

Robert M.

La Follette School of Public Affairs

at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Working Paper Series

La Follette School Working Paper No. 2013-011

<http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/publications/workingpapers>

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July 2013

forthcoming in *Public Administration Review*



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Note: We thank Selina Eadie for her research assistance and Zachary Oberfield and Oliver James for their thoughtful feedback. Previous versions of this paper were presented on June 21, 2013 at the Public Management Research Conference in Madison, Wisconsin; on November 10, 2012 at the Annual Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management Research Conference in Baltimore, Maryland; and on October 22, 2012 at The Ohio State University's John Glenn School of Public Affairs in Columbus, Ohio. We are grateful to the many audience members who provided thoughtful feedback during these presentations.

Abstract

This study examines how ideological differences between political officials and agencies may have affected the implementation of an ostensibly non-partisan, government-wide administrative initiative: the George W. Bush Administration's Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) review of federal programs. The analysis reveals that managers in agencies associated with liberal programs and employees ("liberal agencies") agreed to a greater extent than those in agencies associated with conservative programs and employees ("conservative agencies") that PART required significant agency time and effort and that it imposed a burden on management resources. Further analysis reveals that differences in reported agency effort can be explained partly by objective differences in the demands PART placed on agencies—liberal agencies were required to evaluate more programs and implement more improvement plans relative to their organizational capacity—and partly by the ideological beliefs of employees—on average, liberal managers reported more agency effort, even after accounting for objective measures of administrative burden.

The extent to which politics infiltrates the administration of public programs has long been a fundamental concern in a variety of governmental settings. One reason for such concern is that politics may displace neutral competence—that is, political officials’ meddling in administrative matters may undermine the effectiveness of public programs. On the other hand, some recognize that public administrators are not neutral and fear that their political biases may undermine the goals of political officials. Such worries surface when ideological rifts between political officials and administrative agencies are evident, and the mere perception of such politics may interfere with effective governance.

These political dynamics may be in play when partisan political officials attempt government-wide administrative reforms. No matter the partisan identity of the reformers, their goals and political constituencies are known by all to be at odds with those of some programs and agencies. Indeed, in the United States ideological rifts between presidential administrations and entire agencies often are highly salient. Consequently, government-wide administrative initiatives (e.g., those related to financial management, procurement, information technology, whistleblowers, etc.) can be ensnared easily by political dynamics related to ideological divisions between political reformers and administrative agencies. In this paper, we examine the link between politics and government-wide administrative reform using as a case President George W. Bush’s most extensive and resource-intensive management initiative: the attempt to review of all public programs using the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART).

Using multiple data sources, including data from an original survey of managers from all federal agencies, as well as objective data on agency characteristics and the PART review process, we examine the relationship between ideological divergence (in particular, agency liberalism, which is in contrast to President Bush’s conservatism) and the time and effort that

agencies expended in fulfilling their responsibilities in the PART review process. These data are unusually rich, as they include multiple measures of similar concepts from different data sources. Additionally, the data afford this study the rare opportunity to distinguish between perceptual and objective factors that contributed to the politics of the PART process.

The results indicate that, despite efforts to make PART a non-ideological instrument, managers in liberal agencies agreed to a greater extent than those in conservative agencies that PART required significant agency time and effort and that it imposed a burden on management resources. Descriptive data indicate that these perceptions may have an objective basis, as liberal agencies, despite having fewer employees, performed more PART reviews, were required to take more improvement actions, and involved a greater proportion of their managers in the review process. Indeed, the number of PART improvement plans that the OMB required agencies to implement explains some—and, often, all—of the residual relationship between reported agency effort and agency liberalism (after accounting for respondent characteristics, including their partisanship and views on PART). This finding, considered along with the impact of managers' partisan and ideological views on their perceptions of agency time and effort, indicate that there were significant political dynamics at play during PART implementation—dynamics which likely undermined PART's success as a management tool and that may have impeded agencies' abilities to administer their programs.

In the pages that follow, we first briefly review research on the politics of administrative reform. Second, we review the burgeoning literature on the politics of PART and theorize about how agency ideology might relate to the real and perceived administrative burden associated with PART reviews. Third, we describe and analyze our data. Finally, we discuss our results and their implications for administrative reform efforts.

The Politics of Administrative Reform

A defining concern in public administration research is the relationship between politics and administration (Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981). This concern is present in Woodrow Wilson's (1887) early call for a clear separation between the two and remains central in contemporary accounts of governance (Lee and Raadschelders 2008). The debate on this topic speaks to how values such as responsiveness and competence should be realized, and it is directly relevant to the design of public work. Observers in a wide variety of settings have noted that political officials often are suspicious of bureaucrats who do not share their beliefs and, consequently, that political officials seek to control the behavior of such bureaucrats. Strategies for exercising control have included the appointment of ideological allies in key leadership positions, monitoring and intervening in administrative decision-making, imposing decision-making rules and procedures, promoting partisanship among public servants, and so on (e.g., see Aucoin 2012; Gormley 1989; Huber and Shipan 2007; Lewis 2008). President Ronald Reagan's use of such strategies to control the federal bureaucracy, for example, has been documented especially widely (e.g., see Durant 1987; Golden 2000).

There has been less systematic research, however, on the role of ideological conflict between agencies and partisan reformers in the implementation of common administrative reforms whose explicit purpose is to improve government effectiveness, rather than alter policy. One possibility is that such reforms have truly non-political impacts—that is, agency employees experience and react to the reforms similarly, regardless of the political proclivities of an agency's programs, employees, and constituency. Another possibility is that there are political

dynamics at play. For example, executive-branch reorganizations, though often couched by presidents as means of promoting government effectiveness and efficiency, came to be seen as largely political acts (Garnett 1987). There are also examples of ostensibly neutral reforms drawing resistance from agency managers due to political concerns. For example, the US Department of Defense expended limited effort in the implementation of President Clinton's Reinventing Government reforms partly because of distrust among members of this conservative department toward their liberal commander-in-chief (Durant 2008). Other research has documented agency resistance to Reinventing Government reforms as resulting partly from perceived goal conflicts between political reformers and agency managers (e.g., Trader-Leigh 2002; Nufrio 2001).

Thus, nominally neutral reforms can be politicized if political reformers treat liberal and conservative-leaning programs differently during implementation—for example, by exercising greater scrutiny over implementation in certain agencies. Additionally, agency managers implementing government-wide reforms may respond differently to such reforms simply because of the perceived political bias of reformers or the perceived incongruence between agency goals and the goals of the partisan reformer.

The Politics of PART

PART is perhaps the best studied U.S. administrative reform since the Reinventing Government initiatives of the 1990s. A variety of studies have described its characteristics and impacts (e.g., Dull 2006; Frederickson and Frederickson 2006; Frisco and Stalebrink 2008; Gallo and Lewis 2012; Gilmour and Lewis 2006a,b; Heinrich 2012; Joyce 2011; Lavertu and Moynihan 2012; Moynihan 2008; Moynihan and Lavertu 2012; Stalebrink 2009; Stalebrink and

Frisco 2011; White 2012). PART was a questionnaire that the OMB used to assess the management and goal achievement of federal programs. The questionnaire was broken into sections: “program purpose and design,” “strategic planning,” “program management,” and “program results/accountability.” The OMB graded programs on an ineffective-to-effective summary scale based on scores across these dimensions. It conducted PART reviews in waves between 2003 and 2008 until it had evaluated what OMB defined as all federal programs. This was an enormous project, consuming a great deal of the OMB’s analytical capacity during the Bush years (Moynihan 2008; Redburn and Newcomer 2008), perhaps at the expense of traditional forms of budgetary analysis (White 2012).

The review of public programs—whether through PART or any other process—is inherently political. The many ways in which politics is enmeshed in program evaluation has been well examined (e.g., see Weiss 1993). The OMB under Bush took significant steps to promote PART as a non-partisan administrative tool. Establishing PART’s reputation as an objective tool was critical for realizing the Bush Administration’s goals of using the resulting information to eliminate poorly performing programs and wield the budget as a tool for management improvement. There were concerns voiced by both practitioners and academics that the tool advantaged some programs over others, but the OMB took pains to rid the tool of any perceived ideological biases. The Director of the OMB asked staff to create a non-partisan review process when PART was created and early versions of PART were modified to remove questions perceived as ideological. The OMB solicited outside advice on designing PART from the National Academy of Public Administration and other public management experts and developed detailed training tools intended to ensure consistent application of PART criteria (see Dull 2006; Moynihan 2008).

Yet, even an objective tool can serve ideological ends. The conservative argument for performance data is that it will help to expose the large amount of governmental activity that is unnecessary and wasteful, and identify opportunities for privatization (Thomas 2001). Although all indications are that the OMB developed and administered what it perceived to be a neutral assessment tool, it could be that the Bush Administration's desire to implement it was partly driven by an expectation that performance data would expose the poor performance of liberal programs. This notion is plausible, as the Bush Administration's politicization of the executive branch has been documented extensively (e.g., see Moynihan & Roberts 2010) and PART helped advance the Bush agenda in other ways (Dull 2006).

A variety of studies also have documented how politics might have come to bear in the implementation of PART. Gallo and Lewis (2012) show that programs administered by liberal-leaning agencies received lower PART scores than those administered by conservative-leaning agencies. Gilmour and Lewis (2006a) found that PART scores related to the "purpose" of programs, as opposed to their "results," had a greater impact on OMB budgetary decisions, suggesting that the reform sought to alter what goals agencies pursued in addition to how well they pursued them. Moreover, Gilmour and Lewis (2006b) found that only PART scores for Democratic programs were correlated to changes presidential budget proposals—in other words, that the budgets of traditionally conservative programs appeared insulated from negative PART scores. Finally, it appears that programs that are redistributive in nature, and which are typically associated with liberal political views, received systematically lower scores (Greitens and Joaquin 2010).

These studies suggest that ideological divergence between the Bush Administration and federal agencies may have had an impact on the implementation of PART. In particular, this

research suggests that politics may have played a role in how the OMB conducted performance reviews. But far less is known about how the politics of PART affected perceptions and behavior at the agency level. Our study of the real and perceived administrative burden of PART at the agency level is an effort to increase our knowledge of the political dynamics of PART and other administrative reforms.

PART Reviews, Ideological Conflict, and Administrative Burden

OMB budget examiners spent a good deal of time overseeing the PART process (White 2012) but the reviews also required considerable effort from agency personnel. The burden of proof for documenting performance was on agencies, a burden exacerbated by new requirements to integrate program evaluations into performance reports (Moynihan 2008). Any claim an agency made about the merits of a program had to be supported by evidence. Programs that lacked the qualities specified in the PART criteria would receive low scores, but stronger programs could be scored poorly if agencies did not invest enough resources into the process (Gilmour 2006). The nature of the process meant that the OMB could compel agency participation and reward agency effort with higher PART scores. In other words, there was the potential for agencies to expend significant time and effort on PART reviews if the OMB was inclined to induce such effort. Additionally, even in the absence of such OMB actions, agency officials worried about OMB bias might attempt to compensate by exerting more effort to please their superiors.

There is evidence that agencies varied in the level of effort they committed to the PART review process (Gilmour 2006). Additionally, the research reviewed above suggests that PART may have imposed a greater administrative burden on agencies that administer liberal programs.

If the OMB demanded greater evidence from and imposed more demands for corrective actions on liberal agencies, then employees from those agencies might have had little choice but to expend greater effort than their counterparts in conservative agencies.

There also are some indications that liberal agencies were required to conduct more PART reviews. The OMB and agency leadership had to decide what constituted a program (Gilmour 2006). It is conceivable that liberal programs were defined more narrowly, perhaps to permit closer scrutiny. For example, programs at the (liberal) Department of Education were defined so narrowly that it had more programs than the (conservative) Department of Defense, despite having less than one tenth of the budget (Joyce 2011). Functions within the Department of Education with budgets as low as \$1 million were defined as programs. And functions that arguably represent a single program were subdivided. For example, activities undertaken as part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act were disaggregated into seven separate programs for PART purposes (Gilmour 2006, 11). This narrow definition of programs appears to have been a deliberate strategy of agency leadership (that is, appointed Bush Administration officials) who doubted the quality of much of what the Department did: “the leaders at the Education Department believe the department is burdened with many ill-conceived, poorly designed programs, and see the PART process as a means of shining a light on those deficiencies” (Gilmour 2006, 16).

In addition to the possibility that the Bush Administration implemented the PART review process differently in liberal programs and agencies, there is the possibility that managers in liberal agencies perceived the OMB as biased and adjusted their effort levels accordingly. For example, an employee managing a liberal program in a liberal agency might have devoted significant time and effort to cooperate in PART reviews in order to compensate for the

Administration's possible bias and, thus, protect his or her program's reputation. In this possible scenario, political ideology would have affected program implementation simply because agency managers perceived that political dynamics were in play.

From a principal-agent perspective, the principal (the OMB, on behalf of the President) might have been unable to verify all of the performance information provided by administrative agents (program managers). Much of the information provided during PART reviews could be verified, but managers were likely less inclined to report performance information if it painted their programs in a negative light. Additionally, as mentioned above, Gilmour's (2006) study suggests that there were benefits to be gained from dedicating more resources to generating and presenting performance information in a way that reflects positively on the program—that is, there were benefits to “gaming” the Administration's performance budgeting system, by developing better arguments as opposed to actually improving performance (which would be more costly) to obtain better scores. Those agents whose programmatic goals diverged from the principal's (e.g., managers in liberal agencies) may have been more inclined to invest resources in gaming the system—in generating performance information that put the agency in the best light possible—if they thought that they needed to compensate for a principal's negative prior beliefs about a program.

The extent to which this scenario is a possibility depends on how much of the information provided by managers was verifiable and the magnitude of the asymmetry between the principal's and agents' knowledge of a program's production technology (e.g., Heinrich & Marschke 2010). Existing accounts (e.g., Gilmour 2006), as well as our own knowledge of PART, suggests that the information asymmetry was sufficiently great that such efforts could help agencies generate better PART scores. Thus, it may be that liberal agencies' additional

effort expended on preparing PART reports was inefficient from the point of view of both the OMB (which may have received misleading performance information) and agencies (which may have expended additional effort on a task that does not contribute to program performance).

Thus, there is good reason to believe that PART, a nominally neutral reform, was implemented in non-neutral ways, both because of choices by political officials and those of managers tasked with implementing aspects of these reforms. The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which these dynamics were in play.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Overview of Data and Methods

The analysis below proceeds in two steps. First, we examine the perceived administrative burden of PART reviews using data from surveys of career managers across all federal agencies. Second, using objective agency and PART review data, as well as data on respondent characteristics, we consider and test possible explanations for those perceptual differences by agency ideology. In the sections that follow, we describe our data and review the methods and results of the statistical analysis. Figure 1 summarizes the logic of the analysis, the empirical measures, and the data sources that we describe below.

[Insert Figure 1 about here.]

Data Sources

The analysis primarily employs data from the Survey on the Future of Government Service (SFGS). The principal investigators for this survey of federal managers fielded the survey in 2007-2008 and targeted 7,448 federal administrators (both career and appointed). The

response rate was 33% and robustness checks reveal that the sample of career managers—the focus of this analysis—is representative of the population from which it was drawn (see Clinton et al. 2012 for a full discussion).ⁱ The survey included a number of questions about the backgrounds, attitudes, and activities of federal managers. It also included a number of items that inquired about the PART review process, including whether a respondent had a program evaluated in the PART process and how much agency time and effort was put into the process. Among the sample of respondents, 1,000 career managers indicated that a program in their agency had been “reviewed as part of the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) process.” The data provided by these respondents serve as the basis for much of the analysis below.

The analysis also draws on a number of additional data sources. First, we examine responses to a 2007 Government Accountability Office (GAO) survey item that asks federal managers about the resource burden that PART involvement imposed on their programs. The GAO administered the survey to a random, nationwide sample of mid- and upper-level federal managers in the agencies covered by the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990, with an oversampling of managers from certain agencies to facilitate comparisons across 29 different agencies. The response rate to the survey was 70% overall, ranging between 55% and 84% between agencies.ⁱⁱ Second, we analyze data on agency organizational characteristics (programs budgets, employee counts, etc.) and features of the PART review process (in particular, the number of programs evaluated under PART and the number of corrective actions required). These data were collected from federal agency sources and all remain publicly available.

Variables

The statistical analysis employs a number of variables. Here we describe in depth those variables that are central to the analysis: measures of agency effort and administrative burden, as well as measures of agency ideology. We also briefly review other variables included in some statistical models to account for organizational characteristics and features of the PART review process (to characterize administrative burden using objective measures) and respondent characteristics (to account for perceptual biases).

Agency Time and Effort. The dependent variable in all of the statistical models below is “agency time and effort.” Most career managers who indicated that a program in their agency had been reviewed in the PART process (891 of 1,000) answered the following question: “How much time and effort did your agency put into the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) process?” Responses were coded on a five point scale: “not much at all” (0), “some” (1), “moderate amount” (2), “significant amount” (3), and “tremendous amount” (4). (The remaining 111 career managers indicated “don’t know.”) The overall mean for this variable was 2.92 (just under “significant amount”) with a standard deviation of 0.91. It is important to emphasize that the item inquires about *agency-wide* time and effort expended during PART implementation.

Agency Ideology. The Bush Administration was politically conservative. Consequently, to capture ideological divergence between the administration and agencies we employ measures that capture the extent of agency liberalism (or “Democraticness”). We created four variables to capture this factor at the agency level.

Our primary focus is on Clinton and Lewis’s (2008) measure of agency ideology. They asked respondents in academia, think tanks, and specialized media outlets dealing with the federal government whether agencies “tended to be liberal, conservative, or neither consistently” and used responses to generate numerical estimates of agency ideology on a one dimensional

scale from liberal (captured by negative values) to conservative (captured by positive values). The estimation technique allowed them to account for different definitions of liberal and conservative and the quality of the ratings. Additionally, though the estimates are on a continuous scale, the confidence bounds the authors provide enable one to categorize agencies as liberal, moderate, or conservative. (See the appendix at the end of this paper for the list of SFGS agencies by ideology.)

The Clinton and Lewis ideology score is not based directly on the ideology of an agency's employees. This is important because there are aspects of agency ideology that are distinct from the political views of agency managers (e.g., agency mission, history, culture). Additionally, because the scores are based on the perceptions of observers, they likely capture the perceived ideology that is the focus of this study, as political dynamics are intimately related to the perceptions of political officials and agency employees.

As a robustness check we estimated all models with three additional ideology measures based solely on the partisanship or ideology of respondents to the SFGS survey. We estimated all models using the following as measures of agency ideology: the percentage of agency career managers that self-identify as Democrats (including independents who lean Democratic); the average respondent ideology (reported on a seven point scale from "very conservative" to "very liberal"); and the average respondent ideal point based on how respondents themselves would have voted on bills in Congress. Clinton et al. (2012) generated the ideal point estimates through standard techniques employed to generate such measures for members of Congress. These three measures of agency ideology yield nearly identical results, so we report the results of models that employ the "percent Democrat" measure.

Organizational Characteristics. Measures of organizational characteristics are meant primarily to capture an agency's capacity to perform PART-related tasks. We capture agency size using employee countsⁱⁱⁱ and the average program budget in the respondent's agency. We also employ variables that indicate whether or not an agency resides in a cabinet department and whether or not an agency is an independent commission. Because none of the career managers who responded to the survey worked in the Executive Office of the President, the omitted category consists primarily of agencies independent of cabinet departments but that do not employ the commission structure—that is, independent administrations (e.g., General Services Administration, Office of Personnel Management). Cabinet departments tend to be larger than most independent agencies and commissions and have larger secretariats and staff offices and, thus, might have more capacity to fulfill the requirements of the PART review process. Additionally, cabinet agencies tend to be more directly under the control of the president (Lewis 2003). President Bush would have had a greater ability to control the behavior of cabinet agencies, which could have had implications for how programs were evaluated and how career managers reacted. Overall, however, our main contention is that agency size and human and financial resources likely capture the extent to which an agency could dedicate organizational resources—especially employees—to performing PART related tasks.

PART Review Process. In addition to organizational capacity, in order to capture administrative burden one must account for the scope and nature of PART review activities within agencies. We focus on two measures to capture the scrutiny imposed during the PART review process. The first is a count by agency of the number of programs that underwent PART review. As we discuss above, what constituted a program was defined by administration officials, thus program counts should capture how much program assessment took place in an

agency. We break this measure down into counts by program type (e.g., regulatory, R&D, block/formula grant, direct federal, etc.) as the difficulty of measuring performance arguably varies by program type (Wilson 1989; Radin 2006). For example, it is difficult to measure program outcomes for agencies that administer block grants to states, as states have a lot of discretion in how they choose to allocate those funds. Indeed, Stalebrink (2009) found that state-administered grant programs scored lower on portions of the PART survey that are “dependent on intergovernmental collaboration.” It is particularly important to account for program types because liberal agencies administer more grant programs and, conversely, conservative agencies administer more direct federal programs. The second measure is a count of the improvement plans that agencies were required to implement as part of the PART review process. To make certain that the number of improvement plans is not merely attributable to program quality, supplemental analyses account for the average PART scores (which is on a 1-100 scale indicating the level of program effectiveness) that agency programs received.^{iv}

Respondent Perceptions and Characteristics. The focus of the analysis is on time and effort expended at the agency level. However, the measures of time and effort are based on employee perceptions. It is important, therefore, to account for employee characteristics that may capture differences in these perceptions. Of particular importance is accounting for a respondent’s partisanship or ideology. Agency managers whose personal ideologies differ from a partisan official’s may be more suspicious of reforms and more inclined to perceive their initiatives as burdens. Additionally, managers that identify themselves as liberal may be more inclined to expend effort to improve government performance. As we indicate above, the SFGS asked respondents to report their partisanship and ideology, and additional questions on particular bills enabled Clinton et al (2012) to estimate ideal points for each respondent. These

are all measures that we also examined at the respondent level. Once again, all three measures yield similar results, so the results reported below are based on models that account for a respondent's partisanship (Democrat, Independent, or Republican).

It also is particularly important to capture respondents' views regarding the value of PART reviews, so that reported agency time and effort does not merely reflect views about PART. The SFGS asked managers "To what extent did the PART pick up real differences in program performance among programs in your agency?" Answers range from "PART scores have no connection to real performance" (1) to "Almost always reflected real differences" (5). As we describe below, a small percentage of respondents agree that the PART review process captured real differences—that is, that the tool was useful—which should have an impact on the perception of agency time and effort expended.

Finally, the analysis also accounts for the number of years that respondents worked in the federal government, whether or not they worked in regional offices (as opposed to central administrative offices), and respondent employment classifications (Executive Schedule; senior-level and scientific or professional positions; Senior Executive or Senior Foreign Service; and General Schedule). These classifications are ordered according to their typical positions in executive-branch hierarchies, from highest (Executive Schedule) to lowest (General Schedule). It may be, for example, that those higher up in agency hierarchies perceived less of an administrative burden than those lower down, who may have performed more PART-related tasks.

Descriptive Look at Perceptions of Administrative Burden and Agency Characteristics

Simple descriptive summaries from two different data sources tell the same story: respondents in liberal agencies were markedly more inclined to characterize PART as burdensome. The bar charts in Figure 2 illustrate how agency ideology relates to perceptions of administrative burden reported in the 2007 GAO survey. In figure 2a, agencies are categorized based on whether or not the Clinton and Lewis ideology score is significantly different from zero. In figure 2b, liberal agencies are those for which the percentage of respondents who identify as Democrats (or Independents who lean Democratic) is more than one standard deviation above the mean, and conservative agencies are those for which the percentage of respondents who identify as Democrats is more than one standard deviation below the mean. The results in both bar charts reveal that federal managers in liberal agencies agree to a greater extent than those in conservative agencies (by 10-15 percentage points, with the directional hypothesis test significant at $p < 0.007$) that participating in PART “imposed a significant burden on management resources.” Similarly, as reported in figure 3, career managers in liberal agencies agree to a greater extent than those in conservative agencies (by 20-32 percentage points, with the directional hypothesis test significant at $p < 0.0001$) that their agencies put a significant or tremendous amount of “time and effort...into the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) process.” The results are analogous if we employ the other two measures of agency ideology described above.

[Insert figure 2 and 3 about here.]

These statistics clearly indicate that respondents from liberal agencies were more inclined to perceive that PART imposed an administrative burden than respondents in moderate and, especially, conservative agencies. Recall that anecdotal evidence might lead one to expect this relationship. It may be that liberal agencies were asked to do more during and after PART

reviews, and it may be that employees in liberal agencies, because of antipathy toward the administration or fearful that their programs would be exposed to greater scrutiny, expended more resources to protect their programs during the PART review process. To begin looking into such possibilities, Table 1 provides descriptive statistics that enable one to compare organizational characteristics, measures of PART-related work, and respondent characteristics between agencies associated with conservative, moderate, and liberal ideology (based on the Clinton and Lewis ideology scores).

[Insert Table 1 about here.]

The statistics in Table 1 indicate that the conservative agencies considered in this analysis generally are larger than the liberal agencies in terms of employment and average program budgets (if one excludes the Social Security Administration from the calculation), and that a greater proportion of the conservative agencies than the moderate and liberal agencies are (or are located in) cabinet departments. Additionally, on average, liberal agencies had more programs reviewed under PART and administer far more block/formula and competitive grant programs than moderate and conservative agencies; a greater proportion of respondents from liberal agencies indicated that their agencies were involved with PART reviews; and liberal agencies were required to implement more improvement plans than moderate and conservative agencies. Generally, the descriptive statistics indicate that liberal agencies may have had less organizational capacity (in terms of resources) to conduct PART reviews but that they performed more PART-related tasks. In other words, the descriptive data are generally supportive of the perception that PART reviews imposed a greater administrative burden on liberal agencies.

The employee characteristics also indicate that there are differences between respondents working in liberal, moderate, and conservative agencies that might explain differential

perceptions of burden. Unsurprisingly, a greater proportion of employees in liberal agencies identify themselves as Democrats. It may be that these employees were more likely to perceive a bias in PART reviews or that they were more inclined to consider the Bush Administration's initiative as an unnecessary administrative burden. Additionally, it appears that respondents in conservative agencies had more experience and may have been employed at a higher level in organizational hierarchies, which may explain why they perceived less of an administrative burden, on average. To sort out the relative importance of these issues in explaining the perceived burdens of PART, we employ a regression analysis, discussed in the next section.

Accounting for Organizational and Respondent-level Factors in Estimating Agency Effort

The descriptive statistics presented in figures 2 and 3 reveal basic differences in the perception of administrative burden between employees of liberal and conservative agencies. The key question concerns whether or not these differences are attributable to organizational and respondent characteristics, as well as PART responsibilities, described in table 1. Estimating parametric models enables us to address this question. Table 2 presents the results of ordered probit models that estimate reported agency time and effort (based on the five-point scale discussed above) as a function of agency ideology, organizational characteristics, PART involvement, and respondent characteristics. Standard errors are clustered by agency (to account for the hierarchy in the data) and reported in parentheses next to the regression coefficients. Significance levels are based on two-tailed z-tests or chi-square tests: ** $p < 0.05$ and * $p < 0.10$ (so that * $p < 0.05$ for a one-tailed test).

[Insert table 2 about here.]

Our focus is on two variables capturing agency ideology: an inverted version of Clinton and Lewis's continuous ideology score (so that higher values indicate greater agency liberalism) and the percent of agency respondents who identify as Democrats (or Independents who lean Democratic). Models that employ the other two ideology measures we describe above yield results nearly identical to those that focus on the percentage of Democrats. Similarly, because all measures of respondent ideology yield analogous results, we focus on models that employ variables capturing respondents' partisanship.

The results for model 1 (which employs the Clinton & Lewis measure) and model 5 (which employs the "percent Democrat" measure) indicate that the positive association between agency liberalism and reported agency effort remains significant after accounting for respondent characteristics. Holding all other variables at their means, moving one standard deviation in the liberal direction along the inverted Clinton and Lewis ideology scale (from ½ a standard deviation below the mean to ½ a standard deviation above the mean) is associated with an increase of 7.3 percentage points in the percent of respondents who indicated that their agencies expended a "tremendous amount" of time and effort on the PART process. The increase associated with the "percent Democrats" variable is about 5.6 percentage points. All models also indicate that managers who identified themselves as Democrats were more inclined to perceive that their agencies expended significant agency time and effort on PART. Indeed, holding all variables at their means, Democrats were 7.5 percentage points more likely than Republicans to indicate a "tremendous amount" of time and effort spent on PART. Additionally, all models indicate that managers who agree that PART captures "real differences in program performance" were more inclined to report that their agencies expended a significant amount of time and effort.

Models 2-4 and 6 illustrate the impact of accounting for organizational characteristics and

the PART review process on the coefficient for agency liberalism. Because the results are analogous no matter what measure of agency liberalism is used, for the purpose of illustration we focus on the results of models that employ the Clinton and Lewis measure of agency liberalism (columns 1-4). Model 2 builds on model 1 by accounting for organizational characteristics that should capture agency capacity. The results indicate that accounting for these factors goes a long way toward explaining the amount of effort reported (note the increase in model fit between models 1 and 2), and the coefficients are in the expected direction. The only statistically significant result, however, is that greater program budgets are associated with less reported effort. Additionally, accounting for organizational characteristics does not appear to have much of an effect on the coefficient for agency liberalism.

Model 3 includes one objective measure of PART burden—a count of PART improvement plans by agency—while still accounting for organizational capacity and respondent perceptions and characteristics. It is important to note that, because organizational characteristics are accounted for, the PART review variables should enable us to capture actual disparities in administrative burden. The results indicate that accounting for PART improvement plans eliminates the explanatory power of agency liberalism. The coefficient for the Clinton and Lewis measure of agency liberalism is now close to zero and not statistically significant at traditional levels. The positive relationship between the count of improvement plans and reported agency effort is highly statistically significant and yields a coefficient for agency liberalism that is indistinguishable from zero. (It is worth noting that, though the total number of PART reviews has some explanatory power—and though it is highly correlated with the count of improvement plans—we begin by accounting for improvement plans because it is the PART scrutiny variable

that explains reported effort the best. Clearly, the number of required improvement plans is partly a function of the number of programs reviewed.)

Model 4 reveals that these results obtain even when we include variables that capture the number of programs reviewed by type (regulatory, block/formula grant, R&D, capital assets and service acquisition, competitive grant, direct federal, and credit programs). Model 6, which employs “percent Democrat” as the measure of ideology, yields analogous results. Even after accounting for program counts by type, the count of improvement plans possesses quite a bit of power in explaining reported agency effort. Holding all other variables in model 4 at their means, moving up one standard deviation on that measure (from ½ a standard deviation below the mean to ½ a standard deviation above the mean) is associated with an increase of 22 percentage points in the percent of respondents who indicated that their agencies expended a “tremendous amount” of time and effort on the PART process. It also is worth noting that the estimation of linear mixed-models reveals that including these agency-level covariates (capturing organizational characteristics and the PART review process) accounts for essentially all agency-level variation in reported time and effort.^v

That variables capturing counts of programs by type do not alter the results significantly is noteworthy. Existing research suggests that it is important to account for program type, as some types of programs lend themselves better to performance measurement (Wilson 1989; Radin 2006). For example, some suggest that demonstrating the value of regulatory programs is more difficult (Frederickson and Frederickson 2006) and, as we discuss above, a number of researchers point out the difficulties of demonstrating the performance of grant programs, which tend to be housed in liberal agencies. Variables accounting for program type do, indeed, help explain reported agency effort (note the increase in model fit between models 3 and 4). And the

results also indicate that agencies administering more R&D and direct federal programs (which are more likely to be conservative agencies) are associated with lower levels of reported effort. However, including these variables has a minimal impact on the relationship between counts of PART improvement plans and reported agency-wide effort. One cannot be completely sure that the PART program classifications capture all relevant differences between programs, but these results go a long way toward addressing the concern that inherent differences in program types drive this study's results.

Finally, it is worth noting the results of some sensitivity analyses we conducted. First, results of models that employ Clinton and Lewis ideology scores are sensitive to transformations of the employment and budget variables. For example, if the log of employee counts and the log of program budgets are employed, we are unable to account for much of agency liberalism's impact using our objective measures of organizational burden. That said, the results for the count of improvement plans obtains whether or not these variables are transformed, and these transformations have no impact on the results when other measures of agency ideology are used. Second, as we suggest above, analogous results obtain if models account for PART scores, and variables capturing PART scores yield results that are statistically indistinguishable from zero. Third, as Table 2 indicates, the process of adding variables results in the omission of some agencies from the statistical analysis due to missing values. We conducted supplementary analyses to make sure the change in results across models is not attributable to the list-wise deletion of respondent observations. Estimates restricted to agencies observed across all specifications yield analogous results.

Conclusion

This study reveals that ideological divergence between political officials and federal agencies relates to the perception that a government-wide administrative reform entailed an administrative burden. The findings contribute to our understanding of organizational reform (e.g., Durant 2008), political-administrative relations (e.g., Lewis 2008), and administrative burden (e.g., Burden et al 2012). Specifically, managers in agencies associated with an ideology that diverged from the conservative Bush Administration's were more inclined to agree than those in conservative agencies that PART required significant agency time and effort and that it imposed a burden on management resources. Further analysis reveals that objective measures of administrative burden explain much of the relationship between agency liberalism and reported agency time and effort spent on PART. In particular, holding organizational capacity constant, the number of improvement plans an agency was required to conduct explains much of the disparity in effort reported by managers working in liberal and conservative agencies. Using these objective measures, the analysis suggests that PART imposed a greater administrative burden on liberal agencies—a finding which obtains whether or not one accounts for the types of programs agencies administer.

One of this study's strongest findings illustrates another political dynamic: managers who identified themselves as Democrats consistently reported higher rates of agency effort than those who self-identified as Republicans. In other words, there is evidence that individual ideological views also had a significant impact on the perception of administrative burden, even after accounting for objective measures of administrative burden. Though unsurprising, the finding illustrates how politics might disturb administrative reform efforts simply because ideological differences exist and are well known. That is, the biased perceptions of employees could be a mechanism through which politics affects the implementation of administrative reforms. Agency

managers (Democrats and Republicans alike) are aware when political officials sponsoring a reform have policy goals that conflict with those of their agencies, and this simple awareness may affect their thoughts and behaviors.^{vi}

The implications of these political dynamics for the implementation of PART were likely significant. Managers who perceive an initiative as a burden—as something that unnecessarily redirects resources away from their agency’s priorities, for example—are likely less inclined to invest the time and resources necessary to make the administrative initiative a success (e.g., see Burden et al 2012). There already is some evidence of this with the implementation of PART. Lavertu and Moynihan (2012) found that managerial involvement in the PART review process likely spurred the use of performance information in conservative and, to a lesser extent, moderate agencies, but that managerial involvement in PART reviews had no such effect in liberal agencies. A perception that PART was an unnecessary administrative burden—perhaps resulting from the ideologically motivated perceptions of agency managers—may help explain this finding.

In summary, this study identifies two political dynamics: the objectively greater burden imposed from above and the perception of burden that emanates from the possible ideological biases of managers. A key practical implication of these findings is that even objectively neutral administrative reforms are likely to be implemented and experienced differently across government bureaucracies, depending upon the ideological configuration of agencies and elected officials. Whatever the intention of reformers, agency managers may perceive reforms as non-neutral. Those who manage agencies or programs associated with policy views that differ from those of reformers may feel pressured to exert higher levels of effort due to the perceived or real lack of trust between a reform’s proponents and those implementing the reforms. What reformers

may perceive as a neutral management initiative, managers may perceive as a cover for meddling with disfavored programs and agencies. Given the regularity of broad-gauged management reforms, reformers in areas as varied as financial management, IT, procurement, and whistleblowing, would be advised to be attentive to the necessarily political component of such “neutral” initiatives.

Perhaps the surest way of reducing the negative impact of political ideology entails creating bipartisan support for administrative reforms, perhaps by relying on a non-partisan or bipartisan entity to develop and administer them. At the federal level, the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 and the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 benefit from bipartisan support that PART could not claim. At the state level, Oregon sought to take the politics out of performance management by creating the Oregon Progress Board, a nonpartisan commission tasked with identifying performance benchmarks for the state. This approach brings its own risks, however—primarily the loss of visible high-level political support that makes bureaucrats believe a reform is consequential. Even though it was widely praised, the Oregon Progress Board failed to maintain a strong political constituency and was eliminated in 2009. If the ideal recipe for administrative reform involves a mix of credibility based on non-partisan expertise and political support great enough to enable change, it may be a difficult combination to realize in practice.

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Figure 1. Summary of logic, empirical measures, and data sources

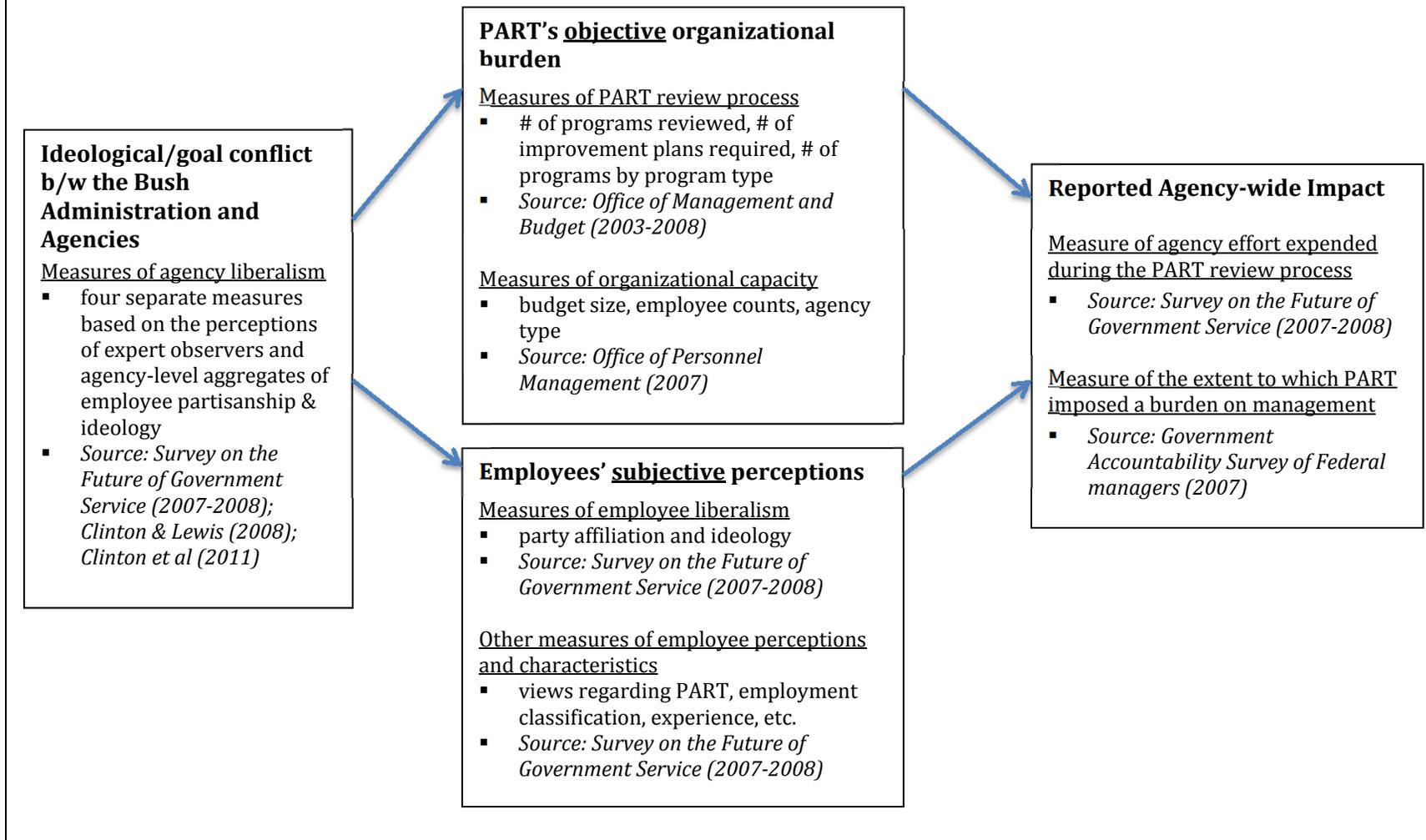
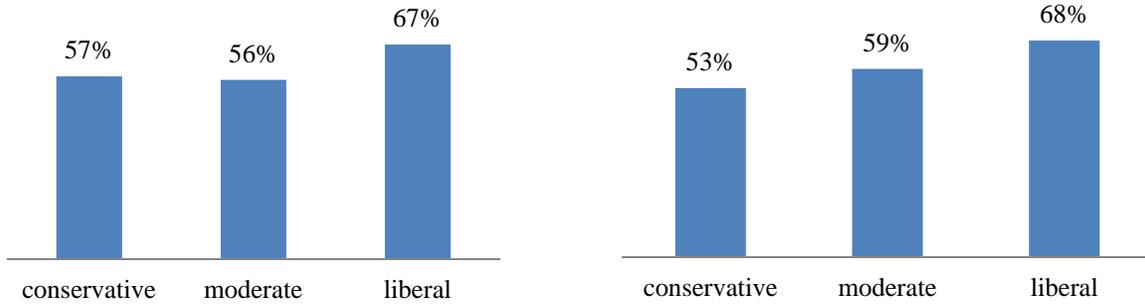


Figure 2. Percent who agree to a “moderate,” “great,” or “very great” extent that “Participating in PART has imposed a significant burden on management resources.”

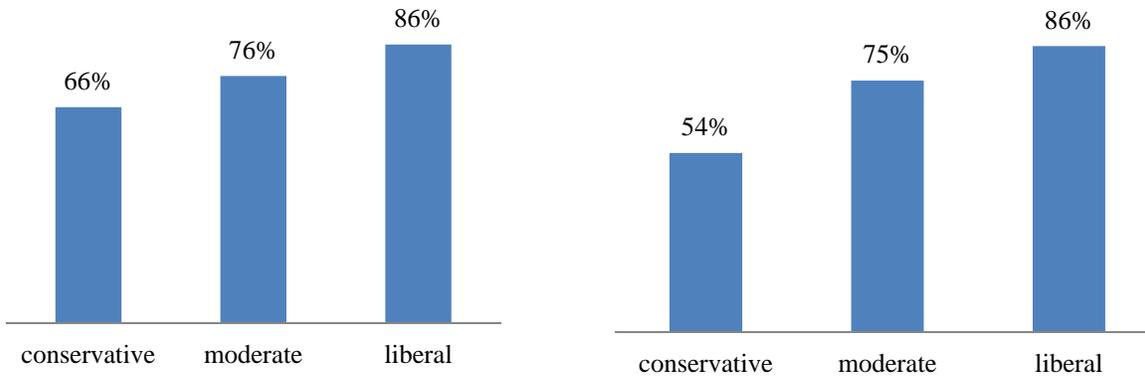
a. Clinton & Lewis (2008) measure of agency ideology b. Based on percent Democratic respondents by agency



Note: Ideology in figure (a) is based on the Clinton and Lewis (2008) ideology score. Moderate agencies are those for which the 95% confidence band around this score overlaps with zero. Ideology in figure (b) is based on the percent of respondents by agency who self-identify as Democrats or as Independents who lean Democrat. Moderate agencies are those for which the percentage of Democrats is within one standard deviation of the mean of 56 percent.

Figure 3. Percent of respondents who answered “significant amount” or “tremendous amount” to the following question: “How much time and effort did your agency put into the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) process?”

a. Clinton & Lewis (2008) measure of agency ideology b. Based on percent Democratic respondents by agency



Note: Ideology in figure (a) is based on the Clinton and Lewis (2008) ideology score. Moderate agencies are those for which the 95% confidence band around this score overlaps with zero. Ideology in figure (b) is based on the percent of respondents by agency who self-identify as Democrats or Independents who lean Democrat. Moderate agencies are those for which the percentage of Democrats is within one standard deviation of the mean of 56 percent.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for measures of organizational characteristics, PART review, and employee characteristics			
	Conservative Agencies	Moderate Agencies	Liberal Agencies
Organizational Characteristics			
Avg. # of employees	97,534 (37,271 w/out DOD)	24,651	11,920
Avg. program budget (in millions)	\$2,812	\$2,657	\$16,693 (\$848 w/out SSA)
% cabinet agencies	56%	21%	31%
% independent agencies	5%	37%	38%
% independent commissions	39%	42%	31%
PART Review Process			
Avg. # of regulatory prgrms	2.3	1.3	2.1
Avg. # of r&d prgrms	3.4	2.1	2.2
Avg. # of block/formula grant prgrms	1.5	2.3	7.9
Avg. # of cap. assets and service acq. prgrms	2.6	1.6	0.9
Avg. # of competitive grant prgrms	1.1	1.5	9.9
Avg. # of credit prgrms	0.5	0.23	0.8
Avg. # of direct federal prgrms	12.2	7.2	3.8
<i>Avg. # of programs (total)</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>% of survey respondents involved w/ PART reviews</i>	<i>55%</i>	<i>55%</i>	<i>71%</i>
<i>Avg. # of improvement plans per agency</i>	<i>119</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>137</i>
<i>Average agency PART score (0-100)</i>	<i>72.22</i>	<i>70.71</i>	<i>68.31</i>
Employee Characteristics			
% who agree that PART captures “real differences” b/w programs	15%	17%	16%
% Democrats	31%	38%	52%
% Independent	37%	40%	34%
% Republicans	28%	18%	11%
Avg. # of years employed by feds	29	26	24
% Executive Schedule	14%	12%	11%
% Senior Level or Scientific/Professional	1%	2%	2%
% Senior Executive or Foreign Service	64%	63%	53%
% General Schedule	21%	24%	34%
% in a regional office	4%	10%	6%
<p><i>Note:</i> Ideology is categorized according to the Clinton & Lewis (2008) ideology score. Moderate agencies are those for which the 95% confidence band around the score overlapped with zero. The results defer somewhat when ideology is based on the percent of respondents who self-identify as Democrats. Using this measure, for example, yields average counts of PART-reviewed programs that are 16, 22, and 26 for conservative, moderate, and liberal agencies, respectively. Note that DOD (Department of Defense) and SSA (Social Security Administration) are outliers in terms of employee counts and program budgets, respectively. Finally, note that “PART Review Process” variables are based on agency-level averages. The statistics reported are averages of agency-level variables (three of which are themselves averages).</p>			

Table 2. Reported agency time and effort expended for PART review process

	(1) C & L	(2) C&L	(3) C&L	(4) C & L	(5) Pct Dem	(6) Pct Dem
Agency Liberalism	0.22(0.06)**	0.20(0.06)**	-0.04(0.06)	-0.06(0.06)	1.11(0.46)**	-0.03(0.34)
Org. Characteristics						
employment (10,000s)		-0.04(0.05)	-0.08(0.05)	-0.07(0.04)*		-0.09(0.04)**
average program budget (\$10,000s)		-0.20(0.05)**	-0.14(0.06)**	-0.11(0.06)*		-0.09(0.08)
cabinet agency		-0.13(0.13)	-0.26(0.16)*	-0.17(0.17)		-0.17(0.18)
independent commission		0.18(0.24)	-0.15(0.20)	-0.28(0.17)		-0.28(0.17)*
PART Review Process						
# of improvement plans			0.0009(0.0003)**	0.004(0.001)**		0.004(0.001)**
# of regulatory programs				0.03(0.02)		0.03(0.03)
# of R&D programs				-0.03(0.01)**		-0.03(0.01)**
# of block/formula grant programs				-0.02(0.02)		-0.02(0.02)
# of cap. assets and service programs				-0.01(0.02)		-0.01(0.02)
# of competitive grant programs				-0.02(0.01)		-0.02(0.02)
# of credit programs				-0.01(0.04)		-0.01(0.04)
# of direct federal programs				-0.02(0.01)*		-0.02(0.01)**
Respondent Characteristics						
Democrat	0.23(0.08)**	0.25(0.07)**	0.23(0.08)**	0.21(0.08)**	0.19(0.08)**	0.22(0.08)**
Independent	0.15(0.09)*	0.15(0.09)*	0.13(0.09)	0.10(0.09)	0.10(0.09)	0.10(0.09)
PART “captures real differences”	0.12(0.03)**	0.11(0.03)**	0.11(0.03)**	0.11(0.04)**	0.12(0.03)	0.11(0.04)**
# of years in federal government	0.00(0.00)	0.00(0.00)	0.00(0.00)	0.00(0.00)	-0.005(0.004)	0.00(0.00)
regional office	-0.14(0.12)	-0.17(0.12)	-0.18(0.13)	-0.19(0.14)	-0.07(0.13)	-0.19(0.14)
Executive Service	-0.06(0.11)	-0.08(0.11)	-0.05(0.12)	-0.02(0.13)	-0.05(0.12)	-0.03(0.13)
SL/ST	0.56(0.31)*	0.56(0.31)*	0.54(0.30)*	0.51(0.31)*	0.53(0.23)**	0.48(0.28)*
Senior Executive or Senior Foreign Service	-0.11(0.10)	-0.11(0.10)	-0.07(0.11)	-0.05(0.12)	-0.09(0.10)	-0.05(0.11)
N	847	839	809	809	867	811
# of Agency Clusters	39	37	34	34	45	35
Wald Chi ²	93.50**	257.50**	355.91**	497.62**	59.15**	586.13**

Note: The results are from ordered probit models that estimate the amount of reported agency time and effort devoted to PART reviews. Standard errors are clustered by agency and reported in parentheses next to the regression coefficients. Cut point estimates are not reported. Significance levels are based on two-tailed z-tests or chi-square tests: **p<0.05 and *p<0.10 (so that *p<0.05 for a one-tailed test).

Appendix

Table A1. Agency Classification based on Clinton & Lewis ideology scores		
Conservative	Moderate	Liberal
Department of the Army Commodity Futures Trading Commission Department of Commerce Department of Homeland Security Department of Defense Department of Energy Department of Justice Department of the Treasury Export Import Bank of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation Department of the Interior Department of the Navy Nuclear Regulatory Commission Small Business Administration Securities and Exchange Commission Department of the Air Force U.S. International Trade Commission	Broadcasting Board of Governors Department of Transportation Department of Veterans Affairs Federal Election Commission Federal Housing Finance Board Federal Maritime Commission Federal Mine Safety & Health Review Comm. Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board Federal Trade Commission General Services Administration National Archive and Records Administration National Aeronautics and Space Admin. National Capital Planning Commission National Labor Relations Board National Mediation Board Office of Personnel Management Railroad Retirement Board Department of State Department of Agriculture	African Development Foundation Appalachian Regional Commission Corporation for National & Community Service Consumer Products Safety Commission Department of Education Department of Labor Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Environmental Protection Agency Department of Health & Human Services Department of Housing & Urban Development Merit Systems Protection Board National Foundation on Arts & Humanities Occupational Safety & Health Review Comm. Peace Corps Social Security Administration U.S. Agency for International Development
NOTE: Agencies listed are those identified in the SFGS survey		

ⁱ Higher level political appointees are underrepresented in the sample. We focus here on the responses of career professionals who indicate involvement with the PART process. Investigators obtained a list of 7,448 federal administrators and program managers from Leadership Directories, Inc., the firm that publishes the *Federal Yellow Book*. Once this list was cleaned to remove names that were incorrectly included there were 7,151 names. In total 2,398 persons completed the survey. The original list also included 461 NSF executives since Leadership Directories, Inc. coded NSF program directors as program managers. If the NSF is excluded from the sample there are 2,250 respondents from 6,690 potential respondents. To verify the representativeness of the sample, the survey's authors hired private firms to match unique names to home addresses, collect voter registration information, and compare party registration with self-reported partisanship. For complete details see Clinton et al. 2012.

ⁱⁱ See Lavertu and Moynihan (2012) for a more detailed description of the data.

ⁱⁱⁱ Source: Office of Personnel Management, Central Personnel Data File (fedscope.opm.gov). We log this measure to account for extreme values.

^{iv} The results are nearly identical if this variable is included. Because the variable is likely endogenous, however, we exclude it from the results below. Results are available upon request.

^v We are violating some modeling assumptions in estimating these models (in particular, the dependent variable is categorical and does not closely approximate a normal distribution), but the rough estimates provided are illuminating. Based on a model that includes respondent-level covariates only, about 13% of the variation in responses is attributable to variation between agencies and agency ideology accounts for about 47% of that agency-level variation.

^{vi} It also may be that Democratic managers were simply more inclined to expend effort in the implementation of policy and, therefore, perceived that their own agencies expended greater effort as well.