

From Policy Signaling to Implementation: The Impact of Trump's 2025 Reciprocal Tariff Policy on State-Level Job Approval in The United States

Haolin Wang

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Macau, Macau, China

Abstract. The implementation of economic policies often exerts far-reaching effects across multiple dimensions, influencing not only the economic sector but also the political and social spheres. In this context, in April 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump introduced the "Reciprocal Tariffs" policy as a key economic measure during his second term. The policy's implementation led to significant shifts in public approval across U.S. states. This study utilizes tracking data on public approval of the president across U.S. states from January to July 2025 to systematically assess the dynamic impact of the policy, from its signaling phase to its formal implementation. The analysis employs three distinct methodologies—paired sample t-tests, Interrupted Time Series Analysis (ITSA), and a two-way fixed-effects panel regression model—to provide comparative validation of the results. The study quantitatively examines approval changes before and after the policy intervention and incorporates spatial visualization to identify regional differences. The findings indicate a significant nationwide decline in average approval ratings following the policy announcement, with no significant differences observed across states with varying political leanings. Quantitative analysis of the intervention effects reveals a sharp decline in approval ratings in the short term, followed by a modest recovery, though the approval ratings did not return to pre-intervention levels. From a spatial perspective, coastal and urbanized regions, characterized by higher voter diversity and a stronger inclination towards liberalism, exhibited more pronounced declines in approval ratings. In contrast, some states in the Midwest and South, owing to stronger personal support for President Trump, showed relative stability. This study highlights the stage-specific impact, time-lag effects, and regional heterogeneity of economic policy signals on public opinion, providing empirical evidence for understanding the political effects of federal economic policies while offering valuable insights for future policy design and public communication strategies.

Keywords: Reciprocal Tariffs; Presidential Approval; Policy Signaling; Time Series Analysis; Spatial Politics.

1. Introduction

At the outset of his second term, U.S. President Donald J. Trump reaffirmed “America First” as the central guiding principle of his administration and advanced a series of radical trade policy adjustments. In early 2025, through multiple official White House statements, he announced the launch of the “Reciprocal Tariffs” policy and designated April 2 as its formal commencement date, which he referred to as “Liberation Day.” Even prior to its implementation, this policy signaling phase drew widespread domestic and international attention, reflecting both Trump’s consistent protectionist stance and his appeal to the longstanding concerns of his core constituencies regarding manufacturing and employment. However, the impact of trade policies on public attitudes is typically complex and subject to temporal lags, with potentially significant variations across different regions and demographic groups.

This study aims to investigate the dynamic changes in public approval of Trump’s job performance across U.S. states during the transition from the signaling phase to the implementation phase of the Reciprocal Tariffs policy in 2025. Using state-level opinion data from January to July 2025, we calculate the net changes in approval between January and April (signaling phase) and between April and July (implementation phase), and employ state-level heat maps for spatial visualization. Particular attention is paid to states with a high proportion of manufacturing industries or strong

dependence on foreign trade, in order to examine whether they exhibited more pronounced shifts in approval during different stages of the policy.

By comprehensively analyzing the entire process from signaling to implementation, this article provides new empirical evidence on the regional political effects of federal economic policies within a highly decentralized political system. The findings not only shed light on the stage-specific and lagged mechanisms through which trade policy influences public opinion, but also offer valuable implications for future policymaking and public communication strategies. More broadly, this study seeks to address a central question: to what extent can major economic policies in contemporary America shape—or even reverse—public evaluations of political leadership?

2. Literature Review

Research on the relationship between trade policy and leadership approval has primarily concentrated on two dimensions: first, the direct economic effects examined from the perspective of economic performance; and second, the political implications analyzed from the lens of international relations and strategic bargaining. Economic studies typically focus on the impacts of tariff policies on employment, prices, exports, and overall economic growth. Early research indicates that raising tariff levels may offer short-term protection to specific industries, while simultaneously increasing consumer prices and reducing allocative efficiency (Autor et al., 2013; Irwin, 1996). Within the political domain, empirical studies consistently demonstrate a strong correlation between economic performance and leadership approval: favorable economic conditions tend to bolster incumbents' support, whereas economic downturns often erode their political standing (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000).

From an international political perspective, trade policy serves not only as an economic regulatory tool but also as a crucial mechanism of strategic signaling. Tariff measures frequently carry symbolic value, functioning both as bargaining chips and as instruments for demonstrating political will and policy commitment (Milner & Rosendorff, 1997; Guisinger, 2009). Public announcements or implementation of such measures are commonly interpreted by the international community as reflections of a government's strategic intentions, thereby shaping the trajectory of bilateral and multilateral relations.

Despite these insights, existing scholarship often relies on a single analytical perspective, lacking a systematic integration of the dual mechanisms through which trade policy operates—namely, its economic performance effects and its political signaling functions. The research question of this study lies at the intersection of economic voting theory and international political economy (IPE). Economic voting theory posits that citizens evaluate incumbents based on their perceptions of both macroeconomic and personal economic conditions, treating economic policies as critical sources of political judgment. At the same time, trade policy is not merely an economic adjustment tool: when a government publicly announces or enacts tariff measures, such actions generate domestic economic consequences while simultaneously functioning as policy and foreign-policy signals.

From the perspective of signaling theory, leaders enhance the credibility of their policy declarations by releasing policy intentions or undertaking costly actions that function as “tying hands” or “sunk costs.” These mechanisms influence the judgments of both domestic and international audiences. Building on the integration of these two theoretical frameworks, this study argues that the “Reciprocal Tariffs” may affect voter attitudes through dual channels: directly, by shaping expectations regarding prices and employment; and indirectly, by serving as a political signal that reshapes perceptions of the leader's credibility and governing capacity. Moreover, if the policy provokes international retaliation or responses from allies, such external feedback may further amplify or accelerate changes in domestic public opinion.

3. Methods and Data

3.1. Research Methodology

3.1.1 Data Sources and Variable Definitions

The empirical analysis in this study is based on a dataset comprising monthly presidential approval ratings across all fifty U.S. states from January to July 2025. The official public statement regarding tariff escalation in April 2025 is defined as the intervention event in a quasi-natural experiment. Accordingly, the pre-intervention period is defined as January–March, while the post-intervention period is defined as May–July. To minimize potential bias caused by transitional effects, April—the month in which the intervention occurred—was excluded from certain comparative analyses.

Dependent Variable: represented by Y_{it} , which denotes the percentage value of presidential approval observed for state i at time t .

Key Independent Variable: represented by T_t , a binary indicator variable used to denote the occurrence of the intervention event. Specifically, T_t is assigned a value of 1 when time t falls within the post-intervention period, and 0 otherwise.

Grouping Variable: based on the historical political orientations of each state, the overall sample was divided into three subgroups: Republican-leaning states, Democrat-leaning states, and Swing states.

3.1.2 Paired-Sample t-Test

To assess the statistical significance of differences in mean presidential approval rates before and after the intervention, a paired-sample t-test was conducted. This method is appropriate for comparing measurements of the same set of observational units at two distinct time points. For each state i , the difference in approval rates between the pre-intervention and post-intervention periods was calculated as:

$$d_i = Y_{i,post} - Y_{i,pre} \quad (1)$$

The calculation of the t-statistic follows the formula:

$$t = \frac{(sd)}{(n * d^-)} \quad (2)$$

where:

d^- refers to the sample mean of the difference d_i .

sd refers to the sample standard deviation of the difference d_i .

n refers to the number of paired samples, that is, the total number of state entities.

This test was applied separately to the overall sample as well as to the three subgroups, in order to evaluate the statistical reliability of the observed changes in approval rates.

3.1.3 Interrupted Time Series Analysis

Interrupted time series analysis (ITSA) was employed as a quasi-experimental evaluation framework to quantify the effects of the intervention occurring at a clearly defined time point. By applying segmented linear regression, ITSA enables the simultaneous estimation of both the immediate level change and the long-term trend change induced by the intervention.

The ITSA model specified in this study is formulated as follows:

$$Y_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot timet + \beta_2 \cdot interventiont + \beta_3 \cdot time_after_interventiont + \epsilon_t \quad (3)$$

where:

Y_t is the average support rate at time point t .

$timet$ is the time variable measured from the start of the observation (e.g., January = 1, February = 2, ...).

$interventiont$ is a binary indicator variable, with 0 for the leading period and 1 for the trailing period.

time_after_intervention_{it} is a continuous variable that measures the time units that have elapsed since the intervention. In the pre-period, its value is 0; in the post-period, its value starts at 1.

ϵ_t is the random disturbance term of the model.

The meanings of the parameters in the model are as follows:

β_0 : Represents the baseline support level at the beginning of the observation period (i.e., the intercept).

β_1 : Represents the inherent trend of support in the preceding period (i.e., the slope).

β_2 : Represents the instantaneous level change caused by the intervention; this is the magnitude of the immediate increase or decrease in support after the intervention.

β_3 : Represents the trend change caused by the intervention; it is the difference between the slope of the preceding period and the slope of the following period.

3.1.4 Two-Way Fixed Effects Panel Regression Model

To obtain the most robust causal inference regarding the intervention effect, a two-way fixed effects (TWFE) panel regression model was constructed and applied. Recognized as the standard paradigm in panel data analysis, this model offers the advantage of simultaneously controlling for two major categories of potential confounders:

Entity Fixed Effects: These account for inherent heterogeneity across states that remains invariant over time but may exert systematic influence on the dependent variable, such as regional industrial structures, political-cultural legacies, and demographic characteristics.

Time Fixed Effects: These account for temporal shocks that evolve over time and exert homogeneous impacts across all states, such as nationwide macroeconomic fluctuations and other major public events.

The basic mathematical form of the two-way fixed effect model is:

$$Y_{it} = \beta_1 \cdot Intervention_{it} + \alpha_i + y_t + \epsilon_{it} \quad (4)$$

Where:

Y_{it} is the approval rating of state entity i at time t .

$Intervention_{it}$ is the core intervention indicator variable. For state entity i , its value is 1 if time t is in the post-period, and 0 otherwise.

α_i represents the individual fixed effects for state entity i , capturing all state-specific attributes that do not evolve over time.

y_t represents the time fixed effects at time t , capturing all common time trends affecting the national level.

ϵ_{it} is a random disturbance term.

Within this model framework, the parameter β_1 constitutes the focal point of interest. This coefficient quantifies the average net effect of the intervention on presidential approval after accounting for and isolating the confounding influences of state-specific invariant characteristics and common temporal shocks. A statistically significant estimate of β_1 provides rigorous empirical support for the existence of a causal relationship between the intervention and the dependent variable.

3.2. Data Source

The data employed in this study were obtained from the Civiqs official website, which reports state-level public approval ratings of Donald Trump's job performance during his second presidential term, spanning the period from January to July 2025. The raw data are expressed in percentages and aggregated by state, covering the vast majority of U.S. states.

To capture the dynamic interplay between policy announcements and public responses across different stages, the dataset was partitioned into two critical periods:

January–April 2025: the initial phase following the announcement of Trump's new round of trade policies;

April–July 2025: the stage during which the policies were concretely implemented and their societal repercussions gradually unfolded.

For each period, we computed the net change in approval, defined as:

Change in Approval

$= \text{Approval Rate at the End of the Period} - \text{Approval Rate at the Beginning of the Period}$ (5)

The approval rate variations for each state were subsequently derived for the two distinct intervals, namely January–April and April–July.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Temporal Dynamics of Trump's Job Approval Before and After the Announcement of the Reciprocal Tariff Policy

During President Trump's second term, state-level approval rates exhibited marked temporal fluctuations between January and July. An analysis of the net change in approval from January to April (Figure 1) reveals substantial heterogeneity across states. While the majority of states experienced declines in approval, several regions—particularly in the West and Northeast—maintained stable or slightly rising levels of support. For instance, Alaska displayed a pronounced increase in approval, suggesting sustained backing for Trump. In contrast, states along the East and West coasts, such as California, New York, and Massachusetts, demonstrated sharp declines.

Moving into the April–July interval (Figure 2), approval trends across states continued to fluctuate. In some states, approval declined further, while others exhibited relatively stable patterns. Notably, several Midwestern and Southeastern states recorded only minor decreases or even slight rebounds in approval. However, Illinois and Washington continued to register sustained declines, indicating that Trump faced mounting challenges in consolidating support in these areas.

A comparative assessment of the January–April and April–July intervals reveals that the downward trajectory of approval intensified during the latter period, particularly in densely populated states such as California and New York, where net changes were markedly negative. By contrast, approval in parts of the South and Midwest remained comparatively stable, underscoring relatively steady support in these regions.

Overall, from January to July, Trump's national approval rate followed a downward trajectory, with declines most pronounced in certain traditional support states. These shifts may be attributable to a combination of policy adjustments during his administration, major public events, and region-specific voter responses to economic and social issues. The state-level analysis not only illuminates temporal variation in Trump's approval but also reflects the regional heterogeneity of political attitudes and socioeconomic contexts across the United States.

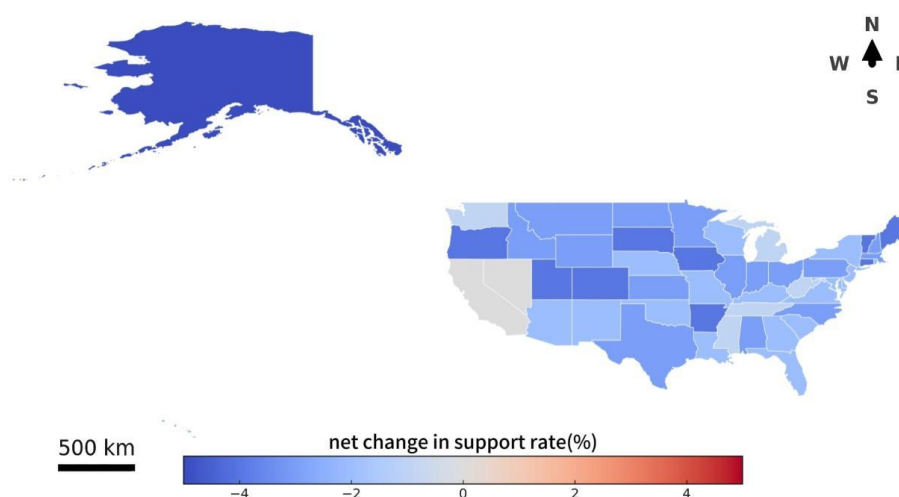


Fig 1. Net change in support rate from January to April

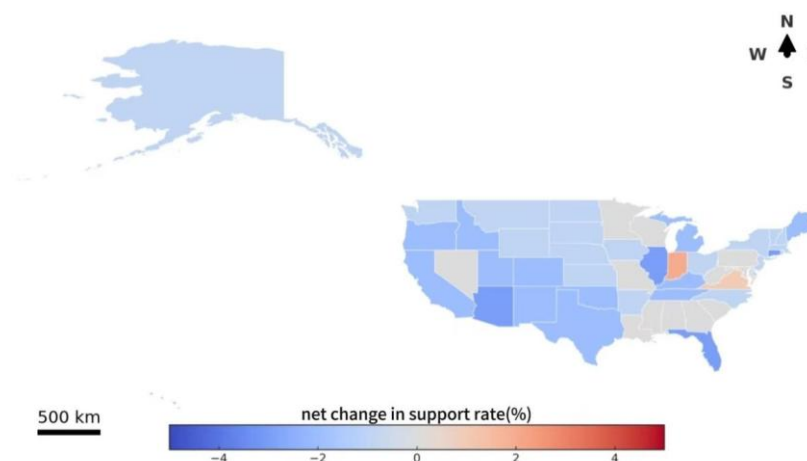


Fig 2. Net change in support rate from April to July

4.2. Spatial Dynamics of Trump’s Job Approval Before and After the Announcement of the Reciprocal Tariff Policy

During President Trump’s second term, the spatial distribution of state-level approval rates exhibited pronounced regional disparities. Based on the approval rate data from January to July, although the majority of states experienced downward trends, several states maintained stable levels or even registered slight increases. These spatial variations reflect the heterogeneity of political attitudes, economic conditions, and social contexts across different regions of the United States.

The overall decline in approval observed in most states can be attributed to several key factors, including the Trump administration’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing economic challenges, and heightened social tensions. This effect was particularly evident in populous states such as California, New York, and Massachusetts, where dissatisfaction with the government’s pandemic management and economic recovery efforts intensified over time, leading to sustained decreases in approval. Moreover, highly urbanized areas—typically more liberal—exhibited stronger opposition to Trump’s policies, further amplifying the decline.

By contrast, approval either increased or remained stable in certain states, particularly in the Midwest, the South, and some more remote regions. For instance, Alaska and several Southern states recorded increases in approval. This resilience likely reflects relatively entrenched support for Trump’s policies in these areas, particularly regarding economic growth and immigration. Voters in these regions tend to prioritize local economic development and security issues, domains in which Trump’s policy agenda found greater resonance, thereby sustaining or bolstering approval rates.

From a geographic perspective, states with relatively higher approval were concentrated in the Midwest and the South, regions characterized by distinct social, cultural, and economic profiles compared with metropolitan areas. In particular, rural areas of the Midwest placed greater emphasis on economic growth and traditional values, aligning closely with Trump’s policy orientation. For example, according to polling data from June 2025, Trump’s approval rate in Wisconsin stood at 47%, indicating persistent support in the Midwest despite overall fluctuations. Notably, while protests occurred in several Midwestern cities in April 2025, rural voters continued to express strong support, largely driven by Trump’s economic initiatives in agriculture and manufacturing.

In contrast, large coastal cities in the East and West—marked by greater demographic diversity and liberal leanings—displayed lower levels of approval, with a downward trajectory over time. For instance, a Harvard CAPS/Harris poll conducted in June 2025 indicated persistently weak urban support, particularly in coastal cities such as New York and Los Angeles. Large-scale protests in April 2025 in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York further underscored widespread discontent with Trump’s policies among urban electorates.

In sum, the spatial dynamics of Trump’s approval during his second term reflect the influence of multiple factors, including regional economic conditions, cultural backgrounds, and the demographic

composition of electorates. These disparities in approval not only highlight divergent responses to Trump’s policy agenda but also reveal underlying regional cleavages in political identity across the United States.

4.3. Validation of Differences in Trump’s Job Approval Before and After the Announcement of the Reciprocal Tariff Policy

4.3.1 Sample Description and Overall Trends

The dataset employed in this study comprises monthly presidential approval ratings across all 50 U.S. states from January to July 2025. Based on historical voting records, the sample was classified into three subgroups: Republican-leaning states ($n = 24$), Democratic-leaning states ($n = 18$), and swing states ($n = 8$). The statements made in April 2025 concerning the imposition of additional tariffs are defined as the “intervention event” in this quasi-natural experimental design.

Descriptive statistics of approval ratings before and after the intervention event are presented in Table 1. The results indicate that average approval rates declined across all three subgroups following the intervention.

Table 1. Average Approval Rates (%) by State Subgroup Before and After the Tariff Announcement

State Type	Mean Approval Rate Before Intervention (%)	Mean Approval Rate After Intervention (%)
National (All States)	47.78	44.97
Republican-leaning	58.12	55.00
Democratic-leaning	36.31	33.06
Swing States	46.16	43.38

4.3.2 Quantitative Analysis of the Intervention Effect

To accurately assess the intervention effect, we employed multiple econometric models. Table 2 summarizes the core results derived from difference-in-differences analysis, paired t-tests, and Interrupted Time Series Analysis (ITSA).

Table 2. Evaluation of the Tariff Announcement Effect Using Multiple Methods

Group	Mean Change in Approval Rate (%)	Paired <i>t</i> -test <i>p</i> -value	Immediate Level Change	Post-intervention Trend Change
All States	-2.85	< 0.001	-0.45	+0.57
Republican-leaning	-2.93	< 0.001	-0.44	+0.65
Democratic-leaning	-2.91	< 0.001	-0.33	+0.47
Swing States	-2.46	< 0.001	-0.74	+0.55

Note: The mean change in approval rate is calculated by comparing the periods January–March and May–July.

The difference-in-differences results indicate that the overall approval rate decreased by an average of 2.85 percentage points following the event. The decline ranged between 2.46 and 2.93 points across subgroups. The *p*-values from the paired *t*-tests were consistently less than 0.001 for all groups, suggesting that the decrease in approval rates is highly statistically significant.

The ITSA results reveal the dynamic nature of the effect. The coefficients for “Immediate Level Change” were negative across all groups, indicating an immediate drop in approval rates in the first month after the intervention (May), with swing states (-0.74) exhibiting the sharpest short-term

decline. Meanwhile, the “Post-intervention Trend Change” coefficients were positive for all groups, suggesting that after the initial shock, the declining trend in approval rates was attenuated, with some evidence of mild recovery.

4.3.3 Robustness Check: Two-way Fixed Effects Model

To control for state-specific time-invariant heterogeneity (e.g., industrial structure, political culture) and nationwide time trends (e.g., national-level events), we estimated a two-way fixed effects panel regression model. This model provides the most robust estimate of the net effect of the intervention. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Estimation of the Intervention Effect Using the Fixed Effects Model

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	(P> t) p-value (P> t)
Intervention Effect	-2.46	0.089	-27.77	< 0.001

The results indicate that, after controlling for both state and time fixed effects, the tariff announcement is significantly associated with a net decrease of 2.46 percentage points in presidential approval rates ($p < 0.001$). This finding is highly consistent with the previous analyses, thereby reinforcing the robustness of the conclusions.

5. Discussion

An examination of the variations in state-level approval rates indicates that the observed decline is closely associated not only with economic factors but also with Trump’s personal image, policy transparency, and fluctuations in voter sentiment.

First, the Trump administration’s policy performance during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the subsequent economic stimulus measures, exerted profound effects on public opinion. During the pandemic, rising economic uncertainty and unemployment rates prompted voters to question Trump’s leadership, particularly against the backdrop of inadequate pandemic response and heightened societal polarization.

Second, following the announcement of the “reciprocal tariff” policy, although the policy was intended to protect the U.S. economy, it simultaneously triggered international trade frictions, price increases, and market instability. These consequences raised doubts among certain segments of the electorate regarding the effectiveness of the policy. The decline in approval rates was especially pronounced in states heavily affected by trade disputes. The uncertainty of such economic policies and their potential adverse impacts—particularly on low- and middle-income groups—constitute an important factor contributing to the erosion of Trump’s approval ratings.

6. Conclusion

This study investigates the “reciprocal tariff” policy introduced by the Trump administration in 2025, drawing on monthly approval data from all 50 U.S. states between January and July 2025. By employing paired t-tests, interrupted time series analysis (ITSA), and two-way fixed-effects panel regression, the study examines the dynamic effects of the policy—spanning from the signaling of its intention to its formal implementation—on state-level approval rates. The results demonstrate that the policy exerted significant impacts on Trump’s approval ratings both before and after its enactment. Overall, approval rates exhibited a declining trend, with sharper decreases observed in coastal and highly urbanized regions, whereas parts of the Midwest and South remained relatively stable. In the temporal dimension, the implementation of the policy led to a short-term, rapid decline in approval rates, followed by a partial rebound that, nevertheless, did not return to pre-intervention levels.

These findings carry both practical policy implications and theoretical significance by providing new empirical evidence for economic voting theory and signaling theory within international political economy. From the perspective of economic voting, voters’ responses to economic policies are

closely tied to their perceptions of both macroeconomic conditions and everyday economic experiences. In the short term, the “reciprocal tariff” may have influenced public economic evaluations—through channels such as rising prices and shifting employment expectations—ultimately affecting political support for the incumbent. At the same time, from the perspective of signaling theory, the policy, as a costly measure with explicit strategic implications for foreign relations, can be interpreted as a form of “tying hands” or “sunk cost,” thereby enhancing the credibility of the leader’s commitment and shaping domestic and international audiences’ assessments of his governing capacity and credibility. Moreover, when the policy provoked retaliatory actions from other countries or diplomatic responses from allies, these external feedback further reinforced or accelerated shifts in domestic public opinion.

The contribution of this study lies in integrating the economic performance effect and the political signaling effect within a unified analytical framework, thereby uncovering the dual mechanisms through which trade policy operates in both domestic politics and international strategic interaction. This analysis not only extends the application of economic voting theory into the realm of international political economy but also provides new insights into understanding the multifaceted political consequences of major trade policies. Future research could benefit from incorporating micro-level survey data to explore heterogeneity in information perception, economic expectations, and the interpretation of political signals across different groups, as well as investigating the persistence of such effects and conducting cross-national comparative analyses.

Nevertheless, this study is subject to certain limitations. Although multiple econometric models were employed to mitigate potential confounding factors, it is not possible to fully eliminate the influence of unobserved variables on approval rates. In addition, the analysis primarily focuses on short-term effects and therefore does not capture the potential long-term impacts of the policy on public support. Future research should extend the investigation to track the policy’s long-term effects and consider variations in approval rates across different economic cycles and policy contexts.

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