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► **To cite this version:**

Omer Faruk Metin, George Georganakis. Partisan Cues and Public Support for Democratic Norm Violations. 2023. hal-04248275

**HAL Id: hal-04248275**

**<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-04248275>**

Preprint submitted on 19 Oct 2023

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# Partisan Cues and Public Support for Democratic Norm Violations

Omer Faruk METIN<sup>†</sup>      George N. GEORGARAKIS<sup>§</sup>

Word Count:7646

October 11, 2023

## Abstract

Democratic norms are implicit guidelines governing acceptable behavior in politics and encompass unspoken principles and conventions that guide political behavior. These norms address a variety of key democratic facets, such as maintaining civility in party politics, recognizing election outcomes, or tolerating diverse viewpoints. In this experimental study, we explore the impact of partisan cues and party endorsements on public support for violations of democratic norms within selected policy areas in the United States. We found that out-party endorsement significantly reduces support for democratic norm violations regardless of policy issue. In contrast, partisans are relatively less responsive and tend to be more selective in increasing their support for norm violations when exposed to explicit endorsements from in-party elites and fellow partisans. Further, compared to less polarized individuals, partisans with higher level of affective polarization primarily care about out-party harm and in-party benefit. They are more willing to update their support for norm violations regardless whether the issues are proattitudinal or counterattitudinal. However, the party cue receptivity does not change across different levels of affective polarization. These findings underscore the importance of considering the multifaceted role of cue-taking and affective polarization in shaping attitudes toward democratic norms.

**Keywords:** democratic norms, party cues, affective polarization, American politics, public opinion

<sup>†</sup>This project was funded by the Polarization Research Lab, an interdisciplinary laboratory jointly established by the Stanford University, University of Pennsylvania, and Dartmouth College. The lab awards research grants through a blind peer-review process and based on the availability of survey space for selected applicants. The list of funded projects can be found on the lab's web page. Our data is freely accessible and can be retrieved from the following URL: [https://osf.io/92ucm?view\\_only=948b88d504144bffb4a511bcc670995b](https://osf.io/92ucm?view_only=948b88d504144bffb4a511bcc670995b). The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare. We are also grateful to Kevin Arceneaux, Romain Lachat, Bert Bakker, and Lou Safra who provided valuable discussions, critical insights, and constructive suggestions that greatly enriched the quality of this work.

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# 1 Introduction

In a democratic system, citizens have the power to vote out politicians who do not comply with the principles of democracy. However, the erosion of commitment to democratic norms at various levels of politics jeopardizes the strength and effectiveness of democratic institutions and, eventually, may lead to democratic backsliding (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2019, Mechkova et al., 2017). To gauge the state of democracies, political scientists use public opinion as a proxy for the way citizens perceive core democratic values. When addressing their commitment to safeguarding democratic values and standards, voters frequently encounter a dilemma where they must decide between two legitimate but potentially contradictory considerations: upholding democratic norms and principles *versus* prioritizing partisan interests (Svolik, 2019). Acknowledging the strong presence of the supply side in politics, how citizens interact with party politics becomes key to understanding the state of our democracies.

Political parties have long been described as collective entities that allow individuals to establish varying degrees of negative or positive identification (Campbell et al., 1960). Lately, partisanship in the United States has undergone a significant transformation, with American voters who align themselves with either the Republican or the Democratic Party showing a growing tendency to hold more negative perceptions of the opposing party (Iyengar, 2019, Iyengar et al., 2012). This shift signified a departure from previously moderate levels of mutual understanding, led to an intensified feeling of animosity. As a result of this transformation, the United States witnessed the swiftest surge in affective polarization among other high-income OECD countries in the past half-century (Boxell et al., 2022).

The increasing affective polarization is a matter of significant concern in tandem, primarily due to the potential and disruptive adverse effects it may have on democratic

societies. After the presidency of Donald Trump, this trend started to signify a deepening divergence in the perception of political reality and facts ([Arceneaux and Truex, 2022](#), [Pennycook and Rand, 2021](#)). President Trump’s circulation of conspiracy theories encompassing a range of social challenges, his failure to repudiate hate groups or his regular attacks against corporate media and mainstream news served as the symbol of the advance of a deep-seated skepticism towards representative bodies (e.g. [Hellinger, 2018](#), [Pirro and Taggart, 2023](#)). Over the period, the divide in assessments of democratic standards between the two camps expanded further ([Carey et al., 2019](#)). Despite similarities in line with global democratic decline trends, the United States represented a notable exception during this period. Various measurements showed that, for the last couple of decades, over two dozen countries across the world have encountered democratic backsliding. Well-established peer democracies, like those in Canada, Northern, Western, and Southern Europe, and East Asia have remained largely unaffected by this trend, with the United States being a major exception ([Carothers and Press, 2022](#)).

Given these unfolding trends, this experimental study explores how partisan signals affect public support for violations of democratic norms within selected policy areas in the United States. Earlier studies indicated that cues from party elites can undermine support for key democratic norms ([Clayton et al., 2020](#), [Gidengil et al., 2022](#), [Kingzette et al., 2021](#)). Nonetheless, we argue that there should be a distinction between supporting democratic norms and supporting the violation of democratic norms, and these should be investigated as separate entities. To understand the nature and dynamics of public support for democratic norm violations, we experimentally manipulate different policy issues with proattitudinal and counterattitudinal issue positions along with cues from both in-party and out-party sources.

The other aim of this study is to determine whether partisans with high levels of

affective polarization are more receptive to party cues and more inclined to support democratic norm violations when compared to voters with lower levels of polarization. Experimental studies exploring the impact of affective polarization on public support for democratic norms presented a mixed picture. [Westwood et al. \(2019\)](#) demonstrated that although higher affective polarization leads voters to support the corruption investigations against the out-party, it does not necessarily increase support for the use of tear gas against protesters from the other side. Similarly, implications of individual-level affective polarization are primarily limited to interpersonal relationships and do not translate into wide-scale behavioral changes concerning the support for upholding democratic norms ([Broockman et al., 2022](#)). This study aims to assess the degree to which affectively polarized party supporters are receptive to party cues and party endorsements in the context of democratic norm violations across diverse policy issues.

In this article, we aim to address two important gaps in the current literature on democratic norm violation. First, previous studies have not sufficiently clarified to what extent partisan endorsement can sway the level of support among affectively polarized voters for extreme measures that curtail the democratic rights of out-party members. We believe that the role of partisan affective polarization in political decision-making is not fully understood within the realm of American politics. Thus, our objective is to shed light on the receptivity of partisan cues concerning unjust and undemocratic practices. Second, despite a growing body of literature on affective polarization, a significant gap remains in understanding whether affectively polarized individuals distinguish between different sources of partisan cues. To bridge this gap, our study differentiates between cues originating from party elites and those from ordinary partisans while examining the receptivity of partisan cues.

## 2 Partisan Cues and Affective Polarization

Establishing the relationship between levels of partisan animosity and issue positions poses a challenging task due to the inherent endogeneity between policy beliefs, affective polarization, and elite issue positions. This endogeneity implies that it remains uncertain whether policy beliefs shape the levels of affective polarization or vice versa, making it difficult to untangle the actual relationship between identity and decision-making (Druckman et al., 2021). The other component of this complexity is the presence of what is called the omitted variable bias, where affect summarizes other factors, and individuals with varying levels of affective polarization may differ in other ways, complicating comparisons between them (Broockman et al., 2022).

Although we lack a concrete roadmap to explain the underlying mechanism between issue preferences, partisanship, and affective polarization, recent scholarship has converged around two main perspectives (e.g. Cohen, 2003, Lelkes, 2021). The “policy-over-party hypothesis” argues that affective polarization primarily reflects the growing divergence in policy preferences between the two major political parties. According to this view, voters are affectively polarized because politicians and their supporters have become more extreme in their issue positions (Webster and Abramowitz, 2017), creating a larger divide between the parties. Alignment of policy issues with longstanding ideological lines explains growing out-party dislike, and it is “neither mediated nor moderated by partisan identity” (Bougher, 2017, p.737). In contrast, the “party-over-policy hypothesis” suggests that affective polarization is driven by a psychological tendency to dislike social out-groups, rather than specific policy disagreements (Mason, 2018). Rooted in theories of social identity, this approach assumes voters’ partisan identities become an important part of their self-concept, and they are more likely to dislike and distrust those who belong to the other party simply be-

cause they are perceived as being different. This gradual shift in citizens' perceptions is a result of a decline in cross-cutting social identities across two camps in American politics (Mason, 2015, 2018). Numerous experimental studies have demonstrated that the degree of partisanship and ideological sorting better predicts affective polarization than policy preferences (Dias and Lelkes, 2022, Huddy et al., 2015, Lelkes, 2018).

While explaining the influence of negative partisanship on political behaviour, expressive partisan identity perspective (for a review, see Bakker et al., 2020) on cue taking emphasizes the role of identity-protective motivations. People use heuristic devices to process information, simplify political choices and guide their decisions when faced with limited information (Carpini and Keeter, 1996, Lupia and McCubbins, 1998, Popkin, 1991). These heuristics and information shortcuts often rely on assumptions that are deeply ingrained in our cognitive processes. When forming judgments, especially in highly partisan environments, individuals rely on these assumptions that are just as likely to mislead voters about optimal or reasonable alternatives (Cohen, 2003, Kuklinski and Quirk, 2000, Lau and Redlawsk, 2001). In a study on voting behavior in insurance reform elections, Lupia (1994) found that information shortcuts enabled poorly informed voters to mimic the behavior of relatively well-informed voters.

An illustrative example of informational shortcuts in political science pertains to the party cues. In contrast to the theoretical account of "bounded rationality" (Simon, 1972) where individuals adopt political positions congruent with their values and interests to reduce effort, the partisan social identity perspective explains cue receptivity with the protection of social identities (Groenendyk, 2013, Lodge and Taber, 2013). Although public opinion studies have acknowledged the central role of party cues and party endorsements<sup>1</sup> in opinion formation, there remains a notable gap in understanding interactions between different frames and cues. As Bullock (2011)

aptly observes, “in political debate, cues and frames almost always appear together: Party elites rarely take a position without trying to frame it in a way that will garner support for it” (p. 511). Studies showed that party cues are influential, yet partisans also tend to be influenced by the exposure to content (i.e. policy issue) (Arceneaux, 2008, Bullock, 2011, Druckman et al., 2010). This relationship is moderated by the nature of partisanship and polarization. Druckman et al. (2013) showed that as elite polarization intensifies, partisan cues diminish the effect of substantive information and increase confidence in “less substantively grounded—opinions”.

### 3 Hypotheses

Our first hypothesis pertains to party cue receptivity and its influence on public support for democratic norm violations. We expect that affective polarization causes a perceptual gap between partisans with high and low level of affective polarization in the reception of party cues. Previous interventions have been proposed to address affective polarization and its potential consequences. Scholars used interventions such as correcting meta-perceptions (Landry et al., 2023, Lees, 2022, Mernyk et al., 2022), promoting inter-partisan friendships (Wojcieszak and Warner, 2020), and facilitating cross-partisan interactions between political leaders (Huddy and Yair, 2021). While some of these interventions have shown promise in reducing affective polarization, it remains unclear whether they serve to mitigate anti-democratic attitudes or simply change sentiments towards out-partisans. Theoretical accounts, along with a substantial body of experimental studies, suggest that partisans are strongly influenced by cues coming from political parties. The heightened affective polarization has expanded the influence of partisan cues by shaping nonpolitical judgments (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015), distorting perceptions about the economy (Bisgaard and



Slothuus, 2018), influencing jobs hiring (Gift and Gift, 2015) and changing public acceptance of court decisions (Nicholson and Hansford, 2014, Strother and Gadarian, 2022). In parallel, personality traits and the degree of cognitive effort constitute key factors contributing to individual-level differences in cue responsiveness. Arceneaux and Vander Wielen (2017) found that individuals who are less inclined to engage in effortful thinking were more likely to follow cues, particularly if they were susceptible to emotional pressure to support their in-party. In light of this gap in the relevant literature, we are putting forward the following hypotheses:

**Partisan Footsteps Hypothesis (H1):** (a) Both Democrats and Republicans will follow in-party cues received from co-partisans and party elites when it comes to democratic norm violation. (b) Cue receptivity will be higher among affectively polarized individuals.

Our initial hypothesis posits that supporters of both parties will follow in their co-partisan's footsteps when they report their support for democratic norm violation. When exposed to in-party statements endorsing the violation of democratic norms in contested policy areas, they will follow the message and will update their stance toward the direction of the party line. At the same time, we argue that partisan source cues contribute to the reinforcement of polarized social identities, which, arguably, lead affectively polarized individuals to exhibit even stronger support for democratic norm violations.

**Out-party Watchdog Hypothesis (H2):** When exposed to out-party messages, (a) respondents will update their views in the opposite direction of the message. (b) This change will be higher for affectively polarized participants.

In the second set of hypotheses, we trace the participants' attitudinal change when exposed to out-party messages. To test whether participants will change their views in line with expectations from motivated reasoning (Lodge and Taber, 2013, Taber and Lodge, 2006) or parallel updating (Coppock, 2023, Page and Shapiro, 2010). Hypothesis 2 (**H2**) will test whether Democrats/Republicans will:

1. Update their opinions in line with elite endorsement (Bayesian Updating) OR
2. Update their opinions in the opposite direction of elite endorsement (Motivated Reasoning-Backlash Effect) OR
3. Do not update their opinions at all (Conditional Bayesian Updating).

Contrary to the first hypothesis, we expect that out-party messages will significantly motivate affectively polarised partisans in the opposite direction on both sides. As the level of affective polarization increases, citizens' response to compliance with democratic norms will increase as the democratic norm violation comes from the out-party. One of the most fundamental differences between motivated reasoning and Bayesian updating relates to the motivations that underlie attitude change, its expected direction, and heterogeneity. On the one hand, theories of motivated reasoning posit that, when exposed to novel information, citizens are directionally motivated to confirm their preexisting beliefs (Kunda, 1987, 1990). Individuals aligned with a particular political party tend to perceive out-party framing as less superior in effectiveness when compared to the framings from in-party sources. On the other hand, parallel updating, as described in "the parallel publics thesis" (Coppock, 2023, Page and Shapiro, 1993) and the Bayesian Learning Model, proposes that citizens are motivated to be accurate and update their opinions in a reasonable fashion when they encounter messages from credible sources. What makes it hard to test the validity of each theory is that citizens tend to find credible sources with whom they share common values and identities (Druckman and McGrath, 2019). Drawing on the motivated

reasoning approach, we also argue in the second hypothesis that affective polarization will undermine the significance and value of upholding democratic norms by making party identity more important than protecting democratic standards. In a highly polarized political environment, we are expecting that voters "act as partisans first and democrats only second" ([Graham and Svobik, 2020](#), p.392).

**Elites-over-Voters Hypothesis (H3):** In the context of addressing questions about the violation of democratic norms, (a) both Republicans and Democrats exhibit a stronger inclination to follow the cues given by their party's political elites compared to the messages coming from in-party ordinary partisans. (b) The difference will be higher among supporters who exhibit strong affective polarization.

Partisan elite cues offer a heuristic to guide individual behaviors ([Arceneaux, 2008](#), [Bullock, 2011](#), [Nicholson and Hansford, 2014](#)). As highlighted by [Lau and Redlawsk \(2001\)](#), elite endorsements hold a distinct heuristic significance, allowing individuals to efficiently infer their own preferences based on the endorsements of influential figures (p.953). This cognitive shortcut simplifies the decision-making process, reducing the need for extensive information processing. Furthermore, studies showed that exposure to messages emanating from out-partisan elite sources can exacerbate ideological polarization among voters ([Bäck et al., 2023](#), [Nicholson, 2012](#)). The literature underscores the strength of elite messaging in shaping partisan attitudes and behavior. Despite these findings, it is worth noting that the current body of research exhibits a notable neglect of whether polarized partisans differentiate the source between political elites and ordinary voters.

## 4 Research Design, Data, and Method

### 4.1 Procedure and Participants

To explore the relationship between affective polarization, cue-taking, and democratic norm violations, we carried out an online survey experiment with respondents recruited by YouGov, a leading polling company.<sup>2</sup> The experiment was fielded to a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults (18 and over) living in the United States. The collected data is sourced from a unique survey acquired through collaboration with the Polarization Research Lab at the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>3</sup> Data collection was completed during March and April 2023 in accordance with the Polarization Research Lab’s data collection standards and timetable.

Before participating in the study, subjects were briefed about the study’s nature and gave their consent. They first answered questions to America’s Political Pulse demographic panel and survey questions (see [Iyengar et al., 2023](#)) collected weekly by the Polarization Research Lab.<sup>4</sup> Table 1 and Table 2 in the Online Appendix present core panel variables and regular survey items. After answering America’s Political Pulse survey questions, participants were randomly assigned to experimental groups. Details about the characteristics of our sample and questionnaire are provided in the Online Appendix.

### 4.2 Treatments

In the survey experiment part, we employed a randomized block design. Participants were randomly divided into six different groups. In each of these six groups, participants were asked to answer whether they agree or disagree with five different democratic norm violations pertaining to selected policy issues: same-sex marriage, taxation, media censorship, immigration, and universal healthcare. The experiment em-

employs two control groups with panelists who were not exposed to any lead paragraph or party cues prior to the questions. However, one group was presented with a democratic norm violation that would likely benefit Republicans/Conservatives whereas the other group saw a democratic norm violation that likely benefit Democrats/Liberals. To clarify, subjects within the control groups were not exposed to any articles or party cues; instead, they were presented with questions that measured their support for democratic norm violations in the selected policy domains.

The four remaining treatment groups were instructed to peruse a lead paragraph preceding each question. These lead paragraphs included statements made by either party elites or ordinary party supporters who endorse norm violations. After reading each lead, panelists were queried about their agreement or disagreement with the breach of democratic norms, a stance that was also supported by statements from party elites or ordinary voters in the given lead paragraph. The first two treatment groups were primed with the Republican Party by highlighting either politicians' or party voters' endorsement of democratic norm violation within a given policy issue. As previously mentioned, the partisan cues were manipulated using either of two political actors: **[1]** high-ranking party elites or **[2]** ordinary voters affiliated with the party. The remaining two groups include lead paragraphs that featured statements from individuals affiliated with the Democratic party. Similar to the first two groups, one group saw a statement made by party elites while the other was tasked with reading statements from regular party supporters.

To enhance the authenticity of the experimental treatments, accompanying political images were introduced alongside the survey questions. Specifically, participants in the treatment groups were exposed to distinct political images that corresponded to their assigned conditions. For instance, participants in group Treatment-1 (see Table 1 below) were presented with an image of Donald Trump, while those in

group Treatment-2 were provided with a photograph of Joe Biden. The photographs chosen for this study were carefully selected to maintain a close resemblance to one another, featuring the American flag in comparable postures and angles. Meanwhile, participants in groups exposed to cues from regular voters were shown images of supporters gathered at rallies either for Donald Trump or Joe Biden. In the control groups, questions were accompanied by an image of Capitol Hill to ensure a consistent baseline. For a comprehensive overview of the experimental groups, please refer to Table 1. Further details, including complete transcripts of question wordings, lead paragraphs, and accompanying photographs, can be accessed in the Online Appendix within the "Questions and Materials for Experimental Study" section.

Table 1. Summary Table - Experimental Groups.

Groups	Party Cue	Political Actor Cue	Lead Paragraph	Leaning Policy
Control-1	No Party Cue	No Actor Cue	No	Conservative Leaning
Control-2	No Party Cue	No Actor Cue	No	Liberal Leaning
Treatment-1	Republican Cue	Party Elites	Yes	Conservative Leaning
Treatment-2	Democratic Cue	Party Elites	Yes	Liberal Leaning
Treatment-3	Republican Cue	Ordinary Voter	Yes	Conservative Leaning
Treatment-4	Democratic Cue	Ordinary Voter	Yes	Liberal Leaning

### 4.3 Measurements

The outcome of the main interest is the assessment of individual support for democratic norm violations across five distinct policy issues. Norms, which are implicit guidelines governing acceptable behavior in a given context (Chung and Rimal, 2016), play a vital role in shaping interactions. Democratic norms, in a broader sense, encompass unspoken principles and conventions that guide political behavior. The recent scholarly discussions surrounding the violation of democratic norms within the American political landscape have predominantly revolved around President Trump's norm-defying actions throughout his presidency and electoral campaigns (Arceneaux

and Truex, 2022, Carey et al., 2022, Clayton et al., 2020, Helmke and Ozturk, 2020, Whitt et al., 2021). To measure the support for democratic norm violations, we employed vignettes sourced from Iyengar et al. (2023). These vignettes prompted participants to express their opinions on specific scenarios involving breaches of democratic norms. From their questionnaire, we selected three types of democratic norm violation, namely: ignoring out-party judges, circumventing out-party-controlled congress with executive orders, and censoring media that critique the in-party more than the out-party.<sup>5</sup> At first, we asked participants whether they agree or disagree with democratic norm violation *in principle*. For example, we presented Democrats with a question like "Do you agree or disagree with the following: The government should be able to censor media sources that spend more time attacking Democrats than Republicans?". Later in the survey, these inquiries were contextualized and rephrased, which led participants to express agreement or disagreement with statements such as "Should the government contest Fox News' broadcasting license?".

In the experimental part of the survey, participants received statements from political actors who demonstrated their public support for these democratic violations targeting certain policies. After reading the lead paragraph, the respondents were asked to choose their level of support for the norm violation. The answer will be on a five-item Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The detailed questionnaire can be found in the Online Appendix. In the leads, actors endorse democratic norm violations in the context of different policy issues. We have chosen policy debates about two economic issues (taxation and universal healthcare), two social issues (same-sex marriage and immigration), and one media censorship. While selecting these issues, we used Google News search to find instances in which party elites either violated democratic norms or endorsed the potential norm violations. We also ensured that these policy positions align with the existing party divisions among

party supporters, as documented in Pew Research Center reports (please see. Table 11 in the Online Appendix). The news items and detailed explanation of the case selections are provided in the Online Appendix.

For measuring affective polarization, we employed the use of feeling thermometer ratings, which refer to the degree of negative or positive emotional intensity that individuals hold towards a political party (see. [Lelkes and Westwood, 2017](#)). Using the same approach, we calculated the level of affective polarization by subtracting the out-party thermometer rating from the in-party thermometer rating. We implemented a 0-100 scale, where 0 represents very cold feelings and 100 signifies a high degree of warm feelings.

#### **4.4 Statistical analysis**

The main estimands of interest are the Average Treatment Effect (ATE) and the Conditional Average Treatment Effect (CATE). The ATE is the difference between the average outcome for all subjects in the control group and the average outcome for all subjects assigned to each treatment group. We estimate the ATE with OLS estimators. We estimate the ATE with multivariate OLS regressions by adjusting for pre-treatment covariates, i.e. sex, race, education, ideology, place of residence, household income, and religiosity. Moreover, to explore variability in treatment effects, we also estimate the Conditional Average Treatment Effect (CATE), which is the ATE for different subgroups. The CATE is obtained by including a treatment-by-covariate interaction in the multivariate OLS estimators to account for the conditional effects of partisan identity and the degree of affective polarization.

To test our hypotheses, we will examine them using the following linear regression model:



$$\begin{aligned}
Y_{ij}^* = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 PRO \times [AP + Party] + \beta_2 IPC \times [AP + Party] + \beta_3 OPC \times [AP + Party] + \\
& + \beta_4 [PRO \times AP \times Party] + \beta_5 [IPC \times AP \times Party] + \beta_6 [OPC \times AP \times Party] + \\
& + \beta_7 [AP \times Party] + \epsilon
\end{aligned}
\tag{1}$$

$Y_{ij}$  = Support for democratic norm violation.

$PRO$  = Exposure to proattitudinal policy issue.

$IPC$  = Exposure to proattitudinal policy issue with in-party cue.

$OPC$  = Exposure to counterattitudinal policy issue with out-party cue.

$AP$  = Level of affective polarization of individual.

$Party$  = Party Identity.

$\beta_0$  represents the baseline level of democratic norm violation for the group receiving a counter-attitudinal group without a party cue. Finally,  $\beta_7$  is the coefficient for adjusting for pretreatment affective polarization and party identity as well as their product, and therefore has no causal interpretation.

In the statistical model, we decided to reduce treatment groups into two by merging Treatment Group-1 and Treatment Group-3, as well as Treatment Group-2 and Treatment Group-4. Difference-in-means estimates showed us that respondents do not differentiate party cues coming from ordinary voters versus party elites, contradicting our third hypothesis. When analyzing all questions related to the dependent variable, we found no significant difference between the treatment groups exposed to elite cues and those exposed to ordinary voter cues. A detailed explanation of balance tests is provided in Chapter 7 of the Online Appendix.

## 5 Results

### 5.1 Partisan Cue Receptivity

Figure 1 shows the contrast in overall support for violations of democratic norms between the conditions of exposure to in-party and out-party cues, in comparison to the control groups. The bars with a solid black color represent the coefficient estimates for the groups that received proattitudinal policy issues without party cues (control) and with party cues (treatment). Conversely, the gray-shaded bars provide correlation coefficients between groups that received counterattitudinal policy issues without party cues (control) and with party cues (treatment). Table 9 in the Online Appendix presents the regression model underlying Figure 1.

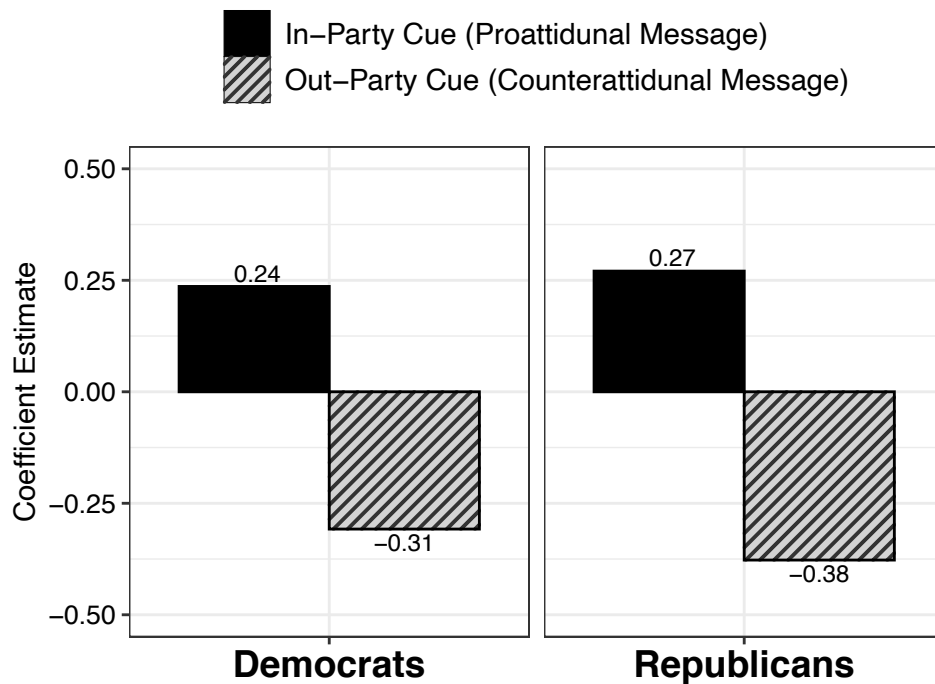


Figure 1. **Party Cue Treatment Effect on Support for Democratic Norm Violation** : The figure displays coefficient estimates from an ordinary least squares model. Bar charts represent linear regression coefficients for both Democrat (left) and Republican (right) participants separately.

Figure 1 demonstrates that concerning the support for democratic norms, exposure to out-party cues appears to have a more pronounced effect in changing preferences in favor of measures that run counter to democratic norms than in-party cues. Upon receiving out-party cues, participants who were exposed to counterattitudinal policy issues showed a greater tendency to withdraw their support for democratic norm violations ( $b = -0.308$ ,  $se = 0.12$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). While Republicans support counterattitudinal policy issues significantly less ( $b = -0.452$ ,  $se = 0.14$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), we did not observe a significant difference between Republican and Democratic Party supporters in terms of cue receptivity for in-party and out-party cues ( $b = 0.034$ ,  $se = 0.18$ ,  $p = 0.85$  and  $b = -0.07$ ,  $se = 0.18$ ,  $p = 0.70$ , respectively). The estimated values for each sub-group can be found in Figure 2.

Overall, these findings provide support for Hypothesis 2a, which suggested that partisans exhibit a greater willingness to withdraw support in response to violations of democratic norms when they receive messages associated with out-party cues. In previous studies, supporters of parties in opposition showed lower levels of support for norm violations, particularly those involving the extension of the power of executive authority or the disproportionate use of violence (Gidengil et al., 2022, Graham and Svulik, 2020). As Kingzette et al. (2021) pointed out, partisans tend to oppose upholding key constitutional protections when their party is in power; however, they endorse these protections when their party becomes the opposition, often facilitated by a cue-taking mechanism. Our findings align with and further reinforce this argument. The survey was conducted during a period when the Republican Party was in the opposition, and our results show that Republicans were notably less inclined to endorse norm violations compared to Democrats in both cases. Figure 2 provides supporting evidence, confirming that, in response to both proattitudinal and counterattitudinal cues, Republicans consistently displayed lower support for violations of

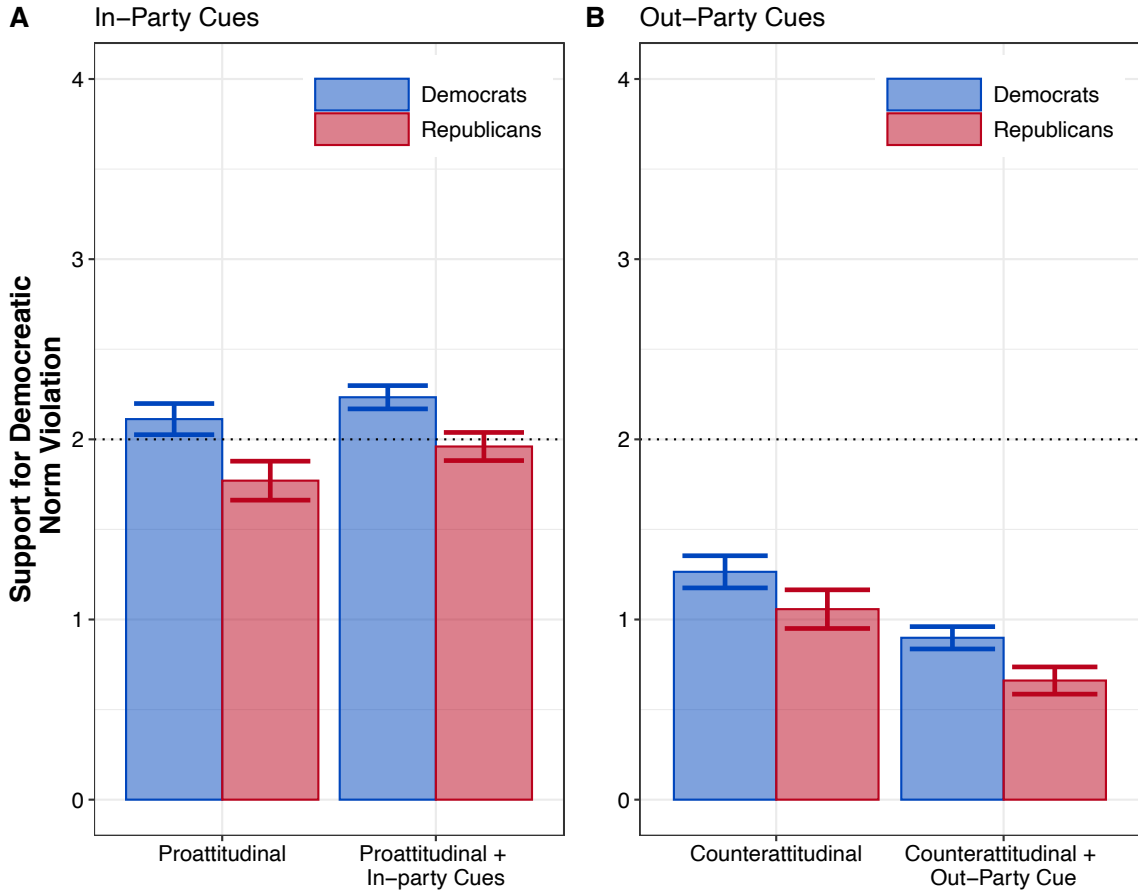


Figure 2. **In-Party and Out-Party Cues on Support for Democratic Norm Violation** : The figure above shows two-way interactions from an ordinary least squares model. Bar charts represent estimated values for both Democrat (left) and Republican (right) participants separately.

democratic norms.

Unlike the group receiving out-party cues with counterattitudinal issue, the effects were notably weaker for participants who received in-party cues when policy positions were proattitudinal. As showed in [1](#), explicit in-party endorsement of democratic norm violations did not lead to a significant increase in public support for these violations ( $b = 0.24$ ,  $se = 0.12$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ). We observed a consistent pattern of small and statistically insignificant effects on each norm violation outcome. This finding does not fully align with our initial expectation as articulated in Hypothesis 1a.

One possible explanation could be that party supporters tend to be more willing to adjust their support to democratic norm violations when the violation originates from the out-party and is counterattitudinal, compared to situations where they are exposed to in-party support for anti-democratic attitudes. As a result, party cue treatments did not have a substantial effect on increasing individual-level support for the violation of democratic norms.

Alternatively, another line of reasoning contends that the variation in the issues presented in the experiment may have contributed to a diminishing treatment effect. To delve into this alternative explanation, we present [Figure 3](#) illustrating differences for each issue and each group of party supporters. The figure shows that Americans are highly responsive to cues from the opposing party across different categories of norm violations and policy subjects. Notably, their support for norm violations in counterattitudinal issues with out-party cues is consistently significantly lower. In contrast, respondents exhibit a more selective increase in their support for democratic norm violations when exposed to in-party cues.

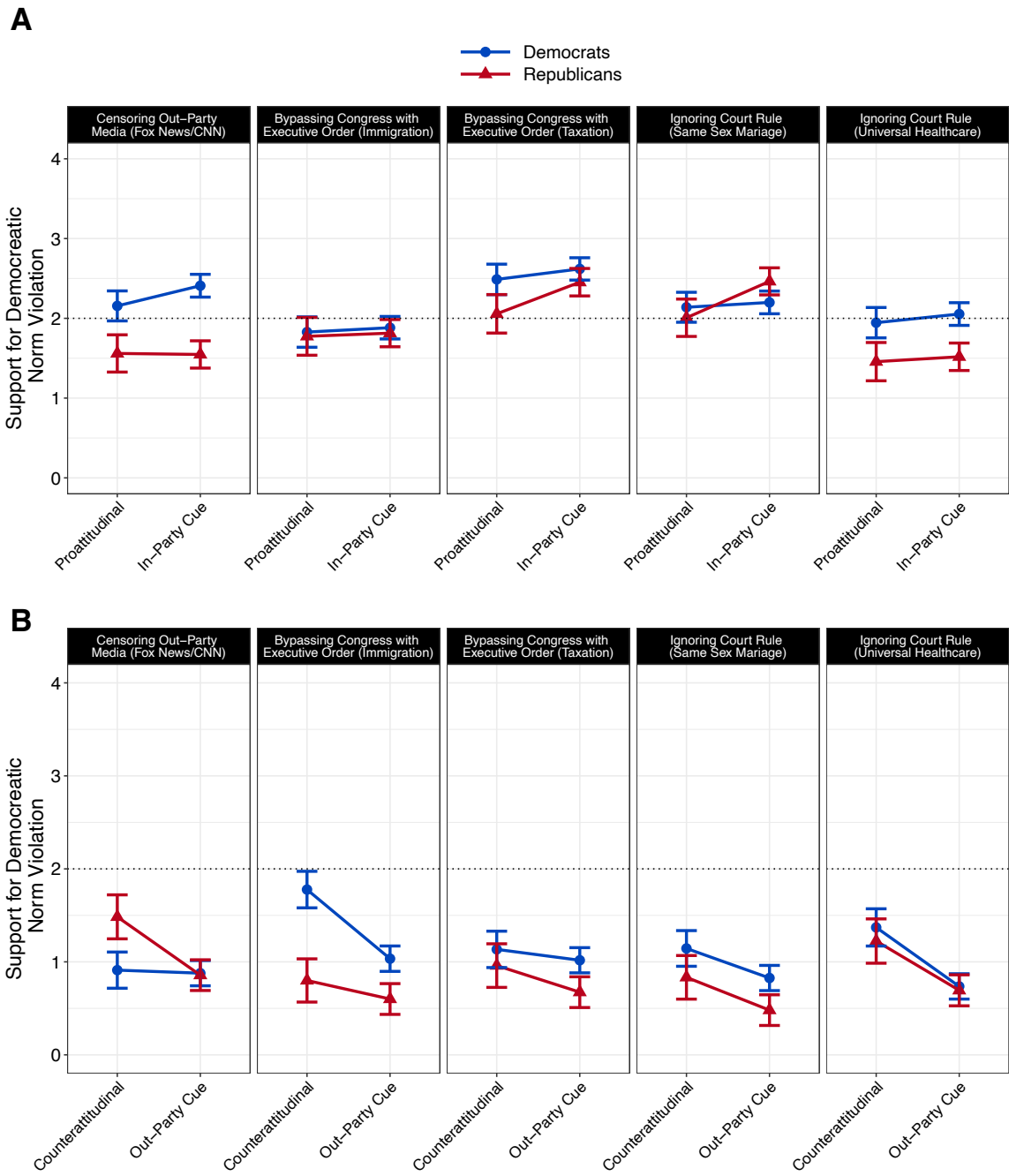


Figure 3. The figure displays coefficient estimates from an OLS model. Bar charts represent linear regression coefficients for both Democrat (blue) and Republican (red) participants separately. Bars with solid colors show the coefficients of the in-party cues when policy issues are proattitudinal, whereas shaded bars represent out-party cue coefficients when the policy issues are counterattitudinal.

## 5.2 Affective Polarization

In the three-way interaction plot provided as Figure 4 below, we illustrate how cue-taking conditions the impact of affective polarization on support for the violations of democratic norms. Further elaboration and regression tables are provided in the Online Appendix. Notably, the chart brings attention to a nuanced yet robust effect of affective polarization on the support for the violation of democratic norms. The effect on support for democratic norm violation of an increase in affective polarization from 0 to 100 is 33% increase for those who received proattitudinal policy issue ( $b = 0.016$ ,  $se = 0.002$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and 20% decrease for participants who were exposed to counterattitudinal topic ( $b = -0.010$ ,  $se = 0.002$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Aside from the effect of this attitudinal proximity, party cue receptivity does not change as affective polarization increases. Whereas in-party cues made significant but extremely small changes compared to no-party cue proattitudinal issues ( $b = -0.002$ ,  $se = 0.001$ ,  $p = 0.261$ ), we could not find any impact of out-party cues on counterattitudinal policy topic ( $b = -0.001$ ,  $se = 0.002$ ,  $p = 0.58$ ).

The results show us that affective polarization plays an important role when updating support for democratic norm violations. On the one hand, these results confirm and strengthen prior findings in the literature. Concerning the violation of democratic norms, affectively polarized voters primarily care about out-party harm and in-party benefit. This finding was previously highlighted by [Kingzette et al. \(2021\)](#) who argued that the occupation of the White House has a pronounced effect on the support for norms among affectively polarized partisans. When the in-party is in an incumbent position, the more affectively polarized voters are, the less they support democratic norms (p.666). In our study, we also found evidence consistent with the argument that partisans from both parties "employ double standard" ([Graham and Svobik](#),

2020) and are willing to curb democratic restraints on the executive "for the sake of their ideological agendas" (Gidengil et al., 2022).

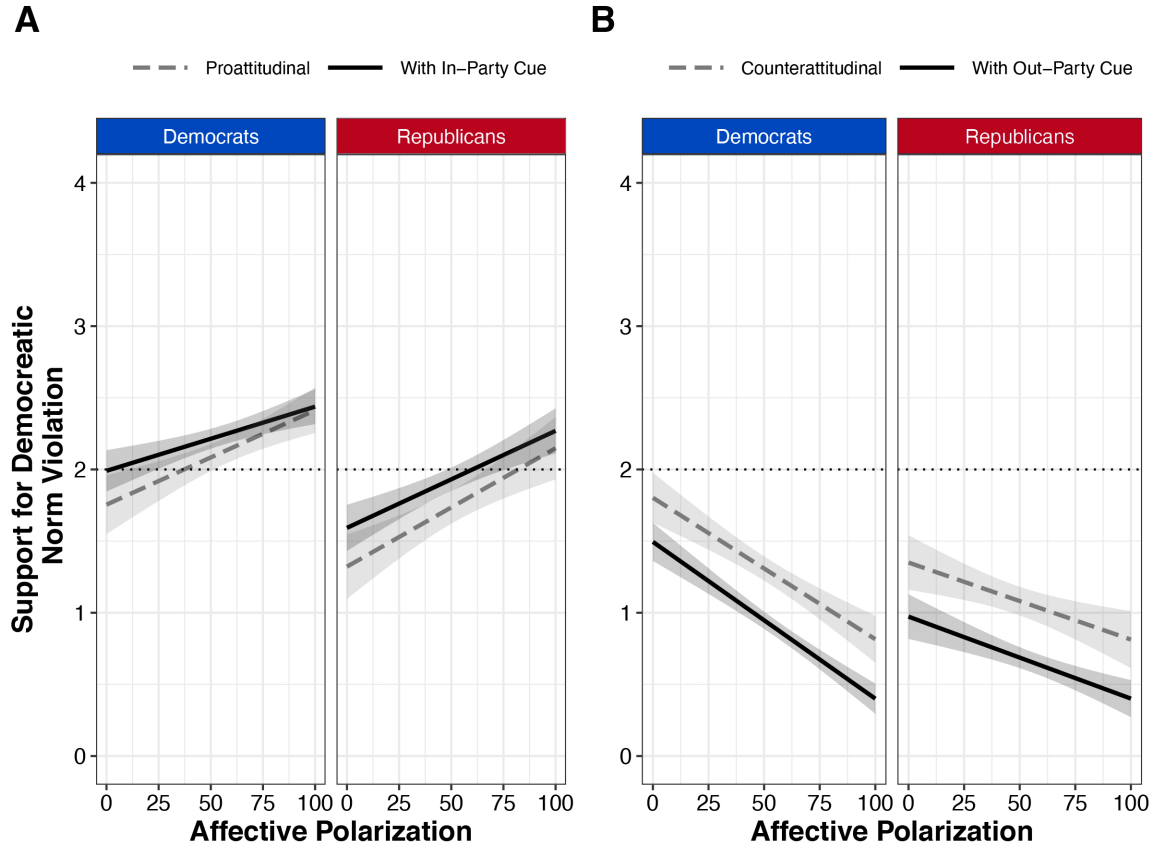


Figure 4. Part-conditioned relationship between affective polarization, party cues, and democratic norm violation.

On the other hand, this study differs from prior studies as it makes reservations for in-party endorsement. In previous studies, the impact of affective polarization on public support for democratic norms yielded mixed results. Westwood et al. (2019) demonstrated that although higher affective polarization leads voters to support the corruption investigations against the out-party, it did not necessarily increase support for the use of tear gas against protesters from the other side. Similarly, implications of individual-level affective polarization are primarily limited to interpersonal relationships and do not translate into wide-scale behavioral changes concerning the support



for upholding democratic norms (Broockman et al., 2022). We found that partisans give weight to the content of policy issues and they are not easily convinced about supporting norm violations when they are exposed to a clear endorsement from party elites and ordinary supporters. This finding is a promising contribution to the literature studying democratic strength in the United States because it suggests that, even in a polarized political climate, individuals are still discerning and are not easily hooked on blind loyalty to their party. It underscores the potential for informed and principled decision-making among citizens, which is a cornerstone of a robust democracy.

### 5.3 Discussions

In summary, our findings contribute to the conclusions drawn in prior research studies on the relationship between affective polarization and support for democratic norms (Broockman et al., 2022, Gidengil et al., 2022, Graham and Svulik, 2020, Kingzette et al., 2021, Voelkel et al., 2023). We found that partisans are highly motivated to update their stance in response to what other party supporters and elites are saying about a democratic norm violation. When they receive clear signals from the out-party, their willingness to support norm violations diminishes significantly. These results closely align with the motivated reasoning model of partisanship. However, the impact of in-party cues on their stance presents a more complex picture. In the context of proattitudinal issues, the in-party cue receptivity depends on the specific policy topic, which makes it challenging to draw definitive conclusions about the interaction between cues, partisanship, and public support for democratic norm violations. Politicization of democratic norms (see. Kingzette et al., 2021) within specific policy areas could explain this divergence and should be investigated more in future research. Instead of focusing solely on snapshot cue manipulation, a more

comprehensive understanding can be gained by examining the long-term effects of elite-level political communication to gain a deeper understanding of the influence of in-party cues.

The evidence also suggests that the higher level of affective polarization are associated with higher level democratic norm violations in proattitudinal contexts, while diminishing support for such violations in counterattitudinal scenarios. These results carry significant, albeit concerning, implications in American politics. Even though partisan cues did not serve as a significant factor in the connection between affective polarization and support for democratic norms, the tendency to follow partisans in a deterioration of democratic values is a troubling trend. This observation underscores the importance of considering the multifaceted role of affective polarization in shaping attitudes toward democratic norms.

Certainly, considering the constraints of both this study and prior research, it's essential to acknowledge some reservations. As for the present study, participants were tasked with evaluating a hypothetical policy scenario, which if anything, could be non-salient issue to subjects. The scenario placed them in a low-information environment, forcing them to make decisions in a context with limited available information. Our selected political figures were top politicians in both parties (ie. elected presidents) and their supporters. Although this creates a hypothetical setting that targets reactions to messages when the message comes from highly partizan political figures, a manipulation of the popularity of political figures can be addressed in forthcoming experiments to better understand cue receptivity for anti-democratic behaviours. At the same time, a controlled laboratory environment doesn't necessarily translate to the feasibility of such behavior for political elites in real-world settings.

While acknowledging its limitations, the current study makes a valuable contribution to affective polarization and democratic norm violations. It delineates the

circumstances in which politicians face repercussions for adopting such positions and those in which they encounter minimal resistance. Moreover, it suggests promising directions for future research. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the factors that lead individuals to systematically assess political messages for actions that violates core democratic values, further research remains imperative.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Throughout this study, we use the terms “party cues” and “party endorsements” interchangeably, recognizing that endorsements represent one category of cues.

<sup>2</sup>YouGov is a reliable provider of survey data used for academic research. Numerous studies ([Ansolabehere and Schaffner, 2014](#), [Simmons and Bobo, 2015](#), e.g.) provide compelling evidence that findings derived from YouGov surveys can be reliably extrapolated to the broader American population. In a recent Pew Research Center study, YouGov consistently outperformed other probability and non-probability samples across more than 20 benchmarks related to sample quality ([Kennedy et al., 2016](#)).

<sup>3</sup>This project was funded by Polarization Research Lab, an interdisciplinary lab created by the University of Pennsylvania, Stanford University and Dartmouth College, which provided available 10-items survey space for selected applicants. The Polarization Research Lab is collecting regular surveys in the framework of [America’s Political Pulse](#), a weekly tracking poll of affective polarization in the U.S. As a result of the grant selection, our survey questions were added to one of the Polarization Research Lab’s panels.

<sup>4</sup>The America’s Political Pulse survey consisted of 10 questions assessing typical socio-demographic characteristics, 14 questions gauging political attitudes and religious beliefs, and 27 questions measuring affective polarization, democratic norms, political violence, political trust, and out-party meta-perceptions ([Iyengar et al., 2023](#)).

<sup>5</sup>In the questionnaire, we rephrased the three questions that are given in America’s Political Pulse survey: (1) “In-party elected officials should ignore out-party judges,” (2) “In-party president should use executive orders to circumvent out-party-controlled congress,” and (3) “Government should censor media that attack in-party more than out-party”. In the statements of the speakers, we re-phrased these three statements given under America’s Political Pulse survey’s democratic norm questions. By doing so, we could test whether people are changing their stance toward these statements when similar statements are made by political elites and ordinary party voters in different policy contexts.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to all those who have contributed to the completion of this research article. We are thankful to Kevin Arceneaux, Romain Lachat, Bert Bakker, Lou Safra, and fellow researchers at Sciences Po CE-VIPOF who provided valuable discussions, critical insights, and constructive suggestions that greatly enriched the quality of this work. We are also indebted to Shanto Iyengar, Yphtach Lelkes, Sean Westwood, and other colleagues at the Polarization Research Lab for providing a generous research grant that facilitated the smooth execution of this research. Correspondence may be addressed to Omer Faruk Metin (Sciences Po, Center for Political Research, CNRS, 75007 Paris, France). E-mail: omerfaruk.metin@sciencespo.fr.

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# Online Appendix

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*Date: October 10, 2023*

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Ethical Statement</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Data Access</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Core Panel and Survey Questions</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Questions and Materials for Experimental Study</b>	<b>4</b>
4.1	Experimental Groups . . . . .	5
4.2	Sample Vignette from Survey: The Case of Media Censorship . . . . .	5
<b>5</b>	<b>Summary Statistics, Balance Test, Factor Analysis</b>	<b>8</b>
5.1	Survey Demographics and Representativeness . . . . .	8
5.2	Balance Test . . . . .	10
<b>6</b>	<b>Regression Tables</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Additional Details</b>	<b>12</b>
7.1	Merging Elites & Voters Treatment Groups . . . . .	12
7.2	Selecting Pro- and Counter-attitudinal Policy Issues . . . . .	13
<b>8</b>	<b>Pre-Analysis Plan</b>	<b>19</b>
8.1	Overview and motivation . . . . .	19
8.2	Hypotheses . . . . .	20
8.3	Experimental Design . . . . .	21
8.4	Data Collection and Sampling Plan . . . . .	23
8.5	Analysis plan . . . . .	23
<b>9</b>	<b>References for Online Appendix</b>	<b>26</b>

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# 1 Ethical Statement

Participants were fully informed that they were participating in academic research. Given our research methodology, some degree of deception was necessary, and participants were duly informed about these deceptions. Immediately after completing the survey, we debriefed all participants about the study. Furthermore, the survey provider offered predetermined and equitable compensation to participants, depending on the survey's duration. However, due to the absence of an Institutional Review Board (IRB) for non-tenured professors and PhD researchers at the primary investigator's institution, located outside the US, obtaining an ethical approval certificate from the institutional review board was unattainable for the author(s). Because of budget constraints and IRB capacity limitations, the institution only reviews applications from permanent faculty staff.

## 2 Data Access

Our data is freely accessible and can be retrieved from the following URL link:

[https://osf.io/92ucm?view\\_only=948b88d504144bffb4a511bcc670995b](https://osf.io/92ucm?view_only=948b88d504144bffb4a511bcc670995b)

## 3 Core Panel and Survey Questions

To access the full wording of the survey questions, please use the file provided at the following link: [https://osf.io/v8uag?view\\_only=948b88d504144bffb4a511bcc670995b](https://osf.io/v8uag?view_only=948b88d504144bffb4a511bcc670995b). The file includes core panel variables and core survey variables that were collected before our experimental questions were administered. An overall summary of variables along with their codes is provided in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

**Table 1: Core Panel Variables**

---

caseid	Case ID
weight	Gen Pop Weight
birthyr	Birth Year
gender	Gender
race	Race
hispanic	Hispanic
speaks spanish	Do you speak Spanish
educ	Education
marstat	Marital Status
employ	Employment Status
faminc_new	Family Income
child18	Children under age 18 in household
pid3	3-point party ID
pid7	7-point Party ID
presvote16post	President Vote Post Election 2016
presvote20post	President Vote Post Election 2020
inputstate	State of Residence
urbanicity2	Residence
votereg	Voter Registration Status
ideo5	Ideology
newsint	Political Interest
religpew	Religion
pew_churatd	Church attendance (Pew version)
pew_bornagain	Born Again (Pew version)
pew_religimp	Importance of religion (Pew version)
pew_prayer	Frequency of Prayer (Pew version)

**Table 2:** Core Survey Variables

democrat_therm_1	Democrat Thermometer
republican_therm_1	Republican Thermometer
general_trust	Social trust
institutional_corruption	Institutional corruption
institutional_response	Institutional response
vote_importance	Vote importance
pride	Pride in being American
fair_treatment	Fair treatment from government
norm_judges	Norm judges
norm_judges_perception	Norm judges perception
norm_polling	Norm polling
norm_polling_perception	Norm polling perception
norm_executive	Norm executive
norm_executive_perception	Norm executive perception
norm_censorship	Norm censorship
norm_censorship_perception	Norm censorship perception
norm_loyalty	Norm loyalty
norm_loyalty_perception	Norm loyalty perception
violence1	Violence 1
violence2	Violence 2
violence3	Violence 3
violence4	Violence 4

## 4 Questions and Materials for Experimental Study

For access to the experimental materials and questionnaire pertaining to our experiment, please use the following link: [https://osf.io/c8s6y?view\\_only=948b88d504144bffb4a511bcc670995b](https://osf.io/c8s6y?view_only=948b88d504144bffb4a511bcc670995b).

**Table 3:** Core Experimental Variables

q2samesexmarriage	Same Sex Marriage
q3taxes	Taxation
q4mediacensorship	Media Censorship
q5immigration	Immigration
q6universalhealthcare	Universal Healthcare

## 4.1 Experimental Groups

**Table 4:** Summary Table - Experimental Groups.

Groups	Party Endorsement	Political Actor Cue	Lead Paragraph	Leaning Policy
$C_{Republican}$	No Party Endorsement	No Actor Cue	No	Conservative Leaning
$C_{Democrat}$	No Party Endorsement	No Actor Cue	No	Liberal Leaning
$T_{RepElite}$	Republican Endorsement	Party Elites	Yes	Conservative Leaning
$T_{DemElite}$	Democratic Endorsement	Party Elites	Yes	Liberal Leaning
$T_{RepVoter}$	Republican Endorsement	Ordinary Voter	Yes	Conservative Leaning
$T_{DemVoter}$	Democratic Endorsement	Ordinary Voter	Yes	Liberal Leaning

## 4.2 Sample Vignette from Survey: The Case of Media Censorship

Below, we present vignettes and experimental manipulations for the media censorship question in the text boxes. As you can see, two control groups do not contain any lead paragraph before questions signaling a party endorsement or cue.

**Control Group:  $C_{Republican}$**

**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?:** *The Federal Government should challenge CNN's broadcast license.*

**Control Group:  $C_{Democrat}$**

**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?:** *The Federal Government should challenge Fox News' broadcast license.*



**Treatment Group: T<sub>RepxElite</sub>**

**GOP Politicians Suggest Challenging CNN's Broadcast License**

Some Republican Party politicians suggest that CNN's broadcast license should be pulled after the network's biased reporting. GOP chairperson recently said that network news has become so partisan and distorted that licenses must be challenged and, if appropriate, revoked. "FCC broadcast licenses include a requirement that the licensee operates in the public interest. It's clear that CNN does not — lying is not in the public interest. Spreading partisan and distorted messages is not in the public interest," said the Republican Party chairperson in the interview.

**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?:** *The Federal Government should challenge CNN's broadcast license.*

**Treatment Group: T<sub>DemxElite</sub>**

**Democratic Party Politicians Suggest Challenging Fox News' Broadcast License**

Some Democratic Party politicians suggest that Fox News' broadcast license should be pulled after the network's biased reporting. Democratic Party chairperson recently said that network news has become so partisan and distorted that licenses must be challenged and, if appropriate, revoked. "FCC broadcast licenses include a requirement that the licensee operates in the public interest. It's clear that Fox News does not — lying is not in the public interest. Spreading partisan and distorted messages is not in the public interest," said the Democratic Party chairperson in the interview.

**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?:** *The Federal Government should challenge Fox News' broadcast license.*

**Treatment Group: T<sub>RepxVoter</sub>**

**Republican Voters Suggest Challenging CNN's Broadcast License**

Some Republican Party voters suggest that CNN's broadcast license should be pulled after

the network's biased reporting. Republican Party supporters believe that network news has become so partisan and distorted that licenses must be challenged and, if appropriate, revoked. 'FCC broadcast licenses include a requirement that the licensee operates in the public interest. It's clear that CNN does not — lying is not in the public interest. Spreading partisan and distorted messages is not in the public interest,' said Republican Party voters in the interview. **How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?:** *The Federal Government should challenge CNN's broadcast license.*

**Treatment Group: T** *DemxVoter*

### **"Democratic Party Voters Suggest Challenging Fox News' Broadcast License**

Democratic Party voters suggest that Fox News' broadcast license should be pulled after the network's biased reporting. Democratic Party supporters believe that network news has become so partisan and distorted that licenses must be challenged and, if appropriate, revoked. 'FCC broadcast licenses include a requirement that the licensee operates in the public interest. It's clear that Fox News does not — lying is not in the public interest. Spreading partisan and distorted messages is not in the public interest,' said the Democratic Party voters in the interview. **How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?:** *The Federal Government should challenge Fox News' broadcast license.*

## 5 Summary Statistics, Balance Test, Factor Analysis

### 5.1 Survey Demographics and Representativeness

**Table 5:** Survey demographics and comparison with the 2019 CCES

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max	CCES Mean
Female	949	0.474	0.499	0	1	0.511
Education Level	2,000	0.4881	0.320	0	1	0.592
Age	2,000	49.574	17.721	19	97	50.385
<b>Race</b>						
Black	239	0.120	0.324	0	1	0.134
Hispanic or Latino	316	0.158	0.365	0	1	0.089
White	1286	0.643	0.479	0	1	0.692
<b>Party Support</b>						
Democrat	973	0.486	0.500	0	1	0.487
Republican	661	0.330	0.471	0	1	0.3641
<b>Ideology</b>						
Very liberal	287	0.143	0.350	0	1	0.129
Liberal	358	0.179	0.383	0	1	0.185
Moderate	663	0.332	0.470	0	1	0.321
Conservative	354	0.177	0.381	0	1	0.184
Very conservative	203	0.102	0.302	0	1	0.108
<b>Residency</b>						
City	832	0.416	0.493	0	1	0.199
Small Town & Suburban	885	0.442	0.497	0	1	0.521
Rural	283	0.142	0.349	0	1	0.280
Family Income	1,820	0.357	0.245	0	1	0.364
Religiosity	1,932	0.526	0.402	0	1	0.426

*Note:* The data is derived from the 2019 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) using uniform weights. All variables have been adjusted to have values between 0 and 1, with the exception of age. Religiosity refers to Pew Research Center's seven-item frequency of prayer question.

**Table 6:** Summary statistics of key demographic variables (for each experimental group)

	$C_{Republican}$	$C_{Democrat}$	$T_{Rept:Elite}$	$T_{Demax:Elite}$	$T_{Rept:Voter}$	$T_{Demax:Voter}$
Female	0.50 (0.50)	0.48 (0.50)	0.46 (0.50)	0.49 (0.50)	0.44 (0.50)	0.48 (0.50)
Education Level	0.09 (0.28)	0.14 (0.35)	0.12 (0.32)	0.12 (0.33)	0.13 (0.34)	0.10 (0.30)
Age	0.49 (0.17)	0.49 (0.17)	0.49 (0.17)	0.51 (0.17)	0.49 (0.18)	0.49 (0.18)
<b>Ethnicity</b>						
Black	0.09 (0.28)	0.14 (0.35)	0.11 (0.31)	0.11 (0.32)	0.15 (0.35)	0.12 (0.32)
Hispanic or Latino	0.17 (0.38)	0.17 (0.37)	0.15 (0.36)	0.17 (0.37)	0.13 (0.34)	0.16 (0.37)
White	0.65 (0.48)	0.62 (0.49)	0.65 (0.48)	0.67 (0.47)	0.63 (0.48)	0.64 (0.48)
<b>Party Support</b>						
Democrat	0.48 (0.50)	0.51 (0.50)	0.46 (0.50)	0.48 (0.50)	0.53 (0.50)	0.46 (0.50)
Republican	0.33 (0.47)	0.33 (0.47)	0.34 (0.47)	0.33 (0.47)	0.31 (0.46)	0.34 (0.48)
<b>Residency</b>						
City	0.44 (0.50)	0.41 (0.49)	0.49 (0.50)	0.34 (0.47)	0.41 (0.49)	0.40 (0.49)
Small Town & Suburban	0.42 (0.49)	0.44 (0.50)	0.36 (0.48)	0.53 (0.50)	0.43 (0.50)	0.47 (0.50)
Rural	0.14 (0.35)	0.15 (0.36)	0.15 (0.35)	0.13 (0.34)	0.16 (0.37)	0.12 (0.33)
Income Level	0.37 (0.25)	0.35 (0.23)	0.36 (0.26)	0.36 (0.24)	0.34 (0.24)	0.37 (0.25)
Religiosity	0.49 (0.40)	0.52 (0.41)	0.55 (0.39)	0.57 (0.40)	0.53 (0.41)	0.50 (0.40)

*Note:* The given numbers represent the mean values of key demographic variables, accompanied by their corresponding standard deviations in parentheses. All variables have been transformed to a scale ranging from 0 to 1, except income level and frequency of prayer which are from 0 to 15, and from 0 to 6, respectively.

## 5.2 Balance Test

Table 7: Table of balance test

	$T_{RepsElite}-C_{Republican}$		$T_{DemxElite}-C_{Democrat}$		$T_{RepsVoter}-C_{Republican}$		$T_{DemxVoter}-C_{Democrat}$	
	Difference	p-value	Difference	p-value	Difference	p-value	Difference	p-value
Female	0.04	0.24	-0.01	0.82	0.07	0.09	-0.01	0.87
Education Level	-0.03	0.20	0.02	0.46	-0.04	0.06	0.04	0.14
Age	-0.30	0.82	-1.56	0.26	-0.33	0.81	0.40	0.77
<b>Ethnicity</b>								
Black	-0.02	0.37	0.03	0.23	-0.06	0.02	0.03	0.27
Hispanic or Latino	0.02	0.38	0.00	0.98	0.05	0.10	0.00	0.92
White	-0.00	0.97	-0.05	0.23	0.03	0.49	-0.02	0.68
<b>Party Support</b>								
Democrat	0.02	0.63	0.03	0.40	-0.05	0.17	0.05	0.17
Republican	-0.00	0.91	0.00	0.91	0.03	0.47	-0.01	0.81
<b>Residency</b>								
City	-0.05	0.23	0.07	0.07	0.03	0.36	0.01	0.85
Small Town & Suburban	0.05	0.15	-0.09	0.03	-0.02	0.68	-0.03	0.43
Rural	-0.01	0.79	0.02	0.50	-0.02	0.48	0.02	0.38
Family Income	0.06	0.85	-0.21	0.46	0.34	0.27	-0.35	0.22
Religiosity	-0.34	0.06	-0.29	0.14	-0.26	0.18	0.10	0.60

**Note:**  $T_{RepsElite}$  refers to the Republican Elite treatment,  $T_{DemxElite}$  refers to the Democratic Elite treatment,  $T_{RepsVoter}$  refers to the Republican Voter treatment, and  $T_{DemxVoter}$  refers to the Democratic Voter treatment. Both treatment groups were compared to proattitudinal Control Groups (Please see. Table 1 for details).

## 6 Regression Tables

**Table 8:** Regression Table

	<i>Support for Democratic Norm Violations:</i>	
	(a)	(b)
Proattitudinal (PRO)	-0.048 (0.137) p = 0.724	-0.034 (0.139) p = 0.809
In-Party Cue (IPC)	0.188 (0.117) p = 0.109	0.159 (0.121) p = 0.189
Out-Party Cue (OPC)	-0.308 (0.118)** p = 0.010	-0.297 (0.122)* p = 0.015
Affective Polarization (AP)	-0.010 (0.002)*** p = 0.000	-0.006 (0.002)*** p = 0.0002
Republicans (REP)	-0.452 (0.139)** p = 0.002	-0.324 (0.145)* p = 0.026
PRO x AP	0.016 (0.002)*** p = 0.000	0.015 (0.002)*** p = 0.000
AP x REP	0.004 (0.002) p = 0.061	0.003 (0.002) p = 0.299
PRO x REP	0.020 (0.203) p = 0.923	0.002 (0.208) p = 0.994
IPC x AP	0.014 (0.002)*** p = 0.000	0.014 (0.002)*** p = 0.000
IPC x REP	0.054 (0.174) p = 0.756	0.104 (0.181) p = 0.566
OPC x AP	-0.001 (0.002) p = 0.581	-0.002 (0.002) p = 0.246
OPC x REP	-0.070 (0.178) p = 0.696	-0.064 (0.183) p = 0.726
PRO x AP x REP	-0.003 (0.003) p = 0.404	-0.002 (0.003) p = 0.545
IPC x AP x REP	-0.002 (0.003) p = 0.456	-0.002 (0.003) p = 0.503
OPC x AP x REP	0.001 (0.003) p = 0.807	0.002 (0.003) p = 0.477
Constant	-0.197 (0.094)* p = 0.036	0.401 (0.132)** p = 0.003
Observations	7,327	6,643
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.220	0.254
Residual Std. Error	1.218 (df = 7311)	1.195 (df = 6617)
F Statistic	138.716*** (df = 15; 7311)	91.389*** (df = 25; 6617)

*Note:* Model on left (a) do not control for any covariates. Covariate-adjusted model (b) controls for sex, education level, age, race, residency level, income, and religiosity.

## 7 Additional Details

### 7.1 Merging Elites & Voters Treatment Groups

Table 9 below presents the difference-in-means outcomes for the treatment groups involving party elites and ordinary voters. Notably, there is no statistically significant disparity between these groups across different questions related to democratic norm violations. This implies that participants do not distinguish based on the partisan source of cues. In our experimental model, we opted to combine these distinct treatment groups into two categories, merging party elites and ordinary partisan cues for each political party.

**Table 9:** Difference-in-means test between treatment groups

	$T_{Rep\ Elite} - T_{Rep\ Voter}$		$T_{Dem\ Elite} - T_{Dem\ Voter}$	
	Difference	<i>p</i> -value	Difference	<i>p</i> -value
Censoring Out-Party Media (Fox News/CNN)	0.11	0.31	0.08	0.51
Bypassing Congress w/ Executive Order (Immigration)	0.11	0.31	-0.06	0.59
Bypassing Congress w/ Executive Order (Taxation)	0.10	0.33	-0.06	0.56
Ignoring Court Rule (Same Sex Marriage)	0.23	0.02	-0.08	0.48
Ignoring Court Rule (Universal Healthcare)	0.01	0.92	-0.06	0.57

**Note:**  $T_{Rep\ Elite}$  refers to the Republican Elite treatment,  $T_{Dem\ Elite}$  refers to the Democratic Elite treatment,  $T_{Rep\ Voter}$  refers to the Republican Voter treatment, and  $T_{Dem\ Voter}$  refers to the Democratic Voter treatment.

## 7.2 Selecting Pro- and Counter-attitudinal Policy Issues

In our study, we examined public support for democratic norm violations across five distinct policy issues. When selecting these topics, we aimed to include a combination of two economic issues, two social issues, and one related to media censorship. Our primary criterion was to identify instances of past democratic norm violations or situations in which political parties supported or attempted to breach such norms. To achieve this objective, we conducted a comprehensive Google News search to pinpoint instances where both political parties violated or endorsed democratic norms but in opposing directions. We provide detailed historical examples below. Additionally, we ensured that these policy stances align with the preferences of each political party's supporters. For a more in-depth analysis, please refer to Table 11, which includes data from public opinion surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for each policy issue.

### Same Sex Marriage

**Ted Cruz** (Republican, Senator (Texas)): “The Courts have the authority to decide cases and controversies between particular individuals. But there is no obligation on others in government to accept the Court as the final arbiter of every constitutional question. Indeed, every officer takes an oath to uphold the Constitution. [State officials] should feel no obligation to agree that the court ruling is right or is consistent with the Constitution [...] They cannot ignore a direct judicial order - the parties to a case cannot ignore a direct judicial order, but it does not mean that those who are not parties to the case are bound by a judicial order.” <https://www.npr.org/2015/06/29/418641191/cruz-states-have-no-obligation-to-accept-same-sex-marriage-ruling>

**Michael Dale Huckabee** (Republican, Former Governor of Arkansas): “I don’t think a lot of pastors and Christian schools are going to have a choice. They either are going to follow God, their conscience and what they truly believe is what the scripture teaches them, or they will follow civil law.” (<https://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/presidential-races/246392-huckabee-predicts-mlk-like-resistance-to-gay-marriage/>)

—“If the courts make a decision, I hear governors and even some aspirants to the presidency



say well, that's settled, and it's the law of the land. No, it isn't the law of the land. Constitutionally, the courts cannot make a law. They can interpret one. And then the legislature has to create enabling legislation, and the executive has to sign it, and has to enforce it." (<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/01/nullification-now-coming-to-the-supreme-court/384704/>)

—“This idea that a judge makes a ruling on Friday afternoon, and Saturday morning same sex marriage licenses are being given out, that's utter nonsense, because there's not been any agreement with the other two branches of government. I may be lonely, I may be the only one, but I'm going to stand absolutely faithful to the issue of marriage not because it's a politically expedient thing to do, because it isn't. I'm going to do it because I believe it is the right position, it's the biblical position, it's the historical position.” ([https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mike-huckabee-gay-marriage-supreme-court\\_n\\_6512042](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mike-huckabee-gay-marriage-supreme-court_n_6512042))

**LaVar Christensen** (Republican, Utah State Representative): “LaVar Christensen, an attorney, said the Supreme Court's decision “is a very narrow decision that some are trying to expand and misapply. Every sentence of the Sovereign Marriage Authority bill comes from Supreme Court rulings and authority,” Christensen said, adding his bill preserves current law “while also acknowledging the limited scope of the marriage decision.” (<https://archive.slttrib.com/article.php?id=3557674&itype=CMSID>)

**Newt Gingrich** (Democrat, Former Member of Congress (Georgia)): “Gingrich said that as president he might ignore a Supreme Court ruling if it held gays and lesbians had the right to marry. “The Constitution of the United States has absolutely nothing to say about a constitutional right to same-sex marriage. Were the federal courts to recognize such a right, it would be completely without constitutional basis,” he wrote. (<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/la-pn-gingrich-judges-20111217-story.html>)

## Immigration

**Donald Trump** (Republican, Former President) :“President Donald Trump said he could use emergency powers to bypass Congress to pay for a wall along the US-Mexico border. “We can declare a national emergency. We shouldn’t have to,” Trump told reporters. “This is just common sense.” Trump insists a government funding bill include \$5.7 billion (€4.9 billion) to pay for a wall on the border but Congressional Democrats are opposing him.” <https://www.dw.com/en/donald-trump-threatens-emergency-powers-to-pay-for-wall/a-47034638>

**Rick Scott** (Republican, Senator (Florida)): “If the Democrats refuse to work with [Donald Trump], then the president needs to use his emergency powers to fund border security and include a permanent solution for DACA and TPS.” <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/politics-government/article225352075.html>

**Lindsay Graham** (Republican, Senator (South Carolina)): “Speaker Pelosi’s refusal to negotiate on Wall/Barrier funding – even if the government were to be reopened – virtually ends congressional path to fund Wall/Barrier. Time for President @realDonaldTrump to use emergency powers to build Wall/Barrier.” <https://www.nationalreview.com/news/lindsey-graham-calls-on-trump-fund-wall-through-emergency-powers/>

**Barack Obama** (Dem. Former President): “I continue to believe that the best way to solve this problem is by working together to pass that kind of common sense law. But until that happens, there are actions I have the legal authority to take as president, the same kinds of actions taken by Democratic and Republican presidents before me, that will help make our immigration system more fair and more just.” (<https://www.npr.org/2014/11/21/365638404/obama-bypasses-congress-to-shield-immigrants-from-deportation>)

—“I take executive action only when we have a serious problem, a serious issue, and Congress chooses to do nothing. And in this situation, the failure of House Republicans to pass a darn bill is bad for our security, it’s bad for our economy and it’s bad for our future.” (<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/president-obama-announces-unilateral-action-immigration/story?id=24368748>)

—“America cannot wait forever for them to act, and that’s why today, I’m beginning a new effort to fix as much of our immigration system as I can on my own, without Congress.” (<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/president-obama-announces-unilateral-action-immigration/story?id=24368748>)

## Universal Healthcare

**Donald Trump** (Republican, Former President): “Seven years ago, congressional Democrats broke the American health care system by forcing the Obamacare nightmare onto the American people. And it has been a nightmare [...] We’ve been hearing about the disaster of Obamacare for so long. In my case, many years, most of it outside, in civilian life, and/or a long period of time. Since I started running and since I became president of the United States, I just keep hearing repeal and replace, repeal, replace. Well, we’re starting that process. And we’re starting it in a very positive manner.” (<https://nypost.com/2017/10/12/trump-signs-executive-order-to-unravel-obamacare/>)

**Barack Obama** (Democrat, Former President): “So wherever and whenever I can take steps without legislation to expand opportunity for more American families, that’s what I’m going to do.” Despite the congressional logjam, Obama declared, “I believe this can be a breakthrough year for America. [...] What I offer tonight is a set of concrete, practical proposals to speed up growth, strengthen the middle class, and build new ladders of opportunity into the middle class.” (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-obama-speech-idUSBREA0R07T20140129>)

## Taxation

**Ted Cruz** (Republican, Senator (Texas)): “Utilizing executive authority to define cost basis in a way that would remove the unfair inflation tax on savings and investment would be one such positive, pro-growth change the Administration could undertake.” <https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/07/30/led-ted-cruz-gop-senators-call-trump-bypass-congress-give-rich-americans-another-tax>

**Donald Trump** (Republican, Former President): “President Trump said on Tuesday that he was considering giving investors a big tax cut without approval from Congress. “We’ve been talking about indexing for a long time,” Mr. Trump said. “And many people like indexing; it can be done directly by me.” He added, “I would love to do something on capital gains.” <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/20/business/trump-capital-gains-taxes.html>

**Barack Obama** (Democrat, Former President): Obama sidestepped a question on the so-called “14th Amendment solution” at the White House Twitter town hall held Wednesday. Obama said that “I don’t think we should even get to the constitutional issue. Congress has a responsibility to make sure we pay our bills. We’ve always paid them in the past. The notion that the U.S. is going to default on its debt is just irresponsible.” <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/95655-gop-rep-says-14th-amendment-solution-is-impeachable-offense/>

**Table 10:** Policy Issue Stances by Political Party - Pew Research Center

% of U.S. adults who...	Democrats Republicans Net Difference		
...favor same-sex marriage <sup>1</sup>	37%	71%	44%
...say tax rates on corporations should be raised <sup>2</sup>	85%	45%	40%
...feel that some wealthy people do not pay fair share of taxes <sup>2</sup>	43%	77%	34%
...favor increasing deportations of illegal immigrants <sup>3</sup>	39%	79%	40%
...favor establishing a way for irregular immigrants to stay legally <sup>3</sup>	80%	37%	43%
...favor increasing security along U.S.-Mexico border <sup>3</sup>	59%	91%	32%
...says federal government should provide health care coverage <sup>4</sup>	19%	78%	59%

*Note:* The percentages in table were collected from Pew Research Center studies. References to these numbers are given below.

1 = "Attitudes on Same-Sex Marriage: Public opinion on same-sex marriage." *Pew Research Center*. 14 May 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/fact-sheet/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/?tabId=tab-03a4fff4-56a1-43c7-b3f7-d675eb751a42>

2 = "Top tax frustrations for Americans: The feeling that some corporations, wealthy people don't pay fair share." *Pew Research Center*. 7 April 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/07/top-tax-frustrations-for-americans-the-feeling-that-some-corporations-wealthy-people-dont-pay-fair-share/>

3= "Republicans and Democrats have different top priorities for U.S. immigration policy." *Pew Research Center*. 8 September 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/09/08/republicans-and-democrats-have-different-top-priorities-for-u-s-immigration-policy/>

4= "Democrats differ over best way to provide health coverage for all Americans." *Pew Research Center*. 26 July 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/07/26/democrats-differ-over-best-way-to-provide-health-coverage-for-all-americans/>

## 8 Pre-Analysis Plan

For complete access to fully anonymized edition of the pre-registered report, please visit:

[Since OSF preregistration link contains files that include ID information about authors, it will be shared to reviewers after approval from journal editor(s). We are attaching the submitted pre-analysis plan below.]

### 8.1 Overview and motivation

In a democratic system, citizens have the power to vote out politicians who do not comply with the principles of democracy. However, the erosion of commitment to democratic norms jeopardizes the strength of democratic institutions and may lead to democratic backsliding (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2019). Does affective polarization undermine support for fundamental democratic principles? Recent studies demonstrate that high levels of affective polarization and democratic backsliding are positively correlated (Orhan, 2022). Citizens who are loyal to their political party tend to stick with in-party candidates, even if the candidates do not adhere to fundamental democratic norms, such as protecting civil rights, supporting fair elections, or implementing checks and balances (Graham and Svobik, 2020). However, the experimental studies testing whether affective polarization decreases public support for democratic norms show mixed results. Westwood et al. (2019) show that although higher affective polarization leads voters to support exclusive corruption investigations against the out-party, it does not increase support for the use of tear gas on a group of protesters from the other side. Similarly, Broockman et al. (2022) argue that the implications of individual-level affective polarization remain only within interpersonal relationships and do not turn into a wide-scale behavioral change concerning the support for maintaining high democratic standards.

This study aims to investigate to what extent partisan cueing affects public support for democratic norm violations in selected policy areas in the United States. Increasing affective polarization and democratic backsliding constitute two main parallel trends in American politics recently, which mobilized social scientists to investigate the potential relationships between these two. At this junc-

ture, our study will try to shed light on potential mechanisms that connect these two trends. Prior studies suggest that receiving cues from party elites can undermine respect for critical democratic norms among their supporters (Gidengil et al., 2022; Clayton et al., 2020; Kingzette et al., 2021). However, two important aspects are neglected in the literature: (1) prior works have not tested the extent to which partisan cueing changes affectively polarized citizens' support for democratic norm violations, and (2) it has not investigated whether citizens differentiate between sources of partisan cues (party elites versus ordinary partisans).

## 8.2 Hypotheses

In light of this gap in the relevant literature, we first assume that supporters of both parties will follow their co-partisans and party elites in terms of democratic norm violation (**H1**). When exposed to in-party statements supporting the violation of democratic norms in contested policy areas, they will follow the message and will update their stance towards the questions about supporting democratic norms more negatively.

In the second set of hypotheses, we will trace the participants' attitudinal change when exposed to out-party messages. To test whether participants will change their views in line with expectations from motivated reasoning (Lodge and Taber, 2013; Taber and Lodge, 2006) or parallel updating (Coppock, 2023; Page and Shapiro, 2010). Hypothesis 2 (**H2**) will test whether Democrats/Republicans will:

1. Update their opinions in a positive direction (Bayesian Updating) OR
2. Update their opinions in the opposite direction (Motivated Reasoning-Backlash Effect) OR
3. Do not update their opinions at all (Conditional Bayesian Updating)

Contrary to the first hypothesis, we expect that out-party messages will significantly motivate only affectively polarised partisans on both sides in the opposite direction. As the level of affective polarization increases, citizens' response to compliance with democratic norms will increase as the democratic norm violation comes from the out-party. One of the most fundamental differences between motivated reasoning and Bayesian updating relates to the motivations that underlie attitude

change, its expected direction, and heterogeneity. On the one hand, theories of motivated reasoning posit that, when exposed to novel information, citizens are directionally motivated to confirm their preexisting beliefs (Kunda, 1987, 1990). On the other hand, parallel updating, as described in the parallel publics thesis (Page and Shapiro, 1993) and the Bayesian Learning Model, proposes that citizens are motivated to be accurate and update their opinions in a reasonable fashion when they encounter messages from credible sources. What makes it hard to test the validity of each theory is that citizens tend to find credible sources with whom they share common values and identities (Druckman and McGrath, 2019). In a recent study, Kingzette et al. (2021) also found that the party supporters' willingness to support democratic norms depends on which party is in power. In other words, we argue that affective polarization will undermine the significance and value of upholding democratic norms by making party identity more important than protecting democratic standards. In a highly polarized political environment, we are expecting that voters "act as partisans first and democrats only second" (Graham and Svobik, 2020, p.392).

### **8.3 Experimental Design**

After survey respondents answer the regular questions of America's Political Pulse survey, including the five 'democratic norms' questions, the respondents will be randomly invited to read the lead paragraph from five articles. These leads will include statements from individuals affiliated with either the Republican party or the Democratic party. We will also randomize whether the message is coming from high-ranking party elites or from ordinary voters of the party. After reading each lead, panelists will be asked if they agree or disagree about the statements made by the party elites or the ordinary voters.

In experimental manipulation, there will be six different groups. All of these six groups will be asked to answer five democratic norm violation questions about selected policy issues: same-sex marriage, taxation, media censorship, immigration, and universal healthcare. The first two groups will not receive any lead paragraph and party cues in policy cases. The democratic norm violation questions about the policies will be given without any political party cues. However, one group



will receive a democratic norm violation that will likely benefit Republican Party whereas the other group will see a democratic norm violation that will likely benefit Democratic Party. In short, for the first two groups, people will not receive any article or party cues but only questions about how much they are in favor of democratic norm violations in the selected policy issues.

The other four groups will receive a lead paragraph before each question. These lead paragraphs will prime the party politicians' or party voters' support for democratic norm violation in a given policy issue. As indicated above, the partisan cues will be manipulated with either of two different political actors: [1] high-ranking party elites or [2] ordinary voters of the given party. The political identity of the speaker [Republican / Democrat] will also be manipulated. To clarify, people will see five leads that prime only one political party and one political actor. Party cues can be in-party or out-party.

In the leads, individuals will express their support for democratic norm violations in the context of different policy issues. We have chosen policy debates about two economic issues, two social issues, and one media censorship. While selecting these policy issues, we tried to select ones that are considered "easy" and "hard" issues (Johnston and Wronski, 2015; Dias and Lelkes, 2022). The empirical evidence supported the categorization of social issues as "easy" and economic issues as "hard". We are also expecting that people will follow party elites on hard issues more than easy issues.

In the statements of the speakers, we are going to re-phrase three statements given under America's Political Pulse survey's democratic norm questions.<sup>1</sup> By doing so, we will be able to test whether people are changing their stance toward these statements when similar statements are made by political elites and ordinary party voters in different policy contexts. After reading the article, the respondents will be asked to answer whether they agree or disagree with the statement from a political actor. The answer will be on a five-item Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

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<sup>1</sup>We will rephrase the three questions that are given in America's Political Pulse survey: (1) "In-party elected officials should ignore out-party judges," (2) "In-party president should use executive orders to circumvent out-party-controlled congress," and (3) "Government should censor media that attack in-party more than out-party".

## **8.4 Data Collection and Sampling Plan**

Data have not been collected for this study yet. This pre-analysis plan is designed as part of our application for a research grant from [ANONYMIZED], which provides available survey space for selected applicants. [ANONYMIZED] is collecting regular surveys in the framework of [ANONYMIZED]. In case of selection, our questions will be added to one of the [ANONYMIZED]'s panels. Data collection procedures will be designed and implemented in accordance with the collector's data collection timetable.

For this study, we are planning to collect responses from 1308 panelists. We expect the effect size in the model looking at affective polarization and the updated support to democratic norms to be about 0.2. G\*power (3.1) gives us a total sample of 198 for that analysis with gives us 80% power to detect a main effect at a 95% confidence level. In turn, we expect that roughly 10% of the sample will be political independents. We will drop this amount. Therefore, to get 198 respondents for each group, we need a sample of roughly 218 respondents. We will then need six times the sample size of the main effect to detect the interaction (to compare ingroup to outgroup) at similar levels for two treatments and one control group, yielding a sample size of 1308. The survey will add six extra units to the panel.

## **8.5 Analysis plan**

### **Statistical analysis**

The main estimands of interest are the Average Treatment Effect (ATE) and the Conditional Average Treatment Effect (CATE). The ATE is the difference between the average outcome for all subjects in the placebo group and the average outcome for all subjects assigned to each treatment group. We estimate the ATE with OLS estimators. Difference-in-means estimates are obtained from a simple bivariate regression while multivariate estimators adjust for pre-treatment covariates. Difference-in-means estimators are structured as follows:

$$Y_i^* = a + bd_i + u_i \quad (1)$$

Accordingly, the following is the structure of the multivariate estimators that adjust for pre-treatment covariates:

$$Y_i^* = a + bd_i + cX_i + u_i \quad (2)$$

where  $Y_i$  is an attitude,  $a$  is an intercept,  $b$  is an estimate of ATE,  $d_i$  is the assignment that causes a subject to receive the treatment,  $c$  is a coefficient associated with a pre-treatment covariate  $X_i$ , and  $u_i$  is the error term.

To explore variability in treatment effects, we estimate the Conditional Average Treatment Effect, that is the ATE for different subgroups. The CATE is obtained by including a treatment-by-covariate interaction in the multivariate OLS estimators to account for the conditional effect of sex, race, education, ideology, and partisanship, separately. The structure of the interactive models is given by the following equation:

$$Y_i^* = a + bd_i + cX_i + jd_iX_i + u_i \quad (3)$$

where  $j$  is an estimate of the CATE and  $d_iX_i$  is an interaction between treatment assignment  $d_i$  and a pre-treatment covariate  $X_i$ . To calculate two-tailed  $p$ -values for hypothesis tests we employ randomization inference. Assuming that there is no treatment effect for any unit, randomization inference (RI) uses the actual distribution of the outcome in the data to estimate the probability of observing an estimate of the ATE as extreme as the one that was actually observed, under infinite (approximated by 100,000) counterfactual random assignments. RI is particularly useful for the analysis of the findings because many outcomes are expected to be skewed and violate the normality assumption that traditional estimators make. We obtain the two-tailed  $p$ -values associated with the CATE in a similar manner, assuming that all units have a constant effect (Gerber and Green, 2012). To conduct randomization inference in R, we will use the *ri2* package (Coppock, 2019).

## **Adjustment for multiple comparisons**

Due to a large number of tests, multiple comparison problems may arise. To correct for multiple comparisons we will obtain estimates from the B-H procedure and the Holm correction.<sup>2</sup> However, in this study, it is unlikely that multiple comparisons are a serious source of concern for three reasons. First, although the treatments are administered randomly, their content is not independent. Second, outcome variables are moderate to highly correlated and tap into similar underlying constructs, i.e., democratic norm violations. Third, we only use linear estimators with and without adjusting for pretreatment covariates. This means that the estimation method does not change across models in a substantive manner. Overall, these features imply that the tests are not independent from one another despite their large number. In other words, one should expect that if a treatment affects an outcome, it will also affect correlated outcomes, and if an outcome is affected by treatment, it will also be affected by treatments with similar content.

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<sup>2</sup>All corrected p-values are obtained using an online tool developed by Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP):<https://egap.shinyapps.io/multiple-comparisons-app/>.

## 9 References for Online Appendix

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