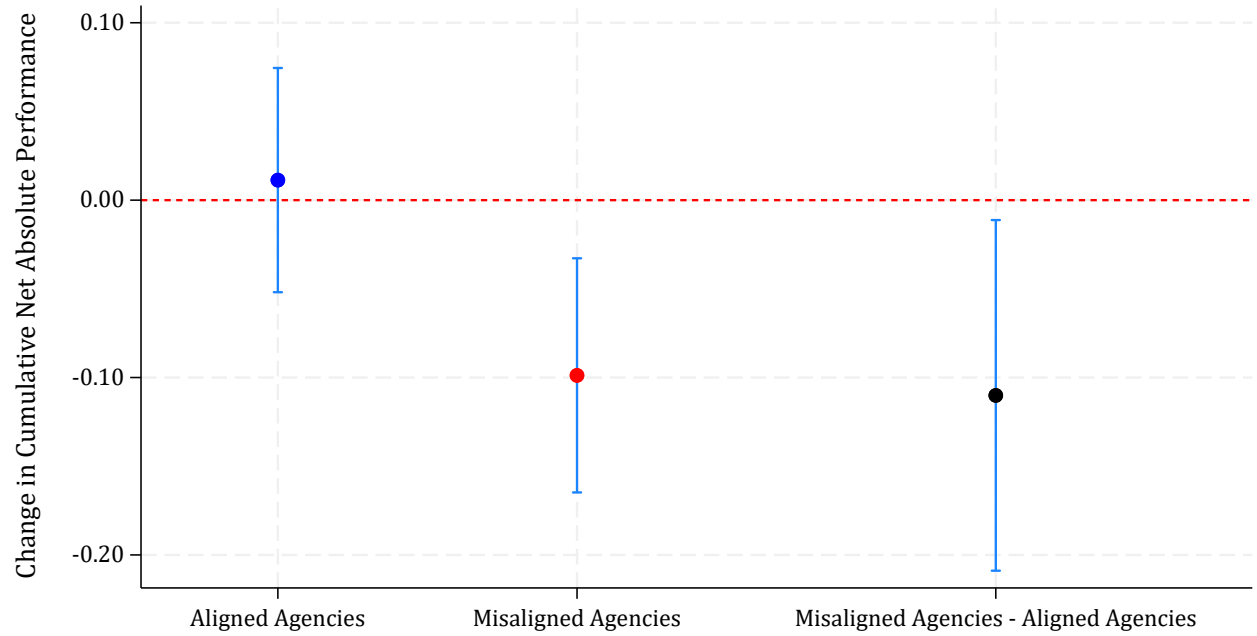


FIGURE C4
Change in Cumulative Net Absolute Performance
From President's First Year in Office [MODEL C6]



Appendix D. Models Evaluating Differential Unified–Divided Partisan Control of Relative Agency Performance, 2002 – 2022

A potential alternative explanation to the one offered in this study is that the existence of unified or divided party government might condition the effects of president-agency misalignment or alignment on performance. To address this issue, we re-estimate the models in *Table 2*, but instead interact the *Divided Govt* indicator with the presidential-agency alignment/misalignment indicators. These estimates are reported in *Table D1* and *Figure D1*. These results indicate that the distinction between unified and divided government does not lead to different estimated alignment effects on performance. The interactions fall short of statistical significance and the Wald coefficient restriction test differences between the aligned and misaligned agency effects in *Model D3* are modest and not statistically discernible from one another at conventional significance levels. This evidence supports our conclusion that performance differences between aligned and misaligned agencies are observed as the first term evolves through time – and not arising from potential interbranch conflict between presidents and Congress.

Table D1. OLS Models of Relative Agency Performance (overall-agency), 2002 – 2022
[Differential Unified–Divided Partisan Control Effects]

	(*Model D1*)			(*Model D2*)			(*Model D3*)		
	B	SE		B	SE		B	SE	
Alignment (Mod. base cat.)									
Aligned (0,1)				0.078	0.084		0.087	0.075	
Misaligned (0,1)	0.002	0.084					0.032	0.075	
Divided Govt (0,1)	-0.203	0.056	**	-0.235	0.059	**	-0.183	0.061	**
Interactions									
Aligned*Divided Govt				-0.011	0.122		-0.061	0.115	
Misaligned*Divided Govt	-0.130	0.119					-0.150	0.113	
Controls									
Ind. Agency (0,1)	-0.012	0.007	*	0.004	0.007		-0.005	0.004	
Second Term (0,1)	-0.221	0.053	**	-0.221	0.054	**	-0.221	0.054	**
Year of 1st Term (Base cat.)									
Year 2 (0,1)	-0.224	0.046	**	-0.224	0.046	**	-0.224	0.046	
Year 3 (0,1)	-0.215	0.057	**	-0.215	0.057	**	-0.215	0.057	**
Year 4 (0,1)	0.016	0.052		0.015	0.052		0.015	0.052	**
Obama (0,1)	0.100	0.075		0.101	0.075		0.099	0.075	
Trump (0,1)	0.376	0.107	**	0.376	0.107	**	0.375	0.107	**
Biden (0,1)	0.720	0.130	**	0.717	0.130	**	0.717	0.131	**
Constant	0.114	0.095		0.092	0.094		0.083	0.094	
N	2,236			2,236			2,236		
F (17, 13, 13)	29.84		**	29.68		**	25.22		**
R^2	0.153			0.152			0.154		
AIC	5859.34			5861.68			5861.70		
BIC	5927.88			5930.23			5941.68		

Note: *significant at the 0.10 level, **significant at the 0.05 level in two-tailed tests. Dependent variable: within-agency normalized performance scores (2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010-2022). Models report robust standard errors clustered on agency. *Model D3* Wald tests of cumulative unified-divided partisan government control difference between aligned vs. misaligned agencies (= -0.089, p = 0.584).

FIGURE D1
Relative Agency Performance Differential Effect Between Unified versus Divided Party Government
(Various President-Agency Ideological Alignment Combinations)