

The Partisan Patriot

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Introduction

Do voters perceive patriotic statements through a partisan lens? I argue that citizens will be more likely to agree with patriotic sentiments and view the source as more credible when the information comes from an official of the same political party. This paper presents a simple experiment in which I present respondents with a series of patriotic statements (e.g. “The American dream is alive and well.”) and ask the degree to which they agree with each statement and how credible they view the source; the control group receives these statements from an official of their selected party ID, and the treatment group receives these statements from an official that is of the opposite party. I find that respondents who receive patriotic statements from an official from the opposite party view the source as less credible; while there is no statistical difference in response to patriotic statements between the treatment and control groups, I find that Democrats agree with patriotic statements at a somewhat smaller but statistically significant rate than Republicans regardless of the source of the information. I also analyze tweets in the United States containing “#patriotism” and find three distinct topics that align with the theoretical types of patriotism.

Framework

Social Identity Theory

Several components comprise an individual’s identity– including partisanship. Social identity theory (SIT) holds that group membership is a crucial part of a person’s self-esteem and sense of belonging and can shape the way individuals perceive the world (Tajfel 2010, Hogg 2016). People tend to favor the group to which they belong and disfavor those outside the group; Greene (1999, 2004) provides evidence that partisans socially identify with their reported party identification, and Huddy (2003) discusses how those who identify as members of a political group coalesce and take collective action. Partisanship is also a very deeply ingrained identity (Green, Palmquist & Schickler

2004), and stronger partisans tend to react more intensely and emotionally to party electoral failure or success (Huddy, Mason & Aarøe 2015). In a fairly novel study, Ubel and Zikmund-Fisher (2011) provide evidence that partisans even interpret differently the intent of voters in disputed ballots.

There also exist theoretical reasons to expect partisans to react strongly to presidents. Lebo & Cassino (2007) provide evidence that partisans often ignore or discount information from opposite party officials including the president, and Beck et al. (2002) show that social influences impact a voter's decision-making calculus in presidential elections. Partisans do give presidents of the opposite party more leeway, though, on foreign issues, most likely due to his information advantages *vis-à-vis* other partisan officials (Levendusky & Horowitz 2012). I contend that one's partisan identity plays a key role in the evaluation of partisan officials and political messages.

Messaging

Political psychology research suggests that a given political message may not matter as much as the identity of the person relaying the message. Lodge and Hamill (1986) suggest that partisans are more aware of campaign information from party officials and are able to retain information at a much higher rate when it comes from a source consistent with their party identification. Attitudes towards social policy also depend on a party's position, and partisans do not necessarily believe they are influenced by the party, even while they claim members of the opposite party *are* influenced by their party (Cohen 2003). Partisans often tend to be selective about their news sources and tend to seek out sources that align with their viewpoints while discrediting information from the opposite side (Baum & Groeling 2008, Kernell & Rice 2011), and they also may view political debates through a partisan lens (Munro et al. 2002). Bullock (2011) shows that— while more informed than some give them credit for— voters do feel somewhat more warmly to policy that is incongruent with their ideology when the position is taken by a member of their party (e.g. Democrats feel more warmly towards Democratic policy-makers taking conservative positions than Republican policy-makers taking similar positions); that said, party elites

do play an integral role in informing voters about policy, and partisan identity can play a role in shaping public opinion (Boudreau & MacKenzie 2014). I argue that voters also perceive patriotic messages through a partisan lens.

Patriotism

There exist relatively few studies of patriotism in political science research. Sullivan et al. (1992) note the importance of George H.W. Bush's appeals to patriotism in the 1988 election, but neglect the role of partisanship in determining the outcome.¹ Other political science research notes rally-round-the-flag effects and spikes in patriotism following presidential unilateral action or attacks on the homeland (Baker & Oneal 2001, Sinclair 2003, Groeling & Baum 2008), but these focus mainly on foreign issues and do not address regular, every day patriotic feelings among Americans.

Political psychology comprises the bulk of political science research regarding patriotic feelings. Most scholars agree that there exist two main types of patriotic sentiment: blind and constructive. Blind patriotism involves a deep, emotional, and unconditional love of country while constructive patriotism involves more critical evaluation of one's country and its actions (Schatz, Staub & Lavine 1999, Parker 2010). Richey (2011) attempts to tease out the differences between these two types of patriotism and their causal relationship with civic engagement, and he finds that constructive patriotism leads to more civic engagement *and* that civic participation increases feelings of constructive patriotism; on the other hand, blind patriotism is associated with lower levels of political engagement. Huddy and Khatib (2007) merge SIT and patriotism and find evidence that patriotism is more or less a bipartisan feeling: most Americans, regardless of political party, feel quite patriotic; however, the authors did not account for the broader American political climate e.g. the party of the president, party of the majority party in Congress, etc. I argue that partisanship and the broader political landscape plays an integral role in evaluating patriotic sentiment.

¹The authors would undoubtedly condemn my research design (see page 202), but I feel my methods capture both the different types of patriotic sentiment and the role of partisanship.

Methods

Exxperimental Design²

I ask a series of demographic questions and present respondents with a series of patriotic statements (two are constructive, two are blind, and two are neutral statements) and they are randomly assigned to two groups: the control group receives these statements from an official of the party matching the respondent's party ID³ and the treatment group receives these statements from an official opposite from the respondent's reported party ID. I ask the respondents the degree to which they agree with each statement on a scale from 1-100 and use the mean as a "patriotism score." I also ask the degree to which the respondent views the source as credible on a sliding scale from 1-100. The survey was created in Qualtrics⁴ and distributed via Amazon's Mechanical Turk⁵ to 122 anonymous respondents.⁶

Twitter Analysis

I also obtain tweets in the United States containing "#patriotism" and run a $k = 3$ LDA model.

Hypotheses

I hypothesize the following:

- H_1 : Respondents who receive information from an official of the opposite party will agree less with patriotic sentiment than those who receive the information from an official of the matching party.

²The full survey is included in this paper's appendix.

³I recognize that this is not a control group in the purest sense; however it would be nonsensical to measure perceived source credibility when the information is presented with no source. Additionally, including no pure control group makes finding results more difficult— a hurdle I clear.

⁴A copy of the survey is available at: https://ugeorgia.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3yBMwYZBqCjXnY9

⁵Amazon's MTurk allows for a cheap, quick, and slightly more representative sample than undergraduate students.

⁶I received 125 responses but three were omitted for failing to answer the survey sincerely e.g. completing the survey in 30 seconds and maxing out all sliders.

- H₂: Respondents who receive information from an official of the opposite party will perceive the source as less credible than those who receive the information from an official of the matching party.
- H₃ Tweets containing the hashtag “patriotism” will adhere to the two main types of patriotism discussed in political science literature: blind and constructive.

Findings

I find that respondents who receive patriotic statements from an official of the opposite party rate the perceived credibility of the information source an average of 10.058 points lower than those in the control group, *ceteris paribus*; while there is no statistical difference in response to patriotic statements between the treatment and control groups, I find that Democrats agree with patriotic statements an average of 10.117 lower than Republicans regardless of the source of the information, all else equal. Additionally, I find that those who voted in the previous presidential election rate the perceived credibility of the source 14.167 points, on average and all else equal, higher than those who did not vote. I also find a small but statistically significant positive relationship between income and agreement with patriotic statements.

It appears tweets containing the hashtag “patriotism” fall fairly clearly into the groups described in the literature about patriotism. Topic 1 seems to be made up of blind patriotism based on words like “flag”, “americafirst”, “america”, etc. Topic 2 seems to be constructive quotes, noting features like “xenophobia” and “racism”. Finally, topic 3 seems to involve patriotism as it relates to foreign affairs, given words like “war” and “global.”

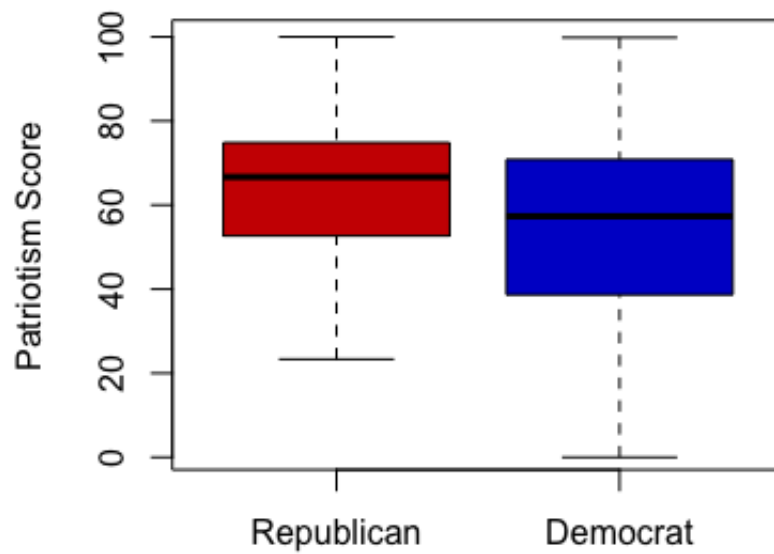
Table 1: OLS Results

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>	
	Patriotism Score	Perceived Credibility
	(1)	(2)
Sex	1.447 (3.850)	7.176 (4.975)
Race	5.704 (4.406)	8.957 (5.693)
Age	0.377 (0.254)	0.021 (0.328)
Income	0.0001* (0.00004)	0.00001 (0.0001)
Education	-4.393 (4.726)	-3.147 (6.107)
Previous voter	4.394 (4.883)	14.167** (6.310)
Party ID	-10.117** (4.041)	-6.777 (5.222)
Group	-3.150 (3.807)	-10.058** (4.919)
Constant	44.833*** (10.191)	45.607*** (13.170)
Observations	122	122
R ²	0.138	0.115
Adjusted R ²	0.077	0.053
Residual Std. Error (df = 113)	19.883	25.695
F Statistic (df = 8; 113)	2.257**	1.841*

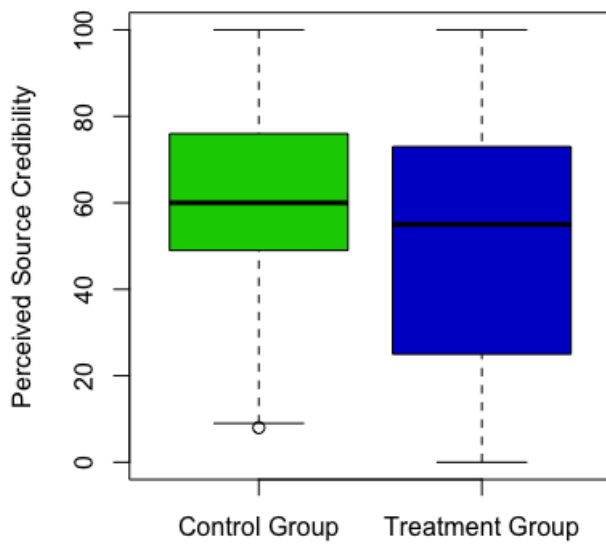
Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

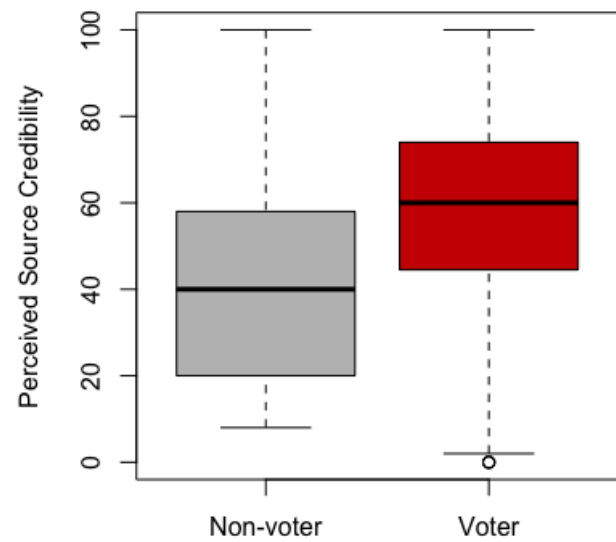
Patriotism Score by Party ID



Source Credibility by Experimental Group



Source Credibility by Previous Vote



Analysis

While I do not find support for my main hypothesis (H_1), it is not surprising that Democrats feel less warmly towards patriotic sentiment than Republicans given the current American political landscape. I posit I did not find support for H_1 due to phrasing: presenting respondents with fabricated information from the Obama administration does not transport them back in time to a period where a Democrat was in charge of the country. If I were to repeat this survey, I might present the Republican source as a member of the Bush administration so the two are more comparable. Additionally, the Trump administration does seem to be unusual for both an American president generally and for a Republican president in particular. The oddity of the current administration may have affected the results of this study. Alternatively, the proximity to defeat in an election in which Democrats thought their candidate had a sure chance of winning may have left them feeling left patriotic and these findings may not hold in other elections.

I do find support for H_2 , which suggests that partisans view information from a conflicting source as less credible. I am not quite certain the mechanism linking previous vote and perceived source credibility— perhaps previous voters were more engaged with the election and willing to accept the credibility of a party source regardless of their party ID? That said, there are very few respondents who did not vote in the previous election. Finally, it is also not surprising that wealthier Americans may feel more patriotic than their poorer counterparts regardless of party ID— I imagine it is much easier to feel sanguine about your country when your bank account is also in good health.⁷

Finally, I find support for H_3 : tweets talking about patriotism fall into three reasonably distinct topics that match theoretical expectations, with the addition of tweets about patriotism as it involves America's involvement on the global stage.

⁷As a recipient of a graduate assistantship, I would not recognize this feeling.

Conclusion

These findings demonstrate differences in agreement with patriotic feelings between parties— not between groups receiving patriotic sentiment from conflicting partisan sources. Instead, it seems more likely that partisans whose team is not in the White House feel less in agreement with patriotic statements, though more data is needed to substantiate this claim. This paper does provide evidence, though, that the public views information from a source of the opposite party as less credible.

Appendix

Table 2: Explanation of Variables

Variable	Explanation
patscore	Average agreement with patriotic statements, ranging from 0-100.
sex	Sex of respondent, coded 1 for female and 0 for male
race	Race of respondent, coded 1 for nonwhite and 0 for white
age	Age of respondent
ed	Education of respondent, coded 1 for college graduate and 0 for otherwise.
income	Reported income of respondent, ranging from 0 - 150,000 +.
vote	Whether or not the respondent voted in the previous presidential election, coded 1 for yes and 0 for no.
pid	Party ID of respondent, coded 1 for Democrat and 0 for Republican or neither party
cred	Perceived credibility of the source of patriotic statements.
group	Group of the respondent, coded 1 for treatment group and 0 for control group.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
patscore	122	57.283	20.693	0.000	100.000
sex	122	0.443	0.499	0	1
race	122	0.475	0.501	0	1
age	122	32.180	8.015	19	67
ed	122	0.680	0.468	0	1
income	122	58,174.000	42,831.160	423	150,000
vote	122	0.811	0.393	0	1
pid	122	0.631	0.484	0	1
cred	122	54.238	26.399	0	100
group	122	0.500	0.502	0	1



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What is your sex?

Male

Female

Prefer not to answer

What is your race/ethnicity?

African-American/Black

Asian/Pacific Islander

Caucasian/White

Hispanic/Latino

Other/Prefer Not to Answer

What is your age?

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

Some high school

High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)

Some college

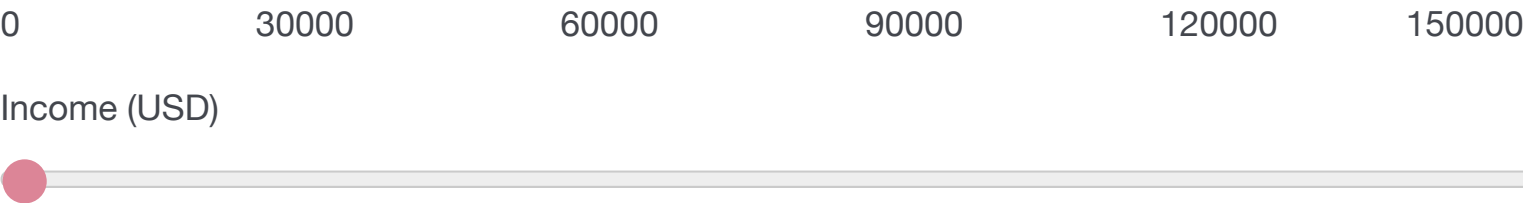
Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)

Master's degree

Doctoral degree

Professional degree (JD, MD)

Please select your best guess for your household income in the previous year.



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Did you vote in the last general election?

Yes

No

With which U.S. political party do your own views **most closely** align?

Democratic

Republican

<<

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The following are quotes from a high-level Democratic official during the Obama presidency. After each statement, please select the degree to which you agree with each statement. 0 means you strongly disagree and 100 means you strongly agree with the statement.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly agree

0

20

40

60

80

100

"The
American
dream is
alive and
well."



"I love my
country
more than
anything
else."



"Patriotism
means
looking out
for yourself
by looking
out for your
country."

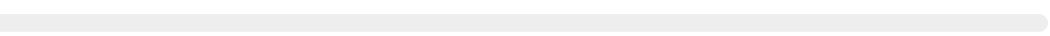


"Patriotism
is
supporting
your
country all
the time
and your
government
when it

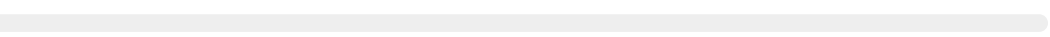


deserves
it."

"The state
of the
economy is
strong."



"In the face
of
impossible
odds,
people who
love this
country can
change it."



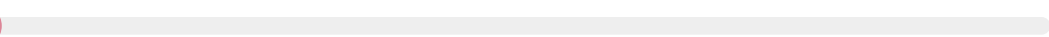
To what degree do you consider the source of these comments as credible? A score of 0 means you **do not** see the source as very credible while a score of 100 means you see the source as very credible.

Not Credible

Very Credible

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Credibility



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We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.

Your MTurk completion code is:
13417070

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