

# **Do colors influence political deliberation?**

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**Total Funding: \$1120.00**

**Previous CARTSS Funding: N/A**

## Background of the bigger project

Since the 2000 Presidential election, the use of the color red has become synonymous with the Republican party, while the use of the color blue has become synonymous with the Democratic party (Elving, 2014). Though the two parties have leaned into the colors used in media depictions of electoral maps (see Figure 1 as an example), it remains unclear whether these associations are strong for the public, and whether these associations influence a political outcomes, including attitude expression and behaviors.<sup>1</sup> This project addresses these questions.

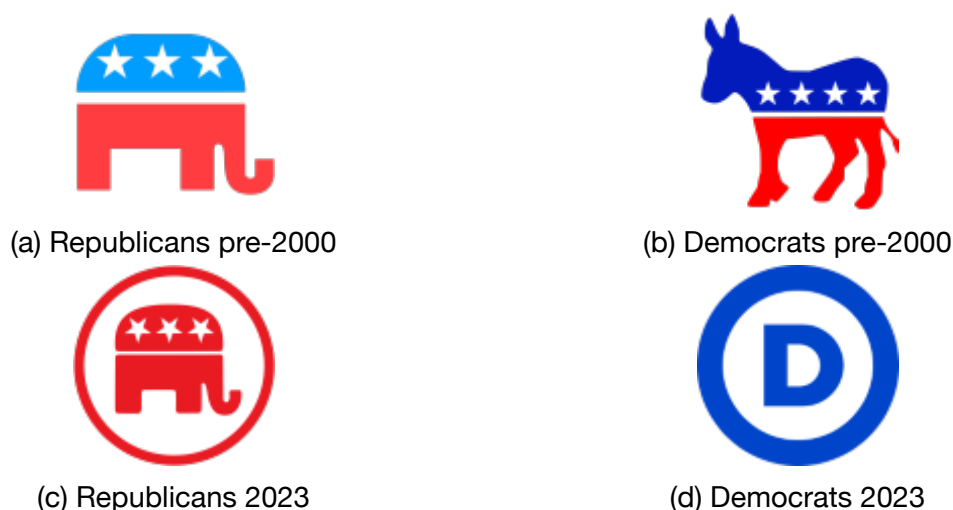


Figure 1: Party logos

Though some may consider color a small concern in the grand scheme of politics, this project argues the opposite. This dissertation lays out a cognitive model that explains how colors may have potent consequences for perceptions of the political affiliations of candidates, individuals, and groups. In the project I also consider how color influences a variety of significant (political) outcomes – these include vote choice in low information environments, the willingness to have a conversation with another person about politics, the conditions under which persuasion can occur, and where people choose to live.

While the outcomes of this project vary, the underlying goal is to examine the ways in which visual information – and even one of the most simple forms of visual information, color – influences long-studied outcomes in political behavior and political psychology. I do this by developing a cognitive model of visual information processing.

<sup>1</sup>Additional work should be done here to examine why the two political parties have gone with these two colors. This is especially true given that in other countries the color red is often picked up by left-leaning parties while the color blue is picked up by right-leaning parties (see Maestre & Medero, 2022). I imagine that there is a feedback loop between the parties and the public that continues to strengthen the association between these particular colors and the parties. The goal of this project is to first establish what the cognitive mechanisms are for the public to establish these associations. This work can then be helpful for those that want to build upon these ideas to explore the motivations for the parties to continue to use these colors.

In the first empirical chapter of this project, I find that not only is there correlational evidence consistent with my argument – that Republican campaigns use more red and less blue in Republican strongholds and that Democratic campaigns use more blue and less red in Democratic strongholds, but I also find experimental evidence of a randomly selected sample of Americans suggesting that subjects make the associations between the colors red and blue with Republicans and Democrats, respectively. In addition, evidence from my sample suggests that these associations are strong enough to influence expressed preference towards political candidates. Specifically, that Republican subjects prefer candidates with a red yard sign over candidates with a blue yard sign and that Democratic subjects prefer candidates with a blue yard sign over candidates with a red yard sign.

## **The study for which I seek funding**

There are other ways people may engage in democratic politics. The political outcome of interest in this chapter is how it may influence the degree to which we have conversations with others about politics. In an age of hyper-polarization in politics (Iyengar et al., 2012), there is growing evidence suggesting that people do not want to talk politics with those they perceive as being from the other political party due to the significant discomfort that often accompanies those conversations (Mutz, 2006). But, it is not always the case that we have *a priori* information on the partisanship of someone we might have a political conversation with. There is some evidence suggesting that we look for visual cues such as whether someone is wearing a Patagonia jacket versus a Carhartt jacket (Carlson & Settle, 2022). This work examines much more complicated cues. In the spirit of the whole of the project, I build on this work of political deliberation and causal predictors of the propensity to engage in political deliberation to argue that we automatically and pre-cognitively infer partisanship with something as simple as color, and not just brand preferences for clothing.

In this chapter, I am currently collecting data for a first study which establishes whether the color of a t-shirt for a potential political discussion partner may evoke these associations and encourage a preference to avoid the conversation if the hypothetical discussion partner is an out-partisan. The second study for this chapter is what I am seeking funding for.

The chapter for which I am seeking funding is to examine whether the effects I pre-registered for the first study are moderated by whether participants are primed to think of politics or not. The plan for the second study is to replicate study 1, however, I intend to have half of the participants primed with politics by asking them a political attitudes questionnaire before the treatment and another half to be asked these questions afterwards.

To provide more detail, I am currently collecting data on Study 1 where participants are randomly presented with one of the two images in Figure 2.

Along with the image, participants are informed that they have been paired with a discussion partner who has made an avatar to protect their privacy (I inform participants that they will have an opportunity to create their own avatar). They are then asked a

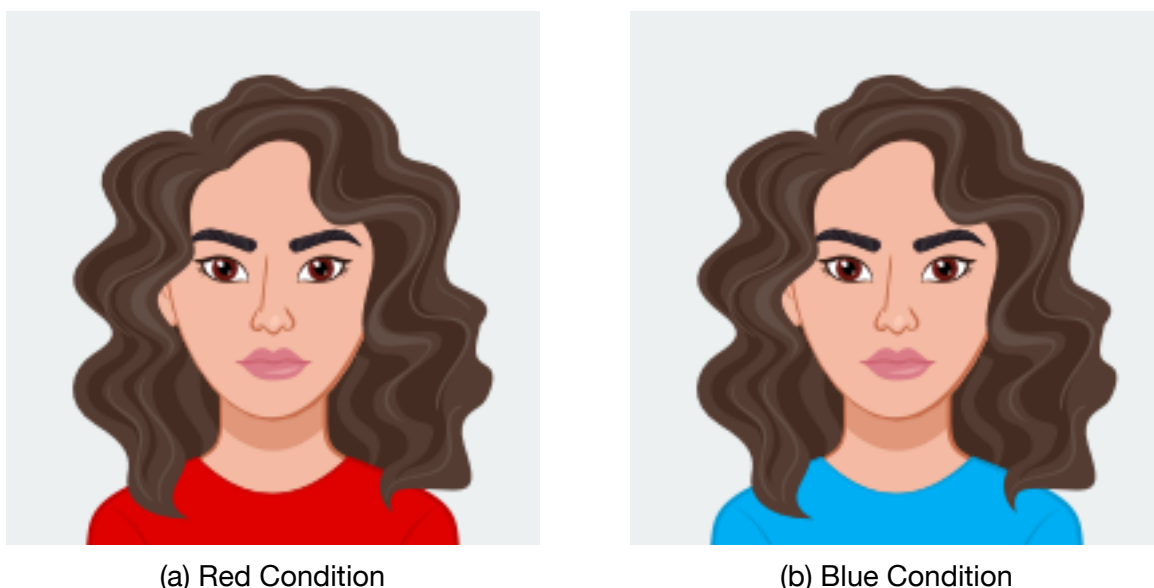


Figure 2: Treatment

series of questions that all attempt to capture the participant's willingness to participate in a conversation with that discussion partner.

In the second study, I will replicate study 1, with a slight change to examine whether or not politics being primed matters for participants. I pre-register that it will. In cases where participants are not already thinking about politics (where they haven't been primed with questionnaires about politics), I suspect the effects of the color of the shirt in the avatar should not follow the same patterns as they would for the participants who were randomly assigned to be asked questions about politics first.

This addition to the design is pivotal not only to this chapter but to the larger project: it helps me test the boundary conditions of my argument that colors matter in shaping a variety of democratic political behaviors.

I have pre-registered my expectations for both studies and have preformed target sample size calculations for this second study which are reflected in my grant application. I intend to collect the sample from Prolific.

## Impact

The impact of this project falls in a few dimensions. First, studying the role of deliberation in shaping political participation and knowledge significant. There is a large area of work in political science that demonstrates that conversations about politics can encourage participation from individuals who are not previously engaged, that it can increase feelings of political efficacy, and that we can use them as a source of information about current events, issues, and policy. Tackling the question of what predicts the propensity by which we participate in these conversations is helpful. The second dimension is that my theory is highlighting a automatic and pre-cognitive process that can shape how we feel about the potential of engaging in a political conversation. If we are avoiding conversations that

can encourage participation and building knowledge of politics based on impressions, this can have potentially significant ramifications for democracy.

## Budget Justification

Table 1: Budget Justification

Item	Units	Price per unit	Total
Participant payment	700	1.20 (based on median of 6 minutes to complete and rate of 12.00/hour)	840
Prolific Service Fee	280	1	280
Total Funding Needed			1120.00

## References

- Carlson, T. N., & Settle, J. E. (2022). *What goes without saying: Navigating political discussion in america*. Cambridge University Press.
- Elving, R. (2014). The color of politics: How did red and blue states come to be? *National Public Radio*.
- Iyengar, S., Sood, G., & Lelkes, Y. (2012). Affect, not ideology: A social identity perspective on polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 76(3), 405–431. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfs038>
- Maestre, R. L., & Medero, R. S. (2022). Color war. does color influence the perception of political messages? *Psychological Reports*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00332941221114418>
- Mutz, D. C. (2006). *Hearing the other side: Deliberative versus participatory democracy*. Cambridge University Press.

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Updated: August 23, 2023

**APPOINTMENTS** Lab Fellow, American Politics Research Lab at the University of Colorado Boulder

**EDUCATION** Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Political Science,  
University of Colorado Boulder,  
Defense expected: Spring 2024  
Dissertation: “The Color and Shape of Politics: How Citizens Process Politically-relevant Visual Information and Its Consequences.”  
Committee: Anand E. Sokhey, Jennifer Fitzgerald, Alexandra Siegel, Amanda Frieson, Efrén O. Pérez

Master of Arts, Department of Political Science,  
University of Colorado Boulder,  
May 2021

Bachelor of Science, Department of Political Science, Boise State University, Boise, ID,  
May 2019

**PUBLICATIONS**

**Peer Reviewed**

5. Roberts, Damon C. and Jennifer Wolak. 2022. “Do Voters Care about the Age of their Elected Representatives?” *Political Behavior*.<sup>1</sup> DOI: 10.1007/s11109-022-09802-5
4. Fahey, James J. Damon C. Roberts, and Stephen M. Utych. 2022. “Principled or Partisan? The Effect of Cancel Culture Framings on Support for Free Speech.” *American Politics Research*. DOI: 10.1177/1532673X221087601
3. Roberts, Damon C. and Stephen M. Utych. 2021. “A Delicate Hand or Two Fisted Affression? How Gendered Language Influences Candidate Perceptions.” *American Politics Research*. DOI: 10.1177/1532673X211064884?journalCode=aprb
2. Roberts, Damon C. and Stephen M. Utych. 2021. “Polarized Social Distancing: Residents of Republican-Majority Counties Spend More Time Away from Home During the COVID-19 Crisis.” *Social Science Quarterly*. DOI: 10.1111/ssqu.13101

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<sup>1</sup>Coverage of paper in: *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, and *National Public Radio*

1. Roberts, Damon C. and Stephen M. Utych. 2020. "Linking Gender, Language, and Partisanship: Developing a Database of Masculine and Feminine Words." *Political Research Quarterly*. DOI: 10.1177/1065912919874883

## Public Scholarship

- Roberts, Damon C. and Jennifer Wolak. 2022. "Will Biden's Age Keep Him From Being Re-elected?" *Washington Post*

## Select Blog Posts

- Roberts, Damon C. 2023. "Why Should Academics Care About Data Engineering Principles?"
- Roberts, Damon C. 2022. "Reading Polls: The Basics"

## Under Review

- Roberts, Damon C., Andrew M. Engelhardt, and Stephen M. Utych. "Racial Identity and Attitudes Towards Social Programs."
- Roberts, Damon C. "Giving the Leaves Back to the Tree: Using Random Forest Models in the Multiple Imputation with Chained Equations Framework for Missing Data."
- Roberts, Damon C. "Economic Concerns Appear to be Weak Predictors of White Political Identity."

## Working Papers

- "Social Communication, Social Expertise, and the Foundations of Political Involvement." (with Scott D. McClurg and Anand E. Sokhey)
- "The Levels of Conceptualization Framework and Political Discussion." (with Jennifer Lin, Todd Makse, and Anand E. Sokhey)
- "Not Absent, Just Different: The Implications of Gender on White's Racial Attitudes." (with Courtney J. Nava and Komal Preet Kaur)
- "Don't Interrupt Me: The Interruption of Female and Nominees of Color in Federal Judiciary Confirmation Hearings." (with Tyler P. Garrett)
- "Changing Norms and Polarization: How Elites Advance Mass Polarization."
- "Moneyballing with Partisanship: Political Forecasting and Models of Vote Choice."

## Book Projects (In Progress)

- “The Shape and Color of Politics: How Citizens Process Politically-relevant Visual Information and Its Consequences.”
- “A Desk Reference for Managing and Pre-processing Political Data.”

## HONORS, GRANTS, & AWARDS

- 2023. Large Research Grant - University of Colorado Boulder, Department of Political Science (\$2,100)
- 2022. Teamwork Grant - University of Colorado Boulder, Department of Political Science (< \$1,000)
- 2021. Travel Grant - Elections, Voting, Public Opinion, and Behavior Section - American Political Science Association (< \$1,000)
- 2021. Time-Sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences Short Studies Program Grant - TESS Funded by the National Science Foundation (> \$1,000)
- 2021. Small Research Grant - University of Colorado Boulder, Department of Political Science (< \$1,000)
- 2020. ICPSR Summer Short Course Scholarship - University of Colorado, Department of Political Science (> \$1,000)
- 2020. Summer Co-Authorship Grant - University of Colorado Boulder, Political Science Graduate Program (< \$1,000)
- 2019. Boise State University - School of Public Service Small Research Grant (< \$1,000)
- 2019. Boise State University - School of Public Service Student Travel Grant (< \$1,000)

## SOFTWARE

1. ScrapeCongress - An R package to scrape the tweets of U.S. Congressmembers. url: [Github](#)
2. genCounter - A python webapp to use the gendered language dictionary. url: [gencounter website](#)
3. fancy-doc - A Quarto extension to produce PDF's with  $\text{\LaTeX}$ 's fancyhdr package. url: [Github](#)

## TECHNICAL SKILLS

Python, R, Quarto,  $\text{\LaTeX}$ , Apache, DuckDB, SQL, Julia, Qualtrics, HTML, CSS, SPSS

## Working Knowledge

JavaScript, AWS, JAGS, MPLUS



## Methods Training

Experiments, Quasi-Experiments and Causal Inference, Bayesian Statistics, Surveys, GLM, MLM, NLP, SEM, Machine Learning, Formal Modeling

### INTERVIEWS

- *E.W. Scripps Media*. On: Why young candidates have a hard time attaining office. Forthcoming.
- *National Public Radio*. “After McConnell’s and Feinstein’s episodes, should age limits be on the table?”
- *New York Times*. “How much do voters really care about Biden’s age?”.
- *Colorado Public Radio*. On: The effects of candidate age on electability. August 31, 2022.
- *University of Colorado Boulder Associated Press*. On: Joe Biden’s re-election announcement and his age. May 2023.

### INVITED TALKS AND GUEST LECTURES

- Fall 2023 (scheduled) - “The Shape and Color of Politics: How Citizens Process Politically-relevant Visual Information and Its Consequences.” Guest Lecture at the University of Texas El Paso for Graduate Seminar on Quantitative Research Methodology.
- Spring 2023 - “An introduction to Experiments in political science.” Guest Lecture at the University of Colorado Boulder for upper-level undergraduate course on Advanced Quantitative Research Methods.
- Spring 2022 - “An Introduction to Quantifying Text in Political Communication”. Guest Lecture at Colorado State University for Graduate Seminar in Political Communication.
- Spring 2022 - Life as a Graduate Student. Guest Lecture at University of Kentucky for PS 492
- Spring 2021 - “The media’s role in the use of gender and racial stereotypes in politics”. Guest Lecture at Colorado State University for undergraduate course on Media and Politics.

### CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

16. Roberts, Damon C. 2023. “How does color influence our political conversations?” Presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology, Montreal.
15. Roberts, Damon C. 2023. “How does color influence our political conversations?” Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Frontrange Political Science Association, Fort Collins.
14. Roberts, Damon C., Courtney J. Nava, and Komal Preet Kaur. 2023. “Not absent, just different: The implications of gender on white’s racial attitudes.” Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Political Science Association, Chicago.

13. Roberts, Damon C. 2022. "Changing norms and polarization: How elites advance mass polarization." Presented at Junior Americanist Workshop Series (JAWS).
12. Lin, Jennifer, Todd Makse, Damon C. Roberts, and Anand E. Sokhey. 2022. "The Levels of Conceptualization Framework and Political Discussion." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Political Science Association, Chicago.
11. Garrett, Tyler P. and Damon C. Roberts. 2022. "Don't Interrupt Me: The Interruption of Female and Nominees of Color in Federal Judiciary Confirmation Hearings." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Political Science Association, Chicago.
10. McClurg, Scott, Damon C. Roberts, and Anand E. Sokhey. 2022. "The Relationship between Social Expertise and Internal Political Efficacy." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Political Science Association, Chicago.
9. Roberts, Damon C. 2022. "Giving leaves back to the tree: A primer on the use of random forest models in the multiple imputation with chained equations for handling missing political data." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Political Science Association, Chicago.
8. Roberts, Damon C. and Jennifer Wolak 2021. "Do Voters Care about the Age of their Elected Representatives?" Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association. Seattle, WA.
7. Roberts, Damon C. 2021. "The Origins of White Political Identity." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Political Science Association, remote.
6. Lin, Jennifer, Todd Makse, Damon C. Roberts, and Anand E. Sokhey. 2021. "The Levels of Conceptualization Framework and Political Discussion." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Political Science Association, remote.
5. Roberts, Damon. C. Stephen M. Utych, and John Griffin. 2021. "Proximity, Identity, and Viability: How Minority Voters Decide." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Political Science Association, remote.
4. Roberts, Damon C. Drew M. Engelhardt, and Stephen M. Utych. 2021. "The Policy Preferences of White Identifiers." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Political Science Association, remote.
3. Roberts, Damon C. and Stephen M. Utych. 2020. "An Expanded Gendered Language Dictionary for Political Analysis." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, remote.
2. Utych, Stephen M. and Damon C. Roberts. 2019. "Gendered Language and Conservatism in American Politics." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Political Science Association, Chicago, IL.
1. Roberts, Damon C. 2018. "Environment or Jobs? Why Do Americans Support One Over the Other?" Pi Sigma Alpha 2018 National Student Conference, Washington, D.C.

**RESEARCH AND  
TEACHING  
APPOINTMENTS**

**Instructor of Record**

- PSCI 1101 - Introduction to American Politics - Fall 2023
- PSCI 3075 - Applied Political Science Research - Fall 2022
- PSCI 2075 - Quantitative Research Methods - Summer 2022

**Research Assistant**

- Methods Lab Coordinator (Department-wide support for methods and coding challenges for Undergraduates) - Fall 2021, Fall 2023
- The LeRoy Keller Center for the Study of the First Amendment - Spring 2021

**Grading assistant**

- PSCI 3225 - Strategy and Politics (Game theory) - Spring 2022
- PSCI 3201 - U.S. Campaigns and Elections - Fall 2020

**Teaching Assistant (Two recitation sections)**

- PSCI 1101 - Introduction to American Politics - Fall 2019 Spring 2020
- PSCI 2075 - Quantitative Research Methods - Spring 2023

**SERVICE**

**Referee**

Research & Politics, Electoral Studies

**Discipline & Community Service**

- 2022. Northglenn STEM High School PBL. Theme: Social Movements. Expert Judge.
- 2021. Northglenn STEM High School PBL. Theme: Congressional District Drawing. Expert Judge.
- 2020-2022. American Association for Public Opinion Research Communications Committee and AAPOR Website Subcommittee

## University and Department Service

- 2022–2023. Comps Liason (Department of Political Science, University of Colorado Boulder)
- 2020–Present. Graduate Student Advisor of The Political Science Club (University of Colorado Boulder)
- 2021–2022. MOPS (Mentors of Political Science) Coordinator (Department of Political Science, University of Colorado Boulder)

## PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- 2022–Present. Member. International Society for Political Psychology
- 2022–Present. Member. Southern Political Science Association
- 2019–Present. Member. American Association for Public Opinion Research
- 2018–Present. Member. American Political Science Association
- 2018–Present. Member. Midwestern Political Science Association

## REFERENCES

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