Wag the Dog Media: Does the President Distract the Public When Issuing Executive Orders?

An Exploratory Empirical Analysis

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Wag the Dog Media: Introduction

- Presidents strategically issue executive orders,
- They are likely to take public mood into consideration while issuing executive orders (Kaufman Rogowski, 2018),
- Two crucial factors in the timing of executive orders (Djourelova Durante, 2019):
  1. existing media preoccupation with scandalous or disastrous events so that public attention is distracted and
  2. whether the government is divided.

Wag the Dog Media: Introduction

- Djourelova and Durante (2019) also assert that it is also possible that *"presidents may proactively try to influence the media agenda through their actions or statements so as to 'create distracting news'"* and evade the public attention while issuing executive orders.
- In other words,
  1. Presidents prefer issuing executive orders when the public attention is diverted.
  2. If a given president has capabilities to set the agenda for the public and distract the media attention, then they would distract it when issuing orders.
  3. So one of the necessary (but not sufficient) conditions of agenda setting theory is that the communication of the President via media must be different at the times of executive orders compared to other times.
- Motivated by this suggestion, I conduct an exploratory empirical analysis to test this necessary condition.

Wag the Dog Media: Introduction

- More specifically, I test two hypotheses in my exploratory empirical analysis based on Twitter data.
- If the content of the tweets is different than the normal times, then the reactive statistics (likes and retweets) must be different than the usual times.
  - **Hypothesis 1:** *Holding others constant, the number of likes and retweets of the presidential tweets must be more at the times of executive orders than the monthly average.*
- For this theory to hold true, moreover, the sentiment of the presidential tweets at the time of executive orders must be more provoking (negative) than other times. Thus,
  - **Hypothesis 2:** *Holding others constant, the sentiment of the presidential tweets must be more negative at the times of executive orders than the monthly average.*

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Wag the Dog Media: Methodology

- To test these two hypotheses, I need to have data on presidential orders and presidential tweets.
- The presidential orders:
  - I collected all executive orders by web-scraping `https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu`.
  - I obtained all presidential order content, number, date, and url since President Donald Trump's presidency.
- The presidential tweets:
  - Because the tweet number of President Donald Trump is more than 20,000, I had to downloaded then from the website `http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/`.
  - Each tweet entry includes tweet content and statistics about tweet likes and retweets.

Wag the Dog Media: Methodology

Hypothesis 1: *Holding others constant, the number of likes and retweets of the presidential tweets must be more at the times of executive orders than the monthly average.*

- I created intervals of 3, 5, 7, 11, and 15 day around the issue dates of executive orders and featured each tweet with 1 if it is within these intervals and 0 otherwise.
- Given the fact that the number and retweets are considerably high, I also took logarithmic transformation of this statistics.
- Finally, I ran a basic linear analysis to test this hypothesis.

Wag the Dog Media: Methodology

Hypothesis 2: *Holding others constant, the sentiment of the presidential tweets must be more negative at the times of executive orders than the monthly average.*

- To test the second hypothesis, I trained a logistic regression to predict the sentiment labels by using a training and validation corpus composed of 10,000 tweets (5,000 positive and 5,000 negative - almost 99% accuracy).
- Then I used this predictor to estimate the sentiment of the presidential tweets that I preprocess (tokenization, removal of regular expressions, etc.)
- Finally, I ran a basic linear analysis to test this hypothesis.

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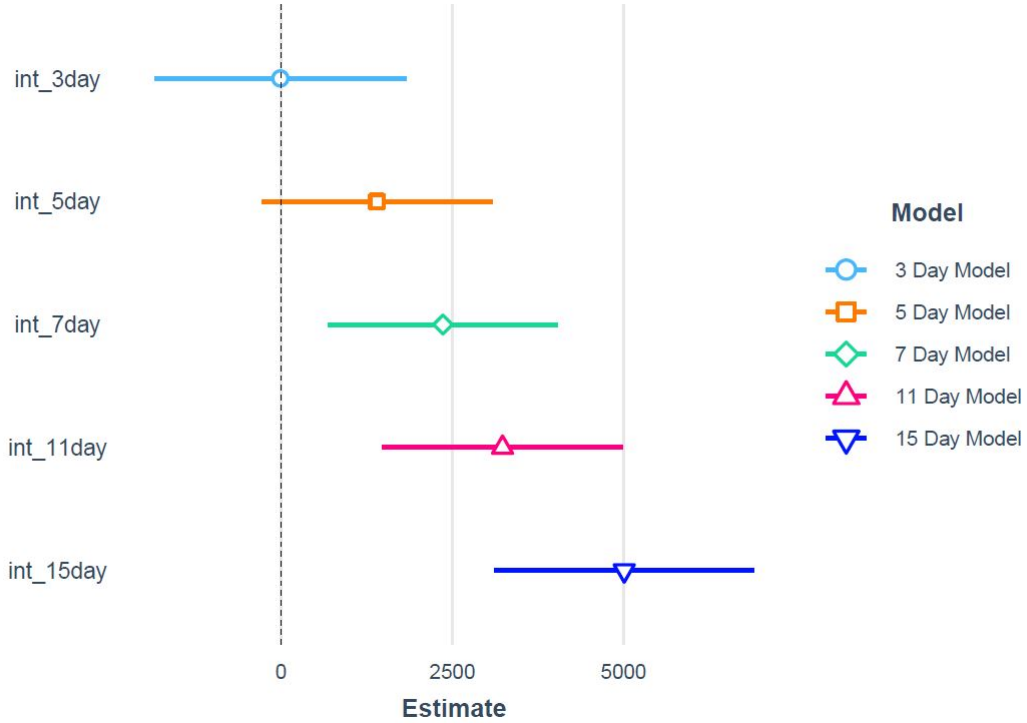
Wag the Dog Media: The Explanatory Empirical Analysis

Hypothesis 1a: *Holding others constant, the number of likes of the presidential tweets must be more at the times of executive orders than the monthly average.*

Hypothesis 1b: *Holding others constant, the number of retweets of the presidential tweets must be more at the times of executive orders than the monthly average.*

Wag the Dog Media: The Explanatory Empirical Analysis

Figure: DV = Number of Likes



Hypothesis 1a: *Holding others constant, the number of likes of the presidential tweets must be more at the times of executive orders than the monthly average.*

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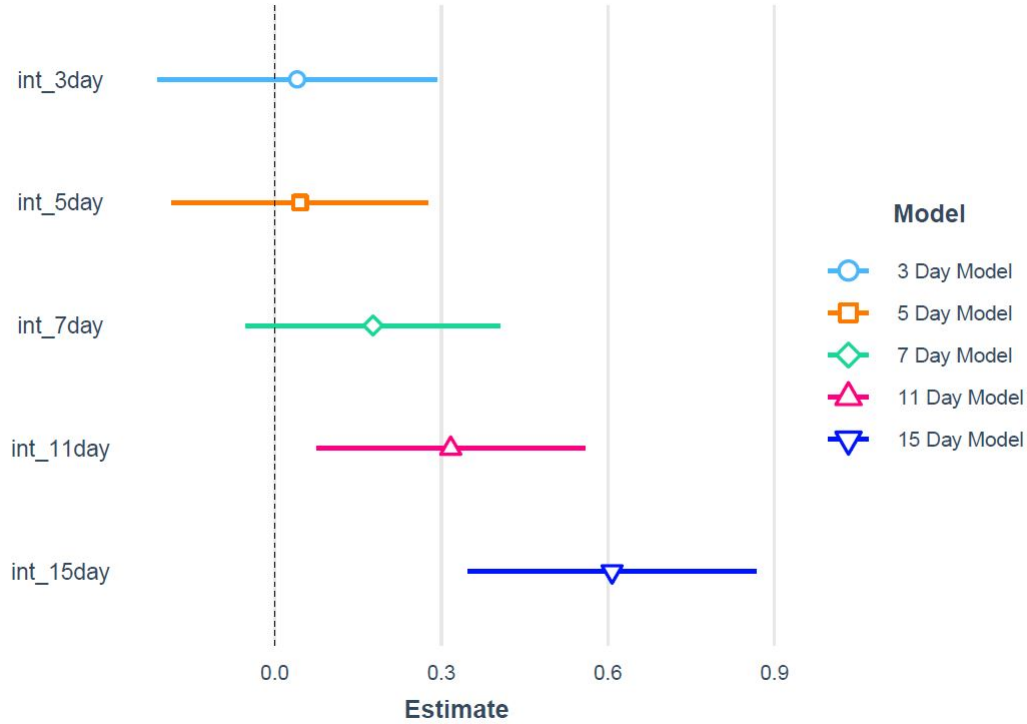
Wag the Dog Media: The Explanatory Empirical Analysis

Figure: DV = log(Number of Likes)



Hypothesis 1a: *Holding others constant, the number of likes of the presidential tweets must be more at the times of executive orders than the monthly average.*

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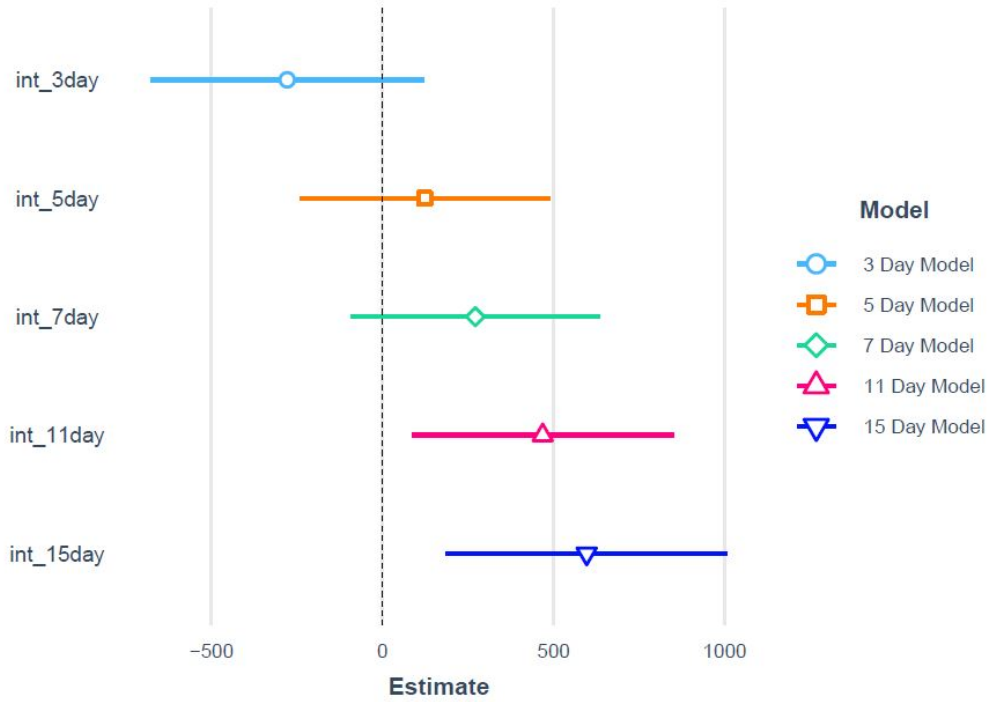
Wag the Dog Media: The Explanatory Empirical Analysis

Figure: DV = Number of Retweets



Hypothesis 1b: *Holding others constant, the number of retweets of the presidential tweets must be more at the times of executive orders than the monthly average.*

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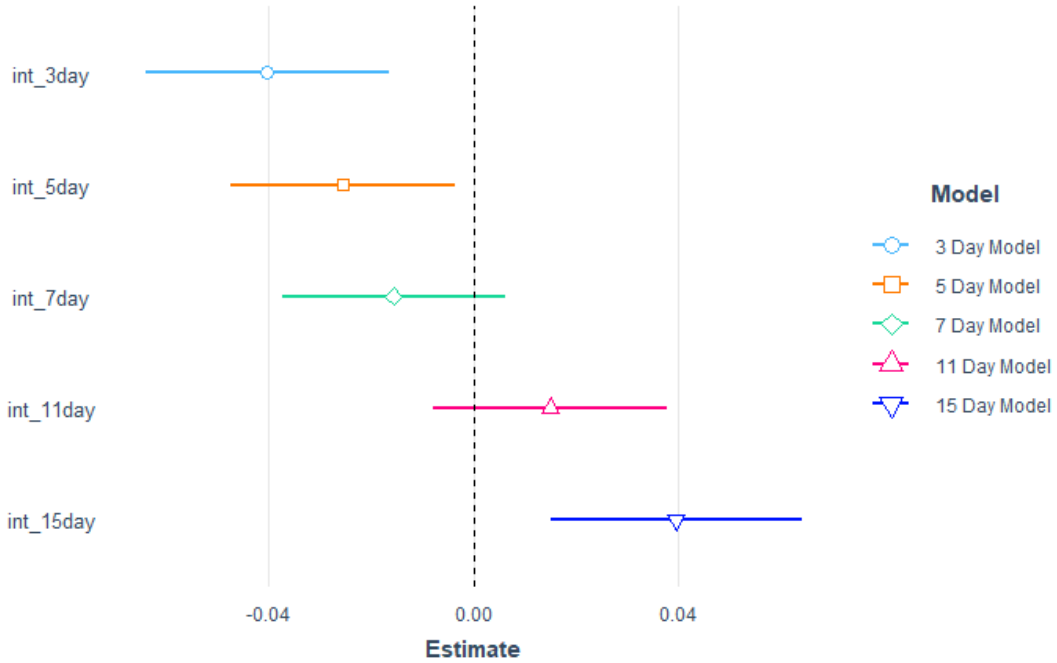
Wag the Dog Media: The Explanatory Empirical Analysis

Figure: DV = log(Number of Retweets)



Hypothesis 1b: *Holding others constant, the number of retweets of the presidential tweets must be more at the times of executive orders than the monthly average.*

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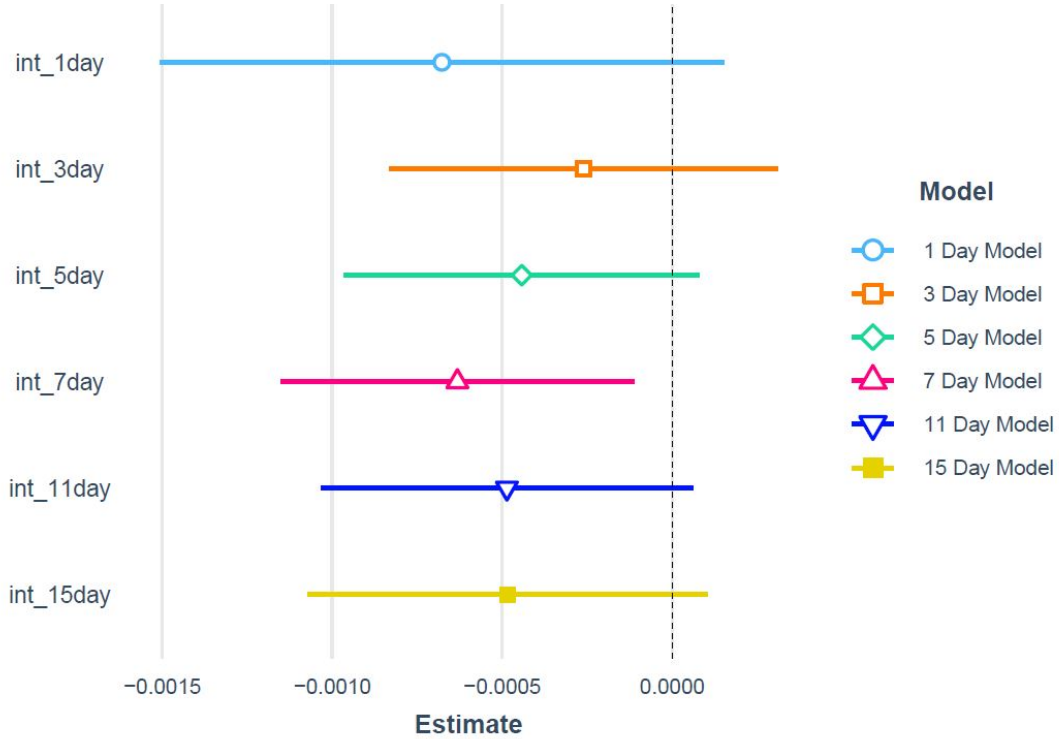
Wag the Dog Media: The Explanatory Empirical Analysis

Figure: DV = Sentiment Score



Hypothesis 2: *Holding others constant, the sentiment of the presidential tweets must be more negative at the times of executive orders than the monthly average.*

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Wag the Dog Media: Further Implications

- Further accuracy test for sentiment scores of the Trump tweets.
- Increasing the internal validity of the results through better identification strategy to capture rather causal relationship than the co-variate one.
- Increasing the external validity of the results through testing these hypothesis for the presidency of Barack Obama.