

# The Association between Disapproval of Supreme Court Actions and the Desire for a Strong President among Voters, Moderated by Perceptions on the Nation's General Condition



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## Introduction

- Increased support for a strong executive has been associated with perceptions of economic crises or inequality. When institutional trust is high in either of these circumstances, this effect becomes more pronounced (Russo et. al 2025; Sprong et al., 2019).
- Periods of perceived societal breakdown and institutional dysfunction such as excessive congressional gridlock are associated with increased support for strong executive leadership (Forteza et. al 2024).
- It is generally established in literature that voters view powerful presidents as a solution to poor national conditions, whether institutional or economic, especially amidst polarization (Forteza et. al 2024; Sprong et al. 2019; Russo et. al 2025).
- Increasing politicization and declining approval ratings of the Supreme Court present an opportunity to explore how voter evaluations of the Court may shape executive leadership preferences (Copeland 2024). There is currently a lack of research on this topic.
- Scholars generally agree that the Supreme Court has gradually been expanding presidential powers (Fisher 2017).

## Research Questions

- Are perceptions of the Supreme Court associated with preferences for a strong president?
- How do perceptions of the nation's general condition moderate the relationship between Supreme Court disapproval and support for strong presidential power?

## Methods

### Sample

- Data were drawn from the pre-election 2024 American National Election Studies (ANES), a nationally representative survey of U.S. eligible voters aged 18 and older across all 50 states and the District of Columbia (n=5,521).
- In-person, fresh web, and panel respondents were recruited, with compensation provided for completion (n=1,042 in-person; n=2,308 web; n=2,171 panel).

### Measures

- Supreme Court sentiment was assessed with the question: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way the Supreme Court has been handling its job?"
- Desire for a stronger executive was evaluated by combining two questions: 1) "Would it be helpful, harmful, or neither helpful nor harmful if U.S. presidents could work on the country's problems without paying attention to what Congress and the courts say?" 2) "How important is it that the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government keep one another from having too much power?"
- Discontent with the nation's general condition was also measured with two questions: 1) Economic evaluation ("Has the nation's economy gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse over the past year?") 2) Congressional approval ("Do you approve or disapprove of the way the U.S. Congress has been handling its job?")

## Results

### Univariate

- Approximately 65% of voters reported disapproving of the Supreme Court.
- Approximately 18% of voters desired a stronger president less impeded by other branches.

### Bivariate

- Chi-Square analysis showed that **those who disapproved of the Supreme Court were just as likely to desire a strong president (18.75%) as those who approved of the SCOTUS (18.98%). The test is not statistically significant,  $\chi^2=.043$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.836$ .** We fail to reject the null hypothesis that these variables are independent.

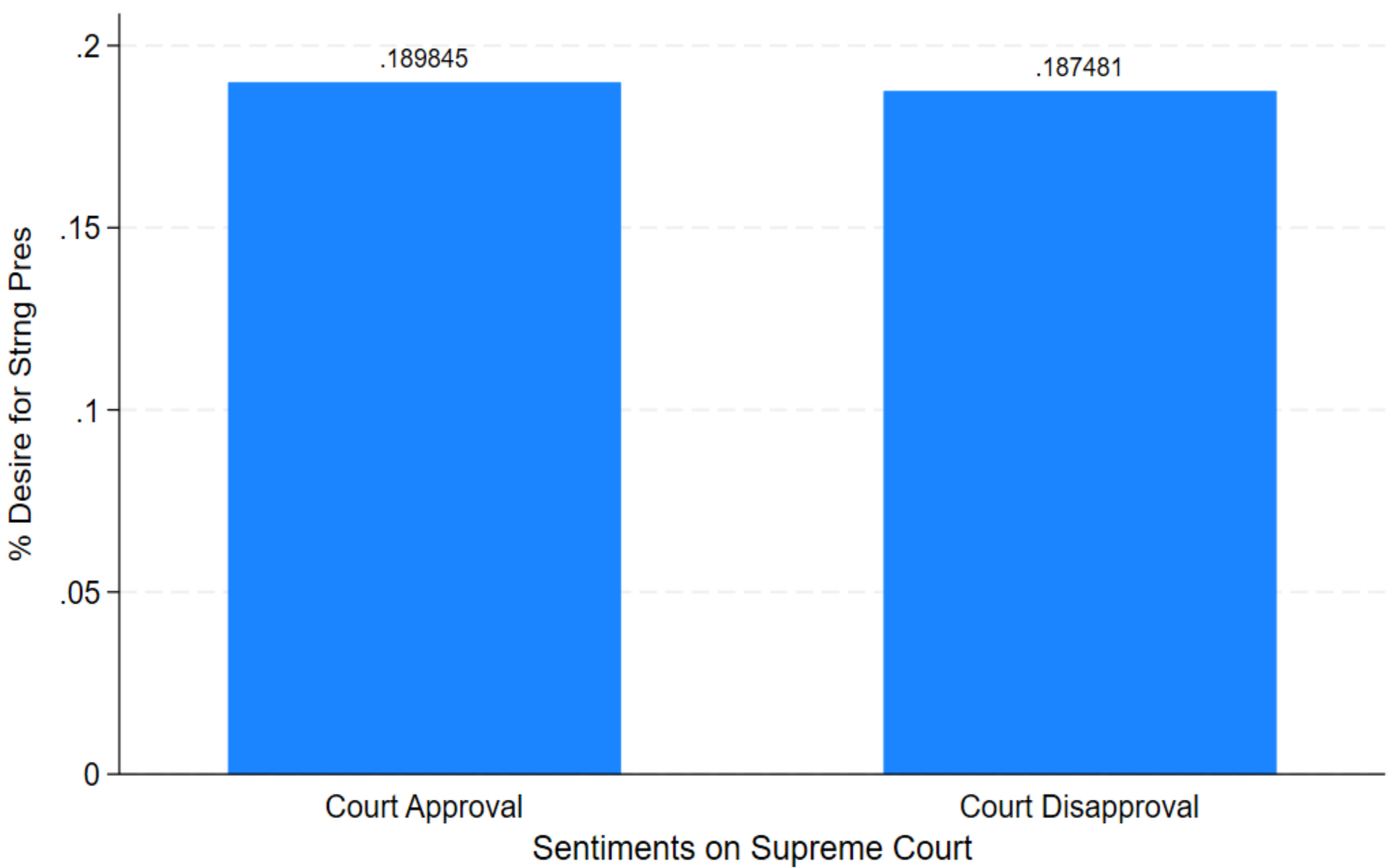


Figure 1. Desire for A strong President by Court Approval or Disapproval

### Multivariate (cont.)

- The **interaction between Supreme Court sentiments and perceptions of the national condition was statistically significant (OR=3.53, CI=2.1-5.7,  $p<0.001$ ).**
- The effect of Supreme Court distrust on support for a strong president differs sharply depending on whether voters view the national condition as healthy or unhealthy.

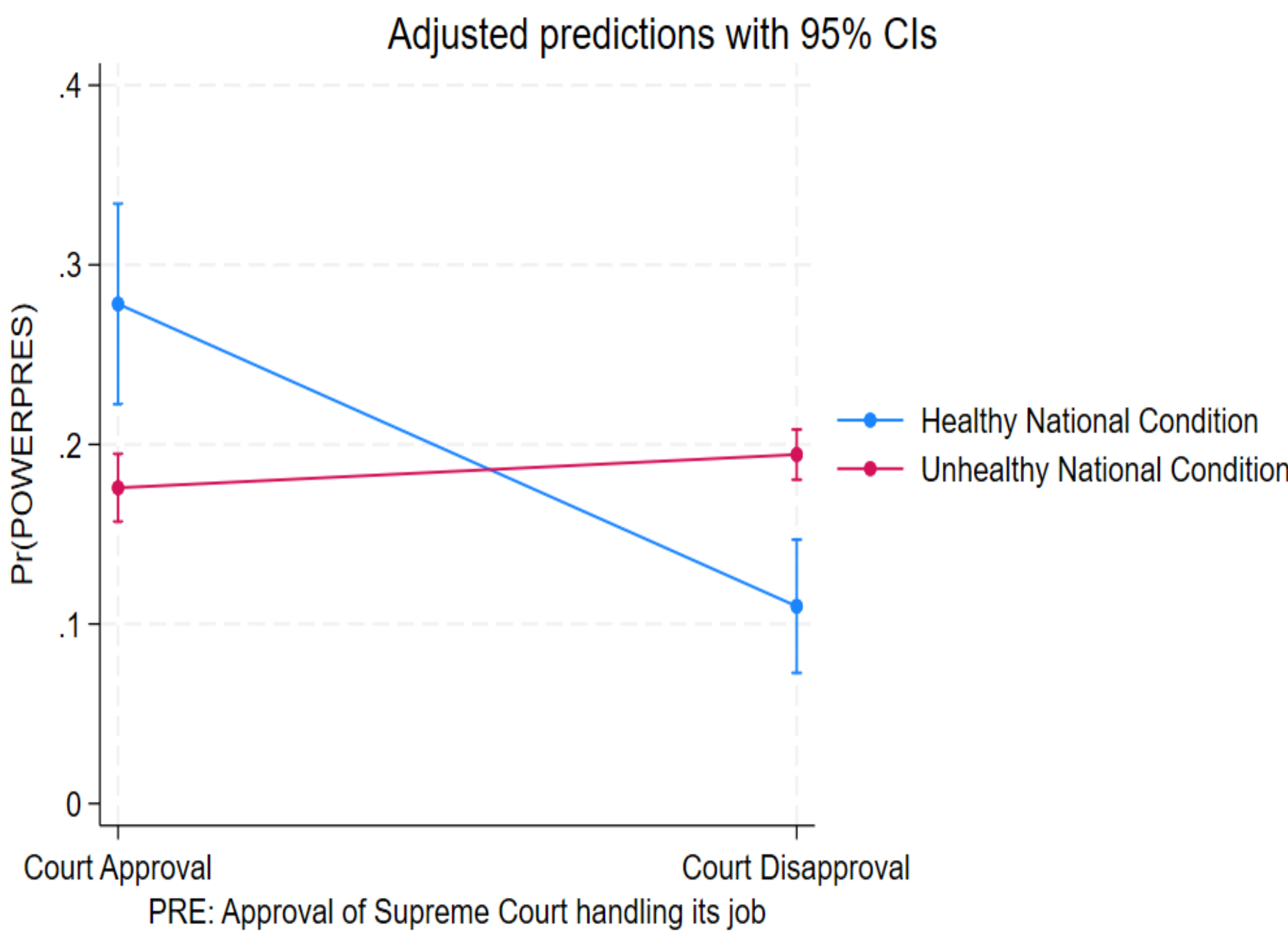


Figure 2: Desire for a Strong President by Court Approval or Disapproval, Separated by Perceptions of a Healthy or Unhealthy National Condition

## Discussion

- Without controlling for perceptions on the national condition, we observe a concretely non-significant relationship between Supreme Court sentiment and the desire for a strong executive.
- Those who perceive the nation as healthy and approve of the Supreme Court may be the most likely of all analyzed groups to support a strong executive.
- Conversely, those who perceive the nation is healthy but disapprove of the Supreme Court may be least likely to support a strong executive.
- For those who perceive the nation as unhealthy, Court disapproval slightly increases the desire for a strong president.

### Potential Areas for Error and Further Research

- The ANES survey had a low 5,521 sample size, with a degree of nonresponse for certain questions. Further research requires larger samples to solidify relationships.
- The measure for the general condition of the nation is broadly defined through two, although major, admittedly lacking questions. Further research requires a more accurate national condition measure.
- This study provides insight into voter decision-making but lacks depth into why voters feel compelled to their respective choices. A subsequent analysis of the underlying political psychology at play is necessary to interpret this study's results.

## References

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### Multivariate

- After controlling for perceptions of the national condition, **sentiments on the Supreme Court were found to have conditional effects on support for a strong executive depending on the national condition.**
- For those who believe that the nation is in a healthy general condition, court disapproval significantly decreases the desire for a strong president (27.8% -> 11%) (OR=.32,  $p<0.001$ )
- For those who believe that the nation is in an unhealthy general condition, court disapproval has slightly increases the desire for a strong president (17.6%->19.4%) (OR=1.13,  $p<0.001$ )