

**TITLE:** Color and political deliberation

**PROTOCOL VERSION DATE: 12/26/2023**

**VERSION: 1.0.0**

# PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI):

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# KEY PERSONNEL

**Name**: Anand Edward Sokhey

**Role in project**: Faculty Advisor

# GENERAL RESEARCH STAFF

N/A

# OBJECTIVES

This study is designed to answer the question of whether or not people will infer how individuals infer the political partisanship of another person when faced with the opportunity to have a conversation with them. Specifically, this study seeks to test a set of hypotheses to address this. First, the study seeks to test whether or not people are less likely to express a willingness to engage in the conversation when the potential discussion partner is wearing clothing with colors that are often associated with the opposing political party than the one an individual is affiliated with. It also seeks to test a hypothesis for whether people change their minds when given substantive policy preferences about this discussion partner.

# BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

This study is part of a much larger book project. In an era of significant political polarization among the U.S. public, there is a lot of literature that seeks to examine how we might be able to reduce some of this political polarization. There is quite a large amount of evidence from a variety of places that suggest that political deliberation can have temporary depolarizing effects, meanwhile there is evidence that suggests that individuals are unlikely to initiate a conversation with someone with opposing political views. This suggests that opportunity for depolarization is unlikely to occur. What remains unclear, however, is the decision-making process for engaging in a conversation with a stranger where you are likely to not possess any knowledge of the person’s political attitudes.

As part of a larger project examining the informational role that the colors red and blue can play in politics due to their strong associations with the Republican and Democratic parties, respectively, one potential mechanism for inferring the partisanship of a potential discussion partner would be through the colors a particular person is wearing. While this is one possible mechanism to a much larger question and is only one study of a much larger project, this study will help to build on both of these dimensions. It should help by not only demonstrating how colors can be used as informational cues to make inferences about the partisanship of another person, but how it can be used alongside substantive information profiling the policy preferences of this person as well as giving us an insight as to how these subtle choices can have behavioral consequences.

# PRELIMINARY STUDIES

There have not been any preliminary studies to-date. There is currently one study similar to this one that is currently in the field (data is being collected). In this other study, I vary whether or not participants are primed to be thinking about politics and looking at the efficacy of the treatment based on whether or not politics was primed before the treatment. This study does not look for that same moderation of the treatment, but instead is interested in looking at how the treatment’s effects may be moderated by a profile of substantive policy positions instead. So different studies, but mostly similar treatments (the avatars, the post-treatment questions, etc) are all the same except for the mentioned slight differences in design.

# RESEARCH STUDY DESIGN

First, participants will randomly either view the treatment and respond to the post-treatment questionnaire first or they will first be asked to respond to the demographic and political questionnaires before viewing the treatments. This counterbalancing of the study is to account for potential pre-and-post-treatment bias.

The study is a simple 2x2 design. Once the treatment has begun, participants will be presented with a screen that tells them, “Imagine you have been assigned to have an online conversation with this person. To protect their identity, your assigned conversation partner created an avatar, and you will have an opportunity to create your own avatar for the conversation as well.” Underneath this message, they will randomly see 1 of 2 images. One of a cartoon avatar where it has a blue shirt or a red shirt. The other dimension in which the treatment will randomly vary for the participants is the content of the “political profile” that is displayed in a table underneath the avatar. In this “political profile” table it will list out the political preferences of the fictional discussion partner by reporting whether they are “Republican/Democrat; Do not support Universal Basic Income/Support Universal Basic Income; Pro-life/Pro-choice; Do not support gun control/Support gun control”. Permutations of these two political profiles (indicated with the slash) and the color of shirt on the avatar constitute the 4 total treatment conditions that participants will randomly be assigned to.

At the completion of data collection, I have pre-registered that I will fit a series of ordered logistic regression models to test my hypotheses that 1). Republicans are more willing to have a conversation with a conversation partner wearing a red shirt and Democrats are more willing to have a conversation with a conversation partner wearing a blue shirt; as well as 2) having a political profile that contrasts with inferred partisanship of the discussion partner will lead to much weaker results than a political profile that aligned with the inferred partisanship of the discussion partner.

I have funding to recruit 700 total participants for the study based on a projected median time to complete the study being no more than 6 minutes.

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| **Name of procedure/instrument/tool** | **Purpose (i.e., what data is being collected?)** |
| **Political Questionnaire** | This is designed to act as a priming for politics as well as to gather basic information about the political preferences of the participants. These self-reported questions gather information on:   * Party Identification * Closely do they follow politics |
| **Demographics Questionnaire** | This is designed to gather information for any variables that may confound the effect of the treatment on the outcome variables. These self-reported questions gather information on:   * Sex * Gender * Age * Education * How much they tend to avoid conflict. |
| **Treatment** | Gather no information on participants. |
| **Post-treatment questionnaire** | Self-reported questions to act as outcome variables:   * Whether participants can see themselves initiating a conversation with potential discussion partner * Whether participants are willing to have a conversation with potential discussion partner. * Whether participants can imagine that they will agree with potential discussion partner |

# FUNDING

The research has been funded by CARTSS (Center to Advance Research and Teaching in the Social Sciences) at CU Boulder.

# ABOUT THE SUBJECTS

I aim to have 700 subjects participate I the study. The population of interest are adults (18+) residing in the United States.

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| **Subject Population(s)** | **Number to be enrolled in each group** |
| **U.S. residents older than 18 years of age** | 700 |
|  |  |

# VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

NA

# RECRUITMENT METHODS

Participants will be recruited through the online survey experiment platform Prolific. Participants are those who have signed up themselves to earn money by participating in online surveys and survey experiments. The recruitment settings I have on Prolific require that my study shows up on the list of studies that individuals can opt into only for those that are citizens of the United States – this aids in my goal of having a nationally representative sample.

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| **List recruitment methods/materials and attach a copy of each in eRA** |
| 1. **Prolific. Materials included in eRA** |
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# COMPENSATION

Upon completion of the study, participants will be compensated through their Prolific account according to their policies. Compensation will be calculated based on a $12.00/hour rate using the amount of time participants took to complete the study (as determined by Prolific). I anticipate the average participant should take no more than 6 minutes, on average, to complete my study, which means ~$1.2 per participant.

# INFORMED CONSENT

Before beginning the study, participants will be presented with the Informed Consent document. Before participants can begin the study, they will need to “Agree” to participate in the study. For those that do not want to participate in the study after viewing the informed consent agreement. No data will be collected on these participants who do not want to participate.

# PROCEDURES

Participants will be recruited on Prolific. Once they have completed the informed consent, they will be randomly assigned to either view the treatment first or to view the political and demographics questionnaires.

For the political and demographics questionnaires, participants will be asked questions about their partisan identity, their tendency to follow politics, age, gender, sex, education, and their tendency to avoid conflict.

Immediately after participants have viewed the treatment, they will be asked three questions to measure the effect of the treatment: whether participants can see themselves initiating a conversation with potential discussion partner; whether participants are willing to have a conversation with potential discussion partner; whether participants can imagine that they will agree with potential discussion partner.

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| **Visit #** | **Procedures/Tools** | **Location** | **How much time the visit will take** |
| 1 | * Demographics questionnaire * Political questionnaire * Treatment | Prolific | 6 minutes |
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# SPECIMEN MANAGEMENT

NA

# DATA MANAGEMENT

The data of the participants will be collected through self-reports. Participants can take the study in the setting of their choosing, on a device of their choosing.

The data will be collected on Prolific and deidentified data will be downloaded in a database format. The database with the deidentified data will be stored on a password-protected device in a locked office. As individuals are recruited through Prolific, I have minimal interaction with participants – the platform is providing the respondents, like other providers (Mechanical Turk, YouGov, etc.).

The data security risk is standard.

# PROVISIONS TO PROTECT THE PRIVACY INTERESTS OF PARTICIPANTS

The data collected in this study are based on voluntary self-reports by the participants. They can choose to not answer questions if they would like. That is, The data collected here will largely be common to any online study they participate in.

Participants can complete this study anywhere and at anytime they choose — so long as they have access to the internet. Participants are not in any position where a researcher can put any undue pressure on participants to share anything about themselves they are uncomfortable with.

# WITHDRAWAL OF PARTICIPANTS

Once participants have provided informed consent, the researchers will not withdraw participants. Any premature completion the study on behalf of the participants will be their choice or if they face technical problems (e.g., disconnection from the internet).

# RISKS TO PARTICIPANTS

I anticipate minimal risks to participants. As the subject material is about politics, participants may experience slight psychological discomfort, but no part of the study intends to induce discomfort/more discomfort than people may normally experience when coming across political materials in the everyday world.

# MANAGEMENT OF RISKS

NA (minimal risk)

Informed consent is obtained and a debrief at the end of the study provides additional information on the purpose of the study.

# POTENTIAL BENEFITS

There is no direct benefit to the subjects.

The study hopes to contribute to our collective understanding of how colors may convey politically-relevant information to individuals. I hope that this will explain the effects of political polarization coming from such information, how individuals can use such simple sources of information to make decisions about how and with whom to engage in a conversation with and the downstream effects this may have on the efficacy of depolarization efforts through political deliberation.

# PROVISIONS TO MONITOR THE DATA FOR THE SAFETY OF PARTICIPANTS

Not applicable (minimal risk).

# MEDICAL CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY

Not applicable

# COST TO PARTICIPANTS

Participation should take only about 6 minutes. Participants should have internet access and can preform the study on a laptop or desktop. There are no required additional costs to the participant.

# DRUG ADMINISTRATION

Not applicable

# INVESTIGATIONAL DEVICES

Not applicable

# WORKING WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Not applicable

# SHARING OF RESULTS WITH PARTICIPANTS

During the debriefing participants are welcomed to email the researchers about the study and are told that I am happy to share results and papers that use the data from this study.

# REFERENCES